# Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #30
Reporting period: 21/05/2024 to 27/05/2024

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 coordinator previously based in Cairo arrived in Rafah on 24 May to boost ETC presence on the ground and to coordinate and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza with technical needs, guidance, and practical advice in the context of the limited availability of telecommunications services in Gaza.

- The ETC team and UNDSS are discussing the technical set up of the Gaza Security Communications System (SCS), licensing agreements, programming of the Very High Frequency (VHF) radios and seeking authorization to reactivate and operationalize the VHF radio network.

- Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network.
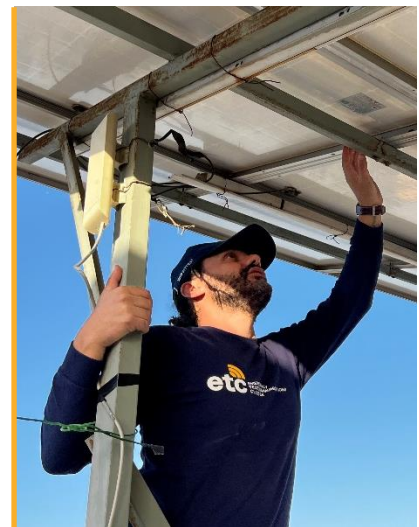
The ETC inspects the VHF repeater site in Gaza. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

The security situation in Gaza remains volatile due to the continuing hostilities. Humanitarian operations are continuing, and responders continue to observe all security measures and protocols, including seeking approved movement authorization.

As of 27 May, the ground incursion in Rafah has displaced more than 800,000 people and has cut off the flow of aid into southern Gaza, further crippling the humanitarian operations.

Humanitarian operations in Gaza continue to face severe access and movement restrictions, including the ongoing closure of key crossings. Joint multiple inter-agency assessments are being conducted to identify suitable sites in northern Gaza to accommodate humanitarian responders.

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at limited capacity due to limited fuel and a congested network due to very few operational telecommunications towers. 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 is worsening as displaced people relocate from the now volatile security situation in Rafah to their original locations in the North. Paltel and Ajyal ISPs are providing internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with intermittent connectivity.

Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network. Critical telecommunications importation process remains lengthy and restricted.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC coordinator previously based in Cairo arrived in Rafah on 24 May to boost ETC presence on the ground and to coordinate and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza with technical needs, guidance, and practical advice, in the context of the limited availability of telecommunications services in Gaza.

Internet connectivity

Internet connectivity across Gaza is operating at reduced capacity with recurrent fluctuating service provision, especially in Rafah and Deir Al Balah, where most humanitarian responders are stationed. The ETC is ready to support OCHA in setting up common internet services to support the surge in humanitarians responders relocating to new locations in Deir Al Balah from Rafah. The ETC has contacted the local ISP requesting to be prioritized in strengthening connectivity for the new locations.

Security communications

The ETC and UNDSS are discussing the technical set up of the Gaza SCS, licensing agreements, programming of the VHF radios and seeking authorization to reactivate and operationalize the VHF radio network. The SCS network repeater is currently installed at the WFP guesthouse in Deir Al Balah since 06 May. It is managed by UNDSS and is yet to be activated for the provision of a secure communications platform for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The site is also yet to be connected to the UNDSS server in Jerusalem for operationalization and the tracking of all connected VHF radio devices as agreed with the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) before the onset of conflict in October 2023.

The ETC team and UNDSS have tentatively agreed to set up an interim UNDSS-managed Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Jerusalem to track staff movement while on mission in Gaza and to produce a daily incident report. The ETC will ensure the provision of all required resources to set up the proposed SOC. Once operational, the network will provide a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders in identified locations.

Staffing

There are currently four ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator arrived in Rafah, Gaza on 24 May to boost ETC presence on the ground, coordinate and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza.

- The ETC field coordinator is based in Rafah, Gaza since 22 April to strengthen face-to-face engagements and support partners with technical advice and guidance;

- The ETC ICT specialist is in Jerusalem since 06 May to seeking to renew his visa to carry out activities from there or return to Gaza;

- A Global ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) is remotely supporting the operation from Dubai, UAE, since 22 April. A dedicated national IMO has been recruited and will join the ETC operation on 02 June.

Dashboard

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

Infographic

See the **ETC Infographic** for an overview of activities data, information, and location of planned and operational services.

Factsheet

See the **ETC Factsheet** for further information and funding requirements.

Funding

The ETC urgently requires US$1.8 million requested in the revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024.

On 13 May 2024, the ETC received US$415,000 from the Government of Poland to set up common ICT services. A further US$158,228 from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) was received on 21 May 2024 to support the maritime logistics project with communications services.

The total funding status is now 31.8% of the US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate communication needs in Gaza. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US$1.8 million was published by OCHA on 17 April.

Challenges

Safety of staff: The safety of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza is a primary concern and priority. The deployment of shared ETC communications services and face-to-face technical support to other humanitarian responders remains a challenge due to insecurity. The ETC is currently waiting for improved security conditions to send the newly received ICT equipment in Jerusalem for distribution and use in Gaza.

Movement of staff: There is currently a restriction of movement in and out of Gaza since 07 May across all border crossing points, thereby delaying staff rotation, and affecting humanitarian activities.

Limited telecommunications services: Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network.

Lack of telecommunications equipment: The availability of telecommunications equipment on the ground is severely restricted and much has been damaged or destroyed. Further, the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is restricted and prolonged. Only 20 satellite phones, four VHF repeaters, four solar power solutions, and 30 VHF handheld radios have been approved for import into Gaza by the Israeli authorities since 07 October 2023. This is severely limiting the delivery of ETC services.

Licensing restrictions: The 30 VHF radios recently imported into Jerusalem cannot yet be programmed at the UNDSS server for use in Gaza due to licensing restrictions and an expired service-level agreement between UNDSS and the service provider, who set up the network before the onset of conflict. Challenges in setting up connectivity in Deir Al Balah is hampering the reactivation of the SCS network. The SCS network is unavailable across the rest of Gaza due to damaged equipment.

Funding: Lack of full funding has limited the ETC in addressing the immediate life-saving communications needs for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The ETC continues to appeal for funding from varied potential donors.

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 **Tuesday 11 June 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 28 May 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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