

Summary report on the

**First meeting of the  
Eastern Mediterranean  
Regional Forum for Road  
Safety Legislators**

**Leadership, legislation and  
data**

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Muscat, Oman  
25–27 June 2019



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE

**World Health  
Organization**

**Eastern Mediterranean**

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## 1. Introduction

Deaths and injuries occurring on the road represent a serious public health issue on a global scale. While the death rate relative to population size has stabilized in recent years, the number of deaths is still rising. In 2016, approximately 1.35 million people died as a result of road traffic crashes across the world, which are currently the eighth leading cause of death globally for all age groups, and the first for young people aged 5–29 years. The burden of road traffic deaths and injuries is also disproportionately borne by those living in low-income countries where death rates are three times higher than those in high-income countries. In addition, vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists are the most affected. Current trends show that the progress made is still not enough to compensate for future increases in population and the rate of motorization. As reflected in the latest *Global status report on road safety 2018*, it is unlikely that target 3.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to halve road traffic injuries and deaths by 2020 will be met.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, despite being the second least motorized region in the world, accounts for almost 9% of global traffic deaths and has the third highest death rate globally after the African and South-East Asia regions. Vulnerable road users account for 51% of all road traffic deaths in the Region, which shows the need to take them into account in any road safety improvement strategies. On the other hand, 39% of regional deaths are borne by car occupants and drivers. Males and young people aged 5–29 years still bear a great portion of road traffic deaths in the Region, accounting for about 81% and 44%, respectively. Indeed, road traffic injuries are among the top three causes for younger age groups, both male and female. This suggests the need for greater attention to road safety for this age group and a general shift in the child health agenda, not only globally but

also at the regional level. This is reflected in the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!), developed by WHO, other United Nations (UN) agencies and partners, as a guiding tool to help countries prioritize interventions to prevent and respond to injuries among adolescents, including road traffic injuries.

In response, WHO has been supporting country efforts to address this grave public health issue, in alignment with regional and global commitments. These include, most recently, 12 voluntary global performance targets for road safety and service delivery mechanisms, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in April 2018. These reinforce previous global commitments within the agendas of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 and the SDGs. The same resolution also requested a third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in 2020. At the regional level, resolution EM/RC56/R.7 on road traffic injuries was endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2009, and renewed commitments were undertaken in 2017, in resolution EM/RC64/R.4 on the operationalization of the adolescent health component of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2016–2030, to develop costed adolescent health plans aimed at reducing preventable deaths, including those due to road traffic injury. Additionally, WHO's thirteenth global programme of work (2019–2023) targets a reduction of road traffic fatalities by 20% and WHO's regional Vision 2023 prioritizes injury prevention and control, including road traffic injuries, as a technical area of work.

WHO has also been providing technical tools and materials to assist countries in reaching the targets for road safety. In 2017, the WHO released Save LIVES, a road safety technical package that provides 22 evidence-based priority interventions and six strategies addressing speed management, leadership, infrastructure design and

improvement, vehicle safety standards, enforcement of traffic laws and post-crash survival. The six strategies and 22 interventions are interrelated and should be implemented in an integrated manner to effectively address road traffic deaths and injuries. WHO has also initiated several global and regional platforms for road safety legislators. In 2018, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators was launched as a chapter of the Global Network for Road Safety Legislators, in recognition of the leading role of parliamentarians in driving the policy change required to improve road safety at all levels. This leadership role was further underlined by the “Leadership for Road Safety” theme of the Fifth UN Global Road Safety Week in 2019.

Against this backdrop, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held the first meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators in Muscat, Oman, from 25 to 27 June 2019. The meeting focused on the areas of road safety leadership, legislation and data, and discussed a proposed initiative to review and strengthen the institutional and legal frameworks for road safety in the Region.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- review the regional road safety situation based on the findings of the *Global status report on road safety 2018*, with a special focus on leadership, legislation, data and youth;
- present the progress made by the Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators, including discussion on a proposed regional initiative on road safety legislation;
- examine the role and importance of data in priority setting, policy-making and strategic planning; and
- agree on the way forward and a follow-up mechanism.

The meeting was attended by 56 parliamentarians and experts from 15 countries of the Region, as well as by representatives of ministries of health, transport and interior and the enforcement sector, as well as key regional and global partners and nongovernmental organizations, such as the Arab Road Safety Organization, Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), and Youth for Road Safety (YOURS).

