

## Sudan, conflict

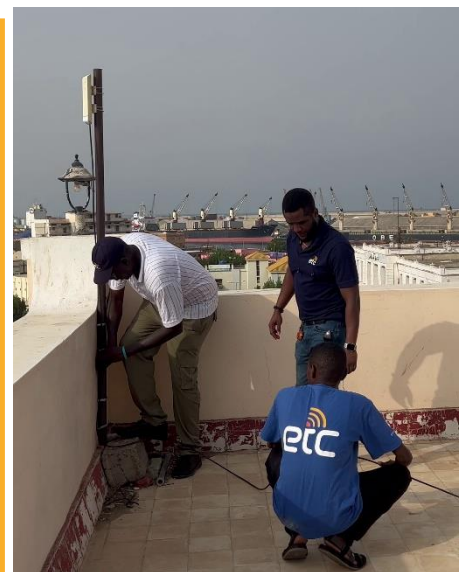
### ETC Situation Report #10

Reporting period: 01/09/2023 to 30/09/2023

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. ETC Situation Reports (SitReps) are produced monthly.

## Highlights

- To date, the ETC is providing connectivity in 12 sites in Port Sudan for 18 UN agencies and 13 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), serving 489 humanitarian users. The ETC is also providing guest Wi-Fi in the WFP office in Kosti and extended connectivity services to UNHCR in Kassala.
- As of 19 September, the ETC received Wi-Fi and network equipment that will enable the enhancement of the existing connectivity services in Port Sudan and the scale-up of ETC connectivity services in the other priority locations—Kassala, Gedaref, Wad Madani.
- The movement of radio equipment into Port Sudan has been temporarily suspended as the customs clearance process remains challenging.



The ETC enhances internet connectivity services in the inter-agency Coral Hotel, Port Sudan, on 01 September.

Photo: WFP/ETC

## Situation overview

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has continued from mid-April for over five months. More than 1,082,033 Sudanese have fled across the border into neighbouring countries, and over 5,502,817 people have been forcibly displaced since the start of the conflict, according to the UNHCR's [operational data portal](#), as of 26 September.

Prior to the outbreak of violence, a third of the population was already in dire 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.

As of 26 August, Port Sudan has become Sudan's temporary administrative capital.

## 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.

All the three Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are gradually restoring their voice services in Port Sudan and the service is improving day-by-day. Other locations still depend on the one operating MNO network whose congestion is worsened by the high 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, Zalingei, Nyala and Ed Daein, 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](mailto:Sudan.ETC@wfp.org) email address. A ticketing system has been established to manage the high volume of requests received. Over 620 requests have been registered so far since 14 May.

The ETC continues to engage with the authorities to obtain clearance for the importation of telecommunications equipment into Sudan to meet the needs of the response. As of 19 September, the ETC received<sup>1</sup> Wi-Fi and network equipment that will enable the enhancement of the existing connectivity services in Port Sudan and the scale-up of ETC connectivity services in the other priority locations—Kassala, Gedaref, Wad Madani. The movement of radio equipment into Port Sudan has been temporarily suspended as the customs clearance process remains challenging.

The ETC continues to work closely with humanitarian partners to ensure ETC common services are deployed in operational locations across the country. On 25 September, the ETC held its sixth 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 23 October.

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<sup>1</sup> Received with support from the WFP Regional Bureau for eastern Africa in Nairobi (RBN) and WFP Sudan.

### Internet connectivity

To date, the ETC is providing connectivity services in a total of 12 sites in Port Sudan for 18 UN agencies and 13 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and serving 489 humanitarian users.

With the recent arrival of stocks of equipment in country, the ETC is prioritizing the expansion of connectivity services for humanitarian partners in three additional locations—Kassala, Gedaref, and Wad Madani.

In Kassala, the national Internet Service Provider (ISP), Sudatel, is not established and there is a need for ETC connectivity services. Although cluster services have already been extended to the UNHCR office in Kassala, there is a need to expand the services to all humanitarian partners operating there.

In Gedaref and Wad Madani, satellite connectivity infrastructure has already been deployed but not yet operational while the ETC awaits further equipment.

In Kosti, the ISP Sudatel is providing connectivity services. Therefore, the ETC is only providing a free Wi-Fi hotspot within WFP premises in Kosti.

### Security communications

Port Sudan and Kassala have operational UNDSS-managed Security Operations Centres (SOCs) that are staffed 12 hours per day. Kosti and Damazine have partially operational SOCs depending on the availability of staff, power, and internet connectivity. Gedaref has a locally connected SOC and there is no operational SOC in Wad Madani.

Locations currently connected to and monitored from the Remote SOC in Nairobi (relocated from Khartoum at the onset of conflict) include Port Sudan, Kassala, Kosti, Damazine, Al Fasher, El Fula, El Obeid, Ed Daein, Kadugli, and Zalingei. However, the SOCs in Al Fasher, Ed Daein, El Obeid, El Fula, Kadugli and Zalingei were recently looted in August, and the SOCs in El Geneina and Nyala were looted in May.

The ETC plans to support operationalization of the SOC in Gedaref using the newly imported equipment. All preparations to connect the SOC to the network—security communications equipment, devices, and radio programming—are in place.

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 eight operational VHF radios in Port Sudan. The ETC and UNDSS continues to manage 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 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 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

The ongoing looting of pre-existing telecommunications assets in-country means that a lack of equipment is one major challenge for the operation.

Difficulties in obtaining customs authorities' clearances, especially for telecommunications equipment such as radio devices means a lack of critical equipment availability on the ground, seriously constraining operations.

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.

## Dashboard

See the latest version of the ETC Dashboard for the Sudan operations [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 12 October 2023 at 15:00 EAT.**

The next Local ETC Working Group meeting will take place online on **Monday 23 October 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](http://www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict)

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

[Sudan.ETC@wfp.org](mailto:Sudan.ETC@wfp.org)