

Humanitarian Mine Action



Deminer in Cambodia. ©The Halo Trust

The walk to school is dangerous, and so is the path to the well or the road to the nearest hospital. Fields cannot be farmed even though food is scarce all around. Playing children risk their lives. These are just a few examples of how landmines and explosive ordnance, also known as explosive remnants of war, restrict or remove people's ability to provide for themselves and thus live in dignity in many regions of the world.

In 2022, 67 states and other areas were either known or suspected to be contaminated with antipersonnel mines; 29 countries and other areas were contaminated or suspected to be contaminated by cluster munition remnants. The UN Secretary-General reports that 9198 people fell victim to explosive ordnance in 2022. That year also holds the sombre record for the highest number of victims of cluster munitions since 2010.

This is what makes humanitarian mine action so crucially important! It serves to protect the lives and livelihoods of people in affected areas, in particular vulnerable

groups such as refugees, displaced people, and women and children, and helps enable them to once again live safe, self-determined lives in dignity. As the second-largest bilateral donor in the field of humanitarian mine action and the holder of the Presidency of the Ottawa Convention for 2022/2023, Germany is making a major contribution to reaching the aim of a mine-free world. The Ottawa Convention is the Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines and on their destruction.

SIDE GLANCE:
Examples of
humanitarian
mine action



What is humanitarian mine action?

Surveying suspected hazardous areas and locating and clearing unexploded ordnance and mines can directly reduce the risk to the local population. However, humanitarian mine action involves much more than just clearance efforts. It covers a broad spectrum of activities from prevention to rehabilitation.

For example, at-risk communities are provided with explosive ordnance risk education to help prevent or minimise accidents involving explosive remnants of war. Victim assistance supports victims of mines and explosive remnants of war with the aim of enabling them to participate as independently as possible in community life. And efforts are made to persuade as many states as possible to sign up to international bans such as the Ottawa Convention and the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Mine victim assistance for a self-determined life in dignity



Mujbil Mizher Muhammad, survivor of a landmine in Mosul.
©T. Nicholson/Handicap International

Mujbil Mizher Muhammad lost both legs due to an accident with an improvised explosive device while working as a shepherd outside Al Salihya, near Mosul. The device was a dangerous remnant of the battles between ISIS and the Peshmerga. With funding from the Federal Foreign Office, Handicap International helps victims of mines and explosive remnants of war in Iraq by providing physical and functional rehabilitation and psychosocial care. It also supports health centres by providing equipment and training physiotherapists. This project and the accompanying advocacy efforts are helping to ensure that the Iraqi health system is able to provide victim assistance in line with national obligations – arising not just from the Ottawa and Oslo Conventions but also from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

An overview of Germany's work in the field of humanitarian mine action

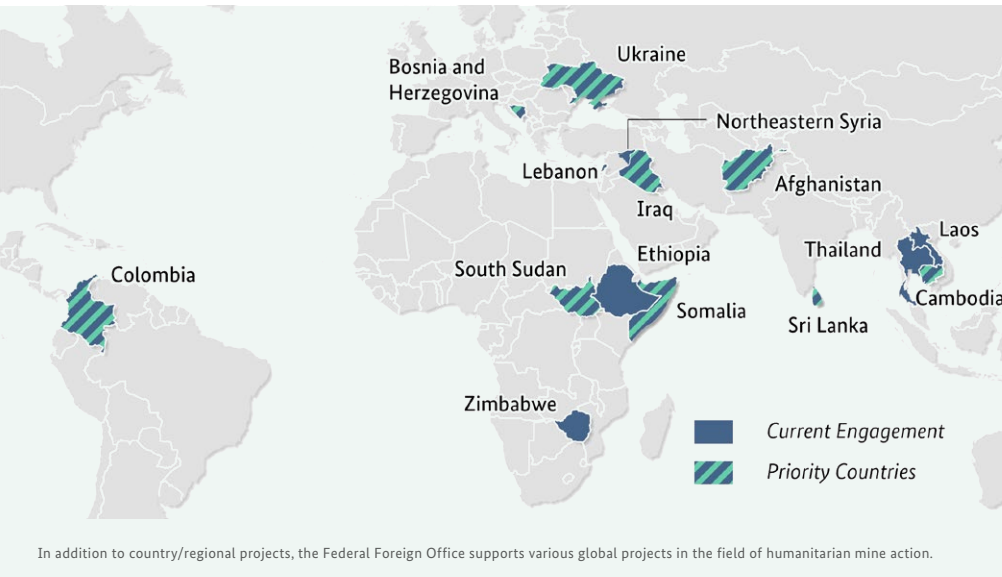
In 2023, the Federal Foreign Office is funding country or regional projects in 15 states as well as a number of global projects in the fields of capacity-building and advice for national actors, strategy development, and the promotion of international standards. With 70 million euro of funding provided this year, Germany remains the second-largest bilateral donor for humanitarian mine action worldwide.

Germany is a dynamic actor and a force for change. Its innovations funding has enabled the testing of drone technology to speed up land release in Iraq, for example. Another of Germany's priorities is training and supporting women to work as deminers, medics and other experts in the field of humanitarian mine action. In addition, victims of accidents with mines and explosive remnants of war receive support to build up strong survivor networks, for example via the civil society organisation ICBL-CMC. Adapting to extreme weather events, which are becoming increasingly common as a result of climate change, and reducing the environmental footprint of mine action are further issues that will be addressed by the Humanitarian Mine Action Strategy when it is updated in 2024.

