

### KEY DATA

**CLUSTER MUNITION  
CONTAMINATION:  
UNKNOWN**

SUBMUNITION  
CLEARANCE IN 2022

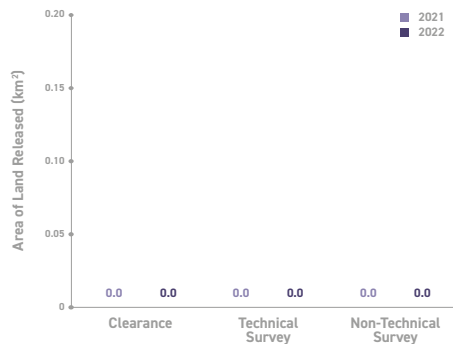
**0** km<sup>2</sup>

SUBMUNITIONS  
DESTROYED IN 2022

**510**

(10 DURING BATTLE AREA  
CLEARANCE AND 500 DESTROYED  
DURING SPOT TASKS)

### LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



## KEY DEVELOPMENTS

A ceasefire agreement brokered in March 2020 between Türkiye and Russia, who support opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, has brought a relative but fragile calm to the country. The earthquake that hit the north of Syria on 6 February 2022 may have displaced explosive ordnance, including cluster munition remnants (CMR), into areas that were previously cleared or had not been previously impacted. On 6 November 2022, Syrian and Russian forces fired cluster munitions on four camps for internally displaced people (IDPs), killing eight civilians and wounding dozens of others. In December 2022, United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) officially handed over the first plot of cleared land to the local authorities in the outskirts of Damascus.

In the north-east of Syria, the mine action sector faced operational delays due to the newly established de-facto mine action centre of the north-east (the north-east of

Syria mine action office, NESMAO), requesting signature of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) as a precursor to operators continuing their field activities. The discussions with NESMAO reached a stalemate on two occasions, leading to the suspension of activities for four months. Restrictions were eventually lifted, MoUs signed, and operations resumed. The HALO Trust (HALO), which operates in the north-west of Syria, received authorisation to carry out explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and use explosives to dispose of explosive ordnance in July 2022.

In government-controlled territories, the number of qualified clearance operators has increased with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) receiving its accreditation in early 2023. UNMAS has taken a role of coordinating the mine action area of responsibility covering the whole of Syria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria and its ally, Russia, should immediately cease the use of cluster munitions.
- Syria should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should create the necessary structures to oversee an efficient mine action programme, namely: a national mine action centre (NMAC), a national mine action authority (NMAA), and a centralised information management (IM) system. The process should be underpinned by the adoption of mine action legislation and a multiyear strategic plan.

# CLUSTER MUNITION SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

## MANAGEMENT

- The interministerial Mine Action Coordination Committee

## NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Syria Civil Defence (SCD) (also called the White Helmets), operating in the north-west
- Roj Mine Control Organization (RMC0), operating in the north-east

## INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- The Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), operating in government-controlled areas
- DanChurchAid (DCA), operating in the north-east
- Mines Advisory Group (MAG), operating in the north-east
- The HALO Trust (HALO), operating in the north-west
- Enhancing Human Security (ITF), operating in the north-east
- Humanity and Inclusion (HI), operating in the north-east
- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), accredited in early 2023

## OTHER ACTORS

- Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP)
- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)

## UNDERSTANDING OF CMR CONTAMINATION

The full extent of CMR contamination is unknown but is certainly widespread due to the repeated use of cluster munitions during the decade-long conflict in Syria. No comprehensive countrywide survey has taken place to date, but several assessments continue to be conducted by various actors and operators across Syria. Thirteen of the country's fourteen governorates (all except Tartus) have experienced persistent use of cluster munitions since 2012.<sup>1</sup> Between 2020 and 2022, cluster munition attacks were recorded in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates. On 6 November 2022, Syrian and Russian forces reportedly used cluster munitions on four IDP camps in Idlib governorate (north-west). Remnants of a M27K-series Uragan cluster munition rocket and at least one unexploded 9N235 submunition were found on the site. The attack killed eight civilians and wounded dozens of others, including two children and a pregnant woman with her foetus.<sup>2</sup>

The Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR) recorded at least 496 cluster munition attacks in Syria between July 2012 and January 2023 attributing them to the Syrian forces, Russian forces, or the alliance of the two.<sup>3</sup> Cluster munition attacks have resulted in the deaths of 1,053 civilians, including 394 children and 219 women. Furthermore, no fewer than 382 civilians, including 124 children and 31 women, were killed due to the explosion of submunitions left by previous cluster munition attacks.<sup>4</sup> A range of Russian-made cluster munitions have been used in the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

## SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

On 6 February 2023, Syria was struck by a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake followed by a series of more than 14,000 aftershocks. The tremors severely affected the north-west of Syria, most notably, the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, and to a lesser extent, Lattakia and Hama in the north-west and Raqqqa and Al-Hassakeh in the north-east. In a rapid assessment conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) one month after the earthquake, mines and explosive remnants of war (ERWs) have been found in 13% of the locations assessed across Syria.<sup>6</sup>

HALO conducted a rapid protection assessment between February and March 2023. The assessment identified explosive ordnance contamination in 42 earthquake-affected communities, affecting 730,000 people. Some specific population groups were deemed to be at an increased risk of explosive ordnance-related accidents, including IDPs who may be unfamiliar with their new environment, and rubble removers who may need to operate in contaminated areas. According to HALO, the earthquake may have led explosive items to move or resurface, and has invalidated the previous mapping work. Resurvey is now critically needed in impacted communities, especially communities who received significant displacement and in rubble removal sites.<sup>7</sup>

1 Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Syria Cluster Munition Ban Policy, last updated 24 November 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yHIY0i>.

2 Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Cluster Munitions Used in November 6 Attacks", 23 November 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3NfkqEq>.

3 SNHR, "Cluster Munitions Remnants are an Open-Ended Threat to the Lives of Syria's Future Generations", Report, 30 January 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/40NicQ0>, p. 10.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., pp. 11–20.

6 OCHA, Data Friendly Space, and DEEP, "Syria Earthquake March 2023", 10 March 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3Mj2DtS>, p. 3.

