

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

MINE ACTION REVIEW

CLEARING THE MINES 2022

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION:

11,035_{M²*}

AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2021

12,559_{M²*}

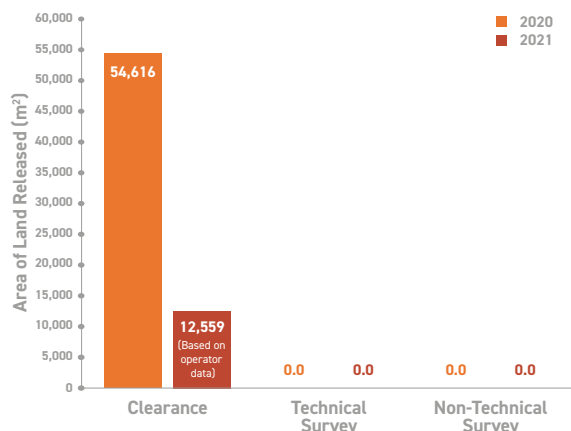
*MINED AREA CONTAINING BOTH ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ANTI-VEHICLE MINES

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2021

4

(3 DESTROYED IN SPOT TASKS) (BASED ON OPERATOR DATA)

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

A six-week armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in September–November 2020 ended with Azerbaijan regaining control over most of its internationally recognised territories, including about a third of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹ Estimates of the extent of the province's mine contamination had risen sharply in 2019 and 2020 but fell dramatically in 2021 following the conflict as most of the mined areas transferred back to Azerbaijan's control. In parallel, The HALO Trust's priorities switched from landmine survey and clearance to addressing the threat posed by cluster munition remnants (CMR) resulting from the conflict. HALO Trust cleared one mined area in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2021, which contained both anti-personnel mine and anti-vehicle mines.

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.

1 T. De Waal, "Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict", Carnegie Europe, 11 February 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3PFvARz>.

DEMINEING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- The Nagorno-Karabakh de facto Authorities

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service
- The Nagorno-Karabakh Armed Forces
- Centre for Humanitarian Demining (CHD) FUND

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- The HALO Trust

OTHER ACTORS

- Russian peacekeeping forces

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Estimates of Nagorno-Karabakh's mine contamination rose sharply as a result of survey conducted by The HALO Trust in 2019 and 2020. In 2019, the estimate more than doubled to 7.75km², and in 2020 it rose a further 22% to 9.48km² after HALO Trust identified a further 58 mined areas.² However, as a result of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, territory under the control of the de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh decreased by about one third.³ As at April 2022, HALO Trust reported just one confirmed hazardous area (CHA) of 11,035m²⁴ in territory remaining under the control of the local authorities, in Martakert.⁵

Table 1: Mined area in areas of Nagorno-Karabakh not under the control of Azerbaijan (at April 2022)⁶

District	CHAs containing AP/AV mines (mixed minefields)	Area (m ²)
Martakert	1	11,035
Totals	1	11,035

AP = anti-personnel AV = anti-vehicle

Most of the additional hazardous areas identified in 2019 and 2020 were in the north-eastern Martakert area bordering Azerbaijan, with smaller additions in Hadrut and Askeran, all pre-dating the 2020 conflict. Azerbaijan reported that pro-Karabakh forces laid mines in that conflict as they retreated before its advancing forces and a large amount of landmine contamination recorded prior to the 2020 conflict is now in areas under Azerbaijani control.⁷

Historically, 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 hostilities. 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.⁸ The mines were of Soviet design and manufacture, and due to the nature of the conflict certain areas were mined several times.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Unconfirmed reports suggest more mines were laid after the so-called "four-day war" in April 2016.

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.¹¹ In August 2021, by presidential decree, the group became the "Mine Action Coordination Council" (also known as the Mine Action Council), with high-level representation from the authorities, Centre for Humanitarian Demining (CHD) FUND (a national non-governmental organisation funded by the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh), and The HALO Trust.¹²

2 Email from Miles Hawthorn, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

3 T. de Waal, "Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict", Carnegie Europe, 11 February 2021.

4 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

5 Ibid.

6 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

7 See, e.g., R. Rehimov, "Karabakh: Azerbaijani civilian killed by landmine blast", *Anadolu Agency*, 14 December 2020.

8 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.

