HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY

BRIEFING PAPER

Number 7615,23 April 2018

Road accident casualties in Britain and the world

By Lydia Jackson
Richard Cracknell

Contents:

Contents

Summary

In 2016 there were 181,384 accident casualties recorded on Britain's roads; 1,792 of these were fatal. The long-term trend in the numbers killed and injured from road accidents has been declining, especially in the last two decades.

In 2016 46% of those fatal road accident victims were car occupants; 25% were pedestrians; 25% motorcyclists; and 6% were cyclists

In Great Britain, the overall number of fatalities and road casualties has been in long term decline since the mid-1960s, and especially since the mid-1990s. Measures to address drink driving and improve safety of vehicles and roads have all contributed to this decline which has occurred while road traffic has been increasing.

According to the World Health Organisation, more than 1.25 million people die each year as a result of road traffic crashes. Injuries from road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among people aged between 15 and 29 years of age.

Between 20 and 50 million more people suffer non-fatal injuries.

More than 90% of road traffic deaths occur in low and middle-income countries. Road traffic injury death rates are highest in the African region.

The newly adopted 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development has set a target to halve the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020.[1]

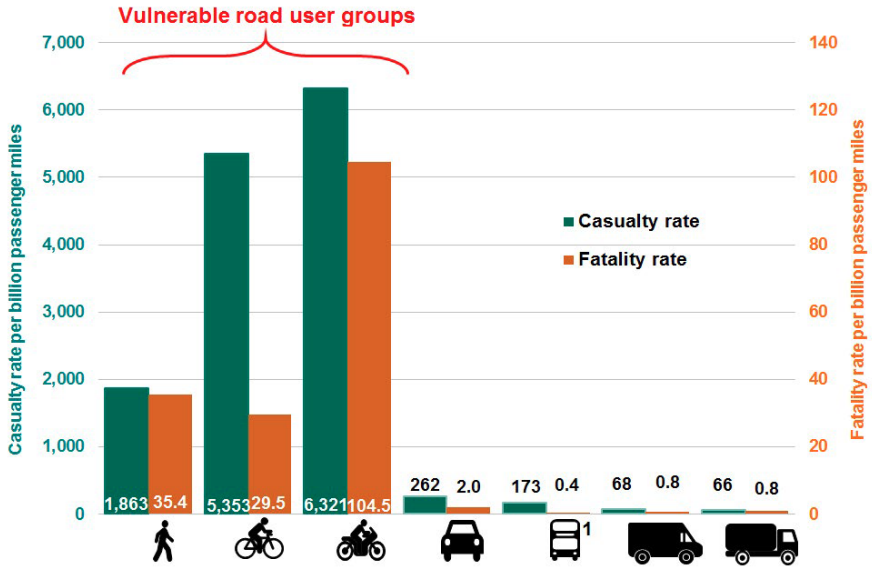
[1] World Health Organisation, Road traffic injuries fact sheet, January 2018 [Accessed: 20th April 2018]

1. Road accident casualties: Great Britain

In 2016 there were 181,384 accident casualties recorded on Britain's roads; 1,792 of these were fatal. The long-term trend in the numbers killed and injured from road accidents has been declining, especially in the last two decades.

In 2016 46% of those fatal road accident victims were car occupants; 25% were pedestrians; 25% motorcyclists; and 6% were cyclists. Car occupants, however, account for the majority of travel and instead it is possible to also look at accident casualties in terms of the number of miles travelled to identify relative vulnerability of different road users. The DfT present this information in an annual report, which shows a higher casualty rate for pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists than for other road users, such as car, bus or lorry occupants.

