

Thematic Report: The legacy threat of ERW in Yemen despite the unofficial truce

December 2023

Data correct at 31 December 2023

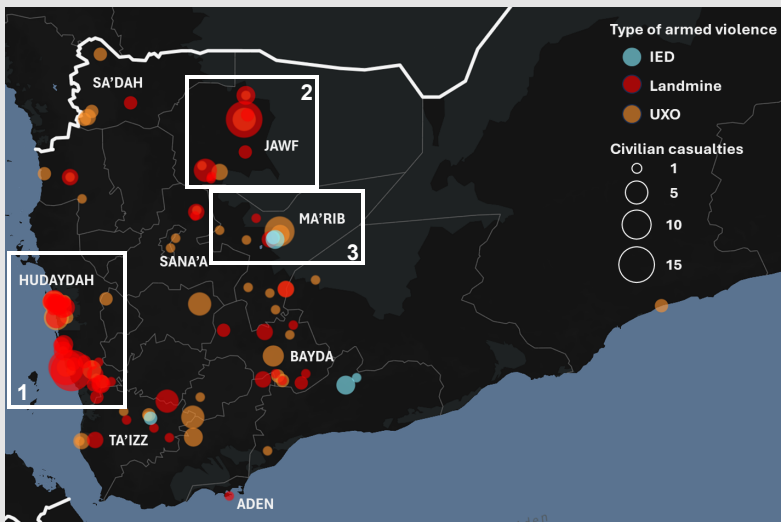
In April 2022, a UN-mediated truce came into effect countrywide in Yemen, seeing a marked reduction in frontline hostilities. The truce officially lapsed in October 2022, but since then has remained unofficially in place; the frontlines have remained largely static and reports of civilian casualties in frontline areas have decreased. However, explosive remnants of warfare (ERW), including landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and remnant improvised explosive devices (IEDs)* have continued to drive high civilian casualty numbers. In 2022, the year the truce was introduced, ERW was responsible for 584 civilian casualties, the highest annual ERW casualty count on CIMP records.

Despite the decline in hostilities, ERW was responsible for another 343 civilian casualties in 2023, including 142 fatalities. Although this marks a decrease from the previous year's 584, it is higher than each of the annual totals seen in 2018, when CIMP commenced reporting, 2019, 2020 and 2021. Moreover, a high proportion of the civilian ERW casualties (44%) in 2023 were children. This report examines the continued flashpoints for civilian harm from ERW, looks at patterns before, during and after the truce period, and discusses specific vulnerabilities to ERW.

*A large proportion of IED incidents in Yemen are the result of targeted IED attacks, for example devices that are used to target military vehicles and security installations, or those used to demolish property. This report is focusing solely on explosive remnants of warfare (ERW), thus only incidents involving remnant IEDs, rather than targeted IEDs, are included in the figures.

ERW incidents are concentrated in former frontline areas

Map to show locations and casualty density of ERW incidents in 2023



1. Almost half of the civilian ERW casualties in 2023 were reported on the west coast, in **Hudaydah**, which consistently sees the weight of ERW casualties reported across the country. Of 343 civilian ERW casualties reported in 2023, 150 (44%) were in Hudaydah. These were concentrated on the outskirts of Hudaydah city, including in Al-Hali, to the east, and Al-Hawak, to the south. ERW was responsible for 44 civilian casualties on the outskirts of Hudaydah city in 2023, closely followed by the former frontline districts in the governorate's south, with another 42 civilian ERW casualties reported in Al Tuhayat district and 31 in Ad Durayhimi. ERW incidents are also frequently reported in Hays and Bayt Al-Faqih.

2. In **Jawf**, the unpaved desert tracks connecting former frontline areas in Khabb wa ash Sha'af district remain particular flashpoints for landmine incidents. The district saw 32 of the 44 civilian ERW casualties reported in Jawf in 2023. Two thirds (19) of the casualties in Khabb wa ash Sha'af were the result of civilians being caught in landmine explosions while driving. Al-Yatmah area has been a particular flashpoint in Khabb wa ash Sha'af, seeing almost a third (9) of the district's ERW casualties.

3. 41 civilian ERW casualties were reported in **Ma'rib** governorate in 2023, primarily in Ma'rib district, which saw 28 of those casualties, the second highest ERW casualty count in the country by district. Harib district saw another seven casualties. Half (14) of the casualties in Ma'rib district were the result of remnant live devices being brought into civilian homes and tampered with. There were also six casualties on account of remnant IEDs, likely leftover from localised conflict in the district, where tensions are heightened on account of rivalries over natural hydrocarbon resources. Moreover, four children were killed and injured in UXO blasts at As Suwayda IDP site.

Other former frontline areas also continue to see intermittent ERW incidents, such as **Ta'izz**, **Bayda** and **Sa'dah**, which saw 24, 22 and 14 civilian ERW casualties respectively in 2023.

