

## Information Note on the Establishment of the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory (AIRSO)

For the 6<sup>th</sup> United Nations Partnership Meeting for Road Safety

Scheduled in Geneva on 5 December 2022

### 1. Background

Road traffic fatalities and serious injuries represent a global public health challenge, especially for the Arab region, where fatality rate due to road crashes was estimated at 18.9<sup>1</sup> fatalities per 100,000 people in 2016, more than the world average of 18.2 fatalities per 100,000 people and more than 3 times the average registered for the European region, which is 5.9 fatalities per 100,000 people<sup>2</sup>.

In response to this alarming situation, Arab governments are facing traffic crashes burden differently. An ESCWA survey conducted in 2018 on the status of road safety management and data in its member States revealed fundamental dysfunctions at the management and data collection levels that endangers police data accuracy and comparability in the region, which generated a large gap between reported and WHO estimated crash fatalities (70%). At the management level, the existence of entities likely to contribute to the management of road safety in each country (such as national committee, higher council, national observatory and lead agency) differs from one country to another, as some countries partially have such entities while others do not. At the data collection level, the use of digital forms to collect traffic crash data is still limited to two countries, while the rest either still use paper form, or do not have a statistical form at all, which affects data accuracy especially crash location. Obviously, these issues prevent countries from properly identifying the existing loopholes in the road safety system, and from achieving effective improvements, and from properly monitoring the progress towards achieving SDG 3.6.

To assist these countries either to improve or to develop new evidence-based road safety policies, strategies and action plans, it is fundamental to collect reliable and accurate data to effectively identify problems, risk factors and priority areas, and to set targets and monitor performance, beyond the police traditional recording and collection of road crash information

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<sup>1</sup> The rate is calculated for 16 ESCWA countries for which data is available in the global report of road safety for 2018, which are: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (With a total of 60.566 road crash fatalities among 321.020.460 inhabitants).

<sup>2</sup> This rate is calculated for 27 EU countries for which data is available in the global report of road safety for 2018, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Eswatini, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

which is focusing by nature on assisting judges on the share of legal responsibilities between users involved in a traffic crash.

Additionally, the recent prevailing conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, made it clear that improving the quality of road crashes data could help the governments to effectively identify priority areas of road crashes among other threats to the lives and well-being of citizens, which compete the public interest for road safety issues, including the Covid-19 or any future pandemics, in order to properly allocate the limited resources (e.g. in national annual budgets) and to ensure that road safety has its rightful place in the efforts to improve public health in general. Furthermore, COVID-19 generated the predominance of some modes of active mobility through “walking”, “cycling” and “Scootering”, resulting in new patterns of road crashes which need to be integrated into road safety analysis with appropriate data.

From their side, ESCWA member States expressed their willingness to improve national road safety information systems in most of the sessions of ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics, where the distressing status of road safety is raised by high-ranking officials from the Ministries of Transport in the Arab countries, seeking the support from the international community to improve the alarming situation. There is a need to convert this willingness and motivation to an official engagement.

As per its mandate as UN Regional Commission, ESCWA focuses on ensuring the alignment of its efforts with the [resolution A/RES/74/299 adopted by the UN General Assembly on 31 August 2020](#). Recommendation #14 of the resolution encourages member States to strengthen institutional capacity through adequate training and capacity-building with regard to road safety to collect, analyze and disseminate disaggregated data for effective and evidence-based policymaking and their implementation. Recommendation #36 of the resolution requests to leverage as appropriate existing efforts, including those of regional road safety observatories, to harmonize and make road safety data available and comparable.

By 2021, several experiences existed already at the global level, such as the International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group ([IRTAD](#)), the European Road Safety Observatory ([ERSO](#)), the Euro- Med Transport Support Project, the African Road Safety Observatory ([ARSO](#)), the Latin America-and the Ibero-American Highway Safety Observatory ([OISEVI](#)), and the Asia Pacific Road Safety Observatory ([APRSO](#)), which revealed the importance of creating synergies between neighbouring countries belonging to a common context, through the establishment of regional observatories on road safety that play a primordial role in accelerating convergence towards common global standards. These standardized data and indicators would constitute a crucial tool assisting in developing the regional orientations (setting targets and strategies). Currently, two of the initiatives listed above tackle road safety data issues in sub-groups of countries in the Arab region, namely the ARSO and the Euro-Med Transport Support Project, but none of them covers all of the 20 ESCWA member States that have a lot in common to share. It must be noted that belonging to more than one observatory is not incompatible, as some countries could join two observatories at the same time following

historical or geographical factors, as this membership strengthens its level of international cooperation and mutual learning.

