WESTERN SAHARA

MINE ACTION REVIEW

CLEARING THE MINES 2026

KEY DATA

NO APMBC ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE:

Not a State Party to the APMBC

AP MINE CONTAMINATION:

50KM²

Heavy
(Mine Action Review estimate)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS

Release of AP mined area	Release in 2025 (km²)*	Release in 2024 (km²)**
Clearance	0	0.19
Technical Survey	0	0
Non-Technical Survey	0	2.88

Destruction of AP mines during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	2025	2024
AP Mines destroyed	0	22

* 0.2km² of AV mined area was released and 12 AV mines were destroyed. ** The 2024 land release figures are for mixed AP and AV mined areas.

MAIN AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE OPERATORS IN 2025:

- SafeLane Global (contracted by UNMAS)

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Movement restrictions were partially eased in 2025 allowing the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) clearance teams to operate within 15km of the Berm, compared to the 30km limit imposed over the previous three years. No anti-personnel (AP) mined area was released and no AP mines were destroyed in 2025, but a previously unknown AP mined area of 0.07km² was added to the database. The 2024–28 mine action strategy was expected to be finalised by the end of 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic should reaffirm its written commitment to implement the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), including clearance of all 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.**
- **The Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office (SMACO), with UNMAS support, should finalise and adopt the 2024–28 mine action strategy, ensuring it includes a revised deadline for completion of mine 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.**

AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

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

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Royal Moroccan Army (RMA)

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- SafeLane Global (contracted by UNMAS)

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 Berm[1] contain some of the densest mine contamination in the world. According to 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]

At the end of 2025, land in Western Sahara to the east of the Berm contained a total of 24 areas confirmed or suspected to contain a mix of AP and AV mines, covering a total of nearly 215km^2 (see Table 1).[3] This is an increase from the previous year when contamination totalled nearly 210km^2.[4] This increase resulted from a reassessment of a previously cancelled area which was subsequently re-categorised as a confirmed hazardous area (CHA).[5]

Table 1: Mined area east of the Berm (at end 2025)[6]

Type of contamination	CHAs	Area (km^2)	SHAs	Area (km^2)	Total CHAs and SHAs	Total area (km^2)
AP/AV mines	14	89.03	10	125.91	24	214.94

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area. SHA = Suspected hazardous area.

Both the north and south of Western Sahara are thought to contain AP mines (see Table 2).[7]

Table 2: Mined area containing AP/AV mines by province east of the Berm (at end 2025)[8]

Region	CHAs	Area (km^2)	SHAs	Area (km^2)	Total CHAs and SHAs	Total area (km^2)
North Region	4	2.45	3	4.11	7	6.56
South Region	10	86.58	7	121.8	17	208.38
Totals	**14**	**89.03**	**10**	**125.91**	**24**	**214.94**

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area. SHA = Suspected hazardous area.

Two previously unknown mined areas were discovered and added to the database in 2025: one AP mined area of 67,110m^2, and another AV mined area totalling 11,065m^2. The AV mined area was released by the end of 2025.[9]

In 2018, UNMAS reported that, following non-technical survey (NTS), 10 of the 24 mined areas east of the Berm, remained, covering an estimated total of almost 120km^2. These areas, which are located within the 5km-wide buffer strip, are not accessible for clearance.[10] Clearance of the buffer strip of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) is not foreseen in the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) Military Agreements No. 2 (with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, the Polisario Front) or No. 3 (with the Royal Moroccan Army, [RMA]). This, according to the United Nations (UN),

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, 27 April 2026.

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

5 Email from Artyom Harutyunyan, Head of Project Unit, UNMAS, 7 September 2026.

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

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

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

9 Ibid.

10 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.

considerably limits the ability of military observers in the MINURSO to conduct patrols and verify developments.[11]

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, but following clearance, some areas were found to contain both AV and AP mines. Historically, mined areas were reported without an indication of the contamination type, and UNMAS was only able to determine whether the area is contaminated with AV mines or with a mix of AV and AP mines once clearance had been completed.[12] 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.[13]

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.[14]

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 2026* 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, was suspended. Following negotiations, UNMAS operations resumed in May 2023.[15] On 31 October 2025, under UN Security Council Resolution 2797, MINURSO's mandate was extended for an additional 12 months until 31 October 2026.[16]

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.[17]

FUNDING FOR AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE

In 2025, SMACO received basic funding from 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.[18] For more information on funding, please see the profile on Western Sahara on the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor* website.[19]

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

UNMAS has a gender strategy as part of its overall country strategy with a work plan and system to monitor its implementation.[20] 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.[21] There are challenges in conducting survey among Bedouin because of their nomadic nature.[22]

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 or 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 held managerial or supervisory positions (see Table 3).[23]

11 "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, Programme Officer, UNMAS, 6 August 2020.

12 Emails from Leon Louw, Programme Manager, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 18 June 2020; Robert Thompson, Chief of Operations, UNMAS, 31 July 2019; Graeme Abernethy, UNMAS, 1 March 2018; Virginie Auger, UNMAS, 29 March 2017; and Artyom Harutyunyan, UNMAS, 7 September 2026.

