SRI LANKA

ROAD SAFETY PROFILE

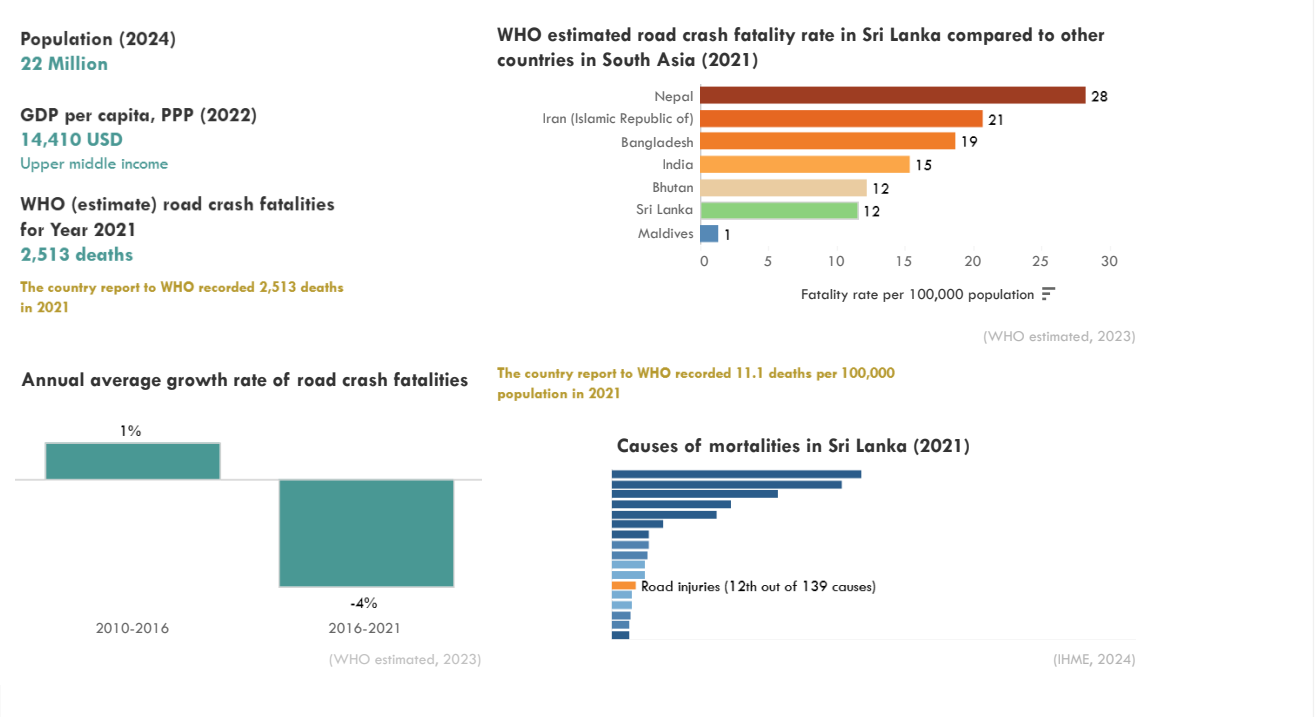
Supported by:

The ATO road safety profiles offer insights into the road safety in 37 Asia-Pacific countries by utilizing road safety related data from various sources and policy information extracted from a range of documents.

These road safety profiles were developed by the Asian Transport Observatory in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Road Safety Observatory (APRSO) and the International Road Federation (IRF). This September 2025 edition updates the February 2025 release—prepared for the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Marrakech—to inform discussions at the Asia-Pacific Regional Road Safety Conference in Manila.

Country Summary

Road safety in Sri Lanka presents a complex picture, with some improvements observed alongside persistent challenges. For the year 2021, WHO estimated about 3 thousand fatalities in Sri Lanka due to road crashes. Road crash injuries accounted for 1.6% of deaths in Sri Lanka in 2021. While the country has made some progress in reducing road traffic fatalities, more concerted efforts are needed to achieve ambitious global targets. This narrative explores the current status of road safety in Sri Lanka, examining data discrepancies, disaggregated data insights, economic costs, crash ratings, motorization trends, benchmarking, and the policy landscape.



