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Working Party on Transport Statistics  
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METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HARMONIZATION  
OF TRANSPORT STATISTICS

Presentation of the road traffic accident statistics  
Common Questionnaire

Submitted by the World Health Organization (WHO)

Note: In view of the interest of the Working Party to follow discussion on the reliability of statistics on the number of persons killed in road traffic accidents and with the goal of improving these data, the World Health Organization (WHO) has prepared a document which is reproduced below.

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Reliability of statistics on the number of people killed in road traffic injuries

The World Health Organization (WHO) is engaged in road safety through its Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention. WHO has noted the commitment of UNECE in dealing with the problem of under-estimation of the number of road crash victims and the number of deaths. WHO has been informed about the work of WP.6 by Prof. Marcel Haegi. WHO is already working with the UNECE Inland Transport Committee Working Party on Road Traffic Safety (WP.1). WHO did offer its contribution to the efforts engaged by WP.6 in general and, more specifically, in the development of the survey questionnaire addressing road crash victim figures. That is related to WHO-five year strategy for road traffic injury prevention, in which improvement of the quality of data is a core area of this strategy. Subsequently, WP.6 has invited WHO to join the work on data harmonization, starting with a survey questionnaire addressing road crash victim figures.

WHO notes that there are different statistics reported on the number of persons killed and injured in road crashes globally and individually for different countries. For example, at the global level, this difference comes out clearly in two well-known references. The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL), in its Report 445 (Estimating global road fatalities by G. Jacobs, A. Aeron-Thomas and A. Astrop, 2000), estimates that in 1999, between 750,000 and 880,000 people died from road crashes worldwide. The WHO estimate for 1998 is 1,170,694 road traffic fatalities around the world. This is estimated to have risen to 1,260,000 road traffic fatalities in 2000 (World Health Report Database 1999, 2002). These two sources also give different figures for the number of persons injured in road crashes globally. The TRL report 445 gives an estimate of 23,000,000-34,000,000 road crash injuries per annum. WHO estimate is 10,000,000-15,000,000 persons injured per year. The main reasons for these differences are because, first, information is provided from different local sources, mainly police and hospitals, and second, they are not using the same data collection process. With respect to differences in data on road traffic fatalities in the European region, the document (TRANS/WP.1/2002/35/Add.1) submitted by the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR) has clearly demonstrated the depth of the problem. WHO observes that the analysis in this document underscores the urgent need to find out how to reduce the differences noted.

WHO suggests two major areas for attention: i) further dissemination of agreed-upon definition of persons killed and injured in road traffic crashes, and supported by efforts to encourage Member States to adopt and use this definition, and ii) standardization of the data collection forms and analysis among the different local data collectors. It is noted that, generally, a road death is deemed to have occurred when the injured person dies within 30 days of the crash (TRL 445). This is commonly referred to as the 30-day rule. A study report from TRL (Survival times following road accidents by J. Broughton, TRL Report 467, 2000) notes: "Several European countries still have not adopted the 30-day rule....". The TRL 445 report shows in Appendix A (page 29) the variation in the application of the 30-day rule in different parts of the world, including Europe. The Traffic Police Department is an important source of data on road traffic injuries worldwide. However, there are other important sources such as hospitals and insurance firms. WP.6 needs to work towards fostering stronger collaboration between these different agents that collect and keep data on road traffic injuries.

In conclusion, WHO notes that the work of WP.6 on under-estimation of road traffic fatalities is a worthwhile initiative that will help improve the relevance and efficiency of road safety measures.

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