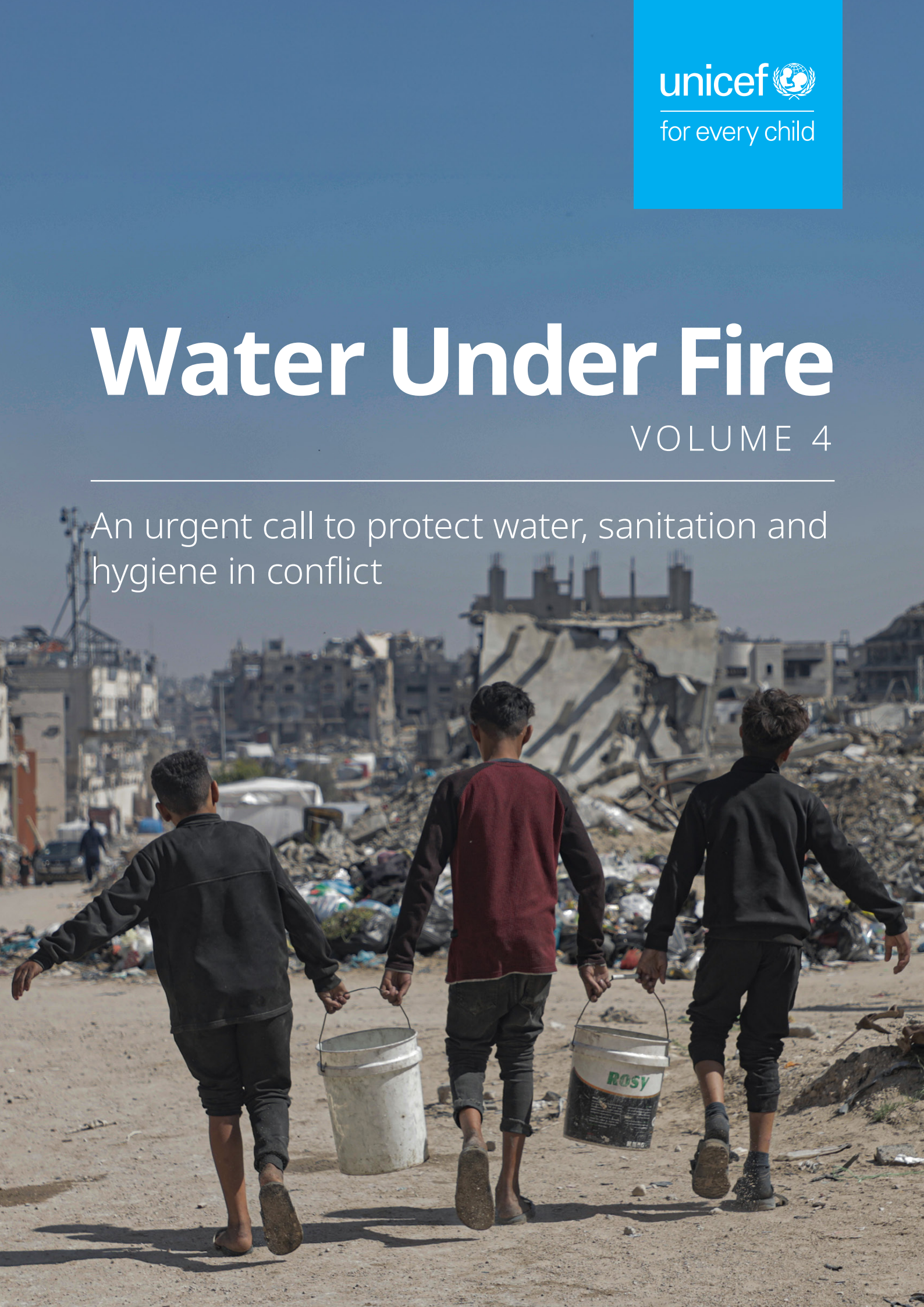
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Water Under Fire

VOLUME 4

An urgent call to protect water, sanitation and hygiene in conflict



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COVER: Boys carry buckets of water back to their tents in Beach Camp, Gaza City, after filling them from tanks brought by UNICEF trucks.

State of Palestine, 2025
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Water Under Fire

VOLUME 4

An urgent call to protect water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in conflict

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Dedication

This report is a tribute to Omar El Hattab, Senior UNICEF WASH Advisor, who passed away before its completion.

Omar was instrumental in bringing this project to completion. He always offered sound advice and wisdom, showing the way without insisting on the route. He humbly shared his passion for helping children in need throughout the project. Always with a smile.

Abbreviations

EO	explosive ordnance
ERW	explosive remnant of war
EWIPA	explosive weapons in populated areas
GASWAC	Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
TAG	technical advisory group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

Foreword

Access to safe water is a matter of life and death for civilians caught in conflict.

Ten years ago, we began to document the lethal consequences for children when conflict disrupts or destroys water, sanitation and hygiene systems and services. The growing pattern of attacks across armed conflicts, including in Iraq, Syria, the State of Palestine, Ukraine and Yemen, to mention a few, provided the impetus for UNICEF to launch the Water Under Fire campaign and its multi-volume report series.

Since the publication of Volume 3 in 2021, important progress has been made to recognize the challenge and strengthen the protection of water in conflict. In 2024, Member States established the Global Coalition to Spare Water from Armed Conflict, spearheading initiatives to elevate the protection of water as a matter of peace and security. Across academia, the humanitarian community and the WASH sector, advocacy and operational efforts have also sought to enhance the protection of water.

Yet this progress has unfolded against a deteriorating global context. Armed conflicts have increased, armed actors have proliferated, and respect for international humanitarian law has come under growing strain. At the same time, new technologies and methods of warfare have increased the scale and reach of destruction, with devastating consequences for WASH systems and the boys and girls and communities that depend on them for their survival.



State of Palestine, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI582413/Badarneh

This worsening context, and the absence of a global monitoring system of attacks harming WASH, led us to seek answers to fundamental questions: how are WASH systems, services, personnel and users being harmed over the past five years? What implications is this having for children and communities living through conflict and on their ability to survive, recover and restore services? And, critically, how are humanitarian actors responding, including innovative approaches to ensuring the delivery of essential services?

The findings of this report point to a deeply troubling global pattern of attacks harming WASH rather than isolated incidents confined to specific parties or conflicts. It also reaffirms the interconnected nature of the systems on which water depends, such as energy, and the many ways in which children and communities are placed at risk when those systems come under attack. This report goes a long way toward illustrating the tragic and often irreversible consequences that a single incident—a strike, an armed drone attack, an explosion—can have on the lives and futures of entire communities, and sometimes even generations.

The use of explosive weapons, often in populated areas, emerges as a major driver of harm to WASH systems, services, personnel and users. The devastating harm these weapons cause children and the systems they rely upon underline the primary responsibility and obligation of parties to conflict to protect water and respect international law.

And it does not end there. Member States, including members of the United Nations Security Council, donors, and humanitarian, development and WASH actors all have a critical role to play in translating international norms into effective protection, to strengthen accountability, and to lead sustained action to mitigate the consequences of these attacks. Most importantly, these attacks must end.

This fourth volume is ultimately a call to close the gap between the international norms aimed at protecting civilians in conflict and what children experience on the ground. Children's rights and lives depend on our ability to mobilize the needed political action to close this gap. We must not let them down.



Lucia Elmi
UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes

Executive summary

The information and extensive consultations underpinning this report indicate that attacks that cause harm to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems, services and to the people who operate, repair and use them are expanding in type, location and frequency in situations of armed conflict and violence globally (see **Box 1** for information on the terminology). Water and sanitation systems and services – indispensable for children's health, development and survival – and the personnel who keep them functioning are increasingly exposed to attack, damage, destruction and obstruction.

Following on from Volume 3 of the *Water Under Fire* series, this report examines where and how such attacks have occurred over the past five years. Drawing on a mixed-methods review of globally available documented information, it identifies and categorizes seven types of attack recorded across 23 countries and territories.

The examples in this report illustrate how water and sanitation systems and services have been damaged or destroyed by strikes on treatment plants, pipelines, wells and wastewater networks, often using explosive weapons in populated areas and, increasingly, by employing armed drones as vehicles for explosive weapons. It further shows how water sources have become polluted as a result of damage to WASH infrastructure and how attacks harming energy systems have brought water pumping and treatment to a halt even when water infrastructure itself has remained intact.

The personnel who operate, maintain and repair essential WASH systems – the large majority of whom are local – have also come under attack, with some being killed, injured, threatened or obstructed in the course of their work. When repair teams cannot safely reach damaged installations, systems that could otherwise be restored remain out of service.



Yemen, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI559310/Qadari



Since 2025, like 2.2 million other girls, 14-year-old Wahida has been unable to attend school under the ban on girls' secondary education.

Afghanistan, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI961949/Azizi

Children have been killed while queuing for water, and women and girls in particular have been exposed to gender-based violence when water collection routes have grown longer and more hazardous. Landmines and explosive remnants of war put people's lives at risk as they travel to collect water. Restrictions on the entry of fuel, electricity, water treatment chemicals, equipment and spare parts to an area can progressively disable systems, even if no direct damage has been caused by an attack, impacting children and communities who depend on it.

These different pathways of attack – some direct, others indirect – paint a picture of WASH systems and services under assault from multiple directions, compounding the consequences for children.

While certain attacks documented in this report – including killing, abduction and sexual violence targeting users at water points – have direct consequences at the individual level, most attacks affect the essential systems and services on which children depend to survive, such as those related to health, nutrition and protection. The disruption of these systems and services often triggers a domino effect that ripples through a child's life. Health facilities without reliable water or power supplies cannot safely sustain services, such as newborn care, infection prevention and control, and the treatment of malnutrition. When families are forced to rely on contaminated water sources, children become more exposed to waterborne disease. Repeated diarrhoeal illness can deplete the nutrient reserves that malnourished children need to recover, and this is compounded by disruption to the services required to prevent and treat malnutrition. Cholera, hepatitis and polio can spread when sanitation systems fail and displaced families are living in overcrowded conditions.

The impacts are also gendered. Women and girls are responsible for collecting water in 7 out of 10 households that must obtain water from outside the home.[1] As services deteriorate, collection routes can become longer and more dangerous, increasing exposure to violence and reducing the amount of time that can be spent in school and on other activities. The risks to children therefore extend from the point of attack to the wider systems and conditions that determine whether they can access safe water and sanitation.

To address these issues, humanitarian WASH actors are adapting and innovating their approaches in increasingly constrained environments. This report showcases these approaches, which are most often country led and grounded in local contexts and build on local capacities. They include negotiating access for repairs, supporting local authorities, utilities and communities to maintain services, stockpiling essential supplies and investing in resilient infrastructure, backup energy systems and alternative supply routes to keep services running when damage occurs.

But neither innovation nor adaptation can substitute for protection. The findings of this report point to five areas in which change is needed to enhance the protection of WASH for children in conflict. This includes urgent calls to parties to conflict, those who enable or support them and those with influence over them to take action and comply with their obligations under international law.

Calls to action:

1. Treat WASH infrastructure in conflict as indispensable to civilian survival, particularly children's survival, and as essential to the realization of fundamental human rights.
2. Create a mechanism to systematically collect data on attacks harming WASH in conflict.
3. Improve the protection of children and communities seeking WASH services and of WASH and energy personnel.
4. Enable safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian, WASH and energy actors to people in need and to the essential supplies required to keep water and energy systems functioning.
5. Invest in conflict-resilient WASH approaches and locally led service continuity arrangements.

The full version of these calls to action and actor-specific recommendations can be found in section 8.

Box 1. Definitions of WASH and its components

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) refers to the services, infrastructure, essential supplies, equipment and energy, personnel and practices required for people to access sufficient, safe, and affordable water; to use safe and dignified sanitation; and to practise hygiene – including menstrual hygiene – with dignity and in safety.

In this report, 'WASH' is used to refer to water, sanitation and hygiene. When relevant, only specific components of WASH are referred to.

In addition, in this report, 'attacks harming WASH' refer to attacks that harm any of these components- the systems, services, personnel and users of water, sanitation and hygiene. When relevant, only specific components are mentioned.

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7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict
8. Calls to action and roadmap

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report – Volume 4 of the Water Under Fire series – reflects the continued commitment of UNICEF to advancing the protection of water as a fundamental means of safeguarding the rights and well-being of children.

Reports emerging since Volume 3 was published in 2021 point towards an increasing number of attacks globally harming WASH in situations of conflict. Moreover, the types of attacks have become more varied, and attacks have expanded across and within countries and territories, with devastating direct and reverberating effects on children and their communities.

These trends give rise to serious concerns about compliance by parties to conflict with applicable international law, as essential civilian infrastructure – including water and sanitation systems, hospitals and schools – is increasingly damaged or destroyed, and about the failure to uphold the rights of children.

Institutions, researchers and experts have underscored the need to better understand the scale, types and patterns of these attacks and their impacts on children and communities. Yet no formal, systematic global mechanism is currently in place for documenting or analysing where and how these attacks occur, or the consequences for children and communities.

Therefore, and as detailed in section 1.2 'Methodology', this report focuses on documented attacks that harm WASH, reflecting the availability of information, in-country reporting capacity, and access and security conditions in different contexts. Section 2 describes how the global protection architecture for water has been strengthened legally, politically and operationally since 2021, and reviews existing data on the impacts of conflict on WASH. Section 3 draws on key sources to identify trends in attacks harming WASH, while section 4 categorizes seven types of attacks that harm WASH systems, services, personnel and users, illustrating the scale and scope of documented attacks across 23 countries and territories. Section 5 examines the ways in which conflict places indirect pressure on water and sanitation through displacement and protracted insecurity, while section 6 considers the consequences for children of attacks harming WASH and of the broader impact of conflict on WASH systems. Section 7 documents the innovations that have enabled services to continue operating, be repaired and, in some cases, be rebuilt amid conflict. Finally, section 8 identifies calls to action and sets out recommendations for key actors.



Don Lu Htoi, 34, collects water with her baby from a standpoint inside a displacement camp.

Myanmar, 2026
© UNICEF/UN0887039/Htet

Box 2. Human rights to water and sanitation in conflict

Access to water and sanitation are fundamental human rights. International human rights law requires States to respect, protect and fulfil these rights – including through ensuring non-discriminatory access to services that are available, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable – and to support the progressive realization of these rights.[2]

Access to water and sanitation is essential for the enjoyment of a range of human rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including through access to clean drinking water, and the right to an adequate standard of living.[3]

In situations of conflict, attacks on or damage to WASH infrastructure, disruption of services and water contamination can undermine these rights, affecting children's health, safety, dignity, education and survival. Girls, children with disabilities and others facing additional barriers to safe access are particularly affected.

For a detailed analysis of how international legal frameworks, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, address the protection of and access to water and sanitation services in situations of armed conflict, see Volume 3 of the Water Under Fire series.[4]

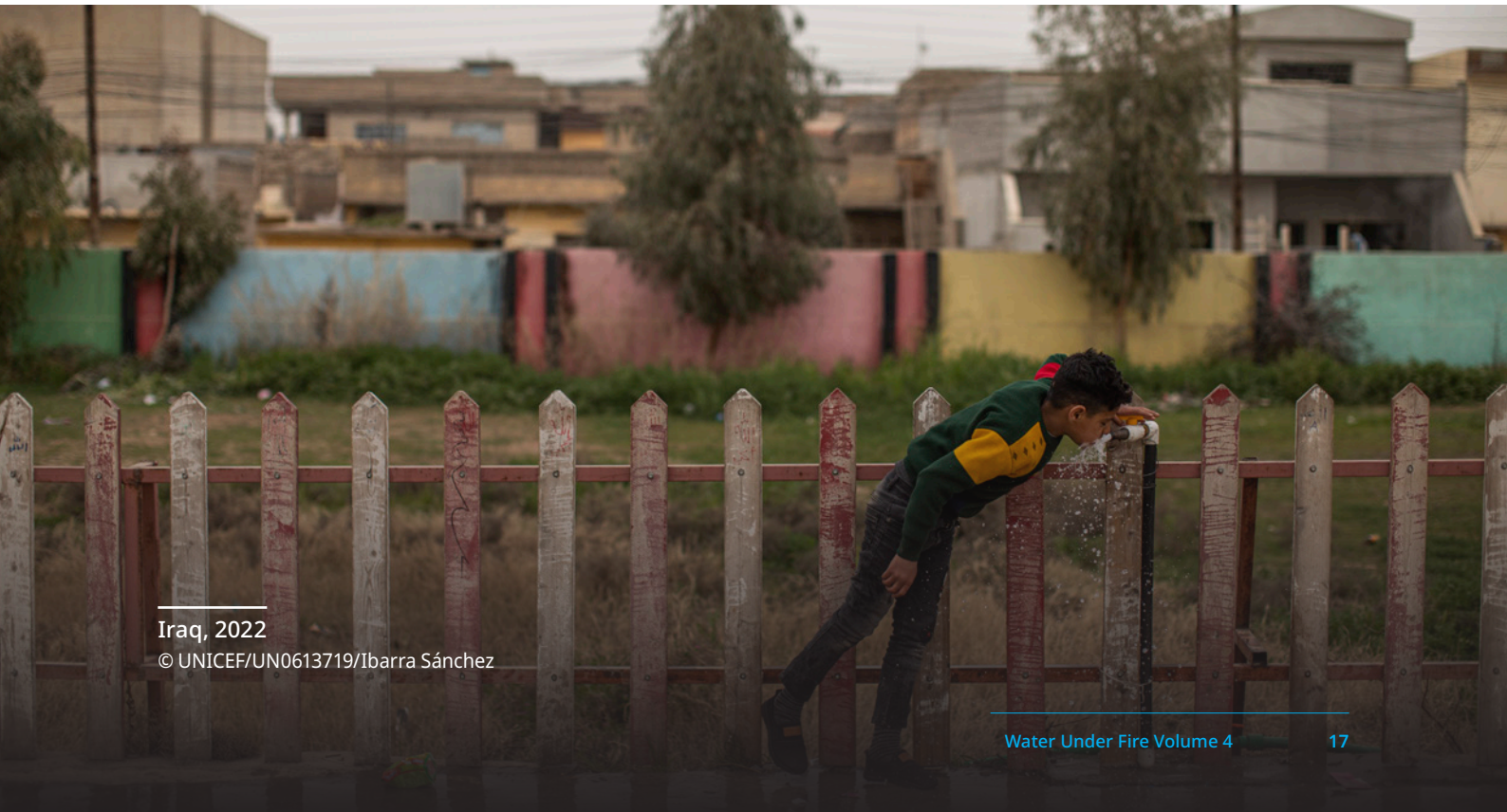
1.2 Methodology

This report is based on a mixed methods review on attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users, covering the period from January 2021 to June 2026.[i] See Annex 2 for further information on the methodology.[5]

Information and review

Publicly available information, including from the United Nations and other sources, was analysed through an iterative process. Successive rounds of review compared reports, data sets, operational documentation and published literature, alongside key informant interviews with 46 WASH specialists working across 20 countries and 22 subject matter experts at the global and regional levels. In addition, consultations were undertaken with two technical advisory groups (TAGs): an internal UNICEF TAG, including specialists from the Global WASH Cluster, the UNICEF WASH Programme, and health, child protection, nutrition, policy and child rights; and an external TAG, including technical specialists from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders (MSF)), the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Oxfam, Insecurity Insight, Duke University and the Geneva Water Hub.

i This report has been compiled with reference to various external sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information presented is subject to correction or update as new data becomes available.



Iraq, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0613719/Ibarra Sánchez



A girl who fled the conflict in Sudan carries water through the Renk Transit Centre.

South Sudan, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI631934/Naftalin

Countries meeting the inclusion threshold for documented attacks harming WASH

Country inclusion was based on documented conflict-related attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users, identified through desk review of documented events and through key informant interviews with WASH specialists at the country, regional and global levels. Inclusion required a minimum of three documented attacks over the reporting period. This criterion for inclusion was adopted to reduce the risk that a country was included on the basis of a single documented event while also recognizing that each attack harming WASH can affect the lives of a high number of people. It does not, however, seek to determine a pattern of attacks and does not measure the frequency or severity of the attacks. A country falling below the threshold may have experienced attacks that were not documented, and a higher count does not necessarily indicate a more severe situation.[ii,6] The number of attacks documented and reported vary considerably across contexts, reflecting not only the incidence of attacks but also differences in access, security, reporting capacity and resources, monitoring systems and the availability of information.

While the impact of attacks harming WASH is often compounded by other factors, including climate shocks, governance challenges and pre-existing vulnerabilities, examining these factors in detail is outside the scope of this report.

ii Twenty-three countries and territories met the threshold: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Somalia, South Sudan, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen. Countries with documented attacks below the threshold are not included. Twenty-two countries and territories are classified as being in conflict under any of three complementary classifications: the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts Project, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program record of state-based armed conflicts active in 2025 and the World Bank FY26 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations.

Identifying conflict-driven pressures on WASH

The analysis of global information also identified two broader ways in which conflict impacts WASH through displacement-driven pressures and conditions deriving from insecurity. These are referred to as 'conflict-driven pressures' and are elaborated on in section 5.