Only minor discrepancy exists between reported road crash fatalities in Sri Lanka and WHO estimates.

Road crash fatality rate, by source

WHO (estimate) for Year 2021
11.5 per 100,000 population

WHO (country-report) for Year 2021
11.1 per 100,000 population

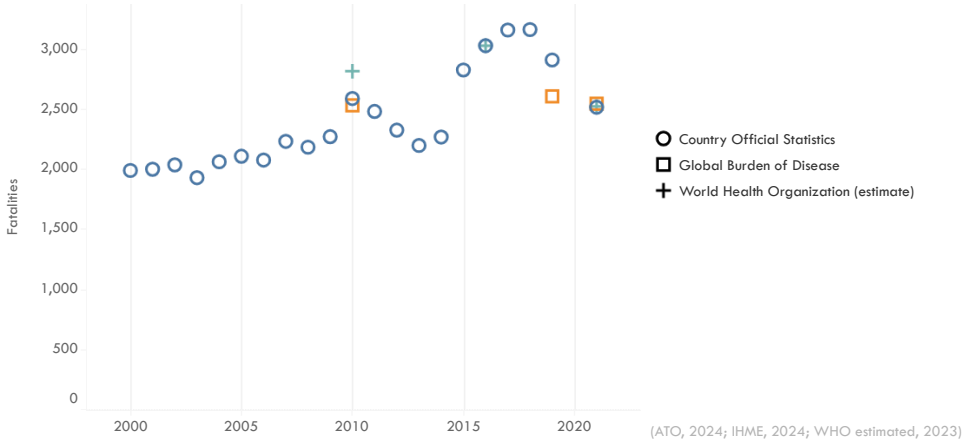
Country official statistics for Year 2022
17.0 per 100,000 population

GBD estimate for Year 2021
11.6 per 100,000 population

Every 1 hour, someone dies in a road crash in Sri Lanka

(WHO estimated, 2023)

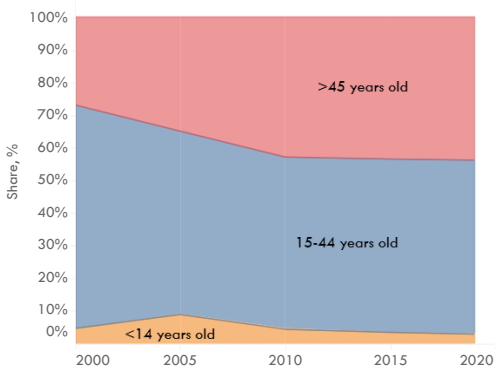
Road crash fatalities, by source



(ATO, 2024; IHME, 2024; WHO estimated, 2023)

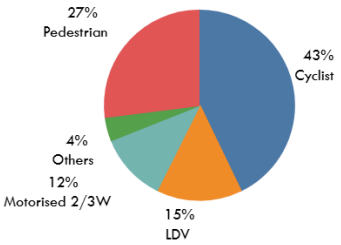
Analyzing disaggregated data provides crucial insights into the specific vulnerabilities of different road user groups. The share of females in road crash fatalities in Sri Lanka remained at 19% between 2010 and 2021. Based on the Global Burden of Disease statistics, the share in road crash fatalities of the minors (<14 years old) and seniors (>65 years old) road user group (combined) in Sri Lanka remained at 46% between 2015 and 2019. Critically, pedestrians and bicyclists constitute a disproportionately high share of fatalities. The combined share of pedestrians and bicyclists in total road traffic crash fatalities in Sri Lanka as given by the WHO, was 70% for 2021. Meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific average was 31%. This underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to protect these vulnerable road users.

