

## KEY DATA

### ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION:

UNKNOWN, BUT AT LEAST 20KM<sup>2</sup> IN THE NORTH-EAST

AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2023

**3.10** KM<sup>2</sup>

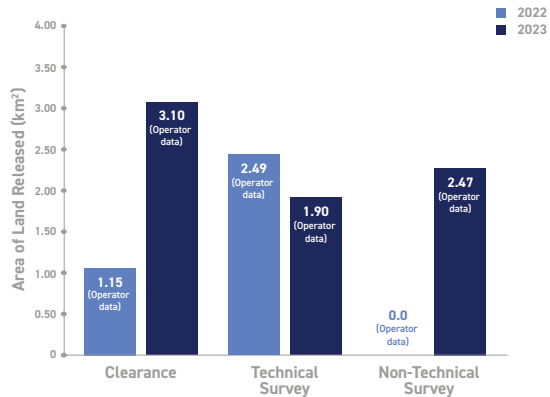
(OPERATOR DATA)

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2023

**69**

(INCLUDING 15 DESTROYED IN SPOT TASKS) (OPERATOR DATA)

## LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



## KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The conflict in Syria remains unresolved, with a fragile ceasefire in place, ongoing regional tensions, and the country still facing significant humanitarian and security challenges, including widespread landmine contamination. Syria recorded the highest number of mine casualties worldwide for the third year in a row. Despite the urgent need for mine action, efforts remain fragmented and underfunded, with declining financial support expected to reduce mine action capacity in 2024. Although a comprehensive nationwide survey of landmine contamination is lacking, subregional mapping efforts are ongoing. From June 2023 to January 2024, 3iSolution/iMMAP, in collaboration with a number of international partners, completed a contamination and impact survey in north-east Syria, identifying 749 hazardous areas covering over 38km<sup>2</sup> and containing different forms of explosive ordnance (EO). From August 2023 to July 2024, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) deployed two non-technical survey (NTS) teams covering more than 70km<sup>2</sup> and identified 90 hazardous areas containing EO. In 2023, three international operators conducted clearance of mined areas, with The HALO Trust (HALO) mechanically clearing an anti-personnel (AP) mined area for the first time in Syria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria should undertake never again to use AP mines and should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should clear mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Syria should undertake a baseline survey of AP mine contamination in areas it controls.
- Syria should formally establish a national mine action centre and national mine action authority.
- A centralised mine action information management database should be established. All mine action operators in Syria should ensure that survey and clearance data are recorded and safeguarded in a digital format in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

## DEMINEING CAPACITY

### MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- The interministerial Mine Action Coordination Committee (headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs)

### NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Engineering Unit of the Syrian Army
- Safety Solutions, operating in government-controlled areas
- The Syria Civil Defence (SCD), also known as the White Helmets, operating in the north-west
- Roj Mine Control Organization (RMC), operating in the north-east
- Reachout, operating in the north-east
- iMFAD, based in Türkiye

### INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), operating in government-controlled areas

- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), operating in government-controlled areas
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), operating in government-controlled areas
- The HALO Trust (HALO), operating in the north-west
- DanChurchAid (DCA), operating in the north-east
- Humanity & Inclusion (HI), operating in the north-east
- ITF Enhancing Human Security (ITF), operating in the north-east
- Mines Advisory Group (MAG), operating in the north-east

### OTHER ACTORS

- Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP/3iSolution)
- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)

## UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Syria is heavily contaminated by mines and mines of an improvised nature used extensively by parties to the country's 13-year-old conflict. It also has mined areas left by a succession of Arab-Israeli wars since 1948. The Syrian government laid mines along borders with Türkiye and Lebanon in 2012 with Turkish authorities claiming that up to 715,000 mines had been planted along Syria's border with Türkiye.<sup>1</sup> Syrian government forces also placed landmines with a view to obstructing the advance of opposition fighters; on illegal migration routes; and, along with Hezbollah forces, in areas subjected to siege, such as in Madaya and al-Zabadani (Rural Damascus).<sup>2</sup>

Non-State armed groups (NSAGs) also laid mines, including around besieged towns such as Kafarayya and al-Fouaa in 2015–18.<sup>3</sup> In Raqqa, where 80% of the city has been destroyed, rubble was mixed with booby-traps left by the parties to the armed conflict.<sup>4</sup> Retreating Islamic States forces emplaced huge numbers of AP mines of an improvised nature and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The full extent of AP mine contamination is unknown. No countrywide survey of contamination has yet been conducted with access restricted in many areas by the fragmented state of security, although the north-east has seen more extensive

survey with several organisations having undertaken NTS since 2016 across four governorates under the control of the Syrian Defence Forces.<sup>5</sup> However, intensive mine use has resulted in significant humanitarian impact across the country. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that as from March 2011 to April 2024, 3,086 civilians, including 794 children, had been killed by landmines in Syria. It is estimated that a further 10,400 civilians have been injured by mines since the beginning of the uprising in 2011.<sup>6</sup>

