

Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #18

Reporting period: 01/05/2024 to 31/05/2024

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

Highlights

- The ETC has initiated several measures in response to possible future Internet Service Provider (ISP) shutdowns by upgrading fibre optic connections in Port Sudan and Kassala, as well as increasing the VSAT capacity.
- On 16 May, the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) of Sudan granted approval to the ETC to import essential equipment to ensure connectivity services for responders in the event of a local ISP outage.
- In partnership with the Sudan Red Cross, the ETC held two focus group discussions with affected populations in Port Sudan to assess the needs and level of access to information. The findings will inform the planned implementation of a services for communities' project to provide connectivity for approximately 600 displaced people at the Alashy camp.



The ETC conducted two focus group discussions with affected populations in Port Sudan in April/May. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

The situation in Sudan remains volatile and unpredictable. More than 8.8 million people have fled their homes since mid-April 2023 due to the conflict outbreak between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), constituting the world's largest displacement crisis. Both SAF and RSF continue to strengthen their military presence in areas of control, such as Darfur.

The situation in Kordofan, Darfur, and Khartoum is a particular challenge. In March and April, some 860,000 people did not receive humanitarian aid in these three locations due to violence as well as bureaucratic and administrative impediments, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The humanitarian community is suggesting to establish or ramp-up their presence in the conflict-affected locations of Darfur and Kordofan—ETC currently has no presence there.

Increased security checkpoints and movement screening of civilians and humanitarian responders across the country have further complicated the humanitarian response.

The situation in Port Sudan and Kassala is relatively calm but with a strong military presence during the curfew hours from 23:00 to 05:00.

The lack of reliable telecommunications infrastructure and power cuts further complicates efforts to deliver humanitarian aid and help people in need.

National telecommunications infrastructure

Much of Sudan is affected by the internet blackout which began on 07 February 2024. National telecommunications services have been severely disrupted across the country and telecommunications infrastructure remains compromised. Partial restoration of services by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Zain and Sudani—has provided limited connectivity, however, these are frequently interrupted due to power cuts and infrastructure damage.

In May, the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) granted approval for the ETC to import self-standing towers and a licensed microwave frequency to enhance the telecommunications infrastructure necessary for humanitarian activities in Sudan.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC continues to strengthen coordination efforts in Port Sudan, Kassala, and Kosti. New operational hubs are being set up in Dongola and Wadi Halfa, close to the border with Egypt where data connectivity services are critically needed for an effective humanitarian response.

Further, the ETC is actively participating in the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG) meetings to align with broader humanitarian efforts in Sudan.

On 29 May, the ETC participated in the first meeting of the inter-agency Famine Prevention Cell. Discussions involved supporting the establishment of seven additional operational hubs across Sudan. The confirmed locations are Kassala, Kosti, and Kadugli (which is covering Kurdufan) —the remaining locations are yet to be confirmed.

Humanitarian partners can request information, technical advice, and access to services to the ETC through the Sudan.ETC@wfp.org email address. A ticketing system has been established to manage the high volume of requests being received.

Data connectivity

ETC internet connectivity services are provided in four common operational areas—Port Sudan (32 sites), Kassala (eight sites), Kosti (one site using the WFP office premises), and most recently in El Gadaref (one site).

As part of the ETC's plan to expand and strengthen connectivity services in up to 10 common operational locations, the following took place in May:

- The ETC met with Sudan's NTC on 16 May, when the necessary approvals to import 10 self-standing telecommunications towers was successfully secured. The installation of these towers will ensure the ETC is able to provide connectivity services for responders in the event of a local ISP outage. The towers are expected to take three months to arrive.
- The ETC engaged with Sudatel Telecom Group to initiate an undersea cable solution to mitigate the impact of future ISP disruptions and ensure more stable and reliable internet services.
- On 28 May, the ETC and WFP met with partner—Cisco Crisis Response—to discuss possible support for the ongoing network upgrade plan using Cisco devices that will improve data connectivity access for the users. The upgrade involves the expansion of the existing network, featuring a landing page with self-registration capabilities which will allow users to log in with the same username and password across all of Sudan. More discussions on this are planned.
- Further, the ETC submitted a request to import five advanced connectivity kits which await shipment from Nairobi. The ETC is currently awaiting a response for approval from the national authorities. In total, 15 advanced connectivity kits are needed to boost the availability of internet connectivity.

In the meantime, the cluster is advancing initiatives to restore and stabilize connectivity services provided in operational locations by upgrading fibre optic connections to 250 megabits in Port Sudan and 150 megabits in Kassala for enhanced data connectivity, as well as increasing the existing VSAT capacity in Port Sudan and Kassala from 18 watts to 150 watts.

The ETC also provided extensive technical support to various UN agencies in Port Sudan including UNDSS, UNICEF, FAO, IOM, UN Women, and the UN Resident Coordinators' Office (UNRCO) as they relocated to new offices to accommodate additional and returning personnel. This support includes cabling, basic IT setup, and ensuring reliable data connectivity services.

Security communications

The ETC continues to programme on demand the 250 handheld VHF radio devices which arrived in Sudan in March, alleviating the severe shortage of radio devices on the ground. A total of 93 radios have so far been programmed for WFP staff in the operational areas of Damazine, Dongola, Gedaref, Kosti, Kassala, and Port Sudan. The radios are used by responders in the field for enhanced safety and security amid the evolving operational demands and security challenges in these regions.

The ETC and UNDSS have discussed the way forward to expand the Security Operations Centres (SOCs) across Sudan by increasing their number and establishing a new common centre for humanitarian coordination at key hubs. Currently, there are four SOCs in Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, and Damazine.

The ETC plans to move radio equipment to the new UNDSS office and relocate the remote SOC from Nairobi to Port Sudan to be closer to the operational needs. All four SOCs in Sudan will be connected to the relocated RSOC in Port Sudan.

Services for communities

In partnership with the Sudan Red Cross, the ETC held two focus group discussions in Port Sudan to assess the needs and level of access to information for affected populations, primarily those who have been displaced. The first discussion took place on 29 April in the village of Hadal with 119 affected people and the second on 01 May in the village of Hay Alkhalij with 592 affected people. An urgent need for additional sources of power, access to the internet, and access to ICT equipment as well as radio broadcasting facilities was found. A detailed report on the findings and recommendations will be produced to inform the planned implementation of a services for communities' project to provide connectivity for approximately 600 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Alashy Camp in Port Sudan between June and August.

The ETC held a meeting with UNICEF on 23 April to discuss collaborative efforts on the requirements to support the activation of an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM). Follow-up meetings with WFP are planned to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication of resources. An inter-agency CFM would support the displaced population in Sudan to access information and communications channels.

Funding

In 2024, the ETC requires USD 6.3 million to continue its provision and expansion of shared ICT services across Sudan in support of humanitarian operations.

So far in 2024, only the UK Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has allocated GBP 240,385. This contribution means that the ETC is 5% funded out of the required USD 6.3 million. Therefore, an additional USD 6 million is still required to meet the funding objectives for 2024. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) grant has been extended until 01 August 2024, while a third extension is not expected.

The ETC is calling for supplementary funds to cover this shortfall.

Challenges

Security concerns, restricted travel, and logistical constraints continue to create operational challenges.

Dashboard

The latest ETC Dashboard for the Sudan operation is available [here](#).

Meetings

A Global ETC Partners Teleconference took place on **04 June**. All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

A Local ETC Working Group meeting took place on **28 May at 15:00 EAT**.

Contacts

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Further information related to the ETC Sudan operation 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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