Documenting reverberating effects

The review traced the consequences both of attacks harming WASH and of conflict-driven pressures, including on children's health, nutrition, protection and education. Reverberating effects, for example long-term indirect effects, were included in the analysis only where sources documented this pathway. While the focus of this report is on the impact that attacks harming WASH have on children, in cases where the disaggregated information did not exist it refers to the impact on the broader population.



Yemen, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI991014/Al-Basha

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2. Conflict and water since 2021

2.1. A strengthened protection architecture for water and sanitation in situations of conflict

Since Volume 3 of the Water Under Fire[7] series was published in 2021, five interrelated developments have strengthened the global protection architecture for water and sanitation in situations of conflict.

First, the protection of water systems during armed conflict rests on binding obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which have been reinforced through United Nations Security Council resolutions and, separately, through non-binding guidance and political commitments. Under international humanitarian law, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population – including drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works – must be protected from attack, destruction and removal, or from being rendered useless.[8] The Security Council has repeatedly called for compliance with these obligations. For instance, Resolution 2417 (2018) addressed conflict-induced food insecurity and the protection of objects indispensable to survival,[9] while Resolution 2573 (2021) recognized the interconnectedness of essential services and the consequences for civilians when access to health care, water, sanitation and energy is reduced.[10] For a detailed analysis of how water is protected under international law, see Volume 3 of the Water under Fire series.



UNICEF briefing on the protection of children.

New York, 2023
© UNICEF/UN0931838/Elias



The establishment of the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts (GASWAC) during Protection of Civilians Week.

New York, 2024
© UNICEF/UN0935527/Courtesy of Slovenia

Second, the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure (2019), its Cyber Annex (2021) and the International Law Commission's Draft Principles on the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (2022)[11] have strengthened practical guidance for States, parties to conflict and other relevant actors on protecting water resources during armed conflict. This includes addressing environmental damage, toxic contamination and the long-term impacts of conflict while further clarifying how international humanitarian law applies in these contexts.[12]

Third, the protection of water has been considered a peace and security issue. On 22 March 2023 and 23 May 2025, dedicated Security Council Arria-formula meetings on protecting water in armed conflict – convened under the leadership of the Member State-led Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts (GASWAC) – placed the protection of water and sanitation on the Security Council's agenda and called for stronger implementation of existing international law.

In addition, GASWAC members and partners have convened Member States on the protection of water and sanitation through side events that have been held during the Protection of Civilians Week and International Law Week in New York since 2024.[iii]

Fourth, the protection of water has featured prominently in wider efforts to protect civilian infrastructure in conflict. Parties that have endorsed the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas have made a commitment to preventing and reducing civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), including harm to water and sanitation services. The declaration also adopted the concept of 'reverberating effects', referring to damage to interconnected civilian systems, including those related to water and sanitation, and which extend far beyond an attack's immediate impact, into mainstream protection policy, with implementation conferences held in Oslo[13] and San José (2025)[14] advancing these commitments.[15]

iii These included the launch of GASWAC at a side event of the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians, 23 May 2024 (Geneva Water Hub, 2024); a side event on strengthening legal frameworks for the protection of water resources in situations of armed conflict during International Law Week 2024 (Geneva Water Hub, 2024); a joint statement to the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in 2025 (Geneva Water Hub, 2025); a side event on the safety of essential service providers during International Law Week, 29 October 2025 (Geneva Water Hub, 2025); and a side event on protection and humanitarian diplomacy for water and sanitation during Protection of Civilians Week, 21 May 2026 (Geneva Water Hub, 2026).

Fifth, international advocacy and coordination have grown substantially. In 2024, a coalition of Member States and organizations launched GASWAC to strengthen the protection of freshwater and related infrastructure and personnel in armed conflict, disseminate existing legal and technical tools, and explore a possible intergovernmental declaration on sparing water from warfare. In 2025, the annual report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the protection of civilians in armed conflict[16] highlighted the collaborative process of GASWAC as an example of effective collaboration among States and partners in addressing critical humanitarian issues. Further, several actors, including the Geneva Water Hub, UNICEF and WHO, have promoted the protection of WASH as a priority for strengthening implementation of international humanitarian law. In addition, through a dedicated workstream on protecting civilian infrastructure as part of the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (2024–2026) led by several Member States[iv] and ICRC, States are developing practical recommendations on protecting infrastructure that provides essential civilian services – including water, sanitation and energy systems – and the personnel responsible for operating, maintaining and repairing this infrastructure.[17]

Together, these developments have strengthened the legal, political and operational foundations for protecting water and sanitation in armed conflict, and they reflect the growing recognition that the protection of water is a core component of the protection of civilians.

Box 3. The deliberate targeting or use of water systems to harm civilians

While many attacks result in incidental damage or destruction of water systems, water infrastructure may also be deliberately attacked or water sources contaminated, diverted or obstructed with the intent of harming civilians, compelling behaviour, controlling territory or obtaining a military or political advantage.[18] These attacks can include cutting water supplies to besieged communities, contaminating wells, destroying treatment facilities or manipulating dams and barrages.[19]

Since 2021, the deliberate targeting of water has been alleged or documented in several conflicts.[20] Yet determining the intent of an attack on a water installation is challenging. It requires establishing that civilians have been deliberately denied water essential to their survival. Collecting the evidence required is constrained when facilities have been damaged, destroyed or abandoned, technical staff have been displaced or killed, access is restricted and physical evidence has been altered.[21]

It is beyond the scope of this report to determine the intent behind these documented incidents.

iv Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa.

2.2 Data, monitoring and analytical tools

Volume 3 of Water Under Fire report called for better monitoring and reporting of attacks harming WASH.[22] Since 2021, documentation, analysis and research have expanded at the global level and within individual countries, yet information and data remain spread across separate tools developed for different purposes. A more detailed list of data, monitoring and analytical tools for documenting attacks related to WASH and analysing their impacts is available in Annex 3.

Documentation

Given the difficulties of collecting information in contexts of conflict, insecurity and/or access constraints, satellite and geospatial analysis have been used to record damage to water and sanitation infrastructure,[23] and open-source investigators[v] have verified individual incidents from imagery and open-source material, establishing what was attacked, how, where and when. Two data sets track conflict-related events over time. Insecurity Insight documents incidents affecting water systems, WASH humanitarian operations and personnel and civilians accessing water across 15 countries,[vi] while the Pacific Institute's Water Conflict Chronology classifies each recorded event based on whether water was a trigger of conflict, used as a weapon or affected by conflict.[24]

Analysis

The WASH Insecurity Analysis (WIA), developed by the Global WASH Cluster,[25] provides a standardized framework for identifying and comparing WASH insecurity at the subnational level. It brings together evidence on access to WASH services, recent hazard impacts, exposure to hazards and underlying vulnerabilities, combining globally available secondary data with country-specific data sets and contextual information. The resulting analysis shows both where WASH insecurity is greatest within a country and the factors driving it, supporting geographical prioritization, resource allocation, preparedness and anticipatory action. In parallel, the Global WASH Sector Resilience Index measures sector resilience across 151 countries,[26] and the indicators trace the pathway from infrastructure damage to service disruption and civilian harm.[27] In addition, public health surveillance links service disruption to outcomes. For instance, WHO monitoring of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea connects disruptions to water and sanitation services with disease outbreaks and mortality.

v Including PAX for Peace, the Conflict and Environment Observatory, Bellingcat and Airwars.

vi Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen.

Research

Peer-reviewed work over the reporting period covered country-level assessment of the impacts of conflict on water resources and infrastructure,[28] reviews of the pathways linking conflict, WASH disruption and infectious disease,[29] outbreak epidemiology,[30] and water management and urban services under armed conflict. This work builds on earlier studies establishing the reverberating effects of explosive weapons on urban services and the impacts of armed conflict on water resources and their management.[31]

The gap

The current documentation and analysis of incidents harming WASH were developed and carried out for operational or research purposes, yet do not provide a collective global record of attacks. Instead, incidents are recorded inconsistently across conflicts, by individual organizations, clusters and United Nations country teams. Technical assessments of damaged infrastructure focus on what needs to be repaired and record the cause of damage in limited detail, if at all, following no common methodology. When the cause goes unrecorded or inadequately recorded, the incident is not recognized as an attack and recurring patterns cannot be identified.[32] Few data sets disaggregate data on those affected by age, so child-specific impacts surface only indirectly through health, nutrition and protection outcomes.[33] Collectively, these initiatives do not generate consistent and comparable information across countries and over time.[34]

While United Nations Security Resolution 2417 (2018)[35] and Resolution 2573 (2021)[36] condemned attacks on water and sanitation, neither resolution established dedicated monitoring and reporting mechanisms for such attacks.

Attacks on health-care services are documented under the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care, mandated by the World Health Assembly, with its own definitions, verification procedures and certainty ratings.[37] While the methodology and scope would differ, no equivalent system exists for water and sanitation.

One of the five calls to action to enhance the protection of water systems in conflict presented in this report is for data on attacks harming WASH in conflict to be systematically monitored and reported on, to generate consistent and comparable information across countries and over time. While a monitoring and reporting mechanism would not itself deliver accountability, it would provide the information on which advocacy, political and operational decisions could be made.[38]

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3. Key trends in conflicts and attacks harming water and sanitation

3.1 Trends in conflicts

Despite the strengthening of legal and policy frameworks in relation to the protection of WASH in conflict situations, their impact has been undermined by trends in armed conflict. In 2025, the number of active armed conflicts worldwide and their average duration were among the highest in decades,[39] with more than 130 active armed conflicts recorded,[40] more than 20 of which had been ongoing for over two decades.[41] Enduring conflicts jeopardize the maintenance and rehabilitation of and investment in water and sanitation systems, increasing the risk that damage will accumulate faster than it can be repaired.[42] Conflicts have also become more fragmented. In 2018, ICRC estimated that more armed groups emerged in the previous six years than had emerged in the preceding 60 years, and that the number of non-international armed conflicts has more than doubled since the start of the century.[43] The more parties that operate in a conflict, the more actors there are in a position to damage, obstruct or seize water systems, and the harder it becomes to negotiate humanitarian access to these systems, protect the personnel who operate and repair them, and prevent attacks. Fragmentation also constrains the ability to raise awareness of the legal and policy frameworks that protect water and sanitation systems: Of the more than 380 armed groups that ICRC identified in 2025, it was in contact with only 64 per cent and conducted dissemination sessions on international humanitarian law with only 29 per cent.[44]

The impact of these trends has been compounded by the widespread lack of compliance by parties to conflict with international law. The 2025 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the protection of civilians observed that parties to conflict increasingly relied on permissive interpretations of the rules on distinction, proportionality and precautions to justify high levels of civilian harm.[45]



Lebanon, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0671361/Haidar

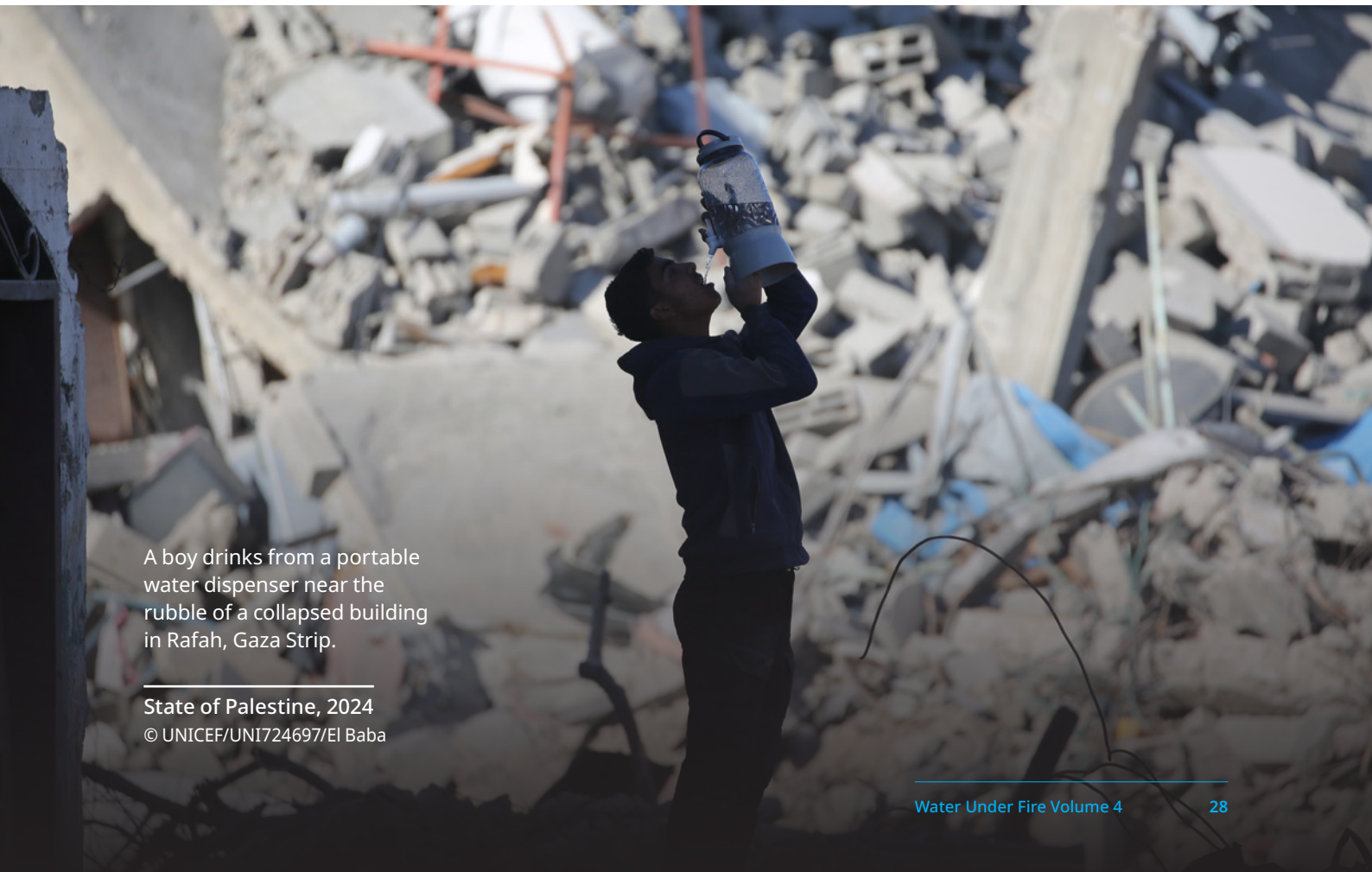
3.2. Trends in attacks harming WASH

Different sources have reported an increase in documented attacks harming water in situations of conflict and violence over the past five years. The Pacific Institute's Water Conflict Chronology has recorded a rise in water-related violence since 2021, notably in the State of Palestine and Ukraine.[46] In 2024, 420 water-related events were recorded globally, an 18 per cent increase from 2023. Of the water related events recorded in 2024, 61 per cent were attacks harming infrastructure.

Data collected by Insecurity Insight point to the same trend, with 883 incidents affecting water systems documented across 15 conflict-affected countries and territories between 2021 and 2025. Of these incidents, 8 per cent included the use of armed drones, with the highest numbers recorded in Ukraine, the State of Palestine and Mali.

Further, attacks that damaged or destroyed water systems accounted for nearly two thirds of all documented attacks harming water systems (64 per cent) and tripled between 2021 and 2025, rising from fewer than 45 incidents across 8 countries in 2021 to more than 135 incidents across 15 countries in 2025. Almost half of all attacks (45 per cent) that damaged or destroyed water and sanitation systems globally were documented in the State of Palestine.[47]

In addition to the increase in the number of attacks harming WASH systems and services globally, available data – in the absence of a single systematic global baseline for recording attacks harming WASH – indicate that the types of attacks harming WASH are increasingly varied and affect wider geographic areas.



A boy drinks from a portable water dispenser near the rubble of a collapsed building in Rafah, Gaza Strip.

State of Palestine, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI724697/El Baba



Firefighters hose down a building damaged in an attack on critical infrastructure in Kyiv that cut electricity, heating and water to millions of residents.

Ukraine, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI928996/Dobronosov

Type: Categories of attacks harming WASH are becoming increasingly varied. Water and sanitation are being attacked in an increasing number of ways, including through strikes on interconnected systems such as energy systems, restrictions on access to essential supplies and contamination of water sources (see section 4).

Location: Attacks harming WASH are increasingly affecting wider geographical areas. Attacks harming WASH are taking place beyond areas of active conflict and front lines, including in rural areas and displacement sites. In addition, certain contexts saw the same WASH systems and services repeatedly damaged and destroyed.

These trends unfold in parallel, as several types of attacks occur more frequently and affect wider geographical areas. This increases the overall exposure of children caught in conflict to the immediate and reverberating effects of attacks harming water and sanitation systems (see section 6).

1. Introduction

2. Conflict and water since 2021

3. Key trends in conflicts and attacks harming water and sanitation

4. Attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users

5. Conflict-driven pressures on WASH systems, services, personnel and users

6. Reverberating effects on children and communities of attacks harming WASH

7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict

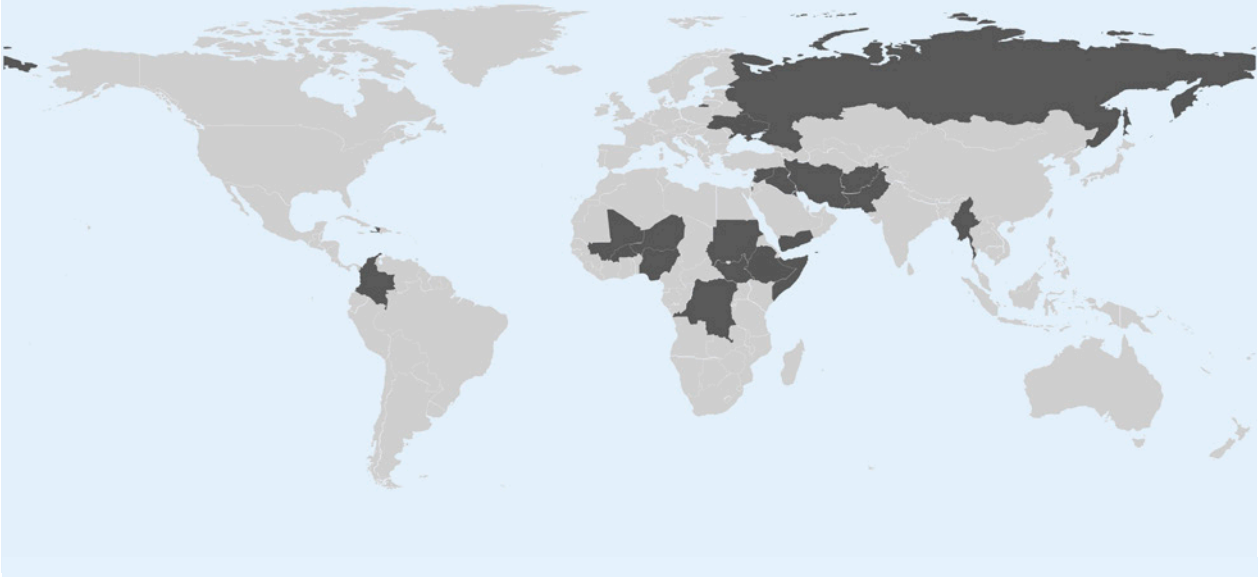
8. Calls to action and roadmap

4. Attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users

To better understand how attacks affect WASH globally, documented incidents were analysed and grouped into seven categories based on the patterns identified in the review. These categories (Table 1) reflect the documented information available and are not intended to represent a complete list of attack patterns that harm WASH globally. As explained in section 1.2, the absence of documented examples in a country or territory does not preclude the occurrence of such attacks but rather reflects that no documented examples were identified through the sources reviewed.

Map 1. Countries and territories with documented attacks harming WASH, January 2021 to June 2026

Afghanistan · Burkina Faso · Colombia · Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) · Ethiopia · Haiti · Iran (Islamic Republic of) · Iraq · Kuwait · Lebanon · Mali · Myanmar · Niger (the) · Nigeria · Pakistan · Russian Federation · Somalia · South Sudan · State of Palestine · Sudan (the)· The Syrian Arab Republic · Ukraine · Yemen



Note: The maps included in this report do not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Table 1. Categories of attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users

	Category	Definition
1	**Damage, destruction and disruption of water and sanitation systems and services**	Kinetic (use of physical force) or cyber actions that damage, destroy or disrupt water and sanitation systems and services.
2	**Contamination of water sources**	The introduction or release of physical, chemical, biological or toxic contaminants into water sources, or pollution resulting from damage or destruction to infrastructure, rendering water unsafe or unsuitable for human use.
3	**Damage, destruction and disruption of energy systems and services**	Kinetic or cyber actions that damage, destroy or disrupt the energy supply on which water and sanitation systems and services depend.
4	**Harm to WASH and energy personnel**	Violence and interference affecting WASH and energy personnel.
5	**Protection violations affecting children and communities related to WASH**	Violence, abuse, coercion and deprivation, including gender-based and sexual violence and the denial of access to WASH systems and services.
6	**Explosive ordnance contamination**	Access restrictions, harm to civilians or damage to water and sanitation systems and services caused by contamination from explosive ordnance.[vii]
7	**Denial of humanitarian access and restrictions on essential supplies, equipment and energy**	Access impediments or deprivation imposed on humanitarian actors, hindering their ability to safely access and assist children and communities with WASH, and restrictions on their ability to access essential supplies, equipment and energy.

vii Explosive ordnance (EO) covers landmines (including improvised landmines) and explosive remnants of war including cluster munitions remnants. The abbreviation 'EO' is used throughout this report. See United Nations Mine Action Service, *International Mine Action Standards, 04.10: Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations*, 2nd ed., amendment 13, New York, 16 June 2026, <www.mineactionstandards.org/standards/04-10/>.