Road crash fatalities, share by age group



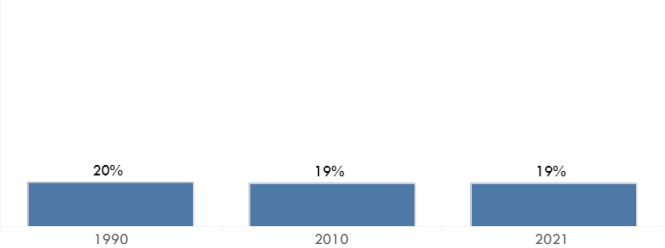
(IHME, 2021)

Road crash fatalities, share by road user



(Country report to WHO, 2023)

Share of female road crash fatalities



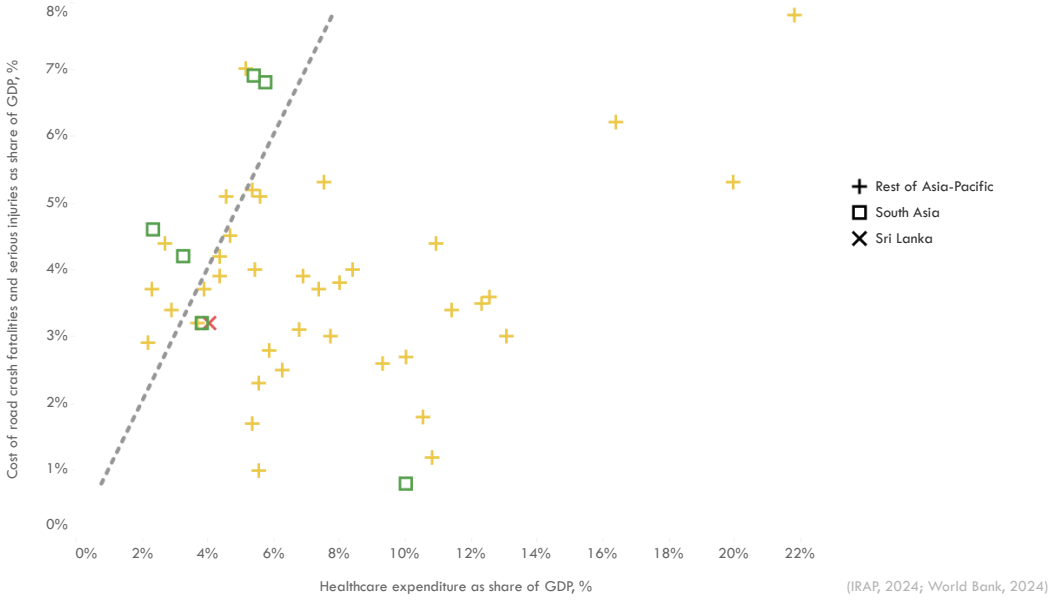
The country report to WHO indicates that women made up 15% of total road crashes deaths in 2021

(IHME, 2024)

The economic burden of road crashes in Sri Lanka is substantial. These fatalities, combined with serious injuries, cost about 3 billion USD, for 2021, which is roughly 3% of Sri Lanka's GDP. As a reference, in the same year, healthcare expenditure in Sri Lanka amounted to 4.1% of its GDP.

Cost of road crash fatalities and serious injuries (2021)
2.8 Billion USD

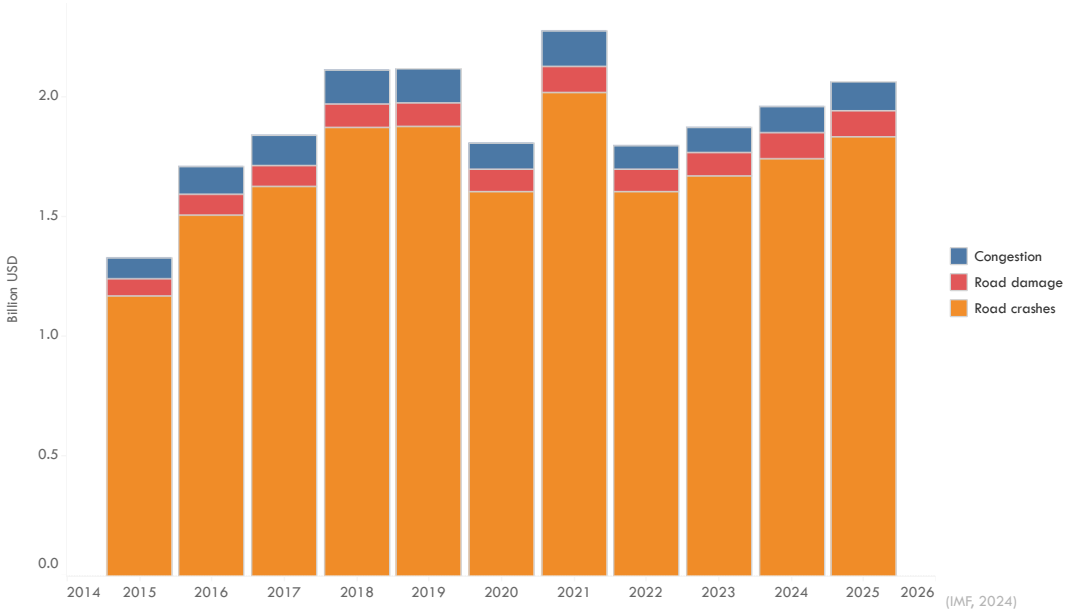
Cost of road crash fatalities and serious injuries vs. country healthcare expenditure as share of GDP (2021)



