

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should make a commitment to respect the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC).
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should commit to never use anti-personnel mines.
- Nagorno-Karabakh should clear or ensure the clearance of anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Nagorno-Karabakh should expedite the creation of a mine action authority to enhance coordination between stakeholders and develop a comprehensive mine action database.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Estimates of Nagorno-Karabakh's mine contamination have risen sharply as a result of survey conducted by HALO Trust. In 2019, the estimate more than doubled to 7.75km², and in 2020 it rose a further 22% to 9.48km² after The HALO Trust identified 58 additional mined areas: 39 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) and 17 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) (see Table 1).¹

Table 1: Anti-personnel mined area by region (at end 2020)²

Region	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total area (m ²)
Askeran	13	435,410	1	28,309	463,719
Hadrut	19	2,068,787	0	0	2,068,787
Lachin	17	550,631	0	0	550,631
Martakert	109	2,626,743	124	3,450,231	6,076,974
Martuni	2	154,715	0	0	154,715
Shahumyan	4	167,900	0	0	167,900
Totals	164	6,004,186	125	3,478,540	9,482,726

Most of the additional hazardous areas were located in the north-eastern Martakert area bordering Azerbaijan, with smaller additions in Hadrut and Askeran, all pre-dating the six-week conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan that broke out in September 2020. Azerbaijan reported that pro-Karabakh forces laid landmines in that conflict as they retreated before its advancing forces but it is unclear whether any contamination was added in the remaining territory under the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.³ A large amount of this contamination is in areas now under Azerbaijani control as the areas remaining after the conflict are considerably smaller than the traditional Oblast. The border has yet to be demarcated preventing a precise determination of how much contamination is in Azerbaijan but HALO Trust reported that more than 40 CHAs and SHAs in its database are in, or contiguous to, areas under Azerbaijan's control.⁴

All regions of Nagorno-Karabakh have been affected by mines and unexploded submunitions as a result of the 1988–94 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and subsequent combat. Mines were laid by both the Azeri and pro-Karabakh forces during the war in the 1990s, with a relatively high proportion of anti-vehicle mines being used in some regions.⁵ The mines were of Soviet design and manufacture, and due to the nature of the conflict certain areas were mined several times.⁶ Nagorno-Karabakh's armed forces said they laid additional anti-personnel mines along the Armenian-Azerbaijani Line of Contact (LoC) in 2013, both east and north of disputed territory.⁷ Unconfirmed reports suggest more mines were laid after the so-called "four-day war" in April 2016.

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a national mine action centre. Nagorno-Karabakh's security chief, Major-General Vitaly Balasanyan, set up a working group in early 2021 to coordinate clearance of explosive remnants of war (ERW). The working group meets weekly with participation from the Rescue Service and humanitarian mine clearance organisations.⁸

The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC) in 2000 but the project did not attract local support and stalled.⁹ Discussions on the issue with Nagorno-Karabakh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued in 2019 and 2020 as well as with the State Emergency Services and the Ministry of Agriculture but did not lead to any decision.¹⁰ A mine action coordination committee responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust ended in 2018.¹¹ HALO trust held discussions with authorities on establishing a mine action centre in 2019 and 2020 but these did not reach a conclusion.¹²

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

HALO's Nagorno-Karabakh programme follows the organisation's gender and diversity policies, providing equal access to employment for women and engaging them in management and operational roles.¹³ HALO's staff of 137 in 2020 included 19 women, with four holding supervisory positions and eleven working in field operations.¹⁴ As 13% of HALO's staff they represented a smaller proportion than in previous years because of an increase in staff numbers. HALO's most senior national staff member is a woman and women have been employed in both survey and clearance. HALO appointed the first woman for non-technical survey in 2019, and by 2021 all HALO survey teams included at least one woman.¹⁵

All groups affected by anti-personnel mines, including women and children, are said to be consulted during survey and community liaison activities. Relevant mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age.¹⁶

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action information management system; The HALO Trust operates its own database.¹⁷

No central mechanism exists for systematic sharing of data on mine clearance, underscoring the value of a mine action authority. The emergency services share information on explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) call-outs and advance notice of demolitions.¹⁸ The Nagorno-Karabakh Army Liaison Officer shares information with The HALO Trust on items found, incidents, CHAs, and clearance on a regular basis. HALO is not authorised to share this data with others.¹⁹

PLANNING AND TASKING

There is no national mine action strategy currently in place in Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁰

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Nagorno-Karabakh has no local mine action standards. The HALO Trust follows its internal standard operating procedures but it updated its standing operating procedures (SOPs) for battle area clearance (BAC) in 2020 to address the threat from urban contamination.²¹

