

Interagency Emergency ICT Sector response in the Tigray region of Ethiopia

Situation Report #2

Reporting period 01/04/2021 to 30/04/2021

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 operationalized a Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Shire from 15-16 April meaning there are now two SOC's located in Mekelle and Shire to support the safety and security of UN responders.
- Following COVID-19-related restrictions, the deployments of the WFP ICT Coordinator and Information Management Officer (IMO) were delayed. They will now deploy to Ethiopia on 3 May to support and strengthen the activities of the ICT Emergency Cell.
- The team continues to follow up on the importation of urgently needed communications equipment into Ethiopia to support the response in Tigray.



A UNHCR radio operator receives radio communication at the newly opened Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Shire.

Photo: UNHCR

Situation Overview

The humanitarian crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia continues to deteriorate since conflict erupted in November 2020. Over 90 percent of the population are estimated to need emergency humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian partners continue the scale-up effort to reach all people in need in Tigray. However, the complex and unpredictable security situation is impacting on humanitarian movement. The response community continue to flag challenges with capacity and resources – including access to communications – to be able to scale up to the level needed to respond across Tigray.

Nearly six months into the conflict, affected communities in the most rural areas remain cut off from communications and power.



ICT Emergency Cell Activities

Coordination

- The ICT Emergency Cell – coordinated by UNHCR – continues to lead the inter-agency emergency ICT response in the Tigray region of Ethiopia to address gaps in IT and security communications.
- A WFP ICT Coordinator and Information Management Officer (IMO) are expected to arrive in Ethiopia on 3 May to support and strengthen the activities of the Cell, following delays caused by COVID-19-related restrictions.

Equipment

- The Cell continues to update each other on the process to import and use communications equipment in country. Several UN agencies have submitted requests for additional operational equipment in line with the guidelines provided by the Ethiopian Communications Authority (ECA).

Security communications

- Provision of security communications services remains a high priority due to the volatile security situation in the Tigray region and the increasing number of humanitarian responders supporting the operation.
- The Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Shire was operationalized by the ICT Emergency Cell from 15-16 April. The SOC is managed by UNDSS and staffed by two SOC operators from UNHCR and UNDSS. A solar power solution will be installed in the SOC to mitigate the impact of power cuts.
 - UNDSS is planning to hire additional SOC operators to scale up the operating hours of the SOC in Shire to 24/7 services. Currently, it is only possible to staff the SOC from 7:00-18:00, in line with curfew hours.
- There are now two SOCs operating in Mekelle and Shire to support the safety and security of responders. The team continues to optimize security communications services in both SOCs.
- The security communications services provided by the SOC are available to UN personnel.

Planning

- The ICT Emergency Cell is preparing to implement a security communications harmonization project to ensure telecommunications infrastructure used by UN agencies – including in vehicles and offices – is optimized for use by UN staff across eight sites in the Tigray region. The harmonization project will be expanded to additional locations once the pilot phase is complete.
- The Cell is engaging in planning – led by the Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) – to prepare for a possible further escalation of tension in the lead up to the general election being held in Ethiopia on 5 June. The elections were postponed in 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Cell planning activities include ensuring the SOCs are fully operational and mapping available connectivity services to ensure reliable means of communications are in place.



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- The Cell is assessing the needs of UN agencies and INGOs on the ground – through coordination with OCHA – to identify areas where additional support can enable humanitarian activities, if required.

Funding

- WFP has submitted a CERF funding request of US\$502,772 to provide ICT coordination and services for three months in support of the humanitarian response plan for Tigray. This will ensure the team can provide dedicated support and resources for the planned activities currently supported by the ICT Emergency Cell.
- WFP has allocated US\$185,000 in advance funds to initiate interagency emergency ICT coordination and Information Management (IM) support until funding is secured.

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.

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Interagency Emergency ICT Sector Response Map

