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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Monitoring Road Safety Progress in the EU - Bulgaria

Accompanying the document

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Report on the Implementation of the EU Road Safety Policy Framework at the Mid-
Point**

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Bulgaria

1. Summary

In 2024, Bulgaria had the **second highest fatality rate in the EU**, with 74 fatalities per million inhabitants, while the EU average was 45. However, compared to 2019, a decrease of 24% in road fatalities was achieved. In 2023, the number of people seriously injured in road crashes was 7% lower than the respective figure in 2019.

Compared to the EU average, the distribution of fatalities in Bulgaria shows a relatively high proportion of car occupants and fatalities occurring on rural roads. However, road crash fatalities and serious injuries declined for all groups examined, with the highest decreases being recorded for killed cyclists, pedestrians and fatalities inside urban areas between 2019 and 2023.

In accordance with the EU policy, in the Road Safety Strategy 2030 of Bulgaria, the **target of halving the number of road fatalities by 2030** compared to 2019 has been set. Also, there is a goal of a **50% reduction of serious injuries by 2030**. There is also a strong commitment to work towards the **Vision Zero** (to move close to zero road deaths by 2050). The first Action Plan 2021-2023 includes 176 road safety measures differentiated by strategic goals in 6 thematic pillars.

Based on the latest available data (2024), Bulgaria is **on track to meet the 2030 target of halving the number of fatalities**, with a 24% decrease since 2019. However, Bulgaria needs to do more if it is to meet the 2030 target of halving the number of serious injuries.

Regarding the implementation of the road safety actions foreseen in the national strategy for the period 2021-2024, progress has been made in several road safety areas, while **delays are reported in most areas examined**. Bulgaria starts from a medium level in most examined road safety areas. Based on the self-reported assessment, the baseline is assessed as medium for 12 out of the 26 road safety areas. In 2024, the majority of the planned measures of the pillars of safe roads, safe vehicles and post-crash care are considered delayed.

The main gap reported in the implementation of Bulgaria's Road Safety Strategic Plan is **funding constraints**. This was reported as the main reason for delaying or deferring various actions, such as carrying out more and frequent campaigns, developing city mobility and safety plans, implementing targeted investments in the municipal road safety programmes towards VRUs and rural roads, and carrying out road safety audits and inspections. Also, the frequent government changes led to delays in the legislation amendments, while gaps are also reported related to technical resources and data collection.

Although Bulgaria is currently on track to meet the road safety targets for 2030, it still has the second highest fatality rate. Possible ways to address this could be:

- exploring new financial resources for the implementation of delayed road safety measures, with a focus on road infrastructure interventions both inside and outside urban areas,
- resolving any legislative obstacles preventing or delaying the implementation of road safety strategy and speeding up the setting of planned road safety measures,
- exploring any other relevant activities, with emphasis on those relating to the prevention

of serious injuries.

2. Road Safety Strategy and Measures

2.1. Road Safety Strategy

The National **Road Safety Strategy of Bulgaria for the decade 2021-2030** was developed by the State Agency Road Safety (SARS).

The context of this strategy is in **accordance with the EU policy** of a 50% reduction of the annual numbers of deaths and serious injuries by 2030 based on the safe system approach. There is also a strong commitment to work towards the **Vision Zero** (to move close to zero road deaths by 2050).

Under the National Strategy for Road Safety 2021-2030 of Bulgaria, summary **action plans with a horizon of 3 years** are drawn up.

Table 4.1: National road safety strategy

Bulgaria	
Timeframe	2021-2030
Lead Authority	Ministry of Interior of Republic of Bulgaria
Link	https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-National-Strategy-for-Road-Safety_Republic-of-Bulgaria.pdf https://www.sars.gov.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/1.3-Strategy-EN.docx

2.2. Road Safety Governance

The Council of Ministers through the State Agency Road Safety as a coordination unit and the State Public Consultative Committee of Road Safety Problems consisting of ministries and organisations as a consultative body at the Council of Ministers are responsible for the formulation of the national road safety strategy. The sectoral ministries at central level – the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health, and the regional governors through the Regional road safety commissions at regional level and the mayors of municipalities at local level are responsible for the implementation of the strategy.

