

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Nagorno-Karabakh should make a commitment to respect the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and set a deadline for the clearance of all anti-personnel mines.
- Despite not being a State Party to the APMBC, Nagorno-Karabakh has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should commit to never use anti-personnel mines and provide resources for mine survey and clearance.
- Nagorno-Karabakh should expedite creation of a mine action authority to centralise and strengthen information management and enhance coordination between all stakeholders.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The estimate of anti-personnel mine contamination more than doubled to 7.75km² in 2019 (see Table 1) as a result of a nationwide survey started by HALO Trust and expected to continue until 2022. It found 125 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs), up from 70 a year earlier, covering 4.72km² compared with 3.78km² at the end of 2018. It also identified 108 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) affecting 3.03km², mostly in the north-eastern Martakert area bordering Azerbaijan.¹

Table 1: Anti-personnel mined area by region (at end 2019)

Region	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Askeran	8	321,286	1	28,309	349,595
Hadrut	15	1,614,398	0	0	1,614,398
Lachin	19	560,044	0	0	560,044
Martakert	77	1,902,840	107	3,003,233	4,906,073
Martuni	2	154,715	0	0	154,715
Shahumyan	4	167,900	0	0	167,900
Totals	125	4,721,183	108	3,031,542	7,752,725

All regions of Nagorno-Karabakh have been affected by mines and unexploded submunitions as a result of the 1988–94 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and subsequent fighting. Mines were laid by both the Azeri and pro-Karabakh forces during the war, with a relatively high proportion of anti-vehicle mines being used in some regions.² The mines were of Soviet design and manufacture, and due to the nature of the conflict certain areas were mined several times.³ Nagorno-Karabakh's armed forces said they laid additional anti-personnel mines along the Armenian-Azerbaijani line of contact in 2013, east and north of disputed territory.⁴

Of 183 CHAs and SHAs newly identified in 2019, 182 covering a total of 4,633,027m² were within the Traditional Oblast while the remaining one, covering 14,318m² was outside. The significant discoveries around Martakert underscored the many years that had elapsed since previous surveys, which were mostly conducted in the early 2000s with some additional survey in 2010–11 and 2014, and increased knowledge of contamination accumulated by local communities.⁵

Nagorno-Karabakh has a relatively small amount of anti-vehicle mine contamination but much more extensive cluster munition contamination (see Table 2), which covers approximately 10 times as much area as anti-personnel mines as well as explosive remnants of war (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munitions 2020*).

Table 2: Explosive contamination by type (at end 2019)⁶

Type of contamination	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHA	Area (m ²)
Anti-personnel mines	125	4,721,183	108	3,031,542
Anti-vehicle mines	20	1,171,238	8	73,319
Cluster munitions	213	70,481,083	0	0
Totals	358	76,373,504	116	3,104,861

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action centre or authority. The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMACH) in 2000, which it hoped would consolidate all mine action-related information and respond to requests from the government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities. The project did not, however, attract local support and has been moribund for several years.⁷

Proposals for establishing a national centre were supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in meetings with The HALO Trust at the end of 2019 and discussions were set to resume in 2020. HALO reported constructive talks on the issue with the State Emergency Services and the Ministry of Agriculture.⁸

A mine action coordination committee is responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust. Regular coordination committee meetings were held between the local authorities, The HALO Trust, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) until 2018 when the head of the committee was moved to a new post. The position remains vacant, with HALO Trust continuing to lobby for a suitable candidate to fill the role.⁹

The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities do not provide The HALO Trust with any funding to clear mined areas.¹⁰

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

HALO's Nagorno-Karabakh programme follows the organisation's gender and diversity policies, providing equal access to employment for women and engaging them in management and operational roles.¹¹ Its most senior national staff member is female and women were employed in both survey and clearance. In 2019, female staff were included in non-technical survey teams for the first time. From 2020, all HALO survey teams include at least one woman. Women made up around 13% of HALO's staff in 2019, about the same as in the previous year, and expected to hire more women, subject to the availability of funding.¹²

All groups affected by anti-personnel mines, including women and children, are said to be consulted during survey and community liaison activities. Relevant mine action data is disaggregated by sex and age.¹³ But gender is said to be not taken into account in the prioritisation, planning, and tasking of survey and clearance activities.¹⁴

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action information management system; The HALO Trust operates its own database.¹⁵

No central mechanism exists for systematic sharing of data on mine clearance, underscoring the value of a mine action authority. The emergency services share information on explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) call-outs and advance notice of demolitions.¹⁶ The Nagorno-Karabakh Army Liaison Officer shares information with The HALO Trust on items found, incidents, CHAs, and clearance on a regular basis. HALO is not authorised to share this data with others.¹⁷

PLANNING AND TASKING

There is no national mine action strategy currently in place in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁸

HALO Trust's work plan has focused on completing existing tasks, giving priority to areas where confirmed accidents indicate the greatest humanitarian threat and where cleared areas are most likely to be put to use. HALO Trust started a nationwide survey in 2019, focusing on Malakert as Nagorno-Karabakh's most heavily mine-contaminated region. When new information of contamination is received, such as a mine find or incident, HALO tasks a non-technical survey team to respond within 48 hours. Otherwise, the survey was due to continue in 2020 on a region-by-region basis.¹⁹

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Nagorno-Karabakh has no local mine action standards. The Nagorno-Karabakh police were planning to lobby the government to develop standards while The HALO Trust planned to support calls for national standards as part of discussions on creating a mine action authority.²⁰

In the meantime, The HALO Trust follows its internal standing operating procedures. These were extensively re-written in 2019 to support introduction of more efficient clearance techniques, including the use of Minehound ground-penetrating-radar detectors.²¹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

The HALO Trust has been the main organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh since it started working there in 2000. The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service, formerly known as the Rescue Service, conducts EOD spot tasks and has reportedly conducted some clearance. One Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining.²²

Clearance is conducted mostly in the summer months between May and October. In 2019, HALO Trust operated with a total staff that peaked at 242 at the end of September before winding down in line with normal practice to 159 at the end of the year. At the end of 2019, HALO had 12 manual clearance teams with a total of 79 deminers together with four four-person non-technical survey teams and two mechanical teams with a total of eight personnel. Uncertainty over the level of continued United States (US) funding raised the possibility that HALO Trust would reduce staff further in 2020 rather than build up capacity over the summer.²³

After trialling Minehound GPR detectors and developing SOPs for them in 2019, The HALO Trust planned to deploy the detectors with demining teams in 2020.²⁴ By May 2020, HALO Trust had received three of the detectors and had one in service. It planned to deploy the other two by mid-June after training which requires dry ground and was delayed by persistent rain. Initial results showed the detector had increased clearance rates by around 10%, a figure expected to rise with experience.²⁵

The HALO Trust introduced a mobile data platform, the Fulcrum App, to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of non-technical survey. It allows survey teams to track and map historical evidence related to mine contamination and will enhance survey of the remaining mine contamination in Nagorno-Karabakh. HALO Trust also introduced use of Differential GPS providing greater accuracy to survey data.²⁶

DEMINER SAFETY

HALO Trust did not experience any demining casualties in 2019.

In November 2019, Nagorno-Karabakh police concluded their investigation into a March 2018 anti-vehicle mine blast which killed three members of a HALO Trust technical survey team and injured two others.²⁷ The HALO Trust and an external investigator had already conducted investigations that were concluded by June 2018. None of the investigations was able to determine with certainty the cause of the accident, which may have been a deep-buried mine. The other possibilities were that the area was missed during clearance due to the complexities of working around a previous accident site, or that the mine was not detected due to inadequate application of clearance techniques.²⁸

The investigation, which was the most detailed in HALO Trust's history, led to 28 recommendations, mostly focused on management systems. Manual prodding, halted after the accident, remains suspended.²⁹

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2019

The HALO Trust released a total of 195,997m² in 2019, all of it through clearance, almost a quarter less than in 2018.

SURVEY IN 2019

No mined area was cancelled through non-technical survey or reduced through technical survey in 2019.

As part of its re-survey of Nagorno-Karabakh, HALO Trust teams surveyed 38 out of 362 villages in 2019. It expects to complete survey of the Traditional Oblast by early 2022 and finish the rest of the territory the following year.³⁰

CLEARANCE IN 2019

HALO Trust cleared 195,997m² in 2019 (see Table 3), down from the 253,804m² it cleared during the previous year, but, in the process, it destroyed more anti-personnel mines than it did in 2018.³¹

Table 3: Mine clearance in 2019

Province/Region/District	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed
Askeran	5,936	2	0
Hadrut	153,360	84	1
Lachin	18,221	5	0
Martakert	15,476	23	0
Martuni	3,004	0	2
Totals	195,997	114	3

HALO survey teams are responsible for conducting EOD spot tasks and seven of nineteen tasks conducted in 2019 involved destruction of mines of which one was an anti-personnel mine and the remainder anti-vehicle mines.³²

- 1 Email from Rob Syfret, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 2 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.
- 3 HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh: History", accessed 20 July 2019 at: bit.ly/2Zyu1KZ.
- 4 L. Musayelian, "Karabakh Enhances Defense Capabilities", *Asbarez*, Stepanakert, 26 July 2013, at: bit.ly/3imvugM.
- 5 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 6 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 7 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 8 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 9 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 10 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 13 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 16 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 17 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 20 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 21 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 22 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 23 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 26 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 27 Emails from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 and 26 April and 1 June 2019.
- 28 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May, 13 May, and 30 July 2020.
- 29 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 30 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 31 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 32 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.