

# Thematic Report: The impact on civilians of violence along the western border of Sa'dah

November 2023

Data correct at 12 November 2023

The western Sa'dah border is increasingly coming under the spotlight on account of continued reports of border violence, particularly in Shada'a and Monabbih districts. On average, in 2023, two civilians have been killed or injured every day on the western Sa'dah border. Border violence\* in western Sa'dah is predominantly characterised by cross-border artillery fire, border outpost shootings, border patrol shootings, and sporadic drone activity, taking a heavy toll on the civilian populations present in the border areas, a large proportion of whom are understood to be migrants.

The western Sa'dah border is one of the most infrastructurally remote parts of Yemen, characterised by rugged and mountainous terrain. Access to western Sa'dah is limited, and the region has become increasingly isolated as a result of the conflict, which has damaged the already basic road networks, while telecommunications networks have been repeatedly impacted by airstrikes. In 2023, reports of civilian casualties as a result of border violence in western Sa'dah have seen an increase. This comes in contrast to other parts of the country where, for the most-part, reports of civilian casualties have been decreasing in recent years. The following report examines these rising numbers and the broader implications of border violence for the civilian population.

## Saudi Arabia

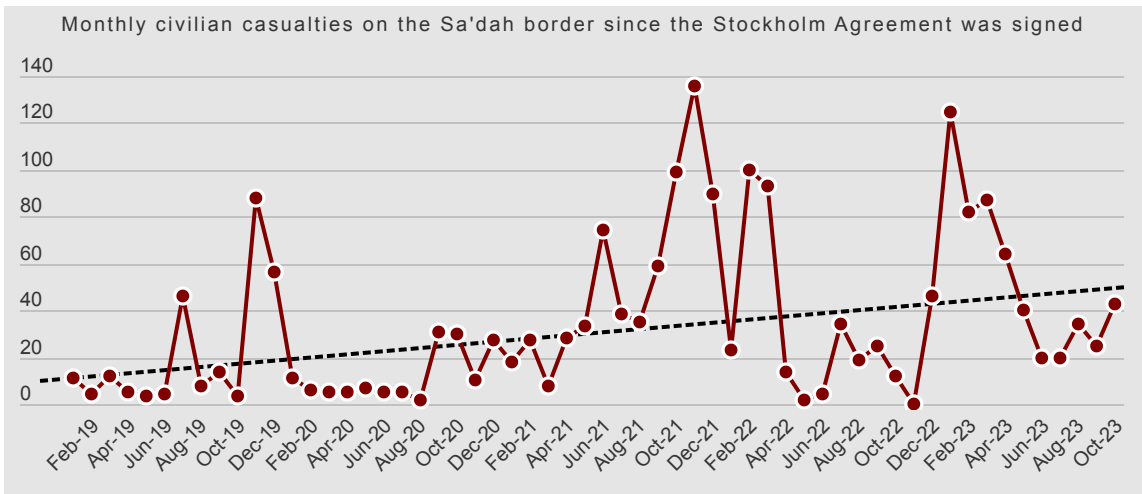
Map to show 2023 casualty numbers in western Sa'dah border districts



## Overall situation

To date in 2023, 567 civilian casualties have been reported in Sa'dah, of whom 547 have been the result of border violence in western Sa'dah (see above map). This marks an increase from the 372 civilian casualties reported as a result of border violence in western Sa'dah in 2022. The 2023 casualties include 86 fatalities, also marking an increase from last year, when 72 fatalities were reported on the border. There are relatively high levels of fluctuation in civilian casualty numbers on the western Sa'dah border on a monthly basis, with recent years having seen peaks in border violence casualties in the winter months. Nonetheless, since the Stockholm Agreement was signed at the end of 2018, there has been a general increase in civilian casualty numbers as a result of artillery fire, light weapons fire and drone activity on the western Sa'dah border.

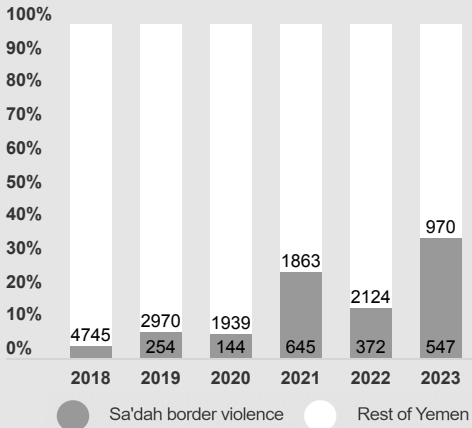
Monthly civilian casualties on the Sa'dah border since the Stockholm Agreement was signed



\*When this report discusses border violence, it is referencing only shelling, drone strikes and light weapons fire, and will exclude casualties as a result of airstrikes and remnant explosive ordnance.

