

Cox's Bazar – Refugee Crisis

ETS Situation Report #38

Reporting period 01/10/2021 to 31/10/2021

Following the increased needs to support the humanitarian efforts in response to the Rohingya crisis, World Food Programme (WFP), in its capacity as global lead of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), is supporting the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) by addressing common Information and Communication Technology (ICT) needs. Through the establishment of the Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS), WFP and its partners ensure a coordinated ICT response and support to those working on the provision of life-saving assistance to the affected populations.

Highlights

- On 27 October, the Local ETS Working Group meeting was held which was attended by 17 participants from across eight organizations to discuss operational needs, input ideas for programming, and discuss the 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP).
- Two additional sites were added to the ETS data connectivity network after connecting two new WFP Nutrition sites – this brings the total number of ETS connectivity sites up to 38.
- The ETS is engaging in the development of the 2022 JRP and has submitted inputs to the process.



*Installing visibility items in ETS connectivity sites.
Photo: WFP/ETS*

ETS Activities

Coordination

- On 27 October, the ETS hosted the local ETS Working Group meeting. Invites were sent out to both existing and new organizations and working group members to attend. 17 participants from eight organizations attended to discuss ETS activities and needs, the 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP), and to give updates from their organizations and input their ideas on ETS programming. The next meeting is scheduled to be held in mid-November to continue reviewing and providing inputs to the JRP.

Data connectivity

- In 2021, the ETS has provided data connectivity services to a total of 496 users from 11 NGOs and five UN agencies.



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- The ETS team worked with the WFP IT team to connect two WFP Nutrition sites to the ETS network. These two sites are now fully operational, bringing the total number of ETS sites up to 38 sites across three operational areas – Cox’s Bazar, Teknaf, and Ukhiya.
 - In October, 29 site visits were conducted throughout the operational areas to rapidly resolve issues with connectivity, power outages, equipment damages, fibre cuts, and other identified challenges.
 - The ETS team is working on remote facilitation and support with site focal points and staff to build capacity in troubleshooting connectivity issues. This activity will enable the ETS team to assist remotely in these sites, when needed. The ETS has developed a guideline of questions that can help diagnose problems remotely and instructions on how to resolve them. Since then, the team has provided remote support in four sites.
 - In Block D5 in the camps, the ETS team improved connectivity in an e-voucher site and WFP Fresh Food Corner by rerouting a new cable to the site.
 - The team conducted a site survey for Camp 9 Bulukhali 2 for a new e-voucher outlet to be connected to the ETS network, once construction works are completed.
 - Throughout October, the ETS disseminated 23 instant messages to notify site focal points and service users of outages and connections, as well as issuing regular updates to keep operations informed.
 - The ETS Helpdesk received and is working to resolve a total of 47 ticket requests for assistance in October. These requests involved user management (13), maintenance requests (15), Internet Service Provider (ISP) issues (9), and incidents (10).
 - To increase visibility in the camps, the team installed ETS flags in several sites while on site visits, with 16 sites now having ETS visibility on display.

Security communications

- In October, ETS security communications services were provided to 959 UN staff members (185 international staff and 774 national staff) through the management of the radio network for 11 UN agencies.
- A total of 8,868 calls were made on VHF handheld radios using the ETS radio network in October, with an average of 295 calls per day throughout the month.
- VHF radio tests were performed twice throughout the month and both had satisfactory results.
- The ETS took an inventory of the telecommunications equipment and emergency communications kits to utilize for security communications activities going forward.
- Planning and documentation began to implement capacity building activities for radio use and telecommunications. These capacity building sessions will begin in the coming months.
- The ETS is currently conducting assessments on the feasibility of using local telecommunications towers already in place in and around the camps for the ETS network, as there remain challenges in importing new telecommunications towers for ETS utilization.



Planning

- With a revised goal of a total of 55 connectivity sites by the end of the year, the ETS is revisiting needs assessments conducted for connectivity in the camps. The ETS will continue these assessments in the next month and follow up on identified needs by visiting sites and contacting organizations and agencies working in the camps to evaluate the need for data connectivity through network expansion.
- The ETS worked with the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) throughout the month to contribute to the Bangladesh Joint Response Plan (JRP) for 2022. The team will continue working with ISCG and partners throughout the rest of the year to finalize the plan.
- The ETS continued its collaboration with IOM throughout October, deciding to use Camp 18 as a relay point for ETS data coverage in Ukhiya. The ETS will now follow up on the implementation to expand the coverage across the camps.

Challenges

- There are continued delays in obtaining approval for VHF and microwave frequencies, to import telecommunications towers, and to import and utilize VSAT and satellite phones. The ETS continues to seek these approvals, which will be utilized to expand the network.
- Additional delays in obtaining approval to use the services of ISPs in the camps has delayed expansion of the ETS network. In the meantime, the ETS is seeking alternative solutions.
- New challenges with the security telecommunications network were experienced throughout October, with reports from users of no or low VHF coverage in areas of Teknaf. The ETS is examining whether work can be carried out to expand and improve the coverage of the network in that area.
- A VHF channel was reported as inoperable – staff are instead utilizing a backup VHF channel. The ETS is working with UNDSS to resolve equipment issues that may be causing the problem.

Funding

- The total annual budget for the ETS in Bangladesh for 2021 is US\$3.9 million. In addition to the carry-over from 2020, a total funding of US\$1,100,514.65 has been received this year from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the US Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA).

Key Information

- All information on the ETS response in Cox's Bazar can be found [here](#).
- For further information or to contact the team on the ground, please email Bangladesh.ETS@wfp.org



Meetings

- The next Global ETC joint teleconference will take place on **17 November 2021**.

Contacts

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