The 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview issued by the United Nations (UN) estimated that a third of communities across Syria were affected by some form of explosive contamination, with the highest percentages in Quneitra, As-Sweida, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Idleb, Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor, Dar'a, and Damascus governorates.<sup>7</sup> Data on the types of destroyed mines provided by operators confirm that many AP mines used in Syria are of an improvised nature. For example, all AP mines found and destroyed by Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and DanChurchAid (DCA) in 2023 were of an improvised nature.<sup>8</sup> Many of these mines have acquired local names from the way they were crafted (e.g. the ruler, the rosary, the stone). Other organisations or media outlets documented use of Russian-made PMN-2 and POMZ AP mines.<sup>9</sup>

- 1 Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Army planting banned landmines", 13 March 2012, at: <http://bit.ly/2Ybz9rK>; "Thousands of landmines planted along Turkish-Syrian border", *Middle East Monitor*, 10 February 2014, at: <https://bit.ly/3YBt705>.
- 2 Physicians for Human Rights and the Syrian American Medical Society, "Madaya: Portrait of a Syrian town under siege", July 2016, at: <https://bit.ly/3MKrpE7>, p. 6; Syria Direct, "Walking in the darkness: Hunger drives the most desperate to risk Madaya land mines", 18 April 2016, at: <https://bit.ly/3ZsrmV0>; and Syrian Association for Citizens Dignity, "The displacement of Madaya and Zabadani, the complex crime and prospect of return (translation from original Arabic)", 5 May 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3XKV0na>.
- 3 The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), "On the International Day for Mines Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions", Report, pp. 3 and 17, at: <https://bit.ly/43Vp2UQ>; and "Inside Foua: A Shi'a town in the eye of the Syrian storm", *Middle East Eye*, 19 August 2018.
- 4 Humanity & Inclusion (HI), "Syria: it will take at least two generations to rebuild", 25 February 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3fPFoaf>.
- 5 Email from Greg Crowther, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), 4 October 2023.
- 6 SNHR, "On the International Day for Mines Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: We are still discovering new areas contaminated with landmines in Syria, with more deaths and injuries recorded across the country", Statement, p. 4, at: <https://bit.ly/46RvSy2>.
- 7 Syria 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview, February 2024, OCHA, at: <https://bit.ly/4erk3St>.
- 8 Emails from Adesh Singh, Acting HMA OM, DCA, 16 May 2024; and Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.
- 9 SNHR, "On the International Day for Mines Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions", Report, p. 6; See also The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, "Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing", Report, April 2021, pp. 11–15.

The Landmine Monitor reported that Syria recorded the highest number of new mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) casualties in 2022, 834, for the third consecutive year. Moreover, due to inconsistency in data availability, casualty figures may even be a considerable undercount.<sup>10</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%) communities reported the presence of ERW. Of the assessed communities, 57% reported the presence of AP mines, 46% reported cluster munition remnants (CMR), and 25% other EO.<sup>11</sup>

## GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

Working from the Syrian capital, Damascus, UNMAS conducted an explosive ordnance assessment team (EOAT) survey in Rural Damascus (South) between August 2020 and June 2022 and identified 1,141 items of EO.<sup>12</sup>

Between August 2023 and July 2024, NTS teams deployed by UNMAS to priority locations in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, and Lattakia completed 99 NTS tasks, identified 2,489 explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) spot tasks, and marked 90 hazardous areas, covering more than 70km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>13</sup>

## NORTH-WEST

In 2023, HALO added 117,660m<sup>2</sup> of previously unrecorded AP mined area to its database.<sup>14</sup> HALO obtained permission to conduct NTS in Idleb and Western Aleppo in February 2022 in areas controlled by the Syria Salvation Government (an alternative opposition authority). HALO's NTS teams assessed 25 communities and identified 158,000m<sup>2</sup> of hazardous areas across six confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) and six suspected hazardous areas (SHAs). Of this total area, 138,000m<sup>2</sup> was mined area and the remaining 20,000m<sup>2</sup> contained a mix of EO.<sup>15</sup>

## NORTH-EAST

3iSolution/iMMAP, in partnership with DCA, Humanity & Inclusion (HI), and ITF Enhancing Human Security (ITF), and with contributions from MAG, completed a contamination and impact survey in north-east Syria from June 2023 to January 2024. A total of 29 specialised survey teams were deployed across the region to conduct NTS. A total of 2,223

initial communities were recorded in north-east Syria based on a system developed by the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Data were available for 1,489 communities of which 1,201 were surveyed and 288 had pre-existing Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) data. Of these, 432 communities (29%) were reported as impacted by explosive ordnance, with 749 hazardous areas identified, totalling over 38km<sup>2</sup>. It is expected that the true figure is actually higher as communities that were deemed inaccessible following a security assessment were excluded from the survey. Several districts, including Menbij, Deir Ez Zor, Al Mayadin, Raqqa, and Ras Al Ain, recorded extremely high levels of contamination, with more than half of their communities affected by EO.<sup>16</sup>

MAG has been conducting surveys across several governorates in the north-east of Syria since 2016. In 2023, MAG registered 2.73km<sup>2</sup> previously unknown AP mined area in the north-east.<sup>17</sup> In 2022, MAG had registered 2.57km<sup>2</sup> of mined area.<sup>18</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 Raqqa and Al-Hassakeh in the north-east. In a rapid assessment across the country by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) one month after the earthquake, mines and ERW were found in 13% of the locations visited.<sup>19</sup>

In the north-west of the country, HALO conducted a rapid protection assessment in February–March 2023 which identified EO in 42 earthquake-affected communities, affecting 730,000 people.<sup>20</sup> According to HI, it is extremely likely that many EO items that littered buildings, streets, and waterways have been moved because of the earthquake.<sup>21</sup> Weapons and ammunition 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>22</sup> MAG received information from the protection working group that the earthquake impact was lighter in the north-east than in the north-west.<sup>23</sup>

10 Landmine Monitor Report 2021, pp. 2, 42, and 45; Landmine Monitor Report 2022, pp. 3 and 20; and Landmine Monitor Report 2023, p. 53. See also Human Rights Watch, "It Was Really Hard to Protect Myself", 8 September 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/43VM1PU>.

