

KEY DATA

NO ARTICLE 4 DEADLINE:

Not party to the CCM

CMR CONTAMINATION:

1.59km²

Light
(UN estimate)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS

Release of cluster munition-contaminated area	Release in 2025 (km ²)	Release in 2024 (km ²)
Clearance	0.76	0.49
Technical Survey	0	0
Non-Technical Survey	0.2	0
Destruction of submunitions during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	2025	2024
Submunitions destroyed	99	354

MAIN CMR SURVEY AND CLEARANCE OPERATOR IN 2025

- SafeLane Global

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Following the reduction of the operational exclusion zone from 30 km to 15 km in March 2025, expanded territorial access led to a direct increase in the survey and clearance of cluster munition-contaminated areas. A total of 0.76km² of contaminated land was cleared in 2025, and a further 0.2km² was cancelled through non-technical survey (NTS), marking the first land release through survey in four years. While the armed conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco has remained at a low intensity and without recorded use of cluster munitions, previously unrecorded cluster munition remnants (CMR) continue to be found, with 0.16km² of legacy contamination newly identified in 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) should reaffirm in writing its commitment to respect and implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), including clearance of all CMR, consonant with its international human rights obligations. This commitment should include annual submission of voluntary Article 7 transparency reports.
- The Saharawi Mine Action Coordination Office (SMACO) should finalise and adopt the newly drafted strategy, ensuring it includes a revised deadline for completion of CMR clearance, annual survey and clearance targets, and a detailed budget.
- Greater support should be provided to SMACO to enable it to continue coordinating mine action in Western Sahara east of the Berm and to ensure that the remaining explosive ordnance contamination is addressed.

CLUSTER MUNITION SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- Saharawi Mine Action Coordination Office (SMACO)
[Western Sahara, east of the Berm]
- Royal Moroccan Army [west of the Berm]

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Royal Moroccan Army

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- SafeLane Global

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
Western Sahara

UNDERSTANDING OF CMR CONTAMINATION

According to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), at the end of 2025, Western Sahara east of the Berm¹ had a total of 34 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) containing CMR, covering a total of 1.59km².² This is an 8% decrease from 2024 when UNMAS reported 1.73km² of CMR contamination. This baseline does not reconcile with that reported at the end of 2025 and the area of land released in the intervening years. This is because the contamination baseline is based on the results of initial surveys, most of which were conducted more than a decade ago, but when CMR hazardous areas are released, the actual extent of contamination is found to be larger than originally identified during the survey phase.³

Both the north and south of Western Sahara east of the Berm are still affected by CMR, as summarised in Table 1.⁴

Table 1: Cluster munition-contaminated area east of the Berm (at end 2025)⁵

Region	CHAs	Area (m ²)
North	19	737,169
South	15	848,321
Totals	34	1,585,490

The Royal Moroccan Armed Forces used both artillery-fired and air-dropped cluster munitions against Polisario Front forces during their conflict in Western Sahara from 1975 to 1991. According to the SADR, the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces scattered BLU-63, M42, and Mk118 submunitions at

multiple locations in Bir Lahlou, Dougaj, Mehaires, Mijek, and Tifariti.⁶ UNMAS reported that submunitions have also been found in Agwanit.⁷

In 2020, Morocco sent troops into the UN-monitored buffer zone to end Polisario Front supporters' three-week blockade of the strategic Guerguerat road. In response, Polisario withdrew from the almost 30-year-long ceasefire and renewed attacks on Moroccan military units.⁸ Mine action operations were suspended following the renewed hostilities and did not resume until May 2023. To date, the renewed conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco has been of low intensity, without any recorded use of cluster munitions.⁹

But while CMR clearance had been projected to be completed by the end of 2012,¹⁰ discovery of previously unrecorded contamination meant this target date was not met. New strike areas continue to be identified as mapping and clearance progress, and based on information received from local populations.¹¹ In 2025, two cluster munition-contaminated areas totalling 157,209m² were identified and added to the database.¹²

Of the 34 recorded CHAs, seven cluster munition strike areas are located inside the buffer strip and are inaccessible for clearance.¹³ Clearance of mines and explosive ordnance (EO) in the buffer strip and along the Berm itself is not foreseen in the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) mission agreements.¹⁴ After the resumption of hostilities, the Polisario Front also issued instructions that clearance of mines and EO could not take place in restricted areas.¹⁵

1 A defensive wall (the Berm) was built during the conflict between the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario Front) forces, dividing control of the territory between Morocco on the west, and the Polisario Front on the east.