(IRAP, 2024; World Bank, 2024)

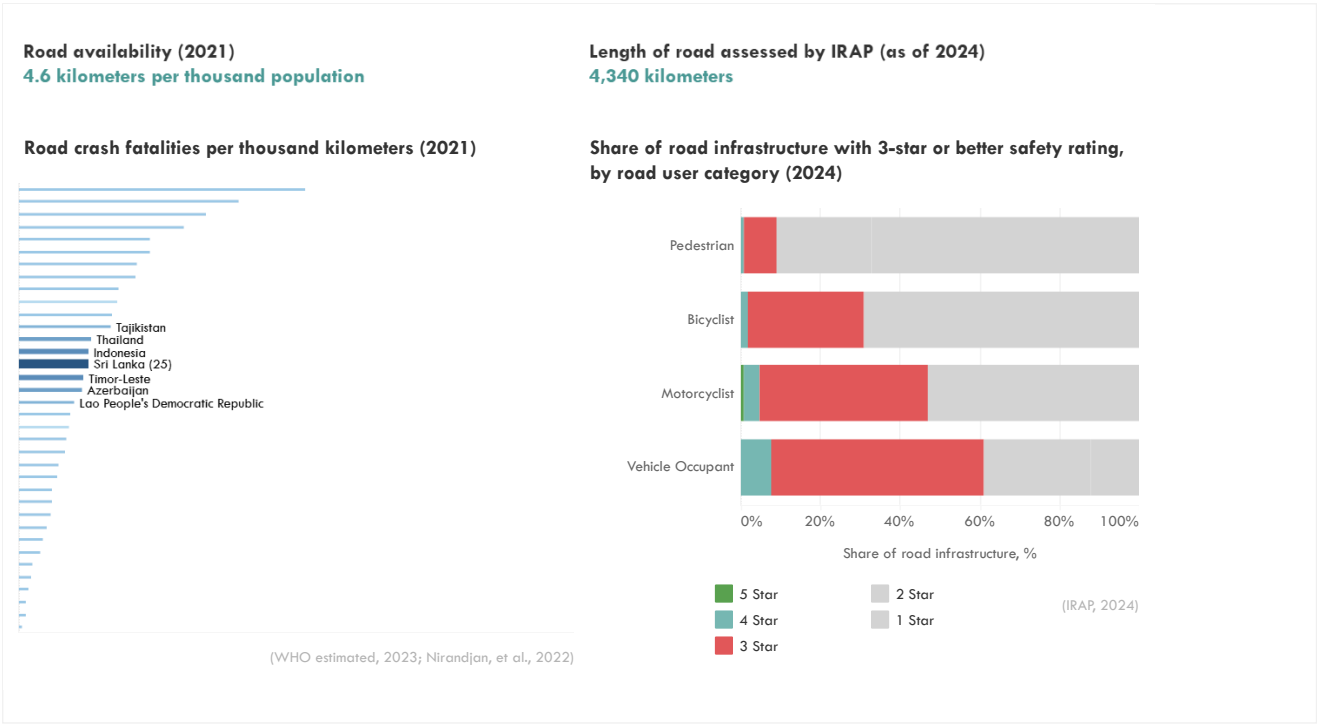
Road crashes constitute about 89% of the total implicit costs due to fossil fuel subsidies in transport. IRAP estimates that an annual investment of 237 million USD, or just about 0.3% of Sri Lanka's GDP, could save about 900 fatalities annually. These costs highlight the compelling economic case for investing in road safety improvements.

