

MINE ACTION IN UKRAINE



BACKGROUND

Mine and UXO contamination affects the lives of two million people in eastern Ukraine, putting vital civilian infrastructure facilities at risk, inhibiting freedom of movement, access to livelihoods and limiting recreational activities for children.

Ukraine ranks amongst the most severely affected places in the world for casualties as a result of landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW)¹. On a monthly basis, the number of civilians injured or killed by these hazards regularly outstrips those as a direct result of active conflict². Landmines, ERWs and unexploded ordnances (UXOs) were the leading cause of child casualties in 2017, accounting for about two-thirds of all recorded deaths and injuries that left many children with lifelong disabilities.

A recent report published by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) placed Ukraine as number one in the world, ahead of both Afghanistan and Syria, for anti-vehicle mine casualties³.

These statistics come as an immediate result of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, which has seen significant areas of land contaminated by landmines and UXO in both government-controlled (GCA) and non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

Concerted efforts have been mounted in GCA to tackle the issue of explosive hazard contamination, both by the Government of Ukraine and the international community, but critical challenges remain. In NGCA, little to no coordinated action has been taken, whilst the situation is understood to be acute.

KEY CONTACTS

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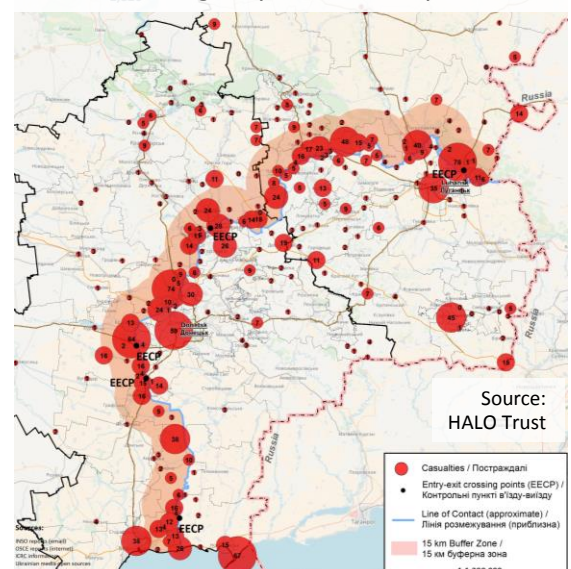
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Humanitarian mine action stakeholders:

National: Ministry of Defense, State Emergency Service, Special Transportation Service.

International: Danish Demining Group (DDG), HALO Trust, Swiss Foundation for Demining (FSD), ICRC, OSCE, UNDP and UNICEF.

Mine and ERW casualties in eastern Ukraine during May 2014-January 2018



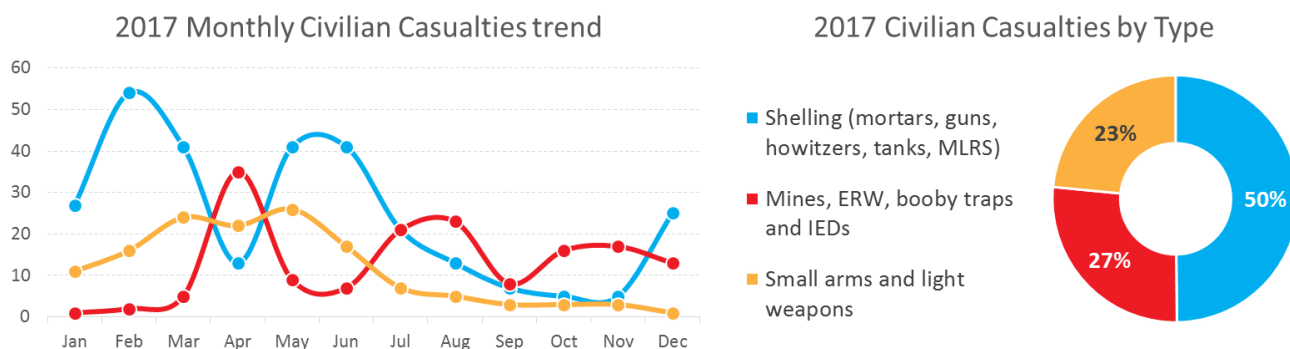
¹ [Landmine Monitor's 2016 annual report](#) placed Ukraine 5th in the world for number of casualties behind Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

² Figures taken from OHCHR monthly reports on civilian casualties. [OHCHR Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 August to 15 November 2017](#).

