Transport that Meets Diverse Needs
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When the issue of gender is raised in relation to road safety, it is usually to point out that men are most at risk. World Health Organization data suggests that globally 73% of all road fatalities are young males aged under the age of 25, who are 3 times more likely to die in a road crash than young females. At EASST, we suggest this perspective should be turned on its head: if roads, living spaces and transport choices were designed by and to meet the needs of women, there would be far fewer casualties altogether.

The Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST) is a network of local partner organisations in 14 countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Our work covers all aspects of road safety and sustainable transport, including road safety management, safe roads and vehicles, police enforcement, safer road users and effective post-crash response. In each country we work very closely with all stakeholders to ensure maximum impact. This includes regularly listening to the concerns of local communities in both urban and rural areas. We also conduct surveys to underpin our project work.

Very similar patterns emerge across our EASST partner countries. First, roads are generally not designed to be people-friendly. Pedestrians are normally an afterthought, and where pedestrian facilities exist they are often insufficient. There is an underlying assumption that motorised transport is gender neutral and available to all, and this is simply not the case. There is still a focus on enabling faster movements for vehicles by building bigger and wider roads rather than controlling speeds and limiting the need for private cars. This attitude is evident, too, in very short crossing times at traffic lights that make it near impossible for elderly people (predominantly women), people with small children and people with disabilities to cross safely. Crossing roads in many countries requires agility and quick feet!

In Tajikistan, supported by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), we surveyed non-motorised road users in the centre of Dushanbe. Our partners - the Young Generation of Tajikistan - counted pedestrians, drivers and passengers in cars and trucks. They found slightly more men on the roads than women – who were around 45% of pedestrians. But women were less than a quarter (22%) of all car occupants and only 5% of drivers were women. As passengers, women were more likely to be in the back seat, where seat belts are generally missing. Our surveys and meetings found that what concerns women in Dushanbe is the lack of accessible, convenient and safe crossings, along with the uncontrolled high speeds and dangerous behaviour of many - mostly male - drivers.

In Kyrgyzstan, supported by the UK Embassy, we have been working with the Mayor and Police to identify the most dangerous road crossings in order to make Bishkek more pedestrian friendly. Our partner "Road Safety PA" counted nearly 19,000 pedestrians crossing at 5 dangerous points – again, just under half of them women. Pedestrians and community groups expressed precisely the same concerns: crossings are too few and not safe, speeds are too high, drivers behave badly and there are no safe alternatives. Cars rule the road.

In EASST partner countries, underpasses and bridges are often added to road designs in an attempt to cater for pedestrians without affecting traffic speeds or impeding flows. Our work has found that almost universally these are avoided by pedestrians – and for good reasons. Women tell us they are frightened to use underpasses, particularly at night. They are often unlit and dark even during the day, so men avoid them too for fear of being robbed. Unless they are well maintained and contain shops or other attractions, they can be extremely dirty and subject to flooding. Without many public toilets available, they may be used as open urinals. Bridges are mostly impossible for parents with pushchairs, elderly people and people...
with limited mobility. In both underpasses and bridges, we have seen the installation of lethal ramps that would defeat the most athletic Paralympian.

According to Carers Worldwide, globally 84% of careers are female. Our EASST partners in Moldova, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan have been interviewing people with disabilities and their care takers to find out how road safety impacts their lives. In Moldova, 40% of people with disabilities and care takers found it very difficult to cross the road. In Belarus 59% have difficulty with the most basic journeys. In Kyrgyzstan 93% of wheelchair users never use public transport due to difficulties with access. Broken pavements and the lack of priority given to pedestrians was their number one complaint. In every country, the life chances of people with disabilities and their care takers have been restricted due to unsafe roads and poor transport choices.

The ITF and OECD can play an important role in encouraging fresh thinking about who should be the priority in road designs and transport. Evidence from around the globe shows that pedestrian-friendly, female-friendly cities are good for tourism, good for local businesses, better for public health and can have a positive impact on local communities and employment. Good starting points are to encourage the involvement of more women in the design and planning process; encourage the implementation of pedestrian-friendly design; assist local authorities with effective speed enforcement; promote accessible and affordable public transport, with more female drivers; and ensure meaningful engagement with local communities as part of all transport policy. ITF can do much to challenge the assumption that motor vehicles should be the priority.

**Useful links**

EASST website: [http://www.easst.co.uk](http://www.easst.co.uk)