



General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 August 2021

Original: English

Seventy-sixth session

Item 51 of the provisional agenda*

Assistance in mine action

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, covering the period from August 2019 to July 2021, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/80](#) on assistance in mine action. The report covers the implementation of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023 and highlights the perseverance of United Nations mine action in the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had led to restricted rotations of personnel and the suspension of many in-person training sessions and community-based explosive ordnance risk education initiatives, had exacerbated the vulnerabilities of communities affected by explosive ordnance contamination and had worsened access challenges for persons with disabilities. The pandemic also created financial uncertainty, which persists to the present day.

2. While data provided by United Nations programmes¹ in 2019 indicated that 15,764 casualties had been caused by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, data reported in 2020 showed a decrease of 35 per cent in such casualties, to 10,102. The change was likely attributable to movement restrictions imposed by the pandemic, limiting both casualties and data collection, as well as to budgetary cuts, which may have also stymied data collection. In some instances, the reduction appears to correlate with positive developments, for example, in Somalia, where the liberation by the Somali armed forces of areas controlled by Al-Shabaab in the Shabelle Hoose region led to a decrease in large-scale improvised explosive device attacks, which historically caused significant casualties. Although Iraq recorded the highest number of casualties, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic,

* [A/75/150](#).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all data in the report have been drawn from the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023, and, for 2020, reflect input from 30 of the 33 countries and territories with a United Nations mine action presence. The data compiled through the mechanism are based on both United Nations and national sources.



Yemen, Afghanistan and Somalia, all except Yemen showed reduced casualties in 2020 as compared with 2019.

3. Improvised explosive devices accounted for 57 per cent of casualties caused by explosive ordnance and recorded by United Nations mine action actors and entities in 2019, and 56 per cent in 2020,² with non-State armed groups employing those devices in a variety of ways to cause maximum harm. Magnetic improvised explosive devices, which are quick and easy to emplace, were used increasingly in Afghanistan, while improvised explosive devices placed in empty homes in Libya targeted returning civilians. Indications of the transfer of components and methodologies for the usage of improvised explosive devices across borders and regions, as seen, for example, between Burkina Faso and Mali, Somalia and Yemen, and Cameroon and Nigeria, underscored the need for a regional and multidisciplinary response.

4. While much progress was made in the clearance of legacy contamination, including in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, new or worsened contamination was recorded in areas that suffered ongoing or escalating hostilities, for example, in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus subregion, in Myanmar and in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. In the Central African Republic, an asymmetric attack on peacekeepers using explosives signalled the emergence of a new explosive threat requiring a mine action response. The urbanization of conflict and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas continued to cause suffering among civilians. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas in 2020, 88 per cent of those killed and injured were civilians, compared with 16 per cent when used in other areas (S/2021/423). The use of explosive weapons in populated areas also generated complex contamination, negatively affecting the work of first responders and of humanitarian and development agencies. Explosive ordnance also fuelled humanitarian emergencies and displacement. Of the 82.4 million people who had been forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2020 as a result of conflict- and climate-related emergencies,³ many faced threats from explosive ordnance on their migration routes and in their efforts to return home. In particular, reports from Cameroon in 2021 indicated that suicide attacks and raids using explosive devices had been key factors in the displacement of more than 400,000 people and had led to rapidly escalating humanitarian needs, with more than 1.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴

5. The need for mine action support continued to grow in humanitarian settings, as shown by the increase in mechanisms established for the mine action area of responsibility, under the auspices of the Global Protection Cluster, from 12 in 2018 to 15 in 2019 and 16 in 2020,⁵ with demand continuing to grow in 2021. The incorporation of mine action into humanitarian response plans also increased, from 12 in 2018 to 17 in 2019 and 18 in 2020. As explosive ordnance constrained development and economic growth across most affected countries and territories – whether through the contamination of land that could otherwise be used for socioeconomic activities or infrastructure development or by preventing the establishment of an environment conducive to development by fuelling violence and conflict – efforts were made to leverage the role of mine action as an enabler for sustainable development.

² For the purposes of the present report, casualty figures from improvised explosive devices, also referred to as anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature, encompass those arising from all such devices, including victim-operated improvised explosive devices.

³ Data provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In 2020, such mechanisms were operating in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

II. Update on international legal instruments related to mine action

6. Significant gaps remain in the universalization of, reporting on and compliance with international legal instruments relating to mine action. Fewer than half of the 27 States with a United Nations mine action presence that were surveyed had ratified or acceded to the conventions pertaining to mine action: 11 were parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction; 6 were parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions; and 5 were parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. All five of the States parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons had also ratified or acceded to the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices as Amended on 3 May 1996 (Protocol II as amended on 3 May 1996), with two of those five having also ratified or acceded to the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V). A slightly higher number (12) of the 27 States surveyed were parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Those data indicate that more work needs to be done to promote the universalization of the major international frameworks, which are meant to guide and support efforts to address contamination or explosive threats.

7. Nonetheless, there have been positive developments. Maldives, Niue, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Saint Lucia joined the Convention on Cluster Munitions, bringing the total number of States parties to 110. That number, however, still falls short of the goal of 130 set at the First Review Conference held in September 2015. Successive presidencies and coordinators on universalization have continued to strengthen advocacy in that domain.

