

ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 MARCH 2023
TWO-YEAR INTERIM EXTENSION REQUESTED TO 1 MARCH 2025

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION: MASSIVE

NATIONAL DATABASE ESTIMATE AT END 2021

191 KM²

AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2021

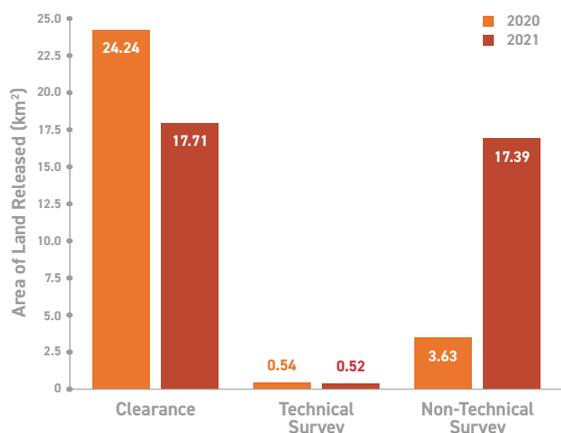
17.71 KM²

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2021

7,656

(INCLUDING 352 IMPROVISED ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



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

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The Taliban took power in August 2021 as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) but the new regime did not receive international recognition and came under international sanctions that crippled the economy and cut off funding to national mine action authorities. International donors continued to provide funds to implementing partners bilaterally or through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and ITF Enhancing Human Security. The IEA retained the existing mine action institutional structure with the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) overseeing the sector and the Directorate of Mine Action (DMAC) in charge of operational management and coordination, but lack of funding caused an exodus of staff from DMAC, limiting its capacity to discharge its responsibilities.

UNMAS set up the UN Emergency Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (UN-EMACCA), later re-established as the UN Humanitarian Mine Action Coordination for Afghanistan (UN-HMACCA), to provide mine action coordination and support. The DMAC terminated the arrangement in March 2022 amid tensions with UNMAS linked to international non-recognition of the de facto authorities. In agreement with DMAC, UNMAS established a Liaison Office funded by the UN, in June 2022 with 15 staff to facilitate humanitarian mine action in Afghanistan and provide coordination and information management to the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA). DMAC expressed the IEA's commitment to upholding Afghanistan's treaty obligations and informed Mine Action Review that it intended to request an extension to its March 2023 Article 5 deadline. A two-year interim extension request submitted by the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, representing the former regime, was not initially valid but DMAC's Director subsequently informed Mine Action Review in August 2022 that it had not prepared the extension request but accepted and endorsed it.

Mine Action Review has sought clarity from UNMAS on which entity—the Taliban regime or the former regime—it believes is bound directly by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as the State of Afghanistan.¹ This would clarify the duties of UNMAS and other UN entities with respect to the Taliban regime in all disarmament treaties since such treaties are directed to States Parties and not to non-State actors. Accordingly, since as a matter of international law, only States are directly prohibited from using the prohibited weapons and required to report to the United Nations, UNMAS would be far better placed to support the implementation of the Convention, in accordance with its strategic plan.² UNMAS has requested guidance on this issue from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). According to UNMAS, the view of the DPPA is that "conventions

1 Meeting between representatives from Mine Action Review and UNMAS Headquarters, virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams, 14 October 2022.

2 See UNMAS Strategic Plan 2019–2023, Strategic Outcome 4.

are concluded by States not governments, so the obligation remains regardless of who is in authority”.³ This does not clarify the fundamental issue, and the DDPA is not a UN entity with specialist international legal expertise. As at the time of writing, UNMAS had not requested guidance from the UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), despite pledging to do so in discussions with Mine Action Review.⁴ Obtaining a clear international legal response from the UN on which entity represents the State of Afghanistan and is legally bound by the APMBC is critical as the Taliban regime, before taking power in August 2021, continued to use anti-personnel mines prohibited under the APMBC, especially mines of an improvised nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Afghanistan should accelerate survey, prioritising areas previously inaccessible due to insecurity.
- The MAPA should establish a definitive baseline estimate of improvised mine contamination.
- DMAC should prepare a detailed work plan that would also support preparation of a more comprehensive Article 5 deadline extension request to follow-on from the interim two-year request submitted by representatives of the former Afghan regime in 2022.
- Afghanistan should resume regular submission of comprehensive Article 7 reports.

ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Criterion	Score (2021)	Score (2020)	Performance Commentary
UNDERSTANDING OF CONTAMINATION (20% of overall score)	7	6	Afghanistan has a good, but still incomplete, knowledge of pre-2001 or “legacy” anti-personnel mine contamination and continues to add significant amounts of previously unrecorded mined area to the database. There is only rudimentary knowledge of post-2001 contamination, including mines of an improvised nature, which may now pose the greater threat to civilians.
NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT (10% of overall score)	5	8	The MAPA is nationally managed but heavily dependent on international funding, which previously covered most DMAC salaries. Diplomatic isolation and international sanctions targeting the Taliban government which took power in August 2021 caused an exodus of DMAC staff, leaving only a skeleton management team in place with minimal capacity to discharge its management and coordination functions. DMAC opposed interim coordination mechanisms put forward by UNMAS until June 2022 when, in agreement with DMAC, UNMAS set up a Liaison Office funded by the UN to coordinate mine action on a temporary basis.
GENDER AND DIVERSITY (10% of overall score)	5	7	Until August 2021, DMAC was committed to mainstreaming gender, which was one of four main goals in the 2016–20 strategic plan. Progress implementing it was slow although most implementing partners (IPs) had gender focal points, hired some women in community liaison and risk education and in rare cases for clearance. After August 2021, stringent IEA regulations sharply reduced public space for women but IPs were able to continue to employ women in office and field (risk education and community liaison) roles.
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING (10% of overall score)	4	8	Information management suffered major disruption after the change of government. DMAC has an Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database but lost its IM personnel after the end to international funding. IPs continued to report operating results to DMAC but database operations largely halted after August 2021. The UN-HMACCA resumed data processing early in 2022 but this was terminated at the end of March. The Liaison Office established by UNMAS in June 2022 took on information management for the MAPA.
PLANNING AND TASKING (10% of overall score)	6	8	DMAC planning and tasking of the MAPA suffered disruption after the August 2021 change of government but survey and clearance continued on a project-by-project basis as international donors continued to fund IPs bilaterally or through UNMAS and the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Mine Action.
LAND RELEASE SYSTEM (20% of overall score)	6	6	The MAPA has national mine action standards (AMAS) in Dari and English that are subject to regular review and in 2019 it introduced new standards for clearance of mines of an improvised nature. International experts believe the AMAS need comprehensive updating. Land release is achieved largely by full clearance, underscoring weaknesses in IP application of non-technical survey. Upheavals in DMAC after August 2021 disrupted its quality management, which has continued but only sporadically.