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

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

15 UNMAS, Territory of Western Sahara, Last update on January 2026, https://shorturl.at/QEHZr.

16 UN Security Council Resolution 2797, adopted on 31 October 2025, operative para. 1.

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

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

19 https://the-monitor.org.

20 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; and Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.

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

22 Emails from El Hadji Mamadou Kebe, UNMAS, 4 May 2019 and 14 March 2018.

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

Table 3: Gender composition of operators in 2025[24]

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%)**

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.[25] All national deminers, both male and female, are ethnic Sahrawi.[26]

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

There is no national standard on environmental management in mine action, but SMACO has a policy according to which all implementation plans must consider environmental impacts.[27] UNMAS Western Sahara does not have an environmental management policy but reports that environmental impact is considered in both tasking and implementation.[28] This includes waste disposal procedures for disposal of rubbish and grey and black water; how and where to set up camps; and how to dismantle camps without leaving an environmental footprint.[29]

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.[30] All data have been successfully migrated to the new database. Review and verification of data, which began at the end of 2023, was ongoing throughout 2025. UNMAS says that the process, which involves multiple data sources and several layers of validation for critical information, is expected to take approximately two years more.[31]

PLANNING AND TASKING

The 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.[32] 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 had 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.[33]

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 monitoring and ensures the safe passage of UN personnel.[34]

24 Ibid.
25 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
26 Email from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 30 March 2021; and SMAWT newsletter, March 2022, https://bit.ly/3yN542U.
27 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 18 June 2020.
28 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 4 February 2022; and Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 21 March 2022.
29 Email from Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 24 May 2022.
30 Emails from Leon Louw, UNMAS, 4 February 2022; and Nadine Husseine, UNMAS, 30 May 2023.
31 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
32 SMACO, "Strategic Plan 2019–2023", http://bit.ly/38jaGm2; and email from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 31 July 2019.
33 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
34 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 (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 was completed by 2019.[35] LMAS are publicly available on SMACO's website.[36] UNMAS said that the standards are reviewed annually but that no updates were made in 2025.[37] An external quality management system was in place from 2018, 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 2025.[39] 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 six additional deminers was approved, although the number of teams could not be increased. As a result, the remaining team was divided into two sub-teams covering northern and southern regions.[40]

Table 4: Operational clearance capacities deployed in 2025[41]

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**	

TS = Technical survey. NTS = Non-technical survey.

Alongside demining, UNMAS Western Sahara, as part of the MINURSO mission, provides 24/7 emergency response to explosive ordnance incidents, as well as logistical support to respond to mission requests.[42]

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2025

Table 5: Summary of land release outputs in 2025

Release of AP mined area	Release in 2025 (km²)	Comments
Clearance	0	UNMAS data
Technical survey	0	UNMAS data
Non-technical survey	0	UNMAS data
Destruction of AP mines during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	**2025**	
AP mines destroyed	0	UNMAS data

SURVEY IN 2025

No AP mined area was released through survey in 2025. In 2024, 2.88km² across three mixed AP and AV mined areas was cancelled through NTS. One AP mined area of 67,110m² was discovered and added to the database in 2025.[43]

UNMAS' operator, SafeLane Global, reduced 28,800m² of AV mined area through technical survey (TS).[44]

35 Emails from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 29 April 2019; and Dandan Xu, UNMAS, 28 June 2019.
36 SMACO, "Local Mine Action Standards" (in Arabic), accessed 15 May 2026.
37 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
38 Emails from Robert Thompson, UNMAS, 29 April 2019; and Edwin Faigmane, UNMAS, 28 July 2020.
39 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.
40 Ibid; and email from Artyom Harutyunyan, UNMAS, 7 September 2026.
41 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025.
42 Ibid.
43 Emails from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 29 April 2025 and 27 April 2026.
44 Email from Elhadji Kebe, UNMAS, 27 April 2026.

CLEARANCE IN 2025

No AP mined area was cleared in 2025 and no AP mines were destroyed. In 2024, 0.19km^2 of mined area was cleared, with the destruction of 22 AP mines, 4 AV mines, and 15 items of UXO.[45]

UNMAS' operator, SafeLane Global, cleared 192,220m^2 of AV mined area, destroying 12 AV mines and 7 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the process.[46]

PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is not a State Party to the APMBC and cannot accede 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".[47]

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.[48] This target was not met. A new mine action strategy 2024–28 was under development, and UNMAS expected the strategy to be finalised by the end of 2026.[49]

No AP mined area was released in 2025 and no AP mines were destroyed, but UNMAS released 0.22km^2 of AV mined area through TS and clearance.[50]

Movement restrictions were partially eased in 2025, allowing UNMAS clearance teams to operate within 15km of the Berm, compared with the 30km limit imposed over the previous three years. Yet, survey and clearance in Western Sahara continued to face 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.[51]

Although demining operations resumed east of the Berm in 2023, the ongoing conflict continued to restrict team movements, and the heavily contaminated buffer strip along the Berm remained off limits.[52]

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

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

47 "SADR initiative welcomed by Maputo Conference on Mine Ban", *Sahara Press Service*, 2 July 2014, https://bit.ly/4mdALHU.

48 SMACO, "Strategic Plan 2019–2023", http://bit.ly/38jaGm2.

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

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

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.