

Finland's Humanitarian Mine Action Concept 2021–2025

Finland's support to humanitarian mine action is designed to take into account synergies across several fields: humanitarian needs, development prospects, security policy considerations and the connections of humanitarian mine action to the wider arms control agenda.

The humanitarian mine action portfolio is administered by the Unit for Arms Control of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This concept and its focus areas have been elaborated in close dialogue with the regional departments of the Ministry, consulting Finnish embassies as well as international partners and other HMA actors.

The overall budget for humanitarian mine action during the period of 2021–2025 is EUR 15 million. The support will be directed towards actions that have clearly defined goals and that complement Finland's other activities in the target countries and facilitate a comprehensive approach. In line with its Fragile States Agenda, Finland will direct its support to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Ukraine.

Finland has supported humanitarian mine action (HMA) since the 1990s. The action is based on the obligations of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, i.e. the Ottawa Treaty. These include, inter alia, providing assistance to countries trying to remove the threat of landmines and other unexploded remnants of war (ERW) as well as assisting the victims of mines.

Humanitarian mine action profoundly amalgamates security and development aspects. It is often a long-term project, and the eradication of a serious landmine problem may continue for decades following the end of an acute crisis. The clearance of landmines is an essential prerequisite for social and economic development. HMA promotes post-conflict reconstruction and development by, among other things, facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) and the recovery of arable land and infrastructure. Mine action can also form a precondition for the deployment and free movement of international peacekeeping or crisis management contingents.

During the past decades, the use of improvised explosive devices (IED) in global crises has grown exponentially. In some countries, IEDs already cause more casualties than conventional mines. This being the case, IED clearance has become an integral part of humanitarian mine action.

Finland's approach to Humanitarian Mine Action

Finland's approach to humanitarian mine action is comprehensive, seeking to integrate the different pillars of humanitarian mine action: mine clearance, risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy. In addition, local capacity building is emphasised, with the aim of assisting host countries to develop the ability to tackle remaining contamination in the long term.

Finnish support is designed to constitute a part of wider efforts to promote international security, stability and development, and form a seamless part of the broader international support to humanitarian mine action. Support is extended to actions that have clearly defined goals, complement other actions and facilitate a comprehensive approach.

To achieve maximum effect, Finland's support is channelled through a limited number of implementing partners to a limited number of carefully selected countries, while retaining a viable scope for individual projects. Scaling up the size of individual interventions while reducing their number enables a better focus on selected priorities and greater efficiency in achieving the desired results and impact.

Finland's implementing partners comprise multilateral organisations and international non-governmental organisations. Partner organisations are financed through multi-annual Framework Agreements that improve the predictability of funding and decrease the administrative burden on both the implementing organisations and the MFA. In partner selection, possibilities for enhancing the effectiveness of action by e.g. tapping into Finnish expertise are considered an asset.

The HMA portfolio is administered by the Unit for Arms Control. Close cooperation between the Political Department, the Department for Development Policy and the regional departments and embassies is maintained

in the planning and implementation of projects. Possibilities for enhancing cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and the private sector will be explored, to seek opportunities for promoting Finnish expertise in the field.

Mine action in fragile states

In line with its Fragile States Agenda, Finland focuses its HMA on least developed countries and on regions which are in a post-conflict recovery phase following an acute conflict. This phase often involves humanitarian assistance, early recovery and reconstruction, development cooperation, and concurrent activities associated with security, peacebuilding and state-building. Depending on the context, mine action can be a means of stabilisation, the first step towards development cooperation or an instrument for the promotion of employment and equality.

Operating in the conditions of fragile states comes with additional risks and difficulties in comparison to other developing countries. At times, projects may even regress. Innovative and flexible practices that strengthen the resilience of operations are often required both from the implementing partners and from the MFA.

Fragile states have typically undergone a violent external or internal conflict and the risk of relapse into another conflict is high. Donors must commit to a long-term presence in order to achieve sustainable results. It is also vital that the host government demonstrates ownership and willingness to cooperate. Developing local capacity is important and Finland encourages partnerships that strengthen local authorities and civil society.