3 Email from Dmitri Alechkevitch, Team Leader Policy, Policy, Advocacy, Donor Relations and Outreach, UNMAS, 21 October 2022.

4 Meeting between representatives from Mine Action Review and UNMAS Headquarters, virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams, 14 October 2022.

Criterion	Score (2021)	Score (2020)	Performance Commentary
LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE (20% of overall score)	6	7	The MAPA has released an average of more than 25km ² a year through clearance over the last five years and despite the security challenges and political upheavals in 2021 overall land release dropped only 5% compared with the previous year. The IEA affirmed its commitment to fulfilling Afghanistan's APMBC treaty obligations and in July 2022 the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN in Geneva submitted a request for a two-year extension.
Average Score	5.8	6.9	Overall Programme Performance: AVERAGE

DEMINING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA)
- 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 2021, but only Assad Brothers Demining reported active in anti-personnel mine clearance

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

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

OTHER ACTORS

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

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Afghanistan estimated its contamination from anti-personnel mines, including improvised mines, as covering 191km² at the end of 2021 (see Table 1).⁵ That represented a rise of 11% over estimated contamination a year earlier but the figure looked set to rise in 2022. The end of widespread active hostilities after the change of government in August 2021 has allowed survey in large swathes of the country that were previously inaccessible due to insecurity. For the first time, this has generated the opportunity to assess the extent of contamination by improvised mines widely used by Taliban forces in conflict areas.

Table 1: Mined area by contamination type (at end 2021)

Contamination type	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Anti-personnel mines	1,622	118,508,095	108	28,984,387	147,492,482
Improvised mines	643	28,773,183	40	14,999,597	43,772,780
AP mine total	2,265	147,281,278	148	43,983,984	191,265,262
Anti-vehicle mines	1,019	178,572,568	207	115,298,702	293,871,270
Total mined area	3,284	325,853,846	355	159,282,686	485,136,532

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area SHA = Suspected hazardous area

Most of Afghanistan's conventional anti-personnel 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 these so-called "legacy" mines dating from before 2001 amounted to 147km² at the end of 2021, a small (3%) reduction from the previous year's estimate. This included big concentrations in the central and north-eastern areas of the country (see Table 2) but operators say some of the survey carried out in the past lacked rigour resulting in inflated suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) that will require significant amounts of cancellation in the future.⁶ After decades of demining, however, the remaining confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) are increasingly located in remote and difficult mountainous terrain that has slowed the pace of clearance.

⁵ Email from Olivier Demars, Information Management Advisor, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

⁶ Interview with Farid Homayoun, Country Director, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

Table 2: Anti-personnel mine contamination by region, excluding improvised mines (at end 2021)⁷

Region	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)
Central	414	27,633,981	24	3,782,208
East	164	13,698,889	5	534,900
North	184	4,445,023	0	0
North East	558	36,940,897	12	8,682,246
South	66	6,019,485	49	7,416,182
South East	109	9,500,144	13	1,967,151
West	127	20,269,676	5	6,601,700
Total	1,622	118,508,095	108	28,984,387

Despite decades of mine clearance in Afghanistan, operators continue to find previously unrecorded mined areas. Survey in 2021 located a further 9.6km² of mined area that was added to the national database (see Table 3). Some 3.6km² of improvised mine contamination was also recorded in 2021.⁸ Additional anti-personnel mined area finds may have been reported but not yet uploaded to the database as a result of disruption and delays experienced in Afghanistan's information management after August 2021.

Table 3: Newly recorded contamination 2021⁹

Contamination type	Mined areas	Area (m ²)	Provinces affected
Anti-personnel mines	70	4,710,000	9
Anti-vehicle mines	40	4,913,661	9
Totals	110	9,623,661	9
Improvised mines	133	3,648,415	7
Sum totals	243	13,272,076	9

Afghanistan is just beginning to get to grips with the extent of improvised mine contamination, made possible by the cessation of active hostilities in most parts of the country after the change of government. In contrast to Afghanistan's conventional mined areas, improvised mine contamination was mostly emplaced after 2017¹⁰ and is located in areas that experienced intense conflict, often close to inhabited areas. Before the August 2021 change of government, Taliban authorities only permitted survey and clearance of what have been officially named as Abandoned Improvised Mines (AIM) in locations which were no longer areas of ongoing hostilities. This prevented an accurate determination of the full extent of the problem. Data available at the end of 2021 pointed to close to 44km² of AIM contamination, mostly in the south (see Table 4).¹¹ However, the understanding of improvised contamination has changed rapidly since August 2021 as operators have gained access to areas where they were previously unable to work because of conflict and insecurity.

Table 4: Improvised mine contamination by region (at end 2021)¹²

Region	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Central	9	812,375	0	0	812,375
East	256	8,022,464	4	111,973	8,134,437
North	29	1,254,778	3	50,188	1,304,966
North East	23	915,903	8	100,236	1,016,139
South	231	15,887,241	25	14,737,200	30,624,441
South East	37	127,642	0	0	127,642
West	58	1,752,780	0	0	1,752,780
Totals	643	28,773,183	40	14,999,597	43,772,780

7 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

8 Ibid.

9 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

10 Interview with Ahmadullah Saalari, Chief of AIM Division, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

11 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

12 Ibid.

The HALO Trust, the lead agency tackling improvised mines, confirmed 14km² of improvised mine hazardous areas in 13 provinces in 2021, half of it in Kandahar.¹³ By June 2022, it had raised the estimate of contamination to well over 100km² but the figures were increasing every month as a result of rapid survey, aided by requests for support from many affected communities and the information provided by some Taliban fighters on the location or general area where they had emplaced improvised mines. In June 2022, HALO reported CHAs totalling 52.21km² and SHAs of 18.08km². It also recorded a further 46.21km² of initial hazardous area (IHA) resulting from remote survey. It believed roughly 70% of IHAs would subsequently be identified as SHAs.¹⁴