9 HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh: History", accessed 20 July 2019 at: <http://bit.ly/2Zyu1KZ>.

10 L. Musayelian, "Karabakh Enhances Defense Capabilities", *Asbarez*, Stepanakert, 26 July 2013, at: <https://bit.ly/30l03ew>.

11 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 20 May 2021.

12 Email from Fiona Kilpatrick-Cooper, Head of Region – Europe (South Caucasus), HALO Trust, 6 May 2022.

The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC) in 2000 but the project did not attract local support and stalled.¹³ 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.¹⁴ A mine action coordination committee responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust ended in 2018.¹⁵ The HALO Trust held discussions with authorities on establishing a mine action centre in 2019 and 2020 but these did not reach a conclusion.¹⁶

The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities do not provide HALO Trust with funding to clear affected areas.¹⁷

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

The HALO Trust does not have programme-level environmental management standard operating procedures (SOPs) for Nagorno-Karabakh, but does adhere to organisational SOPs set at its headquarters. There is a new "Global Environment and Nature Conservation" lead in post at The HALO Trust and the programme expected to have a local SOP in place in 2022.¹⁸ In line with its commitment to protecting the environment, when conducting explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), HALO ensures that safe land is not contaminated by explosive kick-outs, and that all scrap metal is cleared and disposed of appropriately.¹⁹

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.²⁰ Overall, 14% of HALO Trust staff in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2021 were women. Women were in 14% of supervisory positions and 9% of field operations positions.²¹ HALO's most senior national staff member in Nagorno-Karabakh is a woman,²² and women have been employed in both survey and clearance. HALO Trust appointed the first woman for non-technical survey in 2019, and by 2021 all HALO survey teams included at least one woman.²³

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.²⁴

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action information management system. The HALO Trust operates its own database.²⁵ In 2020, HALO switched to an online server (cloud system) that it refers to as the Global Operations Information Management System (GO-IMS).

No central mechanism exists for systematic sharing of data on mine clearance, underscoring the value of a mine action authority. There is, however, the working group noted above, known as the Mine Action Council. This group comprises The HALO Trust, the local Rescue Service, and CHD FUND, the military, and peacekeepers. The Council meets weekly to facilitate information and data sharing, and discuss security and other safety issues. The emergency services share information on EOD call-outs and advance notice of demolitions.²⁶ In general, while the mine action authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh share some information about landmine contamination, survey and clearance, more detail is required to conform to recognised international standards.²⁷

13 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

14 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May and 4 September 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

15 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

16 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.

17 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

21 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

22 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

23 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 29 July 2021.

24 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

25 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.

26 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.

27 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

PLANNING AND TASKING

There is no national mine action strategy currently in place in Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁸

Prior to the outbreak of the conflict in September 2020, HALO Trust focused activities on survey and clearance of mined areas in line with donor wishes. Starting in 2019, HALO embarked on a countrywide survey of mine contamination.²⁹ After the 2020 conflict, HALO Trust put the mine survey on hold and has given priority to survey and clearance of CMR and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) resulting from the war as well as conducting spot-task EOD.³⁰

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Nagorno-Karabakh has no local mine action standards. The HALO Trust follows its internal SOPs and in 2020 it updated its SOPs for battle area clearance (BAC) to address the threat from urban contamination.³¹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

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 have fluctuated in recent years, falling from 159 at the start of 2020 to 137 by September after support from USAID ended in April 2020. In February 2021, HALO recruited new staff, bringing the total complement to 155, increasing the number of survey teams from five to seven and the number of clearance teams from eight to ten.³² By the end of 2021, HALO Trust employed a total of 135 staff in Nagorno-Karabakh.³³ It still had seven non-technical survey teams with a total of 28 personnel, but the number of operational clearance teams had fallen back to eight, with a total of 56 personnel.³⁴ An overall decrease in the number of survey and clearance personnel from March to December 2021 was due to staff who had been displaced and others leaving for Armenia or Russia, as well as decreased funding. The number of non-technical survey staff was likely to drop again in 2022 due to the reduced amount of survey outstanding and less funding.³⁵