Civilian ERW casualties before, during, and after the UN-mediated countrywide truce

There have been some significant peaks in civilian casualties reported as a result of ERW incidents in Yemen, most notably after the frontlines in Hudaydah shifted south at the end of 2021, and after the UN-mediated countrywide truce entered into force in April 2022.

ERW casualties spiked in late 2021, when frontlines shifted south in Hudaydah making former frontline (and likely ERW-contaminated) areas accessible to civilians and returning IDPs. In November 2021, 14 civilian ERW casualties were reported, which leapt to 69 in December 2021. Despite then decreasing somewhat in the run-up to April 2022, with 33 civilian ERW casualties reported in March 2022, once the truce had entered into force, ERW casualties increased once more, again reaching 69 in July 2022, likely for similar reasons. It is possible that some fluctuations in casualty numbers are also linked to environmental factors, such as rainy seasons (see previous CIMP thematic on how rainfall and flooding can exacerbate the ERW threat), or more localised factors, from levels of threat awareness among local communities, to availability of local resources.

Chart to show monthly civilian ERW casualty count from January 2021 to December 2023

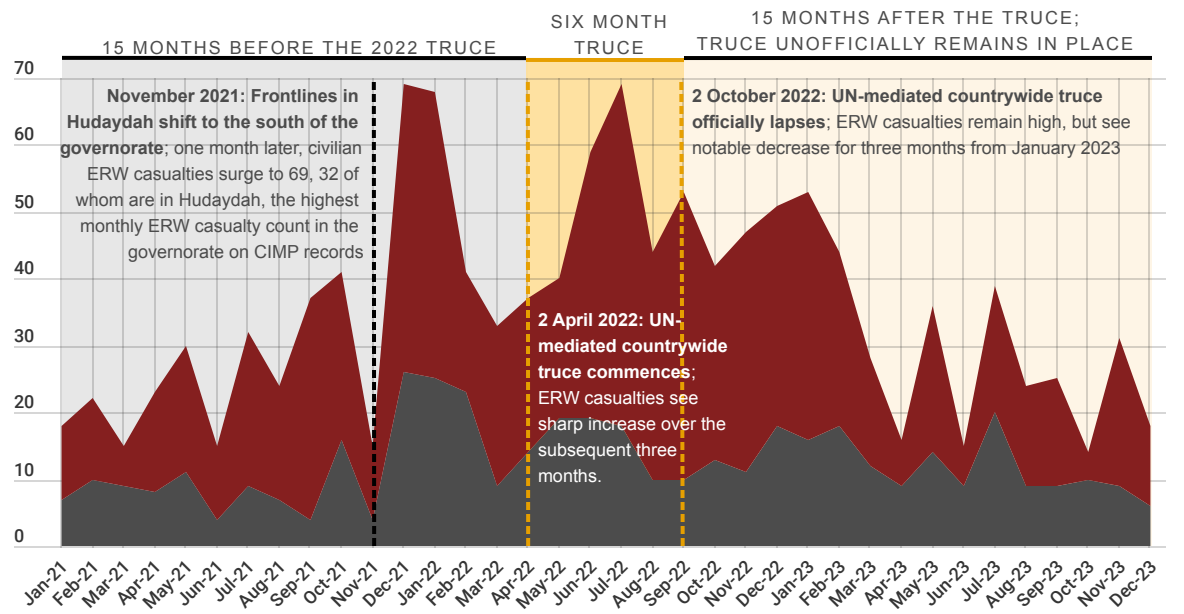
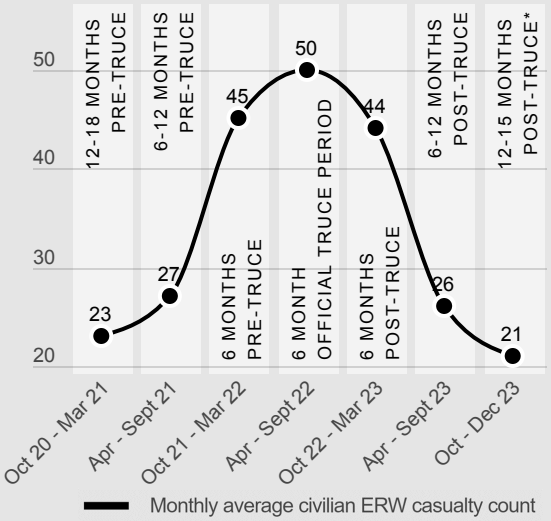


Chart to show monthly average civilian ERW casualty count during six month periods before, during and after the UN-mediated 2022 truce

The chart to the right shows a clear bell curve in relation to average monthly civilian ERW casualties over six month periods in the run-up to the truce, during the truce, and subsequently, with its peak during the six months of the official UN-mediated truce.

