

AFGHANISTAN



CLEARING THE MINES 2021

ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 MARCH 2023
NOT ON TRACK TO MEET DEADLINE

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP)
MINE CONTAMINATION: MASSIVE

187 KM²

AP MINE
CLEARANCE IN 2020

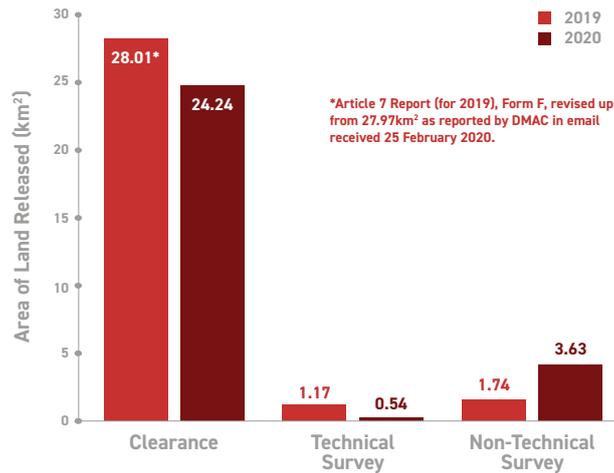
24.24 KM²

AP MINES
DESTROYED IN 2020

5,159

(INCLUDING 288 DESTROYED
IN SPOT TASKS)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



CURRENT LIKELIHOOD OF MEETING 2025 CLEARANCE TARGET (as per the Oslo Action Plan commitment): **LOW**

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The amount of land released through clearance dropped more than 13% in 2020, the second successive annual drop. Clearance of abandoned anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature (AIM) increased but remained at a low level and was conducted by only one operator in 2020. Training and development of AIM survey and clearance standing operating procedures for other implementing partners (IPs) in 2020 laid the groundwork for accelerated clearance in 2021 despite security sensitivities.

The Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) drafted a new strategic plan for 2021–2026 and stated that it would request a second extension to its Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Article 5 deadline of March 2023. Escalating conflict did not prevent IPs from operating in areas of insecurity but slowed access, increased interruptions from kinetic engagements, and exposed operators to increased security threats. An attack by armed actors on HALO Trust in June 2021 killed 11 staff and wounded 15 others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Afghanistan's government should increase financial support for humanitarian mine action.
- DMAC should develop long-term plans identifying the structure and capacity needed to tackle residual risk from conventional (pre-2001) anti-personnel mines.
- DMAC should address the concerns of implementing partners over delays in uploading operating results on to the national information management database.

ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Criterion	Score (2020)	Score (2019)	Performance Commentary
UNDERSTANDING OF CONTAMINATION (20% of overall score)	6	7	Afghanistan has a good, but still incomplete, knowledge of pre-2001 anti-personnel mine contamination and continues to add significant amounts of previously unrecorded mined area to the database. However, there is only rudimentary knowledge of the extent of post-2001 contamination, including mines of an improvised nature, which may now pose the greater threat to civilians and has reportedly increased as a result of heavy use of improvised mines by the Taliban in 2021 prior to their becoming the de facto State authority.
NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT (10% of overall score)	8	8	The Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) completed its transition to national management in 2018 but DMAC salaries are largely donor funded and the government has not yet made a significant financial contribution to the programme. A modest payment pledged in 2019 was received in 2020 and followed by a further pledge of government funding for clearance.
GENDER AND DIVERSITY (10% of overall score)	7	6	DMAC seeks the mainstreaming of gender and diversity in its 2021–2026 strategic plan and it sets out a detailed agenda in its annual work plan. Practice in implementing partners lags behind formal commitment to the goals while custom in deeply conservative Afghan society limits the extent of women's recruitment, particularly in operations. Two female demining teams who operated in Bamyán for DDG were taken over by a national operator, OMAR, and reassigned to battle area tasks in the same province.
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING (10% of overall score)	8	8	DMAC has an Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) New Generation database that provides a range of reports and extensive disaggregated information. DMAC continues to work with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) preparing to upgrade to IMSMA Core and to adopt new mobile data-gathering technologies. Operators say DMAC's data entry can be slow. Afghanistan routinely submits comprehensive Article 7 transparency reports, though is often late in doing so. National operators are not proactive in reporting on their operations.
PLANNING AND TASKING (10% of overall score)	8	8	Afghanistan produced a comprehensive extension request in 2012 and although funding shortfalls and insecurity mean that the MAPA will not achieve its objectives DMAC produces annual work plans in consultation with operators that seek to address emerging challenges.
LAND RELEASE SYSTEM (20% of overall score)	6	6	The MAPA has national mine action standards in Dari and English that are subject to regular review. In 2019, it became the first country to introduce national standards for clearance of mines of an improvised nature and, after review, amended the standard in 2020. Land release is achieved almost entirely by full clearance and DMAC consulted the GICHD with a view to increasing operational efficiency.
LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE (20% of overall score)	7	7	The MAPA has released an average of more than 25km ² a year through clearance over the last five years and largely maintained that level in 2020 despite financial, public health, and security challenges.
Average Score	6.9	7.0	Overall Programme Performance: AVERAGE

