

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Georgia should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Georgia should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Georgia should continue to engage in political dialogue with Azerbaijan, to enable full clearance of the Red Bridge border minefield.
- Georgia should grant access to The HALO Trust to complete survey and clearance of the remaining mined areas.
- Georgia should develop a resource mobilisation strategy and engage with donors to secure the resources needed to complete clearance.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The full extent of mine contamination in Georgia is not known due to access restrictions and lack of survey. According to estimates, as set out in Table 1, Georgia has 2.79km² of contamination across six mined areas in the Tbilisi Administered Territory (TAT),¹ although the size of two areas is not reported. Contamination comprises both anti-personnel and, in one area, also anti-vehicle mines.²

The Humanitarian Demining Control Division (HDCD) of Georgia considers this baseline to be evidence-based and accurate.³ However, The HALO Trust cautions that technical and non-technical survey are required in all sites to determine the size of contaminated areas more accurately.⁴

The Kadoeti minefield, which was laid in 2008, stretches along 950 metres of road near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with South Ossetia. A livestock accident in 2009 and a non-fatal vehicle accident in 2010 indicate that the area is mined. The Khojali includes two adjacent minefields about 12km from the ABL with Abkhazia. One of the two minefields is believed to lie along an approximately 300-metre-long path. HALO received permission to survey and conduct clearance of Kadoeti and Khojali in May 2019 but could not secure the necessary funds. HALO planned to resubmit the proposals for funding to the Japanese Embassy's Grassroots Grants Programme (GGP) in September 2021 and to seek further donors.⁵

In Barisakho, two mined areas are close to a police station on the Russian border, which were laid to prevent entry from Ingushetia during the Second Chechen War. In Osiauri, a military base, mines were laid around the perimeter of an ammunition storage area to defend the position in an event of an invasion.⁶

The Red Bridge minefield is an unfenced 7km-long minefield consisting of densely packed lines of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines at the "Red Bridge" border crossing between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Laid in 1991 by Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh war, it is Georgia's largest minefield and the last major minefield not in the vicinity of a functioning military establishment. As at May 2021, there had been 88 incidents: 22 involving humans and 66 involving livestock and HALO had not been granted permission to conduct clearance in the Red Bridge.⁷

There may also be mined areas in South Ossetia as a result of the 1990–92 Georgian-Ossetian war, and the more recent 2008 conflict with Russia. The HALO Trust has planned to conduct non-technical survey in South Ossetia, but to date, has not been granted access. South Ossetia is effectively subject to Russian control and is inaccessible to both Georgian authorities and international non-governmental organisation (NGO) demining operators.⁸

Table 1: Mined area in the TAT (at end 2020)⁹

Region	District/ Municipality	Village	Contamination	Mined areas	Area (m ²)
Kvemo Kartli	Marneuli	Kirach-Muganlo (Red Bridge)	AP/ AV mines	1	2,738,730
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Dusheti	Barisakho	AP mines	2	28,058
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Dusheti	Kadoeti	AP mines	1	24,000
Shida Kartli	Kashuri	Osiauri (Military zone)	AP mines	1	N/K
Samegrelo Zemo Svaneti	Mestia	Khojali	AP mines	1	N/K
Totals				6	2,790,788

AP = Anti-personnel AV = Anti-vehicle N/K = Not known

In addition to the minefields in TAT as noted in Table 1, five minefields located in the Gulripsh, Ochamchire, and Tkvarcheli regions of Abkhazia came to HALO's attention in 2019. As at April 2021, the presence of the minefields had been confirmed and their area estimated at a total of 10,300m². HALO secured the necessary funding to clear four of these tasks totalling 9,900m² through the Embassy of Norway in April 2021 and planned to clear them between June and December 2021. The remaining task will be cleared by HALO's core explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams in 2021.¹⁰

HALO Trust was not made aware of any additional mined areas in Abkhazia. However, as demonstrated by the discovery of four confirmed mined areas by HALO Abkhazia's roving EOD teams in 2019, there is the possibility of a continued residual mine threat in the territory.¹¹

Georgia is believed to be free of cluster munition remnants (CMR), with the possible exception of South Ossetia, which is occupied by Russia and inaccessible to both the Georgian authorities and international mine action NGOs (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants* report on Georgia for further information).¹² Georgia remains contaminated by other unexploded ordnance (UXO), likely in South Ossetia and also within Georgia in former firing ranges.

