
Transferring European Road Safety Measures to the DRC: Opportunities, Constraints, and AfroTrans-Supported Adaptation Strategies

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Background

Over the past decades, European countries have progressively reduced road traffic injuries and deaths through coordinated safety strategies embedded in education, transport planning, infrastructure design, regulation, and institutional governance (Federal Ministry for Climate Action, 2021). These improvements did not result from isolated measures but from the systematic alignment of technical standards, enforcement mechanisms, and decision-making processes. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), road traffic risk remains high, and safety interventions are often fragmented, reactive, or constrained by limited resources and institutional capacity ((WHO), 2023).

Rather than a lack of proven solutions, one of the central challenges in the DRC is identifying which international road safety measures can be meaningfully adapted to local conditions. Differences in infrastructure quality, funding availability, governance structures, and the informality of transport systems mean that European road safety solutions cannot be directly replicated. Understanding the conditions under which selected measures can be transferred, simplified, or reconfigured is therefore essential for improving road safety outcomes.

Aim

This paper aims to examine the transferability of selected European road safety measures to the DRC by identifying opportunities for adaptation, key structural and institutional constraints, and the role of the AfroTrans project in supporting locally appropriate implementation strategies. The focus is on how international experience can inform Congolese road safety practice without relying on costly or institutionally demanding solutions.

Method

The paper employs a transferability-oriented analytical approach rather than a direct comparative assessment of safety performance ((ITF), 2012). Selected road safety measures commonly applied in European contexts, particularly in Germany, Austria, and Poland, are

reviewed with attention to their functional objectives, implementation requirements, and institutional preconditions.

These measures are then examined against the Congolese transport and governance context, considering factors such as infrastructure condition, enforcement capacity, data availability, and the prevalence of informal transport services. The analysis is complemented by reflections drawn from AfroTrans project activities, including academic collaboration, training initiatives, and exchanges between European and Congolese institutions. This approach allows identification of adaptation pathways rather than direct replication models.

Results / Key Analytical Insights

The analysis shows that many European road safety measures depend on enabling conditions that are only partially present in the DRC. These include stable funding mechanisms, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, reliable crash data systems, and consistent enforcement. As a result, large-scale or capital-intensive interventions, such as fully protected cycling networks or automated enforcement systems, are difficult to implement in the short term.

However, the study identifies a range of low-cost and high-impact measures whose underlying principles are transferable. These include physical speed reduction in high-risk locations, simplified traffic calming techniques, improved road markings and signage, basic pedestrian facilities near markets and schools, and targeted enforcement focused on a small number of high-risk behaviours. When applied selectively and strategically, such measures can significantly reduce exposure to severe crashes even in resource-constrained environments.

A key insight is that successful transfer depends less on the technical complexity of a measure and more on local capacity to design, manage, and sustain it. Without trained professionals, coordination between institutions, and basic data to guide decisions, even low-cost interventions risk remaining isolated or ineffective.

Conclusion

This paper argues that improving road safety in the DRC does not require the wholesale adoption of European road safety models, but rather the selective adaptation of their core principles through context-sensitive strategies. Low-cost, high-impact interventions offer a realistic entry point, provided they are embedded in a broader process of institutional learning and capacity development.

The AfroTrans project plays a central role in enabling this process by serving as a platform for structured knowledge transfer and local adaptation. Through academic cooperation, training, and methodological support, AfroTrans strengthens Congolese capacity to critically assess international practices, redesign them for local use, and implement them in a sustainable manner. By focusing on adaptation rather than replication, AfroTrans contributes to the development of road safety solutions that are technically feasible, institutionally realistic, and aligned with Congolese mobility realities.

1 References

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