

KEY DATA

**ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP)
MINE CONTAMINATION:**
UNKNOWN BUT HEAVY

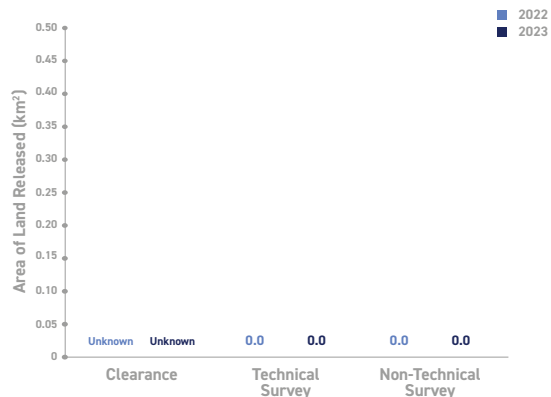
AP MINE
CLEARANCE IN 2023

UNKNOWN

AP MINES
DESTROYED IN 2023

UNKNOWN

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported a surge in mine use in 2023 and said the number of casualties that year was the highest it had ever recorded. The UN said in 2024 it believed that nearly all states and regions are affected by mines and that Myanmar now ranks as one of the world's most mine-affected countries. Despite the threat, the prevailing situation means that mine action operations were restricted to risk education and some victim assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Myanmar's armed forces and non-State armed groups should halt the use of anti-personnel (AP) mines, including mines of an improvised nature.
- Myanmar should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Relevant authorities in Myanmar should permit humanitarian mine action organisations to undertake surveys to identify and mark mined areas using conventional marking systems, particularly in areas expected to receive internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Mine action NGOs and their implementing partners should develop standards for implementing and reporting permitted activities, including community-based assessments and non-technical survey (NTS).

DEMINING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT

- Department of Rehabilitation (DoR)

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Tatmadaw (Army)
- Unspecified ethnic armed entities/non-State armed groups
- Unspecified non-government organisations

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
- DanChurchAid (DCA)
- The HALO Trust (HALO)
- Humanity & Inclusion (HI)
- Mines Advisory Group (MAG)
- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Myanmar is heavily mine-affected as a result of conflicts between the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) and numerous non-State armed groups (NSAGs) affiliated with ethnic minorities. The conflicts started after the nation's independence in 1948. AP mines, including those of an improvised nature, as well as other improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continue to be laid by government forces and NSAGs.¹ Mine use is reported to have accelerated since the military's February 2021 coup and the escalating conflict it has ignited across the country.² UNICEF reported a surge in mine use in 2023 and said the number of mine casualties in that year was the highest ever recorded.³

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, established by the UN Human Rights Council, reported in September 2019 that northern Myanmar is "heavily contaminated with landmines" and that the parties to the conflict, including the Tatmadaw, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Restoration Council of Shan state (RCSS, formerly referred to as the Shan State Army South (SSA-S), and the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP, formerly referred to as the Shan State Army North (SSA-N)), all continued to emplace landmines and IEDs.⁴

There is no accurate estimate of the extent of mine contamination. Before the coup, available data showed that nine of the fourteen states and regions were contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).⁵ The

UN said in April 2024 that it believed that nearly all states and regions were affected by mines and ERW and that Myanmar now ranks as one of the world's most landmine- and explosive ordnance-affected countries.⁶ In June 2024, UN reports also cited mine incidents in Naypitaw.⁷

Mine contamination was previously concentrated in the states bordering Bangladesh, China, and Thailand. UNICEF monitoring of mine and ERW incidents found that most casualties in 2021 occurred in Shan and Kachin states in the north and east of the country, in the western state of Rakhine, and in the south-eastern Kayah and Magway states. Other states experiencing mine/ERW casualties included Bago, Chin, Kayah, Mon, Sagaing, and Tanintharyi.⁸ Since the coup, analysis of casualties suggests mine use has spread more widely.⁹ UNICEF data showed 35% of casualties in 2023 occurred in the central Sagaing region, an area that was mostly peaceful before the coup but has since experienced fierce resistance to the military from the People's Defence Forces.¹⁰

