



Building Momentum for Seat-Belt Laws in Turkey through Press Conferences and Partner Collaboration



The Problem

In Turkey, widespread lack of seatbelt use is a major cause of injuries and fatalities from road crashes. In 2013, the WHO estimates that more than 6,500 people were killed in road traffic crashes, and the Turkish National Police reported more than a quarter of a million people injured. In addition to lives lost and impaired, during that same year road crashes also cost the country an estimated 20 Billion Turkish Lira [EUR6.2 billion].

Evidence shows that wearing a seat belt is the most effective way to prevent death and serious injury in a crash. Yet the seatbelt usage rate in Turkey remains alarmingly low, with the WHO estimating that only 44% of drivers used effective restraints in 2013. Enforcement of existing laws is also sub-par: In its 2015 Global Status Report on Road Safety, The World Health Organization gave Turkey a score of two out of 10 for enforcement of existing seat belt laws.

Against this backdrop, the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) launched a "Road Safety Advocacy Project" to improve road safety legislation. The project's primary focus is amending and implementing seat-belt legislation to reduce disastrous consequences of road crashes.

The Policy Challenge

In 2012, Turkey's Prime Minister launched the country's Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan. This important government strategy set a goal of increasing seatbelt use from 44% to 70% in urban areas and 76% to 90% in suburban areas by 2015, and 80% and 100%, respectively, by 2020.

Road safety advocates applauded the effort and pledged to support implementation. At the same time they believed that weaknesses in the seat-belt legislation threatened to weaken the law. The policy, for example, did not define "protective devices," including seatbelts and child restraints; fines were not clearly articulated; and exemptions allowed for older vehicles without seatbelts. The TRCS believed that improving this law was a critical first step to saving more lives, so their advocacy initiative targeted Members of Parliament (MPs) and the media as key audiences who could help make those changes a political priority.

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Seatbelt Use by 2020

100%



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The Tactics

In 2013, the TRCS initiated a “no seat belt exemptions” policy campaign to amend the legislation, while at the same time pledging to support the overall goals of the national traffic regulation for increasing seatbelt use and reducing the number of fatalities and injuries.

In order to achieve its goals, the TRCS needed to gain the attention of the public and policymakers. Because media coverage is an effective way to reach both audiences, and since road safety is an issue that impacts everyone, they developed a multi-faceted advocacy and communications strategy that would effectively reach and influence their target audiences. Two important advocacy tactics included using press conferences and collaborating with partners to create a civil society declaration (see sidebars). TRCS knew that the press conferences could gain nationwide interest and coverage if they were appealing, newsworthy, and included a clear call to action. They also understood the value of involving other partner organizations to demonstrate broad-based support for their policy recommendations.

Activity #1: A press conference to put a “human face” on road traffic accidents, October 2014

Each year during the Bayram (Eid) holiday, about seven million people in Turkey take to the roads, and road crashes which lead to serious injury and death are particularly prevalent. The TRCS identified the holiday as an opportune time to bring media attention to the high level of road crash death and injury while also highlighting the need for improved seat belt legislation to address it. To underscore the plight of victims and to provide a variety of supportive voices to the policy campaign, the TRCS partnered with the Spinal Cord Paralytic Association (SCPA) of Turkey, a group that works to support people who suffer from paralysis.



The Turkish Red Crescent stage a press conference during the Bayram holiday

CHECKLIST:

Organizing a press conference

1. Define your goal for the press conference. Ensure that the objective supports your advocacy campaign's overall objective, and is measurable. Make certain you have identified a clear 'call to action'.
2. Clarify the report, announcement or newsworthy media angle. Identify a news “hook” that will interest reporters. This might be a statistic, a recent publication, or a new development in road safety in your area.
3. Choose and prepare spokespeople. Target high-level, credible spokespeople who can speak persuasively about your issues to the press.
4. Secure the time and venue. Try to hold the press conference in either a well known or creative venue that is easily accessible. Make sure you secure details in good time.
5. Contact the media. Draft a press announcement that includes the details of the press conference, key speakers, and briefly describes the urgency of the issue. Circulate widely among all major press outlets.
6. Host the press conference. Make sure the press conference is held according to schedule. If possible, allow for a question and answer session between journalists and speakers.
7. Follow up with media. You're not done once the press conference is over. Follow up with reporters and, wherever possible, allow journalists to speak one-on-one with spokespeople to develop their stories. Provide a contact for reporters to follow up for additional information as needed.
8. Collect and evaluate media coverage. Media coverage is a key metric in assessing the success of your press conference, so make sure you collect media clips, links and footage.