External costs to the society due to fossil fuel subsidies in transport



(IMF, 2024)

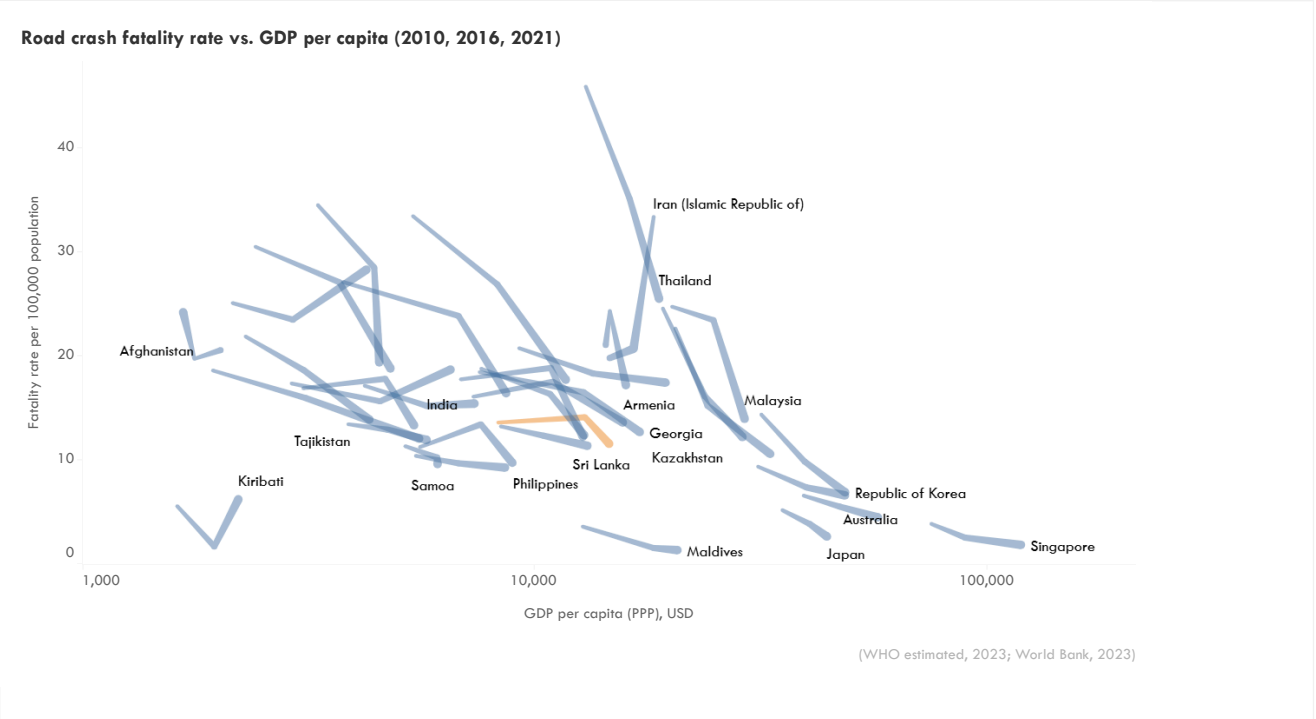
The shares of road infrastructure in Sri Lanka with 3 stars or better IRAP ratings for pedestrians and bicyclists as of 2024 was 9% and 31%, respectively. Meanwhile, Asia-Pacific numbers were 14% for pedestrians and 22% for bicyclists. At least 61% of the road infrastructure in Sri Lanka has 3-star or better rating for vehicle occupants, while only about 47% of road infrastructure has 3-star or better rating for motorcyclists. Sri Lanka had about 25 fatalities per thousand kilometers of road. These ratings reveal gaps in infrastructure safety, particularly for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists, and emphasize the need for upgrades to meet higher safety standards.