UNICEF said 60% of mine accidents in the first quarter of 2023 had occurred in north-western areas of Myanmar hit by Cyclone Mocha, underscoring the challenge posed by migration of mines due to flooding and posing a serious threat to delivery of humanitarian relief. Landmine inspection surveys had identified 300 villages where the presence of landmines was either confirmed or suspected.¹¹

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Myanmar's tentative steps towards setting up a national mine action authority (NMAA) ended with the military coup in February 2021. The State Administration Council established by the Tatmadaw to lead the government has not set up a mechanism for managing or coordinating mine action and focused on an escalating conflict that has increased explosive ordnance contamination and crippled a systematic response.

The government first set up a Myanmar Mine Action Centre under the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) in 2012 with support from Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), but the centre was never

fully staffed. The MPC was dissolved at the end of March 2016 and replaced by a National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, which reported to the then head of government, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.¹² In 2019, Myanmar moved towards establishing an NMAA and told the Fourth APMBC Review Conference in November 2019 that "Myanmar will as soon as feasible establish the needed national legislation to establish a national mine action authority."¹³ An interministerial meeting on 3 January 2020, attended by 14 different ministries including the Ministry of Defence, agreed in principle to establish an NMAA.¹⁴

1 Amnesty International, "Myanmar: Military's use of banned landmines in Kayah state amounts to war crimes", 20 July 2022; and "Myanmar: In reverse: Deteriorating Human Rights Situation, Report, January–February 2021, p. 8.

2 "As Myanmar's army faces setbacks, it is stepping up attacks on civilians, a UN expert warns", *Associated Press*, 20 March 2024; UNICEF, "Three-fold increase in civilian casualties caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance in Myanmar's expanding conflict", 4 April 2024; Karen Human Rights Group, "Danger beneath our feet: Briefing Paper", 22 December 2023; see also UNHCR, Myanmar Emergency Update: Key displacement figures, 6 March 2023; R. Ayisi, "Children pay a heavy price as more landmines are laid", UNICEF, 4 April 2023.

3 UNICEF, Myanmar Country Office, Humanitarian Situation Report No. 10, December 2023 and Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1, 2024.

4 "Report of the Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar", UN doc. A/HRC/42/CRP.5, 16 September 2019, pp. 155–58.

5 Landmine Monitor, Myanmar Burma Mine Ban Policy, Last updated 12 November 2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2Trv0m>.

6 UNICEF, "Three-fold increase in civilian casualties caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance in Myanmar's expanding conflict", 4 April 2024.

7 UNICEF, Myanmar Landmine/ERW Incident Information 2024 (Q2).

8 UNICEF, Myanmar Landmines/ERW Incidents Information, Factsheet (covering calendar year 2021), at: <https://uni.cf/3cgxhWW>.

9 V. Milko and D. Rising, "I just want my legs back: Myanmar landmine casualties soar", *Associated Press*, 19 February 2023.

10 UNICEF, Myanmar Landmine-ERW Incidents Information, 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3STV1SF>.

11 UNICEF, Myanmar Country Office, Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4, 1 May–30 June 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3WPt282>.

12 R. Fasth and P. Simon, "Mine Action in Myanmar", *Journal of Mine Action*, Issue 19.2 (July 2015).

13 Statement of Myanmar, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 25–29 November 2019.

14 Interview with Win Naing Tun, Department of Rehabilitation, MSWRR, Geneva, 14 February 2020; and email from Kyaw Lin Htut, Programme Manager, NPA, 3 April 2020.

