

Synergy, Partnership, and Regional Consensus

Initiated by ESCWA/UNRSF project on

“Strengthening Evidence-Based Interventions for Road Safety in the Arab Region Through Effective and Reliable Data Recording, Processing, and Analysis”

November 2023

Background

Road traffic fatalities and serious injuries are one of the major global public health issues, especially in the Arab region, where the fatality rate due to road crashes was estimated at 18.9¹ 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 people². One of the major challenges against improving road safety in many countries in the Arab region is the poor quality of the data and information collected on road crashes, which prevents the development of efficient and effective evidence-based road safety policies, strategies, and action plans to decrease the number of road traffic fatalities and serious injuries. The poor data quality goes back to the traditional data collection method used by the police in a manual and paper-based way, which is mainly oriented towards assessing how responsibilities are shared between users involved in the traffic crash.

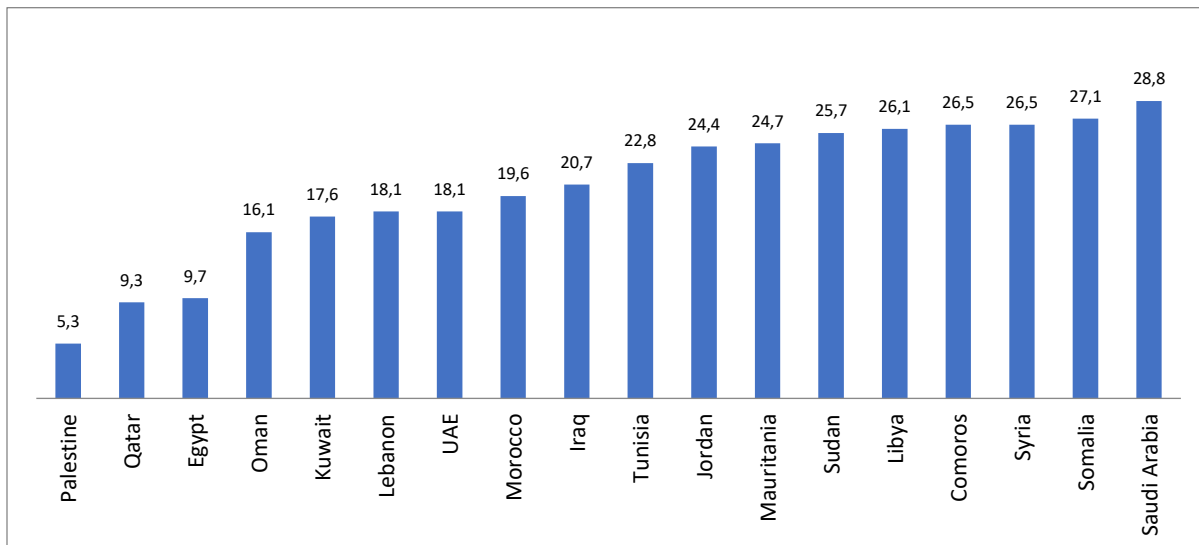


Figure 1 : WHO's estimated road crash fatalities in Arab countries per 100,000 inhabitants for 2016

¹ 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).

² 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.

The current United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF) project, ***“Strengthening evidence-based interventions for road safety in the Arab region through effective and reliable data recording, processing, and analysis,”*** is implemented to strengthen the technical capacities of Arab countries so that they will be able to establish effective and sustainable evidence-based policymaking for road safety. As a first step, a harmonized form for the digital recording of road crash data through handheld devices will be produced. Then, ESCWA will help the countries build their capacities concerning data recording, processing, and analysis to formulate evidence-based road safety policies, strategies, and action plans. Three ESCWA Member States (Lebanon, Qatar, and Tunisia) are benefiting from the project at this stage, with the aim of generalizing the benefits to the other countries at later stages.

This UNRSF project is considered as the initial phase of the establishment of the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory (AIRSO), which ESCWA has been advocating since 2018 as it is one of its main regional priorities. It also enables ESCWA to host the AIRSO technical secretariat during its implementation period. The main objective of establishing AIRSO is to assist ESCWA member States in designing and implementing evidence-based policies, strategies, and action plans to achieve the global targets of the [UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030](#) and SDG 3.6 (halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030) 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 disseminating good practices.

