# 17th MSP APMBC Side Event Report
## Risk Education in the Middle East | 28 Nov 2018

On 28 November 2018, in the margins of the Seventeenth Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) hosted a panel discussion on "Risk Education – Sharing of Experiences from the Middle East." The event drew on current experiences of risk education implementation in the Middle East to suggest recommendations to improve and strengthen risk education tools, approaches and delivery.

The discussion was moderated by Dr. Guy Rhodes, Director of Operations for the GICHD, with collaboration from UNICEF and contributions from the following panellists:

- Emmanuel Sauvage, Armed Violence Reduction Director, Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

- Dr. Habbouba Aoun, Director of Co-Academic Programs at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Balamand

- Clare O'Reilly, Regional Head of Programmes – Middle East, Danish Demining Group (DDG)

- Bridget Forster – Programme Manager, United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Palestine

This report summaries the main conclusions of the panel. It begins with a summary of the current situation in the Middle East, before describing the recommendations from the panel for effective risk education and concluding with a look at the remaining gaps and recommendations to strengthen RE services.

# Current Situation

The Middle East is currently facing multiple protracted crises. Seven years of civil war in Syria have cost over 200,000 civilian lives[1] and forced 6.3 million to flee their homes. The vast majority of these have remained in the region – 13 million inside Syria with another 3.5 million refugees currently in Turkey, nearly 1 million in Lebanon, and another million spread between Jordan, Iraq and Egypt[2]. Meanwhile, a combination of conflict, economic decline and the risk of the world's "worst famine in 100 years"[3] have left over 22 million people in Yemen – three-

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[1] Syrian Network for Human Rights, 'Civilian Death Toll', http://sn4hr.org/blog/2018/09/24/civilian-death-toll/ (last accessed 07.12.2018).
[2] World Vision, 'Syrian refugee crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help', https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts (last accessed 07.12.2018) and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), 'Figures at a Glance', https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html (last accessed 07.12.2018).
[3] Hannah Summers, 'Yemen on brink of "world's worst famine in 100 years" if war continues', *The Guardian*, published 15 Oct 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/15/yemen-on-brink-worst-famine-100-years-un.

quarters of its population – in need of humanitarian or protection assistance[4]. And while 1.9 million people remain internally displaced in Iraq, a landmark 4 million people are estimated to have returned to their homes – the sites of yesterday's battlefields[5].

**Figure 1: Number of Global Mine/ERW Casualties, per year[6]**
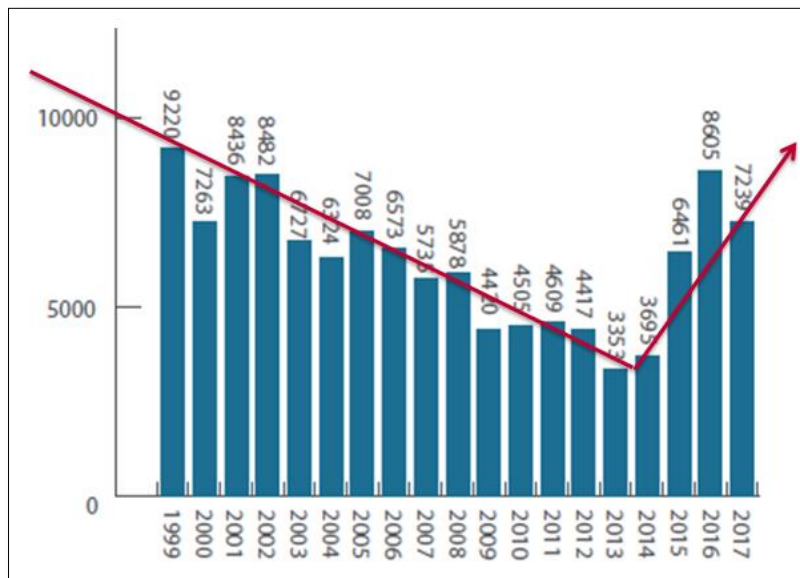


Not coincidentally, over the last several years the world has seen a dramatic increase in casualties from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). In 2017, the recorded number of people injured or killed by mines and other ERW was 7,239 – a decrease from 2016 figures but still more than double the rate from four years prior. The vast majority of these casualties (87 percent) were civilians, and of these nearly half (47 percent) were children[7].