7 Email from Damian O'Brien, Programme Manager, HALO, 10 April 2023.

According to Humanity and Inclusion (HI), it is extremely likely that many of the explosive ordnance that littered buildings, streets and waterways have been moved as a result of the earthquake. A collapse of a water dam 'Al-Taloul' in Idlib governorate, combined with the rising water levels of the Orontes River, has resulted in the flooding of some villages. The rising water could potentially cause flash floods and migrate explosive ordnance into areas that were previously cleared or had not been previously impacted.<sup>8</sup> Weapons and ammunition that were stored in houses are now buried under the rubble. Returnees expose themselves to danger by returning to their destroyed homes to gather belongings, or by starting to remove the rubble to try and rebuild their homes.<sup>9</sup>

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) received information from the protection working group that the earthquake impact was lighter in the north-east than in the north-west. In the north-east, houses and buildings have been badly shaken and some MAG staff members reported cracks appearing in their houses' walls, especially in multistorey buildings. The earthquake impact was the most in Kobani city, in the north-eastern part of Aleppo governorate in the vicinity of the Turkish border. In Raqqa, some organisations reported that a few buildings which were previously shelled have completely collapsed. These were unpopulated buildings as they were previously damaged by the shelling.<sup>10</sup>

Before the earthquake, the 2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, which was published in December 2022, estimated that a third of communities across Syria were affected by some form of explosive contamination, with the highest percentages being in Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, Quneitra, Raqqa, Rural Damascus, and Sweida.<sup>11</sup> In 2020, an average of 76 explosive incidents per day were recorded in Syria.<sup>12</sup>

HALO conducted an explosive ordnance community contamination impact assessment in north-west Syria (in Idlib and Aleppo governorates) between 2018 and 2020. The assessment confirmed contamination in more than 400 communities (equating to 41% of all those assessed).<sup>13</sup> Unexploded submunitions were the most frequent type of ordnance encountered, accounting for 36% of total recorded contamination.<sup>14</sup> Other contamination was from landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (4% combined), and a mixture of other unexploded ordnance (UXO).<sup>15</sup> Submunitions caused 42% of recorded casualties.<sup>16</sup> Another rapid assessment survey conducted by HALO in 2021 identified 91 suspected cluster munition strike zones (50 in Idlib and 41 in Aleppo).<sup>17</sup>

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) conducted a joint mine risk needs assessment of 573 communities in Al-Hassakeh, Aleppo, Daraa, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Quneitra, and Sweida governorates. According to the assessment, 530 (92%) of the assessed communities reported the presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW). Of the assessed communities, 57% reported presence of anti-personnel mines; 46% of CMR; and 25% of IEDs.<sup>18</sup>

The Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP) estimates that 27km<sup>2</sup> of north-east Syria is EO-contaminated as a result of the armed conflict against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and continuing violence in and around Turk controlled areas. Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Al-Hassakeh governorates are the most affected. The EO contamination includes a widespread use of IEDs especially around the homes and various critical infrastructures in both rural and urban areas.<sup>19</sup>

MAG has been conducting surveys across several governorates in the north-east of Syria since 2016. As at May 2022, MAG had recorded 97,365m<sup>2</sup> of CMR-contaminated land. MAG has also received reports of CMR in Deir Ezzor governorate, but these are in areas that MAG could not currently access.<sup>20</sup>

The Syria Civil Defence (SCD), better known as the White Helmets, has been conducting clearance in the north-west of Syria since March 2016, and has operated in Daraa and Quneitra governorates in the South between 2017-18.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, SCD conducted a non-technical survey in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates and recorded explosive ordnance contamination in 145 out of 385 surveyed communities (37.6%). Of the 426 EO items recorded, 177 (41.5%) were submunitions. As at May 2022, explosive ordnance contamination was recorded in 73 of 335 communities surveyed (21.7%), and 42.7% of the total of 194 items of explosive ordnance found were submunitions. SCD and other operators report encountering mainly Russian-made cluster munitions, including SHOAB-0.5, AO-2.5RT, 9N235, AO1-SCH, M77-HEAT, SPBE-HEAT, and PTAB-1M and 2.5M submunitions.<sup>22</sup>

8 Humanity and Inclusion (HI), "Earthquakes may have moved explosive weapons contamination", accessed on 21 May 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/41UA9ww>.

9 HI, "Safety messages in the wake of the earthquake", accessed on 3 July 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3pwz05R>.

10 Email from Najat al Hamri, MAG, 3 July 2023.

11 Syria 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 22 December 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3NcDL9l>, p. 81.

12 Syria 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/43biWQZ>, p. 10.

13 The HALO, "Syria, A Hidden Emergency", Report, at: <https://bit.ly/3f4w44x>, p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 7.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 11.

17 Emails from Mairi Cunningham, Programme Manager, HALO, 7 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022.

18 ICRC and SARC, Mine Risk Needs Assessment and Education, PowerPoint presentation to the 24th National Director's Meeting, Geneva, 25 May 2021.

19 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", September 2021 – April 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/41PZasC>, pp. 6-7.

20 Email from Fabrice Martin, Country Director, MAG, 9 March 2022.

21 Email from Michael Edwards, Explosive Hazard Operations Manager, SCD, 15 June 2022; and Mayday Rescue, "Syria Civil Defence, Explosive Hazard Mitigation Project Overview, Nov 2015-Mar 2018", 1 March 2018.

22 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 11 May 2021 and 15 June 2022.

## OTHER EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR AND LANDMINES

The continued use of cluster munitions adds to the existing CMR problem in addition to dense contamination from other explosive ordnance, in particular landmines, including those of an improvised nature (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing the Mines* report on Syria for further information).

