

MEXICO

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2024



**SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT**



**Insecurity
Insight**
Data on People in Danger

Letter from the Chair



Assaults on health care in conflicts around the world reached new levels of horror in 2024, exceeding 3,600 incidents, 15% more than in 2023. They consisted of air, missile, and drone strikes; shelling; tank fire; shootings; arson; the looting and takeover of health facilities; and the arrest and detention of health workers. As the descriptions in this report show, each incident brings terror, trauma, and - in too many cases - injury, untreated illness, destruction and death.

By far the largest number of attacks on health care – more than 1,300 – took place in Gaza and the West Bank, far more than we have ever reported in one conflict in one year, including more than double the number of health workers killed. Gaza properly drew global attention for the ferocity and relentlessness of assaults on health care. But we must also reckon with the more than 2,300 attacks in other conflicts, including the hundreds in each of Ukraine, Lebanon, Myanmar and Sudan. The cumulative number of attacks over the course of wars that began in the past three years include more than 1,500 in Myanmar since the military coup in 2021; close to 2,000 in Ukraine since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and more than 500 since the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023.

This onslaught of violence has been accompanied by attempts by perpetrators to limit legal protections for health care and civilians in war, driven, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) puts it, by a desire to have more “leeway to kill and detain.” Israel has sought to dilute legal requirements of precaution and proportionality during conflict. The new U.S. secretary of defense has called for “a law of war for winners.” Simultaneously, campaigns to delegitimize the International Criminal Court (ICC) are underway. The newly inaugurated U.S. president Donald Trump imposed sanctions on ICC staff and even their families for having charged Israelis with war crimes. In 2023, Russia’s Duma passed legislation criminalizing cooperation with the ICC or any foreign court or ad hoc tribunal that seeks to hold Russians to account. Hungary announced its plan to withdraw from the ICC, falsely alleging political bias.

These terrible developments threaten to make a mockery of the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 2286 in 2026 and the 50th anniversary of the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions (the law protecting health workers and civilians during armed conflict) in 2027. If this resolution and law are to be more than words, the current approach to protection, amounting to mere admonitions, must be replaced by centering accountability, accompanied by the political will to drive it.

That is the approach long taken by the Coalition, and recently taken by a report *In the Line of Fire*, issued in November 2024 by the World Health Organization and the World Innovation Summit for Health. It called for a new alliance of member states, UN agencies, and NGOs. It recognized that the renewal of long-ignored commitments could not possibly suffice. Instead, UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society organizations must rally together to take tough action, including outreach to the International Criminal Court, to impose consequences on the perpetrators of violence. Actions must include states cutting off arms transfers to perpetrators of attacks and employing the power of universal jurisdiction to prosecute. If the laws of humanity are to be upheld and the carnage is to end, governments and all concerned citizens everywhere must find the political courage and will to act.





A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Len Rubenstein". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

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REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS

 REPORTED INCIDENTS	 INCIDENTS WHERE HEALTH FACILITIES WERE ATTACKED	 HEALTH WORKERS KILLED	 HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED
2024			
28	18	6	4
2023			
12	4	6	9
2022			
14	9	3	5

↓ Source: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 28 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Mexico in 2024, compared to 12 in 2023 and 14 in 2022. In these incidents, six health workers were killed and four kidnapped, and health facilities were attacked 18 times.

-  Deepening insecurity and health care challenges became increasingly evident amid rising armed group violence in Chiapas, Baja California, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Quintana Roo, and Guerrero states.
-  Health facilities became battlegrounds when hospitalized patients were fatally shot or kidnapped by armed individuals.
-  A climate of insecurity, burnout, and fear among health workers undermined the ability of Mexico's health care system to provide equitable and effective care.

Information on incidents of violence against health care in Mexico is compiled from open sources, private sources and information projects. See [Methodology](#) for further information.



THE CONTEXT

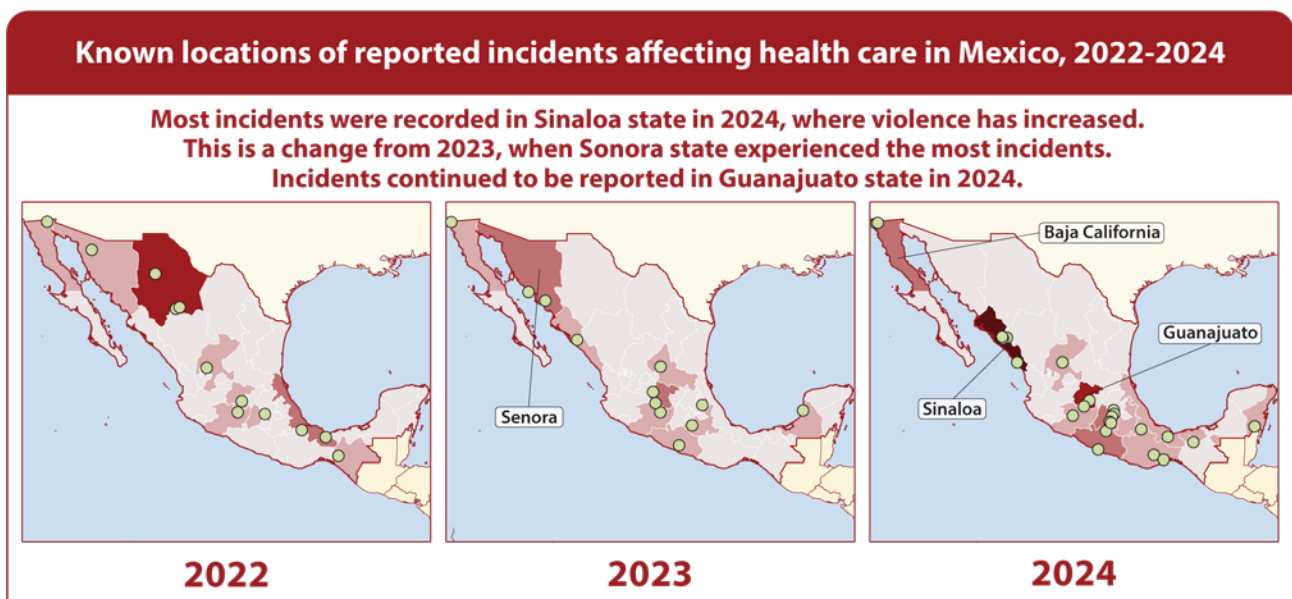
Persistent violence pervades much of Mexico as armed groups and drug cartels fight for territorial control, sometimes using drones to do so. Over 100,000 people have gone missing in the past six years. Armed groups, fueled in part by the fentanyl trade, human trafficking, and financial extortion, continued to drive much of the violence, exacerbating public insecurity particularly in Chiapas, Baja California, Zacatecas, the State of Mexico (which is commonly known as Edomex), Quintana Roo, and Guerrero states. Despite a new security strategy led by President Sheinbaum, reducing insecurity remains a challenge and only 1% of crimes are prosecuted.

