



DRC Scaling Up Its HMA Response in Syria

Syria remains among the countries most affected by explosive ordnance (EO) contamination, posing significant risks to communities, restricting access to land, infrastructure, and essential services, and hindering recovery efforts. As return movements increase, these risks are further amplified, undermining safe and sustainable returns. According to the Syria Mine Action Area of Responsibility, since December 2024, 1,414 EO-related incidents have been recorded as of 28 August 2026, resulting in 2,479 casualties, including 873 fatalities and 1,606 injuries, with children representing a significant proportion of those affected. Agricultural and grazing areas continue to account for the majority of recorded incidents, according to the Mine Action Area of Responsibility (AoR). Against this backdrop, Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) remains critical to reducing risks, enabling safe access, and supporting sustainable return and recovery. It is also a key enabler of humanitarian assistance, early recovery, durable solutions, and economic recovery.

Laying the Foundation for HMA

Within less than one year, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) established a dynamic HMA programme including operational bases, accredited Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) capacity, Information Management (IM), medical support, Quality Management (QM), and national capacity development. This expansion responds to the country's significant HMA needs and builds on DRC's extensive global expertise in mine action. DRC has been delivering Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) in Syria since 2013, with an operational expansion into Non-Technical Survey (NTS) in late 2025. In summer 2025, DRC established a fully equipped, state-of-the-art HMA compound in Al Kiswah, Rural Damascus, providing the operational foundation for programme expansion. The facility includes office space, indoor and outdoor training areas, a warehouse, and vehicle parking, enabling efficient programme delivery, staff training, and sustained operational growth.

In late 2025, following EOD training for its own staff as well as the Syria National Mine Action Centre (SNMAC) staff, DRC teams became fully operational, working with national authorities and local communities to address EO contamination. EOD activities commenced in early 2026, with clearance operations following thereafter. The rapid establishment of EORE, NTS, and EOD capacities required coordinated efforts across operational, technical, medical, logistics, and support teams, accreditation, and the establishment of International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) compliant safety and medical systems.

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A key strength of DRC's scale-up has been its national staff, whose leadership, contextual knowledge, and dedication have been instrumental in establishing new operational systems, strengthening community engagement mechanisms, and expanding mine action capacities in some of the most complex operating environments.

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Jakub Walenda

Head of Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding (HDP)

DRC's Integrated Approach to HMA

DRC's approach to HMA in Syria focuses on strengthening local systems, promoting community ownership, and delivering integrated, conflict-sensitive programming aligned with national recovery priorities. A key component of DRC's approach is the systematic use of NTS to identify the socio-economic impact of contamination, understand community priorities, and generate evidence that informs not only evidence-based mine action planning and prioritisation but also broader humanitarian programming. NTS findings inform interventions across DRC sectors, including Water, Shelter, Protection, Early Recovery, and Livelihoods, and support better-targeted, conflict-sensitive, and community-responsive assistance.

Through DRC's integrated approach to HMA, EOD and land release activities enable communities to safely access land, water resources, essential services, and markets. This supports livelihoods and recovery by reducing both the physical risks of EO and its associated economic and social impacts, while creating safer, more resilient communities and enabling effective humanitarian and recovery efforts.

These achievements were made possible through the generous support of our donors and partners, whose contributions were instrumental in establishing and scaling up DRC's HMA programme.

Victim Assistance

DRC’s Victim Assistance interventions in Aleppo and Rural Damascus address the immediate and longer-term needs of individuals injured by explosive ordnance and other conflict-related incidents through a multidisciplinary approach that combines protection case management, mental health and psychosocial support, specialised referrals for emergency medical and physical rehabilitation services, legal assistance, socio-economic reintegration and psychosocial support to family members of EO victims. The intervention seeks to reduce protection risks, restore functional independence and support the safe and dignified inclusion of EO victims and survivors within their families and communities. DRC closely coordinates with health and disability service actors to ensure timely referrals, continuity of care and access to specialised services that promote survivors’ recovery, dignity and long-term inclusion.

2025 / 2026

DRC HMA Programme: Key Achievements

Within less than one year, DRC expanded from a primarily EORE-focused presence to a multi-pillar HMA programme operating across several governorates with integrated EORE, NTS, EOD, IM, medical, and coordination capacities.

DRC Teams



- 2 mixed-gender EORE/NTS teams (10 people).
- 5 mixed-gender EORE teams (25 people).
- 3 EOD teams (21 people).
- Medical specialists (5 people) and international experts (6 people).
- IM and QM staff and a radio operator (3 people).

Areas of Operation



Rural Damascus, Daraa, Hama, Idlib and Aleppo.

Number of Beneficiaries



- More than 6300 benefited from EORE/NTS activities since December 2025.
- More than 650 items disposed/removed by EOD teams since April 2026.