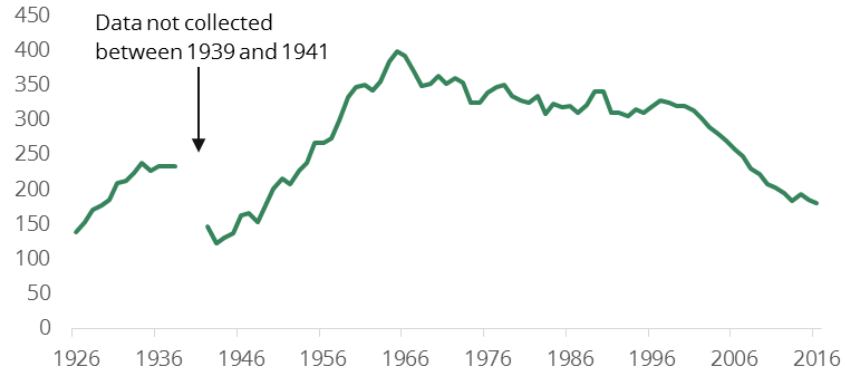
Casualty and fatality rates per billion passenger miles by road user type: GB 2016



Source: DfT Reported road casualties Great Britain, annual report: 2016

The Department for Transport publishes annual and quarterly data on reported road accident casualties. The chart below shows annual road casualty data from 1926 to 2016. Between 1942 and 1965 as the amount of traffic increased on Britain's roads so did the total number of casualties. In 1942 there were 148,000 casualties (including fatalities), and this reached a peak of 398,000 in 1965. Between 1965 and 1999 there was a gradual downward trend in the number of casualties, albeit with some fluctuation. From 1999 there has been consecutive annual decreases in the number of casualties.

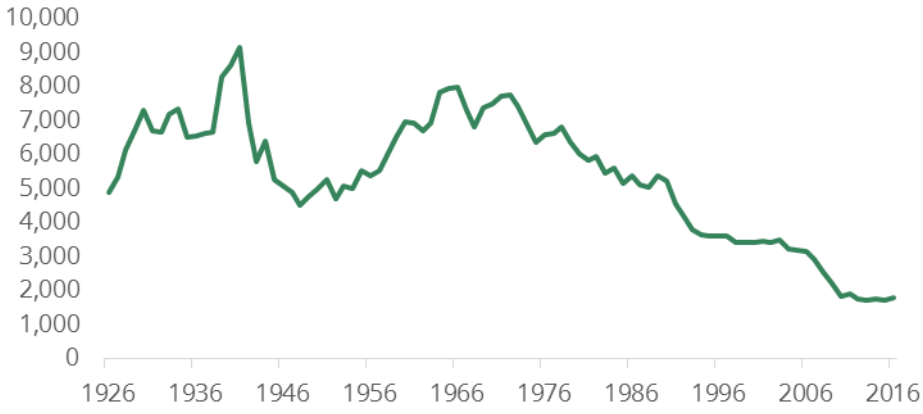
TOTAL NUMBER OF REPORTED ROAD ACCIDENT CASUALTIES IN GREAT BRITAIN (000s)



Source: Department for Transport, Reported Road Traffic Casualties Great Britain

In terms of fatalities, the wartime blackout contributed to a high of over 9,000 fatalities in 1940, and the number of fatalities increased throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, to a peace-time peak of 7,985 (more than 21 road deaths per day) in 1966. The decline in fatalities coincided with the introduction of drink-driving laws in 1966 and, allowing for fluctuation in individual years, the trend has been downwards to the point where fatalities are less than a quarter of the level at the mid-1960s.

NUMBER OF DEATHS CAUSED BY REPORTED ROAD ACCIDENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN



Source: Department for Transport, Reported Road Traffic Casualties Great Britain

About the data

The Department for Transport (DfT) road casualty statistics are drawn from information collected by police forces in Great Britain and cover all accidents involving a road vehicle (including pedal cycles) that result in a personal injury. The data is recorded in the STATS19 database. These figures are dependent on the extent to which accidents are reported. As fatalities are more likely to involve the police it is thought that figures on road deaths from this source are more comprehensive than those for all injuries.

2. International comparisons of road deaths

According to the World Health Organisation, more than 1.25 million people die each year as a result of road traffic crashes. Injuries from road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among people aged between 15 and 29 years of age. In 2013, low- and middle-income countries had higher road traffic fatality rates per 100,000 population (24.1 and 18.4, respectively) compared to high-income countries (9.2).

