

KEY DATA

CLUSTER MUNITION CONTAMINATION: UNKNOWN

SUBMUNITION
CLEARANCE IN 2021

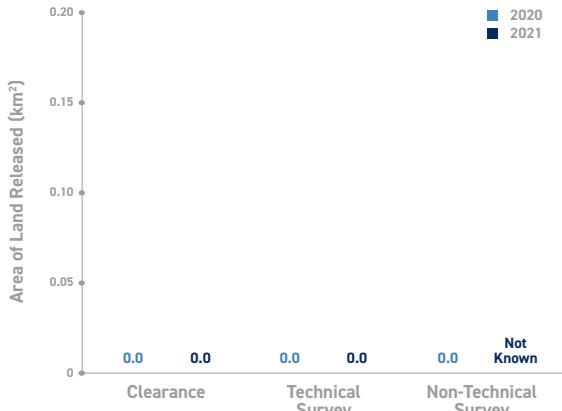
0 KM²

(SPOT CLEARANCE ONLY)

SUBMUNITIONS
DESTROYED IN 2021

305

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

While there have been no reports of renewed use of cluster munition in Syria since February 2021, one third of Syria's populated communities are said to be affected by explosive ordnance (EO), which includes cluster munition remnants (CMR).¹ The humanitarian needs resulting from contamination remain very high against a backdrop of an underfunded and fragmented mine action programme. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has taken a role of coordinating the mine action area of responsibility covering the whole of Syria.²

Several actors, including international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are present in areas not controlled

by the government. In government-controlled territories, however, there is a critical lack of qualified clearance operators with only one international operator, the Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), accredited (in 2020), and another operator, Shield, which as at March 2022, was still undergoing the accreditation process. In late December 2021, the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Syrian government for the establishment of a mine action programme, which was expected to begin implementation in the course of 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should comply with its obligations under international human rights law to clear CMR on territory under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- Syria should undertake a baseline survey of CMR contamination in areas over which it has effective control.
- Syria should adopt national mine action standards (NMAS) that are in line with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

1 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, February 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3vzUXwp>, p. 6.

2 Email from Francesca Chiaudani, Mine Action Coordinator, UNMAS, 7 July 2022.

- Syria should create the necessary structures to oversee an efficient mine action programme, namely, a national mine action centre (NMAC) and a national mine action authority (NMAA). The process should be underpinned by the adoption of mine action legislation and a multiyear strategic plan.
- Syria should expedite registration and access for international demining organisations to facilitate a credible humanitarian demining programme.
- Syria and the other parties present in the country should allow mine action operators to move freely across areas under their control and ensure their safety.
- A centralised mine action information management database should be established. All mine action operators in Syria should ensure that survey and clearance data is recorded and safeguarded in a digital format and in accordance with IMAS.

CLUSTER MUNITION SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT

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

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- The Syrian Civil Defence (SCD), or the White Helmets.
- Roj Mine Control Organization (RMCO)
- iMFAD (based in Turkey)

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, operating in the north-west

OTHER ACTORS

- iMMAP
- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), established in Damascus, December 2021
- United Nations Mine Action Services (UNMAS), operating from Damascus

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. During 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, cluster munition attacks were recorded in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates. Thirteen of the country's fourteen governorates (all except Tartus) have experienced persistent use of cluster munitions since 2012.³

The Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR) recorded at least 492 cluster munition attacks in Syria between July 2012 and 25 February 2020 attributing them to the Syrian forces, Russian forces, or the alliance of the two.⁴ The SNHR recorded the deaths of 176 civilians, including 74 children and 25 women, since the beginning of 2021 as a result of

both mines and CMR.⁵ According to SNHR reports, the Syrian government carried out four cluster munition attacks in the first half of 2020 in Hama and Idlib governorates, two of which hit schools.⁶ In March 2021, SNHR documented the use of 9M55K missiles, loaded with 9N235 submunitions, which were fired from the Russian airbase in Hmeimim and targeting Hiran and the al-Humran crossing in Rural Aleppo. The attack caused civilian casualties, including the death of a civil defence worker, and inflicted considerable damage on fuel tanks and burners. The same report remarked an increased use of BM-30 SMERCH and BM-27 URGAN cluster munitions, delivering mostly submunition types 9M55K, 9M27K, and 9M27K1, which were launched from stationary platforms.⁷

³ The Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor website, Syria Cluster Munition Ban Policy, last updated 24 November 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yHlY0i>.

