

# Contributed Articles

## The Status of Global Road Safety: The Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages urgent action

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### Introduction

Every year around 1.25 million people die as a result of a road traffic collision and between 20 and 50 million more sustain non-fatal injuries, some resulting in significant long term disabilities. These deaths and injuries, while devastating to victims and their families, also cost governments between 3-5% of their Gross Domestic Product (WHO, 2015).

More than a decade since the release of the WHO and World Bank *World report on road traffic injury prevention* in 2004 (WHO, 2004), there has been a major shift in understanding the issue. There is more recognition and increased road safety advocacy which has resulted in road traffic crashes now rightfully being considered a major health and development concern.

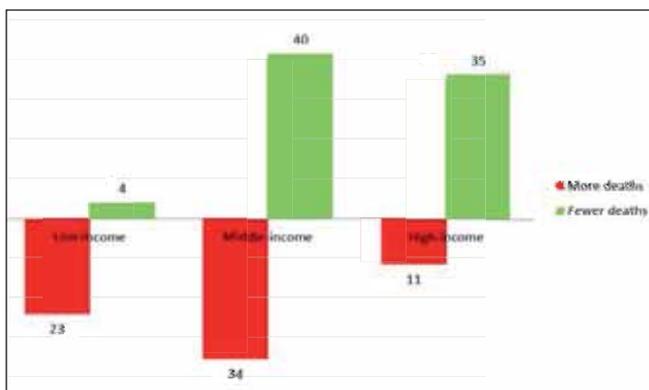


Figure 1: Countries showing changes in the number of road traffic deaths between 2010 and 2013 by income status\*

\*Note: only countries with more than a 2% change in their number of deaths between 2010 and 2013 were included in these calculations.

Midway through the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development now includes road safety in two of its goals. This has the potential to give road safety, for the first time, the priority it deserves – a priority commensurate with the scale of this global challenge.

### Midway through the Decade of Action

With recognition of road safety has come action, and a hint of good news. After more than a century of increasing road traffic deaths, WHO's *Global status report on road safety 2015* now shows a plateau in the number of road traffic deaths globally - this despite a 4% increase in the world's population and a 16% increase in the number of vehicles on the roads around the globe (WHO, 2015). Seventy-nine countries, mainly middle and high-income countries, have seen a decrease in the absolute number of deaths since 2010 while 68 countries, mainly in low- and middle-income countries, have seen an increase in deaths (see Figure 1).

Ninety percent of the 1.25 million road traffic deaths around the world are seen in low- and middle-income countries - despite these countries only having 54% of the world's vehicles (Table 1).

The African region continues to have the highest road traffic death rates (26.6 per 100 000 population versus a global rate of 17.4), while Europe appears to have the safest roads (9.3 per 100 000 population).

In the last three years, only 17 countries have aligned at least one of their laws with best practice on seat-belts, drink-driving, speed, motorcycle helmets or child restraints. While there has been progress towards improving road safety legislation and in making vehicles safer, the

**Table 1: The status of road safety around the world by income level**

	Global	Low-income	Middle-income	High-income
Estimated road traffic deaths	1.25 million	16%	74%	10%
Population	7.15 billion	12%	70%	18%
Estimated road traffic death rate per 100 000 population	17.4	24.1	18.4	9.2
Registered vehicles	1.8 billion	1%	53%	46%

report shows that the pace of change is too slow to attain the recommendation by UN General Assembly resolution 64/255 (UN, 2010) to increase the proportion of countries with good road safety laws up to 50%. At this time only laws on seat-belts meets this recommendation and much more needs to be done on the other key risk factors (Figure 2).

Despite some progress, the Status Report highlights the need to address the issue in a holistic “Safe Systems” approach thereby focusing not only on user behaviour, but also on the other components of the system; namely safe infrastructure and safe vehicles. Since more than half of all deaths occur among those outside a vehicle – 22% pedestrians, 4% cyclists and 23% motorcyclists - more focus needs to be placed on rethinking in particular urban settings to better protect these “vulnerable road users” if significant gains are to be made in countries. Furthermore, vehicles need to be made safer – vehicles sold in 80% of countries fail to meet seven key UN vehicle safety regulations (WHO, 2015).

### Increasing action in the last five years of the Decade of Action

In September 2015, another milestone was achieved. Building on the efforts of WHO and many partners, road safety was included in two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – the Health Goal (3) and the Sustainable Cities and Communities Goal (11). Target 3.6 – to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes – is very ambitious and is one of only a handful of targets with a 2020 end date. This means that in five years, many hundreds of thousands of deaths need to be averted in order to reduce the annual rate down to approximately

600 000 deaths per year. This will require substantially increased and concerted effort from multisectoral agencies within governments, international agencies, civil society and the private sector. In this context WHO is working with international partners to develop a package of core interventions which will assist Member States to put in place both effective and cost-efficient strategies to more rapidly address the problem.

