

## **Looking back on 10 years of global road safety**

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## **Abstract**

Every year more than 1.35 million people lose their lives on the road and tens of millions more are injured, some permanently. Since the early 2000's there has been renewed focus on the issue with the United Nations, World Health Organization and the World Bank placing the issue higher on their agendas. Guided by United Nations General Assembly, World Health Assembly resolutions and ministerial level conferences on the global road safety crisis, multi-sectoral partnerships have synthesised the evidence, advocated for action (there are two SDG targets with an ambitious goal of reducing by 50% deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes), raised public awareness, generated funding, piloted interventions and monitored progress. And yet the total number of deaths has plateaued despite some sporadic country level successes. More needs to be done – more people need to be trained in countries to deliver, monitor and evaluate a systems approach to road safety, more solid evidence of what works in low-resourced settings is needed (including sustainable transportation options) and there needs to be a greater focus on optimising care and support for those injured in crashes – if we are to begin to see numbers come down in the next decade.

## **Key words:**

Road safety, Road traffic injuries, Accidents, Prevention, Injury, Crashes, Global

## Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there were 1.35 million road traffic deaths globally in 2016 and between 20 and 50 million more people suffer non-fatal injuries millions and/or disabilities.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these collisions occurred in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and involved vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. In addition, road traffic collisions are the leading killer of those aged 15 to 29 years. As can be seen in Table 1 there has been very little progress over the last decade despite concerted efforts. Road traffic fatality rates remain unacceptably high in Africa and the south-East Asia regions where they are considerably higher than the 18.2 per 100,000 population global average. However, some progress has been made globally as well as in some regions and countries. This short commentary outlines the progress made in the last 10 years and highlights some of the challenges that lie ahead.

## Getting road safety onto the global agenda

The issue of road safety came to the forefront with the launch of the 1999 *World Disaster Report*<sup>2</sup> which showed that collisions were the leading cause of death for humanitarian workers. This led to concerted efforts by the WHO and the World Bank culminating in the publication of the *World Report on road traffic injury prevention*<sup>3</sup> on World Health Day in 2004.<sup>4</sup> The report moved away from the traditional paradigm of blaming the road user to one of a safe system and made eight recommendations to countries which were approved through both a United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) resolution 58/289<sup>5</sup> and World Health Assembly resolution 57.10<sup>6</sup> later in 2004. The UN Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC)<sup>7</sup> was inaugurated later that year to coordinate and strengthen global and regional road safety efforts to implement the recommendations of the world Report. The UNRSC's vision is that death and injury should not be the price of mobility. Members of the UNRSC<sup>1</sup> – UN and other international agencies, governments, foundations, civil society and the private sector – work together through project groups to implement the objectives of the Collaboration and plan major global events such as the series of ministerial meetings, UN road safety weeks, and the World Day of Remembrance for Victims of road traffic crashes. The UNRSC was instrumental in the development of a series of "Good Practice" manuals addressing the recommendations of the World Report. In response, the Commission for Global Road Safety was established in 2005 that aimed to raise the political response to road traffic injuries ensuring that road safety was fully recognised by the UN as a developmental issue. This in turn encouraged the World Bank to establish a funding mechanism (the Global Road Safety Facility) to assist countries to implement good practices.

## Progress over the last decade

In 2009, the first *Global Status Report on Road Safety*<sup>8</sup> was published revealing the extent of the problem and providing a snapshot of where countries were with regard to the implementation of the recommendations in the World Report. These data provided the basis for discussion at the First Ministerial meeting on road safety hosted by the Russian government in November 2009. This pivotal meeting called for, through the Moscow Declaration, a Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020) – endorsed through UN GA resolution 64/255<sup>9</sup> in 2010. That year also saw Bloomberg Philanthropies announce an USD125 million investment to implement good practices in 10 low- and middle-income countries<sup>10, 11</sup> and a first meeting of global civil society actors (the Global Alliance of NGOs was formally established in 2011).

A Global Plan for the Decade of Action (2011–2020) was developed and launched in 2011 encouraging countries to implement good practices in 5 pillars, viz. road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users and post-crash response<sup>12, 13</sup>. Indicators were proposed for each of the pillars – a total of 50 core and optional indicators for the 5 pillars as well as

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/roadsafety/about/partners/en/>

global monitoring. The 2<sup>nd</sup> *Global Status report on road safety* published in 2013 provided the baseline data for Decade of Action<sup>14</sup> and a mid-term review was undertaken and published in 2017.<sup>13</sup> Follow up monitoring at the end of the decade is proposed as is a full evaluation of the global activities undertaken.

