Lithuania has been announced as this year’s **winner of the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) Award**. This recognises major improvements in road safety over the last decade. Out of the European countries tracked by the ETSC, Lithuania was the only EU country to have managed to halve road deaths between 2011 and 2021.

In fact, among non-EU European countries, only Norway made more progress with a reduction of 52%.

Eight key elements were cited by the ETSC panel of experts in the decision to award this year’s prize to Lithuania. These were:

- A long-term national road safety programme with a target to further reduce deaths by 50% by 2030, with Vision Zero by 2050 (eradicating deaths and serious injuries from roads);
- A nationwide programme since 2018 auditing pedestrian crossings and improving the level of safety;
- A substantial increase in cycling infrastructure in the capital city Vilnius, from 40 km in 2015 to a target of 160 km by 2023;
- An in-depth collision investigation of all fatal vehicle crashes since 2019;
- The development of a new traffic collision information system designed to better capture accurate road death and injury statistics, while incorporating data from hospitals;
- The introduction of average speed cameras in 81 road sections since 2018, with 400 fixed speed cameras;
- The presence of zero-tolerance blood alcohol concentration limits for professional and novice drivers, and 0.4 g/l for all others;
- An alcohol-interlock programme for drink-driving offenders, as an alternative to a driving ban in operation since 2019.

The ETSC’s latest annual Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) report, published on the 15 June
2022, revealed that road deaths in the EU27 member states in 2021 were reduced collectively by a striking amount: an unprecedented 13% in comparison to 2019. The ETSC has explained that this reduction can, to a large extent, be attributed to mobility changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and that there is no guarantee that this progress can be maintained if traffic volumes are to revert to the way they stood prior to the pandemic.

Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director of ETSC said: “Despite a big drop in road deaths over the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has not immunised Europe against road death and injury. 20,000 people die each year on our roads, and getting these numbers down will take hard work, political will and investment. Lithuania is a great example of a country that is tackling the problem on multiple fronts: strategic planning, drink-driving, speed, infrastructure and enforcement – this award is well deserved.”

The European Commission is currently carrying out the process of revising rules on driving licences for the EU. In regard to this the ETSC says that the minimum age for obtaining a driving license should not be lowered. In addition, graduated driving licenses should be recommended to avoid higher risk situations for young drivers such as driving late at night or after consuming alcohol. The ETSC is also calling for the higher standards of training which are currently applied to lorry and bus drivers to be further extended to van drivers.

Ellen Townsend, Director of Policy at ETSC said: “We need to recognise that young and inexperienced drivers have a much higher risk of injuring themselves and others. Smarter rules, such as lower alcohol limits and bans on night driving, can help young people gain experience in a safer environment and protect them from causing a tragedy.”

Photo Credit: LeManna © / Shutterstock.com - no permission to re-use image(s) without separate licence from Shutterstock