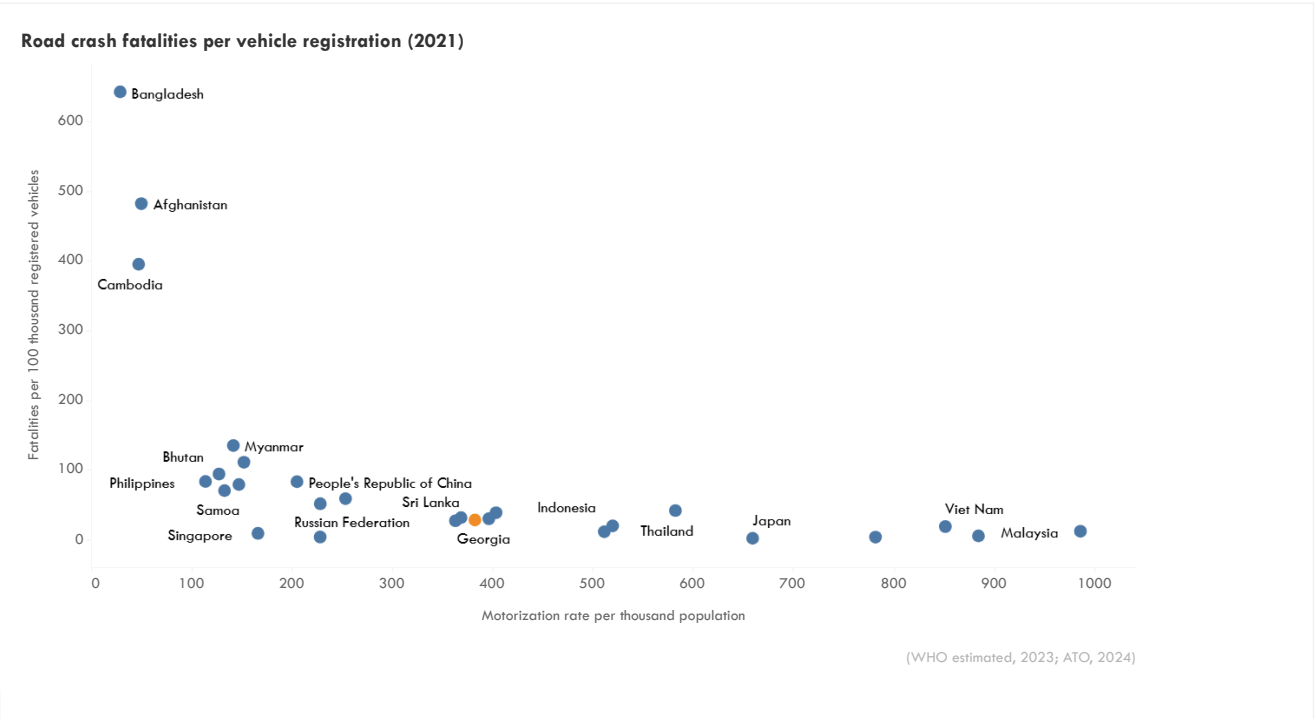
Sri Lanka has experienced rapid motorization, contributing to the road safety challenge. By 2022, there were 383.6 vehicles per thousand population in Sri Lanka. This is shared by 58% of 2-wheelers, 14% of 3-wheelers, 11% of LDVs, 1% of buses, 5% of trucks, and 11% of other vehicle types. Managing this growth sustainably and safely is essential.

Benchmarking

In Sri Lanka, road crash fatalities decreased by approximately -3.6% per year between 2016 and 2021. While Sri Lanka's fatality rate is lower than the South Asia average, it still lags behind the Asia-Pacific average. This suggests that Sri Lanka can learn from best practices in the region to accelerate progress. The road traffic crash fatality rate in Sri Lanka for the year 2021 was 11.5 per 100,000 population. Compare this with the Asia-Pacific average of 15.2 deaths per 100,000 population or against the South Asia average of about 16.1 in the same year. WHO estimates the fatalities in Sri Lanka changing from 13.6 in 2010 to 11.5 deaths per 100,000 population in 2021, equivalent to a -15% decrease. During this period, Asia-Pacific experienced an improvement of about -19% while South Asia also decreased by -10%.