8. The United Nations continued to highlight linkages between the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and humanitarian and disarmament treaties, while advocating for the provision of support to survivors of explosive ordnance incidents, including persons with disabilities, and their families and communities. Attendees at the Conference of States Parties to the Convention, which was held from 15 to 17 June 2021, discussed the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies. Saint Lucia and Uzbekistan ratified the Convention on 11 June 2020 and 28 June 2021, respectively, and Botswana acceded to it on 12 July 2021.

9. Unfortunately, there have been no new ratifications or accessions to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Nonetheless, guided by Protocol V, and underscoring the link between the Convention and the protection of civilians, just over 29 km² of land was cleared in Afghanistan across six firing ranges used by international military forces, benefiting 4,140 people. Ongoing advocacy by the Mine Action Service is aimed at promoting compliance with the Convention in the context of the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan.

10. There were no new ratifications of or accessions to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, although many States not yet party to the Convention are believed to have mines, including in stockpiles, on their territories. Of the signatories to the Convention, 31 States – the most recent of which being Chile and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – have completed their clearance obligations under article 5. Other States presented requests to extend their clearance deadlines during the reporting period; most of those States received technical support from the United Nations in doing so.

11. The five-year Oslo Action Plan was adopted by the States parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention at the Fourth Review Conference, held in Norway in November 2019. Under the Plan, States parties committed themselves to ensuring that national responses are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of people in affected communities, including by taking into account age, gender and other context-specific factors. The introduction of a distinct section dedicated to risk education and reduction is also a strong sign of heightened international and national support for this life-saving endeavour.

12. In November 2020, the Sudan convened the eighteenth meeting of the States parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in a virtual format, at which the reporting rate of just over 50 per cent was flagged as an area in need of attention. The Netherlands, as president of the nineteenth meeting of the States parties, presented a focus on capacity development, innovation and inclusivity.

III. Reporting under the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023

A. Strengthening protection against the risks and socioeconomic impacts of explosive ordnance

13. Progress has been made in reducing casualties from explosive ordnance accidents through the clearance of legacy contamination, as seen, for example, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, where the casualty rate fell by more than 70 per cent in a decade, dropping from 119 in 2010 to 33 in 2020.⁶ In contrast, casualties from improvised explosive devices continued to rise in Burkina Faso in 2020, and the Mine Action Service recorded a growing number of civilian and military casualties as a result of such devices in Ituri Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There was an alarming 50 per cent increase in casualties, from 111 to 166, caused by explosive ordnance in Colombia, and data gathered from Yemen indicated a more than threefold increase in such casualties between 2019 and 2020, with 1,606 recorded in 2020, compared with 498 in 2019. Moreover, some United Nations mine action programmes that had noted a decrease in casualties in 2020 saw a return to higher figures – closer to pre-2020 levels – in the first months of 2021. Those worrying trends underscore the ongoing need for life-saving clearance and survey action and explosive ordnance risk education.

Survey and clearance

14. In 2020, United Nations funds enabled the return of 164 km² of previously contaminated land to communities, making them safer and more productive. That figure was driven by progress seen in many countries and territories, with Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia and Viet Nam having the highest clearance rates. In 2020, the United Nations made 900 essential civilian infrastructure sites, such as schools and hospitals, safe.

15. To minimize the threat posed by explosive ordnance to communities at risk in the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations Mine Action Service deployed its first explosive ordnance assessment team to rural Damascus in July 2020. The team contributed to the mapping of explosive ordnance contamination and laid the groundwork for the first Damascus-based humanitarian clearance operation, set to take place in the next reporting period.

⁶ Data provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

16. The mine action component of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan responded to requests from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Food Programme (WFP) to facilitate cross-line food assistance missions to two enclaves in Southern Kordofan that had not been accessed by United Nations humanitarian assistance since 2011.

17. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan ensured safe access for humanitarian actors by marking areas safe for WFP food drop zones; clearing construction sites for humanitarian hubs, in coordination with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Organization for Migration; and surveying and clearing water pipeline construction projects led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which afforded 110,000 people with access to clean water and sanitation.

18. Clearance operations undertaken by the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei enabled safe and unobstructed returns, which increased from 202,000 to 220,000, and the safe migration of herders, while also enabling mission mobility and improving stability in the area. Between October 2019 and April 2020, in one village in South Sudan, the Mine Action Service destroyed 98 anti-personnel mines and 15 items of unexploded ordnance, releasing land and enabling the community, which included recent returnees from Uganda, to rebuild homes and farm safely.

19. Clearance and survey activities mitigate the socioeconomic impact of contamination and spur development. In Somalia, a community-based clearance project along the border with Ethiopia generated employment opportunities for more than 300 Somali men and women, nearly half of whom were younger than 30 years of age, consistent with the youth and peace and security agenda. In Iraq, the Mine Action Service cleared agricultural lands in Anbar, Kirkuk and Ninawa Governorates, creating safe and productive livelihood opportunities. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo completed 570 explosive ordnance disposal tasks and destroyed 901 explosive remnants of war, allowing for agricultural income generation activities to be carried out. In Afghanistan, post-demining evaluations showed that cleared land had been used for agricultural activities, grazing and the construction of homes, roads and other critical infrastructure. In Libya, the identification and clearance of contaminated areas also facilitated the returns of internally displaced persons.

