

Chapter 5 - Urban risk to health.

Box 5.3 Safety on the urban road

Road transportation has become a key element of urbanization. By speeding up communications and the transport of goods and people, it has generated a revolution in contemporary economic and social relations.

However, this has not come about without cost: environmental pollution and urban stress are directly linked to growing road transportation. Above all, it is increasingly associated with the rapid escalation of road crashes and premature deaths, as well as with physical handicaps and psychological trauma.

Losses are not limited to reduced worker productivity and trauma affecting a victim's private life. Equally significant are the rising costs in health services and the added economic burden (estimated between 1 and 3 per cent of gross national product). In developing countries, the costs often exceed the international development assistance received each year. Consequently, there is a direct link between road safety improvement and poverty reduction.

The situation is made worse in developing countries by rapid and unplanned urbanization. The absence of adequate infrastructure in cities, together with the lack of a legal regulatory framework, makes the exponential rise in the number of road crashes all the more worrying.

Road crash fatality numbers are comparable to the number of global deaths caused by TB or malaria. Worldwide, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 and the second most common cause of death for those aged 5 to 14. An estimated 1.3 million people are killed in road crashes worldwide each year and as many as 50 million are injured. For every death, 20 to 30 people are disabled, many permanently.

"If significant preventive actions are not taken, we estimate that by 2020 road trauma will rank as the sixth biggest cause of death." (*World Health Organization*)

Cost-effective solutions do exist and have already achieved very positive results in many countries. Together with its hosted project, the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has prioritized the reduction of disastrous road safety crashes affecting young people. IFRC and GRSP are advocating for the adoption of straightforward solutions to avoid or significantly decrease the tragic human, social and economic consequences of urban road crashes. These include: implementation of national road safety action policy; better road systems; first-aid training; and closer partnerships with governments, the private sector and civil society.

Viet Nam offers a good example of success. In 2006, the Vietnamese National Traffic Safety Committee, the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, the Red Cross of Viet Nam and the French Red Cross contributed to efforts to create a national action helmet plan supported by GRSP. That led to enactment and enforcement of a new helmet law. In 2008, Viet Nam saw the first results: 1,500 fewer lives lost compared with 2007 when 12,500 people died on the road.

Road crash mortality projection 2020

In millions of people per year

