Background

Approximately 1.24 million people die every year on the world’s roads, and another 20 to 50 million sustain non-fatal injuries as a result of road traffic crashes. These injuries and deaths have an immeasurable impact on the families affected, whose lives are often changed irrevocably by these tragedies, and on the communities in which these people lived and worked.

Road traffic injuries are estimated to be the eighth leading cause of death globally, with an impact similar to that caused by many communicable diseases, such as malaria (1). They are the leading cause of death for young people aged 15–29 years, and as a result take a heavy toll on those entering their most productive years (2). Economically disadvantaged families are hardest hit by both direct medical costs and indirect costs such as lost wages that result from these injuries. At the national level, road traffic injuries result in considerable financial costs, particularly to developing economies. Indeed, road traffic injuries are estimated to cost low- and middle-income countries between 1–2% of their gross national product, estimated at over US$ 100 billion a year (3).

Despite the enormous toll exacted by road traffic injuries, they have for many years been neglected by global health and development agendas, and funding for interventions has not been commensurate with the scale of the problem. This is despite the fact that road traffic injuries are largely preventable and that the evidence base for effective interventions is extensive.

Road traffic injuries are increasing, notably in low- and middle-income countries, where rates are twice those in high-income countries. This is partly attributable to the rapid rate of motorization in many developing countries that has occurred without a concomitant investment in road safety strategies and land use planning. While road traffic fatality rates are decreasing in some high-income countries, the rapid increase in road traffic crashes in low- and middle-income countries has driven an overall global increase in deaths and injuries. Indeed, current trends suggest that road traffic injuries will become the fifth leading cause of death by 2030, with the disparity between high- and low-income countries further accentuated (2).

Nonetheless, evidence from many countries shows that dramatic successes in preventing road traffic injuries can be achieved through concerted efforts at national level. A number of countries, such as Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom have achieved steady declines in road traffic death rates through coordinated, multisectoral responses to the problem. Such responses involve implementation of a number of proven measures that address not only the safety of the road user, but also vehicle safety, the road environment and post-crash care.

The Decade of Action for Road Safety

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 64/255¹, which proclaimed a Decade of Action for Road Safety. The goal of the Decade (2011–2020) is to stabilize and reduce the increasing trend in road traffic fatalities, saving an estimated 5 million lives over the period (see Figure 1).

¹ http://www.who.int/roadsafety/about/resolutions/download/en/index.html

Figure 1
Goal of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020

![Graph showing the goal of the Decade of Action for Road Safety](image-url)
In order to guide countries on taking concrete, national-level actions to achieve this goal, a Global Plan of Action was developed (5). This provides a practical tool to help governments and other national stakeholders develop national and local plans of action, while simultaneously providing a framework for coordinating activities at regional and global levels. National activities are based around five key pillars, as indicated (Figure 2).

The UN General Assembly resolution also called for regular monitoring of global progress toward meeting targets identified in the Global Plan of Action. These targets are, in part, based on data highlighted in the first Global status report on road safety in 2009,1 and to this end, the resolution calls for the publication of further reports to provide and disseminate this information (6). This report, the second Global status report on road safety, meets this request and will provide the baseline data (from 2010) for monitoring progress through the Decade of Action.

The purpose of this report
The specific objectives of this second Global status report on road safety are:

- to describe the burden of road traffic injuries and implementation of effective interventions in all Member States using a standardized methodology, and assess changes since the publication of the first Global status report in 2009;

- to indicate gaps in road safety nationally across a number of domains (institutional management, policies, legislation, data collection) to stimulate and prioritize road safety activities;

- to serve as a baseline for monitoring activities relating to the Decade of Action for Road Safety at national and international levels.

Methodology
The methodology used to generate the data and information presented in this report involved collecting data from each country, coordinated by a National Data Coordinator (see Statistical Annex, Table A1). Data collection in turn was driven by a number of individual respondents from different sectors within a country, each of whom completed a self-administered questionnaire with information on key variables. This group was then required to come to a consensus on the data that best represented their country, which is presented here. More detail on the methodology can be found on page 42. The report highlights data from 182 countries/areas, covering 6.8 billion people (98.6% of the world’s population). Response rates by region covered between 95% of the population in the African Region, to 100% in the South-East Asia Region. Data collection was carried out in 2011: thus, while data on legislation and policies relate to 2011, data on fatalities relate to 2010, the most recent year for which data were available.

1 The Global status report on road safety: time for action (2009) legislation data were collected for 2008 and fatality data for 2007; in both cases these were the most recent data available. The current report provides legislation data updated for 2011 and fatality data updated for 2010. Thus comparisons on fatality data relate to 2007 and 2010.