

NIGERIA

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	 HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED	 INCIDENTS WHERE HEALTH SUPPLIES WERE LOOTED
2024		
32	35	11
2023		
26	24	2
2022		
47	37	11

↓ Source: 2022-2024 SHCC Health Care Nigeria Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 32 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Nigeria in 2024, compared to 26 in 2023 and 47 in 2022. In these incidents, 35 health workers were kidnapped and medical supplies were looted.

-  Escalating insecurity strained health care systems and displaced large numbers of people.
-  Attacks on health care more than tripled in the BAY states between 2023 and 2024.
-  Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara states reported significant health care access disruptions, with local health centers inoperable for extended periods.

Information on incidents of violence against health care in Nigeria is compiled from open sources, aid agency data-sharing mechanisms, information projects and private sources. See [Methodology](#) for further information.

THE CONTEXT

Heightened insecurity continued to impact Nigeria in 2024, driven by multiple armed groups across different regions. In the northeast BAY (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) states, Boko Haram and Islamic State



West Africa Province (ISWAP) militants carried out attacks, while in the northwest, criminal bandit groups were responsible for widespread kidnappings and killings. In the southeast, anti-government groups linked to separatist movements also contributed to insecurity and instability.

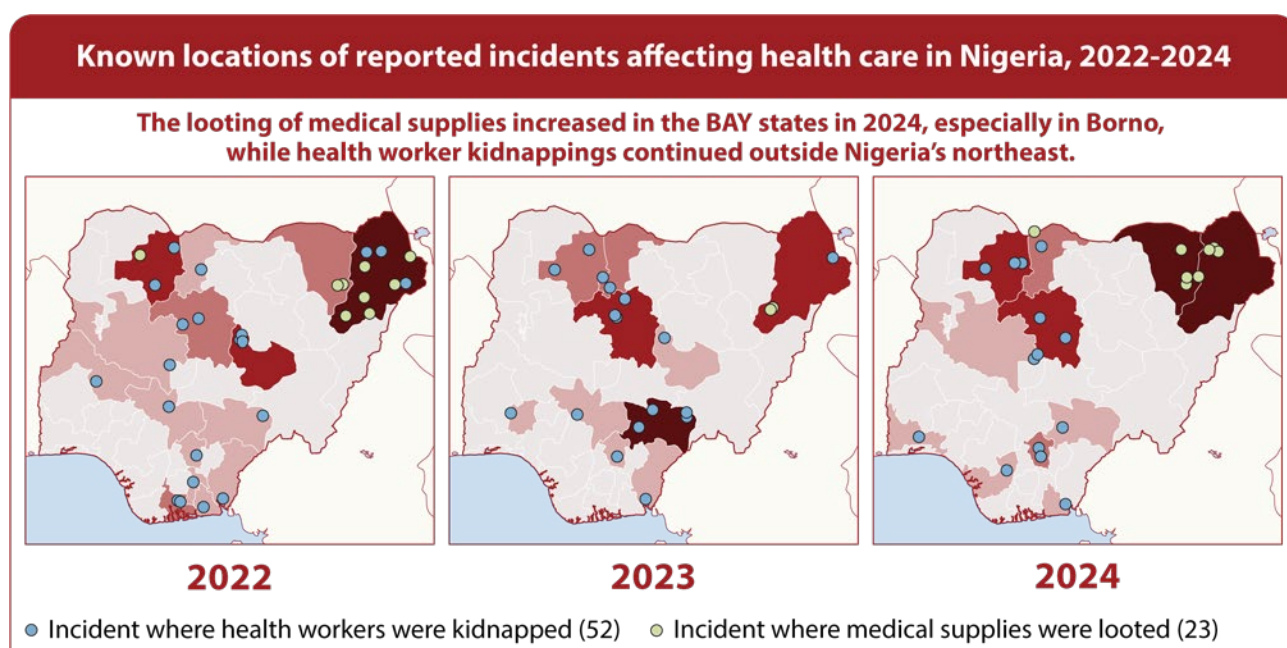
In 2024, northeastern Nigeria was devastated by severe flooding triggered by the collapse of the Alau Dam following heavy rainfall, which displaced nearly two million people and destroyed vital infrastructure, including health care facilities. Thousands of people were forced to seek refuge in emergency shelters that lacked adequate services, where risks such as gender-based violence, child separation, and theft were reported, particularly impacting women and children. Amid this crisis, a cholera outbreak erupted, fueled by contaminated water sources, poor sanitation, and widespread open defecation, leading to over 10,000 suspected cases and more than 350 deaths nationwide, with children under five especially vulnerable.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2024

