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'In Fact' is a quarterly newsletter developed by the team at [ISDM DataSights](#), a free-to-use, pioneering single-window platform developed by the Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), powered by Capgemini. [ISDM DataSights](#) hosts unified datasets, insights, and analytics on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to help social sector organisations make evidence-based decisions and amplify social progress.

A story in numbers

Crash Course in Reality: The Road Safety Crisis

By: [Kshitij Sarawgi](#) and [Bushra Ansari](#)

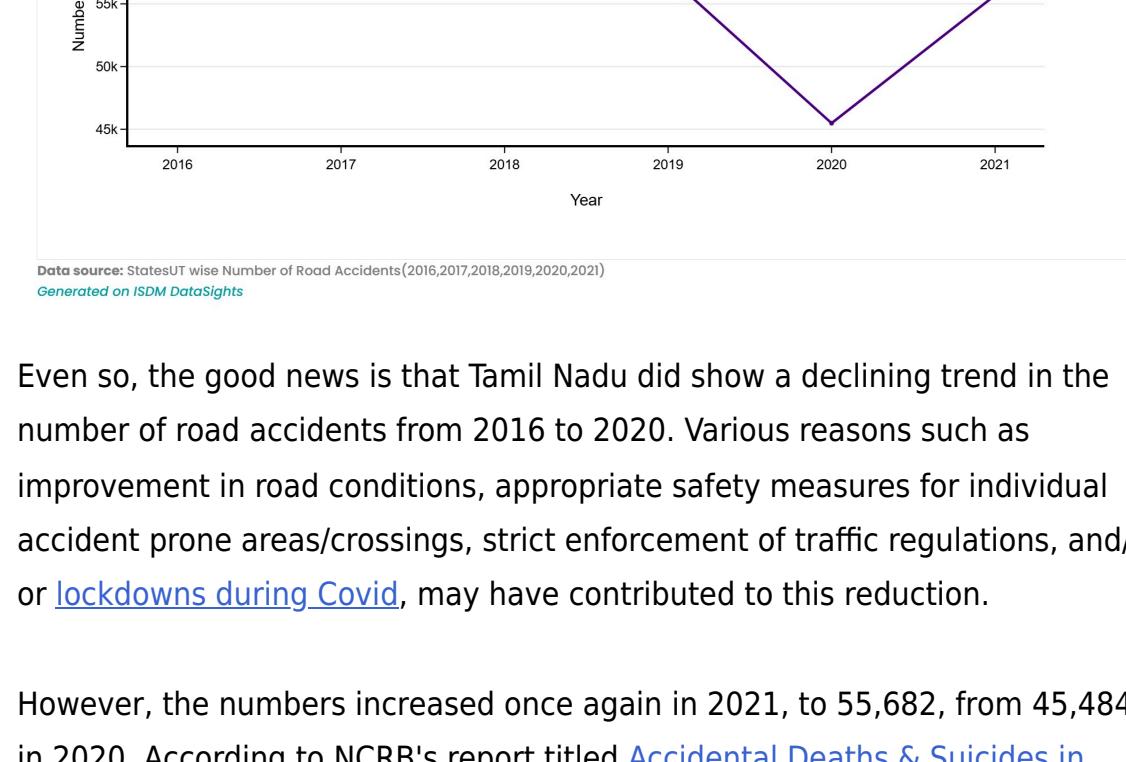
The just-concluded 8th UN Global Road Safety Week declared its theme as 'making walking and cycling safe'.

[WHO statistics](#) tell us that across the globe, more than 1 of every 4 deaths occur among pedestrians and cyclists. There's more — nearly 1.2 million people are killed, and as many as 50 million people are injured each year in road traffic injuries. Road accidents are also the primary cause of death among people aged 5-29.

In India too, road safety is a serious cause for concern. Even as we await the August release of 'Road Accidents in India, 2023', a report by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, past numbers tell us that we have a long way to go.

