

ROAD SAFETY: BASIC FACTS



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ROAD SAFETY AND MEDIA REPORTING

Road traffic crashes are often covered in the media simply as events—not as a leading killer of people and an enormous drain on a country's human, health and financial resources. By framing road safety as a health and development story, with data and in-depth information, journalists have the opportunity to affect the way these stories are told and potentially to help shift public behaviour and attitudes, influence policy and therefore contribute towards saving lives.

WHY ARE ROAD TRAFFIC INJURIES A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Road traffic injuries and deaths have a terrible impact on individuals, communities and countries. They involve massive costs to often overburdened health care systems, occupy scarce hospital beds, consume resources and result in significant losses of productivity and prosperity, with deep social and economic repercussions.

The numbers speak for themselves: this is a public health and development crisis that is expected to worsen unless action is taken.

For more on: [road traffic injuries](#)

1.24 million

road traffic deaths
occur every year.

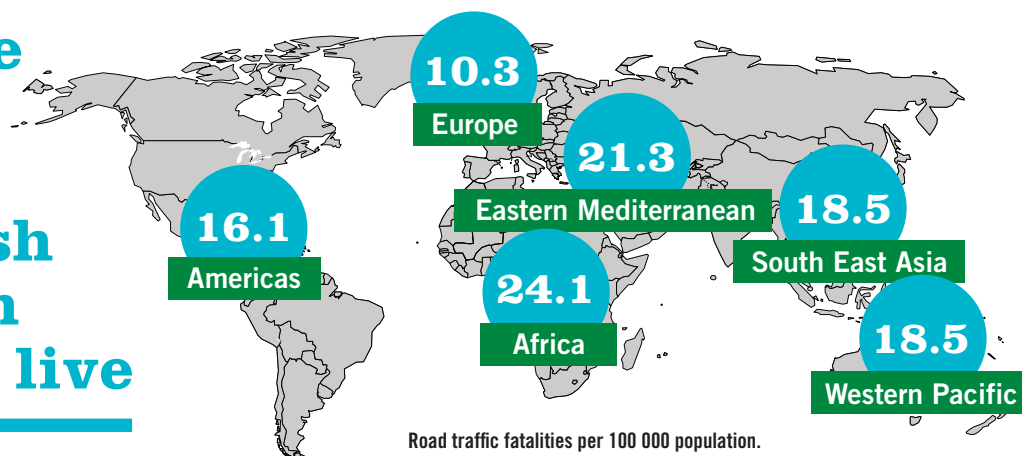


#1

cause of death among
those aged 15-29 years

Global death figures drive home the extent of this public health crisis, especially among young people.

The chance of dying in a road traffic crash depends on where you live

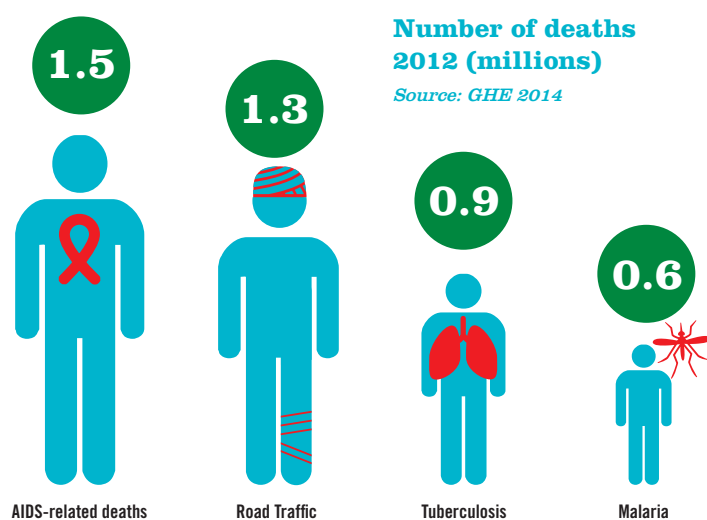


INTERPRETING THE NUMBERS

- Tallying the total number of deaths can, however, be useful for conveying the magnitude of the problem, the prevention effort required and the health care resources potentially needed.
- For comparisons between regions or countries (or within a country over time), the use of death rates per 100 000 population more accurately reflects the size of the problem than absolute numbers. Use of the total number of deaths alone can be misleading, because it leads to comparisons of populations of unequal size.