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The HDCD, renamed after a reorganisation in January 2019, sits under the State Military Scientific Technical Centre, known as DELTA, within the Ministry of Defence (MoD).¹³ The primary task of the HDCD is to coordinate mine action in Georgia, including overseeing the national mine action strategy and quality assurance (QA)/quality control (QC), and facilitating the development and implementation of Georgian National Mine Action Standards (NMAS), in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).¹⁴

For all mine action-related issues, The HALO Trust communicates with DELTA.¹⁵ The Georgian authorities are supportive of the granting of visas for international staff and the importation of demining equipment. The HALO Trust submitted several requests to the MoD seeking access to the remaining minefields, the last of which was submitted in April 2018. As at May 2021, the HALO Trust had received permission to begin clearing two of the six remaining minefields, at Khojali and Kadoeti, respectively, but does not have sufficient funding to complete these tasks. Permissions for the remaining three minefields have not yet been granted and HALO does not anticipate permissions for Barisako or Osiauri to be forthcoming in the near future. This is mainly due to the perceived tactical value of these minefields to the Georgian military.¹⁶

The Georgian government funds the running costs of the HDCD as well as the Engineering Brigade, which carries out some survey and battle area clearance (BAC).¹⁷

The national authority has received capacity development support from HALO Trust and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The HALO Trust has provided training on IMAS, geographic information systems (GIS), clearance and survey techniques, and, in 2018, donated a mine action vehicle to the HDCD.¹⁸ The GICHD has provided training for HDCD staff on the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Core database, ammunition storage, and technical survey.¹⁹ In 2020, one HDCD staff member conducted an online course on IMAS and Compliance organised by the GICHD.²⁰

In 2019, the Georgian government joined the Landmine Free South Caucasus Campaign (LMFSC), which brings together governments and civil society from all three states in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) on an annual basis to encourage cooperation and dialogue on the clearance of mines and UXO in the region.²¹ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 annual roundtable that was to be hosted in Tbilisi was cancelled, though the campaign continued to broadcast messaging through a quarterly newsletter.²²

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

DELTA and The HALO Trust each has gender and diversity policies in place. HALO supports use of mixed-gender teams to conduct survey, which allows for greater engagement with women and children.²³ If HALO is given permission to work in the remaining minefields in the TAT, community liaison and survey teams will be mixed gender and inclusive of ethnic minorities.²⁴ HALO Trust's EOD teams in Abkhazia are mixed ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz.²⁵

There is equal access to employment for qualified women and men in survey and clearance teams in Georgia, including for managerial level/supervisory positions although proportionately the number of women remains low. Among the HDCD's 2020 staff, one of seven members—the GIS/IMSMA specialist—was a woman. No women are employed in operational roles or in managerial/supervisory positions.²⁶

In Abkhazia, The HALO Trust works with local women's organisations to increase the visibility of its work to female audience. As at May 2021, HALO had increased the percentage of women in the Abkhazia programme to 36%. A total of 43% of HALO's administrative/managerial staff and 42% of its operational staff in Abkhazia were women.²⁷

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

The HDCD uses the IMSMA database and, according to The HALO Trust, the data are accurate. Data archives go back to 2009 and are regularly updated, based on HALO Trust's operations reports and on work by the Engineering Brigade. The IMSMA database is updated regularly and is administered by a certified specialist within the HDCD, trained by the GICHD, who receives regular refresher training in the latest procedures.²⁸ In 2019, HDCD personnel attended an IMSMA Core workshop, hosted by the GICHD and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Kiev (Ukraine).²⁹ In 2020, one HDCD staff member conducted an online course on IMAS and Compliance organised by the GICHD.³⁰

The data in the national information management system are accessible to the HALO Trust.³¹ HALO Trust uses its own IMSMA-compatible data collection forms that DELTA has approved while the HDCD QA/QC team also has its own forms.³²

PLANNING AND TASKING

Georgia has a national mine action strategy. Its main aims and targets are focused on clearing the remaining mined areas (unless they are deemed to have military utility) and to clear other areas contaminated with explosive remnants of war (ERW).³³ With respect to the 2020 annual operation plan, DELTA prioritises clearance in areas of high risk to the population.³⁴ HALO collaborates with the national mine action authorities to determine annual operational planning and task priority. HALO uses an internal prioritisation matrix to grade tasks, taking socio-economic data (sex and age disaggregated) into account. Key considerations include accident history, existing evidence, population proximity, post clearance land use, frequency of land use, direct and indirect number of beneficiaries, and the economic impact on beneficiaries.³⁵

