



SAFETeen in brief

By Maria Papdakaki, Project Coordinator

"Building skills for enhancing hazard perception and safe decisions among teenagers" (**SAFETeen**), is a new Erasmus+ funded project, which aims to enhance risk perception and decision-making skills among teenagers in Europe, as well as increase teachers' competences on teaching students how to deal with negative peer pressure while commuting. It employs innovative pedagogical and digital tools, adapted to the developmental capabilities of teenagers. The key products of **SAFETeen** will be a digital emergency aid tool for self-assessment of fitness to commute and a virtual reality (VR) tool to allow students experience the dangers of reckless behaviour while commuting and the consequences of poor decisions, in a safe and controlled simulated environment. The project is expected to produce a cluster effect in adolescents' way of thinking through achieving changes in certain contexts that will be transferred and scaled up in other significant contexts and life circumstances.

SAFETeen is coordinated by the Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU) and the Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (LaHeRS) and brings together experts from various

IN THIS ISSUE

WELCOME TO THE SAFETEEEN PROJECT

IDENTIFYING THE DECISION-MAKING PATHWAYS OF ADOLESCENTS

PARTNER PRESENTATION

KICK OFF

NEWS

fields to offer a holistic approach in addressing the challenges faced by young people in Europe. The consortium consists of seven more organizations from five countries: the Foundation for Research and Technology in Crete (Greece), the University of Valencia (Spain), the Regional Education Office of Tuscany (Italy), the Regional Directorate of Education of Crete (Greece), the University of Turku (Finland), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth of Cyprus and Frederick University in Nicosia (Cyprus).



SAFETeen vision

Research shows that adolescents tend to overestimate their driving ability and take significant risks when commuting. Likewise, despite possessing knowledge of traffic rules, adolescents are likely to violate them because they are susceptible to peer influence, and they lack the skills to avoid difficult social situations. Until now, interventions and campaigns aimed at raising adolescents’ awarenesses on traffic safety rules, are often unsuccessful because they are adult-led and usually aim at increasing adolescents’ knowledge of road safety risks without taking into account adolescents’ social contexts, social influence parameters and developmental socio-emotional characteristics, which influence their decision-making processes. Teaching students how to deal with negative peer pressure and empowering them to make safe decisions in the context of commuting (transportation by vehicle and on foot), and also in other contexts, could be of high importance for reaching more mature decisions and safeguarding their quality of life for their future. The **SAFETeen** project aims at developing real-life dilemmas, helping students to become more competent decision-makers across different social contexts, with emphasis placed on hazard perception, emotional regulation and balanced decision-making. To this end, **SAFETeen** will engage secondary school students in the process of sharing their experiences and co-designing youth-friendly digital tools, including a virtual reality (VR)

self-learning tool and an Emergency-aid tool for safe commuting, while tailoring these tools to their needs. The project further expects to develop a concrete Pedagogical Handbook for the teachers in order to introduce youth-friendly material and tools in schools as part of a safety promotion lesson. Through this project, teachers will gain access to innovative and user-friendly educational material, while students will learn how to build critical thinking skills, through playful personalized, and self-paced decision-making tools. The use of a virtual reality (VR) tool, with an immersive and interactive learning experience with highly realistic simulations, will help students experience the dangers of reckless behaviour and learn their personal limits. At the same time, the self-assessment tool for fitness to commute will inform them on their fitness to commute in real life circumstances.



Identifying the decision-making pathways of adolescents

By Pedro Valero Mora

As parents, teachers, or responsible adults for young adolescents, we often wonder if they will react sensibly to the challenges that await them before maturing into adults. Although we know that facing new experiences is necessary for their growth, it is inevitable to feel fear about whether, when it comes to acting, they will be influenced by their friends, their hormones, or their recklessness, instead of by the “wise” advice we try to give them.