³ [Global Mapping and Analysis of Anti-Vehicle Mine Incidents in 2016](#), Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2017

●●●● KEY PROTECTION CONCERNS

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: Over 1,600 casualties have been recorded as a result of landmines and other explosive remnants of war since 2014⁴. Land mines continue to be planted in eastern Ukraine as a result of the ongoing conflict. At the same time, internally displaced people are returning to their areas of origin, which are heavily mined, and as a result, casualty figures have been rising.



CHILD PROTECTION: Places where children could safely play less than four years ago are now riddled with deadly explosives. Over 200,000 children in the area along the contact line are in constant danger of injury and death, with landmines, ERW and UXOS being the leading cause of child casualties in 2017.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT: Free movement is inhibited by the presence of landmines and UXOs. Mines continued to pose a serious threat to civilians crossing the contact line between GCA and NGCA, and to those living in close vicinity to checkpoints. Access to some villages near the contact line is restricted as roads are contaminated by mines, leaving people isolated and cut off from essential services.

LIVELIHOODS AND SELF RELIANCE: Access to means of income generation, especially for agriculture and farming, is severely affected by the presence of mines and UXOs. Civilians living along the contact line are unable to engage in agricultural activities, severely affecting their access to food and livelihoods. At the same time, they are ineligible for social assistance, because they are deemed to own land plots with which they should be able to feed themselves. However, as this land is contaminated by mines and therefore not bringing any income, people are being left destitute as a result. Hunting and foraging activities are also restricted due to mine contamination.

IMPACT ON CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Access to basic utilities such as water, electricity and gas is frequently interrupted. The maintenance and repair of basic utilities is impeded or made impossible by the presence of mines and UXOs, compounding the hardships for conflict-affected communities. Unable to afford coal for heating, people often resort to collecting firewood, putting themselves at risk of landmines and UXOs.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND MINE RISK EDUCATION ACTIVITIES: Mine risk education should be expanded, including in NGCA if possible, to ensure that life-saving information is provided to all children and adults in eastern Ukraine.

PROVIDE MINE VICTIM ASSISTANCE: A mechanism for victim surveillance should be developed. Provide trauma care and rehabilitation services to ensure the capacity and capability are in place to respond to all victims. Address the longer-term needs of landmine survivors, their families and affected communities.

ENSURE ACCESS: All parties to the conflict are called to recommit to the ceasefire agreements and allow access of international humanitarian mine action actors to conduct mine risk education and mine clearance activities to facilitate recovery efforts. There is a need to allow access of mine action actors to all areas along the contact line where the presence of landmines and UXO serves zero tactical value.

PRIORITIZE CAPACITY BUILDING: Training and support in the areas of data collection and management, coordination and quality management should be prioritized. The provision of specialist demining equipment, if supported by sufficient training is also relevant and needed.

⁴ Data according to DDC's casualty database, compiled from cross-verified open source media and field reports from organizations such as INSO and OSCE.

CRITICAL CHALLENGES FOR MINE ACTION RESPONSE

CAPACITY: Not enough human and technical capacity is currently directed at humanitarian mine action given the scale of the problem. There is also a lack of appropriate and up to date technical equipment for conducting demining amongst national actors, which would ensure a level of thorough clearance that is necessary before handing over land for subsequent civilian use.

STANDARDISATION: There are no government-endorsed national technical standards against which demining activity can be measured. Organizations conduct clearance using different techniques and equipment to different standards. Overlooked mines as a result of overly-rapid clearance by some national actors have claimed civilian lives in areas that have been deemed to have been 'cleared'. Technical mine action standards can be developed independently of legislation and are needed to ensure that there is common acceptance amongst operators of the standard of work that is required.

DATA MANAGEMENT: In its capacity as the acting national mine action coordination body, the Ministry of Defense collects mine action data from multiple actors onto a purpose-made database: the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). However, the system is not fully implemented and is not being used to its full potential. Some national actors do not provide data to the central system, resulting in parallel databases. Holding data in separate databases will not only lead to duplication of efforts and mismanagement of resources but may also result in further fatalities.