Mexico's health care system faced immense challenges in 2024. The dismantling of Seguro Popular, the country's public health insurance program, has left millions without health insurance and doubled the number of people without access to adequate care.

Disparities in health care access persisted, particularly for indigenous and rural populations, who continued to experience systemic discrimination. The many people on the move in Mexico, including refugees and asylum seekers, are often barred from accessing health care, even through a recent study showed that more than half require medical attention.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2024

Incidents of reported violence against or obstruction of health care more than doubled in Mexico between 2022 and 2024, reflecting the wider deterioration in security over this period. Sinaloa and Guanajuato were the most affected states, followed by Baja California, coinciding with high levels of violence in these areas. Armed violence inside hospitals, clinics and pharmacies rose in 2024, particularly in Sinaloa state. A similar number of health workers were killed and kidnapped in 2024 as in previous years.



Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition



The majority of attacks were attributed to unidentified men with guns. On one occasion, an improvised explosive device (IED) was found and safely defused inside a hospital in Sinaloa state, and in another attack two ambulances were set on fire in Guanajuato state.¹

Most cases affected health care providers working for national health structures, with one incident each affecting an NGO and a private health organization.²

Health facilities attacked

Hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies were attacked on at least 18 occasions in 2024, compared to four such incidents in 2023 and nine in 2022. Hospitals and pharmacies often became battlegrounds for gang violence when hospitalized patients were fatally shot or kidnapped by armed individuals. In some cases, health workers were harmed. For example, in Baja California state, armed men entered a pharmacy and opened fire, killing a man and injuring a doctor and another employee. Two non-health workers were also abducted.³

In other incidents, hospital staff were threatened and coerced by armed perpetrators to treat their injured associates. For example, a group of approximately 50 people, including at least ten armed men, arrived at José Maria Rodriguez Hospital and took control of the facility for at least 12 hours, demanding priority medical attention for three people with gunshot wounds. Shots were fired in the air and staff were threatened with violence if the treatment of these people was not prioritized.⁴

Health workers killed and kidnapped

Six health workers were killed in five incidents in 2024, compared to six in five incidents in 2023 and three in three incidents in 2022. Victims included doctors, paramedics, nurses and medical facility directors. Some were killed in shootings at medical facilities and ambushes on ambulances.

Kidnappings also continued. Between April and December 2024, four health workers were kidnapped in four incidents, compared to nine in five incidents in 2023 and five in four incidents in 2022. Two health workers were found tied up and dead after disappearing. At least one of these cases was linked to financial extortion.⁵ Other health workers were kidnapped for ransom and because of their perceived political connections. One kidnapped doctor was released unharmed after one day of captivity, while the fates of the remaining staff members were not recorded.⁶

Attacks on emergency medical services

Emergency medical services were attacked on three occasions in 2024. The actual number of incidents is likely higher due to under-reporting. Two paramedics and a patient were shot and killed and an ambulance driver and paramedic shot and injured in these attacks. In one instance, an ambulance responding to a false call was ambushed and shot at in Guerrero state, leaving a paramedic injured.⁷



This factsheet is based on 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Download the data [here](#) or on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange](#) (HDX).



THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

Ongoing violence in Mexico severely impacts health workers and the broader health care system. Criminal groups have frequently targeted health facilities: in Guanajuato state, where many criminal groups operate, attacks on rehabilitation centers have become a deadly tactic in turf wars between rival gangs. This violence not only endangers patients and staff, but also deters people from seeking care.

In addition to physical violence, health workers face threats when treating people involved in migration and organized crime. Many medical professionals providing care to migrants, who are often victims of kidnapping, torture and abuse, operate in environments with high levels of insecurity.

These conditions create a climate of insecurity, burnout, and fear among health workers, undermining the ability of Mexico's health care system to provide equitable and effective care.

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- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 88085; 46785.
 - 2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 84656; 87044.
 - 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 84469.
 - 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 87976.
 - 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 84471.
 - 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 87956; 88092.
 - 7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 MEX SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 44001.

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.

<https://safeguarding-health.com>

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