Lebanon – Beirut Port Explosions

ETS Situation Report #2

Reporting period 14/08/2020 to 25/08/2020

The ETS in Lebanon left the operation on 25 August. This is the final SitRep for the ETS response to the Beirut Port explosions.

Highlights

The ETS Coordinator carried out an assessment of connectivity needs for affected communities in Karantina and Mar Mikhaël with assistance from Ericsson Response and UNDAC on 12 August.

Photo: WFP/ETS

- An ETS Coordinator deployed to Beirut on 11 August, following a request for ETS services by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).

- Following initial assessments carried out with partners from 11-12 August, the ETS submitted a three-point response plan to the Flash Appeal on 14 August.

- A second assessment of Beirut Port on 17 August confirmed that data connectivity has been re-established and therefore ETS services are no longer required.

- The need for the provision of mobile data packages for the worst-affected communities has not been confirmed by the humanitarian community and will therefore not go ahead.

- A request has been sent to the Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS) team to conduct a country assessment of security telecommunications systems.

- As ETS services are no longer required at this point, it was agreed by the HCT on 21 August that the ETS will demobilize. The ETS operation in Lebanon is now closed and the ETS Coordinator is leaving the country on 25 August.

Situation Overview

On 4 August, a warehouse at the Beirut Port containing large quantities of ammonium nitrate exploded. After an initial explosion, a subsequent blast caused widespread damage around the port area. Over 180 people were killed and an additional 6,000 people were injured. Severe structural damage was reported at the port and surrounding commercial and residential neighbourhoods, leaving an estimated 300,000 without homes.

The ETC is a global network of organizations that work together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies.

COVID-19 cases have continued to rise following the explosions. The Beirut Port explosions occurred amid an ongoing economic crisis, worsening the security situation and socio-economic vulnerability of the population.

ETS Response

- Following a request for Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) services by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) on 8 August, the ETS deployed a Coordinator on 11 August to initiate local coordination with partners and national operators, engage with the Emergency Operation Cell (EOC) and to assess the initial communications needs of the response community and affected population.

- The ETS completed its first series of assessments from 11-12 August with support from UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), NetHope and Ericsson Response. The initial assessments confirmed communications needs in three areas:

    1. Provision of temporary data connectivity in Beirut Port until the services of national operators are fully recovered;

    2. Offer subsidized mobile data packages for the most affected communities to enable access to information and humanitarian assistance and;

    3. Strengthen security communications networks in Beirut to support the safety and security of the response community amid an escalating security situation.

- The need for technology services in these three areas to support the response were outlined in the first draft of the Lebanon Port Explosions Flash Appeal, launched by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 14 August.

- A second connectivity assessment conducted in Beirut Port on 17 August confirmed that data connectivity has been restored by national operators and therefore temporary ETS connectivity services are no longer required.

- The ETS – alongside the World Food Programme (WFP) as the local lead agency of the ETS, and the EOC – re-assessed the second two communications requirements identified by the ETS in the Flash Appeal to support the response to the Beirut Port explosions:

  - The provision of mobile data packages for affected communities will not be implemented as the response community has not confirmed the need for this service.

  - Security communications systems are urgently required to ensure a backup system is in place to support the safety and security of humanitarians operating in a volatile security situation. Assessments confirmed that improvements to security telecommunications systems should be expanded beyond the capital of Beirut to the whole of Lebanon. Following recommendations from the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), a request was sent to the Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS) team to initiate a country assessment as soon as possible. The implementation of any recommendations from the assessment mission will be taken to the HCT and the country Security Management Team (SMT) for discussion and planning.

- Following the decisions made on the three areas of the proposed ETS response, it was recommended to demobilize the ETS for the response to the Beirut Port explosions. The EOC agreed with this proposal and the HCT confirmed the decision on 22 August. The ETS Coordinator in Lebanon is concluding its activities and will leave the operation on 25 August.

- The ETC remains on standby to support future humanitarian activities in Lebanon, should the need arise.

Information

- All the information related to the ETS response in Lebanon can be found on the dedicated emergency page on the ETS website: https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/lebanon-beirut-port-explosions

Contacts

Lebanon.ETS@wfp.org

Prakash Muniandy, ETS Coordinator in Lebanon
Prakash.muniandy@wfp.org

Elizabeth Millership, ETS Information Management Officer
Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org