

Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #8

Reporting period: 21/07/2023 to 04/08/2023

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

Highlights

- The ETC is fully operational in Port Sudan and is providing critical internet connectivity services to 20 UN agencies and 19 NGOs across 11 sites, serving approximately 500 humanitarian users.
- The ETC received two pots of funding for the response—US\$2 million from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), and US\$2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The ETC in Sudan is now 68% funded out of the required US\$6.3 million to deliver critical communications services.
- The ETC is working to obtain the required equipment to extend services to new locations across the four operational areas—Gedaref, Kassala, Kosti, and Wad Madani. Access to the required telecommunications equipment is critical to the delivery and expansion of services.



The ETC data connectivity in Port Sudan is upgraded and improved.

Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has continued from mid-April for over three months. More than 876,669 Sudanese have fled across the border into neighbouring countries, and over 3,020,517 people have been internally displaced since the start of the conflict as of 01 August 2023, 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.

The revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) published on 17 May estimates 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 due to 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 Very High Frequency (VHF) radio network that remains operational in most locations across the country, apart from 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 telecommunications 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

Requests for information, technical advice, and connectivity services can be submitted to the ETC through the Sudan.ETC@wfp.org email address. A ticketing system has been established to handle the high volume of requests received. Over 600 requests have been registered so far since 14 May.

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.

The ETC continues to work closely with humanitarian partners to ensure ETC common services are deployed in different locations across the country. On 31 July, the ETC held its second ETC Working Group meeting to discuss implementation of ETC activities and challenges, partner requests, and the way forward. The next ETC Working Group meeting will be held on 28 August.

Internet Connectivity

The ETC is fully operational in Port Sudan, now providing internet connectivity to 20 UN agencies and 19 NGOs across 11 sites, serving over 500 humanitarian users.

In the reporting period, the ETC resolved data connectivity issues for Alight, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), UNMAS, OCHA, Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS), UN Women, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Upgrades were implemented for the WFP office in Port Sudan for enhanced data connectivity services.

The cluster is working to obtain the necessary equipment to extend services to new locations across Sudan. Satellite infrastructure has already been deployed in Gedaref, Kassala, and Wad Madani. However, more equipment is required to start installing point-to-point links with humanitarian workspaces in these locations, using the same model as the ETC network in Port Sudan.

Meanwhile, the cluster is reviewing requests for connectivity support in Kassala, and site assessments are underway for the expansion of ETC services in Wad Madani and Kosti.

Security communications

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, Zalingei, 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.

Although the telecommunications infrastructure in Port Sudan, Kassala, and Gedaref are still in place, very few functional handheld radios are available for use among humanitarian organisations as many radios were abandoned for security reasons during the evacuation process that took place in April. Presently, there are only seven operational VHF radios in Port Sudan. The ETC and UNDSS are managing a 'radio pool' for humanitarians to collect and return for each mission. The ETC is working with the Resident Coordinator's office to resolve this challenge.

The cluster is also supporting UNDSS to identify bulk messaging solutions to disseminate security alerts to staff in Sudan.

Services for communities

The ETC is exploring the possibility of establishing 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), given the serious deterioration of the communications infrastructure across the country. A CFM taskforce has been established by OCHA with participation from UNICEF, WFP, and UNHCR.

Funding

The total requirement for the ETC operation 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 secured 68% of its funding needs in Sudan, thanks to a contribution of EUR 250,000 (US\$273,434) from the Government of Luxembourg, US\$2 million from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), and US\$2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Although the cluster is partially funded, additional funding is required to continue to maintain and expand the common services.

Challenges

Difficulties in importing telecommunications equipment, compounded by 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.

Difficulties in obtaining visas for travel to Sudan is restricting the ability of the ETC to mobilize the required staff to deploy critical communications services for the humanitarian community.

Mapping

See the latest version of the ETC Infographic for the Sudan operation [here](#).

WFP—as the lead agency of the ETC in Sudan—has been sharing connectivity with humanitarians in Port Sudan since 24 April. Following the activation of the ETC in Sudan on 25 May, the cluster is working to expand common internet services to new sites in Port Sudan and new locations across the country.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the Sudan crisis will take place on **Thursday 10 August 2023 at 15:00 EAT.**

The next Local ETC Working Group meeting will take place online on Monday **28 August 2023 at 15:00 EAT.**

Contacts

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

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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