According to casualty statistics, Middle Eastern and North African countries are among those most severely affected by mine and ERW accidents – despite the fact that under-reporting is expected to be especially high given lack of access to reliable data. Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen in particular had the 2nd, 4th, 8th and 9th highest numbers of casualties in 2017, with over a quarter of global casualties coming from Syria[8]. According to latest verified data, 178 children in Syria were killed or maimed by explosive ordnance in the three month period alone between July and September 2018[9].

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[4] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'About OCHA Yemen', https://www.unocha.org/yemen/about-ocha-yemen (last accessed 07.12.2018).
[5] UN News, 'Iraq milestone: Some four million people return home, displacement drops to four-year low', published 4 Sept 2018, available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1018282.
[6] Actual rectified data for 2016 indicates the casualty rate for 2016 was even higher, at 9,437 (UNICEF). The final number for 2017 may also be expected to increase once rectified data is available.
[7] Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 'Landmine Monitor 2018: Casualties', http://the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2018/landmine-monitor-2018/casualties.aspx.
[8] Ibid.
[9] UN Country Task Force on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of Grave Violations Against Children (Security Council Resolution 1612)

**GICHD**

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Given the extent of the contamination, the need for effective risk education in the Middle East is clear and will only increase if populations have greater freedom of movement and more refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) return to their homes.

# What Makes for Effective Risk Education?

According to the panel, effective risk education (1) uses the right methods, (2) conveys the right messages, (3) targets the right people, (4) is part of a comprehensive approach, and (5) is coordinated across all levels and actors. This section considers each of these aspects in turn.

## 1. Right Methods

Risk education messages succeed when they become ingrained in a population's consciousness; when they become, in a way, inescapable. A cultural mantra. But to achieve this, the right methods need to be used. Many of the risk awareness training methods used today were established decades ago, but methods and tools should evolve given the changing context of conflict in the Middle East and the contamination environment – including in an urban setting.

Today, there is great potential – and need – for break-through innovations: social media, audio-visual formats, new rapid methods of information dissemination like snowball messaging. Technology is widely used in the Middle East, and risk education methodologies need to evolve to embrace opportunities. Given similarities in the language used and potential tools and technologies across the region, there is also the possibility to invest in creating common platforms and establish more uniformity across the sector.

Whatever the method adopted and the degree of emergency, the risk education channels, tools and messages should always be tested with a representative sample of the target audience before wide dissemination. The feedback from affected communities will be decisive to ensure the material is understandable, acceptable, realistic, relevant and persuasive,

## 2. Right Messages

The more "viral" a message, the more important that it be the right message. In contrast to technological platforms that can be more regionalised, messages must be nationally owned, delivered in country and bespoke to the context.

On the one hand, risk education messages should be, by their very nature, tailored to the specific risk(s). With new conflicts in the region, new dynamics of contamination should be taken into account. While factory-produced mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and cluster munitions may have represented the main threat in the past, the highest number of confirmed casualties in 2017 were caused by improvised devices[10]. This is especially a risk in countries like Syria and Iraq. In Yemen, the nature of urban contamination and aerial bombardment poses an increasing risk to civilian populations; in Libya, the main threat is posed by small arms and light weapons; and in Gaza, UNMAS and UNICEF are currently the only organisations delivering UXO risk education.

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[10] Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 'Landmine Monitor 2018: Casualties', http://the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2018/landmine-monitor-2018/casualties.aspx.

On the other hand, messages must also be culturally and socially tailored to the communities at risk – including women, men, girls and boys, and their unique needs and risk factors. Community liaison is essential in this respect, to be able to build rapport and trust with communities but also to better understand what messages are needed and will be most effective. International actors must work with national actors and community focal points to ensure this takes place.

For these reasons, total standardisation of messages across the Middle East would not be appropriate. Space must be given for tailoring of messages, although some degree of alignment is still desirable given overlapping migration flows.

