

Injuries from transport accidents – most of which are due to road traffic – are a major public health problem in the European Union, causing the premature deaths of around 35 000 people in 2011. In addition to these deaths, about 250 000 people were seriously injured in road accidents. The direct and indirect financial costs of transport accidents are substantial: estimations range from 1 to 3% of GDP annually (OECD/ITF, 2014).

The largest number of transport accidents occurs among younger age groups with the risk of dying peaking at ages 15-24, especially for men. Most fatal traffic injuries occur in passenger vehicles, although other road users such as motor cycles and scooters also face substantial risks. In Greece, Italy and France, motorcyclists account for over 20% of road transport accident deaths (OECD/ITF, 2014).

The average EU mortality rate due to transport accidents was 7.7 per 100 000 population in 2011 (Figure 1.6.1). There is great variation between EU countries with transport accidents claiming more than four times as many lives per 100 000 population in Romania compared to the United Kingdom. Fatalities were the highest in Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Croatia in 2011, while they were the lowest in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland. In Sweden, the most recent data indicate a further reduction between 2011 and 2013. The sharp reduction in mortality rates from road traffic accidents in Sweden can be attributed to safer vehicles, better road infrastructure and lower average speed (OECD/ITF, 2014).

In all EU member states, death rates from transport accidents are much higher for males than for females. In most countries, three to four times more men than women die in transport accidents (Figure 1.6.1).

Much transport accident injury and mortality is preventable. Road security has increased greatly over the past decades in many countries through improvements of road systems, education and prevention campaigns as well as vehicle design. In addition, the adoption of new laws and regulations and the enforcement of these laws to improve compliance with speed limits, seatbelt use and drink-driving rules, have had a major impact on reducing the burden of road transport accidents. As a result, death rates due to transport accidents have decreased by more than 45% across the European Union since 2000 (Figure 1.6.2). Spain, Luxembourg, Ireland, Estonia and Latvia have reduced their mortality rates by 60% or more over this ten-year period. An important breakthrough was also achieved in 2008 in Lithuania, with a growing awareness among the citizens of road safety issues and the leading role of the European Union in setting a target to reduce by 50% the number of fatalities, between 2001 and 2011 (OECD/ITF, 2014). Death rates have also declined in Malta, Romania,

Croatia and Bulgaria, but at a slower pace (less than 25% reduction). However, less success has been achieved in saving lives among vulnerable road users than amongst car occupants: reduction in deaths among pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists have levelled-off and some increases have been recorded.

In some countries hard-hit by the economic recession, the downward trend has accelerated since 2008. For example, in Greece, the number of death from transport accidents fell from 1 722 in 2008 to 1 191 in 2012, a reduction of 30% in four years (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). One possible explanation is that the economic crisis has reduced reliance on motor vehicle use. However, this impact is likely to be short-lived and over the longer term, effective road safety policies will remain the primary contributor to reduced mortality.

