



# TEN STRATEGIES FOR KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE ON THE ROAD



World Health  
Organization



**#SaveKidsLives**





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## INTRODUCTION

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*For children aged 15–17 years, there is no greater threat to their lives than a road traffic crash.*

Every four minutes a child is prematurely lost on the roads of this world. Many more are injured, often severely. These traumatic events cause immeasurable suffering and grief, and at times economic hardship for families and friends. In addition, they cost societies precious resources, diverting these from other pressing health and development challenges.

Many of the children who are victims of this man-made calamity are poor. Attempts to address road safety for children are, therefore, inextricably linked to notions of social justice, and should be part of global efforts to reduce poverty.

For countries in a phase of rapid motorization – many of them middle-income countries – roads are often built without due consideration for the communities they pass through. Historically, this was also the case in high-income countries. A shift in mind set is desperately needed to ensure that roads everywhere serve the needs of and are safe for all who use them, including children, but also other vulnerable groups such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.

Such a change is imperative for ongoing efforts to promote healthy lifestyles. The walking, cycling and other physical activity that would do much to curb overweight and obesity in children will inevitably bring them into contact with the road. It is only if those roads are made safe that children will be inclined to use them and their parents and other caregivers will allow them to do so.

No single measure adequately addresses the vast range of risks to children on the road, however, there are steps that

each family, community, and country can take to improve road safety for children. In those countries which have demonstrated the greatest declines in road traffic death and injury, strong laws and stringent enforcement of those laws, and enhancements in the safety of roads and vehicles have proven to make a difference. The United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 offers a broad framework for taking these and other actions to keep children safe on the road.

## How many children are killed in road traffic crashes each year around the world?

## THE FACTS

186 300 children<sup>1</sup> die each year from road traffic crashes around the world – that’s more than 500 children every day. In fact road traffic injury ranks among the top four causes of death for all children over the age of five years.

### Rank cause of death among children under 18 years of age, worldwide, 2012

Rank #	<5 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	<15–17 years
1	Preterm birth complications	Diarrhoeal diseases	HIV/AIDS	Road traffic injury
2	Lower respiratory infections	Lower respiratory infections	Diarrhoeal diseases	Self-harm
3	Birth asphyxia / trauma	Meningitis	Road traffic injury	Interpersonal violence
4	Diarrhoeal diseases	Road traffic injury	Lower respiratory infections	HIV/AIDS

Source: World Health Organization, Global Health Estimates, 2014.

<sup>1</sup> A child is someone under the age of 18 years as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## From where are the children who are most likely to be killed or injured in a road traffic crash?

While the road safety challenge is a global one, the children most likely to die in a road traffic crash live in the world's low- and middle-income countries, where 95% of road traffic fatalities among children occur. Rates vary across regions. Even within countries, children from economically poor backgrounds are at greatest risk.

**Regional variation in road traffic death rates (per 100 000 population) of children under 18 years of age, worldwide, 2012**

Africa		Americas		Eastern Mediterranean		Europe		South-East Asia	Western Pacific		World	
HIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC
6.3	15.6	3.9	6.9	8.5	11.2	2.9	5.6	6.9	2.0	5.7	3.4	9.1

LMIC = Low- and middle income countries; HIC = High-income countries.  
Source: World Health Organization, Global Health Estimates, 2014.

## How are age and sex factors in determining a child's risk of a road traffic crash?

Children of all ages are at risk of being involved in a road traffic crash. Boys account for nearly twice as many road traffic deaths as girls worldwide. This increased risk for boys is thought to be due to greater exposure to traffic, as well as a tendency for boys to take more risks than girls, especially as adolescents.