Table 2. WASH and energy systems and services, personnel and users

Systems and services	'Systems and services' refers to water sources, treatment plants, pumping stations, reservoirs, boreholes, wells, pipelines, distribution networks, sewerage and wastewater treatment systems, sanitation facilities, water trucking and the operation, maintenance and delivery of water and sanitation services. This also includes the energy systems, including electricity and fuel supply, on which water and sanitation services depend.
Personnel	'Personnel' refers to the personnel responsible for operating, maintaining, repairing and supporting water and sanitation services, including water utility staff, engineers, technicians, electricians, contractors, water truck operators, community water committees and humanitarian WASH and energy personnel.
Users	'Users' refers to all individuals, households and institutions that rely on water and sanitation services, and includes all people collecting water, using sanitation facilities and practising hygiene.



A strike on Tehran during hostilities.

Iran, 2026

© UNICEF/UNI955969/Atta Kenare/AFP

Attacks harming WASH were documented in a total of 23 countries and territories between January 2021 and June 2026 (**Map 1**). The country and territory examples in the sections below are presented in alphabetical order, except when grouped thematically within a paragraph or section. No ranking is implied.

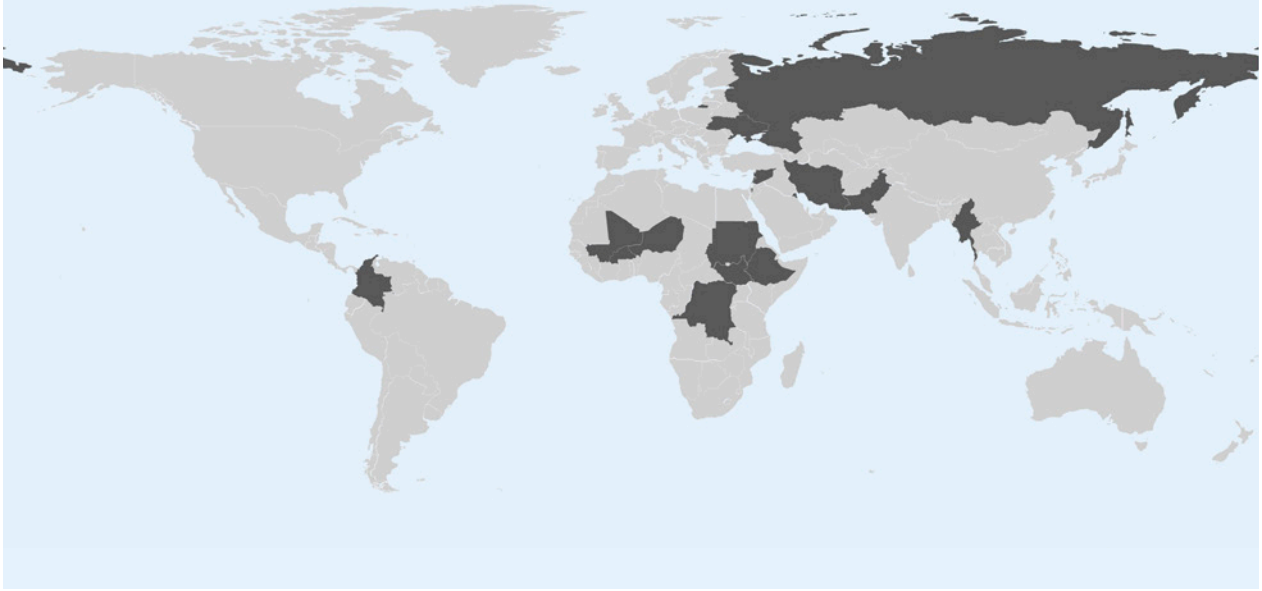
EWIPA tagging. Attack events predominantly involving the use of EWIPA,[48] including air strikes and other aerial operations, shelling and improvised explosive device attacks in cities, towns, villages and other populated areas, are marked/tagged throughout the report with an '**[E]**' to highlight this important pattern of harm.[49] Documented incidents of the use of EWIPA were identified in attack categories 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7, including the reported use of armed drones.

Attacks harming WASH are included when they cause harm to WASH and/or energy systems and services, personnel and users, as defined in **Figure 1**.

4.1. Damage, destruction and disruption of water and sanitation systems and services

Map 2. Damage, destruction and disruption of water and sanitation systems and services

Burkina Faso · Colombia · Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) · Ethiopia · Iran (Islamic Republic of) · Kuwait · Lebanon · Mali · Niger (the) · Pakistan · Russian Federation · South Sudan · State of Palestine · Sudan (the) · The Syrian Arab Republic · Ukraine



Kinetic or cyber actions that damaged, destroyed or disrupted water and sanitation systems and services were identified in 16 of the 23 countries and territories in which attacks harming WASH had been identified.[viii]

Nearly half of all incidents documented in the countries monitored by Insecurity Insight[ix] between 2021 and 2025 were attributed to the use of explosive weapons, including in populated areas, with **the State of Palestine** (Gaza), **the Syrian Arab Republic** and **Ukraine** particularly affected.[50] The reporting period also saw an exponential increase in the use of armed drones as vehicles for explosive weapons, causing damage and destruction to water and sanitation facilities.[51]

viii The countries and territories listed are those in which documented examples were identified through the sources reviewed. The absence of a country or territory does not mean that such attacks did not occur there, only that no documented examples were identified.

ix See footnote vi.



Children walk and gather among the rubble and debris in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, where most water systems have been damaged or destroyed.

State of Palestine, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI580049/El Baba

In **Burkina Faso**, harming water points has become a documented tactic of war. By early May 2022, 32 water and sanitation facilities had been destroyed – most of which were concentrated around Djibo town – directly affecting almost 300,000 people. The destruction was reported to have been systematic, with boreholes closed, solar systems dismantled and generators wrecked. The WASH Cluster recorded that 145 water points had been destroyed in attacks during 2020–2025, cutting off access for around 830,000 people, almost 430,000 of whom were children.[x, 52] A coalition of 13 humanitarian organizations described the pattern as unprecedented in **Burkina Faso and the wider Central Sahel**. In Djibo, repeated attacks harming the town's water system – including its pumping generator and a UNICEF-supplied replacement – left residents with under 3 litres of water per person per day, down from about 6 litres, which is below the Sphere Standards[xi] minimum of 15 litres per person per day.[53]

In **the Islamic Republic of Iran**, damage to water systems incurred during the escalation in hostilities in 2026 has led to localized disruptions in water supplies. On 7 March 2026, desalination and water infrastructure was reportedly damaged on Qeshm Island, disrupting the production and distribution of drinking water to communities, forcing 25 villages to rely on water trucking.[54]

In **Kuwait**, where around 90 per cent of drinking water is produced by desalination, three strikes on power and water desalination plants were recorded within eight days in 2026 **[E]**. On the evening of 29 March, a service building at one of the plants was struck, killing a worker and causing significant material damage to the building. On 3 April, a further electricity generation and water desalination plant was struck, damaging some of its components. On 5 April, two power and water desalination facilities were struck, taking two power-generating units out of service.[55]

x The number of children (those under 18 years) affected was estimated based on 51.8 per cent of the population of Burkina Faso being under 18, according to the Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation (Fifth General Population and Housing Census, 2019), and the fact that approximately 830,000 people in total were affected (i.e., 830,000 × 0.518 = 429,940).

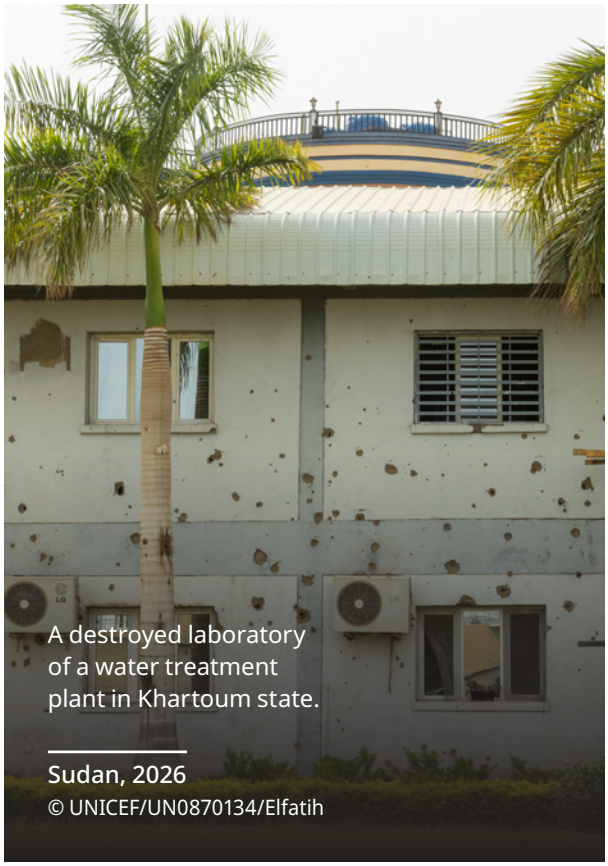
xi The Sphere Standards are internationally recognized minimum standards for humanitarian response, developed to define the conditions required for crisis-affected people to live with dignity and to support the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. They include minimum standards and guidance for WASH conditions.

In **South Sudan**, renewed conflict in Jonglei state in 2025 and 2026 left Akobo town without a functioning water network. Before the fighting, 17 water towers and 35 boreholes supplied the town through an underground network; all were destroyed or looted, and by June 2026 only eight hand pumps remained functional, enough for an estimated 5,000 of more than 100,000 residents. Solar panels were stripped from the town's main water pumping station, leaving it out of service.[56]

In **the State of Palestine**, strikes in November 2023 hit seven water facilities across the Gaza Strip, including three sewage pipelines in Gaza City, two reservoirs in Rafah and Jabalia refugee camp, and two water wells in Rafah **[E]**.[57] A satellite assessment of 239 WASH sites found that half of them had been damaged by late February 2024, including desalination plants, water pumping stations and water towers.[58] Since October 2023, none of the seven wastewater treatment plants in Gaza has been operational. More than 130,000 metres of sewage pipeline had been damaged, and untreated sewage was being discharged through storm water basins to the sea or to temporary holding areas.[59] As at April 2026, the North Gaza seawater desalination plant had been destroyed and at least 51 desalination plants required repair.[60]

On the first day of the current civil war in **the Sudan**, 15 April 2023, the Bahri water treatment plant serving Kartoum was attacked **[E]**.[61] Damage to water treatment plants and to the power stations that run them spread nationwide: By March 2024, only 1 of the 13 treatment plants in Khartoum state was still working, and by 2025, damage across 13 states had cut water facility functionality by 70 per cent, leaving around 9 million women and children without safe water.[62] Water delivery vehicles have also been struck in transit: In September 2025, an armed drone hit a UNICEF-supported water tanker in Al Fasher, North Darfur, as it delivered clean water to 8,500 displaced people and hospital patients, including at Al Saudi hospital.[63]

In the north-east of **the Syrian Arab Republic**, water stations serving Deir ez-Zor city and the surrounding rural areas draw on the Euphrates river, which runs along what became a front line. Hostilities in January 2025 affected eight water treatment plants in the city, reducing water supplies, while water stations in the eastern rural areas were reported to have been damaged by ongoing conflict, with communities reporting severe water shortages causing a strain on livelihoods.[64] In the south, in the city of As-Sweida, following the escalation of hostilities in July 2025, UNICEF reported that extensive damage to infrastructure had left 98 wells out of service, with water supplies being unable to meet community needs as a result.[65]

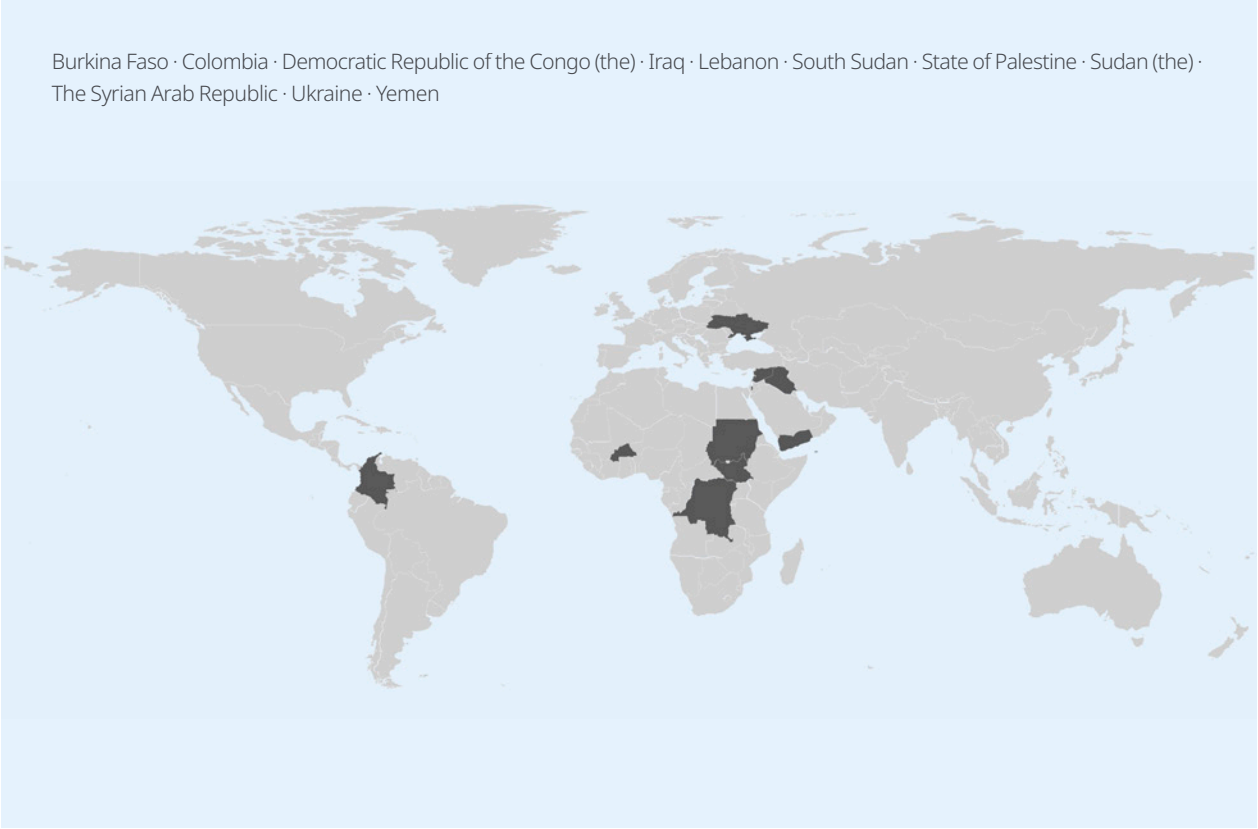


A destroyed laboratory of a water treatment plant in Khartoum state.

Sudan, 2026
© UNICEF/UN0870134/Elfatih

4.2. Contamination of water sources

Map 3. Contamination of water sources



Incidents involving the introduction or release of physical, chemical, biological or toxic contaminants into water sources, or pollution resulting from damage to or destruction of infrastructure, rendering water unsafe or unsuitable for human use, were identified in 11 of the 23 countries and territories.[xii]

In **Burkina Faso**, parties to conflict besieging some 40 towns and villages by the end of 2024, primarily in the Centre-Nord, Est, Nord and Sahel regions – home to up to 2 million people – have sabotaged water systems and contaminated wells, in some cases dumping animal carcasses into them. In Djibo, since March 2022, 300,000 people, including 155,000 children,[xiii] had to rely on unsafe water sources.[66]

xii See footnote viii.

xiii The number of children (those under 18 years) affected was estimated based on 51.8 per cent of the population of Burkina Faso being under 18, according to the Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation (Fifth General Population and Housing Census, 2019), and the fact that approximately 300,000 people in total were affected (i.e., 300,000 × 0.518 = 155,400).



Colombia, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0644712/Franco

In **Colombia**, illegal gold mining operations discharge mercury into rivers used for drinking and fishing, particularly in remote and conflict-affected areas. According to the Office of the Inspector General illegal mining activities have been identified in 29 of the 32 departments in Colombia, while mercury contamination linked to mining has been reported in 26 departments. In the Telembí Triangle region of Nariño, including the municipalities of Barbacoas, Magüí Payán and Roberto Payán, mercury pollution from mining activities has degraded the Telembí river and its tributaries, undermining water quality and increasing public health risks.[67]

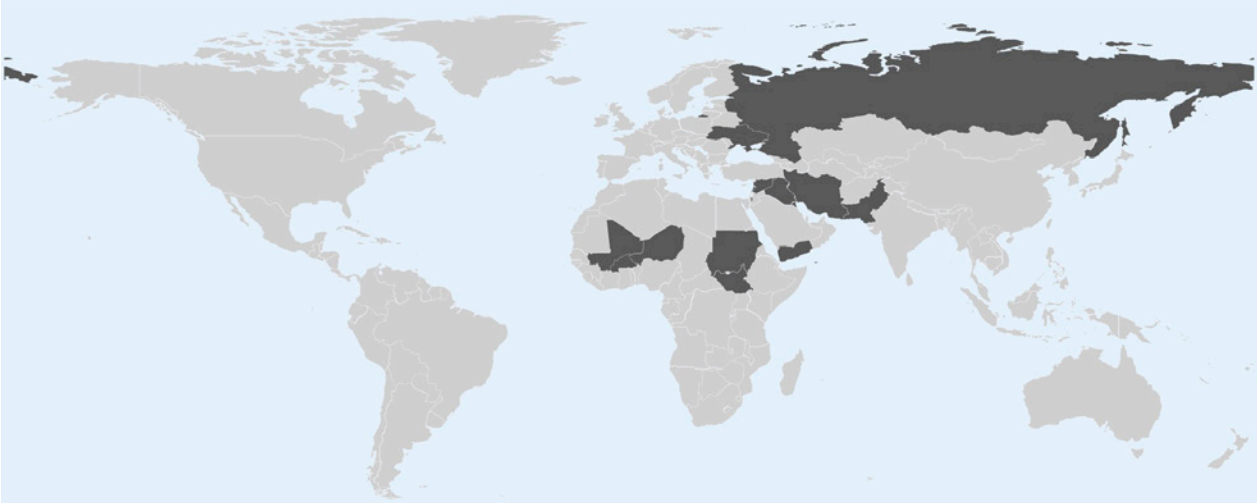
In **Ukraine** the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023 resulted in the widespread contamination of water sources. Floodwater carried industrial chemicals, fuel, sewage and agricultural pollutants into downstream drinking water sources, as an estimated 83,000 tonnes of sediment laden with heavy metals – including lead, cadmium and nickel – put the river system at risk. The breach drained the reservoir that had supplied drinking water to at least 700,000 people, an estimated 126,000 of whom were children.[xiv,68]

xiv This estimate was derived based on data indicating that approximately 18 per cent of the Ukraine population is under 18 years and that more than 700,000 people in total were supplied by the reservoir, i.e., 700,000 × 0.18 = 126,000 (United Nations Children's Fund, 'How Many Children under 18 Are There in Ukraine?', UNICEF Data, <https://data.unicef.org/how-many/how-many-children-under-18-are-there-in-ukraine/>). No age breakdown specific to the reservoir-supplied population is available; the national age structure is applied without adjustment for displacement from the affected oblasts.

4.3. Damage, destruction and disruption of energy systems and services

Map 4. Damage, destruction and disruption of energy systems and services

Burkina Faso · Iran (Islamic Republic of) · Iraq · Kuwait · Lebanon · Mali · Niger (the) · Pakistan · Russian Federation · South Sudan · State of Palestine · Sudan (the) · The Syrian Arab Republic · Ukraine · Yemen



Kinetic or cyber actions that damage, destroy or otherwise disrupt the energy supply on which water and sanitation systems and services depend were identified in 15 of the 23 countries and territories.[xv]

In **Iraq**, on 26 November 2025, an armed drone attack on the Khor Mor gas field halted gas supplies to power stations across the Kurdistan region, causing widespread outages and reducing electricity production by approximately 80 per cent. The electricity shortage affected water services. The Ministry of Electricity of the Kurdistan region reported that the limited remaining electricity had to be rationed across water projects, hospitals, cities and other essential services.[69] The dependence of water services on this energy supply was demonstrated again in July 2026, when Khor Mor gas production was suspended for approximately 11 days amid security threats following a series of armed drone attacks in the Kurdistan region. Three days into the disruption, the Erbil Water Directorate reported that electricity shortages had led to reduced water supply for 30 per cent of the city, with affected neighbourhoods receiving around two fewer hours of running water supply per day.[70]

xv See footnote viii.

