

YEMEN

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2021



**SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT**



**Insecurity
Insight**
Data on People in Danger

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Len Rubenstein'.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

 [Methodology | Full Report](#)



On September 25, 2021, a hospital in Marib city was damaged by missiles fired by Houthi forces.¹

REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



↓ Source: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 20 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Yemen in 2021, a marked decrease from 2020, when 81 incidents were documented.² Seven health facilities were damaged or destroyed by explosive weapons use and six health workers were injured in these incidents.

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

THE CONTEXT

The war in Yemen entered its seventh year in 2021, having started in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) led a military coalition against the Houthi-led forces³ who had taken over the capital, Sana'a. Although 2021 saw a decrease in violent incidents during the first two quarters, conflict increased in the last few months of the year. Saudi Arabia and the UAE conducted air strikes against Houthi-led forces, and fighting became concentrated in the Al Hudaydah, Marib, and Saada governorates. In February 2021 the Houthis launched an offensive to seize Marib city, the last remaining stronghold of Yemen's internationally recognized government.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2021

Half of all documented incidents of violence against health care in Yemen in 2021 reported the use of explosive weapons. Both Saudi-led coalition forces and non-state armed groups, including Houthi rebels, have been named as perpetrators of these incidents.



Drone strikes of an unidentified origin hit and damaged two ambulances responding to victims of a fire caused by missiles at a fuel station in June in Marib governorate.⁴ Houthi forces fired missiles damaging two hospitals in Marib governorate in September and October.⁵

Incidents were documented in nine of Yemen's 21 governorates and were most frequent in Amanat Al Asimah governorate, in which the capital, Sana'a, constitutes a separate administrative district. This is a marked change from 2020, when most incidents were reported in Taizz and Al Hudaydah governorates.

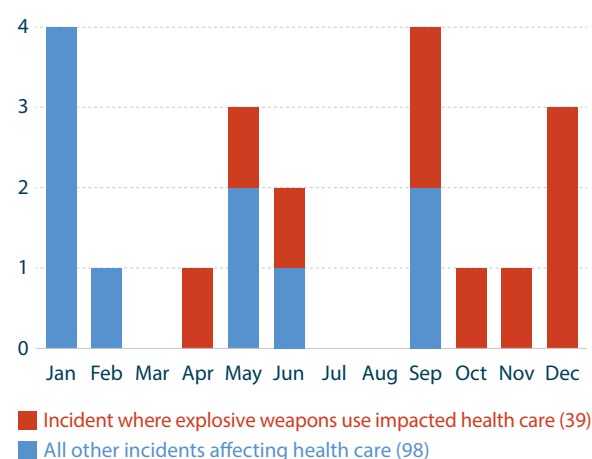
As in previous years, incidents continued to be reported in Marib governorate where heavy fighting between Yemeni government forces and the Houthi-led armed group continued.

Gunmen stormed hospitals on at least six occasions in 2021. At least two health workers were shot and killed and another injured in these armed raids.

In 2021 air and drone strikes, missiles, and hand grenades damaged at least seven hospitals and two ambulances, killing one health worker and injuring two others. These incidents increased in the last four months of 2021, when Saudi-led coalition air strikes in Amanat Al Asimah governorate damaged three health facilities.⁶ Coalition air strikes also damaged two hospitals, one in Amanat Al Asimah in April and the other in Saada in May.⁷

Reported incidents affecting health care in Yemen in 2021, by month

Explosive weapons use impacting health care increased in the last four months of 2021

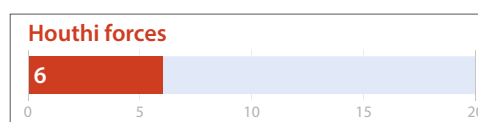


PERPETRATORS



Houthi, Saudi-led coalition, Yemeni National Resistance, and Al Islah forces were all named as perpetrators of violence against or obstruction of health care in Yemen in 2021. In most cases the perpetrators were armed with firearms and/or used explosive weapons including air-launched weapons, missiles and on one occasion a grenade.

