

NORTHEAST SYRIA



Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action



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GLOSSARY

EHl	Explosive Hazard Incident Database
EO	Explosive Ordnance
EORE	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GoS	Government of Syria
HMA	Humanitarian Mine Action
HMA-C	Humanitarian Mine Action Coordinator
HAO	Humanitarian Affairs Office (part of SANES)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMAS	International Mine Action Standards
ISF	Internal Security Forces (NES)
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISWG	Intersectoral Working Group
MASWG	Mine Action Sub Working Group (in NES)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NES	Northeast Syria
NESMAO	Northeast Syria Mine Action Office (De facto Mine Action authority in NES, previously NESMAC)
NTS	Non-technical Survey
OPS	Operation Peace Spring (Turkish operation in NES)
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SANES	Self Administration of North East Syria
SDF	Syrian Defense Forces (mostly Kurdish forces in NES)
TSO	Turkish-supported opposition
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WoS	Whole of Syria
WoSWG	WoS Working Group

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) sector in Northeast Syria (NES) saw some major improvements as well as some major setbacks in the period of September 2021 to April 2022.

Discussions and negotiations for a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the HMA sector have been ongoing throughout this reporting period and were not yet concluded by the end of April 2022. The talks stalled for a while in January and February, when the de facto authorities restricted HMA activities. In April 2022 however, new momentum arose and progress was made.

At the same time, coordination in the HMA sector in NES has improved and the various HMA actors have been operating in a collaborative manner.

Data collection has been standardized, which has allowed for the merger of data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, improving the overview of Explosive Ordnance (EO) contamination in NES.

HMA actors face a drastic reduction of available funding for HMA in NES, as some donors are withdrawing from HMA in NES. This poses a risk, especially because the clearance of water works and agriculture is crucial at a time of an ongoing drought and increasing food prices due to disruptions in the supply of grain from Ukraine and Russia.

While the Self Administration of NES (SANES) has consolidated security and administrative authority in NES, it continues to face multiple concurrent humanitarian and security challenges that impact local communities. In recent months, SANES-controlled areas have been impacted by an acute water crisis and consequent electricity and food security challenges. These fall against a backdrop of poor economic conditions, high levels of un- and under-employment, and continued deterioration of the SYP, which exacerbate challenges for households to meet their basic needs.

SANES-held areas face ongoing security threats from both external and internal actors. Tensions with Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) and Government of Syria (GoS) forces continue to generate significant internal displacement, straining formal and informal camp capacity and host communities. Asymmetric attacks carried out by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) affiliates and other armed actors have limited the ability of SANES and humanitarian organizations to extend services and conduct programming in areas with significant immediate needs.

Access challenges—whether due to active conflict, or EO and debris of war, or other factors—remain a significant barrier to service provision and humanitarian programming that would meet local needs and mitigate impacts of ongoing economic crises. This, in turn, further compounds other challenges, as local grievances over poor service provision and unmet needs can exacerbate tensions with SANES and contribute to conflict.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Following the conclusion of the Syrian Defense Forces' (SDF) campaign to capture territory held by ISIS in Deir ez-Zor in 2019, the SDF and SANES have established themselves as the dominant security and administrative actors in NES. However, SANES and the SDF continue to face a range of challenges that undermine their ability to effectively administer the region. SANES has struggled to extend services reliably across its territory. Acute crises

and high unemployment have compounded these difficulties and imposed further strains on communities. Meanwhile, SANES has confronted sporadic civil unrest, in addition to both external and internal security challenges from actors including TSO on frontlines in Ar-Raqqa, Jazira, and Manbij; GoS forces in Qamishli and Al-Hassakeh cities; asymmetric attacks carried out by ISIS affiliates and unknown armed actors in Deir ez-Zor and elsewhere.

The full impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Syria remains unrealized, although it has been widely predicted to contribute to increased food insecurity throughout the country and has already influenced rising prices of essential food items and NFIs. Further, Russia's increased focus away from Syria and onto Ukraine leaves potential for increased interference by and changing dynamics between other international and security actors.

Figure 1: *Unexploded contamination found inside Al-Qubba School in Kobane that was cleared by RMC0 a local demining organization (picture by RMC0)*



Recent months have seen continued iterative displacement along Operation Peace Spring (OPS, the Turkish operation into parts of NES) conflict lines, as well as largely temporary displacements in Al-Hassakeh during skirmishes around the Al Sina'a (Ghweiran) Prison escape in January.

Communities across SANES-controlled areas of NES have been hit by multiple consecutive and simultaneous crises, with the collapse of the Syrian Pound (SYP), the impacts of an ongoing water crisis, effects of COVID-19 and slow vaccine rollout, ongoing outbreaks of violence, and most recently the influence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The prolonged water crisis has impacted NES communities' access to water, electricity, and agricultural livelihoods, and contributed to growing food insecurity and increasing malnutrition. Despite higher water levels in the Euphrates River in early 2022, electricity access was not improved in NES communities.¹ Economic factors continue to be a major factor influencing displacement in NES. Among those newly internally displaced (or re-displaced) people surveyed in NES in March 2022, 90 percent noted deterioration of the economic conditions of their previous place of residence as a push factor influencing their displacement.²

¹ REACH. Briefing Note: Humanitarian Impact of Water Shortages in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

² HNAP. Mobility and Needs Monitoring, Syrian Arab Republic: Syrian Democratic Forces Controlled Areas. March 2022.

EO contamination³—some of which are remnants of earlier conflict and some newly created—remain a significant security challenge in NES.

Further, debris of war contribute to already-precarious humanitarian conditions by obstructing access of SANES and humanitarian organizations

to communities and limiting the extent of service provision and humanitarian programming.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS – KEY POINTS

1. While SANES has consolidated security and administrative authority in NES, it continues to face multiple concurrent humanitarian and security challenges that impact local communities.
2. In recent months, SANES-controlled areas have been impacted by an acute water crisis and consequent electricity and food security challenges. These fall against a backdrop of poor economic conditions, high levels of un- and under-employment, and continued deterioration of the SYP, which exacerbate challenges for households to meet their basic needs.
3. SANES-held areas face ongoing security threats from both external and internal actors. Over the past year, tensions with TSO and GoS forces have generated significant internal displacement, straining formal and informal camp capacity and host communities. Asymmetric attacks carried out by ISIS affiliates and other armed actors have limited the ability of SANES and humanitarian organizations to extend services and conduct programming in areas with significant immediate needs.
4. Access challenges—whether due to active conflict, or EO and debris of war, or other factors—remain a significant barrier to service provision and humanitarian programming that would meet local needs and mitigate impacts of ongoing economic crises. This, in turn, further compounds other challenges, as local grievances over poor service provision and unmet needs can exacerbate tensions with SANES and contribute to conflict.

³ EO consists of mines (including landmines, sea mines, improvised explosive devices) and ERW (including UXO and cluster munitions)

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

While SANES has made progress in extending services within the territory it administers, populations in NES continue to face multiple concurrent humanitarian challenges.

SANES areas have been afflicted by an acute water crisis driven by low rainfall levels and reduced water flow through the Euphrates River. Al-Hassakeh city and portions of the Jazira region have been particularly impacted as a result of depleted groundwater

reserves and inconsistent pumping from Alouk Water Station in TSO-controlled Ras al-Ain affecting approximately 460,000 people.⁴ . Meanwhile, drinking water stations and irrigation along the Euphrates River have also been impacted. While communities' access to drinking water improved slightly from August 2021 to March 2022, continuing low rainfall and reductions in groundwater levels are likely to influence worsening access in summer 2022.

fully met local needs, Humanitarian organizations have sought to mitigate these challenges by trucking water into impacted areas. However, this has not fully met local needs, and increased reliance on private water trucking presents challenges posed by high costs and reported issues with drinking water safety.⁵⁶

As SANES areas rely heavily on hydroelectric power generation at the Tabqah and Tishrin dams, reduced water flow and consequent reductions in power generation have limited electricity supply across the region. Although water levels in the Euphrates have improved in 2022, access to electricity has remained low in NES as of March 2022 as rationing continued to impact supply.⁷

Further, low rainfall levels contributed to significantly reduced wheat harvests and resulting food insecurity in NES during the 2021 harvest season. While SANES will be able to utilize wheat it had stockpiled, this will be insufficient to fill the gap. Unless SANES is able to import sufficient quantities of wheat or flour, or unless humanitarian organizations help meet current needs, low wheat

supply will critically undermine food security across NES⁸.