The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service, formerly known as the Rescue Service, conducts EOD spot tasks and has reportedly conducted some BAC. The HALO Trust works very closely with the Rescue Service and has provided many of its staff with EOD and clearance training.³⁶ One Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining.³⁷

Russian peacekeepers have conducted some 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.³⁸

A new local mine clearance organisation, HAK (now CHD FUND), was established in 2020, initially with one clearance team. In 2020, it was mainly focused on getting established and learning about contamination and seemingly conducted few operations. In 2020, The HALO Trust provided CHD FUND with information and equipment, including detectors and personal protective equipment (PPE),³⁹ while in 2021, it provided EOD training (Level 1) to two CHD FUND staff.⁴⁰

The HALO Trust started working with Minehound detectors in 2020 following trials the previous year that had showed the detector increased clearance rates by around 10%. This figure was expected to rise further with experience.⁴¹ However by 2021, with the reduction in mined area in Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of Azerbaijan taking back control of most of the mine-contaminated land in late 2020, and HALO Trust's consequent focus away from landmines to CMR clearance, HALO was no longer using Minehound detectors.⁴²

COVID-19 had limited impact on mine clearance operations in 2021 as there was only one four-person mine clearance team working during the year.

28 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

29 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

30 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

31 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

32 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April and 20 May 2021.

33 Email from Fiona Kilpatrick-Cooper, HALO Trust, 6 May 2022.

34 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.

35 Ibid.

36 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

37 Ibid.

38 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

39 Ibid.

40 Email from Fiona Kilpatrick-Cooper, HALO Trust, 13 June 2022.

41 Emails from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021; and Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.

42 Email from Fiona Kilpatrick-Cooper, HALO Trust, 10 July 2022.

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2021

In 2021, the HALO Trust programme changed its priorities to surveying CMR contamination and clearing other ERW, focusing on the destruction of unexploded submunitions.⁴³ It cleared only one confirmed mined area during the year, covering 12,559m² which contained both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. This is significant reduction on the 54,616m² of anti-personnel mined area released through clearance in 2020, prior to the six-week armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan during which Azerbaijan regained part of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In November 2021, the Russian Ministry of Defence reported that its peacekeepers had cleared approximately 26km² in Nagorno-Karabakh in the year to date, including farmland. Specialists from its engineering units are reported to have discovered and neutralized more than 26,000 items of explosive ordnance and to have checked 2,000 buildings and social infrastructure, including gas pipelines, communication lines, roads to schools, hospitals, and religious sites. The types of devices destroyed and the locations of clearance were not specified.⁴⁴

SURVEY IN 2021

HALO Trust did not reduce or cancel any mined areas through survey in 2021, but did confirm 11,035m² of mined area containing both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, following a tractor accident in January 2021 caused by an anti-vehicle mine which resulted in the death of the driver. This is in contrast to 2020 when The HALO Trust continued with the nationwide survey started in 2019, and identified 58 confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) totalling 1,146,026m² (40 CHAs totalling 935,065m² containing anti-personnel mines and mixed anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, and 18 CHAs totalling 210,961m² containing only anti-vehicle mines) and 20 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) affecting 490,699m² (17 SHAs totalling 446,998m² containing anti-personnel mines and mixed anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines and 3 SHAs totalling 43,701m² containing only anti-vehicle mines),⁴⁵ prior to the outbreak of the conflict in September 2020.

CLEARANCE IN 2021

As indicated above, in 2021, HALO Trust cleared 12,559m² of mined area in Martakert with the destruction of a one anti-personnel mine, one anti-vehicle mine, one item of UXO, and two items of abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO) (see Table 2). A further three anti-personnel mines and two anti-vehicle mines were destroyed by HALO Trust during EOD spot tasks.

Table 2: Clearance of anti-personnel mined area in 2021⁴⁶

District	Operator	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	UXO and AXO destroyed during mine clearance
Martakert	HALO	12,559	1	1	3 (1 item of UXO and 2 items of AXO)
			*3	*2	N/A
Totals		12,559	4	3	3

* EOD spot tasks

43 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

44 Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Russian sappers clear about 2,600 hectares of Nagorno Karabakh territory", 10 November 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3o14at4>.

45 Email from David Crawford, Programme Manager, Nagorno Karabakh, 29 September 2022.

46 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 5 May 2022.