

ETC Plenary Meeting minutes

9-10 May 2023

Hosted by UNHCR at UN City Copenhagen

Summary

The annual Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) Plenary Meeting for 2023 was held from 9 to 10 May, hosted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Copenhagen. A total of 50 participants from 20 different partner organizations attended the event in-person.

Participants discussed the critical role of joint telecommunications practices in enabling humanitarian response to crises and empowering communities to adapt, recover, and build better futures.

Throughout the Plenary and following the presentation of a new partnerships model, the group agreed that strong partnerships is required more than ever to tackle unprecedented challenges. The ETC is exemplifying the power of coming together.

Opening Remarks

The Annual ETC Plenary Meeting was opened by Doug Greene, UNHCR Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Director of the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIST), and Jay Mahanand, WFP TEC Director, CIO and Chair of the ETC.

Brent Carbno, Global ETC Coordinator, WFP, welcomed Global ETC partners and invited all to review the 2-day sessions, and the Plenary agenda was adopted.

Sessions day 1 – 9 May

Global ETC updates

Caroline Teyssier, Deputy Global ETC Coordinator, WFP, gave a brief overview of the ETC global and field activities over the last year. Across 10 emergency operations, the cluster connected 9,500 humanitarians and 313 organizations in 2022, achieving an 91% overall satisfaction rate for its services.

She also went through all the action points captured at the last Plenary meeting. All were already addressed or to be addressed in the 2-day meeting.

ETC Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) updates

The **ETC SAG members** presented their activities to date as well as their current priorities.

They also informed that one of their members—FanMan Tsang, CDAC Network—is leaving and his seat is currently vacant.



ESTABLISHING THE SAG

1 year timeline 2022-2023



Action

The SAG proposed to take forward the following activities:

- Drive the implementation and monitor the new partnership model, creating opportunities for the cluster;
- Revive key Working Groups as needed;
- Take forward the Strategy Implementation Plan following the review of the document to list actionable activities;
- Focus on the 'empowering communities' pillar to best support field delivery;
- Plan for SAG member transition, starting by filling up the vacancy;
- Discuss partner mobilization, recognizing that the humanitarian landscape has changed which has impacted on modalities of deployment and the mobilization of resources in emergencies. The SAG will suggest ways to continue delivering effectively in the field.

ETC partner organizations are encouraged to submit their application for the vacant position in the SAG. To promote gender balance, female colleagues are particularly encouraged to submit their interest.

ETC Partnership Model review

A new Partnership Model was presented by Brent Carbno, Global ETC Coordinator and Chair of the SAG, WFP.

The model is proposed to be more inclusive of the private sector, at both global and local levels. It will introduce three categories with different levels of expectations and engagement:

- Global ETC Members
- Global ETC Partner Network
- Local Partners

Participants discussed the different categories in groups and how that affects participation in Plenary as well as the transition implications to the new model, such as the vetting and application processes. The outcomes will be reflected in the model documentation for review.



Decision

Participants had no objections with the proposed changes and support the concepts of the new ETC Partnerships Model. The Global ETC team will document the model based on feedback received in Plenary and distribute it to the current ETC partnership for feedback.

ETC Capacity Building

Priyajeet Arora, Head of the Global ETC Capacity Building team, gave an update on the portfolio of capacity building activities and outcomes over the last year. There have been more than 650 learners on the ETC learning channel from 30 partner organizations.

New initiatives include microlearning videos (i.e. Information Management) and webinars (Let's Comm Refresher), as well as an ongoing translation of some courses into French. A revamped ETC Coordination course will be launched as well as a data connectivity basics e-course. Finally, the Global ETC team continues to solidify its learning and development processes by launching a Competency Framework and developing a quality Assurance Manual.

The ETC Capacity Building Working Group is composed of several ETC partners, who also provided a brief update and invited others to join. ETC partners were then invited to share their capacity building efforts to inform and improve ETC capacity building activities:

- Dagbjartur Brynjarsson, Response Coordinator at **Nethope** presented on their disaster response training in the field and how they engage local actors to be trained and train others.
- Mark Hawkins, Global Humanitarian Technology Manager at **Save the Children** presented on their courses for staff working and supporting operations remotely, particularly on how best to support the field and staff there.
- Anthony Kimani, Humanitarian Technologies Advisor at **World Vision International (WVI)** presented their mentoring programme for IT staff to apply their new competencies.
- Nizar Zeidan, Global IT Emergency Coordinator at **UNHCR** presented on their IT Emergency training that looks at IT services in emergencies, providing tools and resources needed to empower IT staff to lead a field response.

This was followed by a group discussion on challenges and opportunities regarding selection principles. By reviewing a set of fictional applicant profiles, participants were invited to answer the following: 1) Is deployability an important criteria? Shall we prioritize surge capacity over local capacity?; 2) Operational needs or future deployability? And 3) Members and partners: quota?

Decision

During the group discussions around selection challenges and criteria, it was agreed that:

- Selection should align to the new partnership model where applicants will be prioritized based on their level of engagement with the ETC.
- "Deployability" is a key criteria for selection. Those deployed or expected to deploy to an ETC operation will be prioritized.
- Global ETC courses will prioritize 'surge capacity' and ETC partners will be prioritized.

It was discussed that selection of applicants from regions and Country Offices should consider:

- Gaps in the regions based on active or potential ETC operations.
- Ability to readily deploy at the regional or country-level.
- Local champions who may have greater reach at country-level.

Note: In addition to the above, course-specific criteria will also be applicable.

Action

- The Global ETC team will reach out to ETC partners to select new representatives to be part of the selection committee for Global ETC courses.

Sessions day 2 – 10 May

Regional and Country Preparedness

Global ETC team members Phyza Jameel, Global ETC Advisor; Ria Sen, Global ETC Preparedness Consultant; and Lena Bock, Global ETC Partnerships Engagement Officer, presented an overview of the past years' activities, with focus on the national focal points meeting and preparedness missions held in Mozambique and Madagascar, as well as the scoping mission for regional engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean region. An overview of the ETC Return of Investment (ROI) model and the country prioritisation approach was given. Partners are encouraged to use the ROI model to advocate for their investments in IT preparedness actions.

Additional ETC partner representatives presented on their country preparedness efforts:



- Gabriela Alvarado, Country Director, **WFP Dominican Republic**, shared her insights in a recorded video on the use of technology response to support hurricane Fiona in the Dominican Republic in 2022.
- Dagbjartur Brynjarsson, Response Coordinator, **NetHope**, presented a series of capacity building activities being carried out in Ghana (May 2022), Guatemala (February 2023), Philippines (May 2023), and Panama (July 2023).
- Marta Dabbas, Head of IT, **UNICEF**, explained her organization is investing in preparedness activities by building local capacity in partnership with the ETC. One good example has been Mongolia, where UNICEF is leading the project as local ETC lead with Global ETC support in implementing key preparedness activities.
- Sebastien Gillet, ICT Specialist, **Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)**, presented their project that has been implemented for the past two years, providing capacity building in the Caribbean and Asia regions. TSF donates ICT equipment and trains personnel to use the equipment by working with regional actors, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre). Training was held in Barbados (2022) and Singapore (February 2023). The next training sessions will be held in Jamaica (June) and Indonesia (August).
- Vanessa Gray, Head, Environment & Emergency Telecommunications Division, BDT, **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**, shared examples of Disaster Connectivity Map (DCM) activations for ETC responses in Türkiye, Tonga, and Vanuatu. In addition, ITU is leading the early warning communication and dissemination pillar of 'Early Warning For All Initiative', notably the new project on cell broadcast for Multi Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS).

Finally, in working groups, participants discussed ways to continue progressing the ETC country preparedness agenda and increase emergency telecommunications preparedness and resilience.

Decision

Participants agreed to engage more closely on preparedness activities at regional and country levels to avoid any duplication of efforts.

Security Communications

Alf Ellefsen, Senior UN Security Telecommunications Consultant, {TESS+}, presented on the latest {TESS+} updates and more generally about the UN Security Communication System (SCS).

Komi Amedjonekou, Global ETC Operations Specialist, WFP, gave an overview of the support of ETC to Security Communications Systems (SCS) in countries that are prone to emergencies or during emergencies. He clarified that the ETC is providing the backbone network but not the end-user equipment, and that this is only in humanitarian crises or new emergencies where there are gaps in SCS and when the ETC is mobilized. He also presented the implementation of the remote Security Operations Centres (SOC) in Ukraine, an approach that is anticipated to be replicated in other operations with the support of the {TESS+} team.