11 ICRC and SARC, Mine Risk Needs Assessment and Education, PowerPoint presentation to the 24th NDM, 25 May 2021, slides 7–8.

12 Email from Joseph McCartan, Chief Mine Action Programme, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

13 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

14 Email from Damian O'Brien, Programme Manager, HALO, 27 May 2024.

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

16 3iSolution, HI, DCA, and ITF, "Explosive Ordnance contamination survey in Northeast Syria, May 2024", 9 July 2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3AyXjJM>.

17 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

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

19 OCHA, Data Friendly Space, and DEEP, "Syria Earthquake March 2023", 10 March 2023, p. 3.

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

21 HI, "Earthquakes may have moved explosive weapons contamination", accessed 21 May 2023 at: <https://bit.ly/41UA9ww>.

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

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

## OTHER EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE CONTAMINATION

Syria also has significant contamination from CMR and other ERW (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024* report on Syria for further information).

## NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no centralised national mine action authority or mine action centre in Syria. Mine action in Syria is coordinated by three response mechanisms which organise regular coordination meetings with stakeholders:<sup>24</sup>

- Damascus-based Mine Action Sub-Sector (MASS) coordinated by UNMAS;
- The north-west MASC coordinated by The HALO Trust; and
- The north-east Mine Action Working Group (MAWG), which sits under the protection working group in the NGO forum-led response coordinated by iMMAP.<sup>25</sup>

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

In government-controlled areas, an Interministerial National Mine Action Coordination Committee formed by presidential decree in 2019 is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFA). MoFA assigned a focal point for liaison with UNMAS for all mine action. UNMAS has been told that the committee meets on an ad-hoc basis as needed.<sup>26</sup>

Given the lack of critical national mine action structures, UNMAS liaises with the National Mine Action Coordination Committee, accredits clearance operators, and provides quality assurance (QA) on a de-facto basis.<sup>27</sup>

The UNMAS-coordinated, Damascus-based MASS convenes monthly, bringing together a diverse group of mine action partners—notably UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and commercial companies—to discuss key issues.<sup>28</sup> UNMAS sought US\$26 million for its mine action programme in Syria for 2024.<sup>29</sup> As at June, it had secured 15% (US\$4 million) of the funds it said it needed.<sup>30</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

In the north-west, mine action was coordinated by the MASC cross-border response from Amman, with discussions chaired by HALO.<sup>31</sup> Some 15 partners participate in the meetings, with the Syria Civil Defence (SCD) attending as an observer.<sup>32</sup> In early 2024, the MASC transitioned to a Working Group that includes all organisations working in mine action in the north-west. SCD became an active member of this group and was chosen as chair for a year. The group sits under the umbrella of the OCHA Protection Cluster.<sup>33</sup>

HALO works with the approval of the Syrian Salvation Government in Idlib and from the local Turkish authorities for its work across the border with Türkiye.<sup>34</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 due to the complexities of the operating context.<sup>35</sup> For example, the Turkish authorities do not permit the export of some EOD materials such as T-jets, nor do they allow operators to conduct NTS or EOD in northern Aleppo.<sup>36</sup> Funding remains a key challenge for operators.<sup>37</sup>

### NORTH-EAST

The local authorities of the north-east of Syria established a north-east Syria Mine Action Office (NESMAO, now called NESMAC) in 2021, although as a newly formed office its functioning capacity is limited.<sup>38</sup> MAG is supporting the capacity-building of NESMAC, and in 2023, representatives from the Office attended its technical courses.<sup>39</sup> According to MAG, efficient mine action in the north-east faced significant challenges during the year. In May, a brief border closure, even for emergency evacuations, forced expatriate staff to leave the country, suspending operations. Sporadic security

24 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.

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

26 Ibid. According to Syria's statement to the APMB 20MSP, "a National Committee on Demining was established in June [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.

27 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

28 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

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

30 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

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

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

33 Emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; and Sami Mohammad, Mine Action Programme Coordinator, SCD, 24 May 2024.

34 Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 and 17 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022 and 27 May 2024.

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

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

37 Emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; and Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024.

38 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", October 2022 - March 2023, p. 15.

