

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Syria experienced at least four attacks with cluster munitions by Syrian and Russian forces in 2020 targeting the non-government controlled areas in north-west Syria. Mine action in Syria remains fragmented due to the ongoing instability, the multitude of armed actors, and continuing shifts in control over territory. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has taken on a de facto role as a coordinator of mine action for the whole of Syria. Several actors, including international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are present in areas not controlled by the government. In government-controlled territories, however, there is a critical lack of qualified clearance operators with only one international operator, the Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), accredited (in 2020).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria and Russia should immediately halt all use of cluster munitions.
- Syria should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should apply with its obligations under international human rights law to clear cluster munition remnants (CMR) on territory under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- Syria should undertake a baseline survey of CMR contamination in areas over which it has effective control.
- Syria should adopt national mine action standards (NMAAS) that are in line with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).
- Syria should create the necessary structures to oversee an efficient mine action programme, namely, a national mine action centre (NMAC) and a national mine action authority (NMAA). The process should be underpinned by the adoption of mine action legislation and a multiyear strategy.
- Syria should expedite registration and access for international demining organisations to facilitate a credible humanitarian demining programme.
- Syria and the other parties present in the country should allow mine action operators to move freely across areas under their control and ensure their safety.
- A centralised information management database should be established. All mine action operators in Syria should ensure that survey and clearance data is recorded and safeguarded in a digital format and in accordance with the IMAS.

## UNDERSTANDING OF CMR CONTAMINATION

The full extent of CMR contamination is unknown but is certainly widespread due to the repeated use of cluster munitions during the decade-old conflict in Syria. During 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 cluster munition attacks were recorded in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates. Thirteen of the country's fourteen governorates (all except Tartus) have experienced use of cluster munitions since 2012.<sup>1</sup> The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) recorded at least 492 cluster munition attacks in Syria between July 2012 and 25 February 2020 attributing them to the Syrian forces, Russian forces, or the alliance of the two.<sup>2</sup>

The UN estimated in 2020 that explosive ordnance (EO) contamination was affecting one third of populated communities with areas that experienced intense hostilities, including Aleppo, Daraa, Deir Ezzor, Idlib, Raqqa, and Rural Damascus, being particularly affected. In the same year, the UN recorded an average of 76 explosions per day, equating to

an explosion every 20 minutes.<sup>3</sup> The extent of contamination by any particular category of device is not known.

The HALO Trust conducted an EO community contamination impact assessment in north-west Syria (Idlib and Aleppo governorates) between 2018 and 2020. The assessment confirmed EO contamination in over 400 communities (41% of those assessed).<sup>4</sup> Submunitions were the most frequent type of EO encountered, alone accounting for 36% of total recorded contamination,<sup>5</sup> with remaining contamination caused by landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (4% combined) and a mixture of other unexploded ordnance (UXO).<sup>6</sup> Submunitions, which constituted the biggest driver of EO incidents, and alone caused 42% of the recorded casualties.<sup>7</sup> Another rapid assessment survey conducted by HALO in 2020 identified 91 suspected cluster munition strike zones (50 in Idlib and 41 in Aleppo).<sup>8</sup>

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) also conducted a joint mine risk needs assessment of 573 communities in Al-Hassakeh, Aleppo, Daraa, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Quneitira, and Sweida governorates. According to the assessment, 530 (92%) of the assessed communities reported the presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW). Of the assessed communities, 57% reported presence of anti-personnel mines, 46% of CMR, and 25% of IEDs.<sup>9</sup>

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has been conducting surveys across several governorates in the north-east of Syria since 2016. To date, MAG has registered 241,900m<sup>2</sup> of CMR contamination across two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and three confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in Al-Hassakeh and Raqqa governorates. As at May 2021, MAG had released 60% of the areas leaving 94,270m<sup>2</sup> requiring further survey and clearance (see Table 1).<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: Cluster munition-contaminated area in north-east Syria surveyed by MAG (as at May 2021)<sup>11</sup>**

Governorate	CHAs	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Total area (m <sup>2</sup> )
Al-Hassakeh	1	93,270	93,270
Raqqa	1	1,000	1,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>94,270</b>	<b>94,270</b>