Working from the Syrian capital, Damascus, UNMAS completed in June 2022 an explosive ordnance assessment team (EOAT) survey in Rural Damascus (South) that it had started in August 2020. The EOAT survey assessed more

than 4,200 residential buildings in Daraya (Rural Damascus) and Yarmouk neighbourhood (Damascus), confirming the presence of explosive ordnance in 142 buildings, identifying 774 buildings as suspected to be hazardous, with the possible presence of explosives and need for future mechanical clearance. In addition, more than 2km<sup>2</sup> of mostly agricultural lands were assessed in Daraya (Rural Damascus), of which around 71% was confirmed hazardous.<sup>23</sup>

## NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no national mine action authority in Syria. In government-controlled areas, an Interministerial National Mine Action Coordination Committee is said to have been formed by presidential decree in 2019 and is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFA), Dr Faisal Mikdad.<sup>24</sup> MoFA assigned a focal point for liaison with UNMAS for all mine action. UNMAS is informed that the committee meets on an ad-hoc basis as needed.<sup>25</sup>

Mine action in Syria is coordinated by three response mechanisms:

- Damascus-based Mine Action Sub-Sector (MASS) coordinated by UNMAS;
- The north-west MASC coordinated by HALO; and
- The north-east Mine Action Working Group (MAWG), which sits under the protection working group in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) forum-led response that is coordinated by iMMAP.<sup>26</sup>

Coordinators of the three structures organise monthly meetings with the respective mine action actors,<sup>27</sup> but since November 2022, the MAWG's monthly meetings have been temporarily suspended, then resumed following the replacement of the mine action coordinator.<sup>28</sup> The Damascus-based MASS meets on a monthly basis, and is attended by a variety of mine action partners, including UN agencies, NGOs, and the ICRC.<sup>29</sup>

The local authorities of the north-east of Syria established a north-east Syria Mine Action Office (NESMAO) in 2022. NESMAO introduced the signature of an MoU for all humanitarian mine action operators as a prerequisite to continuation of field operations. This led to the two to four months suspension of all humanitarian demining activities in 2022.

UNMAS continues to represent the mine action area of responsibility within the UN-led coordination mechanism for Syria, as well as supporting the hub-based coordination mechanisms. UNMAS provides technical expertise and support to the humanitarian clusters, sectors, and mine action partners.<sup>30</sup> As part of this undertaking, UNMAS provides explosive ordnance risk awareness (EORE) and training to UN and humanitarian personnel. UNMAS has directly supported the implementation of risk education and victim assistance projects in cooperation with local Syrian NGOs.<sup>31</sup>

Given the lack of critical national mine action structures, UNMAS liaises with the National Mine Action Coordination Committee chaired by the Syrian MoFA and accredits clearance operators on a de-facto basis.<sup>32</sup> UNMAS does not provide capacity building to the national authorities, but as a mine action coordination body in 2020, UNMAS drafted national technical standards and guidelines for mine action and has provided them to the Syrian government for consideration.<sup>33</sup>

23 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023.

24 This information was provided on condition of anonymity.

25 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023. According to Syria's statement to the APMB 20MSP, "a National Committee on Demining was established in June [of 2022] under the chairmanship of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates". Mine Action Review believes that the committee Syria refers to is the same Interministerial Committee that was established in 2019, and that Syria's statement has incorrectly indicated the formation date of the committee.

26 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023.

27 iMMAP, Coordination Support to Humanitarian Mine Action, 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yGh9nQ>; and emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 and 17 June 2021; and UNMAS, 30 June 2021.

28 Emails from Akram Alsaedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; Najat El Hamri, MAG, 3 July 2023; and Kevin Starker, Humanitarian Mine Action Operations Manager, DCA, 28 June 2023.

29 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

30 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

31 Ibid., 30 April 2023.

32 Information was provided on condition of anonymity.

33 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.

Until November 2022, the north-east MAWG coordination meetings were held on monthly and ad-hoc basis, and attended regularly by MAG, HI, DanChurchAid (DCA), and Enhancing Human Security (ITF) among others.<sup>34</sup> The working group mainly discussed context updates, coordination of activities, challenges faced, the relationship with authorities, gaps in the provision of humanitarian mine action services, and mine action information management system.<sup>35</sup> In 2022, MAWG was planning a non-technical survey (NTS) project with iMMAP and various mine action operators.<sup>36</sup> In 2023, iMMAP, in collaboration with DCA, HI, MAG, and ITF, initiated the NTS project, prioritising communities across the north-east of Syria.<sup>37</sup>

The humanitarian mine action sector faced some operational challenges late 2021 and early 2022. Discussions about an MoU between NESMAO and the humanitarian mine action actors, which were led and facilitated by the humanitarian mine action coordinator of the north-east, iMMAP, stalled and reached a stalemate, forcing the mine action actors to cease operating for almost two months at the beginning of 2022. Restrictions were eventually lifted, and all parties returned to the discussions.<sup>38</sup>

According to MAG, the main challenges to efficient mine action in the north-east were the continuous security threat, the four-month suspension of operations due to the ongoing negotiations around the signature of the MoU (indicated above), the temporary suspension in MAWG coordination meetings, the limited access but high needs in Deir Ezzor governorate, and the shortage of funding for mine action activities.<sup>39</sup>

MAG is providing capacity-building support to NESMAO, to its own staff members, and those of other organisations present in the north-east such as the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC). MAG is also providing support to the north-east educational council to integrate EORE safety messages into school curricula. In close collaboration with NESMAO, MAG has constructed two explosives' storehouses and was planning for the construction of one more, to help operators store recovered explosives until their demolition.<sup>40</sup>

DCA reported a cooperative relationship with NESMAO. In April 2023, NESMAO representatives took part in DCA's NTS training course as part of the NTS project in the north-east of Syria. DCA intends to continue capacity building support to the NESMAO. The main challenges reported by DCA were the lack of national mine action standards (NMAS), the lack of formal tasking and prioritisation, alignment of mine action activities with humanitarian needs and development projects,

as well as the different donor requirements from different operators.<sup>41</sup>

According to iMMAP, mine action actors face a drastic reduction in funding for the north-east of Syria as more donors are withdrawing from mine action support. This affects the crucial need to clear water sources and agricultural land due to the ongoing drought and increasing food prices.<sup>42</sup>

In the north-west, mine action was coordinated by the MASC cross-border response from Gaziantep (Türkiye-based response) and was co-chaired by HALO and UNMAS. Since May 2022, HALO started chairing the meetings from Amman,<sup>43</sup> and UNMAS stopped being a co-chairmanship to the MASC due to lack of personnel and funding. Some 15 partners attend the MASC monthly meetings, with SCD attending as observers.<sup>44</sup> HALO and its partners coordinate and receive approvals from the local Turkish authorities for its work across the border with Türkiye.<sup>45</sup> HALO reported generally good coordination with the local authorities when it comes to access and security, but the range of mine action activities has been limited and varied due to the complexities of the operating context.<sup>46</sup> For example, the Turkish authorities do not permit the export of some EOD materials such as T-jets, nor authorises operators to conduct NTS or EOD in northern Aleppo.<sup>47</sup>

According to HALO, the coordination of mine action in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake has been challenging. The immediate needs of the affected population were very high and the emphasis was put on vital assistance such as food and shelter. Mine action operators redirected their activities to respond to these vital needs in the most efficient way possible. For example, HALO purchased a tracked excavator in January 2023 and had begun modifying it for minefield clearance when the earthquake struck. In coordination with local authorities, the excavator was temporarily deployed on rubble removal in earthquake-impacted communities.<sup>48</sup>

The MASC coordination meetings were held every two months in 2022 after a gap in early 2022 during which no meetings were held. MASC meetings include many organisations that are not operationally involved in mine action beyond risk education. The meetings discuss security and access, response coordination, organisations' updates of their activities, funding mechanism and opportunities, experience sharing, the humanitarian programme cycle process, and partnership opportunities, among other topics.<sup>49</sup>

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34 Emails from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022, and Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

35 Ibid.

36 Email from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March 2023.

37 Ibid., 28 June 2023.

38 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", September 2021–April 2022, p. 15.

