Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #10
Reporting period: 27/12/2023 to 02/01/2024

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated for the conflict crisis in Gaza on 31 October 2023. Situation Reports are published weekly.

Highlights

- Following a shutdown of the telecommunications and internet services in Gaza on 26 December, services were gradually restored to all areas of Gaza starting on 27 December.

- The United Nations (UN) appointed the new Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) ad interim—Jamie McGoldrick—who arrived in Jerusalem on 29 December to take up his duties. The HC visited Gaza from 31 December to 02 January to familiarize and be aware of the humanitarian realities on the ground.

- The ETC and its partners continues to actively engage with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent, efficient, and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders. The ETC has requested a follow up meeting with COGAT during the week ending 06 January to discuss the pending approval status.

Buildings, telecommunications, and power infrastructure have been destroyed in Gaza due to the ongoing conflict. Photo: UNICEF/ Hassan Islyeh.

Situation overview

The UN appointed the new Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) *ad interim*—Jamie McGoldrick—who arrived in Jerusalem on 29 December to take up his duties. This follows the departure of Lynn Hastings. The HC visited Gaza from 31 December to 02 January to familiarize and be aware of the humanitarian realities on the ground.

On 02 January, heavy bombardments from air, land, and sea, and intense ground operations between Israeli forces and Hamas armed groups continued across most of the Gaza Strip. Ground battles are being reported in the refugee camps in central Gaza and the southern town of Khan Younis, and heavy strikes are reported in Gaza city.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 1.9 million people in Gaza—nearly 90% of the population—are estimated to be internally displaced, including people who have been displaced multiple times as families are forced to move repeatedly in search of safety.

Over 60% of infrastructure in Gaza has been destroyed or damaged.

Following a decision from the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the second and current version of the Flash Appeal has been extended until the end of March with no changes to the funding request.

Telecommunications overview

Following a shutdown of the telecommunications and internet services in Gaza on 26 December, services were gradually restored to all areas of Gaza from 27 December. According to the telecommunications provider—Paltel—nine blackouts lasting 24 hours or longer have occurred since the onset of conflict on 07 October. The frequent disruption in communications, along with intensified hostilities, insecurity, blocked roads, and scarcity of fuel pose significant challenges to humanitarian operations.

Humanitarian agencies and first responders have warned that telecommunications blackouts jeopardize the already constrained provision of life-saving assistance. Some humanitarian agencies are relying on their independent connectivity platforms or the local infrastructure for access to telecommunications services. It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization from the authorities to set up independent and reliable shared services for telecommunications to ensure coordinated humanitarian service delivery to the population of Gaza.

Electricity to charge devices is limited in certain areas that have generators and solar power solutions. Other locations are completely without power since the shutdown of Gaza's sole power plant by Israeli authorities on 11 October.

The Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications and the Ministry of Interior have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to advance the 911 core infrastructure[1] with support from the World Bank in both the West Bank and Gaza.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC operation in Gaza continues with the ETC Coordinator supporting remotely while the Deputy Coordinator is based in Cairo. Both members of staff await the issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

A WFP FITTEST[2] ICT Specialist deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December for ETC technical engagements with other humanitarians and relevant authorities and is scheduled to proceed to Gaza on 08 January. Deployment to Gaza is part of the ETC response for ICT information gathering, rapid situation assessment, and to quantify the state of available telecommunications equipment on the ground, if possible.

On 29 December, the ETC attended the Palestine national Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). The ETC presented on past activities, planning, and current challenges for submission to the newly appointed HC.

Equipment importation

---

[1] 911 core infrastructure enables the population to call 911 for help in emergency situations.
[2] WFP Fast Information Technology & Telecommunications Emergency Support Team

Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC)   www.ETCluster.org

The ETC and its partners continues to actively engage with the COGAT for authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent, efficient, and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders. The ETC has requested a follow up meeting with COGAT during the week ending 06 January to discuss the pending approval status.

To date, only 20 Iridium satellite phones—purchased from Israeli telecommunications service provider Gilat Telecom—have been authorized for import into Gaza. The phones are being managed by the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) for issuance to UN agencies to support critical field missions across Gaza. On 31 December, the ETC requested Gilat Telecom to provide the consumption report for the 20 satellite phone devices to track current usage.

