

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has the second highest road traffic fatality rates in the world

29 October 2013 - Today, the sixtieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean witnesses the release of the Global status report on road safety 2013: supporting a decade of action. This report provides an update of the road safety situation in countries across the world. More importantly it sets the baseline for monitoring action through the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020.

The report presents information from 182 countries – including 19 countries from the Eastern Mediterranean Region – accounting for almost 99% of the world's population, or 6.8 billion people.

Among other important information, the report shows that only 28 countries, covering 7% of the world's population, have comprehensive road safety laws on five key risk factors: drinking and driving, speeding, and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints. It thus indicates that, among other measures, the pace of legislative change needs to accelerate rapidly if the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 is to meet its target of saving 5 million lives.

The report also documents that between 2007 and 2010, 88 countries managed to reduce the number of deaths on their roads, showing that improvements are possible. However, the number of deaths increased in 87 countries during the same period. Worldwide the total number of road traffic deaths remains unacceptably high, at 1.24 million per year.

Data from the Eastern Mediterranean Region show that it accounts for 10% of the world's road traffic deaths and has the second highest road traffic fatality rate among WHO regions after the African Region. Middle-income countries of the Region account for over 85% of its road traffic deaths. At the same time, high-income countries in the Region have road traffic death rates that are double the rates in high-income countries in other regions of the world. This clearly shows that road traffic injuries pose a grave problem for all countries in the Region regardless of their income level.

More alarming is that the younger productive age groups are hardest hit. About 60% of those

who are killed in road traffic crashes are between the ages of 15 and 44 years, and over 75% are male. This is in line with the most updated global burden of disease data for 2010, which show that road traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among those aged 15–29 years in the Region.

Of all road traffic victims in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, about 45% are vulnerable road users. The highest toll is among pedestrians, followed by motorcyclists and bicyclists. Yet only a few countries have national policies and enabling environments to encourage walking and cycling or to separate vulnerable road users.

Laws on key risk factors are available in the majority of the Region's countries, but are mostly not comprehensive. This, together with inadequate enforcement, limits their effectiveness. And although most countries have post-crash care systems, these need strengthening in terms of both trauma care and rehabilitation.

The 2013 global status report is the second in a series analysing the extent to which countries are implementing a number of effective road safety measures. In addition to the five risk factors noted above, the report highlights the importance of issues such as vehicle safety standards, road infrastructure inspections, policies on walking and cycling and aspects of pre-hospital care systems. It also indicates whether countries have a national strategy which sets measurable targets to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads.

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