

PAKISTAN

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 AFFECTING VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS	 HEALTH WORKERS KILLED	 HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED
2024			
39	21	15	7
2023			
12	8	3	6
2022			
16	14	5	3

↓ Source: 2022-2024 PAK SHCC Health Care Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 39 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Pakistan in 2024, compared to 12 in 2023 and 16 in 2022. In these incidents, polio vaccination campaigns came under attack 25 times, while 15 health workers were killed and seven kidnapped.

-  Wild poliovirus type 1 remains endemic in Pakistan, with cases increasing from six in 2023 to 74 in 2024.
-  There was a rise in targeted attacks on polio vaccination teams in the border areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where vaccine hesitancy and mistrust are high.
-  Health worker shortages, rising medication costs and access barriers increased amid widespread distrust of the health care sector.

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



THE CONTEXT

Pakistan continued to face conflicts in 2024, while militant violence and violence against civilians increased.¹ In November 2022, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) resumed violent attacks, primarily in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces and the Afghan-Pakistani border areas, after ending a ceasefire, sparking tensions with Afghanistan and prompting Pakistan to expel Afghan refugees in response. Baloch separatist groups increased violent attacks in Balochistan, fueled by long-standing grievances over resource exploitation, political marginalization and the influx of foreign investments, particularly from China.

National and subnational polio vaccination campaigns were held year-round, including in south Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where ongoing violence threatens the safety of front line polio vaccination program workers. Vaccination teams often require police escorts, which can increase the risk of attacks by militants targeting security personnel.

Pakistan also faced political instability in 2024, marked by escalating violence, electoral controversy and widespread unrest.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2024

Incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care attributed to organized armed actors more than tripled in Pakistan between 2023 and 2024, reflecting broader instability, growing tensions, and violence during the government polio vaccination campaign.

Incidents increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's southern districts of Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Malakand, which are known for security challenges and militant activity. Before then, incidents were more prevalent in the province's North and South Waziristan districts. Cases were also recorded in Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh provinces in 2024.

Attacks on polio vaccination workers and their security escorts mostly involved personnel being shot at or threatened. Similarly, health worker killings escalated, and kidnappings continued. The majority of reported incidents were attributed to unidentified men armed with guns. TTP militants were named in eight incidents, most of which targeted polio vaccination campaigns. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by Baloch separatists in Balochistan and TTP militants in Peshawar targeted police and military vehicles near medical facilities.

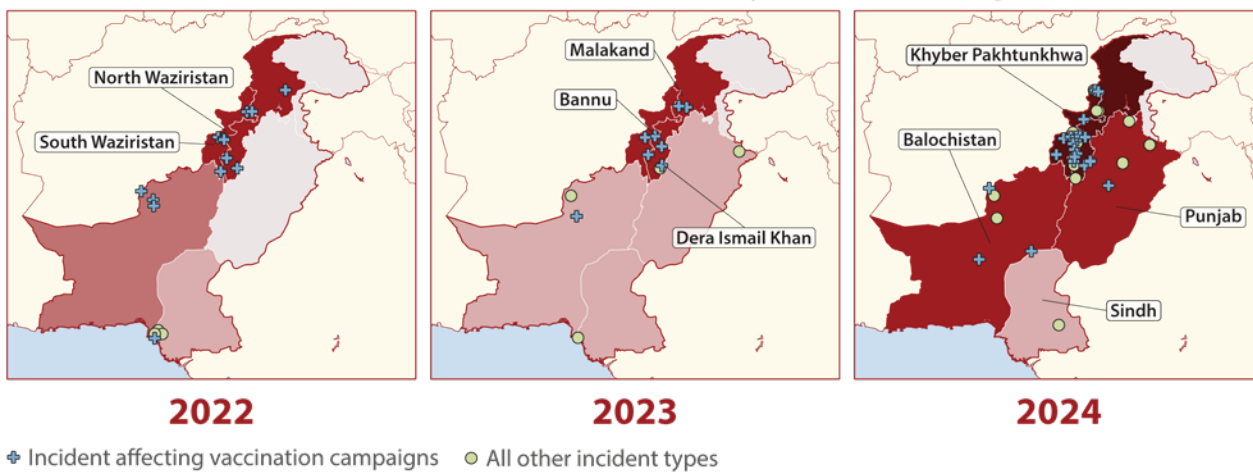
Pakistani intelligence services personnel arrested a Baloch student from a medical college in Punjab and police reportedly killed a doctor accused of sharing blasphemous content on social media in a reported staged encounter in Sindh province. The doctor was first arrested by police in Karachi and later handed over to Mirpur Khas police, who reportedly orchestrated the killing.²

Most cases affected health care providers working for national health structures, with one incident affecting a UN agency.³



Known locations of reported incidents affecting health care in Pakistan, 2022-2024

Incidents more than tripled between 2023 and 2024, with high numbers impacting polio vaccination campaigns in the border areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's southern Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Malakand districts, where vaccine hesitancy and mistrust are high.



Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

Attacks on vaccination campaigns

Threats or violence against polio workers during vaccination drives were reported on 21 occasions in 2024 and were primarily reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, but also occurred in Balochistan, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. In total, three vaccinators were killed, seven injured and four kidnapped by armed groups, including the TTP. Several kidnapped polio workers were released on the condition that they would abandon their work. Armed groups, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have long opposed polio vaccination campaigns, often viewing them as foreign interventions or intelligence operations, although such attacks have also aimed to undermine the government.



ATTACKS ON VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS IN PAKISTAN

For more information on attacks on vaccination campaigns in Pakistan, explore the 'Attacked and Threatened' global map by selecting vaccinations and zooming in on Pakistan. The map is continually updated with new and backdated reports.

Health workers killed

Between January and September 2024, 15 health workers were killed in 12 incidents, an increase from three in three incidents in 2023 and five in five incidents in 2022. As well as the previously mentioned vaccinators, victims included doctors, pharmaceutical employees, and a dentist, who were shot and killed in targeted shootings in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. Some victims were ambushed and killed outside their homes, while others were attacked at their workplaces or while traveling.



Health workers kidnapped

Seven health workers were kidnapped in six incidents in 2024, similar to 2023. Along with the previously mentioned four vaccinators, a doctor and a pediatrician were kidnapped while returning home from work in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces, respectively. Health worker kidnappings were primarily carried out as a form of opposition to vaccination programs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Five kidnapped health workers were released, sometimes after being warned to abandon their work or after the intervention of tribal elders, while others were held for extended periods before their release. The fates of the remaining two staff members were not recorded.⁴



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

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries where wild poliovirus type 1 remains endemic, with polio cases in Pakistan increasing from six in 2023 to 74 in 2024. Outbreaks were mostly concentrated in Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, where vaccination campaigns often face various challenges, including a historic distrust of foreign health providers and vaccine hesitancy due to misinformation and disinformation. As a result, in September 2024, government officials reported that more than a million children had missed their polio vaccination doses. Attacks on vaccination campaigns further undermined efforts to eliminate polio in Pakistan.

- 1 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) database attribution policy, <https://acleddata.com/privacy-policy/> (accessed March 21, 2025).
- 2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 PAK SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 87900; 84659.
- 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 PAK SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 60623.
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 PAK SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 84429; 60623.

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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