⁴ The Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR) press release, "The Syrian Regime Repeatedly Uses Cluster Munitions Against Residential Neighborhoods in and Around Idlib Governorate, Constituting War Crimes", 27 February 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3fUfEtB>.

⁵ SNHR, "1,271 Civilians, including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021", 1 January 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3F2ZjyY>.

⁶ SNHR, "The Syrian Regime Repeatedly Uses Cluster Munitions Against Residential Neighborhoods in and Around Idlib Governorate, Constituting War Crimes", Report 27 February 2020, p. 8, at: <https://bit.ly/2TlIWbH>; and SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First half of 2020, Report at: <https://bit.ly/3vvWssY>, p. 28.

⁷ SNHR, "The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2021", Report, 5 April 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/2SCnU3m>, p. 3.

The Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview of 2022 estimates that EO contamination affected one third of populated communities. Areas that experienced intense hostilities, including Aleppo, Daraa, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Raqqa, and Rural Damascus, were found to be particularly hard hit. The same report recorded an increase of 23% in the number of incidents caused by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in 2022 compared to 2020.⁸ The extent of contamination disaggregated by device is not known. In 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 1,874 civilian casualties as a result of airstrikes, ground-based shelling, and armed clashes in north-west Syria, as well as EO incidents, including those involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and landmines. Most of these incidents occurred in Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor Governorates.⁹ Contamination is most frequently reported on agricultural land, on roads, on private property, as well as in and around schools, other public infrastructure and hospitals.¹⁰

The HALO Trust conducted an EO 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).¹¹ Unexploded submunitions were the most frequent type of ordnance encountered, accounting for 36% of total recorded contamination.¹² Other contamination was from landmines and IEDs (4% combined), and a mixture of other unexploded ordnance (UXO).¹³ Submunitions caused 42% of recorded casualties.¹⁴ Another rapid assessment survey conducted by HALO Trust in 2021 identified 91 suspected cluster munition strike zones (50 in Idlib and 41 in Aleppo).¹⁵

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) also 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 ERW. Of the assessed communities, 57% reported presence of anti-personnel mines; 46% of CMR; and 25% of IEDs.¹⁶

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has been conducting surveys across several governorates in the north-east of Syria since 2016. To date, MAG has registered 241,900m² of CMR contamination across two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and three confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in Al-Hassakeh and Raqqa governorates. As at May 2022, MAG had a further 97,365m² of CMR contaminated land requiring survey and clearance. MAG has also received reports of CMR in Deir Ezzor governorate, but these are in areas that it cannot currently access.¹⁷

Table 1: Cluster munition-contaminated area in north-east Syria surveyed by MAG (at end 2021)¹⁸

Governorate	CHAs	Area (m ²)
Al-Hassakeh	2	96,365
Raqqa	1	1,000
Totals	3	97,365

Syrian Civil Defence (SCD), better known as the White Helmets (WH), 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 2017–18.¹⁹ In 2021, SCD conducted a non-technical survey in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates and recorded EO 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, EO contamination was recorded in 73 out of 335 communities surveyed (21.7%), and 42.7% of the total of 194 items of EO found were submunitions.²⁰ 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.²¹

Working from the Syrian capital, Damascus, UNMAS continued an explosive ordnance assessment team (EOAT) survey in Rural Damascus (South) that it had started in August 2020. The assessment locations were identified by UNMAS in line with the UN Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) priorities and with the approval of the Syrian government. At the end of 2021, the EOAT surveyed 10km² in four locations in Daraya, (Rural Damascus), of which around 6km² were confirmed as hazardous. The EOAT also surveyed residential buildings in Yarmouk camp in Rural Damascus. Of the 423 buildings assessed, 88 were confirmed as contaminated. The EOAT survey was planned to continue throughout 2022.²²

Table 2: Cluster munition-contaminated area in Rural Damascus governorate (at end 2021)²³

Governorate	CHAs	Area (m ²)
Rural Damascus	4	6,383,615
Totals	4	6,383,615

The continued use of cluster munitions in 2020 and 2021 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).

