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UN ROAD SAFETY FUND

KNOWLEDGE KIT EXPERTS CONNECT Seat-belt use

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EXPERTS CONNECT SEAT BELT USE

Summary

Experts Connect is the UNRSF's main platform for informal knowledge exchange on critical road safety gaps and good practices to address them.

Our session on Seat-belt use, focused on one of the most proven, cost-effective interventions to save lives and advance SDG 3.6. Through this multi-stakeholder dialogue, we brought together representatives from 9 member states, UN agencies, the private sector, and civil society across four continents.

The session was structured around three segments: an expert evidence-sharing panel and a country good practices panel, followed by an open discussion on priorities ahead of the 2026 UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Road Safety.

KEY FACTS ON SEAT BELTS

Seat belts impact

- Seat belts reduce the risk of death among **drivers and front-seat passengers by 40–50%**.
- For rear-seat passengers, fatal injury risk is reduced by approximately **25%**.
- Child restraint systems can reduce deaths by **at least 60%**.

Global context: gap on legislation

- **170 countries** report having a mandatory seat-belt law.
- Only **117 countries meet WHO best practice**, meaning the law applies to **all seating positions (front and rear)**.
- Only **63 countries** report having national data on seat-belt use.
- Only **12 countries** report $\geq 80\%$ compliance for all occupants (front and rear).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Knowledge Sharing by Experts

Global challenge: data gaps can undermine action

- According to the 2023 WHO Global Status Report only 63 countries have national and, where applicable, sub-national data on use of safety belts, as well as the appropriate use of child restraint systems.
- In low- and middle-income countries, seat-belt use data is often incomplete, not nationally representative, and not systematically collected.
- In the Americas, several countries show stagnation or decline in seatbelt use, highlighting inconsistent progress. Out of the 35 countries, only four report enforcing seat belt use rigorously.

UNECE Working Parties: WP1 (traffic safety) and WP29 (vehicle safety)

- UNECE's two-track approach addresses both user behaviour and vehicle safety standards considering technology:
 - WP.1 sets best practices for promoting seat belt compliance;
 - WP.29 governs technical standards, with UN Regulation No. 16 which has been amended around 60 times since the 1970s and still evolving.
- Seat-belt reminders are the next regulatory objective mandatory for front seats from 2026 and rear seats from 2027 in the EU, with the US, China and other WP.29 members moving in the same direction.



Featuring:

Key note: Luciana Iorio, Chair of the UN Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety

- Ricardo Pérez Núñez, PAHO
- Francois Guichard, UNECE, WP.29

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Knowledge Sharing by Experts

Driven by data: why seatbelts are a lifesaving intervention



Technology, research, and the push for inclusive safety standards

- Seat belts are not only a life saving measure itself, the effectiveness of other technologies, such as airbags, rely on occupants being properly belted to achieve their maximum safety benefits.
- To advocate for the inclusion of technologies that can increase seat belt usage, NCAP includes them in the protocol scoring, which pushes manufacturers to adopt these technologies even where no regulation exists. If we take the ASEAN region as an example, at least 90% of new cars now have seat belts even though many countries lack the legislation.
- Current seat belts do not equally protect all occupants. Field data shows injury reduction rates have plateaued and women face statistically higher risk in frontal crashes. Ongoing research by Equitable Occupant Protection Working Group is developing more robust, inclusive standards — addressing rear-seat occupants, diverse body types, pregnant women, and varied seating configurations.

The scale of the opportunity

- Every year between 400-500M seatbelts are manufactured. The volume has made seatbelts affordable for every vehicle.
- There is an opportunity to save 150,000 lives if all existing seat belts in cars and commercial vehicles were used consistently.
- The industry is working on an adaptive restraint system and virtual modelling to protect diverse body size, seat positions, and crash speed.

Featuring:

- Jessica Truong, Global NCAP
- Pernilla Bremer, Sweden, GRSP EqOP
- Jordi Lombarte, Autoliv

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: AUSTRIA

Context

In 1972 — Austria's worst-ever road safety year — 2,948 people were killed on its roads. By 2024 that figure had fallen to 351, even as the vehicle fleet tripled from 2.5 to over 7 million. Seat-belt legislation has been central to this transformation over five decades of sustained, evolving national action.

Actions taken

- Gradual legislation: mandatory front-seat belts introduced in the mid-1970s, rear seats added later, child restraints mandatory since 1994 for children under 14 or under 150cm in height.
- National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 with a dedicated passenger car safety action field, two monitored indicators (seat-belt wearing rate; correct child restraint use), and explicit focus on 'seat-belt refusers'.
- Austria invested in the DIVERSE research project, examining gender and body-type differences in restraint system protection.