In 2015 the issue of road safety was raised to the highest level through the inclusion of two Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets (3.6 and 11.2) on road safety; the hosting by the Brazilian government of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial meeting on road safety; Bloomberg Philanthropies announcing a further USD125 million investment to address road safety and the UN Secretary General announcing Jean Todt as a Special Envoy on Road Safety and WHO declaring Michael Bloomberg as a Global Ambassador for NCDs. SDG target 3.6, with an endpoint of 2020, ambitiously requires a 50% reduction of road traffic deaths and injuries from the baseline of around 1.25 million. This target spawned renewed awareness and an alignment of national strategies to the Decade framework in a number of countries.<sup>2</sup> The Brasilia Declaration – the outcome document from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial level meeting – called for the development of global voluntary targets for road safety risk factors and service delivery in order to guide Member States towards attainment of SDG target 3.6.<sup>3</sup>

Further guidance was provided to countries through the publication of the Save LIVES technical package by WHO in 2017<sup>15</sup>. The package, which included 22 interventions in 6 domains, encouraged governments to conduct local assessments and implement the most appropriate interventions which, based on published evidence, would prevent or mitigate the consequences of road traffic collisions and thus save lives. In order to assist organizations and countries further, a UN Road Safety Trust Fund was also set up and the first USD 1 million was provided for the implementation of five pilot projects in 2018.<sup>4</sup> These projects included advancing street design in Ethiopia, improving data collection in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, strengthening legal frameworks in Arab countries, reducing speeds in the Philippines and building capacity for improved urban planning and sustainable transportation to keep children safer in Paraguay, the Philippines and South Africa.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Global status report published in late 2018 revealed little change in the 10-years since 2009, both in numbers (see Table 1) and good practices (see Figure 1). Reasons cited for this include rapid population growth, urbanization and motorization in many countries coupled with incomplete data, inadequate enforcement, inferior safety standards for vehicles and roads, and poor road user behaviour such as driving under the influence, speeding, not wearing helmets and seat-belts, etc.

However, some countries have made significant progress. Thailand, for instance, has addressed the discrepancies between their reported road safety data and the estimates published by WHO (in 2010 Thailand reported 13,766 while WHO estimated 26,312).<sup>16</sup> Through a process of triangulation of three data sources the Ministry of Health has been able to reallocate some “ill-defined” causes of death in their vital registration system and now report road traffic deaths to be similar to those estimated by WHO, i.e. 21,745 deaths from the three databases in 2016 versus the WHO estimate of 22,491.<sup>17,1</sup> Sweden, on the other hand, is an example many nations aspire to copy. They have seen steady reductions in both fatal and non-fatal road traffic crashes since they launched their “safe systems” approach in 1994. “Vision Zero”, which strives to compensate for human errors through the implementation of a holistic, systems-wide approach to road safety, has now been taken up by many countries around the world with similar noteworthy successes and this approach is promoted by the United Nations.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.who.int/roadsafety/decade\\_of\\_action/plan/national/en/](https://www.who.int/roadsafety/decade_of_action/plan/national/en/)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/road\\_traffic/road-safety-targets/en/](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_traffic/road-safety-targets/en/)

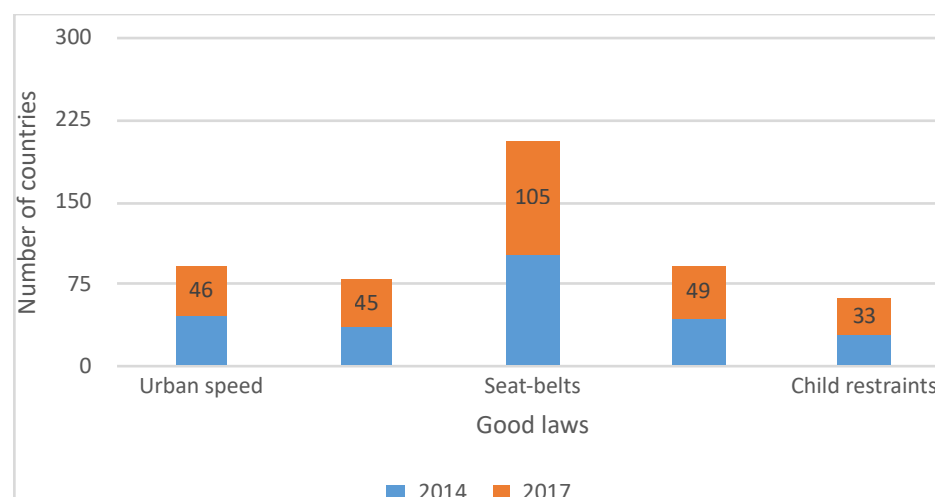
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unece.org/unrstf/home.html>

