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News

## Road deaths three times higher in poorer European countries

**Zosia Kmiotowicz**

<sup>1</sup> London

Countries in the World Bank's Europe and central Asia region need to develop a systematic response to improve road safety, to protect the health and economic wellbeing of their citizens, says a report, *Confronting "Death on Wheels" Making Roads Safe in Europe and Central Asia*.

Several factors have contributed to rapid increases of deaths and injuries from road traffic incidents in these countries, which include the Commonwealth of Independent States (countries of the former Soviet Union), eastern and central Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkans, it says. These include weak road safety management capacity, deteriorated roads, unsafe vehicles, poor driver behaviour, patchy enforcement of road safety laws, and exponential growth in the number of vehicles.

The report shows that although deaths from road incidents have fallen steadily to fewer than six per 100 000 in many western European countries, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, they have increased in most countries in Europe and central Asia even though these countries have fewer cars. In the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, for example, the death rate is 22 per 100 000.

Deaths from road traffic are among the top 10 causes of death in countries covered by the report. In 2007 increases in deaths from road crashes in these countries ranged from 8% to 39%.

The report, which was released on 19 November on the eve of the first global ministerial conference on road safety in Moscow, says that 55% of road traffic deaths in countries in Europe and central Asia are among people aged between 5 and 44, more than 80% of them men. Children and elderly people are also vulnerable on the roads, especially as pedestrians, and are seven to nine times more likely to be killed in a road crash than car occupants.

The report says, "Human impact of the traffic crashes is enormous, with families being driven into poverty because of the mounting costs of medical care and rehabilitation or loss of the main breadwinner."

In the countries of Europe and central Asia, the highest costs to governments are in the large economies that also have sizeable populations, such as Russia

**(\$34bn; £20bn; €23bn a year), Turkey (\$14bn), Poland (\$10bn), and Ukraine (\$5bn).**

**According to the report, an effective country road safety strategy requires a strong lead from government, with coordinated contributions from many departments, including those overseeing transport, the interior, the police, health, and education.**

**The goal should be to prevent road traffic injuries, minimise their severity, and prevent lasting disability from them.**

**The bank says that it will support programmes that include road safety reviews, strengthening capacity of national road safety authorities, improving safety features of road infrastructure, tightening enforcement, public campaigns for safer driving, and strengthening emergency medical services to prevent deaths and disability from road crashes.**

**In a separate report on road safety in Europe the World Health Organization says that policies that encourage public transport use, walking, and cycling provide multiple health gains by reducing injuries, decreasing respiratory illness, preventing non-communicable disease through physical activity, and mitigating the negative effects of climate change.**

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