In 2024, reported incidents of violence against or obstruction of health more than tripled in the BAY states, especially in Borno, which experienced severe flooding, disease outbreaks, and continued Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies. Incidents continued to be recorded in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states, where communal militia carried out coordinated armed assaults on villages. New cases were reported in Niger, Ogun and Sokoto states.

The looting of medical supplies increased in Borno, while health worker kidnappings rose in other conflict-affected regions. The majority of incidents were attributed to unidentified men armed with guns. In Borno, a Boko Haram suicide bomber targeted mourners near a hospital, while ISWAP looted medical supplies from health centers. In Sokoto, a militia member shot, injured and robbed a nurse on his way home from work.¹

Most incidents affected health care providers working for national health structures, with four incidents affecting local NGOs.²



Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition



Health workers killed and kidnapped

In total, 35 health workers were kidnapped in 15 incidents in Nigeria in 2024, compared to 24 in 18 incidents in 2023 and 37 in 22 incidents in 2023. Victims included doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and hospital staff kidnapped by gunmen and militia from hospitals, clinics, while traveling to remote areas to provide care, or in public spaces. Nineteen medical students and a doctor in Benue state were freed, however, after an NGN 50 million (approximately USD 31,160) ransom demand was paid. Others, including a Kaduna pharmacist, who was abducted with 14 other civilians while watching football, were tortured and killed.³ The fates of many other kidnapped health workers remained unclear. One kidnapping incident involving nurses took place after an attempted school attack in Kaduna state.⁴

Medical supplies looted

The looting of vital medical supplies from health centers increased in 2024, with all but one in villages and districts in Borno and Yobe states. Armed men, mostly unidentified and armed with rifles, looted medical supplies, ready-to-use therapeutic food, children's vaccines, generators, solar panels, and telecom equipment from health centers, often firing sporadically to instill fear and drive people away. One looting incident included setting fire to a tricycle ambulance, and others were accompanied by damage to and the vandalizing of health centers.⁵



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

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

States that included Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara reported significant disruptions to health care, with entire local health centers being inoperable for extended periods as a result of the violence. Facility closures due to insecurity reduced access to health care in rural and conflict-affected areas and forced residents to travel long distances to state capitals or nearby regions to obtain care.

These challenges exacerbated the country's existing human resource shortages in the health care system, with Nigeria currently reporting only four doctors per 10,000 people, which is far below the WHO's recommended doctor-to-population ratio of 1:1,000.

Violence also affects how communities engage with the health care system. Civilians who have experienced severe insecurity, such as assault or the loss of a household member, demonstrated different health-seeking behaviors compared to others in similarly exposed areas, including lower use of government facilities and lower vaccination rates for children. These patterns indicate that apart from damaging infrastructure and lowering morale, insecurity has a measurable impact on public health outcomes and service utilization.



STILL NO ANSWERS

On November 17, 2022, a Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World, or MdM) staff member was killed by a Nigerian soldier at Damboa military base in Borno state.

Since then, MdM has been calling for complete transparency around the circumstances of the killing. Calls of this kind have been made publicly through a statement published shortly after the incident and privately to both Nigerian civilian and military authorities and UN officials. MdM's repeated call for answers and access to the military report on the incident remain unsuccessful almost three years later.

Full transparency on the circumstances of the attack remains key to ensuring that the motives for the assault are correctly analyzed, and all involved stakeholders need to take measures to improve the safety and security of all humanitarian workers in Nigeria.

- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 NGA SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 60558; 46128; 86627; 45404.
- 2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 NGA SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 92377; 92375; 92373; 92365.
- 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 NGA SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 70495; 56169.
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 NGA SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 84437.
- 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 NGA SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 92375; 92373; 92365; 92371.

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>

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