



POVERTY & ROAD SAFETY

A GRSP Positioning Paper

This paper is one of a suite of **Positioning Papers from the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP)**. These papers are designed to create an understanding of the scale of road traffic deaths and injuries and their linkages to other humanitarian and development issues. The Positioning Papers seek to highlight that road safety is a multidimensional issue that requires an urgent and sustained contribution across many sectors.

There are a number of evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing road traffic deaths and injuries, including designing safer roads, strengthening vehicle safety standards, improving road safety management, implementing effective post-crash care, and ensuring the passage, implementation and enforcement of comprehensive laws to protect road users. GRSP Positioning Papers primarily focus on the role of road users and the need for strong laws that help protect them.

OVERVIEW

According to the World Health Organization, low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) account for more than 90% of road traffic deaths, despite having only 54% of the world's registered vehicles.¹ LMICs lose up to 5% of their gross domestic product (GDP) each year, which is significantly more than the global average of approximately 3%² and amounts to more than the total amount of development assistance these countries receive annually.^{3,4} This loss in GDP negatively impacts the ability of countries to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of citizens.⁵

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁶ recognize the need to address the factors which cause and perpetuate poverty. Poverty and road traffic injuries are strongly

interlinked. The pattern of road traffic injury globally shows that it is developing countries that bear the heaviest burden and poor people are disproportionately affected.⁷ Poor people are more likely to be involved in a road traffic crash, and the economic impact on people with low incomes can be more significant, pushing people deeper into poverty or limiting their future economic potential.⁸ Given that road traffic deaths and serious injuries are largely preventable, road safety should be considered as an issue that can contribute to poverty reduction at a national and household level.

ROAD SAFETY IS A POVERTY ISSUE

- The significant number of road traffic deaths and injuries in LMICs has a negative impact on human and economic development. Safe road transportation facilitates the movement of goods and people, creating employment, supporting economic growth and enhancing access to education and health care.⁹
- The economic costs of road traffic death and injury strike hard at a national level, imposing a significant burden on health, insurance, and legal systems.¹⁰ Costs from road traffic deaths and injuries can hold back job creation, erode opportunities for sustainable development, and restrict the level of revenue collected by governments for investment in priority social services and infrastructure.¹¹ Losses of GDP on this scale can also have a negative impact on poverty reduction, as a 1% increase in economic growth is estimated to reduce poverty levels by 0.7%.¹²
- Road crashes particularly affect people in the most productive age group (between 15 and 44 years). This has a significant impact on national economic productivity, especially among low-income groups, who are most likely to rely on physical activity in their work.¹³

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- Poor people are more likely to be involved in a road traffic crash. This relationship is a product of multiple interacting factors:
 - Poor people are more likely to live in more dangerous areas; for example informal dwellings near major arterial roads
 - Poor people in developing countries are more exposed to risks as their transport modes are more vulnerable – they may be more reliant on walking and cycling as they cannot afford motorized transport
 - Often, there is less investment in and provision of road safety in poorer communities.¹⁴
- Furthermore, the impact of road traffic injuries and deaths disproportionately affects lower socioeconomic groups, and can drive families deeper into poverty. Low-income households are less likely to be able to afford medical and treatment services, and can be denied access to care because they cannot afford it.¹⁵
- Road crashes can push families into poverty, through the costs of prolonged medical care and treatment, and the potential loss of a family's income earner or long-term disability.^{16,17} Indeed, any household suffering such a loss may face substantial economic distress, however, poor families may be particularly vulnerable as they may lack insurance or ability to draw on savings or to borrow funds.

ESSENTIAL FACTS

- More than 90% of the world's road fatalities occur in low- and middle-income countries, even though these countries only account for 54% of the world's registered vehicles.¹⁸
- The global losses related to road traffic deaths and injuries are estimated to cost governments about 3% of their GDP, increasing to approximately 5% for LMIC.¹⁹ This exceeds the total annual amount received in development assistance by these countries.^{20,21}
- Various country case studies show that road traffic death and serious injuries contribute to poverty at a family and microeconomic level:
 - A study in Bangladesh showed that mortality from road traffic injuries was twice as high among the poorest socio-economic groups as among the richest. Furthermore, the research found that fewer seriously injured poor people are able to return to their job, and over 70 % of poor bereaved families suffered a decrease in household income following a road crash.²²
 - In India, the majority of poor households who have a family member injured in a road crash report that at least one person has to stop working to care for that family member, thus suffering immediate economic effects as a result of lost income.²³

CASE STUDY

Road safety and poverty in Bangladesh

ROAD TRAFFIC DEATHS AND INJURIES DISPROPORTIONALLY AFFECT POOR FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. A study in Bangladesh found that the loss of the main income earner has a significant economic effect on families who rely on this income. Serious injuries can also have an impact on poor families due to the combination of loss of income, medical costs and potential legal bills.

