

KEY DATA

NO APMBC ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE:

Not party to the APMBC

AP MINE CONTAMINATION:

50KM²

Heavy

(Mine Action Review estimate)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS

Release of AP mined area	Release in 2024 (km ²)	Release in 2023 (km ²)
Clearance	0.19	0.08
Technical Survey	0	0
Non-Technical Survey	2.88	0
 Destruction of AP mines during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	2024	2023
AP Mines destroyed	22	1

MAIN AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE OPERATOR IN 2024:

■ SafeLane Global

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

There was a substantial increase in land release output from 2023 to 2024, with a doubling of clearance and, for the first time since 2018, release of mined areas through non-technical survey (NTS). The Saharawi Mine Action Coordination Office (SMACO) developed a new mine action strategy for 2024–28, although this is currently only available as a short summary document in Arabic and will require review in 2026. It does not include a completion date for mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) clearance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic should reaffirm its written commitment to implement the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), including clearance of all anti-personnel (AP) mines east of the Berm, consonant with its international human rights obligations. The commitment should include annual submission of a voluntary Article 7 report.
- Greater support should be provided to SMACO to enable it to continue to coordinate mine action east of the Berm, and to ensure that capacity development efforts are not wasted.
- Mine action in Western Sahara must not become forgotten or overlooked by the international community. Support must still be given to address the remaining mine, cluster munition, and other explosive ordnance contamination.

AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT

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

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Royal Moroccan Army (RMA)

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- SafeLane Global

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Western Sahara

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The exact extent of mine contamination across Western Sahara is not known, although the areas along the Berm¹ contain some of the densest mine contamination in the world. According to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the primary mine threat in Western Sahara east of the Berm—excluding the Berm itself, restricted areas, and the buffer strip—is from anti-vehicle (AV) mines rather than AP mines; cluster munition remnants (CMR) are also a major hazard.² No areas suspected or confirmed to contain solely AP mines remain to the east of the Berm.

At the end of 2024, land in Western Sahara to the east of the Berm contained a total of 24 areas confirmed or suspected to contain mixed mines, covering a total of nearly 210km² (see Table 1).³ This is a decrease from the previous year when contamination totalled nearly 213km² across 24 areas,⁴ reflecting land release during 2024.

Both the north and south of Western Sahara are known or suspected to contain AP mines, as set out in Table 2.⁵

Table 1: Mined area east of the Berm (at end 2024)⁶

Type of contamination	CHAs	Area (km ²)	SHAs	Area (km ²)	Total CHAs and SHAs	Total area (km ²)
AP/AV mines	14	84.08	10	125.91	24	209.99
Totals	14	84.08	10	125.91	24	209.99

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area SHA = Suspected hazardous area

Table 2: Mined area containing AP mines by province east of the Berm (at end 2024)⁷

Province	CHAs	Area (km ²)	SHAs	Area (km ²)	Total CHAs and SHAs	Total area (km ²)
North Region	4	0.24	3	4.11	7	4.35
South Region	10	83.84	7	121.80	17	205.64
Totals	14	84.08	10	125.91	24	209.99

In September 2018, UNMAS reported that, following NTS, east of the Berm, 10 of the then 27 mined areas remained, covering an estimated total of almost 120km². These areas, which are located within the 5km-wide buffer strip, are not accessible for clearance.⁸ Clearance of the buffer strip of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) is not foreseen in the MINURSO Military Agreements No. 2 (with the Popular

Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, the Polisario Front) and No. 3 (with the Royal Moroccan Army, RMA). This, according to the United Nations (UN), considerably limits the ability of military observers in the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to conduct patrols and verify developments.⁹ No survey or clearance of the buffer strip was conducted during 2024.¹⁰

1 A 2,700km-long defensive wall, the Berm was built during the conflict, of which 1,465km divides the territory between Morocco on the west and the Polisario Front on the east. The Berm is 12 times the length of the erstwhile Berlin Wall and second in length today only to the Great Wall of China.

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

3 Email from Elhadji Kebe, Chief, Mine Action Programme, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

4 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

5 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

6 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

7 Ibid.

8 Email from Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 14 September 2018. The buffer strip is an area 5km wide east of the Berm. MINURSO, "Ceasefire Monitoring Overview", undated but accessed 1 June 2016, at: <http://bit.ly/2Yg1nv>.

9 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2017/307, 10 April 2017, p. 8; and email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 6 August 2020.

