



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 0001 GMT on Monday 24 April 2023

Dying under bombs and shells: New report finds escalation in armed conflicts worldwide causes over 80 percent surge in civilian casualties from explosive weapons

The number of civilians killed or injured by bombing and shelling in urban areas globally soared by 83 percent in 2022, largely driven by the increased use of explosive weapons by Russian armed forces in Ukraine, and rising incidents in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Somalia, a new report by the Explosive Weapons Monitor (EWM) has revealed.

According to *"Two Years of Global Harm to Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons (2021-2022)"*, explosive weapons used in cities, towns and villages caused at least 20,793 civilian deaths and injuries around the world in 2022, compared with at least 11,343 in 2021. The highest civilian toll was recorded in Ukraine where 10,351 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion of the country, compared with 28 casualties in 2021.

"Civilians are paying the ultimate price when explosive weapons with a wide destructive radius are launched or dropped on populated towns and cities. We see a disturbing pattern of harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in new and ongoing conflicts that extends well beyond the area of attack," said Katherine Young, Research and Monitoring Coordinator at EWM.

"Not only do explosive weapons kill and maim, they also cause massive damage to schools, health clinics, power lines, water supplies and other essential infrastructure which can last long after conflicts have ended. This inflicts further, long-term suffering on populations whose lives have been made unbearable by being under bombardment," she explained.

The EWM is part of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), which is calling for all states to sign the [Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#). The international agreement to protect civilians from the devastating effects of explosive weapons in urban areas has been endorsed by 83 countries so far.

"States must refuse to normalise the devastating toll of explosive weapons on civilians. By signing the political declaration, states are sending a clear message that harm to civilians, and destruction of the infrastructure they need to survive, will not be tolerated," said Laura Boillot, Coordinator for INEW.

Attacks on schools and hospitals

Modern wars are increasingly fought in urban areas, putting civilians at risk of immense harm and suffering from explosive weapons that were designed for use against military

targets in the open battlefield. These include aerial bombs, rockets, artillery and missiles, which have a wide blast or destructive radius.

Many of these inaccurate and often recklessly deployed weapons have an indiscriminate effect on civilian populations. Bombarding populated areas from afar often leads to homes, schools, hospitals and other vital infrastructure being pulverised causing reverberating impacts on education, healthcare and other critical services long after conflicts end.

According to EWM, incidents in which hospitals, ambulances and health workers were bombed or shelled globally almost quadrupled to 603 in 2022, from 165 in 2021.

In Ukraine, ground-launched artillery shells and missiles fired by Russian forces have damaged and destroyed hundreds of health facilities, clinics, pharmacies and emergency response centres. At least 53 hospitals were reported to have been hit multiple times by explosive weapons, while one in 10 of the country's hospitals have been damaged.

Damage to health facilities providing specialist care can have catastrophic consequences. In Ethiopia's western Tigray region, a rocket attack forced a facility providing maternity care to close with serious implications for the already low infant survival rates in the area.

The report also showed that incidents involving the use of explosive weapons on schools and teachers rose to 168 in 2022, from 133 in 2021.

In Myanmar alone, 190 attacks involving explosions in and around school buildings were documented between February 2021 and March 2022. By June 2022, at least 7.8 million children in the country were out of school.

Patterns of harm

The report detailed harrowing attacks using explosive weapons, including the 16 March 2022 Russian airstrike on the Donetsk Regional Academic Drama Theatre in Mariupol, Ukraine, where hundreds of civilians were sheltering. They had fled there to escape increased shelling by Russian forces, who also targeted power stations, water and gas supplies, and cellular towers, in their assault on the city.

In Tigray, Ethiopian National Defence Forces bombed a camp for internally displaced people in Dedebeit town, using an armed drone on 7 January 2022. At least 56 people were killed in an attack that left dismembered bodies and human flesh hanging from trees, and forced humanitarian agencies to suspend operations.

Somalia also saw an increase in explosive weapons use with car bombs reportedly causing 821 civilian casualties in 2022. The report also outlined examples of harm caused by explosive weapons in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria and Yemen.

"By endorsing the political declaration, governments and militaries are committing to ensure their policies and rules of engagement are updated to fall in line with stronger standards to protect civilians caught up in armed conflict," Laura Boillot said.

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Notes to editors:

[The Explosive Weapons Monitor](#) is a civil society initiative that conducts research and analysis on harms from and practices of explosive weapon use in populated areas for the International Network on Explosive Weapons. It works with partner organisations to collect and publish data on incidents of explosive weapon use around the world as reported in open sources.

[The International Network on Explosive Weapons](#) is an international network of nearly 50 NGOs that calls for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Its member organisations engage in research, policy and advocacy to promote greater understanding of the issues arising from explosive weapons use in populated areas, and concrete steps that can be taken to address it.