## 3. Right People

It is important to establish national prioritisation mechanisms including through the development of injury surveillance systems that will help determine *who* are the most at risk, *where*, *when* and *why*; and that will be used to elaborate and implement the right prevention strategy. Not everyone is at equal risk and therefore in equal need, and generally it is not possible to deliver to the whole at-risk population universal and direct risk education services. Prioritisation mechanisms need to be more evidence-based to ensure the 'most in need' are the first targeted with the right message and the right behaviour change approach.

## 4. A Comprehensive/Integrated Approach

Traditionally, risk education has been applied through a top-down, educational approach. While this can be highly effective in certain contexts, such as volatile emergency situations, evidence shows that best results can be achieved when combining such an approach with other community-based efforts that help address potential "pull" factors (to the extent possible). Across the region, there are observable trends towards self-clearance as returnees attempt to resettle in their homes. Economic, social, ethical and political dimensions of the communities at risk must all be taken into account for risk education to be effective. For this reason, it is important for mine action actors to engage with other humanitarian and social protection actors to design comprehensive, integrated risk education programmes[11], and also to ensure that other humanitarian and social protection programmes are designed with awareness of potential risks posed by mines and other ERW to beneficiaries and/or personnel.

Importantly, when active explosive ordnance (EO) are used by a party to a conflict, risk education might be seen as a threat for EO users which may lead to some forms of retaliation against the programme or against communities encouraged to report the location of EO. Moreover, in some contexts, civilians reporting EO information can be considered under high suspicion by local authorities. For these reasons (and others), EO risk education programming should always be carefully assessed and the 'do no harm' and humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence principles factored in before any implementation. A conflict-sensitive approach is further important to ensure risk education does not inadvertently lead to changes in the modus operandi of groups laying EO by virtue of including imagery in risk education programmes.

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[11] In some instances, mine and ERW risk education has been integrated in wider Conflict Prevention and Preparedness programmes – an option depending on the particular context.

