

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #7

Reporting period: 06/12/2023 to 12/12/2023

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

Highlights

- The ETC procured 20 fully activated satellite phones on 08 December which were hand carried on 12 December to Gaza by the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), to enhance communication amongst humanitarian responders.
- The UNDSS is engaging with United Nations (UN) agencies to use the digital security communications network following the successful re-activation of the Very High Frequency (VHF) digital repeaters in Rafah and Khan Yunis.
- The ETC is currently coordinating and engaging with 31 organizations—11 UN agencies, 16 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), two government partners, and two private sector partners—in the Gaza conflict emergency response.



Buildings, telecommunications, and power infrastructure have been destroyed in Gaza due to the ongoing conflict. Photo: UNRWA/Shareef Sarhan.

Situation overview

On 12 December, fighting across Gaza continued, especially in the city of Rafah and Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

The Rafah governorate remains the almost exclusive area in Gaza where limited aid distribution continues to take place. Aid distribution in the rest of the Gaza Strip has largely stopped over the past one week due to the intensity of hostilities and restrictions of movement along the main roads, except for limited fuel deliveries to key service providers.

On 12 December, 120,000 litres of fuel entered Gaza from Egypt—up from a daily average of 67,000 litres in the previous days. The increased amounts are the bare minimum needed to prevent the collapse of critical services that include health services, water provision, sanitation infrastructure, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) shelters.

On 09 December—a day after visiting Gaza—the WFP Deputy Executive Director stated that, *“with just a fraction of the needed food supplies coming in, a fatal absence of fuel, interruptions to communications systems and no security for our staff or for the people we serve at food distributions, we cannot do our job.”*

Over 1.9 million people—approximately 85% of the Gaza population—are estimated to be internally displaced. Families are very vulnerable as they are forced to move repeatedly in search of safety. On

09 December, estimates show that nearly 1.3 million IDPs are registered in 154 United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) facilities across Gaza, including more than 1.1 million in 97 UNRWA shelters in the Middle area, Khan Younis and Rafah governorates.

Telecommunications overview

Recurring telecommunications shutdown events continue to be experienced in Gaza city and northern Gaza since 03 December due to escalated hostilities and fuel shortages to power the 217 priority Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) telecommunications towers. Humanitarian agencies and first responders have warned that telecommunications blackouts jeopardize the already constrained provision of life-saving assistance.

Some humanitarian agencies are relying on their independent connectivity platforms for access to telecommunications services. It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization from the authorities to set up independent and reliable solutions for telecommunications to ensure coordinated humanitarian service delivery to the population of Gaza.

Residents' access to information is impaired by recurrent interruptions in telecommunications and the lack of electricity to charge electronic devices. 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

The Global ETC Deputy Coordinator—deployed in Cairo since 03 December—continues to support the coordination of ETC activities in the emergency response until 19 December. The dedicated ETC Coordinator returned from compassionate leave on 10 December and is still waiting for issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

A WFP FITTEST¹ ICT Specialist deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December for ETC technical engagements, while requesting for visa extension and plan to proceed to Gaza on 22 December. Deployment to Gaza is part of the ETC response for ICT information gathering, rapid situation assessment, and to quantify the state of available telecommunications equipment on the ground, if possible.

The ETC continues to coordinate a collective approach among partners for the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza. On 06 December—at the request of the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)—the interagency group (OCHA, UNDSS and ETC team) submitted a revised proposal containing the consolidated description of all telecommunications equipment for importation and installation in Gaza as well how the equipment will be set up, managed, and used. On 10 December, COGAT contacted the agencies to enquire whether all telecommunications systems intended for use in Gaza can be hand carried, used on local service provider platforms, and disabled remotely. The ETC and partners submitted all the requested information to COGAT on 11 December and are now awaiting feedback.

The ETC is currently coordinating and engaging with 31 organizations—11 UN agencies, 16 NGOs, two government partners, and two private sector partners—in the Gaza conflict response. 11 agencies

¹ WFP Fast Information Technology & Telecommunications Emergency Support Team

submitted equipment importation lists for Gaza. The ETC is yet to submit the partners' lists to COGAT once feedback on the previously submitted list is issued.

The ETC participated at the Palestine ICT Local Working Group meeting on 11 December, with nine agencies in attendance. Discussions focused on informing the partners about the latest activities including the 20 satellite phones purchased and deployed by UNDSS for use by UN staff in Gaza. UNDSS also shared updates on the successfully re-activated Security Communications Systems (SCS) digital repeaters in Rafah and Khan Yunis. To access the services, all UN agencies will need to provide their VHF radios to UNDSS for programming in Jerusalem as agreed and approved by COGAT.

