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Gender and Employment in Mine Action by the Numbers: An Update

Introduction to the 2023 Updated Report

How many people work clearing landmines around the world? How many of those humanitarian mine action staff are women? Are there any changes between today and the 2019 survey?

These questions are often met with stammering as such statistics are not readily available. In an effort to better understand the state of play in humanitarian mine action employment, Mines Action Canada surveyed 11 non-governmental organizations involved in land release and landmine clearance about their workforce in early 2019¹ and then again in 2023.² Although the five pillars of humanitarian mine action include victim assistance and advocacy, we chose to focus on survey and clearance, stockpile destruction and risk education as those areas are more likely to be considered “men’s work.” The first goal of this research was to gauge the current level of and factors surrounding women’s employment in the sector globally. In 2019, Mines Action Canada found that two factors impacted women’s employment in mine action: cultural understandings of women’s role in communities and/or the workforce and the program’s age.

The second goal is now to observe if there are any changes in the workforce between 2019 and 2023, especially after COVID-19 and renewed conflicts around the globe and explore further trends in women’s employment in mine action. The updated survey and current report show a 10% increase in the proportion of women employees in humanitarian mine action between 2019 and 2023.

Responses were received from the following organizations: Syria Civil Defence, Project RENEW, Norwegian People’s Aid, Mines Advisory Group, ITF: Enhancing Human Security, Humanity & Inclusion, HALO Trust, Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines, APOPO, Danish Refugee Council, and Free Fields Foundation. The data presented in this report is anonymized and compiled to create a snapshot of mine action employment as of September 2023. All but one of the participating organizations also participated in the 2019 survey. In addition, it must be noted that one organization from the 2019 survey did not submit a response this year. All the data processing, analysis and commentary is the responsibility of Mines Action Canada alone.

¹ Mines Action Canada, “Gender and Employment in Mine Action by the Numbers” 2019. <https://www.minesactioncanada.org/bythenumbers>

² The update of the 2019’s survey, the 2023 data collection and the writing of the present report has been conducted by MAC’s Gender and Mine Action Consultant Bénédicte Santoire from the University of Ottawa.

Background: What We Know about Women in Humanitarian Mine Action

From explosive remnants of war (ERW) exposure to access to information about risks and rehabilitation, and then to decision-making, gender, along with other identity factors such as age, capacity, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation, affect all pillars of humanitarian mine actions (i.e., survey and clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance, advocacy and stockpile destruction). Mine action programs, therefore, occur in gendered environments.³

Although data on women's employment in mine action is scarce, existing literature points to the benefits of greater employment of women in this field. Indeed, research has clearly shown that a gender-balanced workforce in mine action can have positive effects on communities, such as women's economic empowerment, greater teams' operational effectiveness & efficiency, more accurate needs & priorities assessment in planning and implementation of programs and the challenging of persisting sexist stereotypes.⁴ Women's inclusion and meaningful participation in the mine action sector also align with various international gender equality frameworks and norms, such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16.⁵

However, the mine action and disarmament field more broadly – from field operations to diplomatic meetings – remains a predominantly male-dominated sector still to this day for various reasons. Persisting barriers include workplace discrimination, gender & cultural norms regarding employment and inadequate infrastructure and working conditions that do not accommodate women employees, for example.⁶

Since Mines Action Canada conducted its first survey in 2019, many things changed in the field of humanitarian mine action. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly changing employment dynamics worldwide, the conversations around gender, disarmament and mine action also rapidly evolved. Notable is the addition of actions focused on gender and diverse needs in the Oslo Action Plan of the Mine Ban Convention (2019) and the Lausanne Action

³ UNIDIR, "Gender in the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention" November 1st, 2018.

<https://unidir.org/files/publication/pdfs/gender-in-the-anti-personnel-mine-ban-convention-en-795.pdf>

⁴ UNIDIR, "Gender in the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention" November 1st, 2018.