The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Dr Mohammed Bin Saif Al Hosani, Undersecretary for Health Affairs, Ministry of Health, Oman, who underlined the high-level political commitment of Oman to addressing road safety at all levels. Opening remarks were made by Dr Sikandar Ali Mandhro, Chair of the Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators, and Dr Akjemal Magtymova, WHO Representative in Oman, who delivered a message from Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, recognizing Oman's efforts over many years to put road safety on the global and regional agenda and highlighting that road traffic injuries affect the youngest age groups at the height of their productivity, causing major economic losses. Dr Al-Mandhari said that road traffic injuries are preventable and improved road safety is achievable, but required political will and determined efforts at all levels. He noted that the meeting aimed to put plans into action and was parallel to ongoing global dialogues to shape the global road safety agenda leading up to 2030. He promised WHO's commitment to providing technical support to countries so that road safety and Health for All by All would become a reality in the Region.

Dr Sikandar Ali Mandhro underlined the essential role and responsibility of legislators in addressing road safety through the appropriate governance mechanisms, sufficient resources and the power to act. He observed that the launch of the Regional Forum in September 2018 had been a major step in providing political



leadership and advocacy for legislative and policy frameworks to improve road safety in a systematic, universal and practical way.

The main meeting was followed by a special meeting for attending parliamentarians to discuss future steps for the Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators and ways to strengthen the Forum's contribution to policy change and to progress the recommendations of the main meeting at both the country and regional levels.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

### *Global and regional road safety perspectives*

The rate of progress in terms of reducing fatalities on the road has been uneven across regions and income levels. Overall the pace of progress has been too slow and insufficient to meet SDG target 3.6. The *Global status report on road safety 2018* shows that while there has been progress in some middle- and high-income countries, there has been no reduction in the number of road traffic deaths in any low-income country since 2013. In fact, there was an increase in road traffic deaths in 104 countries between 2013 and 2016. Even though low-income countries represent only 1% of motor vehicles in circulation, 13% of road traffic deaths occur in these countries.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region shows trends that are contrary to what is observed globally. While over 80% of deaths occur in the Region's middle-income countries, its high-income countries have a road traffic fatality rate of 23.6 per 100 000 population, which is higher than the fatality rate in their low- and middle-income neighbours (18.6 and 17.4 deaths per 100 000 population, respectively) and that is also three times the average death rate of high-income countries globally (which is 8.3 per 100 000 population).

Few countries around the world, including in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, have laws that meet best practice for all behavioural road safety risk factors, including speeding, drinking and driving and non-use of seat belts, child restraints and helmets.

In terms of post-crash care, the proportion of patients who die before reaching a hospital in low-income countries is twice as much as in high-income countries. There are key elements that need to be addressed to ensure effective care, including timely access and prompt transfer to appropriate care, and early access to rehabilitation services.

To improve road safety, an entire holistic safe system needs to be established and coordinated. The number of people lost every year due to road traffic injuries is a very big price to pay for mobility, especially as it impacts the most productive strata of the population – youth. The Vision Zero and “safe system” approaches see death and serious injuries as unacceptable products of mobility. They view safe mobility as a right for everyone, everywhere.

Vision Zero underlines that road safety is about saving lives rather than merely preventing crashes and thus does not aim at zero crashes, but at zero deaths. This entails that road design considers two things simultaneously: guiding road users to the safest behaviour possible, while mitigating the consequences of human error. It underlines a shared responsibility between those who design, build, use and manage the roads, and those who provide post-crash care.

A holistic strategy using the safe system approach to reducing road traffic deaths, requires adopting the Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach and the whole-of-government approach. Health is affected by an array of social, economic, structural, environmental and cultural factors that are often beyond the control of individuals. These factors

are mostly under the responsibility of government entities other than those in charge of health. Thus, the health sector, acting alone, cannot manage threats to people's health that have their root causes in multiple other sectors. HiAP considers the health implications of decisions and public policies across different sectors and enhances the accountability of policy-makers for these implications.

The whole-of-government approach aims at ensuring policy coherence and focuses on achieving an integrated government response to particular issues through programme and project management. It complements the HiAP approach and both allow proper implementation of the Vision Zero and "safe system" approaches for road safety. In turn, improving road infrastructure and design, providing sidewalks, bike lanes and accessible, affordable public transport, all increase physical activity, while simultaneously reducing carbon emissions and improving road safety. There are several guides available for implementing the HiAP approach, including the WHO framework for country action across sectors for health and health equity, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2014, and the WHO HiAP training manual.