How is humanitarian mine action implemented via German humanitarian assistance?

Where can we reach and protect as many people as possible who are affected by mines and explosive remnants of war? Where can we secure and open up urgently needed access to humanitarian services? Where and how can we support affected states who do not have the capacities needed to tackle the vast scale of contamination on their territory alone? Where can we make a difference for ordinary people? These questions guide Germany's work in the field of humanitarian mine action.

Germany's efforts are underpinned by the Federal Foreign Office Humanitarian Mine Action Strategy within the framework of Federal Government humanitarian assistance. To implement its humanitarian mine action measures, the Federal Foreign Office works with specialised NGOs and international organisations.



Federal Foreign Office engagement in humanitarian mine action 2023. ©AA, PREVIEW

It is often still necessary to search and clear areas of land manually, which is draining work that requires extreme concentration. Mine and explosive ordnance clearance is thus a lengthy and costly process – which takes decades to complete. Germany’s efforts take this challenge into account and cover acute crises as well as countries with long-past conflicts.

As well as having a direct humanitarian impact, humanitarian mine action is also extremely important for peace-building, reconstruction and development. In Ukraine, for example, it will not be possible to rebuild destroyed towns and cities, schools and hospitals, and to resume agricultural production unless mines and explosive ordnance are located and cleared. The positive effects of land release are directly visible. Every Ukrainian farm that is able to function normally again makes farmers less dependent and increases the amount of food available for domestic consumption and for reducing worldwide shortages.

Mine action – a humanitarian necessity and a prerequisite for peace-building, reconstruction and sustainable development, illustrated by the example of Ukraine

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Innovation in the interest of safety and efficiency

Craters

Drone images support the identification of mine contamination in Iraq. ©John Fardoulis/Handicap International/Norwegian People’s Aid

comprehensive visual search of wide areas without leaving their office. Drones are used to good effect to identify indicators such as craters, traffic incidents and visible explosives. This helps improve the management of land release operations.

Handicap International and Mobility Robotics have worked with various humanitarian mine action organisations since 2018 to test the integration of small drones into routine operations. With financing from the Federal Foreign Office, field tests have been carried out in partnership with Norwegian People’s Aid in Iraq, among other work. In a follow-up project, the Federal Foreign Office is funding Handicap International to expand its drone testing and contribute to new international standards in this area.

Small drones are a valuable tool for scanning dangerous areas and reduce the risk faced by deminers. Using affordable standard technology, these drones make it possible to generate highly detailed maps with a resolution up to 100 times higher than that of satellite images. The teams are then able to conduct a

A mine-free world – a shared goal, a shared responsibility

A world without anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions – this is the shared goal to which the 164 States Parties to the Ottawa Convention and the 112 States Parties to the Oslo Convention have committed. Both conventions serve to guide Germany's work in the field of humanitarian mine action. This includes political advocacy for the universalisation of the conventions, or, in other words, convincing more states to stop using these weapons. Persuaded of the necessity and the potential of these arms control agreements, Germany has taken on the Presidency of the 2023 Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention. Germany is also active in donor coordination efforts, for example as part of the Mine Action Support Group within the United Nations.

SIDE GLANCE:

German
Presidency of
the Ottawa
Convention



Shared responsibility also means working with one another in a spirit of partnership and providing needs-oriented support. Under the terms of the Convention, states affected by mine and explosive ordnance contamination are responsible for eliminating the risks on their territory and supporting victims of mines. As well as financial resources for organising mine clearance activities, this also requires strong national structures and a legal framework. The Federal Foreign Office therefore funds advice and training for the competent authorities in affected states via NGOs such as the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). Strengthening national ownership of mine action and empowering local stakeholders are important aspects of Germany's work in this field.

Every year, too many people still die as a result of mines and explosive remnants of war, too many children are injured, and too many people are unable to live in safety. But every square metre that is cleared, and every mine that is destroyed, is a small step towards the major goal of a mine-free world. Together with its partners, and through the efforts of the Federal Foreign Office in the field of humanitarian mine action, Germany is making a significant contribution to reaching this goal.

A mine-free Zimbabwe is in sight



Rosemary Chigariro, NPA team leader, prepares to destroy an anti-personnel mine. ©Norwegian People's Aid

With the Oslo Action Plan, the international community set the goal of a mine-free world by 2025 – a goal that now looks almost out of reach in many places. Zimbabwe still does have a realistic chance of meeting this goal with international support. However, as the country looks forward to becoming mine-free, the Zimbabwean authorities also face new challenges. Even after the last minefields have been successfully cleared, a residual risk will remain – mines and explosive ordnance may still occasionally be discovered, as they are to this day in Germany following the World Wars. Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is supporting the government authority Zimbabwe Mine Action Centre (ZIMAC) in developing a comprehensive strategy for managing the risks of residual contamination and in establishing a reporting mechanism for suspected cases. This will ensure that Zimbabwe can safely transition to taking complete national ownership of the process. NPA's support for ZIMAC is part of a project funded by the Federal Foreign Office.

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Federal Foreign Office

Directorate-General for Crisis Prevention,
Stabilisation, Peacebuilding and
Humanitarian Assistance
Werderscher Markt 1
10117 Berlin

Find out more online:

diplo.de/humanitaerhilfe
X: @AA_stabilisiert



Federal Foreign Office