

# *The “Silent Epidemic” of Road Traffic Fatalities In Ukraine*

*Martin Raiser*

People in Ukraine are nowadays facing a “silent epidemic”. As documented in a recent World Bank report ““*Confronting “Death on Wheels”*: *Making Roads Safe in Europe and Central Asia*”, they are four or more times likely to die from road traffic injuries than people in Western Europe, in spite of the smaller car fleet and the relatively low number of kilometers travelled per capita by car. Indeed, Ukraine, along with Kazakhstan, the Russia Federation, Kyrgyzstan, and Lithuania, has among the highest road traffic mortality rates in Europe and Central Asia- above 20 per 100,000 people compared to less 5 per 100,000 in several European Union countries.

The report also indicates that road traffic injuries already rank among the top 10 causes of death in Ukraine. Recent official statistics indicate that more than 22,000 people died and about 90,000 people required medical treatment as a result of road traffic injuries during the 2007-2009 period.

Road traffic injuries and fatalities affect disproportionately the economic active population in Ukraine, and the economic and social consequences are quite severe. Poor road conditions, coupled by unsafe driving behavior and ineffective enforcement of traffic laws and regulations, contribute to this problem, with a high number of pedestrian fatalities. Excessive speed, limited use of seat belts and child restraints, drunk driving, and distracting driving due to the use of cell phones and texting devices, are important risk factors, and young drivers and riders aged 18–25 are particularly at risk of road crashes.

Collective impact of road safety hazard on society is often unseen. The economic cost of road deaths and injuries in countries of Europe and Central Asia is estimated to exceed 1.5 percent of GDP per year. Ukraine has fourth highest cost per year in the region with US\$ 5 billion, after Russia (US\$34 billion), Turkey – (US\$14 billion), and Poland (US\$10 billion). So, this is not just a huge human toll, but also a very substantial economic toll that the country is paying.

These troubling facts provide clear evidence that poor road safety conditions in Ukraine continue to be a major challenge in spite of the recent efforts to address it in the country. Priority attention and support by the new Government, with an active involvement of different sectoral ministries, local governments, civil society organizations, and the general population alike, is now required to intensify the effort and make it sustainable over time. The sharp increase in motor vehicle traffic - with car traffic rising by around 7 percent and heavy goods vehicle traffic by 10 percent - is likely to continue into the future. Therefore, unless effective comprehensive

measures are put in place and maintained , Ukraine’s current serious road safety situation will only deteriorate.

As noted in the report, international experience suggest that improving road safety in Ukraine would require a number of actions to be implemented consistently over the medium term. These are:

- Gaining high level political commitment to prevent road crash death and injury in Ukraine

**Assigning the responsibility of the overall effort to a lead agency and strengthening its technical and operational capacity** for promoting and coordinating the participation and contribution of different ministries and other public agencies, business community and civil society organizations with the support of the highest political levels.

- **Developing a medium-and longer term policy vision and system-wide strategies and action plans that include measurable targets.** The setting of quantitative targets allows a focus on results that lead to better programs, most effective use of resources, and improved road safety performance.

- **Securing sustainable funding** from both local and international sources.

- **Improving the main legislative road safety requirements** so that they further align with the European norms, and added efforts to guarantee the effective enforcement of traffic laws and regulations.

- **Adopting priority interventions** related to safe planning design of the road network, addressing excessive speeding, particularly in urban areas, implementing drunk-driving and broader alcohol control policies, preventing distracting driving due to the use of cell phone and texting devices while driving, increasing seat belt and child restraint use, and reducing younger drivers risk and protecting pedestrians, particularly children and the elderly that tend to be the most vulnerable groups.

- **Improving the delivery of emergency medical services** by adopting new organizational and governance models for operating post-vehicle crash and trauma care services at health facilities as part of broader health system restructuring initiatives.

- **Improving nationwide traffic injury surveillance systems and supporting national road safety reviews** for formulating policies and plans, particularly at the regional level, and evaluating the impact of programs and interventions.

The World Bank, working in partnership with other agencies such as the World Health Organization and the Commission for Global Road Safety, and other multilateral development banks and the Global Road Safety Partnership, stands ready to provide technical and financial

assistance to the Ukrainian Government in order to help implement national road safety plans in accordance with the recently-adopted “UN Decade of Action for Road Safety” over 2011-2020.

By acting now Ukraine could start saving lives, improve the life expectancy of its population, minimize injuries and lasting disability, and reduce high economic and social costs associated with road traffic injuries and fatalities.

***Martin Raiser is the World Bank Director for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.***

The report “Confronting “Death on Wheels”: Making Roads Safe in Europe and Central Asia” can be downloaded from: <http://go.worldbank.org/DR6NO0B0P0>