



Addressing explosive ordnance contamination

Renewing the EU's commitment to a comprehensive and effective Strategy on Humanitarian Mine Action¹ (2025-2029)

This paper provides insights, understanding, and practical recommendations from humanitarian mine action (HMA) operators and sector experts. It aims to guide EU institutions **towards a renewed commitment to a comprehensive and effective HMA strategy**. By collaborating with governments, civil society organisations, and affected communities, the EU plays a pivotal role in promoting a peaceful, stable, prosperous and inclusive world.

“The EU and its Member States have a long history of support for mine clearance and the destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines, as well as for support to States Parties in their full and effective implementation of the Convention. [...] Any use of anti-personnel mines anywhere, anytime, and by any actor remains completely unacceptable to the EU. [...] The EU has continued and will continue, through policy and funding, to support mine clearance activities to help mine-affected States Parties meet their Article 5 obligations.”

EU Statements at the Fifth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, Siem Reap, 25-29 November 2024

[1] **Mine action (IMAS 2009)**: activities which aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of explosive ordnance (EO). Mine action is not just about demining; it is also about people and societies, and how they are affected by EO contamination. The objective of mine action is to reduce the risk from EO to a level where people can live safely; in which economic, social and health development can occur free from the constraints imposed by EO contamination, and in which the victims' different needs can be addressed. Mine action comprises five complementary groups of activities: a) EO Risk Education; b) humanitarian demining, i.e. EO survey, mapping, marking and clearance; c) victim assistance, including rehabilitation and reintegration; d) stockpile destruction; e) advocacy against the use of EO.

HMA operators are calling for the EU to renew and operationalise its commitments in safeguarding its values and ensuring a world free from the threat of landmines and other explosive ordnance (EO)², by:

- Developing updated and cross-institutional Humanitarian Mine Action Guidelines (Joint Staff Working Document);
- Upholding and promoting international norms to reduce harm and strengthen the protection of civilians before, during and after armed conflict;
- Ensuring continuity of technical and financial support for Humanitarian Mine Action;
- Regularly addressing Humanitarian Mine Action in relevant EU coordination and consultation mechanisms;
- Explicitly including Humanitarian Mine Action in external action funding;
- Promoting Partnerships, fostering national ownership and sustainability.

Recommendations are detailed in Section 3.

1. Background and Context to Humanitarian Mine Action and the EU

Millions of people worldwide continue to live in fear of landmines, cluster munitions remnants (CMR), and other EO during active hostilities and long after conflicts end. These deadly remnants of wars **pose a persistent physical threat, mental harm and to livelihoods**. EO contamination obstructs emergency assistance, hampers economic and social development, and leaves thousands of survivors facing lifelong disabilities. Despite significant progress, it remains a complex challenge requiring a comprehensive and sustained response.

The global landscape is marked by a **complex interplay of historical, protracted, and ongoing conflicts**. Since 2023, the world experienced record levels of conflict and unprecedented violence³, with several 'record-breaking' months reported by [ACLED](#). Although 30 previously contaminated states have completed clearance, casualties are alarmingly on the rise due to **the ongoing and new use of landmines by states and non-state actors**, and the increased use of victim-activated IEDs. While efforts to **counter the threat of IEDs** tend to centre on military and security approaches, victim-activated IEDs (also referred to as improvised landmines) fall within the framework of the Ottawa Convention and must be addressed through HMA responses.

Today's conflicts are marked by the increasing **use of explosive weapons in populated areas** leading to exacerbating the humanitarian impact on civilians and infrastructure.

[2] For the purpose of this document, **explosive ordnance** is understood to mean the following forms of ammunition as defined in the International Mine Action Standards 04.10: mines, cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance, abandoned explosive ordnance, booby traps, other devices (in line with the CCW APII definition) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

[3] Uppsala University – Uppsala Conflict Data Programme "In 2023, the number of conflicts involving states totalled 59, the highest number ever since the data collection's starting point in 1946."

This is evident in countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Gaza, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen. Explosive weapons often fail to detonate, leaving unexploded ordnance that impedes humanitarian operations and people's returns, further threatening lives long after conflicts end. Rubble removal and clearance in urban areas require expensive mechanical assets and specialised vehicles, reducing efficiency by up to 80% compared to rural environments. Collaboration on innovative approaches, including with the debris management sector, is essential to drive costs down and outcomes up.

According to the 2024 Landmine Monitor and Cluster Munition reports, **at least 58 countries and other areas are still contaminated by landmines, and 28 countries and other areas are contaminated or suspected to be contaminated by cluster munition remnants.** In 2024, at least 5,757 landmine and other EO casualties and 219 cluster munitions casualties, where civilians accounting respectively for 84 per cent and 93 per cent of them.

Modern conflicts, characterised by **new technologies, tactics, and weapons**, create complex security environments that hinder HMA operations and prolong the devastating impact of landmines, CMR, and other EO. **The increasing disregard for international humanitarian law (IHL)** in many conflicts further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. Additionally, the climate crisis and extreme weather events, such as flooding, fires, and heatwaves, increase the risks posed by EO contamination, for example, by deteriorating EO conditions and triggering landscape fires.

