

GEORGIA

“ROAD SAFETY IS MORE THAN PASSING A DRIVING TEST” IMPROVING ROAD SAFETY THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE IN GEORGIA

By Madona Gasanova

It took George, 15, about two years to rebuild his life after getting hit by a car on his way to school. He is lucky to still be alive; other people are not so lucky. In George's words, drivers can make a big difference in helping to prevent injuries, deaths and suffering by becoming more aware about the harm they can cause, and taking responsibility for the speed of their vehicles.

“Drivers should slow down on shopping streets, in residential neighbourhoods and around schools. Vehicles have the right to be on roads, but so do pedestrians and other non-vehicle road users. If you are behind the wheel of a vehicle, you also have the responsibility to drive keeping the lives outside your vehicle in mind. In this regard, I see huge importance in various activities that aim to teach youngsters to observe traffic rules from as early age as possible, so that the traffic threats are prevented and children are

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familiar with necessary rules and road safety from the outset. At the same time, I see the importance of explaining to drivers not to drive drunk. We might not see a dramatic reduction in road accidents since the very first activities of various societies, however it changes the attitude of children and car holders from the very first lecture. So, I think that by continuing this way, the whole situation in the country will be changed for the better ,” said George.

The traffic-related death rate in Georgia is around four times that of the better performers globally and twice as high as the EU average.

CIVIL SOCIETY HAS BEEN THE ONLY FORCE PUSHING TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM.

They continue working on both sides – providing evidence-based knowledge

for government to enact smarter policies that prevent injuries and loss of life on roads and highways and help people to become aware of what they need to do to have peace of mind on the road.

The Georgian Alliance for Safe Roads is the leading NGO in Georgia promoting road safety, with a vigorous involvement in road safety activities such as public education campaigns, research and engaging events. The Alliance recognizes that it is essential to have an intimate understanding of cultural and legal factors that shape decision-making and strategies to reduce road accidents.

CHALLENGE OF ROAD SAFETY IN GEORGIA

Statistically, the biggest problem in Georgia is speeding, followed by drunk driving and cases in which pedestrians crossroads where prohibited. Approximately 94% of accidents in the world, including in Georgia, are caused by preventable human factors like speeding or drink driving.

The number of road traffic accidents has risen by 30% over the last 2 years; the number of motor vehicle accident deaths has risen as well. During the summer, road traffic becomes more intense which increases the likelihood of car crashes in Georgia's regions. Lately most such accidents have been fatal. The number of injuries and fatalities is significantly high among youth and kids, which are tragic events for many Georgian families.

“95 PERCENT OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS HAPPEN AS A RESULT OF HUMAN ERROR,”

said Eka Laliashvili, Chairman of the Board of the Alliance for Safe Roads. “Lacking a strategic approach and fundamental efforts, the actions taken so far have failed to bring tangible results. 8,000 people were injured and 550 killed only last year due to traffic accidents in Georgia. This is a rate 2.5 times higher indicator than that of most European countries. We call on the Georgian authorities to join us and work on a strategy. Creating an adequate environment and infrastructure for pedestrians is of utmost importance. I am happy that our foreign colleagues have come to Georgia several times to share their successful stories, and now, with the generous help of the EU Civil Society. Dialogue for Progress initiative, we'll concentrate more on pedestrians, who are the most unprotected users of the road” she added.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ROAD SAFETY

Improving road safety requires the participation of many different organisations and sectors. No one sector working alone can effectively reduce the number of road casualties.

This is proven by the recent changes in Georgian road safety behaviour. During several years the non-governmental sector together with the local authorities and media had been very intensively working on the issue of

seat-belts and drunk driving - as a result, since 2010, 95% of all passengers and drivers in the front seat are now using seat-belts. The same successful example is the new drunk driving law (since January, 2014), under which an individual's driving



license is suspended for a period of 6 months after their first drunk driving offence.

Making seat belts obligatory in front and increasing the fines on drunk driving (according to new regulations) are the most positive steps taken recently by Georgian officials. Seat belts can slash serious crash-related injuries and deaths by about a half; airbags provide added protection but are not a substitute for seat belts. Together, they provide the greatest protection for adults. Meanwhile there is no obligation to wear seatbelts on back seats in Georgia and you can frequently find infants sitting at the front of the vehicle.

Recently, Georgia's Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs expressed his eagerness to tighten road safety regulations through various legislation. He underlined the areas in which the Ministry will begin and continue its active cooperation with the Alliance in the nearest future, including pedestrian safety, hamlet use and seatbelts on back seats.

THE ROLE OF TRAFFIC EDUCATION AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION

The Georgia Alliance for Safe Roads has held different activities to raise awareness about road safety in Georgian society since 2010. The Alliance



has implemented the public-education project, with the participation of Estonian non-governmental partner organisations and Tartu Patrol Police. The project aimed to meet with youth and explain to them the dangers of not obeying road rules. Beside a very

effective campaign - “Don’t Drink and Drive!”, which was successfully implemented in 2011, the project served to raise public awareness of issues related to drunk driving.

Now, in the framework of the EU-funded project *“Advocating for Pedestrian Safety through Multi-stakeholder Dialogue and Road Safety Research”*, the Alliance is working on pedestrian safety, involving different sectors and at the same time conducting research on pedestrian and drivers’ behaviour.

Apart from road safety research and worldwide road safety events such as the UN Road Safety Week, celebrated in May in Tbilisi and more than 70

countries around the world, another component of the pedestrian safety project has been advocacy and traffic education.

“Teaching safety skills to children and to the general publicity can provide lifelong benefits to society, but should be seen as a long term intervention strategy. Experience in many countries has shown that children may remember the messages in the short term, but effective and sustainable development of positive attitudes towards road safety are best achieved by inclusion in the core curriculum, either as a compulsory subject in its own right or as a cross-curricular theme. It is also essential that education inputs are incremental (building on

previous skills) and linked to the safe infrastructure and effective traffic law enforcement. This is the only proven way – multi-stakeholder dialogue and effective cooperation across different sectors to improve the road safety situation, peoples’ attitudes and behaviour in Georgia” – said Maya Kobalia, Executive Director of the Georgia Alliance for Safe Roads.

“ROAD SAFETY IS A CULTURE. THEREFORE IT SHOULD BE TAUGHT AT SCHOOL LIKE OTHER HABITS AND CUSTOMS.

Road safety is more than passing a driving test - it is really a culture which dictates respect for one another. It is a challenge in Georgia where car usage is high and road safety rules are not sufficiently obeyed. If children start their education with activities and educational games related to road safety it will become easier for them to obey the rules when they start driving, as the lack of awareness is cited as a major problem behind the current high incidence of car accidents in the country. The trend can only be reversed through the joint and deliberate efforts of government, civil society and the private sector” – she added.

Road Safety cannot be the responsibility of one sector alone. The commercial sector, service organisations and non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play an

important role in increasing road safety awareness. Together with the valuable job that the Georgia Alliance for Safe Roads is doing to improve the road safety situation in Georgia, good

traffic law enforcement and effective monitoring of vehicle standards from the side of the government will result in a significant improvement of road as well as pedestrian safety in Georgia.



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