In **Pakistan**, hostilities in February 2026 interrupted the energy supply on which water systems in the Balochistan province depend. Water pumping and water trucking in the Makran region of the province relied on imported electricity – accounting for over 70 per cent of the region's power supply – and on fuel brought informally across the border. Border closures and supply interruptions during hostilities disrupted fuel supply and, according to the provincial utility provider, also disrupted electricity supply across the Makran region's grid stations, affecting pumping and trucking in border districts. The utility provider stated that the suspension caused significant difficulties for residents and that supply was insufficient to meet demand.[71] Energy infrastructure elsewhere in the Balochistan province was damaged by explosions on repeated occasions over the period. In June 2026, an explosion destroyed a high-voltage transmission pylon carrying electricity from a power plant in the east of the province, suspending supply to the provincial capital and other districts. The distribution company reported that repair work could not begin until security clearance for the affected area was obtained.[72]

In **the Russian Federation**, strikes on energy infrastructure were reported to have caused localized disruptions to water supplies, including in Belgorod in January 2026 **[E]**.[73] According to local authorities in Belgorod, 600,000 residents were left without water on 10 January 2026, following a strike on energy infrastructure the previous night.[74]

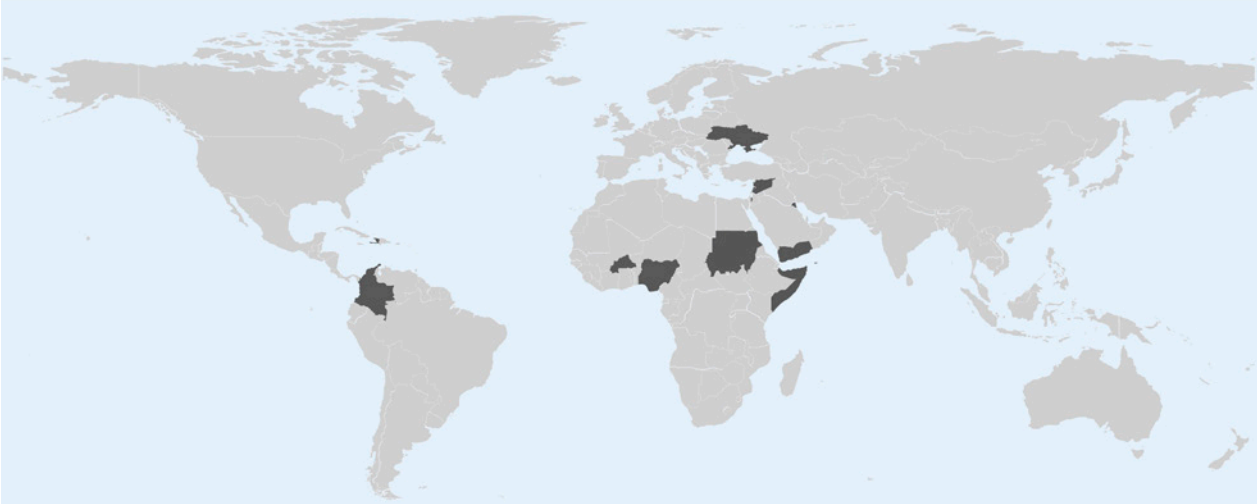
Insecurity Insight data on **the Sudan** indicate that repeated looting of and damage to the energy supply infrastructure on which water and sanitation systems depend occurred between 2024 and 2025, including solar power systems, generators, electricity infrastructure and satellite internet equipment.[75] For instance, during the fighting in Khartoum between April 2023 and early 2025, thousands of solar units were stripped from the federal water authority's stores, according to the Director-General of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Authority,[76] with similar incidents documented in West Kordofan and North Kordofan.[77]

In **Ukraine**, sustained attacks impacting the electricity grid since autumn 2022 have cut power to centralized water systems, with damage recorded across Kharkiv, Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kyiv **[E]**. By December 2022, UNICEF reported that attacks had left almost every child in Ukraine – nearly 7 million children – without sustained access to electricity, heating and water.[78] Earlier that year, within the first seven weeks of the full-scale escalation of the conflict, 1.4 million people in eastern Ukraine had been left without piped water, as damage to water and electricity networks and power cuts disabled the pumps.[79] This disruption has persisted across successive winters: In late 2025, intensified attacks impacting energy infrastructure caused blackouts lasting 12 or more hours at a time, cutting off water and heating, and one third of children in Ukraine were living in homes without functioning water supplies or sewage systems.[80]

4.4. Harm to WASH and energy personnel

Map 5. Harm to WASH and energy personnel

Burkina Faso · Colombia · Haiti · Kuwait · Lebanon · Nigeria · Somalia · State of Palestine · Sudan (the) · The Syrian Arab Republic · Ukraine · Yemen



Incidents of violence and interference affecting WASH and energy personnel were identified in 12 of the 23 countries and territories.[xvi]

Insecurity Insights documented 46 attacks harming WASH personnel between 2021 and 2025, with close to 60 per cent of these attacks occurring in **the Syrian Arab Republic** and **Yemen**, with physical assaults, threats and interference with repair activities persistently being recorded in **the State of Palestine**.[81]

In **Lebanon**, the South Lebanon Water Establishment reported that 16 of its employees were killed during the conflict in 2024. Two of them were killed when the Tyre water filtration and pumping station was struck on 18 November 2024 **[E]**. The strike cut off water to around 72,000 people in Tyre and surrounding areas, who relied on trucked water until temporary repairs restored supply on 25 December.[82]

In December 2025, three primary health-care facilities in north-west **Nigeria** were attacked: Security guards were restrained and injured, and the solar systems used to power the facilities and pump water were stolen, leaving two recently constructed boreholes non-functional. These attacks and the looting of solar equipment have made facility management teams and communities reluctant to replace the systems, fearing that personnel and infrastructure will again be targeted. Solar looting at health facilities elsewhere in Kano state has similarly undermined services and community confidence in the durability of newly upgraded facilities.[83]

xvi See footnote viii.



A UNICEF staff member at a water storage tank.

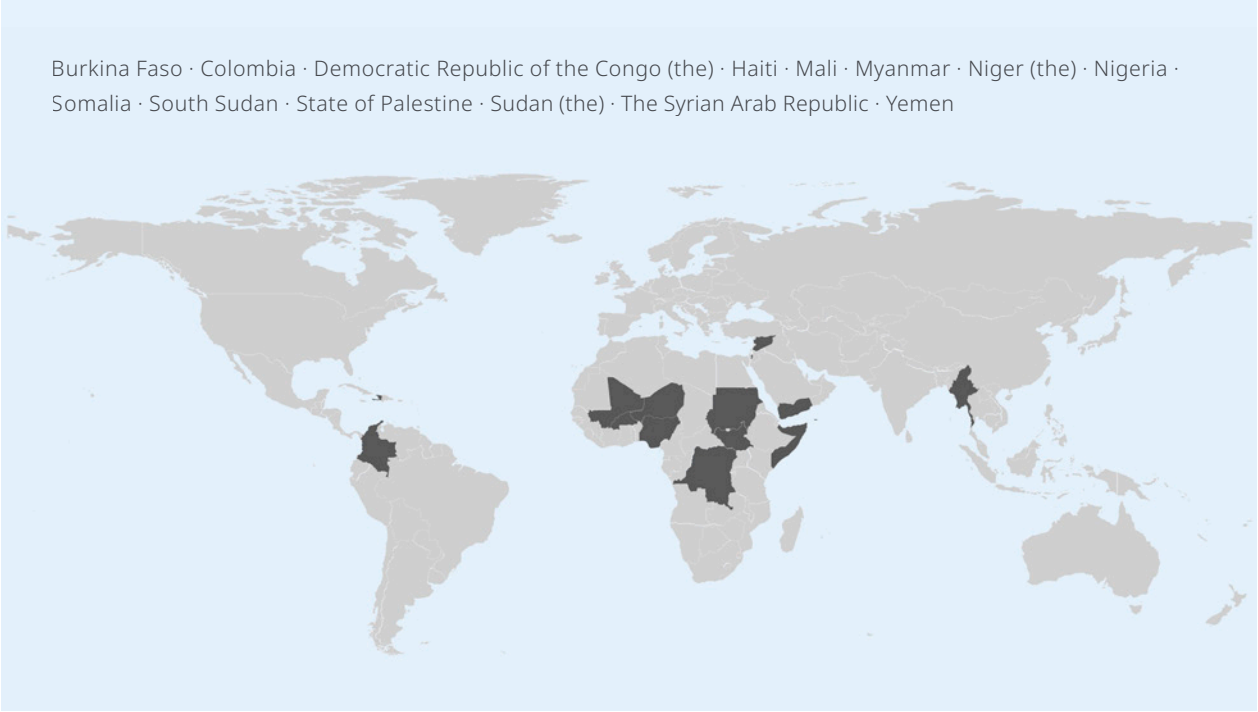
Lebanon, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0725104/Choufany

In **the State of Palestine**, at least 13 water personnel were killed in Gaza in three documented incidents between 2024 and 2026. In one of the incidents, on 17 April 2026, two contracted drivers were killed at the Mansoura water filling point during routine water trucking operations.[84] This incident had far-reaching consequences. In early April 2026, 74 per cent of households assessed in Gaza relied on water trucking as their primary means of obtaining drinking water, delivered across more than 2,000 distribution points by over 50 organizations.[85] Those deliveries depended on a small number of filling points. Mansoura was the major operational truck filling point on the Mekorot supply line serving Gaza City, used several times a day to deliver water to hundreds of thousands of people including children. Yet, after the incident, contractors were instructed to suspend on-site activities until security conditions were restored.[86]

In **Ukraine**, a water-trucking team from the International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation came under armed drone fire while filling a drinking water point in Kherson in August 2024, killing the truck driver and a field coordinator.[87]

4.5. Protection violations affecting children and communities related to WASH

Map 6. Protection violations affecting children and communities related to WASH



Incidents of violence, abuse, coercion and deprivation, including gender-based and sexual violence and the denial of access to WASH systems and services, were identified in 14 of the 23 countries and territories.[xvii]

These documented protection violations had a disproportionate impact on girls and women. In March 2024, after leaving displacement camps to collect firewood for boiling water and cooking, at least 200 people, mostly internally displaced women and children, were abducted in Borno state, **Nigeria**.[88]

In **Colombia**, confinement[xviii,89] and mobility restrictions have severely compromised access to WASH facilities in communities that already have inadequate infrastructure for basic services. Communities can reach water sources only when permitted and must travel long distances to do so. Between January and October 2025, more than 1 million people were affected by confinement – three times the 2024 total – with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities being disproportionately affected.[90]

In **Haiti**, 75 per cent of displacement sites in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area are located in areas controlled by armed actors or in high-risk zones, hindering humanitarian access to the sites.[91] A 2024 assessment by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women of six displacement sites found that rape was used in most camps by armed actors to control women's access to scarce humanitarian assistance, including water.[92]

xvii See footnote viii.

xviii Confinement is defined as the loss of mobility and of access to at least three basic services or goods, water and sanitation being among them, for a minimum of one week.



Lauratu, 13, washes dishes at a water point.

Nigeria, 2023
© UNICEF/UN0854628/Owoicho

In **Somalia**, in the context of the displacement of 653,000 people by conflict and insecurity in 2023 and a further 290,000 in 2024,[93] the United Nations Population Fund reported that 95 per cent of women and girls living in displacement sites faced heightened risks of violence, exploitation and abuse. In 2022, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) reported that women displaced by drought had to walk farther to reach water, leaving them exposed to sexual violence, and recorded a 200 per cent rise in reported gender-based violence cases among drought-displaced populations compared with the same period in 2021.[94]

In Gaza, **State of Palestine**, civilians have repeatedly been killed while trying to access drinking water. In 2023, six Palestinians were shot and injured by sniper fire while filling water at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, and in 2024, eight Palestinians were killed by sniper fire while filling water containers near Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.[95] On 13 July 2025, seven children were killed in a strike while queuing at a water distribution point in Nuseirat **[E]**.[96] On 2 September 2025, at least nine Palestinians, including six children, were reportedly killed and several others injured in multiple air strikes on a group of people collecting water in the Al Attar area of Al Mawasi, west of Khan Younis **[E]**.[97] Water and sanitation facilities in Gaza have also been placed beyond the reach of the communities that depend on them. UNICEF reported that, by August 2025, 81 per cent of public water and sanitation facilities in Gaza were inaccessible, located in areas that were militarised or under displacement orders.[98] In early April 2026, more than 64 per cent of the Gaza Strip was designated a military zone and was inaccessible to the population, and movement of the demarcation line eastwards in May 2026 further reduced the area in which services could be delivered.[99]

Box 4. Denial of access to menstrual hygiene products and services in conflict

In **South Sudan**, at Gorom Refugee Settlement outside Juba, women and girls have faced limited access to sanitary products, clean water and a private place to wash and change during menstruation. In 2025, girls left without menstrual products after dignity kit supplies ran out were reported to have been approached by men offering money or basic supplies in exchange for sex.[100]

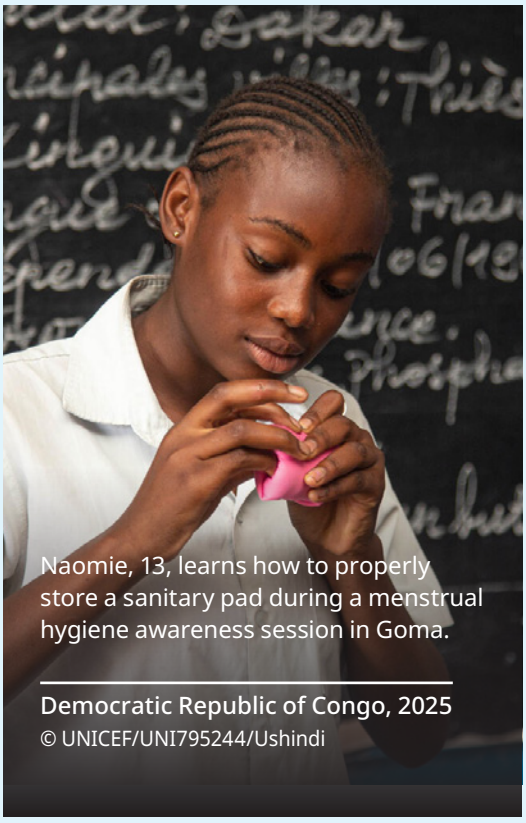
In **the State of Palestine**, the destruction of WASH infrastructure and the closure of crossings in March 2025 blocked sanitary pads, soap and dignity kits from entering the Gaza Strip, leaving over 540,000 women and girls of reproductive age unable to obtain menstrual products as prices reached five times pre-war levels.[101]

In **the Sudan**, by late 2025, a single packet of sanitary pads in North Darfur cost around US$27 in the local market – a quarter of the monthly humanitarian cash assistance of just under US$150 provided to a family of six – and women and girls reported having to choose between food or sanitary pads and being left with no choice but to use dirty cloth or dried leaves as a substitute.[102]

Box 5. Protection risks for adolescents collecting water and firewood in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

In 2023, UNICEF, the European Union Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and partners examined protection risks among displaced adolescents in eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, surveying 2,354 people across three provinces, including more than 1,400 adolescents aged 11–19.

Collecting water and firewood and using sanitation facilities were among the activities exposing adolescents to the greatest risks. Girls aged 15–19 faced the highest levels of risk across these activities, with sexual and gender-based violence being the most commonly reported threat. In North Kivu, 41 per cent of respondents identified girls as being at risk of rape while collecting firewood, while 72 per cent of adolescent boys reported being at risk of kidnapping, killing or other types of physical violence.[103]

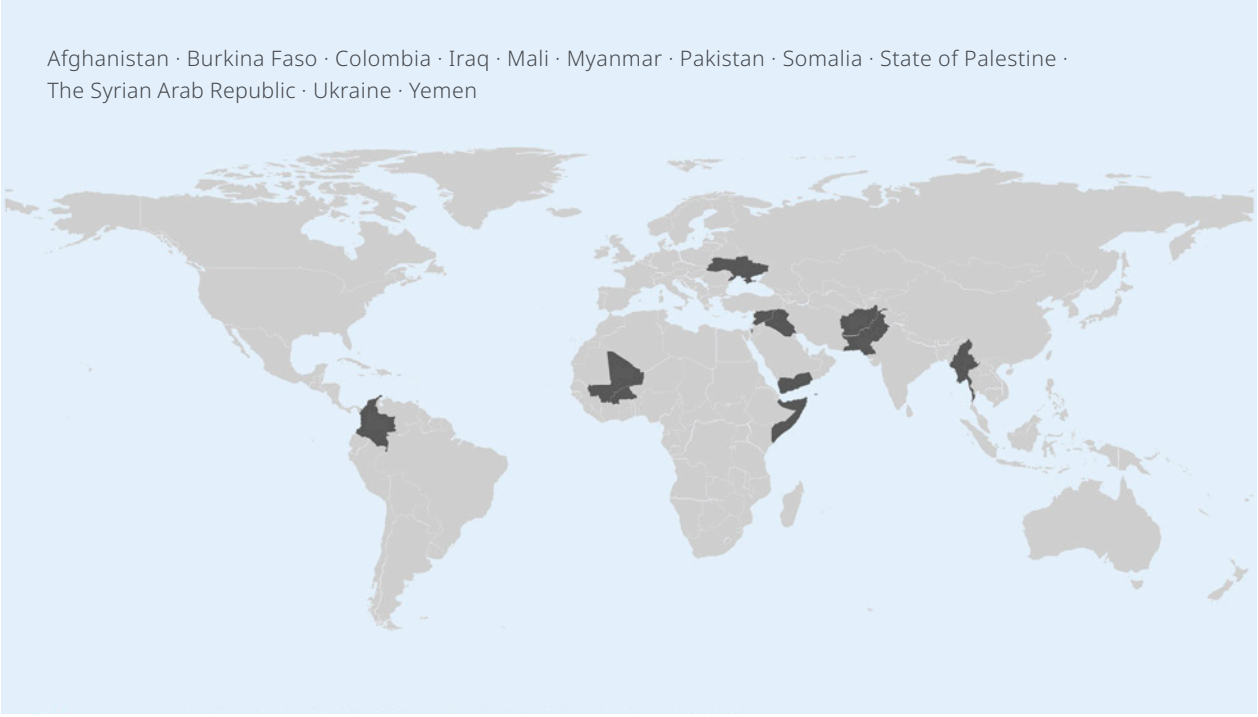


Naomie, 13, learns how to properly store a sanitary pad during a menstrual hygiene awareness session in Goma.

Democratic Republic of Congo, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI795244/Ushindi

4.6. Explosive ordnance contamination

Map 7. Explosive ordnance contamination



Access restrictions, harm to civilians or damage to water and sanitation infrastructure caused by contamination with explosive ordnance (EO) were identified in 12 of the 23 countries and territories from 2021 to 2026.[xix] Insecurity Insights recorded EO as a particularly prominent form of attack harming water in **Somalia** and **Yemen**.[104]

Myanmar recorded the world's highest annual EO casualties for two consecutive years (2023 and 2024), with children accounting for more than a quarter of the over 2,000 casualties in 2024. UNICEF recorded the presence of landmines near water sources, with people encountering them while fetching water or collecting firewood. Humanitarian assessments have identified landmine contamination as being among the key obstacles to displaced people's access to essential services, including WASH facilities.[105]



Aung, 15, was tending to his family's rice farm when he stepped on a landmine. His left leg had to be amputated to save his life.

Myanmar, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI549328/Oo

xix See footnote viii.