Syrian Civil Defence (SCD), better known as the White Helmets, has reported clearing large numbers of unexploded submunitions over the past four years in Idlib, Aleppo, and Hama governorates and to a lesser extent in Daraa and Quneitra, over the past three years.<sup>12</sup> SCD and other operators report encountering mainly Russian-made

cluster munitions, including SHOAB-0.5, AO-2.5RT, 9N235, A01-SCH, M77-HEAT, SPBE-HEAT, and PTAB-1M and 2.5M submunitions.<sup>13</sup>

Working from the Syrian capital, Damascus, UNMAS started an EO assessment in Rural Damascus (South) in August 2020. The assessment locations were identified by UNMAS in line with the UN Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) priorities and with the approval of the Syrian government. As at May 2021, a little over 7km<sup>2</sup> of SHA had been surveyed, of which over 4.9km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 70%) was confirmed as hazardous. Over 750 items of EO were located and marked.<sup>14</sup>

### NEW CONTAMINATION

According to Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reports, the Syrian government carried out four cluster munition attacks in the first half of 2020 in Hama and Idlib governorates, two of which hit schools.<sup>15</sup> In March 2021, SNHR documented the use of 9M55K missiles, loaded with 9N235 submunitions, which were fired from the Russian airbase in Hmeimim and targeting Hiran area and al-Humran crossing in Rural Aleppo. The attack caused civilian casualties, including the death of a civil defence worker, and inflicted significant damage on fuel tanks and burners. The same report remarked an increased use of BM-30 SMERCH and BM-27 URGAN cluster munitions, delivering mostly submunition types 9M55K, 9M27K, and 9M27K1, which were launched from stationary platforms.<sup>16</sup>

The continued use of cluster munitions in 2020 and 2021 adds to the existing CMR problem in addition to dense contamination by other ERW, including conventional mines and those of an improvised nature (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing the Mines* report on Syria for further information).

## NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no national mine action authority in Syria. In government-controlled areas, an inter-ministerial National Mine Action Coordination Committee is said to have been formed by a presidential decree in 2019 and is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Faisal Mikdad. The committee meets on an ad-hoc basis.<sup>17</sup>

Given the lack of critical national mine action structures, UNMAS liaises with the National Mine Action Coordination Committee chaired by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and accredits clearance operators on a de-facto basis. UNMAS does not provide capacity building support to the national authorities, but in 2020, as part of its role as a coordinator of mine action, UNMAS drafted NMAS and associated guidelines and submitted them to the Syrian government for its review and approval.<sup>18</sup>

Mine action in Syria is coordinated by three response mechanisms: i) the Damascus-based Mine Action Sub-Cluster (MASC) coordinated by UNMAS; ii) the north-west MASC co-chaired by UNMAS and The HALO Trust; and iii) the north-east Mine Action Working Group (MAWG), which sits under the protection working group in the NGO forum-led response and is coordinated by iMMAP. Coordinators of the three structures organise monthly meetings with the respective mine action actors.<sup>19</sup>

In north-east Syria, a mine action centre (MAC) was created in January 2021<sup>20</sup> by the Humanitarian Affairs Office (HAO) of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The MAC largely supports and facilitates mine action activities but does not maintain an updated database or task operators.<sup>21</sup> Mine action stakeholders hold monthly working group meetings and are supported by iMMAP.<sup>22</sup> DanChurchAid (DCA) reported having a constructive relationship with and support from the MAC. This has seen it receive unhindered access and permission to operate and import demining equipment. As at May 2021, DCA was in the process of drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the north-east MAC.<sup>23</sup> MAG confirmed a positive relationship with that MAC, but underlined challenges due to the complex and bureaucratic procedures established by the Iraqi side for staff screening and border-crossing permissions. This results in long waiting times and undermines the mine action efficiency in the north-east. Contingent on future funding, MAG is considering providing support to the existing mine action coordination structure in the north-east in partnership with iMMAP in 2021. MAG will also work with the north-east MAC to elaborate a specific plan for capacity building of the centre.<sup>24</sup>

Headed by iMMAP under the umbrella of the protection cluster,<sup>25</sup> the north-east MAWG is attended by some 27 active members. Its activities include survey, risk education, clearance, and victim assistance.<sup>26</sup>

In the north-west, mine action is coordinated by the MASC cross-border response from Gaziantep (Turkey-based response) and is co-chaired by The HALO Trust and UNMAS. Some 25 partners attend its monthly meetings. HALO and its partners coordinate and receive approvals from the local Turkish authorities for its work across the border with Turkey. HALO also coordinates with local bodies in the north-west of Syria when necessary. HALO provides explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) and training of trainer (ToT) sessions to the local protection committees and volunteer groups organised under the local councils in the north-west.<sup>27</sup>

