Road Safety: An Inherent Right and Equal Opportunity for All People
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BACKGROUND

Disability and road risk are closely interlinked. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), every year 20 to 50 million people are injured and 1.24 million are killed on the world's roads. Road crashes are the primary cause of head injuries, and it is estimated that some 30 per cent of those injured on the roads remain permanently disabled.1 2

Road injury is not just a major cause of permanent disability – people with disabilities are also more at risk on the roads. The WHO World Report on Disability points out that “People with disabilities are at a higher risk of non-fatal unintentional injury from road traffic crashes” and other causes. 3 A number of studies have shown greater risks faced by people with different disabling conditions – for example, an injury rate over two times higher for children with autism than for other children.4

Little statistical data exists, however, on the specific road risks faced by people with disabilities and the impact on their lives. Road casualty databases do not routinely collect information on the exposure of people with disabilities to road risk even in countries with well-developed data collection systems such as the UK.5

The extent to which people with disabilities may avoid travelling due to the road safety environment and poor access to transport is also not generally recorded. However sources such as the UK National Travel Survey 6 show that people facing mobility challenges - in particular those who have difficulty travelling on foot or by bus - make fewer trips, on average, than others in their age groups. An analysis of data from the National Household Travel Survey in the US concluded that:

2 The WHO and World Bank noted that estimates of post-crash disability vary from 2-87%, World Report on Disability, 2011, p.34.
3 WHO and World Bank, Ibid., p.60.
“Concerns about getting into an accident, congestion, price of travel, aggressive or distracted drivers, access to transit, and lack of walkways are important issues for a large percentage of the population, but they tend to be more important for people with disabilities or medical conditions...”

The same study found that people with disabilities make fewer trips a day than others in the population, though not necessarily by choice. Among those surveyed who had not made a trip at all during the past week, people with medical conditions or disabilities were more likely to want to get out more often – indicating that for many people, a lack of mobility reduces their quality of life.

The new framework of UN Sustainable Development Goals has set a tough target of a 50 per cent reduction in road fatalities and injuries by 2020. It also makes a commitment to people with disabilities that governments should:

“By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.”

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises “the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” If an individual’s mobility choices are so severely limited that they are unable to participate fully in society or fulfil their own potential, their rights are being denied.

An estimated 30 per cent of those injured on the roads remain permanently disabled.

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7 Jeremy Mattson, Travel Behavior and Mobility of Transportation – Disadvantaged Populations: Evidence from the National Household Travel Survey, Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, North Dakota State University, 2012, p.47.
8 United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Outcome Document for the UN Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, August 2015, goal 3.6, p. 16 and Goal 11.2, p. 20.
INTRODUCTION

The Survey in Belarus

In Belarus, as in every country of the world, people with disabilities face discrimination and obstacles to their economic and social involvement. An unsafe road environment and lack of adequate transport can present severe impediments to their mobility and participation in everyday activities. However, in 2015 the Belarusian government signed the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, committing to protecting the rights of Belarus’ half-a-million disabled people by providing a safe and accessible environment free from discrimination.

Building on this commitment, in 2016 the Belarusian Auto Moto Touring Club (BKA), supported by the Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST), surveyed 1000 disabled people and carers across Belarus with the aim of better understanding the needs, desires and problems disabled people face as drivers, pedestrians and public transport users and how to address such issues proactively.

The aim of this report is to record the findings of this survey and offer recommendations to public policy-makers that may address the key issues and problems found relating to disability, mobility and road risk in Belarus.

Methodology and Survey Participants

1000 disabled people and carers representing different disability groups, ages and regions were surveyed and/or interviewed via their connections with local community groups and civil society organisations between September and December 2016. Questions primarily centred on issues related to public transport use, road surface convenience and the attitudes of other road users towards disabled people. This data was then built upon through an observational study whereby the BKA invited a group of 100 participants on a theatre trip in Minsk where, in transit to the venue, they were able to observe and record at first hand the difficulties disabled people face while travelling around the city.
While, the goal of the exercise was to reach as wide a target group as possible, with eighty per cent of those surveyed living in rural areas and outside the capital city of Minsk, it is possible that the sample may contain a bias towards those who are better able to access services and engage in public life. For this reason, carers were also included to ensure that as much information as possible was identified about the needs of disabled people.

Of those surveyed, 60 per cent were male and 40 per cent were female. 22 per cent were aged between 17-25 years old, 57 per cent were between 26-35 and 21 percent were over 36 years old.

As a result, compared to the Belarusian age demographic,\(^\text{10}\) young people were somewhat over-represented. Young children were not surveyed, as a focus on the needs of children is planned for future work.