**Table 1: Changes in road traffic deaths between 2008 and 2017**

	Year of data	
	2008*	2017#
Global population (billions)	6.7	7.3
Global total registered vehicle fleet (billion)	1.3	2.0
<b>DEATHS</b>		
Estimated number of road traffic deaths (millions)	1.23	1.35
Death rates per 100,000 population		
The world	18.8	18.2
African region	32.2	26.6
Region of the Americas	15.8	15.6
Eastern Mediterranean region	32.2	18.0
European region	13.4	9.3
South-east Asia region	16.6	20.7
Western Pacific region	15.6	16.9
Proportion of deaths among vulnerable road users (%)	46	54

Source: \* Global status report on road safety, 2009; # Global status report on road safety, 2018

**Figure 1: Countries improving their road safety laws between 2014 and 2017**



Source: Global status report on road safety, 2018.

## The way forward

The last decade has shown some progress in a few countries and regions but there is an urgent need to do more as the numbers have plateaued but not yet begun to show a downward trend. The Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020) and SDG 3.6 (expires 2020) have clearly had some influence on countries taking action but these need to be extended to 2030 if the current level of awareness is to be maintained.

So what is required to save more lives?

A stronger emphasis on building capacity at national levels is essential as experience from donor-funded initiatives has revealed that money alone does not help if there are no adequately trained road safety practitioners in the country. A supportive environment for road safety that spans across multiple sectors is necessary if road safety programmes are to be sustainable funding sources and delivered by highly trained experts in order to develop the capacity of road safety practitioners in LMICs. The Global Road Safety Leadership Course<sup>5</sup> run by the Global Road Safety Partnership and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies is one such course which aims to build leadership capacity so that individuals can understand, design and importantly implement road safety programmes at the same time as advocating for policy change within their own countries.

Underpinning the Safe Systems approach is the key principle that road safety is a shared responsibility between everybody in the community. There is increasing interest in the role of co-design and community-based participatory research (CBPR) in road safety which involve communities rather than just governments and research institutions working in silos. Such contributions can have a significant impact on the successful acceptance and implementation of road safety programmes and can be crucial in overcoming barriers to uptake. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in actively engaging the community and assisting CBPR is highlighted by work done by AMEND through the School Area Road Safety Assessment and Improvement programme in Tanzania.<sup>19</sup> This initiative involves the systematic assessment of school zones, identification of specific measures that would improve road safety and the implementation of those measures with the engagement and participation of community stakeholders and local authorities. It is the engagement with these groups that is vital for the sustainability of the programme. Such initiatives by CSOs should be actively promoted and supported.

The corporate sector has become increasingly interested in road safety initiatives recognising that factors driving improvements in road safety require a systems approach from all stakeholders and that the consequences of road traffic injuries can have a direct impact on multinational and large national corporations. Despite this, until now little has been done to investigate the role that the private sector can play in road safety. The engagement of the private sector through core business activities (e.g. vehicles fleets that meet safety standards and promoting research and development), community and philanthropic work supporting research programmes and policies particularly in LMIC, and in advocating for policy change should be encouraged. FedEx is one such company that expects only the highest road safety from all its staff while also supporting road safety initiatives around the world.<sup>6</sup>

Solid evidence of what works in low-income countries (including sustainable transportation and improved urban planning options), using robust research methodologies, is urgently required so that these can be scaled up and replicated. Countries and practitioners should be empowered to monitor

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.grsroadsafety.org/programmes/global-road-safety-leadership-course/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://fedexcares.com/about-fedex-cares/road-safety>

their road safety deaths and injuries and evaluate their programmes more rigorously. The reported versus estimated numbers published by WHO are testament to the need for continued support and capacity development in this area. A number of philanthropic organizations, including Fondation Botnar, have built into their grant mechanisms an expectation of robust monitoring and evaluation using digital health mechanisms where appropriate,<sup>20</sup> while the Child Health Initiative has published a “toolkit” in order to support and enable the delivery of safe routes to school interventions using robust research and participatory methods.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the post-crash phase should receive more support from the international and donor community. Sadly, even if primary prevention activities are well conducted, some injury producing collisions will still occur and therefore solid trauma services – from extrication of occupants at the crash site to justice for victims – should be implemented as this will save a significant number of lives.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

Reductions in road traffic deaths and injuries are possible. However, for this to happen in the next decade countries need to implement a systems approach to road safety, build capacity and engage end-users. They should also scale up their enforcement activities, design smarter roads, sell safety vehicles, and deliver powerful social marketing campaigns to raise awareness among all road users. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial road safety meeting in Sweden in February 2020 will be the next opportunity to take stock of global progress and for countries to share experiences.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.childhealthinitiative.org/toolkit>

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