Working groups discussed opportunities for road safety in relation to the HiAP and whole-of-government approaches, including the ways in which the social determinants of health affect road safety, in particular transport means and patterns and the impact of road safety on health. Legislative or policy interventions were then identified to address these issues, along with the concerned stakeholders.

Driving license regulation and monitoring was one area identified, and it was proposed that there should be strict physical and mental medical certification before any person is licensed to drive. Medical records that deem people unfit for driving should be linked to licensing authorities and should be updated, especially during license renewal.

It was also proposed that the mental and physical condition of professional drivers be monitored. Within the private sector, trading companies, delivery services, travel agencies and transportation companies should abide by strict working hours and shifts to ensure driver attentiveness on the road. There should be provision of accessible public or private collective transportation to ensure that exhausted employees from all sectors have alternative means of transport other than personal/private cars. The promotion and use of collective, safe and affordable transport would also enable more inclusive mobility, helping to improve overall health.

Various stakeholders were identified, including ministries of health, interior and transport, trade unions, professional associations, legislators and the private sector. The ministries of health, transport and interior along with legislators, were identified as key parties with the most interest in road safety.

### *Leadership*

Leadership for road safety was the global theme of the Fifth UN Road Safety Week in 2019. Leadership is key for road safety because it provides a vision and is necessary for positive policy change and successful implementation. The discussions focused on the role of legislators and youth as leaders and catalysts for improving road safety. The second recommendation of the Manifesto for Road Safety, which was adopted by parliamentarians from the Global Network for Road Safety, is concerned with the crucial role that legislators as leaders can play in enacting the road safety policies that are needed to make change. Leaders can also support adequate levels of funding for road injury prevention and promote oversight and accountability for both governments and the public authorities that are responsible for planning and enforcement. Parliamentarians can also effectively

engage the community, especially the youth, as their representatives. However, they cannot act alone, but need government support to be able to achieve their goals.

Because improving and implementing road safety is a complex task that involves many sectors, parliamentarians can ensure the complementarity of policies across sectors and can help set priorities and translate them into financial commitments. Higher levels of endorsement and support for road safety targets from different parties in parliament, can help secure better legislation and sustained political commitment as leadership changes. Countries can also make use of available WHO platforms for legislators and other ongoing global and regional road safety initiatives to share experiences, lessons learnt and good practices.

The main challenges that parliamentarians face in advancing road safety as a priority include the absence of holistic safe system thinking and a focus on stand-alone interventions. Another challenge is weak coordination among sectors and inadequate multisectoral action. There is a tendency towards competition among different parties rather than collaboration, and often competing priorities at different levels and a lack of policy coherence. In addition, the instability in many countries in the Region is a major challenge to the proper functioning of governments. A particular challenge facing the Regional Forum is ensuring the sustainability of its efforts.

Young people should be actively engaged in advancing road safety. With road traffic injuries gravely affecting those under the age of 30, it is essential to find ways to include them in the decision-making process. Youth are usually viewed as part of the problem of road safety, but should be seen as an asset instead. They should also be trained to become leaders. The first UN World Youth Assembly in 2007 aimed to

create a global youth-led organization to lead a movement for road safety, giving young people the chance to be part of the solution.

This is how the global organization YOURS came to life, focusing on how to make the world's roads safer for and by youth. YOURS was officially launched in 2009 during the opening ceremony of the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Russia. Its main areas of activity are global advocacy, youth empowerment and providing support for decision-makers. YOURS proposes a three-lens approach to youth participation where youth start as beneficiaries, become partners and finally assume their role as leaders. During the beneficiary stage, youth are informed of what they should or can do. As they climb the ladder, they get more involved as partners who collaborate and contribute. Finally, they reach a stage of initiation and leadership, sharing decision-making on different issues, including road safety.

In group work, participants identified leadership actions for parliamentarians, drawing on the 10 recommendations of the Manifesto for Road Safety, as well as approaches and strategies for effective youth engagement in identified actions, where applicable. Group discussion focused on the fourth recommendation of the Manifesto, related to road safety policy and legislative priorities. This recommendation asks parliamentarians to review and improve their national safety laws and policies and support the implementation of WHO's Save LIVES technical package. Increasing parliamentarians' accountability was identified as a means to ensure that laws are in line with international standards and best practices.

The importance of reviewing existing institutional frameworks and relevant stakeholders for the effective implementation of all pillars of the WHO package was underlined. It was also proposed that each country should have a legislative council specifically concerned with

road safety that would include different parties or All-Party Road Safety Friends Groups. These councils or groups would play a leadership role in advocating for road safety in parliament.

The importance of awareness and educational campaigns on road safety from a safe system perspective, by and for youth (and the general public), was also stressed, whether through schools, civil society or government. Parliamentarians were urged to draft laws to encourage youth participation and engagement, to ensure their inclusion in both decision-making and implementation processes. Youth also need to have appropriate support, including capacity-building and funding for their initiatives.

### *Legislation*

Currently 11 countries in the Region, representing only 38% of the Region's population, have laws that meet best practice for at least one of the five key behavioural risk factors (speed, drink-driving and non-use of helmets, seatbelts and child restraints). None of the participating countries in the *Global status report on road safety 2018* have laws that meet best practice criteria for all the five key risk factors. Drawing on requests received from different countries to strengthen their institutional and legal frameworks within a holistic safe system approach, a proposed regional legislative initiative was presented for discussion and feedback by meeting participants.

The main objectives of the initiative are to:

- support Eastern Mediterranean Region countries to improve road safety management by identifying and addressing legislative and institutional gaps;

- convene and facilitate inclusive, participatory and multisectoral policy dialogue and consultation;
- document country efforts in strengthening national legal and institutional frameworks;
- develop a holistic legal framework with evidence-based and context-driven laws and policies; and
- build the required capacities of concerned national teams.

This legal framework can be implemented through four phases. A preparatory phase focuses on advocating for a legal and institutional assessment as well as the mapping and landscaping of relevant stakeholders. This is followed by an assessment and consultation phase, during which an in-depth assessment of institutional and legal frameworks and regulations is done, with recommendations to address any identified gaps. The third phase focuses on advocacy for change and requires capacity-building for policy-makers, lawmakers, civil society, media and the general public, especially youth, in order to advocate for change and road safety improvement. Finally, the fourth follow-up phase requires strong support for adopting data-driven legislative and regulatory changes, where new laws are adopted and/or existing ones are amended. Follow-up would also include a monitoring and evaluation aspect that ensures appropriate enforcement, awareness and implementation.

The experience of the Philippines in improving its legal road safety frameworks was presented as a country example. The Philippines embarked on a legal development programme in 2015 to improve road safety by implementing the Bloomberg Initiative for Global Road Safety and WHO media fellowship programmes. A road safety action plan was crafted in line with the Decade of Action for Road Safety. The initial and most important step was an in-depth institutional and legal assessment of road safety to detect gaps and provide recommendations.



Stakeholders and key leadership actors were identified and engaged for each pillar of the global plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety (road safety management, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer road-users and post-crash care). Agents of change such as the media and people with strategic government positions were constantly updated on current trends and issues related to road safety, while utilizing their expertise and perspectives. Keeping a good relationship with key government agencies was an important facilitating factor that ensured sustained work and follow-up. Finally, community engagement and alliance-building with different legal, health and road safety advocates, especially for vulnerable road users, brought silent issues into the light and gave depth to the discourse, which made the initiatives and actions more inclusive beyond the usual concerns.

Participants discussed the proposed legislative initiative in groups, including its conceptual framework, technical content, capacity-building component and the expected support from WHO. The need for capacity-building on advocacy tools and data reporting was stressed, and the provision of free online courses for parliamentarians on strengthening road safety legislation requested, potentially through partnership with academic institutions in the Region with programmes on traffic management. Other potential partnerships to support the Regional Forum's efforts to improve road safety legislation were identified, including with the media, civil society and political parties.

### *Data*

Data on road safety affects a country's road safety profile and ranking both globally and regionally, and is an important challenge for countries of the Region, with observed disparities between reported and WHO estimated data on road safety. Data is needed in all phases of addressing road safety, including for assessment, planning,

advocacy, implementation and evaluation. It can help identify the scope, trends and scale of the issue, measure the socioeconomic burden of road safety, identify risk-factors and allow comparisons with other public health problems. It supports and informs the developing and improving of laws and policies, and allows legislators and stakeholders to follow-up on the implementation and impact of planned interventions through monitoring and evaluation.

There are many sources of road safety data that provide different types of data. It is crucial that these sources are harmonized, combined and integrated. Currently, the most common and most utilized source of data is police records, which accounts for more than 70% of reported data on road traffic injuries and fatalities in the Region. However, there are other sources such as vital registration, health facility records and insurance companies.