Information from Taliban supporters since August 2021 has increased understanding of device types, switches, and how they were deployed. By June 2022, HALO Trust had located and examined 13 improvised mine factories in southern Afghanistan. HALO Trust found that around 90% of devices were initiated by pressure plates and the remainder were activated by remote command or timers (meaning they are

not mines under international law). Most were home-made but around 10% employed conventional ammunition as a main charge.¹⁵

Afghanistan also has extensive areas of anti-vehicle mine contamination, much of it a low-priority threat scattered over wide areas of sparse population. Since the change of government, however, implementing partner (IP) access to areas previously shut off by insecurity has also revealed anti-vehicle mined areas inside villages that are high priority for clearance.¹⁶

Afghanistan has massive contamination by explosive remnants of war, including at least around 10km² of cluster munition-contaminated area¹⁷ and a wide range of other unexploded ordnance (UXO) (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing the Cluster Munition Remnants* report on Afghanistan for further information). The UN reported that Afghanistan had 39 former NATO firing ranges covering 681km² to be cleared of UXO, of which one, covering 51km², was being addressed.¹⁸

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan's government in August 2021 brought little formal change to the MAPA management structure but disrupted its ability to function. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan retained Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority in the role of a mine action authority setting policy, while DMAC was responsible for managing and coordinating operations, information management, and quality management (QM). The IEA-appointed director of DMAC said that the only change resulting from the change of government was in the personnel running it.¹⁹

The lack of international recognition of the IEA and financial sanctions imposed by the United States and Western governments has severely limited DMAC's ability to function. DMAC completed the transition from being a project of UNMAS to national management in June 2018. From its headquarters in Kabul and seven regional offices, DMAC coordinated the work of national and international implementing partners, prepared strategic plans and annual work plans, set priorities and standards, accredited operators, conducted quality assurance, managed the mine action database, and liaised with international donors.²⁰

However, DMAC remained almost entirely dependent on international financing. By 2021, the Government of Afghanistan paid salaries of only 15 of DMAC's 155 staff, the rest being paid by UNMAS and ITF Enhancing Human Security.²¹ After August 2021, international sanctions imposed on the IEA halted cooperation between UNMAS and DMAC, and DMAC staff on internationally funded salaries transferred to UNMAS. As of June 2022, DMAC's active staff consisted of the director and 15 other staff, including the heads of planning and operations and an information management officer.²²

DMAC's director has maintained close contact with IPs and engaged proactively to support MAPA operations, intervening to resolve occasional difficulties between IPs and local authorities or to facilitate equipment imports. DMAC has acknowledged it lacks capacity to conduct previous levels of coordination and management. Its regional offices closed and although QM staff were able to conduct visits to IP operating sites to accredit teams and mechanical assets this occurred only sporadically. IPs continued to submit progress reports to DMAC but the Directorate lacked capacity to upload them into the database.²³

13 Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

14 Interview with Ahmadullah Saalari, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

15 Interview with Ahmadullah Saalari, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

16 Interview with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

17 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

18 UNMAS, "Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan", 10 February 2022.

19 Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, Director, DMAC, 4 June 2022.

20 Email from Mohammad Wakil Jamshidi, Chief of Staff, UNMAS/DMAC, 16 May 2017.

21 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

22 Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022; and email, 15 June 2022.

23 Interviews with international and national implementing partners, Kabul, 4–10 June 2022.

In September 2021, UNMAS set up the UN Emergency Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (UN-EMACCA) to serve as a temporary coordination body on an emergency basis and acting independently of the government, tasking IPs that were bilaterally funded, as well as providing QM and information management for these projects.²⁴ In early November, the UN-EMACCA was dissolved and re-established as the UN Humanitarian Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (UN-HMACCA), still separate from the DMAC. By the end of the year, it was operating with 114 national staff.²⁵ As a result of discussions between UNMAS and the DMAC on division of responsibilities DMAC continued to set the national mine action strategy, act as custodian of national mine action standards, sign and issue the final certification of land release, oversee adherence to international treaties, and regulate the mine action sector's commercial and development-focused actors. Working within the parameters of the United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF),²⁶ UNMAS took the lead in humanitarian mine action managing implementation of the strategy, planning, and priorities. It would also support the process of accreditation and land release, data collection and information management, research, training, and public relations, including resource mobilisation.²⁷ The formula proved unacceptable to DMAC, leading to the termination of UN-HMACCA at the end of March and ending the employment of 118 national staff.²⁸

Further negotiations between DMAC and UNMAS led in June 2022 to agreement on the creation of a Liaison Office, funded by the UN, located in a separate building from DMAC offices and UNMAS offices. This became operational by the end of that month.²⁹ DMAC described the office as a temporary facility to support coordination of the MAPA until the removal of international sanctions. DMAC emphasised that it remained the primary point of contact for IPs for data sharing, disseminating information, planning, operational activities, and QM. It agreed that the Liaison Office would manage the MAPA's Information Management System for Mine Action

(IMSMA) database, processing survey and clearance results, completion reports, new hazard reports, risk education results, and accident reports. DMAC also required support for QM,³⁰ and regional liaison offices were also established. The Liaison Office was due to have a staff of 25, employing national staff on a salary linked to non-governmental organisation (NGO) pay scales, higher than government rates but below UN salaries.³¹ In addition to information management, it would undertake tasking and prioritisation of humanitarian mine action in consultation with DMAC.³²

Mine Action Review has sought clarity from UNMAS on which entity—the Taliban regime or the former regime—it believes is bound directly by the APMBC as the State of Afghanistan.³³ This would clarify the duties of UNMAS and other UN entities with respect to the Taliban regime in all disarmament treaties since such treaties are directed to States Parties and not to non-State actors. Accordingly, since as a matter of international law, only States are directly prohibited from using the prohibited weapons and required to report to the United Nations, UNMAS would be far better placed to support the implementation of the Convention, in accordance with its strategic plan.³⁴ UNMAS has requested guidance on this issue from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). According to UNMAS, the view of the DPPA is that "conventions are concluded by States not governments, so the obligation remains regardless of who is in authority".³⁵ This does not clarify the fundamental issue, and the DPPA is not a UN entity with specialist international legal expertise. As at the time of writing, UNMAS had not requested guidance from the UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), despite pledging to do so in discussions with Mine Action Review.³⁶ Obtaining a clear international legal response from the UN on which entity represents the State of Afghanistan and is legally bound by the APMBC is critical as the Taliban regime, before taking power in August 2021, continued to use anti-personnel mines prohibited under the APMBC, especially mines of an improvised nature.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

DMAC has had a national standard for environmental protection in mine action (AMAS 07.06) since 2017 which sets out policy and lays down a 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.³⁷ In addition, individual operators, such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and The HALO Trust, have institutional policies in place at headquarters level.

