

HAITI

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2021



Letter from the Chair



During the past 18 months the list of health care systems that have been destroyed or severely compromised by war-related violence lengthened. Three-quarters of the health facilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region were destroyed or damaged in the conflict that began in November 2020. In the now-forgotten conflict in Gaza in the spring of 2021, 30 health facilities were damaged. In Myanmar the public health system has all but collapsed since the coup in February 2021, because many hospitals have been occupied by the military, while COVID-19, HIV, TB, and malaria programs stalled and 300 health workers were arrested. Then in February 2022 Russia began attacking hospitals, ambulances, and health workers during its invasion of Ukraine. By the end of April 2022, The World Health Organizations confirmed almost 200 such attacks.

The past year was marked by continued international failure to prevent such attacks and hold perpetrators to account. Governments' expressions of horror at the violence continued without being accompanied by action. By the fifth anniversary of the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2286, in which governments committed to concrete actions to prevent such attacks and increase accountability, very little had been done. Nor did the Security Council consider new course corrections to implement the resolution's requirements.

At the same time, one of the foundations of action, the WHO's systems for tracking attacks, remained inadequate to its function. Except for reporting in Myanmar and Ukraine, where widespread attention increased pressure to collect data, the system severely under-reported incidents. In Ethiopia, despite the effective destruction of the health system and the murder of health workers in Tigray region and other attacks in Afar and Amhara regions, the WHO reported zero attacks in the country for the whole of 2021. This failure no doubt contributed to the lack of global attention to the dire situation in Ethiopia. When the WHO system did report, it continued to withhold information essential to understanding what took place and where attacks occurred.

There were some advances in the area of accountability. Germany obtained a conviction of a Syrian war criminal under principles of universal jurisdiction (although not for crimes involving attacks on health care). The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) accepted Ukraine's request to investigate alleged war crimes there. But these cases did not address the continuing structural problem that permits the five permanent members of the Security Council to block certain referrals to the ICC, but nevertheless are a sign that accountability may finally be on the increase.

Perhaps 2022 will be an inflection point, as images and reports of attacks on health care and their consequences in Ukraine continue to go viral, accompanied by frequent and loud demands for accountability – but it won't be if the lassitude of the international community continues.



Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

[!\[\]\(6059a5aa8b4ca7bb793408023d6c6e42_img.jpg\) Methodology | Full Report](#)



On August 25, 2021 armed perpetrators kidnapped a female NGO health worker while she was on her way to work in Haiti's Ouest department. The victim worked as a laboratory technician and had collaborated with a local hospital and prenatal clinic for over 15 years. As a result of the attack the NGO closed all its institutions in Haiti except for a hospital A&E department until the victim was released on August 28.¹

REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



15
REPORTED INCIDENTS



8
HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED

↓ Source: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 15 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Haiti in 2021, compared to six in 2020. Non-state armed groups affiliated to gangs equipped with firearms were named as perpetrators in all 15 incidents. At least eight health workers were kidnapped in these incidents.

This factsheet is based on the dataset [2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data](#), which is available for download on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).

THE CONTEXT

Haiti has been in a permanent state of political instability since 2004. In July 2021 the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse plunged the country even further into chaos and created a power vacuum that has further undermined the rule of law and led to increasing violence. Rival political groupings are unable to agree on a way forward for the country to develop effective governance and address security and other crucial issues.