Collaboration across sector lines has other advantages, too. Confronted with emergency situations in hard-to-reach areas, some mine action actors engaged in risk education have addressed access challenges through working creatively with partners. There is also a drive to integrate risk education with other sectors in protection because risk awareness often has a very direct impact by virtue of which it is easier to secure funding.
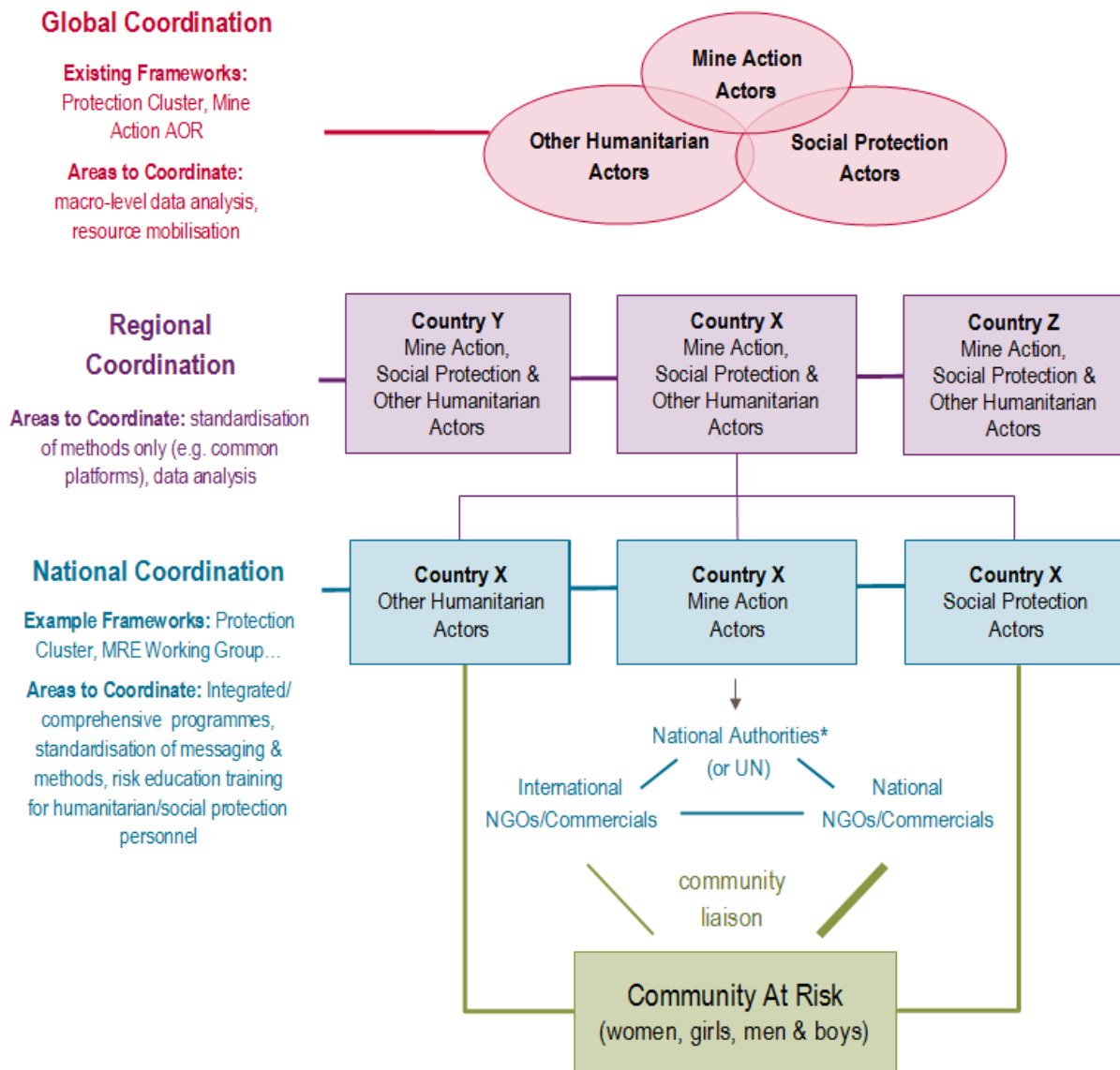
## 5. Coordinated Across Sectors & Levels

The figure below depicts the multiple, intersecting layers of coordination frameworks that can support risk education outcomes. At a country level, lack of coordination between agencies operating on the ground can hinder the creation of common and coherent messaging that is targeted to groups that are prioritised based on the sequencing of expected return. Meanwhile, failure to value community liaison can endanger trust and threaten the long-term success of such programmes.

It's about more than just integration of other sectors, too: risk education is strengthened when operators coordinate their various mine action activities and act through joint approaches. The UN Protection Cluster can serve as a frame for boosting coordination, and in some cases ad hoc groups have been formed with similar purposes, such as the former Mine Risk Education Working Group in Syria. Ideally, national mine action authorities should have the primary leadership role, but in cases where there is no accepted authority this can be a UN body working with the government's agreement.

Similar layers of coordination are also important at the regional and global levels. Coordination across the whole Middle East is challenging given the complexities of the region, but there are some hubs that have the potential to serve as regional platforms for such purposes – such as, for instance, the Arab Regional Cooperation Programme (ARCP) that could use the Hammana Regional School in Lebanon for workshops and training. Globally, the UN Protection Cluster and Mine Action Area of Responsibility can be drawn on.

**Figure 2: Risk Education Coordination Matrix**



**Global Coordination**

**Existing Frameworks:**
Protection Cluster, Mine Action AOR

**Areas to Coordinate:**
macro-level data analysis, resource mobilisation

**Regional Coordination**

**Areas to Coordinate:** standardisation of methods only (e.g. common platforms), data analysis

**National Coordination**

**Example Frameworks:** Protection Cluster, MRE Working Group...

**Areas to Coordinate:** Integrated/ comprehensive programmes, standardisation of messaging & methods, risk education training for humanitarian/social protection personnel

# Gaps & Recommendations

In the near future, the Middle East is likely to see a rapid increase in the number of refugees and other displaced persons returning to their homes and becoming exposed to the risk of mines and other ERW. If the sector is to be ready, a number of gaps in risk education will need to be addressed. These include (1) funding, (2) data availability and analysis, (3) strengthening of coordination, and (4) need for developing and sharing innovation in tools and approaches.