Also, the State Agency Road Safety is responsible for the **monitoring of road safety developments** in the country within the Strategy as well as for progress monitoring and evaluation.

2.3. Road Safety Measures

A total of **60 road safety actions** divided in **six fields** are included in the road safety strategy of Bulgaria¹.

¹ <https://www.sars.gov.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/1.3-Strategy-EN.docx>

Table 4.2: Road safety fields of actions and number of actions

Field of Actions	Actions
1. Management	11
2. Road users' behaviour	13
3. Enforcement	6
4. Infrastructure	15
5. Safe Vehicles	7
6. Life-saving rescue chain	8
Total	60

The first Action Plan (2021-2023) includes **176 road safety measures** differentiated by strategic goals in 6 thematic pillars:

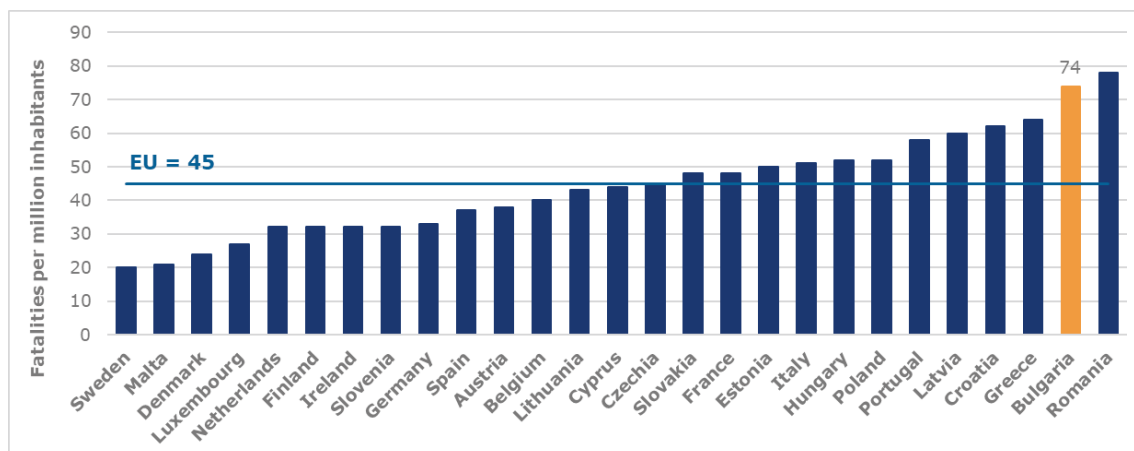
1. Integrity-based management
2. Socially-responsible behaviour of road users: life-long learning
3. Effective and preventive enforcement
4. Trauma mitigating road infrastructure
5. Vehicles in protection of humans
6. Life-saving rescue chain

3. Road Safety Progress

3.1. Road Safety Outcomes

Based on data for 2024, Bulgaria was the country with the **second highest number of fatalities per million inhabitants in the EU**. In fact, 74 road fatalities per million inhabitants were recorded in 2024, which is well above the EU average (45).

Figure 4.1 Mortality rates by country, 2024



Sources: CARE database on road crashes; population data from Eurostat (online data code [demo_pjan](#)).

Compared to 2019, which is the baseline year for the target 2030 set in the road safety strategy, a decrease in road fatalities has been recorded. In particular, in 2024, the number of fatalities decreased by 24% compared to 2019. Thus, Bulgaria is **on track to meet the 2030 target of halving the number of road fatalities**

The number of serious injuries declined by 7% in 2023 compared to 2019.

