

Road Safety Education for Children and Young People in Selected European Union Countries: Good Practices and Recommendations for Poland

Edukacja dzieci i młodzieży w zakresie bezpieczeństwa ruchu drogowego w wybranych państwach Unii Europejskiej: dobre praktyki i rekomendacje dla Polski

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Abstract: Road safety education is an important component of protecting children and young people and reducing road traffic casualties. This article compares the design and implementation of preventive and educational measures in Poland and selected European Union countries. The study combines descriptive analysis of Polish police road accident statistics for 2023–2024 with comparative document analysis of road traffic legislation, prevention programmes, the ROSE 25 project, and initiatives from Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and France. In 2024, Poland recorded 1,741 accidents involving children aged 0–14, resulting in 50 deaths and 1,838 injuries, confirming the urgency of the problem. The analysis shows that well-developed models embed road safety education in long-term strategies, emphasise practical skills, involve parents and local communities, and coordinate the activities of schools, public authorities, the police, and non-governmental organisations. In Poland, implementation remains fragmented: road safety content is dispersed across school subjects, teacher preparation and practical training are insufficient, parental participation is limited, and responsibility for coordination is unclear. The article recommends strengthening institutional coordination, preparing specialist educators, increasing practical instruction, engaging families and local stakeholders, and extending road safety education beyond the formal school setting.

Keywords: road safety education, children and young people, road traffic injury prevention, road safety programmes, good practices, policy implementation, European Union, Poland

Abstrakt: Edukacja w zakresie bezpieczeństwa ruchu drogowego jest istotnym elementem ochrony dzieci i młodzieży oraz ograniczania liczby ofiar wypadków drogowych. Celem artykułu jest porównanie sposobów projektowania i wdrażania działań profilaktycznych i edukacyjnych w Polsce oraz w wybranych państwach Unii Europejskiej. W badaniu połączono analizę opisową polskich statystyk policyjnych z lat 2023–2024 z porównawczą analizą dokumentów: regulacji prawnych, programów profilaktycznych, projektu ROSE 25 oraz inicjatyw z Austrii, Belgii, Słowenii, Niemiec, Holandii, Danii i Francji. W 2024 r. w Polsce odnotowano 1741 wypadków z udziałem dzieci w wieku 0–14 lat, w których 50 dzieci zginęło, a 1838 zostało rannych, co potwierdza pilność problemu. Analiza wskazuje, że rozwinięte modele edukacji są osadzone w strategiach długoterminowych, koncentrują się na umiejętnościach praktycznych, angażują rodziców i społeczności lokalne oraz opierają się na współpracy szkół, władz publicznych, policji i organizacji pozarząd-



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dowych. W Polsce realizacja edukacji komunikacyjnej pozostaje rozproszona: treści są podzielone między różne przedmioty szkolne, przygotowanie nauczycieli i zajęcia praktyczne są niewystarczające, udział rodziców jest ograniczony, a odpowiedzialność za koordynację nie została jasno określona. Artykuł rekomenduje wzmocnienie koordynacji instytucjonalnej, przygotowanie specjalistycznej kadry, zwiększenie wymiaru zajęć praktycznych, zaangażowanie rodzin i podmiotów lokalnych oraz rozszerzenie edukacji poza formalne środowisko szkolne.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja w zakresie bezpieczeństwa ruchu drogowego, dzieci i młodzież, zapobieganie urazom w ruchu drogowym, programy bezpieczeństwa ruchu drogowego, dobre praktyki, wdrażanie polityk publicznych, Unia Europejska, Polska

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the issue of educating children and adolescents in safe participation in road traffic in selected European Union countries. The data cited demonstrates the significant social problem posed by road safety threats, the scale of losses caused by road accidents, and the factors influencing their occurrence. Given the subject matter of the article, statistical data are presented detailing the involvement of children and adolescents in road accidents as both perpetrators and casualties in Poland in 2023–2024. These data are used to conduct a comparative analysis of such incidents. Furthermore, the legal status of children in various forms of participation in road traffic in Poland is defined and clarified through an analysis of legal acts regulating road traffic. The article then discusses selected aspects of safety in some European Union countries. Examples of good practices promoting road safety principles at various levels, with regard to children and adolescents participating in road traffic, are identified. Based on a review of the available materials, these activities are summarised and analysed, and reference is made to the situation of children and adolescents in relation to road safety education in Poland. The article concludes with an evaluation of the problem and attempts to indicate optimal solutions to the issue of educating children and adolescents in the field of road safety.