Armed gangs are the main source of violence against health care. Gangs have controlled the poorer districts of the capital, Port-au-Prince, for years. Increasingly gangs rely on paramilitary structures to fill the current void in governance. This has also increased the conflict among rival gangs (of which there are around 95) and has manifested itself in violent disputes over fuel, food, and medical supplies.²

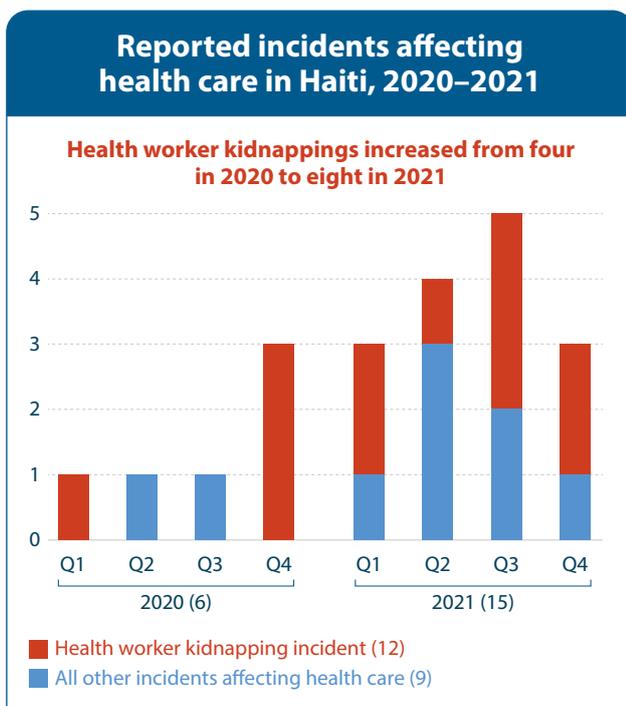


The largest and most powerful of the gangs is currently G9 (formerly G9 Fanmi ak Alye or G9 Family and Allies). G9 was a federation of gangs brokered and led by a former police officer, Jimmy Chérizier, which formed in 2020. This alliance gave Chérizier control of Port-au-Prince’s downtown area, including the Martissant commune. G9 is opposed by Ti Lapli, which controls the Grand Ravine area, and 400 Mawozo, which was responsible for the kidnapping of a group of Canadian and US missionaries in October 2021. 400 Mawozo controls the commune of Croix Des-Bouquets, which is just east of Port-au-Prince.

Gangs have been blamed for the increase in kidnappings throughout Haiti, and health workers have been affected along with other civilians.³ Most kidnappings are for ransom.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program has included one-sided violence by gangs in its dataset since 2020. Targeted violence by gang members against health workers was also first recorded in 2020, and has since increased.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2021



Overall, 15 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were reported in Haiti in 2021, compared to six in 2020. Health worker kidnappings increased from four in 2020 to eight in 2021. All were abducted on their own in separate incidents in Ouest department either outside a hospital, or at home, or as they traveled to or from work. Most were doctors and some worked for NGOs. Two kidnapped health workers sustained gunshot injuries while resisting their kidnappers.⁴ In most other cases the health worker was released the same day or after between one and four days. A ransom was paid to release a female doctor who had been held for four days.⁵ The status of two obstetricians and an orthopedic surgeon is still unclear.⁶

LOCATIONS OF INCIDENTS

Over half the incidents were reported in **Martissant**, Port-au-Prince, where gang-related violence against health care is at its highest. An orthopedic surgeon was kidnapped, and a nurse shot and killed when gang members fired at the ambulance she was in. Two INGO health vehicles were robbed in a suspected carjacking spree.⁷ Health facilities, including an INGO emergency center that served a community of 300,000 people, were forced to suspend their activities for a week to safeguard staff and patients because street fighting broke out between gangs. Incidents were also reported in other areas of Port-au-Prince.

