

## Syria – Conflict

### ETC Situation Report #54

Reporting period: 01/06/2022 to 31/07/2022

The ETC was activated in Syria in January 2013 in response to the conflict crisis. Situation Reports are distributed every two months.

## Highlights

- In partnership with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the ETC completed maintenance of the VHF radio network and Security Operations Centre (SOC) equipment in Damascus to ensure services are maximized for responders.
- From 25 May to 20 June, the ETC established VHF radio coverage in Al-Hol camp and the surrounding area, and linked responders in the camp to the UNDSS SOC in Qamishli to improve staff safety.
- The ETC completed the initial selection process for the planned technical workshop scheduled to take place in October 2022 for inter-agency partners in Syria. Expressions of interest were received from a total of 25 personnel from nine UN agencies.



The ETC installs a repeater in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) office in Al-Hol camp to provide radio services for responders. Photo: WFP/ETC

## Activities

### Coordination

The ETC continues to participate in the weekly Syria Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) meetings. One key update impacting on the ETC is the United Nations Security Council resolution to extend the entry of assistance into northern Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey by six months, until 10 January 2023.

The joint ETC and WFP oversight mission to Aleppo—planned to take place in July—was postponed due to staff shortages. The team is working to identify an alternative date. When the mission goes ahead, the ETC Coordinator will meet with all partners in the UN hub to gather their inputs on ETC services and assess the service infrastructure.

### Data connectivity

The ETC provides internet connectivity services to humanitarian workers from 11 UN agencies in six sites in Syria (Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Hama, Homs, Qamishli) and Turkey (Gaziantep).

A shipment of network equipment to upgrade the connectivity infrastructure in all UN hubs in Syria was dispatched from the USA on 4 July and is now undergoing the customs clearance process at the Syrian border. Following engagement between the ETC and the authorities, the new processing time to clear equipment from customs is expected to be reduced to 45 days.

The ETC received approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to conduct a mission to Deir Ez-Zor from 7-11 August to upgrade the existing solar power solution to support data connectivity services. The ETC delivered the required equipment to Deir Ez-Zor in May in preparation for the installation mission. To further upgrade connectivity services in the UN hub in Deir Ez-Zor, the ETC is engaging with the ICT Working Group to activate a back-up fibre internet link provided by a second Internet Service Provider (ISP) and agree on a revised technical set-up of the connectivity network to meet enhanced requirements. Partner UNICEF is following up with the ISP on the new set-up.

### Security communications

The ETC provides security communications services to users from 14 UN agencies across seven sites in Syria (Aleppo, Damascus, Deir Ez-Zor, Homs, Tartous, Qamishli) and Turkey (Gaziantep).

On 19 July, the ETC completed maintenance of the VHF radio network and Security Operations Centre (SOC) equipment in Damascus as part of routine annual maintenance to ensure services are maximized for responders. In partnership with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the ETC has now completed this maintenance activity for all six common operational areas across Syria for 2022.

From 25 May to 20 June, the ETC established VHF radio coverage in Al-Hol camp and the surrounding area, and linked responders in the camp to the UNDSS SOC in Qamishli to improve staff safety. These upgrades were carried out in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and were requested following the latest security assessment in the camp. Further, VHF radio coverage and solar power supporting ETC services were expanded in the Qamishli UN hub.

The ETC is planning to preposition VHF repeater equipment in Syria. The ETC is engaging with WFP FITTEST in the UAE to procure the equipment.

The ETC is working with WFP FITTEST to procure portable power solutions which will be used by interagency staff to power radios, mobile phones, satellite phones, and laptops during field missions, based on the operational needs of the SOCs. MoFA approval to import the equipment has already been received.

The ETC requested a meeting with the Syrian Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (SyTRA) to discuss the status of the Push-To-Talk (PTT) radio devices, which had been held under customs clearance at the border since April 2021 before they were rejected for use in country. SyTRA has indicated a possible revision of this decision, pending the meeting with the ETC. Meanwhile, the ETC has initiated the re-export process. The radios were originally ordered as a replacement for HF radios based on Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} recommendations.

The ETC is following up with UNDSS on the pending MoFA approval for the release of 20 VHF radio devices from Syrian border customs, where the equipment has been held since July 2021. Once received in Syria, the radio devices will be installed in the six UNDSS-managed SOCs to enhance security communications services in Aleppo, Damascus, Deir Ez-Zor, Homs, Qamishli, and Tartous.

### Capacity building

The ETC completed the initial selection process for the planned technical workshop scheduled to take place in October 2022 for inter-agency partners in Syria. Expressions of interest were received from a total of 25 personnel from nine UN agencies. The workshop will boost the technical capacity of ICT responders in Syria.

## Funding

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) contributed US\$250,000 to the ETC operation in Syria in 2022.

With an additional US\$300,000 in funding from the Government of Ireland carried over from 2021, the ETC is fully funded out of the required US\$550,000 to carry out planned maintenance, improvement, and expansion activities in Syria and the surrounding countries in 2022.

## Challenges

Syria is facing a country-wide power crisis which impacts on ETC connectivity services.

The importation of equipment, lack of access to operational areas, and lengthy deployment authorisations from relevant authorities frequently affects the timely implementation of ETC activities across Syria.

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 is restricting staff movement and causing delays in the delivery of critical equipment.

## Meetings

The next Global ETC Joint teleconference will take place on **7 September 2022**.

## Contacts

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

[\*\*www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-conflict\*\*](http://www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-conflict)

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