39 Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

40 Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

41 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023.

42 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", September 2021 – April 2022, p. 4.

43 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023.

44 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

45 Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 and 17 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022.

46 Emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022 and 10 April 2023.

47 Ibid., 10 April 2023.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

According to SCD, limited funding and access, and difficulties in importing equipment constitute the main challenges to mine action operators in north-west Syria. SCD was able to secure funding for 2022 and early 2023, and, at the time of writing, was in the process of negotiating funding until the end of 2024. However, other organisations have limited options for importing equipment and there is a continued decrease in available funding due to donor fatigue. SCD continues to have sufficient stocks of demining equipment and has therefore not needed to import any such equipment in 2022. However, restrictions that are currently in place continue to prevent such equipment being imported, should it be required. Consumable items, such as marking materials, electric cables, and sandbags, can be procured locally within the north-west of Syria.<sup>50</sup>

UNMAS was seeking US\$25 million for its mine action programme in Syria through to the end of 2023.<sup>51</sup> UNMAS expects a decrease in the funding available for mine action, particularly in the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake, as the majority of the immediate response of humanitarian actors is focused on shelter and health. A progressive inclusion of mine action in damage assessment and rubble removal work is also to be expected.<sup>52</sup> In a statement to the 24<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and UN Advisors (24<sup>th</sup> NDM) in 2021, Syria appealed to the international community to boost its financial support to UNMAS so the UN could expand its operation in Syria, provide equipment to the existing qualified national resources, and encourage international NGOs to step in and help Syria clear explosive ordnance.<sup>53</sup>

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

DCA's global Strategy has a commitment to advance its climate and sustainability work in fragile contexts and crisis. DCA is exploring greener approaches to humanitarian mine action activities across all of its humanitarian mine action country programmes.<sup>54</sup> The HALO's environmental policy has been established by executive management at its headquarters. In line with this policy, HALO's activities seek to minimise negative environmental impacts wherever possible and enhance positive impacts in pursuit of improved lives and livelihoods. HALO complies with the international mine action standards (IMAS) to ensure that activities are conducted with appropriate measures in place to minimise environmental damage, and respect national laws and local needs. HALO has also established an Environment and Conservation Cross-Cutting Network to provide continued guidance on how environmental impacts can be reduced.<sup>55</sup>

UNMAS reports that it takes into consideration the impacts of assessing and removing explosive ordnance on the landscape, for instance, when the removal of vegetation is a necessary precondition for the successful implementation of operations. As UNMAS is a secretariat entity, it globally refers to the environment strategy of the UN Department of Field Support (DFS). UNMAS also benefits from the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) environmental policies, of which the 2018–21 strategic plan explicitly mentions "environmental respect" and "environmental impact". As such, UNMAS's partnership with implementing partners is governed by guidelines that refer to environmental requirements for task implementation.<sup>58</sup>

MAG's community liaison standing operating procedures (SOPs) include consultations with affected communities about the use of mechanical assets and the timing of clearance, to minimise impact on the environment, agricultural land, or other local activities, including consultations on water use, rubbish disposal, land erosion, and burning of vegetation.<sup>56</sup> MAG conducts demolition activities in a very remote areas of Al-Hassakeh governorate, in agreement with the local authorities, community members, far from any animal movements or farming activities, and in accordance with IMAS.<sup>57</sup>

50 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022 and 27 March 2023.

51 UNMAS website, Syria programme, accessed on 19 May 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3uCiB0N>.

52 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

53 Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 3.

54 Email from Kevin Straker, DCA, 28 June 2023.

55 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022.

56 Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

57 Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

58 Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023.

## GENDER AND DIVERSITY

There is no national gender and diversity policy for the mine action programme.

DCA has a country-specific gender and diversity policy and implementation plan, in addition to its global gender and diversity policy that is aligned to its Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging principles. All national staff recruitment is done through candidate lists put forward by NESMAO as specified in the MoU. Although DCA asks for gender-balanced candidate lists for all positions, such conditions are seldom met. In 2022, 20% of DCA's employees were women, with 19% and 36% of operational positions and managerial positions filled by women, respectively.<sup>59</sup>

In Syria, access to female beneficiaries has long been challenging because of the lack of women in the workforce. Employing women not only allows HALO to empower them, but also to ensure their interventions are inclusive and gender sensitive. HALO field teams include at least two women each for better access to women and girls. HALO's employment policy promotes non-discrimination, gender equality, and diversity. Women staff have access to female-friendly spaces in the office as per local cultural norms. HALO provides women with opportunities to be trained in technical field roles to recognised international standards, offering transferable and skills and qualifications that enhance their earning potential. By doing so, HALO empowers women and contributes to shifting gender norms in the north-west. In 2022, 43% of HALO's employees were women, with 38% of operational positions and 54% of managerial positions filled by women.<sup>60</sup>

MAG has an institutional gender and diversity policy and implementation plan. MAG's community liaison, survey, and clearance activities take gender into account during the planning and implementation phases. These activities are guided by MAG's own SOPs and those of IMAS, and are implemented by gender and language balanced community liaison teams. All mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age.<sup>61</sup> In 2022, 18% of MAG's employees were women, with 17% of operational positions and 22% of managerial positions filled by women.<sup>62</sup> MAG's national mine action strategy and annual work plans integrate gender and diversity on a programme and beneficiary levels. Guided by its SOPs, MAG consults with women, children, ethnic, and minority groups in all its activities, and ensures these groups are consulted separately to identify diverse needs.<sup>63</sup> MAG is using mine action as a tool to advocate gender importance and encourage the employment of women in mine action. The number of female staff members has increased compared to previous years.<sup>64</sup>