DEMINING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
- Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC)

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC)
- Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan (AREA)
- Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA)
- Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA)
- Mine Detection and Dog Centre (MDC)
- Organisation for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR)
- 18 commercial companies accredited in 2020, but only Assad Brothers Demining reported active in anti-personnel mine clearance

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- Danish Demining Group (DDG) now known as Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding Sector
- Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD)
- The HALO Trust (HALO)

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)
- Artios Global

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Afghanistan reported contamination by conventional and improvised anti-personnel mines amounting to 187km² at the end of 2020 (see Table 1).¹ This was almost 10% less than a year earlier but still kept it among the world's most heavily mine-affected countries and the figure does not even capture the full extent of the national mine threat.

Anti-personnel mines are known or suspected to affect 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.² Moreover, escalating conflict in 2021 as Afghanistan faced the withdrawal of United States (US) and other international forces and the return of the Taliban regime appeared to have resulted in extensive mine use, adding further to the problem.³

Most of Afghanistan's known mine contamination resulted from the decade-long war of resistance that followed the Soviet invasion of 1979, the 1992–96 internal armed conflict, and the 1996–2001 fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Afghanistan estimated the area affected by so-called "legacy" mines dating from before 2001 amounted to nearly 153km² at the end of 2020, with big concentrations in the central and north-eastern areas of the country (see Table 2). However, the full extent of legacy mined areas may be significantly greater.

DMAC reported that at the end of 2020 some 66 of Afghanistan's 400 districts have not yet been subjected to any non-technical survey as a result of insecurity and access problems.⁴ DMAC has also acknowledged that some areas previously cleared have been re-contaminated with improvised mines and explosive remnants of war as a result of continuing conflict.⁵ Survey in Afghanistan also continues to find previously unrecorded areas of contamination and in 2020, DMAC added 185 areas affected by legacy

anti-personnel and mixed anti-personnel/anti-vehicle mines to the database, which covered a total of nearly 13km². Only 11 of these areas, covering 0.8km², were identified as the result of recent conflict.⁶

Moreover, Afghanistan still has only a rudimentary assessment of the extent of the areas affected by mines of an improvised nature. These mines are identified by the United Nations as one of the biggest threats to civilians, and one that is still growing. The UN warned in August 2021 that Taliban forces were laying large numbers of improvised mines in the offensive that followed the withdrawal of US and foreign forces.⁷ Victim-activated pressure-plate devices inflicted 35% more civilian casualties in 2020 than they did the year before. Improvised mines placed on roads caused the most recorded casualties, including devices triggered by the weight of a child, which Afghanistan has duly recognised as anti-personnel mines.⁸ The UN reported that improvised mines, "nearly all" of them emplaced by the Taliban, killed 216 people and injured 238 in the first six months of 2021, an increase of 42 per cent over the same period of 2020 and the highest level of casualties in a six-month period since it started keeping records.⁹

As at the end of 2020, Afghanistan had identified a total of 34.5km² of confirmed and suspected improvised mined areas, more than two-thirds of which was in the fiercely contested southern region (see Table 3).¹⁰ But DMAC has also estimated that, in reality, abandoned improvised mines (AIM) affect 103km².¹¹ (In a May 2019 assessment, Afghanistan had estimated that an area of 465km² might be affected.¹²) It is believed that improvised mines are "the greatest challenge faced by the mine action sector in Afghanistan today."¹³

Table 1: Mine contamination by contamination type, as at the end of 2020¹⁴

Type of contamination	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Anti-personnel mines	1,645	126,201,063	135	26,624,987	152,826,050
Improvised AP mines	428	22,254,408	54	12,227,044	34,481,452
AP mine totals	2,073	148,455,471	189	38,852,031	187,307,502
AV mines	991	181,170,687	234	94,921,043	276,091,730
Totals	3,064	329,626,158	423	133,773,074	463,399,232

AP = Anti-personnel AV = Anti-vehicle CHAs = Confirmed hazardous areas SHAs = Suspected hazardous areas

Table 2: Anti-personnel mine contamination by region (end-2020)¹⁵

Region	Confirmed areas	Area confirmed (m ²)	Suspected areas	Area suspected (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Central	420	30,523,926	33	4,642,463	35,166,389
East	155	13,141,858	5	534,900	13,676,758
North	214	8,981,804	0	0	8,981,804
North East	562	35,919,511	12	8,682,246	44,601,757
South	77	9,432,448	54	8,315,270	17,747,718
South East	108	10,217,533	20	4,137,651	14,355,184
West	109	17,983,983	11	312,457	18,296,440
Totals	1,645	126,201,063	135	26,624,987	152,826,050