24 Email from Sohaila Hashemi, Communications and Advocacy Officer, UNMAS, 23 February 2022; UNMAS, Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan, MASG, 9 April 2022.

25 Email from Sohaila Hashemi, UNMAS, 23 February 2022.

26 'United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan', 26 January 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3SNGIgh>.

27 UNMAS, "Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan", 10 February 2022.

28 Interview with Paul Heslop, Chief of Mine Action Programme, UNMAS, 7 June 2022; UNMAS, "Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan", 9 April 2022.

29 Email from Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 15 June 2022.

30 Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022; and email, 15 June 2022.

31 Interview with Paul Heslop, UNMAS, 7 June 2022.

32 Ibid.

33 Meeting between representatives from Mine Action Review and UNMAS Headquarters, virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams, 14 October 2022.

34 See UNMAS Strategic Plan 2019–2023, Strategic Outcome 4.

35 Email from Dmitri Alechkevitch, Team Leader Policy, Policy, Advocacy, Donor Relations and Outreach, UNMAS, 21 October 2022.

36 Meeting between representatives from Mine Action Review and UNMAS Headquarters, virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams, 14 October 2022

37 Afghanistan Mine Action Standards – AMAS 07.06, Environmental Management in Mine Action, March 2017.

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Prior to August 2021, Afghanistan had taken initial steps to develop more inclusive mine action within limits imposed by a deeply conservative society. DMAC's 2016–20 strategic plan included gender mainstreaming as one of four main goals. It stated that "achievable targets, reflecting prevailing circumstances and conditions, will be adopted to support and encourage progress wherever possible."³⁸ After August 2021, Taliban rules imposed stricter regulation on women and girls condemned by the UN as the "institutionalised systematic oppression of women"³⁹ but DMAC has said it remained possible for women to work in the MAPA.⁴⁰ UNMAS convened the first post-regime-change meeting of a Gender and Diversity Technical Working Group in February 2022⁴¹ and IPs have continued to employ female staff in office and field jobs.⁴² UNMAS also provided grants to four Afghan IPs (AREA, DAFA, MDC, and OMAR) early in 2022 to support equality and inclusion mainstreaming.⁴³

Despite the commitment to promoting gender and inclusion in mine action, employment of women remained low. The MAPA, with a total workforce of close to 6,000 in 2020, had increased the number of women employees from 170 near the end of 2019 to 212 in the last quarter of 2020.⁴⁴ DMAC acknowledged in 2021 that women made up only 4% of MAPA personnel and persons with disabilities 1%.⁴⁵ In early 2021, DMAC's 155 staff still included only four women employees, consisting of a female human resources assistant and three interns for the gender and diversity, information management, and risk education departments.⁴⁶

DMAC had taken a number of measures to raise awareness of gender issues and promote compliance by implementing partners. In October 2020, after a gap of six months, it appointed a new gender focal point who trained the gender focal points of implementing partners as well as some training on non-technical survey for male and female staff of DMAC and IPs.⁴⁷ DMAC reported that all vacancy

announcements were gender sensitive and that a woman is present in all recruitment panels, and that women candidates' scores are automatically accorded extra points.⁴⁸

After August 2021, conditions for female employees varied in different locations, but women NGO staff still worked across the country.⁴⁹ Afghanistan's first female clearance team, set up by DRC in Bamyan province in 2018 and taken on by OMAR for battle area clearance (BAC) tasks in the same province in 2020, no longer exists and some of its members have reportedly left the country. However, some IPs reported employing more women in 2022 than before the Taliban takeover. Females employed in operations largely worked in mixed teams with a male family member and almost exclusively in risk education and community liaison. IPs noted this added to operating costs requiring separate vehicles, office space, and accommodation.⁵⁰

DRC, the first IP to deploy an all-female manual clearance team in 2018, had 21 women employees including one international in its staff in 2021, four of them working in managerial positions, and the remainder working in risk education teams. In 2022, DRC hired more women and as of April 2022 had 23 female staff working in the field on risk education and expected to deploy more mixed gender risk education/non-technical survey teams in each of the five main regions by the end of the year.⁵¹ The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD)'s total staff of 99 in 2021 included five women, two of whom worked in financial management positions in the head office in Tajikistan with the other three in Afghanistan in FSD's programme of support to mine victims. Since the change of government, these staff have been working from home.⁵² The HALO Trust reported it employed 15 women before August 2021 and by June 2022 had increased the number to 46 working in mixed gender teams with family members. In most teams, HALO Trust said it gave women the position of team leader.⁵³

38 DMAC, "National Mine Action Strategic Plan 1395–1399 (2016–2020)", State Ministry for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs, undated but 2016, p. 17.

39 Statement of Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the UN Human Rights Council, 15 June 2022.

40 Interviews with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, Director, 4 June 2022; Soeren Adser Soerensen, Head of Humanitarian Disarmament, DRC, 6 June 2022; Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022; and with Awal Khan, QA Manager, OMAR, and Zarina Omar, EORE Manager & Gender Focal Point, OMAR, 8 June 2022.

41 Email from Sohaila Hashemi, UNMAS, 23 February 2022.

42 Interviews with international and national implementing partners, Kabul, 4–10 June 2022.

43 Email from Sohaila Hashemi, UNMAS, 6 March 2022.

44 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

45 Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) Article 4 deadline Extension Request, 3 August 2021, p. 4.

46 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

47 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

48 Ibid.

49 Email from Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, 27 March 2022.

50 Interviews with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022; and with Awal Khan, QA Manager, OMAR, and Zarina Omar, EORE Manager & Gender Focal Point, OMAR, 8 June 2022.

51 Email from Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, 27 March 2022.

52 Email from Din Mohammad Nickwah, Country Director, FSD, 23 March 2022.

53 Interviews with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

DMAC had embarked in 2021 on upgrading its national database from the New Generation version to IMSMA Core, but had expected the process of cleaning up data to be uploaded into the new system to last into 2023.⁵⁴ The MAPA's information management suffered severe disruption in 2021 after the change of government in August and the loss of staff experienced by DMAC as a result of international sanctions against the IEA.⁵⁵ As at September 2022, Afghanistan had still to submit its Article 7 transparency report covering 2021.