Women made up 45% of the total NPA Syria programme workforce in 2023.<sup>65</sup> SCD has a gender and a diversity strategy in place. In 2022, SCD successfully trained and deployed 12 female survey operators, with two volunteers joining one of each of the six SCD NTS teams. In 2023, SCD will train and deploy at least six female clearance operators. As at April 2023, SCD was in the final stages of recruiting candidates, with a clearance course expected in July 2023. After the course, the female clearance operators will deploy within three of SCD's six clearance teams. SCD intends to train and deploy additional female volunteers in 2024 as and when replacement staff are needed to backfill both survey and clearance teams. In 2022, about 11% of SCD's total employees are female, and 11% of managerial and operational positions were filled by women.<sup>66</sup> SCD teams are trained to gather information from a variety of sources and to interview and liaise with all segments within a community, including those from ethnic and minority groups. The names, gender, and age of each focal point and interviewee are recorded as part of the survey reporting process and are reviewed by the management team to ensure that the process remains as inclusive as possible. SCD volunteers are recruited from the communities they serve and thus reflect the various ethnic and minority groups which reside in their area of operations. SCD has procedures and policies in place to ensure that individuals do not face discrimination due to their ethnicity, religion, or sex.<sup>67</sup>

UNMAS has a gender and diversity strategy, and gender and diversity considerations are addressed in implementation of activities. During survey and liaison activities, UNMAS teams usually consult with community focal points or representatives from communities and interact with women and children living in close vicinity to the working sites.<sup>68</sup>

UNMAS risk education teams are fully gender balanced, and its clearance contractor, the Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), has integrated gender and diversity elements in its work. A diverse set of indicators, including sex and age of victims and beneficiaries, are used to evaluate prioritisation. In 2022, women made up 57% of all UNMAS Syria staff, with 57% of operational and 33% of managerial positions.<sup>69</sup> UNMAS has deployed to communities with ethnic and minority groups (Druze in Sweida for instance), and engaged with all community members to gather feedback.<sup>70</sup>

59 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023.

60 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023.

61 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

62 Email from Akram Alsaedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

63 Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

64 Email from Akram Alsaedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

65 Email from Claus Nielsen, Programme Manager, NPA, 30 June 2023.

66 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 27 March 2023.

67 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March and 15 June 2022.

68 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

69 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

70 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

UNMAS's context analysis appeared to indicate that ethnic/minority groups are not affected by explosive ordnance contamination differently, but rather that all population groups are vulnerable regardless of ethnicity.<sup>71</sup> But Mine Action Review believes that minority groups loyal to the Syrian government are significantly less affected by CMR contamination by virtue of their lesser exposure to the attacks carried out by the Syrian and Russian armed forces.

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

DCA employs an IM GIS coordinator and an officer, using Aeronautical Reconnaissance Coverage Geographic Information (ArcGis), Environmental Systems Research Institutions (ESRI), and Survey123 for its information management. Survey and clearance data is collected using Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) data collection forms and shared monthly with iMMAP, which helps build a clear and accurate contamination mapping across the north-east of Syria. The ongoing iMMAP NTS project is expected to improve the accuracy of existing explosive ordnance contamination data, enabling better prioritisation of subsequent clearance activities.<sup>72</sup>

HALO uses the IMSMA data collection forms and regularly reports to the north-west MASC and the Office of the UNHCR-led Gaziantep coordination response. HALO uses Kobo to collect NTS data, as well as pre- and post-EORE survey to monitor the quality of sessions and knowledge increase of participants. In 2023, Kobo forms will be used as well for pre- and post-clearance survey to measure the impact of mechanical clearance. Data collection tools are reviewed regularly by HALO's Syria information management (IM) staff and the HALO global monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL) team. Data visualisation and mapping tools are also being regularly developed and improved. At the MASC level, HALO collects data from operators through forward planning and the 4Ws tools, using protection cluster templates. In 2023, the 4Ws data collection tool became the 5Ws data collection tool as more data and details have been added to the template, such as more locations, more detailed activities, and sub-activities.<sup>73</sup>

MAG continues to use the online server, SharePoint, to preserve and archive its mine action data. In October 2022, MAG established the Global MAG Operational Management Information System (OMIS). Data is collected from the field through the Survey 123 mobile data application, using the IMSMA form then verified by technical managers through the online OMIS portal, which is linked to the ArcGis maps,

and then validated by the IM department. MAG continues to develop and improve OMIS, and started to use the satellite imagery for more accurate coordinates of the identified hazardous areas in 2023. MAG shares its data with the iMMAP on monthly basis, which is part of the protection working group coordination tools. MAG also shares its operations plans with road maps with the NESMAO on a weekly basis.<sup>74</sup>

iMMAP has been providing mine action coordination support and information management services in compliance with the IMAS in the north-east since 2017. The project's primary goal was providing a comprehensive picture of explosive hazard contamination and progress of intervention measures to stakeholders.<sup>75</sup>

Despite concerted efforts to establish a centralised database representing the whole of Syria, SCD reported that its survey and clearance data continue not to be accepted in the north-west MASC mine action database and the 4W<sup>76</sup> reporting mechanism. This is reportedly because SCD's application to join the protection coordination cluster had not yet been granted, with membership of the cluster a pre-condition for active membership in the MASC. SCD remains ready to provide data to the MASC, which it was unable to do under an observer status.<sup>77</sup> It is of course important that all relevant data on explosive ordnance contamination, survey efforts, and clearance operations are captured in a central information management database.

SCD uses Survey123 for data collection IMSMA Core for data keeping and management. SCD continues to employ a multitier validation process for all activities (survey, clearance, and EORE), with each report being checked by three individuals, at increasing levels of seniority. Furthermore, at the end of each month, the data for all tasks is compiled and a final check carried out to ensure no errors are present.<sup>78</sup>

71 Ibid.

72 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023.

73 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023.

74 Emails from Akram Alsaedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; and Najat El Hamri, MAG, 3 July 2023.

75 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", September 2021–April 2022, p. 4.

76 The 4W is an excel-based reporting matrix that feeds into the UN HRP. The term 4W stands for Who (which operator) is doing What, Where, and When. It is used as both a coordination and planning tool.

77 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022 and 27 March 2023.

