

Mexico

The proliferation of criminal organisations in Mexico that display increasingly aggressive behaviour is spreading across the whole country. This violence now also affects health care workers.

- Nine events of violence against health care providers were reported between April and July 2020. The perpetrators are not always clearly identifiable. Not all violence can be ascribed to convolutions of organised crime.
- Several vigilante groups, set up to protect communities from criminal predators, not only clash with criminal groups but, in seizing territory and resorting to extreme violence, some of these autodefensas have started to resemble criminals themselves.
- The increasing spread of such violence, in particular in the Guerrero region, appears to be linked to fragmentation in criminal groups that followed the killing of criminal overlord Arturo Beltrán Leyva in 2009. Since then, organised crime in the state has spread geographically, broadening its range of activities and becoming more dangerous to locals – above all, to those individuals it targets for extortion or suspects of helping competitors. This general violence is now also affecting health professionals and health centres.

Reported conflict-related events affecting health care in Mexico, by state (January-July 2020)



Since April, seven Mexican health workers have been killed and fourteen kidnapped, and two hospitals have been stormed.

- Two female health workers were shot and killed in the street on 24 June in Veracruz and on 24 July in Guerrero, and the bodies of five health workers were found on 8 May in Coahuila, 18 June in Morelos and on 21 June in Guerrero. The body of a transgender doctor was discovered on the side of the highway in Morelos on 18 June, in a suspected transphobic attack. She had been reported missing ten days earlier.
- Fourteen health workers were victims of ‘virtual kidnappings’ in May by criminal gangs demanding money from their families. The health workers, who were in Mexico City to help battle COVID-19, were threatened via phone or video calls, with the criminals claiming they had control of the hotel surveillance cameras and warning the workers would be attacked if they tried to leave. They were rescued on 19 May from two hotels in the Tacubaya district by police searching for another kidnap victim.
- Armed groups stormed two hospitals in April in Veracruz and Sonora and another in May in Guerrero, killing patients in suspected targeted attacks. It is unclear if the victims were members of rival gangs or if they were killed in order to silence them.
- Most events took place in Guerrero and Veracruz states, the areas most affected by increasingly violent conflicts between organised groups. However, other incidents have been reported in Mexico City, the Coahuila, Morelos and Sonora states, reflecting the increasing spread of violence across the country. According to the International Crisis Group, there are no indications that these competing groups have any intention of ceasing their activities as a result of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

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Insecurity Insight follows the UDCP definition of armed conflict: Conflict is defined as a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. Incompatibility describes the disagreement between at least two parties based on the fact that both make claims to the same scarce resources, such as territory, power or material resources. The context of violence is not categorised according to the conflict party's possible ‘political’ as opposed to ‘criminal’ goals but looks at where violence is organized by identifiable groups. According to UDCP's definition, violence can be ‘state-based violence’, ‘non-state violence’ or ‘one-sided violence’ against civilians. With regard to violence against health care providers, only incidents are included that are perpetrated in the context of a conflict party's wider goal, including criminal or economic objectives, whereas criminal violence against individual health workers are excluded.