Historically underdeveloped by the GoS, NES's economic conditions worsened considerably over the course of the conflict.

The region is largely dependent on agricultural and livestock production, while a significant portion of the population is engaged in the informal sector. The deteriorating value of the SYP has driven up costs, exacerbating challenges for households.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted global markets and prices, contributing to rising energy prices and affordability of food items and other basic needs in Syria and internationally. With much of Syria's wheat imports coming from Russia, this will likely contribute to increases in already high food insecurity and rates of malnutrition and further compound the crises facing residents of NES. Syria has already seen a 39 percent increase in the price of cooking oil, an essential item, with a 97 percent annual increase in the price of a basic food basket in 2022.⁹

⁴ REACH. Briefing Note: Humanitarian Impact of Water Shortages in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

⁵ REACH. Briefing Note: Humanitarian Impact of Water Shortages in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

⁶ REACH. Briefing Note: Humanitarian Impact of Water Shortages in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

⁷ REACH. Briefing Note: Humanitarian Impact of Water Shortages in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ WFP. War in Ukraine pushes Middle East and North Africa deeper into hunger as food prices reach alarming highs. March 31, 2022.

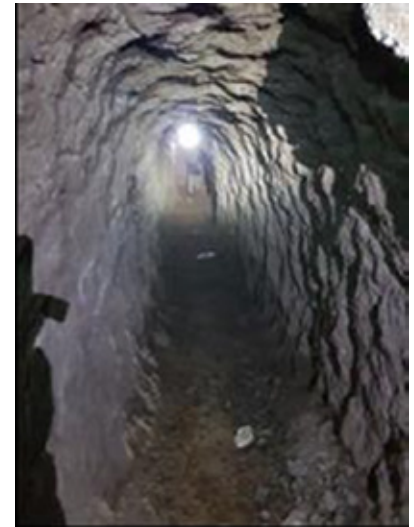
CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

While SANES and humanitarian actors are seeking to ameliorate these conditions, SANES's response is constrained by its own resource limitations. SANES and humanitarian actors also face access challenges driven in large part by ongoing security dynamics.

The SANES responded to displacements along OPS conflict lines by activating transit centers in December 2021 and January 2022.

The majority of humanitarian actors are unable to access these populations, given the proximity of both home communities and transit centers to conflict lines. All camps in NES, both formal and informal, are at full capacity, with a lengthy waitlist. Further, humanitarian programming is significantly impacted by major funding cuts by donors, detracting from relevant actors' ability to respond to ongoing crises in NES and across Syria.¹⁰

Figure 2: A tunnel in Al Faraby School yard in Ar-Raqqa.



SECURITY SITUATION

NES experiences conflicts at different levels, the most important of which is the fight against ISIS and operations by Turkish-backed groups. In addition, there are frequent tensions and clashes between the SDF and GoS forces within NES cities. Currently, there are many different parties on the ground, including international and regional forces. One of the most prominent security threats in the region is the activity of ISIS cells in Deir ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakeh Regions, targeting governmental or administrative headquarters, checkpoints and military structures through planting explosive devices and assassinations.

The largest operation by ISIS since its defeat in March 2019 was the attack on Al Sina'a Prison in Al-Hassakeh City in February 2022. Al-Hol camp endures serious accidents frequently, resulting in casualties and short-term curfews imposed by the security forces. The iMMAP security team in NES speculates that ISIS sleeper cells are likely to carry out more large-scale attacks, mostly in the countryside of Al-Hassakeh and Al-Hol Camp.

Turkish forces and Turkish-backed group are frequently bombing villages around Turkish controlled OPS area. They also frequently target SDF commanders, vehicles, and social figures with drones. These attacks left many casualties and increased in 2022, also in areas that have witnessed relatively little violence in past years, such as Qamishli. As the context is changing due to less visible presence of Russian forces, some are concerned that the Turkish army will launch more operations in NES after Operation Olive Branch (OOB) in January 2018 and OPS in October 2019.

¹⁰ iMMAP. Thematic Report: Recent Conflict Displacement Dynamics and Response in Northeast Syria. April 2022.

GoS forces have a presence in Qamishli and al-Al-Hassakeh, under an agreement from October 2019. Both sides often impose roadblocks, resulting in clashes and tensions, most notably in April 2022. Such clashes lead to temporary closures of the crossing points

between SDF and GoS areas. The border crossing between NES and KRI, the only international crossing used by INGOs, witnessed disturbances and closures between December 2021 and February 2022, due to a political conflict between the authorities in NES and KRI.

So far, the iMMAP security team has not observed any major changes in the security situation as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. A portion of Russian soldiers have withdrawn from Syria, leading to a reduction of Russian patrols in NES.

HMA ANALYSIS

Figure 3: Typical contamination found in Residential areas that has to be cleared before people can move back to their homes. (Picture by RMC0)



Over 27 million m2 of NES have EO contaminated land as a result of the armed conflict against ISIS and continuing violence in and around Turk controlled areas. Ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Al-Hassakeh governorates are most affected.

Such hazards pose a threat to civilians, and children are particularly vulnerable. The previous HMA report of October 2021 reported 20 million m2. The increase is largely the result of standardized and therefore improved data collection, as well as HMA actors carrying out additional surveys. The HMA situation in Deir ez Zor remains largely unclear, because of access issues in the south and east of the governorate.

CONTAMINATION

Since 2017 a total of 63,432,374 million m² of land has been identified as contaminated, equating to a total of 3,798 hazardous areas identified since data was collated and collected centrally.

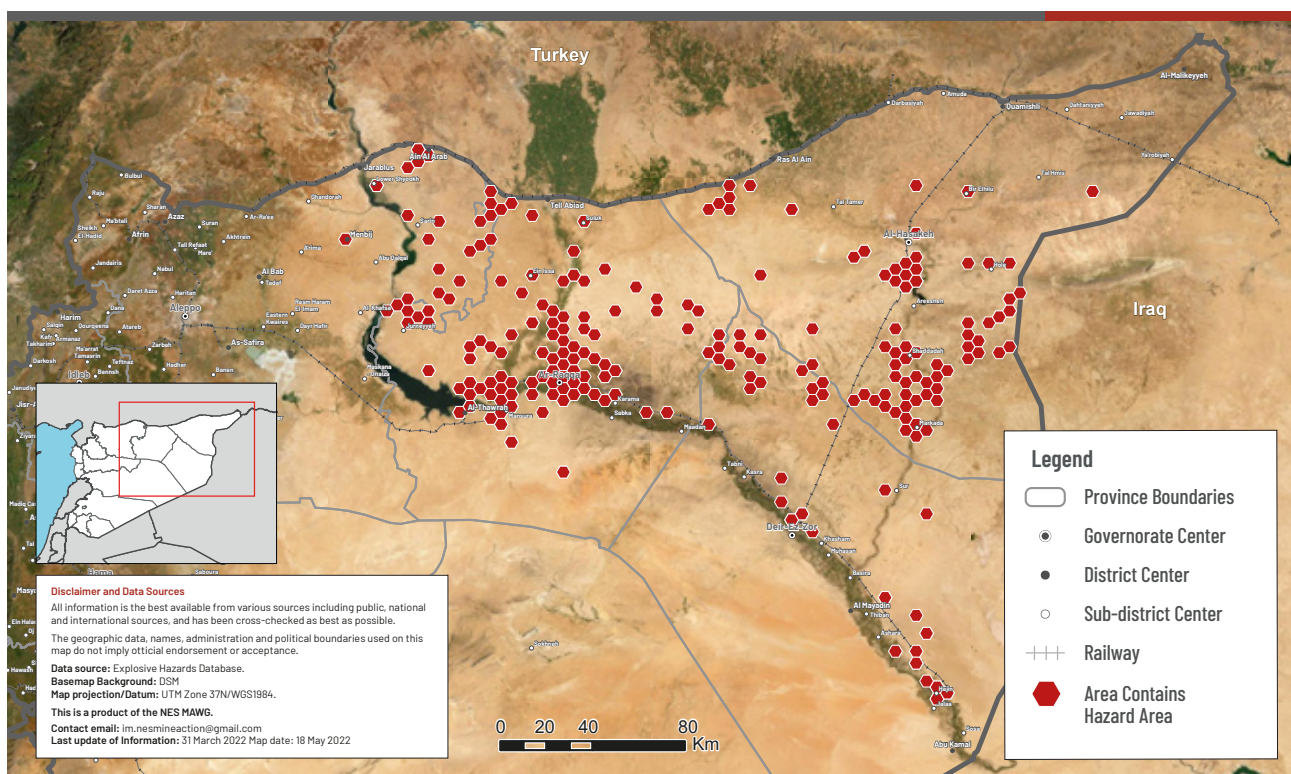
After the heavy fighting in NES over the years since 2014, it led to contamination of various governorates from Ar-Raqqa to Deir ez-Zor and Al-Hassakeh with improvised explosive devices including wide spread of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) especially around the homes and various critical infrastructures in both rural and urban areas.