MAGNITUDE

- About 1.24 million people globally die each year as a result of road traffic crashes—that's nearly 3400 deaths a day.
- Half of those who die on the world's roads are vulnerable road users: pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.
- Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death globally among people aged 15–29 years.
- Around the world, almost three times more men than women die from road traffic injuries.



For a broader perspective on the dimensions of road traffic deaths, this infographic provides a comparison to some of the world's main killer diseases.



- Five key risk factors in road traffic deaths and injuries are: drinking and driving, speeding and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints.
- Over 90% of the world's road traffic fatalities occur in low- and middle-income countries, even though these countries have only about half the world's vehicles.
- Without action, annual road traffic deaths are predicted to increase to around 1.9 million by 2030 and to become the seventh leading cause of death.

ECONOMIC COSTS

Road traffic crashes cause not only grief and suffering but also economic losses to victims, their families, communities and nations as a whole, costing countries on average 3% of their gross national product. Indirect costs, such as loss of productivity, damage to vehicles and property, reduced quality of life and other factors, must also be included in calculating the true cost to society.

Note: A variety of methods are used in costing studies at country level; they therefore don't necessarily provide a solid basis for global comparisons. Nevertheless, at country level, they serve to highlight the impact of road traffic crashes on different sectors and help to convince policy-makers to invest in prevention.

THE GLOBAL STATUS REPORT ON ROAD SAFETY

"With the Global status report on road safety, we have an assessment on the status of road safety around the globe. This unique and comparable set of data confirms the relevance of this issue to the societal challenges of today."

WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, 2013

Approximately every 2 years, WHO produces a new **Global status report on road safety** (GSRRS). The 2013 report:

- presents information from 182 countries and includes country profiles and a statistical annex;
- uses a standardized method, so that comparisons can be made between countries and in the same country over time;
- analyses how effectively countries are implementing road safety measures and whether they have a national strategy with targets to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries;
- examines the **five main risk factors**; and
- concludes that, as legislative change and enforcement are key to reducing fatalities, the pace of legislation change must accelerate. Only 28 countries in the world have comprehensive road safety laws to address the five main risk factors.

Full report: Global status report on road safety 2013
Press release
Statement by WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

WHO's recommendations for countries addressing road safety in the long term focus on "holistic action," a comprehensive approach involving multiple sectors that considers vehicles, road users and the road environment. However, in the short term, some results can be achieved with cost effective interventions such as passing laws on relevant risk factors, enforcing them, and supporting these with public awareness campaigns.

DECADE OF ACTION FOR ROAD SAFETY 2011–2020



Targeted at Member States, the Global Plan aims to reduce the number of road traffic fatalities. It identifies five "pillars" or areas for intervention:

- 1 road safety management**
- 2 safer roads and mobility**
- 3 safer vehicles**
- 4 safer road users**
- 5 post-crash response**

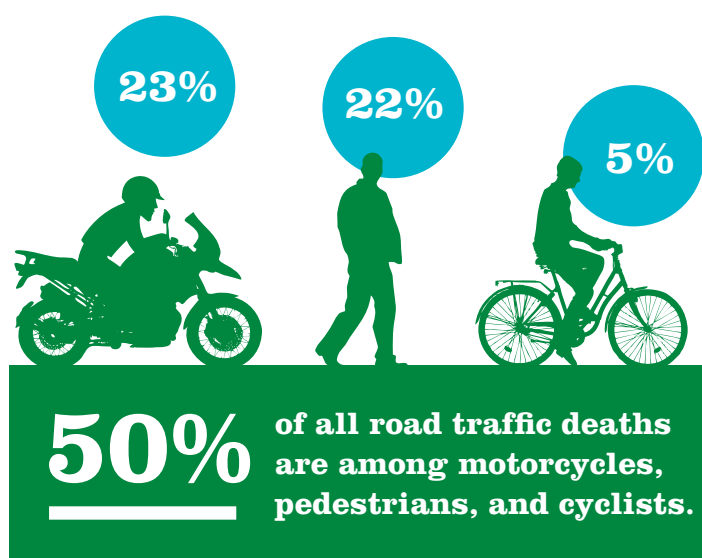
Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020
United Nations Road Safety Collaboration