In terms of disability, 20 per cent suffered from some level of mental disability, 35 per cent suffered from loco motor system impairments, 37 per cent had sensory impairments, and 8 per cent suffered from brain injury. Out of the total group surveyed, four hundred and twenty-six used mobility aids such as wheel chairs or walking sticks.

\(^{10}\) Index Mundi, Belarusian Demographics Profile 2016 estimates that 10.68 per cent of the population of Belarus are between the ages of 15-24 years old; 45.04 per cent are between the ages of 25-54 years old, and 14.69 per cent are over 65.
CASE STUDY: Road Crash Victim to Mobility Advocate

After being badly injured in his youth, Serghey Drozdovskiy has dedicated his life to helping people with disabilities and building a society that is free from barriers.

A month before his graduation from the Belarusian National Technical University Serghey was enjoying a picnic by the river with a group of friends. Then, as a result of a dramatic dive into the river, Serghey broke his back and was permanently paralysed from the waist down as well losing partial mobility of his right hand. From that moment on, Serghey was faced with life as a ‘disabled person’. With the support of friends and family, along with his power and determination, Serghey regained the ability to use his right hand and just a year later was able to participate in a track-and-field competition for wheelchair users.

During his recovery, Serghey attended a special camp where he had to re-learn basic skills such as getting dressed, getting in and out of his wheelchair, and how to overcome other daily obstacles. The camp also helped Serghey to rehabilitate socially and interact with the world around him.

Realising that a supportive and understanding environment was the key - in 1997, Serghey joined with several others to form the Republican Association of Wheelchair Users (RAWU), providing psychological support and a forum for wheelchair users to share positive thoughts and inspiring ideas with one another. Through RAWU, Serghey and his colleagues have now taught many desperate wheelchair users how to live a new life, and helped them to realise that many opportunities are still available to them.

“Those who rush to work everyday around the city do not understand that every step and every kerb that abound in our cities is like Everest for wheelchair users” - Serghey says.
Serghey himself graduated from the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus, and became a lawyer. During his studies, Serghey noted that whilst the Academy was fully accessible for wheelchair users – equipped with ramps and providing accessibility to auditoriums – one problem persisted. Most people still did not understand him and the problems he faced as a disabled person. This is something he has faced in other areas of his life also.

As such, Serghey, today, works as the Chairman of an organisation advocating for the rights of disabled people in Belarus. The organisation’s main objective is to build a barrier-free society for people with disabilities. Personally, he wants people to understand that disability is not just a medical problem, but also a problem of ensuring and advocating for people’s rights.

Through both his personal and professional life, Serghey sets a great example for young disabled people and empowers those who are feeling desperate because of their disability not to lose their willpower and love for life.
SURVEY RESULTS

The impact of poor mobility: participation in social and economic life

Participation in social and economic life includes the ability to travel for work or pleasure. However, of those surveyed, sixty-nine per cent reported difficulties when travelling outside their hometown, and over half reported difficulties just in entering and leaving their own homes.

A difficult road environment can create barriers to conducting even the simplest of everyday activities - with 59 per cent reporting difficulties in conducting activities such as going out to visit family and friends, going to the shops or visiting the doctor’s surgery. Those with mental disabilities were most likely to find difficulties in making such journeys, as shown in the table below.

Unemployment amongst disabled people is also generally high. Of the disabled people surveyed only 34 per cent had jobs. Indeed, discrimination in the labour market and difficulties in getting to work can act as a barrier to employment and certainly pose a disincentive to work, as reported by 100 per cent of respondents suffering from mental disorders who experience difficulties in travelling to or from work.

In light of these findings, the next section sets out the issues and problems disabled people in Belarus face as drivers, pedestrians and as public transport users that serve as particular barriers to their mobility, and consequently, participation in public life.

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<th>By disability type, level to which disabled people in Belarus reported difficulties:</th>
<th>a) entering &amp; leaving their homes</th>
<th>b) going to work (if working)</th>
<th>c) travelling to visit friends or relatives</th>
<th>d) going to the shops</th>
<th>e) visiting the doctor</th>
<th>f) travelling to other towns or villages</th>
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<tr>
<td>Those with loco motor system impairments</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Those with mental disabilities</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those with sensory impairments</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those with brain injuries</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
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What problems do disabled people face ... 
... as drivers?