<https://unidir.org/files/publication/pdfs/gender-in-the-anti-personnel-mine-ban-convention-en-795.pdf>; UNMAS

"United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes, 3rd edition," 2019,

https://unmas.org/sites/default/files/mine_action_gender_guidelines_web_0.pdf; Lark, Raphaela, David Hewitson, and Dominic Wolsey, 2022, "Gender and Operational Efficiency" *The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction* 26 (1), <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol26/iss1/7>.

⁵ SDG 5 is "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" and SDG 16 is "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions". GICHD, "Gender and Diversity in the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)" September 13th, 2023. <https://unidir.org/publication/gender-and-diversity-in-the-convention-on-cluster-munitions-ccm/>

⁶ Mines Action Canada, "Gender and Employment in Mine Action by the Numbers" 2019.

<https://www.minesactioncanada.org/bythenumbers>; Hessmann Dalaqua, Renata, Kjølv Egeland and Torbjørn Graff Hugo, "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy" UNIDIR, September 16th, 2020. <https://unidir.org/still-behind-the-curve-gender-balance-in-arms-control-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-diplomacy/>; Myrtilinen, Henry, "Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda" October 21st, 2020.

<https://unidir.org/publication/connecting-the-dots/>; ⁶ Hessman Dalaqua, Renata, Manaved Nambiar and Hana Salama, "Best Practices for Promoting Gender Equality in Conventional Arms Control: Survey Results" UNIDIR, May 15th, 2023. <https://unidir.org/publication/best-practices-for-promoting-gender-equality-in-conventional-arms-control-survey-results/>

Plan of the Cluster Munition Convention (2021), leading several States Parties to include a gender component in their mine action strategies, programs and operations as well as increasing the focus on gender at the multilateral level. Since 2019, institutional changes within the Mine Ban Treaty such as reporting formats and the new Gender Focal Points provided a strong grounding for organizations to pursue gender and diversity conscious programming and practices. The specific Action Plan actions on survey and clearance as well as risk education provided strong motivation to improve the ratio of men to women employed in mine action. In addition, the United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes was revised in 2019. Mixed or all-women clearance teams have been reported in several State Parties of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and many of them incorporated gender in their mine action national strategy.⁷ The following section presents the detailed results of the updated survey.

Results

The study's main findings are summarized below in the form of descriptive quantitative data. We asked the participating organizations to fill out a survey providing the gender breakdown of employees in two main categories: Headquarters (HQ-based senior management, finance and administration teams) and Field operations (clearance, survey, stockpile destruction & risk education and national program support). Survey participants were also asked to provide voluntary qualitative information on their organization's and/or programs' gender and diversity policies, whether they reviewed and implemented Action #3 of the Oslo Action Plan and whether COVID-19 or any other major events (e.g., the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquake) impacted their staffing levels since Mines Action Canada's last survey.

Organizations varied in size and age of programs, ranging between 9 and 629 employees in offices and between 42 and 11,2424 employees in field operations. Some organizations focus entirely on mine action; for others, mine action is only one dimension of their work.

Figure 1: Headquarters/Finance Administration Staff by Gender

	2019 survey	2023 survey
Male %	60.31%	61.53%
Female %	39.69%	38.33%
Others/unknown %	0%	0.14%

Figure 2: Field Operations/National Staff by Gender

	2019 survey	2023 survey
Male %	80.69%	70.64%
Female %	19.31%	29.30%
Others/unknown %	0%	0.06%

⁷ International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Gender and the Mine Ban Treaty" June 2022. http://www.the-monitor.org/media/3327346/Gender-and-MBT_June-2022.pdf

Figure 3: Total Number of Staff by Gender

	2019 survey	2023 survey
Male %	80.21%	70.12%
Female %	19.79%	29.88%

Figure 4: Type of Task in Field Operations by Gender⁸

	Male %	Female %	Others/unknown %
Clearance operations	73.71%	26.16%	0.14%
Survey/EORE	45.25%	54.21%	0.55%
Program support	69.13%	30.87%	0%

Figure 5: Qualitative Answers (N= 11)

