

# Executive summary

Over 1.2 million people die each year on the world's roads, and between 20 and 50 million suffer non-fatal injuries. In most regions of the world this epidemic of road traffic injuries is still increasing. In the past five years most countries have endorsed the recommendations of the *World report on road traffic injury prevention* which give guidance on how countries can implement a comprehensive approach to improving road safety and reducing the death toll on their roads. To date, however, there has been no global assessment of road safety that indicates the extent to which this approach is being implemented. This *Global status report on road safety* is the first broad assessment of the status of road safety in 178 countries, using data drawn from a standardized survey

conducted in 2008. The results provide a benchmark that countries can use to assess their road safety position relative to other countries, while internationally the data presented can collectively be considered as a global "baseline" against which progress over time can be measured. *The Global status report* presents a number of key findings:

- Low-income and middle-income countries have higher road traffic fatality rates (21.5 and 19.5 per 100 000 population, respectively) than high-income countries (10.3 per 100 000). Over 90% of the world's fatalities on the roads occur in low-income and middle-income countries, which have only 48% of the world's registered vehicles.

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Death rates have been declining over the last four to five decades in many high-income countries. Even in these countries, road traffic injuries remain an important cause of death, injury and disability.

- Almost half of those who die in road traffic crashes are pedestrians, cyclists or users of motorized two-wheelers – collectively known as “vulnerable road users” – and this proportion is higher in the poorer economies of the world. For example, while in the high-income countries of the Americas Region 65% of reported road deaths are among vehicle occupants, this situation is very different in the low-income and middle-income countries of the Western Pacific Region where 70% of reported road deaths are among vulnerable road users. The report suggests that not enough is being done to meet the needs of these vulnerable groups. For instance, speed is a key risk factor for injury among pedestrians and cyclists, and yet only 29% of countries meet basic criteria for reducing speed in urban areas, while less than 10% of countries rate the enforcement of their speed limits as effective. Traffic calming measures (particularly where different groups of road users are not separated), infrastructure and policy measures that allow road users to walk and cycle safely, and measures that improve the quality of and access to public transport are also lacking. Many of the measures shown to be effective at reducing road traffic injuries among vulnerable road users can also have other effects on health such as improved respiratory health (as a result of reduced exhaust emissions) and the positive effects associated with increased physical activity.
- The adoption and enforcement of traffic laws appears inadequate in many countries. The development and effective enforcement of legislation is critical in reducing drink-driving and excessive speed, and in increasing the use of helmets, seat-belts and child restraints. This survey showed that fewer than half the countries have laws to address all five of these risk factors, while only 15% have laws that can be considered comprehensive in scope.<sup>1</sup> Over 90% of countries have some kind of national drink-driving law, yet only 49% of countries stipulate a legal blood alcohol concentration limit of less than or equal to 0.05 grams per decilitre, as recommended in the *World report*. Similarly, only 40% of countries have a motorcycle helmet law that covers both riders and passengers, and mandate that helmets should meet a specific national or international standard. Only 57% of countries require seat-belts to be used by passengers in both front and rear seats, and while 90% of high-income countries have a law requiring young children in cars to be restrained with appropriate child restraints, only 20% of low-income countries have similar requirements. Enforcement scores for all these risk factors is generally low suggesting that road safety law enforcement needs to be improved. This requires political will and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are given sufficient human and financial resources to mount sustainable and effective enforcement activities.
- Addressing road safety in a comprehensive manner necessitates the involvement of multiple sectors,

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<sup>1</sup> The criteria used to define “comprehensive” in relation to laws on speed, drink-driving, and use of helmets, seat-belts and child restraints are described in the main text.

such as health, transport and police. A coordinated response to the problem includes the development and implementation of a multisectoral strategy on road traffic injury prevention with sufficient finances for planned activities to be achieved within a specified timeframe. While many countries have taken positive steps towards improving the institutional frameworks needed to support road safety efforts, many challenges remain. Only one-third of countries have a national road safety strategy that is endorsed by the government, that includes specific targets, and that has funding allocated for its implementation.