## Funding

Risk education is underresourced, and there is currently insufficient capacity to meet operational needs. Securing funding for the "unknown" is also a challenge, hampering the ability of the

sector to prepare for mass migration movements linked to constantly fluctuating political and security dynamics.

At the same time, risk education is the fastest and cheapest risk reduction activity that can be implemented before survey and clearance – which in some parts of the Middle East are simply not yet feasible. Moreover, it has a clear and direct impact that should be easily visible to donors and therefore facilitate resource mobilisation. More can be done to ensure donors are aware of the gaps and connect them to specific mechanisms that can be invested in to address them.

*Recommendation:*

- *Increase funding to meet the current and future demands of the region*
  *(also see related recommendations of data analysis and coordination to target funds and ensure coverage and sequencing of groups to address priorities)*

## Data Availability and Analysis

Data plays an important role in strengthening mine risk education outcomes. On the one hand, accurate data improves our ability to plan and effectively target our activities so that the right messages can be delivered at the right times to the right audiences. This is especially true in the context of highly fluid patterns of displacement and return, where accurate data on past, present and expected migration flows is thus important to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of resources without missing especially at risk groups – especially when those resources are limited.

Data can also be a powerful advocacy tool for additional resources, helping to make the case to donors on the importance of funding risk education.

Today, accurate sex and age disaggregated data from the Middle East is lacking. This is true both at the programming level (e.g. tracking of which beneficiaries have been reached by which risk education activities) and at the macro-level (e.g. the aforementioned mapping of migration patterns). Part of the gap is attributable to the dynamics of the crises that limit reliable sources of information – but another dimension is tied to funding. With limited resources available for risk education, data collection and analysis has not been prioritised. As much as good data can improve fundraising prospects, so too more resources are needed to enable make such data collection and analysis possible. This would not need to start from scratch, either: multiple existing research platforms that sit under protection and are vastly under-utilised could be tapped into.

*Recommendation:*

- *Commit resources to data collection and analysis at both programming and macro-levels*
- *Feed accurate data on past, present and expected migration flows into RE programming and donor support*

## Strengthened Coordination

While there are many examples of good coordination and integration of risk education activities in the Middle East, what is missing is systematic coordination across the region. This should start with a mapping of existing coordination structures and assessment of their effectiveness.

Regionally and globally in particular, high level coordination could be strengthened. International organisations – ideally through an appropriate coordination platform – have a macro-level role to

play in the collection and analysis of data from the Middle East to ensure the geographic focus is in sync with patterns of displacement and resettlement; in continually monitoring developments and understanding how they will affect population movements; in generating and amplifying information to partners and donors about the opportunities and gaps facing the sector; and in ensuring that resources are being directed to the areas with highest risk.

Donors also have a role to play in addressing the coordination gap. To start, donors can encourage mine action operators to coordinate their risk education approaches on a global scale and, more specifically, require that organisations receiving funding for risk education be active in the Protection Cluster (or other appropriate coordination frames). Finally, coordination has a cost: in many cases, effective coordination requires a full-time staff capacity. By funding such positions, donors will make a clear indication that coordination is not "optional".

*Recommendation:*

- *Map and assess effectiveness of existing coordination structures*
- *Strengthen and systematise coordination especially at a high-level across Middle East to ensure targeting of resources to groups at highest risk and need*
- *Improve coordination with partners in other sectors particularly those with an IDP/refugee focus*
- *Explore the utilisation of regional platforms such as the ARCP and/or regional school in Lebanon*

## Innovation in Tools and Approaches

Technology is accelerating at a rapid pace, presenting unique opportunities for risk education that have not yet been capitalised on. Innovation in risk education tools and methods is needed to maximise this great potential.

*Recommendation:*

- *Invest in the development of innovative tools and methods for risk education and the sharing of experience and knowledge*
- *Work creatively with partners to access hard-to-reach areas*