Between August 2021 and the end of the year, IPs continued to submit operating results to DMAC and UNMAS but reports were not uploaded systematically into the database.⁵⁶ UNMAS set up a small IMSMA cell early in 2022, which first uploaded operating data for UNMAS-funded projects and then moved onto the other IPs' results.⁵⁷ The termination of UN-HMACCA at the end of March 2022 led to another interruption in data processing. DMAC and UNMAS subsequently agreed that UNMAS would run the IMSMA database in the Liaison Office providing a duplicate data set to DMAC.⁵⁸

UNMAS pursued a number of other initiatives to enhance access to data and strengthen IP reporting. These include working towards launching the Global Information Management System, digitally capturing data imported from IPs and humanitarian agencies and presenting it on a dashboard. This will provide operators, donors, and other stakeholders with easy access to an updated snapshot that includes explosive ordnance contamination estimates, the status of current operations, and donor funding.⁵⁹ UNMAS is also promoting use of electronic tablets by IP survey and clearance teams to facilitate and improve the quality of reporting from the field. UNMAS started distributing the tablets in May 2022 and by early June had delivered 120. It planned to roll out the programme to all IPs it funded in the course of the year.⁶⁰

PLANNING AND TASKING

Until the middle of 2021, Afghanistan was working with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) to develop a new strategic plan for Afghan years 1400-1404 (April 2021–March 2026). This set out five strategic goals which included integrating mine action into development planning, promoting gender and inclusivity in MAPA operations and land release and strengthening advocacy for humanitarian mine action as an enabler of sustainable development, peace, and security.⁶¹ DMAC was still finalising the document when the government changed in August 2021.

Since August 2021, IPs have continued to report to, and coordinate operations with, DMAC as the national authority but also with the UNMAS coordination mechanisms operational between September 2021 and the end of March 2022 when DMAC criticisms of the cost of the UN-HMACCA led to its closure. Subsequent discussions between DMAC and UNMAS produced agreement on the creation of a Liaison Office at the end of June 2022, which took on the roles of coordinating and tasking IPs and information management, including management of the IMSMA database.⁶²

As the MAPA navigated political change and international sanctions, UNMAS sought to mobilise international funding to support six priorities:⁶³

- **Coordination:** compared with more than 100 staff coordinating mine action in DMAC before August 2021 and in interim UN bodies up to March 2022, the Liaison Office had 25 staff and funding through UNMAS only until the end of August 2022.
- **National survey:** in April 2022 IPs started conducting survey in four provinces that experienced the most casualties in the last five years: Helmand, Kandahar, Kunduz, and Uruzgan. UNMAS advocated for a full national survey taking advantage of improved security and access to previously inaccessible districts in order to establish a baseline estimate of contamination that could inform an Afghanistan's APMB Article 5 deadline extension request.
- **Large-scale clearance:** at the start of 2022 UNMAS had hoped to raise some \$75 million for the MAPA for the year, aiming among other priorities to increase the number of Quick Response Teams matching post-conflict needs for emergency explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) call-outs, survey and clearance.

⁵⁴ Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

⁵⁵ Interviews with international and national implementing partners, Kabul, 4–10 June 2022.

⁵⁶ Interview with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

⁵⁷ Email from Mohammad Wakil Jamshidi, Acting Head of Project/CoOPS Unit, UNMAS, 16 February 2022.

⁵⁸ Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022.

⁵⁹ Interview with Paul Heslop and Malcom MacDonald, Senior Technical Advisor, UNMAS, Kabul, 7 June 2022.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Emails from Akhbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 11 April and 1 June 2021.

⁶² Interviews with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022, and Paul Heslop, UNMAS, Kabul, 7 June 2022.

⁶³ Interview with Paul Heslop and Malcom MacDonald, Senior Technical Advisor, UNMAS, Kabul, 6 June 2022.

- **Increased risk education:** broadening nationwide messaging, learning from the success of a BBC Media Action series,⁶⁴
- **Expanding regional communications and community-level engagement.**
- **Hostile environment training** for humanitarian organisations and NGOs to address risks from widespread improvised mine contamination. Aid organisations had shown strong interest and a first course was due to take place in July 2022.

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

The MAPA has comprehensive national mine action standards that are compliant with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Before the change of government in August 2021 and the disruption to MAPA management, DMAC had reviewed them annually and amended them in consultation with IPs. No further updates of AMAS or SOPs has occurred since August 2021.⁶⁵

The GICHD noted in a 2019 capacity assessment that DMAC is "proactive in introducing new AMAS as and when needed" but commented that it had not updated them regularly. It noted that most of the AMAS were developed between 2011 and 2013 and said some chapters needed to be reviewed and updated to promote greater efficiency.⁶⁶ The persistently high percentage of land released through full clearance—averaging 78% between 2018 and 2020—calls into question the efficiency of the MAPA's survey and land release practices. In 2021, the percentage of full clearance fell to below half (48%) but primarily as a result of the HALO Trust's cancellation of land affected by improvised mines.

The GICHD's assessment 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.⁶⁷ Plans for DMAC and the GICHD to review and revise land release standards to strengthen non-technical survey and increase operational efficiency⁶⁸ were overtaken by the change of government.

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.⁶⁹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Afghanistan had 40 humanitarian and commercial companies engaged in mine action at the start of 2021, of which 31 were accredited for survey and clearance and the remainder for victim assistance, explosive ordnance risk reduction, and monitoring.⁷⁰ However, three international and six national IPs are responsible for virtually all mine and improvised mine clearance. In January 2021, DMAC accredited a seventh national humanitarian IP, the Justice and Peace Organisation (JAPO), to conduct non-technical and technical survey, manual and mechanical mine clearance, BAC, and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) but it does not appear to have been active.⁷¹

64 BBC Media Action prepared a 16-episode radio drama incorporating explosive hazard messaging broadcast three times daily in Dari and Pushto. The first broadcast reportedly attracted an audience of 600,000 people; the second, an audience of 6 million.