Only twelve per cent of those surveyed reported driving their own car as often as once a week. Among the top reasons for this low figure is the fact that many disabled people find it difficult to win the right to drive at all due to discriminatory policies based on a lack of understanding. Indeed, the survey found that 54 per cent of people with congenital disabilities had faced problems getting a driving license due to restrictions set by the Ministry of Health. While it was identified that many of the officials who set these restrictions themselves have little to no driving experience, do not have driving licenses, and have little understanding of the effects of congenital disabilities on one’s ability to drive.

Some respondents also highlighted that the lifting gates allowing access to car parks, in many instances, do not leave enough time for disabled people to go through.

However, the main concern, reported by over 60 per cent of respondents, was driver behaviour and the attitudes of other road users. Several respondents cited incidents involving drivers purposely over-running or cutting across their cars, which are marked with a ‘disabled persons’ badge, as well as some occasions where they had been subject to derogatory remarks from passers by.

54 per cent of people with congenital disabilities had faced problems getting a driving license
As pedestrians, 90 per cent of those surveyed with locomotor impairments reported difficulties in using so-called facilities for disabled people at walk-through tunnels and bus stations as well as highlighting issues with the general road environment such as the absence of ramps near steps and the height of kerbs. Of those respondents with visual impairments, 50 per cent reported problems with the high number of cars that park in their yards and on the roadside which cause them problems when leaving the house or crossing the road. A common complaint amongst those suffering from brain injuries was the short duration of traffic lights allowing people to cross the road safely.

Social attitudes were again perceived as one of the main problems faced by disabled pedestrians with 30 per cent of those with sensory impairments reporting that they find it difficult to ask others for assistance when out and about, stating that most people seem indifferent when they see a person with disabilities having trouble.

90 per cent of those surveyed with locomotor system impairments reported difficulties in using so-called facilities for disabled people.

Level to which disabled people in Belarus have used different modes of public transport in the last 12 months

- Underground: 100%
- Buses/Trolleybuses: 75%
- Railroad: 25%
- Trams: 12.5%
- Route Taxis: 6.25%
as public transport users?

The accessibility of public transport is a crucial issue for disabled people, and one that seriously restricts their mobility. On average over thirty per cent of those surveyed reported that they use some form of public transport on a weekly basis, of which 90 per cent use underground services; 51 per cent travel by bus or trolley; 10 per cent by railroad; 8 per cent by tram; and 4 per cent by route maxi-taxi (marshrutka).

Since 2011 $3.5 million has been spent in Minsk to create a 'barrier-free environment' for disabled people, adapting 32 subway stations for disabled access. These developments may account for the high proportion of disabled people travelling by underground. Nevertheless, respondents raised a number of issues in accessing subway stations such as the lack of ramps at walk through-tunnels; narrow ticket barriers; overcrowding; limited seating; and disabled facilities being used by others.

Overcrowding, in particular, was an issue across all transport modes with sixty-seven per cent of those surveyed highlighting that seats reserved for disabled people were often occupied by others, leaving them feeling vulnerable and increasing their risk of being injured as a result of overcrowding and pushing.

Additional constraints were reported by at least 78 per cent of those surveyed with loco motor impairments in terms of getting in and out of public transport vehicles and taxis. It was noted that few buses and trolleybuses have ramps or grab-handles to help with accessibility, while the passages between seats in many marshrutka are too narrow for wheelchair users to pass through.

Meanwhile, of those respondents with visual impairments, 22 per cent reported problems with indistinct ‘stop’ announcements on board buses, trolleybuses and trams. While 18 per cent of those with hearing difficulties reported feeling disoriented when faced with inactive electronic displays.

At the end of the survey, participants were invited to give their view on how these road safety and mobility issues might be addressed more comprehensively by policy makers. These recommendations are outlined in the next section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this report has been to highlight the particular road safety and mobility issues faced by people with disabilities in Belarus. Many of these issues are challenging for all road users – such as poor road surfaces, overcrowding in public transport, or dangerous driver behaviour. However, the discomfort, danger and difficulties are accentuated for people with special needs, including disabled or elderly people.

The following set of recommendations, based on this report’s findings as well as suggestions from survey participants, are not intended to be a comprehensive guide but are a basic list of issues requiring more attention from policy makers, helping them live up to their obligations in a more meaningful way.

As a member of the UNECE, Belarus is party to the Amsterdam Declaration, a priority of which is to:

“Promote policies and actions conducive to healthy and safe modes of transport by designing and modernizing human settlements to improve the conditions for safe and physically active mobility, including infrastructure for walking and cycling, and efficient and accessible public transport, particularly focused on vulnerable groups such as children and persons with reduced mobility.”