In the same way as the frontlines shifting to southern Hudaydah likely opened up civilian mobility in the governorate, including in uncleared areas, it is possible that the truce period gave civilians greater confidence in their freedom of movement, due to the de-escalation on the frontlines, prompting greater civilian mobility in areas that had not been cleared of explosive ordnance. The truce may have provided IDPs with the opportunity to return home, possibly to former or dormant frontline areas that similarly may not have undergone explosive ordnance clearance efforts.

The decrease in ERW casualty numbers post-truce may be reflective of a number of factors, including but not limited to: increased threat awareness, a degree of success in clearance operations, lessening extremes of population mobility following a possible surge in returnees, lower UXO prevalence in light of the de-escalation, and fewer new devices being planted.



* the final point shows the monthly average from only three months of data due to data availability

For certain groups within the population, vulnerabilities to the ERW threat are heightened. Children in particular continue to be disproportionately impacted. There were also further instances impacting civilians on IDP sites this year, and a number of incidents have impacted civilians engaged in rural labour, such as tending to livestock, collecting firewood and working on farmland. Hudaydah remains the primary flashpoint for all civilian ERW casualties countrywide.

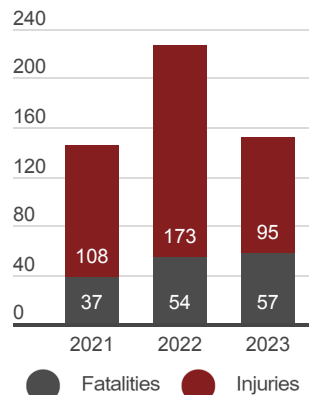
Children face heightened vulnerability to ERW incidents in Yemen

ERW was responsible for 152 child casualties in 2023. Although this marks a decrease from the 227 child ERW casualties in 2022, ERW killed more children in 2023 than in 2022, seeing a slight increase from 54 to 57. This is the highest annual child fatality count as a result of ERW on CIMP records. Moreover, the proportion of children among ERW casualties increased from 39% in 2022, up to 44% in 2023.

Moreover, while the proportion of fatalities among civilian ERW casualties increased in 2023 compared to 2022, from 24% to 37%, this was particularly pronounced among children: one in three of the 152 children to be impacted by ERW incidents in 2023 was harmed fatally. In the two years prior, one in four of the child ERW casualties were fatalities. UXO has proved particularly deadly for children; of 144 UXO casualties in 2023, 59% (85) were children. By contrast, of 186 civilian landmine casualties in 2023, 33% (62) were children.

Children are particularly vulnerable to ERW incidents, especially UXO. This is likely linked to them having heightened mobility in less well-trodden areas that may not yet have been cleared, for instance while playing, collecting firewood or tending to livestock. When coupled with heightened inquisitiveness and possibly a lower level of threat awareness, this results in a heightened propensity among children to play or tamper with unfamiliar devices.

Chart to show annual child fatalities and injuries as a result of ERW in Yemen



Vulnerabilities to ERW while engaged in rural labour

2023 saw at least 18 instances of civilians being harmed by ERW while tending to livestock, resulting in at least 33 casualties, 23 of whom were children, and seven of whom were women. Almost half (8) of these incidents were reported in Hudaydah. There were also at least five instances of civilians being harmed by ERW while collecting firewood, resulting in six casualties. Three of these incidents were reported on the eastern outskirts of Hudaydah city. And, of four incidents in which civilians were harmed by ERW while working on farmland, resulting in five casualties, three were in Hudaydah.

Children impacted by ERW on IDP sites in Ma'rib

In July 2023, three children were killed in a landmine blast at As Suwayda IDP site in Ma'rib. The device had reportedly been washed into the camp by floodwaters. Upon finding it, the children attempted to set fire to it in a garbage barrel, but it exploded. In December, a boy was injured when a UXO exploded on the same site. The incidents highlight the hazards facing IDP sites situated near former and active conflict zones, and in particular the hazards facing children on those sites, who may not have access to the same awareness-raising initiatives as those in the local community.

Protection Implications

Explosive remnants of warfare (ERW), including landmines, UXO and remnant IEDs, remain a legacy threat to civilians across Yemen's main frontline areas. Taking civilian casualty numbers as a proxy, Hudaydah appears to remain one of the most contaminated parts of the country, seeing almost half of the ERW casualties reported in 2023, with Jawf and Ma'rib also seeing high civilian casualty counts, and civilians are likely to remain at heightened risk of harm from ERW in these areas for years to come. Moreover, the patterns seen before, during and after the truce reflect the significant threat ERW continues to pose to civilians, particularly in periods of heightened civilian mobility and confidence such as in the immediate aftermath of frontline shifts and ceasefire agreements.

The presence of ERW is not only putting civilians' lives in danger, but also presents key obstacles to the return of IDPs to their places of origin and barriers to pursuing subsistence farming and other income generating activities. At least 45 ERW casualties in 2023 have occurred while civilians have been engaged in rural labour, predominantly tending to livestock and collecting firewood. Without extensive awareness raising and clearance efforts, the threat will likely remain heightened in more remote, rural areas.

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.