1. ROAD SAFETY HAZARDS

The global development of the automotive industry has brought numerous benefits to society, becoming a significant element of technological progress. It has also profoundly influenced many areas of social life. Among the most important effects are the acceleration of travel, the faster and more efficient transport of people and goods, the development of modern road infrastructure, and changes in leisure activities.

However, alongside these beneficial effects, this development is accompanied by a substantial and irreversible scale of losses, including fatalities and injuries resulting from road accidents, material damage, and a significant contribution to environmental degradation, which in turn adversely affects public health. In addition to accidents, there exists the dangerous phenomenon of the so-called “near-accident” (Hołyst 2022, 633), in which an event exhibits all the characteristics

of a road accident but does not result in a collision between a vehicle and another road user or object, such as a pedestrian. This constitutes an element of road traffic that increases the sense of danger and unpredictability, particularly among the youngest road users. Despite the many social problems already identified, the growing and continuously evolving automotive industry remains one of the most important elements of modern life. As noted, “In the history of civilisation, transport has played such a significant role that it has been considered a type and component of prosperity” (Wiktorowska-Jasik 2016, 15).

All the positive aspects resulting from the widespread use of various means of transport in road traffic should not, however, obscure or justify the growing social problems associated with this development. Can these social losses, sometimes irreversible, be regarded as inevitable costs of civilisational development? Rather, it is more appropriate to consider them as a form of significant civilisational neglect, posing a challenge for modern societies in terms of improving road safety, introducing modern and user-friendly technologies, and developing safer road infrastructure. One of the most important challenges is reducing the number of road accidents and preparing societies for safe participation in dynamically developing road traffic. Children and adolescents constitute a particularly important group in road traffic and should be supported through targeted education in this area. It is important to recognise that today’s children and adolescents will soon become adults shaping road traffic behaviours. The issue of road safety among children and adolescents often receives heightened media attention, particularly in the period preceding the new school year. Actions aimed at improving this safety raise several fundamental questions:

- Has an adequate budget been allocated for their implementation?
- Is there sufficient material infrastructure in the form of dedicated facilities and specialised equipment?
- Is professional support provided in schools?
- Have teachers been adequately trained to deliver road safety education?
- Is there an entity coordinating the above-mentioned activities?

These questions highlight important doubts regarding the effectiveness of proposed measures aimed at improving road safety for children and adolescents in Poland.

2. SCALE OF LOSSES CAUSED BY ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

The social costs of road accidents and collisions, estimated using the PANDORA method, which is based on the valuation of human capital and restitution costs generated by road accidents, constitute a significant component of Poland’s GDP and, according to the most recent available data, amounted to PLN 52 billion in 2022, representing 1.7% of GDP (Krajowa Rada Bezpieczeństwa Ruchu Drogowego 2023, 2). This amount comprises several components: fatalities, minor and serious injuries, and material losses resulting from these events.

Additionally, the estimated costs include expenditures related to the activities of emergency services, criminal proceedings, compensation, and broader material and economic losses. Cost forecasts predict a decrease to approximately PLN 42.3 billion in 2026 (Krajowa Rada Bezpieczeństwa Ruchu Drogowego 2023, 9). This estimate is based on the assumption of comprehensive corrective measures and the effective implementation of preventive programmes aimed at improving road safety. However, it is important to assess realistically both the level of implementation of such measures and the timeframe for their execution. In this regard, a clear time lag and a lack of the expected progress in the implementation of planned objectives become evident, limiting the possibility of achieving significant improvements in road safety in Poland.