Table 3: Improvised mine contamination by region (31 December 2020)¹⁶

Region	Confirmed areas	Area confirmed (m ²)	Suspected areas	Area suspected (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Central	7	800,197	0	0	800,197
East	203	6,494,576	20	549,907	7,044,483
North	28	1,200,764	3	50,188	1,250,952
North East	24	946,708	8	100,236	1,046,944
South	157	12,410,321	23	11,526,713	23,937,034
South East	2	31,603	0	0	31,603
West	7	370,239	0	0	370,239
Totals	428	22,254,408	54	12,227,044	34,481,452

Afghanistan also records large areas of “Initial Hazardous Areas” which are suspected hazards that have not yet been subjected to non-technical survey. At the end of 2020, DMAC estimated the total area of these areas at almost 240km², including 35 anti-personnel mined areas affecting 0.95km² and a further 114 AIM hazards covering 57.33km². The remainder was accounted for by anti-vehicle mine hazards (47.63km²) and ERW hazards affecting 133.66km².¹⁷

In addition to the challenge from anti-personnel mines, Afghanistan contends with 1,225 areas known or suspected

to be affected by anti-vehicle mines, which cover 276km², and even bigger areas contaminated by ERW. The intervention of the US-led coalition in late 2001 added considerable quantities of unexploded ordnance (UXO) to this problem. Continuing conflict between the Afghan government and the Taliban and other armed groups continues to add new contamination.¹⁸ DMAC reported total mine and ERW contamination of 1,593km² remaining at the end of 2020, of which ERW accounted for 974km², including North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) firing ranges covering 667km².¹⁹

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA), originally established in 1989, is led by DMAC, which comes under the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority. By the end of 2020 it employed a total of 5,910 people, of whom DMAC reported that 4,700 were deployed in the field. For 2021, an expected increase in funding through the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) might, it said, support a corresponding increase in mine action personnel.²⁰

DMAC fulfils the role of a national mine action centre. From its headquarters in Kabul and seven regional offices, DMAC manages and coordinates the work of national and international IPs, providing strategic planning and annual work plans. It also sets priorities and standards, accredits operators, conducts quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC), manages the mine action database, and conducts resource mobilisation. It coordinates closely with operators through technical working groups that address planning and priority setting, survey, mechanical clearance, risk education, and victim assistance.²¹ In 2018, it set up a separate technical working group to deal with AIMs.²²

The MAPA is nationally managed but remains largely dependent on international finance. Since 2012, it has transitioned from being a project of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to national management, a process formally completed with the transfer of the last positions from UNMAS to DMAC in June 2018. The government paid the salaries of 15 of DMAC's total staff of 155 people in 2020. The remainder were funded by UNMAS (93 people), the ITF (26), the New Zealand Defence Forces (15), and the United States (6).²³

In 2020, the Afghan government made its first financial contribution to humanitarian mine action operations, providing AFN20 million (approx. US\$250,000) for a clearance project in Khost province. DMAC expected additional government funding to become available in 2021.²⁴ Its annual plan for Afghan year 1400 (April 2021–March 2022) requested funding of \$5 million from the government for demining projects.²⁵

UNMAS supported DMAC in 2020, providing funding of US\$7.1 million through the VTF, down from US\$17.4 million provided the previous year. UNMAS noted that donors delivered the funding previously committed, but new funding was limited, reflecting the priority given to the COVID-19 response. Funding went to six IPs for survey, clearance, and the delivery of risk education. UNMAS operated in 2020 with 32 national and 3 international staff providing technical advice, training, and capacity building. It expected to add three more international and one further national staff in 2021. UNMAS also reports conducting advocacy at a political level for humanitarian mine action with armed non-state actors, including the Taliban, and in the field at community level to facilitate access for survey and clearance.²⁶

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) provided third-party monitoring of all mine action and conventional weapons disposal projects funded by the US Department of State, working with 18 staff, of whom six were international staff. In 2020, it monitored a total of 21 grants worth approximately US\$13 million to nine organisations, including 14 grants for mine clearance and 1 for non-technical survey. The grants did not include survey or clearance of CMR hazards.²⁷

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

The MAPA, which has had a policy on gender in mine action since 2014, set gender mainstreaming as one of four goals in its 2016–20 strategic plan. It states that “achievable targets, reflecting prevailing circumstances and conditions, will be adopted to support and encourage progress wherever possible.”²⁸ Afghanistan’s request for an extension to its Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) Article 4 clearance deadline noted that “the ongoing conflict, political issues and uncertain peace process in Afghanistan has major implications for women’s workforce participation in different areas of Afghanistan.”²⁹