78 Ibid.



In 2021, UNMAS completed the establishment of IMSMA Core as the national mine action information management system in Damascus, although it continues to have another IMSMA database outside of Damascus for reasons of data confidentiality.<sup>79</sup> UNMAS manages the database, collating explosive ordnance data from partners across Syria in a central database. To improve data quality, UNMAS regularly provides training in Arabic and English to mine action organisations, explaining reporting procedures, data handling, and technicalities. UNMAS further collects mine action data through the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-led humanitarian response tracking.<sup>80</sup> Since its accreditation in 2020, the ACHDE has been providing monthly reports on areas worked and items found to UNMAS IMSMA.<sup>81</sup> It is believed, however, that clearance by Syrian and Russian forces largely goes unreported.

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## PLANNING AND TASKING

Syria does not have a national mine action strategic plan. Mine action is fragmented and has a long way to develop into a coherent national response. Different actors have set different priorities for survey and clearance as dictated by the circumstances and the authorities under which they operate.

In the north-east of Syria, there is neither a central tasking and prioritisation body to issue tasks nor a strategic mine action plan, but operators have their own plans.<sup>82</sup> DCA has a five-year global and country office strategy, which is reviewed annually.<sup>83</sup> In 2022, following the capacity building provided by MAG, NESMAO started to follow MAG's prioritisation criteria. The prioritisation criteria are the following: persons or animals injured or killed by landmines or UXO spots during the past 24 months; IEDs, landmines or UXO spots found; blocked irrigated agricultural fields, pasture lands, non-agricultural areas, housing, roads, or infrastructure; the number of the population using the land; and the presence of persons with disabilities among the population who use the land.<sup>84</sup>

The north-west of Syria has no central tasking or prioritisation body. HALO uses data collected from its previous community assessments and NTS to identify high-priority communities for EOD, focusing on removing contamination from agricultural areas to support economic activities, sustainable livelihoods, and mitigate food insecurity. Incident data shows that a large percentage of detonations affect adult men and that two of the most at-risk

occupations are farming and herding. HALO engages with communities where it conducts EOD to obtain their informed consent and considers requests from the local authorities for future interventions.<sup>85</sup>

SCD prioritises tasks based upon a number of factors which ultimately determine the level of risk to the community. These factors include the type of item, its location (whether close to inhabited buildings or blocking vital infrastructure), the number of items, as well as logistical information, such as the location of the task relative to the clearance team, and whether there are multiple tasks within the same area. Following an assessment of these factors, tasks that are deemed to pose the highest risk to the community are prioritised. At present, the number of tasks identified through survey does not yet exceed the operational capacity of the clearance teams, meaning that once items are identified they are cleared within one or two days, thus reducing the need to prioritise.<sup>86</sup>

UNMAS continued its survey and clearance tasks in 2022 in high priority areas in Rural Damascus based on the agreed list of priority locations that it had discussed with partners and the Government of Syria. UNMAS also follows its own internal country programme strategy and annual work plans, which are done in consultation with its partners. Tasks are prioritised and selected based on a set of criteria, including severity of humanitarian needs, presence of humanitarian partners, delivery of humanitarian activities, IDP flows, and historic data on explosive incidents.<sup>87</sup>

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79 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

80 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

81 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.

82 Emails from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; and Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March 2023.

83 Email from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March 2023.

84 Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

85 Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022 and 10 April 2023.

86 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022 and 27 March 2023.

87 Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023.

## LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

### STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

There are no formal NMAS in Syria, but in 2020, UNMAS drafted NMAS and associated guidelines and submitted them to the Syrian government for its review and approval. Despite having received informal positive feedback, no official response had been given on the proposed NMAS as at April 2023.<sup>88</sup> In its statement as an observer to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Twentieth Meeting of State Party (20MSP) in 2022, Syria stated that: "Technical standards and guidelines have been developed that will define the operational framework for all mine action activities in Syria, in line with the International Mine Action Standards."<sup>89</sup>

In the non-government-controlled north-east and north-west of Syria, local authorities do not endorse the Damascus-developed NMAS. As a result, most of the operators work to their own SOPs. For example, DCA works in accordance with its global SOPs which derive from IMAS, and applies best practice guidelines from the Geneva

International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).<sup>90</sup> In the absence of a formal land release policy, a signing of a handover land-release certificate happens between DCA, the landowner, and NESMAO. This process was introduced to NESMAO by DCA.<sup>91</sup>

MAG Syria continues to work to its own established SOPs which are in line with IMAS and the needs in the north-east. MAG's own SOPs were last updated in December 2021 to align with MAG's new Global Technical Standards. There was no need for the revision of MAG's SOPs in 2022. MAG started a capacity-building plan on NMAS development for NESMAO and plans to elaborate NMAS in the long-term.<sup>92</sup>

HALO increased its efforts to refine its quality assurance (QA) mechanisms through stronger integration of field teams using Kobo software for mobile data collection.<sup>93</sup> SCD teams also operate according to IMAS for clearance, survey, and risk education.<sup>94</sup>

### OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Mine action in Syria has been conducted by a wide range of organisations, largely determined by the circumstances and forces controlling the region at a given time. In areas under government control these have included mainly Russian and Syrian military engineers and civil defence organisations.<sup>95</sup>

DCA has been present in Syria since 2015. Due to the frequent shifts and outbreaks of violence, its Syria country offices have closed and reopened several times. Its staff were relocated to Türkiye, Iraq, and then back to Syria in 2020.<sup>96</sup> In January 2022, DCA consolidated its capacity to Raqqa governate. This included all humanitarian mine action staff: four manual clearance teams, international technical staff, project support staff, and the existing mechanical assets. DCA continues survey and clearance operations from its established Forward Operating Base in Raqqa city. In 2023, DCA has tentatively extended its outreach to Deir Ezzor where previous humanitarian interventions have been hindered by security and other political, social, and economic obstacles. DCA's manual teams cover both TS and NTS. They are supported by a mechanical team which consists of two armoured excavators, two front-end loaders, two dump trucks, one bobcat, and nine mechanical and maintenance staff. Between February and September 2022, the number of clearance teams was reduced to two due to a shortage in funding.<sup>97</sup> DCA is continuing its localisation efforts by extending the existing agreement with its local partner: Roj