## What is it about children that make them so vulnerable in traffic?

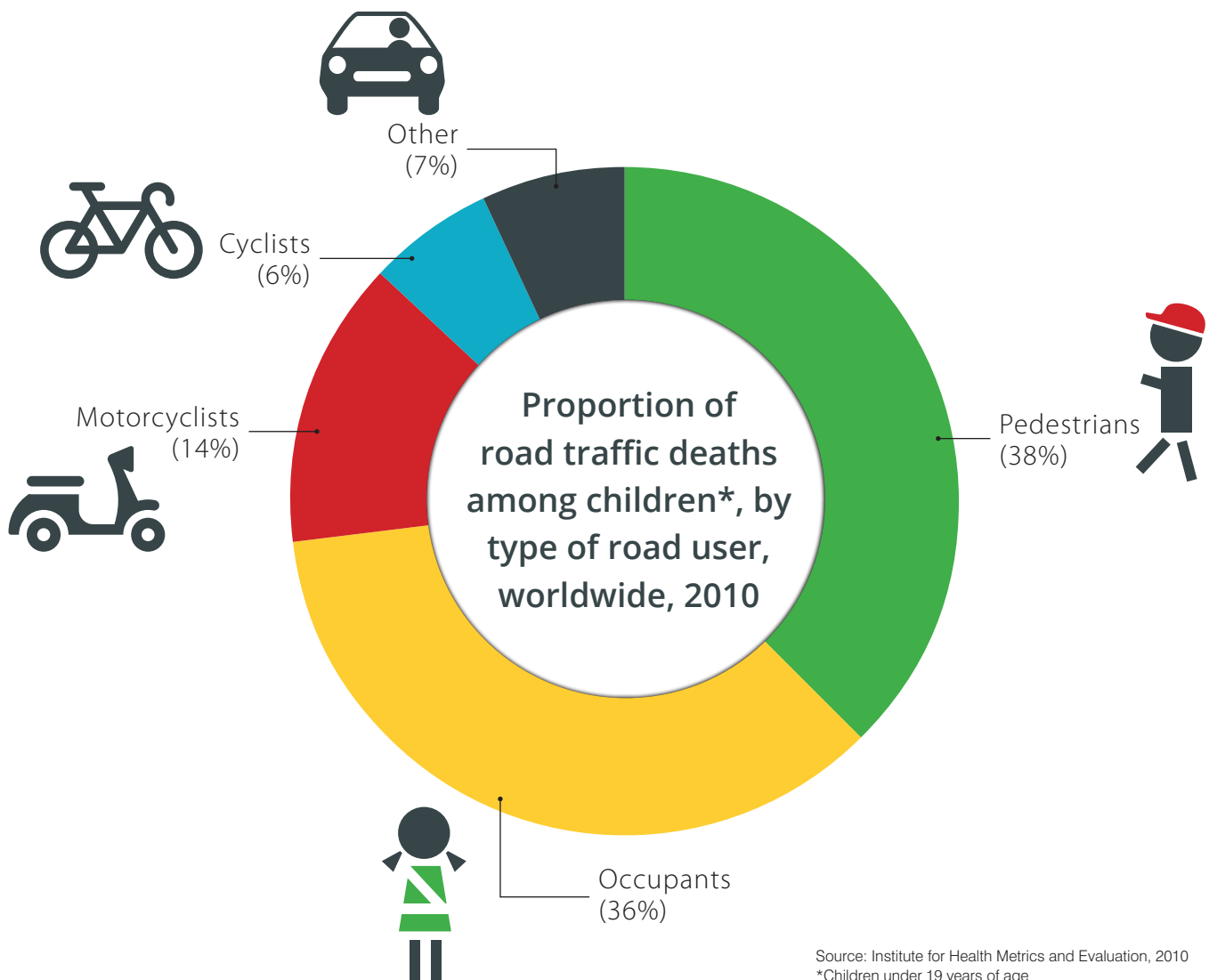
Younger children are limited by their physical, cognitive and social development, making them more vulnerable in road traffic than adults. Because of their small stature, it

can be difficult for children to see surrounding traffic and for drivers and others to see them. In addition if they are involved in a road traffic crash, their softer heads make them more susceptible to serious head injury than adults. Younger children may have difficulties interpreting various sights and sounds, which may impact on their judgement regarding the proximity, speed and direction of moving vehicles. Younger children may also be impulsive, and their short attention spans mean that they struggle to cope with more than one challenge at a time. As they grow older, children of adolescent age are especially prone to take risks, compromising their safety on the road.

### **Which modes of transport place children most at risk of a road traffic crash?**

It might come as a surprise that of the children injured or killed on the roads worldwide each year, 38% are pedestrians. In the low- and middle-income countries where these fatalities most often occur, children walk along roads where there is a mixture of different modes of transport – some moving at high speed – and where infrastructure such as sidewalks, cross walks and safety barriers is lacking. Children who travel by car make up another 36% of those killed. Most of these children are from high-income countries. They are at greater risk both in the front and the back seat of a vehicle when they are unrestrained. The remainder of the children who are killed on the roads each year travel by bicycle or motorcycle, often without helmets, or are drivers themselves.

*Globally, children in low- and middle-income countries have a road traffic death rate nearly three times as high as those in high-income countries.*



## TEN STRATEGIES

Safer roads for all will mean safer roads for children. The Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 highlights what's needed to improve road safety for everyone. For governments, this includes legislating

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