

EASTERN UKRAINE

BRIEF ON THE URGENT NEED FOR HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION ACTIVITIES

As a result of the crisis, the protection needs of civilians have risen significantly and there is a clear requirement for increased humanitarian mine action activities to ensure the safe return of IDPs to conflict affected areas and to support the safe and secure delivery of other forms of humanitarian assistance. Mine action stakeholders such as UNICEF, the Danish Demining Group (part of DRC) and ICRC are already in-country and implementing activities in support of the relevant national institutions, but additional funding is urgently required to increase coverage and maximise impact on conflict affected populations.

Mine, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive device (IED) threat in eastern Ukraine

With the exception of air-launched weapons, the full arsenal of conventional weapons available to both sides to the conflict have allegedly been used. This has primarily been in those areas that have been recovered by Ukrainian forces, along the line of separation, and in areas that have recently come under the control of the de facto authorities e.g. Debaltseve. There is significant evidence of artillery and 'direct fire' weapons usage (such as tanks), as well as credible reports from Human Rights Watch (HRW), ICRC and the State Emergency Services (SES) of widespread use of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, particularly around military checkpoints, on road sides and in the lines of separation. Additionally there is evidence that cluster munitions have been extensively used by both sides and that booby traps are being laid. A number of IED attacks have taken place across Ukraine in recent months, contributing to instability.

Humanitarian impact of mine/ERW/IED contamination

Whilst no official survey of the mine/ERW/IED situation in the Donbas has been carried out, the humanitarian impact is expected to be significant. Mines and booby traps are reported to have been strategically laid to block access to essential infrastructure as well as to forested areas where people gather wood to heat their homes. Cluster munitions use in urban and rural areas is blocking access to family allotments and collective farms, which in an area where a lot of the population rely on agriculture has serious implications. There are anecdotal reports of landmine/ERW/IED casualties in the media and from humanitarian NGOs and civilian volunteer networks. Data on these incidents is formally collected by different government ministries, but is not made publically available at present. Although no clear baseline exists, the number of casualties from mine/ERW/IED accidents is expected to rise in the coming months as IDPs start to return home and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of essential infrastructure takes place.

Current capacity for clearance and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)

Three different agencies are involved in mine action operations in Ukraine. The Army has its combat engineers fully engaged in military activities; the Ukrainian police have a counter-IED capacity for use in criminal and terrorist incidents; and the State Emergency Service (SES) and Ministry of Transportation are responsible for responding to reports of UXO from the local population. Nationally, the SES has fifty, five-man mobile EOD teams. These are spread out across the country, with two teams allocated per Oblast. SES teams are trained and equipped to deal with Second World War and Soviet-era contamination. The SES teams in the areas under the control of the de facto authorities in the LNR and DNR continue to function, but their capacity, particularly in Donetsk, is limited. There are reports that Ukrobronservice, a Ukrainian commercial entity, and ITF have signed an MoU with the Ukrainian government to carry out clearance work in government controlled areas, but no activities have taken place as of yet. There are also reports that Emerkom, the Russian state agency for emergency situations, is planning to begin clearance work in the areas under the control of the de facto authorities in the LNR and DNR. A number of international INGOs are scoping out the possibility of

Urgent needs for increased clearance and explosive ordnance disposal

Clearance and EOD is of high priority in the Donbas as it will support the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, return of IDPs and refugees, enable the reconstruction and rehabilitation of essential infrastructure and remove blockages to agricultural land. To facilitate clearance and EOD work, the following urgent needs have been identified:

- Additional EOD capacity in those areas that have been fought over but are now outside the direct area of the confrontation line, such that people may be expecting to return to these areas.
- Establishment of a fully-functioning national mine action authority, able to:

- Operate a centralized database that collects data on mine/ERW/IED contamination and is used to establish priority clearance and EOD tasks.
- Coordinate clearance priorities and the response
- Introduce coordinated non-technical survey efforts targeted at areas that are expected to be heavily contaminated with mines and ERW, in order to improve the prioritization of tasks and the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the emergency mine/ERW response;
- Plan for future requirements
- Strengthening public information on suspected hazardous areas and strengthen reporting mechanisms to enhance EOD and clearance efforts through web- and mobile platforms as well as crowdsourcing techniques. Strengthening government capacity in the injury surveillance system for mine/Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)-related incidents through the establishment of a centralized database that collects and shares casualty data.
- Subsequently, but probably not immediately, there will be a need to carry out minefield clearance, battlefield area clearance, and clearance of sub munition footprints from cluster bomb strikes in the current and recent confrontation lines.

Current capacity for mine risk education (MRE)

The SES and OSCE had a standard programme of public information posters informing the general public about the risk from WWII/Soviet era contamination, supported by visits to schools by SES bomb disposal teams. The SES and OSCE had also developed a number of short MRE clips that are shown on TV and have launched a website, but recognise that more needs to be done to disseminate the MRE messages and adapt them to the realities of conventional weapons and IED use. In response to the recent escalation in conflict, UNICEF, the SES and the ICRC have made some other posters as an emergency intervention. However, as of yet, no community or school-based MRE programmes have been implemented, although a number of INGOs (DRC/DDG, ICRC, ADRA) and civilian volunteer networks (YMCA, Ukraine Red Cross) are preparing to do so in the next few months. To facilitate the design of targeted MRE messages and methodologies, DRC/DDG and UNICEF will carry out an emergency knowledge, attitudes and practices survey (KAP) in April 2015. In March 2015 ICRC will begin to provide MRE training to Ukraine Red Cross staff and volunteers, both in the government held and opposition controlled territories.

Urgent needs for increased mine risk education

Providing mine risk education (MRE) will be critical to saving lives and strengthening resilience of the civilian population in the Donbas and the following urgent needs have been identified:

- Mine risk education (MRE) for the affected populations, including both IDP and those who remained in potentially contaminated areas.
- Mine, ERW and IED safety briefings for state employees, civilian volunteer networks and humanitarian organisations responsible for carrying out activities in areas where there is evidence of high intensity fighting and use of different types of munitions

All of the above activities are planned and some are being partially implemented by existing mine action stakeholders in the Donbas, however additional funding is urgently required to increase coverage and maximise impact.

This brief was developed by DDG with input from ICRC and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

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