In 2020, US\$53 million were requested by the humanitarian sector to respond to mine action needs across Syria. By the end of 2020, only 17% of these needs had been funded. UNMAS Syria Response Programme was seeking US\$30 million for 2021 to support coordination and to scale up mine action interventions, including survey and clearance across Syria, but as at March 2021, the programme was facing an imminent shortfall of US\$9 million for the pilot clearance project alone.<sup>28</sup>

In a statement to the 24<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and UN Advisors (24<sup>th</sup> NDM), Syria appealed to the international community to boost its financial support to UNMAS so the UN could expand its operation in Syria, provide equipment to the existing qualified national resources, and encourage international NGOs to step in and help Syria clear explosive ordnance.<sup>29</sup>

## GENDER AND DIVERSITY

DCA mainstreams gender and diversity in its programme and recruitment policy. As at April 2021, women made up 38% of DCA's Syria programme staff and 28% of the mine action project staff. Moreover, 42% of the supervisory positions were filled by women. DCA was also planning to deploy an all-female clearance team in Al-Hassakeh governorate. DCA ensures that survey and community liaison teams are inclusive and gender balanced by deploying mixed risk education (RE) and non-technical survey teams and by hiring both female and male community liaison officers. DCA disaggregates mine action data by sex and age in its questionnaires, monthly reports, and database.<sup>30</sup>

HALO Trust's mainstreams gender, diversity, and inclusion in its programme, and disaggregates all mine action data by sex and age. As part of its community liaison activities, HALO holds separate focus group sessions with women and children with the attendance of appropriate staff. In 2020, HALO designed EORE materials tailored for women, children, and teenagers audiences and included a character with disability. HALO reports that its field staff represent the communities in which they work in terms of ethnic and social background, and that they are all gender balanced. All of HALO's staff are trained on gender-sensitive content and approaches to EORE messaging. As at December 2020, women comprised 30% of the total number of HALO Trust employees, including its partner organisations in Syria. Women also made up 22% of managerial/supervisory positions and 35% of operational positions.<sup>31</sup>

MAG has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan. MAG's community liaison, survey, and clearance activities take gender into account during the planning and implementation phases. These activities are guided by MAG's own SOPs and those of IMAS and are implemented by

gender and language balanced community liaison teams. All mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age. In 2020, women made up 30% of MAG's total number of employees, 50% of its community liaison officers, and 29% of the organisation's operational positions.<sup>32</sup>

The SCD reports having a gender and diversity policy in place. As at May 2021, SCD had 10 women in supervisory and management positions, but women were not represented in clearance and survey teams. SCD hoped to achieve a 50/50 split when selecting volunteers for two additional survey teams it was planning to train in 2021. Despite not having female volunteers within its clearance and survey teams, SCD ensures that women and girls are consulted during community liaison activities by seconding female volunteers from other areas of the organisation during EORE and survey activities. Mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age.<sup>33</sup>

As of end 2020, women made up almost 40% of UNMAS personnel in the Syria programme. Of the total women employed, 25% held supervisory/managerial roles and 32% occupied operations and security positions. In adherence to UN gender guidelines for mine action, gender is mainstreamed in planning and implementation. UNMAS disaggregates data by sex, age, and ethnic background. Throughout the project cycle, UNMAS takes into consideration how EO contamination impacts beneficiaries differently according to age, sex, physical abilities, and personal background, and recognises the importance of ensuring that messages target women specifically. The programme continues to look for methods to improve targeting and to encourage gender parity in the composition of field teams. According to UNMAS, the recruitment of women, especially for roles involved in community liaison and direct contact with the population, is critical.<sup>34</sup>

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

SCD uses Survey123 for data collection and Information Management System of Mine Action (IMSMA) Core for data keeping and management,<sup>35</sup> while DCA uses Survey123.<sup>36</sup>

HALO uses IMSMA data collection forms and regularly reports to the north-west MASC and the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR-led Gaziantep coordination response. HALO uses mobile-data collection tools and preserves data in Excel and Microsoft PowerBI databases.<sup>37</sup> MAG uses the online server, SharePoint, to preserve its mine action data.<sup>38</sup>

iMMAP provides technical information management (IM) services to the mine action working group in north-east Syria through mobile data collection, geographic information systems (GIS), and maps of explosive hazard contamination, survey, and clearance progress. iMMAP also supports the north-east HAO in setting up its MAC. As at May 2021, the MAC did not have the capacity to manage an IMSMA database on its own. The working group in north-east Syria has recently harmonised data collection forms used by all actors to make it compatible with IMSMA.<sup>39</sup>