	Yes	No	N/A
Organization's staff policy on gender and diversity?	11	-	-
Program's gender and diversity policies?	10	-	1
Reviewed Action #3 of the Oslo Action Plan?	8	2	1
Plan to implement Action #3 of the Oslo Action Plan?	8	2	1
COVID-19 or other major events impacting staffing levels since 2019?	4	3	4

A total of 1,474 people were reported to work in headquarters or finance and administration as of September 2023, out of which 907 are men, 565 are women, and 2 are without a gender recorded (Figure 1). The gender balance is significantly better in this category of employees, with women making up 38.33% of the workforce compared to men (61.53%). However, these types of jobs account for a very small number of mine action employees. Despite this more equal gender balance compared to field operations, a slight decrease is noticeable compared to the 2019 survey, where 60.31% of the workforce were men and 39.69% were women. The research did not provide insight into why the proportion of women employed in headquarters or finance and administration declined from 2019 to 2023 but possible explanations include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global employment, the Taliban restrictions on women's employment or normal small-scale shifts in the workplace. The difference between 2019 and 2023 is estimated to be less than 15 people so a few more men working in headquarters, two or three resignations and a couple women moving from administrative to field roles could explain this decline.

Out of 22,006 field operations or national staff as of September 2023, 15,546 (70.64%) are men, 6,447 (29.30%) are women, and 13 (0.06%) did not have a gender recorded (Figure 2). This is a notable 10% increase in women participation in comparison to the 2019 survey, where men made up 80.69% and women 19.31% of the total number of employees for field operations or national staff.

⁸ Those numbers are based on the data provided by 8 out of 11 participating organizations. The three remaining organizations were not able to provide the data breakdown by type of tasks.

In total, combining both headquarters or finance and administration and field operations or national staff (which includes survey and clearance, stockpile destruction and risk education and program support), there were a recorded number of 23,465 employees as of September 2023. Men comprised 70.12% of that number, and women, 29.88% (Figure 3). This is also a notable 10% increase in the total women participation in comparison to the 2019 survey, where men made up 80.21% (13,190) and women 19.79% (3,255) of the total number of staff (16,445). Overall, the total number of employees in all categories has also increased, although the same number of organizations (11) responded to our survey this year compared to 2019. This may be because some organizations have significantly extended their programs to other countries (57 mine action programs were recorded in 2023 compared to 23 in 2019) due to different reasons (e.g., increased funding) and/or it may be explained by the greater needs in humanitarian mine action, given that some armed conflicts have worsened since 2019, such as in Ukraine.

In 2019, Mines Action Canada's survey revealed that many organizations noted that it was significantly easier to hire women for policy, advocacy, finance and administration positions, while survey and clearance teams, which make up the majority of mine action jobs, are often dominated by men. Within field operations, for example, community liaison positions appeared to have a higher level of women's employment; unfortunately, not enough data was broken down to the task level to back up this observation rigorously. The same problem happened in 2023, making it hard to see in which tasks are women more often employed. For field operations, only 8 out of 11 responding organizations could break down their data by type of task. 5,891 employees were recorded for mine clearance (out of which 73.71% were men and 26.16% were women). 915 employees were recorded for survey, stockpile destruction and risk education (out of which 45.25% were men and 54.21% were women). And finally, 1,218 employees were recorded for program support (out of which 69.13% were men and 30.87% were women) (Figure 4). Although women seem proportionally more present in the second category, it is difficult to establish robust conclusions because data is incomplete and not systematic enough (see the next section for limits of the survey). However, a higher gender-balanced workforce in risk education is consistent with existing research and in line with best practice in the sector.⁹

In terms of mine action programs¹⁰, men proportionally outnumbered women staff in field operations in all 57 states and other areas¹¹ where specific data were recorded by survey respondents, except for Armenia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Georgia, Mozambique, Peru, Solomon Islands and Tunisia. However, these figures tell us very little in general as the size and age of these programs vary greatly. For example,

⁹ UNMAS "United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes, 3rd edition," 2019, p. 15. https://unmas.org/sites/default/files/mine_action_gender_guidelines_web_0.pdf

¹⁰ The numbers shown in this section for each country reflect the total number of organizations operating in each country, in order to respect the anonymity of the participating organizations. For example, the numbers for Ukraine reflect the total number of staff operating in the country, regardless of the organizations.