8 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, February 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3vzUXwp>, pp. 6 and 14.

9 OCHA, Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, February 2022, p. 14.

10 Ibid., p. 60.

11 The HALO Trust, Syria, A Hidden Emergency, Report, at: <https://bit.ly/3fD4w4x>, p. 3.

12 Ibid., p. 7.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 11.

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

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

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

18 Ibid.

19 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.

20 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 15 June 2022.

21 Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 11 May 2021.

22 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

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

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, Dr Faisal Mikdad.²⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) assigned a focal point for liaison with UNMAS for all what concerns mine action. UNMAS is informed that the committee meets on an ad-hoc basis as needed.²⁵

Mine action in Syria is coordinated by three response mechanisms:

- Damascus-based Mine Action Sub-Cluster (MASC) coordinated by UNMAS
- The north-west MASC co-chaired by UNMAS and HALO Trust; and
- The north-east Mine Action Working Group (MAWG), which sits under the protection working group in the NGO forum-led response that is coordinated by iMMAP.²⁶

Coordinators of the three structures organise monthly meetings with the respective mine action actors.²⁷ In addition to the MAWG, in 2021, the Humanitarian Affairs Office (HAO) created a north-east Syria Mine Action Centre (NESMAC) to coordinate mine action activities. The HAO is reported to have provided NESMAC with a power of attorney to function as a national authority.²⁸

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. Within this line of effort, UNMAS has been encouraging safer programming for humanitarian workers, training security focal points in risk awareness, and integrating risk education into the programming of different humanitarian clusters and sectors to expand the operational scope and reach the people most in need.²⁹

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.³⁰ 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.³¹

The north-east MAWG meets on monthly and ad-hoc basis whenever required. Coordination meetings were attended regularly by MAG, Humanity and Inclusion (HI), DanChurchAid (DCA), and Enhancing Human Security (ITF) among others. The working group mainly discussed the coordination of explosive ordnance mine risk education (EORE), the sharing of detailed non-technical survey reports, and feedback on MoUs.³²

MAG reported the fragile security as a main challenge to an efficient mine action in the north-east. The border closure with Iraq impacted movement of staff and supplies critical for operations. Further, the lack of available trauma medical care within an hour's reach of its mine action operations has restricted MAG's ability to expand its work to other affected areas. The occasional lack of ownership documents of land and property is a concern that occasionally leads to disputes over clearance, and the absence of a qualified national mine action authority impedes coordination and clearance prioritisation, along with the resolution of property disputes. On the other hand, MAG reported that the newly established NESMAC has been suspending orders due to operators not signing an MoU that requires a 10% monthly service fee on all humanitarian NGO national staff salaries. MAG did not provide any capacity development in the north-east in 2021, but has secured funding for this purpose for 2022.³³

In the north-west, mine action is coordinated by the MASC cross-border response from Gaziantep (Turkey-based response) and is co-chaired by The HALO Trust and UNMAS. Some 25 partners attend its monthly meetings. HALO and its partners coordinate and receive approvals from the local Turkish authorities for its work across the border with Turkey.³⁴ 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.³⁵

The monthly MASC coordination meetings include many organisations that are not operationally involved in mine action beyond risk education. 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 2021 and already have sufficient stocks of equipment required to carry out its activities. However, other organisations have limited options for importing equipment and there is a continued decrease in available funding due to donor fatigue.³⁶

24 This information was provided on condition of anonymity.

25 Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021; and Francesca Chiudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

26 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021, and email from Francesca Chiudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