Telephony

Following COGAT approval on 03 December, the ETC procured 20 fully activated satellite phones from Gilat Telecom—the sole authorized satellite technology service provider for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)—in Tel Aviv on 08 December. The satellite phones were hand carried to Gaza and arrived on 12 December as a donation to the UNDSS, who is working with the Area Security Management Team (ASMT) to distribute them for communication needs among UN staff in Gaza. The satellite phones serial numbers, SIM cards information, and assignee for each phone should be shared with COGAT and Shabak—the Israeli national security agency.

COGAT has also authorized and proposed to the cluster and partners to procure and use Cellcom SIM cards. Cellcom is an Israeli MNO which offers voice and possibly data connectivity services that can be used in Gaza. The use of Cellcom SIM cards is cleared by Shabak and service is authorized for all humanitarian staff. The mobile phones serial numbers, SIM cards information, and assignee for each phone would have to be shared with COGAT and Shabak if the agencies are keen to use this option. The offer was circulated on 10 December by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) office to all heads of agencies. The ETC, UNDSS, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) are collecting feedback from organizations and will then propose a way forward. To date, three UN agencies confirmed their interest in procuring the SIM cards.

Security communications services

UNDSS is engaging with UN agencies to use the digital security communications network following the successful re-activation of VHF digital repeaters in Rafah and Khan Yunis. To access the services, all UN agencies will need to provide their VHF radios to UNDSS for programming in Jerusalem as agreed and approved by COGAT before the onset of the conflict.

UNDSS successfully programmed seven VHF radio handsets in the past one week and is now waiting for COGAT confirmation and authorization to bring the devices for use into Gaza. UNDSS has a COGAT license to operate 110 digital VHF radios in Gaza. As part of the joint equipment importation request, UNDSS has requested the licensing of 550 digital VHF handheld radio devices to meet the need for enhanced SCS for all UN staff operating in Gaza.

The UNDSS confirmed that the VHF radio analogue system in Gaza is non-functional and can only be re-activated by installing an analogue repeater once importation of equipment into Gaza becomes authorized. The ETC is collaborating with UNDSS to explore other possible solutions to enhance the SCS in Gaza. 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

ETC partner—REACH—has agreed to develop a communications and information needs assessment report by 21 December using available collected secondary data from sources on the ground. UNOCHA is jointly involved in the exercise as the chair of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

group. The ETC will engage with CDAC network, UNRWA and the Office of the Quartet to source any other available data to inform the assessment.

Staffing

The Global ETC Deputy Coordinator—Caroline Teyssier—who deployed to Cairo on 03 December continues to support the coordination of ETC activities in the emergency response until 19 December. The dedicated ETC Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—returned from compassionate leave on 10 December and is still waiting for issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.

Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer (IMO)—deployed to Cairo on 21 November to support the IM and reporting activities in the Gaza emergency response until 19 December. On 10 December, the ETC initiated a standby partner replacement for Mufaro. Partners with potential candidates were informed on 11 December and are currently responding to the WFP Standby Partner unit to express their interest.

FITTEST ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—deployed to Cairo on 04 December for onward deployment to Gaza, tentatively scheduled for 22 December for an initial technical engagement with local actors, to plan an initial needs assessment, and to set up technical coordination processes for the response. He deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December to fill ETC gaps while requesting extension of his visa prior to going into Gaza.

The ETC is planning for the next phase of staff scale-up. ETC Operations Specialist—Komi Amedjonekou—is tentatively set to deploy to Jerusalem to coordinate ETC activities, once visa entry documents applied for on 06 December are issued.

Dashboard

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

Funding

On 10 December, the Government of Luxembourg confirmed the allocation of EUR250,000 funding to the ETC response in Gaza, bringing the total funding status to 64% of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate needs in Gaza. The funding will enable the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management, as well as be ready to deploy shared communications services in up to two locations for the next 1 to 2 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.

Challenges

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

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

The Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and Gaza is the only point open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are now extremely restricted due to 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 pre-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 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 **13 December at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **06 December**. All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
Hossam Metwally	ETC Coordinator	Cairo, Egypt	Hossam.Metwally@wfp.org
Mufaro Masuka	Information Management Officer	Cairo, Egypt	mufaro.masuka@wfp.org
Caroline Teyssier	Deputy Global ETC Coordinator	Cairo, Egypt	Caroline.Teyssier@wfp.org

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:

Palestine.ETC@wfp.org