In 2015 Belarus ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the focal point of which is the Secretariat, housed within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN. UNESDA have published a comprehensive ‘Design Manual for a Barrier Free Environment’ for people with disabilities containing detailed information on improving accessibility of pavements, buildings, roads and crossings, which should be used in conjunction with the recommendations in this report.

Discomfort, danger and difficulties on the road and on public transport are accentuated for people with disabilities and special needs

Road infrastructure:

People travel in order to reach a destination, so if they are unable to exit their homes easily or gain access to other buildings and sites their participation in social and economic life is impaired. As such, a common concern raised by the survey included the difficulties many of them face every day in just crossing the road. Many factors contribute to this problem, including road design, signage and driver behaviour. However, the survey found that this is an area where the risk of injury and death can be greatly reduced by taking measures such as:

- Installing ramps at the entrances to hospitals, shops, universities and other public places;
- Adjusting traffic lights to allow disabled people enough time to cross the road, as well as making all traffic lights sound assisted;
- Introducing special signs for drivers to be careful and slow down in areas where a lot of deaf or blind people reside;
- Expanding car parks and designating more spaces for disabled drivers as well as tightening the laws prohibiting others to park there;
- Introducing tactile and colour-contrasting pavements to assist blind and visually impaired pedestrians wherever possible;
- Applying good quality paint on the roads, making zebra crossings more visible for people with visual impairments;
- Building tactile and lower kerbs at crossing points for people with locomotor and visual disabilities;
- Involving groups representing people with disabilities in the planning process.
Public Transport accessibility:

The need for more accessible public transport was a strong message from the survey participants. While many underground stations have now been adapted for use by passengers with special needs, there is still more that can be achieved. The costs of renewing and adapting all types of public transport may mean that progress takes time but, as resources allow and as fleets are renewed, the needs of disabled passengers must be a priority. Areas to be improved in this regard may include:

- Equipping all public transport vehicles with ramps and grab-handles as well as installing lifts at all underground stations;
- Increasing the number of seats specially designated for disabled people in public transport vehicles;
- Increasing of the frequency of public transport routes in order to reduce overcrowding;
- Ensuring clear announcements are made at all stops along transport routes and that electronic displays are always in good working condition;
- Increasing the number of social taxis in circulation designated for disabled people.
Driver behaviour and public awareness:

Poor driver behaviour was identified by many survey participants as a particular obstacle to their mobility. Speeding vehicles and aggressive drivers are a risk to all road users, but vulnerable pedestrians – including people with disabilities, elderly people, children and parents with pushchairs – are less able to get out of the way quickly and are often less visible on the road. As such, this report recommends:

- Driver awareness campaigns to build better understanding of the challenges faced by disabled pedestrians, drivers and passengers;
- Checking roads regularly for their compliance with disabled people’s needs;
- Introducing special signs for drivers to be careful and slow down in areas where a lot of deaf or blind people reside;
- Broadcasting social videos online and on TV to raise awareness and encourage people to consider their actions on the roads.
CONCLUSION

This report has focussed on the mobility needs of people with disabilities in Belarus. The results of surveying 1000 Belarusian citizens with different disabilities have shown that disabled people face a wide variety of serious obstacles to full mobility. Overcrowded public transport, dangerous crossings and poor roads are hazardous for anyone but for disabled people, these dangers are accentuated.

Many survey participants reported that public transport is often inaccessible or impossible to access. This has impeded their full participation in social and economic life, and prevented them from playing an active role in their communities. Ensuring accessible mobility is a challenge for all countries, therefore, improving road infrastructure and public transport accessibility should be long-term objectives. The most urgent action, however, as highlighted in the survey results, is to change social attitudes towards disabled people in Belarus.

One way in which the BKA have been achieving this already is through a public awareness campaign that demonstrates the daily struggles faced by disabled people on the roads and encourages people to show more consideration in helping vulnerable road users. A video, which was shot during the survey participants’ trip to the theatre, has been broadcast on a number of local TV channels as well as via online media platforms across Belarus. In addition, the BKA have committed to employing people with disabilities within their own organisation as a result of this survey work.

It should also not be forgotten that Belarus now has legal and moral responsibilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This survey indicates that the mobility choices of people with disabilities in Belarus are still severely constrained. The evidence of people with disabilities must be taken more seriously by policy makers to ensure adequate priority is given to these important issues.

Finally, the BKA would like to remind everyone that there is only one step from being a healthy person to becoming disabled one, so disability should be respected and treated politely and helpfully. Disabled people should not feel as if they are inferior, because everyone may appear in the wrong place at the wrong time.