Hajera Begum, a farmer from the Munshiganj district in central Bangladesh, was taking vegetables to a market with her husband Solaiman when the pickup truck they were riding in was hit by a bus. Five people were killed, including Solaiman. Hajera, who suffered broken ribs, lost not only her husband but also her land and her livelihood. "My family used to be well off," said Hajera. "We had quite a bit of land, and we made a good living off it. But since my husband died, I have struggled. I have had to sell much of our land. I am now worried about my future and that of my two children."

For poor families in Bangladesh, injuries such as these can have a significant impact on their economic situation. Households were more likely to go into debt and were forced to sell their assets if a member of the household had died or was unable to return to work due to a road crash.³⁵

Traffic crashes strike deadly blows to poor families like the Begums, and they are a huge financial burden on Bangladesh's economy. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), road traffic injuries cause a loss of about 1.6% of GDP in Bangladesh. This amount is almost equal to the total foreign aid received in a fiscal year. The losses include direct and indirect expenses, such as medical costs, insurance loss, property damage, family income losses and traffic congestion.^{36,37}

- A recent case study in South Korea highlighted that close to 71% of people who suffer a disability as a result of a road crash experience job losses, and a significant portion of those victims remain unemployed for a long time. Furthermore, almost half [49.5%] of those injured from road crashes were forced to give up the home they owned and move into rental properties.²⁴
- A detailed study in Cambodia reached the conclusion that road traffic crashes lead to a 21 % income loss for affected families.²⁵
- A study in Ghana showed that only 27% of people injured in road crashes used hospital services. The most common reason cited for not seeking health care was the lack of money.²⁶



SOLUTIONS

In response to the road traffic fatality crisis, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011-2020), which serves as the primary vehicle by which road safety is being addressed at the global level. The Global Plan of the Decade of Action is organized around five pillars, which detail a series of recognized interventions: improving road safety management; designing safer roads; strengthening vehicle safety standards; ensuring the passage, implementation and enforcement of comprehensive laws to protect road users; and implementing effective post-crash care.²⁷

Reducing the burden of road traffic deaths and injuries around the world requires multiple players working together. While each element of the road system (vehicle, road, and person) contributes to any given road crash, road user related factors make a significant contribution and, therefore, require ongoing attention.²⁸ The Global Road Safety Partnership's Advocacy and Grants Programme focuses primarily on advocating for stronger road safety policies and improving the effectiveness of road safety law enforcement. According to international best practices, adopting and enforcing strong road safety laws on five key risk factors can significantly reduce road traffic death and injury.²⁹

- **Speed management:** Setting and enforcing appropriate speed limits is one of the most effective measures in reducing road traffic injuries, influencing

both the risk of being in a road traffic crash, as well as the severity of the injuries that result from crashes. For example, for an adult pedestrian, the risk of dying if struck by a car travelling at less than 50km/h is below 20%. Those odds rise substantially as vehicle speed increases. The same adult pedestrian has a 60% risk of dying if hit at 80 km/h.³⁰

- **Seatbelts:** The simple act of buckling a seatbelt is one of the most effective ways to save lives. Correctly wearing a seat-belt reduces the risk of a fatal injury by up to 50% for front seat occupants and by up to 75% for rear seat occupants.
- **Child restraints:** Children wearing an appropriate restraint for their size and weight are significantly less likely to be killed or injured than unrestrained children. Rear-facing restraints for children aged 0 to 23 months have been shown to reduce the risk of death or injury by over 90% and forward facing child restraints by almost 80% compared to being unrestrained.³¹
- **Motorcycle helmets:** Wearing a motorcycle helmet is a proven way to decrease death and serious injury. Helmet usage decreases the risk of injuries by 69%, and deaths by 42%.³²
- **Drinking and driving:** Driving while impaired by alcohol increases both the risk of a crash and the likelihood that a death or a serious injury will occur. Strictly enforcing an effective drink-driving law can reduce the number of road deaths by 20%.³³

ENDNOTES

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Global Road Safety Partnership

The Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) is a hosted programme of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and is a voluntary association of governments, businesses and civil society organisations. 23 GRSP works to reduce deaths and serious injuries as a result of road crashes in low- and middle-income countries in a number of ways. One important way to address this humanitarian crisis is to ensure that strong, evidence-based laws are in place and effectively implemented and enforced in order to protect road users.

GRSP is looking to partner with government and civil society organizations committed to reducing this unacceptable rate of road injuries and fatalities by advocating for stronger road safety policies. For more information on our work – and the Road Safety Grants Programme – please visit our website at www.grsproadsafety.org/advocacy.

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