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Proposal for the establishment of an Arab integrated road safety observatory

Summary

The present document sets out a proposal to establish an Arab integrated road safety observatory, and identifies its purpose and functions. It also defines the position of the observatory within international projects in the field.

The Commission is invited to consider the proposal to establish the observatory.

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Introduction

1. Deaths and serious injuries resulting from road crashes represent a global threat to public health, especially in the Arab region where the estimated death rate from road crashes was 19.2 deaths per 100,000 in 2016. This rate is higher than the global average of 18.2 deaths per 100,000, and three times more than in the European Union (5.9 deaths per 100,000).¹

2. In view of this alarming situation, Arab countries are employing various mechanisms to deal with the burdens of road crashes. A survey conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the status of road safety management and its data collection mechanism in member States, whose findings were published in 2018, revealed several gaps that limit data accuracy and comparability between Arab countries. This explains the large discrepancies between estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) of the number of road deaths and estimates presented in countries' official reports, as WHO estimates are 80 per cent higher. The survey also indicated that when collecting data on road crashes, only two Arab countries rely on the digital forms used during investigations at crash sites, while other countries limit data collection to paper forms or do not use any type of standardized form. These gaps prevent an accurate examination of road safety in a country, which makes it difficult to identify and apply effective interventions to enhance road safety. They also impede accurate monitoring of progress in reducing road crashes and their consequences, especially the implementation of target 3.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on halving the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes by 2020.²

I. Need for the proposed observatory

3. The Arab integrated road safety observatory aims to support countries in developing and implementing evidence-based policies, strategies and action plans to improve road safety, starting with a detailed diagnosis based on reliable and accurate data to determine problems, risk factors, priority areas, goals, and performance monitoring. This diagnosis cannot result from the traditional mechanism used to collect and process the paper records of road crashes prepared by traffic police, which by their nature focus only on identifying the legal responsibilities of those involved in the crash. Establishing a regional road safety observatory will not replace national observatories, but will support consistency between national observatories by helping them adopt unified standards, drawn from lessons learned and best experiences, so as to achieve national, regional and global goals.

4. The project to establish a regional road safety observatory is of great importance in the current conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, given that improving the reliability of road crash data will enable Governments to accurately place this challenge on their health priority list, and to take it into account when allocating resources. The pandemic has led to the dominance of some modes of transport, such as walking, cycling and mopeds, which have contributed to the emergence of new types of road crashes that must be monitored and integrated into road safety analysis using appropriate data.

5. In view of the limited financial resources allocated to improving road safety worldwide, the regional observatory will serve as a compass to guide donors (development banks, financing funds, non-profit institutions) towards intervention priorities in the region, including countries most in need of funding, and the size and quality of needed interventions. The observatory will also act as a platform for countries to exchange

¹ These rates were calculated for Arab countries included in the 2018 World Health Organization report entitled [Global Status Report on Road Safety 2018](#), namely Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

² The date for achieving this target was extended pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/299 of 31 August 2020 that proclaims the period 2021–2030 as the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety, and calls upon member States to continue action through 2030 on all the road safety-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 3.6.

road safety initiatives in the region, so that experiences can be optimally utilized to avoid duplication and resource waste.

II. Similar regional initiatives

6. There are several initiatives to establish regional observatories worldwide, with varying degrees of implementation and operationalization, including the following: the International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group (**IRTAD**), the European Road Safety Observatory (**ERSO**), the African Road Safety Observatory (**ARSO**), the Ibero-American Road Safety Observatory (**OISEVI**), and the Asia Pacific Road Safety Observatory (**APRSO**). The initiatives to establish these observatories stemmed from recognizing the importance of creating a space for collaboration between neighbouring countries that belong to a similar environment, and that regional road safety observatories make significant contributions to the production of unified regional data and indicators, which are key to formulating regional measures for road safety in line with global goals and targets adopted by the United Nations and its institutions.

7. Some Arab countries have joined the African Road Safety Observatory. Moreover, some Arab countries located on the Mediterranean Basin have benefited from technical support provided by the Euro-Mediterranean Transport Support Project to harmonize and unify standards for collecting road safety data. However, these initiatives have not resulted in clear and effective support for the preparation and implementation of evidence-based policies, strategies and action plans to improve road safety in the Arab region.

8. Consequently, the Arab integrated road safety observatory will benefit from previous experiences in the field, will include all Arab countries without exception, and will work to find mechanisms to coordinate with existing initiatives.

9. The inclusion of a country in more than one regional observatory simultaneously does not constitute a conflict, as some countries are members of two observatories because of common historical or geographical factors (such as Spain, which belongs to both the European Observatory and to the Ibero-American Observatory), and such membership promotes international cooperation and mutual learning.

III. Purpose of the observatory

10. The following are the main functions of the observatory:

(a) Highlighting challenges and areas requiring further efforts through a regional vision to improve road safety;

(b) Providing a regional platform to assist member States in developing effective and evidence-based national policies and strategies for improving road safety, building on the global plan for the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030;

(c) Developing and adapting tools and methods for managing and analysing road crash data in the Arab region, based on consistent evidence and standards, and in line with international best practices; and cooperating with the World Health Organization to produce its reports;

(d) Supporting road safety partners in the region in adopting standardized data management components at the national level;

(e) Creating, hosting and managing a regional database of road safety policies and data;

(f) Contributing to training of trainers to build national and local capacities in developing and implementing evidence-based policies to improve traffic safety;

(g) Facilitating the sharing and exchange of lessons learned among decision makers and analysts in member States;

(h) Contributing to organizing regional workshops on road safety issues common to Arab countries;

(i) Providing technical and logistical support to projects of common interest at the regional level, and evaluating the effectiveness of such projects;

(j) Assisting member States in benefiting from the applications of the digital revolution and the available complementary tools that help increase the efficiency of data collection and analysis systems, and simplify and increase the speed and accuracy of relevant procedures (bar codes on vehicle registrations and driving licenses).

IV. Way forward

11. Document E/ESCWA/C.5/2021/7 on the project to establish the observatory was presented at the [twenty-second session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics](#), which was held in Cairo on 6 and 7 December 2021. The Committee welcomed a request by Morocco to host the observatory.
