EASST, iRAP and IRF join forces with UNESCAP to update road design standards in Central Asia

15 March 2024. Improved road design standards across the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) countries is the goal of a new United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) project being implemented by iRAP, EASST, and the International Road Federation (IRF).

Funded by the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF), the project focuses on three pilot countries – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – from within the CAREC region. Over the course of the next 18 months, the project will take a collaborative approach to meticulously review, update, and improve local road design standards.

Project activities officially kicked off this month with the team travelling to each of the pilot countries to meet with local partners and relevant government agencies to introduce the project and explore local needs in terms of road design and mobility.

This week, the project team has been in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, meeting with the respective Ministries of Transport and Traffic Police.

On introducing the project in Uzbekistan Mr Ilkhomjon Abdugafarov, Deputy Minister of Transport said:

"We are very pleased to take part and contribute to this important initiative. Road safety for us is a national priority and we are ready to work with international partners and provide all the information needed."

Earlier in the month, the project team also visited Kyrgyzstan to meet with Ulan Sultanov, Deputy Director of the Kyrgyz Road Transport Project under the Ministry of Transport and Communication, who said:

"We welcome this project with great enthusiasm. At the moment, we use both old and new standards on road design in our work. We need to review and refine these standards, while also preparing new standard documents that address all issues, including safety and inclusivity for vulnerable road users."

Speaking about the project launch, iRAP Global Projects Director Mr Julio Urzua said "Roads must be designed safe right from the start, taking into account the needs of all road users, particularly those most vulnerable. This project is vitally important in ensuring that significant investments being made in the region are safe. It will complement the safe delivery of infrastructure projects by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and European Investment Bank (EIB); all investing to support safer journeys in the region".

IRF Senior Programme Manager & Head of Statistics, Julia Funk commented “Enhancing road safety is not just about better roads; it is about creating environments where everyone, especially those most vulnerable, can travel with confidence. Through our collaborative efforts and adherence to global best practices, this project is dedicated to raising the bar on road standards in Central Asia. By prioritising inclusivity and safety for all road users, we’re not just building roads; we are building pathways to safer, more sustainable journeys for everyone in the region”.

Commenting on the region, EASST Deputy Director for Strategic Partnerships, Dmitry Sambuk said “Existing design standards that are currently in use in several Central Asian countries are in need of urgent modernisation to reflect international best practice in terms of safety and inclusivity. This is recognised by each of the participating countries whose governments have committed to review and update national and regional standards under the CAREC Regional Road Safety Strategy. Through this project and the anticipated endorsement of the recommendations for updating and improving standards, which are now several decades old, will have a lasting effect on the safety of road designs in the participating countries, and across the region.”

Data from the recent Global Status Report on Road Safety underscores a persistent concern: while the incidence of road fatalities is generally declining across the 11 CAREC countries, it is still 10% higher than the global average, and double the average for the European Region.

Building safer and more inclusive roads are key to achieving global targets to reduce road casualties by 50% by 2030. Safe road infrastructure is an essential component of the Safe System approach and improving design standards are highlighted as a priority by both the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030) and the CAREC Regional Road Safety Strategy (2017-2030).

Working in partnership with multilateral development banks and the relevant government entities of each pilot country, the project will review the national (GOST-SNiP) design standards and recommend updates that include aspects of safe road design within the national standards – working towards the development of a new regional standard that aligns with the Global Road Safety Targets and international best practices for safe road design.

By including a focus on pedestrians, bicyclists and other vulnerable road users, the enhanced design standards created in this project will also support several complementary development objectives, including improved accessibility and inclusivity, promoting sustainable cities, low-carbon transport solutions, and good health and well-being. The project will also aim to build capacity of the road designers across the three countries towards safer road design.

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