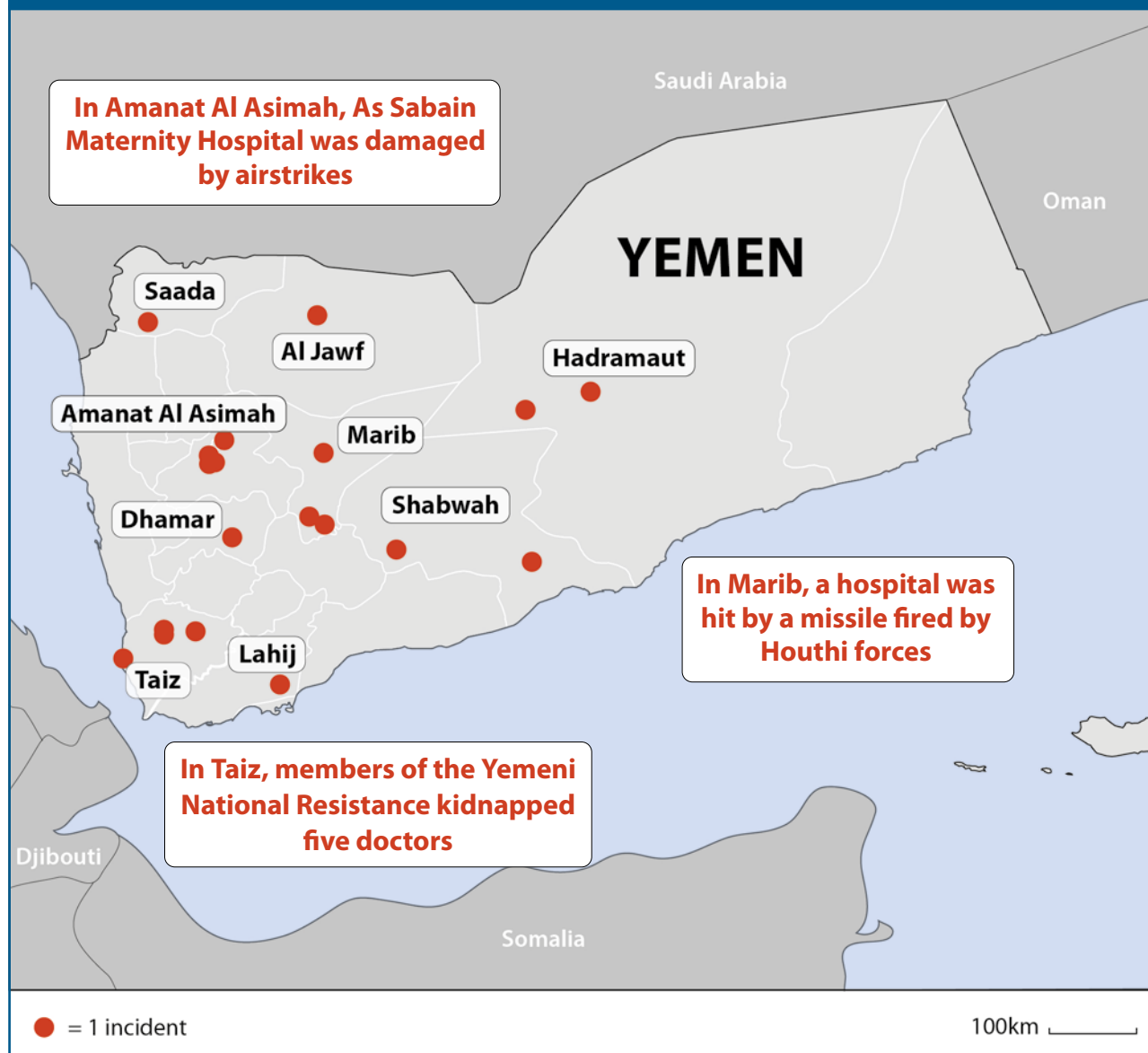
Houthi-led forces in Marib governorate fired missiles damaging two hospitals in September and October.⁸ In addition, in January they stormed a hospital in Al Jawf governorate and assaulted three health workers in Dhamar governorate, allegedly to coerce state workers to participate in upcoming demonstrations.⁹



In Taizz a **Houthi fighter** shot and killed a doctor and his brother in May, allegedly due to an earlier argument between the two. Two other civilians, including a child, were also injured.¹⁰ **Houthi** authorities in Sana'a and parts of northern governorates under their control reportedly concealed information about virus prevalence and blocked international efforts to supply COVID-19 vaccines during June.¹¹



Known locations of reported incidents affecting health care in Yemen in 2021, by governorate