Material losses constitute an important element of the social dimension of road accidents. However, it should be emphasised that the most significant aspect remains human casualties resulting from road accidents and collisions. Numerous factors influence the number of casualties. Among the most important are the number of motor vehicles on Polish roads and the volume of transit traffic passing through the country. In 2024, the number of motor vehicles registered in the Central Vehicle Register (CEP) was over 30,033,000 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2025, 521). In addition, 5,074,626 vehicles were recorded as entering or leaving Poland (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej 2025, 4). In total, this indicates that tens of millions of motor vehicles travel across Poland annually.

3. ROAD ACCIDENTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Road safety issues are closely linked to the number of road accident casualties, which are typically recorded in the basic categories of injuries and fatalities. These elements of road safety, despite significant material losses, constitute the primary indicators for assessing this situation. At the same time, year-on-year comparisons of these data provide an accurate picture of road safety. An approach based on specific numerical data leaves little room for distortion of the actual situation across different statistical analyses.

Table 1. Number of road accident casualties in 2023-2024.

This table presents the numbers of road accidents, fatalities, and injured persons recorded in Poland in 2023 and 2024. All three indicators increased slightly in 2024 compared with the previous year. Despite the relatively stable level of fatalities, the rise in both accidents and injuries indicates that road safety remains a significant public concern.

Year	2023	2024
Number of accidents	20 936	21 519
Fatalities	1893	1896
Injured	24 125	24 782

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Komenda Główna Policji, Biuro Ruchu Drogowego. 2025. Wypadki drogowe w Polsce w 2024 roku.

Analysis of the figures presented in the table above allows the conclusion that in 2024, 21,519 road accidents occurring on public roads, in residential areas, and in traffic zones were reported to the Police. Compared to 2023, this represents an increase of 583 accidents. In 2024, 1,896 people were killed in road accidents. Compared to 2023, this indicates a slight increase in the number of fatalities. In the same year, 24,782 people were injured in road accidents (including 7,796 seriously injured). Compared to 2023, the number of injured persons increased by 657 (Komenda Główna Policji, Biuro Ruchu Drogowego 2025, 6). A trend towards stabilisation in the number of fatalities can be observed; however, this level remains far from the assumptions of “Vision Zero” (Malinowski 2019), which continues to be postponed by several decades in road safety forecasts. The situation regarding injuries is particularly concerning, as a further increase in the number of injured persons has been recorded. The steady rise in injuries indicates that no significant progress has been achieved in this area.

Furthermore, 390,580 road traffic collisions were reported in 2024, representing an increase of 24,589 compared to 2023 (Komenda Główna Policji, Biuro Ruchu Drogowego 2025, 6). It should be noted that the issue of the so-called “dark figure” of collisions persists, referring to incidents that occurred but were not reported to the Police. Therefore, data on reported collisions do not fully reflect the actual situation. This limitation affects the reliability of forecasts and conclusions derived from the available data concerning this type of social phenomenon.

With regard to the perpetrators and casualties of road accidents, this study focuses on children aged 0–6 and those aged 7–14. In 2024, 1,741 accidents involving children aged 0–14 were recorded in Poland. In these incidents, 50 children were killed and 1,838 were injured. Compared to 2023, the number of accidents decreased by 37, while the number of children killed increased by 6. In 2024, children aged 0–14 were responsible for 483 accidents, representing an increase of 75 compared to the previous year (Komenda Główna Policji, Biuro Ruchu Drogowego 2025, 39–45).

4. THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN’S SAFETY IN ROAD TRAFFIC

The latest report of the European Transport Safety Council (Carson et al. 2022, 15) indicates that between 2011 and 2020, over 6,000 children under the age of 14 died in the European Union. Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA) estimates that over 500 children die on roads worldwide each day (Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile n.d.). Nearly half of these fatalities occur when children are travelling in vehicles with adults. The most significant causes of these deaths during or following road accidents include the failure to use child restraint systems or their improper use. The remaining fatalities occur on or near pedestrian crossings and on roads outside built-up areas, as well as during activities such as cycling or riding scooters.

In light of the regulations governing children’s participation in road traffic, the location, age, and manner of participation constitute important determinants.

