

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 05, 2009

## Road Safety and the South Caucasus | WHO Global Status Report on Road Safety

A recent report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) claims that over 90% of the world's fatalities on the roads occur in low-income and middle income countries, which constitute only 48% of the world's vehicles. The study assesses the status of road safety in 178 countries, identifies gaps in road safety and proposes recommendations for intervention.

A principal finding reveals that very few countries have comprehensive road safety laws that are effectively enforced. Hence, only 29% of the countries meet basic criteria for reducing speed in urban areas, and less than 10% of countries rate the enforcement of their speed limits as effective. Moreover, only 20% of low-income countries have a law requiring young children in cars to be in car restraints in contrast to 90% of high income countries, which have similar regulations. Additionally, only 57% of countries require seatbelts to be used by passengers in both front and rear seats.

The report provides data on the three South Caucasus countries as well: the separate country profiles include data on the availability and enforcement of road safety laws, statistics on the vehicles and road traffic fatalities. According to the study Georgia has the highest number of fatal and non-fatal traffic accidents in the Caucasus. The data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs shows that 737 road traffic fatalities and 7,349 non-fatal road traffic injuries were reported in 2007. Officially in 2007 the number of the reported road casualties was lower in Armenia: 371 reported fatalities and 2,720 non fatal road traffic injuries, with a significant majority of incidents involving pedestrians. However, the actual numbers in both countries could possibly be higher, considering the fact that in some cases the non-fatal injuries go unreported and post-accident results are rarely recorded.

Yet, Georgia scores surprisingly high on the enforcement of the road safety laws. -- perhaps given its quite successful police reform and recent emphasis on breathalyzer tests. Drunk-driving law enforcement is rated nine out of ten (ten being the most effective), though the State Road Police 2007 data reveals that 37% of the road traffic deaths in the country involved alcohol. Road safety law enforcement scores are striking in Azerbaijan as well, where all the road traffic law enforcements, including drunk-driving, motorcycle helmet, seat-belts and child restraints are rated nine out of ten.

When drawing conclusions, however, we need to take into consideration that the ratings are based on the results of a self-administered survey, and represent the populations' perceptions of the law enforcement, rather than the facts. While the report provides [information on the methodology](#), it is still unclear, for example, how many people were surveyed and how the respondents were selected.

The full report can be found [here](#).