Saudi-led coalition air strikes in Amanat Al Asimah governorate struck and damaged a hospital in April, an under-construction medical facility in November, and As Sabain Maternity Hospital and a hospital near a prison holding prisoners of war in December.¹²



Saudi-led coalition air strikes in Saada governorate struck and damaged a hospital, killing a health worker and injuring two others.¹³ In Taizz governorate an air strike hit and damaged a vehicle belonging to the Taizz local health office in December.¹⁴



Al Islah forces in Shabwah governorate assaulted a doctor outside his private clinic in September after he refused to let a patient jump the queue.¹⁵



In January **Yemeni National Resistance** fighters in Taizz governorate stormed the home of five doctors and kidnapped them. At time of writing all are reportedly still being held by the group and have been forced to care for its members.¹⁶



Unidentified non-state armed groups in Lahij governorate opened fire near the Ibn Khaldun Hospital in January, killing a nurse, and in May fired shots outside a medical center, killing one civilian and injuring five others in an alleged tribal dispute related to a vengeance-related issue. Other reports claim the attack was related to COVID-19 vaccinations.¹⁷ In September **unidentified non-state armed groups** in Taizz governorate stole health care materials from a mobile clinic and threw a grenade into a pharmacy. In Hadhramaut governorate a civilian was killed in crossfire at a hospital in February.¹⁸



IMPACT ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE



Health services

In early 2022 the WHO reported that only 50% of health facilities in Yemen were fully functioning, and those that remained open lacked both staff and supplies.¹⁹ Yemen continues to experience chronic shortages of medical supplies and staff.²⁰



Access to health care

At the end of 2021 an estimated 20.1 million people, or almost 70% of the total population in the country, lacked access to basic health care,²¹ while an estimated 3 million people had been displaced. The lack of access to health care combined with dire living conditions had a widespread impact on the Yemeni people.

The UN estimated that the maternal mortality ratio in Yemen in 2017 was 164 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. This was about five times the average in the Middle East. In August 2021 the Health Cluster estimated that more than half of deliveries occurred under risky conditions without a skilled caregiver.²²

In 2021 cases of malnutrition, particularly in children, increased by over 40% compared with 2020. This in turn made them more vulnerable to disease.²³

There was a resurgence of cases of infectious diseases. The cholera outbreak that began in 2016 and the diphtheria outbreak that began in 2017 continued in 2021,²⁴ while 16 cases of polio were recorded that were linked to children being unvaccinated.²⁵

Vaccination can prevent cholera, diphtheria, and polio, but regular population-based vaccination campaigns have not been conducted in Yemen since 2019. Ongoing violence and unrest mean that there is no prospect of widespread vaccinations restarting. Instead, NGOs such as MSF are using mobile clinics to try and conduct localized vaccination campaigns.



- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 29835
- 2 <https://shcc.pub/2021SHCCYemen>.
- 3 Ansar Allah is the official name of the movement, which draws its leadership and fighters largely from the Houthis tribe.
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 28525.
- 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 29835; 29744.
- 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 30728; 30732; 30303.
- 7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 27788; 28208.
- 8 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 29835; 29744.
- 9 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 26988; 26991.
- 10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 28207.
- 11 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 28545.
- 12 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 27788; 30728; 30732; 30303
- 13 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 28208.
- 14 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 30738.
- 15 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 29290.
- 16 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 26958.
- 17 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 26993; 28256.
- 18 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC Yemen Health Data. Incident number 27286.
- 19 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/yemen-crisis>.
- 20 <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/supporting-yemen-s-healthcare-workforce>.
- 21 <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/unfpa-response-yemen-situation-report-issue-3-october-december-2021>.
- 22 <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-health-cluster-bulletin-july-and-august-2021>.
- 23 <https://msf.org.uk/article/yemen-how-conflict-and-poverty-combine-against-mothers-and-children>.
- 24 <http://www.emro.who.int/yemen/news/emergency-health-and-nutrition-project-continues-the-fight-against-cholera-in-yemen.html>; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247\(21\)00094-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247(21)00094-X/fulltext).
- 25 <https://polioeradication.org/where-we-work/polio-outbreak-countries/yemen/>; <http://www.emro.who.int/yemen/priority-areas/polio.html>.

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

Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition
615 N. Wolfe Street, E7143, Baltimore, MD 21205
Jenny Jun, safeguardinghcc@gmail.com