

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #9

Reporting period: 20/12/2023 to 26/12/2023

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

Highlights

- On 26 December, the primary telecommunications provider in the Gaza Strip announced a halt in communication and internet services due to reported damage to the infrastructure—severely disrupting ongoing critical humanitarian response work in the whole Gaza Strip.
- The ETC and its partners continue to engage with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent, efficient, and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders.
- On 18 December, ETC partner—REACH—completed a communications and information needs assessment for the population in Gaza using the secondary data review methodology of all available material from sources on the ground. The [assessment report](#) was shared with all ETC global partners on 22 December, including those collaborating in the current emergency response.



Buildings, telecommunications, and power infrastructure have been destroyed in Gaza due to the ongoing conflict. Photo: UNRWA.

Situation overview

Between 23 and 26 December, heavy bombardments from air, land, and sea, and intense ground operations—between Israeli forces and Hamas armed groups—continued across most of the Gaza Strip. More than 50 airstrikes were reported in the Middle Area governorate alone.

On 22 December, the Israeli military designated a new area covering about 15% (approximately 9 square kilometres) of the Middle Area governorate for evacuation. The area was marked in an online map published on social media. Prior to the onset of hostilities, this area was home to nearly 90,000 people. The area also includes six shelters that accommodated about 61,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), the vast majority of whom were previously displaced from the north.

Over 60% of the infrastructure in Gaza has been destroyed or damaged. More than 90% of the Gazan population have been displaced.

Telecommunications overview

On 26 December, the primary telecommunications provider in the Gaza Strip—Paltel Group—announced a halt in communication and internet services due to reported damage to service infrastructure—severely disrupting ongoing critical humanitarian response work in the whole Gaza Strip. Paltel Group services were gradually returning to the southern and central Gaza on 21 December, following a shut down since 14 December, apart from 18 to 20 December, where there was a partial resumption at about 10% capacity in southern Gaza.

Humanitarian agencies and first responders have warned that telecommunications blackouts jeopardize the already constrained provision of life-saving assistance. Some humanitarian agencies are relying on their independent connectivity platforms or the local infrastructure for access to telecommunications services. It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization from the authorities to set up independent and reliable shared services for telecommunications to ensure coordinated humanitarian service delivery to the population of Gaza.

Electricity to charge devices is limited 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.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC Coordinator, is remotely supporting coordination activities, while the Deputy Coordinator—based in Cairo, continues coordinating other activities. Both members of staff are waiting for issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

A WFP FITTEST¹ ICT Specialist deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December for ETC technical engagements with other humanitarians and relevant authorities and is scheduled to proceed to Gaza on 01 January 2024. Deployment to Gaza is part of the ETC response for ICT information gathering, rapid situation assessment, and to quantify the state of available telecommunications equipment on the ground, if possible.

The ETC and its partners continue to actively engage with the COGAT for authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent, efficient, and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders. To date, no approval for importation has been received.

On 20 December the ETC participated at the inter-agency coordination cell meeting chaired and hosted by the UNOCHA, in Cairo.

The cluster met with Access Now—a global organization working at the intersection of human rights and new technologies—to discuss some of the telecommunication challenges the humanitarian responders are facing in the Gaza response, on 21 December. The ETC plans to schedule a follow up meeting during the first week of January.

On 22 December the ETC participated in the Palestine national Inter – Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), hosted and chaired by UNOCHA to discuss the Palestine ICCG structure.

¹ WFP Fast Information Technology & Telecommunications Emergency Support Team

Telephony

Following COGAT's authorization and proposal to the UN agencies to procure Cellcom SIM cards (Israeli MNO) for use by humanitarian staff in Gaza—the ETC is consolidating a list of agencies who are interested in using the service and tabulating the quantity of required SIM cards. The use of Cellcom SIM cards is technically cleared by Shabak—the Israeli national security agency—and the service authorized for use by all humanitarian staff. The mobile phone serial numbers, SIM card information, and assignee for each phone would have to be shared with COGAT and Shabak for all agencies who choose to use the service. The offer was circulated on 10 December by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) office to all heads of agencies with a reminder sent on 20 December.

The ETC is supporting global partner—ITU—to allocate 100 fully activated Thuraya satellite phones to UN agencies operating in the Gaza emergency response—for enhanced communication services. The satellite phones were donated by the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to ITU for the inter-agency use and are fully paid for. The phones are yet to be temporarily imported into Egypt, once approved, and authorized by both the Egyptian and Israeli authorities. The ETC invited all UN agencies working in Gaza to submit expressions of interest, stating quantity of phones needed and justification by participating in an online survey, running from 26 December to 04 January.

Security communications services

On 21 December, the ETC contacted an Egyptian local service provider for Very High Frequency (VHF)/High Frequency (HF) radios to seek clarity on the available equipment, cost, licensing, subscription, and the procurement process. This is part of future planning once importation of equipment into Gaza is authorized.

Access to information

On 18 December, ETC partner—[REACH](#)—completed a communications and information needs assessment for the population in Gaza using the secondary data review methodology of all available data from sources on the ground. The [assessment report](#) was shared with all ETC global partners on 22 December, including those collaborating in the current emergency response. The report findings can be used to inform and guide humanitarian responders on their current and planned activities in Gaza. Discussions continue with the World Bank and Ministry of Information to obtain additional information on the status of connectivity, mobile network operator needs (particularly fuel), and general accessibility of information and preferences among the affected population in Gaza. UNOCHA is jointly involved in the exercise as the chair of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) group. The ETC will engage with the CDAC Network, UNRWA, and the Office of the Quartet to source any other available data to enhance the assessment.

Staffing

ETC Coordinator —Komi Amedjonekou—is remotely supporting ETC Palestine coordination activities while waiting for entry visa issuance to deploy to Jerusalem.

The Deputy ETC Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—based in Cairo, continues coordinating ETC activities while waiting for issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

FITTEST ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December to fill ETC gaps while requesting an extension of his visa prior to enter Gaza. He received the extension of his visa for two-months up to 23 February. Deployment to Gaza is tentatively now scheduled for 01 January 2024 for an initial technical engagement with local actors, to plan an initial needs assessment, and to set up technical coordination processes for the response.

Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer— continues to remotely support the response until a replacement is recruited. On 21 December, the team confirmed to go ahead with the selected

candidate from standby partner Canadem. The team is supporting the preparation of staff deployment to have him commence duty on 05 January 2024.

Dashboard

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

Funding

On 10 December, the Government of Luxembourg confirmed a funding allocation of EUR250,000 for the ETC Palestine response in Gaza. On 05 December, the Government of France allocated EUR250,000 to the ETC Palestine operation in Gaza, bringing the total funding status to 64% of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate needs in Gaza. The funding will enable the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management, as well as be ready to deploy shared communications services in up to two locations for the next 1 to 2 months, pending the evolution of the situation.

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

Challenges

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

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

The Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and Gaza is the only point open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are now extremely restricted due to 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 pre-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 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 **03 January at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **27 December**. 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**](http://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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