HALO did not carry out any activities in TAT in 2020 due to lack of funding for clearance of the Kadoeti and Khojali minefields, the two tasks that have permissions from the Government of Georgia. In Abkhazia, HALO's operations continued in Primorsky and responding to EOD call-outs. HALO secured three-year funding for its EOD work in Abkhazia and will maintain this capacity until at least 2023.³⁶

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

As at April 2021, Georgian NMAS and National Technical Standards and Guidelines were still under development. The International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) have been translated to Georgian but the IMAS translation was still ongoing.³⁷ HALO expected Georgia's NMAS and non-technical survey guidelines to be finalised in the course of 2021.³⁸

HALO was in the process of updating its standing operating procedures (SOPs) for clearance of the four minefield tasks in Abkhazia, slated for clearance in June–December 2021.³⁹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

DELTA retains a small demining and EOD capacity in TAT. In 2020, all mine clearance activities were suspended in TAT due to the COVID-19 pandemic but the Georgian State Security Service (SSS) EOD team continued to respond to call-outs and EOD spot tasks.⁴⁰ In Abkhazia, the emergency services (EMERCOM) have a small EOD capacity, though HALO Trust is generally relied upon to deal with all items of UXO.⁴¹

The HALO Trust, which is the only international operator working in the country, conducts survey and both BAC and mine clearance.⁴² In 2020, as in the previous year, the HALO Trust did not conduct survey or clearance of anti-personnel mined areas in TAT.

In Abkhazia, HALO's clearance operations in Primorsky continued alongside responding to EOD call-outs. In 2020, HALO deployed two four-strong EOD teams and two

four-strong mechanical and mechanical support teams, along with 53 personnel across 6 teams for BAC.⁴³ HALO secured three-year funding for its EOD work in Abkhazia and will maintain this capacity until at least 2023. Further, HALO has been responding to the COVID-19 crisis in Abkhazia through the deployment of four HALO ambulances providing transportation to COVID-19 patients and medical personnel. HALO was planning to deploy one four-strong manual clearance team to conduct clearance of the four minefield tasks in Abkhazia from June to December 2021.⁴⁴

In TAT, quality management (QM) is conducted by DELTA. In Abkhazia, The HALO Trust is responsible for its own QM.⁴⁵

There were no demining accidents in 2020 in Georgia, but a hand grenade exploded killed one teenager and injured another.⁴⁶

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2020

A total of almost 0.8km² of land was released through clearance in Abkhazia in 2020 destroying in the process 155 anti-personnel mines and 3 anti-vehicle mines (see Table 2). In addition, 93 anti-personnel mines and 11 anti-vehicle mines were destroyed in EOD spot tasks by HALO and the Georgian State Security Service SSS EOD teams.⁴⁷

No land was released through technical or non-technical survey in TAT or in Abkhazia in 2020.

SURVEY IN 2020

No mined area was released through survey in 2020 or in 2019 in TAT or in Abkhazia.

CLEARANCE IN 2020

In 2020, HALO cleared 753,903m² of hazardous area in Primorsky, Abkhazia, destroying in the process 155 anti-personnel mines, 3 anti-vehicle mines, and 12,208 items of UXOs. The anti-personnel mines destroyed in Primorsky were the result of BAC and mechanical clearance of an ammunition storage area explosion in August 2017. The mines were scattered across the landscape as a result of the explosion and had not been emplaced. In addition, The HALO Trust destroyed 28 anti-personnel mines and 3 anti-vehicle mines and 1,037 items of UXO. in Abkhazia during EOD spot tasks in 2020. None of the mines destroyed in Gali and Sukhumi had been laid but were either stored in personal stockpiles or had been discarded in uninhabited areas.⁴⁸

The Georgian SSS EOD teams responded to EOD spot tasks in TAT in 2020 and destroyed 65 anti-personnel mines and 5 anti-vehicle mines.⁴⁹

No target date has been set for completion of anti-personnel mine clearance in Georgia. The Red Bridge minefield is Georgia's largest, clearance of which has been identified as one of its key strategic mine action priorities.⁵⁰ Georgia previously reported plans to start clearing the Red Bridge minefield in 2015 but after discussions between Georgian and Azerbaijani representatives only survey was permitted.⁵¹ The HALO Trust conducted non-technical survey between 1 and 3 July, and then began technical survey on 4 July 2015. The following month, however, the Azerbaijani military demanded that technical survey operations be halted.⁵²