Explosive ordnance risk education

20. In 2019 and 2020, 7.3 million people were reached by in-person explosive ordnance risk education that was responsive and tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable communities, with many more reached through remote methods, all delivered or funded by the United Nations.

21. The Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group was formed in May 2019 to enable practitioners to share good practices and technical guidance. The Advisory Group comprises 15 organizations from the mine action sector and is co-chaired by UNICEF and a civil society organization (on a rotating basis, currently Humanity and Inclusion), with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining acting as secretariat.

22. Although United Nations in-person risk education programming was curtailed by COVID-19, the mine action sector adapted so as to leverage remote methods. In Iraq, a social media campaign was launched, entitled "Safe Step", which reached more than 1 million individuals across six different governorates. Posters, billboards and mobile phone messaging campaigns, television and radio broadcasting campaigns and social media campaigns were also rolled out, with United Nations support, in

Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya, the Niger, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen.

23. In 2020, UNICEF increased its investment in the development of the capacities of frontline workers to deliver risk education, including by training nearly 19,000 professionals, including teachers, health-care workers and army officers, reflecting a 42 per cent increase in the number of risk education messengers compared with 2019 and marking large-scale adaptation to the localization of delivery spurred by the pandemic. Similarly, in Afghanistan, risk education messaging delivered by the Mine Action Service linked the need to avoid touching one's face as a hygiene measure to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 with the dangers of touching unknown and potentially explosive objects. In Abyei, the Mine Action Service designed drama sessions for children, which included the distribution of face masks customized with explosive ordnance risk education messaging. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) adapted its victim assistance efforts in Viet Nam to support a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities, including victims of explosive ordnance accidents, assisting 6,000 people assessed as "most vulnerable". By harnessing new technologies, the mine action component of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon supported the national mine action centre in the country to engage 400 school children in virtual reality explosive ordnance risk education.

24. The explosive ordnance risk education community also adapted its activities in response to access constraints and emerging security risks. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF engaged extensively with the Ministry of Health to integrate such education into national immunization programmes, developing tailored materials for use by health workers who were able to reach a wide range of vulnerable children in besieged or hard-to-reach areas. UNICEF also supported the Syrian Ministry of Education in integrating explosive ordnance risk education into the official national school curriculum for all grades, ensuring that a generation of children and adolescents could adopt safe behaviours. Upon the outbreak of hostilities in Gaza in May 2021, the Mine Action Service and UNICEF collaborated on the delivery of risk education messages to communities facing new contamination.

25. In Iraq, with the announcement of the closure of camps for internally displaced persons in 2020, explosive ordnance risk education sessions were quickly adapted for and delivered to returning families and communities. A comprehensive United Nations programme in Lebanon designed risk education tools for refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. In Yemen, in 2019, UNICEF and its civil society partner launched a pilot sign language campaign tailored to children with hearing impairments, reaching around 4,000 deaf children with risk education messaging, as well as young people in internally displaced persons camps and host communities. A further 18,300 children and young people from surrounding communities were also reached.

26. Increasing integration of mine action into education and health sectors further reinforced the link between mine action and efforts to bolster development and livelihood opportunities, including through ongoing efforts to incorporate explosive ordnance risk education into primary school and university curricula, as seen in Mali and Nigeria, respectively, or into health-care campaigns, such as immunization drives carried out in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Protection from the threat posed by improvised explosive devices

27. Numerous United Nations entities contribute to the improvised explosive device response cycle, which encompasses a range of activities, from the prevention of attacks to the detection of devices and the rehabilitation of survivors – all serving to

protect civilians, United Nations peacekeepers and personnel and humanitarian and other actors from the threat posed by such devices. The United Nations Coordinating Task Force on a Whole-of-System Approach to Improvised Explosive Devices, coordinated by the Mine Action Service pursuant to the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, entitled *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, was established to deliver a coherent response. Engagement through the Task Force resulted in the establishment of a coordination body in Yemen on the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, led by UNDP. Collectively, the efforts of its members have contributed to the reduction of civilian casualties in Hadramawt, Shabwah and Ta'izz Governorates, which dropped from 231 in 2019 to 125 in 2020.⁷

28. In Mali, the Mine Action Service seeks to improve the safety and security of peacekeepers while supporting the capacity development of both the Malian Defence and Security Forces and civil society in mitigating the threat posed by explosive ordnance, in particular improvised explosive devices. The United Nations has recorded 102 improvised explosive device incidents in Mali to date in 2021. National security forces were the primary target, although 38 incidents targeted United Nations peacekeepers and 10 incidents affected civilians.⁸ From January to June 2021 alone, six peacekeepers lost their lives in incidents related to such devices, underscoring the critical role played by mission-specific training on improvised explosive device threat mitigation and disposal and mentoring provided to troop-contributing countries. Positive indications of the capacity of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to detect and neutralize improvised explosive devices before causing harm to peacekeepers or the civilian population continued to be seen.⁹ From August 2019 to June 2021, Malian instructors who had been previously trained and mentored by the Mission successfully delivered more than 50 courses in explosive ordnance disposal to the country's defence and security forces, signalling an increasingly self-sufficient national capacity.

