

Libya – Conflict [FINAL]

ETS Situation Report #34

Reporting period: Activation to 30/06/2022

Since activation in October 2018, the Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) in Libya has responded with government, private sector, and humanitarian partners on the ground to ensure a coordinated response to the ICT needs of the conflict emergency. The ETS transitioned its services to partners in June 2022. This is the final situation report.

Highlights

- Nearly four years since activation, the ETS in Libya transitioned its services and activities to partners in June 2022. This decision follows the extension of the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to the end of 2022, and the consumption of all ETS funding for the completion of its HRP activities.
- The ETS enhanced the safety of humanitarian personnel in Libya over the course of its operation through the establishment of a Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Benghazi supported by a VHF radio network, and the implementation of upgrades to the country's security communications network in line with Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} recommendations.
- The ETS also impacted the affected population in Libya through the provision of internet connectivity services at the UNHCR Community Day Centre in Tripoli and through the establishment and management of Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM). Over 68,000 cases have been registered through the CFM, reducing barriers to people seeking assistance and enhancing the accountability of the humanitarian response. The CFM will continue to operate in Libya under WFP management.



The Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) service in Tripoli has transitioned to partner WFP Libya. Photo: WFP/ETS

Response Overview

The downfall of the Libyan regime in 2011 was followed by years of escalating violence and instability, and growing numbers of displaced Libyans. The ETS was activated in Libya in October 2018 following an ICT assessment mission conducted by the Global Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) in May of that year, which found a clear need for reliable security communications and internet connectivity services to bolster the humanitarian response capacity across the country.

After its activation, the ETS supported the initial setup of internet connectivity, customer support services, and a Security Operations Centre (SOC) in the UN hub in Benghazi which was handed over to UNDSS in 2019. In 2021, the ETS provided further support with the improvement of the security communications infrastructure to enhance the safety of humanitarian personnel operating in the country, notably with the establishment of a VHF radio network in Benghazi in February.

The ETS also expanded its portfolio of services offered to the affected population, with the provision of internet connectivity to persons of concern at a UNHCR Community Day Centre and an interagency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) call centre and chatbot. In March 2020, the call centre was able to quickly pivot to providing information on the COVID-19 virus in cooperation with Libya's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

When the inter-agency community decided to extend the 2021 Libya Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to the end of 2022, the ETS revised its requirements of the operation in Libya. The ETS' main activity was its support to the CFM, which was already planned to be transitioned to partners through long-term cost sharing arrangements. Furthermore, the ETS received only 18 percent of funding to carry on coordination and CFM provision until the end of the year. No other ICT gaps were further identified. As a result, the decision was made to hand over the ETS's existing services to its partners in Libya and deactivate the sector by mid-year. The ETS worked with its partners to phase out its activities and ensure the continued operation of the CFM call centre and the ongoing work to improve security communications in the country.

ETS Activities

Security communications

When the ETS was activated, the main security communications network available to humanitarians in Libya was the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) network owned and maintained by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). In July 2019, the ETS submitted a request to the Libyan Ministry of Telecommunications for a VHF license on behalf of the humanitarian community. The license request was granted in August 2020 after a year of consistent efforts, and in February 2021, the ETS installed a VHF network in the SOC established by the ETS in the UN hub in Benghazi in June 2019, during the sector's first year of activation in Libya. The ETS recruited radio operators and local telecommunications assistants to support the security communications network.

In November 2021, the Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} team sent a specialist to Libya to assess the security communications infrastructure for humanitarians in the country. The ETS supported the inter-agency adoption of VHF radio as the security communications system to be used in Libya, as recommended by {TESS+}. This decision was made to ensure all radio equipment used by the humanitarian community is accessible and compatible.

A project to rehabilitate VHF radio infrastructure in Benghazi to strengthen security communications for humanitarians is ongoing. Approval has been granted by the Telecommunications Authority to import a VHF repeater and handheld radios from WFP

FITTEST in the UAE to equip the SOC in Benghazi – the shipment has been received in Benghazi. A {TESS+} mission is being planned to assist the rehabilitation. WFP will continue these efforts going forwards, as well as take over from the ETS in supporting the relocation of the UNDSS VHF repeater in Tripoli to a permanent location.