39 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

incidents intermittently halted activities. Funding constraints further complicated efforts for humanitarian mine action actors in the region.<sup>40</sup>

In 2023 and early 2024, DCA faced several challenges to efficient mine action in north-east Syria. Heightened security concerns, including tribal disputes in Deir-ez-Zor, restricted access to various target communities, hindering the movement of survey teams. In May 2023, the closure of the NES/KRI border crossing forced DCA to temporarily relocate all international staff to Erbil, where they supported national

staff remotely. Additionally, DCA encountered issues with ERW storage facilities, relying on a temporary storage unit at their secured Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Ar-Raqqa. When this facility neared capacity, explosive ordnance was transported to DCA's local partner Roj Mine Control Organization (RMCO) in Al-Hassakeh, which has a larger, purpose-built storage facility.<sup>41</sup>

iMMAP reported that as of March 2023, no mine action operators in the north-east had met their required levels of funding and that funding levels were critical.<sup>42</sup>

## GENDER AND DIVERSITY

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

**Table 1: Gender composition of operators in 2023<sup>43</sup>**

Operator	Total staff	Women staff	Total managerial or supervisory staff	Women in managerial or supervisory positions	Total operational staff	Women in operational positions
UNMAS	16	7 (44%)	4	2 (50%)	3	2 (67%)
NPA	56	23 (41%)	6	1 (17%)	38	16 (42%)
HALO	55	19 (35%)	15	4 (27%)	34	10 (29%)
SCD	3,246	419 (13%)	630	88 (14%)	2,616	331 (13%)
MAG	229	44 (19%)	40	6 (15%)	*144	*36 (25%)
DCA	65	12 (18%)	7	1 (14%)	58	11 (19%)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,667</b>	<b>524 (14%)</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>102 (15%)</b>	<b>2,893</b>	<b>406 (14%)</b>

\* Managerial employees included.

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

UNMAS has a gender and diversity strategy, and gender and diversity considerations are addressed in implementation of activities.<sup>44</sup> Its survey and clearance contractors, the Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE) and Safety Solutions, have integrated gender and diversity elements in their work. A diverse set of indicators, including sex and age of victims and beneficiaries, are used to evaluate prioritisation.<sup>45</sup> In 2023, women made up 44% of all UNMAS Syria staff, with 42% of operational and 16% of managerial positions.<sup>46</sup> NPA has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan in place. Women made up 41% of the total NPA Syria programme workforce in 2023.<sup>47</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

HALO's field teams typically include at least two women, including in EOD, where two female staff are certified to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) Level 1. HALO's employment policy promotes non-discrimination, gender equality, and diversity. Female staff have access to female-friendly spaces in HALO's office, as per local cultural norms. HALO provides women with opportunities for training in technical field roles to recognised international standards, offering transferable skills and enhancing their earning potential. In 2023, 35% of HALO's total employees were female with 29% of managerial and operational positions filled by women.<sup>48</sup>

40 Ibid.

41 Email from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

42 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", October 2022 – March 2023, p. 15.

43 Emails from Chris Tierney, Deputy Country Director, NPA, 17 June 2024; Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024; Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024; Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024; and Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024.

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

45 Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 30 April 2023; and Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

46 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

47 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

48 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024.

SCD has a gender and a diversity strategy, and policies are in place to prevent discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or sex.<sup>49</sup> In 2023, SCD trained and deployed six female clearance operators who were deployed in three of SCD's six clearance teams in 2024.<sup>50</sup> SCD recruits volunteers from the communities they serve, reflecting local ethnic and minority groups. In 2023, about 13% of SCD's total employees were female with 14% of managerial and operational positions filled by women.<sup>51</sup>

#### NORTH-EAST

DCA has a country-specific gender and diversity policy and implementation plan in addition to its global gender and diversity policy. All national staff recruitment is done through candidate lists put forward by NESMAC as specified in the memorandum of understanding (MoU). Although DCA asks for gender-balanced candidate lists for all positions, such conditions are seldom met. Despite challenges in finding female candidates, DCA has maintained gender diversity

in operational positions, including having the first female Explosive Hazard Search Team Leader and female Assistant Team Leader, and all its Explosive Hazard Search teams are mixed gender. Support staff also include an equal number of female employees in roles such as GIS officer and interpreters. DCA's commitment to broader diversity ensures its teams come from various ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the communities they serve and enhancing the effectiveness of its humanitarian efforts. In 2022, 18% of DCA's employees were women, with 19% and 14% of operational positions and managerial positions, respectively, filled by women.<sup>52</sup>

MAG has an institutional gender and diversity policy and implementation plan.<sup>53</sup> MAG consults separately with women, children, ethnic, and minority groups to identify diverse needs.<sup>54</sup> In 2023, MAG conducted gender and diversity workshops and formed a committee to lead these initiatives. In 2023, 19% of its employees were women including 15% of operational positions and 25% of managerial positions.<sup>55</sup>

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

UNMAS's partnerships with implementing partners follow guidelines that include environmental requirements. UNMAS applies the IMAS 10.70 on environmental management, and the "do no harm" principle. UNMAS also considers the environmental impacts of assessing and removing EO, such as the necessary removal of vegetation for operations.<sup>56</sup>

NPA has a country-specific environmental management policy for Syria launched in February 2024, with environmental assessment to support survey and clearance commencing at the same time.<sup>57</sup> To minimise environmental harm, NPA uses a Green Office tool and will soon implement a Green Field tool to measure carbon footprints and encourage waste reduction and recycling. Climate-related and extreme weather risks are considered in planning, with priority for clearance given to areas prone to water inundation during the dry season.<sup>58</sup>

#### NORTH-WEST

The HALO Trust has an environmental management policy and standard operating procedure (SOP) that applies to all country programmes. Environmental considerations are integrated into the planning and delivery of survey and clearance tasks as per the SOP. Measures are taken to

minimise environmental harm, including generating all the electricity needed for mine clearance from solar power and replacing all excavated soil after processing.<sup>59</sup>

