

A third of the world's countries and territories were affected by explosive weapons in 2023

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Fouad, nine-year-old, is from Gaza. Seeking refuge at his uncle's house initially, he suffered injuries when a nearby house was bombed upon their return home. | © S. Hejji / HI

On 22 April 2024, International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)* is publishing the Explosive Weapons Monitor 2023. 75 countries and territories have been exposed to explosive violence, says the report.

Staggering death toll

The [Explosive Weapons Monitor 2023](#) is the second global report on the bombing and shelling of towns and cities. The reports says that civilians in at least 75 countries and territories were affected by explosive weapons use in 2023. Civilian deaths caused by explosive weapons increased in 2023 compared to 2022:

In an annual publication that looks into explosive violence worldwide, [Action on Armed Violence \(AOAV\)](#) reports a worrying increase in civilian deaths and incidents caused by explosive weapons worldwide in 2023, with a 122% rise in civilian deaths worldwide compared to the previous year. This means a 69% increase in incidents linked to the use of explosive weapons. Airstrikes would be responsible for 67% of civilian deaths. In cities, 90% of those wounded by airstrikes were civilians.

Monitoring the trends of increase, the Explosive Weapons Monitor 2023 largely attributes this increase to the use of explosive weapons in Palestine. Civilian deaths also increased in other countries and territories in 2023, including Sudan, Myanmar, Syria and Pakistan. Civilian deaths also occurred in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Yemen and Iraq, etc.

Affected vital infrastructures

Explosive weapons were employed in 763 assaults on healthcare facilities across 20 countries and territories in 2023. They were utilized in at least 296 attacks targeting educational institutions spanning 21 countries and territories. The Explosive Weapons Monitor also reports at least 470 attacks aimed at humanitarian aid efforts across 11 countries and territories.

The publication comes six months after the escalation of hostilities in Gaza and two years after the current war in Ukraine, where in both cases explosive weapons are systematically used in populated areas.

In November 2022, 83 States endorsed an international agreement in Dublin to end the harm and suffering caused to civilians by these practices. Today, 86 States have joined the agreement officially known as a “Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.”



Ceremony of the Unknown Civilian at the Dublin Conference, 18 November 2022 © G. Lordet / HI

Fouad, 9, a double victim in Gaza

Fouad, 9, is one of the many victims of bombing and shelling in Gaza. He has been a victim of bombing twice, actually: first, he was directly injured by an explosion when a bomb was dropped on a neighbour house. Secondly, he cannot get the proper medical care he needs due to the heavy bombing and shelling, which has destroyed all medical infrastructures and equipment. He also had to flee and now lives in an overcrowded shelter in Rafah in poor hygienic conditions. Fouad, who could have been easily supported in normal times, is likely to have a permanent disability.



Fouad, 9, suffered injuries when a nearby house was bombed. He underwent surgery on his leg. Subsequent conditions in a shelter exacerbated his wounds, leading to infection and the need for another surgery. His once-active life, filled with soccer and bicycle rides, has been replaced by constant fear of nightmares. Unable to attend school, Fouad longs to return home. © S. Hejji / HI

It is very common for people injured by blast explosions not to be able to access to proper medical care due to intense bombing and shelling that destroy vital infrastructure such as hospitals and force people to flee. In war zones, particularly when explosive weapons are used extensively, the prevalence of impairments in the population increases. In Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and Gaza, entire generations have been mutilated by explosive violence.

“The data from the Explosive Weapons Monitor show a devastating increase in human suffering caused by bombing and shelling. On daily bases, it becomes even more evident that states must take action. Explosive violence has affected 75 countries and territories, accounting for a third of the world's countries and territories. States must immediately implement the international agreement to protect civilians from the consequences of explosive weapons’ use. They must introduce concrete policies to alleviate humanitarian suffering caused by bombing and shelling on towns and cities. We ask for a strong stance from states during the conference in Oslo on April 23, which will be the first implementation conference of this international agreement,” says Alma Taslidžan, HI Arms and Protection of Civilians Advocacy Manager

Unbearable countries and territories

Gaza, territories in Ukraine, Syria, and Yemen, etc. have become unbearable places for people to live after massive bombing and shelling.

Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip and [six months of hostilities](#) has damaged or destroyed more than 60 percent of housing units and annihilated most of the infrastructure in northern and central Gaza.

People who are currently returning to Khan Younes, Gaza, for example, discover a landscape of rubble and debris. The contamination by unexploded ordnance poses a danger to the returning population and impedes any reconstruction that will be impossible without long and complex clearance operations.

A systematic pattern of harms for civilian

Bombing and shelling in populated areas has a systematically indiscriminate impact on civilians. They cause a pattern of harm to civilians that organizations have systematically observed in armed conflicts, and this is exacerbated in densely populated Gaza:

- They kill and injure civilians in the vast majority (worldwide figures establish that 90% of explosive weapons in populated areas affect civilians).
- They cause complex injuries that are difficult to care for and often result in impairments.
- They destroy essential civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and houses.
- They cause massive displacement of populations who try to protect themselves from shelling and bombing.

- They leave heavy contamination from explosive ordnance, preventing the population from returning once the fighting is over and making clean-up complex and time-consuming.

The Oslo Conference, to act now

On 23 April 2024, more than 250 delegates from 86 States and the civil society will meet in Oslo to discuss the implementation of the international agreement to better protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). To this day, a total of 86 states have joined the agreement.

They must act now, and we must see how this agreement turns into concrete policy.

* HI is a founding member of [INEW](#) in 2011.