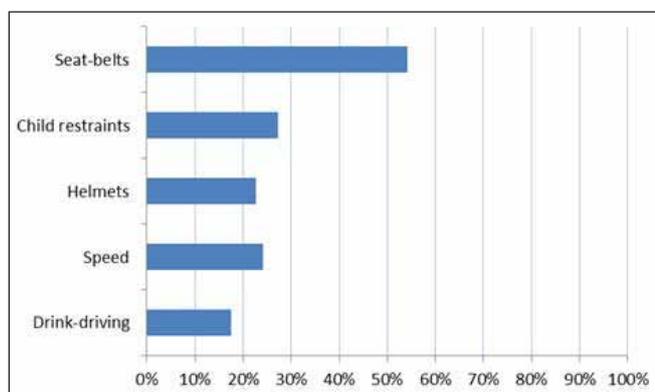
The 2nd Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety, hosted by the Government of Brazil and co-sponsored by WHO in November 2015, served as an opportunity to engage with policy-makers at the highest level to chart ways to fulfil the ambitious target set by the SDGs. Fifty-two ministers/vice ministers were among the 2000 strong delegates who adopted the Brasilia Declaration which calls on all countries to step up road safety activities (Brasilia Declaration, 2015). A United Nations General Assembly resolution and a World Health Assembly resolution are likely to endorse the recommendations of this declaration in 2016.

While these political processes help to drive action, the true test of their power rests with their ability to affect change in countries, states/provinces, and municipal governments. This manifests through improved management of road safety, the adoption and enforcement of legislation around speeding, drinking and driving and the use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints; improvements in the safety of roads and vehicles; and enhancements in trauma care.

During the last six years WHO, in collaboration with partners, has been able to help achieve and demonstrate substantial gains in countries. These include reductions in speeding and increases in seat-belt and child restraint wearing in the Russian Federation (see Box 1) and Turkey; and reductions in drinking and driving and increases in motorcycle helmet wearing in Cambodia and Viet Nam, among others. Bloomberg Philanthropies was a key financial supporter of these initiatives and as a result of the success of the first grant announced a new five-year commitment (2015-2019) of US\$ 125 million to global road safety focusing on five countries and 10 cities.

### Conclusion

The Global status report on road safety 2015, reflecting information from 180 countries, indicates that worldwide the total number of road traffic deaths has plateaued at 1.25 million per year, with the highest road traffic fatality rates in low-income countries.



**Figure 2: Proportion of countries with good laws\* by risk factor**

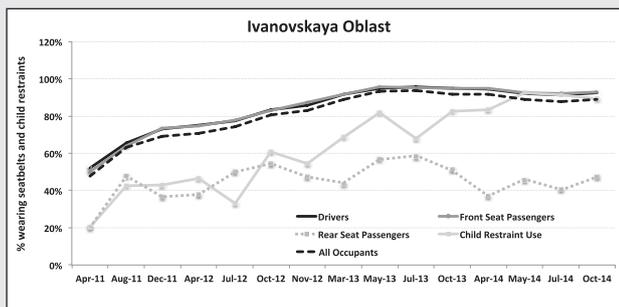
\* As defined in the *Global status report on road safety 2015*.

### Box 1: Improving seat-belt and child restraint wearing in the Russian Federation

In the Russian Federation, the RS10 project was implemented from 2010 to 2014 by three partners – the World Health Organization, the Global Road Safety Partnership and Johns Hopkins University (JHU) – in cooperation with the Ministries of Health and Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in Lipetsk and Ivanovo regions, with the support of the Regional Administrations, the State Inspectorate for Road Safety and regional Departments of Health.

The goal of the project was to enhance road safety in the pilot regions through targeted actions addressing three risk factors – speeding, not wearing seat-belts and not using child restraints – with the potential for dissemination of the project experience in the Russian Federation in the medium term.

According to roadside surveys conducted by JHU together with Lipetsk State Technical University and Ivanovo State Polytechnic University, seat-belt use among all car occupants increased from 52.4% in October 2010 to 77.4% in October 2014 in the Lipetsk Region, and from 47.5% in April 2011 to 88.7% in October 2014 in the Ivanovo Region (see Figure).



### Observed seat-belt and child-restraint use in Ivanovo Region, 2011–2014

Source: EURO, 2015

Under the banner of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020, WHO will continue to focus on providing technical support to Member States to implement and monitor good road safety practices while continuing to act as the coordinator of road safety within the United Nations system together with the United Nations regional commissions. The passing of both United Nations and World Health Assembly resolutions during 2016 will provide further guidance to Member States and raise the profile of road traffic deaths and injuries higher on the global political agenda.

Urgent action is needed to achieve the target for road safety reflected in the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: halving the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes by 2020. Evidence from many high-income and a few middle-income countries show that while this might be technically possible, the momentum garnered in Brasilia at the Second Global High Level Conference on Road Safety needs to be converted into action in all countries around the world.

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