One of the areas of greatest concern is mobility, and it is entirely justified to feel this way: among adolescents and young people (aged 10 to 24), traffic injuries are the leading cause of death, taking more lives than communicable or non-communicable diseases, nutritional or maternal health causes, or self-harm (Global Burden of Disease, GBD 2019). During this life period, young people transition from travelling under the supervision of others to doing so more independently, either individually or with friends. In these movements, young people mainly fall into the category referred to by experts as vulnerable road users (including, for example, pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, or scooter users), but it is also when they start driving private vehicles. All these modes of transport are subject to specific dangers, and we adults wonder... do adolescents realize these dangers? And if they do... do they know and will do the right thing to reduce or avoid those dangers?

Unfortunately, finding out this information is not easy. After all, adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by the young person's search for independence from those who have been their references up to that point, replacing them with peers of the same age. This change often leads adolescents to stop communicating fluently with the adults around them and to value much more the opinions, attitudes, and actions sanctioned by their peers. Therefore, it is common for children not to report many of the problems that affect them to adults, despite the latter's eagerness to be informed.

However, we must not think that these barriers are impossible to overcome.

When adolescents are given the opportunity to speak in an environment where they do not feel pressured, it is possible to get them to overcome their distrust and start talking freely about their views on their experiences. This environment has been achieved in our project using the methodology of focus groups.



Focus groups emerged around the late 1930s as an alternative to individual interviews. Some social scientists began to question the quality of the information obtained through a series of pre-prepared questions asked by the interviewer. Stuart A. Rice (1931) was one of the first social scientists to criticize this method, pointing out that often the interviewer takes a directive role and the interviewee plays a more or less passive role, leading to results being limited by the former's point of view. In the case of adolescents, it is not difficult to see that they often feel uncomfortable and under pressure in front of an inquisitive adult, and they often react by hiding or distorting the information they give. However, when these questions are asked in the company of others of their same age, their attitude can change enormously.

In a focus group, there are usually a minimum of 5 or 6 participants, and a maximum of 10. This is done to allow all subjects to contribute easily to the discussion. Although there is of course a list of topics or issues to address, focus group facilitators try to take a passive role, allowing participants to talk among themselves and reach conclusions with sufficient consensus. The person who manages the meeting ensures that all important issues are discussed and also makes sure that everyone participates in a balanced and sufficiently correct way. Additionally, a second person is responsible for recording the participants' responses, either electronically or on paper, to later summarize the findings.

be able to discuss these problems with peers, because it made them see that what they felt individually was shared with others and that, therefore, reacting cautiously was also accepted among their peers.

However, our project will not simply stop at describing road safety conflicts from the perspective of adolescents. We also want to ask parents, teachers, and other responsible adults about the same topics using focus groups to find out if there is agreement between the problems identified by one group and the other. Knowing if the perceptions of the dangers that adolescents face are the same would greatly facilitate intergenerational dialogue and lead to more effective and reality-based measures.

Finally, this work will be used to implement educational and awareness-raising actions among adolescents. Among them, the most important is to develop a virtual reality tool that shows the situations identified in the focus groups. In this tool, young people can interact with the simulation and select what actions they would take in each case, as well as what aspects should be taken into account to make the decision with the confidence that these situations are inspired by the experiences of young people who, like them, have felt threatened by everyday situations like moving from one place to another.



In our case, the young people were delighted to participate in our focus groups and express their opinions and fears about road safety in their environment. Very quickly, they began to express conflicts in which they or others their age had found themselves, as well as ways in which they typically act and/or should have acted. For example: using a mobile phone while moving, riding motorcycles or mopeds with friends who are attractive but do not have a helmet for them, crossing streets as pedestrians without paying attention because they are talking to their friends or listening to music, drinking alcohol because everyone does it and then going to a different place in a private vehicle. Apparently, it was a very revealing fact for adolescents to



Partner Presentation

Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (Project Coordinator)