Another limitation in the Region is the different definitions used by countries to classify road traffic deaths and injuries. The definition of a road traffic death as being within 30 days of the road traffic crash is currently used in 13 countries in the Region, compared to only nine in the *Global status report on road safety 2015*. The variation in definitions greatly affects the number and comparability of road traffic injuries and deaths in different countries.

WHO has been supporting countries to strengthen their road traffic data. Reported and estimated road traffic death rates are among the regional core indicators, and countries are supported to enhance road traffic death reporting through the strengthening of their national vital registration systems. Furthermore, 19 countries in the Region received technical support to complete the survey of the *Global status report on road safety 2018*, which collected data on all aspects of road safety.

A national observatory is an important element of road safety management systems. It provides a tool for the collection and analysis of harmonized road safety data. This complements the role of the system's lead agency. Institutional road safety management plays a huge role in the overall improvement of the road safety situation. Road safety best practices underline the importance of the establishment, activation and strengthening of evidence-based management systems centred on a lead agency and multi-layered coordination mechanisms. The agency should have the appropriate resources and adequate funding to be functional and operational. Currently, 17 countries in the Region report having a designated lead agency for road safety, of which 11 are funded. The roles and responsibilities of the lead agencies vary between coordination of national road safety efforts, development and revision of legislation, and monitoring and evaluation.

A regional observatory would be a formal platform to foster international and regional cooperation. ESCWA and WHO are partnering to explore the possibility of establishing an Arab transport and road safety observatory, possibly with the support of a champion country in the Region to support the initiative and host the observatory.

Participants were asked to reflect on road safety data in their own countries, including potential sources of data for road traffic injuries, level of access to data, missing types of data and opportunities to improve road traffic databases. A data analysis exercise was held in which participants suggested policies/strategies to reduce road traffic deaths based on a dataset of road traffic deaths disaggregated by sex and type of road user, crash and road.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### *To Member States*

1. Promote a paradigm shift in the understanding of road traffic injury prevention through adopting and implementing the Vision Zero/safe system approaches.
2. Ensure that road safety interventions benefit from Health in All Policies and whole-of-government approaches.
3. Strengthen multisectoral country representation at the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety to be held in Sweden in February 2020.
4. Enhance youth engagement in road safety efforts, as beneficiaries and decision-makers, including participation in the 2nd World Youth Assembly for Road Safety to be held in Sweden in February 2020 as an official pre-event to the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety.
5. Improve national road safety data systems through the mapping and harmonization of different sources based on WHO normative guidance.
6. Implement the regional road safety initiative through assessing road safety laws and policies, while considering possible changes and modifications and ensuring appropriate follow-up of the required enforcement.
7. Ensure that parliaments engage in advancing road safety efforts in collaboration with other stakeholders at the national level and with other parliaments at the regional and global levels.
8. Promote the exchange of experiences and best practices in road safety.

*To WHO*

9. Ensure that technical support is tailored to the context of the Region and takes into account the variation in country contexts and development levels.
10. Provide technical support for building national capacity on data strengthening, strategic planning and addressing legislative and institutional gaps, based on WHO guidance such as the road safety legislative change model and the regional action framework for establishing road safety systems.
11. Continue to support the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Forum for Road Safety Legislators, link it to practical initiatives and explore possibilities to mobilize resources beyond WHO support.
12. Support country efforts to adopt positive models for youth engagement and skills development in advocacy and communication, as well as the design, implementation and monitoring of road safety strategies and interventions.
13. Ensure that the inputs from members of parliament, country representatives and experts who attended the meeting are reflected in the updated version of the proposed regional road safety legislative initiative document.
14. Support country-level implementation of the regional road safety legislative initiative, including through capacity-building by exploring the possibility of an online course adapted to regional needs, media and other advocacy mechanisms, enforcement and evidence-based legislation.
15. Support country efforts to strengthen and harmonize road safety data systems, including by unifying the definition of road traffic deaths across the Region, possibly through employing definitions based on deaths/kilometres travelled or number of vehicles.
16. Promote and support the establishment of a regional (or subregional) road safety observatory, with the participation of all

countries in the Region and in collaboration with concerned partners, including ESCWA.

17. Identify and disseminate experiences and best practices in road safety legislation, data improvement and youth engagement, including through an online platform.



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