Clearance activities have been ongoing and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) sessions as well to create awareness in the region in the dangers of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). However, victim assistance as a mine action pillar has not been well articulated but it's slowly picking up and full circle of mine action 5 pillars.

The main concern right now is the re-contamination of the OPS region as parts of the region had already been cleared after October 2019. The extent of this re-contamination is unknown, because HMA actors have no access in and around OPS areas, including in areas

that are controlled by Russian forces. Active shelling occurs frequently, especially around the region of Tal Tamr, Tell Abiad and Ain Issa where most partners had done surveying and clearing prior to OPS.

Figure 4: This map highlights the the extent of contamination in NES since 2017. However the OPS region has new contamination which has not been captured since Oct 2019



Potential New Contamination

As mentioned in the previous chapter, besides the SDF led operation against ISIS, a second source of ERW contamination is related to OPS, which was launched in October 2019. Conflict around OPS lines remains ongoing, with Turkish forces frequently shelling villages around the M4 highway, including Tel Tamr (to the east of the OPS territory),

Ain Issa (south), Kobani and Manbij (west). This repeated bombardment has resulted in a number of villages being abandoned, further adding to the internally displaced persons (IDP) situation. Between 2019 and 2021, there have been 6,732 indirect fire attacks and 2,156 air strikes in NES.¹¹

In January 2022 ISIS attacked

Ghweiran Prison in al-Al-Hassakeh, which was followed by a brief siege and some heavy fighting with SDF forces. However, this has unlikely led to widespread EO contamination or IED risk, possibly apart from a limited number of small arms fighting.

IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND CIVILIAN LIFE

The sub-districts of Ain Al Arab, Sarin, Al-Hassakeh, Markada, Shadaddi, Tel Tamer, Ras al-Ain and Ar-Raqqa continue to be most affected. Although contamination poses a constant threat, it has become a daily reality for the communities who live around it. They deal with limitations, such as blocked

access to 22.7% of agricultural and pastureland in NES, 54% blocked infrastructure (mostly civilian building complexes, schools, bakeries, bridges, electrical substations, hospitals etc.) and 1.6% blocked water infrastructure. The latter poses a particular challenge within the larger context of an ongoing

drought. In the context of the humanitarian issues affecting NES, including high numbers of IDPs, there is a pressing need to continue clearance in a prioritized and systematic manner, especially targeting the acute water crisis which also impacts food generation and electricity production.

Blockage Category	Task Completed (3,101)	Task Remaining (778)
Agriculture	40	32
Infrastructure	573	157
Non-Agriculture	31	16
Roads	146	52
Water	10	6
Uncategorized	2,301	515

¹¹ Based on iMMAP research of Opensource data from Websites reporting on the conflicts in Syria

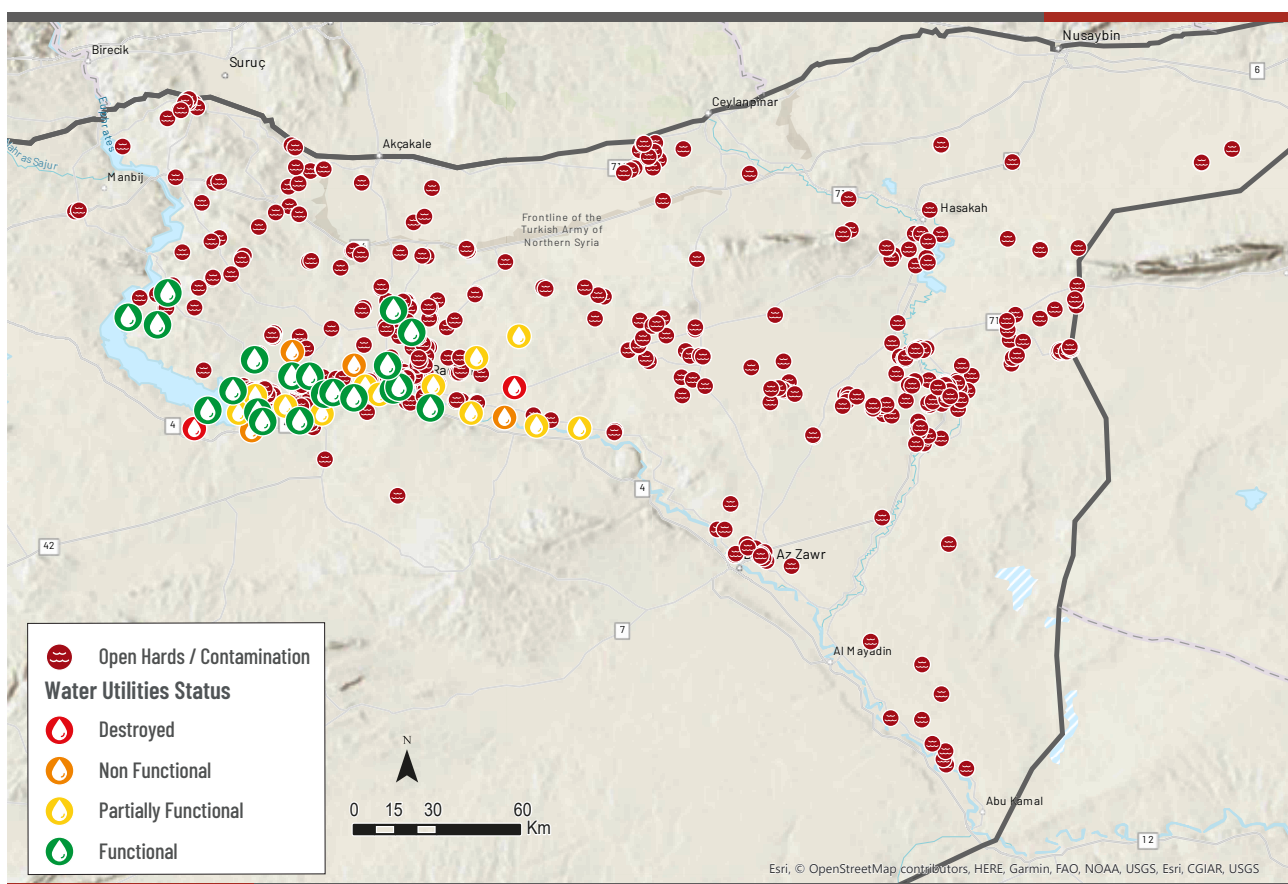
DATA SETS CATEGORIES ERW BLOCKAGES IN GENERAL CATEGORIES

Reduced availability and access to water continue to be a humanitarian threat. This has been an issue since the spring of 2021. The winter months of 2021 and 2022 again saw limited rainfall in many areas

of NES. This lack of rainfall and blockages in Turkey and Turkish held areas continue to cause low water levels of the Euphrates River. This in turn led to a low harvest in 2021 and by April-May 2022, many crops were failing

again. For 2022 again a reduced operational capacity of several critical water stations supplying larger urban centers and catchment areas is expected.

Figure 5: Map¹² showing status of water infrastructure that are repaired or planning to be repaired



NES also suffers significant power shortages. This is partially caused by broken power lines in areas that have not been cleared of EO.

¹² Source: NES Agriculture Working Group (AWG) maintains an Agriculture Water System Online List

LANDMINE VICTIMS

Statistics show that men are at significantly higher risk – although many reports don't indicate sex. Of the victims recorded 42% were recorded as fatalities.

During the period September 2021 to April 2022 through the unverified data from other

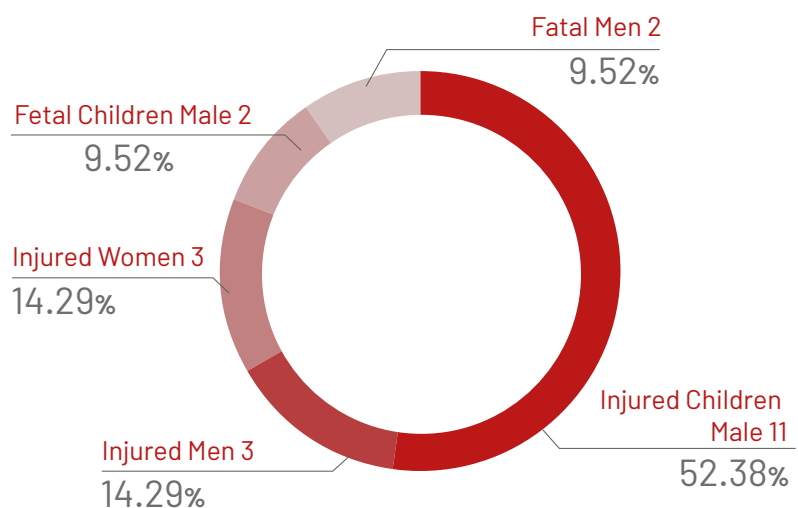
sources collected via the Explosive Hazard Incidences (EHI) that is maintained by iMMAP there were a total of 1,162 deaths and 860 injuries.

This was distributed as follows: 204 in Aleppo, 372 in Al-Hassakeh, 194 in Ar-Raqqa

and 392 in Deir ez-Zor for the deaths and 336 in Aleppo, 144 in Al-Hassakeh, 148 in Ar-Raqqa and 232 in Deir ez-Zor for the injuries. The data is not categorized in the same manner as that which is received from the partners.

Figure 6: Pie Chart showing the number of persons killed and injured in NES from September 2021 to April 2022s

ACCIDENTS AND VICTIMS DATA



Socioeconomic challenges force people to adopt risk-taking behavior patterns to earn a living, such as scrap metal collection, truffle picking, and farming in potentially contaminated land. Soon after the defeat of ISIS, many people undertook clearing themselves in their homes, businesses, and fields, leading to countless accidents. The most affected and widely reported victims are children, especially when they are sent out to the fields to graze in the countryside of both Ar-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

These numbers are not entirely verified, and are therefore indicative. Verified numbers are much lower because these numbers only include incidents reported to HMA actors. Another source of information is local news, but these reports don't necessarily coincide with the reporting from HMA partners. Many incidents go unreported, especially in remote areas where victims are likely to be buried within hours after their deaths.

Human Interest Story: Syria's Washokani Camp: Steadfast and Hopeful In the Face of War, Explosives, and COVID-19

Explosives, refugees and Covid are a daily routine in Northeast Syria. IMMAP traveled to Washokani camp to see the human stories behind the reality of HMA conditions on the ground. This article tells the story of a group of cheerful school kids who are growing up in this reality and a young man who lost his leg but not his ambition.

A group of 12-year-old kids from the camp's school shared their experiences with fleeing explosives and COVID-19. They all knew about EO and many of them had previous experiences or encounters. Some of them told that they had seen EO laying in the area where they were playing and that they ran for their lives -as taught by their parents or by EORE activities from HMA or humanitarian actors. There was also a boy, who told that his cousin did not survive an EO accident.

The story then continues with Ayman, another story of resilience. Now 23, he lost his leg when his village was bombarded. He now lives in a domed tent with his pregnant wife. Because of his handicap, he's allowed to live close to the bath houses, although the stench was no blessing. He had to give up his dream to enter an acting school, but now studies law. His ambition doesn't stop there. After losing his leg, he re-taught himself how to ride his motor bike. He did that by literally falling of many times, until he managed. He now drives around, sitting on his crutches.

(Source: <https://immap.org/story/syrias-washokani-camp-steadfast-and-hopeful-in-the-face-of-war-explosives-and-covid-19/>)

HMA SECTOR

iMMAP has been providing HMA coordination and information management in NES since 2017. With the primary goal of providing a comprehensive picture of explosive hazard contamination and progress of intervention measures to stakeholders, the project focused on two specific activities, providing coordination support and providing information management support complying to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

The HMA sector faced some operational challenges late 2021 and early 2022. Discussions about a MoU between the

NESMAO and the HMA actors, which were led and facilitated by the HMA Coordinator (HMA-C), stalled and led to a stalemate, forcing the HMA actors to cease operating for almost two months at the beginning of 2022. Restrictions were eventually lifted, and all parties returned to the discussions.

Between September 2021 and April 2022, 3,654 devices were found and destroyed, bringing the total to date to 113,787 devices, among which there were 16,807 landmines, 90,756 UXOs, and 6,224 IEDs for the whole period from 2017.

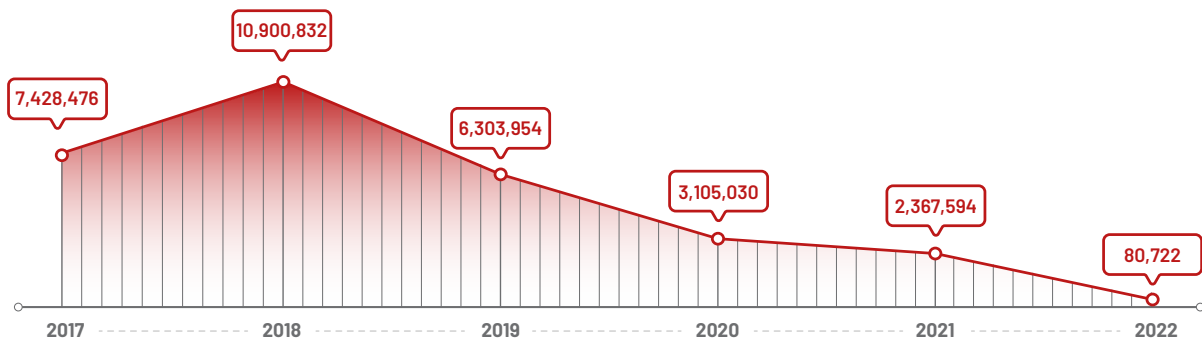
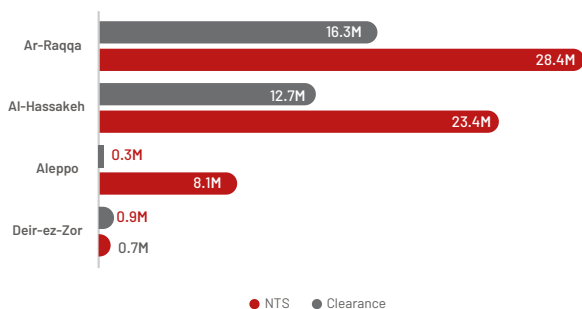
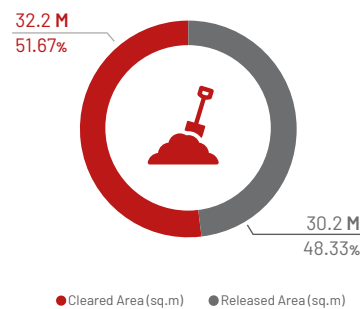
The need for the project will continue as long as HMA operations are maintained or an alternative service provider (NESMAO or INGO in future) comes on board. Lastly, iMMAP maintained close contacts with all stakeholders by successfully hosting Mine Action Sub Working Group (MASWG) and EORE Coordination monthly meetings, participating in all the NES Forum TL, Intersectoral working group (ISWG) and Protection working group (PWG) meetings.

HMA ACTORS

To date a total of 29 million m² have been cleared that resulted from 4,255 physical activities.

Currently six organizations are engaging in HMA. Danish Church Aid (DCA), HAMAP, Humanity and Inclusion (HI), ITF Enhancing Human Security (previously called International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance), Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and Roj Mine Control Organization (RMCÖ) are active in clearance activities and non-technical survey (NTS). Most of these organizations are also active in EORE. HI is the only actor that conducts victim assistance.

This clearing is a slow and labor-intensive process, especially in urban settings. Buildings may have been bombed or littered with IEDs and HMA actors need to clear the rubble without knowing what they will find in buildings that may not have structural integrity.

Figure 7: Infographic showing Clearance activities breakdown**CLEARED AREA PER YEAR (SQM)****REDUCTION TYPE PER GOVERNORATE****AREA TYPE PERCENTAGE**

As other sectors, HMA will move from humanitarian response to early recovery in many regions in NES. This transition is ongoing. The early response was targeted at getting critical infrastructure back into running and to reduce the immediate and obvious threats to life. HMA partners are now transitioning to areas that are less contaminated and don't present the high levels of direct exposure. People are avoiding these areas because they may have alternative resources and as such are able to reduce their risk-taking behaviors.

HMA in numbers: Since 2017, HMA partners have been able to remove a number of blockages:

- Food Security: 614 x Farms and Grain storage facilities made available for use.
- Education: 136 x Schools and Training institutions reopened.
- Health: 25 x Medical facilities reopened.
- Water: 43 x Water stations reopened.
- Power: 22 x Electricity stations restored.
- Transport: 198 x Facilities including bridges, culverts and stations have been made safe.
- Housing: 1141 x Access to Housing sites for rehabilitation/reoccupation.
- Others: 715 x Facilities including administrative centers, religious/cultural sites and commercial sites have been put back to use.

HI is the only HMA actor assisting survivors with victim assistance services. It offers rehabilitation, prosthetics, and self-care training. Other INGOs such as Medecins Du Monde (MDM)

also provide mental health and psycho-social support (MPHSS) for both child survivors and their caregivers. There is currently no referral process for victim support. This was requested at

a MASWG meeting in September 2021 and is an action point between the HMA Coordinator and HI.

CURRENT CLEARING ACTIVITIES

A significant amount of capacity in the terms numbers of personnel and equipment were lost or reduced following OPS and then the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, HMA actors have started to re-establish operations, primarily using residual funding from previous grants that is largely due to expire between December 2021 and January 2022.

In NES, HMA operations encounter mostly IEDs or improvised mines. These are well known to HMA actors and built of similar principles such

as crush wire, pressure plates, electrical circuits, and various types of main charges. The degrees of complexity are more widely impacted by how the devices and the environments are used.

HMA is by nature a high-risk operation, and the general principle is to do activities remotely whenever possible and to avoid exposing the operators to the potential impact of an uncontrolled explosion. Therefore, it is highly desirable and best practice to utilize equipment that will

distance the operator from the devices. The use of drones and machinery all serve the purpose of allowing the organization and operators distance themselves from the effects of any device detonation. During an HMA operation there are certain mandatory standards that apply. This shapes the nature and types of equipment, vehicles, training etc. that need to be in place. Examples of this include Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), medical and trauma support, and communications.

Access strategy

Currently, access in most sites in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakeh is possible and security risks are acceptable. These risks are higher in OPS areas and currently security guidelines of HMA partners don't allow for clearance activities in vulnerable contested areas. In theory, this might be possible

through coordination with NESMAO or International Coalition forces, who have communication with the Russian forces.

Security concerns still limit HMA activities in large areas in Deir ez-Zor, especially in the southern and eastern desert

areas. Here, some local HMA actors are active. The main access solutions are through a community-based strategy, or some sort of bracketed access (HMA actors leave the area immediately after clearing) or through local solutions potentially lead by the NESMAO.

DATA COLLECTION

Whereas the first part of 2021 saw a recovery of HMA activities, coordination and data collection after OPS and the COVID-19 pandemic, the period of September 2021 to April 2022 this sustained and solidified. The HMA-C succeeded in improving standardization, which in turn helped data become available that the HMA partners had collected prior to OPS and the pandemic. This has been captured on the database, which explains a spike in the contaminated areas for the last 4 months.

The HMA partners also agreed on how to work on areas where some HMA partners previously established contamination, which will provide more details and context on the type of contamination for the partners that are planning to work in those areas.

Therefore, the quality of the contamination data has significantly improved, but is still incomplete. Surveys are limited to areas where HMA actors are active. Only a handful of contamination impact

surveys have been conducted in communities potentially at risk. Although this enables HMA actors to advise communities and humanitarian actors of potential hazards in their project locations, there is no complete overview of the hazards in NES. For example, the northwestern area of NES is barely surveyed, with only the inner city of Manbij having been surveyed by Tetra Tech. Now, recontamination due to frequent shelling make the situation even less clear.

Baseline data

All data from HMA partners, that lists the clearance activities and results to date are in the HMA coordination database, including what this for the use of infrastructure. This information management is coordinated and collated through NESMAO office and administered through the grant by iMMAP. The main database in use is widely accepted as the standard for HMA, known as the International Management System for Mine Action referred to as IMSMA. It collects information about ERW activities and EORE and stores it in the subscribed formats. iMMAP manages the IMSMA data base for NES, which is populated from the data provided by the partner agencies.

The contamination data follows the main drive of individual partners, their original (emergency) plans, and access at a given time. As a result, most data focus on Al-Hassakeh, Tel Tamar, Ar-Raqqah, Tabqah, Shidadi and main access routes M4 east to west. From the end of 2019 through to the beginning of 2021, data activities declined as a result of OPS, when most agencies withdrew from NES.

The current Information Management Systems allow to state how many m2 have been cleared and what was found and destroyed. Information collection and surveying has been limited to specific areas, actors, and activities. Survey data has predominantly focused on and around the main ISIS battle fronts.

One aim for 2022 to develop capacity to break this down by the type of clearance, such as agricultural land, schools, etc.

Currently, the system also shows that the clearance to date (number of m2 versus the number of tasks) is greater than what is showing as left to do. Using this as a potential indicator of time and resources needed, it could potentially indicate that within a similar timeline. If the pace of clearance remains constant, it would be feasible for NES to be well on its way to being EO impact free within 4 years. This is a rough estimation—a broad assumption based on clearance done versus contamination remaining, while assuming the same or similar levels of clearance and no further contamination being found.

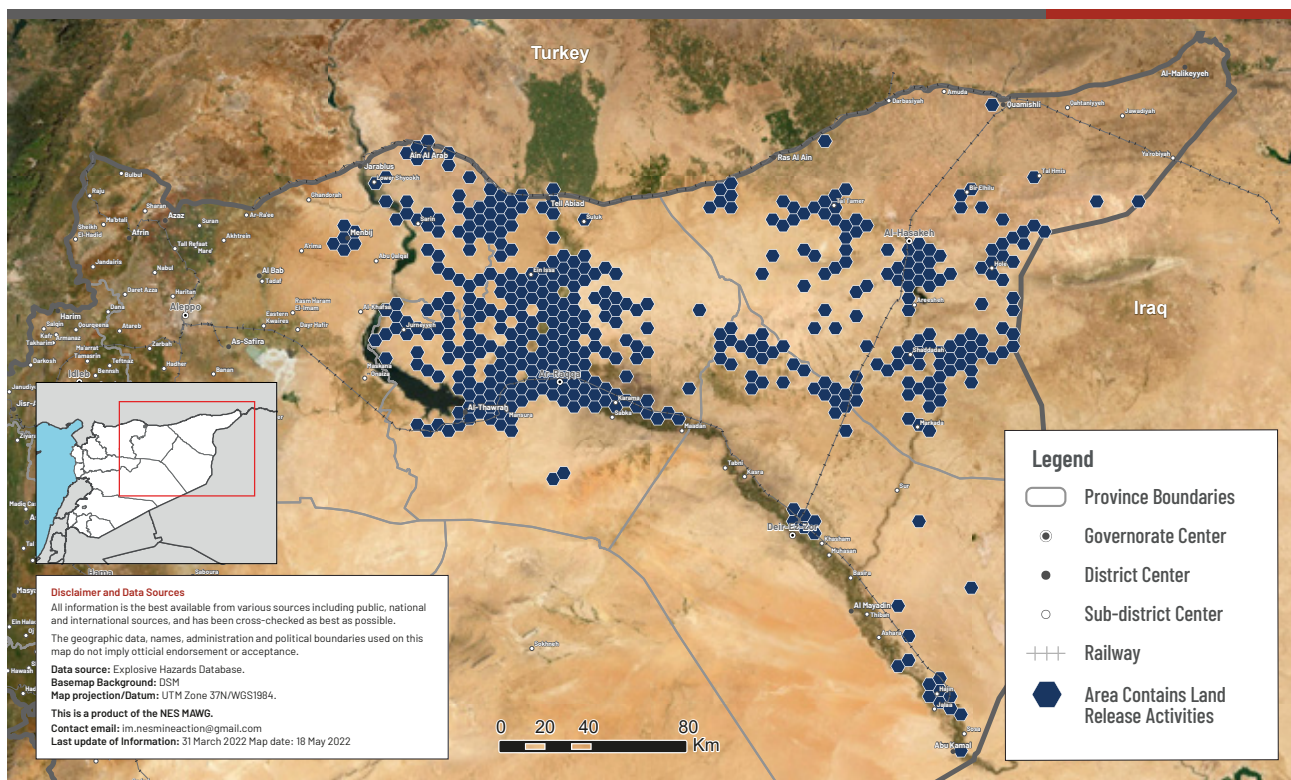
Contamination data coverage and gaps

Consolidated clearance records held by the NESMAO on the IMSMA data base are the most up to date records held for NES. However, this data should not be viewed as a complete historical record, nor as a full picture. Also, because of fighting in OPS areas and southern and eastern Deir ez-Zor, any impact surveys conducted in the past can be assumed to be incorrect and will eventually need to be redone, when the security situation allows.

Currently, survey activities only record the location of hazards, but are not used to identify the areas where no hazards are reported or where surveys have been carried out. As a result, there is no complete and accurate overview of the contamination in NES and a full systematic survey has not been conducted for the region. A joint baseline survey would create insight that could guide clearance activities in a strategic manner, in order to support the implementation

of humanitarian and early recovery activities. Combining the base line NTS data with inter-sector and self-administration work plans would form an essential tool on developing a prioritization system. NTS reporting system collects impact data as well as contamination data.

Figure 8: Map showing the coverage of known land released in NES



It should be recognized that there has been no consolidated regional survey and to establish the baseline data and there are known gaps in data coverage. Noticeable data gaps exist along the Euphrates River north of Tabqah toward Manbij and Kobani and south of Ar-Raqqa to Bhagouz. The northwestern areas of NES,

particularly Kobani and Manbij and southeastern sector notably Deir ez-Zor. In the southeast access due to the continued levels of insecurity continues to be the main challenge. Whereas the northwest of NES never received the attention as the agencies concentrated the efforts following the frontlines and liberation. As such there has

been less priority given to the areas around Kobani and Manbij and the northerly Euphrates areas. There is also a noticeable lack of data around the area associated with Operation Peace Spring between the M4 road and Turkish border.

Baseline data quality

The quality and quantity of the data received has improved since September 2021. This has resulted in various data gaps being filled, although many remain. Generally, key information such as hazard data has been lacking, although this has been due in part to effects of COVID-19. Whereas partners previously used various systems, data collection has been standardized into IMSMA or standard Excel forms, and the provision of data in hard copy reports has ended. The room for data errors has decreased significantly, while the HMA-C continues to work on further improvements.

Figure 9: Critical infrastructure clearance in Ar-Raqqa - typical example of the rubble and structural damage that has to be removed before access into the main building is secure (picture by RMC0)



HMA COORDINATION

The HMA sector is small and has a very focused set of activities. Until recently, cooperation and coordination between HMA actors had a largely informal character. It operated through the MASWG chaired by the HMA-C. During the emergency phase prior to 2019, at a time when the SANES faced more pressing needs of active conflict and mass IDP issues, this functioned effectively. Today, the situation has evolved, and greater emphasis is being placed on coordinating HMA activities with humanitarian efforts into a more cohesive process that also ties into the priorities of the SANES.

The main improvement in HMA coordination is more collaborative action in consistent data collection and coordinated surveying, clearance and EORE activities. This avoids duplication and strengthens the role of HMA data supporting humanitarian and rehabilitation activities.

Prior to 2018, a lack of HMA coordination made it technically hard for HMA organizations to implement their programs. There was no consolidated information on a single database to support the rehabilitation of infrastructure in WASH, SNFI, and FSL sectors. Since then, coordination efforts have avoided loss of time and effort.

The over-arching challenge continues to be to further link HMA into the mainstream planning of the reconstruction and development plans of SANES and of humanitarian actors. The recent improvement in the relations between the NESMAO and the HMA partners seem to open up the space to further work on this link. To strengthen the notion that HMA should be viewed as an enabler for other activities, the Mine Action Request for Information system was introduced. This now serves as a source of HMA information for humanitarian and early recovery actors, where they can request information that is then processed in under 24 hours, if already available. Hospitals, schools, and water infrastructure have been the greatest beneficiaries of this arrangement.

Humanitarian actors who made use of the products, enhanced their reporting and implementation of their programs. For example, the Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) coordinator shared a master list with 829 records of water infrastructure that need verification of contamination and clearance. With that information, they were able to rehabilitate and restore the usage of pumping/boosting stations, dams, irrigation canals, boreholes, and water treatment plants in the different communities.

Forum

The HMA-C remains the focal point for HMA within the NGO Forum. The HMA coordination attends the various working groups and promotes the use of the HMA Request form. The coordinator provides updates of the ISWG as and when there is something relevant. The leadership of the NGO Forum and the ISWG played a significant role in supporting the HMA-C in lifting the restrictions

on HMA activities as a result of the stalled MoU negotiations in January and February 2022.

The HMA-C developed and delivered a Preliminary Risk Assessment tool whereby partners can request a desktop risk assessment. The ambition is to drive this into mainstream humanitarian and rehabilitation activities, particularly where there are intrusive activities

planned in higher risk areas. The proposed baseline NTS of all of NES will play a very important part in this tool. At this moment eight partners have requested and gained access to the tool with another two partners asking for direct information by email from the team about contamination in potential humanitarian work areas

Whole of Syria

The HMA-C works closely with the other regional coordinators in the understanding of the HMA situational analysis, general standardization, conflict resolution etc., in order to present a cohesive Whole of Syria (WoS) viewpoint and representation.

The HMA coordinator has regular communication with UNMAS and WoS coordination. He participates in biweekly meetings of the WoS Working Group (WoSWG). In addition, he contributed to the ECHO HIP, the Humanitarian Response Plan. Also, he is in discussion

with regards to the 4W's and the issue of bilateral reporting of the partners. The intention is that this will again be coordinated through the HMA Coordination Office.

Mine Action Authorities

An increasingly crucial element for effective coordination is the NES Mine Action Office (NESMAO, previously NESMA Center). SANES established this body as a response to concerns over their ability to manage the HMA response in line with their own priorities. The NESMAO still is not a fully functioning HMA authority and still lacks a core of fully complement of staff. Recently, its role has become clearer and its interaction with the HMA sector more consistent. This also improved the interaction with the HMA-C and it seems that the NESMAO appreciates communicating with one representative rather than a number of HMA actors. NESMAO leadership also seems to be developing a clearer picture of the support, training and equipment it requires.

Until recently, the Mine Action authority in NES was called NESMAC and it was established as a local NGO, outside the structure of the SANES, but reporting to the Humanitarian Affairs Office (HAO). This was an unusual situation, which did not do justice to the need of a real authority that takes final responsibility, including for issues like prioritization of clearance areas and quality assurance and control. It also meant that the NESMAC (NES Mine Action Center) didn't fall inside SANES funding, which inhibited its capacity as a HMA authority. In January 2022, the NESMAC (NES Mine Action Center) became the NESMAO, as part of the SANES reporting directly to the HAO. It now receives funding from SANES and lately it seems that NESMAO officials are focusing more on their tasks rather than surviving.

The MoU negotiations exemplify this transition. Until March, the relation between the NESMAO and the HMA sector was tense and negotiations dragged on, sanding in on lots of details mainly around budgetary issues. Collective meetings alternated with individual meetings, making it difficult to come to a common ground for all parties involved. The main issues were an additional income tax for national staff of HMA organizations only and recruitment vetting by the authorities. In January this resulted in both sides digging in, at which point the NESMAC restricted HMA operations.

The HMA-C office, being a neutral party in this and supported by the NGO Forum leadership, succeeded in keeping all parties to keep talking in an effort to find common ground.

This resulted in the HMA actors returning to work in February, after a two-month suspension. Since April, the talks have regained momentum and the HMA-C was able to shift the focus much more the full picture of a functioning mine authority, including elements as quality assurance and control and prioritization.

HMA coordination works very closely with the NESMAO. The coordinator is developed a digital tool in the form of a 3-part dashboard, including Activity Reporting, Capability Reporting and a Coordinating tool. This dashboard offers visibility on what is happening on a weekly basis: which agency has what capacity funded and who is allocated to what task and eventually what priority.

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION (EORE)

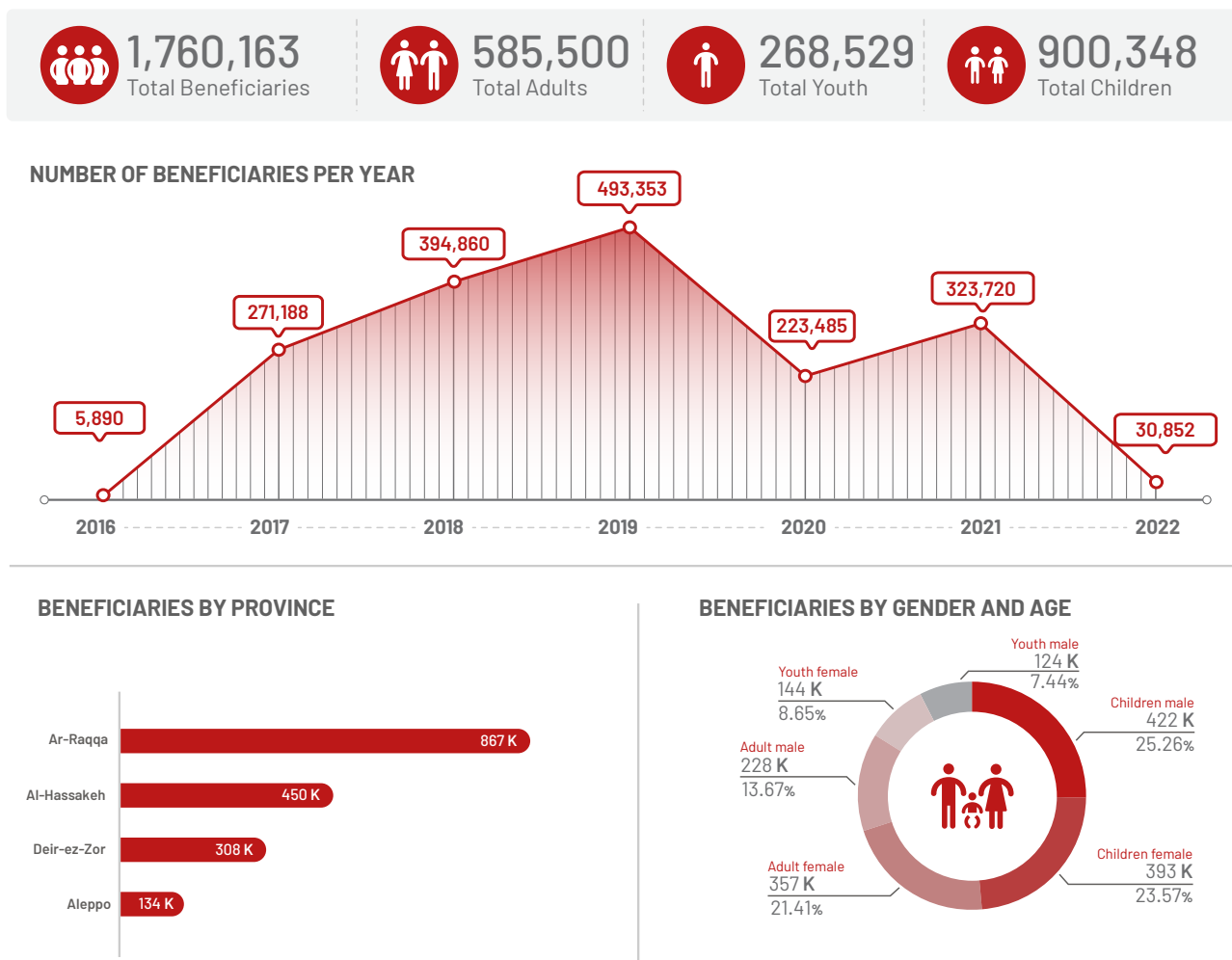
Between 2016 and April 2022, HMA actors have been providing 115,236 risk education activities had been reported to 1,733,565 beneficiaries. With an estimated population of approximately 2.6 million¹³ people in NES, an estimated 66% of the population should have now received an EORE intervention of some sort.

Most HMA actors offer EORE. EORE sessions have been conducted widely in NES to increase the sensitization of ERWs and included Trainings of Trainers (ToTs) to better disseminate the message. EORE activities consist of media campaigns, such as radio, school campaigns, poster campaigns as well as text messages (UNMAS). They are

implemented by mixed gender teams to reach as many people as possible and generally follow standard messaging: “don’t touch, mark, report”.

Due to security issues, HMA actors providing EORE have limited access to areas like Deir ez-Zor and around OPS territories. This also affects EORE activities.

Figure 10: Infographic showing number of EORE beneficiaries by age group.



¹³ Statement by WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean on the tenth year of Syria crisis – Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Despite the efforts made to date, the true extent of the ERW contamination and its subsequent effects is not fully known. Due to the nature in which HMA evolved in NES, activities have centered around the most accessible and subsequently densely populated centers. As wider reconstruction efforts begin, more information is required in less densely populated areas, combined with a greater understanding of the planned recovery works to ensure that the limited resources are optimized to maximum effect.

There is a need to expand clearance capacities. The bigger the capacity, the quicker the job is done. In this sense, expansion of national capacity should be the priority. This would allow for a reduction of the reliance on international direct support and increase sustainable local HMA capacity.

Our data suggest that with numbers of operational assets working at capacity levels from before October 2019, the impact of ERW could be reduced significantly and very quickly. This requires funding for the short and medium term but

would lower the need for the longer term. In this scenario, contamination would go to levels as seen in Europe today and a local authority would be able to deal with this.

The current issue of data collection needs to be reviewed and revised to a standardized processes in collection, reporting minimum field requirements, formats of data provision, standardized terminology and definitions, to avoid unnecessary workloads and an inaccurate picture of the HMA challenges.

Quality of data

The quality of the data being provided is variable and this significantly impacts its usefulness. The process of data management could be significantly improved by implementing minimum mandatory standards:

- Minimum mandatory reporting fields – this will ensure that critical data is captured and that meets the needs of multiple users.
- Standardized definitions and terminology – ensure consistency of data. Training may be needed for data collectors.
- Data collection system – using digital online/offline data collection systems will reduce the opportunity for data entry errors, automated geo data etc. Electronic systems are commercially and freely available.
- Provision of data – timelines for the receiving of data and also for the turnaround and presentation of data would allow for planning on the part of the providers and the users. Standardizing the formats for data will strengthen collation and quality assurance. There should no longer be any reason for providing data in word or pdf format. This procedure is time consuming, increases the risk of data errors and is harder to manage..

Prioritization and selection criteria

Currently there is no common and coordinated prioritization process in NES. Each partner plans its tasks against their own assessment and criteria. Currently, NESMAO frequently makes ad-hoc requests to survey and clear areas. The HMA-C and NESMAO, along with all partners recognize that it is not effective. As part of the development of the NESMAO systems, there is a strong

need to develop a prioritization mechanism that links the needs and capabilities of the HMA sector and the capabilities of the Humanitarian Sector and SA to implement projects in-line with the pressing needs of the population and rehabilitation and recovery plans.

Quality data collection will be a key part in the development of the NESMAO, allowing it to

achieve most of its overarching objectives. Linking data sets from other sectors and SANES would greatly enhance the ability to prioritize, enhance coordination and optimize operational effectiveness and efficiency. This would strengthen the NESMAO ability to implement its role as a tasking and approvals body.

Monitoring system

There is no established formal monitoring system. This has been identified by the SANES and forms part of the NESMAO mandate. The HMA-C has developed a NESMAO Coordination and Monitoring tool that will provide the NESMAO and HMA Coordinator with visibility on activities and

associated performance. This will allow the NESMAO to look at the data and be able to do base line data monitoring. Therefore, data showing unusual patterns can be used to follow up with the agencies or conduct targeted site visits and follow up. The NESMAO also has plans to create an M&E department

with four teams comprising eight personnel to conduct on site field monitoring. The HMA-C has a training plan for this ready, which can be implemented as soon as the MoU between the NESMAO and the HMA actors is signed.

ADVOCACY

Funding, prioritization, coordination, structures for monitoring and evaluation, baseline surveying and mainstreaming are needed to strengthen the role HMA actors, especially local ones.

This goes against a perceived HMA fatigue in the donor community, which resulted in reduced budgets and other equally pressing needs being prioritized.

Baseline data

The non-technical surveys (NTS) provide the start point for all HMA clearance and education activities. It provides critical data on the location, type, and extent of the contamination in the first instance as well as data on the communities, beneficiaries, and the impact of contamination. At least as important for prioritization and coordination is the recording of where there are no known hazards and which areas are uncontaminated.

Information collection and surveying has been limited to specific areas, actors, and activities. Survey data has predominantly focused on and around the main ISIS

battlefronts. Traditionally, survey activities have only recorded the location of hazards and have not been utilized to identify the areas where no hazards are reported or where the survey has been carried. As a result, there is no complete and accurate overview of the contamination in NES. A joint baseline survey would create insight that could guide clearance activities in a strategic manner, in order to support the implementation of humanitarian and early recovery activities. Combining the baseline NTS data with inter-sector and SANES work plans would form an essential tool for developing a prioritization system.

Conducting a systematic community by community level collection of NTS data, enables surveyors to map areas of no contamination with a reasonable degree and accuracy. This would yield a color-coded map which visualizes contamination-free areas in a short period of time.

This will provide a good baseline for ongoing prioritization. NTS provide the start point for all HMA clearance and education activities. It provides critical data on the location, type, and extent of the contamination in the first instance whilst having the capacity to provide data on the communities, beneficiaries, and impact of the contamination.

Coordination

Progress has been made in 2021 and 2022 in improving coordination among HMA partners. All HMA actors are committed to transparently contributing to the data sharing mechanism in place. Additionally, previous inconsistency in incoming data has improved, largely as a result of standardization of

data collection. A key challenge across the sector continues to be that standardized data is collected with consistent standard and quality.

There is a clear need to establish a prioritization mechanism that better serves the region and works as an enabler to other reconstruction and

regeneration activities. This is symbiotic with the ability to coordinate the effective and efficient use of limited resources. Such a prioritization mechanism would define what clearance, survey and EORE activities would have a priority. It needs to be defined in close coordination with the NESMAO.

Local Response

The MASWG is supportive of the development of the NESMAO. That support needs to be coordinated and aligned to a planned, systematic, and structured process, that is realistic and auditable in terms of deliverables. As a first realistic priority the NESMAO and the HMA Coordinator are developing Information Management tools that will enable the NESMAO to track the operational activities, to have a system of task management and to have insight in the capabilities of HMA actors by donor and project ends dates. It is anticipated that HMA partners will develop additional initiatives.

Priorities for this will be support in developing a 3-year strategic plan, support in building effective systems and resources, practice training and resourcing in line with a strategic plan. Chances for this have improved now that NESMAO in the SANES organizational structure and supported with the operating costs and salaries.

The implementation of a third-party M&E system would be an important step to ensure quality control. It would have the primary intention of continual improvement and betterment of the HMA sector. HMA actors need to be compliant with IMAS to ensure that clearance and

activities are at a satisfactory and acceptable standard. Additionally, agencies need to deliver cost effective activities in the right place and the right time.

Strategic planning is required for HMA response capability, in order to clear contamination in four to five years to create a manageable situation. Local organizations often have a good understanding of the dynamics, security, and politics of their working areas. Their staff are highly motivated and committed to the HMA cause. Local organizations could be a key resource in the longevity planning of NES HMA Capacity.

Mainstreaming HMA into Recovery and Rehabilitation

Especially in and around the OPS territories, continuing EO contamination is likely to be a humanitarian issue. In many other areas, HMA activities are transitioning into the early recovery stage. For 2022, the HMA-C aims to enhance multisector coordination, thereby strengthening the link with education, health, livelihood, and water activities

for both humanitarian and early recovery activities.

This will improve the pre-activity risk management process. Whilst the HMA support request form is gaining traction, there needs to be constant communication with humanitarian actors and other coordination bodies, such as the ISWG. However, for HMA to

be an integral part of the multi sector approach and become a mainstream consideration there is a need to show partners an immediate useful contribution. The HMA sector intends to develop a preliminary desktop risk assessment 2022, supporting the agencies in their due diligence.

Funding

Between 2017 and 2021 HMA actors cleared more than 50% of the known contaminated area. It is reasonable to assume that the remaining known contaminated areas could also be made safe in a similar sort of timeline, with a similar level of resources. A similar level of capacity should be seen as a key component of reducing the impact and risk to more manageable and tolerable levels not dissimilar to those in western Europe.

Combining this approach with a capacity building initiative that includes local organizations, international commitment could be incrementally reduced within three to five years –assuming there will be no major recontamination and clearance capacity and production levels are similar to that prior to OPS. Supporting clearance capacity of local NGOs and a response capability provided by Internal Security Forces (ISF) could further strengthen a sustainable development.

To ensure that humanitarian and early recovery actors can safely do their jobs, the maintenance of the clearance, survey and risk education capability is essential. Four of the six partners will have no funding after the end of 2021, and only two have confirmed funding into 2022. Clearance activities have recently started to resume, but reduced funding has resulted in a significant reduction in capability and lost momentum. Strengthening a coordinated and structured approach will further improve the clearance of UXO. This requires continued prioritizing HMA action among other essential services, in order to maintain ongoing recovery and save countless lives.

BACKGROUND

This report is a quarterly deliverable by the HMA-C. The HMA-C coordinates activities and information between HMA actors and represents the HMA sector with the authorities (including NESMAO) in NES. iMMAP is the host agency of the HMA-C and manages the IMSMA database. This report is based on data that is collected from the various HMA actors in NES dating back 2016. The data is collated and processed on the IMSMA platform and made available to anyone who requests in the form of an online Portal, Interactive map and request specific products. Other data used in this report is referenced in footnotes.

Click here for access to the NES Humanitarian Mine Action Activities dashboard, or go here: <https://bit.ly/HMA-C-nes>

For any requests in NES regarding Mine Action, click here for access to the NES Mine Action Assistance Request Form, or go here: <https://ee.humanitarianresponse.info/x/RA7hIUeA>, or contact the HMA-C or contact the MASWG.

Amuda NES, 31 May 2022

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