Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #26
Reporting period: 22/04/2024 to 28/04/2024

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

Highlights

- On 21 April, the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) granted approval for the ETC to activate the data internet connectivity service function on the existing 20 Iridium satellite phones which were purchased by the ETC and donated to the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) in December 2023 and currently in use by UN humanitarian responders in Gaza.

- On 24 April, COGAT authorized the ETC to import four VHF repeaters, 50 handheld radios and cabling to set up a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders across operational sites Gaza.

The ETC and other clusters engage in Area-Based Coordination (ABC) efforts in Gaza. Photo: ETC/Burak Sezgin

- The import clearance for the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that arrived at Tel Aviv airport on 02 April, is ongoing with facilitation from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Situation overview

Israeli bombardment from the air, land, and sea continues to be reported across the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of houses and other infrastructure. Airstrikes on Rafah, Deir al Balah, and Gaza City have reportedly been intense, with continued reports of fighting between the Israeli military and armed Hamas groups in northern Gaza.

On 24 April, the WFP senior spokesperson—Abeer Etefa—stated in a briefing to the European Parliament that the only way to halt famine in Gaza is by, "rolling out massive and consistent food assistance in conditions that allow humanitarian staff and supplies to move freely and people to access the assistance safely."

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

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) —Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational, although the network is congested. Few telecommunications towers are operational due to limited fuel allocation. Both MNOs do not offer internet connectivity, as was the condition before the onset of hostilities in October 2023.

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

Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are providing internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with intermittent connectivity.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC along with other clusters continue to engage in Area-Based Coordination (ABC) efforts to address connectivity issues, ensure access to information for communities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in Khan Yunis and Deir Al Balah. The ABC approach has been adopted following the population movements and the expansion of humanitarian response northwards, resulting in clusters shifting their meetings from the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) in Rafah to communities in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis. The lastest meeting took place in Gaza City on 25 April.

On 21 April, the ETC met with COGAT to review all pending requests to import telecommunications equipment. The ETC is seeking priority authorization to import the Security Communications System (SCS) equipment and the ETC rapid response solution kits, to be jointly deployed by Ericsson Response and emergency.lu (Government of Luxembourg) to provide shared secure and independent data connectivity services. COGAT requested the ETC to complete an online request form for each set of equipment system describing how the equipment will be set up, managed, used, and justifying the need for import and use in Gaza.

The ETC met with partners UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNDSS on 22 April to review the latest equipment list submitted to COGAT and agreed to revise it and only keep the major priority equipment that can be used to provide immediate shared common communications services in Gaza.

Internet connectivity

On 21 April, COGAT granted approval for the ETC to activate the data internet connectivity service function on the existing 20 Iridium satellite phones which were purchased by the ETC and donated to the UNDSS in December 2023 and currently in use by UN humanitarian responders in Gaza.

On 21 April, COGAT expressed future willingness to grant the cluster permission to import the ETC rapid response solution kits. COGAT will require to know how the VSAT connectivity kits work and all the locations where the solution will be deployed and installed.

Security Communications Systems

On 24 April, COGAT authorized the ETC to import four VHF repeaters, 50 handheld radios and cabling to set up a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders across operational sites Gaza. The ETC also requested authorization from COGAT to import independent solar energy solution kits to power the VHF repeaters and enable adequate uninterrupted services for all sites which will host the devices in selected ETC common operational areas across Gaza.

On 20 April, the ETC received the quotation for the complete radio-based SCS kit to be installed per operational site. The ETC plans to install the system in each of common operational sites of Deir Al Balah, Gaza City, and Jabalia.

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UNDSS is currently unable to programme the new VHF radios in Jerusalem due to licensing restrictions by equipment supplier. The ETC is urgently working to resolve the challenge to enable the programming of the new VHF handheld radios.

On 21 April, the ETC conducted an ICT assessment mission to Gaza City to inspect the status of the VHF repeater site. The mission was denied access into the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) compound where the VHF repeaters are installed, due to the current unsafe security situation. UNRWA telecoms unit confirmed the presence of the VHF antennae but suspect that the repeaters may have been stolen. UNRWA telecoms also confirmed that the Jabalia site still has the VHF antennae, but the repeaters, routers, and solar power solution were stolen during the ongoing conflict.

The ETC is planning to undertake a joint assessment mission of Gaza City with UNDSS and UNRWA to establish safe accommodation for international staff in preparation to accommodate the anticipated relocation movement of staff from Rafah to Gaza City.

The import clearance for the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that arrived at Tel Aviv airport on 02 April, is ongoing with facilitation from the UNDP. The radios were shipped by WFP Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support (FITTEST) in Dubai. They are to be configured by UNDSS in Jerusalem and further distributed to UN agencies in Gaza.

Staffing

There are currently five ETC staff engaged in the response. The new ETC coordinator arrived in Cairo on 20 April and commenced duties. He will be based in Cairo and remotely coordinating activities in Gaza. The deputy ETC coordinator continues to support the response while based in Cairo. The ETC field coordinator arrived in Cairo on 19 April and further deployed to Gaza on 22 April to strengthen face-to-face engagements and support partners with technical advice and guidance. The ETC field coordinator is set to take over the function of the deputy coordinator starting 01 May. The ETC ICT specialist has been in Gaza since 15 April to support agencies and partners with technical advice and guidance on telecommunications services in Gaza. The ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) has left the operation and the function is being currently carried out remotely from the Global ETC team in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) until a new IMO can be appointed.

Dashboard

See the **ETC Dashboard** for an overview of planned and operational services.

Funding

The ETC urgently requires US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024. The revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US$1.8 million was published by OCHA on 17 April.

On 15 April, the ETC developed a factsheet with updated information and funding requirements aligned with the revised Flash Appeal to facilitate the fund-raising efforts to support its coordination and information management activities until December 2024. Additionally, the ETC engaged with WFP Palestine management to advocate for resource mobilization and fund-raising efforts to support the implementation of ETC activities in the Gaza response.

Challenges

The safety concerns of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza have significantly intensified, following the killing of seven humanitarian aid workers on 01 April.

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

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

The issuance of entry visas for staff remains prolonged and challenging.

Cybersecurity continues to be a pressing issue. 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 08 May 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 17 April 2024. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

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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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