2 Email from Elhadji Kebe, Chief Mine Action Programme, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

3 Email from Artyom Harutyunyan, Head of Project Unit, UNMAS MINURSO, 4 June 2026.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 SADR Voluntary CCM Article 7 Report, dated 20 June 2014, Form F.

7 Email from Artyom Harutyunyan, Head of Project Unit, UNMAS – MINURSO, 11 June 2024.

8 International Crisis Group, *Time for International Re-engagement in Western Sahara*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing No. 82, 11 March 2021, <https://bit.ly/3mPrYgI>.

9 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 24 May 2022.

10 Email from Karl Greenwood, Chief of Operations, Action on Armed Violence/Mechem Western Sahara Programme, 18 June 2012.

11 Emails from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 29 April 2019; Dandan Xu, UNMAS, 28 June 2019; Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March 2018; and Artyom Harutyunyan, UNMAS MINURSO, 4 June 2026.

12 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

13 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025. The buffer strip is an area 5km wide, east of the Berm.

14 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2017/307, 10 April 2017, p. 8; and email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

15 Email from Artyom Harutyunyan, UNMAS – MINURSO, 11 June 2024.

OTHER EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR AND LANDMINES

Western Sahara also remains significantly affected by other explosive remnants of war (ERW) and mines due to the conflict (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing the Mines* report on Western Sahara for further information).

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

UNMAS has operated in Western Sahara as part of MINURSO since 2008, supporting safe movement of UN personnel and responding to explosive threats. Following the breakdown of the ceasefire in November 2020, most demining, except for limited emergency responses, were suspended. Following negotiations, UNMAS operations resumed in May 2023.¹⁶ On 31 October 2025, under UN Security Council Resolution 2756, MINURSO's mandate was extended for an additional 12 months until 31 October 2026.¹⁷

The Royal Moroccan Army conducts its own demining in areas west of the Berm. In 2013–14, the Polisario Front established SMACO, which is responsible for coordinating mine action activities in Western Sahara east of the Berm, excluding the buffer strip.¹⁸

FUNDING FOR CMR SURVEY AND CLEARANCE

In 2025, SMACO received basic funding from the Kingdom of Spain and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to support its running costs and facilitate coordination and risk education projects. UNMAS received funding from MINURSO for its clearance activities.¹⁹

For more information on funding, please see the profile on Western Sahara on the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor* website.²⁰

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Gender policies are said to be implemented in accordance with UNMAS, the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and MINURSO guidelines, as well as with direction from the Polisario Front.²¹ UNMAS has a gender strategy as part of its overall country strategy with a work plan and system to monitor its implementation.²² UNMAS also reported that gender has been mainstreamed into Western Sahara's national mine action work plans and the SMACO 2019–23 mine action strategy.²³ There are challenges in conducting survey among Bedouin because of their nomadic nature.²⁴

UNMAS reported equal access to employment for qualified women and men in survey and clearance teams in Western Sahara east of the Berm, including for managerial level/supervisory positions. In 2025, one woman was employed by SMACO and six women were employed by SafeLane Global (UNMAS's contractor), with two women working for UNMAS. Overall, women held 17% of operational positions but none was in a managerial or supervisory position (See Table 2).²⁵

Table 2: Gender composition in Western Sahara in 2025²⁶

Entity	Total staff	Total women staff	Total managerial or supervisory staff	Women managerial or supervisory staff	Total operational staff	Women operational staff
SMACO	5	1 (20%)	2	0 (0%)	0	0 (0%)
SafeLane Global	62	6 (10%)	12	0 (0%)	34	5 (15%)
UNMAS	6	2 (33%)	2	0 (0%)	2	1 (50%)
Totals	73	9 (12%)	16	0 (0%)	36	6 (17%)