The government created an interministerial task force in 2020 to work towards setting up the NMAA.¹⁵ Myanmar informed the Eighteenth Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC in November 2020 that it had set up a Mine Action Working Group in May 2020 as “the first step towards formulating a National Strategy and Plan of Action for mine clearance”.¹⁶ However, momentum was lost with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, government elections in November 2020, and the February 2021 coup.¹⁷

The operating context for humanitarian demining organisations—as for humanitarian and civil society organisations in general—has become increasingly challenging. A Department of Rehabilitation (DoR) created in 2018 gradually took over responsibility for overseeing mine action operators and their activities. Operators found the DoR cooperative and engaged¹⁸ but it was also felt to lack the capacity needed to tackle national-level issues such as creating an NMAA and mine action legislation. In November 2020, the DoR’s Director General announced during a mine

risk working group (MRWG) meeting that it had finalised the vision and terms of reference of a working committee that was to be set up prior to the establishment of an NMAA and had submitted it to the President office for consideration. No concrete results emerged by the time the Tatmadaw took over the government in February 2021. Since then, operators have followed a policy of non-engagement with the DoR.¹⁹

Meetings of the MRWG also came to a halt after February 2021. The State Administration Council expressed interest in establishing a new MRWG in April 2022 but engagement between the government and humanitarian actors has remained largely frozen and no further action followed on the issue.²⁰ The operating environment has become progressively less permissive as a result of movement restrictions, the proliferation of military checkpoints, deteriorating communications, targeted attacks on staff, and additional controls imposed by a Registration of Associations Law introduced in October 2022.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Myanmar does not have a centralised mine action information management database. Data collection and information management were included as one of the six main priorities of the 2018–19 MRWG strategic plan.²¹ It was hoped that a national database would be set up once an NMAA was established,²² but that process stalled after the February 2021 coup.

The Mine Action Area of Responsibility (MA AoR) set up by the UN ranked improving information management as a top objective and specifically creating a comprehensive mine

victim information system. UNICEF continues to collect victim data from open sources which it releases quarterly, but the number of victims is believed to significantly exceed that recorded in available data.²³

DanChurchAid (DCA) in 2021 had a project with a component related to information management which sought to capacity build partners to gather, input, manage, and analyse data, and included plans to introduce and train them in the use of Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Core. The project was delayed as a result of the coup.²⁴

PLANNING AND TASKING

In the absence of a national mine action authority, Myanmar has not formulated national or state level plans for mine action.

The MA AoR drew up a strategic plan setting out general goals for the sector, including improving information management, risk education, victim assistance, improving coordination, and developing advocacy to raise the profile of humanitarian demining operators in Myanmar and attract more funding for delivery of protection services. In 2022,

MA AoR members reportedly provided explosive ordnance risk education to approximately 508,000 people in 2022, of whom 251,000 were children, and to 499,929 people in 2023, including more than 206,000 children.²⁵

Operators are not tasked by central authorities but liaise with local actors and communities in their operating areas to identify tasks.²⁶ The location of armed clashes and displacement as well as results of community survey helped operators to determine priorities.²⁷

15 Interview with Win Naing Tun, Department of Rehabilitation, MSWRR, Geneva, 14 February 2020; and email from Hilde Jørgensen, Programme Manager – Humanitarian Mine Action, NPA, 27 May 2021.

16 Statement of Myanmar, 18th Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC (18MSP), Geneva 16–20 November 2020.

17 Email from Hilde Jørgensen, NPA, 27 May 2021.

18 Email from Liam Harvey, Programme Manager, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 21 April 2021.

19 Email from Matthew Walsh, Head of Humanitarian Response and Mine Action, DCA, 22 April 2021.

20 Email from mine action stakeholders, August 2022.

21 Email from Matthew Walsh, DCA, 22 April 2021.

22 Emails from Bekim Shala, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), 13 April 2020; Fabrice Vandeputte, Humanity & Inclusion (HI), 8 May 2020; Kyaw Lin Htut, NPA, 3 April 2020; and Liam Harvey, DRC, 22 May 2020; and Matthew Walsh, DCA, 22 April 2021.