Over the course of its activation in Libya, the ETS also supported the humanitarian community by providing radio programming services and liaising with the Ministry of Telecommunications on behalf of NGOs and UN agencies to obtain licenses for the importation and use of satellite and radio telecommunications equipment.

Common Feedback Mechanism

To enable affected communities to access critical information about the services and assistance available to them, and to improve the accountability and efficiency of the humanitarian response in Libya, the ETS established a hotline that served as an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) in February 2020. The hotline, launched with support from the Government of Luxembourg, was promoted under the name “Tawasul”, meaning “communication” in Arabic.

Soon after its launch, the ETS received a request from the Ministry of Health’s National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to use the hotline as a nationwide COVID-19 information channel. The ETS responded by training its operators to provide critical information and public health guidelines to the population, raising awareness about the virus and measures people can take to prevent infection. From March 2020, the hotline handled over 7,500 cases related to COVID-19.

Since the hotline’s launch in February 2020, 68,795 cases related to humanitarian assistance were received. The number of people contacting the hotline grew steadily from a few hundred a month to a peak of 8,118 cases in June 2022. Protection issues have consistently been the most common category of concern raised by callers, accounting for 30-40% of calls, while Cash-Based Interventions, Food Security, and Shelter and Non-Food Items were among the other leading concerns of callers. The vast majority of calls were received from refugees in the western part of the country. Over the course of its management of the CFM, the ETS worked to expand access to the hotline by hiring multilingual operators who were able to respond to cases in six languages.

In addition to serving as a means for affected communities to seek information about humanitarian services, the CFM allows people to provide feedback on the assistance they receive. This makes it a valuable tool for humanitarian organizations to better understand the needs of the communities they serve and to increase their accountability to the affected population.

The ETS handed over the management of the CFM service to WFP Libya in June 2022. As part of the transition process, technical training on the customer relationship management system integrated into the CFM was delivered to WFP in Libya on 16 May. This built the capacity of WFP Libya to continue the service.

In November 2021, the ETS launched a Chatbot to serve as an additional channel providing information about humanitarian assistance in English and Arabic to complement the CFM hotline. The chatbot, which was made available on Telegram, provided automated answers

to frequently asked questions about COVID-19 and humanitarian services in English and Arabic. Following an impact analysis, it was decided to deactivate the Chatbot as part of the transition of CFM services to WFP.

Internet connectivity

In April 2019, the ETS established a satellite link in the UN hub in Benghazi, which was later transferred to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) connection and handed over to the UN hub in a cost recovery agreement. The ETS also supported the recruitment of staff to establish an IT helpdesk service for the Benghazi hub.

At the request of UNHCR, the ETS began providing a free-of-charge internet connectivity service to Persons of Concern (POC) including refugees, returnees, stateless people, the internally displaced, and asylum seekers at the UNHCR Community Day Centre (CDC) in Tripoli in July 2020.

In 2021, the service was used by 352 POCs in a total of 3,041 sessions until the CDC's eventual permanent closure in November for security reasons.

Funding

Over the course of the ETS' activation in Libya, OCHA's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Government of Luxembourg, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UN Reform Critical Corporate Initiatives (CCI), and WFP all contributed funding to support ETS activities.

At the time of service transition in June 2022, the ETS had received 18% of the required funding for the ETC project captured in the 2021 HRP (which was extended to the end of 2022). All funds received were spent.

Challenges

A consistent lack of funding for the Libya operation and ETS activities limited the ability of the ETS to expand and maintain services in Libya.

Over the course of the ETS operation in Libya, the volatile security environment and political instability posed an ongoing challenge to the implementation and maintenance of ETS services. Limitations on movement in the south of the country proved challenging.

Restrictions on the importation of radio and satellite equipment and difficulties in obtaining licenses for the use of telecommunications equipment and devices remained a challenge throughout the course of the operation.

Further information related to the ETS Libya operation can be found on the website:
www.etcluster.org/emergencies/libya-crisis