16 UNMAS, Territory of Western Sahara, Last update on January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4wW5kHb>.
17 UN Digital Library, "Resolution 2797 (2025), adopted by the Security Council at its 10030th meeting, on 31 October 2025", 2025.
18 Response to questionnaire by Sarah Holland, UNMAS, 24 February 2014, and email, 25 February 2014; and email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 6 August 2020.
19 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
20 <https://the-monitor.org>.
21 Emails from Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March and 5 May 2018.
22 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; and Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
23 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 18 June 2020.
24 Emails from El Hadji Mamadou Kebe, NPA, 4 May 2019 and 14 March 2018.
25 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
26 Ibid.

Through SMACO, UNMAS also supports the Sahrawi Mine Action Women's Team (SMAWT), an all-female organisation working on risk education, training, and capacity building.²⁷ All national deminers, both male and female, are ethnic Sahrawi.²⁸

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

There is no national standard on environmental management in mine action, but SMACO have a policy according to which all implementation plans must consider environmental impacts.²⁹ UNMAS Western Sahara does not have an environmental management policy but reports that environmental impact is considered as part of the tasking process and an implementation plan, in order to minimise potential harm from demining.³⁰ This includes waste disposal procedures for rubbish and grey and black water disposal; how and where to set up camps; and how to dismantle camps without leaving an environmental footprint.³¹

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

The Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database for Western Sahara, east of the Berm, was upgraded to IMSMA Core in 2022.³² All data have been successfully migrated to the new database. Review and verification of data, which began at the end of 2023, was still ongoing as at May 2026. UNMAS says that the process, which involves multiple data sources and several layers of validation for critical information, is expected to take another two years or so.³³

PLANNING AND TASKING

SMACO 2019–23 mine action strategy for Western Sahara east of the Berm included no specific objectives on CMR, but set goals toward a Western Sahara free of mine and ERW impact, including effective accident data collection, sustainable funding by 2020, and adequate staffing.³⁴ These goals were not achieved.

SMACO has developed a new Mine Action Strategy 2024–28 with the support of UNMAS. As at May 2026, a concept note summarising the main elements of the strategy has been drafted in Arabic, and the document was being refined to

align with SMACO's operational priorities and the wider political and regional context. UNMAS expected the strategy to be released by the end of 2026. An annual work plan for survey and clearance east of the Berm was also in place.³⁵

UNMAS and SMACO identify priorities for clearance of both minefields and cluster munition strikes east of the Berm in conjunction with MINURSO. Priorities are identified based on humanitarian needs for the safety and freedom of movement of local populations, while UNMAS Western Sahara facilitates the ceasefire and ensures the safe passage of UN personnel.³⁶

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Local mine action standards (LMAS) were developed and finalised in 2016 by UNMAS, together with SMACO, and in coordination with mine action partners. Translation of the standards into Arabic had occurred by 2019.³⁷ LMAS are made publicly available on SMACO's website.³⁸ UNMAS said that the standards are reviewed annually but that no updates were made in 2025.³⁹ An external quality management system was in place from 2018, implemented by UNMAS and SMACO to the east of the Berm.⁴⁰

27 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

28 Email from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; and SMAWT newsletter, March 2022, <https://bit.ly/3yN542U>.

29 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 18 June 2020.

30 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 4 February 2022; and Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 21 March 2022.

31 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 24 May 2022.

32 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 4 February 2022; and Nadine Hussein, UNMAS, 30 May 2023.

33 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.

34 SMACO, "Strategic Plan 2019–2023", <http://bit.ly/38jaGm2>; and email from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 31 July 2019.

35 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.

36 Emails from Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March and 5 May 2018; and Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 6 August 2020.

37 Emails from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 29 April 2019; and Dandan Xu, UNMAS, 28 June 2019.

38 SMACO, "Local Mine Action Standards", (in Arabic), accessed on 15 May 2026, <https://bit.ly/4wW7si9>.

39 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.

40 Emails from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 29 April 2019; and Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 28 July 2020.