In **the Syrian Arab Republic**, EO contamination has restricted safe access to water points and water infrastructure. In Deir ez-Zor, one of the country's most heavily EO-contaminated governorates, water stations and water and sewage networks were reported to be contaminated in 2026, limiting safe access for communities and humanitarian organizations alike. Between April 2025 and April 2026, more than 215 people injured by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERWs) were treated at Deir ez-Zor National Hospital, and nearly half of them were children.[106]

In **Ukraine**, almost a quarter of the country was recorded to be potentially contaminated with mines and ERWs as at February 2026.[107] As of 1 September 2026, mines and ERWs had killed or injured 1,688 civilians in Ukraine since 24 February 2022, including 173 children, according to the Ukrainian Main Directorate of Mine Action, Civil Protection and Environmental Safety.[108] Utility crews must clear contaminated ground before bombed pipes and pumping stations can be brought back into service.[109] The Ukrainian Deminers Association has reported that clearance has prioritized agricultural land and roads, leaving reservoirs and the margins of farmland – where residents fetch water and collect firewood – contaminated and routine water collection remains dangerous.[110]

In 2023 in **Yemen**, the National Mine Action Programme (NMAP) recorded contamination of public facilities, including water sources.[111] This meant that ERWs, particularly near schools and farmland, had to be cleared before routes to water sources could be used safely.[112]



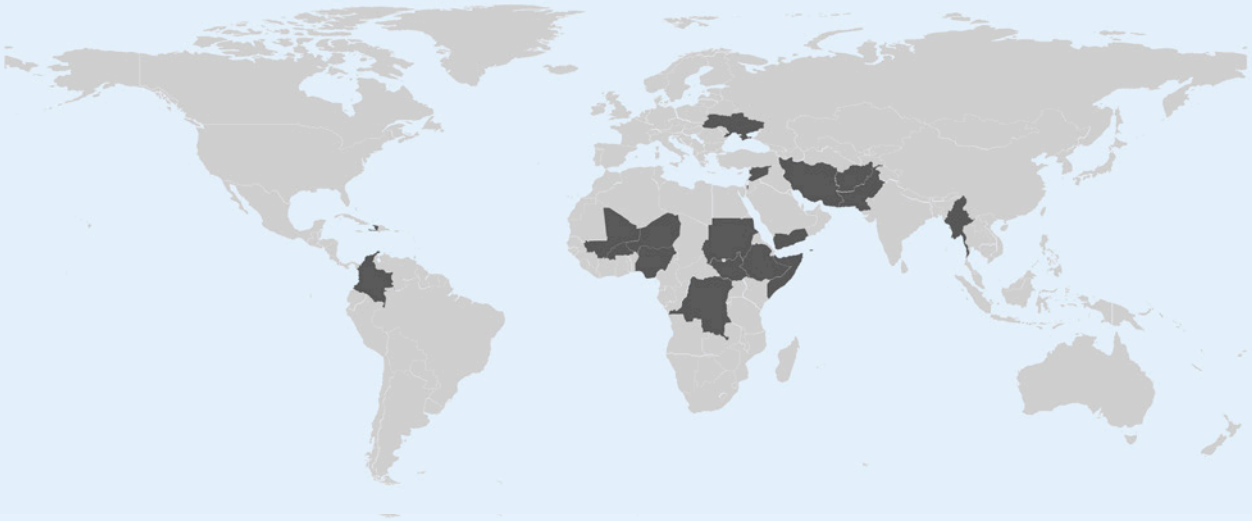
Yahia, 13, lost both his legs at the age of 6 when a shell exploded near his house; one due to the lack of adequate medical supplies at the hospital.

Syrian Arab Republic, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI733333/Shahan

4.7. Denial of humanitarian access to and restrictions on essential supplies, equipment and energy

Map 8. Denial of humanitarian access to and restrictions on essential supplies, equipment and energy

Afghanistan · Burkina Faso · Colombia · Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) · Ethiopia · Haiti · Iran (Islamic Republic of) · Mali · Myanmar · Niger (the) · Nigeria · Pakistan · Somalia · South Sudan · State of Palestine · Sudan (the) · The Syrian Arab Republic · Ukraine · Yemen



Access impediments imposed on humanitarian actors hindering their ability to safely reach and assist children and communities with WASH, and restrictions on their ability to access essential supplies, equipment and energy were identified in 19 of the 23 countries and territories from 2021 to 2026.[xx]

In **Afghanistan**, the December 2022 decree banning women from working for national and international non-governmental organizations, extended to the United Nations in April 2023, was issued at a point when female aid workers constituted about a third of those delivering the WASH response.

In March 2023, the WASH Cluster reported that needs assessments, supplies distribution, post-distribution monitoring and hygiene promotion were most affected by the ban, representing a 60–70 per cent decrease in activities. In 2026, the WASH Cluster reported that access restrictions, particularly on female staff, continued to limit safe access to services and impede gender-responsive programming, including hygiene promotion, for women and girls.[113]

In **Haiti**, insecurity and armed actors have repeatedly obstructed the collection, transport and treatment of solid waste and faecal

xx See footnote viii.

sludge. From 2022, gaining access to Truitier, the only public landfill site serving metropolitan Port-au-Prince, became increasingly difficult, as armed actors controlled surrounding roads, preventing municipal drivers from reaching the site. In response, partners in Port-au-Prince began disposing of collected waste along the Bicentenaire waterfront, where it was openly burned and dumped into the sea. In November 2024, waste collection trucks in Pétion-Ville were stranded for more than eight days after being blocked from reaching the disposal site. By December 2025, armed actors reportedly controlled access to Truitier, demanding payments and confiscating some water disposal vehicles. In May and June 2026, the WASH Cluster reported weeks-long blockages of access roads to the faecal sludge treatment plant at Morne-à-Cabri, while access constraints also disrupted waste transport from displacement sites and host communities to Truitier. These persistent constraints disrupted safe waste and faecal sludge disposal, increasing public health and environmental risks.[114]

In **the State of Palestine**, the humanitarian access restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip have severely restricted the entry of the fuel, electricity, chlorine, generators, pumps, engine oil and spare parts that water and sanitation systems depend on.[115] By mid- 2024, an estimated 84.6 per cent of critical WASH infrastructure was damaged, which together with the cutting of external supplies and the obstruction of aid deliveries, led to 62 per cent of households not having access to the minimum amount of 6 litres per person per day of drinking water.[116]



A girl queuing for a water truck in an internal displacement camp in Gaza City, where restrictions on fuel and supplies, damage to water and sanitation infrastructure and displacement have left 96 per cent of households struggling to get clean water.

State of Palestine, 2025
© UNICEF/UN0932007/Nateel

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2. Conflict and water since 2021
3. Key trends in conflicts and attacks harming water and sanitation
4. Attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users
5. **Conflict-driven pressures on WASH systems, services, personnel and users**
6. Reverberating effects on children and communities of attacks harming WASH
7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict
8. Calls to action and roadmap

5. Conflict-driven pressures on WASH systems, services, personnel and users

The harm to WASH systems, services, personnel and users caused by the attacks categorized above is further exacerbated by the humanitarian, security and economic consequences of conflict. Two conflict-driven pressures on WASH consistently emerged from the information reviewed: (1) the displacement of populations, adding pressure to WASH systems in areas of arrival, and (2) prolonged insecurity, preventing WASH system operations, maintenance and rehabilitation.

5.1. Conflict-driven displacement pressures on water and sanitation services

Conflict-driven displacement often places acute pressures on WASH systems in areas of arrival within countries and across borders, overwhelming existing infrastructure, increasing public health risks and reducing access to safe services for displaced and host communities.[xxi]

In **the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, in the period before the January 2025 escalation of the conflict, when the camps around Goma were still in place, approximately 700,000 internally displaced people were living in camps with dangerously inadequate WASH services. Following the escalation, a third of the 2 million Goma residents, a third of whom had been recently displaced, were left without access to clean water, sanitation or power, and hundreds of thousands of people began moving from those displacement sites to areas of return with limited water and sanitation services.[117] Despite large-scale humanitarian interventions, water and sanitation services in the camps remained unable to meet the needs of the growing displaced population. WASH Cluster data showed that, in February 2024, an average of 6.3 litres of water per person per day was available across North Kivu, with one latrine for every 138 people and one shower for every 249 people.[118] In December 2023, WHO reported that more than 143,000 people in Rusayo camp were surviving on two litres of water per person per day.[119]

In north-east **Nigeria**, protracted conflict left approximately 2.3 million people internally displaced across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states by the end of 2024, alongside more than 2 million returnees living in areas with limited services.[120] Around 40 per cent of displaced people were living in camp or camp-like settings, where overcrowding overwhelmed already limited water and sanitation services; 46 per cent of displacement sites in the north-east were located in flood-prone and overcrowded areas, and in Borno state 900,000 displaced people lacked access to clean water, electricity, shelter and other essential services.[121]

xxi This list presents documented attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users identified in the countries and territories included in this report. It does not represent the total number or proportion of attacks occurring in each country or territory, nor should the countries and territories included be interpreted as an exhaustive representation of where such attacks have occurred. The absence of documented examples should not be interpreted as evidence that attacks did not occur, but rather that sufficiently documented examples were not identified through the sources reviewed.

In refugee-hosting areas of **Pakistan**, levels of access to water and sanitation facilities are below national levels for both the refugees and the host community. The Forced Displacement Survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with fieldwork conducted between May 2024 and February 2025, recorded 73 per cent of refugees and 83 per cent of hosts as having access to basic drinking water services, compared with a 2022 national estimate of 91 per cent, and 18 per cent of refugees and 26 per cent of hosts as having access to basic sanitation facilities, compared with an estimate of 71 per cent nationally.[122]

In Gaza, **State of Palestine**, around 90 per cent of the population, roughly half of them children, has been displaced at least once since October 2023 to shelters and informal sites where WASH services cannot meet demand. As of March 2026, nearly 1.7 million people, around 80 per cent of the population, remained displaced, including approximately 800,000 children living in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions marked by high levels of insects, pests and rodents and a severe lack of privacy.[123] The war in **the Sudan** has driven cross-border displacement into at least seven neighbouring countries whose water and sanitation systems cannot accommodate the increased population. Over 1 million people, including more than 440,000 children, had arrived in **South Sudan** by early 2025, concentrating at the two transit centres in Renk, designed for 4,800 people but hosting over 16,000 , forcing more than 300 people to share a single water tap. This has been a major contributor to the longest cholera outbreak in the country's history.[124] In eastern **Chad**, Sudanese refugees had access to only five litres of water per person per day as at June 2025.[125]



Marzia, 9, washes her hands in a transit centre for returnees to Afghanistan from Pakistan. "This is our own country, but we have no place to go."

Afghanistan, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI578347/Khan

5.2 Protracted insecurity causing degradation of water and sanitation systems

Prolonged insecurity progressively weakens water and sanitation systems by preventing maintenance and rehabilitation, limiting access for engineers and repair teams, driving away skilled personnel, reducing investment and leaving infrastructure to deteriorate over time.

As a result, WASH infrastructure becomes progressively less reliable and more difficult to operate, maintain and restore, reducing the availability and continuity of essential services long after periods of intense fighting have subsided. This decline is frequently compounded by wider structural constraints – economic collapse, donor funding reductions, sanctions and banking restrictions, governance failures and climate shocks – which delay or inhibit rehabilitation and raise operating costs.[126]

Repeated conflict causes infrastructure to deteriorate year after year as maintenance is deferred and damaged assets remain unrepaired. In **the Syrian Arab Republic** in 2022, nearly two thirds of the country's water treatment plants, half of its pumping stations and one third of its water towers were damaged by the conflict, and at least 70 per cent of discharged sewage was untreated.[127] Yet rehabilitation did not follow, as repair teams could not reach damaged facilities, and facilities that could have been restored quickly remained out of operation because technical staff were denied safe access.[128] Abandoned munitions that had failed to detonate, or that had been dumped in rivers, lakes and streams, impeded repairs to water systems, and clearing contaminated water bodies required specialist underwater expertise and equipment.[129] By 2026, over half of the country's water infrastructure and 70 per cent of its wastewater treatment plants remained severely damaged, and households in Damascus received water for only six to eight hours a day, compared with the continuous supply seen before the conflict.[130]

In **Yemen**, Taizz city's public water network served 83 per cent of the city's population in 2014, compared with only 16 per cent in 2021. Yet, since the conflict that affected Taizz in 2015, water extraction has been suspended at two of the five basins feeding the network because personnel could not safely access them owing to crossfire, landmines and ERWs. In 2024, many of the boreholes identified as primary water sources for supplying the city remained inactive because of their proximity to front lines, and displaced households relied almost entirely on water trucking, with insufficient numbers of communal water points.[131]

Conflict degrades water and sanitation systems not only through physical damage but by driving away the workforce needed to operate and maintain them. In **the Sudan**, UNICEF reported that approximately 60 per cent of WASH engineers and technical personnel have left the country.[132]

1. Introduction

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6. Reverberating effects on children and communities of attacks harming WASH

7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict

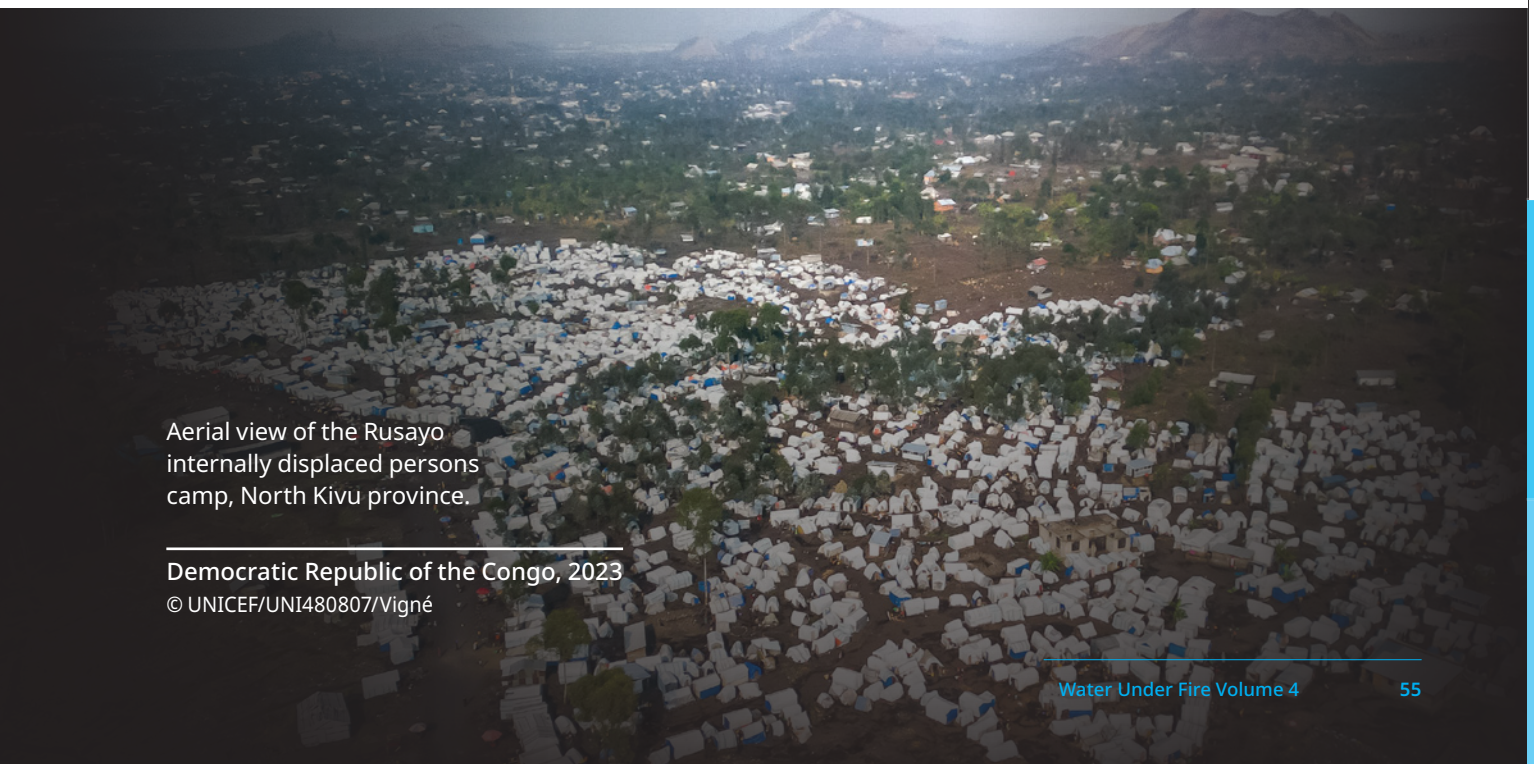
8. Calls to action and roadmap

6. Reverberating effects on children and communities of attacks harming WASH

Attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users have indirect, cascading and long-lasting consequences, referred to in this report as 'reverberating effects'. Because water and sanitation underpin essential civilian services and are closely interconnected with other critical systems, including health, energy, food production and education, attacks harming WASH affect multiple sectors.[133] The reverberating effects of attacks harming WASH are further exacerbated by the successive shocks often occurring in protracted conflicts, which prevent recovery and progressively degrade water system functions.[134]

Across the 23 countries examined in this report, reverberating effects of attacks harming water and sanitation systems were most consistently identified across four interconnected areas: **(1) health-care services**, **(2) child nutrition**, **(3) infectious disease** and **(4) protection**. Disruptions to WASH services can simultaneously contribute to disease-, malnutrition- and protection-related harms while weakening the essential services needed to prevent and respond to them.

The reverberating effects have a differentiated effect on vulnerable populations – including persons with disabilities, pregnant and lactating women and girls, young children, older people and those with chronic illness – yet their experiences remain under documented, reflecting a gap in the available evidence.[135] Children with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing water and sanitation facilities, and depend on caregivers to do so, yet they are among the least visible in documentation on conflict-driven disruption.[136]



Aerial view of the Rusayo internally displaced persons camp, North Kivu province.

Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023
© UNICEF/UNI480807/Vigné

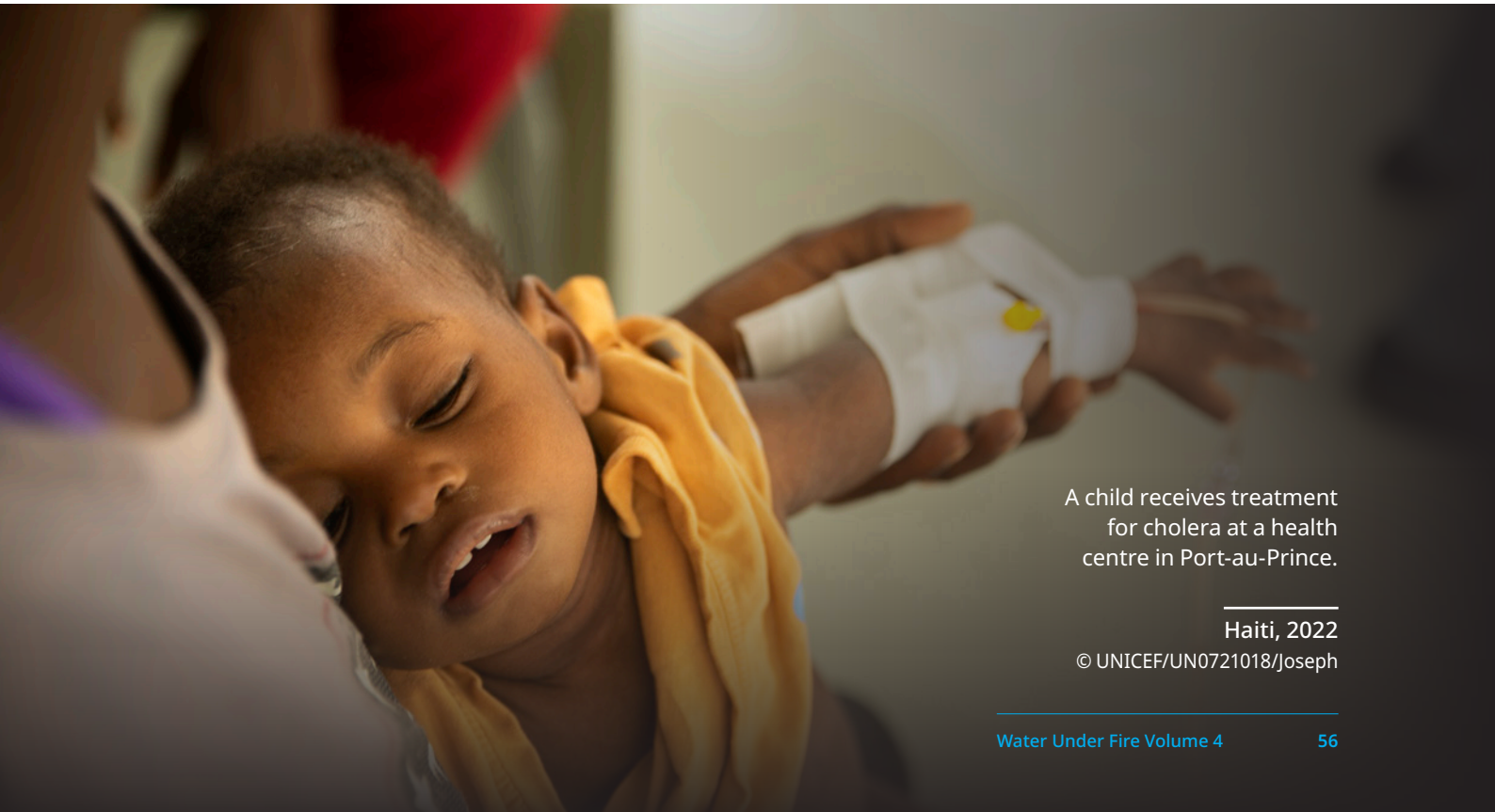
6.1. Healthcare system disruption

Disruptions to the water infrastructure serving health facilities can have profound consequences for clinical care, including maternal and newborn care, neonatal intensive care, infection prevention and control, and the management of severe acute malnutrition.