During 2018, Georgia reported further discussions with Azerbaijan regarding the clearance of Red Bridge minefield.⁵³ As at May 2021, however, The HALO Trust had not been granted permission to restart clearance there.⁵⁴ HALO currently maintains residual presence in TAT as, while permissions have been granted to conduct clearance in Kadoeti and Khojali, the programme does not have the funding in place. This arrangement is anticipated to be maintained regardless of having active projects in TAT so long as operations continue in Abkhazia. In the meantime, HALO continues to seek donor funding for clearance of Kadoeti and Khojali.⁵⁵

For The HALO Trust, the main priority in Abkhazia is the clearance of the site at Primorsky, where an explosion in 2017 contaminated the surrounding territory with mines and UXO. In 2020, HALO received additional funding from the Slovak Government through SlovakAid and has been seeking to extend the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) funds beyond May 2021 to finish the remaining contamination. With adequate funding, HALO Trust hoped to finish the clearance of Primorsky by December 2021.⁵⁶

According to DELTA, the mine clearance completion date is highly dependent on funding given that there is only one international operator in Georgia, which is reliant on donor funding. The engineering brigade of the MoD assumes its responsibility to conduct humanitarian mine clearance but its resources are insufficient to meet the demand. Georgia's engineering brigade also requires technical support, training, and modern equipment to be able to conduct operations according to the standards.⁵⁷

Table 2: Mine clearance in 2020⁵⁸

Region	Village	Operator	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
Abkhazia	Gali	HALO Trust	0	20	2	977
Abkhazia	Primorsky	HALO Trust	753,903	155	3	12,208
Abkhazia	Sukhumi	HALO Trust	0	8	1	60
TAT Georgia		SSS EOD Teams	0	65	5	315
Total			753,903	248	11	13,560

PLANNING FOR RESIDUAL RISK AFTER COMPLETION

The engineering brigade of the MoD has been trained to carry out EOD, demining, and BAC by the NATO Partnership for Peace and has the capacity to deal with any residual contamination once all the known minefields have been cleared.⁵⁹

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- 1 The Tbilisi Administered Territory (TAT) does not include the autonomous republics of Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, which are outside of Georgia's effective control.
- 2 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, Head of Division, DELTA, 12 May 2020.
- 3 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, Head of Division, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 4 Email from Michael Montafi, Programme Officer, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 5 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 10 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 12 May 2020; and Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 13 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 20 June 2016 and 28 March and 10 June 2019; and Matthew Walker, Programme Officer, HALO Trust, 8 April 2019; Decree 897 issued by the Minister of Defence, 30 December 2010; and Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Protocol V Article 10 Report (for 21 March 2017 to 31 March 2018), Form A.
- 14 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 6 July 2015.
- 15 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 21 June 2019.
- 16 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 17 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 12 May 2020.
- 18 Emails from Matthew Walker, 8 April 2019; Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020; and Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 10 June 2019.
- 19 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 12 May 2020.
- 20 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 21 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 22 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 23 Email from Matthew Walker, HALO Trust, 8 April 2019.
- 24 Email from Matthew Walker, HALO Trust, 8 April 2019.
- 25 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 26 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 27 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 May 2021.
- 28 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 29 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 12 May 2020.
- 30 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 31 Email from Matthew Walker, HALO Trust, 8 April 2019.
- 32 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 March 2019; and Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 33 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 March 2019.
- 34 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 35 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 36 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 37 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 38 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 41 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 March 2019 and 12 May 2020; and Matthew Walker, HALO Trust, 8 April 2019.
- 42 Email from Irakli Chitanava, HALO Trust, 2 May 2017.
- 43 Email from Sian McGee, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 19 May 2021; HALO deployed four BAC teams from January to May 2021 then increased to six teams from June to December.
- 44 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 45 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 March 2019.
- 46 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 47 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021; and Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 48 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 28 April 2021.
- 49 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 50 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 3 April 2017.
- 51 Interview with George Dolidze, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Geneva, 28 May 2009; and response to Mine Action Review questionnaire by Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 3 June 2015.
- 52 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 18 October 2016; Irakli Chitanava, HALO Trust, 2 May 2017; and Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 3 April 2017.
- 53 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 March 2019.
- 54 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 8 May 2020.
- 55 Email from Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Email from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021.
- 58 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021; and Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.
- 59 Emails from Oleg Gochashvili, DELTA, 28 April 2021; and Michael Montafi, HALO Trust, 30 April 2021.