As at June 2021, UNMAS was in the process of setting up IMSMA Core as the national mine action information management system in Damascus. UNMAS manages the database, collating explosive ordnance data from partners across Syria in a central database. Since its accreditation in 2020, the ACHDE has been providing monthly reports on areas worked and items found to UNMAS IMSMA.<sup>40</sup> It is believed, however, that clearance conducted by the Syrian and Russian forces largely goes unreported.

Despite concerted efforts to establish a centralised database representing the whole of Syria, SCD reported that its clearance and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) data were not accepted in the 4W reporting mechanism of the north-west MASC.<sup>41</sup> This is reportedly because, as at June 2021, SCD's application to re-join the protection coordination cluster had yet to be granted, and membership of the protection coordination cluster is a pre-condition for active membership in the MASC.<sup>42</sup> It is of course important that all relevant data on EO contamination, survey efforts, and clearance/EOD operations are captured in a central information management database.

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## PLANNING AND TASKING

Syria does not have a national mine action strategic plan. Mine action is fragmented and has a long way to develop into a coherent national response. Different actors have set different priorities for survey and clearance as dictated by the circumstances and the authorities under which they operate.

In the north-east, DCA reports that the MAC prioritises urban clearance (houses, schools, and public facilities).<sup>43</sup> The mine action working group, with the support of iMMAP, also participates in determining areas of operations. MAG reported that, due to the lack of the necessary structures in 2020, there was no tasking system in place. MAG's community liaison teams identify hazardous areas through non-technical surveys. They subsequently complete a clearance prioritisation form to assess the impact of EO contamination on communities and to provide data for the technical operations, including information on direct and indirect beneficiaries, infrastructure, natural resources, land use and land ownership.<sup>44</sup>

In the north-west, HALO's uses data collected from its EO community contamination assessment survey to identify high-priority communities for EOD, focusing on removing contamination that prevents access to basic services or livelihood resources. HALO engages with communities where it conducts EOD to obtain their informed consent and considers requests from the local authorities for future interventions.<sup>45</sup> SCD does not have a specific prioritisation system as the vast majority of its tasks are call-outs or immediate disposal of items encountered during survey.<sup>46</sup>

UNMAS reports that it collates EO data from different partners and analyses it to enable needs-based prioritisation and inform the wider humanitarian response with data, maps, and identification of hazardous areas.<sup>47</sup>

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## LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

### STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

There are no formal NMAS in Syria, but in 2020, UNMAS drafted NMAS and associated guidelines and submitted them to the Syrian government for its review and approval.<sup>48</sup>

Due to the lack of NMAS, most of the operators work to their own SOPs. For example, DCA works in accordance to its global SOPs which derive from IMAS and applies best practice guidelines from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). DCA also offers guidance and advocates best practices to the newly established MAC in the north-east of Syria.<sup>49</sup> In the north-west, HALO's operations are governed by HALO's SOPs, which are compliant with IMAS.<sup>50</sup>

## OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Mine action in Syria has been conducted by a wide range of organisations, largely determined by the circumstances and forces controlling the region at a given time. In areas under government control, these have included mainly Russian and Syrian military engineers and civil defence organisations. Russia deployed several hundred military deminers from its Armed Forces Demining Centre from 2017 onwards and provided training courses for Syrian army engineers at Hmeimim airbase (Latakia governorate in the north-west) and at training centres established in 2017 in Aleppo and Homs. By the start of January 2018, Russian armed forces reported they had trained 900 Syrian engineers.<sup>51</sup> Russia started to withdraw troops, including deminers, from Syria in 2018 but its Ministry of Defence (MoD) continued to report mine clearance and EOD in Syria in 2020.<sup>52</sup>

Russia appealed to other countries in 2018 to provide support. Armenia responded by sending an 83-man team to Syria in February 2019, planning to focus its work on the northern governorate of Aleppo.<sup>53</sup> Armenia rotated a new team to replace the first after four months.<sup>54</sup> The ACHDE reported having cleared 35,000m<sup>2</sup> and destroyed 29 landmines and items of UXO during the clearance operation in Aleppo city between February and June 2019.<sup>55</sup>