In this regard, the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory will build on the experience of previous projects and encompass all Arab countries without leaving any member State behind. The regional cooperation between Arab countries on road safety issues is not spur-of-the-moment, Arab countries are used to work together, either under the umbrella of the League of Arab States which have two channels of cooperation through its Ministerial Councils (Transport and Interior), or under the umbrella of ESCWA as a regional commission of the United Nations. ESCWA has a mandate to support the economic and social development of its 20<sup>3</sup> Arab member States, promote regional integration and represent the concerns of its member States at the global level. Road Safety is one of the main concerns that ESCWA is focusing on, as part of a long-term process, as a component of ESCWA activities related to the development of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab States (ITSAS), which includes also ESCWA agreements on International Roads and International Railways.

Already, within the activities of the first decade of action for road safety 2011-2020, ESCWA took the initiative to advocate for the safe systems approach in the region. Therefore, ESCWA has developed “[technical guidelines for the implementation of national road safety management systems](#)”, including the establishment of national lead agencies and the appropriate coordination mechanism, in addition to national road safety observatories that are needed to ensure that interventions are formulated and implemented based on reliable and comprehensive information addressing road safety in all its dimensions. These guidelines were adopted at the [16<sup>th</sup> session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport held in Cairo in 2015](#).

Furthermore, road safety is at the heart of ESCWA's main recurring activities. ESCWA has reported on the annual road safety status of its member States as part of the agenda for several annual sessions of the Committee on Transport and Logistics (e.g. the [18<sup>th</sup>](#) , [19<sup>th</sup>](#) , [20<sup>th</sup>](#) , [21<sup>st</sup>](#) ). Road safety indicators are also among the attributes of the GIS platform that ESCWA is developing to follow up the implementation of the components of the ITSAS elements (The GIS for the transport networks and facilities in the Arab region).

Since 2018, ESCWA has been advocating for the establishment of an Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory. A [regional workshop specifically dedicated to the management of road safety in Arab countries](#) was organized in Beirut on 27 and 28 November 2018 with the support of the UNSG' Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt, and in cooperation with the UNECE. The workshop concluded with the adoption of [Regional priorities for road safety management, 2019-2020](#), taking into account global best practices and lessons learned from various experiences around the world. In what concerns road safety data, the participants of the workshop agreed on several priorities including the establishment of a Regional Observatory that coordinates and facilitates national data improvements.

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<sup>3</sup> Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics recommended through item # j to Continue implementing a project to establish a regional road safety observatory for Arab countries to improve the collection of data on road safety and ensure their consistency, given the importance of this project to increasing the efficiency of policies, strategies and work.

plans aimed at improving road safety in the Arab countries. Thus, the recommendation #h of the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics called for seeking financial support for the establishment of the Arab observatory.

Within the activities of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Road safety Week during 17-23 May 2021, ESCWA organized a regional workshop on road safety in the Arab countries, on 18 May 2021. The workshop presented and discussed the draft concept note on the establishment of the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory (AIRSO), which was prepared in cooperation with the UNSG's Special Envoy for Road Safety team and WHO.

For the inception phase, ESCWA could provide the transitional technical secretariat of the Arab Observatory according to the procedures of the United Nations. Later, during the operational phase, the observatory could be hosted either by ESCWA itself or by the member State that shows the highest level of interest, commitment, and sustainability to host the observatory.