WASH and waste management are essential for effective infection prevention and control, sterilization and safe births, surgery and inpatient care.[137] Maternal, newborn and child health services are particularly exposed to risks because they all depend on a reliable supply of safe water.[138]

Between 2021 and 2025, Insecurity Insight identified 33 occasions when water and sanitation systems serving health facilities were disabled, with damage to hospital water tanks, pumping stations and pipelines being documented in **Cameroon**, **the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **South Sudan**, **the State of Palestine**, **the Sudan** and **Ukraine**.[139]

In **Haiti**, fuel blockades and shortages amid escalating violence have cut the supply of fuel that runs community water pumping and treatment systems and hospital generators – and with it the clean water that health facilities depend on. During the blockade of autumn 2021, the Haitian water authority announced that it lacked the fuel to continue pumping drinking water, affecting more than 265,000 people in the Cité Soleil commune alone. As hospitals and other health-care facilities were forced to cut their services, women in labour turned to an MSF emergency centre, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence struggled to access care, with some walking for hours across the capital. The resulting disruption to the water supply and health services heightened the risk of waterborne disease transmission and exacerbated other urgent health needs faced by patients, facilities and surrounding communities.[140]



A child receives treatment for cholera at a health centre in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti, 2022

© UNICEF/UN0721018/Joseph



State of Palestine, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI751091/Nateel

In Gaza, **State of Palestine**, attacks since October 2023 have damaged and destroyed the water, sanitation and energy infrastructure that hospitals depend on **[E]**. In November 2023, WHO reported that the lack of clean water, fuel, medicines and food at Al-Shifa Hospital – once the largest referral hospital in Gaza – meant that it could no longer be considered a functioning medical facility. Clean water was unavailable and the security situation prevented staff from managing waste. The WHO assessment team recorded corridors and hospital grounds being filled with medical and solid waste, increasing the risk of infection for the 291 patients and 25 health workers still present.[141] As electricity for incubators and life support equipment failed, premature newborns died; the 31 surviving babies, described by UNICEF as being at imminent risk of death, were evacuated on 19 November 2023.[142] At Kamal Adwan Hospital, housing the last functioning neonatal intensive care unit in northern Gaza, attacks put the oxygen system out of service and damaged the water tanks, leaving the hospital with no source of water before it was put out of service entirely.[143] At Nasser Hospital, WHO found that no electricity or running water was available and that the intensive care unit was non-functioning; 2 children were among the 32 critical patients evacuated by WHO.[144] The damage to Al-Rantisi Specialized Hospital for Children left the Gaza Strip's only paediatric dialysis unit, serving 45 children, unable to deliver dialysis; 10 children died of kidney failure as a result of inadequate access to treatment.[145]

In **Ukraine**, when the pipeline supplying Mykolaiv from the Dnipro river was damaged by shelling in April 2022, the city had no water supply for several weeks and no safe centralized water source for more than three years **[E]**. The municipal system was then supplied with brackish, high-salinity water from the Southern Buh estuary, which was for hygiene, sterilization or safe patient care, leaving hospitals reliant on stored non-potable water. By August 2022, the United Nations reported that the city was completely cut off from the centralized drinking water supply and that medical services were becoming increasingly limited.[146] In a survey of more than 2,200 health workers, more than 65 per cent reported that power outages following attacks had affected clinical procedures, including maternity care. Power outages following the October 2022 attacks harming energy infrastructure cut the flow of water to the national specialized children's hospital Okhmatdyt in Kyiv, creating unhygienic conditions, and interrupted or delayed surgery for child patients.[147]

6.2. Impacts on child nutrition

Attacks harming WASH can affect child nutrition through two main pathways. First, infections, including those causing diarrhoeal disease, that result from attacks harming WASH can impair children's nutritional status through their effects on appetite, nutrient absorption and metabolism.[148] Second, inpatient treatment of severe acute malnutrition with medical complications relies on therapeutic milk, which must be reconstituted with clean, safe drinking water.[149] Damage or disruption to water and energy services can therefore compromise this treatment.

In Tigray, **Ethiopia**, basic services, including electricity and fuel supply, were disrupted from July 2021 to November 2022. Water supply infrastructure was heavily damaged – the proportion of non-functioning water facilities rose from 7 per cent to 71 per cent over two years of the conflict – and shortages of fuel and spare parts constrained water trucking and repair operations, with assessments reporting high levels of diarrhoeal disease among displaced people. Fuel scarcity also prevented standard nutrition surveys and rapid nutrition assessments from being carried out and constrained the transport of essential supplies. During the response, only 73.5 per cent of targeted children with severe acute malnutrition were admitted for treatment, while therapeutic feeding admissions increased substantially from July 2021.[150]

In early 2024 in Gaza, **State of Palestine**, 70 per cent of children under five surveyed had experienced diarrhoea in the preceding two weeks, while the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children was increasing rapidly. UNICEF, WHO and the World Food Programme warned that diarrhoea was compromising children's ability to absorb nutrients and contributing to deteriorating nutritional status.[151] In mid-March 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) cited the critically restricted access to humanitarian and commercial supplies – including water, fuel and medicine – as being a key driver of the conditions that eventually resulted in famine (IPC Phase 5) being confirmed in Gaza Governorate as of 15 August 2025.[152] The situation improved following the October 2025 ceasefire and the subsequent increase in the number of humanitarian and commercial deliveries reaching Gaza, with no 'famine' classifications being given to any governorate in the Gaza Strip in the IPC analysis published in December 2025.[153] However, the conditions driving malnutrition persist. Between October and the end of November 2025, 1.6 million people, 77 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip, faced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), including more than 500,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and over 100,000 in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Acute malnutrition was at Critical levels (IPC Phase 4) in Gaza Governorate and as of April 2026, over 100,000 children in the Gaza Strip were projected to be in need of treatment for acute malnutrition.

6.3. Reverberating effects on health and infectious disease

Infectious diseases spread quickly in the absence of safe water and functioning sanitation and hygiene systems.

Menstrual health and hygiene

Where conflict cuts off the supply of clean water and menstrual materials, the risk of poor menstrual hygiene increases, which in turn increases the risk of urinary and reproductive tract infections.[154] In **Somalia**, the United Nations Population Fund reported in 2021 that period poverty was widespread across the country and most acute in humanitarian settings, including settlements for internally displaced people, where women and girls displaced into camps and settlements lacked secure bathing facilities and menstrual supplies, and that those without materials used improvised substitutes including leaves, old cloth, newspaper, socks and pieces of mattress, increasing their risk of urogenital symptoms and infections.[155] A cross-sectional study of over 350 female **Palestinian** refugees living in refugee camps found that reusing menstrual products and difficulties in obtaining them were associated with higher rates of urinary or reproductive tract infection diagnoses; 92 per cent of respondents reported at least one symptom of a urinary or reproductive tract infection in the previous three months.



Adolescent girls in the Gaza Strip receive much needed menstrual hygiene items.

State of Palestine, 2024
© UNICEF/UN0931762/El Baba

Hepatitis E

In **the Sudan**, strikes on electricity and water infrastructure in Khartoum in September 2025 caused prolonged outages that disrupted health services amid ongoing cholera, dengue and malaria outbreaks. Hepatitis E was one of several concurrent outbreaks, resulting in more than 3,100 cumulative cases and 43 deaths by mid-November 2025, concentrated in Aj Jazirah state, where pregnant women accounted for more than 80 per cent of deaths. WHO attributed the decline in WASH services partly to damaged infrastructure and conflict-related insecurity, and identified limited access to WASH as driving a particularly high risk of infection in camp settings.[156]

The Sudanese conflict also led to refugee flows in eastern **Chad**. In camps and transit sites in Ouaddaï province, a hepatitis E outbreak was recorded and attributed by WHO to limited access to safe drinking water and inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities. Half of the 2,092 suspected cases reported between January and April 2024 were among children aged 6–17 years.[157]



One-year-old Ershad receives hospital treatment for acute watery diarrhoea.

Afghanistan, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI823707/Azizi

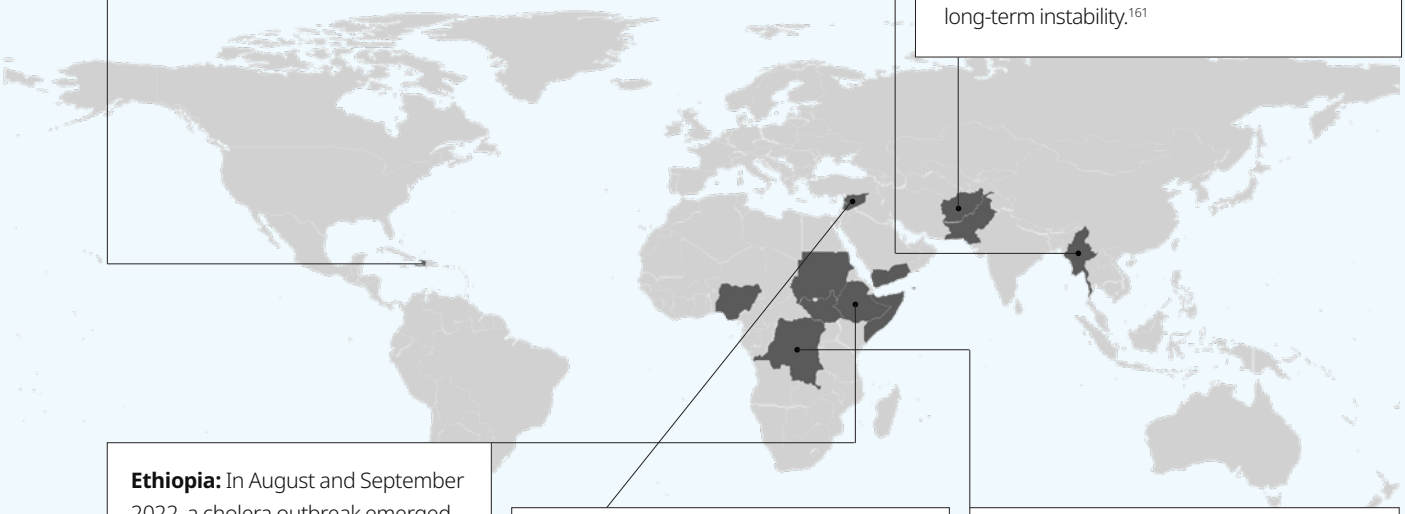
Box 6. Cholera and conflict

Armed conflict increases the risk of cholera. WHO reported that 60 countries had cholera cases in 2024, up from 45 in 2023, with 98 per cent of cases being in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and attributed the upsurge to conflict, climate change, population displacement and long-term deficiencies in WASH infrastructure.[158]

Haiti: The blockade of the Varreux fuel terminal in Port-au-Prince in October 2022 cut off the supply of fuel, leaving 9 of the 16 cholera treatment centres without enough fuel to operate and contributing to the first cholera outbreak in the country in over three years. More than 17,600 suspected cases and over 310 deaths were recorded by the end of 2022.[159]

Myanmar: Since 2021, conflict and displacement have impacted water and sanitation services. An acute watery diarrhoea/cholera outbreak began in late June 2024 in Yangon and was worsened by flooding in September 2024 that damaged boreholes and piped networks and contaminated water supplies. By January 2025, 9 out of 15 states were affected by cholera/acute watery diarrhoea, with more than 2,000 cases recorded nationally.[160]

Afghanistan: Following the August 2021 events, major donor funding for WASH was withdrawn, leaving essential personnel and administrative staff unable to maintain water and sanitation systems. By September 2021, only 17 per cent of facilities under the national primary healthcare programme were fully functional. Clinics closed or ran out of medicines, and provincial and district hospitals became overwhelmed. In 2022, 242,000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea and 87 associated deaths were recorded, more than half of them among children under five. As of 2025, despite donor support, only 10 per cent of the UNICEF Humanitarian Appeal on WASH was funded, leaving significant gaps in service delivery and system maintenance, and creating long-term instability.[161]



Ethiopia: In August and September 2022, a cholera outbreak emerged in Oromia state amid conflict-driven displacement and the worst drought in the Horn of Africa in decades. Heavy floods in October and November 2023 then damaged and contaminated water systems and destroyed latrines, forcing reliance on unsafe water. In November 2023, more than 770 cases of cholera and 23 associated deaths were recorded. In the most affected area, 80 per cent of cases were among children under five.[162]

Syrian Arab Republic: More than a decade of conflict had damaged around two thirds of the country's water treatment plants by 2022. Since early 2021, critically low flow levels in the Euphrates river have affected 54 of 73 water stations along the river's western bank, which more than 5 million people depend on for drinking water. Repeated disruption of the Alouk water station has also affected safe water supply for more than 460,000 people in Al-Hasakeh. In November 2022, more than 35,500 suspected cases of cholera were recorded, approximately 8,900 of which were among children under five, as well as 92 associated deaths.[163]

Democratic Republic of the Congo: In January 2025, an offensive captured Goma, cutting the supply of running water and electricity to some 2 million people. Pumping stations restarted only after emergency fuel was supplied, acutely amplifying an endemic cholera outbreak in the Kivu region. More than 64,400 suspected cases of cholera and 1,800 associated deaths were recorded by December 2025, the worst outbreak in 25 years.[164]



A child receives oral polio vaccine in the Gaza Strip. Poliovirus was found in sewage in Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis in July 2024.

State of Palestine, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI751086/Nateel

Box 7. Reverberating impacts on health in the State of Palestine

In Gaza, **State of Palestine**, attacks harming water, sanitation and energy infrastructure, restrictions on fuel and humanitarian access, and disrupted sewage treatment have sharply reduced the population's access to safe water and increased the risk of infectious disease. Overcrowded displacement camps have further exacerbated the risks. In this context, in July 2024, **poliovirus** was detected in sewage in Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis, where wastewater systems had stopped functioning and untreated sewage was accumulating. With vaccination coverage falling from 99 per cent in 2022 to below 90 per cent in 2024, Gaza recorded its first confirmed polio case in 25 years, with a 10-month-old child being partially paralysed as a result in August of that year, prompting an emergency campaign targeting more than 640,000 children.[165] The same conditions contributed to the spread of **hepatitis A**. By August 2024, nearly 40,000 hepatitis A cases had been reported, compared with 85 during the equivalent period before the war, with 800–1,000 new cases of acute jaundice syndrome being recorded each week. Skin infections also spread rapidly among children.[166] By 30 June 2024, WHO had recorded more than 100,000 cases of scabies and lice, more than 65,000 cases of skin rashes and over 11,000 cases of chickenpox. Health providers reported that children were the most affected by these highly contagious skin conditions.[167]

6.4. Reverberating protection impacts of attacks harming water and sanitation

The lack of access to safe water in conflict creates an environment in which children are increasingly exposed to protection risks, while the capacity of their families and communities to prevent, mitigate or cope with the consequences of these risks is weakened.

As WASH services become scarce, less accessible or less reliable, children may increasingly be required to collect water, queue for long periods at water points or contribute to household survival, exposing them to protection risks. This burden is not evenly distributed. Where water must be collected outside the home, women and girls are responsible for water collection in 7 out of 10 households, with girls being nearly twice as likely as boys to undertake this task.[168] As described in section 4.5, these often perilous journeys to water collection points expose women and girls to heightened risks of gender-based violence.

Repeated encounters with armed actors along routes used to collect and transport water may also normalize their occurrence and increase children's exposure to recruitment, abduction and other forms of exploitation. For example, in the Jabal Awlia locality of Khartoum state in **the Sudan** in 2025, children reportedly travelled regularly to a neighbouring area to collect water because of limited access within their own community, requiring them to pass through two checkpoints staffed by armed actors. Focus group discussions conducted by UNICEF and partners with community members indicated that this repeated exposure contributed to normalizing the presence of armed actors in children's daily lives and increased their interactions with them.[169]

Time spent collecting water also limits children's access to education. Schools do not only offer education and the promise of another future, but they also provide safe and protective spaces where children can develop socially with their peers and access essential services such as feeding programmes, health care and mental health support. For these reasons, children who are out of school face significantly heightened risks of exploitation, child labour, child marriage, trafficking and recruitment, among other risks.



Noor fills her canister from a tank, part of a new solar-powered water project that has transformed life for 12,000 Taiz residents.

Yemen, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI934860/Al-Basha

For instance, in **Ethiopia**, residents in the Abergele and Tsagibiji districts of the Amhara region were dependent on river water for seven months after water points and generators powering water pumps were damaged because of the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Access had been limited before the conflict, with only 30 per cent of people in Abergele having access to piped water and many in Tsagibiji relying on unprotected ponds. Girls collected water daily from the rivers in groups before dawn, and their schooling suffered as a result. Following the rehabilitation of water points, a student in Abergele reported no longer missing school, while in villages still relying on rivers to source water girls continued to miss it.[170]

In **Yemen**, the burden of securing water often falls on children: In villages in Dhamar and Ibb, water is collected from streams at least an hour and a half's walk from the village, often twice a day, and residents and a former local council member have reported that this has forced many children to drop out of school.[171] Attacks harming water and sanitation systems can also drive displacement, forcing families to leave their homes in search of safer or more accessible water sources. Repeated displacement and secondary movements increase the risk of family separation and psychosocial distress, and children's exposure to gender-based violence, recruitment by armed actors, abduction and EO, among other protection risks. As families are forced to move in search of safer or more accessible water sources, children may be left without adult supervision and exposed to insecure environments, while access to protective services and existing family- and community-based protection mechanisms may also be disrupted.

For example, in **the Sudan** in 2026, communities in White Nile, Blue Nile, Central Darfur and North Darfur – areas receiving internally displaced populations – have reportedly faced significant challenges in accessing safe water along displacement routes. Caregivers described having to temporarily leave children unattended while searching for water or waiting in lengthy queues at water points, highlighting how displacement driven by inadequate access to water can create new protection risks for children.[172]

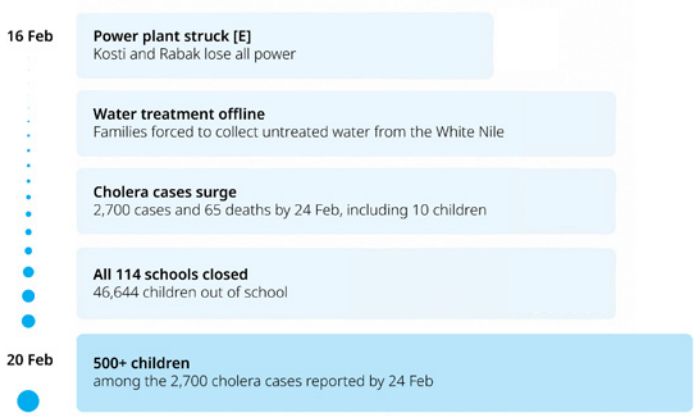


Nuria Izac, 18, pulls a water container across her village. She has never been to school; lack of water was one of the barriers.

Ethiopia, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0694020/Bizuwerk

Box 8. The Sudan, February 2025: one strike, multiple repercussions

On 16 February 2025, a strike on the power plant serving Kosti and Rabak cut the electricity supply to both towns. Within eight days, this single strike on energy infrastructure had widespread repercussions for children and their communities. Water treatment stopped, and families had to collect untreated water directly from the White Nile **[E]**. Cholera cases rose sharply, and on 20 February all 114 schools in Kosti closed to curb the epidemic, leaving more than 46,000 children out of school. By 24 February, 2,700 cases of cholera and 65 associated deaths had been reported, including 500 cases and 10 deaths among children.[173]



Sources: UNICEF (2025), 'Cholera surges in Sudan's White Nile State'; UNICEF Sudan, 'The fight against cholera'; OCHA (2025), Flash Update No. 01, 25 Feb; Adam et al. (2025), cholera resurgence in Kosti City; UNICEF internal reporting (school closures).

Box 9. Kabul: damage from conflict surfacing years later

Decades of war and political instability decimated the hydrological infrastructure of **Afghanistan**, and the breakdown of water services in urban areas halved water availability.[174] In Kabul, the reverberating effects of that damage to WASH continue to surface years later.

War destroyed much of the city's public water supply network. With no functioning piped alternative, households turned to private groundwater wells and purchased tanker water, and water became a recurring household expense rather than a public service, further exacerbating a trend established well before the 2021 transition of power.[175]

As fighting declined after August 2021 and populations returned, water systems were not restored at the same pace, and degradation continued faster than repair. Because water had to be bought, falling incomes had the greatest impact on those who were already most vulnerable, with many households forced to use unsafe sources.[176]

Groundwater levels then fell. Because the piped network had not been restored, there was nothing for households to fall back on as the water supply from the wells they depended on declined. By 2025, wells reaching depths of 120 metres had run dry and poorer households were spending up to 30 per cent of their income on tanker water. Nationally, nearly a third of the population, including 6.8 million children, lacked access to safe drinking water.[177]

The burden of collection then fell on children. With water no longer available nearby or affordably, collection became a household chore, with children queuing for hours each day at communal taps rather than attending school.[178] Children continue to carry the burden of the reverberating effects of damage to WASH sustained years earlier.

1. Introduction

2. Conflict and water since 2021

3. Key trends in conflicts and attacks harming water and sanitation

4. Attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users

5. Conflict-driven pressures on WASH systems, services, personnel and users

6. Reverberating effects on children and communities of attacks harming WASH

7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict

8. Calls to action and roadmap

7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict

This section highlights three areas in which WASH practitioners have employed innovative and adaptive approaches to mitigate the risks of attacks harming water and sanitation systems and their humanitarian consequences despite challenging circumstances.