Definition and comparability

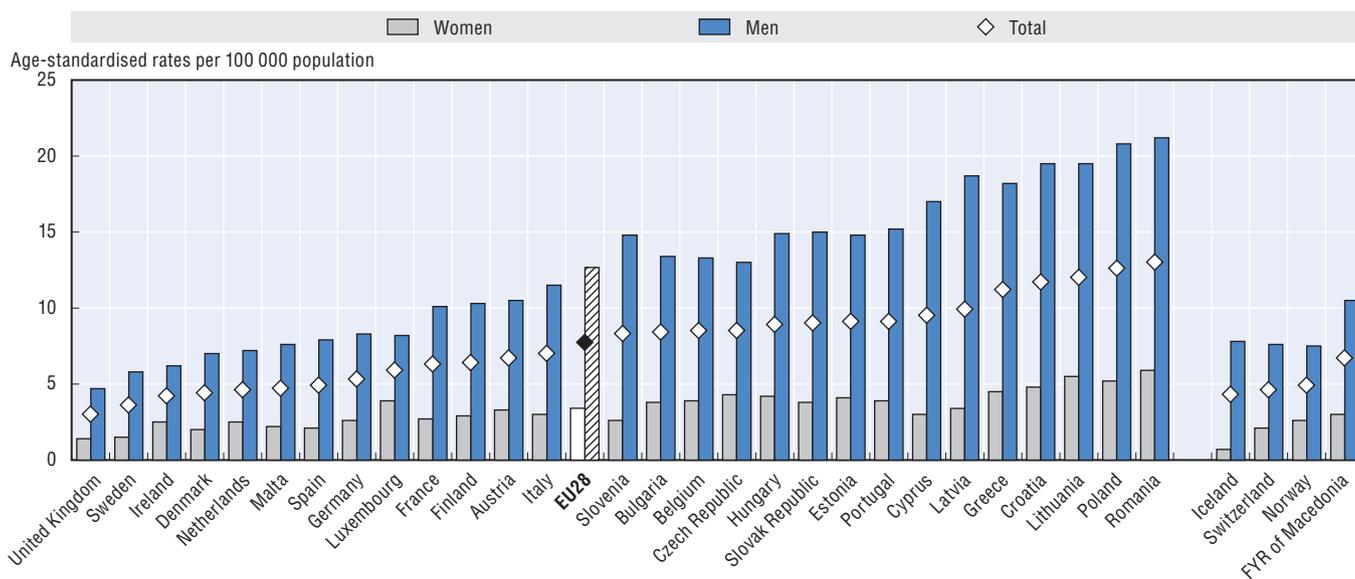
Mortality rates are based on numbers of deaths registered in a country in a year divided by the size of the corresponding population. The rates have been age-standardised to the revised European standard population adopted by Eurostat in 2012, to remove variations arising from differences in age structures across countries and over time. The change in the population structure in this edition of *Health at a Glance Europe* compared with previous editions has led to a general increase in the standardised rates for all countries.

Deaths from transport accidents relate to ICD-10 codes V01-V99 and Y85. The majority of deaths from transport accidents are due to road traffic accidents. Mortality rates from transport accidents in Luxembourg are biased upward because of the large volume of traffic in transit, resulting in a significant proportion of *non-residents* killed.

References

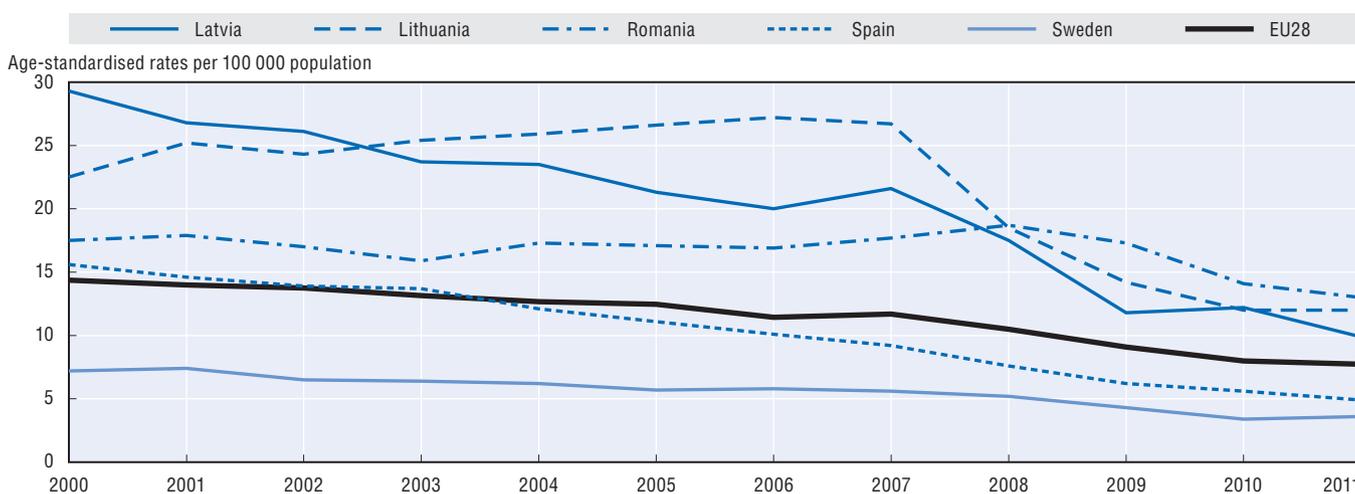
- Hellenic Statistical Authority (2014), *Causes of Death: 2012*, Athens.
- OECD/ITF (2014), *IRTAD Road Safety 2014 Annual Report*, OECD/ITF, Paris.

1.6.1. Transport accident mortality rates, 2011



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database.

1.6.2. Trends in transport accident mortality rates, selected EU member states, 2000-11



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database.

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