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

SafeLane Global was the sole implementing operator for UNMAS Western Sahara in 2025.⁴¹ The number of survey and clearance personnel remained unchanged throughout most of the year, but was cut by half by November 2025 due to funding shortfalls. As at May 2026, a request to reinforce the capacity with two additional deminers was approved, although the number of teams could not be increased.⁴²

Table 3: Operational clearance capacities deployed in 2025⁴³

Operator	Manual teams	Total deminers	Comments
SafeLane Global (for UNMAS Western Sahara)	2 (reduced to 1 during November and December)	24 (reduced to 12 during November and December)	Clearance personnel also conduct TS and NTS.
Totals	2	24	

Alongside demining, UNMAS Western Sahara, as part of the MINURSO mission, provides 24/7 emergency response to EO incidents, as well as logistical support to respond to mission requests.⁴⁴

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2025

Table 4: Land release outputs in 2025⁴⁵

Release of cluster munition-contaminated area	Release in 2025 (m²)
Clearance	760,330
Technical Survey*	0
Non-Technical Survey	198,282
Destruction of submunitions during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	
Submunitions destroyed	99

SURVEY IN 2025

A total of 0.2km² of cluster munition-contaminated area was cancelled through NTS in 2025 south-east of the Berm – by SafeLane Global. No land was released through survey in 2024.⁴⁶

CLEARANCE IN 2025

In 2025, six cluster munition-contaminated areas totalling 0.76km² were cleared with the destruction of 99 submunitions and two other items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) (See Table 5). This represents an increase in the area cleared compared to 2024 when 0.49km² across 12 areas of cluster munition-contamination was cleared, although the number of submunitions destroyed in 2025 (99) was significantly lower than that of 2024 (354). The increase in area cleared was due to the partial lifting of restrictions on previously inaccessible areas, which was implemented in March 2025.⁴⁷

Table 5: Clearance in 2025⁴⁸

Region	Operator	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m²)	Submunitions destroyed	Other UXO destroyed
North	SafeLane Global	3	42,794	3	0
South	SafeLane Global	3	717,536	96	2
Totals		6	760,330	99	2

41 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
42 Ibid.
43 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.
44 Ibid.
45 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
46 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
47 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
48 Ibid.

PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Western Sahara is neither a State Party nor a signatory to the CCM—it is not recognised as a State by the UN Secretary-General and therefore cannot formally adhere to the treaty—and hence does not have a specific clearance deadline under Article 4. However, the SADR submitted a voluntary CCM Article 7 transparency report to the UN in 2014, stating that “the SADR would like to reaffirm its commitment to a total ban on cluster munitions as well as its willingness to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and be bound by its provisions”.⁴⁹ The SADR has obligations under international human rights law to clear CMR as soon as possible.

Western Sahara's draft strategy aimed to release all cluster munition strike areas east of the Berm (outside the buffer strip) by 2019,⁵⁰ and UNMAS had expected to clear all CMR in the Northern Sector by the end of 2018.⁵¹ These targets were not met. SMACO's 2019–23 strategy set a new vision of being mine and ERW impact-free by 2023, which was also not met. A new strategic plan 2024–28 plan has been drafted, and NMAS expected the strategy to be finalised by the end of 2026.⁵²

The year 2025 saw a partial easing of movement restrictions allowing UNMAS-contracted clearance teams to operate within 8km of the Berm, compared with the 30km limit imposed over the previous three years. Yet, survey and clearance in Western Sahara continued to be challenged by critical funding shortfalls and limited field capacity. The desert's vast terrain and lack of infrastructure complicate logistics, medical evacuations, and resupply of field bases. Temperatures exceeding 50°C during the summer reduce operational hours and accelerate wear on machinery.⁵³

Although demining operations resumed east of the Berm in 2023, the ongoing conflict continued to restrict movement of teams, and the heavily contaminated buffer zone along the Berm remained off limits.⁵⁴

49 SADR Voluntary CCM Article 7 Report, Form F, 20 June 2014.

50 Emails from Virginie Auger, UNMAS, 29 March 2017; and Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 31 March 2018.

51 Email from Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March 2018.

52 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.

53 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

54 Ibid.