Telephony

Following COGAT's authorization and proposal to the UN agencies to procure Cellcom (Israeli Mobile Network Operator) SIM cards for use by humanitarian staff in Gaza, the ETC is consolidating a list of agencies who are interested in using the service and tabulating the quantity of required SIM cards. The use of Cellcom SIM cards is technically cleared by Shabak—the Israeli national security agency—and the service authorized for use by all humanitarian staff. The mobile phone serial numbers, SIM card information, and assignee for each phone would have to be shared with COGAT and Shabak for all agencies who choose to use the service. So far, eight heads of humanitarian agencies have expressed interest in exploring the use of this option. Discussions are ongoing and the possibility of fast-tracking the procurement of the SIM cards is being explored.

The ETC is supporting global partner—International Telecommunication Union (ITU)—to allocate 100 fully activated Thuraya satellite phones to UN agencies operating in the Gaza emergency response for enhanced communication services. The satellite phones were donated by the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to ITU for the inter-agency use and are fully paid for. The ETC conducted an online survey for UN heads of agencies to express their interest in being allocated part of the 100 Thuraya satellite phones. The survey is scheduled to run from 26 December to 04 January. The ETC will follow up with ITU and explore the possibility of providing extra satellite phone devices to other humanitarian agencies.

The Palestinian Office of the Quartet reported that the Palestinian Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are identifying the equipment needed for repairs with the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunication and, once ready, will share with the ETC the list of equipment needed for repairs.

Security communications services

The ETC is engaging an Egyptian local service provider for Very High Frequency (VHF)/ High Frequency (HF) radios to seek clarity on the available equipment, cost, licensing, subscription, and the procurement process. This is part of future planning once importation of equipment into Gaza is authorized.

Access to information

Following the Information and Communication Population Needs Assessment—undertaken by REACH on 18 December and shared with all ETC global partners on 22 December—the cluster is continuing discussions with the World Bank and the Palestine Ministry of Information to obtain additional information on the status of connectivity, MNO needs (particularly fuel), and general accessibility of information and preferences among the affected population in Gaza. UNOCHA is jointly involved in the exercise as the chair of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) group. The ETC continues also to engage with the CDAC Network, UNRWA, and the Office of the Quartet to source any other available data to enhance the assessment.

Staffing

The ETC operation in Gaza continues with Komi Amedjonekou as ETC Coordinator supporting remotely while the Deputy Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—is based in Cairo. Both members of staff await the issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

FITTEST ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December to fill ETC gaps while requesting an extension of his visa prior to enter Gaza. He received the extension of his visa for two-months up to 23 February. Deployment to Gaza is now scheduled for 08 January for an initial technical engagement with local actors, to plan an initial needs assessment, and to set up technical coordination processes for the response.

Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer—continues to remotely support the response until recruitment, entry visa, travel documents, and contract are finalized for the identified replacement candidate. The WFP Standby Partnership unit is currently identifying the new staff for recruitment and deployment initially to Cairo, pending issuance of entry visa to Jerusalem—to take up duties by 05 January.

Dashboard

See the **ETC Dashboard** for an overview of planned service locations.

Funding

As of 10 December, the ETC is 64% funded out of the US$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate needs in Gaza. The Government of France and the Government of Luxembourg allocated EUR250,000 each to the ETC response in Gaza. The funds will enable the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management, as well as be ready to deploy shared communications services in up to two locations for two months, pending the evolution of the situation.

The **updated Flash Appeal** released on 06 November is requesting US$1.2 billion to meet the needs of the entire population of Gaza and 500,000 people in the West Bank.

Challenges

The intensity of hostilities has spread further south to include locations such as Khan Younis and Rafah, thereby limiting the safe movements of humanitarian responders.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to hamper the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and Gaza is the only point open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are now extremely restricted due to security checks and the lack of fuel.

Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is lengthy and extremely challenging.

All items going into Gaza need to be pre-approved by the Israeli authorities. Any items brought in via Egypt also needs to have importation permits from the Egyptian authorities and agreement with the Egyptian Red Crescent, who are the sole consignee of goods for the Rafah Border Crossing.

The reach of operations will remain limited without a prolonged ceasefire, safe access, and significant funding for the humanitarian response.

The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered extremely high.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **10 January at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **03 January**. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
Komi Amedjonekou	ETC Coordinator	Lomé, Togo	komi.amedjonekou@wfp.org
Hossam Metwally	ETC Deputy Coordinator	Cairo, Egypt	Hossam.Metwally@wfp.org
Mufaro Masuka	Information Management Officer	Dubai, UAE	mufaro.masuka@wfp.org

Further information related to the ETC operation can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

Palestine.ETC@wfp.org

Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC)   www.ETCluster.org