10 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

The contamination is a result of fighting in previous decades between the RMA and the Polisario Front forces. Most mine contamination identified during ongoing and historical clearance was from AV mines though some areas previously thought to contain only AV mines were found to also contain AP mines following NTS in the Agwanit Area of Responsibility.¹¹ In 2023, MINURSO identified a probable additional threat of AP mines in the Territory. MINURSO has continued to advocate for the parties to the conflict to share detailed information on where renewed fighting had taken place and the types of munitions used so that it could update the mine action database.¹²

The RMA controls territory to the west of the Berm where it has been conducting large-scale demining. According to UNMAS, the RMA cooperates with the MINURSO mine action component and submits regular monthly reports of its activities in the territory, west of the Berm, helping to build a clearer understanding of the mine and ERW threat across Western Sahara.¹³

OTHER EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE CONTAMINATION

Western Sahara also has a significant problem from CMR and other ERW (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2025* report on Western Sahara for further information).

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

UNMAS Western Sahara, formerly the MINURSO Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC), facilitates MINURSO's monitoring of the ceasefire and ensures the safe passage of UN personnel. On 31 October 2024, under UN Security Council Resolution 2756, MINURSO's mandate was extended for an additional 12 months to 31 October 2025.

UNMAS Western Sahara serves as the UN focal point for mine action activities within the MINURSO area of operations.

Its contracted teams work only in areas east of the Berm. The RMA conducts its own demining in areas west of the Berm. In 2013–14, the Polisario Front, with UN support, established SMACO, which is responsible for coordinating mine action in Western Sahara east of the Berm, excluding the buffer strip.¹⁴

In 2024, SMACO received funding from Spain to cover its running costs and UNMAS received funding from MINURSO for its clearance.¹⁵

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

UNMAS has reported that gender policies are implemented in accordance with UNMAS, the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and MINURSO guidelines, as well as with direction from the Polisario Front.¹⁶ UNMAS has a gender strategy as part of its overall country strategy with a work plan and system to monitor its implementation.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ During survey, efforts are made to consider the needs of men, women, girls, and boys to ensure more effective and efficient operations, despite challenges presented by survey among Bedouin.¹⁹

UNMAS claims equal access to employment for qualified women and men in survey and clearance teams east of the Berm, including for managerial and supervisory positions. In 2024, one woman was employed by SMACO and eleven (14% of the total) by SafeLane Global (UNMAS's contractor), including eight in operational roles (also 14%) (see Table 3).²⁰ This is unchanged from 2023.²¹

¹¹ Emails from Leon Louw, Programme Manager, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; Edwin Faigmane, Programme Officer, UNMAS, 18 June 2020; Robert Thompson, Chief of Operations, UNMAS, 31 July 2019; Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March 2018; and Virginie Auger, UNMAS, 29 March 2017.

¹² Report of the Secretary-General, Situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2023/729, 3 October 2023, para. 52.

¹³ Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

¹⁴ Response to questionnaire by Sarah Holland, UNMAS, 24 February 2014, and email, 25 February 2014; and email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 6 August 2020.

¹⁵ Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

¹⁶ Emails from Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March and 5 May 2018.

¹⁷ Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; and Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

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

¹⁹ Emails from El Hadji Mamadou Kebe, NPA, 4 May 2019 and 14 March 2018.

²⁰ Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

²¹ Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

Table 3: Gender composition of SMACO and SafeLane Global in 2024²²

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
SafeLane Global	77	11 (14%)	17	2 (12%)	57	8 (14%)
Totals	82	12 (15%)	19	2 (11%)	57	8 (14%)

Through SMACO, UNMAS also supports the Sahrawi Mine Action Women's Team (SMAWT), an all-female organisation working on risk education in Rabouni and the five Sahrawi refugee camps. All national deminers, both male and female, are ethnic Sahrawi.²³

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

There is no national standard on environmental management in mine action, but SMACO have a policy on environmental management that requires all implementation plans to consider environmental impacts.²⁴ UNMAS Western Sahara also does not have an environmental management policy but reported that environmental impact is considered as part of the tasking process and the implementation plan to minimise potential harm from demining.²⁵ 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 operational footprint.²⁶

Risks from extreme weather such as high temperatures and sandstorms are factored into the planning and prioritisation of survey and clearance tasks. Operations are halted during sandstorms; during periods of extreme heat, teams start earlier and work shorter hours.²⁷

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 2022.²⁸ All data have been successfully migrated to the new database. Review and verification of the data, which began at the end of 2023, was ongoing at the time of writing.²⁹ In addition, a process is now in place to validate any newly submitted information from the implementing partner.³⁰

PLANNING AND TASKING

SMACO 2019–23 mine action strategy for Western Sahara east of the Berm, included objectives toward a Western Sahara free of mine and ERW impact, including effective accident data collection, sustainable funding by 2020, and adequate staffing.³¹ These goals were not achieved.