Noting the devastating impact of EO contamination in conflict-affected areas, it must be highlighted that EO contamination further contributes to fragility where fragile states are grappling with weak governance and socio-economic challenges, EO contamination further obstructs access to basic services and sustainable development.

While increased attention is drawn to ongoing conflicts and crises, post-conflict EO contamination is often neglected, sometimes for decades, falling off international assistance agendas. Neglected post-conflict contamination still poses significant barriers to humanitarian operations and development and can lead to increased risks. For example, landmines can move due to flash floods, as seen in Derna, Libya, and Wardak Province, Afghanistan, in 2023. Explosives are harvested to fabricate IEDs, as in Chad in 2023⁴, further fuelling conflicts or being used against civilians to prevent movement. Addressing contamination from historical and protracted conflicts requires sustainable national capacity, national ownership, and multi-year international cooperation and assistance.

[4] Out of Control – Trafficking of IED components and Commercial explosives in West Africa – Small Arms Survey, Nov 2023 [4] Out of Control – Trafficking of IED components and Commercial explosives in West Africa – Small Arms Survey, Nov 2023 [5] Background-Paper-Funding-for-Article-5-Completion_Final.pdf

Addressing EO contamination requires resources. Whilst the top six recipient countries received 75 per cent (EUR 1,622.42 million) of the overall funding for HMA support between 2019-2023, the bottom six recipient countries received only 0.77 per cent (EUR 16.68 million) for the same period⁵. Furthermore, the widespread contamination in protracted conflicts, such as those in Yemen, South Sudan, and Myanmar, is insufficiently addressed. Those contexts are often referred to as forgotten crises, where humanitarian needs are high, and funding limited. The EU has committed to allocate at least 15 per cent of its initial annual humanitarian budget to address forgotten crises, HMA should explicitly be included with earmarked resources.

The EU has a long history of supporting HMA, valuing humanitarian disarmament instruments and frameworks. **The EU has demonstrated strong political engagement towards the Ottawa Convention**, as exemplified in the Council Resolution in support to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) or the Council Resolution in support to the Oslo Action Plan and remains a major contributor to HMA. In total, the EU provided EUR 365 million from 2019 to 2023, representing 12% of total HMA funding worldwide, including a sharp increase in 2022 in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine with EUR 118 million provided in 2022 alone⁶.

However, **the EU's approach lacks clear mechanisms** to prevent funding gaps and ensure sustainable programming across regions and contexts (emergency, development, peacebuilding). The latest strategic document, the **Guidelines on European Community Mine Action 2008-2013**, was adopted in 2008. Despite efforts in 2018 to map EU HMA efforts and coordinate a strategic approach through a joint staff working document, The European Union's Support for Mine Action Across the World, and **a commitment to revise the EU Humanitarian Mine Action Strategy under the 2019-2024 Commission**, the guidelines remain outdated. They lack crucial revisions in light of global changes, new conflicts, and advancements in the HMA sector.

Effective HMA requires the active involvement of various EU stakeholders. Given the range of funding instruments that can be deployed, **a joint position and enhanced coordination** are fundamental to ensure a strategic approach at the EU level and to guarantee the EU can build on its geopolitical position to contribute to human security and achieve a mine-free world.

As the EU launches discussions on its next Multiannual Financial Framework, dedicated attention to streamlining the use of available instruments combined with a revised strategic vision will be paramount to a comprehensive approach to HMA in the medium- and long-term.

[5] [Background-Paper-Funding-for-Article-5-Completion_Final.pdf](#)
[6] Source: [Landmine Monitor 2024 Report](#)

2. Why humanitarian mine action should matter to the EU

The EU's commitment to an integrated approach to HMA is essential to its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (Triple Nexus) efforts, as well as developing an integrated approach to fragility and contributing to the EU objectives. This aligns with Council Conclusions on Humanitarian Assistance and International Humanitarian Law (2019), on Women, Peace and Security (2022), on operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus (2017), on protection in humanitarian settings (2024).

In the context of decreasing foreign aid, gains in development are halted and reversed, potentially contributing to global insecurity and instability. Amidst this downward trend, the EU has a unique opportunity to act positively, increasing its reach and contributing to its Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, particularly for a strong and secure Europe.

Humanitarian Assistance:

Landmines, CMR and other EO hamper freedom of movement, including the delivery of humanitarian relief, further exacerbating the plight of populations in need. Clearance and delivering comprehensive emergency mine action response enable humanitarian routes to be utilised safely and ensure that aid reaches those who need it most. EO contamination also prevents refugees, displaced persons and affected communities from moving freely. EO risk education is crucial to prevent injuries and deaths, while clearance operations restore safe access to land, basic services and infrastructure. EO victims should receive adequate and relevant support and assistance, whether accessing high-quality early trauma care and continuous medical care, including prosthetics, mobility devices, and assistive technologies, as well as integrating psychosocial support systematically to address long-term trauma. This ensures that communities can return to their areas of origin and rebuild their lives in dignity. As such, wherever relevant, HMA should be a key component of the EU's humanitarian response, as enshrined in the **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**.