Progress in the prevailing circumstances has continued at a modest pace. DMAC’s 155 staff included in early 2021 one woman employed as a human resources assistant and three women had been hired as interns for the gender and diversity, information management, and risk education departments. In MAPA’s workforce, the number of women employees had increased from 170 towards the end of 2019 to 212 in the last quarter of 2020.³⁰

After leaving the position vacant for some months, DMAC appointed a new gender and diversity manager in October 2020. By the end of the year, the new incumbent had reviewed the gender and diversity content of DMAC’s internal policy documents and guidelines and provided training for the gender focal points of IPs as well as on non-technical survey for male and female staff of DMAC and IPs.³¹ DMAC reported that all vacancy announcements are now gender sensitive; that a woman is present in all recruitment panels; and that women candidates’ scores are automatically accorded extra points, in line with Afghan labour law. It also reported having a human resources manual that recognises rights of female employees, including maternity leave and reduced working hours for pregnant women.³² DMAC operates a hotline taking calls from affected communities which it said also allows interests of minorities to be considered.³³

DMAC reported that six national implementing partners all now have a dedicated gender and diversity officer. UNMAS reported it recruited gender mainstreaming officers for five of them in 2020 who were working in conjunction with DMAC and UNMAS on reviewing their gender standards and training. They were also responsible for ensuring implementing partner projects engaged with women and addressed the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys.³⁴ In 2020, the GICHD provided training on non-technical survey and reported that at least two operators had plans in 2021 to deploy paired teams to conduct non-technical survey.³⁵ Some IPs employ women in operational as well as administrative roles but deploying women in field operations in particular remains challenging in Afghanistan’s deeply conservative society. Danish Demining Group (DDG), now known as Danish Refugee Council Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding Sector, operated with female deminers for the first time in 2018 in Bamyán province, and were not operational in 2020.³⁶

A technical working group on gender and diversity meets regularly with implementing partners to promote implementation.³⁷ DMAC’s review of IP project proposals also ensures gender issues are considered in operational planning. It operates a hotline taking calls from affected communities, which it said also allows interests of minorities to be considered.³⁸

The gender strategy and Afghanistan’s national mine action standards (AMAS) for community liaison underscore the importance of including women and girls as well as boys and men in non-technical survey, and pre- and post-clearance impact assessments and for equal access to employment for women. The strategy called for implementing partners to identify forums in which to access under-represented groups, including women and girls, and to ensure data collection and reporting was disaggregated for gender and age.³⁹ The AMAS also refer to the importance of consulting representatives of different groups, such as tribal and religious leaders.⁴⁰ Risk education teams are required to include a female and male trainer.⁴¹

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

DMAC is preparing to upgrade its national database from the present New Generation version to IMSMA Core but says the process of cleaning up data to be uploaded into the new system will not be completed until 2023,⁴² two years beyond the previously expected completion date.⁴³ In the meantime, DMAC, working in collaboration with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), brought into service in 2020 the Mine Action Reporting System (MARS), a digital tool for improving data collection in the field. MARS will initially be used for post-demining impact assessments and quality management but will later cover all survey and clearance activities as well.⁴⁴

Afghanistan submits comprehensive Article 7 reports annually and DMAC’s information department produces a range of monthly, quarterly, and annual reports as well as reports on request and maps.⁴⁵ DMAC also holds monthly data-coordination meetings which IPs said had resulted in improvements, but complained that entry of survey and clearance data continued to be slow because of a shortage of trained information management staff in DMAC.

PLANNING AND TASKING

Afghanistan has worked with the support of the GICHD to develop a new strategic plan for Afghan years 1400–1404 (April 2021–March 2026), but as of June 2021 was still finalising the document. The plan sets out five strategic goals:⁴⁶

- Innovative and gender and diversity-sensitive land release, risk education, and weapons and ammunition destruction to promote behavioural change and ensure safe access to land;
- Rights-based gender and diversity-sensitive inclusive services and equal opportunities are promoted and made accessible to EO victims;
- Mine action is integrated and aligned into relevant sustainable development frameworks and interventions, contributing to the fulfilment of Afghanistan's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Women and other marginalised groups are included and empowered within the MAPA through effective gender and diversity mainstreaming; and
- Effective advocacy and coordination at national and international levels increase recognition and support to mine action as an enabler of humanitarian response, sustainable development, and peace and security.

DMAC also issues annual work plans that set detailed targets towards general goals. The plan for year 1400 (April 2021–March 2022) called for clearance of 330km², including 114km² of areas affected by anti-personnel mines, AIM, and mixed anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, subject to availability of funding. But DMAC said the MAPA only had confirmed funding for clearance of 46km², including anti-personnel mined areas totalling 15.63km², AIM-affected areas totalling 0.14km², and mixed mined area of 2.08km².⁴⁷ The MAPA had confirmed funding of \$18.3 million from the United States, \$13.2 million from the VTF, and \$14.4 million from 11 other donors.⁴⁸

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

The MAPA has comprehensive national mine action standards that are compliant with International Mine Action Standards and which DMAC reviews annually and amends in consultation with IPs. The persistently high percentage of land released through full clearance—averaging 78% between 2018 and 2020—has called into question the efficiency of the MAPA's survey and land release practices.

