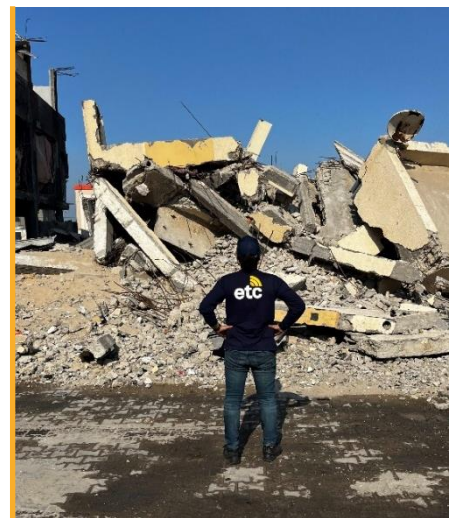# Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #13
Reporting period: 18/01/2024 to 24/01/2024

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

Highlights

- Voice call services were gradually restored to most of Gaza during the evening of 19 January, having been shut down for one week since 12 January. However, internet connectivity remains down across the whole of Gaza Strip.

- On 20 January, the ETC resubmitted the consolidated partners' ICT equipment list in an official letter format to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) through the United Nations (UN) Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) ad interim, as requested. The list contains the detailed description of all equipment, quantities, and solutions required for humanitarians to effectively operate in Gaza.

- Since 09 January, the ETC has supported 10 humanitarian agencies with ICT assessments, technical advice and information, quick repairs, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment in Gaza.

The ETC is conducting ICT assessments and providing technical assistance to humanitarian responders in Rafah, Gaza.

Situation overview

The intense Israeli air, land, and sea bombardments, coupled with ground fighting against Hamas armed groups continued across much of the Gaza Strip. According to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza—between 07 October 2023 and 24 January 2024—at least 25,700 have been killed and 63,740 injured. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), reports that, 1.9 million people—approximately 90% of the Gaza population—are internally displaced and 60% of the infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged.

The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively anywhere in Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent denials of access to the north, restrictions on the import of critical equipment, recurrent and the intensity of hostilities, among other factors.

The United Nations (UN) Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza and the UN HC ad interim for the Occupied Palestine Territory (OPT) visited Gaza on 23 January to engage authorities to facilitate humanitarian interventions and meet civilians. The Head of UNRWA has been appointed the Deputy HC for the OPT.

All UN personnel have been reminded to observe curfew time periods and coordinate all movement with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS).

Telecommunications overview

Voice call services were gradually restored to most of Gaza during the evening of 19 January, having been shut down for one week since 12 January. However, internet remains down across the whole of Gaza. The blackout of telecommunications restricts people in Gaza from accessing lifesaving information and impedes other forms of humanitarian response. This is the tenth time that communications have stopped working since the crisis began on 07 October. The absence of telecommunications deprives people from accessing life-saving information, while also detrimental for the operation of first responders and other humanitarian actors.

Some humanitarian agencies are relying on their independent connectivity platforms or the local infrastructure—when available—for access to telecommunications services. It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization 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.

ETC Activities

Coordination

On 17 January, the ETC met with the CDAC Network to discuss information needs for the population in Gaza. CDAC Network is a global alliance of organizations working to ensure people can access safe, trustworthy information and communicate during crises.

The ETC met with the Inter-Agency Coordination Cell Group (ICCG) in Cairo on 17 January to discuss cluster responses in Gaza. The ETC presented its challenges and status of the response in Gaza.

On 18 January, the ETC met with Importation And Customs Clearance Together (IMPACCT)—to discuss the importation and customs clearance process for telecommunications and ICT equipment in Cairo. This is part of a planning process to aid the prepositioning of equipment in El-Arish at the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) warehouse, for eventual importation into Gaza once approval from the authorities is issued. IMPACCT fosters a dialogue between aid donors and national customs administrations to help crisis-affected people rapidly get the humanitarian assistance they need, in line with the UN's vision.

On 19 January, the ETC attended the national ICCG meeting for the OPT to discuss ongoing emergency response cluster operations in Gaza. The **updated Flash Appeal** was discussed and the interagency group agreed to propose a 9-month extension with budget revision to respond to the evolved needs in Gaza.

The ETC and World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau for the Middle East and Northern Africa (RBC) team completed a joint IT and Emergency Preparedness Response (EPR) needs assessment mission for the proposed Logistics hub in El-Arish from 15 to 19 January. This is to plan for possible future WFP operations at the location to support the emergency response in Gaza with telecommunications services for transiting humanitarian staff and warehouses to store prepositioned ICT equipment for importation into Gaza. The joint team has submitted the mission report to the ETC, Logistics Cluster, and WFP RBC will follow up to discuss the recommendations and way forward.