65 Email from Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, 27 March 2022.

66 GICHD, Integrated Capacity Assessment Report, 5 July 2019 (draft), p. 7.

67 Ibid., pp. 7–9, 28.

68 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

69 AMAS 06.10, March 2019, p. 5; Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form F, p. 15.

70 Email from Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

71 Ibid.

MAPA operating results for 2021 show that four national IPs, ATC, DAFA, MCPA and OMAR, were active clearing mines.⁷² ATC deployed nine manual teams, an EOD team, and a mechanical demining unit working in Maydan Wardak on a US-funded project for clearing conventional mines and other capacity working on BAC tasks but the priority for 2022 was tackling improvised mines. ATC reported it had 16 deminers trained by Artios for clearing improvised mines and another 10 people undergoing training. It said it was developing proposals for clearing improvised mines in the Musa Qala and Nad Ali districts of Helmand province.⁷³

DAFA had a total staff of 412 working in 2021, including 12 manual teams with 120 deminers alongside seven BAC teams and four mechanical demining units. DAFA was the only IP conducting cluster munition clearance in 2021 but also carried out clearance of legacy mine contamination in Baghlan, Nuristan, and Kandahar provinces under a grant from the US Department of State that ran until September 2021. In 2022 it had 16 manual teams and a mechanical team with an excavator tackling improvised mines in Kandahar and Helmand provinces as well as four demining teams, a survey team, and two EORE teams working on legacy anti-personnel mines in Baghlan province's Dih Salah district. Later in the year, DAFA expected to move operations to Nangahar province.⁷⁴

DRC underwent significant expansion early in 2021 with support from the Dutch Mine Action & Cluster Munitions Programme for 2022-2024. This enabled it to increase the number of clearance teams from 12 to 16 and the number of deminers from 130 to 170, and it also added a five-person Survey-EOD team and two mechanical demining units (MDU) consisting of six people and two machines, including a front-end loader and a rotary mine comb.⁷⁵ DRC planned to increase its MDU teams to seven in 2022 and to recruit an international technical adviser to manage its mechanical capacity. It planned to recruit a second international technical adviser to support wider operations. In 2021, DRC operated mainly in the northern province of Balkh and on a smaller scale in the central provinces of Kabul and Maydan Wardak, tackling conventional anti-personnel mines and UXO. After reviewing its operations in early in 2022, DRC planned to focus resources on areas experiencing the highest casualties, including notably southern Helmand province, and to move into clearance of improvised mines. DRC trained a total of 28 staff on improvised mine clearance in 2021 and expected them to deploy in Helmand by the end of the year.⁷⁶

FSD has worked for years conducting survey and clearance in northern Badakshan province, an area contaminated mainly with Soviet-era butterfly mines. Until July 2021, FSD maintained its headquarters in Tajikistan's border town of Kalai Khumb for better access to the minefields in Badakshan, a remote area with poor communications links to the rest of Afghanistan. Tajikistan closed the border with Afghanistan in July 2021 and in 2022 FSD opened a new operating base in Kunduz city.⁷⁷ In the first half of 2021, FSD worked with five demining teams and 79 deminers, but after a deterioration in security FSD temporarily suspended operations in late July. From mid-August, one donor suspended funding for three demining teams as well as two EORE and a Mine Victim Assistance (MVA) team. The donor agreed to continue its support and those teams were expected to return to operations if a channel for delivering funds could be identified.⁷⁸

The HALO Trust is much the biggest operator in the MAPA with a total staff of just over 3,000 people in 2021. It still represented close to 60% of total MAPA manpower in mid-2022 although it expected the number of staff to drop slightly in the course of the year. HALO Trust's capacity included 64 manual teams employing 1,716 deminers who conducted clearance in nine provinces in 2021 and backed by 19 mechanical demining units operating 75 machines employing more than 100 personnel. HALO also led on tackling improvised mines and by 2022 had a total of 410 staff assigned to AIM survey and clearance. This included 32 manual teams, 9 mechanical demining units, and 18 teams conducting non-technical survey and quick reaction call-outs. A total of 241 deminers were assigned to improvised mine survey and clearance.⁷⁹

For improvised mine clearance, HALO Trust aims to deploy an excavator to each site working double shifts alongside alternating manual teams. A problem for all IPs, however, has been a shortage of the Wirehound and Minehound detectors employing ground penetrating radar that have proved effective (but which are also prone to software failure). To avoid the complications of shipping detectors to Europe for repair, HALO Trust arranged with Vallon, the manufacturer, to host a visit by technicians to carry out repairs in Kabul.⁸⁰

MCPA ranked as the national IP with the most assets active in 2021 with 11 manual demining teams and 154 deminers working in Kunduz province in 2021 as well as seven quick response teams with 28 personnel. MCPA also conducted non-technical survey funded by the US Department of State

72 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

73 Interview with Abdul Qahir Rahmanzai, ATC, Kabul, 8 June 2022.

74 Interview with Bismillah Haqmal, Planning Manager, DAFA, Kabul, 8 June 2022; and email, 17 July 2022.

75 Email from Soeren Adser Soerensen, Head of Humanitarian Disarmament, DRC, 27 March 2022.

76 Interview with Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, Kabul, 6 June 2022.

77 Email from Din Mohammad Nickwah, Country Director, FSD, 23 March 2022; and interview with Matthew Wilson, Head of Operations, FSD, 13 July 2022.

78 Ibid.

79 Emails from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May and 20 June 2022; and interview, Kabul, 4 June 2022.

80 Interview with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

and fielded nine non-technical survey teams which it reported conducted survey in 13 provinces⁸¹ in 2021. In October 2021, MCPA started a six-month project funded by UNOPS for clearance of improvised mines in Kunduz province for which it deployed four manual teams and mechanical demining unit.⁸²

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), with a team of 18 people (including an international country director, an international financial director, four international, and seven national technical advisers), provides third-party monitoring of all US Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) grants to IPs in Afghanistan. In 2021, these included 18 grants with an estimated value of \$12.5 million

that spanned mine and cluster munition remnants (CMR) clearance as well as weapons and ammunition disposal, conventional weapons destruction, stockpile security and management, and community survey, in addition to post-clearance impact assessments. Apart from a short hiatus in MAPA operations in August 2021, NPA's activities continued throughout the year involving more than 400 visits to projects. Most sites visited had achieved the necessary standards and none of the sites declared to have been cleared had subsequently recorded items founds or accidents.⁸³

