

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #23

Reporting period: 01/04/2024 to 07/04/2024

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

Highlights

- On 02 April, the 30 pre-approved Very High Frequency (VHF) digital radios arrived at Tel Aviv airport. The radios were shipped by WFP Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST) in Dubai and will be received by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Jerusalem for configuration and further distribution to UN agencies in Gaza.
- On 02 April, the ETC and other clusters provided a briefing about their activities to the UN Undersecretary-General (USG) in Rafah. The USG was also briefed on the security situation, particularly on the killing of seven humanitarian aid workers in Deir Al Balah on 01 April.
- On 02 April, the ETC received confirmation from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) regarding the approval secured from the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) on importation of an additional 20 satellite phones into Gaza.
- On 31 March, the ETC confirmed the successful internet connection of the VHF radio repeater site in Rafah with the UNDSS server in Jerusalem, following the resolution of a configuration issue by Paltel. With the installation of internet connectivity and a solar-powered solution on 25 February, the repeater site is now fully functioning, ensuring uninterrupted 24/7 operations.



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

Situation overview

Intense Israeli bombardment and ground operations as well as heavy fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups continue to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, particularly in Deir Al Balah and areas surrounding Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza city, central Khan Younis, and the vicinity of Al Amal and Nasser hospitals. This has resulted in further casualties, displacement (over 75% of the population have been internally displaced across the Gaza Strip – some multiple times), and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.

The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively across Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent restrictions of access to the north, the import of critical equipment, and recurrent intense hostilities.

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 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.

The internet services from both MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are non-operational in Gaza. This situation existed before the onset of conflict on 07 October 2023. Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have restored internet services in parts of Rafah and Deir Al Balah, though with intermittent connectivity, significantly affecting humanitarian responders to access critical information for delivering lifesaving aid.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC continues to coordinate with and support humanitarian actors, including UN agencies and humanitarian partners operating in Gaza with technical needs, guidance and setting realistic expectations on available telecommunications services in Gaza.

On 04 April, the ETC along with other clusters engaged in Area-Based Coordination (ABC) efforts to address connectivity issues, ensure access to information for communities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in Khan Yunis and Deir Al Balah. The ABC approach has been adopted following the population movements and the expansion of humanitarian response northwards, resulting in clusters shifting their meetings from the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) in Rafah to communities in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis.

On 02 April, the ETC and other clusters provided a briefing about their activities to the UN USG in Rafah. The USG was also briefed on the security situation, particularly on the killing of seven humanitarian aid workers in Deir Al Balah on 01 April.

Since 09 January, with the presence of ETC staff in Gaza, the ETC has conducted 22 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessments in 15 locations and supported 18 humanitarian agencies with repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment.

The ongoing limited access to internet connectivity in Gaza restricts coordination to face-to-face meetings at the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) with limited online collaboration and engagement among partners and agencies operating remotely.

Internet connectivity

On 04 April, the ETC presented the findings of the assessment to WFP on the availability of Wi-Fi hotspots in Deir Al Balah, this included the data collected from more than 450 Wi-Fi hotspots. The availability of Wi-Fi hotspots is aimed to enhance WFP's efforts in registering refugees and displaced people to facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid across Deir Al Balah and Rafah.

Security Communications Systems (SCS)

On 02 April, the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios arrived at Tel Aviv airport. The radios were shipped by WFP FITTEST in Dubai and will be received by UNDSS in Jerusalem for configuration and further distribution to UN agencies in Gaza. The ETC is collaborating with UNDSS in Jerusalem for the swift release of the VHF radios, their configuration, assignment of call signs, and facilitating their delivery to Gaza.

On 02 April, the ETC received confirmation from OCHA regarding the approval secured from COGAT to import an additional 20 satellite phones into Gaza. However, COGAT requested that these phones must be procured from Gilat Telecom in Israel and must only be intended for use by UN international staff in Gaza. The ETC is coordinating with OCHA and UNDSS to develop a distribution plan among the UN agencies in Gaza.

On 31 March, the ETC confirmed the successful internet connection of the VHF radio repeater site in Rafah with the UNDSS server in Jerusalem, following the resolution of a configuration issue by Paltel. With the installation of internet connectivity and a solar-powered solution on 25 February, the repeater site is now fully functioning, ensuring uninterrupted 24/7 operations.

As of early March, the latest high resolution satellite mapping shared by partners has revealed that the VHF repeater sites in Gaza City and Jabalia are still standing, while the repeater site in Khan Yunis has been destroyed. The ETC is planning to conduct physical assessments at these sites to make informed recommendations, once authorized safe access to these locations is secured.

There is an urgent requirement to expand the VHF radio coverage in Deir al Balah and Khan Yunis, particularly in anticipation of the humanitarian response expanding further to the north with the population movement. The ETC has identified a location for the SCS repeater site in Deir Al Balah and further assessing its viability. Additionally, the scheduled technical assessments to identify the availability and functionality of SCS equipment in Deir al Balah and Gaza city is rescheduled until safe access to these sites are secured.

Access to information for communities

On 08 April, the ETC along with Relief Radio and other humanitarian partners will discuss the prerequisites for the importation of Frequency Modulation (FM) station equipment into Gaza. Previously, on 29 March, the ETC engaged with humanitarian partners and provided guidance and support on identifying viable solutions for the importation of FM broadcasting equipment for public messaging and to provide access to information for communities in Gaza, including guidance on operating licenses.

Staffing

There are currently four dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. The ETC coordinator deployed to Rafah on 25 March to continue the ETC presence and enhance coordination efforts and face-to-face engagement with partners. The ETC coordinator is scheduled to return to Cairo on 15 April for handover to a replacement coordinator who is scheduled to arrive in Cairo on 17 April.

The deputy ETC coordinator is on annual leave and is scheduled to resume his role on 14 April, while being based in Cairo. The deputy ETC coordinator will hand over to his replacement, who is scheduled to arrive in Cairo on 16 April. The ETC Telecommunications Specialist has been in Jerusalem since 01 April, supporting the coordination of the arrival and configuration of VHF radios by UNDSS for further delivery to Gaza. The ETC 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](#) expired on 31 March. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US\$1.8 million until 31 December 2024, was submitted to OCHA on 16 March for inclusion.

Challenges

The safety concerns of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza have significantly intensified, following the killing of seven humanitarian aid workers on 01 April.

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

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 **Wednesday 17 April 2024 at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 03 April 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

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