The ETC also met with United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in El-Arish on 17 January, who proposed the establishment of a joint working space for all personnel from the agencies. The meeting proceeded to view an available building, which will be recommended to both agencies' management once the need to set up the working space is authorized.

Finally, the ETC met with the UN Under Secretary General (USG), who landed in El-Arish city to visit the ERC warehouses to understand the operations prior to entering Gaza. The ETC's main activities, challenges, and action plan were shared with her.

Equipment importation

The ETC met with the OPT UN HC on 18 January, the WFP Palestine CO CD, and the DCD to discuss the status of the ETC response in Gaza and request the HC to engage COGAT in seeking authorization for the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza. The UN HC is scheduled to meet COGAT on 25 January.

On 20 January, the ETC resubmitted the consolidated partners' ICT equipment list in an official letter format to COGAT through the UN HC, as requested. The list contains the detailed description of all equipment, quantities, and solutions required for humanitarians to effectively operate in Gaza. The HC is scheduled to meet COGAT for an update on the submitted request. The ETC will continue engaging COGAT for the importation of all essential telecommunications equipment into Gaza.

Data connectivity

Voice call services from two Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—were gradually restored to most of Gaza starting on the evening of 19 January, having been shut down for one week since 12 January. However, the internet services of the MNOs as well as Paltel Internet Service Provider (ISP) remains down across the whole of Gaza.

The ETC conducted data connectivity assessments from 19 to 22 January at several humanitarian office and guesthouse locations to establish the availability of services.

Since 09 January, the ETC has supported 10 humanitarian agencies with ICT assessments, technical advice and information, quick repairs, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment. The organizations include Action Against Hunger (ACF), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Logistics Cluster United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDSS, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), UNOCHA, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO). Four organizations—the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), and the UK-Med—are yet to be assisted.

Telephony

Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

Security communications systems (SCS)

The ETC is assisting UNDSS to identify, procure, and install a solar power solution for the VHF digital radio repeater installed at Al Shaboura Clinic, Rafah. The repeater is currently powered by a generator at Al Shaboura Clinic that operates daily from 0730 until 1600.

On 18 January, the ETC met with ERC in El-Arish, who requested to receive the VHF handheld radios as an in-kind donation from the ETC to use in Egypt to resolve a shortage of the devices among their staff. ERC seeks to facilitate an enhanced cross border communications system for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The ETC is consulting on both the internal administrative and technical feasibility for the implementation of this approach.

Access to information

Global ETC, REACH, and the World Bank discussed the World Bank's Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA), scheduled for publication by 31 January. The meeting discussed the possibility to benchmark the World Bank methodologies against those used by REACH during the Palestine-Gaza Information and Communication Dynamics assessment report. The World Bank shared their bi-weekly

qualitative assessments. The RDNA findings may be useful for the planned updated January version of REACH during the Palestine-Gaza Information and Communication Dynamics assessment report.

The ETC met with UNRWA representatives and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to discuss the communication needs of the Gaza population. UNRWA is currently contracting BBC for a special program to be aired on the BBC from Ramallah (located in the West Bank) and neighbouring countries. This program is intended to cover child protection and education needs in Gaza. The ETC is also exploring a community radio option to be hosted by UNRWA to facilitate message outreach for the affected communities.

Staffing

The ETC Coordinator—Komi Amedjonekou—is in Cairo, Egypt, since 09 January jointly with the Deputy Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—and continues to remotely support all Gaza response activities. David Pickering deployed to Cairo on 23 January to take over from Komi as the ETC Coordinator. Komi is leaving the operation on 29 January. The members of staff await the issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

The ETC Senior ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—is in Rafah, Gaza, since 08 January to conduct technical engagements with local actors, ICT needs assessments, and offer technical telecommunications support to other humanitarian responders. Burak is tentatively scheduled to depart Gaza on 29 January and embark on leave.

Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer—continues to remotely support the response, while in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), until entry visa, travel documents, and contract are finalized for the identified replacement candidate. The WFP Standby Partnership (SBP) unit has identified the replacement candidate from WFP SBP—RedR Australia—who is currently being onboarded to fully take over the role, starting 01 February, based in Cairo, Egypt.

Dashboard

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

Funding

Currently, 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 allocated EUR250,000 to the ETC out of a EUR 3 million contribution to the WFP Palestine operation in December 2023 and the Government of Luxembourg allocated a further EUR250,000 to the ETC response in Gaza in the same month. The funds are currently enabling the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management activities, 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. It was extended until the end of March 2024.

Challenges

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

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

The Egypt-Gaza Rafah Border crossing and recently the Israel-Gaza Kerem Shalom border crossing are the only two points open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are extremely restricted due to ongoing shelling, 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 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 issuance of Gaza entry visa for staff intending to deploy to Gaza remains lengthy.

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 **07 February at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **24 January**. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

Contacts

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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:
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