

Syria – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #58

Reporting period: 01/01/2023 to 28/02/2023

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

Highlights

- Since the Kahramanmaras earthquake which devastated northwest Syria on 6 February, the ETC has been engaging through the local ICT Working Group to identify telecommunications needs for the earthquake response within Syria.
- To support the scale-up of humanitarian activities in Syria, the ETC is prioritizing the establishment of a VHF network in Hama and potential upgrades to its existing data connectivity services in Aleppo and Hama.
- The ETC is also working to upgrade the data connectivity services in the UN hub in Deir Ez-Zor, which have experienced increased instability since the earthquake. On 22 February, Wi-Fi coverage was expanded to cover all floors in the building, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity for staff working in the UN hub.



The ETC installs a satellite phone and docking station in the UNDSS SOC in Damascus. The equipment has now been installed in all six SOCs in Syria.

Photo: WFP/ETC

Activities

Kahramanmaras earthquake

In the early hours of the morning on 6 February, northwest Syria was rocked by two successive earthquakes of 7.8 and 7.7 magnitude. The earthquakes, which struck in Türkiye's Gaziantep province, were felt across Syria and caused devastation in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

Since 2015 the ETC in Syria has supported the UN community in Gaziantep with technical UHF radio support to facilitate cross-border assistance. An Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) response was established in Türkiye on 16 February and is co-led by WFP and the Government of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure to support the response in the areas affected by the multiple earthquakes that struck on 6 February 2023.

Following the earthquakes, the ETC in Syria immediately began engaging with humanitarians on the ground through its ICT Working Group to identify needs for common communications services to support the humanitarian response within Syria.

While an initial rapid ETC assessment found some degradation of the mobile network in the coastal areas of Lattakia and Tartous, the ETC's services in Aleppo, Hama, and Tartous remain operational. The ETC is providing VHF radio security communications services in Aleppo, Lattakia and Tartous, and internet connectivity in two interagency sites in Aleppo and Hama. In order to support increased humanitarian activity in the area following the earthquake, the ETC is prioritizing the deployment of a VHF radio network to provide coverage in rural in Hama. Data connectivity upgrades in Aleppo and Hama are also planned in case additional capacity is required to support the response scale up.

Coordination

A planned mission to Qamishli to assess the ETC services in the UN hub was cancelled due to the prioritization of earthquake response activities. Approval had been received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to conduct the mission from 12 to 15 February.

Data connectivity

The ETC provides internet connectivity services to humanitarians from 18 UN agencies in six sites in Syria (Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Hama, Homs, Qamishli) and is continuing to support existing connectivity services in Gaziantep for cross-border operations, in line with the Whole of Syria approach.

The ETC is prioritizing its plans to upgrade the connectivity services in the UN hub in Aleppo and in the interagency WFP and UNDSS office in Hama in anticipation of increased humanitarian activities in response to the earthquake. The network equipment for these upgrades was received along with the necessary approvals from the authorities in November 2022. The ETC also plans to upgrade connectivity services in the UN hubs in Deir Ez-Zor, Homs, and Qamishli in 2023.

In January, the ETC put together a plan including equipment requirements to upgrade the network infrastructure in Deir Ez-Zor after experiencing issues with the fibre connection. The team had to intervene to restore the ISP connection on 11 January after an outage caused by an equipment failure. Back-up internet services remained operational throughout the outage.

Since the earthquake, issues with the fibre connectivity in the hub have become more frequent. On 6 February, there was an outage of internet connectivity services in the interagency hub due to a broken fibre optic cable. Humanitarians relied on back-up VSAT satellite connectivity until the fibre-optic connectivity was restored that evening. Data connectivity services in the hub again experienced temporary instability from 8 to 9 February due to another broken fibre cable. Humanitarians used the back-up VSAT connectivity link again until the fibre cable was fixed.

The ETC submitted a request to MoFA for approval to transport equipment required to upgrade the network connectivity in the hub from the Damascus warehouse to Deir Ez-Zor. On 22 February, Wi-Fi coverage was expanded to cover all floors in the building, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity for staff working in the UN hub.

The ETC is exploring options with local service providers for the delivery of internet services in Lattakia after several UN agencies indicated interest in establishing a temporary shared office there to support earthquake response activities. No official request has been received at this stage.

On 15 January, a shipment of batteries and inverters for 2023 power maintenance activities was received. The equipment will be used to maintain the power systems supporting ETC services in all UN hubs across Syria.

Security communications

The ETC provides security communications services to 15 UN agencies across six sites in Syria (Aleppo, Damascus, Deir Ez-Zor, Homs, Tartous, Qamishli). ETC Syria is continuing to support security communications services in Gaziantep for cross-border operations in coordination with ETS Türkiye.

In order to support the scale-up of field operations in Syria as a part of the earthquake response, the ETC is planning to establish a VHF radio network in Hama. While central Hama is already partially covered by the radio repeater in nearby Homs, the ETC will extend coverage to further areas in rural Hama with the installation of a new repeater. The ETC is already providing internet connectivity services in the small interagency WFP and UNDSS office there. VHF equipment has been prepared for deployment, and the ETC is in negotiations with the owner of the installation site for permission to install the repeater.

The ETC installed satellite phones and docking stations in UNDSS' Security Operations Centres (SOC) in Qamishli and Homs on 23 and 30 January respectively. All six UNDSS-managed SOCs in Syria—Deir Ezzor, Aleppo, Tartous, Damascus, Qamishli and Homs—are now equipped with the new equipment and external antenna.

Portable solar power solutions procured by the ETC on behalf of UNDSS were cleared from customs and inspected by the ETC team. The 12 devices, which will support communications for interagency missions across Syria, were handed over to UNDSS in Damascus on 9 February and will be distributed to the six SOCs.

In 2023, the ETC is planning to build a contingency stock of VHF repeaters in Syria. The ETC received approval from MoFA to import the repeaters and is waiting for the final approval from the Council of Ministries. A new Note Verbale (NV) was submitted to MoFA to amend the technical specifications of the VHF repeaters as the previously specified VHF repeater model is no longer available on the market.

The VHF and HF frequency licenses have been renewed for all UN agencies across Syria for 2023.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of service locations.

Funding

The ETC has identified a funding requirement of USD 500,000 to cover its operations in Syria in 2023.

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) contributed USD 181,000 to the ETC operation in Syria in 2023.

With this grant, as well as funding carried over from contributions from BHA and the Government of Ireland in 2022, the ETC has met 58% of its funding requirement for 2023.

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.

Access to the earthquake-affected areas in northwest Syria is a significant challenge for the overall humanitarian response.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Joint teleconference will take place on **23 March 2023**.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
Atmaja Sembiring	ETC Coordinator	Damascus, Syria	Atmaja.sembiring@wfp.org
Claire Roach	Information Management Officer	Dubai, UAE	Claire.roach@wfp.org

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

www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-conflict

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

Syria.ETC@wfp.org