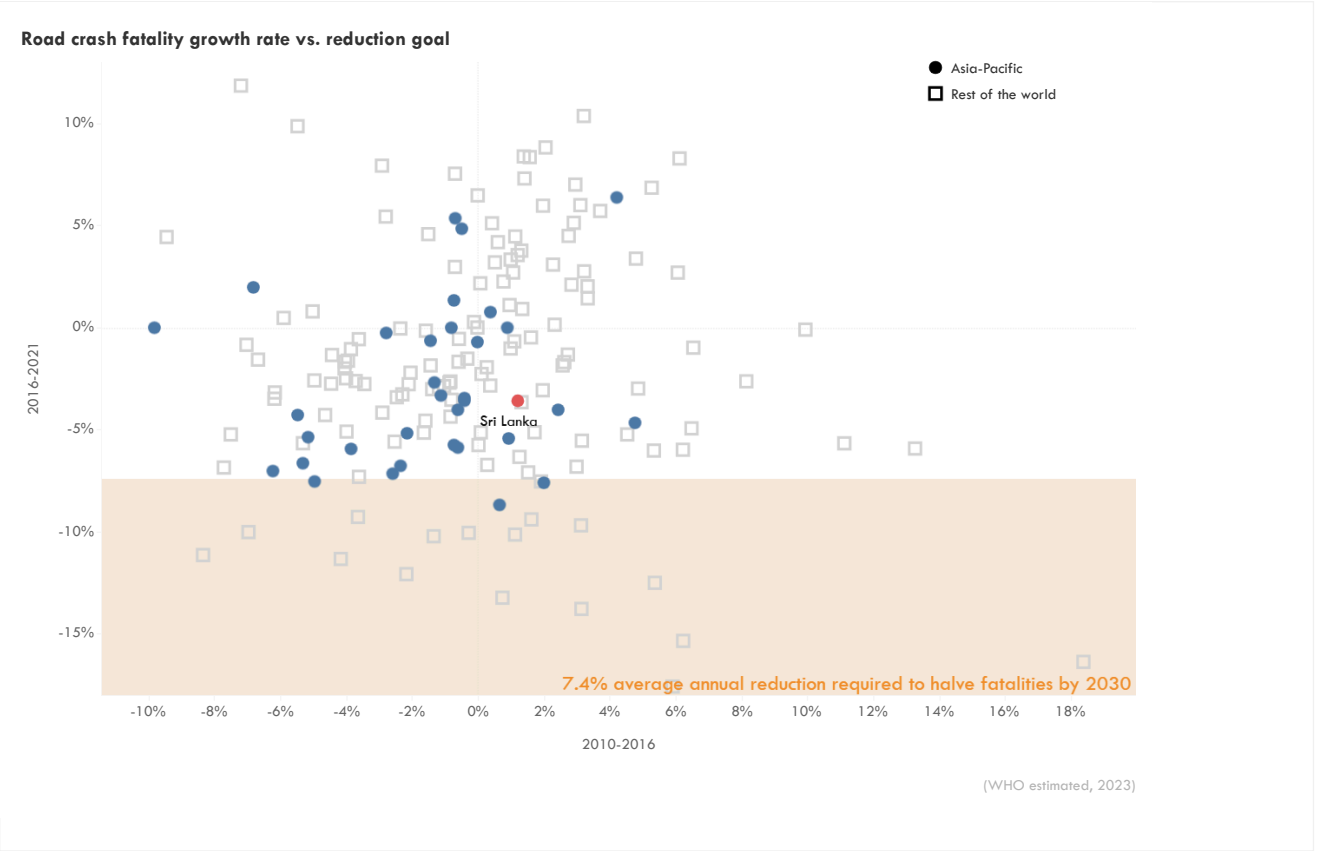


Sri Lanka had about 30 fatalities per 100 thousand registered vehicles.



Can Asia meet the 2030 target of halving fatalities?