Mine Control Organisation (RMCO). This partnership has had unique benefits in terms of reaching difficult locations and sensitive communities. In 2022, the partnership was centred on EORE activities. As at mid 2023, the focus had shifted to implementing the iMMAP NTS project where DCA/ RMCO are working in the hard-to-access areas of Deir Ezzor and Kobani.<sup>98</sup>

Operating in the north-east, ITF, which had started phase I of its explosive hazards clearance and EORE with agricultural recovery in the north-east in 2021, has completed the second phase of the programme in August 2022. Clearance operations were conducted in several locations in the north-east, particularly in contaminated agricultural lands that were no longer being used due to contamination.<sup>99</sup>

HALO, which has been present in Syria since 2016, is operational in the north-west of Syria in the opposition-controlled territories of Idlib and Aleppo. HALO conducts NTS, EOD, risk education, and victim assistance. In July 2022, after receiving permission to conduct NTS and EOD for the first time in Idlib and western Aleppo in areas controlled by the Syria Salvation Government (SSG), HALO trained and deployed two teams composed of four members, including two women, for NTS and EOD spot tasks since July-August 2022. In February 2023, HALO's EOD teams received authorisation to use explosives for demolitions. This

88 Ibid.

89 Statement of Syria, APMBC Twentieth Meeting of States Parties, Geneva, 21–25 November 2022.

90 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.

91 Email from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March 2023.

92 Emails from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022; and Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

93 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022.

94 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

95 "Russian military boosts qualified Syrian sappers to demine war-ravaged country", Tass, 9 January 2018.

96 Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.

97 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023.

98 Email from Kevin Straker, DCA, 28 June 2023.

99 ITF, "Annual Report 2022", at: <https://bit.ly/3o5ulMO>, p. 134.

has been a major step forward in its operational capacity as previously HALO had to rely on burning techniques, which limited the types and quantity of devices that could be disposed of. HALO is planning to conduct mechanical clearance using an excavator in the north-west. The excavator was delivered to Idlib in January 2023, and as at April 2023, had nearly finished being armoured. HALO intends to conduct mechanical clearance by a team of four personnel that will be extended to five or six if additional funding is secured.<sup>100</sup>

MAG has been operational in the north-east of Syria since 2016, following a forced suspension of its activities in October 2019, it resumed its activities in the north-east in late 2020.<sup>101</sup> In 2022, MAG operated in Al-Hassakeh (north-east) and Raqqa governorates, conducting contamination survey, NTS, TS, risk education, training of community focal points, and clearance. MAG operated with six mine action teams, four multi-task teams, 20 community liaison teams, and two mechanical teams with seven machines in 2022: two Scarifiers, two Tracked Excavators, and three Bobcats. MAG established a mechanical workshop and a training centre in Al-Hassakeh governorate, which is the main centre for mine action capacity building. It also established a smaller training centre in Raqqa. MAG capacity remained unchanged for the first four months of 2023, and in May, MAG decreased its EORE capacity to 50% but maintained the same clearance capacity.<sup>102</sup>

Following the signature of an MoU with the Syrian government in 21 December 2021,<sup>103</sup> NPA received accreditation and completed its inception phase in 2022. The inception phase included the recruitment of national key staff, setting up of NPA's permanent office in Damascus, identification of future working areas, recruitment, and training. The operational training took place in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, and as at April 2023, NPA was deploying four multi-skilled clearance teams and NTS teams in these governorates.<sup>104</sup> As at July 2023, NPA was deploying two multi-skilled operational teams and two NTS teams within the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk (at the outskirts of Damascus), in addition to two multi-skilled operational teams and three NTS teams deployed within the sub-district of Al-Nashrabiyyeh (Rural Damascus).<sup>105</sup> A local organisation, RMCO, was established in 2016, and was conducting clearance in north-east Syria but reportedly sustained heavy casualties among its deminers attempting clearance of improvised devices.<sup>106</sup> In 2022, RMCO partnered with DCA for the provision of EORE. As noted above, the two

organisations extended their partnership in 2023 with the focus on NTS activities in hard-to-reach areas.<sup>107</sup>

In the north-west, HALO and HI carried out survey activities. HALO and SCD were the only two organisations that carried out clearance and/or EOD.<sup>108</sup>

The SCD was operational in Aleppo, and Idlib governorates (in the north and north-west of the country), and continued to conduct surface level battle area clearance (BAC), NTS, EORE, and single item disposal. SCD encounters items that are predominantly CMR, but its teams also dispose of anti-personnel mines when they are encountered. SCD has maintained its operational capacity of six NTS and six clearance teams in 2022. All SCD teams are trained to deliver risk education.<sup>109</sup>

SCD mine action activities were temporarily suspended in the aftermath of the earthquake as SCD staff assisted in the wider response. SCD teams participated in urban search and rescue operations, provided medical care and specialist support when hazardous items were discovered or suspected to be present. Since then, SCD has prioritised the delivery of EORE due to the large number of people displaced by the earthquake, and the likelihood of families moving to or travelling through unfamiliar areas.<sup>110</sup>

UNMAS signed an MoU with the Syrian government in July 2018. After meeting the then Deputy Foreign Minister, Faisal Mikdad in Damascus in October 2019, UNMAS Director Agnes Marcaillou reported the government had agreed to the involvement of international demining organisations. They would be registered by the government and coordinated by UNMAS.<sup>111</sup>

UNMAS reported the lack of qualified in-country operators as one of the major challenges to progress in mine action in 2020. This led UNMAS to hire its own UN personnel to conduct the explosive ordnance assessment survey, which normally would be conducted through implementing partners.<sup>112</sup> To facilitate access for clearance operators, UNMAS conducted a global pre-qualification exercise for Syria. Ten mine clearance operators from a wide range of countries were pre-qualified to participate in UNMAS procurement for clearance operations.<sup>113</sup> As at April 2023, two operators: the ACHDE and NPA had been accredited by UNMAS for conducting mine action activities in government-controlled areas. Another three organisations, DRC, SHIELD, and Global Clearance Solutions, were undergoing desk accreditation as at May 2023.<sup>114</sup>

100 Emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022 and 10 April 2023.

101 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

102 Emails from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; and Najat El Hamri, MAG, 3 July 2023.

103 NPA, New Humanitarian Mine Action in Syria, at: <https://bit.ly/3MHNXTF>.

104 Email from Claus Nielsen, Programme Manager, NPA, 12 April 2023.

105 Emails from Claus Nielsen, NPA, 12 April and 30 June 2023.

106 S. Kajjo, "Landmine removal crucial in post-IS Syria", Voice of America, 3 April 2019; and interview with operators, Erbil, Iraq, May 2019.