SCD is developing an environmentally focused management strategy, initiated through donor-funded training. SCD plans to conduct environmental assessments to support the planning and execution of survey and clearance under the new strategy. Measures to minimise environmental harm include the proper disposal of ordnance and other hazardous materials. Future measures will also include training deminers on environmental risks and waste management.<sup>60</sup>

#### NORTH-EAST

DCA has an SOP for environmental protection in mine action operations. It conducts environmental assessments as part of their land release process to identify and mitigate potential environmental impacts, ensuring that its operations do not disturb local ecosystems. Measures to minimise harm during clearance operations include using fuel-efficient vehicles and optimising travel routes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; implementing waste management practices, including recycling non-explosive metal scraps at an iron smelting factory; and safely disposing of EO at designated locations to prevent soil and water pollution.<sup>61</sup>

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

50 Email from Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024.

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

52 Email from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

53 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

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

55 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

56 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

57 Emails from Chris Tierney, NPA, 21 and 24 June 2024.

58 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

59 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024.

60 Email from Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024.

61 Email from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

MAG has an SOP for environmental management and reports that environmental assessments are conducted to support the planning and delivery of survey and clearance. MAG ensures that previously hazardous areas are suitable for their intended use and that non-hazardous areas are left in

a similar condition to before demining. Clearance seeks to avoid environmental pollution or degradation, particularly concerning surface and groundwater quality, sensitive areas, wildlife and their habitats, vegetation, soil conservation, erosion control, and archaeological and cultural resources.<sup>62</sup>

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## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

In 2021, UNMAS completed installation of IMSMA Core as the national mine action information management (IM) system in Damascus.<sup>63</sup> UNMAS manages the database, collating EO-related data from operators working within government-controlled areas. UNMAS also collects mine action data through the OCHA-led humanitarian response tracking (5Ws).<sup>64</sup> Clearance by Syrian and Russian forces is not reported to UNMAS. In 2023, the UNMAS IM team began a comprehensive overhaul of the database to ensure better data accuracy.<sup>65</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

HALO uses IMSMA data collection forms and regularly reports to the north-west MASC and the UNHCR-led Gaziantep coordination response. HALO uses Kobo to collect NTS data and pre- and post-clearance surveys to measure the impact of mechanical clearance. HALO's Syria IM staff and the global MEAL team regularly review data collection tools. At the MASC level, HALO collects data from operators using forward planning and the 5Ws tool to include detailed locations, activities, and sub-activities.<sup>66</sup>

SCD uses Survey123 for data collection and IMSMA Core for data storage and management. SCD continues to employ a multi-tier validation process for all mine action activities, with each report checked by three individuals at increasing levels of seniority. Furthermore, at the end of each month, the data for all tasks are compiled and a final check carried out to ensure data accuracy.<sup>67</sup>

### NORTH-EAST

Since 2017, iMMAP has provided mine action coordination support and information management services in the north-east.<sup>68</sup> Operators report all survey and clearance data to iMMAP, which consolidates the information and develops contamination maps for the sub-region.<sup>69</sup>

MAG established its global Operational Management Information System (OMIS) in 2022. Field data are collected via Survey123 using IMSMA forms, verified by technical managers through OMIS, linked to Aeronautical Reconnaissance Coverage Geographic Information (ArcGis) maps, and validated by the IM department.<sup>70</sup> OMIS was upgraded to OMIS 2 in 2023 and began incorporating satellite imagery for more accurate coordinates of hazardous areas. MAG shares its data with iMMAP monthly and its operations plans and road maps with NESMAC weekly. Quality Management (QM) t has also been added to the upgraded OMIS 2 system.<sup>71</sup>

DCA employs an IM GIS coordinator and an officer, using ArcGis, Environmental Systems Research Institutions (ESRI), and Survey123 for its information management. Survey and clearance data are collected using IMSMA data collection forms and shared monthly with iMMAP. The ongoing iMMAP NTS project is expected to improve the accuracy of EO contamination data, enabling better prioritisation of clearance.<sup>72</sup>

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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.

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

UNMAS's strategy in Syria is to support humanitarian and early recovery partners to deliver services free from the risk of EO contamination, so that the Syrian population can safely access basic services and livelihood opportunities.<sup>73</sup> In 2023, UNMAS continued to focus on high priority areas

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62 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

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

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

65 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

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

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

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

69 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

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

71 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

72 Emails from Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March and 28 June 2023; and Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

73 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

in Rural Damascus, identified by OCHA as one of the most contaminated governorates, and based on the list of priority locations discussed with partners and agreed with the government. UNMAS supported a joint debris-removal project by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Habitat to address the impact of the earthquake on Aleppo City. UNMAS deployed an NTS team, a multitask EOD team, and two banksmen (crane driver's helpers) in support of the project, which started in November 2023.<sup>74</sup> Tasks are prioritised based on criteria such as humanitarian need, the presence of humanitarian partners, delivery of humanitarian activities, internally displaced person (IDP) flows, and historic data on explosive incidents.<sup>75</sup>

In 2023, NPA prioritised CMR clearance of agricultural areas in the Nashbiyah sub-district. Clearance efforts are contingent on receiving approval from national authorities to conduct survey and clearance in designated villages and locations.<sup>76</sup> NPA is also operational in Al-Yarmouk in Damascus, an urban area with a high concentration of Palestinian refugees.<sup>77</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

