

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

A Continuum of Civilian Harm and the Path to Protection:

How Explosive Ordnance Shapes Protection Risks
and the Imperative for Humanitarian Mine Action in
the Occupied Palestinian Territory



SEPTEMBER 2026



Explosive Hazard Assessment (EHA), Deir el
Balah, Gaza, June 2026 © HALO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Explosive ordnance contamination has become one of the defining humanitarian and protection challenges in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), creating a continuum of civilian harm that extends long after an attack occurs. In Gaza, extensive use of explosive weapons in a densely populated environment has caused exceptionally high levels of death, traumatic injury, displacement and destruction, leaving at least 68 million metric tonnes of debris and contaminated rubble, and creating one of the most complex explosive ordnance contamination environments in recent history.¹ Explosive ordnance remain embedded in collapsed homes and damaged infrastructure,² creating immediate risk of harm to civilians while increasing the complexity of Explosive Hazard Assessments, debris management, the dignified recovery of human remains, and broader Humanitarian Mine Action operations.³ Since October 2023, UNMAS have recorded 1,455 explosive ordnance incidents across OPT resulting in 1,175 people injured and 280 killed as of September 2026 and growing. In Gaza, more than 918,000 people are estimated to be living in close proximity to identified explosive ordnance threats, however considering limitations, the actual number of people at risk is likely significantly higher. In the West Bank, decades of legacy contamination are increasingly compounded by militarized operations in populated areas and emerging hazards associated with wider regional escalation. Over 3,097 explosive ordnance items were reported in 2025, with the highest concentrations recorded in Hebron, Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem governorates.

The consequences are immediate and long-term. Harm begins with death and traumatic injury but continues through subsequent exposure to unexploded ordnance, damaged civilian infrastructure, disrupted services, psychological distress and repeated displacement. Survivors frequently require complex medical treatment, rehabilitation, psychosocial support and concurrent specialized services, while the parallel impacts of explosive ordnance use resulting in injury and the decimation of the health services required for rehabilitation converge to create additional, long-term and complex harm for survivors. Persistent fear of explosive ordnance further limits everyday movement, access to essential services, livelihoods and wellbeing.

Operational constraints are amplifying this harm while preventing Humanitarian Mine Action from responding at the scale required. Continuing use of explosive ordnance in attacks generate new contamination while restricting access to affected areas. Restrictions on humanitarian access, operational permissions, Explosive Ordnance Disposal activities, and the entry of specialized personnel and equipment significantly constrain Mine Action actors' ability to assess, mark and mitigate hazards. **100 per cent of partners reported that planned Mine Action activities had been delayed, reduced, or cancelled due to access constraints during the previous 12 months.** Severe funding shortfalls further limit capacity; the Mine Action thematic area is currently only funded to cover 10.5 per cent of requirements. As a result, many contaminated areas remain unassessed and civilians, humanitarian personnel and communities face prolonged exposure to risk.

These constraints affect the entire humanitarian response. Where explosive ordnance cannot be addressed, humanitarian operations, debris management, and infrastructure repair are delayed or made more dangerous. Contamination also constitutes a major barrier to safe, informed, voluntary and dignified return. Explosive ordnance embedded in homes, neighbourhoods, agricultural land, public infrastructure and rubble prevent Palestinians from safely returning to their homes and communities. **Combined with restrictions on the activities required to create safer conditions, contamination prolongs displacement, limits freedom of movement, delays reconstruction and undermines durable solutions and the realization of Palestinians' right to return.**

Humanitarian Mine Action is therefore both life-saving and an essential enabler of protection, the wider humanitarian response, recovery and the enjoyment of rights in Palestine. Through Explosive Hazard Assessments, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, Victim Assistance and Mine Action information management, Humanitarian Mine Action reduces immediate risks while enabling safe aid delivery and return. It must be treated not as a stand-alone technical activity, but centrally as a cross-cutting protection intervention integrated into the OPT humanitarian response and recovery.

Ultimately, Humanitarian Mine Action addressing explosive ordnance contamination is essential to interrupting the continuum of civilian harm created by the use of explosive ordnance including weapons with wide area effects. This requires safe and predictable humanitarian access, authorization for Mine Action activities, access for specialized personnel and equipment, sustained multi-year financing and investment in Palestinian capacity. Without these conditions, Palestinians will continue to face the consequences of explosive weapons long after attacks occur. Enabling Humanitarian Mine Action at the required scale is essential to save lives and create the conditions for protection, and for Palestinians to safely return, rebuild their lives and re-establish their communities.

CONTEXT: EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE IN GAZA AND THE WEST BANK



An Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Officer supervising and monitoring debris removal operations during a WFP-led road assessment, ensuring the detection and mitigation of potential explosive hazards. Gaza City, 18 September 2025 © WFP

GAZA: ONGOING EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE CONTAMINATION

As hostilities in Gaza continue, the explosive ordnance threat continues to grow and become more complex. Ground operations, airstrikes, shelling and widespread destruction have left explosive ordnance buried in and around homes, roads, infrastructure, debris and displacement sites, exposing civilians to risks in the places where they live, move and seek essential services. The contamination is further compounded by items that failed to function as intended and may remain concealed within damaged structures, debris and other affected areas, increasing the challenges for humanitarian operations, debris management and recovery.⁴

From October 2023 until mid-August 2026, Mine Action partners identified and marked 1,067 explosive ordnance items through Explosive Hazard Assessments. These hazards continue to pose a serious risk to civilians who may encounter them, live near them or pass through affected areas, as explosive ordnance can detonate unexpectedly, causing severe injuries or death.

Explosive ordnance identified and marked through Explosive Hazard Assessments

Gaza Strip · October 2023 – mid-August 2026

1,067

EXPLOSIVE
ORDNANCE ITEMS
IDENTIFIED AND
MARKED

Marked, not removed

Items stay in place until clearance teams can safely dispose of them, and continue to endanger anyone who lives near or passes through the area.

Likely a significant undercount

Assessments are visual and non-intrusive, do not search inside rubble and exclude areas partners cannot access.

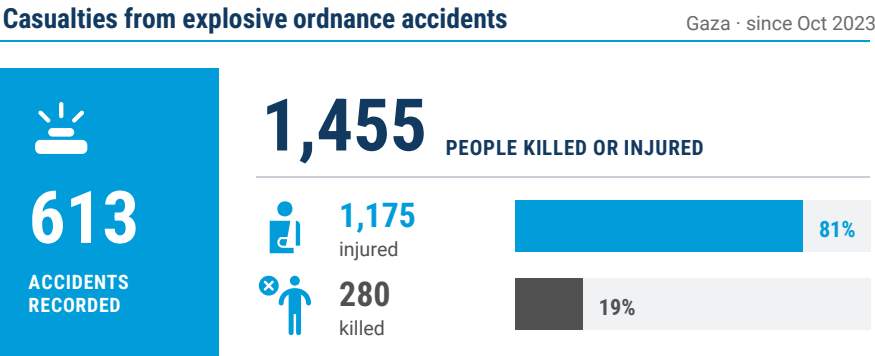
Explosive Hazard Assessments consist of visual, non-intrusive survey, meaning that additional contamination may remain concealed within the rubble and cannot be identified or assessed in areas Mine Action partners do not have access to. As such, these findings therefore likely significantly underrepresent the actual scale of contamination.⁵ In addition, significant amounts of explosive ordnance may remain within rubble, beneath the surface and under or alongside roads and damaged infrastructure, meaning that they cannot currently be identified or assessed without appropriate access, equipment and technical assessment. Large air-delivered munitions



have penetrated deeply into buildings before detonating or may fail to detonate altogether, leaving explosive hazards concealed beneath collapsed structures and rubble that may not be identified until debris removal or reconstruction begins.⁶

The explosive hazard within rubble extends beyond unexploded air-delivered munitions. These hazards may also include abandoned, stored or displaced ammunition and other explosive items that were present in or around structures prior to their destruction. As a result, explosive contamination within rubble may not be identified until debris removal, reconstruction or other recovery activities begin.

