

Sahel

Protection crisis

2022

Operation overview

In **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, only 16 percent, 13 percent and 5 percent of the population, respectively, use the internet. Lack of access to electricity exacerbates the **digital divide**, particularly in rural areas. The ETC is working to address the information and technology gaps faced by **affected communities in the Sahel** by providing tailored ICT services which will enable them to gain access to life-saving information, connect, and develop their digital skills.



Project countries:
**BURKINA FASO, MALI,
NIGER**



Project timeline:
2021—2023



Preparation for first site
in **DIFFA, NIGER**
underway



With the support of
**GOVERNMENT OF
LUXEMBOURG**



Supporting partner and donor organizations supporting the ETC in the Sahel: WFP, and with **special thanks** to the Government of Luxembourg for initiating and supporting this joint project with funding, expertise, and technical solutions.

About the ETC Sahel Project

In the Central Sahel, where over 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, there are stark inequalities in access to information and communications technology (ICT) services. Within the broader context of increasing climate vulnerability, chronic food insecurity and intensifying violence, barriers to access information and connect to the rest of the world are leaving communities in the Sahel vulnerable and trapped in a perpetual cycle of poverty.

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) is working to **bridge the digital divide** and address the information and technology gaps faced by communities in the Sahel by providing tailored ICT services which will enable them to gain **access to life-saving information, connect, and develop their digital skills**. Based on the needs identified, the ETC is planning to provide a range of services to communities in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, including phone booths, charging stations, connectivity services, in the form of a cybercafé and internet hotspot, and a Digital Learning Centre.

In doing so, the ETC is also working to develop a robust and scalable business model for providing ICT services to communities and leverage lessons learned from the project to build the ETC's capacity to replicate the approach in other contexts.

First ETC Services Centre in Niger

In 2021, the ETC kicked off the project by conducting an in-depth needs analysis and assessment of the information and communications landscape in Niger and designing a technical architecture for the project that aims to be both replicable across countries and adaptable to the specific contexts in which it is being deployed and the needs of the people it is meant to serve.

The city of Diffa in Niger will host the first ETC Services Centre. The ETC is in the process of signing an agreement with the City Council reflecting its contribution of a plot of land on which the Centre will be constructed. The ETC Services Centre will be built using a semi-permanent structure supplied through the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD). The ETC has also begun to source the necessary equipment and technical solutions for its services, both through Global ETC Partners, such as the Government of Luxembourg, and through local and regional commercial channels.

Needs assessment in Burkina Faso

To prepare for the scale-up of the ETC Sahel Project following the launch of the pilot in Diffa, the ETC has conducted a needs assessment in Burkina Faso to improve its understanding of the telecommunications landscape, including aspects such as mobile phone access and use, availability and use of charging stations, strength of network coverage and market conditions. A total of 9 sites were assessed across the Sahel, Centre-Nord, Nord, and Est regions. As in Niger, the assessment tools were based on the Connectivity, Needs and Usage Assessment (CoNUA) toolkit developed by the GSMA, in partnership with REACH and the ETC.