Want to learn more? You can find other resources for advocates at www.grsproadsafety.org/XXX



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The press conference was held immediately after the 2014 holiday, during which 59 people, including children, had been killed. TRCS invited national and local journalists, who found one pair of shoes representing each person killed during the holiday period in front of the speaker's table. Both the Deputy Head of the SCPA Ms. Cetinkaya and President of the TRCS Mr. Akar – a well known and respected public official – spoke at the event. Mr. Akar shared statistics and called for higher penalties for those who do not wear seat belts. Ms. Cetinkaya was paralyzed by a road crash in which she was not wearing a seatbelt and is now a passionate champion for seat-belt legislation. She told her story of receiving a low fine for not using a seatbelt, continuing on without wearing one, and eventually being involved in a debilitating crash.

In the planning and execution of their press conference, the TRCS incorporated a number of good practice media advocacy techniques to ensure the activity had the strongest possible impact. First, they highlighted a statistic – 59 people killed in road crashes – with wide appeal to journalists, illustrating that number with a visual and camera-friendly representation that prevented the statistic from being “just a number.” Second, they utilized high-level spokespeople: The TRCS representative spoke about the statistics and made the critical link to their proposed policy changes, which would be necessary to reduce that toll. Then, by telling her story, the SPCA representative provided the media with a personal story that could complement the more complex issue of policy change. The TRCS hoped that the whole press conference “package” would invite comprehensive and powerful media coverage that could reach the public and policymakers.

The media response to the press conference was swift and widespread. As a result, over 35 online stories and extensive coverage in national and local outlets focused on the plight of victims and the need for improved legislation. Importantly, by providing a clear link between the road safety problem and the policy solution, TRCS were able to ensure their ‘call to action’ was reported by the media.

Activity #2: Pressuring policymakers through a civil society declaration, October 2015

Civil society interest in road safety in Turkey is relatively strong, with a number of well respected NGOs focused on the issue. The TRCS wanted to emphasise to decision makers that the road safety problem in Turkey had reached crisis proportions, civil society was alarmed, and the government must act immediately to strengthen its policies. With elections on the horizon, the TRCS decided to seize the opportunity to showcase the need for improved seat-belt laws and influence MPs in the build up to the election, and to create momentum toward influencing new MPs early in the next administration's tenure.

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The Turkish Red Crescent and partners join together to pressure policymakers

TRCS demonstrated how strategically using press conferences and collaborating with partners to implement a civil society declaration can achieve progress towards both objectives.

TRCS determined that an influential way to demonstrate civil society unity would be a publicly signed declaration carried out at a high-visibility press conference. First, TRCS leaders approached the chairpersons of large, reputable road safety and public health NGOs to solicit support and input, with follow up details on the proposed legislation and key data supporting the changes. They then drafted a declaration that laid out the evidence for policy change and called for increased fines and strengthened implementation.

Six partner associations – the Turkish Traffic Safety Association, Turkey Traffic Safety and Research Association, Suat Ayoç Traffic Victim Association, Turkey Spinal Cord Paralytic Association, Turkish Drive Academy and Turkish Medical Association – joined with the TRCS to participate in the press conference, sharing their perspectives and calling on MPs to take action to amend the legislation. At the end of the event, the leaders of each NGO signed the joint declaration and announced that it would be delivered to all MPs following the election.

A well planned civil society declaration is a strong demonstration of demand for change from citizens to their legislators. In this case, the impact of the declaration was enhanced by the TRCS' decisions to include respected, high-profile organizations (including those not known for being involved in policy advocacy), sign the declaration during a press conference, and explicitly share its plans to deliver the document to MPs.

Media coverage of this event was strong, with the major news agencies and TV channels providing coverage. TRCS will deliver the declaration to all MPs after the election and request that they bring the issue to Parliament's floor.



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The Wrap-Up

Many policy advocacy campaigns face the dual challenges of increasing public awareness and pressuring decision makers to take action. Over a year's time, the TRCS demonstrated how strategically using press conferences and collaborating with partners to implement a civil society declaration can achieve progress towards both objectives, when implemented within the context of a broader advocacy agenda. TRCS is now continuing with its efforts – including delivering the declaration to MPs and following up to cultivate potential champions who can bring improved and well supported legislation to Parliament's floor.

The TRCS hopes to see this objective achieved early in the tenure of the new Parliament. However, the group is also aware that policies are only the first step towards practice. Once policy change is achieved, it must go hand in hand with effective implementation to be effective in saving lives from road crashes in Turkey.