In pedestrian traffic, pursuant to Art. 43 of the Road Traffic Act (*Prawo o ruchu drogowym* 1997, art. 43 ust. 1, 3), a child under the age of 7 may use the road only under the supervision of a person who is at least 10 years old. It is, however, noteworthy that such supervision may be entrusted to another minor who, despite being older, may not yet be fully emotionally mature or adequately prepared to provide such care. This provision does not apply to roads designated exclusively for pedestrians. An exception is the residential zone, where pedestrians have priority and may use the space freely, and where children under the age of seven do not require supervision by an adult or a person aged at least 10 years. However, this remains an area of mixed traffic. Despite having priority, pedestrians must remain aware that they share the space with vehicles. Residential zones are most commonly found in urban areas and they regulate traffic, for example, in residential neighbourhoods where children spend time playing, riding scooters, or cycling. It is therefore important, as part of road safety education, to reinforce children's understanding of the specific nature of such areas, which function as relatively safe spaces for pedestrians.

Another form of participation in road traffic is cycling. In Poland, a child over 10 years of age who holds a bicycle licence becomes a full road user and is therefore permitted to use designated cycling infrastructure or carriageways (*Ustawa o kierujących pojazdami* 2011, art. 7, ust. 1, pkt 2). A younger child using a bicycle must be supervised by an adult and is classified as a pedestrian; accordingly, they use the pavement and comply with pedestrian traffic regulations. Pursuant to Art. 33 point 5 of the Road Traffic Act (*Prawo o ruchu drogowym* 1997, art. 33 ust. 5), an adult guardian accompanying the child is permitted to ride on the pavement. A child may also participate in road traffic as a passenger and, up to the age of seven, may be transported on a bicycle; however, pursuant to Art. 33 point 2 of the same Act (*Prawo o ruchu drogowym* 1997, art. 33 ust. 2), an additional seat ensuring the child's safety must be used. It is also permissible to transport a child in a specially designed trailer. Certain regulatory aspects related to cycling remain controversial. In Poland, a person who has reached the age of 18 may ride a bicycle without holding a bicycle licence. This could lead to the unjustified assumption that legal adulthood equates to adequate knowledge of road traffic regulations. At the same time, it is worth noting recent initiatives aimed at improving the safety of children using bicycles, including proposed legislation – following deliberation in the Sejm – that would introduce an obligation for children and adolescents to wear protective helmets.

Another form of children's participation in road traffic is pedestrian traffic. This most common form of participation is subject to numerous regulations that apply to all road users, including children. Pedestrian traffic may be divided into two categories: within built-up areas and outside built-up areas. The responsibilities of pedestrians in residential zones have been discussed above. A child travelling on a road outside a built-up area, up to the age of 7, should be under the supervision of a person aged at least 10, as specified in Art. 43 of the Road Traffic Act (*Prawo*

o ruchu drogowym 1997, art. 43 ust. 2–3). An important safety requirement is the obligation to use reflective elements from dusk to dawn, as stipulated in Art. 11 section 4a of the Road Traffic Act (Prawo o ruchu drogowym 1997, art. 11 ust. 4a). It should be noted that a pedestrian without reflective elements in such conditions is visible from a distance of approximately 20–30 metres, whereas a person equipped with reflective elements may be visible from a distance of over 100 metres (Kępa et al. 2017). All other regulations concerning pedestrians, both within and outside built-up areas, apply equally to all road users, including children and adolescents.

Another common form of participation in road traffic for this age group is as passengers in vehicles, both in public and private transport. In practice, this most often involves transporting children in passenger cars. In this case, the relevant regulations are clearly defined. However, above all, parents and guardians should prioritise children's safety and assume responsibility for compliance with the applicable legal provisions. The general rule is that children should be transported in an appropriate child restraint system. It should be emphasised that the restraint system must be adapted to the child's growth and physical characteristics. Up to the age of 3, a child must be transported exclusively in a seat approved in accordance with European Union standards. In addition to age, the primary criterion is the child's height. If a child is under 1.5 metres tall, certain exceptions to the general regulations apply. One exception concerns public transport or taxis; however, it is increasingly common practice for service providers to equip vehicles with child seats upon request. Another exception applies when a child is over 1.35 metres tall and weighs more than 36 kg and, for justified reasons, cannot use a standard child seat. When transporting three children in the rear seat of a vehicle, a child over 3 years of age may be seated in the middle position and secured with a seat belt. Children over 3 years of age weighing between 25 and 35 kg may be transported using a booster seat, which must also comply with European approval standards. The above obligations are precisely defined in legal provisions, including the Road Traffic Act (Prawo o ruchu drogowym 1997, art. 39 ust. 3–4, 3b–3c, w brzmieniu zmienionym ustawą z 9 kwietnia 2015 r., Dz. U. 2015 poz. 591), which align national regulations with standards adopted in European Union countries. Although many devices supporting the transport of children in vehicles are available on the market, some do not meet the required approval standards and may pose a risk to the child in the event of a collision or accident.