Chronology

Within the activities of the 6th Global Road Safety Week during 17-23 May 2021, ESCWA implemented, with the support of the UNSG Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt, and in cooperation with the UNECE, a regional workshop on road safety in the Arab countries, on [18 May 2021](#). The workshop presented and discussed the draft concept note on AIRSO establishment, which was prepared in cooperation with the teams of the UNSG’s Special Envoy for Road Safety and of WHO.

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.

Later, in the [22nd session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics, held in Cairo on 6 and 7 December 2021](#), a [parliamentary document on the AIRSO project \(in Arabic\)](#) was presented, 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 ESCWA member States.

Withn the activities of the UNRSF project, two virtual workshops on road safety were implemented: one on [5 July 2022](#) and another on [19 July 2022](#). In both workshops, the AIRSO

project was briefed, and the remaining member States were encouraged to name their respective national coordinators for the AIRSO project. Besides, the survey conducted through the UNRSF project to capture the status of road safety management and the documentation and analysis of road crashes in the Arab region was briefed.

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.

During the [23rd session of its committee on Transport and Logistics, held in Alexandria on 20 and 21 October 2022](#), ESCWA implemented a [regional panel discussion on evidence-based policies to improve traffic safety in Arab countries](#) (Agenda item 9, in Arabic) as part of the activities of the UNRSF project. In this session, the requirements for the preparation and implementation of evidence-based policies to improve road safety were discussed and the interim results of the survey implemented by ESCWA in 2022 on the national road safety management and data systems in the Arab countries were presented and validated. Besides, the proposed components of the harmonized template for road crash recording were presented. It was agreed that ESCWA continues the activities for the implementation of AIRSO to identify the gaps in the road safety system, deliver effective improvements at the national level of the Arab countries, and harmonize and coordinate the efforts made by member States to improve road safety. Besides, the representative of the Ministry of Transport and Logistics in Morocco explained that the issue of hosting the Observatory was under study by the concerned authorities in the Moroccan government.

On 8 December 2022, a [consultation meeting on road safety data and policies in Lebanon, Qatar, and Tunisia](#) was held within the framework of the UNRSF project to consult on the details of the existing processes of collecting, processing, and analyzing police records on road crash fatalities and injuries in the three countries and for the final validation of the components of the harmonized template for road crash recording proposed by ESCWA. The discussion held during that meeting allowed for a better understanding of the experiences of the three countries in collecting, processing, and analyzing police records and the individual and collective challenges, as well as the initiatives and programs envisaged to address them. The meeting participants agreed that the proposed template covered the desired components for recording road crashes and to present its details in the regional workshop on road safety data and policies in some Arab countries.

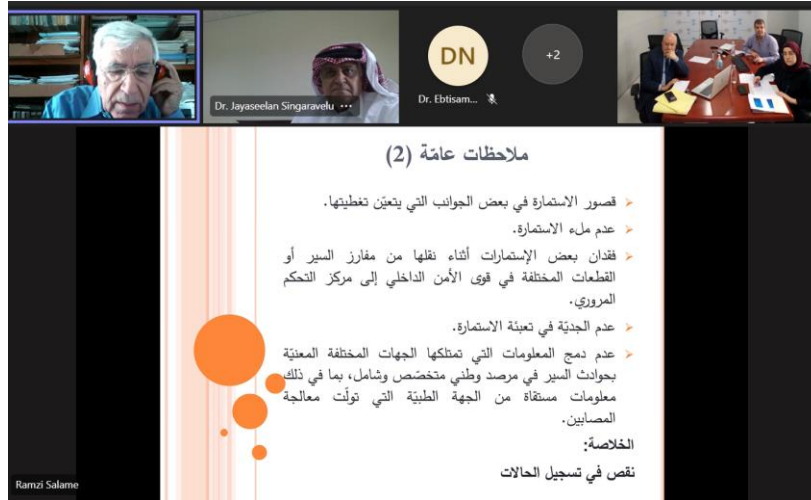


Figure 2: Remote consultation meeting on road safety data and policies in Lebanon, Qatar, and Tunisia on 8 December 2022

On 30 January 2023, Libya nominated two national coordinators for the Observatory project, so the total number of responses received from the countries supporting the Observatory project and providing the names of the national coordinators for policies and data reached eleven.