Figure 4.2 Road fatalities and target 2030
(Source CARE database)²

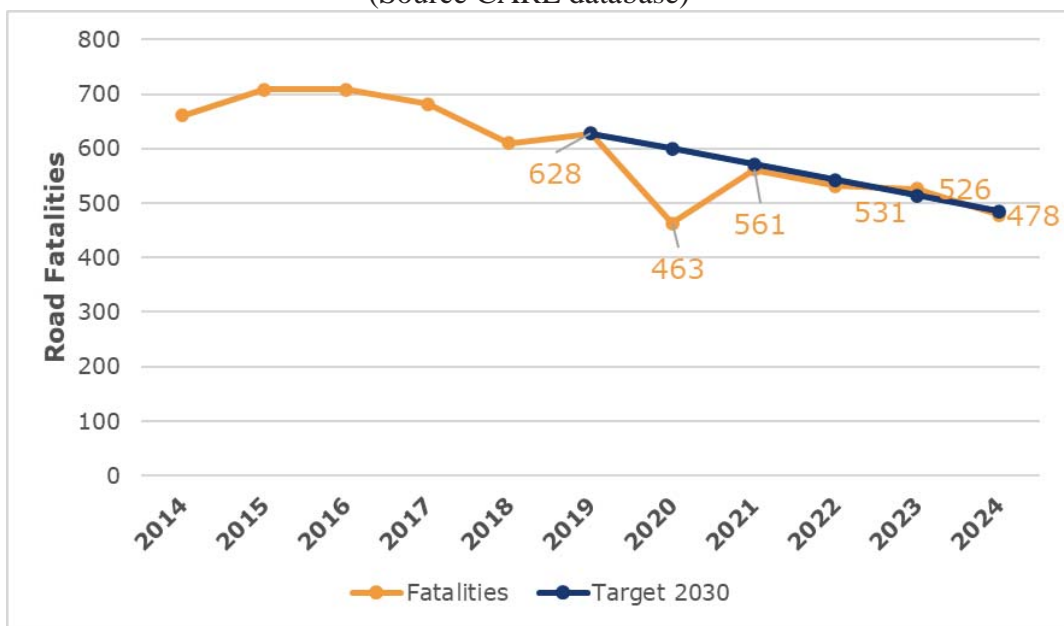
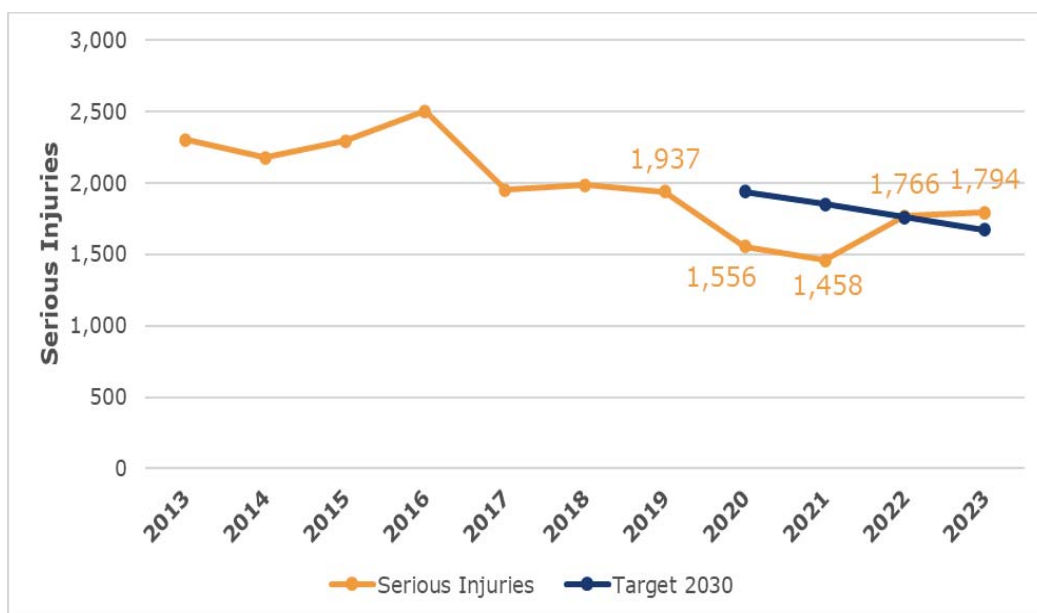


Figure 4.3 Serious road injuries
(Source: CARE database)²



² It is noted that the global COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the CARE data for 2020 and 2021 for many European countries. Traffic volumes dropped sharply during the pandemic due to traffic restrictions, which was associated with a significant drop in road traffic crashes and fatalities.

Compared to the EU average, the distribution of fatalities in Bulgaria shows a relatively high proportion of car occupants and fatalities occurring on rural roads ³. In fact, 60% of fatalities were car occupants in 2023 and 68% of road crash fatalities occurred outside urban areas, on non-motorway roads.