## 2. Objective

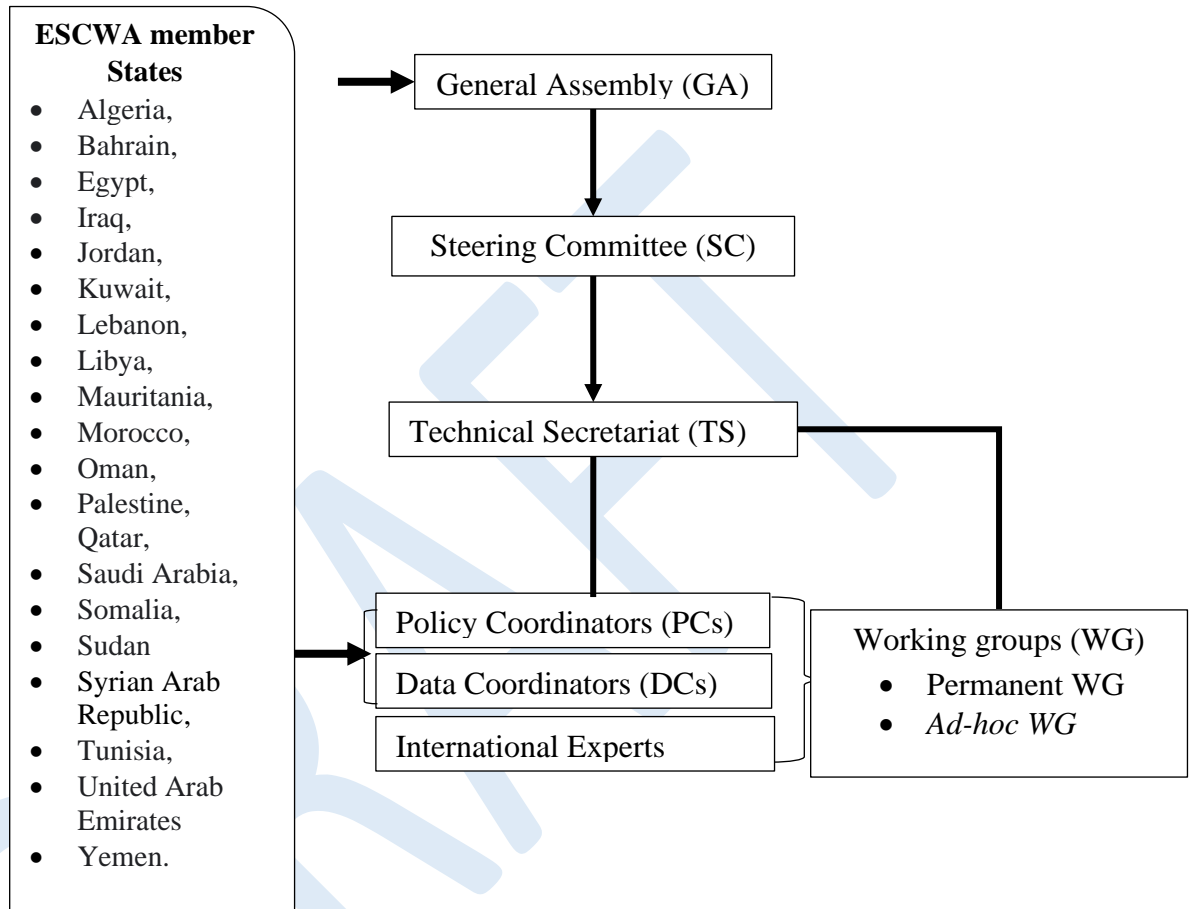
The main objective of establishing the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory is to assist ESCWA member States to design and implement evidence-based policies, strategies and action plans to achieve the global targets of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 and the SDG 3.6, by monitoring road crashes, contributing to international cooperation on road safety data and its analysis, enhancing cooperation and exchange of information, experiences and methodologies, supporting comparison between different countries and regions, and the dissemination of good practices.

## 3. Missions of the AIRSO:

- Outline regional **vision** to assist member States on developing effective national policies and strategies;
- Develop and adapt **specific processes, tools, guidelines, methods and indicators for road safety management** in the Arab region, in line with regional and global **best practices**;
- Assist national road safety entities and partners in the region to implement efficient and effective road safety management systems at their national level;
- Create, host and administrate a regional **repository of databases** for data on road crashes;
- Contribute to the development and dissemination of **training materials** in the languages of the region and coordinate the training of trainers in national and local

- capacity building** institutions;
- **Reduce discrepancy** between the national- reported and the WHO-estimated fatalities and injuries due to road crashes;
  - Produce an **annual report** on the status of road safety, including a comparative analysis of indicators and a presentation of best practices (new developments, opportunities, and constraints). In addition to the mutual cooperation with WHO to produce Global Status Reports;
  - Highlight the **challenges and areas** that require further analysis through a **regional vision**;
  - Coordinate **research** programs and advanced regional studies;
  - Facilitate the **sharing and exchange** of lessons learned between countries by providing a tool for dissemination between decision-makers and analysts from different countries ;
  - Hold **regional consultations / workshops** on common issues, including cross-border road safety issues;
  - Provide **logistical support** to projects of common interest and assess the effectiveness of the initiatives / countermeasures.