Results

- 99% of front-seat and 91% of rear-seat occupants now wear a seat belt— among the highest compliance rates in the world.
- Road fatalities down nearly 90% since 1972 (2,948 to 351 in 2024) despite tripling of the vehicle fleet.
- Child fatalities as car occupants dramatically reduced following mandatory child restraint legislation.

What worked / next steps

The strategy must keep evolving — targeting critical demographics, improving correct use, and investing in research to ensure restraint systems protect everyone equally.

Speaker: Karin Schranz (Austria)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: JORDAN

Context

Jordan had seat-belt laws in place but faced stubborn compliance gaps. In 2023, the government enacted stricter penalties and deployed AI-powered cameras for enforcement, producing a striking paradox: fatalities fell while detected violations surged due to enhanced enforcement.

Actions taken

- August 2023 amendment to the traffic law significantly increased financial penalties for not wearing a seat belt.
- From 2024, AI-powered cameras deployed to automatically detect violations — beginning with a single camera strategically repositioned across multiple locations to build public awareness before scaling.
- Pilot-first approach: compliance data from the first camera deployment was analysed before expanding, enabling evidence-based scaling.

Results

- Total road fatalities fell 13.4% between 2021 and 2025.
- Driver fatalities down 17%; front-seat passenger fatalities down 21.5%.
- 90% compliance achieved at AI-camera monitored locations.
- Increased enforcement showed violations rose from 74,700 (2021) to 400,000 (2025) reflecting better detection.

What worked / next steps

Sustainable progress depends on behaviour change. Jordan's AI camera model — combined with meaningful penalties and a smart scaling strategy — produced measurable fatality reductions in a short period. Enforcement needs to be visible, credible, and data-driven.

Speaker: Fuaad Amaaytah (Jordan)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: SPAIN

Context

Spain has transformed its seat-belt use in under two decades — from 67% in urban areas and 79% on rural roads in 2005, to 98% on both in 2023. Yet even at 98% use, 20% of occupants killed in crashes last year were not wearing a belt — a stark reminder that the remaining non-users carry disproportionate risk.

Actions taken

- Three-pillar national approach: data monitoring, vehicle safety standards, and enforcement & public awareness.
- Data monitoring to track seat-belt use with common standards, enabling direct comparison with best-performing countries.
- Vehicle safety: national regulations require seat belts at every seating position, type-approved to international standards, with seat-belt reminders mandated for every occupied seat.

Results

- Urban seat-belt use: 67% (2005) to 98% (2023)
- Rural road use: 79% (2005) to 98% (2023)
- Sanctions for non-use fell 65% from 200,000 drivers fined per year 15 years ago to 70,000 today .
- In new vehicles with seat-belt reminders: only 10% of fatal crash victims were unbelted. In vehicles over 25 years old: above 30%, which directly links vehicle technology to compliance outcomes

What worked / next steps

Spain's integrated approach (data, vehicle standards, enforcement) is replicable. Remaining challenges: non-use is concentrated in older vehicles without reminders, among high-risk groups, and correlates with other risk factors like speeding and drink-driving.

Speaker: Alvaro Gomez (Spain)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: BRAZIL

Context

Brazil has had mandatory seat-belt laws since 1998, but compliance gaps persist — particularly for rear-seat passengers. In the state of Pará, an UNRSF-funded project (2020–2022) tested whether evidence-based, high-visibility enforcement could drive a measurable shift in behaviour.

Actions taken

- UNRSF seed funding enabled DETRAN Pará to design and implement an evidence-based, high-visibility enforcement strategy.
- Operations combined visible police presence, strategic planning, and targeted checks of both drivers and passengers — including rear seats.
- During drink-driving operations, a second officer simultaneously checked for seat-belt compliance — maximising impact per enforcement event.
- Systematic data collection before and after operations enabled measurement and adaptive management.

Results

- At the start of the project: ~6 out of every 10 rear-seat passengers were unbelted.
- By project end: only 1–2 out of every 10 rear-seat passengers were unbelted.
- Demonstrated that targeted, visible enforcement can rapidly improve compliance even for the hardest-to-reach occupants.

What worked / next steps

UNRSF catalytic funding unlocked capacity for evidence-based enforcement that did not previously exist. Combining enforcement with data collection and adaptive management is replicable. Next step: scaling to other Brazilian states and institutionalising the approach in national enforcement policy.