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 and clearance, focusing on removing contamination from agricultural areas to support economic activities and livelihoods and to mitigate food insecurity. Incident data show 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>78</sup>

SCD prioritises tasks based upon several 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>79</sup>

### NORTH-EAST

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>80</sup> In 2023, DCA prioritised survey and clearance in Ar-Raqqa governorate. NTS was conducted in Deir-ez-Zor, though heightened security sometimes impeded operations. Prioritisation is based on needs and impact, focusing first on areas where populations live among explosive hazards, followed by unoccupied areas expected to see IDP returns once cleared. Tasks are reported to NESMAC before clearance. In urban areas particularly, extensive conflict damage has left explosive hazards in public spaces and densely populated areas. Prioritising clearance of battle-damaged rubble is crucial. The cleared rubble is then repurposed for infrastructure construction. DCA also integrates programming by rehabilitating cleared spaces and key infrastructure, working with the community to prioritise projects.<sup>81</sup>

In 2022, following capacity building provided by MAG, NESMAC started to follow MAG's prioritisation criteria. These are: 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>82</sup> In 2023, MAG prioritised survey and clearance in Hasekah and Raqqa governates.<sup>83</sup>

## LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

### STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

#### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

There are no formal national mine action standards (NMAS) in Syria.<sup>84</sup> In 2024, UNMAS said it was in the process of

drafting National Technical Standards and Guidelines (NTSGs).<sup>85</sup> In its statement as an observer to the APMBT Twentieth Meeting of States Parties (20MSP) in 2022, Syria

<sup>74</sup> Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

<sup>75</sup> Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

<sup>77</sup> Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

<sup>78</sup> Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022 and 10 April 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022 and 27 March 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Emails from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023; and Kevin Straker, DCA, 15 March 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Email from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

<sup>82</sup> Email from Akram Alsaeedi, MAG, 24 March 2023.

<sup>83</sup> Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

<sup>84</sup> Emails from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022 and 30 April 2023; and Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.



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>86</sup>

### NORTH-WEST AND NORTH-EAST

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 standard operating procedures (SOPs).<sup>87</sup> In the absence of a formal land release policy,

a signing of a handover land-release certificate happens between DCA, the landowner, and NESMAC. This process was introduced to NESMAC by DCA.<sup>88</sup>

MAG Syria continues to work to its own established SOPs in the north-east. MAG started a capacity-building plan on NMAS development for NESMAC and plans to elaborate NMAS in the long-term.<sup>89</sup> As at May 2024, a technical advisor has been appointed by iMMAP to advise and support this, but no NMAS has been produced yet.<sup>90</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.

**Table 2: Operational clearance capacities deployed in 2023<sup>91</sup>**

Operator	Clearance teams	Total deminers	Mechanical assets	Comments
UNMAS	3	22	0	Two teams worked (each 16-strong) Jan–April. One team (6 strong) worked Aug–Dec.
NPA	4	16	0	Technical survey (TS) and clearance.
HALO	3	12	1	Two four-person EOD teams and one four-person mechanical clearance team deployed on AP mined area.
SCD	6	54	0	
MAG	10 (6 MAT, 4 MTT)	80	10	Teams reduced to 8 (5 MAT, 3 MTT) by end-2023 due to reduced funding.
DCA	4	27	8	TS and clearance.
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>19</b>	

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

UNMAS signed an MoU with the Syrian government in 2018. The following year, UNMAS reported the government had agreed to the involvement of international demining organisations which would be registered by the government and coordinated by UNMAS.<sup>92</sup> In 2023, four organisations received accreditation to conduct mine action in government-controlled areas: SHIELD, NPA, Global Clearance Solutions, and Safety Solutions. In 2024, DRC also received accreditation.<sup>93</sup> To date, however, in areas under government control most survey and clearance has been conducted by Russian and Syrian military engineers and civil defence organisations.<sup>94</sup>

UNMAS deployed two NTS teams totalling six personnel from 30 August 2023 with three clearance teams deployed over the course of the year. UNMAS was planning to sustain its capacity in 2024 if sufficient funding was secured. In response to the earthquake in 2023, a multi-tasking team was deployed to support the UN rapid assessment in Aleppo. Since November 2023, UNMAS has supported the UNDP and UN-Habitat debris removal project in Aleppo and Lattakia. UNMAS deployed an NTS team to assess the level of contamination in the worksites. An EOD team was then deployed to remove EO, with two banksmen ensuring worker safety during debris removal.<sup>95</sup>

86 Statement of Syria, 20MSP, Geneva, 21–25 November 2022.

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

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

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

90 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

91 Emails from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024; Damian O’Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024; Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024; Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024; Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024; and Kim Feldewerth, HALO, 17 July 2024.

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

93 Emails from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June and 10 September 2024.

94 “Russian military boosts qualified Syrian sappers to demine war-ravaged country”, *Tass*, 9 January 2018.