LEGISLATION: Competing versions of draft legislation as well as a lack of consensus over the future of the mine action framework in Ukraine have stalled the formation of a national mine action authority (NMAA). As a result, there is no formal process of accreditation and licensing for the importation of vital equipment such as detectors and heavy machinery or for the purchase of commercial explosives, negatively affecting the efficiency of international operators. Vital mine action work is being done but the efficacy and quality of such work will be improved by legislation and a well-functioning national coordination body.

ACCESS: Access to NGCA is closed for all humanitarian mine action organizations. Access to conduct surveys or clearance in areas of the buffer zone in GCA is improving but time-consuming to obtain, due to the ongoing conflict. At the same time, there are many areas within the buffer zone, where the presence of landmines and UXO serves zero tactical value and which could therefore be demined.

VICTIM ASSISTANCE: Ukraine does not have a national centralized landmine/UXO casualty database where information about mine victims could be stored. As a result, mine action victims cannot obtain official status and there is no mechanism for recognizing victims of mine-related incidents and providing them with appropriate assistance or compensation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

SCALE UP MINE ACTION EFFORTS: Mine and UXO contamination affects the lives of two million people in eastern Ukraine, putting vital civilian infrastructure facilities at risk, inhibiting freedom of movement, access to livelihoods and limiting recreational activities for children. Demining efforts need to be immediately scaled up and made a priority by the national authorities and the humanitarian community. While there is no data available on the contamination in NGCA, information on civilian casualties indicates that the situation there is equally acute.

ADOPT NATIONAL MINE ACTION LEGISLATION: National legislation on mine action, including on victim assistance, should be adopted and a well-coordinated and Ukrainian-owned, multi-stakeholder commission for the effective management of humanitarian mine action must be established.

ADOPT TECHNICAL STANDARDS: National technical standards and guidelines should be adopted to ensure that all actors are conducting mine clearance operations to a set minimum standard, based on international mine action standards (IMAS). All actors should be required to pass an accreditation process and be subsequently monitored for quality and consistency by a national body in a transparent manner to ensure accountability.



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●●●● HUMAN COST OF MINES

- 6 February, 2018, **three children (3, 9 and 14 years old) were injured** after an unknown explosive device they found on the street detonated in their hands in Krasnohorivka (Donetsk, GCA). The oldest 14-years old girl sustained light injuries, while two others sustained serious injuries as result of the explosion.
- 28 November, 2017, **14-year-old boy lost a thumb and three fingers** when a grenade plug he found exploded in his hand in Vozdvyzhenka village (Donetsk GCA).
- 6 November, 2017, **children were evacuated from school** when an UXO was found in the schoolyard in Kremenivka village (Donetsk GCA).
- 16 October, 2017, **a woman crossing the contact line was injured** due to a mine explosion near the checkpoint in Mayorsk (Donetsk GCA).
- 4 October, 2017, an **employee of the power distribution plant was killed** by an explosion of an unknown ordnance, while working on repairing damaged power lines in Yasynuvatskiy rayon (Donetsk NGCA).
- 12, August 2017, a **63-year-old tractor driver was injured** when his tractor hit an anti-tank landmine near the village Luhanske (Donetsk GCA).
- 7 July, 2017, **a man was killed and a woman received multiple injuries** due to a mine explosion when the couple was returning from Mayorsk to Zhovanka village located **near the contact line** in Donetsk GCA.
- 24 April, 2017, a tractor hit a land mine, which caused the **death of three farmers** in Fashchivka village (Luhansk NGCA).
- 23 April, 2017, **one OSCE patrol member killed and two injured** when their vehicle was destroyed in an explosion, most likely caused by a land mine, on a regularly used road in Pryshyb (Luhansk NGCA).
- 4 April, 2017, **a music school teacher was killed** and 10 of her colleagues were injured when a trip wire hand grenade detonated in Novoazovsk (Donetsk NGCA). The incident happened when the civilians were **performing community service activities** in a forested area near the local bread factory.