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

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

29 Email from Francesca Chiudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

30 Information was provided on condition of anonymity.

31 Email from UNMAS, 30 June 2021,

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

33 Ibid.

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

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

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

UNMAS was seeking US\$34 million for its mine action programme in Syria through to the end of 2022, but as at the end of 2021, the programme was facing a shortfall of US\$25.3 million.³⁷ In a statement to the 24th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and UN Advisors (24th NDM), 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.³⁸

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

The HALO Trust'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 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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

UNMAS reports that it takes into consideration the impacts of assessing and removing EO 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 2018–2021 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.⁴¹

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

HALO Trust mainstreams gender, diversity, and inclusion in its programme, and disaggregates all mine action data by sex and age. As part of its community liaison activities, HALO holds separate focus group sessions with women and children with the attendance of appropriate staff. HALO provides equal opportunities and encourages applications regardless of gender, race, religion, or ethnic background and is committed to increasing women's participation at all levels of the organisation and ensuring that its activities benefit women, girls, boys, and men equally. In 2021, 41% of HALO's employees were women, and 23% and 32% of HALO's managerial and operational positions were filled by women, respectively.⁴²

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.⁴³ In 2021, women made up 20% of MAG's total number of employees, 50% of its community liaison officers, and 26% of the organisation's operational positions. 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.⁴⁴

³⁷ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

³⁸ Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 3.

³⁹ Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

⁴⁰ Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

⁴¹ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁴² Email from Mairi Cunningham, HALO Trust, 7 June 2021.

⁴³ Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

⁴⁴ Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

SCD has a gender and a diversity strategy in place. Yet, in 2021, SCD's clearance and survey teams were exclusively male. SCD reports that it is actively working to improve the gender balance of the survey teams in order to ensure that all the members of the community, regardless of gender and age, are involved in the information gathering process. SCD was training 12 female volunteers on non-technical survey and was planning to deploy them with the survey teams in June 2022. About 9% of SCD's total employees are female, and 9% of managerial and operational positions are filled by women. The 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 very communities they serve and thus reflect the various ethnic and minority groups which reside in their area of operations. SCD reported that it has procedures and policies in place to ensure that individuals do not face discrimination due to their ethnicity, religion, or sex.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

UNMAS risk education teams are fully gender balanced, and its clearance contractor, the ACHDE, has integrated gender and diversity elements in its work. UNMAS reports that recruiting qualified females for technical roles at national level continues to be a challenge, but it continues to reach out to a diverse pool of applicants and create positive working conditions that enable women's participation. A diverse set of indicators, including sex and age of victims and beneficiaries, are used to evaluate prioritisation. In total, 40% of UNMAS Syria employees are women, with women in 30% of the employees in managerial or supervisory positions, and 26% of those in operational positions. UNMAS has deployed to communities with ethnic and minority groups (Druze in Sweida for instance), and engaged with all community members to gather feedback.⁴⁷

UNMAS's context analysis appeared to indicate that ethnic/minority groups are not affected by EO contamination differently, but rather that all population groups are vulnerable regardless of ethnicity.⁴⁸ Despite the lack of evidence to the contrary, Mine Action Review believes that minority groups loyal to the Syrian government are significantly less affected by the EO contamination by virtue of their lesser exposure to the attacks carried out by the Syrian and Russian armed forces.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

The HALO Trust uses the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) data collection forms and regularly reports to the north-west MASC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-led Gaziantep coordination response. HALO uses mobile-data collection tools and preserves data in Excel and Microsoft PowerBI databases.⁴⁹ In 2021, HALO sought to refine its quality assurance mechanisms through stronger integration of field teams using Kobo software for mobile data collection.⁵⁰

MAG uses the online server, SharePoint, to preserve its mine action data. MAG also continued sharing data with iMMAP and the protection sector, who can also preserve its mine action data if required.⁵¹ MAG conducted multiple checks across all activities in 2021 in order to uphold data quality. MAG Syria is also in the process of establishing a global information management system, which was not possible beforehand.⁵²

iMMAP provides technical information management (IM) services to the mine action working group in north-east

Syria through mobile data collection, geographic information systems (GIS), and maps of explosive hazard contamination, survey, and clearance progress. iMMAP also supports the north-east HAO in setting up its MAC. As at May 2021, the MAC did not have the capacity to manage an IMSMA database on its own. SCD uses Survey123 for data collection and IMSMA Core for data keeping and management,⁵³ while DCA uses Survey123.⁵⁴

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 4W⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ It is of course important that all relevant data on EO contamination, survey efforts, and clearance operations are

⁴⁵ Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March and 15 June 2022.