#### 4. Tentative Organizational Structure of the AIRSO:



- **General Assembly (GA):** It comprises the leading road safety authorities of each member State. It is the highest governing body of the Observatory, charged with outlining the overall policies.
- **Steering Committee (SC):** It comprises some member States, proposed and approved by the GA on a rotational base; one member is elected as Chair. The committee's main functions are to approve the action plan and ensure its implementation.
- **Technical Secretariat (TS):** It is in charge of implementing GA agreements and guidelines adopted by the SC. It has the technical and operational functions, including outlining the AIRSO Annual Work Plan, coordinating technical assistance to member States, and proposing methodological improvements for collecting road safety data.
- **Working Groups (WG):** (called in some observatories, cooperation committees or task forces) include two types of WGs, the "permanent working groups" which work



on the recurring topics on road safety, and the “ad-hoc working groups” which study specific road safety topics for a limited period of time. The WGs are made up of:

- **Policy coordinators** (PCs) who participate on designing, implementing, and evaluating road safety policies.
- **Data Coordinators** (DCs) who are the primary link between the Observatory and each member country and are responsible for the gathering and systematizing of country-level data on road safety.
- **International experts** from partner entities (UN-regional commissions, Multilateral Development Banks, other regional observatories, universities, private sector, etc.)

More detailed information on each element of the structure is provided in the **bylaws**.

## 5. Funding opportunities

To cover the initial cost of setting up the observatory and the regularly running costs, grants and contributions will be pooled from:

- The Host Country
- Multilateral Development Banks
- High level income Arab countries
- GRSF, UNRSF, FIA, philanthropies, etc.
- Private companies/ foundations
- member States contributions (annual fee)

It must be noted that the costs associated with existing road safety observatories vary widely, but consist mainly of costs related to:

- Secretariat technical staff (including local/ international staff and consultants)
- Events/ meetings/ workshops
- Travel
- Office space and equipment
- Website cost
- Miscellaneous administration/ support cost

## 6. Road map for the design and implementation process

(As agreed upon by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of [ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics, held in Cairo on 6 and 7 December 2021](#))

Goal #	Goal Description and Key Related Actions	S.M.A.R.T <sup>4</sup> Success Criteria	Deadline
1	<p><b>Engagement and commitment of stakeholders (administratively and financially)</b></p> <p>The observatory's current conceptual framework was shared with the main stakeholders in road safety in the Arab region through ESCWA workshop that was held on 18 May 2021, during the 6<sup>th</sup> UN Global Road Safety Week (17-23 May 2021). Member States will be invited to indicate their level of commitment by sending a <b>letter</b> by <b>July 2021</b> to the UN- ESCWA expressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their <b>interest</b> to becoming members and defining their contribution (financially and technically) and the <b>appointment of two national coordinators</b>, one for policy issues and the other for data.</li> <li>• Their <b>wish to host the technical secretariat</b> of the observatory (if applicable). Countries wishing to host are invited to provide details of the operational resources that the designated country will allocate to ensure an optimal functioning of the secretariat. On a consultative basis, ESCWA will select the country that demonstrates the highest level of interest, commitment and sustainability to host the observatory secretariat.</li> </ul>	Consistent number of participating and motivated countries	July 2021
2	<p><b>Design and implementation of the institutional, organizational and operational framework of the observatory</b></p> <p>2.1. The organizational and management structure, core competencies and the rules governing how the observatory will be run (Bylaws).</p> <p>2.2. Estimate the costs and logistical requirements for the observatory initialization and operation.</p> <p>2.3. A regional workshop will be organized to launch the project activities during 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of</p>	<p>At least <b>10 countries</b> are officially committed</p> <p>Member States agreed on the structure, bylaws</p>	September 2021

<sup>4</sup> S.M.A.R.T: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.



	ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics and agree on the members of the organizational and management structure (Expected around November- December 2021)	and names affectation	
3	<p><b>Establish, test, and evaluate the technical components of the observatory</b></p> <p>3.1. Conceive a standardized information system, which includes all templates, tools, methods, resources and protocols for data collection, management, distribution, archiving, and security.</p> <p>3.2. Create a dashboard for the translation from data/information to knowledge supporting evidence-based policies strategies and action plans.</p> <p>3.3. Implement the resulting technical components into 3 pilot countries to obtain the optimal technical structure before disseminating it with the rest of the Arab countries. Thus, presenting the required technical assistance and capacity building.</p> <p>3.4. Assess and suggest areas of improvement</p> <p>3.5. Share the validated technical components during the -23<sup>rd</sup> session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics</p>	The prototypes are tested and validated	October 2022
4	<p><b>Disseminate acquired knowledge and produce evidence-based policies, strategies and action plans</b></p> <p>4.1. Assist the rest of the Arab countries to adopt the validated and harmonized technical components of the observatory</p> <p>4.2. Sustain the support for capacity building</p> <p>4.3. Produce the first annual report</p> <p>4.4. Highlight areas of priority for the regional road safety policy during the-24<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics</p>	% reduction of road crash fatalities and serious injuries	October 2023
5	The four previous goals of the observatory focus on the improvement of the police data as it is considered the preliminary road crashes data. In this stage, the planned Arab road safety observatory will	% gap between WHO estimated fatalities and officially	October 2024

<p><b>link</b> police data with data collected by <b>health facilities, insurance companies</b> and individual sources to supplement them in a streamlined manner. Thus, the use of big data will be also considered.</p>	<p>reported fatalities is reduced</p>	
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## 7. Updated information on the process of Establishing the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory, AIRSO:

- Between February and April 2021, ESCWA developed a draft concept note on the establishment of an Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory (AIRSO), in cooperation with the UNSG's Special Envoy for Road Safety team and of WHO.
- Within the activities of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Road Safety Week from 17 to 23 May 2021, ESCWA organized a [regional workshop on road safety in the Arab countries on 18 May 2021](#). The draft concept note for the establishment of an [Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory](#) (AIRSO) was presented and discussed during this regional workshop.
- ESCWA successfully secured funding from the UNRSF to implement a 22-months project on “*Strengthening Evidence-Based Interventions for Road Safety in the Arab Region Through Effective and Reliable Data Recording, Processing, and Analysis*”. This project is considered as the initial phase of the establishment of AIRSO, and for hosting its technical secretariat during the implementation period of the project.
- On 30 June 2021, ESCWA sent an official letter to the focal point ministries of member States, requesting that they indicate their interest in joining AIRSO and appoint two national coordinators, one for road safety policies and the other for road safety data. In addition, they were requested to express their opinion on the possibility of hosting the observatory after the take-off period.
- ESCWA received replies to the above request from the following countries: Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Furthermore, Morocco expressed its willingness to host the technical secretariat of the Observatory, as per its response sent on 24 August, 2021, which is confirmed by the official letter sent on 01 December, 2021.
- A [parliamentary document on the project \(in Arabic\)](#) was presented during the [22<sup>nd</sup> session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics, held in Cairo on 6 and 7 December, 2021](#), where Morocco's willingness to host the observatory was welcomed. The committee recommended as success criteria for the project's follow-up [the reception of supporting letters from at least 10 of ESCWA member States](#).
- On 26 January 2022, reminder letters were sent to the focal point Ministries in the countries that had not yet responded to the letter sent by ESCWA on 30 June 2021, noting in the reminder letter Morocco's confirmation of its willingness to host the technical secretariat of the observatory.

- Two virtual workshops on road safety were implemented: one on July 5, 2022, and another on July 19, 2022. In both workshops, the AIRSO project was briefed and countries were invited to reply on the topic.
- On 26 July 2022, the number of responses received from the countries supporting the project of the Observatory and providing the names of the national coordinators for policies and data reached the quorum of ten: **Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic.** Accordingly, a decision was taken to communicate with Morocco to discuss the aspect of hosting the Observatory.
- Two remote meetings were held with the Director of the National Agency for Road Safety in Morocco on 1 August and on 18 October 2022 to discuss on the requirements for hosting the observatory in terms of technical, financial, logistical, and institutional aspects.
- The project updates were presented during the activities of the [23<sup>rd</sup> session of the Transport and Logistics Committee, held in Alexandria on 20 and 21 October, 2022](#), within agenda item 9 / [panel discussion \(1\) on evidence-based policies to improve traffic safety in Arab countries \(in Arabic\)](#). The representative of the Ministry of Transport and Logistics in Morocco explained that the issue of hosting is the Observatory was under study by the concerned authorities in the Moroccan Government.
- By mid- November 2022, ESCWA is in the process of discussing with the Government of Morocco the terms of the agreement for the hosting of the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory.