

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #15

Reporting period: 01/02/2024 to 07/02/2024

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated for the conflict crisis in Gaza on 31 October 2023. Situation Reports are published weekly.

Highlights

- The ETC is in Rafah, Gaza, since 09 January to support humanitarian agencies with assessments, repairs, and technical support so responders can communicate using the resources they have.
- The ETC shared a one-month telecommunications planning and implementation document with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on 06 February. The document is being presented to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Deputy HC at the Joint Humanitarian Coordination Centre (JHOC) on 08 February.
- On 06 February, progress had been made by the HC in advocacy efforts with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for the importation of communication equipment, prioritizing the importation of solar power solutions and VHF radios for the security communications systems (SCS).



The ETC test a satellite phone at the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) in Rafah, Gaza. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

The intense Israeli air, land, and sea bombardments as well as ground operations and fighting with Hamas armed groups continued across much of the Gaza Strip. According to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, at least 27,708 have been killed (70% of those killed are children and women) and 67,147 injured between 07 October 2023 and 07 February 2024. The UNRWA reports that 1.7 million people (approximately 90% of the Gaza population) are internally displaced and 60% of the infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged.

The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively anywhere in Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent denials of access to the north, restrictions on the import of critical equipment, and recurrent intense hostilities. On 07 February, the Israeli military announced a temporary suspension of military activities in the western neighbourhood of Rafah between 10:00 and 14:00 for humanitarian purposes.

WFP reports that humanitarian aid reaching Gaza city is, “not enough to prevent a famine.” WFP stressed that “faster and sustained access” is urgently needed. The last time UNRWA was able to carry out a food distribution in the north of Wadi Gaza was 23 January. On 04 February, the World Central

Kitchen, with the support of the Royal Jordanian Air Force and the Dutch Air Force, carried out airdrops using Global Positioning System (GPS)-guided parachutes to deliver humanitarian aid for the Jordanian field hospital in northern Gaza.

Telecommunications overview

Voice services from Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) Jawwal and Ooredoo are operational, although the network is congested due to increased users and few operational telecommunications towers. Paltel Internet Service Provider (ISP) has restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though with intermittent connectivity. Internet services from both MNOs Jawwal and Ooredoo remains down across the whole of Gaza.

Electricity to charge devices is limited and only available in certain areas that have generators and solar power solutions. Other locations are completely without power since the shutdown of Gaza's sole power plant by Israeli authorities on 11 October. The communications and industrial fuel shutdown continue to significantly hinder people from seeking lifesaving services, as well as the aid community's efforts to assess and to adequately respond to the deepening humanitarian crisis.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC shared a one-month telecommunications planning and implementation document with UNOCHA and UNRWA on 06 February. The document is being presented to the HC and Deputy HC at the JHOC on 08 February. The main purpose of the document is to inform humanitarian responders, clusters, and agencies about achievable goals with or without the anticipated humanitarian pause. The plan depends on the successful importation of the required telecommunications equipment.

The ETC met with partner UNICEF on 06 February in Jerusalem for an information exchange session on the communication needs of staff in the field. UNICEF recently identified a local supplier for the purchase of Garmin GPS devices that are usable for location navigation and tracking of staff during field operations.

Equipment importation

Since 03 November 2023, ETC efforts have been underway to obtain the authorization from COGAT to import telecommunications equipment to set-up and provide an independent platform for communications in Gaza. On 06 February, progress was made by the HC in advocacy efforts with COGAT for the importation of communication equipment, prioritizing the importation of solar power solutions and VHF radios for the SCS. Adhering to past documentation practices and management processes, all the telecommunications equipment will have the name and contact details of the user and who manages it with a system in place to update the authorities on loss, damage, or change of the equipment. The equipment importation list is being updated in collaboration with United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) and UNOCHA for feedback to COGAT. As of 06 February, no VHF equipment has yet been approved by the authorities for importation into Gaza. Any future VHF equipment that will be authorized for importation into Gaza has to be first programmed at the UNDSS Jerusalem server.

Data connectivity

Paltel ISP has restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though service is slow and experiencing intermittent connectivity. Internet services from both MNOs Jawwal and Ooredoo remains down across the whole of Gaza.