5. SELECTED ASPECTS OF CHILD SAFETY IN EU COUNTRIES

Child road safety is becoming a priority within the European Union. Measures are being undertaken at multiple levels to protect the youngest road users. These efforts constitute an important component of achieving the objective of reducing road accident casualties by 50% by 2030 and, ultimately, of implementing the “Vision Zero” concept, which aims to eliminate road accident fatalities by 2050. The Polish Road Safety Observatory highlights the importance of the ROSE 25

research project (Polskie Obserwatorium Bezpieczeństwa Ruchu Drogowego n.d.). The aim of this project, initiated by the European Commission for Transport and Energy, was to collect information on the implementation of road safety education activities in 25 EU Member States, identify best educational practices, develop a European guide on this subject, and propose guidelines for an effective road safety education system in the EU.

In accordance with the project assumptions, the following target groups for educational activities were identified:

- a. children and adolescents aged 3 to 17
- b. parents of younger children
- c. individuals implementing road safety education.

As road safety education for children and adolescents is primarily delivered in preschools and schools, as well as in other institutions, these areas were included in the study. Accordingly, the following definitions were adopted:

- a. activities/actions: all activities and initiatives related to road safety, ranging from one-off events to those included in the core curriculum.
- b. tools/media: all educational materials and tools used in preschools and schools for instructional support.

At the same time, measures aimed at developing practical skills for safe participation in road traffic were assessed. The study also sought examples of effective media communication of road safety content. An important element of the research was the identification and evaluation of the attitudes of all road users with regard to mutual respect, helpfulness, consideration, cooperation, and responsibility.

Based on the Final Report – ROSE 25, Inventory and Compiling of the European Guide on Road Safety Education Targeted at Young People (Weber 2005), the Polish Road Safety Observatory, prepared a national version of the document, titled Good Practices in Road Safety Education for Children and Youth – European ROSE 25 Project (Polskie Obserwatorium Bezpieczeństwa Ruchu Drogowego n.d.). This was possible due to Poland's participation in the project through the Polish Road Safety Observatory (POBRD). As indicated in the report, the project was coordinated by representatives of the Austrian Road Safety Board. To achieve the research objectives, a committee was established comprising road safety institutes from Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (which was still a member of the EU at the time), while Poland was represented by the Road Safety Centre of the Motor Transport Institute. The analysis of the submitted materials revealed several challenges associated with the implementation of road safety education:

- a wide variety of traffic education structures in schools
- traffic education is not implemented in some regions of individual countries
- ineffective debate regarding the mandatory or optional status of traffic education in schools
- insufficient financing of traffic education
- significant discrepancies between the demand for and implementation of traffic education

- outdated and ineffective teaching methods (a disconnect between theory and practice, teaching only theory and regulations)
- a lack of clear teacher responsibility for road safety content due to its distribution across multiple subjects, resulting in limited accountability for educational outcomes
- a lack of facilities for practical learning - the effectiveness of traffic parks remains questionable
- the risk of marginalisation of traffic education within educational institutions
- a lack of motivation among teachers to deliver such content
- insufficient information flow to teachers and inadequate preparation for delivering road safety education
- the acquisition of competences for teaching road safety content is voluntary for teachers
- a relatively good level of road safety education among younger children, contrasted with significantly weaker outcomes among adolescents, who, under certain conditions, may apply for a driving licence from the age of 17 (in Poland, for example, category B)
- insufficient training of police officers involved in educating children, primarily due to a lack of pedagogical preparation
- a lack of coordination with educational institutions at both the state and local levels.

