

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #19

Reporting period: 29/02/2024 to 06/03/2024

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

Highlights

- On 06 March, the ETC conducted a survey amongst the operational UN agencies in Gaza to collect their security communication services (SCS) needs, focal point contact details, and desired quantities to facilitate the distribution of the approved 30 digital Very High Frequency (VHF) radios upon importation into Gaza. The survey submission deadline is set for 14 March and the results will be shared with UNDSS for effective distribution of the digital VHF handheld radios once they arrive in Gaza.
- Since 09 January, the ETC has conducted 18 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessments in Gaza in 14 locations and supported 17 humanitarian agencies with ICT repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment.
- According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT), the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) has authorized telecommunications operators in Gaza to import essential spare parts—primarily cables—to enable critical repairs and restore services, which is expected to improve the available services.



The ETC supported solar power solution installation at the VHF radio repeater site in Rafah, Gaza. Photo WFP/ETC

Situation overview

Intense Israeli bombardment from air, land, and sea continues to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Thousands of Palestinians continue to flee further south towards Rafah, which is now severely overcrowded. Population movements out of Rafah and towards Deir Al Balah and Nuseirat refugee camps in the Middle Area have been reported.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports that 1.7 million people (over 75% of the population) have been displaced across Gaza Strip, some multiple times, and more than 60% of the infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged across Gaza.

Telecommunications overview

Recurrent telecommunications shutdown in the Gaza Strip restricts people from accessing life-saving information and impedes other forms of humanitarian response. Internet connectivity remains a primary communications challenge across the Gaza Strip, and it is expected to worsen as refugees

relocate to their original locations in the North to flee the now volatile security situation in southern Rafah.

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNO)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational, although the network is congested due to increased subscribers in Rafah following multiple displacements and few operational telecommunications towers due to fuel allocation limitations. The internet services of both MNOs remain down across the whole of Gaza.

Since 06 February, Paltel Internet Service Providers (ISP) has restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though with intermittent connectivity. The internet services from the ISP, Ajyal, are very limited and connectivity remains a major challenge across Gaza, significantly affecting humanitarian responders to access critical information and coordinate the humanitarian response.

Satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT), the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) has authorized telecommunications operators in Gaza to import essential spare parts—primarily cables—to enable critical repairs and restore services, which is expected to improve the available services.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC continues to engage, coordinate, and support all humanitarian local actors, UN agencies, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in Gaza with technical needs and advice to ensure that the limited communications resources on the ground are utilized effectively.

Since 09 January when ETC personnel arrived in Gaza, the ETC has conducted 18 ICT assessments in 14 locations and supported 17 humanitarian agencies with ICT repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment.

Equipment importation

ETC efforts have been underway since 03 November 2023 to obtain the authorization to import telecommunications equipment to set-up and provide an independent platform for humanitarian communications services in Gaza. Currently, the ETC is in continuous engagement with the COGAT, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), and WFP to facilitate the importation of additional critical telecommunications equipment in Gaza.

The ETC is collaborating with UNDSS in Jerusalem to coordinate the arrival, configuration, assignment of call signs, and the distribution of the approved 30 VHF digital radios donated by the ETC to UNDSS. The radios are being imported from WFP in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and are destined for use by UN agencies providing humanitarian support in Gaza.

On 06 March, the ETC conducted a survey amongst the operational UN agencies in Gaza to collect their SCS needs, focal point contact details, and desired quantities to facilitate the distribution of the approved 30 digital VHF radios upon importation into Gaza. The survey submission deadline is set for 14 March and the results will be shared with UNDSS for effective distribution of digital VHF handheld radios upon their arrival in Gaza.

Data connectivity

On 25 February, the ETC conducted two communications assessments in Deir al Balah as part of the preparedness efforts for the possible humanitarian response expansion to cater for the population returning towards the north. The assessment results showed the availability of 3G signals with limited or no data connectivity. The ETC is collaborating with OCHA to seek COGAT approval for solutions to strengthen the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) signals of telecommunications service providers in Deir al Balah.

Telephony

The ETC is awaiting guidance from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regarding the distribution of 100 Thuraya satellite phones donated by the Government of the UAE, whether they can be allocated to I/NGOs or if it must be limited to UN agencies in Gaza. For effective planning of distribution, a survey was conducted in January for UN agencies to express their interest, required quantity, and focal point contact details of satellite phones.

Security communications systems (SCS)

As the population returns to their original locations in Gaza, the humanitarian response is anticipated to expand northward. To support this, there is an additional requirement to install two solar power solutions at Deir al Balah and Gaza City to ensure continuous 24/7 operation of the VHF radio repeaters, facilitating effective communication for humanitarian responders. Previously, on 25 February, the ETC addressed power supply issue at the UNDSS-managed SCS VHF digital radio repeater site in Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah. The ETC successfully installed and commissioned a solar power solution ensuring continuous 24/7 operation of the VHF radio repeater, overcoming previous limitations with a generator operating only five days a week from 07:30 until 16:00.

Staffing

There are currently two dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. The ETC Coordinator previously based in Rafah, Gaza, since 31 January, is on break from 28 February until 08 March. The Deputy ETC Coordinator is therefore currently leading all coordination related activities remotely from Cairo. The ETC Telecommunications Specialist is scheduled to re-join the operation in mid-March and possibly deploy to Gaza to assist partners with technical support. The Information Management Officer (IMO) continues to support the response while based in Cairo.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned and operational services.

Funding

The ETC remains 64 per cent funded out of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its coordination and information management activities to address the immediate needs in Gaza. Funding was received in 2023 from the Government of France and the Government of Luxembourg. The budget and staffing needs are being reviewed to continue providing technical support in coordination, information management and procurement of ICT solutions until 31 December 2024.

The current Palestine Flash Appeal expires on 31 March 2024. Submissions have been made to the revised Flash Appeal by Clusters to reflect their updated requirements extended until 31 December 2024. The updated ETC budget requirement of US\$1.8 million for an extended period is being drafted for submission to OCHA by 16 March 2024.

Challenges

The intensity of hostilities has spread further south to the outskirts of North Rafah, limiting the movements of humanitarian responders. Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to hamper the humanitarian response in Gaza.

Several media reports have adversely impacted humanitarian operations, significantly restricting the ETC's ability to travel safely and access various locations.

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. Caution in using technology platforms applies, including the use of social media and press platforms.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **20 March 2024 at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **06 March 2024**. 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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