23 Email from Kim Warren, MA AoR, 11 August 2022; and Zoom interview, 12 August 2022.

24 Email from Matthew Walsh, DCA, 22 April 2021.

25 Email from an international stakeholder, September 2024.

26 Email from Julie Utting, HALO, 10 May 2022.

27 Email from Sofia Raineri, MAG, 8 August 2022.

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Historically, Myanmar has not developed national standards and therefore operators have followed the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and their own standard operating procedures (SOPs). Operators are not permitted to conduct technical survey, clearance, or explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) so the focus of the mine action sector is on developing standards for permitted activities.

Prior to the February 2021 military coup, tentative steps to develop national standards saw the drafting of a first national standard on marking, which was approved by the government in January 2020. An NTS Working Group also worked on a standard for NTS in 2020, led by the Mine Action Advisor from the New Zealand Embassy,²⁸ but the group had

not finalised and approved the standard by the February 2021 coup which suspended discussions on national standards.

The civilian-led government in office in 2018 agreed that physical marking (with warning signs) and fencing should be included as part of NTS²⁹ but implementation has been patchy. It also approved marking of polygons, though local authorities were also involved in the approval process.³⁰ Circumstances prevailing after the coup, including increased hostilities, the Junta's crackdown on civil society and humanitarian programmes, and increased use of mines by parties to the conflict left little space for developing humanitarian mine action.

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Until 2023, five international demining organisations—DCA, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), The HALO Trust (HALO), Mines Advisory Group (MAG), and NPA—had offices in Yangon and some provincial locations. Demining organisations were not permitted to conduct technical survey or clearance and therefore concentrated on building up NTS, risk education, and community liaison. After the February 2021 coup, an increasingly hostile political environment and escalating conflict limited the space for international NGO involvement in humanitarian demining.

MAG employed a total staff of 54 in 2023, working from offices in Sittwe (Rakhine), Hpa An (Kayin), Loikaw (Kayah), and Dawei (Tanintharyi) but also active in Chin, Kachin, Sagaing, and Magway, with nine teams conducting community-based assessments of mine and explosive ordnance threats and delivering risk education to communities and to organisations. MAG additionally supervise 26 community-based volunteers delivering EORE. The Dawei office shut in August 2023 because of funding

cuts. MAG also established and chaired the North West AoR convening monthly meetings with local stakeholders.³¹

Among other demining organisations, DCA said it works entirely through local partner organisations in Myanmar. DCA had around 15 formal partners in 2020 and supported a number of other small civil society organisations (CSOs) implementing risk education and victim assistance.³² DRC had planned to start NTS in Kachin and Shan states in 2020 but it was prevented from proceeding, first by COVID-19 restrictions and then, after February 2021, by the political-security situation. It also partnered national CSOs for community liaison and mapping activities.³³ Since 2022, The HALO Trust keeps an administrative office in Yangon and supports teams in Bago, Shan, Kachin, and Kayin states which conduct risk education and provide some victim assistance.³⁴ NPA closed down its head office in Yangon and field offices in Bago, Kachin, and Mon states in 2022 but continued to work remotely through partners to deliver conflict preparedness and protection training to communities.³⁵

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Even before the February 2021 military coup, demining operators were not permitted to conduct technical survey, clearance, or EOD spot tasks by either the government or ethnic minority authorities. After the coup, operators largely limited their activities to community-based assessments of contamination and risk education. In 2023, donor support mainly focused on risk education and victim assistance.³⁶

28 Email from Liam Harvey, DRC, 21 April 2021.

29 Emails from Liam Harvey, DRC, 21 April 2021; and Matthew Walsh, DCA, 22 April 2021.

30 Emails from Bekim Shala, MAG, 16 August 2019 and 26 May 2020; and Kyaw Lin Htut, NPA, 21 August 2019.

31 Emails from Camille Marie-Regnault, MAG, 13 May and 10 September 2024.

32 Emails from Matthew Walsh, DCA, 22 April and 29 June 2021.

33 Email from Liam Harvey, DRC, 21 April 2021.

34 Email from Charles Fowle, Programme Manager, HALO, 29 August 2024.

35 Email from Felipe Atkins, Country Director, NPA, 1 September 2023.

36 Email from Camille Marie-Regnault, MAG, 15 May 2023.