As of 06 February, the JHOC in Rafah—which is accommodating approximately 300 humanitarians—has over 500 internet connections on the fibre optic and microwave link data connectivity provided by local service provider, Ajyal. The network is also heavily congested resulting in slow download and upload speeds.

Telephony

Some humanitarian agencies are using satellite phone voice services, which are operational across the Gaza Strip. However, the signal strength is low, and connectivity is often slow.

Security communications systems (SCS)

The UNDSS-managed VHF radio repeater in Rafah for the Gaza SCS is still currently powered by a generator at the UNRWA-managed Al Shaboura Clinic that now operates five days (down from seven days) a week from 0730 until 1600, due to limited fuel allocation. The SCS remains non-operational as it is disconnected from the Jerusalem server due to power challenges. UNRWA has identified and will locally procure a solar power solution that will be installed by the ETC to ensure the VHF digital radio repeater can operate for 24 hours daily.

The ETC is scheduled to meet the official service provider who installed the digital VHF SCS in Gaza. The meeting is scheduled for 08 February, in Jerusalem, to obtain the technical details of the VHF repeater system, understand it better, and explore the possibility of procuring the VHF radio antennae that is compatible with the Gaza SCS. The ETC is also exploring the possibility of purchasing the compatible VHF radio antennae from service providers in Egypt and seeking authorization to import the spare parts into Gaza.

Cybersecurity

On 06 February, the ETC Coordinator currently based in Gaza briefed UNDSS personnel and other humanitarian coordinators about the global rise of cyber-crimes and underscored the significance of cyber security by encouraging colleagues to maintain UN neutrality and refrain from posting and interacting on social media regarding the conflict in Gaza.

Staffing

The ETC Coordinator—David Pickering—is in Rafah, Gaza, since 31 January, where he is supporting the response with coordination activities, conduct technical engagements with local actors, and offer technical support to other humanitarian responders. The Deputy ETC Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—continues to remotely support all Gaza response activities while based in Cairo.

The ETC Senior ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—is in Jerusalem and is scheduled to engage the service provider who installed the SCS in Gaza on 08 February. Burak is scheduled to depart Jerusalem on 09 February and embark on annual leave.

The Information Management Officer (IMO) for the ETC Palestine–Gaza response—Bipin Jha—officially started his 3-month deployment on 01 February. Bipin started remotely from Kathmandu, Nepal, and is tentatively scheduled to deploy to Cairo on 12 February, where he will be remotely supporting the response until his visa entry to Jerusalem is issued. The Global ETC Information Management (IM) unit is providing the handover guidance and technical onboarding process. Bipin replaces the Global ETC IMO—Mufaro Masuka, who has been dedicated to the response since 16 November 2023.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned service locations.

Funding

Currently, the ETC is 64% funded out of the US\$800,000 requested in the [updated Flash Appeal](#) to undertake its activities and address the immediate needs in Gaza. The Government of France allocated EUR250,000 to the ETC out of a EUR 3 million contribution to the WFP Palestine operation in December 2023 and the Government of Luxembourg allocated a further EUR250,000 to the ETC response in Gaza in the same month. The funds are currently enabling the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management activities, as well as be ready to deploy shared communications services in up to two locations for two months, pending the evolution of the situation.

The [updated Flash Appeal](#) released on 06 November 2023 is requesting US\$1.2 billion to meet the needs of the entire population of Gaza and 500,000 people in the West Bank. It was extended until the end of March 2024.

Challenges

The intensity of hostilities has spread further south to include locations such as Khan Younis, limiting the movements of humanitarian responders.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to hamper the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The Egypt-Gaza Rafah Border crossing and recently the Israel-Gaza Kerem Shalom border crossing are the only two points open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are extremely restricted due to ongoing shelling, security checks, and the lack of fuel.

Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is lengthy and extremely challenging.

All items going into Gaza need to be approved by the Israeli authorities. Any items brought in via Egypt also needs to have importation permits from the Egyptian authorities and agreement with the Egyptian Red Crescent, who are the sole consignee of goods for the Rafah Border Crossing.

The reach of operations will remain limited without a prolonged ceasefire, safe access, and significant funding for the humanitarian response.

The issuance of Gaza entry visa for staff intending to deploy to Gaza remains lengthy.

The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered extremely high.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **21 February at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **07 February**. All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

Contacts

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Further information related to the ETC operation can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

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