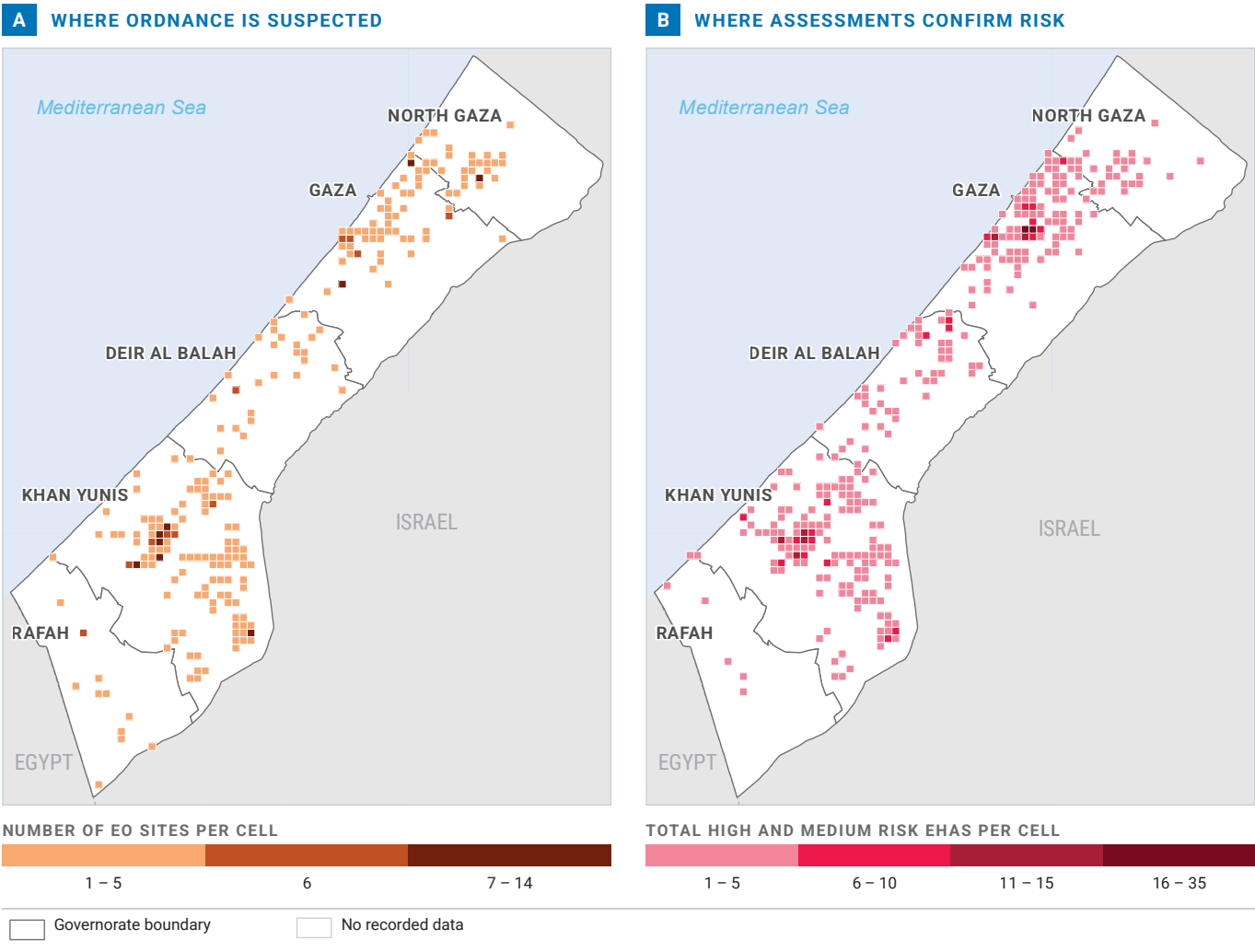
Although the actual number of people injured or killed as a result of encountering explosive ordnance remains unknown and is believed to be underestimated, since October 2023, 613 explosive ordnance-related accidents have been recorded in the UNMAS Mine Action Database, resulting in 1,455 incidents: 1,175 people injured and 280 killed as of September 2026 and growing.





Despite the announcement of a ceasefire in October 2025, ongoing Israeli airstrikes and shelling have continued to kill and injure Palestinians,¹⁰ damage civilian infrastructure,¹¹ and **steadily increase the scale of contamination** while reshaping the protection environment.

Suspected explosive ordnance and Explosive Hazard Assessments (EHA) confirming high or medium risk, Gaza Strip



Unshaded areas are not known to be safe.
Both maps at identical scale and extent; class values are not comparable between them.
Coverage is limited to where survey teams could operate; data may be preliminary and neither map is a definitive assessment. They support planning, not safety decisions.

About these maps. Produced by UNMAS from data collected during mine action operations and coordination with Mine Action partners. Formatted for this publication by the OPT Protection Cluster; classification, class breaks and values are unchanged.
DISCLAIMER
The designations employed and the presentation of material on these maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Gaza, a small and densely populated urban area, where civilians and alleged combatants are reportedly at times in close proximity, has repeatedly been subjected to both heavy and indiscriminate explosive weapons that put at risk everything within their wide impact area, with heightened risk of death and injury including to children.¹² Explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated area has also devastated civilian infrastructure, exacerbating further, preventable, civilian harm.

Incident-based documentation identifies **consistent patterns of repeated attacks using explosive ordnance, including explosives with wide area affects, affecting densely populated residential areas and displacement sites**, with civilian casualties occurring predominantly inside homes, family residences, and tents.¹³ Airwars’ analysis demonstrates that numerous neighbourhoods were subjected to repeated strikes over time, exposing civilians to **cumulative risks as attacks recurred in the same geographic areas.**¹⁴

These repeated attacks frequently resulted in the deaths of multiple members of the same family within residential buildings, illustrating the intense civilian harm associated with sustained explosive weapon use in densely populated urban environments.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) identified patterns of strikes repeatedly hitting tents and congested sites sheltering displaced families.¹⁵ OHCHR reported that seven attacks on IDP tent encampments within a two-week period killed at least 34 Palestinians, including 10 children and 3 women,¹⁶ and between 8 and 9 July 2025, OHCHR documented 21 attacks on tents sheltering displaced Palestinians, killing at least 77 people, including at least 30 women and children.¹⁷

The extensive use of explosive weapons has resulted in **unprecedented destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure**, causing widespread damage to housing, essential services, public facilities and productive assets.¹⁸ Satellite-based damage assessments conducted by UNOSAT illustrate the scale and geographic extent of destruction: By April 2025, approximately 70 per cent of all structures in Gaza had sustained damage, rising to 76.6 per cent as of April 2026.¹⁹ This included approximately 70,436 destroyed structures, 18,588 severely damaged structures, 51,962 moderately damaged structures, and 33,500 possibly damaged structures.²⁰ One year later in April 2026, the Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment estimates that physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at US\$35.2 billion, while associated economic and social losses amount to a further US\$22.7 billion.²¹ The housing sector has sustained particularly severe damage, with more than 371,888 housing units destroyed or damaged.²² Damage to health and education infrastructure has further undermined the delivery of essential services, with more than half of hospitals rendered non-functional and nearly all schools destroyed or damaged.²³ According to OHCHR, patterns of repeated attacks on hospitals led to the destruction of most hospitals in Gaza, **pushing the healthcare system to the point of almost complete collapse.**²⁴

Adults and older persons participate in an Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) session conducted by ActionAid and MA'AN in the Middle Area of the Gaza Strip. June 2026 © ActionAid and MA'AN



The repeated use of explosive weapons in densely populated urban areas has contributed directly to the widespread destruction of housing and critical civilian infrastructure, and the accumulation of explosive ordnance within collapsed buildings and debris.²⁵ The loss of housing and health facilities, along with schools, water and sanitation systems, roads and productive assets has simultaneously increased humanitarian needs, disrupted access to essential services, prolonged displacement, heightened exposure to explosive ordnance, and delayed recovery and reconstruction, demonstrating that **infrastructure destruction functions as a multiplier of civilian harm.**²⁶

WEST BANK: A GROWING CONTAMINATION PROFILE

Contamination in the West Bank has historically been localized, consisting primarily of legacy minefields, abandoned military ammunition, military firing ranges and unexploded ordnance remaining from previous conflicts and military training and activities.²⁷ Since October 2023, however, the contamination profile has evolved. Intensified military operations and armed clashes, particularly in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nablus, have likely increased the density of explosive ordnance contamination in these areas,²⁸ and **the use of explosive weapons in densely populated refugee camps and urban centres has generated new contamination from unexploded ordnance and abandoned ammunition.**²⁹ Unlike the relatively static nature of legacy contamination, these hazards continue to emerge as operations evolve, creating a **dynamic contamination environment that requires continuous monitoring and response.**³⁰

Operational reporting demonstrates both the growing scale of contamination and the limitations on current assessment efforts. During 2025, the Palestinian Mine Action Centre (PMAC) and the Palestinian Authority Explosive Ordnance Disposal Police reported more than 3,097 explosive ordnance items, with the highest concentrations recorded in Hebron, Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem governorates.³¹ This figure reflects only reported and accessible locations and therefore likely underestimates the actual extent of contamination. The humanitarian consequences are already evident, with 14 explosive ordnance-related casualties recorded during 2025, considered to be an underestimate due to underreporting and limited access to affected communities.³²

The contamination environment has also become increasingly complex as a result of broader regional developments. Regional hostilities have introduced a new contamination pathway through falling missile and interceptor debris, creating explosive hazards in communities previously unaffected by such risks.³³ During March and April 2026, Mine Action partners reported 9 incidents resulting in 19 casualties as a result of falling debris linked to the regional escalation.³⁴

At the same time, the intensification of stress factors driving broader deterioration in the protection environment in the West Bank is further compounding the exposure to risks associated with explosive ordnance contamination. Escalating settler violence, repeated militarized operations and extensive movement restrictions have significantly increased displacement and constrained civilian and humanitarian access across the West Bank,³⁵ reducing safe movement for community members and humanitarian responders, delaying explosive ordnance survey and disposal, and increasing the likelihood that communities will remain exposed to explosive ordnance for prolonged periods.³⁶ These risks are particularly acute for communities already exposed to repeated displacement, settler violence, military operations and severe access restrictions, where explosive ordnance contamination can further restrict safe access to homes, land, livelihoods and essential services and compound existing protection risks.



Community outreach and awareness-raising activities conducted by PalVision at a displacement site in Ainun, Tubas.
May 2026 © PalVision

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE CREATES A CONTINUUM OF CIVILIAN HARM



A DRC field staff member carrying out a Vulnerability Assessment (VA) with a displaced community member in Deir Al-Balah, Gaza, September 2025 © DRC

Explosive ordnance use and subsequent contamination creates a **continuum of civilian harm and protection risks experienced during the moment of attack, continue through ongoing exposure to explosive ordnance and contaminated rubble, and extended by damaged infrastructure, disrupted services, repeated displacement and prolonged barriers to recovery and return.**³⁷

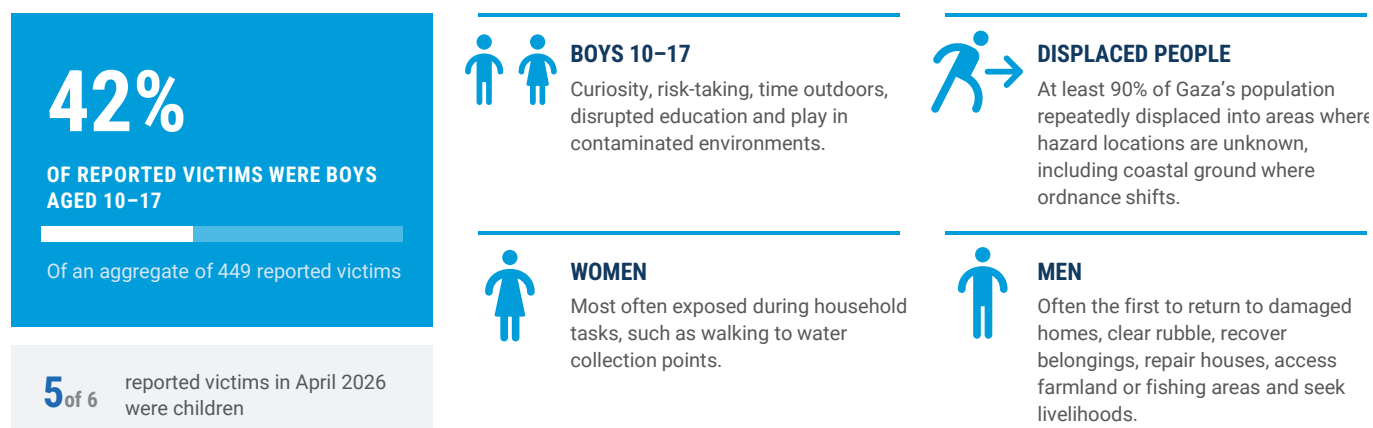
RISK OF DEATH AND TRAUMATIC INJURY

Gaza was the principal driver of the unprecedented global increase in civilian casualties from explosive weapons in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 39 per cent of all civilian casualties from explosive weapons worldwide in each year.³⁸ Peer-reviewed epidemiological research on civilian harm in Gaza estimates that approximately 64,260 people (95 percent CI: 55,298–78,525) died from traumatic injuries between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2024.³⁹ This estimate is approximately 41 per cent higher than officially reported deaths during the same period⁴⁰ due to challenges of documenting mortality during active conflict, and **illustrates both the scale of violence carried out and the extensive, indirect harm civilians face when military operations result in physical injury requiring complex care while civilian infrastructure including hospitals are also attacked.** The study estimated an annualized traumatic injury mortality rate of 39.3 deaths per 1,000 population, approximately 14 times Gaza's all-cause mortality rate in 2022.⁴¹ OHCHR fatalities verification from October 2023 to August 2026 show that approximately 59 per cent of the deaths were women and children, underscoring the disproportionate impact of explosive ordnance on civilians.⁴² First responders are also at heightened risk due to proximity and rapid response to areas under attack, and often navigate damaged and unstable infrastructure and potentially contaminated rubble while conducting rescue and assistance activities.

According to OPT Mine Action databases and partner reporting, children, in particular boys aged 10 – 17, are the group most affected by explosive ordnance in OPT after the initial attack due to curiosity, risk-taking, outdoor activity, disrupted education and playing in contaminated environments; in April 2026, five out of six reported victims of explosive ordnance were children, and out of an aggregate of 449 reported victims, approximately 42 per cent were boys.⁴³ Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also at heightened risk due to unfamiliarity with and movement across and into areas where hazard locations are unknown. This is particularly the case in Gaza where at least 90 per cent of the population have faced repeated and ongoing displacement across the highly contaminated environment, including in coastal areas where ordnance can easily shift. Women face explosive ordnance risks most frequently when carrying out household tasks such as walking to water collection points, while men face risks as they are often the first to return to damaged homes, clear rubble, recover belongings, repair houses, attempt to access farmland or fishing areas, and seek livelihoods in contaminated environments.⁴⁴ In the West Bank, Bedouin herding communities and people whose livelihoods require regular access to agricultural and grazing land, residents of refugee camps and areas affected by militarized operations, and those in close proximity to military training areas face heightened risk of explosive ordnance exposure.

Who explosive ordnance affects most, and why

OPT · reported victims, April 2026



Shares are of reported victims only. Exposure reflects the tasks each group carries out, not differences in caution.

Sources: OPT Mine Action databases; partner reporting

As of May 2026, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that approximately 172,000 people in Gaza have sustained injuries since October 2023. Of these, an estimated 43,000 people have life-changing injuries, including approximately 10,000 children, and more than 50,000 people require long-term rehabilitation. Since the previous WHO assessment in September 2025, almost 5,000 additional injuries have been recorded, with nearly half occurring after the October 2025 ceasefire announcement.⁴⁵ Clinical evidence from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) found that **the overwhelming majority of war injuries treated during 2024 were caused by explosive weapons**,⁴⁶ and eight per cent of individuals supported through the Danish Refugee Council's Victim Assistance programme reported being injured more than once as a result of explosive ordnance.⁴⁷



Children participate in a UNMAS-led group session using an interactive maze game to strengthen awareness of explosive ordnance risks in the Middle Area of the Gaza Strip. August 2026 © UNMAS

Explosive weapons use in OPT has generated complex patterns of injury that frequently require prolonged multidisciplinary treatment, repeated surgical interventions and lifelong rehabilitation.⁴⁸ Clinical analysis by health actors in Gaza have documented extensive blast injuries, fragmentation wounds, traumatic amputations and severe soft tissue injuries requiring multiple operations rather than a single intervention.⁴⁹ Survivors are facing high risk of permanent disability, including due to amputations, burns, blindness, hearing impairment, traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries, requiring sustained and multidisciplinary rehabilitation, prosthetic services and assistive devices throughout their lives,⁵⁰ all of which remains severely constrained by the collapse of Gaza's health system.⁵¹

Lack of access to rehabilitation and care as a result of health system collapse in Gaza increases the likelihood that an injury will result in permanent disability, in turn increasing reliance on caregivers, socio-economic vulnerability and barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, while limiting access to adequate housing, healthcare, education, employment and full participation in community life.⁵² **The parallel impacts of explosive ordnance use resulting in injury and the decimation of the health services required for rehabilitation converge to create additional, long-term and complex harm for survivors.**

RISK OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM

The impacts of explosive ordnance extend beyond physical injury, generating **profound and enduring psychological consequences for survivors, families, first responders and entire communities.**⁵³ Victim Assistance partners in Gaza report that psychosocial support is among the most frequently requested services by explosive ordnance survivors and their families.⁵⁴ Communities report that fear of explosive ordnance persists after attacks have ended, and drive coping mechanisms such as preventing children from playing outdoors or taking longer routes to attempt accessing basic services or carry out daily activities because of uncertainty over whether explosive ordnance remain present, adding substantial burden to an environment of extreme need.⁵⁵ Ongoing fear of explosive ordnance also compounds the psychological trauma of repeated displacement, bereavement, and destruction of homes stemming from the violence and occupation.⁵⁶

CONTAMINATION DIRECTLY AFFECTS THE ABILITY OF THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY TO DELIVER LIFE-SAVING ASSISTANCE

Explosive ordnance contamination in OPT is a cross-cutting operational constraint that **affects every stage of the humanitarian response**, from initial assessments to recovery activities. Because explosive ordnance is frequently concealed within damaged buildings, roads, and public infrastructure, humanitarian access depends on effective explosive threat analysis to identify potential contamination and inform appropriate mitigation measures that reduce risk to humanitarian personnel and operations. In the West Bank, explosive ordnance risks can compound existing humanitarian access constraints in areas affected by military operations, particularly where checkpoints, road closures and other movement restrictions limit access to affected communities. This can delay assessments, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education and other protection and humanitarian responses. Extensive explosive ordnance contamination in Gaza limits the movement of humanitarian convoys by creating uncertainty regarding the safety of transport routes and access corridors, and roads affected by bombardment or military operations require route verification and Explosive Hazard Assessment before humanitarian personnel and relief supplies can move safely.⁵⁷ Aid convoys have frequently required embedded Explosive Ordnance Disposal support from Mine Action personnel to assess routes following periods of intense fighting and to guide convoys safely through areas of potential explosive contamination. Explosive ordnance also affects humanitarian distributions and service points by creating risks around distribution and other static sites and along the routes used by both humanitarian personnel and affected communities, and restrictions on Mine Action activities significantly limit humanitarians' ability to ensure their safety.⁵⁸ Explosive ordnance concealed within rubble presents one of the principal challenges for debris management and the safe recovery of human remains in Gaza. Until contaminated rubble can be assessed and explosive hazards addressed, debris management and restoration of essential services remain significantly constrained.⁵⁹

CONTAMINATION IMPEDES RECOVERY

Explosive ordnance contamination in OPT is extending the humanitarian consequences already caused by their use by preventing communities from safely rebuilding homes, restoring essential services, and achieving durable solutions. Recovery cannot begin safely until explosive contamination has been adequately addressed, with progress dependent on both the scale of destruction and the capacity to identify, clear and dispose of items.