An analysis of the above issues enabled the identification of good practices, understood as those forming part of a structured and planned process of road safety education. Such practices are not limited to one-off initiatives but constitute elements of a long-term strategy. Initiatives implemented by multiple institutions, multi-phased in nature and widely accessible, were assessed particularly positively. Attention was paid not only to the transmission of knowledge but also to the development of specific skills and attitudes, as well as to the ethical dimension of these activities, which, although significant, is often underestimated. The importance of fostering appropriate habits and social attitudes consistent with broadly accepted standards of behaviour was also emphasised (Polskie Obserwatorium Bezpieczeństwa Ruchu Drogowego n.d.; Weber 2005).

6. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

One such initiative is the “Kangaroo Campaign” implemented in Austria, which aims to promote the safe transport of children using child restraint systems and seat belts. The target group consists of children aged 3–10. The programme is implemented in kindergartens and schools, where not only children but also parents and teachers constitute the target audience. The implementation of this initiative is multi-phased. The first phase is directed at children, while the second is addressed to parents. The meetings are interactive in nature and are conducted by instructors from the Austrian Road Safety Council (Kuratorium für Verkehrssicherheit – KFV).

Another project aimed at pedestrians – in this case children – is implemented in Belgium under the name “Save the Zebra”. The primary objective is to increase awareness among children participating in road traffic, particularly in the vicinity of pedestrian crossings. The main focus is on children’s appropriate behaviour in traffic; however, considerable attention is also given to drivers’ behaviour, especially in terms of recognising pedestrian crossings as critical safety elements. This is a practical, activity-based project. Children observe and monitor the behaviour of drivers approaching pedestrian crossings, including their speed and reactions. The campaign targets children aged 8–10. The topic is first addressed in school, after which participants take part in an organised march with parents under police supervision.

In Slovenia, the “Safe Bike” campaign is implemented within the school system and targets children aged 10–11. The activities are nationwide and involve approximately 500 schools, reaching nearly 80% of the target group. The campaign promotes the use of equipment that enhances cyclist safety and encourages the preparation of bicycles for the season; it is typically launched in spring. The programme is implemented by the Slovenian Road Safety Council, local authorities, and the police, with active cooperation between parents and children. Although participation is not mandatory, the programme covers almost all bicycles used by 10-year-olds. Additionally, the “A Wise Head Wears a Helmet” project is implemented. This is a nationwide initiative aimed at children and young people aged 6–17. Each year, the Slovenian Road Safety Council recommends approved safety helmets and facilitates access to them at favourable prices through schools. The campaign is linked to legislative measures requiring the use of protective helmets by cyclists up to 14 years of age. This represents an interesting solution, particularly in the Polish context, where planned legislative changes may introduce an obligation for cyclists up to 15 years of age to wear helmets. If such regulations are implemented, the question arises as to which institutions will be responsible for recommending helmets that meet European approval standards and under what conditions.

In Germany, the non-governmental organisation Deutsche Verkehrswacht was founded in 1924, was banned between 1933 and 1945, and was re-established in 1950 (Deutsche Verkehrswacht n.d.-b). Today, it operates under the motto “Road safety in all phases of life in line with Vision Zero” (Deutsche Verkehrswacht n.d.-a). The organisation aims to promote safe participation across all categories of road traffic and to support intergenerational communication in this field. The core idea of this movement, which has evolved over time into a structured, nationwide system, is the promotion of intergenerational dialogue and safe participation in road traffic. School-age children and adolescents constitute a particularly important target group. A key component of the organisation’s activities is the strong social engagement of individuals across different age groups. In response to contemporary needs, Deutsche Verkehrswacht promotes long-term cooperation by organising periodic “Road Safety Days” in schools, providing comprehensive

logistical support and assistance from trained professionals implementing the programme. Additionally, an online platform operating under the DV Campus initiative functions in the digital environment (Deutsche Verkehrswacht n.d.-c). It enables users to select target groups and thematic areas, such as children cycling, children travelling in vehicles, or other issues related to road safety education. An interesting initiative implemented in Germany is the Bus Guards programme, within which adolescents aged 13–18 act as supervisors for younger children using public transport (Weber 2005).

