Poland:
Overview of Road Safety Situation
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Republic of Poland
Secretariat of National Road Safety Council

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1. Introduction

The last decade was a period of motorization boom in Poland. The number of passenger cars almost doubled, from 5,251 thousand in 1990 to 9,700 thousand in 2000. This was accompanied by an increase of annual vehicle/kilometers and a rapid expansion of road freight and passenger transport. As a result, considering in addition incorrect behavior of road users as well as underdevelopment and poor maintenance of the road network, over 76 thousand fatalities were recorded on Polish roads. Over 700 thousand people sustained injuries and many will be disable for the rest of their lives.

At the same time in 26 OECD countries over 116 thousand people died on roads in 2000, a decrease by 1.6% comparing to 1999. According to OECD this number could be halved provided most effective countermeasures are implemented in all countries. For example, measures taken in the UK, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden brought their accident exposure down to 7 killed/100 thousand people in 1999, while Poland had 17. Accident severity in Poland in 1999 looked even more serious with 12 killed/100 accidents against 4 in Norway and Sweden, 3 in the Netherlands and 1 in the UK.

Despite recent improvements, Poland continues to show a rather poor road safety record compared with European leaders. The main premises of unsafety on roads could be summarized as follows:

» Large number of accident casualties, high material and social loses.
» Unfavorable predictions concerning further developments in road safety situation.
» Lack of effective cooperation between State Administration, regional authorities and NGOs.
» Insufficient political and social support to road safety initiatives.

Every day there about 18 road deaths on Polish roads and almost 200 people are injured. Every fourth decease due to external factors is the result of a road accident. Road accidents are the first cause of death of young people. Thus social and economic costs of road accidents in Poland are huge. According to the World Bank estimates, road accident costs would account for 2.7% of country’s GDP. Internal and external costs of road accidents in Poland would amount to as much as 3 billion USD annually.
2. The National Road Safety Council

Alarming road safety situation in early nineties called for a multidisciplinary coordination body to tackle the issue of unsafety on roads, prevent further increase of road accidents and draw up a national road safety plan to provide solid basis for guidance and strategy in road safety efforts that would lead to a sustainable increase of safety on roads.

In 1993 the National Road Safety Council (NRSC) was established pursuant to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers. The NRSC was chaired by Deputy Prime Minister, Prime Minister and then successively by Ministers of Transport (currently Minister of Infrastructure). The executive agency of NRSC – the Secretariat is located in the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The NRSC has undertaken to provide directions and coordinate activities aimed at improvement of the road safety implemented by all relevant institutions in view of abating road crashes and their aftermath. Appropriate steps were taken in view of developing a national road safety program.

Recent efforts of the Council focused mainly on creating administrative framework at national and local levels, coordinating all road safety related activities implemented by various institutions and increasing the road safety awareness in the society by wide spread promotion.

Actions aiming at improvement of road safety conditions are financed from the State Budget and regional budgets, financial assistance is provided under World Bank’s Roads II Project (road safety measures and technical assistance). Support is also lent by Global Road Safety Partnership; the Polish GRSP Committee is endorsed by NRSC.
3. A new institutional setup for road safety

On January 1, 2002, upon entry into force of the amended Highway Code, a new, reinforced administrative setup was introduced for national road safety structures.

The National Road Safety Council was provided with enhanced legal mandate and vested with more authority. As a multidisciplinary coordination body, the NRSC is presided over by the Minister of Infrastructure (in charge of Transport) and includes major entities of State Administration from all the sectors concerned with road safety: Transport (part of Infrastructure), Home Affairs, State Defense, Justice, Public Administration, Budget and Finance, Economy, Spatial Planning, Education, Environment, Public Health, Police, Fire Brigade and National Roads. Research institutes and NGOs are providing advice and expertise to NRSC. The Code has also endowed the Secretariat of NRSC with executive powers.

A list of statutory tasks for NRSC has been set out:

» Recommending guidance of State policy.
» Developing and appraising road safety programs.
» Initiating research works, legal acts, international agreements and staff training programs.
» Conducting international cooperation.
» Working closely with social institutions and NGOs.
» Instigating road safety education, publicity and promotion campaigns.
» Monitoring and evaluation of road safety activities.

In parallel, a nationwide road safety structure was brought into existence: regional road safety councils were set up in every of 16 Voivodships (regions). They are presided over by Voivodes (regional governors) and comprise representatives of lower administrative degrees, as well as Police, Fire Brigade, Education and Roads at regional level. Regional road safety councils have been assigned an inventory of tasks similar to those of NRSC, in a restrained scope however, according to their regional competence.

It is important to note that the Highway Code provides for the obligation of countrywide reporting on road safety activities. Annual status reports shall be submitted by all agencies associated within the NRSC to the Secretariat, to be put together and further submitted to the Parliament and to the President of the Country.
4. National Road Safety Program

Basis for operation of NRSC has been defined upon completion of the National Road Safety Program in Poland GAMBIT 2000 and approved by the Government in May 2001.

The overall aim is to achieve an effective and sustainable improvement of road safety conditions, mainly in terms of the number of road fatalities. This shall be attained through implementation of long term and short term tasks of two types:

» establishing a countrywide road safety structure; and
» implementing road safety countermeasures.

At executive level, the Program provides for major orientations of measures to be taken against seven contributory factors, which have been identified as main road safety hazards in Poland. These are targeted as problem areas:

» excessive speed;
» young drivers;
» unprotected road users;
» drunk road users;
» accident severity;
» roads passing through small towns; and
» black spots.

Based on the road safety diagnosis and forecasts, guidelines for an effective road safety policy were formulated. It was assumed that road safety improvement efforts should be primarily focused on:

» Implementing road safety measures within the seven problem areas.
» Establishing basis for an effective and long-term road safety policy.
» Gaining public and political support to road safety initiatives.

The Program is designed to foster the right conditions for sustainable improvement of road safety. This can only be achieved through a comprehensive implementation of road safety measures by all levels of government administration and local authorities.
5. Towards a safer road traffic - main activities

At the moment, main actions concerning improvement of the road safety in Poland are focused on the critical areas formulated in the National Program, which have been identified as priority targets:

» excessive speed as the main contributory factor;
» unprotected road users as the most vulnerable;
» young drivers as the most refractory and accident-prone;
» black spots – sites that need physical improvement; and
» drink-driving being still a problem.

Those major hazards have been engaged with a concerted approach and a number of efforts have been undertaken within the NRSC to address the road safety problem.

Works on adjusting Polish legislation to the European Union Requirements are underway. NRSC representatives take regular part in sessions, consultations, meetings and international conferences on road traffic and developments in transport.

Considerable legislative efforts have been undertaken and a number of road safety related regulations have been adopted. Apart from the new Highway Code, by which a number of crucial provisions were laid down, the following laws have been recently adopted: Law on Road Transport (bringing into existence the Road Transport Inspectorate), Law on Driving Time and Law on National Medical Rescue (providing for an integrated rescue system).

Traffic education has been introduced into primary school curricula; nationwide contests on road safety knowledge have been organized for primary schools and separately for secondary schools. Traffic guards were mobilized to ensure safe street crossing in the vicinity of schools and a nationwide campaign “safe road to school” undertaken by the Ministry and supported by private sector is providing children with reflective elements.

Several publicity actions and media campaigns have been coordinated and co-financed with participation of NGOs in order to raise awareness among society and decision-makers. Focused publications and magazines are issued to enhance knowledge and understanding of road safety.
Specific actions in the area of road safety (prevention and severity mitigation) have been initiated under nationwide programs undertaken by the Ministry of Health, Police and Fire Brigade.

Numerous promotional events and publicity campaigns on road safety have been supported and endorsed, including the Third International Road Safety Week, which was taken part in by the Prime Minister.

Multiple research works and studies have been commissioned and accomplished in order to provide the road safety decision-making process with sound knowledge base and actual data backup necessary in planning further steps.

NRSC has also been very active on the field of international cooperation. Its representatives have regularly participating in working groups and sessions on road safety of large multinational bodies - OECD and ECMT, as well as in many other multilateral and bi-lateral road safety initiatives, partnerships and events, such as GRSP, Memorandum of Understanding, IRF, PIARC ect.

Polish Committee of Global Road Safety Partnership has been established and Polish GRSP Program basing on a tri-sectoral approach (public-private-NGO) is running successfully. Country Secretariat of GRSP is hosted by NRSC.

As for road infrastructure, the program “Beware of Black Spots” is being implemented with the assistance of publicity campaign in press promoting safety on roads, in parallel with a program of repainting markings on all national roads.