29. Efforts have also been focused on tackling the threat posed by improvised explosive devices at its roots. Following advocacy and technical support received from the Mine Action Service, including through information provided to the Panel of Experts on Somalia, the Somalia arms embargo was expanded by the Security Council, in its resolution [2498 \(2019\)](#), to include a ban on components for improvised explosive devices, thereby bolstering preventative efforts to address the threat.

B. Reintegration of survivors and family members and access to health and education services

30. United Nations mine action was increasingly responsive to victim assistance during the reporting period, with 14 United Nations programmes in 2020 documenting and supporting referral pathways, which link victims to available services and support offered by the State or other partners, compared with 8 in 2019. In Colombia, the United Nations provided guidance and support to victims of explosive ordnance incidents, so as to enhance their access to the Government's referral pathways. Access to assistance at the local level was also strengthened through the development of, and updates to, local and regional referral pathways and through the delivery of training to local ombudsperson offices, in order to enhance responses to requests for assistance. The Mine Action Service in Nigeria worked with

⁷ Data provided by the UNDP country office in Yemen.

⁸ Data provided by the Mine Action Service in Mali.

⁹ From slightly over a third of the improvised explosive devices that were targeting the Mission found and cleared in 2018, to approximately half of the improvised explosive devices that were targeting the Mission found and cleared in 2020 and the first half of 2021.

the International Organization for Migration to map psychosocial support services and identify focal points for the provision of information on referral pathways to international and national mine action actors who engage with victims. Following a sharp increase in accidents in the Occupied Palestinian Territory precipitated by the easing of restrictions related to COVID-19 and, later, by the outbreak of hostilities in Gaza, the Mine Action Service continued to verify incidents and provide referrals to survivors of explosive ordnance incidents and their families.

31. In the Syrian Arab Republic, in order to mainstream victim assistance into the humanitarian response, a Working Group on Victim Assistance was established within the framework of the mine action area of responsibility. Since its launch in October 2020, the Working Group has identified 250 existing services related to disability and victim assistance across 13 governorates. In Mali, the needs of survivors and relevant information on their impairments were integrated into efforts made through the in-country mine action area of responsibility, including its information management process, in order to improve and strengthen referral pathways and assistance.

32. In some cases, the United Nations provided direct assistance where referral pathways were not available. For example, in eastern Ukraine, UNICEF facilitated the provision of comprehensive assistance packages to victims of explosive ordnance incidents, while undertaking individual case management to ensure evolving needs were mapped to inform continued care. In 2019 and 2020, a total of 2,105 child victims were supported by UNICEF across 11 countries and territories, namely, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Myanmar, the Niger, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.¹⁰

33. Mine action promotes the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy launched by the Secretary-General in June 2019 to bring about lasting and transformative change on disability inclusion, in particular by ensuring, through advocacy and technical assistance, equal access for all persons with disabilities, including survivors of explosive ordnance. As part of those efforts, the United Nations works closely with national and local institutions to enhance policy and prioritization mechanisms intended to ensure respect for human rights, and, specifically, the rights of persons with disabilities. In Afghanistan, a national disability inclusion strategy, developed with United Nations support and in consultation with civil society stakeholders, was designed to uphold the rights and improve the lives of persons with disabilities, as well as their families and caretakers. In Somalia, persons with disabilities, including survivors of explosive incidents, were consulted in the development of a national action plan for disability assistance launched in November 2019. UNDP supported national authorities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to design a five-year victim assistance framework (2021–2025). The United Nations also supported the updating of the national victim assistance strategy of the Sudan. United Nations data indicate an increase in the countries and territories that have established a national coordination mechanism on victim assistance (9 of the 29 surveyed in 2019 and 11 of the 30 surveyed in 2020).

34. Data collection is key to ensuring adequate responses, tailored to the needs of victims of explosive ordnance incidents. With the support of UNDP, the Government of Viet Nam launched its first large-scale data collection initiative focused on persons with disabilities, aimed at enhancing strategic planning, prioritization and national victim assistance programmes. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations increased its data collection capacity to better inform humanitarian responses so that activities could be adapted to address gaps in services for victims.

¹⁰ Data provided by UNICEF.

35. The United Nations advocated both the protection and realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and the inclusion of survivors of explosive ordnance in international and national responses and services. In May 2020, with the support of UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Governments and regional and civil society representatives, the Mine Action Service convened a virtual event to explore policy and operational responses, including through the implementation of Security Council resolution 2475 (2019), to challenges faced by persons with disabilities. In addition, in April 2020, the Mine Action Service launched a virtual exhibit, entitled “Together for Mine Action: Give Life Back”, to draw attention to the specific needs and requirements of persons with disabilities exposed to conflict, while addressing persistent challenges faced by victims. Under the mine action area of responsibility, advocacy for the inclusion of victim assistance projects in humanitarian response planning continued at the global and country levels.

C. Development of mine action capacities of national and local institutions

36. The capacity development of national and local institutions and the elaboration of policy and legislative mechanisms are tools to ensure sustainable leadership and the implementation of national mine action programmes. A total of 15 countries and territories with a United Nations mine action presence now have a mine action legislative framework, compared with 10 in 2019 and 9 in 2018. In a positive development, 16 countries and territories reported having developed a gender strategy for mine action in 2020, a significant increase from 8 in 2019.