Table 5: Operational clearance capacities deployed in 2021

Operator	Manual teams	Total deminers	Machines	Comments
ATC	9	80	1	
DAFA	12	120	1	
DRC	16	170	12	
FSD	5	79	0	
HALO Trust	101	1,957	75	Includes 64 demining teams with 1,716 deminers and 37 AIM teams with 241 deminers
OMAR	16		1	
MCPA	15	170	6	Includes 4 AIM teams with 16 deminers
Totals	174	2,576	96	

DEMINER SAFETY

An attack on HALO Trust's camp in Baghlan province on 8 June 2021 resulted in the deaths of 10 deminers and injured 16, representing the worst ever recorded violence against HALO Trust and the mine action community in Afghanistan. Islamic State – 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.⁸⁴

An ammunition explosion at a former Soviet logistics depot at Hairatan in northern Afghanistan in February 2021 injured four HALO Trust staff, three of whom subsequently died of their injuries. The accident occurred as employees were moving ammunition recovered from BAC to a planned demolition site and a team member unloaded a sack containing ammunition. The incident was investigated, including by an external third party, and corrective action taken.⁸⁵

81 Provinces in which MCPA conducted non-technical survey in 2021 included Badakhshan, Balkh, Farah, Ghor, Herat, Helmand, Jawzjan, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, Nangahar, Nuristan, and Zabul.

82 Interview with Mir Mohammad, Operations Manager, MCPA, 8 June 2022 and email 18 July 2022.

83 Interview with Russell Bedford, Country Director; Mats Hektor, Senior Technical Advisor; and Nermin Mujcinovic, Senior Technical Advisor, NPA, 5 June 2022; and emails from Sayed Wali, Information Manager, NPA, 9 June 2022; and Mats Hektor, NPA, 1 July 2022 and 17 August 2022.

84 Video statement by James Cowan, Chief Executive, HALO Trust, 9 June 2021; email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022; UN Security Council statement, 12 June 2021. See also Emma Graham-Harrison, "Gunmen kill 10 mine-clearance workers in Afghanistan," *The Guardian*, 9 June 2021, and N. Rahim and M. Ives, "Attack in Afghanistan kills 10 from charity that clears land mines," *The New York Times*, 9 June 2021; email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 11 August 2021.

85 Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2021

The MAPA released a total of more than 35.6km² of mined area through survey and clearance in 2021,⁸⁶ a drop of only 5% from the year before.⁸⁷ The outcome was helped by a sharp jump in the amount of land cancelled through non-technical survey as operations tackling improvised mine contamination started to gather momentum. Afghanistan's output included a total of 17.91km² released through survey (see Tables 6 and 7) and 17.71km² through clearance of conventionally manufactured anti-personnel mines and improvised anti-personnel mines (see Tables 8 and 9).

IPs faced intensifying conflict in the first half of the year and political upheavals in the second half but were generally able to keep operating where donor funding continued. The HALO Trust, the biggest operator, progressively suspended operations starting in Kandahar in May 2021 and finished in Samangan in August but by the end of September was still 70% operational. FSD moved teams to safer locations in June and then brought forward planned leave, suspending work in late July. MCPA also halted non-technical survey operations in the south in July and August due to the conflict while ATC paused operations for several days. Since August 2021, IPs have reported a more permissive environment, with better security and access to almost all parts of the country, an end to the demands for "taxes" previously faced from field commanders and local authorities in areas outside central government control, faster and corruption-free procedures for importing equipment, and support from DMAC in tackling issues in encountered in government bureaucracy or interceding to resolve problems encountered with local authorities in the provinces.⁸⁸

SURVEY IN 2021

The total mined area cancelled rose sharply to 17.39km² in 2021 (see Table 6) from 3.63km² the previous year as a result of operations addressing improvised mine contamination. Five IPs released a further 0.52km² through technical survey (see Table 7).⁸⁹

Cancellation through non-technical survey has accounted for only a small proportion of land release in Afghanistan and that continued to apply to operations targeting area suspected of contamination by conventional or "legacy" anti-personnel mines. Non-technical survey of these areas resulted in cancellation of 4.72km² in 2021 but only two of the seven IPs active in 2021 cancelled any area, while one IP, HALO Trust, accounted for more than 80% of it (see Table 6).⁹⁰

Systematic survey of areas contaminated by improvised mines also became possible in 2021 with the cessation of active hostilities in many areas after the Taliban's takeover of the government in August 2021 and the access that then became possible to some of the worst affected areas. Before the change of government, authorities in areas controlled by the Taliban had previously only allowed clearance of abandoned improvised mines. Since then, the new authorities have recognised the serious threat of improvised mines and encouraged their clearance. The HALO Trust noted that the de facto authorities have often provided valuable information on locations and design of improvised mines, on occasion requesting assistance to clear buildings where they were made and stored.⁹¹ HALO Trust surveyed and confirmed hazardous areas totalling 14.03km² in 13 provinces in 2021. It also cancelled 12.66km² of suspected improvised mine-affected areas, mostly in Helmand (3.1km²), Kandahar (6.6km²) and Uruzgan (2.9km²) provinces and mostly between August and the end of the year.⁹²

86 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

87 Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form F.

88 Interviews with Abdul Qahir Rahmanzai, ATC, 8 June 2022; Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, 6 June 2022; Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022; Mir Mohammad, MCPA, 8 June 2022; and email from Din Mohammad Nickwah, FSD, 23 March 2022.

89 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

90 Email from Ajmal Babak, MIS Data Processor, MAPA Liaison Office, 18 July 2022.

91 Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022 and interview with Ahmadullah Salari, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

92 Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

Table 6: Non-technical survey of anti-personnel mined areas in 2021⁹³

Operator	Province	Area cancelled (m ²)
Legacy AP mines		
HALO Trust ⁹⁴	Kapisa, Zabul	3,845,578
MCPA	Ghazni, Herat, Maydan Wardak	878,991
Sub total		4,724,569
Improvised mines		
HALO Trust	Helmand, Kandahar, Kunduz, Nangahar, Samangan, Uruzgan	12,664,104
Total		17,388,673

Table 7: Technical survey of anti-personnel mined areas in 2021⁹⁵

Operator	Province	Area reduced through TS (m ²)
ATC	Faryab, Laghman	272,907
DAFA	Kandahar, Nuristan	24,886
DRC	Balkh, Kabul	152,846
HALO Trust	Kabul	54,214
OMAR	Nimroz	11,775
Total		516,628

CLEARANCE IN 2021

Mined area cleared in Afghanistan in 2021 fell nearly 30% from the previous year to 16.69km² (see Table 8), although the 7,304 anti-personnel mines destroyed was 55% up on the 4,716 destroyed in 2020 clearance operations.⁹⁶ Clearance in 2021 of areas with improvised anti-personnel mines covered a further 1.02km², destroying 352 mines (see Table 9).