## The western Sa'dah border sees more civilian casualties than anywhere else in the country

Annual civilian casualties as a result of border violence in western Sa'dah as a proportion of countrywide casualties



Sa'dah consistently sees more civilian casualties reported as a result of armed violence than anywhere else in the country. The high numbers of border violence casualties date back to 2021, when western Sa'dah saw an unprecedented increase in the number of civilian casualties as a result of border violence, rising from 144 in 2020 to 645 in 2021. The 2021 total was more than the previous three years combined. It is unclear as to what catalysed the sudden increase. Since then, despite having relatively quiet frontlines, and despite the countrywide truce, Sa'dah annually sees the highest civilian casualty numbers in Yemen.

Moreover, as casualties elsewhere in Yemen decline, civilian casualties reported as a result of Sa'dah border violence have been making up a growing proportion of countrywide casualties. In 2020, the 144 civilian Sa'dah border violence casualties accounted for just 7% of the 2,083 civilian casualties reported countrywide. In 2021, this proportion rose, with the 645 Sa'dah border violence casualties accounting for 26% of the countrywide total. The proportion dropped somewhat in 2022, to 15%, but in 2023, the 547 civilian casualties already reported in the Sa'dah border area account for over a third (36%) of the 1,517 civilian casualties reported as a result of armed violence countrywide so far this year.

## Typology of violence on the western Sa'dah border

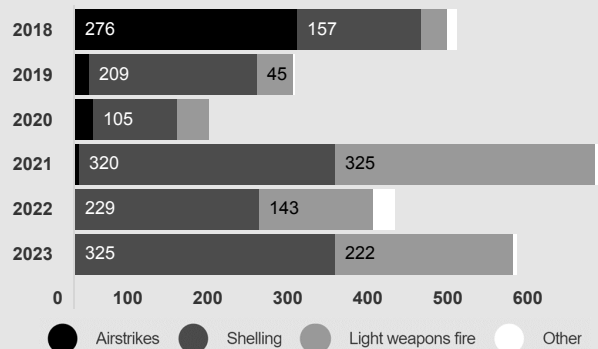
Prior to the Stockholm Agreement being signed, in 2018, airstrikes were the primary form of armed violence responsible for civilian casualties in Sa'dah, accounting for 276 of 478 civilian casualties reported in the governorate's western border districts that year. Since then, however, the balance has shifted, with shelling and light weapons fire now accounting for the majority of casualties in the border areas.

In 2023 to date, of 547 civilian casualties reported as a result of border violence in western Sa'dah this year, 322 have been on account of shellfire. Another 222 civilian casualties have been reported as a result of light weapons fire, amid border outpost and patrol shootings.

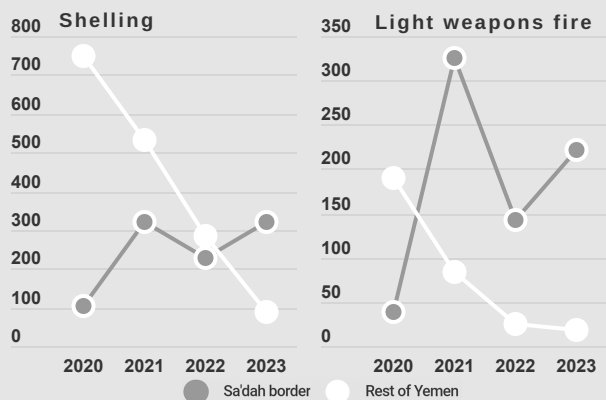
Across Yemen, civilian casualties as a result of frontline hostilities, including armed clashes and shelling\*, have been gradually declining since CIMP commenced monitoring at the start of 2018, with further decreases coinciding with the UN-mediated truce from April to October 2022, and the unofficial truce that has remained in place since October 2022. Resultantly, a growing proportion of countrywide shelling casualties are being reported in western Sa'dah. Of 408 civilian shelling casualties reported across Yemen so far this year, 79% (322) have been along the western Sa'dah border. Moreover, of 240 light weapons fire casualties reported across Yemen so far this year, 93% (222) have been reported on the Sa'dah border.