95 Email from Hassana Mardam Bey, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

Following the signature of an MoU with the Syrian government in December 2021,<sup>96</sup> NPA received accreditation and completed its inception phase in 2022. The inception phase included the recruitment of national staff and the setting up of NPA's office in Damascus. The operational training took place in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>97</sup> In 2023, NPA deployed four NTS teams totalling eight personnel and four multi-task teams which conducted both technical survey (TS) and clearance in Nashebiyah sub-district, Rural Damascus. Dependent on funding, NPA planned to increase the number of its teams in 2024.<sup>98</sup>

SARC deployed 13 NTS teams in 2023 with ICRC providing QA. In 2024, 16 personnel were deployed to Aleppo and 12 to Damascus to conduct battle area clearance (BAC) and EOD spot tasks.<sup>99</sup>

The Syrian army also continues to conduct clearance in government-controlled areas, on a limited scale.<sup>100</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

In the north-west, HALO carried out NTS, EOD call-outs, and clearance of hazardous areas while SCD conducted NTS and EOD call-outs.<sup>101</sup>

HALO, which has been present in Syria since 2016, conducts NTS, clearance, EOD, and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) in the north-west, in the opposition-controlled territories of Idlib, and in countryside in the western Aleppo. In 2023, HALO's EOD teams received authorisation to use explosives for demolitions. This was a major step forward in operational capacity as previously HALO had to rely on burning techniques, which limited the types and quantity of devices suitable for disposal.<sup>102</sup> HALO created its first mechanical clearance team using an excavator, which was deployed to clear AP mines. HALO deployed two NTS teams totalling 10 persons which also conducted EOD call-outs. In 2024, a second mechanical clearance team was deployed, expanding the team size to five members each. Now, HALO operates with two teams, two machines (an excavator and a front loader), and a total of ten personnel.<sup>103</sup>

SCD was operational in 33 sub-districts of Idlib, Aleppo, and Hama governorates providing NTS and single item disposal via remote-controlled open burning. In 2023, SCD deployed

six NTS teams totalling thirty personnel along with six clearance teams.<sup>104</sup>

HALO and SCD mine action activities were suspended in the aftermath of the earthquake and teams assisted in supporting the earthquake response. SCD resumed operations in February 2024.<sup>105</sup> HALO resumed EOD operations the same month with its other operations fully resuming in April 2024.<sup>106</sup>

### NORTH-EAST

DCA has been present in Syria since 2015.<sup>107</sup> In 2023, DCA primarily focused on survey and clearance, EOD spot tasks, and risk education in Ar-Raqqa governorate. In Deir-ez-Zor governorate, NTS was carried out by DCA's local partner, RMCO. DCA deployed three NTS teams with ten personnel each from RMCO and four clearance teams totalling forty-five personnel. Clearance teams also conducted TS. DCA increased its capacity from 2022 to 2023 due to new funding but expected severe reductions in NTS and clearance personnel in 2024 due to critical funding gaps.<sup>108</sup>

A local organisation, RMCO, established in 2016, was conducting clearance in the north-east but sustained heavy casualties among its deminers attempting clearance of improvised devices.<sup>109</sup> In 2023, RMCO partnered with DCA for NTS in hard-to-reach areas.<sup>110</sup>

ITF has been conducting NTS in 2023 as part of the iMMAP project and is on phase III of its explosive hazards clearance which began in 2021. It focuses on former agricultural land or infrastructure on areas liberated from Islamic State. ITF is also providing capacity-building support for a local mine action NGO, Reachout.<sup>111</sup>

MAG has been operational in the north-east of Syria since 2016.<sup>112</sup> In 2023, MAG operated in Al-Hassakeh (north-east) and Raqqa governorates, conducting TS, clearance, EORE, contamination baseline assessments, community focal points training, training of trainers for school teachers, and NTS. MAG deployed ten community liaison teams totalling 20 personnel who also conduct NTS and 10 clearance teams. MAG's capacity decreased in 2023 due to a lack of funding but MAG expected this reduced capacity to remain unchanged in 2024.<sup>113</sup>

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

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

98 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

99 Interview with Ben Lark, Weapon Contamination Coordinator, ICRC Syria, Geneva, 29 April 2024.

100 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

101 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024.

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

103 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024.

104 Email from Sami Mohammad, SCD, 24 May 2024.

105 Ibid.

106 Emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; and Kim Feldewerth, HALO, 17 July 2024.

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

108 Emails from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May and 30 June 2024.

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

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

111 ITF, "Annual Report 2023", at: <https://bit.ly/3zjmWEB>, pp. 93–94.

112 Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

113 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

## LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Syria's continuing instability and the dwindling funds for mine action prevented progress towards a coordinated national programme of mine action. Comprehensive country-wide information on outcomes of survey and clearance in any area was unavailable, but Table 3 below summarises the available data for clearance in 2023. A total of 3.1km<sup>2</sup> of mine clearance was reported with the destruction of 54 AP mines. A further 15 AP mines were destroyed in spot tasks.

**Table 3: Mine clearance in 2023<sup>114</sup>**

Region	Operator	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m <sup>2</sup> )	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
North-west (Idleb)	HALO	0	6,639	5	0	14
North-east (Hasekah)	MAG	20	1,955,519	43	6	82
North-east (Raqqa)	MAG	13	367,688	5	2	1829
North-east (Ar-Raqqa)	DCA	7	775,122	1	0	*4158
<b>Totals</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>3,104,968</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6,083</b>

\*158 x IED Main Charge, 3999 x ERW, and 1 x suicide belt.

### GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

No survey or clearance of AP mined area was reported to Mine Action Review in 2023. The ACHDE found five AP mines during spot tasks, two of which were safe to move and destroy. Two of the five mines were of an improvised nature. In addition, 37 AV mines were found during spot tasks, 30 of which were safe to move.<sup>115</sup>

Between August 2023 and July 2024, UNMAS deployed a multi-tasking team (MTT) to priority locations in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, and Lattakia. The MTT completed 1,123 EOD spot tasks, removed 1,102 items of EO, and cleared a total area of 281,855m<sup>2</sup>. No AP mines were found. Two banksmen were also deployed to Aleppo to support UNDP's debris removal project, where they identified and removed 89 items of EO, none of which was an AP mine.<sup>116</sup>

### NORTH-WEST

In August 2023, HALO conducted mechanical clearance of an AP mined area in the Ariha district, clearing 6,639m<sup>2</sup> with five AP mines found and destroyed. This mine clearance was the first in the region. HALO planned to deploy a second machine in 2024. Clearance of the entire task was expected to be completed by late 2024. Additionally, HALO destroyed three AP mines, none of which was improvised, during spot tasks.<sup>117</sup>

SCD did not undertake any survey or clearance of AP mined area in 2023.

### NORTH-EAST

In 2023, MAG released a total 4.23km<sup>2</sup>, of which 1.90km<sup>2</sup> across 20 hazardous areas was reduced through technical survey (TS) and 2.32km<sup>2</sup> across 33 hazardous areas was cleared with 48 AP mines and 8 AV mines found and destroyed. In addition, MAG found one AP mine during spot tasks. All AP mines found and destroyed in Syria in 2023 were of an improvised nature.<sup>118</sup> This is an increase from the 3.64km<sup>2</sup> of AP mined area released in 2022.<sup>119</sup>

In 2023, DCA released a total of 3.25km<sup>2</sup> in Ar-Raqqa, of which 2.47km<sup>2</sup> across 27 areas was cancelled through NTS and 0.78km<sup>2</sup> of suspected mined area was cleared with one AP mine found and destroyed. In addition, six AP mines were destroyed during EOD spot tasks. All seven were improvised mines. While some of these mines targeted foot traffic, others were strategically placed to deter vehicles. Although all these devices were equipped with high metallic pressure plates and crush wire switches that were sensitive to human weight. DCA cleared six CHAs in Syria, totalling 774,401m<sup>2</sup>, that were suspected to contain improvised AP mines but none was found, although the clearance team successfully removed other types of EO.<sup>120</sup> This is a significant increase in area from 2022 when only spot tasks were conducted.<sup>121</sup>

In 15 August–31 December 2023, as part of its clearance of contaminated agricultural lands, ITF deployed two clearance teams, one NTS team, and one EORE team and released 101,697m<sup>2</sup> of land contaminated with EO through TS and clearance.<sup>122</sup> It is not clear how many EO items, if any, were mines.

114 Ibid.; and emails from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024; and Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

115 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 19 June 2024.

116 Email from Joseph McCartan, UNMAS, 10 September 2024.

117 Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO, 27 May 2024.

118 Email from Riaan Boshoff, MAG, 21 May 2024.

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

120 Email from Adesh Singh, DCA, 16 May 2024.

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

122 ITF, "Annual Report 2023", p. 94.

According to iMMAP, between October 2022 and March 2023, operators removed/destroyed 2,289 items, and cleared or cancelled through NTS 1,791,987m<sup>2</sup> in the districts of Al-Hassakeh, Deir-ez-Zor, Ath-Thawrah, and Ar-Raqqa with landmines and submunitions recorded in all districts. iMMAP does not disaggregate data by munition.<sup>123</sup>

## DEMINER SAFETY

None of the operators reported demining related incidents in 2023. Media reported the death of a Syrian army deminer while attempting to dispose of a mine in Deir Ezzor city in April 2023.<sup>124</sup>

## PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

In its statement to the APMBC Twentieth Meeting of States Parties in 2022, Syria stated that its armed forces removed more than 50,000 explosive devices, 84,000 unexploded shells, and 45,000 mines from more than 550km<sup>2</sup> of land. 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>125</sup>

Although Syria is not yet a State Party to the APMBC, it has obligations under international human rights law to clear AP mines from its territory as soon as possible. NPA reported that the question of acceding to the APMBC and Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) was raised with the Director of the National Committee for Mine Action in several meetings

in 2023. However, the government representatives, citing the ongoing conflict, indicated that the country is not currently in a position to accede to these conventions.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, NPA also noted that the National Committee for Mine Action and the Syrian government are supportive of mine action initiatives and have conveyed appreciation to donors and clearance operators working to make Syria safer.<sup>127</sup>

Operators reported that the main obstacles to mine clearance were ongoing insecurity that limits access to contaminated areas, a lack of a comprehensive understanding of contamination at regional or national level, and reduced funding. Moreover, funding was again on the decline for 2024, resulting in reduced capacity for mine action.

123 iMMAP, "Northeast Syria: Progress, Challenges, and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action", October 2022 – March 2023, p. 9.

124 SOHR, "Attempting to dismantle landmines Regime soldier killed in Deir Ezzor city", 14 April 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3Ks3Zm5>.

125 Statement of Syria, 20MSP, Geneva, 21–25 November 2022.

126 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 17 June 2024.

127 Email from Chris Tierney, NPA, 29 August 2024.