

## Sudan, conflict

### ETC Situation Report #5

Reporting period: 17/06/2023 to 23/06/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 25 May 2023 to support the humanitarian response following the outbreak of conflict on 15 May. The ETC is led by WFP in Sudan.

## Highlights

- On 21 June, the ETC connected IOM's office to its data connectivity network in Port Sudan. Satellite internet services are being provided to humanitarian from 17 UN agencies and seven I/NGOs across nine sites in the city.
- Satellite connectivity equipment has been installed in Kassala and Wad Madani in preparation for the expansion of the ETC network, however the cluster will not be able to deliver services to meet the demands of humanitarian operations unless funding is received.
- The ETC urgently requires USD 6.3 million to continue to provide communications services to the humanitarian community in Sudan.



A WFP IT specialist connects aligns the link connecting IOM's office in Port Sudan to ETC data connectivity.

Photo: WFP

## Situation overview

### Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed hundreds, forced more than 530,000 to flee across borders, and displaced over 1,965,000 people internally since the start of the conflict according to the [UNHCR's operational data portal](#).

Prior to the recent outbreak of violence, a third of the population was already in need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the conflict has dramatically constrained access to food, water, fuel, cash and health care.

In the revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) it is now estimated that the number of people in need of assistance is 24.7 million – a 57 per cent increase from before the crisis.

### Telecommunications infrastructure

Since the outbreak of conflict on 15 April, Sudan's communications infrastructure has been heavily impacted as a result of direct damage to telecommunications towers, as well as indirectly through the rapid deterioration of the national power grid.

Two of the country's three Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are no longer operational. Congestion on the one remaining MNO network is worsened by the concentration of internally displaced people (IDPs) in safer areas away from the active fighting. Two of the major internet service providers (ISPs) are also no longer functioning, and local VSAT services are unreliable.

UNDSS maintains a VHF radio network that remains operational in most locations across the country, with the exception of El Geneina and Nyala, which were affected by looting.

The extensive looting of communications assets across the country means that there is a clear need to rebuild and strengthen common humanitarian information and telecommunication technology infrastructure to enable a swift and coordinated response to the crisis.

See the Sudan [ICT Profile](#) for more information on national telecommunications infrastructure.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

The second local ETC Working Group Meeting was held on 19 June, with participation from UN organisations and I/NGOs present in country. There continues to be a strong demand for ETC data connectivity services, as local internet service providers (ISPs) and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are unable to provide reliable internet services.

The ETC is accepting requests for information, technical advice, and connectivity services through the [Sudan.ETC@wfp.org](mailto:Sudan.ETC@wfp.org) email address. A ticketing system has been established to handle the high volume of requests received.

The ETC is continuing to engage with the authorities to obtain clearances for the importation of telecommunications equipment to meet the needs of the response.

### Internet Connectivity

Despite not having received funding to meet its operational requirements, the ETC has been working with the limited equipment available in-country to extend WFP satellite internet to the humanitarian community in Port Sudan.

On 21 June, the ETC added a ninth site to its data connectivity network in Port Sudan. IOM's new office will also host a workspace where humanitarian workers from other organisations can access ETC satellite internet services. Further, in order to improve the resilience of ETC services, the network's relay point will be moved to the new IOM office for more stable power supply.

The cluster is now providing connectivity to all 17 UN agencies present in Port Sudan, as well as seven NGOs – over 180 individual users.

Technical assessments are underway for the extension of connectivity to more sites – including the WHO office – however the cluster will not be able to meet the demand for its services unless funding is received.

Satellite connectivity equipment is in place in Kassala and Wad Madani in preparation for the establishment of ETC connectivity services in these locations once the necessary equipment to extend connectivity to the humanitarian community can be procured. Al Gedarif has also been identified as one of the priority locations for the expansion of ETC services.

In Port Sudan, banks have been unable to provide financial services due to connectivity issues. The ETC facilitated an agreement between two banks serving humanitarians from WFP's premises with a local ISP to reinforce their internet connectivity.

### **Security communications**

As a part of a security communications needs assessment, the cluster is conducting an inventory of VHF handsets amongst UN agencies and I/NGOs in Port Sudan. Many radio handsets were left behind, damaged, or looted during the evacuation of humanitarians in the first phase of the conflict. The cluster is working to identify and disable missing radios suspected to have been looted to preserve the security of the radio network. The inventory of remaining radios will be used to coordinate the provision of radio programming and training.

Due to the lack of equipment available in country, the cluster has been receiving requests to borrow radios. Two radios were loaned to IOM to support their communications needs for a field mission.

The local Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in Port Sudan and Kassala are staffed and fully operational 12 hours per day. Apart from the SOCs in Nyala, El Geneina, Zalinguei, and Ed Daein, which were looted, the remaining SOCs across the country are intermittently active, depending on the availability of staff, electrical power, and internet connectivity. The radio network is also monitored remotely from Nairobi, where the Remote SOC was transferred after the evacuation of the Khartoum SOC.

The ETC team is supporting UNDSS to enhance the coverage of the HF network in Port Sudan by installing a new antenna. The improvements will enable the use of HF radio for long-distance communications.

### **Services for communities**

The ETC is exploring the needs to establish platforms to access information or for communication between humanitarians and the affected population, such as a Chatbot or an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM). Due to the serious deterioration of the communications infrastructure across the country, the implementation of any such platforms will depend upon the cluster's ability to first establish reliable independent communications infrastructure.

## Funding

The total requirement for ETC operations in Sudan is US\$6.3 million to deliver services in up to 10 common operational areas, including data connectivity and ICT helpdesk support, security communications services – radio programming and training – and platforms for the affected population to receive information and provide feedback to humanitarians.

The ETC has yet to receive any donor contributions towards its requirements. WFP provided the cluster with an advance to initiate the provision of critical services until funding is secured.

## Challenges

The lack of funding received is constraining the ETC's ability to maintain and expand services.

Difficulties importing telecommunications equipment, compounded with the looting of pre-existing telecommunications assets in-country has meant that a lack of equipment is a major challenge for the operation.

As a result of the security situation, travel and access is severely constrained across the country.

Further information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

<https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict>

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

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