Table 8: Anti-personnel mine clearance in 2021⁹⁷

Operator	Province/district	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
ATC	Kabul, Faryab, Laghman, Khost	1,476,623	96	0	380
DAFA	Kandahar, Nuristan	2,735,060	145	3	130
DRC	Balkh, Kabul	865,107	263	0	1,215
FSD	Baghlan	169,736	1,061	0	30
HALO Trust	Baghlan, Kabul, Logar, Parwan, Samangan, Takhar	7,627,327	2,250	10	140
MCPA	Kunduz, Nimroz	3,645,925	3,475	1,600	46
OMAR	Laghman, Nimroz	171,270	14	0	0
Totals		16,691,048	7,304	1,613	1,941

⁹³ Email from Ajmal Babak, MAPA Liaison Office, 18 July 2022.

⁹⁴ HALO Trust reported that it cancelled 2,223,300m² of legacy AP mined area in 2021. Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

⁹⁵ Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

⁹⁶ Emails from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022, and Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil, DMAC, 17 March 2021.

⁹⁷ Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

Table 9: Clearance of improvised mines in 2021⁹⁸

Operator	Province/district	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	Improvised mines destroyed
HALO Trust ⁹⁹	Helmand, Kandahar, Nangahar	48	1,001,003	350
MCPA	Kunduz	4	16,950	2
Totals		52	1,017,953	352

Clearance of improvised mines, although triple the level in the previous year, remained on a modest scale in 2021, releasing a little over 1km² and destroying 352 devices (see Table 9). However, clearance was expected to accelerate sharply in 2022. HALO Trust reported it cleared 212 improvised mines in March 2022 compared with 161 in March 2021, and the number had risen to 350 in May 2022.¹⁰⁰ By June 2022, it reported it was clearing around 300,000m² of improvised mine-affected areas a month.¹⁰¹

One factor aiding the acceleration has been the flow of information provided by serving or former Taliban fighters on locations where they had placed improvised mines and by former improvised explosive device (IED) makers on their design and switches.¹⁰² At the same time, most IPs were preparing to deploy or increase assets for improvised mine clearance, particularly in areas previously inaccessible due to conflict. HALO Trust, which increased the number of personnel working on improvised mines by 16 to 37 in 2021, expected to increase that capacity further in 2022.¹⁰³ A clearance project started by MCPA in Kunduz province in October 2021 carried on into 2022,¹⁰⁴ and DAFA deployed 16 teams and a mechanical asset in 2021 to clear a 239,666m² task in the Arghanbad district of Kandahar.¹⁰⁵ DRC dispatched an assessment team to the same provinces to prepare for deploying clearance assets later in the year.¹⁰⁶

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.

Since the change of regime, the IEA has affirmed its commitment to fulfilling its obligations in relation to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and other international conventions to which Afghanistan is already a State Party,¹⁰⁷ which includes the APMBC. It also stated it would request an extension of its Article 5 deadline in 2022.¹⁰⁸ Afghanistan's ambassador in Geneva, appointed by the previous government, also informed the APMBC in May 2022 that Afghanistan would submit an extension request.¹⁰⁹ DMAC said in early June that it planned to submit an Article 5 deadline extension request in one or two months. At the time it had not started work on the request and was awaiting the establishment of a Liaison Office with UNMAS to collaborate on preparation of the request.¹¹⁰

98 Email from Olivier Demars, UNMAS, 24 April 2022.

99 HALO recorded clearing 1,055, 842 and destroying 418 CMRs. Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

100 Interview with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022.

101 Interview with Ahmadullah Salari, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

102 Interviews with Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 4 June 2022 and Ahmadullah Salari, HALO Trust, 9 June 2022.

103 Email from Farid Homayoun, HALO Trust, 12 May 2022.

104 Interview with Mir Mohammad, MCPA, 8 June 2022 and email 18 July 2022.

105 Interview with Bismillah Haqmal, DAFA, 8 June 2022, and email 17 July 2022.

106 Interview with Soeren Adser Soerensen, DRC, 6 June 2022.

107 Afghanistan statement to the CCM Intersessional Meeting, 16 May 2022.

108 Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022.

109 Preliminary Observations, Committee on Article 5 Implementation, Intersessional Meeting, 20 June 2022.

110 Interview with Qari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 4 June 2022.

Afghanistan's Permanent Mission in Geneva submitted an extension request in July 2022 asking for a two-year interim extension until 1 March 2025 to provide time for achieving greater clarity on Afghanistan's situation and circumstances, "including allowing for more time for understanding how the mine action sector in Afghanistan will develop in terms of institutional arrangements and continued support from donors." The Permanent Mission also committed Afghanistan to working with all stakeholders to develop a detailed extension request by 31 March 2024.¹¹¹ DMAC's Director informed Mine Action Review in August 2022 that it had not prepared the extension request but accepted and endorsed it as "the best possible solution for continuing mine clearance operations in Afghanistan in the current circumstances."¹¹²

The Permanent Mission in Geneva no longer represents the State of Afghanistan and therefore, a priori, the extension request it submitted was not valid under the APMBC or general international law. That said, under international law, conduct that is not ordinarily attributable to a State may be considered an act of that State "if and to the extent that the State acknowledges and adopts the conduct in question as its own".¹¹³ DMAC is a directorate under the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority, which was established by Presidential Decree in 1973 as the Department of Disaster Preparedness¹¹⁴ (and later renamed as the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority, ANDMA), and is therefore an organ of the Afghan State.¹¹⁵ The request may therefore be considered to have been submitted by Afghanistan as a State Party to the APMBC.

Table 10: Five-year summary of anti-personnel mine clearance (2017–21)*

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2021	17.71
2020	24.24
2019	28.01
2018	30.90
2017	28.12
Total	128.98

* Including improvised mines

111 Letter from the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations in Geneva to the APMBC Committee on Article 5 Implementation, 4 July 2022.

112 Email from Gari Nooruddin Rustamkhail, DMAC, 1 August 2022.

113 Art. 11, International Law Commission (ILC) Draft Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, 2001.

114 Presidential Decree 56 of 16 February 1973.

115 Art. 4(1), 2001 Draft Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts.