

# Interagency Emergency ICT Sector response in the Tigray region of Ethiopia

## Situation Report #1

Reporting period 03/03/2021 to 31/03/2021

The ICT Emergency Cell – launched in February 2021 – leads the interagency emergency ICT sectoral response in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Situation Reports will be distributed in line with the evolving situation on the ground.

### Highlights

- The ICT Emergency Cell was endorsed by the Operational Management Team (OMT) in November 2020 and launched in February 2021 to coordinate and address IT and communications gaps in the response to the crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.
- Following a series of requests sent by the ICT Emergency Cell, the national authorities approved the re-activation of Internet connectivity for the offices of UN agencies and a number of INGOs in Mekelle and Shire to support the humanitarian response.
- To support the safety and security of humanitarian personnel operating in and around Mekelle, the ICT Emergency Cell set up and operationalized a Security Operations Centre (SOC).



UNHCR's IT Emergency Coordinator leads the IT assessment mission in Mekelle in March 2021.

Photo: UNHCR/Rami Shakra

### Situation Overview

The humanitarian crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is in its fifth month since the conflict erupted between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the country's northern Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on 4 November 2020. The humanitarian situation across the region continues to rapidly deteriorate.

Out of a total population of over 5.7 million people, an estimated 5.2 million people are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. The conflict has led to thousands of civilians fleeing across the border to Sudan. The humanitarian situation across the region remains deeply insecure and concerning for internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities.



At the beginning of the crisis, all communications services were shut down in the Tigray region. The region also faces major power cuts. The connectivity and power blackouts continue to disrupt the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

On 3 March, the Government of Ethiopia granted approval for humanitarians to operate in the Tigray region, although access to some locations remains a challenge due to the ongoing security situation.

## ICT Emergency Cell Activities

### *Coordination*

- Access to communications services remains a challenge for humanitarian responders across the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The ICT Emergency Cell was endorsed by the Operational Management Team (OMT) in November 2020 and launched in February 2021 to coordinate and address IT and communications gaps in the response to the crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The ICT Emergency Cell membership – IOM, OCHA, UNDSS, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP – has been led by UNHCR since it was established. The ICT Emergency Cell is operating under the response led by the Government of Ethiopia and coordinated by the UN.

### *Assessment*

- UNHCR's IT Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) deployed to Ethiopia in March 2021 to coordinate the provision of common ICT services. An assessment mission was carried out in Addis Ababa and Mekelle to identify the ICT needs of the operation. Following the assessment, three priority locations were identified in the Tigray region – Mekelle, Shire and Embamadre.

### *Internet connectivity*

- The ICT Emergency Cell prioritized efforts to re-establish the Internet connectivity services shut down by national authorities since November 2020. Following a series of requests sent by the ICT Emergency Cell, the national authorities approved the re-activation of Internet connectivity for the offices of UN agencies and a number of INGOs in Mekelle and Shire to support the humanitarian response coordinated from these locations.

### *Security communications*

- Provision of security communications services is a high priority due to the volatile security situation in the Tigray region and the increasing volume of humanitarian responders supporting the operation.
- The ICT Emergency Cell set up a Security Operations Centre (SOC) in the UNICEF office in Mekelle. HF/VHF services in the SOC are supported by UNICEF and WFP. Security communications equipment to operationalize the SOC has been provided by UNHCR. Two UNDSS radio operators deployed to the SOC on 29 March. The security communications services provided by the SOC are available to UN personnel.



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## Planning

- The ICT Emergency Cell is planning to set up a second SOC in the UNHCR office in Shire. A UNHCR radio operator in Shire will be joined by a second UNDSS radio operator, once the SOC infrastructure has been set up. Available HF/VHF services in Shire require maintenance before being utilized as part of the SOC services. A solar power solution will be installed in the SOC to mitigate the impact of power cuts. A joint UNDSS/UNHCR technical assessment is planned to complete the maintenance activities required to set up the SOC in Shire.
- The ICT Emergency Cell is exploring the option of setting up a SOC in a third location – Embamadre – which hosts members of the humanitarian community due to its proximity to refugee camps in Adi Harush and Mai Aini.
- A WFP ICT Coordinator and Information Management Officer (IMO) will travel to Ethiopia in April to support the interagency emergency ICT sector response in Tigray, following a seven-day self-isolation period in Addis Ababa.
- UNHCR is working with its partners and the ICT Emergency Cell to provide access to dedicated Internet connectivity for partners in Mekelle, Shire and Embamadre.

## Funding

- WFP has been allocated US\$185,000 to initiate interagency emergency ICT coordination and continue to provide critical communications services in three common operational locations for three months.

## Challenges

- Frequent power cuts across the Tigray region are impacting on the delivery of ICT services.
- Lengthy approval processes to import and operate communications equipment is a challenge.
- The security situation in Tigray remains volatile, impacting on access to the region or certain locations.

## Contacts

Rami Shakra, UNHCR Senior IT Emergency Coordination Officer

[shakrar@unhcr.org](mailto:shakrar@unhcr.org)

Abdalla Khalil, UNHCR Senior IT Service Delivery Management Officer

[khalila@unhcr.org](mailto:khalila@unhcr.org)

Ivan Thomas, IT Operations Manager

[ivan.thomas@wfp.org](mailto:ivan.thomas@wfp.org)

Elizabeth Millership, WFP Information Management Officer (IMO)

[elizabeth.millership@wfp.org](mailto:elizabeth.millership@wfp.org)

## Interagency Emergency ICT Sector Response Map