107 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023.

108 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023.

109 Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022 and 27 March 2023.

110 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 27 March 2023.

111 Statement by Agnes Marcaillou, Director, UNMAS, to the UN Security Council, 24 October 2019.

112 Email from UNMAS, 30 July 2021.

113 The ten operators originate from Afghanistan, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates.

114 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

In late 2019, UNMAS identified 50 locations in Rural Damascus, Daraa, and Homs for survey and clearance operations. All areas were classified as level three or above on the humanitarian response plan and protection sector severity scale. In February 2020, UNMAS shared the list of these 50 recommended areas/sub-districts with the Syrian government for its acceptance and granting access for the explosive ordnance assessment. Among the 50 locations, it was jointly agreed with government of Syria to start the assessment in eight locations of high humanitarian priority, also taking into consideration access and logistics questions in Rural Damascus and Homs.<sup>115</sup> In December 2021, UNMAS started the pilot clearance project of the priority area of

western Ghouta, in the outskirts of the capital Damascus. Two ACHDE clearance teams started BAC in Daraya (western Ghouta).<sup>116</sup>

UNMAS's operational capacity for the first half of 2022 was two explosive ordnance assessment teams, which consisted of seven TS personnel, and two NTS personnel. Following the completion of project funding in June 2022, the teams work was discontinued. UNMAS does not expect changes in its operational capacity in 2023. UNMAS opened a sub-office in Aleppo in 2021, which then closed in May 2022 due to the lack of funding. The ACHDE deployed two clearance teams of 18 deminers.<sup>117</sup>

## LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Syria's continuing instability prevented progress towards a coordinated national programme of mine action. Comprehensive information on outcomes of survey and clearance in any area was unavailable.

In the north-east of Syria, MAG destroyed a total of 46 submunitions and 35 items of UXO in Al-Hassakeh and Raqqa governorates during spot tasks. MAG released a total area of 2.42km<sup>2</sup> of contaminated land through mechanical clearing, pressing 89,962m<sup>3</sup> of rubble, and carrying out 383 spot tasks. No CMR was destroyed as a result of these activities.<sup>118</sup> Since the beginning of its operation in 2016, MAG has released more than 43km<sup>2</sup> and removed over 78,000 items of explosive ordnance in the north-east of Syria.<sup>119</sup>

From June 2021 to August 2022, as part of its explosive hazards clearance and EORE with agricultural recovery project in the north-east of Syria, ITF surveyed, cleared, and subsequently handed back to the local community 5.64km<sup>2</sup> of land that was previously contaminated with explosive hazards.<sup>120</sup> It is not clear if how many of the explosive hazards were CMR, if any.

According to iMMAP, between September 2021 and April 2022, a total of 3,654 explosive devices were found and destroyed in the north-east of Syria, bringing the total to date to 113,787 devices, among which there were 16,807 landmines, 90,756 items of UXO, and 6,224 IEDs for the whole period from 2017.<sup>121</sup> It is not known what proportion of the explosive ordnance were CMR, if at all.

In the north-west, HALO conducted EOD in 17 communities in the districts of Ariha and Idlib (Idlib governorate). A total of 86 items were disposed of through 54 call-outs, including 14 submunitions.<sup>122</sup>

The SCD destroyed a total of 440 submunitions in Aleppo and Idlib governorates in north-west Syria during EOD call-outs. SCD disposed of a further 512 items of UXOs that were not submunitions in 2022.<sup>123</sup>

In April 2022, UNMAS obtained approval for the use of explosives, and conducted the first bulk demolition of items in Rural Damascus. This was the first demolition entirely conducted, controlled, and quality checked by mine action actors in a government-controlled area of Syria. In 2022, a total of 3.26km<sup>2</sup> of land was cleared, of which 1.95km<sup>2</sup> was of surface area and 1.31km<sup>2</sup> of sub-surface area. A total of 10 submunitions and 264 other items of UXO were destroyed during the clearance. In December 2022, the first plot of cleared land in Daraya was officially handed over to local authorities.<sup>124</sup>

115 Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 2.

116 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

117 Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April and 30 June 2023.

118 Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

119 Email from Najat El Hamri, MAG, 3 July 2023.

120 ITF, "Annual Report 2022", p. 134.

121 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", September 2021 – April 2022, P. 15.

122 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023.

123 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 27 March 2023.

124 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023.

**Table 1: Submunitions destroyed in Syria in 2022<sup>125</sup>**

Governorate	Operator	Submunitions destroyed
North-east (non-government controlled)	MAG <sup>126</sup>	46
North-west (non-government controlled)	HALO <sup>127</sup>	14
	SCD <sup>128</sup>	440
Centre and South (government-controlled)	UNMAS <sup>129</sup>	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>510</b>

In its statement to the 20MSP to the APMBC in November 2022, Syria stated that its armed forces removed more than 50,000 explosive devices, 84,000 unexploded shells, 45,000 miscellaneous mines, and cleared more than 550km<sup>2</sup> of mines and ammunitions. Syria described the “The occupation, the illegal foreign presence in some areas of Syria, and the use of mines and improvised devices by armed terrorist groups in those areas, constitute obstacles to access and clearance of all mine-contaminated areas.” In the same statement, Syria called on an “immediate and unconditional lifting of western unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria, and for supporting efforts to cleanse its entire territory of the evils of mines”.<sup>130</sup>

125 Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023; Damian O'Brien, HALO, 10 April 2023; Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; and Michael Edwards, SCD, 27 March 2023.

126 All submunitions destroyed by MAG were in Raqqa and Al-Hassakeh governorates.

127 HALO conducted its EOD operations in Idlib district (Sarmin, Idlib, Maaret Tamsrin, and Bennish sub-districts), and Ariha (Ariha sub-district).

128 All the 440 submunitions destroyed by SCD were located in Aleppo and Idlib governorate in the following sub-districts: Azaz (11), Al-Bab (14), Al-Maara (2), Ariha (51), As-Suqaylabiyah (2), Harim (11), Idlib (143), Jebel Saman (80), and Jisr Ash-shughur (126).

129 All submunitions destroyed by UNMAS were located in Rural Damascus governorate (Daraya sub-district).

130 Statement of Syria, APMBC Twentieth Meeting of States Parties, Geneva, 21–25 November 2022.