

Belgian approach to mine action

1. Introduction

Belgium is a steadfast supporter of mine action. As the first country to prohibit antipersonnel mines in 1996, it played a pioneering role in the fight to ban these weapons. The Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention, adopted in 1997, has turned this fight into a highly successful global endeavor.

The Belgian engagement in mine action involves a wide range of actors and instruments, and includes both humanitarian and non-humanitarian demining.

In order to promote synergy between the different stakeholders, this paper sets out the context, objectives, transversal principles and funding arrangements of the Belgian mine action policy. This should enable better coordination as well as increased sharing of information between all relevant actors, including partner countries and operators in the field.

2. Context

Belgium's policy on mine action is a reflection of its commitment to support and strengthen International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. It aims to mitigate the threat posed by explosive ordnance, i.e. mines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices (IED). The response to this threat has to correspond to the specificity of each explosive hazard involved. It also has to take into account the contextual circumstances having an impact on the effectiveness and feasibility of mitigating measures. Global prohibition is the appropriate and realistic goal in the case of antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions. Action in this regard is underpinned by, respectively, the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. For IED and for landmines other than antipersonnel mines, restrictions have been circumscribed and agreed upon in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Under this Convention, States are also under the obligation to reduce the impact of ERW.

Contamination of land by explosive ordnance jeopardizes the livelihood and well-being of the civilian population. It impedes humanitarian access during and after conflict. In post-conflict situation, it represents a serious obstacle to stabilization, the return of refugees or internally displaced people to their home and economic recovery.

3. Objectives

Mine action is part of Belgium's overarching goal to improve human security. This entails the reinforcement of international humanitarian law, through support for the international conventions tackling the threat of explosive ordnance, as well as support for demining and victim assistance activities. Therefore, all five pillars of mine action need to be strengthened: clearance, risk education, victim assistance, advocacy and stockpile destruction.

The following objectives are pursued:

- Universal adherence to and compliance with the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols.
- Alleviation of the suffering in communities affected by mines and other explosive ordnance.
- Empowerment of mine victims and survivors, through victim assistance and initiatives restoring the sustainability and cohesion of affected communities, with the aim to achieve full and equal participation of mine victims/survivors in society.
- Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goal 16, target 16.1¹
- Promotion of innovation in mine action methodology. Mine action is in continuous transformation as it has to adapt to evolving threats and adopt the most effective and efficient methods, taking advantage of new technological solutions.
- Support for the development and implementation of international standards for mine action.

4. Cross-cutting principles

Belgium attaches particular attention to the following elements, which help to construe mine action as a comprehensive practice enabling productive synergy with related areas of activity:

- The integration of mine action into broader foreign policy, humanitarian, stabilization, peacebuilding and sustainable development approaches. Special attention is given to the “comprehensive approach”, whereby a wide range of policies and tools are combined in a coherent and consistent manner.
- Systematic dialogue, interaction and coordination between the stakeholders at all levels (local, national, regional and international).
- Gender mainstreaming, with particular attention for the disaggregation of data by gender and age and for increased participation of women in mine action.
- Holistic approach to mine action, putting into practice the concept of explosive ordnance threat mitigation. This entails inter alia the consideration of the increasing, complex threat of IED. It also implies addressing both recent and legacy contamination of ERW.

5. Selection criteria for Belgian aid

Specific rules, regulations and selection criteria apply for the different financing instruments available for mine action in Belgium. However, the following cross-cutting aspects should be taken into account, with the objective of funding needs-based and sustainable programs and respecting the “do no harm” principle:

- Humanitarian needs and impact assessment, tailored to the threat encountered.

¹ Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

- National position of the potential recipient country towards the relevant international agreements and instruments. Examine the country's adherence to relevant international conventions, analyze the country's respect for its international obligations, assess if mine action will help the country meet its treaty obligations or will facilitate its accession to international conventions.
- National ownership:
 - o Capacity of national authorities to support the execution of the mine action program: presence of a national mine action authority, existence of a national mine action strategy, national legislation.
 - o Inclusion and active role of affected communities. Indicators on how mine action can increase social cohesion.
 - o Ensure sustainability of the program's results through capacity building of the national structures, e.g. improving national management and coordination.
- Integration of mine action in the post conflict peacebuilding strategy of the country.
- Convergence with geographic and thematic priority areas of Belgian foreign policy and development cooperation. Examples are: the partner countries for the Belgian development cooperation, the Great Lakes region, or areas where the "comprehensive approach"² is applied (currently: the G5 Sahel countries, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia).

6. Funding channels

Belgium does not have a dedicated instrument to finance mine action. Different departments administer the available budget lines.

- Mine action is a key priority of the Peacebuilding Instrument of the MFA Belgium allocating limited contributions (target amount is 300,000 EUR) for field projects.
- The Humanitarian Aid Division of the Belgian Development Cooperation contributes to humanitarian mine action through international organizations and NGOs by means of calls for proposals.
- A number of international organizations receive un-earmarked funding (core), which can be used for mine action. A number of NGOs receive plurennial funding used in part for mine action activities.
- Ad hoc contributions (including in kind) based on a political decision are also possible.

7. From words to action

The principles of this approach have already been put into practice in the recent past. Some examples:

(3. Objectives)

(- Universalization and full implementation of the Ottawa and Oslo conventions)

² As set out in the Strategy Note approved by the Council of Ministers on 20 July 2017

HRH Princess Astrid has been serving as Special Envoy of the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention since 2013 with the mandate to promote the Convention and to support the efforts for universal adherence to it.

(- Empowerment of mine victims and survivors)

Belgium served four years in the Victim Assistance Committee of the Ottawa Convention, including as its President. Funding for victim assistance passes through *inter alia* the ICRC's Special Appeal: disability and mine action (500,000 EUR in 2018 and 1 million EUR in 2019).

(- Promotion of innovation)

Belgium contributed to the development of a new survey technique making use of the African giant pouch rat for scent detection of mines. It also contributed to the development of Tiramisu, a comprehensive modular toolbox for mine action. In 2018, Belgium financed a project of Humanity & Inclusion testing the use of drones in technical survey/land release in Chad.

(- Support for the development and implementation of international mine action standards)

Belgium co-presided a working group in charge of drafting the UN Improvised Explosive Device Disposal Standards, which were published in May 2018. A Belgian expert participates in the Review Board of IMAS (International Mine Action Standards).

(4. Cross-cutting principles for Mine Action)

(- The integration of mine action into broader humanitarian, peacebuilding and sustainable development approaches)

The present paper is part of an effort for greater interagency communication and cooperation, facilitating mutual assistance in the analysis, where appropriate, of project proposals; public promotion of funded programs, e.g. at international meetings; and the functional convergence of approaches between the different stakeholders.

(5. Selection criteria for Belgian aid)

(- Convergence with geographic and thematic priority areas)

Support for the UNMAS programs in Iraq and Syria (2 million EUR in 2020) fits the purpose of the comprehensive approach, whereby mine action is part of the effort to stabilize the areas ravaged by IS-terrorism.