

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #20

Reporting period: 07/03/2024 to 13/03/2024

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

Highlights

- The results of the Security Communications Systems (SCS) needs survey—distributed on 06 March to UN agencies in Gaza to inform the distribution of the 30 approved digital Very High Frequency (VHF) handheld radios and focal point contact details—will be shared with United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) after the deadline of 14 March to facilitate the distribution of the radios.
- The ETC is collaborating with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) to obtain a certificate of approval to facilitate the quick release of the 30 approved digital VHF handheld radios upon their arrival at Tel Aviv airport. Additionally, the ETC is engaging with UNDSS in Jerusalem to coordinate the arrival, configuration, and assignment of call signs for the radios.
- There is an urgent requirement for a continuous 24/7 power supply at the VHF radio repeater sites in Khan Yunis and Deir al Balah in anticipation of the humanitarian response expanding further north. The ETC is seeking approval to bring additional solar power solutions into Gaza for this purpose by engaging with the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).



UNRWA reports that over 75% of the population in Gaza are now displaced.
Photo WFP/Ali Jadallah

Situation overview

On 12 March, WFP [delivered](#) food for 25,000 people in Gaza city, marking the first successful convoy to reach northern Gaza since 20 February, when it announced a pause in deliveries to the north due to unsafe access and distribution conditions.

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 houses and other civilian infrastructure.

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 the Gaza Strip, some multiple times.

Telecommunications overview

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 and SMS services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational, although limited to Rafah and some locations in the north of Gaza. The network is congested due to the increased subscribers in Rafah and few operational telecommunications towers.

However, the internet services of both MNOs are not operational in Gaza. This situation existed before the conflict started on 07 October 2023.

Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though with intermittent connectivity, significantly affecting humanitarian responders to access critical information for delivering lifesaving aid.

According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT), the 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.

Satellite phone services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC continues to engage, coordinate, and support all humanitarian local actors, UN agencies, and partners 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 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessments in 14 locations and supported 17 humanitarian agencies with repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment.

Due to the reduction in staff presence in Gaza amid potential impending incursion, as well as the limited availability of armoured vehicles for evacuation planning, challenges have been observed in the coordination of in-person meetings in Gaza. Additionally, the persistent poor internet connectivity remains a major challenge for online connectivity and remote coordination with partners and agencies in Gaza.

Equipment importation

The ETC is collaborating with UNOCHA to obtain a certificate of approval to facilitate the quick release of 30 pre-approved digital VHF handheld radios upon their arrival at Tel Aviv airport.

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.

Internet 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 Khan Yunis and Deir al Balah.

Security Communications Systems (SCS)

The results of the SCS needs survey—distributed on 06 March to UN agencies in Gaza to inform the distribution of the 30 approved digital VHF handheld radios and focal point contact details—will be shared with UNDSS after the deadline of 14 March to facilitate the distribution of the radios.

There is an urgent requirement for a continuous 24/7 power supply at the VHF radio repeater sites in Khan Yunis and Deir al Balah, particularly in anticipation of the humanitarian response expanding further to the north. The ETC is seeking approval to bring additional solar power solutions into Gaza for this purpose by engaging with COGAT. Previously, on 25 February, following approval from COGAT, the ETC successfully implemented a solar power solution at the UNDSS-managed SCS VHF radio repeater site in Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah, ensuring uninterrupted 24/7 operations there.

Telephony

The ETC is following up with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regarding the distribution of 100 Thuraya satellite phones donated by the Government of the UAE, and their allocation to humanitarian organizations. 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.

Staffing

There are currently four dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. Due to the reduction of UN staff footprint in Gaza, the ETC Coordinator has resumed his role remotely based in Cairo since 08 March. The Deputy ETC Coordinator continues to support from the response while also based in Cairo. The ETC Telecommunications Specialist rejoined the operation following a short break on 13 March in Cairo and is tentatively scheduled to deploy to Gaza on 18 March 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% 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.

The current Palestine Flash Appeal expires on 31 March. The revised draft Flash Appeal is being reviewed for submission to OCHA before 16 March, which shall incorporate an ETC budget requirement of US\$1.8 million until 31 December 2024.

Challenges

The reduction of staff presence in Gaza has posed challenges for face-to-face meetings and coordination activities, exacerbated by the existing internet connectivity issues across Gaza.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to impede the humanitarian response in Gaza. Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is prolonged and extremely challenging.

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 requiring approval from respective authorities. The cross-border operations are extremely restricted due to ongoing shelling, security checks, and the lack of fuel.

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

The issuance of entry visa for staff intending to deploy to Gaza remains prolonged and challenging.

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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