Over 3 400 people die on the world's roads every day and tens of millions of people are injured or disabled every year. Children, pedestrians, cyclists and older people are among the most vulnerable of road users. Policy changes which have been identified to address some of the risk factors include: reducing traffic speed, drink-driving and increasing the use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints.

According to the World Health Organisation, road accidents are the 10th leading cause of death globally. The numbers killed in road accidents is just lower than the 1.4 million deaths from tuberculosis in 9th place.[2]

The African region had the highest road traffic fatality rate, at 26.6, while the European region had the lowest rate, at 9.3 per 100,000 population.

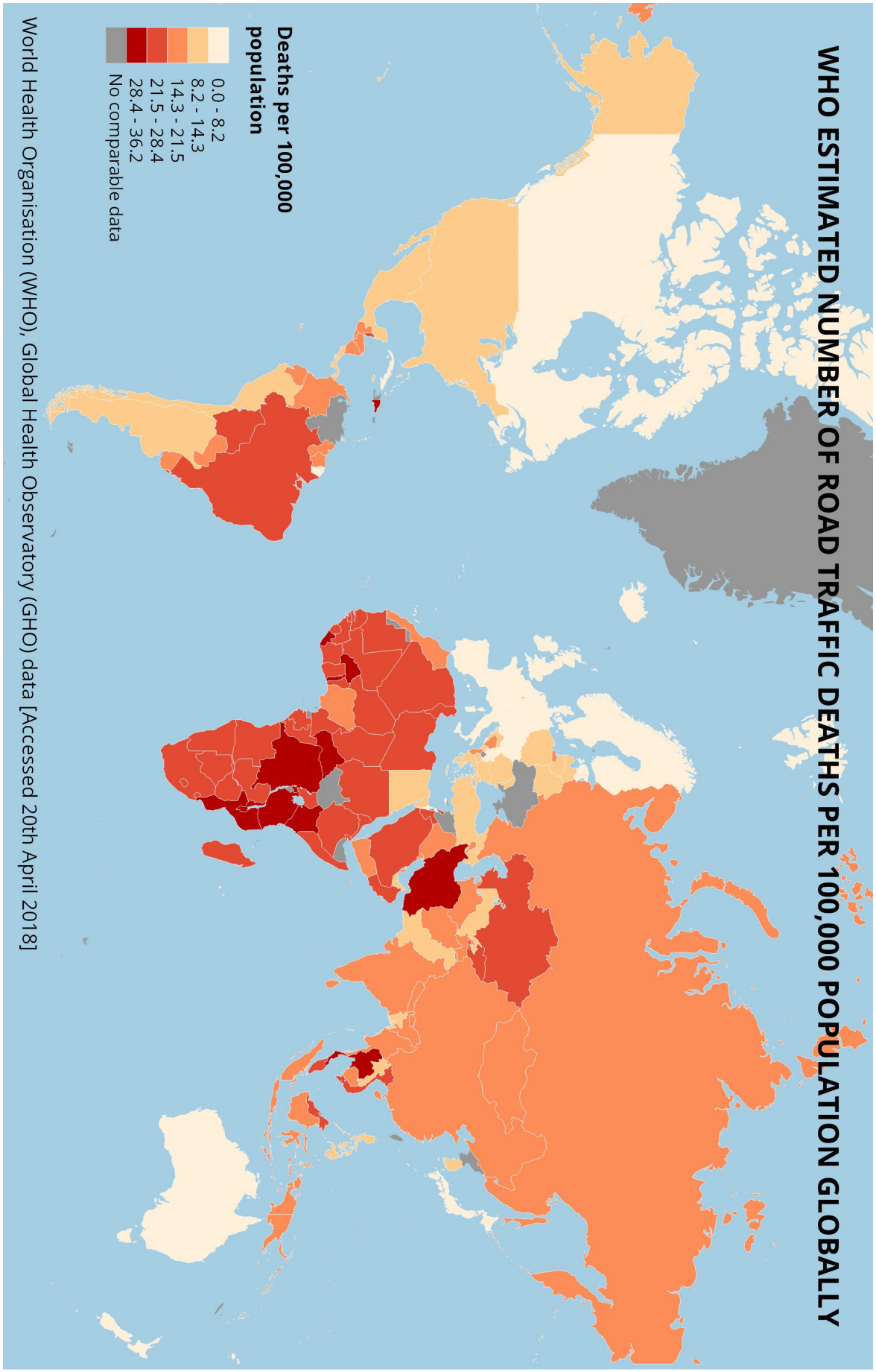
The WHO suggests that on current trends road traffic accidents are to become the seventh leading cause of death by 2030. The newly adopted 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development has set a target to halve the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020.[3]