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: TUNISIA

Context

In 2015, Tunisia had a seat-belt law (passed in 2002) but only 10% urban compliance and 29% of road deaths linked to non-use.

Actions taken

- Civil society organisation Les Ambassadeurs de la Sécurité Routière built a national campaign using media, social media, and celebrity ambassadors to create social pressure for compliance.
- The advocated worked to activate the existing 2002 legislation — coordinating with Ministries of Transport and Interior, traffic police, and private sector partners.
- From April 2017, active enforcement of the existing law for front and rear seats in urban areas, backed by visible police presence.

Results

- Seat-belt use jumped from 10% to 45% in two years.
- Road deaths linked to non-use fell 17%; injuries decreased 28%.
- Within just two months of enforcement in 2017, total road deaths dropped 35%.
- Campaign received the Prince Michael Road Safety Award in 2019.

What worked / next steps

Civil society can be the catalyst, creating the public pressure that turns a dormant regulation into an active one. Rapid progress is possible even in constrained contexts when awareness, enforcement and political commitment align.

Speaker: Afef Ben Ghenia (Tunisia)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: SOUTH AFRICA

Context

South Africa has a mandatory seat-belt law and seatbelts are available in all vehicles — yet overall usage sits at around 60%, rear-seat compliance is as low as 8.3%, and 52% of 18–24 year-olds report sometimes or never wearing a belt. Human behaviour contributes to 88% of road fatalities; young people account for 52% of those deaths.

Actions taken

- National Rd. Traffic Act Regulation 213 for mandatory seat belt use and child restraint legislation since 2015, mandating child seat for children under 3 years old.
- The government secured partnerships with civil society organizations to carry out national awareness campaigns such as the 'Arrive Alive' campaign to boost awareness, increase drivers signing road safety pledges, and extend reach into communities, schools and homes.
- Additionally they partnered with Wheelwell to distribute over child restraints systems for families that otherwise wouldn't be able to afford it.

Results

- Over 12,000 child seats distributed through the Wheelwell 'Car Seats for Kids' initiative since 2012.
- Child fatalities (ages 0–14) decreased between 2012 and 2024 — from 10% to 5.6% of total road fatalities.

What worked / next steps

South Africa's model of government as platform-builder, connecting civil society, the private sector and communities, is a replicable approach for countries where enforcement capacity is limited. T

Speaker: Ntsoaki Tsokolibane (South Africa)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: FRANCE

Context

Although seat belt laws had been in place for decades, France faced challenges, and achieving high compliance required several years of sustained, coordinated national action across multiple ministries and sectors

Actions taken

- Interministerial coordination under a national road safety strategy, involving the Ministries of Interior, Health, Transport, and Education.
- Gradual legislation: mandatory front-seat belts first, then rear seats, then mandatory child restraints.
- Sustained enforcement campaigns combined with public communication targeting specific risk groups.
- Integration of seatbelt use into driving education, health initiatives, and vehicle safety requirements across the occupant lifecycle.

Results

- Road deaths reduced dramatically — from over 18,000 in the 1970s to well under 4,000 today.
- Seatbelt usage now very high across all population groups.
- Child fatalities drastically reduced following child restraint legislation.

What worked / next steps

Strong interministerial coordination is the foundation. Remaining challenges include rear-seat compliance, incorrect child restraint use, and territorial disparities. Continued targeting of correct use — not just use — and high-risk groups is the next frontier.

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: MOLDOVA

Context

Moldova has a seat-belt law and child restraint requirements, however very often child seats are used incorrectly, or not properly installed.

Actions taken

- The Moldova Automobile Club launched a national campaign 'Keep Your Kids Safe in Cars' (2017) with TV, 50+ parent trainings, and 30+ roadside actions with traffic police.
- Provided training for 1,000+ parents including pregnant women, medical staff, and school communities on correct installation and positioning.
- Created BabyForBaby.org — a donation platform allowing families to share child seats, addressing the affordability barrier and building a community movement around safety.
- Joint police checkpoints where drivers were not only fined but also informed and guided by Automobile Club experts on the spot.

Results

- After practical skills training, 80% of participants felt confident using child restraints correctly.
- Over 2,500 families have received child seats through BabyForBaby.
- Urban seat-belt and child restraint use reached 50% (vs 20% in rural areas, highlighting the persistent reach challenge)
- March 2026: targeted capital city campaign with police showed continued progress

What worked / next steps

Moldova shows that civil society organisations can close the gap between legislation and behaviour change, considering other barriers such as accessibility and affordability and proper use.