A GICHD assessment in 2019 observed that the emphasis on costs-per-square-metre cleared in tendering and contractual arrangements did not encourage operators to apply the full range of land release options, including survey. It recommended operations should be based on stronger evidence-based decision-making and that a review of land release applications should probe the reasons for the high percentage of full clearance and consider possible alternatives. To increase efficiency, it also recommended standardised training in non-technical survey and technical survey.⁴⁹

MAPA survey is in a process of transition. Under Afghanistan's Article 5 deadline extension plan, the MAPA embarked on a Mine/ERW Impact Free Community Survey (MEIFCS), aiming to complete non-technical survey of all districts. It suspended the MEIFCS programme in 2019 because of funding constraints and because most remaining districts requiring survey were in areas that are hard to access due to insecurity.⁵⁰ In 2020, non-technical survey was mainly conducted by IP quick-response teams focusing on central, eastern, north-eastern, and southern regions, aiming to record contamination by both improvised and "legacy" mines.⁵¹ The MAPA operational plan for 1400 (2021–2022) identified 26 districts earmarked for non-technical survey, and to try to mitigate the problems of negotiating access, it assigned all non-technical survey to a single IP, MCPA.⁵²

The GICHD noted in a 2019 capacity assessment that DMAC is "proactive in introducing new AMAS as and when needed" but noted that it had not updated them regularly. It noted that most of the AMAS were developed between 2011 and 2013 and some chapters needed to be reviewed and updated to promote greater efficiency.⁵³ DMAC and the GICHD are due to review land release standards and are expected to undertake revisions to strengthen non-technical survey and increase operational efficiency but DMAC acknowledged no changes were made to the AMAS in 2020.⁵⁴

In 2019 Afghanistan became the first country programme to release a standard for tackling mines of an improvised nature. AMAS 06.10 (Abandoned Improvised Mine Clearance) was released in March 2019 emphasising the neutrality of humanitarian mine action. The standard was reviewed in a series of technical working group meetings and a revised version issued in 2020. The standard requires operators to secure prior written consent from local authorities and other "key local stakeholders", including armed opposition groups, and confirmation by the party that laid devices that they are abandoned and that clearance may proceed. It stipulates clearance should take place only in a rural or semi-rural setting. All action to neutralise AIMS should be conducted remotely or semi-remotely, and where possible devices should be destroyed in situ.⁵⁵

In 2021, Afghanistan completed the digital databasing of the AMAS, using the mineaction.net application, the first country to do so. The national standards were then linked digitally to the IMAS database, providing a "smart" updating arrangement to support DMAC's operations and promote long-term national ownership and sustainability.⁵⁶

In 2017, DMAC introduced a national standard for environmental protection in mine action (AMAS 07.06), setting policy and standing operating procedure (SOP). The Standard aims to ensure that mine action operations “leave the environment in a status that is similar to, or where possible better than, before mine action operations commenced, and that permits the intended use of land once mine action operations have been completed.” The AMAS calls for environmental protection to be incorporated into operational plans and consultation with local communities on issues relating to burning or clearing vegetation, as well as on noise and dust.⁵⁷

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Afghanistan had 40 humanitarian and commercial companies engaged in mine action in 2020 of which 31 were accredited for survey and clearance and the remainder for victim assistance, explosive ordnance risk reduction, and monitoring.⁵⁸

Survey and clearance of landmines is conducted mostly by six national and three international organisations. The national IPs active in 2020 were AREA, ATC, DAFA, MCPA, MDC, and OMAR. A seventh national humanitarian IP, the Justice and Peace Organisation (JAPO), received DMAC accreditation in January 2021 to conduct non-technical and technical survey, manual and mechanical mine clearance, battle area clearance, and explosive ordnance risk education. As of June 2021 JAPO had not conducted any operations.⁵⁹

MCPA, employed a total staff of 624 in 2020, operating 38 manual clearance teams with 532 personnel along with nine non-technical survey teams with 47 staff, and seven mechanical teams employing 28 staff. In 2021, with DMAC having given MCPA the lead role in survey, it expected to conduct non-technical survey in 14 provinces. MCPA had also received training for 24 experienced staff on survey and clearance of abandoned improvised mines and was preparing to engage in these activities.⁶⁰ Other national IPs contacted by Mine Action Review did not respond to requests for information.