OPERATORS

Since it started working in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2000, HALO Trust has been and remains the main organisation conducting land release. Clearance is conducted mostly in the summer months between May and October. The HALO Trust's overall staff numbers fell from 159 at the start of the year to 137 by September after financing support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) ended in April 2020. In the process, HALO reduced the number of manual clearance teams from twelve to seven, and the number of deminers from 74 to 54. In February 2021, HALO recruited new staff, increasing the total number to 155, and in the process increasing the number of survey teams from five to seven and the number of clearance teams from eight to ten. It also converted two non-technical survey teams to conduct only EOD and operated two mechanical teams with eight staff. HALO reported an urgent need for more staff but further expansion was not expected without additional donor support.²²

The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service, formerly known as the Rescue Service, conducts EOD spot tasks and has reportedly conducted some BAC. HALO works very closely with the Rescue Service and has provided many of its staff with EOD and clearance training.²³ One Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining.²⁴ Russian peacekeepers have conducted area clearance and spot EOD since the conflict. The units have not shared details of clearance operations but coordinated with HALO Trust on carrying out demolitions.²⁵

A new local mine clearance organisation, HAK, was established in 2020, initially with one clearance team. In 2020, it mainly focused on getting established and learning about contamination and was not heavily active operationally. HALO Trust said it provided HAK with information and equipment, including detectors and personal protective equipment (PPE).²⁶

OPERATIONAL TOOLS

The HALO Trust started working with Minehound detectors in 2020 following trials the previous year that showed the detector had increased clearance rates by around 10%. This figure was expected to rise further with experience.²⁷

DEMINER SAFETY

The HALO Trust did not experience any demining or EOD accidents resulting in casualties in 2020. However, all men under 58 were conscripted into the army during the 2020 war and three serving and four former HALO Trust staff were killed in the fighting.²⁸

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2020

The HALO Trust released 54,616m² through clearance in 2020, a year in which continuing survey was a priority and operations were halted by the outbreak of war in September.²⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic mainly affected risk education but also led to a decrease in the number of personnel available for survey because of their age and risk category and led to a suspension of surveyors' interviews with community members. As one of only two international organisations working in Nagorno-Karabakh, The HALO Trust also supported the authorities' health response by providing ambulances as well as supplying health kits to six villages in Martakert and food and other supplies to hundreds of families in the Lachin region.³⁰

SURVEY IN 2020

The HALO Trust continued in 2020 with the nationwide survey started in the previous year which did not result in cancellation of any suspected areas but confirmed another 58 hazardous areas affecting 1,146,026m². Of this, most—828,934m²—was in Martakert. HALO halted the nationwide survey after the 2020 war, giving priority instead to surveying cluster munition contamination and clearing ERW.³¹

CLEARANCE IN 2020

The 54,616m² cleared by the HALO Trust in 2020 (see Table 2) was little more than a quarter of the clearance conducted in 2019 and resulted in destruction of 7 anti-personnel mines compared with 114 in 2019. HALO Trust destroyed six more anti-personnel mines and seventeen anti-vehicle mines in EOD spot operations.³²

Table 2: Clearance of anti-personnel mines in 2020³³

Province/Region/District	Operator	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed
Hadrut	HALO Trust	24,768	1	1
Lachin	HALO Trust	9,694	3	0
Martakert	HALO Trust	20,154	3	0
Total		54,616	7	1

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- 1 Email from Miles Hawthorn, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 2 Ibid.
 - 3 See, e.g., R. Rehimov, "Karabakh: Azerbaijani civilian killed by landmine blast", *Anadolu Agency*, 14 December 2020.
 - 4 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 12 August 2021.
 - 5 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.
 - 6 HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh: History", accessed 20 July 2019 at: <http://bit.ly/2Zyu1KZ>.
 - 7 L. Musayelian, "Karabakh Enhances Defense Capabilities", *Asbarez*, Stepanakert, 26 July 2013, at: <https://bit.ly/30I03ew>.
 - 8 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 20 May 2021.
 - 9 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
 - 10 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May and 4 September 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 11 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
 - 12 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
 - 13 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
 - 14 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 15 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 29 July 2021.
 - 16 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
 - 17 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
 - 18 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
 - 19 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
 - 20 Ibid.
 - 21 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 22 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April and 20 May 2021.
 - 23 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 26 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 27 Emails from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021; and Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
 - 28 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
 - 29 Ibid.
 - 30 Ibid.
 - 31 Ibid.
 - 32 Ibid.
 - 33 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.