The selected examples presented here do not exhaust the range of activities aimed at improving road safety among children and adolescents; however, they illustrate noteworthy initiatives and directions for the further development of measures aimed at preparing the youngest road users in the European Union.

7. PROBLEMS AND WAYS OF ADDRESSING THEM IN SELECTED EU COUNTRIES

In the article „Children in traffic: how do they do it in the West?” (Fundacja Drogi Mazowsza 2025), the Masovian Roads Foundation analyses the challenges and methods of addressing them in the implementation of safe participation of children and adolescents in road traffic, particularly in the context of cycling. The study presents examples from several countries that have undertaken comprehensive measures to improve road safety.

In the Netherlands, widely recognised as a leader in cycling, the current high level of cycling infrastructure, including extensive networks of cycle paths and pedestrian crossings, has not always been the norm. In the 1970s, motor vehicle users were prioritised. The process of change was initiated by parents concerned about the risks their children faced when travelling to school. This grassroots initiative was quickly recognised by the government, which introduced programmes aimed at improving road safety. The system of road safety education for children and adolescents is based on cooperation between parents and local authorities, supported by organisations of instructors and examiners. Parents receive guidance from schools regarding how and what to teach. This constitutes a key element of both the educational process and family engagement. Although a bicycle licence is not mandatory in the Netherlands, parents are strongly encouraged to ensure that their children undergo assessment to verify the knowledge and skills necessary for safe cycling. Schools and cycling organisations may also play a supporting role in this process.

A more detailed analysis revealed that cycling on dedicated cycle paths had led to the perception of these spaces as safe zones in which general traffic regulations were less strictly observed. In response to this issue, the education system established a joint fund to support local authorities in developing safer cycling routes. It is noteworthy that the Danish system of road safety education relies primarily on recommendations and guidelines that support local initiatives. A cooperative framework has been established involving local authorities, parents, and educational institutions.

In France, despite a long tradition of cycling, systematic institutional support for cycling was for many years limited, and cyclists often encountered a high level of tolerance from drivers in road traffic. Cycling was perceived primarily as a recreational and sporting activity. However, in 2018, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the National Road Safety Council, introduced nationwide guidelines defining the knowledge and skills required of young cyclists. The culmination of theoretical and practical training for approximately ten-year-old children is an examination. Upon successful completion, the child receives a certificate; however, this does not constitute a licence to ride a bicycle, as such a requirement is not mandatory in France.

In summary, initiatives undertaken by local authorities and residents of specific areas to engage in road safety education for children and young people can be observed. All forms of government intervention play a supportive role, including financial assistance, the provision of appropriate educational materials, and support for local initiatives through the involvement of professional facilitators. A key element of this cooperation is the involvement of various non-governmental entities in achieving the common goal of ensuring the safety of children and young people in road traffic. This is a significant investment in the development of modern societies with a shared ideal of safe behaviour in road traffic, which accompanies people throughout their lives and constitutes a strong point in their value system, passed down through generations. How does Poland compare to this?

In Poland, road safety education began to be introduced into primary schools in 1995. Unfortunately, from the outset, content related to road safety was delivered through cross-curricular integration and was generally “lost” within the core subject matter of the respective disciplines covered by the curriculum. Decisions taken by the Ministry of National Education outpaced the preparedness of schools for implementation. Teachers lacked the necessary competences and attempts to prepare them for delivering road safety education were sporadic and lacked a systemic approach. A fundamental problem was the absence of a dedicated subject addressing both the theoretical and practical aspects of safe participation in road traffic. In practice, the intended objectives were not achieved, despite the emergence in those years of the term “Disappearing School.” This term reflected the annual number of fatalities in road accidents among school-age children. Initiatives aimed at involving parents in road safety education across various domains of road traffic were largely absent. Educational institutions typically limited their activities to inviting police officers to meet with children or organising one-off initiatives, for example at the beginning of the school year. These experiences should serve as a basis for introducing necessary changes in this area. However, similar challenges persist. There is still no dedicated subject for road safety education, and school principals assign responsibility for this content to individual teachers or, in some cases, to police officers with pedagogical training. Furthermore, there remains a significant deficit in practical training conducted under real traffic conditions. It should also be noted that, under current regulations, a child as young as 10