Recovery and reconstruction costs for the housing, health, education, WASH and energy sectors in Gaza are estimated at US\$71.4 billion over the next decade, a substantial investment that is dependent on safe access enabled through Humanitarian Mine Action for rehabilitation to proceed.⁶⁰

CONTAMINATION LIMITS FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND SAFE RETURNS

Since October 2023, more than 1.9 million people have been forcibly displaced across the Gaza Strip, many on multiple occasions, while more than 1.2 million people have lost their homes.⁶¹ At least 46,000 people in the West Bank have been forcibly displaced during the same period and on a scale previously unseen.⁶² According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the forced displacement and mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes across the OPT indicates a concerted Israeli policy of mass forcible transfer aimed at permanent displacement.⁶³ International standards require that returns of displaced persons are safe, informed, voluntary and dignified.⁶⁴



An UNMAS Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) officer marking and cordoning off a large explosive ordnance item found near a busy road in Gaza City, October 2025 © UNMAS

In Gaza and increasingly in the West Bank, **widespread explosive ordnance contamination and restrictions on activities designed to create a safer environment directly undermine these conditions, resulting in prolonged displacement.** Particularly in Gaza, the significant volume of estimated contamination means that any movement across the Strip including attempts to return home carry a significant risk of explosive ordnance exposure. Homes, neighbourhoods, public infrastructure, agricultural land and access routes may all contain explosive ordnance concealed beneath rubble, yet cannot be systematically assessed because of humanitarian access constraints.⁶⁵ Fear of explosive ordnance further influences everyday movement and decisions regarding return, even where contamination has not been confirmed.⁶⁶ In the West Bank, explosive ordnance risks can further complicate safe access and return for displaced communities in areas affected by military operations, including access to homes, camps, land and livelihoods, alongside existing movement and other protection-related constraints.



OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON MINE ACTION IN OPT

The Humanitarian Mine Action response in the OPT is operating in an environment in which the scale and complexity of explosive ordnance contamination continue to increase while the ability of humanitarian actors to assess and dispose of explosive ordnance remains severely constrained. **Continuing hostilities, severe humanitarian access constraints, restrictions on Explosive Ordnance Disposal and national capacity development, and import limitations, along with funding shortfalls, have produced cumulative civilian harm while actively limiting humanitarian response and Palestinians’ ability to fulfill their right to return.**

In Gaza, **continuing hostilities** remain the single greatest obstacle to reducing explosive ordnance risk. In a Protection Cluster survey of Mine Action partners in July 2026, continuing hostilities was reported as the most critical operational constraint impeding Humanitarian Mine Action, with 100 per cent of partners reporting it as either high or critical. In Gaza and increasingly in the West Bank, contamination is dynamic, and ongoing hostilities means that areas previously assessed may have renewed contamination, requiring repeated assessments that may also be delayed due to the military activity, while also **steadily increasing the scale of contamination.**

Restrictions on humanitarian access was the second highest reported challenge by Mine Action partners and are resulting in concrete disruptions to Mine Action delivery in OPT. 88 per cent of partners reported access as a high or critical operational challenge, and 100 per cent of partners reported that planned Mine Action activities had been delayed, reduced, or cancelled due to access constraints during the previous 12 months.

Operational constraints rated high or critical by partners



100% of partners also reported planned activities delayed, reduced or cancelled due to access constraints in the previous 12 months. Source: Mine Action partner survey, July 2026

Visas and entry approvals for specialized technical staff into Gaza and the West Bank have been limited by Israeli authorities since the start of the escalation in October 2023, and three international Mine Action partners have had their registrations revoked since January 2026, preventing them from deploying technical staff and forcing them to halt their already limited Explosive Hazard Assessment activities entirely in Gaza. In addition, one Mine Action partner that had obtained the necessary Palestinian Authority and Israeli registrations and authorisations has subsequently faced limitations on its ability to operate in Gaza following requirements from the de-facto authorities.

Revoked registrations have halted assessment capacity in Gaza

3

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS DEREGISTERED SINCE JAN 2026

Visas and entry approvals for specialized technical staff into Gaza and the West Bank limited by Israeli authorities since October 2023

WHICH MEANS

Already limited Explosive Hazard Assessment activities in Gaza halted entirely



Mine Action partners are restricted from carrying out positive actions including explosive ordnance clearance and disposal activities. Burdensome bureaucratic and frequently delayed operational permissions including movement approvals by Israel for Mine Action partners to conduct activities in Gaza and movement restrictions and restricted or delayed access to affected locations in the West Bank has further reduced timely response to identified hazards and significantly delays emergency response capacity. Meanwhile, it has not been possible to meaningfully and sustainably gain permissions for the entry of technical equipment and machinery which has significantly limited the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) into Gaza in particular required for Mine Action partners to safely conduct clearance.



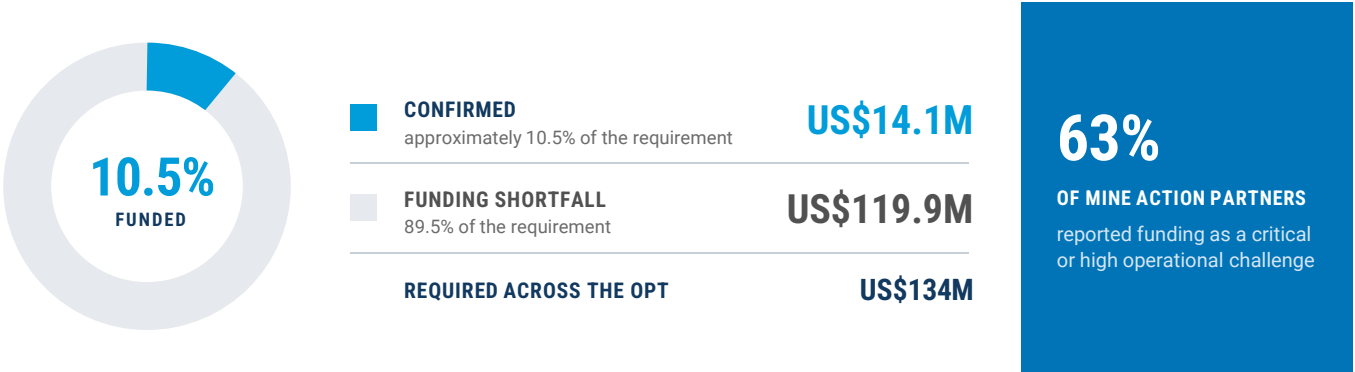
Children participate in an interactive Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) session facilitated by MAG at a displacement site in Gaza. February 2026 © MAG

Sustainable Mine Action requires strengthening national institutions and developing national technical capacity, **however restrictions and limitations on opportunities for training, institutional development, equipment acquisition and expansion of national response capabilities limit long-term sustainability** and increase dependence on international actors that face above-mentioned access restrictions. While Mine Action partners have carried out concerted efforts to ensure Explosive Ordnance Risk Education across the OPT, reducing humanitarian space means that not all communities and those at highest risk will be reached. As a result, Mine Action partners are limited in their ability to carry out meaningful Mine Action response and to address explosive ordnance at the scale required, while contamination and risks linked to explosive ordnance exposure steadily grow due to continued military activity, including in densely populated areas.

