

The first global assessment of road safety finds that almost half of the estimated 1.27 million people who die in road traffic crashes each year are pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. While progress has been made towards protecting people in cars, the needs of these vulnerable groups of users are not being met.

The Global status report on road safety, provides the first worldwide analysis of how well countries are implementing effective road safety measures. These include limiting speed, reducing drink-driving, and increasing the use of seatbelts, child restraints and motorcycle helmets. Funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the report presents information from 178 countries, accounting for over 98% of the world's population. It uses a standardized method that allows comparisons between countries to be made.

"We found that in many countries, the laws necessary to protect people are either not in place or are not comprehensive. And even when there is adequate legislation, most countries report that their enforcement is low," said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. "We are not giving sufficient attention to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists many of whom end up in clinics and hospitals. We must do better if we are to halt or reverse the rise in road traffic injuries, disability and deaths."

"In the Eastern Mediterranean Region...the findings of the Global status report on road safety are even more alarming when compared with the figures from 2002," said WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Hussein Geziary. "They indicate that fatalities from road traffic injuries have witnessed a sharp rise in the past five years. The implications alert us to the urgent need for comprehensive and concerted actions to address the rising death toll. "

"Traffic crashes are a leading cause of death, particularly among young people 5 to 44 years of age," said Mr Bloomberg. "For the first time, we have solid data to hold us accountable and to target our efforts. Road safety must be part of all transport planning efforts, particularly at this moment of focus on infrastructure improvements and road building by many countries around the globe."

While road traffic death rates in many high-income countries have stabilized or declined in recent decades, research suggests road deaths are increasing in most regions of the world and that if trends continue unabated, they will rise to an estimated 2.4 million a year by 2030. In

addition, road crashes cause between 20 million and 50 million non-fatal injuries every year and are an important cause of disability. In many countries support services for road traffic victims are inadequate. These avoidable injuries also overload already stretched health-care systems in many countries.

The report found that underreporting of deaths occurs in many countries, and that few countries have completely reliable data on road traffic injuries. The highest death rates are seen in the Eastern Mediterranean and African regions, at 32.2 deaths per 100 000 population. This indicates a drastic rise in comparison to the 2002 data where the death rate in the Region stood at 26.4 deaths per 100 000 population, and came second to the African Region.

“More than 90% of the world’s road deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries, while these countries only have 48% of the world’s vehicles,” said Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of WHO’s Department of Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability. “Our roads are particularly unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists who, without the protective shell of a car around them, are more vulnerable. These road users need to be given increased attention. Measures such as building sidewalks, raised crossings and separate lanes for two wheelers; reducing drink-driving and excessive speed; increasing the use of helmets and improving trauma care are some of the interventions that could save hundreds of thousands of lives every year.”

The Global status report on road safety is currently being translated into Arabic to maximize its benefit in the Region. Meanwhile a Regional report focusing on the situation of road safety in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and its Member States is being prepared and will follow in due time.

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