may supervise a younger child in standard road traffic conditions. The National Road Safety Council of Poland (KRBRD) undertakes initiatives in this area in line with European Union recommendations; however, it should also function as a coordinating and supporting body for local government and community initiatives. In addition, it should provide targeted support for specific initiatives, for example by facilitating cooperation between various stakeholders. Another valuable approach is the development of partnerships, for instance between schools and local businesses, which should recognise road safety as an important element of their social responsibility.

The 2025/2026 school year will once again demonstrate the extent to which decision-making processes are preceded by appropriate preparation for the implementation of road safety education in educational institutions. Considering that today's children and young people will soon become adult road users, and that they will shape patterns of behaviour in road traffic, it is important to recall the well-known statement by Jan Zamoyski: "Such will be the Commonwealth as the upbringing of its youth" (Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie n.d.; author's translation).

CONCLUSION

The safety of children and young people in all forms of participation in road traffic currently constitutes a serious social problem in all European Union countries. For obvious reasons, this group of road users is considered the most vulnerable and least protected in situations involving a high risk of accidents. Various approaches are being developed across Europe to address this issue. Undoubtedly, the most important objective is to prepare children and young people for safe participation in this common social activity. To achieve this goal, a range of methods has been employed, taking into account multiple factors:

- the activity of schools and extracurricular educational institutions
- the engagement of local communities
- parental involvement in addressing the problem
- national programmes aimed at improving road safety
- initiatives undertaken by other stakeholders
- preparedness for the implementation of relevant measures.

Road safety education integrates the fields of education and road safety and should therefore involve cooperation among multiple stakeholders influencing both the content of educational programmes and the level of engagement in their implementation. The current model for the implementation of road safety education in Poland does not appear to meet expectations effectively. This is clearly indicated by the statistical data presented earlier, which continue to show an increasing involvement of children and adolescents in road traffic accidents. It can be observed that many entities responsible for road safety in Poland recognise the problem and implement remedial programmes and projects related to European

Union activities in this area. This has led to numerous initiatives by the National Road Safety Council of Poland (KRBRD) and the Polish Road Safety Observatory, Motor Transport Institute (POBR ITS), as well as the Ministry of National Education (MEN), aimed at introducing road safety education in schools. These projects and programs play a crucial role in shaping children's and young people's road safety, but the implementation phase must always be kept in mind.

In this context, it is worth considering several proposals based on the analysis of European Union experience in this field:

- introducing a separate subject titled Road Safety Education
- promoting road safety issues among children and adolescents through support for the organisation of interest groups and clubs focused on these topics
- increasing the number of practical hours within the curriculum, with particular emphasis on teaching appropriate behaviour in real, local road traffic conditions
- providing professional support through the involvement of road safety specialists in education for children and adolescents
- creating mobile road safety training facilities
- ensuring parental involvement in the implementation of the curriculum
- encouraging the engagement of insurance companies, businesses, and other entities operating in the local market.

These proposals have been successfully implemented across the European Union and could also contribute to improving the safety of this group of road users in Poland. An analysis of the findings of this study allows for several valid conclusions:

- the introduction and development of road safety education in schools should be preceded by the preparation of qualified specialists, appropriate teaching materials, and suitable facilities for delivering such content
- elements of road safety education should be extended beyond the formal school environment
- local communities should be more actively involved in implementing the above-mentioned programmes and initiatives
- a specialised pathway for road safety educators should be developed within the higher education system
- efforts should be made to influence public awareness, for example through media campaigns promoting shared responsibility for the safe participation of children and adolescents in road traffic
- the development of an intergenerational approach to road safety education should be embedded within the educational system
- reinstating the appointment of a road safety (BRD) representative (this may be a voluntary or community-based role) should be considered.

The study does not fully exhaust the social problems associated with the need to ensure safety for future generations of Poles. However, it identifies directions and possibilities for improving this safety and offers the hope that it may serve as a source of inspiration for those working in this field.

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