While needs for Humanitarian Mine Action grows, **funding shortfalls** further limit response capacity; 63 per cent of partners reported funding as a critical or high operational challenge. The Mine Action thematic area under the Protection Cluster estimates that US\$134 million is required across OPT, yet only US\$14.1 million – approximately 10.5 per cent – has been confirmed, leaving a US\$119.9 million (89.5 per cent) funding shortfall. Funding constraints compound access restrictions, limiting Mine Action partners from responding at scale even where access is available.

Mine Action funding requirement and shortfall, OPT 2026

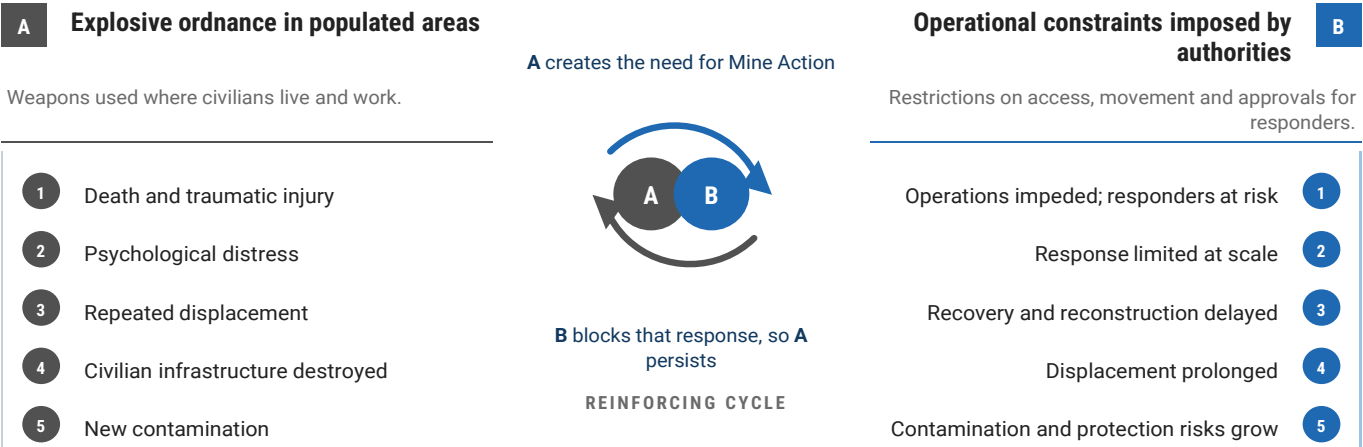
Confirmed funding, 2026



The implications produced by the cycle of ongoing hostilities and operational restrictions have severe implications for civilians, who are exposed to cumulative harm and mounting risk of explosive ordnance exposure, and who face growing barriers to fulfillment of their right to return.

Compounded civilian harm: how two pressures reinforce one another

01 PRESSURES



THE PATH TO PROTECTION: HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION IS LIFE-SAVING AND ENABLES SAFE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND RETURNS

Humanitarian Mine Action is a life-saving protection intervention because it directly reduces the risk of death and serious injury from explosive ordnance while providing civilians with the information needed to navigate contaminated environments safely. Since October 2023, UNMAS and its partners have reached 647,092 people through in-person Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, including 627,477 people in Gaza and 19,615 in the West Bank. Across the OPT, Victim Assistance integrating emergency medical care, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, assistive devices, socio-economic inclusion and referral pathways to specialized service support addresses both the immediate and long-term needs of survivors of explosive incidents accidents, their families and affected communities. Together, these interventions reduce immediate exposure to explosive ordnance, enable safer behaviour while contamination persists, and provide direct risk reduction for civilians living in and moving through potentially contaminated areas.⁶⁷



Internally displaced persons (IDPs) receiving explosive ordnance safety awareness postcards distributed by an UNMAS surge team in Khan Yunis, Gaza, July 2026 © UNMAS

Humanitarian Mine Action is also a critical enabler of safe humanitarian response, protecting both humanitarian personnel and the communities they serve. Explosive Hazard Assessments, route assessments, marking, and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education for humanitarians allow humanitarian actors to enter, assess and operate in contaminated environments while reducing the risk of secondary casualties. Since October 2023, UNMAS has completed 1,865 Explosive Hazard Assessments of humanitarian sites in Gaza and enabled 931 humanitarian missions, including operations involving hospitals, shelters, schools, WASH facilities, roads and other critical infrastructure.⁶⁸ These assessments reduce the risk of accidents involving explosive ordnance and increase the safety of humanitarian staff seeking to rehabilitate critical infrastructure and to manage debris containing explosive ordnance. Humanitarian Mine Action is also critical to enabling the dignified recovery and identification of human remains, allowing families to locate deceased relatives and recover them for appropriate identification and burial.⁶⁹ Mine Action therefore functions as an operational prerequisite for humanitarian action in areas where explosive ordnance can prevent personnel from safely reaching communities or carrying out assessments, assistance, infrastructure repair and debris-removal activities. By reducing the explosive threat to both first responders and affected populations, Humanitarian Mine Action also expands humanitarian space available for additional multi-sector life-saving operations.⁷⁰

Humanitarian Mine Action is life-saving and enables safe humanitarian response

Since October 2023

ENABLING SAFE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE · GAZA



1,865

Explosive Hazard Assessments of humanitarian sites completed



931

Humanitarian missions enabled

Bar widths are proportional: about one humanitarian mission enabled for every two assessments completed.

OPERATIONS INCLUDED



Hospitals



Shelters



Schools



WASH facilities



Roads



Other critical infrastructure

LIFE-SAVING RISK EDUCATION · OPT
UNMAS and its partners

647,092

People reached through in-person Explosive Ordnance Risk Education

Including

627,477
people in Gaza

19,615

in the West Bank

Source: UNMAS

Humanitarian Mine Action is equally critical to enabling Palestinians to return safely to their homes, communities and places of origin, and to restoring the conditions in which they can rebuild their lives there. In Gaza and increasingly in the West Bank, explosive ordnance embedded within collapsed or damaged homes (an estimated 92 per cent of Gaza's housing stock has been damaged or destroyed⁷¹), neighbourhoods, roads, public infrastructure and vast quantities of debris, remains a key prohibitor to Palestinians' safe physical return to their places of origin. Humanitarian Mine Action provides the Explosive Hazard Assessments, marking, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education and (once possible) Explosive Ordnance Disposal interventions necessary to mitigate and dispose of these risks before and as civilians return, while also enabling debris removal, restoration of essential services and reconstruction to proceed more safely. Humanitarian Mine Action therefore contributes directly to making return physically safer, not only by enabling Palestinians to re-enter individual homes and neighbourhoods, but by helping restore the wider conditions necessary for people to reclaim access to their communities, land, services and livelihoods.