⁴⁶ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 June 2021, and Damian O'Brien, HALO, 1 March 2022.

⁵⁰ Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

⁵¹ Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG 9 March 2022.

⁵² Emails from MAG, 24 May 2021; and Fabrice Martin, MAG 9 March 2022.

⁵³ Emails from Michael Edwards, SCD, 7 May 2021 and 5 March 2022.

⁵⁴ Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

captured in a central information management database.

To ensure or improve the quality of data in its mine action database in 2021, SCD continued to employ a multistage data verification system as part of its quality assurance process. All activity reports were checked by three different individuals, at increasing levels of seniority, as part of SCD's operational oversight. Improvements and modifications are made to SCD's data collection and information management systems, as and when dictated by operational or donor requirements.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ UNMAS manages the database, collating explosive ordnance data from partners across Syria in a central database. Since its accreditation in 2020, the ACHDE has been providing monthly reports on areas worked and items found to UNMAS IMSMA.⁵⁹ It is believed, however, that clearance conducted by the Syrian and Russian forces largely goes unreported.

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-west, The HALO Trust uses data collected from its EO community contamination assessment survey to identify high-priority communities for explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), focusing on removing contamination that prevents access to basic services or livelihood resources. HALO Trust engages with communities where it conducts EOD to obtain their informed consent and considers requests from the local authorities for future interventions.⁶⁰

The mine action working group, with the support of iMMAP, also participates in determining areas of operations. MAG reported that, due to the lack of the necessary structures, there was no tasking system in place. MAG's community liaison teams identify hazardous areas through non-technical surveys. They subsequently complete a clearance prioritisation matrix to assess the impact of EO contamination on communities and to provide data for the technical operations, including information on direct and indirect beneficiaries, infrastructure, natural resources, land use, and land ownership.⁶¹ The NESMAC proposed to establish a clearance prioritisation

system based on the priorities of civilian authorities in the north-east, which remained under discussion as of writing.⁶²

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.⁶³

UNMAS planned survey and clearance tasks in 2021 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, internally displaced person (IDP) flows, and historic data on explosive incidents.⁶⁴

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

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁵⁹ Emails from UNMAS, 30 June 2021.

⁶⁰ Emails from Mairi Cunningham, HALO, 7 June 2021; and Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

⁶¹ Emails from MAG, 24 May 2021; and Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

⁶² Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

⁶³ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁶⁴ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

had been given on the proposed NMAS as at April 2022. The NMAS will be reviewed annually to address new challenges and ensure the employment of best practices.⁶⁵

Due to the lack of NMAS, 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). DCA also offers guidance and advocates best practices to the NESMAC in the north-east of Syria.⁶⁶ HALO increased its efforts to refine its quality assurance (QA) mechanisms through stronger integration of field teams using Kobo software for mobile data collection.⁶⁷ SCD teams also operate according to IMAS for clearance, survey, and risk education.⁶⁸

MAG offered support to the NESMAC to develop NMAS. Such support would include an external consultant to develop mine action standards and overall capacity building, including on quality management (QM). MAG Syria continues to work to its own established SOPs which are in line with IMAS. MAG's own SOPs were updated in December 2021. The updates were designed to align with MAG's new Global Technical Standards.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰

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 Turkey, Iraq, and then back to Syria in 2020. As at May 2021, and due purely to issues of access, DCA's operations were confined to the parts of north-east Syria not controlled by the government.⁷¹ Updates on DCA's operations in 2021 were not provided to Mine Action Review.