SMACO has developed a new mine action strategy for 2024–28 and UNMAS is supporting SMACO in reviewing and updating the strategy in line with the political and regional developments.³² As at September 2025, SMACO reported to UNMAS that only a summarised version of the strategy

(in Arabic) is available and noted that the plan will require review in 2026.³³ The UNMAS mine action work plan for 2024 supports MINURSO's mandate.³⁴

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 ensuring the safe passage of UN personnel.³⁵

22 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

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

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

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

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

27 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

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

29 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

30 Ibid.

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

32 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

33 Email from Dimitri Lermytte, Associate Program Officer, UNMAS, 15 September 2025.

34 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

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

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Local mine action standards were developed and finalised in 2016 by UNMAS, together with SMACO, and in coordination with mine action partners. UNMAS reported in 2019 that translation of the standards into Arabic had been completed and shared with SMACO.³⁶ UNMAS said that the standards are reviewed annually but that no updates were made in 2024.³⁷ An external quality management system was in place from 2018 and implemented by UNMAS and SMACO to the east of the Berm.³⁸

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

SafeLane Global was the sole implementing operator for UNMAS Western Sahara in 2024.³⁹

Table 4: Operational clearance capacities deployed in 2024⁴⁰

Operator	Manual teams	Total deminers	Comments
SafeLane Global (for UNMAS Western Sahara)	2	24	No change from 2023*
Totals	2	24	

*Two teams have been deployed since 23 May 2023 when demining operations resumed.

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2024

Table 5: Summary of land release outputs in 2024

Release of AP mined area	Release in 2024 (km ²)	Comments
Clearance	0.19	UNMAS data
Technical survey	0	UNMAS data
Non-technical survey	2.88	UNMAS data
Destruction of AP mines during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	2024	Comments
AP mines destroyed	22	UNMAS data

SURVEY IN 2024

In 2024, 2.88km² across three AP mined area was cancelled through NTS (see Table 5), an increase from 2023 when no area was cancelled through NTS. No area was reduced through TS in 2024 or 2023.⁴¹

Table 6: Release of AP mined area through NTS in 2024⁴²

Region	Operator	Areas cancelled	Area cancelled (m ²)
North	SafeLane Global	*2	149,493
South	SafeLane Global	*1	2,732,080
Totals		3	2,881,573

*Partially cancelled.

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

37 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

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

39 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

40 Ibid.

41 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 16 May 2024.

42 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

In addition, two previously unrecorded mined areas totalling 112,998m² which have a mix of AP and AV mines were added to the database. These were legacy minefields from the 1985–91 conflict.⁴³

CLEARANCE IN 2024

In 2024, 0.19km² of mined area was cleared, with the destruction of 22 AP mines, 4 AV mines, and 15 items of UXO.⁴⁴ This is an increase from 2023 when 0.08km² was cleared with one AP mine, two AV mines, and one item of UXO found and destroyed.⁴⁵

Table 7: Clearance of AP/AV mined areas in 2024⁴⁶

Region	Operator	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed
North	SafeLane Global	*4	188,218	22
Total		4	188,218	22

*Two areas were partially cancelled by NTS; clearance is ongoing in one area.

Between 1 September 2023 and 31 July 2024, the RMA reported release of more than 189km² of land west of the berm with the destruction of 35 AP mines, 15 AV mines, and 549 items of ERW.⁴⁷

PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is not a State Party to the APMBC and cannot adhere to it as it is not recognised as a State by the depositary – the UN Secretary-General. In June 2014, however, the SADR submitted a voluntary Article 7 transparency report to the UN “as a sign of the support of the Sahrawi State for the goals of the Treaty”.⁴⁸

There was a substantial increase in land release output from 2023 to 2024, as the resumption of clearance by UNMAS teams in the Mijek area in January 2024 marked the restart of full demining operations east of the berm for the first time since September 2019. At that time, operations were suspended at the request of the Polisario Front.⁴⁹

In SMACO's mine action strategy 2019–23, the vision was for Western Sahara to be free of the impact of mines and ERW by 2023.⁵⁰ This target was not met. A new strategic plan 2024–28 plan has been developed, but UNMAS has stated that due to the current political and security situation, it is challenging to estimate a completion date for clearing mines and other explosive ordnance in Western Sahara.⁵¹

Additional challenges include maintaining consistent support for funding, capacity-building, and access to new clearance technologies, all of which are vital to improving clearance efficiency. Alongside demining, UNMAS Western Sahara, as part of the MINURSO mission, provides 24/7 emergency response to EO-related incidents, as well as logistical support in response to mission requests.⁵²

43 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

44 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

45 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 16 May 2024.

46 Ibid.

47 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2024/707, 1 October 2024, para. 49.

48 “SADR initiative welcomed by Maputo Conference on Mine Ban”, *Sahara Press Service*, 2 July 2014, at: <https://bit.ly/4mdALHU>.

49 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2024/707, 1 October 2024, para. 49.

50 SMACO “Strategic Plan 2019–2023”, at: <http://bit.ly/38jaGm2>.

51 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.

52 Ibid.