The Laboratory of Health and Road Safety (Project Coordinator) (LaHeRS, <https://lahers.hmu.gr/>) is affiliated to the Department of Social Work of the Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU). LaHeRS aims at promoting health and safety through education, policymaking and research. Injury prevention is one of the key priorities of LaHeRS and particularly prevention of intentional and unintentional injuries. LaHeRS works directly with people to inform, educate, and empower them about safety, health, mental health and social issues, particularly the underserved and those at risk. LaHeRS tests innovative solutions to treat individuals, couples, families and communities experiencing adverse biopsychosocial circumstances and contributes to service evaluation in terms of effectiveness, accessibility, and quality. LaHeRS supports the development of scientific tools and training materials for use by academic, research and civil organizations. LaHeRS is a leading research entity in Greece in transport safety. A wide range of theories and methodologies are employed by LaHeRS experts in the field of road safety to promote understanding on how the road user engages with different forms of mobility, seeking to develop tools and countermeasures of road errors, violations and accidents. LaHeRS possesses a “Virage VS500M” driving simulator and three electric cars, which are used in research and awareness raising on safety and eco-mobility. The laboratory is visited by thousands of primary and secondary education students across Crete region for educational purposes.



The road safety education programme includes hands-on training on the driving simulator, experiential activities, road safety games and other educational activities. Finally, LaHeRS also delivers brief interventions for minor offenders of the Road Traffic Code, as part of reformative measures, in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office and the Juvenile Probation Service of Heraklion. The program is delivered by qualified social workers and child/adolescent psychologists and aims at changing behaviour and preventing risk. Special interventions have been also designed and applied to the parents of juvenile offenders, who are invited and participate in parallel programs.



SAFETeen Kick-off meeting

The first meeting of the SAFETeen project partners was successfully held in Heraklion, Crete (January 18-19, 2024). During the first meeting, the vision of the project as well as the final outcomes like the digital tools that will be developed, together with the Pedagogical handbook in order to support students to make safer decisions depending on the different contexts and social conditions, as teenagers usually face major dilemmas and particular peer pressure regarding their commuting behaviour. The meeting was attended by all project partners, mostly with physical presence and was covered by the local TV, as road safety is a very important issue in Crete and Greece.



News

The SAFETeen project at the 2nd Panhellenic Conference on "Special Educational Needs"

On March 30, 2024, the **SAFETeen** project was presented to a large number of teachers, psychologists, social workers, and other special education professionals who were at the Galaxy Hotel in Heraklion, Crete, for the needs of the 2nd Panhellenic Conference "Special Educational Needs: family- school – adulthood – community". The conference was co-organized

by the Health & Road Safety Laboratory of the Hellenic Mediterranean University and the General and Special Education Studies & Research Institute (IMEGEE) and was intended

to discuss the new developments in the field of special education and learning difficulties, to present innovative methods for supporting families, modern tools and good practices from the field of formal, non-formal and informal education.

Mr. Vassilis Kontogiannis, representative of the Foundation of Research and Technology (FORTH), delivered a presentation on the SAFETeen project, as part of a Round Table discussion on "Innovative Pedagogical Practices and New Technologies". The title of his presentation was **"SAFETeen Project – Developing Skills to Enhance Risk Perception and Safe Decisions among Teenagers (Road Safety)"**, presenting details on the scope, activities, innovative products and expected impact of the SAFETeen project



SAFETeen at the 5th International Conference “Artificial Intelligence – eLearning – eCreativity” in Rethymno

Ms. Areti Vouraki, SAFETeen project manager for the RDE of Crete, attended the 5th International Conference "Artificial Intelligence - eLearning - eCreativity", which took place at the premises of University of Crete in Rethymnon on 20-26 May 2024. Ms. Vouraki, participated in a workshop, organized by the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) and RDE of Crete in which she presented the priorities, objectives and expected outcomes of the Erasmus+ SAFETeen project to an audience of teachers and academics from Greece and abroad, pupils from schools in Rethymnon, students of the universities of Crete and representatives of the local authorities.



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