¹¹ This number includes unrecognized and partially recognized countries like Abkhazia, Palestine, Kosovo, Somaliland and Nagorno-Karabakh (data was collected prior to its dissolution at the end of September 2023). Other areas are indicated in *italics*.

three states - Armenia, Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia had only one registered employee resulting in a 100% female workforce.

Others, such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Laos, Mozambique, Niger, Peru, Solomon Islands and Thailand, were closer to gender balance (15% or less of gender difference between men and women employees). Mine action programs with the most significant gender imbalance (where men accounted for 85% or more of the total number of staff) were *Abkhazia*, Afghanistan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, *Nagorno-Karabakh*, *Somaliland*, and Tajikistan. However, it's important not to jump to conclusions from these figures, as the size and age of these programs vary enormously.

The countries where the highest numerical number of women in field operations were recorded were in Angola (749), Cambodia (749), Laos (1442), Sri Lanka (652), and Ukraine (537), but they were also among the countries with the highest overall number of employees and the most established programs. This does not mean, however, that they had more gender-balanced workforce than other mine action programs (except for Angola and Laos programs who have a significant gender balanced workforce).

In terms of gender and diversity policies (Figure 5), nearly all survey participants responded that both their organizations and programs had them. The majority (8 out of 11) also said that they had reviewed Action #3 of the Oslo Action Plan on gender equality in mine action and had plans to implement (or are already implementing it) in their organizational and program policies. The most commonly identified gender mainstreaming strategies were, for example:

- ⇒ Needs & barriers assessment of women employees.
- ⇒ Trainings following the twin-track approach, awareness-raising and capacity-building.
- ⇒ Gender mainstreaming for internal policies & program design.
- ⇒ Gender-balanced recruitment and employment targets & indicators.
- ⇒ Ethical guidelines for employees to prevent sexual abuse in the workplace.
- ⇒ Gender-sensitive and contextual analysis where programs take place.
- ⇒ Gender-sensitive organizational language and communication.
- ⇒ Regular monitoring & evaluation of those policies.

The most ambiguous part regards the effects of COVID-19 or other major events on staffing levels since 2019. Four organizations did not answer, three of them said that it did not have impacts, and four said that it did. The latter organizations mentioned that COVID-19 or other major events did not necessarily impact their staffing levels per se, but it may have indirectly created other changes in organizational policies, flexible work arrangements for employees, and an increase or decrease in donations. For example, one stated that specific donors have redirected funding from mine action to COVID-19 response, which impacted their programming. The lack of donor funding for mine action indirectly impacted staffing levels because they had to cut down on teams, redirecting funding away from mine action to other humanitarian responses. Another stated that COVID-19 reinforced their policies on staff care and access to health.

In line with the 2019 survey, evidence from the 2023 survey shows that two main factors still remain as having an impact on the employment of women in mine action. Countries with

smaller gender gaps regarding participation in the workforce seem to have higher percentages of women working in mine action. Moreover, a program's age appears to impact women's employment in mine action with newer programs finding it easier to reach gender parity when starting from scratch than older programs that must work to create balance after years of imbalance. However, the results show progress on the matter since we noted a 10% increase in the total number of recorded women staff in field operations.

Challenges and Policy Recommendations

In conducting this research, the past report has identified a number of challenges. The differences in terminology between organizations made it very difficult to classify the roles that different staff persons played. Additionally, various organizations have different categories of staff; some organizations use national versus international staff, others headquarters or field staff, and then some make distinctions by role, such as finance or programming. For the most part, human resources data was restricted to a binary understanding of gender, which may obscure the true diversity of the mine action workforce. Also notable was an overlap in the roles and tasks of certain employees, so the categories shown above cannot be considered “clear-cut.”