Community Reporting Mechanism



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In April 2026, DRC established a hotline to enable communities to request mine action support and report hazardous items. Since its launch, it has been used by community members and local partners, including Syrian Civil Defence teams, with all reports promptly addressed and hazardous items safely removed from residential, agricultural, water, and farming areas by DRC’s EOD teams. This demonstrates an effective and accessible reporting mechanism that addresses existing reporting gaps, while strengthening engagement with affected communities, increasing awareness of contamination risks and available support, and reinforcing community-centred programming and trust.

HLP Integration in Mine Action

DRC is mainstreaming Housing, Land and Property (HLP) considerations throughout the Land Release cycle, including prioritisation, NTS, community liaison, tasking, clearance, and handover processes. This approach ensures that mine action interventions are conflict-sensitive, avoid increasing land-related tensions or exclusion, and contribute to equitable, safe, and sustainable recovery outcomes. This strengthens community engagement, supports inclusive decision-making, and helps ensure that released land is safely and sustainably accessed and used by communities. This is particularly critical in the Syrian context, where displacement, damaged property records, informal occupation, and unresolved ownership disputes intersect with widespread EO contamination.

DRC staff conducting an EORE session for women in Rural Damascus. DRC 2026

Beyond its own programming, DRC is leading the development of sector-wide guidance on the integration of HLP into mine action in close collaboration with the HLP Technical Working Group and the Mine Action AoR. This initiative aims to establish a harmonised approach across the sector, strengthen coordination between HLP and mine action actors, and support conflict-sensitive, rights-based land release and recovery processes.

Conflict Sensitivity

In parallel with the expansion of its HMA portfolio, DRC is strengthening its broader Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding (HDP) programme by establishing a dedicated Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity function, thereby integrating these aspects across its operations in Syria. Through regular, evidence-based conflict analyses incorporating gender, age, diversity and inclusion perspectives, the programme continuously informs humanitarian mine action programming while also supporting adaptive programming across DRC's other sectoral pillars.

Beyond analytical work, DRC is strengthening organisational and partner capacities by delivering conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm training to DRC staff, national partners and key stakeholders. Conflict sensitivity, social cohesion and peacebuilding principles are systematically mainstreamed throughout programme design, implementation, monitoring and learning, ensuring interventions are context-responsive, minimise unintended negative impacts, strengthen community resilience, promote inclusive participation and contribute to peaceful coexistence and sustainable recovery.



DRC team removing a safe-to-move EO item from an irrigation channel in Rural Damascus, DRC 2026

Strategic Outlook and Key Operational Priorities

Expansion

Building on the rapid establishment of its HMA programme, DRC will continue to strengthen its integrated operational footprint across Syria in response to evolving humanitarian needs. In 2026, DRC is expanding its HMA capacity in Hama and Idlib, drawing on its existing presence across key sectors, including WASH, shelter & infrastructure, protection, and economic recovery & resilience, while establishing a new HMA base in Aleppo to complement its fully operational base in Al-Kiswah, Rural Damascus. This expansion strengthens DRC's integrated response by enabling safer access for humanitarian interventions across sectors, increasing operational capacity, and reaching more EO-affected communities.

Innovation

DRC invests in its robust IM system, building it within the Esri environment, which streamlines mine action data management through geospatial tools and mobile technology, enabling better planning, prioritisation, and evidence-based decision-making. This initiative brings together advanced geospatial tools, mobile technology, and structured data workflows to modernise how information is captured, validated, and analysed across all stages of the HMA cycle. This system ensures data quality, operational planning, prioritisation, and evidence-based decision-making. To further strengthen operational efficiency and data quality, DRC is integrating drone technology into its NTS portfolio to enhance data collection, mapping, and situational awareness, supporting evidence-based land release.

National Systems

DRC works closely with the Ministry of Emergency and Disaster Management (MoEDM) and the SNMAC to strengthen a nationally owned, effective and sustainable mine action system. DRC's approach goes beyond standalone training and focuses on long-term institutional development through technical mentoring, operational accompaniment, and support across key mine action disciplines, including EORE, NTS, EOD, QM, coordination, and community engagement. Through sustained investment in national systems, technical expertise and institutional capacity, DRC supports national actors in strengthening its oversight, coordination and QM functions in line with IMAS. DRC is also supporting the development of the National Mine Action Strategy as well as National Mine Action Standards. This contributes to building a sustainable, nationally led mine action programme capable of addressing Syria's long-term humanitarian and recovery needs.

As DRC continues to expand its operational footprint across Syria through its integrated, multi-sectoral approach that delivers coordinated support addressing the interconnected needs of affected communities, it remains committed to working in partnership with national and local stakeholders to strengthen national systems, reduce risks, and build the resilience of affected communities. By combining operational expertise with sustained investment in national capacity, DRC is helping to build a safer, more inclusive, and sustainable future while laying the foundations for resilient recovery and durable solutions across Syria.

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