*\*In areas demarcating the main lines of control between the parties, such as in Ta'izz, Hudaydah, Ma'rib, Jawf and Bayda, which typically see the fiercest hostilities, the primary types of armed violence since the Stockholm Agreement was signed have been shellfire, including from rocketry and artillery fire, and armed clashes.*

Annual civilian casualties on the western Sa'dah border by type of armed violence



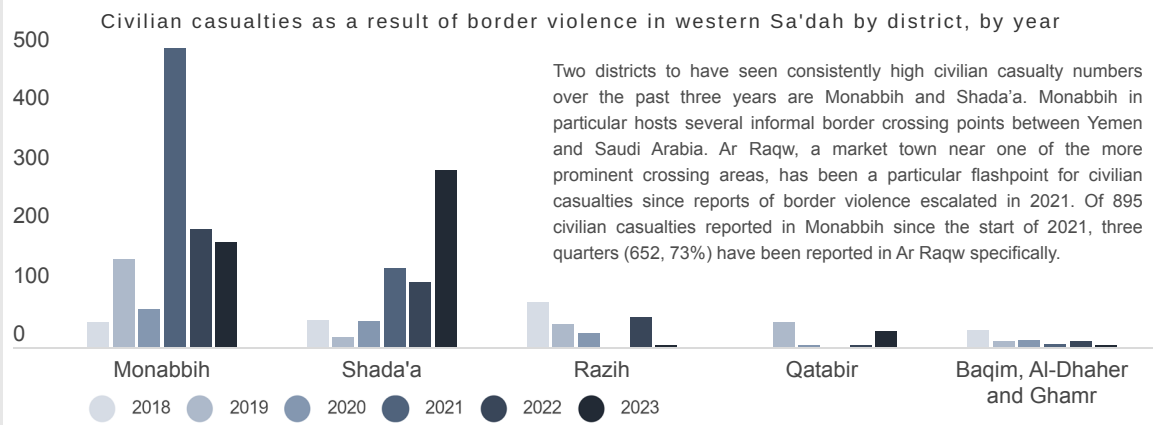
Annual shelling and light weapons fire civilian casualties on the western Sa'dah border compared to the rest of Yemen



## Growing reports of migrants among impacted population

The number of migrants being reported among the casualties is growing. Historically, the local economy in the Sa'dah periphery was bolstered by informal trading networks spanning what used to be a porous border between northern Yemen and southern Saudi Arabia. Local produce, including fruit, vegetables and qat, were regularly traded across the border. The permeability of the border has also established it as a route for African nationals with a migration profile who are seeking to reach Saudi Arabia, as well as for those involved in smuggling and trafficking along these same routes. However, the conflict has changed the landscape along Sa'dah's border with Saudi Arabia, the length of which is now heavily militarised, lined with fortifications and border guard outposts.

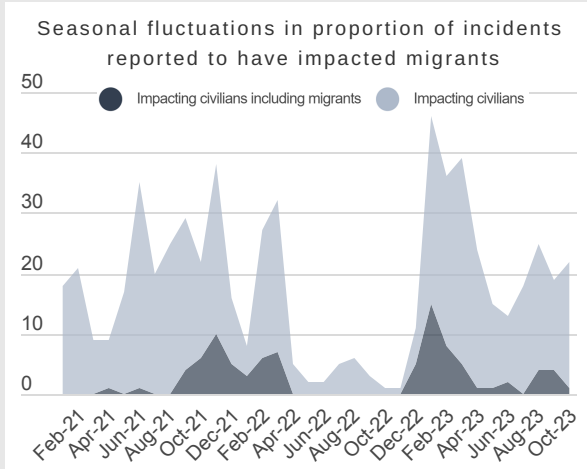
As the conflict progresses, reports of civilian casualties in these areas continue to mount, and a growing number of reports are indicating that migrants are among the casualties. In 2023, of 182 instances of border violence that have been reported to have resulted in civilian casualties so far this year, at least 41 have involved migrants. This is almost double the 21 incidents to have resulted in migrant casualties on the border in 2022. Due to limited media and telecommunications infrastructure in the area, however, exact casualty numbers remain unclear.



On a district-by-district basis, Shada'a has seen 328 civilian casualties reported this year as a result of border violence, the highest district-level total in the country. Moreover, this marks an increase of almost threefold from the 2022 total of 109 civilian casualties in Shada'a. Nearby Monabbih has seen the second highest numbers of civilian casualties in the country, at 188, almost matching last year's total of 200.

The profile in how armed violence is impacting civilians differs somewhat between Monabbih and Shada'a. Of the 328 civilian casualties reported in Shada'a this year, 79% (260) have been on account of shellfire, followed by another 21% (68) from light weapons fire. Conversely, in Monabbih, 70% (132) of the casualties have been the result of light weapons fire, and 30% (56) have been killed or injured by shelling.

Since border violence surged in 2021, there has been some seasonal fluctuations in reports of Sa'dah border violence impacting migrants. For example, of the 89 incidents reported to have impacted migrants on the Sa'dah border since the start of 2021, 89% have been reported between September and March, while only 11% have been reported between the months of April and August, marking a notable drop off during the summer months.



The Civilian Impact Monitoring Project is a service under the Protection Cluster for the collection, analysis and dissemination of open source data on the civilian impact from armed violence in Yemen, to inform and complement protection programming.



For more information, please visit [www.civilianimpactmonitoring.org](http://www.civilianimpactmonitoring.org)