DDG/DRC operated with slightly less capacity in 2020 than the previous year but still deployed 18 manual clearance teams with 180 deminers and four survey teams with 20 personnel, working in the northern Balk province and central areas. DRC capacity also included two mechanical teams and 24 explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams with a total of 53 operators.⁶¹

The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) continued conducting survey and clearance in northern Badakshan province, an area which it accesses from neighbouring Tajikistan and that is contaminated mainly with Soviet-era

butterfly mines. In 2020, FSD worked with much the same capacity as the previous year but reconfigured its contingent into four manual clearance teams with a total of 40 deminers supported by two non-technical survey teams. In 2021, it expected to add one more clearance team.⁶²

The HALO Trust is much the biggest operator in Afghanistan employing 2,770 people in 2020, including 2,292 in operations. These were conducted by 59 manual demining teams with 1,681 staff, as well as two survey/EOD teams, 25 mechanical teams with 149 staff, and additional weapons and ammunition disposal capacity. HALO Trust was the only IP conducting survey and clearance of AIMs in 2020, with 24 teams totalling 85 personnel dedicated to this operation. These teams were split into 21 quick response teams and 4 bilateral survey/EOD teams. Some of HALO's demining capacity was deployed in four-person quick response teams with a minimum of one team in each of Afghanistan's seven regions and larger numbers of teams according to local needs. The teams were tasked in a process of consultation between DMAC and HALO Trust.⁶³

Demining and AIM clearance teams work with ground-penetrating-radar (GPR) detectors which have proved efficient in detecting low-metal devices and avoiding metal clutter, thereby contributing to better productivity. These include Minehound detectors funded by the US Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate, and man-portable Scorpion detectors. HALO also uses tractors fitted with rotary mine-combs, which are an efficient tool particularly for clearing anti-vehicle mines that are sparsely distributed over large areas. The organisation also uses a STORM severe-terrain excavator with independent axles that can cope with steep-sloping terrain and reach into gullies, and a tractor-mounted Harrow magnet used on battle area tasks. HALO also started using solar panels at its headquarters and another main base in line with broader environmental management goals of reducing its energy footprint.⁶⁴

DEMINER SAFETY

The MAPA reported one demining casualty in 2020 which resulted from an accident clearing an anti-personnel mine and was identified as a deminer's non-compliance with procedures.

Deteriorating security continued to pose the main threat to deminers. IPs experienced 12 major security incidents in 2020 in which one MAPA employee was killed and three injured. IPs also face constant demands for payment of “tax”. A total of 18 MAPA personnel were abducted but later released after negotiations through community outreach channels. IPs faced intimidation and also lost equipment. The MAPA was unable to conduct a number of planned projects in Baghlan, Farah, Herat, Kandahar, and Kunar provinces, although it also gained access for the first time to Nuristan province and returned to Faryab for the first time in a decade.⁶⁵

An attack on HALO Trust's camp in Baghlan province in June 2021 in which 11 deminers were killed and 15 injured represented the worst ever recorded violence against HALO Trust and the mine action community in Afghanistan. Islamic State in Khorasan Province later claimed responsibility for the attack, which was condemned by the UN Security Council. HALO Trust, which has worked in Afghanistan since 1988, pledged to continue operations and is investigating the incident.⁶⁶

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2020

Afghanistan's Article 7 reports show it released a total of 37km² in 2020, compared with 196km² in 2019. Those totals, however, include cancellation of big areas of "initial hazardous areas": 8.7km² in 2020 and 167km² in 2019.⁶⁷ This represents land that was identified as possibly contaminated by abandoned improvised mines (AIM) in a preliminary assessment but never subjected to non-technical survey and therefore not recorded as suspected hazardous areas. A narrower assessment of mine action outcomes based on release of confirmed and suspected hazardous areas shows that Afghanistan released 28.4km² through survey and clearance in 2020 (24.24km² through clearance; 0.54km² reduced through technical survey; and 3.63km² cancelled through non-technical survey), compared with almost 30.6km² in 2019, a drop of 7%. Discrepancies between official data and results reported by operators, particularly in relation to non-technical survey, left uncertainty over the precise outputs achieved.

Measures to counter the COVID-19 pandemic affected delivery of risk education but appear to have had little impact on other mine action in 2020.⁶⁸ HALO Trust, the biggest operator said small numbers of deminers were forced to isolate at certain times but it had not experienced widespread outbreaks and the overall impact of mitigation measures was "minimal".⁶⁹

SURVEY IN 2020

Afghanistan reported cancelling a total of 12.32km² through non-technical survey in 2020, initially recording 7.08km² as area affected by conventional anti-personnel mines (see Table 4) and 5.24km² as AIM-contaminated areas.⁷¹ Afghanistan's subsequent Article 7 report, however, recorded cancellation of 3.63km² of anti-personnel and AIM mined area. The remaining 8.69km² consisted of "initial hazardous areas", representing areas that had been identified as probably contaminated by AIM in a preliminary assessment but never subjected to non-technical survey.⁷²