37. Over half of countries with a United Nations mine action presence – 17 out of 30 – have adopted national mine action standards, which enhance and ensure the quality and safety of activities. In Afghanistan, the adoption of new national standards, which were developed with United Nations support to address the increase in victim-operated improvised explosive devices, allowed for the initiation of projects to clear these devices in accordance with established standards for the first time. In Colombia, the Mine Action Service supported the review and update of national mine action standards, allowing for greater prioritization and efficiency of operations. The first review in nine years of national mine action standards in the Sudan was conducted in 2020 in consultation with civil society and United Nations partners. In Yemen, the first national mine action standards were developed with support provided by UNDP to the Government of Yemen.

38. The Mine Action Service partnered with the Government of Iraq to develop specialized skills across multiple government sectors in a gender-sensitive manner, for example, through the provision of explosive ordnance disposal and first responder training to police officers, 22 per cent of whom were women. Following the transfer of mine action responsibilities to the Government of Afghanistan, United Nations support strengthened the management capacities conducive to the implementation of sustainable mine action.

39. In Colombia, the Mine Action Service supported the deployment of national coordinators to 13 regions in urgent need of mine action interventions, helping to expand the Government’s presence and the reach of its mine action support to respond to the needs of affected communities better and sustainably. In Somalia, the United Nations delivered training to the Somali Explosive Management Authority in technical areas such as the accreditation of mine action operators, quality assurance and information management. In Lebanon, UNDP supported the Lebanese Mine Action Centre to develop standard operating procedures aimed at ensuring cost-effectiveness

and operational efficiency while elaborating tools for the prioritization of mine action activities based on safety, socioeconomic priorities and international obligations.

40. United Nations support to the Palestinian Mine Action Centre prioritized the integration of a gender perspective in the risk education strategy for the occupied West Bank. The United Nations also supported the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office in the development of a four-year strategic plan that will enable the Office to manage the residual explosive threat more easily in the territory of Western Sahara east of the berm.

41. In the area of weapons and ammunition management, the United Nations develops capacity through technical assistance that is consistent with international standards and guidelines, including the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines and the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium. The mine action component of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo supported the establishment of a mechanism to oversee the implementation of the national action plan for the control of small arms and light weapons. Training was delivered to the Congolese National Police to effectively manage and secure weapons and ammunition stockpiles in accordance with international standards and was carried out in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. Similarly, MINUSMA delivered, in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy, the United Nations Staff Officer Course to Malian Security and Defence Forces staff officers, which included a module dedicated to raising awareness of human rights and instilling a strong sense of accountability.

42. Activities in the Central African Republic were affected by a deterioration in the security situation before and after the December 2020 elections. Nevertheless, the mine action component of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic continued to support security sector reform and the extension of State authority through the training of national defence and security forces in weapons and ammunition management in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy. A milestone was achieved in 2020 with the handover of the Bouar regional ammunition depot from the United Nations to national authorities.

43. In Burkina Faso, mine action capacity development efforts also supported security sector reform, promoting trust between institutions and communities. Through training and technical assistance, the Mine Action Service developed the capacity of the security sector in improvised explosive device threat mitigation, allowing for deployment to high-threat areas, and assisted the country's national commission for arms control in the coordination of activities among local, national and international actors. Work is continuing on the development of a national mine action plan and an accreditation system, and on the elaboration of national norms and standards on mine action, which will enhance efficiency in the management of the mine action response by national authorities.

44. The United Nations relies heavily on partnerships with local civil society organizations to undertake and sustain many mine action activities, in particular in the areas of risk education and survey and clearance. In Iraq, the Mine Action Service partnered national non-governmental mine action organizations with international counterparts for mentoring and organizational and technical skill transfer to enable a nationally and locally led response. In the Syrian Arab Republic, community-based facilitators received capacity development support from the United Nations in the delivery of explosive ordnance risk education, while training aligned with national and international standards in Afghanistan, Colombia and the Democratic Republic

of the Congo focused on developing explosive ordnance disposal, information management and operational efficiency skills of local organizations.

45. At the regional level, the Mine Action Service and the United Nations Office to the African Union supported the African Union in mine action and improvised explosive device policy development. This support included technical assistance in the development of a counter-improvised explosive device strategy – poised to be the first such framework to be adopted by the African Union – which benefited from lessons learned from a counter-improvised explosive device strategy rolled out in Yemen with UNDP support. In Somalia, technical assistance and training delivered by the Mine Action Service to the African Union Mission in Somalia and the Somali National Army in mitigating the threat posed by improvised explosive devices provided critical support to the largest peacekeeping mission of the African Union, contributing to stability and peace in the region.

46. The mobile training team of the improvised explosive device threat mitigation advisory team within the Mine Action Service was established in Entebbe, Uganda, to support troop- and police-contributing countries in preparing their contingents for high-threat environments.

47. With the support of UNDP, a partnership between the Republic of Korea and countries affected by explosive ordnance in South-East Asia, including Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, allowed for the sharing of technical expertise and the provision of capacity development to address the legacy of conflicts.