DCA has been present in Syria since 2015. Due to the frequent shifts and outbreaks of violence, its Syria country offices have closed and reopened several times. Its staff were relocated to Turkey, Iraq, and then back to Syria in 2020. As at May 2021, and due purely to issues of access, DCA's operations were confined to the parts of north-east Syria not controlled by the government.<sup>56</sup>

The HALO Trust, which has been present in Syria since 2016, is operational in north and north-west Syria in opposition-controlled areas of Idlib and western Aleppo, as well as the Turkish-administered areas of northern Aleppo. HALO's programme in 2020 covered EORE, victim and survivor assistance, survey and EOD. Since November 2020, HALO has deployed an EOD team in the Turkish-administered areas of northern Aleppo in partnership with a Turkish implementing partner organisation. HALO delivers activities through direct implementation, as well as in partnership with local NGOs. In 2020, HALO partnered with Turkish registered Syrian NGOs, Shafak and HiHFAD, for EORE and survivor assistance activities, and with a Turkish NGO, iMFAD, for non-technical survey and EOD.

HALO's capacity in 2020 comprised six survey teams, one EOD team, and seven EORE and victim assistance teams. As at June 2021, HALO was planning to continue EOD activities in northern Aleppo, expand its EOD capacity westwards to the opposition-controlled areas of Idlib and to start non-technical survey and mine clearance in 2021. However, HALO is facing a serious shortfall of funding for its operations. According to HALO, the COVID-19 pandemic had minimally disrupted the operations and project outputs overall. Security, however, remains the key challenge for international staff entering north-west Syria (a problem for all international NGOs and not only HALO).<sup>57</sup>

MAG has been operational in the north-east of Syria since 2016, conducting clearance, EORE and surveys on contamination, accidents and victims. As reported by iMMAP, in 2020, MAG alone accounted for 70% of clearance activities, 60% of mine action beneficiaries, and 95% of contamination mapped and reported in north-east Syria. Following a forced suspension of

its activities in October 2019, MAG resumed its activities in the north-east in late 2020. MAG partnered with two national NGOs only for community liaison activities in 2020, and had no plans of partnership for clearance activities.<sup>58</sup>

As at May 2021, MAG was deploying 10 community liaison teams, three mine action teams, and two multi-task teams in its Shaddadi base in Al-Hassakeh. Funds permitting, MAG is planning to set up a training centre and a second line mechanical workshop. MAG reported that it intends to re-open its operational base in Raqqa in October 2021 with a planned capacity of 10 community liaison teams, two mine action teams and two EOD teams. In addition, MAG is looking into expanding its presence in the north-east, with a view to re-establishing its operations at the same level as that prior to its suspension of activities. Through a combination of partner and direct led implementation, MAG will address mine and cluster munition contamination to enable the safe return of displaced communities, restore access to agricultural land, and enable the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure and property.<sup>59</sup>

According to MAG, the challenges to the clearance in Syria are: the volatile security situation; the lack of trauma medical care within an hour's reach to the operation site, which is a pre-condition for clearance; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential increase of cases that could lead to additional lockdowns; the potential disputes in housing, land, and property for clearance activities when ownership documents are unavailable for returnees or other community members; and the lack of a functioning national mine action authority, which impedes coordination and clearance prioritisation.<sup>60</sup>

A small national organisation, Roj Mine Control Organization (RMCO), was established in 2016, and was conducting clearance in north-east Syria but reportedly sustained heavy casualties among its deminers attempting clearance of improvised devices.<sup>61</sup> As at July 2021, RMCO was still operational and was being trained on EOD by the United States (US) forces.<sup>62</sup>

The SCD was operational in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates (in the north and north-west of the country) and continued to conduct single-item disposal of UXO along with survey in north-west Syria. SCD reported that the items it encountered are predominately cluster munition remnants, but SCD teams also disposed of abandoned anti-personnel mines it encountered. SCD's operational capacity in 2020 was six clearance teams and four survey teams and it was planning to recruit two additional survey teams in May 2021.<sup>63</sup>

UNMAS signed an MoU with the Syrian government in July 2018. After meeting the then Deputy Foreign Minister, Faisal Mikdad in Damascus in October 2019, UNMAS Director Agnes Marcaillou reported the government had agreed to the involvement of international demining organisations. They would be registered by the government and coordinated by UNMAS, which stated that discussions were underway on plans for survey, marking, and clearance.<sup>64</sup> As at June 2021, only the ACHDE was accredited in government-controlled areas.