- **Urgent action needed to reduce road fatalities** The Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 aims to cut road fatalities in half by 2030. An annual reduction of at least 7.4% is necessary to achieve this.
- **Asia-Pacific region falling behind** Despite reaching a peak in road crash fatalities, the Asia-Pacific region is not on track to meet the 2030 goal. The average annual reduction in deaths between 2016 and 2021 was only 0.6%, far below the required rate.
- **Varying progress across Asia** Using the 2016-2021 road crash fatality growth rate as a basis for estimates until 2030:
  - Only 3 Asian countries are projected to achieve the 50% reduction target by 2030.
  - 18 Asian countries are expected to reduce fatalities by at least 25%.
  - Worryingly, 7 Asian countries will continue to increase road fatalities, moving further away from the target.
- In Sri Lanka, road crash fatalities decreased by approximately -3.6% per year between 2016 and 2021. However, this is not enough to reach the 2030 target to halve the fatalities by 2030



Policy Landscape

Sri Lanka's policy landscape includes several documents, directly and indirectly, relevant to road safety. There are no road safety targets in Sri Lanka. However, Sri Lanka has targets that have indirect benefits to road safety such as on budget of road safety projects, development of active and public transport plan, active mobility, road space repurpose to allow access for other modes, and implementing vehicle scrappage scheme. Other policy documents with indirect road safety benefits include the National Transport Policy of Sri Lanka, Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path, Public Investment Program 2021, Updated Nationally Determined Contributions, and National Action Plan for Haritha Lanka Programme. While these policies address various aspects of transport, a comprehensive and dedicated national road safety strategy with clear targets and dedicated funding is crucial for achieving significant improvements.

Targets to reduce road crash fatalities or injuries	Target year	Document	Year published
No data			

Measure type	Other targets with indirect benefits to road safety	Target year	Document	Year published
Budget/ identification of road safety projects	An allocation of 5 per cent of all transport sector capital investment should be allocated for transport safety improvements from 2020	>2020	Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path	2019
Development of active transport plan/ policy	By 2025, each city with over a 100,000 day time population will have a transport and traffic plan that will ensure adequate walkability, cycling and access by public transport modes including a multi-modal transport terminal, while controlling traffic volumes and on-street and even off-street parking to levels that are sustainable for the physical and cultural character of the city.	2025	Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path	2019
Development of public transport plan/ policy	By 2025, each city with over a 100,000 day time population will have a transport and traffic plan that will ensure adequate walkability, cycling and access by public transport modes including a multi-modal transport terminal, while controlling traffic volumes and on-street and even off-street parking to levels that are sustainable for the physical and cultural character of the city.	2025	Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path	2019

Development of transport plan/ policy	By 2025, each city with over a 100,000 day time population will have a transport and traffic plan that will ensure adequate walkability, cycling and access by public transport modes including a multi-modal transport terminal, while controlling traffic volumes and on-street and even off-street parking to levels that are sustainable for the physical and cultural character of the city.	2025	Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path	2019
Employment in transport, communication, and storage	Economy-wide: 75% of new jobs supported by re_x0002_skilling and training for industries of the future	2030	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
General active mobility	Share of non-motorized transportation increases to 20% of all road trips.	2030	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
General active mobility	Share of non-motorized transportation increases to 30% of all road trips.	2035	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
National road safety strategy	prioritizing steps to improve road safety and achieve the vision zero goal by 2030	2030	Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path	2019
Road space repurpose to allow access for other modes	5km of bike lanes integrated into relevant roads in 10 key urban locations	2025	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
Road space repurpose to allow access for other modes	50% of relevant roads include bike lane	2030	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
Road space repurpose to allow access for other modes	90-100% of relevant roads include bike lane.	2035	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
Technology and knowledge transfer	Clean technologies are leveraged to digitize or provide new digital support to 90-100% of the economy across all sectors.	2035	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
Technology and knowledge transfer	Economy-wide: 75% of new jobs supported by re_x0002_skilling and training for industries of the future Clean technologies are leveraged to digitize or provide new digital support to 75% of the economy across all sectors	2030	Climate Prosperity Plan	2022
Vehicle scrappage scheme	Reduce unproductive vehicles by 25% in 2025 unconditionally. This could be increased by 50% with conditions.	2025	First Nationally Determined Contributions	2016

Policy measures with indirect benefit to road safety

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