

Policy brief

Reducing injury, disability, death and economic losses through road safety in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Background

Road traffic injuries kill approximately 120 000 people every year in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The Region accounts for almost 9% of the world's estimated road traffic deaths, despite having only 5% of the world's vehicles.¹ An additional 340 000 people are injured in non-fatal crashes annually.² This presents governments in the Region with not only a significant public health concern, but also a development challenge. The huge toll from road traffic injury, disability and death costs the Region's economies billions of dollars and places a strain on families, communities, health care and social services.

Reducing road traffic injury and death will benefit both public health and development

Impact on public health

According to WHO estimates,³ road traffic injury is the eighth leading cause of death in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The Region has the third highest road traffic death rate in the world, after the African and South-East Asia regions. Beside deaths, a substantial number of people are seriously injured, often facing costly, life-long disabilities. In 2016, the Region lost the equivalent of 8 million years to ill health, disability or early death as a result of road traffic injuries. Road traffic injury is a major problem for all countries in the Region regardless of their income level.

¹ Global status report on road safety 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-status-report-on-road-safety-2018>).

² Global health estimates 2016 summary tables: deaths by cause, age, and sex, by WHO region, 2000–2016. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016.

³ Global health estimates 2016 summary tables: DALY estimates by cause, age, and sex, by WHO region, 2000–2016. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016.

“Almost 14 people an hour die every day in the Eastern Mediterranean Region as a result of road traffic injuries”

Tackling road traffic injuries and deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean Region – targets for change

- The current approach to road safety is focused on tackling specific issues in isolation rather than addressing the road safety system in its entirety.
- Road safety strategies often lack measurable time-bound targets for fatalities, non-fatal injuries and road safety risk factors.
- Legislation often fails to meet best practice criteria on the five behavioural risk factors (speed, drink-driving, and use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints).
- Enforcement of traffic laws is inadequate in most countries.
- There is a lack of policies to protect vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists) and promote walking and cycling.
- United Nations priority vehicle safety standards are generally neglected.
- Post-crash care services need further development.
- Regional data are currently insufficient, making it difficult to select effective road safety interventions and evaluate their success.
- Transport systems need to provide safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable means of collective transport.
- Young people should be seen as an asset rather than a problem, and should be engaged in road safety efforts at all levels.

Over 80% of road traffic deaths occur in the Region's middle-income countries. Unlike the global trend, high-income countries in the Region have an overall estimated road traffic death rate that is higher than their less affluent neighbours. This regional death rate is three times the average rate of high-income countries globally.

Impact on economic and social development

The regional burden of road traffic injury and death falls disproportionately on males and on those aged between 15 and 44 years. Road traffic injury is one of the leading causes of death among young people (aged 15–29 years) in the Region.¹ This represents a sizeable impact on the Region's most economically productive members of society.

In the Region, the cost of post-crash services – including emergency services, medical and legal expenses, insurance administration fees, lost economic output and damage to vehicles – is mostly borne by crash victims and their families. This seriously affects those with limited resources. Considerable economic losses are also incurred at the national level, with road traffic crashes costing countries up to 5% of their gross domestic product (GDP).² The scarcity of economic studies, problems with underreporting and other methodological limitations make it difficult to fully understand the economic impact of road traffic crashes in the Region. One study indicates that an estimated US\$ 120 billion was lost due to road traffic injuries in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010.³ More recent findings have revealed a growing economic burden due to road traffic injuries, ranging from 0.05% to 6.6% of countries' GDP.⁴

Why act now?

Road traffic deaths and injuries are predictable and preventable, yet recent findings from WHO's *Global status report on road safety 2018* reveal that road deaths have increased or remained the same in the majority of countries in the Region. Without increased efforts and new initiatives road traffic injuries will remain a significant problem in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



Road traffic injury is a public health concern with more than **120 000** people killed and **340 000** people injured on roads every year in the Region.

Road traffic injury is a leading killer of children and young adults aged 5–29 years in the Region.

Road traffic injuries affect economic growth by removing prime-age adults from the workforce and reducing productivity.

Road traffic injury is a social equity issue. Vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists – account for half of all road deaths yet benefit the least from road safety policies in the Region.

¹ Global health estimates 2016 summary tables: deaths by cause, age, and sex, by WHO region, 2000–2016. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016.

² United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/72/271 on Improving global road safety. New York: United Nations; 2018 (https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/media/news/2018/UNGA-RES-72-271.pdf?ua=1).

³ Dahdah S, Bose D. Road traffic injuries: a public health crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. Transport notes series, no. TRN 45. Washington (DC): World Bank; 2013.

⁴ Global status report on road safety 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018 (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-status-report-on-road-safety-2018>).

Generating action: major international commitments on road safety

The Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020, its Global Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are great opportunities to capitalize on existing country efforts and strengthen collective action for road safety.

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/64/255, which declared the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020. The Decade aims to stabilize and reduce predicted levels of road traffic fatalities around the world. The accompanying Global Plan provides an overall framework for action, based on the Safe System approach, and promotes proven cost-effective solutions to improve road safety, including: (i) road safety management; (ii) safer roads and mobility; (iii) safer vehicles; (iv) making road users safer; and (v) improved post-crash response and hospital care (see Fig. 1). Although it is time-bound, the Decade is a framework for action that continues to be relevant for future road safety efforts in the Region and across the world.