Conflict prevention, democratic and accountable society, rule of law and women's participation are Finland's thematic focus areas in its Fragile States agenda. Promoting gender equality and human rights, strengthening the influence and participation of women and girls as well as advancing non-discrimination are of special importance to Finland within the HMA agenda. Gender equality can be promoted by, among other things, striving to provide women with equal access to employment opportunities within HMA operations. Attention is also paid to Finland's cross-cutting development co-operation objectives, as well as to results-based management and human rights based approach in mine action.

In order to increase impact, Finland concentrates its humanitarian mine action on countries where it can refer to complementarity between HMA and other portfolios, both in development and security policy fields, and where Finnish presence gives the possibility of actively monitoring the projects and influencing the operating environment. Coherence with future Country Strategies, currently under preparation in the MFA, will be ensured in an appropriate manner, as well as the link between HMA and existing Country Programmes.

Attention is paid to effectiveness and the efficient use of limited resources. This means focusing action on a limited number of target countries as well as close cooperation with other countries, international organisations and NGOs.

Mine action and sustainable development

Humanitarian mine action contributes to the wider development agenda both indirectly, by facilitating recovery and long-term structural changes, and directly, by ameliorating the lives of affected communities during project implementation. For Finland, humanitarian mine action is first and foremost a life-saving activity, and therefore cannot be measured only against development targets and indicators. Safeguarding the impartial status of humanitarian mine action organisations is essential to enable assistance to cover also contested areas.

At the same time, it is important to explore possibilities for increased synergies between these agendas. Mine action has an important role in facilitating stability and development through improving livelihoods. By removing mine contamination and educating people about the hazards associated with munitions, access to food and clean drinking water and arable land and forests can be increased in locations with scarce resources.

In addition to creating conditions for local agriculture and re-establishing infrastructure, mine action can support local communities by providing employment opportunities and skills training, thus contributing to long-term socio-economic development. In fragile states, Finland pays special attention to the employment of youth and women, support to returning refugees and to the reintegration of former combatants.

In assessing the results of humanitarian mine action, emphasis should be placed on long-term effects. In addition to annual reports that enable the monitoring of individual projects and their outputs, the impacts of mine action should be assessed 10 or 20 years after inception of activities. Meanwhile, immediate outcomes contribute to the priorities of Finland's development policy and humanitarian aid, especially in priority area "Education and peaceful democratic societies". HMA outcomes will also be included in measuring the impact of Finland's humanitarian assistance.

Target countries during 2021–2025

In line with the financial planning of the Ministry, 15 million euro have been earmarked for humanitarian mine action during 2021–2025. This marks an increase of 3 million euro in comparison to the preceding five-year period.

Based on an external evaluation of the previous programme cycle, consultations within the Ministry and discussions with other HMA stakeholders, it is recommended that Finland continue its engagement with Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine also during 2021–2025.

All countries in question suffer from serious mine contamination and the review of the preceding five-year programme has confirmed that Finnish support to these countries is efficient and relevant. It complements Finland's activities in the selected countries from both a development policy and a foreign and security policy perspective, and in so doing, contributes to achieving Finland's long-term policy priorities. Focusing on these countries is also in line with the Fragile States Agenda.

According to the comprehensive approach of the HMA concept, Finland prioritises projects combining several pillars of HMA. Projects designed according to this principle have the additional benefit of providing flexibility in uncertain circumstances. Exploring possibilities for synergies and cooperation with other actors is also encouraged.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the long-standing partnerships in Finland's development and security policy portfolio, cooperation taking multiple forms. Needs for humanitarian mine action are persistent.

Afghanistan continues to be one of the most mine-affected countries, the number of mine casualties being the highest in the world. The ongoing conflict between the government, the Taliban, and other armed groups continues to add new contamination to the already heavy load of explosives on the ground, particularly by improvised mines, which form a long-lasting and severe humanitarian threat even after the actual hostilities have ended. In recent years, Afghanistan has had the highest number of recorded improvised mine casualties of all countries. Explosive remnants of war continue to pose a serious threat for children, who comprise a clear majority of ERW casualties.

Afghanistan's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture. Instability and failed access to secure land due to mine contamination hamper Afghanistan's possibilities for economic development as well as its ability to cope with challenges posed by climate change, such as natural shocks and food insecurity. Afghanistan also continues to see a high rate of IDPs, who risk of being affected by explosive devices while moving across the regions or trying to return to their homes.

Finland's support to Afghanistan has been long-term and wide-ranging. Mine action in Afghanistan has been supported since the 1990s and Finland has gained a reputation as a reliable and long-standing partner. It is important to continue this work, and through it, contribute to alleviating the ongoing conflict, reclaiming contaminated land and reducing the rising number of victims.

Afghanistan has demonstrated national initiative and international engagement in the mine sector: the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan is now led by DMAC (Department for Mine Action Coordination) after a successful transition to national ownership was completed in 2018. In the same year, Afghanistan held the presidency of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, demonstrating the level of international engagement by the government of Afghanistan to tackle mine contamination.

At the same time, Afghanistan's goal of clearing all landmines by 2023 seems difficult if not impossible to achieve as new contamination keeps emerging due to the continuing conflict. Afghanistan saw a remarkable fall in the level of HMA funding during the previous decade, although the trend has now reversed. A lot of work is still ahead - according to some estimates 20–30 years of clearance work remains. It is important that mine clearance continue to be regarded as a humanitarian and impartial activity, so that work is possible also in areas controlled by the Taliban.

Syria and Iraq

Finland continues to emphasise mine action conducted in regions liberated from ISIL. The political and security environment in Syria remains challenging, limiting the scope of activities. Funding can only be granted to operations that are of strictly humanitarian nature. Other forms of cooperation will be considered if and when conditions allow. In Iraq, fewer limitations for operations exist. To allow for flexibility on the ground, a regional approach remains a valid option for Finland's mine action.

Conditions in both Iraq and Syria remain challenging and the dynamics of their conflicts unpredictable, depending on a wide range of developments also at the international level. Sustained efforts are needed in order to protect the populations from explosive hazards and to promote long-term prospects for peace and stability. In Iraq, years of active conflict and the tactics deployed by ISIL have added to an already considerable amount of mine contamination from the previous decades. According to some estimations, Iraq is currently the most contaminated country in the world, if measured by the extent of mined area, the legacy contamination from previous conflicts worsening the situation. In Syria, contamination is recent but wide-ranging, with approximately one third of populated communities estimated to be contaminated. Ongoing hostilities have prevented systematic survey of the actual scale and type of contamination, but the problem is wide-ranging and severe in both countries, posing an enormous challenge to efforts for recovery.

Retreating ISIL forces have deployed various types of improvised mines and other explosive devices that are difficult and slow to clear even for the most experienced demining actors. Booby-trapping roads, fields, residential buildings and hospitals as well as other key infrastructure has been systematic and makes vast areas of urban and agricultural land an acute threat to the civilian population. At the same time, this deprives people of several basic services and opportunities for re-establishing livelihoods.

The conflict has forced large numbers of people to leave their homes and the number of internally displaced persons continues to be counted in millions. Explosive devices pose a serious threat to people migrating across the region and to families seeking to return to their homes recaptured from ISIL. Along with urgent needs for survey and clearance, providing risk education and promoting safe behaviours is essential in order to reduce the number of mine victims and to reduce human suffering. The number of mine victims in the region is already one of the highest in the world and the growth of population movements once the security situations starts to stabilise risks an even higher number of casualties among the returning civilians.

Long-term displacement and food insecurity highlight the continuing need for humanitarian response. Clearing activities contribute to securing humanitarian aid deliveries in a situation that remains dire. Long-term stabilisation and socio-economic recovery are also supported through mine action – restoring public services, facilitating economic recovery and resuming livelihoods will only be possible after the risk of explosive hazards has been considerably reduced.

Administrative procedures also remain a challenge for actors operating in the region, including permissions for movement. As the situation develops, it is important to continue to review the modalities for action. Cooperation will be sought especially with actors that due to their status have neutral access and possibility for dialogue with different parties. With a low level of predictability, a programme that has high resilience e.g. by combining several components and that can modify and/or close and re-open activities in a flexible way would best serve the interests and results-based approach of Finland.

Enhancing local mine action capacities, including through recruiting deminers among the communities, is of utmost importance, as according to preliminary estimations, clearing the region from mines and other explosive devices will take decades.

Ukraine

Finland has been actively engaged in the efforts to solve and alleviate the consequences of the conflict in eastern Ukraine since its beginning. Humanitarian mine action plays an important part in disengagement and development efforts.