48. In 2021, UNDP compiled best practices and lessons learned from across the United Nations mine action sector to produce a handbook on capacity development in mine action, which will allow the United Nations mine action community to learn from past experiences and continue to evolve capacity development efforts, guided by the priorities of national actors.

49. Efforts to develop mine action capacities at the national and local levels contribute to the realization of the “New way of working”, a global framework adopted in April 2017 to guide development and humanitarian actors. They also underpin peace and political processes given that communities are more likely to trust national institutions that improve the lives of individuals and protect communities from the threat of explosive ordnance.

D. Leveraging mine action to enhance humanitarian, peace and security and development priorities

United Nations humanitarian coordination

50. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, which is chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations with the support of the Mine Action Service and brings together actors from across the United Nations system, continued to be a valuable forum for coordination. This was seen clearly through coherent and rapid responses to emerging needs or requests for United Nations support in the South Caucasus, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and elsewhere, which maximized available capacities, expertise, on-the-ground presence and resources from across the United Nations system while ensuring close engagement with civil society partners. Coordinated advocacy involving actors across sectors and institutions on the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, which is observed each year on 4 April, sought to increase momentum towards the vision of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action of a world free of the threat of explosive ordnance.

51. Cross-United Nations data-gathering through the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023 is another concrete output of efforts of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action. Such data inform and enhance responses not only within the United Nations mine action community, but also among humanitarian, peace and security and development actors. Another example of information management coordination was the real-time dashboard created by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on personnel and project delivery across United Nations mine action programmes.

52. The mine action area of responsibility continued to serve as a coordination mechanism on mine action support at the country and global levels for United Nations humanitarian actors and civil society partners operating in high-threat environments. In-country coordinators in the mine action area of responsibility worked with some 140 local and international organizations to coordinate the inclusion of mine action in humanitarian response plans through data- and information-sharing and joint analysis. Despite these efforts, only half of the \$212 million required for mine action in humanitarian response plans in 2020 was secured.¹¹ Against this backdrop, 2021 saw a growing demand for the expansion of the mine action area of responsibility to new locations, with requests received from protection coordinators in Cameroon and Ethiopia in response to escalating threats. The coordinators of the mine action area of responsibility at the global level – the Mine Action Service and the Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding unit within the Danish Refugee Council – launched consultations on a global strategy for the mine action area of responsibility to ensure harmonization across multiple country-level coordination platforms.

53. The twenty-fourth International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers, which was hosted virtually with the support of the Government of Germany from 25 to 27 May 2021, provided a platform for coordination and exchange among United Nations actors and with international, regional and local partners, even amid a global pandemic. With approximately 1,000 participants from more than 105 countries and territories, the Meeting tackled issues as diverse as technical innovations in survey and clearance, mental health and social support in mine action, community engagement, environmental assessments and racial equity and inclusion in the mine action sector.

Integration in peace and security priorities

54. The United Nations promoted mine action as a confidence-building measure in peace and political processes. In Colombia, with United Nations support, major advancements were seen in the provision of information on explosive ordnance by ex-combatants to the State, contributing to the operationalization of the tripartite mechanism comprising the Government, the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the United Nations, consistent with the 2016 peace agreement. The parties agreed on a methodology, developed by the Mine Action Service, for the sharing of information to design future demining operations. In June 2021, the parties carried out local visits to introduce the methodology and collect information from former combatants. The Mine Action Service also provided quality assurance for the mine action operations of Humanicemos DH, an organization that reintegrates former FARC-EP combatants into civilian life and which began demining operations in two municipalities.

55. In Libya, the mine action component of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya contributed to the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, including

¹¹ Data drawn from humanitarian response plans in the 16 countries and territories with a mine action area of responsibility.

through support for the clearance of 120 km of the coastal road in Sirte by Libyan parties, enabling the safe mobility of local communities. Mine action also continued to act as a confidence-building measure in Cyprus, where in 2019 the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus carried out surveys of suspected contaminated areas between the north and south of the island. Training provided by the mine action component of MINUSMA to United Nations observers in light weapons manipulation and identification contributed to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration component of the peace process in Mali.

56. The Mine Action Service is a mission component in eight peacekeeping operations,¹² directly contributing to the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and Action for Peacekeeping Plus priorities, including by mitigating threats to civilians, advancing the safety and security of peacekeepers, bolstering performance through weapons and ammunition management and providing technical assistance to national authorities in support of sustaining peace and the advancement of political processes.

57. Member States, including members of the Security Council, continued to attach great importance to the topic of mine action, as demonstrated by several debates organized during the reporting period. In April 2021, Viet Nam, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, convened an open debate of the Council on the theme “Mine action and sustaining peace: stronger partnerships for better delivery”. The open debate, in which the Secretary-General participated, underscored the role of mine action in enabling mandate delivery across several peace operations and provided an opportunity to explore challenges and opportunities for mine action in facilitating progress in humanitarian, development and peace and security activities. In March 2021, Kenya convened an Arria-formula meeting on the theme “Protecting the peacekeeper: suppressing the deployment of improvised explosive devices against peace operations”, during which Member States recommended strengthening the international response to the improvised explosive device threat through investment in technology, equipment and training.