The updated survey confirms those obstacles to data collection on women's employment in humanitarian mine action. More data is needed to reflect the diversified nature of women, as they are not a homogenous group. Only one organization shared data disaggregated by ethnicity, and none shared by age, for example. Data regarding trans and non-binary individuals working in mine action remains extremely limited, as shown elsewhere in disarmament research,¹² something that would be crucial to understand in future research.

Because of those limits, the data provided in this report is still partial. Organizations do not always collect disaggregated data in a useful way for comparison, which makes it very hard to compare between mine action organizations, making it tricky to systematize and draw rigorous conclusions on the state of the field today.

Organizations should actively work toward creating safe and family-friendly work environments everywhere, but even more in countries where the gender gap in the workforce is higher. While there is historically a gap between administrative (perceived as more “feminine” and culturally appropriate for women)¹³ and clearance jobs (perceived as more “masculine” and culturally appropriate for men) in mine action, the present report shows progress in narrowing this gap between women employment in office jobs (38,33%) and field operations (29,30%).

However, despite those positive signs of progress, we must not forget that women's sole numerical presence is insufficient to promote gender equality and sustainable, long-term,

¹² Hessman Dalaqua, Renata, Manaved Nambiar and Hana Salama, “Best Practices for Promoting Gender Equality in Conventional Arms Control: Survey Results” UNIDIR, May 15th, 2023.
<https://unidir.org/publication/best-practices-for-promoting-gender-equality-in-conventional-arms-control-survey-results/>

¹³ Mines Action Canada, “Gender and Employment in Mine Action by the Numbers” 2019.
<https://www.minesactioncanada.org/bythenumbers>

meaningful women's participation in humanitarian action. Organizations must continue working toward flexible and gender-sensitive workplaces for women to work safely but also address more structural issues of power in conflict/post-conflict settings, sexist & cultural bias and institutional change.

Conclusions

This report's results have shown a 10% increase in field operations (including survey and clearance, stockpile destruction and risk education and program support) and the total number of women employed in humanitarian mine action between 2019 and 2023. This is positive progress since Mines Action Canada's last report. In addition, nearly all survey participants responded that their organizations had gender and/or diversity policies to implement in their programs and operations.

While significant progress has been made towards parity in employment in the sector, there is still work to be done. We know that diverse teams perform better, whether it is landmine clearance, mine action policy or any other profession. Although countries with smaller gender gaps with regards to participation in the workforce seem to have higher percentages of women working in mine action, and despite progress since 2019, the percentage of mine action employees who are women (29.88%) is still lower than the percentage of the global workforce who are women (39.50%).¹⁴

First, the results of this research point to the need for consistent monitoring of employment statistics for easier changes and comparison tracking over time and across the sector and for employment data disaggregated by identity factors other than gender.

Second, women deminers play a crucial role in international peace and security issues and should be more present in broader arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament discussions, as research has systematically shown in recent years.¹⁵ With increased research on their growing presence in the mine action, these successes can also inform the security and defense sector on culture change within male-dominated fields and institutions.

Third, there is a need for greater synergy between humanitarian mine action and other frameworks, such as the WPS agenda,¹⁶ to address deeper structural and societal barriers to women's meaningful participation in humanitarian mine action.

The updated 2023 survey shows that progress towards a more inclusive mine action sector is possible. Going forward from here will only strengthen the sector.

¹⁴ The World Bank, "Labor force, female (% of total labor force)" 2022.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?end=2022&start=2022&view=bar>

¹⁵ Hessmann Dalaqua, Renata, Kjølsv Egeland and Torbjørn Graff Hugo, "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy" UNIDIR, September 16th, 2020.

<https://unidir.org/still-behind-the-curve-gender-balance-in-arms-control-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-diplomacy/>; Myrntinen, Henry, "Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda" October 21st, 2020. <https://unidir.org/publication/connecting-the-dots/>

¹⁶ Ibid.