SUSTAINING OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY THROUGH WORKFORCE DIVERSIFICATION IN UKRAINE



Quality Management in Mine Action Course, Ukraine, 2025 © Vasya Shtefaniak

A SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

Ukraine's mine action sector is operating at scale in response to widespread explosive ordnance contamination and the demands of recovery while still in active conflict. At the same time, workforce availability has been significantly affected by the war, particularly due to the large-scale mobilization of men. This has created a structural challenge: how to sustain clearance operations when personnel availability is constrained and unpredictable.[1]

ADAPTING WORKFORCE MODELS TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS

Workforce shortages and turnover linked to mobilization create potential inefficiencies through repeated recruitment, retraining, loss of experience, delays, and reduced readiness to scale. These all represent funds, time, and expertise being used less efficiently.

In response, operators have adjusted recruitment and employment practices to diversify the workforce and ensure continuity of operations:

- Recruitment practices have been reformed to remove barriers, such as requirements for prior military experience.
- Training is provided for new entrants to support their integration into operational roles.
- Career progression opportunities are being developed to support retention and advancement within the sector.

These changes have expanded the available workforce and enabled many women to enter and remain in the sector.[2]

The Ukraine experience shows that workforce adjustments require sustained investment in recruitment, training, and professional development over time in order to maintain operational capacity and support workforce retention.[3]

Evidence from many mine action contexts confirms that removing entry barriers and providing targeted training enables individuals without prior military experience to perform effectively in clearance roles, thereby expanding workforce capacity.[4]

MAINTAINING OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY AND EFFICIENCY

In Ukraine, the recruitment, development, and promotion of women in operational roles has helped sustain staffing levels despite mobilization pressures.

Women now make up around 29 per cent of the mine action workforce, with approximately 22 per cent of operational roles–such as clearance and survey–performed by women.[5] A diversified workforce has therefore been an important factor in sustaining operations in high-demand and resource-constrained environments.

Workforce diversification is not only an inclusion measure in Ukraine, but a practical operational strategy. By expanding the pool of available personnel, operators can:

- maintain staffing levels through a broader labour pool
- reduce operational disruption
- sustain field operations under changing conditions.

The resulting efficiency gains are primarily systemic. Workforce diversification may not necessarily increase daily output per individual team, but it helps the overall mine action system operate more efficiently by reducing disruption, repeated recruitment and retraining cycles, loss of experience, delays, and reduced readiness to scale. In this sense, diversification protects operational continuity and delivery capacity under conditions of sustained workforce pressure.

Evidence from other contexts demonstrates that women deminers perform to the same operational standards as men and contribute to sustained operations, reinforcing the assertion that diversification supports operational continuity, not only inclusion objectives.[6]

Workforce composition is therefore directly linked to operational continuity, and operational efficiency depends on the ability to adapt workforce structures to changing contexts and labour constraints.

OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY OUTCOMES

These recruitment and workforce adjustments help sustain operational capacity despite labour constraints. They reduce vulnerability to staffing shortages and support continuity of clearance operations.

This is particularly significant in a context where delays in clearance directly impact civilian safety, as well as access to key infrastructure and livelihoods. Mine action depends on consistent, sustained operations, and disruptions to staffing can directly affect both the pace and effectiveness of clearance.

Inclusive recruitment practices also reduce dependency on traditional workforce pipelines, helping to mitigate labour shortages and maintain operational output.[7]

The case of Ukraine highlights that workforce constraints are a core operational challenge, and that recruitment and training reforms–particularly workforce diversification–are essential to maintaining operational continuity.

KEY INSIGHTS & IMPLICATIONS

Maintaining an adaptable workforce is one important component of operational continuity and efficiency in mine action.

This has several important implications:

- Workforce diversification supports continuity of operations in crisis contexts.
- Inclusive recruitment expands operational capacity.
- Training and career development are essential to integrating new personnel effectively.
- Sustained and flexible funding is required to support workforce development over time.

ENDNOTES

1 GICHD (2025). Clearing the Way Forward: Women, Peace, and Security in Ukraine's Mine Action Response.

2 GICHD (2025). Clearing the Way Forward: Women, Peace, and Security in Ukraine's Mine Action Response.

3 GICHD (2025). Clearing the Way Forward: Women, Peace, and Security in Ukraine's Mine Action Response.

4 Raphaela Lark, David Hewitson and Dominic Wolsey. "Gender and Operational Efficiency," The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction: Vol.26: 1, Art. 7 (2022), Gender and Operational Efficiency - JMU.

5 GICHD (2025). Clearing the Way Forward: Women, Peace, and Security in Ukraine's Mine Action Response.

6 Raphaela Lark, David Hewitson and Dominic Wolsey. "Gender and Operational Efficiency," The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction: Vol.26: 1, Art. 7 (2022), Gender and Operational Efficiency - JMU.

7 Raphaela Lark, David Hewitson and Dominic Wolsey. "Gender and Operational Efficiency," The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction: Vol.26: 1, Art. 7 (2022), Gender and Operational Efficiency - JMU.

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