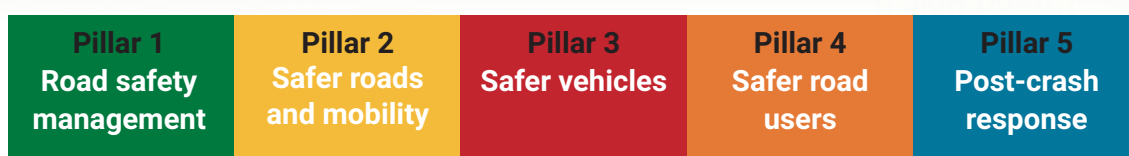


Fig. 1. The five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action

The SDGs acknowledge road traffic safety as a development issue and recognize its importance to broader global health and development. The SDGs include two targets that relate to road safety, one in Goal 3 (on health) and one in Goal 11 (on sustainable transport in cities and human settlements) (see Fig. 2). This is the first time that road safety has formally appeared on the global development agenda.

SDG 3.6 – By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

SDG 11.2 – By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

Fig. 2. SDGs for road safety

In 2017, WHO, in close consultation with experts and Member States, developed a set of 12 voluntary global performance targets for road safety risk factors and service delivery mechanisms (see Fig. 3). The 12 targets, endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2018 (resolution A/RES/70/260), provide a clear framework to guide and monitor the development and implementation of road safety interventions.



Fig. 3. Global road safety performance targets

Source: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_traffic/12GlobalRoadSafetyTargets.pdf?ua=1.

What can be done?

There is a strong scientific base for what works in practice, as demonstrated by the success of different countries across the world in reducing the burden of road traffic deaths. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the burden of road traffic injuries can also be successfully reduced using effective, evidence-based interventions and approaches.

Policy-makers, road safety practitioners and ministries concerned with road user safety (health, transport, police, etc.) are encouraged to holistically implement road safety interventions by drawing on the Safe System approach (see Fig. 4). This approach helps to guide the building of safe road systems to prevent crashes and, when crashes do occur, to ensure they do not result in serious injury or death, and that those injured receive adequate trauma care.

Regional road safety efforts

- Resolution EM/RC56/R.7, on Road traffic injuries: a growing public health concern, represents a joint commitment by WHO and Member States to make road safety a reality in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- The Eastern Mediterranean Forum for Road Safety Legislators, launched in 2018 as part of the Global Network for Road Safety Legislators, provides a platform for regional legislators to set priorities, exchange best practices and advocate for and adopt legislation to improve road safety at all levels.
- In 2019, the Regional Legislators Forum launched a Regional Road Safety Legislative Initiative aiming to review and update related legislative and policy frameworks based on international best practices.
- WHO, in consultation with Member States, developed a road safety system framework for the Region to aid the development of comprehensive national action plans, based on the Safe System approach.
- Road traffic injury prevention among young people is a priority in the national adolescent health plans of several Member States, which have been updated based on WHO's Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!).



Fig. 4. Safe System approach

Source: Save LIVES: a road safety technical package. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/255199/9789241511704-engpdf;jsessionid=6F8C916B2CCCD301C403937B5FE21E5C?sequence=1>

Recommendations

Leadership and institutional management

- Establish and/or strengthen a lead agency with the authority and adequate resources to coordinate all road safety activities among multiple stakeholders.
- Develop and/or update multisectoral, data-driven road safety strategies with measurable targets and indicators.

Safer roads and sustainable transport

- Invest in safer road infrastructure and design for all road users with special attention to vulnerable users.
- Review existing speed limits to ensure they are appropriate for different road functions.
- Raise public awareness of the impacts of speeding, in combination with appropriate enforcement.
- Develop policies that promote a shift to safer modes of transport, such as walking and cycling, while also providing safer spaces for such modes on the road.
- Invest in safe and affordable public transport and encourage its use.

Legislation and enforcement of traffic laws

- Establish/update/enact laws that meet best practice criteria on the five key behavioural risk factors: speed, drink-driving and non-use of motorcycle helmets, seatbelts and child restraints; and address emerging risk factors such as mobile phone use and drug-driving.
- Establish and/or enact appropriate incentives and penalties that ensure compliance with road safety laws.
- Adopt effective enforcement strategies that use new technologies and automated enforcement tools which have proven to be successful in reducing speed.

Safer vehicles

- Adopt the United Nations vehicle safety standards to protect all road users.
- Establish mechanisms for the periodic assessment of vehicles in order to ensure that all new and in-use vehicles comply with basic vehicle safety regulations.
- Provide consumer information on vehicle safety through new car assessment programmes that are independent of vehicle manufacturers.

Post-crash care

- Designate a lead government agency with the authority to set system-wide standards and to coordinate pre-hospital and hospital-based emergency care for the injured as well as access to rehabilitation services.
- Develop organized, integrated and timely pre-hospital and facility-based emergency response and care systems.
- Develop laws that protect bystanders who provide help to the injured (Good Samaritan laws).

Data

- Adopt the WHO-recommended standard definition of road traffic death (occurring within 30 days of a crash for police data) and for road traffic injury classification (by age, sex and type of road user).
- Establish/strengthen data systems such as emergency room-based surveillance; civil registration and vital statistics; and trauma registries.
- Include non-fatal injuries and the proportion of victims sustaining permanent disability in reported data.
- Improve data linkages between multiple sectors and data sources such as police data and health facility records.
- Improve data collection on intermediate indicators such as speed surveys, helmet/seat-belt observational studies, etc.
- Conduct research on the economic cost of road traffic crashes, deaths and injuries.
- Establish policies that ensure effective crash investigation and equitable access to information for survivors and their families.

Conclusion

Road traffic injuries and deaths are preventable, and the global road safety community knows what works and what does not work when it comes to reducing the burden. Effective interventions must follow the Safe System approach and cover all five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020. Implemented together, and fully, these will result in fewer deaths and injuries. Such efforts require understanding the current burden, an effective action plan and a multisectoral response. It is a momentous time to address road safety in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The global community's acknowledgement of the importance and severity of road traffic injuries is unprecedented. The time to act is now.

