

# The African Road Safety Observatory (AfrSO)

Dr. Wouter Van den Berghe  
Road Safety Expert  
AfrSO Secretariat

AfroSAFE Conference,  
Lusaka, June 2026



# What is a road safety observatory?

- An RS Observatory systematically collects, analyses and shares reliable road safety data in a country or region to support evidence-based decision-making.
- It often also serves as a political and technical forum, recommending policies and measures to reduce deaths and serious injuries.
- Typical functions span:
  - Data collection and analysis; research and studies
  - Policy support and benchmarking
  - Awareness, advocacy and capacity building
- In practice, no single observatory does everything; activities are shared with agencies, research institutes and partners.

# Regional road safety observatories

- Several regional observatories now operate worldwide, at very different stages of development:
  - **AfRSO** — African Road Safety Observatory
  - **ERSO** — European Road Safety Observatory (incl. CARE database)
  - **APRSO** — Asia-Pacific Road Safety Observatory
  - **OISEVI** — Ibero-American Road Safety Observatory
  - **AIRSO** — Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory
  - **IRTAD / ITF** — mainly high-income countries
  - **WBRSO** – Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory
- They differ in the activities they undertake, and all face funding challenges.

# Why an African road safety observatory?

- Africa carries a disproportionate burden — about 19 road deaths per 100,000 people, roughly triple the European rate — despite the lowest motorisation worldwide.
- It is the only WHO region where road deaths rose over the first Decade of Action, with nearly 250,000 fatalities each year.
- A wide gap persists between official statistics and WHO estimates; crash data are often underreported and fragmented.
- A regional observatory delivers economies of scale: harmonised data, benchmarking and shared learning across Member States.
- This supports more evidence-based policy and accelerates action across the continent.



# Mission and mandate of AfRSO

- To foster cooperation that generates a comprehensive and reliable body of road safety data for informed decision-making across the 55 AU Member States.
- To act as a political and technical forum where Member States discuss mobility and safety and recommend policies to cut deaths and serious injuries.
- To encourage adherence to the UN 12 global road safety performance targets.
- Mandate roots:
  - African Road Safety Charter (2016); Lomé decision on harmonised indicators (2017)
  - STC-TTIIE decision to establish the Observatory (Cairo, 2019)

# A new chapter: the AfRSO Secretariat

- The AfRSO Secretariat was established in January 2025, which was a major milestone toward full operationalisation of the Observatory.
- It is hosted by the African Union Commission.
- A four-year EU-funded technical assistance project supports its set-up and eventual integration into AU structures.
- Delivered by a consortium (SweRoad, Tilkon, IRD Engineering) based in Addis Ababa:
  - David Niyonsenga (Team Lead, Policy expert)
  - Yonas Bekele (Data expert)
  - Wouter Van den Berghe (Road Safety Expert, part-time)
  - Short-term experts
- **Note:** *the Observatory acronym, formerly “ARSO”, is now “AfRSO”.*



# Work plan 2025–2029: three outcomes

- **Outcome 1** — Data collection and evidence-based decision-making strengthened
- **Outcome 2** — Road safety policy implementation and governance improved
- **Outcome 3** — Regional collaboration and capacity building enhanced
- Aligned with the African Road Safety Action Plan 2021–2030 and the EU technical assistance terms of reference.
- Endorsed by the Transitional Steering Committee (Cape Town, December 2025) and approved by the STC on Transport and Energy (Sandton, April 2026).

# Delivered through six “outputs”

- **Output 1** — Further institutional development of AfRSO
- **Output 2** — Achieving increased visibility of AfRSO
- **Output 3** — Coordinating and delivering data-related activities
- **Output 4** — Coordinating and delivering policy-related activities
- **Output 5** — Leading and assisting in capacity building
- **Output 6** — Organising and running high-level meetings

# The African Road Safety Charter is now in force

- On 12 March 2026, the Charter entered into force.
- It is Africa's first continental, legally-binding road safety framework.
- Entry into force required 15 Member States to ratify and deposit instruments; Mozambique became the 15th in February 2026.
- This activates the Conference of the State Parties, with AfRSO acting as its Secretariat.
- **Next priority:** accelerate further ratifications and translate the Charter into domestic legislation.

15

Member States ratified

In force since 12 March 2026



# Challenges and priorities ahead

- **Institutional transition:** completing integration into permanent AU structures and securing funding beyond the EU technical assistance.
- **Data quality:** fatalities are significantly underreported (some estimates near four times official figures) and injury data remain weak.
- **Legislation:** in a few countries only do laws on key behavioural risk factors meet best practice.
- **Diversity:** road safety situations and cultures differ widely across the continent.
- **Accessibility:** building French-language capacity to serve Francophone Africa.
- **Coordination:** ensuring synergy with partners and other regional initiatives.

# Thank you for your attention!

[AfRSO@AfricanUnion.org](mailto:AfRSO@AfricanUnion.org)

[wouter.vandenberghe@sweroad.se](mailto:wouter.vandenberghe@sweroad.se)