As such, **Humanitarian Mine Action is an essential component of protecting the possibility of safe, informed, voluntary and dignified return and preventing explosive contamination from becoming a further, long-term barrier to Palestinians' ability to return to and remain in their places of origin.**⁷²

An effective Humanitarian Mine Action response in the OPT requires an enabling operational environment in which humanitarian actors can access affected areas safely, obtain timely authorization for technical activities, access the equipment and resources required to operate, and sustain operations over the full emergency-to-recovery spectrum. This requires action including respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law, including protection of civilians and facilitation of impartial humanitarian action; safe, sustained and predictable humanitarian access; timely authorization of Explosive Hazard Assessments, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and other positive Mine Action activities; and the removal of unnecessary barriers to the importation of specialized equipment and supplies. These operational conditions must be underpinned by predictable, multi-year and flexible financing, investment in Palestinian institutional and technical capacity, and systematic integration of Mine Action into humanitarian, early recovery and reconstruction planning. Together, these measures would enable the Humanitarian Mine Action sector in OPT to scale the lifesaving response services required by the contamination profile, protecting civilians and humanitarian personnel while enabling safe returns and recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parties to the Conflict

ENABLE TIMELY AND SUSTAINED HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION OPERATIONS

Facilitate safe, sustained and predictable Humanitarian Mine Action by ensuring humanitarian access, facilitating the movement of qualified personnel, and expediting the importation of specialized equipment and other items required for Explosive Hazard Assessments, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, and Victim Assistance.

REDUCE CIVILIAN HARM FROM THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Parties to the conflict should take all feasible measures to *prevent and reduce civilian harm* from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, in full compliance with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack. They should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas where their effects are likely to be indiscriminate or otherwise cause excessive civilian harm, and should cease such use where it cannot be conducted consistently with these obligations.

REDUCE CIVILIAN EXPOSURE TO EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE AND FACILITATE RISK REDUCTION

Parties to the conflict should take all feasible measures required under applicable international humanitarian law to *protect civilians from the risks and effects* of explosive ordnance and explosive remnants of war. Parties that use or abandon explosive ordnance should, to the extent required and feasible, record and share relevant information on its location and nature to facilitate risk reduction. Authorities exercising control over affected areas should facilitate the identification, marking and mitigation of explosive ordnance and enable impartial Humanitarian Mine Action actors to safely undertake risk-reduction activities, including Explosive Hazard Assessment and, where feasible, clearance and disposal.

Member States

USE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT TO SECURE AN ENABLING OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Use bilateral and multilateral engagement with relevant authorities to advocate for sustained humanitarian access, timely operational permissions and the removal of administrative and logistical barriers affecting Mine Action, including restrictions on personnel, specialized equipment and humanitarian clearance activities.

STRENGTHEN COMPLIANCE WITH AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Promote compliance with international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, facilitation of impartial humanitarian relief and measures to reduce the humanitarian consequences of explosive remnants of war. States that have endorsed the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* should use it to inform diplomatic engagement for improved civilian protection.

SUSTAIN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PALESTINIAN CAPACITY

Provide technical, political and financial support for contamination mapping, information management, Victim Assistance and Palestinian institutional and technical capacity, including through longer-term cooperation that enables national systems to progressively assume greater responsibility for Mine Action.

Donors

CLOSE THE IMMEDIATE MINE ACTION FINANCING GAP WHILE ESTABLISHING MULTI-YEAR FUNDING

Urgently address the Mine Action's sector estimated US\$119.9 million funding shortfall in OPT against a US\$134 million requirement, while shifting towards flexible, multi-year financing that can sustain Humanitarian Mine Action from emergency risk reduction through clearance, recovery and reconstruction.

FUND IMPARTIAL HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION AND PALESTINIAN CAPACITY

Ensure funding covers Explosive Hazard Assessments, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and clearance, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, Victim Assistance and information management by impartial humanitarian actors, alongside investment in Palestinian institutions, national technical capacity, local organizations and community-based approaches. Funding should enable national actors to develop sustainable capacity rather than perpetuating reliance on short-term international surge capacity.

MAKE HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF RECOVERY FINANCING

Include dedicated Mine Action requirements in financing for debris management, housing, infrastructure rehabilitation, agricultural recovery and reconstruction, recognizing explosive risk mitigation and disposal as an enabling condition for the safe implementation of these investments and for civilian return to affected communities.

Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)

COMMIT TO HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION AS A CROSS-CUTTING OPERATIONAL PRIORITY

Recognize Mine Action as a life-saving protection intervention and critical enabling service for humanitarian access, civilian movement, and recovery. Ensure explosive contamination and Mine Action requirements are systematically reflected in HCT-level operational priorities, access discussions and inter-sectoral decision-making.

INTEGRATE EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK INTO HUMANITARIAN AND RECOVERY PLANNING

Ensure that humanitarian needs assessments, response plans, displacement contingency planning, debris-management strategies and recovery frameworks incorporate Mine Action requirements from the outset, including the resources and access needed to address explosive ordnance. In the West Bank, ensure that explosive ordnance risk analysis and Mine Action considerations are systematically integrated into contingency and response planning for communities affected by military operations, displacement and access restrictions, particularly in areas experiencing recurrent operations and newly emerging contamination.

USE COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY TO ADDRESS THE CONDITIONS PREVENTING EFFECTIVE MINE ACTION

Develop coordinated HCT advocacy on humanitarian access, operational permissions, importation of essential equipment, supported by evidence from Mine Action partners. Frame these issues as barriers to civilian protection, humanitarian operations and safe return rather than solely as bureaucratic constraints.

Protection Actors

INTEGRATE EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISKS INTO PROTECTION ANALYSIS AND MONITORING

Systematically incorporate explosive ordnance contamination into protection monitoring, protection analysis, protection and multisector needs assessments, community-based protection interventions, and advocacy, including analysis of how contamination affects freedom of movement, access to services, and safe return, and how risks intersect with displacement, settler violence, military operations, access restrictions and other drivers of protection risks.

STRENGTHEN SURVIVOR-CENTERED REFERRAL AND PROTECTION PATHWAYS

Strengthen referral mechanisms between Humanitarian Mine Action, Health, rehabilitation, disability inclusion, Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Housing Land and Property and Legal actors so that survivors and affected families can access appropriate support. Ensure that survivor-centered Victim Assistance is integrated into broader protection and recovery planning.

MAINSTREAM EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION ACROSS THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Extend preventive outreach to at-risk groups by integrating Explosive Ordnance Risk Education and referrals into community contact points and protection and multisectoral interventions including Education, Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Legal protection and other sectors using context-appropriate messaging and materials.

ANNEX 1: APPLICABLE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

International humanitarian law (IHL) including the law of occupation governs the conduct of hostilities in the OPT. As the occupying Power, Israel is bound by the law of occupation, which requires the protection of the civilian population, the restoration and maintenance of public order and civil life to the fullest extent possible, and the facilitation of humanitarian relief where the needs of the population are not met. These obligations provide an important legal framework for ensuring humanitarian access, protecting civilians from explosive hazards, and enabling humanitarian mine action, recovery and reconstruction activities following hostilities.⁷³

The customary principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack require parties to the conflict to distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives, to refrain from attacks directed against civilians or civilian objects, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize incidental civilian harm. These obligations are particularly relevant in light of the documented humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons in populated areas and the resulting explosive ordnance contamination.⁷⁴

Following hostilities, parties must, to the extent feasible, record, retain and share information on explosive ordnance, facilitate the marking, clearance, removal or destruction of explosive remnants of war, protect civilians from associated risks, and cooperate in measures that reduce the humanitarian consequences of explosive contamination. Humanitarian mine action supports the implementation of these obligations by identifying, managing and reducing explosive hazards that threaten civilian populations and humanitarian operations.⁷⁵

IHL requires parties to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, subject to their right of control. Where explosive ordnance impedes humanitarian access or endangers humanitarian personnel, humanitarian mine action constitutes an essential enabling component of humanitarian relief by supporting safe access, humanitarian assessments, aid delivery, infrastructure repair and other life-saving operations.⁷⁶

Humanitarian personnel engaged in impartial relief operations, including humanitarian mine action, must be respected and protected. Parties to the conflict should facilitate the safe conduct of humanitarian activities, including Explosive Hazard Assessments, explosive ordnance disposal, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, Victim Assistance and other activities necessary to reduce risks to civilians and humanitarian operations.⁷⁷

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

International human rights law (IHRL) continues to apply during armed conflict and occupation alongside IHL. The Human Rights Council has recognized that explosive ordnance contamination has profound and long-lasting impacts on the enjoyment of a broad range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, extending well beyond the cessation of active hostilities. Humanitarian Mine Action contributes to the realization of these rights by reducing explosive hazards, facilitating safe access, supporting victims and enabling recovery.

The right to life requires States to take appropriate measures to protect individuals against reasonably foreseeable threats to life, including explosive ordnance remaining after armed conflict. Humanitarian Mine Action supports the realization of this right by identifying and reducing explosive hazards, delivering Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, and facilitating Victim Assistance.⁷⁸

Explosive ordnance contamination restricts civilians' ability to move safely within their communities, access humanitarian assistance and essential services, cultivate agricultural land, and return voluntarily, safely and with dignity to their homes. Addressing explosive hazards is therefore an important component of realizing the right to freedom of movement.⁷⁹

Explosive ordnance has significant physical and psychological consequences and may impede access to healthcare by damaging health infrastructure or rendering access routes unsafe. States should ensure access to emergency medical care, rehabilitation, mental health and psychosocial support, while taking measures to reduce continuing health risks associated with explosive contamination.⁸⁰

Explosive ordnance frequently causes life-changing injuries resulting in permanent disabilities. Survivors are entitled to rehabilitation, assistive devices, accessibility, independent living and equal participation in society without discrimination. Humanitarian Mine Action contributes to these objectives through comprehensive Victim Assistance, rehabilitation referral and support for the inclusion of survivors.⁸¹

Explosive contamination prevents the safe use of homes, schools, healthcare facilities, workplaces, public infrastructure and agricultural land, undermining the enjoyment of multiple economic, social and cultural rights. Reducing explosive hazards is therefore an important prerequisite for restoring access to essential services, supporting livelihoods and enabling recovery and reconstruction.⁸²

The Human Rights Council has recognized that explosive ordnance contamination delays reconstruction, economic recovery, environmental restoration and sustainable development. Humanitarian Mine Action contributes to creating the conditions necessary for the realization of the right to development by enabling the safe restoration of infrastructure, livelihoods and public services, and supporting durable solutions for affected communities.⁸³

OBLIGATIONS OF THIRD STATES

The protection of civilians from explosive ordnance is not solely the responsibility of parties to the conflict. Under international law, third States also have obligations to promote respect for IHL and to support efforts to address the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict, including through international cooperation and assistance for Humanitarian Mine Action.

All High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions undertake not only to respect, but also to ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances. This includes taking appropriate diplomatic, political and other lawful measures to promote compliance with IHL and to encourage respect for obligations relating to the protection of civilians and the humanitarian consequences of explosive remnants of war.⁸⁴

International law encourages States to cooperate in addressing the humanitarian consequences of explosive remnants of war through technical assistance, capacity development, information sharing, Victim Assistance and support for humanitarian mine action programmes. Such cooperation is particularly important where the scale of contamination exceeds national response capacities.⁸⁵

Given the scale and complexity of explosive ordnance contamination in the OPT, sustained political engagement, predictable financing and technical support from the international community remain essential to enable humanitarian mine action, reduce civilian harm, facilitate humanitarian access and support safe recovery and reconstruction.⁸⁶

INTERNATIONAL MINE ACTION POLICY AND TECHNICAL FRAMEWORKS

Humanitarian Mine Action in the OPT is further guided by internationally agreed policy commitments and technical standards that support safe, effective and rights-based mine action.

The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) provide the internationally recognized technical framework for Explosive Hazard Assessment, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, land release, Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, Victim Assistance, information management and quality management. These standards underpin Humanitarian Mine Action operations in the OPT.⁸⁷

The United Nations Policy on Mine Action recognizes Mine Action as a cross-cutting humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and human rights activity that contributes to civilian protection, humanitarian access, recovery and national resilience.⁸⁸

Although developed under the framework of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Oslo Action Plan provides internationally recognized good practice for victim-centred, gender-responsive, nationally owned and sustainably financed mine action programmes. Many of its principles inform Humanitarian Mine Action programming beyond the Convention's States Parties.⁸⁹

United Nations General Assembly resolutions on Assistance in Mine Action and the Human Rights Council's work on Mine Action and Human Rights emphasize the importance of international cooperation, sustainable financing, Victim Assistance, humanitarian access and integration of mine action into broader humanitarian and recovery efforts.⁹⁰

The legal and policy frameworks summarized above demonstrate that addressing explosive ordnance contamination is both a humanitarian imperative and a legal responsibility. IHL requires the protection of civilians, facilitation of humanitarian relief and measures to address explosive remnants of war; IHRL reinforces obligations to safeguard fundamental rights affected by explosive contamination; and internationally agreed mine action standards provide the operational framework for implementing these obligations. Together, these frameworks underscore that Humanitarian Mine Action is an indispensable component of civilian protection, humanitarian response, recovery and durable solutions in the OPT.

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Children participating in a UNMAS Explosive Ordnance Risk Education and Community Protection Programme (EORE-CPP) session © UNMAS



A Continuum of Civilian Harm and the Path to Protection

How Explosive Ordnance Shapes Protection Risks and the Imperative for Humanitarian Mine Action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

For further information please contact the OPT Protection Cluster: ohchr-protectioncluster-opt@un.org