HALO Trust reported cancelling a total of 4.68km², including 1.6km² of conventional anti-personnel mines, largely in western Farah province, along with 3.08km² of areas affected by AIMS in Helmand, Nangahar, Faryab and Kunduz provinces. HALO Trust noted that in many areas survey is hampered by the amount of time that has lapsed since contamination occurred, sparse population, the lack of mine maps or marking, and the sporadic way mines were placed, making it difficult to prove the absence of mines and that areas can be cancelled.⁷³ Official data also did not include a small amount of cancellation (5,121m²) reported by DDG/DRC.⁷⁴

Access to areas under the control of armed groups has posed an increasing challenge to survey requiring a greater focus on liaison with communities and locally influential personalities. DMAC said it planned to trial a different approach to non-technical survey, assigning one operator to conduct two or three pilot projects in 2021 with a view to having it take on all non-technical survey in 2022.⁷⁵

DMAC reported that only 0.54km² was reduced through technical survey in 2020, half the amount reduced in 2019. Most of it was conducted by ATC in Faryab province where operators had access for the first time in a decade in 2020. DMAC recorded reduction of 34,530m² by HALO Trust in two provinces in 2020 (see Table 5) but HALO reported it reduced 114,329m² in four provinces.⁷⁶

OUTLOOK

The Taliban takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021 and uncertainty over the operation of the new government did not halt the work of the mine action sector. In early September 2021, HALO Trust had 1,400 deminers deployed and active in five provinces, including Helmand and Kandahar in the south; Nangahar in the east; Parwan in the centre; and Samangan in the north. Operations included clearance of abandoned improvised mines, mainly in Nangahar, as well as "legacy" mines and unexploded ordnance. In areas where HALO Trust previously had permission to conduct clearance, local authorities have generally wanted demining to continue. Taliban authorities in northern Kunduz province had reportedly submitted a request to DMAC for it to provide demining capacity. The HALO Trust expects there will be increased demand for survey, risk education, and demining to support and protect displaced populations, assist access for humanitarian aid, and prevent further heavy casualties resulting from use of improvised mines and other explosive ordnance. HALO Trust has found international donors supportive.⁷⁰

Table 4: Cancellation of "legacy" mined areas through non-technical survey in 2020 (including cancellation of "initial hazardous areas") (as reported by DMAC)⁷⁷

Operator	Province	Area cancelled (m ²)
ATC	Faryab, Sari Pul	483,571
FSD	Badakhshan	20,855
HALO	Farah, Faryab, Herat, Jawzjan, Kabul, Khost, Kunduz, Maydan Wardak, Parwan	6,397,677
MCPA	Balkh, Kunduz	161,500
OMAR	Kapisa	15,000
Total		7,078,603

Table 5: Reduction through technical survey in 2020 (as reported by DMAC)⁷⁸

Operator	Province	Area reduced (m ²)
ATC	Faryab, Kunar	344,226
DAFA	Baghlan, Khost, Paktia	32,503
DDG	Balkh	34,709
HALO	Balkh, Panjshir	34,530
MCPA	Zabul	35,720
OMAR	Kapisa, Logar	56,395
Total		538,083

CLEARANCE IN 2020

Afghanistan released a total of 24.24km² through clearance in 2020,⁷⁹ including 23.83km² of area contaminated by conventional anti-personnel mines, 13% less than the previous year, and with 70% completed by just two IPs, HALO Trust and DAFA (see Table 6). A further 0.41km² of cleared mined area contained abandoned anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature (AIMs). The number of anti-personnel mines destroyed also dropped sharply from 7,801 in 2019 to 5,159 in 2020, of which 4,716 were destroyed in clearance operations.⁸⁰ This continued a downward trend of recent years as IPs worked on minefields in increasingly remote areas and difficult terrain. Only eight clearance tasks covering an aggregate of 76,312m² yielded no mines.⁸¹

The downturn reflected a number of factors. DDG/DRC cleared one-fifth of the mined area it tackled in 2019, shifting its focus in 2020 to battle area clearance.⁸² Pandemic restrictions also slowed some operations, although HALO Trust said it had minimal impact and only a few isolated cases of deminers affected by COVID-19.⁸³ Insecurity also contributed to slower rates of progress, putting a premium on intensive contact with local communities. DMAC reported all IPs received training in access negotiations in 2020 to try to expand access to hard-to-reach areas.⁸⁴ IPs were still able to work in areas of conflict but had more frequent interruptions from outbreaks of fighting close to clearance tasks that forced teams to temporarily halt operations.⁸⁵

Afghanistan saw significant progress in dealing with improvised mines, albeit with clearance still on a limited scale (see Table 7). In 2020, HALO Trust remained the only IP conducting clearance of AIM, but Afghanistan reported clearance of 369,655m² affected by AIM, compared with just under 85,000m² in 2019, and destruction of 142 AIM, up from 21 AIM in 2019.⁸⁶ HALO Trust reported that it cleared less area and fewer devices.⁸⁷

