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Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety

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Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic (R.E.1)

Policies for Vulnerable Road Users (VRU)- focus on road safety challenges in low- and middle-income countries as identified during the South-East Asia project

Submitted by Italy, IRTE, University of Birmingham (UK), and Johns Hopkins

This informal document, optimizing the outcomes of the webinar held in March 2021, has elaborated some guidance references to address non-regulated transport modes commonly used in South-East Asia and other regions. WP.1 is invited to consider these guidelines in the context of the prominent role played by non-regulated transport modes in the regions where such transport is commonly utilized due to economic and social necessities.

Working Paper on the Development of Guidance for Improving the Safety of Non-Regulated Vehicles While Preserving Access to Mobility

1. UNECE Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety Forum delegates, transport professionals, researchers, stakeholders and policy makers are considering the potential of developing guidance that could facilitate recognizing and improving the safety of non-regulated vehicles in regions where such transport is commonly utilized as a form of accessible mobility and may be an economic and social necessity.

Two Worlds of Mobility

2. In a webinar on this topic presented by the Global Forum on 10 March 2021 and in subsequent deliberations, a consistent theme of discussion is the vast difference in traffic conditions between western countries and many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). One key difference is in the economy of these regions and the ability of road users to purchase new or used vehicles to meet their mobility needs. In some LMICs, the purchase of new or even used vehicles that comply with local vehicle safety laws is impractical for many people and the use of improvised non-regulated powered two- or three-wheelers, as well as animal- and human-pulled vehicles is necessary to meet basic mobility needs related to health, education, and quality of life. Another key difference between high income and LMICs is in the proportion of powered two-wheelers in traffic. In South-East Asian countries, nearly 75 percent of registered vehicles are powered two-wheelers as compared to 11 percent in the Americas and 9 percent in the European region. The wide availability and mechanical simplicity of powered two- and three-wheelers may contribute to the prevalence of modified and non-regulated vehicle configurations created to meet local needs.

3. These improvised vehicles include conventional vehicles that have been modified to carry more passengers or larger loads than their original design allowed, and innovative vehicle configurations that utilize a power unit from a conventional vehicle or other source in a locally designed and constructed vehicle framework. While little data are available with regard to the safety of such improvised non-regulated transport, it is reasonable to conclude that critical vehicle systems such as steering, braking, lighting and overall vehicle integrity are generally less effective and reliable among such vehicles than among those that are designed, manufactured and tested according to safety standards.

4. A central point of discussions of non-regulated transport by Global Forum Delegates is the need for a balance between the safety assurances that underly the UN Road Safety Conventions and the need for accessible mobility by populations facing economic and social needs that are common in many LMIC. Delegates have also discussed the simultaneous need to motivate LMICs toward adoption and compliance with international safety standards. It was stressed the importance of the UNECE road safety conventions as a framework for road safety development and of the critical role that their adoption can play in the safety progress of LMICs.

Thinking out of the box: The harm reduction approach

5. While motor vehicle safety policy commonly considers a range of factors other than injury prevention, as in calculations of cost-benefit, consideration of the need for accessible mobility in LMIC environments involves an even more interdisciplinary approach incorporating cross-cutting, innovative and integrated principles that examine road traffic safety holistically, in the context of other social needs, and focus on achieving the greatest social good.

6. The principle of harm reduction as practiced in public health programs could be useful in addressing non-regulated transport modes. Harm reduction techniques seek to reduce the risk of behaviours which may be difficult or counterproductive to eliminate through other means. In the case of non-regulated transport, the harm reduction approach could be used to exercise some control of the use of non-complying vehicles without eliminating their use

altogether, thus reducing their risk while still accommodating local need for accessible mobility. Such an approach would not seek to modify the standards described in legal instruments, but rather would attempt to reduce the risk of non-regulated mobility alternatives that are common in areas that cannot yet afford to comply with best practices.

7. Examples of risk reduction measures for non-regulated vehicles could include establishing lower speed limits for these vehicles and prohibiting their use on high-speed roads when other lower-speed roads are available. Special educational requirements could also be applied to drivers of such vehicles that include instruction on minimizing risks when mixing with higher speed traffic as well as information on general rules of the road.

8. The intent of these harm reduction approaches would not be to endorse the use of non-regulated transport vehicles or to provide a sustainable solution for the risks associated with their use, but rather to improve the safety of a situation that is difficult - or counterproductive - to eliminate in the short - or mid-term. Thus, this approach would best be pursued along with longer-term efforts to improve the local economy so that safer vehicles could be accessible and facilitate adoption and widespread compliance of international standards for vehicle safety.

Principles for Governance

9. Global Forum delegates intend to continue discussing the potential of producing guidance for improving the safety of non-regulated vehicles where their use is necessary to provide accessible mobility. Deliberations to-date have centred around several basic principles that would underly any potential guidance on accessible mobility, including:

- Guidance should recognize the necessity of non-regulated vehicles in certain economic and social environments, seek to minimize the risk without disrupting mobility, and be flexible to accommodate the unique needs of specific environments.
 - Guidance should include education for the driver and passengers of non-regulated vehicles to improve their safety and may address protective measures such as helmet use, as well as recommendations for limited travel speeds and road types for use of these vehicles.
 - Guidance should encourage data collection on the use of non-regulated vehicles and safety problems associated with their use.
 - Guidance should be applied in the context of broader efforts to improve underlying conditions and enable regions to adopt vehicles that comply with international safety standards.
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