Partnerships Initiated by the UNRSF Project

The current UNRSF regional project triggered a regional dialogue on road safety data in the [23rd session of the Transport and Logistics Committee](#). Therefore, ESCWA planned to organize a regional workshop on road safety data and policies to:

- Present and discuss the findings of the ESCWA surveys on road safety management and data systems.
- Address gaps in collecting, processing, and analyzing police records on road traffic fatalities and injuries.
- Present and discuss the outputs of the meeting held by ESCWA on [road safety data and policies in Lebanon, Qatar, and Tunisia](#).
- Agree on the elements of the optimal unified template for road crash data recording suggested for developing the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory.

The interlinkages between the UNRSF project and the AIRSO project paved the way for several effective partnerships. In 2022, ESCWA liaised with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) about possible collaboration in financing some of the project activities scheduled for 2023. The IsDB expressed its willingness to fund the regional workshop on road safety data and policies in some Arab countries scheduled for March 2023. Besides, ESCWA liaised with the World Bank (WB) for potential collaboration in the activities of the regional workshop. The WB expressed its interest in continuing its coordination and constructive dialogue with ESCWA on the road safety agenda

in Mashreq countries, and the team expressed their willingness to take part in the workshop's discussions.

Within the activities of the UNRSF project, ESCWA and IsDB implemented the [regional workshop on road safety data and policies in some Arab countries on 7 and 8 March 2023 in Beirut](#). The IsDB and WB participated in the workshop alongside the national coordinators of eleven countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Tunisia.

The workshop was a great opportunity to exchange experiences between the participating countries. The discussions held on the findings of the survey implemented by ESCWA in 2022 on “National Road Safety Management and Data Systems in Arab Countries” led to a better understanding of the status of road safety in some Arab countries. Besides, these discussions assisted in ensuring the validity of the collected data. Also, the discussions on the presentations of the national coordinators of the three countries participating in the project—Lebanon, Qatar, and Tunisia—led to the validation of the identified gaps in the existing processes of collecting, processing, and analyzing police records on road crash fatalities and injuries in these countries. Moreover, the discussions on the proposed elements of the optimal unified template for road crash recording suggested as a base for developing the AIRSO project assisted the ESCWA transport and road safety team in updating the first version of the electronic form to collect road crash data, considering the constructive comments of the national coordinators.



Figure 3: ESCWA, UNRSF, IsDB and WB provided support to reach regional consensus of AIRSO national coordinators from 11 Arab countries, Beirut, 7-8 March 2023

The efforts made during 2022–2023 on this project contributed to achieving two of the three outputs identified to produce the first outcome of the UNRSF project. The first output achieved is the identification of the current gaps and loopholes in the existing processes of collecting, processing, and analyzing police records on road crash fatalities and injuries in the Arab region. The second output achieved is the conception and validation of the elements of the optimal template for road crash recording. At this stage, ESCWA’s transport and road safety team efforts are devoted to output three, which is the release and validation of the prototype of the Harmonized digital form for handheld devices (mobile application).

Challenges and Opportunities:

Several challenges are witnessed in accomplishing the UNRSF project activities. One of the main challenges is finalizing the project within the assigned duration of 22 months. Administrative complications and procedural reasons, in addition to other operational obstacles, lead to a delay in achieving all the project’s deliverables, and the project will need an extension of duration.

Another challenge is the conflicting priorities at the national level of the three countries involved in the project. Two out of the three countries, Lebanon and Tunisia, that are involved at the current stage in the project are low- and middle-income countries. These countries suffer from enormous and varied social and economic problems, along with a scarcity of resources that are subject to competing development challenges. Therefore, their progress towards the sustainable development goals is lower than that of GCC high-income countries such as Qatar, which is also involved in the project. As for road safety, it is one of the development issues in Lebanon and Tunisia that has not been well addressed in the past due to other pressing development issues and priorities.

On the other hand, these countries, as well as other ESCWA member States, expressed their willingness to improve national road safety information systems in most of the sessions of the ESCWA Committee on Transport and Logistics and requested support from the international community to improve the alarming situation, specially the eleven countries engaged in the establishment of the AIRSO.

ESCWA’s technical support, the financial support of IsDB, and the experience of WB are great opportunities to reach the UNRSF project goal and enhance the status of road safety in the targeted countries.

Despite all the challenges, the current UNRSF project has accomplished significant parts of its activities, and its impact will be tangible to targeted countries once finalized.



Figure 4: Interface of the prototype of AIRSO mobile application for road crash data collection, (MHDAR).