Accelerating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

58. In 2020, the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023 began to track the integration of mine action in development plans, with 15 out of 30 States and territories surveyed reporting that mine action had been included in their relevant United Nations-supported development framework (such as relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks) and 13 States reporting that mine action had been incorporated into their national development plans. In countries and territories facing contamination, the United Nations is leveraging mine action as an accelerator for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹² United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations Mission in South Sudan, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara and United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei.

E. Addressing the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys from diverse groups while facilitating their empowerment and inclusion

59. In 2019 and 2020, men and boys comprised the majority of fatalities and casualties caused by explosive ordnance incidents.¹³ At the same time, the women and girls who survived such incidents continued to experience multilayered discrimination in gaining access to services and reintegrating into society.

60. United Nations mine action programmes continued to be tailored to respond to the needs of each segment of society. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, female risk educators were trained and deployed by the United Nations in the occupied West Bank to ensure that the delivery of explosive ordnance risk education was culturally relevant. In South Sudan, gender-balanced community liaison teams enabled the delivery of explosive ordnance risk education to women and girls who would not be permitted to gain access to information provided in male-only forums. In Colombia, United Nations-supported organizations delivering explosive ordnance risk education in Afro-Colombian communities identified the impact of explosive ordnance on women and girls, leading to a series of workshops in which both women and men could engage in safe behaviour messaging and discuss their respective roles.

61. The United Nations continued to ensure that women were represented in training and capacity development activities. Mine action can dismantle barriers to women's participation in stabilization and peacebuilding processes, advancing the women and peace and security agenda and contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, on gender equality. The Mine Action Service delivered first responder training for explosive ordnance incidents to a group of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps comprising 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men.¹⁴ In Burkina Faso, despite discrimination surrounding the role of women in security matters, women accounted for 17 per cent of participants in training on the search and detection of improvised explosive devices delivered by the United Nations to the Ministry of Security in 2020, with plans to introduce a 10 per cent minimum threshold of women participants across all such training in 2021.¹⁵ In Libya, following engagement between the Mine Action Service and the Libyan Forensic Police, two female police officers were trained on device scene incident management in 2019, the first time women had received such training in Libya. In Yemen, the first female bomb disposal and non-technical survey teams in the country's history were trained and deployed by UNDP, widening routes for the further empowerment and inclusion of women in national security responses.

62. In 2020, the Mine Action Service in Afghanistan employed gender mainstreaming officers with the goal of developing the capacities of national mine action partners in areas such as professional mobility for women and gender-sensitive programming. Having supported the establishment of a gender unit in the Directorate of Mine Action of Iraq, the Mine Action Service provided technical assistance for the development of a workplan that will ensure the promotion of women's inclusion in mine action activities as the Government of Iraq increasingly assumes mine action responsibilities. In Iraq, the recruitment and training of 30 women deminers, resulting in the deployment of four mixed-gender clearance teams, challenged norms and opened pathways for women's participation in male-dominated fields.

¹³ Men and boys comprised 41 per cent and 12 per cent of casualties, respectively, in 2020, and 36.9 per cent and 11.8 per cent, respectively, in 2019, although the real proportion is likely to be higher, given that a large number of casualties are currently unattributed.

¹⁴ Data provided by the Mine Action Service in Nigeria.

¹⁵ Data provided by the Mine Action Service in Burkina Faso.

63. Women's employment in United Nations mine action increased slightly from 19 per cent in 2019 to 21 per cent in 2020. The Mine Action Service and its implementing partner, UNOPS, have made impressive strides in pursuing gender parity across mine action programmes. Gender parity has steadily increased in recent years,¹⁶ with women now representing 39 per cent of the workforce (22 per cent national and 17 per cent international), while the proportion of women in technical¹⁷ and leadership¹⁸ positions in programme teams at the end of 2020 stood at 38 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively, compared with 35 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively, in 2019.¹⁹ In implementing its global gender and diversity strategy, UNOPS placed emphasis on talent outreach, mentoring and retention strategies and reviewed terms of reference to screen for language that could create gender barriers. Efforts to promote enabling environments were also prioritized, for example, in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the decision to offer daytime shifts exclusively to female security guards increased gender parity among the security teams protecting Mine Action Service offices.

64. In 2020, UNOPS piloted a diversity and inclusion survey at the global scale, the first of its kind in mine action. The survey data, which highlighted, inter alia, diverse perceptions of equal opportunities in the workplace and a need for mechanisms to address discriminatory behaviours, will drive efforts to institute global change in the areas of diversity, inclusion and equality. The Secretary-General welcomes progress made by the mine action community to deepen discussions in this area, including through a dedicated plenary discussion on racial equity in the mine action sector during the International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers in May 2021. The Secretary-General is confident that next steps will complement the initiatives of the Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations, which he launched in 2020.

IV. Observations and recommendations

65. The mine action community was resilient in the face of the pandemic. Innovative methods, such as migration to virtual training platforms or campaigns merging COVID-19 and explosive ordnance risk education messages, allowed for safety and security training and risk education to continue to be delivered to affected communities and to international, national and local personnel operating in high-risk areas. The reprioritization and tailoring of programmes and the steadfast commitment of donors to maintaining national capacity ensured that livelihoods rebounded efficiently. Lessons learned from such pandemic-spurred adaptations – many of which will continue to be applicable in the foreseeable future – should be leveraged to improve the mine action response.