Alf Ellefsen then highlighted some of the foreseen trends. While smartphones were originally not considered a security communications tool, today, the landscape has changed and among all the countries visited by {TESS+}, only one country does not use mobile phone as the primary security communications tool. With at least 2G services working most of the time, there is wide coverage and most people are familiar with the technology, also relying on messaging apps. Mobile phones are seen as the future of security communications.

Empowering communities

Phyza Jameel, Global ETC Programme Advisor, WFP, and Maria Gonzales Garcia, Global ETC Services for Communities Consultant, WFP, provided an update of activities over the past year, including the Ukraine Chatbot, inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) in Madagascar, the charging stations in Türkiye, the Learning Centre and cybercafé and inter-agency CFM in the Central African Republic (CAR), and the possible interventions of connectivity for people in Panama.

A 'Connectivity for Aid' workshop was held in Valencia from 28-30 March 2023, hosted by UNICEF. The main takeaway from the workshop was the need to develop a framework and standards for providing connectivity.

The team also provided an update on the Sahel project for the countries of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali with the ETC Services Centre in Niger planned to open in July 2023.

ETC partners also updated on some of their activities:

- Rosie Jackson, Director of Policy & Programmes, **CDAC Network**, shared an update on key activities undertaken including information management, training, and supporting surge capacity development.
- Stijn Aelbers, Humanitarian Advisor, **Internews**, shared about several reports released and analysis that would be of utility and interest to humanitarians and the ETC.
- John Warnes, Innovation Officer, **UNHCR**, provided an update on their new digital strategy and how it aims to contribute to changing the way the organization focuses on digital services, including potential expansion of fund allocation to country offices for this area. Focus areas for them include: how to provide more digital services to refugees, making a case for the Global Refugee forum; and connectivity for refugees in Colombia where they are working on community-based models i.e. local communities managing the tools provided by them and on building their evidence base on evolving needs and demands in the area of connectivity from the community (Digital Leisure Divide); working in Sudan, looking at South Sudan and other neighbouring communities to understand connectivity needs, working closely with the ETC.

- Lukasz Kruk, Assessment Specialist, **REACH**, and Bryce Davis Hartley, Senior Manager: Strategic Partnerships & Market Engagement, **GSMA** presented on the Connectivity, Needs and Usage Assessment (CoNUA) Toolkit which is now available in five languages and has been used in several deployments. Global ETC, REACH, and GSMA combined efforts for this initiative and now, through the recent launch of its website, country-level assessments can be found. Recently, REACH worked with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in North Darfur, Sudan, who used the toolkit to design their humanitarian programming.



Technology in emergencies

In a marketplace format, partner organizations shared information on tools and platforms with participants:

- Lars Ruediger, Program Director, **Ericsson Response**, and Gilles Hoffmann, emergency.lu Coordinator, **Government of Luxembourg**, presented on the latest changes of the ETC rapid response solution.
- Bertrand Rukundu, Head of Innovation, Business Development and Technology, **iMMAP**, presented on iMMAP services to humanitarians and a chatbot project in Columbia.
- Bryce Davis Hartley, Senior Manager: Strategic Partnerships & Market Engagement, **GSMA**, presented the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter latest updates.
- Vanessa Gray, Head, Environment & Emergency Telecommunications Division, BDT, **ITU**, presented on the Disaster Connectivity Maps and planned enhancements.
- Lukasz Kruk, Assessment Specialist, **REACH**, presented the updated Connectivity, Needs and Usage Assessment (CoNUA) Toolkit and showed all how to use it.



Conclusion

The 2023 Plenary Meeting was closed by the WFP CIO and Chair of the ETC, Jay Mahanand and UNHCR CIO, Doug Greene.

While Jay emphasized the importance of collecting and sharing data, Doug expressed his positive appreciation for the way the ETC has evolved by developing the emergency preparedness pillar. Both agreed that the ETC and its network of partners should take an increasingly bold approach towards implementing its strategy to continue to effectively support ICT emergency preparedness and response in the field.



All information related to Global ETC activities and field operations can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org

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

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