The World Health Organisation (WHO) publishes data on the estimated number of road traffic deaths and the estimated number of road traffic deaths per 100,000 population. The map below provides a visual representation of this data. The latest available WHO data is for 2013.

The map highlights Africa, Asia and Latin America as the regions with the highest rates of road fatalities per 100,000 population.

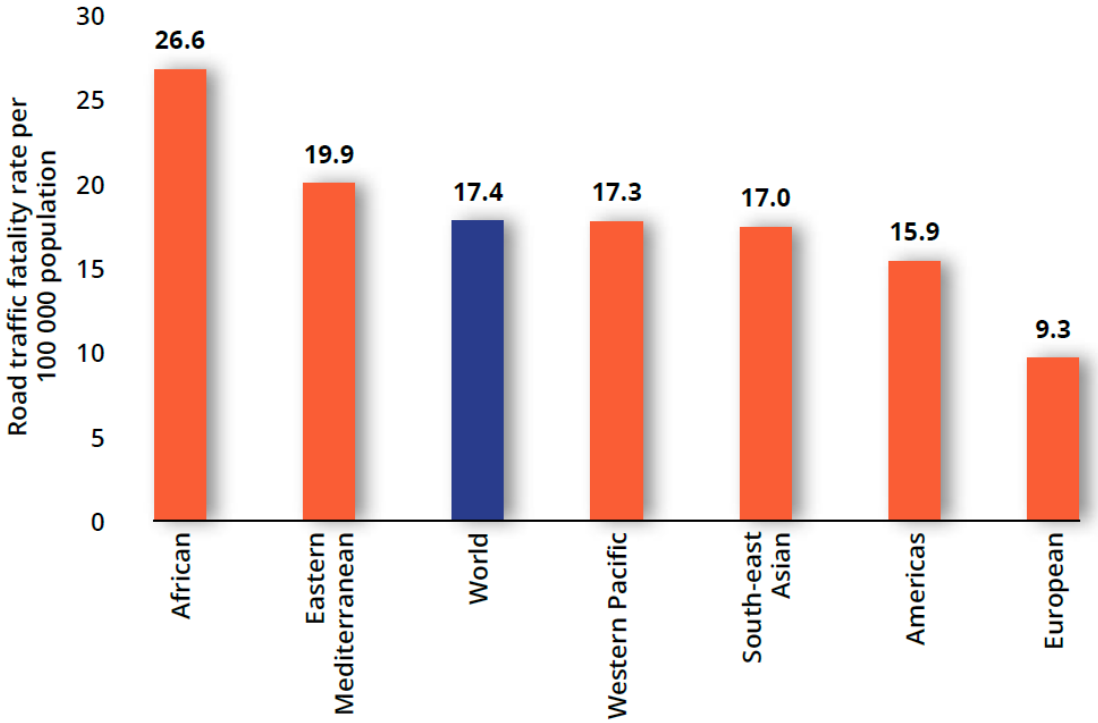
2 World Health Organisation, The top 10 causes of death, January 2017, [Accessed: 20th April 2018]

3 World Health Organisation, Road traffic injuries fact sheet, January 2018 [Accessed: 20th April 2018]


WHO ESTIMATED NUMBER OF ROAD TRAFFIC DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION GLOBALLY
Deaths per 100,000 population
0.0 - 8.2
8.2 - 14.3
14.3 - 21.5
21.5 - 28.4
28.4 - 36.2
No comparable data
World Health Organisation (WHO), Global Health Observatory (GHO) data [Accessed 20th April 2018]

The chart below provides regional figures of road traffic fatality rates and shows that both Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean regions have road traffic fatality rates per 100,000 higher than the world average (17.4 per 100,000 population).