7.1. Maintaining access to water and sanitation services

Parties to conflict restrict access to water and sanitation by preventing and delaying repairs, limiting movement, disrupting supplies, and exposing WASH and energy personnel to attack. In response, WASH actors have adapted how services are delivered and maintained, shifting delivery to local counterparts, supporting them remotely where international presence is limited and engaging those who control territory so that repairs, delivery of supplies and water provision can continue.

Water and sanitation services rely on local actors, including the authorities that plan, regulate and oversee services, the technicians who operate systems, the utility companies that maintain infrastructure and the community committees that manage them. When humanitarian access is constrained, the role of these local actors becomes even more important, with international organizations pivoting to remote technical and coordination support.



A UNICEF WASH Officer assesses the solar-powered borehole in Niafunké, Timbuktu region.

Mali, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI939781/Keïta



A UNICEF WASH Officer checks a solar-powered water system.

Myanmar, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI980477/Htet

In **Afghanistan**, water management committees elected by communities and shuras[xxii] – local councils that take decisions on behalf of a village or district – maintain systems and negotiate access in hard-to-reach areas, with local mechanics trained through WASH partners carrying out ongoing maintenance.[179] In Bargimatal, in the province of Nuristan, spring water is collected in two reservoirs and piped downhill to more than 200 families, including 780 children, with no pumps or electricity required. Maintenance costs are met from a monthly household contribution, reducing dependence on external contractors and supply lines.[180] In **Mali**, where insecurity constrains access to many localities, UNICEF and partners have adopted a localization-based access strategy. In 2025, national non-governmental organizations delivered an integrated package of services, including WASH, to 280 hard-to-reach villages in the Bandiagara, Douentza, Tombouctou and Gao regions, with UNICEF field offices providing technical support, quality assurance and monitoring.[181] In this context, national and local authorities, UNICEF, the private sector and civil society signed a 10-year WASH sustainability pact for 2026–2035 in February 2026, and production of a national guide on conflict-sensitive WASH programming is under way as of June 2026.[182] In **Myanmar** in 2024, restrictions on waterways and travel authorisations affected the transport of materials needed for dry season water provision, at a point when water scarcity was expected to affect almost 84,000 displaced people. The water scarcity response to support affected communities was activated after intense negotiations and agreements.[183]

Across contexts, relationship-building, humanitarian diplomacy and local negotiation are critical factors in making repairs and service delivery possible, being central to maintaining access in complex environments.[184]

xxii Shuras are consultative councils rooted in customary practice, through which community decisions are taken and disputes resolved. In Afghanistan, they operate at the village and district levels and are widely used as the entry point for the community management of water and sanitation systems.

7.2 Rehabilitating and recovering differently

Simply rebuilding systems as they were risks reproducing the vulnerabilities exposed by damage sustained during conflict. Rehabilitation is therefore increasingly planned by weighing the risk of conflict alongside technical, financial, environmental and social factors.

Rehabilitating differently also means restoring services to a higher standard. Maintaining continuity of service is not sufficient where water or sanitation remains unsafe, physically inaccessible, unaffordable or systematically unavailable to parts of the population. Consistent with applicable human rights standards, rehabilitation and recovery should ensure that services are available, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable, without discrimination, and that affected communities can meaningfully participate in decision-making concerning these services.[185]

In practice, this has meant moving away from rebuilding large, centralized systems – whose failure as a result of attacks severs supplies for all communities in the region – to decentralized systems intended to improve resilience by reducing dependence on a single system.[186]



One of more than a thousand mechanics and community water management committee members trained by UNICEF to operate and maintain water systems where insecurity would otherwise leave them unserved.

Afghanistan, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI756062/Azizi

This has involved adapting systems as follows:

1. **Enabling energy independence:** To achieve this, fuel-dependent pumps, at risk from attacks harming central energy supplies and supply lines, can be replaced with solar-powered pumps. In **Afghanistan**, to mitigate conflict-driven disruptions to the supply of fuel and electricity, UNICEF-supported water supply has shifted from handpump boreholes to solar-powered piped systems that bring water closer to households. Solar-powered systems made up 74 per cent of UNICEF-supported water systems completed in 2024, up from 65 per cent in 2021.[187]

2. **Decentralizing water and energy supplies:** In 2025 in **Haiti**, when violence cut communities off from their central water supply, the Haitian water authorities and UNICEF installed water kiosks in communities affected by violence, while a World Bank-supported model used community-contracted local water operators and solar-powered systems to reach rural areas and displacement sites.[188]

   In **Iraq**, communities in Sinjar, Ninewa, depended entirely on groundwater, as the conflict had damaged water stations. United Nations actors rehabilitated the stations, drilling deep wells equipped with solar-powered pumping facilities and training local operators to run them so that supply no longer depended on fuel deliveries or on repair crews being able to reach the district. Across Ninewa, more than 20 conflict-damaged stations were rehabilitated between 2020 and 2025, restoring supplies for communities of returnees.[189]

   In **Yemen**, when centralized, fuel-dependent systems failed during the conflict, families and communities kept water flowing with their own small solar-powered supply. Between June 2022 and 2023 across Sa'ada, Al Jawf, Ibb and Marib, village and district wells, reservoirs and pipelines were paired with solar pumping, engineered and managed as planned local systems.[190]

3. **Building the capacity of local operation and maintenance personnel:** In **Afghanistan** in 2021, community water management committees and more than a thousand mechanics were trained through UNICEF-supported partners to operate and maintain systems that otherwise would have been left unserved because of insecurity.[191] Using local personnel reduces dependence on long and insecure supply chains and enables faster repair following damage.[192]



State of Palestine, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI724700/El Baba

Box 10. From bakery to water hub: restoring essential infrastructure differently in Ukraine

Following attacks impacting municipal water infrastructure across Ukraine in 2022, damage to centralized networks disrupted not only household water supplies but also other essential civilian services that depended on them, including bakeries. In response, independent water sources were developed at bakery sites, allowing them to continue or resume bread production while also supplying safe drinking water to surrounding communities.

In Mykolaiv, shelling that damaged the city's main water supply system in April 2022 cut the main bread factory off from the municipal supply. The factory drilled its own borehole, and UNICEF provided a purification station to make the groundwater safe for baking and drinking, on condition that the factory share the water with the surrounding neighbourhood. This enabled the factory to continue producing around 30 tonnes of bread a day while providing more than 500,000 litres of drinking water to residents.[193]

In eastern Ukraine, the same principle was incorporated into reconstruction. A family-run bakery destroyed during fighting in 2022 was rebuilt with new equipment and an independent water supply, including a borehole and reverse-osmosis treatment system. Rather than simply restoring the bakery to its pre-conflict configuration, the rehabilitation operation reduced the bakery's dependence on the municipal network. The bakery resumed production, while its new water system also became a community water source, supplying residents and filling two water trucks each day to serve nearby villages cut off from their supply as a result of damaged networks.[194]

In both cases, facilities that had depended on damaged municipal networks were turned into independent sources of both water and bread.



Workers from the local water utility repair a damaged pipeline during emergency works.

Ukraine, 2025
© UNICEF/UNI853924/Filippov

7.3 Conflict-resilient WASH approaches and infrastructure

Water and sanitation systems can be designed and adapted to continue functioning when conflict damages infrastructure, interrupts energy and other supply chains, or prevents external support from reaching them.

Where conflict destroys or damages water and sanitation infrastructure, resilient infrastructure should be built to resist it. In **Afghanistan**, partners have fortified water infrastructure to withstand attack, by encasing reservoirs and manholes in concrete, constructing fences and walls around solar arrays and building reinforced guard structures around pumps and generators.[195] In **Burkina Faso**, to mitigate looting from water points, tap fittings were designed to be removed and taken home each night by community members, and communities worked with UNICEF and WASH Cluster partners to design fencing to secure the solar panels.[196] In **the Niger**, to mitigate the looting of solar panels that power water pumps, UNICEF and the Ministry of Water and Sanitation began co-designing protection for solarised water points.[197] In **the Sudan**, WASH teams have sited tanks, lines and treatment elements underground to reduce their exposure to strikes.[198]

In several contexts, to mitigate conflict-related disruption to supply chains, critical inputs have been prepositioned close to the systems that need them, while local repair and production capacity has been strengthened to reduce reliance on external supply and support. For instance, in **Iraq**, after conflict interrupted government chlorine deliveries to the water directorate, chlorine for disinfection has increasingly been generated on-site rather than transported to the point of use. Save the Children and the water directorate installed a chlorine generation unit in Sinjar in 2022, serving around 15,000 people, and UNICEF installed similar units at water treatment plants in Koya and Khurmal, across three governorates, in 2023.[199] In **Ukraine**, UNICEF had prepositioned half of its emergency supplies – water tanks, generators and chlorine tablets – in the conflict-affected south-east as early as 2022, as sustained fighting and access constraints made resupply unreliable.[200] Throughout the 2025/26 winter response, this practice kept water, sanitation and heating systems operating during attacks and prolonged outages. Standing supply agreements and contingency stocks meant that generators already held in the country could be deployed at the height of the January 2026 energy crisis, with fuel, pipes, fittings and repair materials being delivered directly for the water and heating services of national and municipal utilities. In the first quarter of 2026, over 200 generators were delivered to water and heating utilities across 15 regions, keeping networks operating for nearly 1.5 million people.[201]

In **the Sudan**, where fighting has damaged water systems across the country, UNICEF has established a WASH academy to train young people to rebuild water and energy systems, and it deploys mobile maintenance teams to restore damaged water systems within 48 hours using solar-powered pumps and generators.[202]

In **Yemen**, ICRC supplies chlorine tablets, fuel, generators and maintenance tools directly to the local water and sanitation utilities to ensure the continuous provision of safe water – in 2021 alone, the organization supplied 17 generators and more than 1.2 million chlorine tablets.[203]

Box 11. Water for peace: conflict-sensitive WASH across access, recovery and resilience

Conflict-sensitive WASH integrates conflict dynamics into decisions about where and how water and sanitation services are delivered, restored, designed and managed.[204] It can help in negotiating access across front lines, providing guidance on how damaged systems can be rehabilitated and shared among communities, and shaping where decentralized or alternative services should be located and who should manage them. In some contexts, shared water services can also create practical opportunities for cooperation between communities and authorities divided by conflict.

In **the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, UNICEF supported the development of a shared water system in Ituri in 2024 for the neighbouring Lendu and Hema communities whose relations had deteriorated amid armed conflict that began in 2018. The system serves both villages equally, with a joint management committee representing both communities overseeing fair distribution and maintenance. When technical problems arise, residents from both villages work together to repair the system, fostering practical cooperation in relation to a shared essential service.[205]

Since January 2026, in the border areas of **Mali**, **Mauritania** and **Senegal**, UNICEF has been leading a programme in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, with the explicit objective of securing sustainable, inclusive and peaceful access to water for sedentary and mobile communities, including transhumant herders and displaced people. Signed with the three governments and developed in collaboration with the Senegal River Basin Organization (Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Sénégal (OMVS)), it pairs multi-use, solar-powered and climate-resilient water points along transhumance corridors and in schools and health centres with a sizeable investment in governance, including local consultation and conflict prevention mechanisms, cross-border cooperation frameworks between local authorities, transhumance monitoring and community early warning systems, and training in hydro-diplomacy and water mediation.[206]

In addition, in **Mali**, the inclusive governance of water points has been practised since 2022 to reduce tensions between host and displaced communities and between farmers and herders. A 2022 survey of 1,112 people found that 69 per cent perceived WASH infrastructure to improve social cohesion and 74 per cent described their communities as united and working together towards common interests. By 2024/25, water management and conflict prevention committees reported increased cohesion, greater participation of women and youth in decision-making, and reduced farmer–herder tensions in several regions.[207]

Between 2023 and 2025, in the Abyei Administrative Area (**South Sudan** and **the Sudan**), the arrival of nearly 25,000 refugees and returnees increased pressure on water and grazing land and fuelled intercommunal tensions. In the context of a United Nations project, community management committees were formed with a representative from every village, including internally displaced people and refugees, with 30 per cent of the seats allocated to women. The committees decided which water points would be rehabilitated, and a community conference produced agreements on the shared use of land and water and on regulating livestock movement. A solar-powered borehole was also upgraded near key grazing routes at a site selected with local leaders from both farming and herding communities, to reduce pressure on shared resources.[208]

In **Yemen**, water authorities worked across the front line to restore services in Taiz, where water infrastructure crossed areas controlled by two different authorities. In 2025, the two authorities reached a reciprocal technical arrangement that allowed infrastructure on either side of the front line to be repaired and water to be shared across it. The agreement focused on restoring access to water rather than wider political negotiations, enabling cooperation despite the absence of a broader political settlement.[209]



A woman carries water from a UNICEF tap installed under the Water for Peace project in Ituri province, June 2024.

Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024
© UNICEF/UNI619329/Ngombua

Considerations for conflict-resilient decision-making

No single level of protection is right everywhere. Making decisions about conflict-resilient infrastructure requires considering the trade-offs between the risks a system faces, the consequences of it failing, the costs of protecting it and the populations that it is expected to serve. Four considerations are particularly important:

1. **Cost versus coverage:** Conflict-resilient design can increase construction costs. Concrete encasement, protective housing, underground siting and similar measures require additional investment, forcing trade-offs to be made between investing in infrastructure to prevent future conflict-related damage and responding to other urgent humanitarian priorities.

2. **Designing based on the threat:** The design and protection of water and sanitation infrastructure need to account for the conflict risks that it is likely to face. Measures intended to reduce exposure to air strikes will not necessarily protect infrastructure from looting. Similarly, measures for securing equipment against looting will provide little protection against explosive weapons. Solarization illustrates this complexity: While solarization reduces dependence on electricity networks and fuel supplies that may themselves be disrupted by conflict, it introduces equipment – including solar panels and pumps – that may require additional protection against looting.[210] Risks are also rarely static: The intensity, geography and methods of warfare can change, while water and sanitation infrastructure may remain in use for decades. Decisions taken at the design or rehabilitation stage must therefore be informed by documented risks, while allowing for changes in the nature and intensity of conflict over time.

3. **Permanence of the population served:** The level of investment should reflect both the expected lifespan of the infrastructure and how long the population served is likely to depend on it. A relatively high level of protection may be justified for long-term assets serving established populations, while emergency infrastructure intended for temporary displacement sites may warrant a lower degree of protection. Yet these distinctions can shift rapidly in situations of conflict, as temporary displacement can become protracted, while infrastructure designed for stable populations may later be exposed to conflict or serve large, displaced populations.

4. **Dependence on energy:** Protecting water infrastructure alone is not enough, if that infrastructure depends on vulnerable energy systems to function. Resilience therefore requires identifying these dependencies and, where appropriate, providing alternative ways of powering critical functions, including through protected solar power, generators or other decentralized energy sources, so that failure of the main energy supply does not stop water services from functioning.[211]

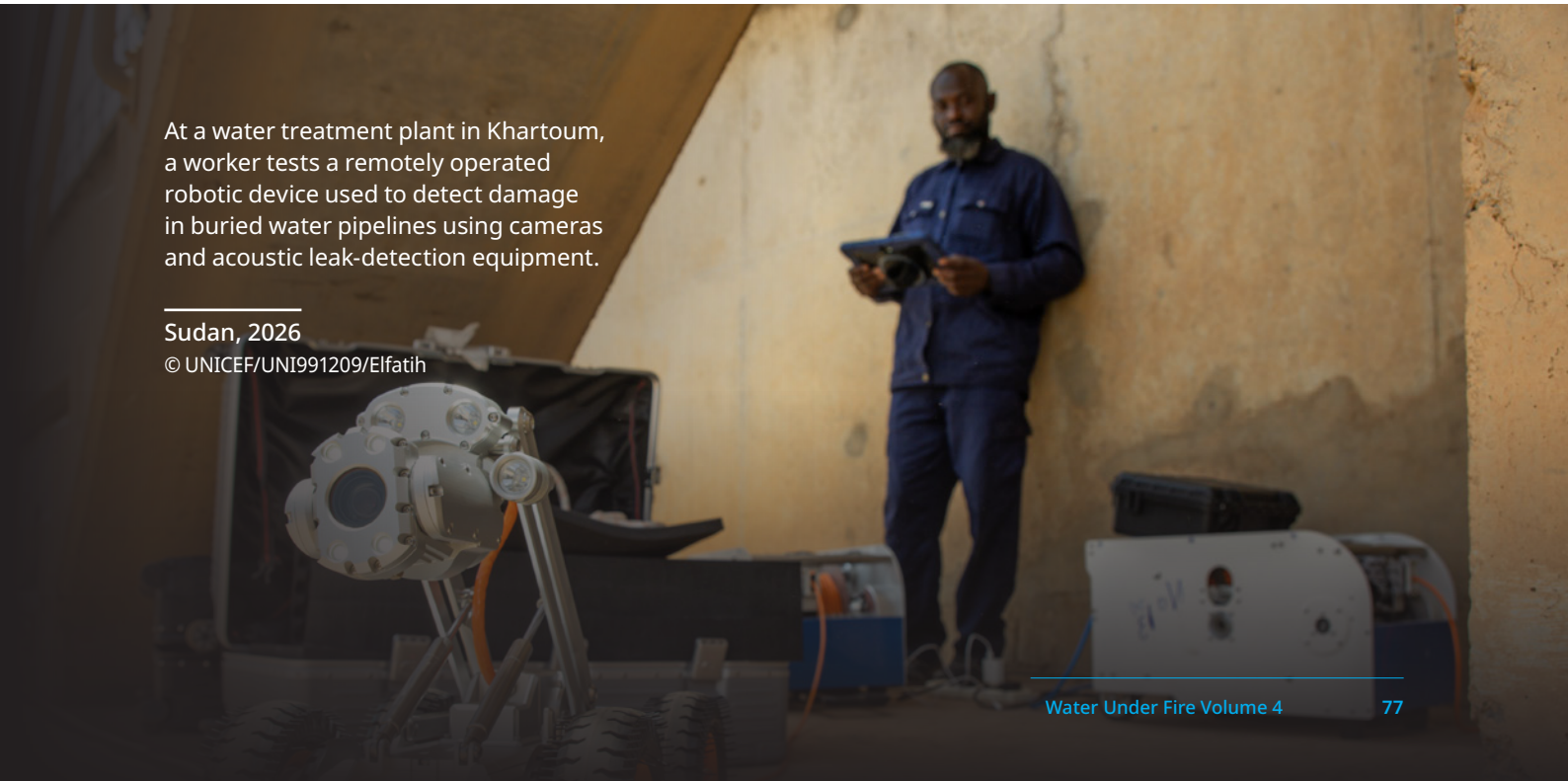
Since conflict erupted in the Sudan in April 2023, destruction, damage, disruption and mass displacement have placed immense pressure on water and sanitation services across the country. In response, WASH actors continue to adapt how services are maintained, restored and protected, applying innovative approaches to sustain and improve access for children and communities.

Table 3. Focus on the Sudan: adapting WASH under fire

Damaged water networks	Response
Khartoum, 2023–2024: Bombardment, shelling and looting damaged WASH infrastructure across Khartoum state.[212]	**Investing in new technology and local capacity:** In April 2026, 11 Sudanese water sector staff were trained to use remotely operated cameras and acoustic leak detection equipment to inspect the main water pipeline for Khartoum from within the pipeline itself. The technology enables damage to be located and repairs to be targeted without extensive excavation. The response has also built local capacity to assess and rehabilitate the network as recovery continues.[213] This technology was subsequently deployed in urban water rehabilitation projects across the Sudan.[214]
Damage to water infrastructure	**Response**
Khartoum, 2023–2025: Fighting damaged water treatment infrastructure across Khartoum and severely reduced treatment capacity. The Bahri Water Treatment Plant was struck on the first day of the war, while other treatment infrastructure was subsequently damaged or destroyed. In March 2024, only 1 of the 13 treatment plants in Khartoum state was functional.[215]	**Rehabilitating damaged systems and establishing an energy supply that withstands disruption:** At Al Manara treatment plant, rehabilitation was combined with establishing alternative power sources and pumping capacity and ensuring continued supplies of the chlorine and polymer needed for water treatment, with local water authorities and community structures supporting operations. This enabled the plant to continue producing chlorinated water for more than 1 million people during the conflict.[216]
Attacks impacting energy infrastructure	**Response**
Kosti and Rabak, 2025: Attacks impacting power plants caused a major electricity outage that disrupted water supply, forcing families to collect untreated water from the White Nile river.[217]	**Setting up energy systems that withstand disruption:** Solarization and establishing backup energy generation were prioritized to reduce dependence on vulnerable energy networks and provide alternative sources of power in conflict. By the end of 2025, solarization had been completed for 64 water supply systems, and 7 large generators supporting 6 treatment plants had been installed.[218] In River Nile state, a solar-powered borehole continued operating during outages caused by attacks impacting infrastructure.[219] In 2026, recurring outages and rising fuel costs led the WASH sector to prioritize further rehabilitation and solarization.[220]

EO close to WASH infrastructure	Response
Khartoum, October–December 2025: EO from the conflict was identified in close proximity to civilian infrastructure, including a water treatment facility, as services began to resume in the city.[221]	**Ensuring safe access to WASH infrastructure compromised by EO by capitalizing on local capacity:** EO risk reduction initiatives were organized in contaminated areas, including for sanitation personnel, so that suspected hazards could be recognized, reported and avoided. A national hotline, run by the National Mine Action Center (NMAC), connected those reports to specialist assessment and clearance personnel, with reports from trained community members leading to items being removed.[222]

Restricted access	Response
North Darfur, 2024–2025: Al Fasher was besieged from May 2024. Access to essential supplies including water and medical aid was effectively cut off, with key supply routes such as the Tawila–Zamzam–Al Fasher corridor being blocked. By August 2025, WFP had not been able to deliver food assistance to the city by road for over a year, despite sustained high-level engagement. In the displacement sites in Tawila, less than 10 per cent of the population had reliable access to safe water and latrines.[223]	**Maintaining access by negotiation with parties to the conflict:** Negotiation with parties to the conflict opened up new supply routes into Darfur, namely the Adré crossing from Chad in 2024 and a parallel route from Port Sudan and negotiated safe passage through territories outside government control. This facilitated the transport of the fuel, treatment chemicals and spare parts needed to maintain water systems. When cities could not be reached, services targeted people fleeing the conflict. For example, chlorination facilities were set up at 10 public water stations in Tawila, serving 45,000 people daily; hygiene kits for adolescent girls and women were distributed; and 54 new gathering sites offering humanitarian support were established. National organizations and volunteer networks already present in the country delivered aid where international agencies could not, chlorinating community wells, establishing safe water points and repairing water systems.[224]



At a water treatment plant in Khartoum, a worker tests a remotely operated robotic device used to detect damage in buried water pipelines using cameras and acoustic leak-detection equipment.