UNMAS reported the lack of qualified in-country operators as one of the major challenges to advancing in mine action. This led UNMAS to hire its own UN personnel to conduct the EO assessment survey in the interim, which normally would

be conducted through implementing partners.<sup>65</sup> To facilitate access for clearance operators, following consultations with the Syrian government in December 2020, UNMAS conducted a global pre-qualification exercise for Syria. Ten mine clearance operators from a wide range of countries were pre-qualified to participate in UNMAS procurement for clearance operations.<sup>66</sup> Subject to in-country registration by the government, UNMAS hopes that government acceptance of the listed pre-qualified operators will lead to expanding access for qualified international clearance operators within Syria. UNMAS reports that it might further increase its capacity if the pilot clearance project starts as planned and clearance operations scale up in 2021. UNMAS has been encouraging safer programming for humanitarian workers, training security focal points in risk awareness, and integrating risk education into a range of humanitarian programmes.<sup>67</sup>

In late 2019, UNMAS identified 50 locations in Rural Damascus, Daraa, and Homs for survey and clearance operations. All areas were classified as level three or above on the HRP protection sector severity scale. In February 2020, UNMAS shared the list of these 50 recommended

areas/sub-districts with the Syrian government for its acceptance and granting access for the EO assessment. Among the 50 locations, it was jointly agreed with government of Syria to start the assessment in eight locations of high humanitarian priority, also taking into consideration access and logistics questions in Rural Damascus and Homs. The prioritisation criteria covered key issues such as EO contamination, potential land use for housing, land and property issues, access to key infrastructure, returnees/internally displaced persons (IDPs), and support to the UN humanitarian activities.<sup>68</sup>

As at June 2021, an area for a pilot clearance project was identified, initially focusing on agricultural areas in western Ghouta (Rural Damascus), and UNMAS was in the process of preparing a clearance contract. Further humanitarian clearance is subject to Syrian government approvals for international humanitarian mine action operators to register and work in Syria, and the availability of necessary funding.<sup>69</sup> In its statement to the 24<sup>th</sup> NDM in May 2021, Syria said that it had facilitated the opening of UNMAS offices in Aleppo.<sup>70</sup>

## LAND RELEASE AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Syria's continuing instability prevented progress towards a coordinated national programme of mine action. Comprehensive information on outcomes of survey and clearance in any areas was unavailable.

The ACHDE reported to UNMAS that it had cleared 319,820m<sup>2</sup> of land between February 2019 and December 2020. When EO items are found by the Armenian teams, they are marked and reported to the Aleppo Governor's office and the Russian Center for Reconciliation. These authorities then liaise with the Syrian army engineers to remove the marked items or destroy them in situ.<sup>71</sup>

In the north of Syria in 2020, HALO Trust destroyed 22 items of ERW in Aleppo governorate, though none of the destroyed items was a submunition. As at June 2021, HALO Trust EOD team had disposed of 51 items of UXO.<sup>72</sup>

SCD destroyed a total of 313 submunitions in north-west Syria during EOD call outs, survey, and BAC. In addition, SCD disposed of 193 items of UXO, marked and avoided 52 others.<sup>73</sup>

Table 2: SCD CMR clearance 2020<sup>74</sup>

Governorate	Submunitions destroyed
Aleppo	44
Hama	4
Idlib	265
<b>Total</b>	<b>313</b>

In its statement to the 18 Meeting of States Parties (18MSP) of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), Syria stated that "the unilateral sanctions inflicted on the Syrian people pose challenges for the Syrian government to provide the financial, technical and logistical resources [required to clear the mines]". The statement called for an unpoliticised financial and technical assistance to the mine action sector in Syria, without pre-conditions and in coordination with the Syrian government.<sup>75</sup>