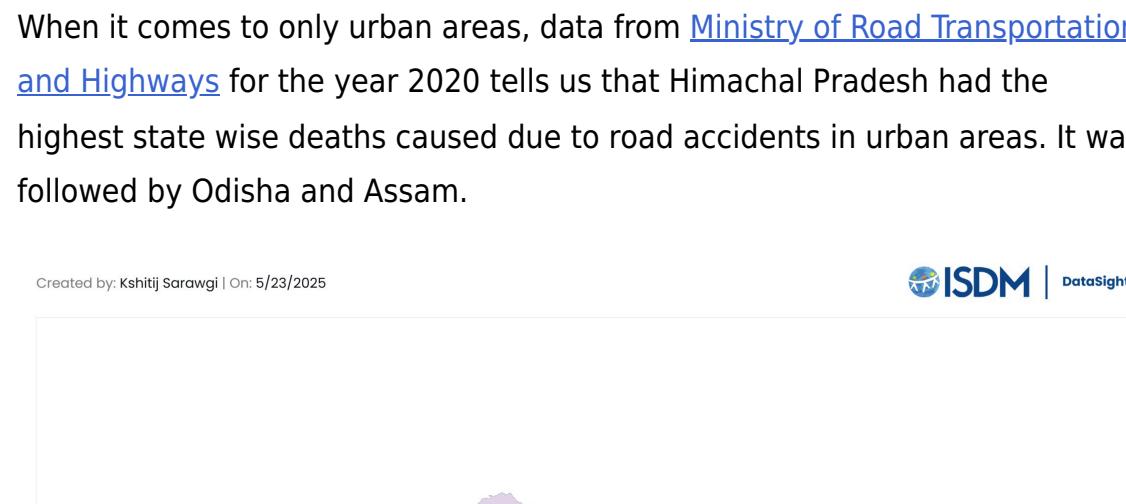
[According to numbers released by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways](#), in 2016, 1,50,785 people across India lost their lives due to road accidents. This number rose to 1,53,972 in 2021.

Statewise number of road accidents caused in 2021



As per this data, which has been cleaned, consolidated, and made available on [ISDM DataSights](#), Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala & Uttar Pradesh saw over 25,000 road accidents in 2021. Of these, Tamil Nadu has consistently ranked among the highest in the country for road accidents, from 2016 to 2021.

Trend in Road Accidents in Tamil Nadu (2016 to 2021)



Even so, the good news is that Tamil Nadu did show a declining trend in the number of road accidents from 2016 to 2020. Various reasons such as improvement in road conditions, appropriate safety measures for individual accident prone areas/crossings, strict enforcement of traffic regulations, and/or [lockdowns during Covid](#), may have contributed to this reduction.

However, the numbers increased once again in 2021, to 55,682, from 45,484 in 2020. According to NCRB's report titled [Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India – 2021](#), overspeeding was the cause of 70% of these accidents in TN. As a result, over 10,000 lives were lost that year.

Road accidents are certainly an avoidable human tragedy, but the data tells us that they also have socio-economic costs. [As per a study conducted by IIT Madras in 2019](#), road accidents cost TN Rs 12,912 crores, which is 1.6 times the state's police budget, and 'dwarfed the budgets of health, transport, and social welfare departments'.

The epicentre of these road crashes in TN is in [Chennai](#), [Coimbatore](#) and their surrounding regions. The poorer districts in south and south eastern Tamil Nadu see much fewer road crashes.

When it comes to only urban areas, data from [Ministry of Road Transportation and Highways](#) for the year 2020 tells us that Himachal Pradesh had the highest state wise deaths caused due to road accidents in urban areas. It was followed by Odisha and Assam.

This has serious consequences for the state's youth. As per the [Himachal Pradesh Department of Transportation's report](#) on road accidents in 2022, the

primary cause of death for people aged 18-45 years in the state is road accidents. The same report discusses how challenging terrains, poor road infrastructure, high-risk driving, adverse weather and lack of alternatives to road transportation for local commute contribute to the high number of fatal road accidents in the region.

This tragedy could be avoided if drivers followed traffic rules and lane discipline. As per the above-mentioned report, there are three main causes of road accidents: human error, road condition /environment, and vehicular condition. Of all these, accidents due to human error form the biggest piece of the pie. Approximately one-third of accident-related deaths in 2022 were due to overspeeding, while approximately 15% were caused due to driving on the wrong side.

Pan-India too, trucks and buses are involved in more than 70% of the crashes in both rural and urban areas, as per a research study by [IIT Delhi, published in 2023](#).

Despite efforts over the years, finding an effective, lasting solution has remained a challenge. The rapid urban growth over the past decade, which has led to a surge in the number of vehicles on the road — especially private ones — could be one factor, as it puts immense pressure on the existing infrastructure.

Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, has said that [India aims to halve its road accidents by 2030](#). This can only be achieved if punitive action is taken against those who flout traffic regulations. Our roads and highways need separate lanes and strict timings for heavy vehicles. Lane discipline must be maintained, and cyclists and pedestrians must be given priority in road development plans.

In addition, we need to identify roadblocks to road safety such as illegal hoardings, poor construction quality, and improper water drainage, and eliminate them. Countries like [Japan](#) have implemented Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS) (which helps in automated emergency braking and lane-keeping assist) and V2X Technology (Vehicle-to-Everything), which allows the vehicles to communicate with each other and with road infrastructure, providing real-time traffic information and warnings to drivers. This ultimately reduces collisions.

Road Safety Week is an opportunity to discuss how stakeholders — from governments to civil society — can take collective action to address the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.

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