Speaker: Tatiana Mihalova (Moldova)

GOOD PRACTICES SHARED: UNITED STATES

Context

Despite ~90% front-seat belt use, nearly 50% of US traffic fatalities involve unbelted occupants. Non-use is concentrated among high-risk groups and varies sharply by state law and enforcement approach. A national campaign was needed to shift behaviour at scale.

Actions taken

- 'Click It or Ticket' — a high-visibility enforcement campaign combining media campaigns with coordinated enforcement operations — launched at state level and scaled nationally.
- Primary enforcement laws (allowing police to stop drivers solely for non-belt use) proved significantly more effective than secondary enforcement laws.
- National Seat-belt Day introduced as a focal point for advocacy, data reporting, and media engagement.
- IIHS developed a seat-belt law impact calculator — a policy tool helping legislators understand the estimated life-saving benefit of stronger laws.

Results

- Front-seat belt use increased significantly — from ~14% in 1983 to ~90% today.
- States with primary enforcement laws consistently report higher use rates.
- Campaign started in one state, adopted nationally — demonstrating the scalability of coordinated enforcement-awareness approaches.

What worked / next steps

A replicable model: pair visible enforcement operations with sustained media campaigns, backed by enabling legislation. The lesson for other countries: even with high overall use rates, targeting non-users through primary enforcement and focused campaigns can close the remaining gap.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Strengthen legislation & enforcement

- A legislative gap persists: the technology to improve seat-belt use for all occupants is available, but many countries have not yet required it.
- Strengthen enforcement through proven tools, such as AI cameras, seat-belt reminders and interlocks with a particular focus on rear-seat compliance, where the gap is greatest.
- Joint enforcement operations combining seat-belt checks with action on speeding and other risk factors multiply impact at no additional cost.

Close data gaps and continue research

- Invest in nationally representative, systematic seatbelt use data — disaggregated by seat position, road type, and occupant group — to drive evidence-based policy and monitor progress toward SDG 3.6.
- Research must cover the full diversity of car occupants, including different body types, ages, sexes and life stages, to ensure seat belts protect everyone equally, not just the average.

Scale proven approaches

Models from Brazil (UNRSF-funded enforcement), the US ('Click It or Ticket' and National Seat Belt Day), and Tunisia (civil society advocacy and awareness campaigns of existing laws) are replicable.

Leverage the UNGA High-Level Meeting for seat-belt advocacy

The UN GA High-Level Meeting is an opportunity to secure concrete, time-bound commitments on seatbelt advocacy and use — linked to SDG 3.6 targets and the second half of the Decade of Action.

SOME KEY QUESTIONS

- How can the UN's convening power be better leveraged to position seat-belt use as a global priority — through dedicated moments such as a UN Seat-Belt Day, the UN Global Road Safety Week, the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, or language in the outcome document of the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Road Safety?
- How do we systematically build the capacity of all actors needed to drive compliance — from enforcement agencies to civil society organisations and community advocates — ensuring they have the tools, funding, and technical support to act effectively?
- What approaches have proven most effective in accelerating the universal adoption of seat-belt technologies across all markets?
- Considering what has already been achieved and the evidence we have, what should we prioritize:
 - Short-term implementing and enforcing laws aligned with WHO best practices?
 - Medium-long term research and innovation to protect all car occupants?

RESOURCES LINKS

Find out more:

- **WHO Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023** — <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240086517>
- **PAHO Road Safety in the Americas (2024)** — <https://www.paho.org/pub/en/saving-lives-promoting-safe-systems-approach-road-safety-americas/>
- **UNECE WP.1 Best Practice on Seat-belt Use** — <https://unece.org/road-safety/wp1>
- **UNECE WP.29 — UN Regulation No.16 (Seat Belts)** — <https://unece.org/transport/vehicle-regulations/wp29-working-party-passive-safety>
- **IIHS — Seat Belt Use Research and Calculator** — <https://www.iihs.org/topics/seat-belts>
- **IWG EqOP — Equitable Occupant Protection (UNECE)** — <https://unece.org/transport/vehicle-regulations/wp29-working-party-passive-safety/grsp/informal-groups/equitable-occupant-protection>

UNRSF Expert Connect Platform — <https://roadsafetyfund.un.org/platforms-engagement>



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Seat-belt Use
Thank you!