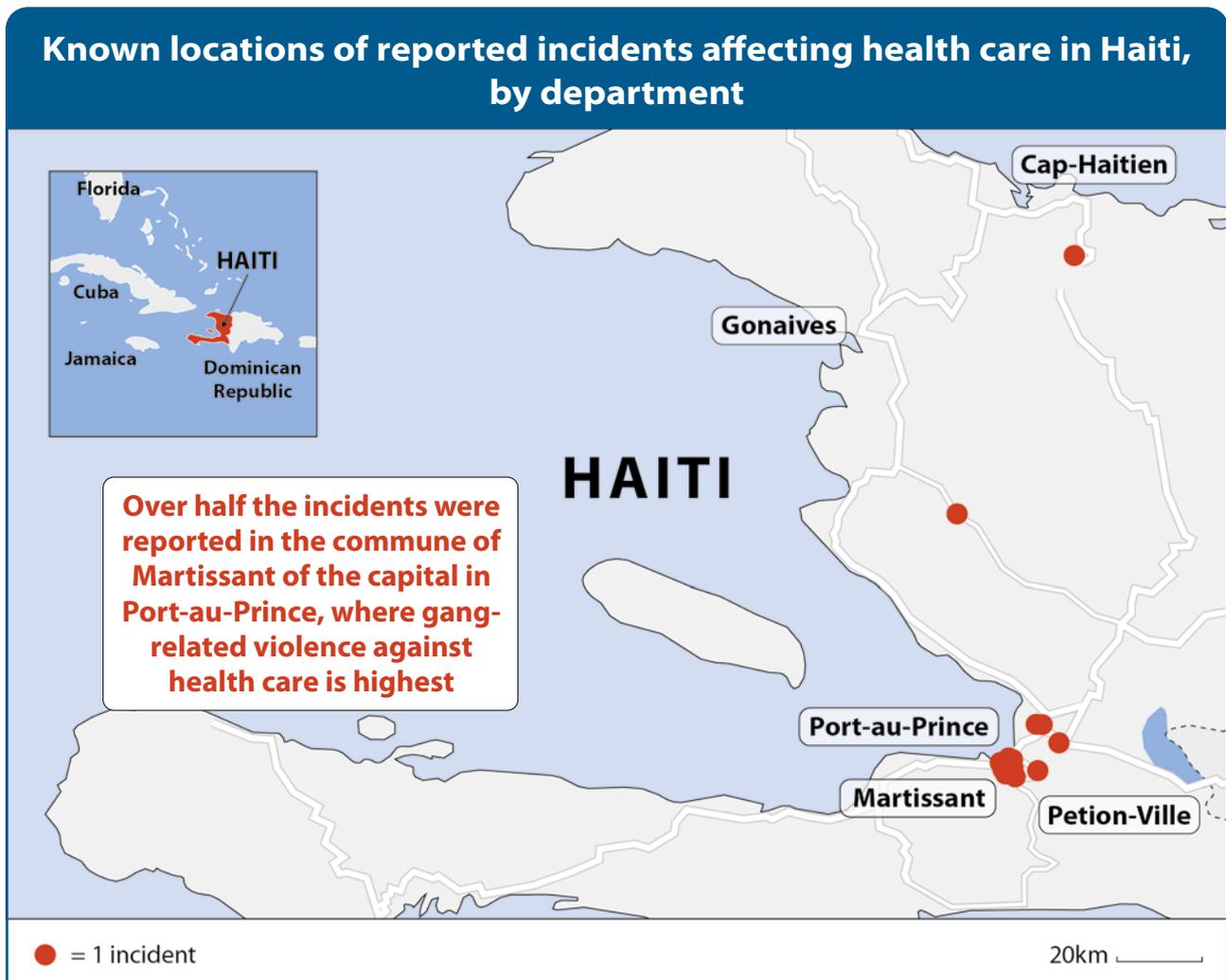


- In **Bois Vernad** a dental surgeon and his wife were both shot in an attempted kidnapping in December.⁸
- In **Petionville** a doctor was kidnapped on his way to the hospital he worked at in March.⁹ In April a marked INGO vehicle was shot at while a staff member was inside. The staff member was wounded.¹⁰ In August an obstetrics surgeon was kidnapped.¹¹
- In **Tabarre** an NGO volunteer doctor and her son were kidnapped from their home, prompting the NGO to shut down its health care activities, including Saint-Damien Hospital. Both were rescued by police after two days on May 3.¹²