DMAC expected the pace of AIM clearance to accelerate in 2021 as more IPs deployed capacity to deal with the threat. HALO put five manual clearance teams, four mechanical teams, and ten non-technical survey teams onto AIM survey and clearance in 2020 and planned to increase this capacity in 2021. It also collaborated with Artios Global in providing training in AIM survey and clearance for other IPs from July to September 2020 to help broaden the sector response.⁸⁸ DDG expected to engage in AIM clearance in the second half of 2021.⁸⁹ DMAC reported that ATC, DAFA, MCPA and OMAR now have staff trained for AIM clearance, and that it has approved the AIM clearance SOPs of seven IPs.⁹⁰

Table 6: Clearance of pre-2001 anti-personnel mined areas in 2020 (as reported by DMAC)⁹¹

Operator	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed
ADC	249,069	23	0
Area	68,304	10	0
ATC	1,722,257	78	0
DAFA	8,119,986	513	14
DDG ⁹²	358,140	120	0
FSD	136,484	628	0
HALO Trust ⁹³	8,735,944	3,105	0
MCPA	48,010	0	0
OMAR	3,245,623	168	15
SDC	24,462	1	0
TDC	1,121,603	70	0
Totals	23,829,882	4,716	29

Table 7: Clearance of abandoned improvised mines by HALO Trust in 2020⁹⁴

Region/Province / District	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	Improvised AP mines destroyed
East: Nangarhar/Deh Bala/Acheen	5	127,332	55
South: Helmand/Nad Ali/Lashkar Gah	11	242,323	74
Totals	16	369,655	129

ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE AND COMPLIANCE



Under Article 5 of the APMBC (and in accordance with the 10-year extension granted by States Parties in 2013), Afghanistan is required to destroy all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, but not later than 1 March 2023.

Afghanistan will not meet this deadline and has already indicated that it will seek a second deadline extension in 2022.⁹⁵ In its first extension request submitted in 2012, Afghanistan set out milestones for completing clearance of all anti-personnel mine contamination estimated at 185.5km² as well as all anti-vehicle mine and ERW contamination, but this was based on receiving international donor assistance of \$619 million. Since then, Afghanistan has continued to discover previously unrecorded anti-personnel mined areas and faced extensive contamination by improvised mines for which no provision was made in the extension request. In addition to its mine threat, Afghanistan has had to address UXO contamination on more than 1,200km² of NATO firing ranges.⁹⁶ At the same time, it also faced a sharp drop in donor funding, deteriorating security impeding access to hazardous areas and slower clearance rates.

At the end of 2020 Afghanistan had well over 187km² of conventional and improvised mine contamination remaining. The MAPA work plan for 2021–22 set a nominal target of

clearing 330km² of mines and ERW but by March 2021 had confirmed funding of US\$32 million, or only a quarter of the \$129 million required, and aimed instead to clear a total of 46km². That included less than 18km² of areas affected by AP mines, improvised mines or mixed mined areas, a significant drop on clearance rates in the last five years (see Table 8).⁹⁷

Table 8: Five-year summary of AP mine clearance

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2020	24.24
2019 ⁹⁸	28.01
2018	30.90
2017	28.12
2016	27.12
Total	138.39

PLANNING FOR RESIDUAL RISK AFTER COMPLETION

Afghanistan looked set to release a five-year plan in 2021 that would provide a sense of the direction it will pursue in its extension request. Looking beyond plans for clearance, DMAC is also reportedly discussing with the GICHD how to transition to a more reactive operating model once the bulk of clearance is complete and what capacity will be retained to tackle residual mine contamination.

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- 5 Article 7 Report (for 2020), Form F, p. 20.
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- 14 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021; Article 7 Report (for 2020), Form C.
- 15 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.
- 16 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.
- 17 Article 7 Report (for 2020), Form C, p. 9; email from Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 21 June 2020.
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- 24 Ibid.
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- 27 Emails from Mats Hektor, Senior Technical Advisor, NPA, 7 and 19 April 2021.
- 28 DMAC, "National Mine Action Strategic Plan 1395–1399 (2016–2020)", State Ministry for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs, undated but 2016, p. 17.
- 29 2021 CCM Article 4 deadline Extension Request, p. 4.
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- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Email from Fazel Rahman, DMAC, 25 February 2020.
- 34 Email from Sohaila Hahsemi, Communications and Advocacy Officer, UNMAS, 22 April 2021.
- 35 Email from Arianna Calza Bini, GICHD, 27 July 2021.
- 36 Email from Daniel Bertoli, Head of Programme – Afghanistan, DDG, 14 April 2021.
- 37 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.
- 38 Email from Fazel Rahman, Project Manager Operations, DMAC, 25 February 2020.
- 39 DMAC, "Gender mainstreaming strategy of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan", undated but 2013, pp. 3–9.
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- 81 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.
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