- 1 The Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor website, Syria Cluster Munition Ban Policy, last updated 24 November 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yHLY0i>.
- 2 SNHR press release, "The Syrian Regime Repeatedly Uses Cluster Munitions Against Residential Neighborhoods in and Around Idleb Governorate, Constituting War Crimes ", 27 February 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3fUfEtB>.
- 3 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), March 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3yu8Tar>, p. 10.
- 4 The HALO Trust, 'Syria, A Hidden Emergency', at: <https://bit.ly/3fD4w4x>, p. 3.
- 5 Ibid., p. 7.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 11.
- 8 Email from Mairi Cunningham, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 9 ICRC and SARC, Mine Risk Needs Assessment and Education, PowerPoint presentation to the 24th NDM, 25 May 2021, slides 7-8.
- 10 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Emails from Michael Edwards, Explosive Hazard Operations Manager, Mayday Rescue, 11 May 2021; Mayday Rescue, "Syria Civil Defence, Explosive Hazard Mitigation Project Overview, Nov 2015–Mar 2018", 1 March 2018.
- 13 Emails from Michael Edwards, Mayday Rescue, 11 May 2021.
- 14 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 15 SNHR report, The Syrian Regime Repeatedly Uses Cluster Munitions Against Residential Neighborhoods in and Around Idlib Governorate, Constituting War Crimes, 27 February 2020, p. 8, at: <https://bit.ly/2T11WbH>; and SNHR report, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First half of 2020, p. 28, at: <https://bit.ly/3vvWssY>.
- 16 SNHR report, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2021, 5 April 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/2SCnu3m>, p. 3.
- 17 This information was provided on condition of anonymity.
- 18 This information was provided on condition of anonymity.
- 19 iMMAP, Coordination Support to Humanitarian Mine Action, 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yGh9nQ>; emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 and 17 June 2021; and email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 20 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 21 This information was provided on condition of anonymity.
- 22 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 23 Email from Lene Rasmussen, Mine Action Programme Advisor, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 24 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 25 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 26 iMMAP, Coordination Support to Humanitarian Mine Action, 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yGh9nQ>.
- 27 Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 and 17 June 2021.
- 28 UNMAS website, last updated in March 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3uCiBON>; and email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 29 Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 3.
- 30 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 31 Email from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 32 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 33 Email from Michael Edwards, Explosive Hazards Operations Manager, Mayday, 7 May 2021.
- 34 Email from UNMAS 15 July 2021.
- 35 Email from Michael Edwards, White Helmets, 7 May 2021.
- 36 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 37 Email from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 38 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 39 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021; see also, iMMAP, Coordination Support to Humanitarian Mine Action, 2020.
- 40 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 41 The 4W is an excel-based reporting matrix that feeds into the UN HRP. The term 4W stands for Who (which operator) is doing What, Where, and When. It is used as both a coordination and planning tool.
- 42 Emails from Michael Edwards, White Helmets, 12–22 June 2021; and online interview with UNMAS, 21 June 2021.
- 43 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 44 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 45 Email from Mairi Cunningham, The HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 46 Email from Michael Edwards, Mayday, 7 May 2021.
- 47 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 48 This information is provided on the condition of anonymity.
- 49 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 50 Email from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 51 "Russian military boosts qualified Syrian sappers to demine war-ravaged country", Tass, 9 January 2018.
- 52 See, e.g., "The Leramun district of the Syrian city of Aleppo will be cleared of explosive devices by the end of April", Report, Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides, 27 April 2020. The report did not state who conducted the clearance. The centre said engineers had cleared over 3,000 hectares (30km<sup>2</sup>), 3,112 buildings and 273 kilometres of roads, destroying 34,000 explosive items, including 5,400 IEDs, but did not say in what period of time.
- 53 "Russia calls for international support for demining efforts in Syria", Xinhua, 7 July 2018; and "Armenia sends deminers to Syria as part of Russia-backed mission", Radio Free Europe, 10 February 2019, at: <http://bit.ly/2K1glxo>.
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- 56 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.
- 57 Email from Mairi Cunningham, The HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 58 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 S. Kajjo, "Landmine removal crucial in post-IS Syria", Voice of America, 3 April 2019; and interview with operators, Erbil, Iraq, May 2019.
- 62 This information is provided under the condition of anonymity.
- 63 Email from Michael Edwards, Mayday, 7 May 2021.
- 64 Statement by Agnes Marcaillou, Director, UNMAS, to the UN Security Council, 24 October 2019.
- 65 Email from UNMAS, 30 July 2021.
- 66 The ten operators originate from Afghanistan, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates.
- 67 Email from UNMAS, 30 July 2021.
- 68 Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 2.
- 69 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.
- 70 Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 2.
- 71 Email from UNMAS, 15 July 2021.
- 72 Email from Mairi Cunningham, The HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.
- 73 Email from Michael Edwards, Mayday, 12 May 2021.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Statement of Syria, 18MSP, Geneva, 16–20 November 2020.