Ukraine continues to suffer from the security and humanitarian implications of the conflict that started after the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 that severely violate international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), eastern Ukraine is now one of the areas most contaminated by landmines in the world. Mines and other explosive ordnance (EO) continue to affect the lives of the people on both sides of the contact line and across the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where Finnish-funded HMA actors are allowed to conduct their work in the government-controlled areas. The extent of civilian exposure to mines and other EO is particularly worrisome: it has been estimated that currently approximately 40 percent of civilian casualties are caused by mines. In recent years, more civilians than military personnel have suffered from mine accidents.

Humanitarian needs in eastern Ukraine are dire and wide-ranging. Mine action plays an important part in enabling the movement of humanitarian actors and provision of humanitarian aid across the region. Roads cleared by HMA organisations are regularly used by a wide range of other established humanitarian and development organisations. Mine action also brings additional security to civilian movement such as crossings across the contact line. In addition to reducing direct human suffering, mine action can generate relief through possibilities for socio-economic

development. Once released, the previously contaminated land is used for income-generating activities and for infrastructure projects, enabling improvements to the basic services of the communities.

For Finland, it is important to continue promoting the disengagement of the forces and contribute to confidence-building through mine action. Comprehensive support to the resolution of the conflict affecting the immediate security environment of Finland remains inevitably a high priority. Part of this is the support to OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), which can better fulfil its mandate when supported by mine clearance activities, thus gaining access to a wider area for monitoring. Ensuring that demining is regarded as a humanitarian and neutral activity is of utmost importance.

A long-awaited law on mine action came into force in Ukraine in the beginning of 2019. Progress towards the establishment of a national mine action authority and a national mine action centre has been slow but the process is expected to be finalised during 2020. The ongoing conflict has had a major impact on the original target to declare Ukraine free of landmines by 2016 – at present, an extension is in place until 2021 but is unlikely to be reached. Most of the work is still ahead and progress depends on reaching a sustainable political solution to the conflict.

Somalia

Somalia is a priority region for Finnish engagement in Eastern Africa, both from a security policy and a development perspective.

Somalia has lived through several decades of violent conflict and continues to suffer from internal unrest. Years of instability have created a dire need for humanitarian mine action: the ground is severely contaminated with landmines, improvised explosive devices and other explosive remnants of war. These explosive hazards hamper development prospects, restrict access and thus limit economic opportunities for the population, preventing Somalia from ridding itself of its legacy as one of the world's poorest and most fragile states. By restricting access and endangering livestock, mines and ERW also contribute to lower food security and hamper Somalia's ability to adapt to climate change.

In addition to accidents and casualties, explosives are a proliferation risk and thus aggravate an already difficult security situation. Abandoned ammunition stockpiles pose a significant danger to the civilian population while also providing Al-Shabab with an important source of material for IED manufacturing. IEDs are an integral means for Al-Shabab in its strategy to sustain instability and fear in the society. In addition to stockpile safety, operations that address the dangers of explosives can also contribute to de-radicalization efforts: by hiring local workforce they promote employment among the population and advance reintegration into society. Better employment opportunities coupled with the communities' improving socio-economic situation make it less appealing for youth and former combatants to recruit into the cadres of armed non-state groups.

Finland has supported mine action in Somaliland for almost two decades. The level of casualties is lower than in other parts of the country, but operating in Somaliland is easier due to a more stable security situation. According to earlier estimates, declaring Somaliland free of landmines should have been possible by 2017. However, previously unknown contamination has been detected especially in the regions bordering Ethiopia. Given the increasing amount of people willing to settle into the border regions and the increasing role of Somaliland as a regional corridor to the Gulf of Aden, it is worthwhile to consider continuing this work and thus contributing to a wider agenda of regional development and cooperation between Somalia and Ethiopia. At the same time, humanitarian needs and high levels of contamination persist in other parts of Somalia. During the previous HMA cycle, Finnish support was extended to activities in south central Somalia despite the volatile security environment and difficult conditions for operation. Support to ammunition management remains relevant in this regard. Different options can be considered in line with the two approaches outlined above. Supporting the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somalia Explosive Management Authority (SEMA) in establishing national ownership and creating stability is an important part of this consideration.