

## Syria – Conflict

### ETC Situation Report #67: July – August

Reporting period: 01/07/2024 to 31/08/2024

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

## Highlights

- The ETC collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP) to successfully test all ICT telecommunications devices currently in use and in stock as part of emergency preparedness activities.
- On 22 August, Global ETC and ETC Syria discussed the Middle East ICT preparedness scale-up exercise that includes Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon amid the escalation of tensions in the region.
- The ETC continues to collaborate with the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) to enable HF radio communications between UNHAS aircrafts and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS)-managed Security Operations Centres (SOCs) to enhance travel safety and boost operational efficiency.



The ETC installs a VHF repeater at the WFP warehouse in Aleppo to enhance secure communications. Photo: WFP/ETC

## Activities

### Coordination

On 04 July, the ETC collaborated with WFP to successfully test all satellite phones, Very High Frequency (VHF), and High Frequency (HF) radio communications devices currently in use and in stock as part of emergency preparedness activities.

On 02 August, the ETC successfully relocated the alternate UN Crisis Coordination Centre (CCC) equipment to the new WFP meeting room at the UN hub in Damascus, which accommodates all UN international staff.

On 22 August, Global ETC and ETC Syria discussed the Middle East ICT preparedness scale-up exercise that includes Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon amid the escalation of tensions in the region. The coordinator confirmed that no additional ICT equipment is currently needed, as all essential equipment stock is in place at the WFP Damascus warehouse.

The ETC participated in the ICT Working Group (WG) meeting conducted on 13 August and updated partners on the telecommunications readiness of equipment and systems for all VHF radio repeaters in Syria to be operated as part of the Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) planned to be set up in Damascus in partnership with UNDSS and [{TESS+}](#).

Due to the security situation in Deir Ezzor<sup>1</sup>, the cluster postponed the ETC annual service maintenance mission from August to October, with the expectation that the security situation will have improved.

### Security communications

#### HF radio

On 21 July, the cluster received approval from the Syrian Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SYTRA) to use HF radio licenses for communication between the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) aircrafts and the UNDSS-managed SOCs to enhance travel safety and boost operational efficiency. Despite multiple HF network adjustments and tests from 08 to 26 August, communication between the UNHAS aircrafts and the HF radio base in the Damascus SOC continues to experience issues related to interference in key cities, thereby hindering secure radio communications for the safety of traveling humanitarians. The ETC and UNHAS continue to troubleshoot the issue and alternatively considering requesting government approval to use secure AirBand frequency, which will require the importation of ICT equipment for use within the frequency.

The ETC re-aligned the HF antenna and replaced the radio frequency unit of the HF radio system in the SOC in Damascus as part of ongoing improvements to the radio signal quality.

On 08 July, the ETC supported the Tartous SOC by providing essential IT and telecoms equipment and critical solar power solution to boost the operational efficiency in the location.

#### VHF radio

Following mission authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the ETC has successfully conducted multiple missions that includes; telecommunications equipment and solar power system maintenance in Aleppo from 15 to 18 July; VHF network repeater link restoration in Al-Hol camp; and a SOC maintenance mission in Al Qamishli on 22 July.

On 24 July, the ETC received approval from MoFA to import new VHF equipment and accessories. The equipment is part of the ETC's plan to enhance and link the VHF radio networks across all common operational areas in Syria and boost secure communications for staff.

The ETC is importing additional VHF equipment (related to the RSOC) as strategic stock. The ETC shared the network details for all VHF radio repeater sites in Syria to {TESS+} as part of the plan to establish the RSOC based in Damascus, in line with the Middle East regional ICT preparedness scale-up. {TESS+} confirmed the technical readiness of all VHF repeaters to be operated as full RSOC or in hybrid mode. The cluster now awaits endorsement of the latest {TESS+} recommendations from the Security Management Team (SMT) and the UN Resident Coordinator.

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<sup>1</sup> [press.un.org/en/2024/sc15802.doc.htm](https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15802.doc.htm)

Following a report on 05 August, the ETC resolved an issue with the 5kW inverter for the solar power solution in the Aleppo SOC on 07 August. Further, the ETC will send an additional back-up inverter to minimize down time caused by hardware issues. The cluster also programmed two VHF handheld for the UN Security Guard—one in each of Aleppo and Deir-Ezzor.

On 07 August, the ETC received a verbal approval from SYTRA to relocate the VHF radio repeater to the new location in Hama. The equipment is prepared, and the cluster will install the repeater at the new site once final approval from the authorities is issued.

### Data connectivity

The ETC continues to provide internet connectivity services to 300+ humanitarians from 15 UN agencies across eight operational sites in Syria.

The ETC is following up with UNICEF—the partner agency that provides VSAT connectivity services in the UN hub in Deir Ezzor—as currently the VSAT is down due to a hardware issue. UNICEF is arranging an Internet Service Provider (ISP) field engineer mission to Deir Ezzor once approval from the authorities is received.

## Dashboard

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

## Funding

In 2024, the ETC requires funding of US\$465,000 to maintain and expand services in eight common operational areas across Syria and Türkiye.

The cluster is currently 54% funded out of the required US\$465,000. In February, USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) confirmed funding of US\$200,000 for ETC activities in 2024. Additionally, the ETC carried over US\$50,000 in funding from 2023.

The ETC will start exploring transition of ETC services and activities as of 2025. The cluster is optimizing its planned activities until the end of the year to match the current funding level.

## Challenges

The ongoing power crisis across Syria continued to pose significant challenges and impact the ETC's ability to maintain continuous services.

Moreover, the Syrian telecommunications standards have affected the importation and usage of communication equipment which means there is need for constant adaptation to changes as well as flexible response strategies.

The operation faces ongoing lengthy equipment importation challenges and the need for successful applications for authorizations from relevant authorities to move equipment. This can affect the timely implementation of ETC activities across Syria.

The escalating tension in the Middle East region poses a threat to the delivery of cluster services needs to humanitarian responders. The ETC has commenced ICT emergency preparedness activities in case the current situation worsens.

## 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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