

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #4

Reporting period: 15/11/2023 to 21/11/2023

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

Highlights

- The shortage of electricity and fuel is hampering the humanitarian response in Gaza. This includes the closure of all telecommunications services on 16 November. The shutdown of telecommunications services lasted for approximately 30 hours into 17 November and brought the already challenging delivery of humanitarian assistance to a near halt.
- The Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) continues to collect humanitarian ICT needs and engaging all relevant parties to fast-track the telecommunications equipment importation process for Gaza through either Egypt or Israel.
- The ETC team is engaging with UNDSS to formulate a Security Communications Services (SCS) implementation plan to support the humanitarian response in Gaza.



Buildings, telecoms, and power infrastructure have been destroyed in Gaza due to the ongoing conflict. Photo: UNRWA/Mohammed Hinnawi.

Situation overview

Armed conflict between Palestinian militant groups and Israeli military forces began on 07 October 2023. Since then, intense airstrikes and a complete siege in the Gaza Strip has resulted in a humanitarian crisis.

On 15 November, the last functioning mill in Gaza—the As Salam Mill in Deir Al Balah—was reportedly hit and destroyed. The destruction means that locally produced flour will not be available in Gaza in the foreseeable future.

According to UNRWA—as of 21 November—1.7 million people in Gaza are estimated to be internally displaced, including about 840,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are staying in at least 154 UNRWA shelters, across all five governorates of the Gaza Strip. 770,000 IDPs are sheltering in 97 facilities in the Middle, Khan Younis, and Rafah areas. UNRWA shelters are overcrowded and accommodating far more people than the intended capacity.

On 18 November, 123,000 litres of fuel entered Gaza from Egypt. A further 69,000 litres entered Gaza since 19 November. The Israeli authorities confirmed that they would start allowing the entry of a daily amount of 70,000 litres of fuel from Egypt, which is well below the minimum requirements for essential humanitarian operations. Fuel is being distributed by UNRWA to support food distribution, operation of

generators at hospitals, IDP shelters, water, and sanitation facilities. UNRWA requires about 160,000 litres of fuel per day to run basic humanitarian operations.

Although a restricted allocation of fuel has been permitted for the operation of select humanitarian activities, the persistent prevalence of critical fuel shortages continues to present a formidable impediment to the delivery of life-saving assistance and remains a significant factor contributing to barriers obstructing access to critical services.

Telecommunications overview

The shortage of electricity and fuel is hampering the humanitarian response in Gaza. This includes the closure of all telecommunications services on 16 November. The shutdown of telecommunications services lasted for approximately 30 hours into 17 November and brought the already challenging delivery of humanitarian assistance to a near halt.

Telecommunications services in Gaza were gradually restored overnight 17 into 18 November after network connectivity providers received a limited amount of fuel.

UNRWA reports that approximately 70% of the networks remain down, resulting in low quality services and limited coverage in some areas. Registration of damage and maintenance in networks are very limited due to movement restrictions and high security risks. The Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have no back-up satellite services—those previously operational are exhausted and solar panels are either destroyed or not working properly due to explosion dust.

According to the Office of the Quartet¹—which collects information on and needs of the network operators and sites from the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology (MTIT) and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority—approximately 14,500 litres of fuel are required daily to power 217 priority telecommunications towers across Gaza.

It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization from the relevant authorities to set up independent platforms for telecommunications to ensure humanitarian service delivery to the population.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC coordinator is currently based in Cairo until the documents to travel to Jerusalem are finalized.

The ETC convened a meeting of the UN ICT Working Group on 19 November to foster engagement and collaboration with humanitarian agencies working in Egypt. The major focus of the meeting centred on the processes and challenges of importing ICT equipment into Egypt. The meeting agreed to initiate a collaborative approach in proposing a solution and securing authorization to import equipment into Egypt—which may then eventually be imported into Gaza—to assist with the shared common communications services for the humanitarian response.

The ETC is relaying information provided by the Office of the Quartet on the status and needs of network operators and telecoms sites in Gaza. The information is supporting the ETC's effort to

¹ The Office of the Quartet was established in East Jerusalem in 2002 by the Quartet on the Middle East: <https://www.quartetoffice.org/>

strengthen advocacy on the need for fuel, safe access for network maintenance teams to the relevant sites, and uninterrupted communications services for all.

Importation of equipment

The ETC continues engaging all relevant parties to fast-track the telecommunications equipment importation process for Gaza through either Egypt or Israel. This includes a meeting with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Director for Egypt on 19 November to discuss ways to engage the Egyptian authorities to find a fast-track solution for the importation of telecommunications equipment into Egypt and eventually into Gaza.

On 18 November, the ETC met UNDSS and OCHA to align on the collective approach in engaging the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) regarding ICT equipment importation into Gaza. A list of essential telecommunications equipment to import into Gaza was submitted via OCHA to the COGAT on 01 November. The cluster awaits the final decision from COGAT.

A total of 29 respondents have participated in the survey circulated by the ETC to coordinate a collective approach among partners for the importation of equipment. Seven organizations provided their list of equipment. The survey was sent on 16 November to all partners and interested humanitarian organizations to collect their ICT requirements, including equipment types and quantities intended for importation.

The ITU has secured 100 Thuraya satellite phones as a donation from the UAE. The equipment is ready to be shipped by diplomatic pouch, pending approval from the Egyptian authorities. As the phones have not all been allocated, ITU agreed to engage with the ETC to coordinate the distribution of these phones as needed.

Security Communication Services

The ETC team is engaging with UNDSS to formulate a Security Communications Services (SCS) implementation plan to support the humanitarian response in Gaza. Currently, security communications services are very limited in Gaza. UNDSS's implementation of a new VHF digital radio Security Communications System (SCS) in Gaza had reached 90 percent completion before the conflict broke out. The system is currently not operable. The security communications services implementation plan incorporates the immediate, mid-, and long-term SCS actions to be taken. Reliable communications networks are needed to enable humanitarians to stay connected in high-risk situations, restore security communications networks for UN staff, and coordinate response activities.

Access to information

The ETC is participating in the OCHA-led drafting of key messages on fuel and telecommunications to be broadcasted to the affected population.

At least five FM radio stations are working. Assessments shows that 1 in 6 people in Gaza are listening to radio. A BBC World News Arabic service broadcasts on Friday evenings from their transmitter in Cyprus, aimed at the population in Gaza.

Staffing

The ETC Coordinator is based in Cairo. The coordinator awaits the visa to be relocated to Jerusalem, which will be crucial to engage with local actors.

An ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) deployed to Cairo on 21 November and is now based with the ETC Coordinator there for up to one month.

The ETC is working on the required profiles needed for the operation, some of which are applying for visas to be placed on standby for deployment, depending on how the situation on the ground evolves.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned service locations.

Funding

Funding is a major challenge faced by the ETC in the response for Gaza to provide common shared telecommunications services for humanitarian responders, once importation of equipment into Gaza is established.

The ETC urgently requires an initial US\$250,000 out of the total requested US\$800,000 in the Flash Appeal to continue its ongoing activities to address the immediate needs in Gaza. At this stage, the ETC has no funding for the response in Gaza and is operating on emergency reserves. The ETC is working with partners to explore funding options.

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

Airstrikes and movement restrictions continue to pose a challenge to humanitarian staff in Gaza.

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

Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is lengthy and extremely challenging. Further challenges will now be in place following the further restrictions on humanitarian operations for the delivery of aid via the Rafah Border Crossing.

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 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 **22 November at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **15 November**. 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**](http://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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