WHO endorses a comprehensive approach to road safety, called the **safe system approach**, which recognizes that, as the human body is vulnerable to injury and humans will always make mistakes, the safety of all parts of the system (e.g. road users, vehicles and roads) must be improved to help minimize the impact of those mistakes. The aim of the safe system approach is to develop a road transport system that can better accommodate human error and take into consideration the vulnerability of the human body, rather than just maintaining a focus on human error. The countries that have made the most progress on road safety have adopted this approach. Likewise, initiatives like the Global Plan with its five pillars are designed to compensate for human error by addressing road safety on as many fronts as possible.

More resources on the safe system approach:
OECD: **Towards zero: Ambitious road safety targets and the safe system approach**

VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

- Reducing road traffic deaths requires paying more attention to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, who have so far been largely neglected in transport and planning policies.
- By putting in place measures to increase safe walking and cycling, governments can also reduce air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and traffic and achieve better health resulting from more physical activity.



For more resources, click below:

WHO: [Make walking safe](#)

WHO and partners: [Pedestrian safety, a road safety manual for decision-makers and practitioners](#)

WHO: [Youth and road safety](#)

OECD: [Cycling, health and safety](#)

OECD: [Working group on pedestrian safety](#)

A ROAD SAFETY SUCCESS STORY

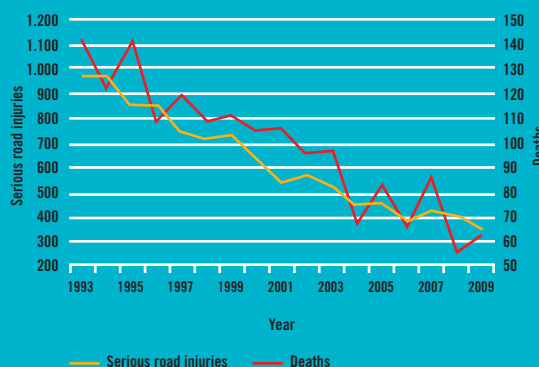
“Political will is needed at the highest level of government to ensure appropriate road safety legislation and stringent enforcement of laws by which we all need to abide. If this cannot be ensured, families and communities will continue to grieve, and health systems will continue to bear the brunt of injury and disability due to road traffic crashes.”

WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, 2013

CASE STUDY: THE NETHERLANDS

For decades, the Netherlands has made great strides in reducing pedestrian fatalities and injuries on the nation's roads. Road design measures such as construction of 30 km/h zones and raised, highly visible, uniform crossings; vehicle measures such as pedestrian-friendly car fronts; and information and education on behavioural measures such as those related to drinking and driving and speeding have increased the safety of pedestrians. Paying particular attention to the specific needs of children and the elderly has also contributed to a decline in pedestrian fatalities and injuries. The citizens of the Netherlands have accepted and supported the notion of a culture of safety, and the progress in protecting pedestrian lives is evidence of an overall focus on safety throughout society.

**Pedestrian casualties
(registered by police)**



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, Netherlands

For more road safety data:

[Resources fact sheet](#)

WHO: [Global status report on road safety 2013](#)

WHO/World Bank: [World report on road traffic injury prevention](#)

OECD: [International Road Traffic and Accident Database](#)

UNECE: [Statistical database](#)

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