- Finally, the report shows that huge gaps remain in the quality and coverage of the data that

countries collect and report on road traffic injuries. Reliable data on fatalities and non-fatal injuries are needed by countries to assess the scope of the road traffic injury problem, to target responses to it, and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention measures. Underreporting of road traffic fatalities remains a big problem in many countries, and the situation is even worse with regard to non-fatal injuries. Furthermore, the lack of harmonization of terminology between countries, and even between sectors within them, limits comparability of data. For instance, varying time periods between the crash and death are used to define a road traffic death, and the definition of a severe non-fatal injury also varies. Just 22% of countries had information on the extent of their

WHO predicts that road traffic injuries will rise to become the fifth leading cause of death by 2030.

### Leading causes of death, 2004 and 2030 compared

TOTAL 2004			TOTAL 2030		
RANK	LEADING CAUSE	%	RANK	LEADING CAUSE	%
1	Ischaemic heart disease	12.2	1	Ischaemic heart disease	12.2
2	Cerebrovascular disease	9.7	2	Cerebrovascular disease	9.7
3	Lower respiratory infections	7.0	3	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	7.0
4	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	5.1	4	Lower respiratory infections	5.1
5	Diarrhoeal diseases	3.6	5	Road traffic injuries	3.6
6	HIV/AIDS	3.5	6	Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers	3.5
7	Tuberculosis	2.5	7	Diabetes mellitus	2.5
8	Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers	2.3	8	Hypertensive heart disease	2.3
9	Road traffic injuries	2.2	9	Stomach cancer	2.2
10	Prematurity and low birth weight	2.0	10	HIV/AIDS	2.0
11	Neonatal infections and other	1.9	11	Nephritis and nephrosis	1.9
12	Diabetes mellitus	1.9	12	Self-inflicted injuries	1.9
13	Malaria	1.7	13	Liver cancer	1.7
14	Hypertensive heart disease	1.7	14	Colon and rectum cancer	1.7
15	Birth asphyxia and birth trauma	1.5	15	Oesophagus cancer	1.5
16	Self-inflicted injuries	1.4	16	Violence	1.4
17	Stomach cancer	1.4	17	Alzheimer and other dementias	1.4
18	Cirrhosis of the liver	1.3	18	Cirrhosis of the liver	1.3
19	Nephritis and nephrosis	1.3	19	Breast cancer	1.3
20	Colon and rectum cancers	1.1	20	Tuberculosis	1.1

Source: World health statistics 2008 (<http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2008/en/index.html>)

road traffic injury problem, the costs incurred by their health sector or their national economies, and the data needed to monitor and evaluate interventions accurately.

There is a growing body of sound scientific evidence on the steps necessary to improve road safety. The last few years have seen an increase in political will in many countries with a number of these measures implemented widely, while road safety has received increasing international attention and support. However, the results presented in this *Global status report* show that much more needs to be done. Key recommendations from this report are:

- Governments need to take into consideration the needs of all road users when making policy decisions that impact on road safety. To date, the needs of vulnerable road users have been neglected in many countries and should be given renewed emphasis, particularly when decisions are made about road infrastructure, land-use planning and transport services.
- Governments need to enact comprehensive laws that require all road users to be protected through enforcement of speed limits that are appropriate to the type and function of the road, through the stipulation of blood alcohol concentration limits to reduce drink-driving, and through the use of appropriate occupant protection measures. Existing legislation should be reviewed and amended to conform with good practices that are based on sound evidence of effectiveness.

- The enforcement of comprehensive and clear legislation with appropriate penalties and accompanied by public awareness campaigns is a critical factor in reducing road traffic injuries and deaths. Enforcement of all road safety laws needs to be both improved and sustained.
- Governments need to ensure that the institutions nominated as responsible for action on road safety are fostering multisectoral collaboration and have the necessary human and financial resources to act effectively.
- Governments need to encourage collaboration between the different sectors involved in collecting and reporting data on road traffic injuries. This involves improving data linkages between police, transport and health services as well as increasing human capacity to undertake data collection.

This *Global status report* shows that no country can afford to sit back and assume that its road safety work is complete. Significant progress in national road safety requires close collaboration between relevant leaders and agencies whose policies – directly or indirectly – impact on the safety of those on the roads. The international community must also play its part in halting and reversing the current global trend of increasing road traffic deaths, by recognizing road traffic injuries as an important health and development problem and by intensifying support for prevention.