An overview of the evolution of road crash fatalities and serious injuries for the years 2019 and 2023 (year with the latest available detailed crash data) is provided below for specific types of roads, crashes and road users. Overall, in Bulgaria, **road fatalities and serious injuries declined** for all groups examined. The highest decreases were recorded for killed cyclists, pedestrians and fatalities inside urban areas, which were considerably higher than the decreases in the total number of fatalities. Regarding serious injuries, the highest decrease is observed in crashes on motorways.

Table 4.3: Evolution of road fatalities, 2019-2023

Road Crash Fatalities	2019	2023	% in 2023	% change 2019-2023
Total road fatalities	628	526	-	-16%
Inside urban areas	232	144	27%	-38%
Outside urban areas	351	356	68%	+1%
Motorways	45	25	5%	-44%
Single vehicle crashes	196	161	31%	-18%
Multi vehicle crashes	287	275	52%	-4%
Passenger cars	348	313	60%	-10%
PTWs	7	53	10%	++⁴
Cycles	27	14	3%	-48%
Pedestrians	154	97	18%	-37%

Table 4.4: Evolution of serious injuries, 2019-2023

Serious Injuries	2019	2023	% in 2023	% change 2019-2023
Total serious injuries	1,937	1,794		-7%
Inside urban areas	1,092	1,012	40%	-7%
Outside urban areas	734	717	4%	-2%
Motorways	111	65	29%	-41%
Single vehicle crashes	550	519	47%	-6%
Multi vehicle crashes	904	851	46%	-62%
Passenger cars	964	822	13%	-15%
PTWs	37	239	5%	++⁵

³ European Commission (2023), Country Profile Bulgaria. Road Safety Observatory. Brussels, European Commission, Directorate General for Transport.

⁴ A break in the time series of killed PTW riders appears between 2016 and 2019

⁵ A break in time series of seriously injured PTWs appears between 2016 and 2019.

Cycles	87	85	25%	-2%
Pedestrians	497	444	56%	-11%

3.2. Road Safety Performance Indicators

Bulgaria performs worse than the EU average in relation to seat belt and helmet use.

Table 4.5: Road Safety Performance Indicators, 2022 - 2025
(Source: ERSO, Country Profiles)

	Bulgaria		EU	
	2022	2025	2022	2025
Speeding⁶				
% of passenger cars travelling within speed limits ^a				
Motorways	89.4	92.0	-	-
Rural Roads	93.4	96.0	-	-
Urban Roads	44.7	56.0	-	-
Seat belt & CRS use rates (%) ^{a*,b}				
Front	76.4	87.8	93.1	92.4
Rear	31.2	41.7	75.3	69.9
Child restraint systems (roadside observations)	50.0	51.5	67.0	83.3
Child restraint systems (in-vehicle inspections)	60.8	/	-	-
Helmet use rates (%) ^a				
PTW driver	97.0	94.5	97.0	97.6
PTW passenger	90.6	85.3	94.4	97.0
Cyclist	20.1	23.1	37.8	34.5
DUI of Alcohol^c (self-reported)				
% of car drivers who have driven at least once in the last 30 days over the legal limit	-	-	11.8	11.8
Driver Distraction ^a				
% of drivers not using hand-held mobile device/phone while driving	91.9	96.3	94.8	94.5
Vehicle Safety				
% of new passenger cars rated with 4 EuroNCAP stars and above ^a	73.1	72.0	83.6	82.7
Average age of passenger car fleet (years) ^d	-	-	12.3	12.5

Sources: ^a Baseline and Trendline projects, ^b ETSC (2022), ^c ESRA3 project (2024), ^d ACEA (2024, 2025), Notes: *2025 data only for weekdays

⁶ An EU average is not available for speeding, due to different legal speed limits among countries, which does not allow for a straightforward comparison.

4. Monitoring Road Safety Strategy Implementation

4.1. Implementation Progress

Road Safety Management

Bulgaria starts from a low level in two road safety areas related to **Road Safety Management** and from a medium level in the area of road safety legislation. In 2024, the implementation of the measures related to road safety budget and legislation has been delayed, while the measures related to the national road safety authority were on track. It is noted that no measures have been planned for the area of the national road safety observatory.