Sudan, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI991209/Elfatih

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7. Adaptive and innovative approaches for WASH in conflict

8. Calls to action and roadmap

8. Calls to action and road map

8.1. Calls to action

1. **Treat WASH infrastructure in conflict as indispensable to civilian survival, particularly children's survival, and as essential to the realization of fundamental human rights.**

The findings of this report indicate that, over the past five years, attacks harming water and sanitation systems, services, personnel and users have increased in frequency, diversified in type and expanded geographically across conflicts worldwide. Compounded by the wider impacts of conflict, these attacks pose severe threats to children's survival, well-being and development, with reverberating effects on their health, nutrition, protection and education. Parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law, including by taking all feasible precautions to protect WASH infrastructure and services from attack, damage, destruction and disruption. They must also respect, protect and fulfil the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas – to which a significant proportion of attacks affecting WASH is attributed – must end, and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas should be endorsed and implemented. Those with influence over parties to conflict must use all available levers to promote compliance, prevent violations and drive changes in behaviour. Those responsible for violations must be held accountable through effective investigations and, where appropriate, prosecution and other measures to prevent recurrence.



Ethiopia, 2022
© UNICEF/UN0694032/Bizuwerk

2. **Create a mechanism to systematically collect data on attacks harming WASH in conflict.**

Despite the significant number of attacks affecting WASH in conflict, no formal, standardized global mechanism currently exists for documenting and analysing the full range of harm caused to WASH systems, services, personnel and users across contexts. Existing monitoring efforts instead tend to focus on particular types of incidents, individual countries or reverberating effects. The findings of this report underscore the need to establish a system that captures attacks harming WASH and their impacts on vulnerable civilians, particularly children. Systematic data collection would enable the identification and reporting of global patterns; deepen the understanding of reverberating effects; and inform policies, advocacy and engagement with parties to conflict and operational responses that better protect children and the essential services on which they depend.

3. **Improve the protection of children and communities seeking WASH services and of WASH and energy personnel.**

In situations of armed conflict, people and communities face significant protection risks when accessing WASH services. These risks are especially acute for children, particularly girls and children with disabilities. At water points or en route to them, people may face sexual violence, abduction, killing and exposure to unexploded ordnance. Entire communities may also be denied access to water or humanitarian assistance, and/or suffer the consequences of water contamination and other attacks harming WASH systems, services and personnel.

This report also demonstrates the severe harm inflicted on WASH and energy personnel in situations of armed conflict. Although protected as civilians under international humanitarian law, these personnel do not benefit from the additional specific protections afforded to certain other categories of civilians. Predominantly local, these essential service providers play a critical role in safeguarding children's health, nutrition and overall well-being during conflict. Given their essential role and the threats they face, concrete measures must be taken to ensure their safety, security and well-being.

While parties to conflict bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians, Member States, local authorities and humanitarian actors also have important roles to play in reducing the risks that these personnel face and in strengthening their protection.

4. **Enable safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian, WASH and energy actors to people in need and to the essential supplies required to keep water and energy systems functioning.**

Across many conflict-affected settings, humanitarian, WASH and energy actors are denied access to communities in need, preventing them from delivering urgent WASH and other critical assistance and services. In other cases, restrictions on essential supplies, equipment and energy undermine emergency operations and the functioning of water and energy systems. Together, these constraints have devastating consequences for children, depriving them of safe and reliable access to water when they need it most.

5. **Invest in conflict-resilient WASH approaches and locally led service continuity arrangements.**

In increasingly challenging operating environments, humanitarian actors have adopted innovative, adaptive and conflict-resilient approaches to sustain WASH services for communities in need. These include strengthening local capacity to maintain services where access is constrained; using decentralized approaches to rehabilitate damaged or destroyed WASH systems; and investing in resilient infrastructure that can better withstand the effects of conflict. Donors should prioritize and support these approaches in emergency settings to safeguard the essential services on which conflict-affected children and communities depend for their survival.



A displaced family in Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince.

Haiti, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI999940/Joseph

8.2. Road map

The recommendations below provide a road map for advancing the five calls to action listed above. They set out the steps that parties to conflict, Member States – including members of the United Nations Security Council – donors and humanitarian, development and WASH actors must take to protect WASH systems, services and users in conflict.

1. **Treat WASH infrastructure in conflict as indispensable to civilian survival, particularly children's survival, and as essential to the realization of their fundamental human rights.**

- **Parties to conflict must:**

    - Comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including with rules protecting civilian objects and infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. This requires protecting WASH systems from attack, damage and disruption; taking all feasible measures to maintain essential WASH services; and integrating these obligations into military doctrine, targeting guidance, training, standard operating procedures, command guidance and codes of conduct. These measures should ensure that military operations comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, paying particular attention to critical infrastructure and services.

    - Refrain from using water infrastructure or services in ways prohibited under applicable international humanitarian law, including harming water infrastructure or services as a method of warfare or to deprive civilians of water indispensable to their survival.

    - Identify and map critical civilian water and sanitation infrastructure, together with the interdependent systems, assets and supply chains required for its operation. Where feasible, maintain and update this information and adopt context-specific protective measures, including no-strike and restricted-strike arrangements, as appropriate.

- **Member States that are parties to armed conflict** must also comply with their obligations under applicable international human rights law, including those arising from the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning children's rights to clean drinking water and safe sanitation and the prevention of disease and malnutrition.

- **Members of the United Nations Security Council and other Member States** should consider taking additional political measures to strengthen the implementation of existing legal protections and secure concrete commitments. These may include, as appropriate, further United Nations Security Council action or other intergovernmental initiatives, such as a political declaration focused on protecting water infrastructure and essential water and sanitation services in armed conflict.

- **Member States** should endorse and implement the political declaration on EWIPA[225] and adopt policies and practices that reduce harm to civilians and essential services. These should include measures to prevent and mitigate direct and indirect effects of conflict on water and sanitation services, paying particular attention to the impacts on children.

- **Member States** must protect water and sanitation infrastructure, civilian water supplies, facilities and related systems from digital attacks, including cyberattacks.

- **Member States and donors** should use financing, policy dialogue and advocacy to reinforce respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, advance Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation for all, and promote equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, particularly for children and populations facing the greatest barriers to access.

2. **Create a mechanism to systematically collect data on attacks affecting WASH in conflict.**

- **Member States, members of the United Nations Security Council and donors** should establish and invest in a standardized global system for monitoring and reporting on attacks affecting water and sanitation systems, services, personnel and users.[xxiii] This will require sustained strategic, programmatic and financial investment in common definitions, reporting and verification methods, data governance, confidentiality and protection, and ethical standards, while also allowing data collection and assessment to be adapted to different contexts.

- **Members of the United Nations Security Council and other Member States** should support the systematic inclusion of attacks affecting water and sanitation systems, services, personnel and users in the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict as a grave violation of denial of humanitarian access, where incidents meet the applicable criteria. They should also request that attacks affecting water and sanitation systems, services, personnel and users be included in relevant United Nations reporting and protection mechanisms.

- **Humanitarian, development and WASH actors** should adopt a common minimum approach to documenting incidents affecting water and sanitation systems, services, personnel and users. This approach should enable comparison across countries and over time and include analysis of age-, gender- and disability-related differences.

xxiii Such a system could draw on relevant lessons from the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care.

3. **Improve the protection of children and communities seeking WASH services and of WASH and energy personnel.**

- **Parties to conflict** must comply with their obligations under international law. This includes respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights to water and sanitation and ensuring non-discriminatory access to services that are available, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable. In situations of armed conflict, parties must also comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including by taking all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects from the effects of hostilities and to facilitate humanitarian access.

- **Parties to conflict** must protect utility and sanitation personnel, engineers, technicians, repair teams and humanitarian personnel from attacks, threats, intimidation, arbitrary detention and other interference that prevents or impedes the delivery, maintenance or restoration of essential services, in accordance with applicable law.

- **Member States** should promote the national implementation of applicable international humanitarian law and commitments on the protection of civilians through legislation, doctrine, training, legal review and clearly defined institutional responsibilities. These measures should address the protection of civilians, including vulnerable people seeking access to WASH services and WASH and energy personnel.

- **Member States, donors and humanitarian actors** should systematically identify and monitor risks of sexual violence, exploitation and coercion, and integrate measures to prevent gender-based violence and strengthen child protection responses in WASH efforts to protect and restore safe access to water in conflict settings.

- **Humanitarian, development and WASH actors** should design WASH programmes that safeguard the safety and dignity of affected communities, including children, and ensure equitable access among communities to services.

4. **Enable safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian, WASH and energy actors to people in need and to the essential supplies required to keep water and energy systems functioning.**

- **Parties to conflict** must:

    - Allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian, WASH and energy actors to assess, operate, maintain, repair and rehabilitate essential water and sanitation infrastructure.

    - Enable safe and sustained access for humanitarian, WASH and energy actors to the essential supplies, equipment and energy required to operate, maintain and restore water and sanitation services.

- **Members of the United Nations Security Council and other Member States** implementing restrictive measures – including unilateral sanctions, sanction regimes, counter-terrorism legislation, or donor policies and conditionalities – should include clear and broad humanitarian exemptions. These exemptions should ensure that such measures do not inadvertently hinder the delivery of WASH supplies, equipment or fuel or other essential WASH inputs; humanitarian access; the repair and rehabilitation of infrastructure; or the continuity of essential water and sanitation services.



UNICEF personnel remove a damaged water tank from an affected household to prepare for its replacement.

Yemen, 2026
© UNICEF/UN0927186/Al-Nahari

5. **Invest in conflict-resilient WASH approaches and locally led service continuity arrangements.**

- **Member States and donors** should:
  - Fund the development of conflict-resilient water and sanitation systems capable of maintaining essential services during crises.
  - Invest in national and local technical and institutional capacity, including workforce development and retention, training, surge capacity, resilient supply chains, maintenance and repair capabilities, and business continuity arrangements for utilities and service providers.
  - Support the sustainable recovery and restoration of essential services, including through flexible, multi-year financing that bridges humanitarian, recovery and development timelines.
  - Fund monitoring, evidence generation, early warning systems and impact evaluation, including the analysis of data disaggregated by age, gender and disability, as appropriate.
  - Strengthen links between WASH, protection, public health and displacement data to identify risks, inequities and impacts on affected populations.
- **Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors** should assess and address how disruptions to WASH services drive displacement, impede safe and sustainable return, and undermine recovery and social stability. Restoration priorities should reflect protection risks, population movements, public health needs and equitable access considerations.

8.3. Recommendations for academic institutions, policymakers and researchers

Academic institutions, policymakers and researchers also have a role to play in protecting children and their communities from conflict-related harm. They should:

- Sustain and expand research on the links between conflict, damage to civilian infrastructure, public health and water insecurity, while strengthening efforts to translate findings into operational practice and policy decisions.
- Strengthen research on the relationships between conflict, water insecurity, health outcomes and contamination from ERWs.
- Strengthen knowledge translation by converting research findings – particularly on the reverberating effects of attacks harming water and sanitation – into operational guidance, policy options, decision support tools and evidence that can be accessed by national and local decision makers, service providers and other relevant actors.
- Assess and validate the use of remote-sensing methods, open-source information, public health surveillance and other methods for documenting attacks harming infrastructure that cause damage or degradation and service disruption, including the accuracy of these methods and the associated limitations, uncertainties, and ethical and data protection risks.
- Expand the evidence base on the costs, feasibility, sustainability and effectiveness of conflict-resilient infrastructure and service continuity measures across diverse conflict-affected operating environments, including those marked by recurrent disruption, displacement and resource constraints.

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Annex 2. Additional information on the methodology

Rolling review and verification

Available information was reviewed and updated between May and July 2026 through ongoing research and engagement with key informants. Incidents impacting water and sanitation falling into the categories of attacks harming WASH and documented by at least one cited source were included, with details of incidents being checked against that source for accuracy. Incidents that did not link the event to conflict or other situations of violence were excluded from the review. Incidents were further discussed in key informant interviews, and in-country WASH specialists reviewed the draft text relevant to their contexts, confirming or correcting descriptions of events. This process ensured that events were documented accurately according to the source, but it did not constitute independent verification of the events themselves.



Women fill containers at a water point where solar-powered systems serve some 30,000 displaced people, refugees and host community members with potable water.

Burkina Faso, 2026
© UNICEF/UNI978350

Data and review

Data and information were analysed through an iterative process of review and triangulation: Successive rounds of analysis compared reports, data sets, operational documentation and published literature across sources, triangulated with key informant interviews with 46 WASH specialists working across 20 countries and 22 subject matter experts at the global and regional levels, from academic and research institutions, WASH clusters, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental bodies. The key informant interviews and group discussions were followed by continued exchanges to clarify the evidence discussed, identify and obtain the underlying documentation where events had been described verbally, and confirm how country offices characterized specific events. Where a participant could not identify a source for an incident, or where the underlying documentation did not support the account given, the incident was excluded. Three consultations were undertaken with both the internal and the external TAGs.

Scope and limitations

The information and data included in the report were drawn from key informant interviews with WASH technical experts at the country, regional and global levels, from publicly available data and documentation from a range of United Nations and other sources, including operational reports, data sets, published literature and material shared by key informants, referenced in the endnotes. Establishing independently whether each documented event occurred as reported was outside the scope of this review. The reliability of details describing each event rests on the source cited for it. This report does not provide a comprehensive account of all attacks harming WASH globally, but provides an analysis of what is documented across available sources. The number of attacks included should therefore be interpreted as minimum estimates rather than complete totals. The availability of data varies across contexts depending on the presence, capacity and level of access of entities collecting data; the absence of documented attacks should not be interpreted as evidence that none occurred, and the numbers are not directly comparable across countries. Reverberating effects are reported only where the cited source documents a pathway from the attack to the outcome. The examples of attacks included are not attributed to any specific party to conflict; attributing responsibility for individual attacks fell outside the scope of and methodology used for this report.

Annex 3. Data, monitoring and analytical tools

Table A1. Data, monitoring and analytical tools for documenting attacks harming WASH systems, services, personnel and users, and for analysing their impacts

1. Satellite and geospatial mapping – detecting damage where ground access is limited	
UNOSAT (UNITAR) · unosat.org Satellite imagery analysis providing near real-time, building-by-building assessment of damage to civilian infrastructure – including water and sanitation systems – when ground access is limited. **Example:** In Gaza, State of Palestine, UNOSAT satellite analysis found that by June 2024, 400 of 592 water and sanitation infrastructure sites (67 per cent) had been damaged or destroyed.[226]	**Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT)** · hotosm.org A global volunteer community creating free, open-access, up-to-date map data – covering buildings, roads, water points, health facilities – so that responders can locate services and populations where official maps are missing or outdated. **Example:** In the Sudan, in April 2023, a geospatial data activation mapped roads and essential services across conflict-affected areas.[227]
2. Open-source investigation and incident monitoring – verifying what happened, where and when	
Open-source investigators · PAX for Peace · CEOBS · Bellingcat · Airwars Groups documenting attacks harming civilian infrastructure using open-source imagery and satellite evidence. **Example:** UNEP's rapid assessment of the 2023 Kakhovka Dam breach in Ukraine documented chemical contamination and toxic heavy metals across the flood zone.[228]	**Insecurity Insight** · insecurityinsight.org Verifies and analyses security incidents affecting essential services, including water, in situations of conflict. Country trackers document individual incidents affecting water systems, personnel and users, published as open data sets via HDX. **Example:** In Ukraine, discrete incidents of WASH system damage and harm to personnel form a dated, georeferenced evidence base.[229]
ACLED · acleddata.com A disaggregated conflict event database recording incidents of political violence and related events worldwide, each coded with date, precise location, actors, event type and fatalities. ACLED does not code for water or sanitation, so relevant events have to be extracted from the free-text notes or cross-referenced with WASH data rather than filtered directly. **Example:** Records of fighting in Khartoum, the Sudan, can be mapped against areas where water treatment and supply were disrupted.[230]	**Pacific Institute – Water Conflict Chronology** · worldwater.org The longest-running open-source database of water-related violence, spanning antiquity to the present. Each dated entry is classified by the role that water played – trigger (cause of dispute), weapon (infrastructure targeted to inflict harm) or casualty (water systems damaged incidentally during episodes of fighting) – providing a longitudinal reference for patterns and precedents rather than a real-time tracker. **Example:** Records the 2023 Kakhovka Dam destruction in Ukraine as both a weapon and casualty of war, causing catastrophic flooding, displacement and contamination.[231]

3. Public health surveillance – linking the breakdown of WASH to disease and death

WHO cholera and acute watery diarrhoea surveillance · who.int · with the Global Task Force on Cholera Control
WHO monitors and reports on cholera and acute watery diarrhoea outbreaks worldwide – cases, deaths, spread, risk – providing epidemiological evidence linking water and sanitation breakdown to disease and mortality.

Example: In the Sudan, a major cholera epidemic tracked since 2024, driven by damage to infrastructure caused by conflict, displacement and flooding, recorded 48,768 cases of cholera/acute watery diarrhoea and 1,094 associated deaths in the period 1 January–11 August 2025 alone.[232]

4. Assessment frameworks and indices – turning data into comparable analysis

WASH Insecurity Analysis (WIA) · Global WASH Cluster and UNICEF · washcluster.net
Combines secondary data on needs, hazards (conflict, displacement, flooding, outbreaks) and vulnerabilities to give a subnational picture of WASH insecurity, informing humanitarian needs overviews, and preparedness and resilience planning.

Example: In South Sudan, the WIA brought fragmented data sets into one subnational analysis, reshaping how needs were prioritized and resources targeted.[233]

Global WASH Sector Resilience Index (GWSRI) · UNICEF
A resilience lens through which the WASH sector can be viewed, combining hazard, exposure, vulnerability, governance and WASH system conditions to produce a comparative measure tracking sector resilience and informing investment dialogue, with subnational applications emerging.

Example: Lebanon sits near the bottom of the index globally (0.629), with weak governance (0.432) despite high water coverage (0.917), separating coverage from resilience.[234]

INFORM Severity Index · EC Joint Research Centre · ACAPS
A globally comparable measure of crisis severity, combining more than 30 indicators related to impact, conditions of affected people and complexity in a single monthly score. Not WASH-specific, but an external benchmark for crisis severity in settings where WASH systems are affected.

Example: The Sudan is classified as having the highest severity levels ("very high") for impact, conditions and complexity.[235]

UNIDIR EWIPA Research Framework · unidir.org
A structured set of indicators tracing the indirect, knock-on effects of explosive weapon damage impacting civilians across sectors including health and WASH. Developed in the process leading to the 2022 political declaration on EWIPA.

Example: Points to indicators such as the number of people left without safe water after damage to a treatment facility, operationalizing the chain from damage to service disruption to civilian harm.[236]

Abbreviations: ACAPS, Assessment Capacities Project; ACLED, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data; AWD, acute watery diarrhoea; CEOBS, Conflict and Environment Observatory; EC, European Commission; EWIPA, explosive weapons in populated areas; GWSRI, Global WASH Sector Resilience Index; HDX, Humanitarian Data Exchange; HOT, Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team; INFORM, Index for Risk Management; UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme; UNIDIR, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research; UNITAR, United Nations Institute for Training and Research; UNOSAT, Operational Satellite Application Programme of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research; WIA, WASH Insecurity Analysis.

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