The HALO Trust, which has been present in Syria since 2016, is operational in the north-west of Syria in the opposition-controlled territories of Idlib and northern Aleppo. HALO conducted EOD, risk education, and victim assistance in 2021 in partnership with the following local NGOs: Shafak for risk education; iMFAD for EOD and risk education; and "Hand in Hand for aid and development" for victim assistance, in addition to implementing risk education directly. HALO's operational capacity in 2021 comprised one EOD team (iMFAD), six risk education teams (HALO Trust and iMFAD), and two victim assistance case teams (HALO). As at March 2022, The HALO Trust was preparing to deploy one non-technical survey team in Idlib in 2022, possibly adding another team later in the year. Negotiations to conduct non-technical surveys in northern Aleppo, in addition to clearance and disposal in all of HALO's area of responsibility, were ongoing.⁷²

MAG has been operational in the north-east of Syria since 2016, conducting clearance, risk education, and surveys on contamination, accidents, and victims. As reported by iMMAP,

in 2020, MAG alone accounted for 70% of clearance activities, 60% of mine action beneficiaries, and 95% of contamination mapped and reported in north-east Syria. Following a forced suspension of its activities in October 2019, MAG resumed its activities in the north-east in late 2020,⁷³ and restored around 25% of its pre-2019 capacity in 2021. In early 2022, MAG expected to have restored half of its pre-2019 capacity.⁷⁴

MAG operated from Shaddadi, Markada, and Al-Hasakeh sub-districts in Al-Hasakeh governorate in north-east Syria, conducting survey, risk education, and clearance in Al-Hasakeh, Deir Ezzor, and Raqqa governorates. In the first quarter of 2021, MAG partnered with two NGOs for risk education and community focal point (CFP) training in Deir Ezzor and Aleppo governorates: Action for Humanity (formerly known as Syria Relief), and Bahar. In 2021, as in the previous year, MAG deployed 10 community liaison teams who conduct non-technical survey, in addition to three mine action teams, and two multi-task teams for technical survey and clearance.⁷⁵

In 2022, MAG planned to upscale its operational capacity to 42 community liaison teams (10 in each of Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh, and Eastern Aleppo, and another 12 in Deir Ezzor). For technical survey and clearance, MAG will deploy five mine action teams, four multi-task teams, and two mechanical survey teams. MAG was unable to set-up a training centre and a second line mechanical workshop as planned for in 2021, but hoped to do so in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic caused operational delays due to reduced numbers of risk education beneficiaries, quarantine, and isolation measures.⁷⁶

On 21 December 2021, NPA negotiated an MoU with the Syrian government for the establishment of a humanitarian mine action programme in Syria. In 2022, NPA will start the operational phase primarily focusing on survey and clearance

⁶⁶ Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.

⁶⁷ Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

⁶⁸ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁶⁹ Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

⁷⁰ "Russian military boosts qualified Syrian sappers to demine war-ravaged country", Tass, 9 January 2018.

⁷¹ Email from Lene Rasmussen, DCA, 13 April 2021.

⁷² Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

⁷³ Email from MAG, 24 May 2021.

⁷⁴ Email from Fabrice Martin, MAG, 9 March 2022.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ NPA, New Humanitarian Mine Action in Syria, at: <https://bit.ly/3MHNXTF>.

of areas as identified under the UN humanitarian response plan and needs overview.⁷⁷

A small national organisation, Roj Mine Control Organization (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.⁷⁸ As at July 2021, RMCO was still operational and was being trained on EOD by the United States (US) forces.⁷⁹

The SCD was operational in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates (in the north and north-west of the country),⁸⁰ and continued to conduct surface level battle area clearance (BAC), non-technical survey, 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's operational capacity in 2021 was six non-technical survey and six clearance teams. All SCD teams are trained to deliver risk education.⁸¹

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.⁸²

UNMAS reported the lack of qualified in-country operators as one of the major challenges to progress in mine action. This led UNMAS to hire its own UN personnel to conduct the EO assessment survey in the interim, which normally would be conducted through implementing partners.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ As at March 2022, only the ACHDE had been accredited by UNMAS for conducting mine action activities in government-controlled areas. Another organisation, SHIELD, was undergoing the process of desk accreditation.⁸⁵