Table 4.6: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to road safety management

B1	Road Safety Management	Baseline Assessment (2021) ⁷	Progress (2021-2024)
1	National road safety authority	low	on track
2	National road safety budget	low	delayed
3	Road safety legislation	medium	delayed
4	National road safety observatory	-	-

More specifically, the State Agency Road Safety (SARS) has been operational for 5 years now and in 2020 a new road safety strategy 2021-2030 was prepared and adopted. **Coordination and interaction between institutions have improved** since the establishment of SARS, as the agency streamlines the process of planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting, based on constant analysis and methodological guidelines for the relevant administrations with road safety competencies.

The first three-year road safety action plan (2021-2023) was underfinanced due to **lack of funds allocated for road safety**. The second three-year Road safety action plan 2024-2026 is also tied to fixed budget funding, without major improvements in allocation of targeted road safety funds. This issue is highlighted by SARS accordingly in its annual road safety report.

Some important **legislative amendments** (incl. Road Traffic Act, legislation on road infrastructure safety management procedures) have been introduced in the past few years that lay the groundwork for improving the overall road safety legislation. Other major amendments are ongoing and underway.

Safe Road User Behaviour

In relation to the pillar of **Safe Road User Behaviour**, Bulgaria starts from a medium level in 2021 in all road safety areas, except training of novice drivers and measures for VRUs.

⁷ In line with the beginning of the national strategy

Table 4.7: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to road user behaviour

B2	Safe Road User Behaviour	Baseline Assessment (2021)	Progress (2021-2024)
1	Enforcement	medium	on track
2	Education	medium	on track
3	New drivers training	low	delayed
4	Communication campaigns	medium	on track
5	Measures for vulnerable road users	low	on track
6	Measures for professional drivers	medium	on track

In 2024, **all relevant measures to this pillar were on track**, except those concerning novice driver training, which have been delayed.

Crash data is currently being analysed, and the **police enforcement** is taking into account locations with high crash frequencies and risks. There is also a special focus on prevention. Thematic operations and wide-ranging inspections were carried out jointly with other institutions.

At the level of kindergartens, schools and support centres for personal development, **annual programmes for road safety** are developed, and the training is conducted according to the curricula and documentation approved by the Ministry of Education. The necessary educational and material base is currently updated, including teaching aids, educational books, specialised classrooms and playgrounds, interactive systems, technical tools, boards etc. Many initiatives in and out of class are focused on road safety.

The Ministry of Education and Science, SARS and the Executive Agency for Road Transport Administration developed an updated secondary legal framework and updated the training material regarding the **training of novice drivers**. All drafts are being consulted with the relevant stakeholders and further public consultations are underway. However, the lack of a consolidated opinion on key issues from the branch organisations has led to delays compared to the time plan.

A **single communication strategy for road safety** is currently being implemented, and annual communication plans are prepared, consistent with the national priorities for road safety, prevention needs and coordination with other institutions. Particular emphasis is placed on children. SARS is active with campaigns and dissemination of information.

Preventive campaigns are regularly organised, with an emphasis on **vulnerable road users**. On a regular basis (every 3 months), an SARS information bulletin is prepared and disseminated with practical information on VRU protection. Regular trainings on sustainable mobility that centres around people are organised by SARS for the municipalities.

Safe Speeds

Regarding the **Safe Speeds** pillar, Bulgaria starts from a medium level in the two related road safety areas. In 2024, all relevant measures under this pillar were on track. It is noted that no measures have been planned for the areas of update of speed limits and speed enforcement.

Table 4.8: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to safe speeds

B3	Safe Speeds	Baseline Assessment (2021)	Progress (2021-2024)
1	Update of speed limits	-	-
2	Enforcing speed limits	-	-
3	Campaigns on speeding	medium	on track
4	Monitoring speeding	medium	on track

Preventive campaigns are regularly organised, with a focus on **speeding**. Also, crash data is analysed on a regular basis, and the enforcement activity is being focused on the relevant road/street sections.

Safe Roads

Regarding the **Safe Roads** pillar, based on the self-reported assessment, Bulgaria starts from a medium level in four road safety areas: rural roads safety interventions, motorways safety management, road design standards and road safety audit and inspection. The starting level in 2021 for the remaining road safety areas is assessed as low.

However, only the measures related to road safety audits and inspections are on track. Nevertheless due to financial restraints these measures are rather underestimated in most of the municipalities. The **implementation of all remaining measures has been delayed mainly due to funding constraints**. Key measures are also delayed due to lack of appropriate organisational arrangements and functional limitations within the Road Infrastructure Agency which hinders the successful integration of the safe system approach.

Table 4.9: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to safe roads

B4	Safe Roads	Baseline Assessment (2021)	Progress (2021-2024)
1	City mobility & safety plans	low	delayed
2	Urban infrastructure for VRUs	low	delayed
3	Rural roads safety interventions	medium	delayed
4	Motorways safety management	medium	delayed
5	Road design standards	medium	delayed
6	Road safety audit and inspection	medium	on track

The implementation of EC guidelines for the **development of plans for sustainable urban mobility** as part of the plans for integrated development of municipalities is lagging behind. In a significant part of the municipalities neither sustainable urban mobility plans nor traffic organisation plans have been developed or are not up to date due to lack of funds and institutional capacity.

It is important to note that local authorities make serious efforts to survey the elements of the road infrastructure, to document the results and to plan measures for vulnerable road users.

Municipal road safety programmes are developed and approved by SARS on an annual basis. SARS also insists on planning such measures, as considerable efforts are directed towards the elaboration of GIS-based software instruments for data collection and risk-analysis to be made available at municipal level. However, the implementation of **targeted investments in the municipal road safety programmes** towards vulnerable road users is very limited due to lack of sufficient funds in municipal budgets and human resources in the municipalities.

Regarding the state of municipal road infrastructure, data was collected from 265 municipalities, which allowed the review to claim a relatively complete territorial coverage, looking at key elements of road safety determinants. In the annual municipal road safety programmes, SARS insists on prioritising measures on rural roads based on a needs- and risk analysis.

Despite the investments made over the past years in road infrastructure, **no sustainable improvement is noticed on the national roads**, and there is even an accumulation and deepening of the problems as a result of systemic weaknesses in construction and maintenance activities. Based on the self-reported assessment, road signs, markings and restraint systems are in poor condition in this portion of the road network.

The EU Directive 2019/1936 was fully transposed in the national legislation. At national level, **audits and inspections** are carried out by the Road Infrastructure Agency. Local authorities are given the opportunity to apply for financial support (by SARS) to carry out audits and road safety inspections. However, road safety audits and road safety elements in general are still not a common part of the investment procedures and designs, especially at municipal level, mainly due to lack of funds and staff.

Safe Vehicles

In relation to the pillar of **Safe Vehicles**, Bulgaria starts from a low level in two areas, fleet renewal and promotion of ADAS, and from a medium level in the area of technical vehicle inspection. In 2024, the implementation of all measures of this pillar had been delayed. It is noted that no measures have been planned as regards preparing road traffic policies for vehicle automation.

Table 4.10: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to safe vehicles

B5	Safe Vehicles	Baseline Assessment (2021)	Progress (2021-2024)
1	Fleet renewal	low	delayed
2	Promotion of ADAS	low	delayed
3	Technical vehicle inspection	medium	delayed
4	Automation preparation	-	-

The implementation of measures related to the area of fleet renewal has been delayed mainly due to insufficient funds. Bulgaria is among the EU countries with the oldest vehicle fleet, however, there is no state subsidy in the country to provide incentives for citizens (e.g. local government tax policies) to renew the vehicle fleet.

On the other hand, legislative amendments were developed and adopted on **periodic inspections of the technical condition of vehicles**, which introduced the requirements of

Delegated Directive (EU) 2021/1717. Significant improvements on inspections are expected.

Post Crash Care

Regarding the **Post-Crash Care** pillar, Bulgaria starts from a low level in 2021 in both key road safety areas. In 2024, the implementation of all measures relevant to this pillar had been delayed.

Road safety is not integrated as a major health issue in the national healthcare strategies. Data on serious injuries is underreported and such an indicator within the monitoring and reporting of UN sustainable development goal 3.6 was not supported by the Ministry of Health as a lead organisation despite several requests made by the State Agency Road Safety as a partner organisation.

Joint regional trainings are organised regularly, aimed at increasing the capacity of the relevant teams of the safety chain. However, the measures aimed at achieving objective reporting of traffic crash statistics based on uniform criteria for the assessment of injuries are not implemented, although they are systematically included in the planning documents.

Table 4.11: Self-reported assessment of implementation progress of measures related to post crash care

B6	Post Crash Care	Baseline Assessment (2021)	Progress (2021-2024)
1	Reduce EMS reaction time	low	delayed
2	Support people injured	low	delayed

4.2.Gaps

The main gap reported by the authorities in the implementation of Bulgaria’s Road Safety Strategic Plan is **funding constraints**. This was reported as the main reason for delaying or deferring various actions across all pillars, including:

- Carrying out more and frequent campaigns
- Development of city mobility and safety plans
- Implementation of the safe system approach on national roads
- Implementation of targeted investments in the municipal road safety programmes towards VRUs
- Interventions on rural roads
- Road safety audits and inspections, mainly at municipal level
- Providing incentives to citizens towards fleet renewal

Furthermore, the adoption of drafted and proposed legislative amendments is often delayed, mainly due to the **frequent government changes** and interruptions in the activities of the National Assembly. Political instability has also hindered the smooth and fast adoption of legislative amendments related to novice driver training.

Additionally, gaps in **technical resources** are a concern, with the number of available speed control cameras being limited.

Deficiencies are also observed in the **registration of crash data by police**. As a result, the lack of exact locations prevents the precise identification of sections with an increased number of road crashes. There are also some deficiencies in the identification of the exact causes and all influencing factors for crash occurrences.

Moreover, there is a **lack of coherence in the checks of the characteristics and deficiencies of the national roads** with a view to carrying out safety activities. The results of the inspections are not documented in a unified and computerised GIS-based database, which would allow quick access to reports for analytical and investment purposes.

Finally, it is **impossible to trace the entire trauma history of victims and their treatment**, nor the final diagnosis of the severity of the injury, which does not allow for the correct assessment of the severity of injuries of the victims according to the Maximum Abbreviated Injury Scale (MAIS). This also does not allow subsequent analysis of the necessary measures and activities for the prevention of the most serious injuries (MAIS3+) to human life and health.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the Road Safety Strategy 2030 of Bulgaria, the targets of **halving the numbers of road fatalities and serious injuries by 2030** have been set. There is also a strong commitment to work towards the Vision Zero (to move close to zero road deaths by 2050). The first Action Plan 2021-2023 includes 176 road safety measures differentiated by strategic goals in 6 thematic pillars.

In 2024, Bulgaria **was the second worst performing country in the European Union** in terms of fatality rates per population. Compared to the EU average, the distribution of fatalities in Bulgaria shows a relatively high proportion of car occupants and fatalities occurring on rural roads.

However, based on data between 2019 and 2024, a significant reduction of 24% in road fatalities was recorded. Therefore, Bulgaria is currently **on track to meet the 50% reduction target** in road fatalities. The highest decrease was recorded for killed cyclists, pedestrians and fatalities inside urban areas between 2019 and 2023. Meanwhile, serious injuries decreased by 7% during the period 2019-2023.

Regarding the implementation of the road safety actions foreseen in the national strategy for the period 2021-2024, based on the self-reported assessment, progress has been made in several road safety areas, while **delays are reported in most areas examined**. The majority of the planned measures of the pillars of safe roads, safe vehicles and post-crash care are considered delayed.

Funding limitations are the primary self-reported gap in the implementation of Bulgaria's Road Safety Strategic Plan. Additionally, delays in legislation amendments are caused by the frequent government changes, while gaps are also reported related to technical resources and data collection.

Finally, even if Bulgaria is currently on track to meet the road safety target for 2030, it still needs to do more to improve its road safety performance. Possible ways to address this include:

- exploring new financial resources for the implementation of delayed road safety measures, with a focus on road infrastructure works both inside and outside urban areas,

- resolving any legislative obstacles preventing or delaying the implementation of the road safety strategy and speeding up the implementation of planned road safety measures,
- exploring any other relevant activities, with emphasis on those relating to the prevention of serious injuries.