

# Vulnerable Road Users in the DRC: Risk Profiles, European Safety Standards, and AfroTrans-Supported Pathways to Safer Mobility

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## Background

Mobility in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is shaped mainly by walking, informal transport services, and non-motorised or lightly motorised modes. As a result, a large proportion of road users interact directly with traffic environments that were not designed to protect them. Pedestrians move along carriageways, children cross busy roads to reach schools, cyclists share space with heavy vehicles, and motorcycle taxis operate in dense, often chaotic traffic. These mobility patterns place vulnerable road users (VRUs) at the centre of the country's road safety challenge.

The risks faced by VRUs in the DRC are closely linked to the structure of the transport system itself rather than to isolated user behaviour. Limited pedestrian infrastructure, absence of safe school zones, lack of facilities for cyclists, and the widespread use of informal and modified motorcycle taxis contribute to high exposure to serious road traffic crashes. At the same time, the scarcity of reliable and systematically collected crash data makes it difficult to accurately quantify risks, identify priority locations, or design targeted interventions.

In European countries such as Germany, Austria, and Poland, the safety of VRUs has increasingly been addressed through targeted policies focusing on urban design, speed reduction, and protection of non-motorised users. These countries have progressively shifted attention toward creating safer everyday mobility environments, supported by detailed crash data and long-term monitoring. The contrast between these approaches and the realities of Congolese cities highlights both the scale of the challenge and the potential for adapting selected strategies to improve the safety of VRUs in the DRC.

## Aim

This paper aims to analyse the risk profiles of VRUs in the DRC, compare these risks with European safety standards and outcomes, and examine how the AfroTrans project supports research, capacity building, and context-adapted interventions to improve road safety for vulnerable populations.

## **Method**

This paper takes an exploratory, comparative approach to examine road safety risks for VRUs in the DRC. It reviews literature, policy documents, and observations on mobility patterns involving pedestrians, cyclists, children, and informal motorcycle taxi users. European examples from Germany, Austria, and Poland are reviewed to highlight safety approaches, with relevance rather than direct applicability emphasised. Empirical insights come from preliminary data in cities like Butembo, including hospital records, police reports, and academic fieldwork, and note dataset limitations. The study also examines AfroTrans activities, including capacity-building and research collaborations, to identify suitable pathways to improve the safety of VRUs in the DRC.

## **Results / Overview of Key Insights**

The analysis confirms that walking is the main mode of transport across much of the DRC, especially in urban areas with limited public transit. Pedestrians share roads with fast-moving vehicles, motorcycles, and trucks, often lacking pavements, crossings, or traffic calming measures. Children are vulnerable, with many schools on busy roads without proper infrastructure. Cyclists face similar risks due to a lack of dedicated lanes. Motorcycle taxis pose a major safety issue. Besides standard motorcycles, modified three- and multi-wheel vehicles, sometimes carrying over ten passengers, are used as informal taxis without safety features or regulation, increasing crash severity, especially for women and children. Despite the risks, they provide vital, affordable mobility where formal transport is weak. Data from cities like Butembo shows high pedestrian and motorcycle taxi injury rates, but underreporting and poor data limit trend analysis. Unlike Europe, which has crash databases supporting measures like 30 km/h zones, safe crossings, and dedicated bike lanes to reduce injuries and deaths.

## **Conclusion**

Improving the safety of VRUs in the DRC requires a long-term, systematic approach grounded in reliable data, strengthened institutions, and human capacity development. While direct transfer of European road safety measures is constrained by structural, institutional, and financial limitations, the underlying principles prioritising human life, managing speed according to context, and separating traffic flows remain highly relevant and adaptable.

The AfroTrans project plays a key role in enabling this adaptation by supporting Afro-centric, context-sensitive research and capacity building. Through training programmes, methodological support, and international knowledge exchange, AfroTrans empowers Congolese researchers and practitioners to identify risks, design targeted interventions, and gradually improve road safety outcomes. Although immediate alignment with European safety standards is unrealistic, AfroTrans-supported pathways offer a realistic, sustainable trajectory toward RS, more equitable mobility for VRUs.