Procurement of road safety equipment, in line with a number of pilot programs of road safety improvement based on recommendation of the National Program, are underway as part of the World Bank’s Roads II Project.

It is a pre-requisite for success that all road safety actions are implemented in a regular and systematical manner, within long-term programs coordinated by the NRSC with strong support by the Government, Parliament and institutions responsible for road safety conditions. Proposed activities are to be coordinated with the Social Committee of Road Safety with as high as possible acceptance by the society.
6. Achievements so far

In the overall, activities undertaken within NRSC have started bringing fruits. Since 2001 Poland has the National Road Safety Program and main orientations of road safety policy are there to provide guidance for concrete actions.

The number of road accident fatalities has been steadily diminishing during the last four years, despite a rapid growth in car ownership. In slowly improving safety figures the number of fatalities has recorded the fastest decline, followed by injuries and accident figures.

An important speed-up in this decreasing trend was recorded in 2001, when the number of killed on the spot went down by 12.6%. The target area of drink-driving has also shown noticeable improvement: the Police pulled over 22% less intoxicated drivers than in the previous year.

The case of Warsaw is also noteworthy – after application of a 50 km/h speed limit the number of fatalities has decreased by 50%.

In parallel, important provisions of national legislation have been adopted to further strengthen the road safety structure and enhance its operational basis. Poland has been provided with a genuine national road safety system comprising a central coordination body and 16 regional branches.

Another important aspect is more involvement of private sector and NGOs, mainly within the framework of Polish GRSP Committee. An increased contribution to national road safety efforts has been noticed with a more important role of insurance sector.

This was accompanied by a slow but steady progress in social awareness of road hazards and recognition of road safety measures, especially against overspeed and alcohol impairment.

Two initiatives failed however. A countrywide speed limit of 50 km/h within built-up areas was not passed by the Parliament the obligation of daytime running lights was defeated. Clearly, road safety still lacks acknowledgement in politics.
7. Future steps: challenges ahead

Every fatality is one too many – says a road safety motto. The current performance has proven again that the development of road traffic accidents is a reversible trend and expansion of car ownership and heavy traffic growth can proceed without being followed by an increase in number of lives lost on roads.

Thus, a substantial part of road crashes are avoidable accidents, which may be prevented thanks to professional and joint activities of all people and all sectors engaged in struggle for safer roads. NRSC activities in the nearest future will focus on:

- Technical measures, studies and institutional building within the main problem areas, as set out in the National Road Safety Program.
- Pilot implementation three regional road safety programs, in close collaboration with regional authorities, co-financed under the World Bank Roads II Project.
- Passing and enacting the two critical provisions: 50 km/h and daytime running lights.
- Continuous road safety education and publicity efforts, towards more social and political recognition of the problem.
- National GRSP Program (tri-sectoral partnership: public, private and NGOs).

The NRSC has undertaken the challenge to further abate the rate of fatalities and approach to the performance of world’s road safety leaders and the National Road Safety Program has paved the way towards a sustainable improvement.

We have made progress, but so have the others – we must continuously strive to catch up.
Enclosures
## 1. Accidents, car ownership and population in Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of accidents</th>
<th>Number of fatalities</th>
<th>Number of injured</th>
<th>Number of collisions (reported to the police)</th>
<th>Number of vehicles (000)</th>
<th>Number of passenger cars (000)</th>
<th>Population (000)</th>
<th>Accident exposure (fatalities/100 000 of population)</th>
<th>Accident severity (fatalities/100 accidents)</th>
<th>Motorization ratio (passenger cars/1000 of population)</th>
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Source: Headquarters of Police, Motor Transport Institute

1) Estimated
2. Trends in car ownership and accident risk in Poland

![Graph showing trends in car ownership and accident risk in Poland]

- Number of fatalities (Zabici w wypadkach drogowych)
- Ownership of passenger cars (Samochody osobowe)
- Fatalities in road accidents (Fatalities in road accidents)
- Ownership of pass. cars (Ownership of pass. cars)
3. Road accidents by type in Poland

- Pedestrian hits: 36%
- Flank crashes: 23%
- Head-to-head crashes: 11%
- Rear crashes: 10%
- Single accidents: 18%
- Other: 2%
4. Trends in road accident victims in Poland

![Graph showing trends in road accident victims in Poland](image-url)
5. Road accident victims by age in Poland