66. The critical role of local actors in ensuring and sustaining protection was reaffirmed during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in the face of grave danger and uncertainty, local partners stayed the course. A continued and expanded

¹⁶ At the P-3 level, representation of women increased from 25 per cent in 2019 to 33 per cent in 2020 and 38 per cent so far in 2021. At the P-4 level, representation of women increased from 31 per cent in 2019 to 37 per cent in 2020 and 39 per cent so far in 2021. At the P-5 level, representation of women increased from 15 per cent in 2019 to 20 per cent in 2020 and 28 per cent so far in 2021. From 2019 to 2021, D-1 and D-2 positions have been occupied by women.

¹⁷ Technical positions refer to those positions necessary for the conduct of mine action processes and operations that require technical qualifications or experience, for example, improvised explosive ordnance disposal, explosive detection dog handling, improvised explosive device threat analysis, quality assurance and weapons and ammunition management.

¹⁸ P-4 level and above.

¹⁹ Data drawn from the UNOPS global gender and diversity strategy.

focus on the localization of mine action, including through local capacity development, is needed to ensure sustainable and tailored mine action benefits for affected communities.

67. Across continents, the danger posed by explosive ordnance has not dissipated. At the same time, funding levels are not keeping pace. I appeal to donors for adequate and predictable mine action funding. I also call for increased and sustainable financial support for and attention to the rights of victims of explosive ordnance incidents, including persons with disabilities, with due regard to the challenges of accessibility, exclusion and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or race.

68. Explosive ordnance continues to exacerbate protection concerns, including on migration routes. Improvised explosive devices represent an increasing protection risk to civilians in the Sahel region, including in recent escalations of violence in Cameroon, impeding access to basic services and livelihoods, posing a critical obstacle to safe and dignified returns and deterring efforts towards economic recovery, development and peace. Funding for protection responses must be scaled up, including through the mine action area of responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster. Increased integration of the needs of refugees and people forcibly displaced in national mine action plans and strategies is necessary to ensure adequate responses for affected communities.

69. The rise in the use of improvised explosive devices by non-State armed groups and organized criminal groups is alarming as it destabilizes situations, sows insecurity, protects trafficking corridors, disrupts mobility and attacks the civilian population, humanitarian workers and personnel of United Nations field missions. Regional and global approaches are warranted. The cooperation seen through the United Nations Coordinating Task Force on a Whole-of-System Approach to Improvised Explosive Devices is a positive development. I appeal to Member States to support peace operations deployed to high-threat environments, including through the provision of equipment, such as costly but life-saving mine-protected vehicles, the delivery of bilateral training or the provision of trainers to the mobile training team of the Mine Action Service and the reinforcement of expertise at United Nations Headquarters. I welcome the ongoing focus of the Security Council on the safety and security of peacekeepers as a pillar of my Action for Peacekeeping initiative. The independent strategic review of the response to improvised explosive devices in peacekeeping operations requested in Security Council presidential statement [S/PRST/2021/11](#) will provide valuable insights and recommendations in this regard.

70. I wish to reinforce the message of the General Assembly in its resolution [74/80](#) on the importance of explicitly incorporating references to mine action, when appropriate, in ceasefire and peace agreements, as well as in the mandates of peace operations. Further efforts will not only generate trust in peace processes by improving security, contributing to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes and building confidence between parties, but will also enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers, the protection of civilians and mandate delivery and performance in high-risk settings, all of which are elements of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative. Mine action also helps to dismantle barriers to women's participation and advances inclusion, thus contributing to sustainable development outcomes. Mine action should be considered at the early stages of mandate design, evolution and transition and be appropriately resourced.

71. Universal adherence to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Convention on Cluster Munitions and strict compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law pave the way to ensuring protection and saving lives. I urge all States to accede to these conventions and call upon those that have already done so to continue their steadfast

implementation and to recommit to reporting and advocacy efforts. Given the well-documented, widespread patterns of civilian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, I welcome efforts towards a political declaration that directly addresses this harm. I continue to call upon parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and to develop operational policies and practices on the basis of a presumption against such use.

72. It is deplorable that those who risk their lives to mitigate the effects of explosive ordnance should themselves be targeted. The attack of 8 June 2021 on humanitarian deminers in Afghanistan – the deadliest attack on deminers in the history of the mine action sector – serves as a stark reminder of the complex and dangerous environments in which mine action activities are undertaken. The attack also underscores the need for investment in the enhancement of the protection, safety and security of United Nations personnel and international and national implementing partners, including through political advocacy and the provision of adequate training and equipment.

73. I take this opportunity to thank the brave, dedicated individuals who work in mine action and put themselves in danger to protect lives, livelihoods and land. From climate change to cybersecurity, the world is grappling with challenges unforeseen when the General Assembly first put mine action on its agenda. The use of landmines and improvised explosive devices and the harm caused by explosive remnants of war challenge the delivery of core priorities of the United Nations, from effective humanitarian responses to sustainable development and sustaining peace. Mine action continues to act as a critical enabler and therefore remains a priority. We all have a role to play in sustaining and increasing the momentum of mine action and in ensuring that people living under the pall of explosive ordnance are not left behind.