

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #22

Reporting period: 25/03/2024 to 31/03/2024

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

Highlights

- On 28 March, the ETC engaged with partners and other clusters in area-based coordination efforts to address connectivity issues, ensure access to information for communities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis.
- On 28 March, the ETC supported the World Food Programme (WFP) Department of Programmes by conducting an assessment on WiFi hotspot availability. The findings from this assessment are being collated for WFP's efforts in registering refugees and displaced people to facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in Deir Al Balah.
- On 26 March, the ETC submitted an updated list of critical Security Communications Systems (SCS) and Information Technology (IT) equipment, including Very High Frequency (VHF) repeaters, solar-powered solutions, and satellite connectivity devices to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). The HC met with the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) on the same day to advocate for the importation of this equipment.



VHF radio repeater site at Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah is operational 24/7. Photo WFP/Burak Sezgin

Situation overview

Intense Israeli bombardment and ground operations as well as heavy fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups continue to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, particularly in Al Rimal area near Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza city, central Khan Younis, and the vicinity of Al Amal and Nasser hospitals. This has resulted in further casualties, displacement (over 75% of the population have been internally displaced across the Gaza Strip – some multiple times), and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.

The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively across Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent restrictions of access to the north, the import of critical equipment, and recurrent intense hostilities.

Telecommunications overview

Internet connectivity remains a primary communications challenge across the Gaza Strip, and it is expected to worsen as refugees relocate to their original locations in the North to flee the now volatile security situation in Rafah.

Voice and SMS services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational, although limited to Rafah and some locations in the north of Gaza. The network is congested due to the increased subscribers in Rafah and few operational telecommunications towers.

The internet services from both MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are non-operational in Gaza. This situation pre-existed before the onset of conflict on 07 October 2023. Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though with intermittent connectivity, significantly affecting humanitarian responders to access critical information for delivering lifesaving aid.

Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC continues to engage, coordinate, and support all humanitarian local actors, UN agencies, and partners in Gaza with technical needs, providing guidance on a regular basis and ensuring that the limited communications resources on the ground are utilized effectively.

On 28 March, the ETC engaged with partners and other clusters in area-based coordination efforts to address connectivity issues, ensure access to information for communities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis.

Since 09 January, when ETC personnel arrived in Gaza, the ETC has conducted 21 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessments in 15 locations and supported 18 humanitarian agencies with repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment.

The ongoing limited access to internet connectivity in Gaza restricts coordination to face-to-face meetings at the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) with limited online collaboration and engagement among partners and agencies operating remotely.

Internet connectivity

On 28 March, the ETC supported the World Food Programme (WFP) Department of Programmes by conducting an assessment on WiFi hotspot availability. The findings from this assessment are being collated for WFP's efforts in registering refugees and displaced people to facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in Deir Al Balah.

The ETC, through its partners, received updated information on Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) and mobile network coverage across Gaza. This information will enable UN agencies and partners to effectively plan delivery of humanitarian aid and services, particularly those requiring connectivity.

The ETC is engaging with OCHA and WFP Palestine to secure approval from COGAT to import Starlink terminals for internet connectivity in Gaza. On 26 March, a letter requesting approval for Starlink terminals was shared with OCHA for the HC to submit it to COGAT for advocacy and approval from COGAT. Previously, a UAE field hospital in Gaza received Starlink approval, indicating a successful precedence.

Security Communications Systems (SCS)

On 26 March, the ETC submitted an updated list of critical security communications and IT equipment, including VHF repeaters, solar-powered solutions, and satellite connectivity devices to the HC. The HC met with COGAT on the same day to advocate for the importation of this equipment.

On 26 March, the ETC provided support to humanitarian partner—CADUS—by offering advice and technical information on their VHF radios already in use.

There is an urgent requirement to expand the VHF radio coverage in Deir al Balah and Khan Yunis, particularly in anticipation of the humanitarian response expanding further to the north with the population movement. The ETC is exploring on identifying the suitable location for the SCS repeater site in Deir Al Bahal. Additionally, the scheduled technical assessments to identify the availability and functionality of SCS equipment in Deir al Balah and Gaza city is rescheduled until safe access to these sites are secured.

The 30 digital VHF handheld radios approved for importation by COGAT are ready for shipment from WFP FITTEST¹ warehouse in the UAE to Jerusalem. The ETC is coordinating with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Jerusalem for the arrival of the radios, scheduled for 02 April, as well as their configuration, assignment of call signs, and distribution upon arrival in Gaza.

Access to information for communities

On 31 March, the ETC received a quotation for the purchase of solar-powered charging stations intended for the use of vulnerable women traveling from Rafah to the welcome centre of the World Central Kitchen located northwest of Deir al Balah. Previously, on 22 March, the ETC conducted a technical assessment and provided recommendations to the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) for the provision of solar-powered charging station at this centre to enable vulnerable women to charge their electronic devices, allowing them to access information on humanitarian aid, services, and complaint mechanisms.

On 29 March, the ETC engaged with UN agencies and partners to access the availability and legality of mobile Frequency Modulation (FM) broadcast system for public messaging and to provide access to information for communities.

Staffing

There are currently four dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. The ETC Coordinator deployed to Rafah on 25 March to continue the ETC presence and enhance coordination and face-to-face engagement with partners. The Deputy ETC Coordinator continues to support the response while based in Cairo. The ETC Telecommunications Specialist is on a short break and tentatively scheduled to travel Jerusalem on first week of April to coordinate the arrival and configuration of VHF radios by UNDSS. The Information Management Officer (IMO) continues to support the response while based in Cairo.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned and operational services.

Funding

The ETC remains 64% funded out of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its coordination and information management activities to address the immediate needs in Gaza.

The current Palestine [Flash Appeal](#) expired on 31 March. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US\$1.8 million until 31 December 2024, has been submitted to OCHA on 16 March for inclusion.

¹ Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team

Challenges

The reduction of staff presence in Gaza has posed challenges for face-to-face meetings and coordination activities, exacerbated by the existing internet connectivity issues across Gaza.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to impede the humanitarian response in Gaza. Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is prolonged and extremely challenging.

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 requiring approval from respective authorities. The cross-border operations are extremely restricted due to ongoing shelling, security checks, and the lack of fuel.

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

The issuance of entry visa for staff intending to deploy to Gaza remains prolonged and challenging.

The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered extremely high. Caution in using technology platforms applies, including the use of social media and press platforms.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **Wednesday 03 April 2024 at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 20 March 2024. 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

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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