Additionally, in **Croix-des-Bouquet, Ouest department** a health worker was shot in a kidnapping attempt inside a hospital in March.¹³ An NGO health worker was kidnapped on her way to work in August.¹⁴

In **Acul-du-Nord, Nord department** gang members, some armed with machetes and guns, shot at and damaged 13 ambulances parked outside a hospital, then set the facility on fire in November. Their intended target was a patient who had been injured during a voodoo ceremony. The hospital was temporarily closed as a result of the attack.¹⁵

In **Verrettes, Artibonite department**, where there is a strong gang presence, a Ministry of Public Health and Population ambulance was shot at while traveling in March.¹⁶





IMPACT ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE



Health workers

Health workers who have experienced kidnapping do not always return to work because of the psychological impact on them,¹⁷ which can be long lasting, and which further depletes the number of available health care staff.



Health services

MSF described the nation's health system as *'being on the brink of collapse amid an escalating political and economic crisis.'* Hospitals in Port-au-Prince struggled to cope with the aftermath of the earthquake in August 2021 as escalating levels of violence between armed gangs prevented both staff and supplies, including fuel for hospital generators, from reaching them. Patients, in turn, were afraid to make the journey to health facilities for fear of being attacked on route.¹⁸

Over 19,000 people were displaced from Port-au-Prince because of violence and are currently living in displacement sites such as schools, stadiums, and churches. Overcrowding and lack of sanitation means both waterborne diseases and COVID-19 are spreading at these sites. Sexual violence against women and girls has been reported across all the sites, but many victims are reluctant to seek help for fear of further attacks and reprisals. MSF is deploying mobile health clinics to these areas.¹⁹



Access to health care

MSF had to close a hospital in Martissant, Port-au-Prince in late June after doctors and patients were the target of an armed gang attack.²⁰ Health facilities, including an INGO emergency center that served a community of 300,000 people, were forced to suspend their activities for a week to safeguard staff and patients when street fighting between gangs broke out nearby.²¹

Multiple patient deaths were also directly linked to kidnappings of health workers when critically ill patients died because their surgeon or physician had been abducted and therefore prevented from providing vital medical care. For instance, an obstetrics surgeon was kidnapped while on route to perform an emergency caesarean in Petionville in August. Both the mother and baby died as a result.²² In other cases health workers went on strike or health organizations temporarily suspended their services following a colleague's kidnapping, disrupting service delivery.



- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29102.
- 2 <https://bit.ly/Jan2022Haiti>.
- 3 According to the UN, kidnappings tripled to 234 cases in 2020 compared to 2019, with the real figures likely to be much higher due to under-reporting because people fear reprisals from the criminal gangs who carry them out. Since the assassination of President Moïse, the UN noted in early October that kidnappings were again on the rise, especially in Port-au-Prince and along Route No. 2 motorway, as gangs tried to extend their power, using kidnapping as both a weapon and a way of extorting money, e.g. CARDH reported more than 782 kidnappings for ransom in 2021 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-58993730>).
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 27690; 30373.
- 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30069.
- 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29693; 29694.
- 7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29694; 27690; 28660.
- 8 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30373.
- 9 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30845.
- 10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30845.
- 11 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29693.
- 12 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 28227.
- 13 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 27690.
- 14 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 27690; 29102.
- 15 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30095.
- 16 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29110.
- 17 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/gangs-abduct-doctors-haiti-including-needed-surgeon-79542435>.
- 18 <https://msf.org.uk/article/haiti-how-one-hospital-adapted-tumultuous-year>.
- 19 <https://www.msf.org/unbearable-insecurity-haiti-amidst-violence-and-economic-crisis>.
- 20 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 30069.
- 21 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 28548; <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/haiti-political-upheaval-and-natural-disaster/>.
- 22 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Haiti Health Data. Incident number 29693.

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators.

www.safeguardinghealth.org

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