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 EO 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.⁸⁶ In December 2021, UNMAS started the pilot clearance project of the priority area of western Ghouta, in the outskirts of the capital Damascus. After passing their on-site accreditation, two ACHDE clearance teams started BAC in Daraya (western Ghouta).⁸⁷

At the end of 2021, UNMAS operational capacity was two explosive ordnance assessment teams, which consisted of seven technical survey personnel and two non-technical survey personnel. The ACHDE deployed two clearance teams of 12 deminers, in addition to two BAC teams. UNMAS opened a sub-office in Aleppo in 2021. UNMAS hoped to scale up clearance and survey activities in 2022, but this remained contingent on funding and operational capacity.⁸⁸

DEMINER SAFETY

SCD suffered one non-fatal accident in 2021, in which one assistant team leader was injured while disposing of an AO-2.5RT submunition. The operator received fragmentation injuries, which required hospital treatment. As at June 2022, the injured person had fully recovered and rejoined his team. An independent investigation team was deployed to investigate the cause of the accident, after which refresher training was provided to all teams. In addition, a brief summary of the accident was shared with HALO Trust, despite them not being currently conducting single item disposal.⁸⁹

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.

The SCD destroyed a total of 305 submunitions in Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib governorates in north-west Syria during EOD call-outs.

⁷⁸ S. Kajjo, "Landmine removal crucial in post-IS Syria", Voice of America, 3 April 2019; and interview with operators, Erbil, Iraq, May 2019.

⁷⁹ This information is provided under the condition of anonymity.

⁸⁰ SCD worked in the following districts of north-west Syria in 2021, A'zaz, Afrin, Al'bab, Jebel Saman (Aleppo governorate), Al Ma'ra, Ariha, Harim, Idlib, Jisr-Ash-Shugur (Idlib governorate), and in As-Suqaylabiyah (Hama governorate); email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁸¹ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁸² Statement by Agnes Marcaillou, Director, UNMAS, to the UN Security Council, 24 October 2019.

⁸³ Email from UNMAS, 30 July 2021.

⁸⁴ The ten operators originate from Afghanistan, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates.

⁸⁵ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁸⁶ Statement of Syria to the 24th NDM Meeting, 25–27 May 2021, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Email from Damian O'Brien, HALO Trust, 1 March 2022.

Destroyed items included 9N210, AO-1SCh, PTAB, ShOAB-0.5, and M77 submunitions. SCD disposed of a further 373 items of EO that were not submunitions in 2021.⁹⁰ In 2021, HALO and iMFAD disposed of 66 items of EO, including three anti-personnel mines, in addition to projectiles, mortars, rockets, grenades, and fuzes in the north-west of Syria.⁹¹

UNMAS explosive ordnance assessment team reported having non-technically surveyed 13,198,478m² of EO-contaminated land in 2021.⁹² The results of surveys conducted by both MAG in the north-west and UNMAS are reported above.

Table 3: SCD CMR clearance in 2021⁹³

Governorate	Submunitions destroyed
Aleppo	55
Hama	2
Idlib	248
Total	305

UNMAS's clearance project that started on the first of December 2021 in Daraya (Rural Damascus), continues into 2022. In the first month of the project, ACHDE conducted BAC and cleared a total of 71,187m² of surface and 22,731m² of subsurface area. A total of 44 items of EO (39 conventional munitions and 5 IEDs) were identified and marked for destruction. The Syrian army engineering unit continues to be the only entity entitled to conduct demolition in the government-controlled areas of Syria.⁹⁴

In its statement to the Eighteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) in 2020, Syria stated that "the unilateral sanctions inflicted on the Syrian people pose challenges for the Syrian government to provide the financial, technical and logistical resources [required to clear the mines]". The statement called for an "un politicised" financial and technical assistance to the mine action sector in Syria, without pre-conditions and in coordination with the Syrian government.⁹⁵

⁹² Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 7 July 2022.

⁹³ Email from Michael Edwards, SCD, 5 March 2022.

⁹⁴ Email from Francesca Chiaudani, UNMAS, 31 March 2022.

⁹⁵ Statement of Syria, APMBC 18MSP, Geneva, 16–20 November 2020.