Road traffic fatality rates per 100 000 (2013), by WHO region



Source: WHO Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015

More than 90% of road traffic deaths occur in low and middle-income countries. Road traffic injury death rates are highest in the African region.

Road injuries killed 1.3 million people in 2015, about three-quarters (76%) of whom were men and boys.

The OECD publishes data on the number of road accidents in a number of countries each year.[4] Accidents are measured in terms of the number of persons injured and deaths due to road accidents (excluding suicides involving motor vehicles). Vehicles are defined "as any road vehicle fitted with an engine as the sole means of propulsion and one that is normally used to carry people or goods, or for towing, on the road. This includes buses, coaches, trolleys, tramways (street cars) and road vehicles used to transport goods and to transport passengers."[5] Vehicles are attributed to the countries in which they are registered, whilst deaths are attributed to the country in which they occur.

Road traffic accidents are measured in terms the number of people injured and deaths due to accidents within 30 days of the accident.

4 OECD, Road Accidents, various years [Accessed 19th April 2018]
5 OECD, Road Accidents, various years [Accessed 19th April 2018]

The below table details international comparisons of road deaths using 2015 data and each country is provided with a rank, 1 being the country with the most deaths per million population. Although some data is available for 2016, 2015 data has been used to enable the comparison of a wider range of countries.

Great Britain had a lower road death rate in 2015 than 45 of the other 48 countries included in the OECD's data series (48 per million population). Countries with a lower rate included Sweden (43 per million pop.), Malta (31 per million pop.) and Norway (30 per million pop.). The death rate in the United States was more than 3 times higher than that in the UK.

ROAD TRAFFIC FATALITIES BY COUNTRY, 2015			
Rank	Country	Deaths per million population	Death per million vehicles
1	Georgia	162.0	..
2	Russia	160.4	..
3	Armenia	118.6	..
4	India	111.6	..
5	United States	109.4	124.7
6	Bulgaria	98.6	184.7
7	Turkey	96.2	423.6
8	Romania	95.5	305.3
9	Latvia	95.1	237.2
10	Albania	93.7	..
11	Azerbaijan	92.7	..
12	Korea	90.6	195.3
13	Serbia	84.7	279.3
14	Moldova	84.4	..
15	Lithuania	83.3	156.2
16	Croatia	82.8	201.7
17	Montenegro	82.0	..
18	Poland	77.3	112.4
19	Greece	73.3	83.3
20	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedo	71.2	..
21	Czech Republic	70.0	113.6
22	New Zealand	69.4	90.8
23	Hungary	65.4	165.7
24	Belgium	64.9	102.0
25	Luxembourg	63.2	81.2
26	Slovenia	58.2	86.0
27	Portugal	57.3	102.9
28	Slovakia	57.2	125.8
29	Italy	56.5	66.0
30	Austria	55.5	74.1
31	France	52.0	81.1
32	Canada	51.8	77.7
33	Australia	50.7	66.9
34	Finland	49.3	61.0
35	Iceland	48.4	56.1
36	Estonia	46.4	0.0
37	Germany	42.3	62.0
38	Israel	38.4	104.2
39	Japan	38.4	53.5
40	Netherlands	36.7	61.3
41	Spain	36.4	50.6
42	Ireland	34.6	63.0
43	Denmark	31.3	58.8
44	Switzerland	30.6	41.8
45	Mexico	27.7	99.8
46	Great Britain	27.7	48.0
47	Sweden	26.4	43.0
48	Malta	25.5	31.9
49	Norway	22.6	30.0

Source: OECD, Road Accidents, various years [Accessed: 19th April 2018]

Note: Some 2016 data is available, but only for a small amount of countries

.. Data not available

3. Further information

- Department for Transport statistics
- Royal Society for the prevention of accidents (RoSPA) – RoSPA's Road Safety Department raises awareness on the causes of road accidents and promotes measures to help prevent them. The Department provides information, education, training and publicity resources and services for road users and road safety professionals

BRIEFING PAPER

Number

19 April 2018

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer