



For the past two years, The HALO Trust has worked with national NGO partners to assess almost 1,000 towns and villages in the Idlib, Aleppo and Afrin districts of northwest Syria. This has led to the first comprehensive understanding of explosive ordnance contamination across northwest Syria which is now documented in a [HALO report](#).

To mark the report's release and to raise awareness of the humanitarian issues linked to explosive hazard contamination, HALO, the Netherlands

- 1 The whole of Syria faces a massive protection and displacement crisis: 12 million people from all of Syria are displaced, 50% of these people are within Syria, the majority in Idlib. The displacement is affecting all communities across northwest Syria, and although host communities are mobilising to support IDPs, any influx of people adds pressure on already strained resources and infrastructures.
- 2 Living conditions for Internally Displaced People (IDP) in northwest Syria are appalling: most are forced to shelter either in abandoned buildings and building sites, or overcrowded IDP camps. As a result of these conditions, significant numbers of IDPs are preferring instead to return to their homes in front line areas, despite the risk of frequent shelling from the ongoing conflict.

- 5 Explosive ordnance contamination has been confirmed in over 40% of communities surveyed by HALO since 2018. HALO highlighted that just because contamination has not been reported or identified in the other 60% of communities, this does not mean that they are free of contamination, particularly as the conflict is ongoing and new contamination emerges. For this reason, continued survey efforts in northwest Syria are required to understand the exact scale and nature of explosive ordnance contamination and accurately map areas for future clearance.
- 6 Contamination is spread across both urban and rural areas in northwest Syria. In areas where contamination is considered low, the risk to civilian life is still high. This was illustrated by three case studies, all emerging from areas of relatively low level contamination. All three cases involved children picking up, or interacting with unusual items found in their everyday environment which then exploded in their hands, causing multiple deaths and injuries.
- 7 HALO's assessment has revealed that cluster munitions represent 26% of

MINE ACTION RESPONSE: CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- 11 It was identified that the future needs in northwest Syria span the full spectrum of mine action activities: the continuation of explosive ordnance disposal, risk education, more extensive and detailed survey and continued victim assistance programming.
- 12 Securing and maintaining cross border access, gaining community consent and ensuring the welfare and safety of teams were identified as the key challenges for mine action interventions in northwest Syria. None of these challenges are unique to mine action.
- 13 Participants raised the challenge of new contamination emerging while the conflict is ongoing. Although there are some communities, normally those close to the front lines, where it is too dangerous for any intervention, it was recognised that there is already access to a large number of communities affected by explosive ordnance where help can be provided to deal with the contamination and its effects without a ceasefire being in place.
- 14 Participants identified the further challenge of the availability of technically competent staff in northwest Syria. This is particularly the case for victim assistance activities where specialist technical roles are required, including physiotherapists and prosthetic technicians. There has been significant investment in upskilling a workforce to meet these needs however there is a risk of losing this technical capacity to other opportunities elsewhere, if needed victim assistance activities are not sustained and current programming is interrupted.
- 15 Many of the general needs of explosive ordnance accident victims/survivors could be met by other humanitarian actors working in the areas of health, protection and livelihood support. Victim assistance needs to be better mainstreamed to encourage other actors to provide this support.
- 16 Working through local implementing partners requires close collaboration and constant communication but it does offer opportunities to broaden programming, encompassing partners' areas of expertise.

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CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

- 17 The threat of explosive ordnance contamination in northwest Syria has not had enough attention or funding to date and despite a clear indication of need there remains a significant funding deficit for mine action going forward.
- 18 The mine action work delivered to date in northwest Syria has been well balanced, addressing both protection and health needs. Future mine action programming in northwest Syria should maintain this balance.
- 19 In order to encourage future funding support, the mine action sector could do more to highlight the inter-linkages between mine action and health and protection sectors and mainstream its work within the broader humanitarian response for northwest Syria.
- 20 Although risk education is a life-saving measure that mitigates the threat to civilians, and survey remains crucial to determine the existence, scale and location of ERW contamination, only through delivery of clearance and disposal, is the threat of death and injury from ERW contamination completely eliminated.
- 21 Beyond financial support, the donors' role can be extended to supporting advocacy efforts through their own channels.

This report is a brief summary of the main points and conclusions of the event. The report reflects an account of the proceedings and does not necessarily reflect any views or policies of the attendees.



If you would like to learn more about tackling the impact of explosive ordnance contamination in northwest Syria, please contact:

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