Development:

Clearing landmines, CMR and other EO release land for productive use, improves safe access to services and the development of key infrastructures in health, energy, water and sanitation sectors. Prioritising socio-economic inclusion ensures affected communities, including survivors, can access employment opportunities, vocational training, and education programs. It contributes building more inclusive societies. HMA improves living conditions in partners countries, reduces dependency on EU financial aid and fosters mutually beneficial trade relations.

Supporting HMA actively contributes to implementing the **Human Rights frameworks, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, and the **UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development**, and its 17 sustainable development goals, to which the EU committed by adopting the **European Consensus on Development**.

Peacebuilding:

HMA supports the **EU's goal of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and good governance**. EO contamination hinders community recovery, weakens social structures, fuels mistrust and restricts access to vital resources, threatening livelihoods and long-term stability. Conflict-sensitive HMA fosters an increased feeling of safety and paves the way for community engagement activities such as community security planning, conflict mediation, strengthening local governance and conflict management capacities. Programming addressing the needs of survivors is equally crucial, as the physical and psychological consequences of EO contamination can fuel grievances and perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalisation. HMA contributes to confidence-building and social cohesion, empower affected individuals and communities and ensures their meaningful participation in reconstruction and reconciliation.

Stronger international norms:

The EU supports and advocates for the protection of civilians through promoting and defending international norms, including IHL and human rights as explicitly included in the founding treaties of the EU⁷. Upholding international norms and agreements has always been a fundamental value of the European Union, enshrined in successive treaties as well as in the **Council Conclusions on EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism**. However, key international frameworks, including the Ottawa Convention and Oslo Convention face new challenges, where the EU must take a more proactive stance to prevent backsliding on the norms. Supporting the universalisation of, and compliance with, the Ottawa and Oslo Conventions, and the implementation of the [new Siem Reap-Angkor Action Plan](#), will embody the EU's commitment to the protection of civilians and a rules and rights-based multilateral order which 'delivers benefits for citizens in Europe and across the globe'⁸. The EU can play a unique role and take the lead in discussions with states dealing with contamination, representing the different Member States.

[7] Treaty of the European Union, Article 21.

[8] Quotes from the Council Conclusion on Strengthening multilateralism



3. Recommendations – How could the EU play a leading role in Humanitarian Mine Action

As mine action operators and experts, we call on the EU and its Member States to invest in and support, whenever relevant, responsive HMA activities aimed at the protection of civilians. The European Union should translate its commitments into bolder political engagement and actions through the following:

- **Work towards developing updated and cross-institution HMA Guidelines** in close coordination with civil society organisations to renew the EU's commitment to address consequences of landmines and other EO contamination and collectively address new challenges. This will create a framework for a collective and effective EU response. This approach should further allow **integrating HMA into EU flagship initiatives**, such as into the work on the development of a Commission-wide integrated approach to fragility⁹, within Global Gateways or when launching Team Europe Initiatives.
- **Ensure continuity of technical and financial support, including earmarked resources**, towards mine clearance, explosive ordnance risk education, victim assistance and developing sustainable national capacity in line with the Siem-Reap Action Plan.
- **Regularly address HMA in relevant committees and workings parties** of the European Parliament, Commission and Council to reiterate the EU's commitments to an integrated approach and ensure budget availability to translate these intents into action. This should be complemented by a joint work with member states to identify gaps and overlaps and ensure sustainable resources.
- **Uphold and promote international norms reducing harm and strengthening the protection of civilians before, during and after armed conflict** and advocate for the universalisation and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention, the Oslo Convention and the EWIPA Declaration¹⁰, recognising that advocacy is a core pillar of HMA. The EU must ensure that advocacy is explicitly included in future funding streams, with dedicated financial support for initiatives that promote compliance with international treaties, monitor violations, and counter the erosion of norms.
- **Call for HMA to be explicitly included in external action funding** and sustain international assistance to at least EUR 77.4 million per year¹¹. Funding for HMA should be included in all relevant funding instruments to address the diversity of contexts and needs.
- **Promote Partnerships**, including with local NGOs, whose contextual expertise, community acceptance and existing networks facilitates access not available to international actors. Partner with both local and national actors as this not only enhances the relevance of the response but also contributes to **national ownership** and ensures the **sustainability** of efforts in the long term.

[9] [Speech in the European Parliament on the integrated Approach to Fragility](#)

[10] EWIPA Declaration refers to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. Note that the Ottawa Convention and Oslo Convention are legally binding instruments for their signatories, while the EWIPA declaration aims to build political consensus and encourages states to adopt better practices.

[11] Amount calculated based on the annual budget committed by the EU over the past five years, including a 2.3% inflation in 2024.



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