

## Sudan, conflict

### ETC Situation Report #9

Reporting period: 05/08/2023 to 31/08/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 25 May 2023 to support the humanitarian response following the outbreak of conflict on 15 April. The ETC is led by WFP in Sudan. ETC Situation Reports (SitReps) are produced monthly.

## Highlights

- Critical ETC connectivity services are provided in Port Sudan to 462 humanitarian workers from 18 UN agencies and 13 I/NGOs across 11 sites.
- Based on needs assessments across 14 sites, the cluster is planning to expand data connectivity services to five additional common operational areas—Kassala, Gedaref, Wad Madani, Kosti, and Damazine.
- A shipment of telecommunications equipment has started arriving in batches in Port Sudan since 24 August to support the expansion of ETC services to additional operational areas.



At the warehouse in Nairobi repacking equipment for shipment to Port Sudan on 28 August.

Photo: WFP/ETC

## Situation overview

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has continued from mid-April for over four months. More than 965,630 Sudanese have fled across the border into neighbouring countries, and over 4,754,717 people have been forcibly displaced since the start of the conflict, according to the UNHCR's [operational data portal](#), as of 31 August.

Prior to the outbreak of violence, a third of the population was already in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the conflict has dramatically constrained access to food, water, fuel, cash, and health care.

The [revised Humanitarian Response Plan](#) (HRP) published on 17 May estimates that the number of people in need of assistance is 24.7 million—a 57 per cent increase from before the crisis.

As of 26 August, Port Sudan has become Sudan's temporary administrative capital.

### Telecommunications infrastructure

Since the outbreak of conflict on 15 April, Sudan's communications infrastructure has been heavily impacted due to direct damage to telecommunications towers, as well as indirectly through the rapid deterioration of the national power grid.

All the three Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are gradually restoring their voice services in Port Sudan and the service is improving day-by-day. Other locations still depend on the one operating MNO network whose congestion is worsened by the high concentration of internally displaced people (IDPs) in safer areas, away from the active fighting. Two of the major internet service providers (ISPs) are also no longer functioning, and local VSAT services are unreliable.

UNDSS maintains a Very High Frequency (VHF) radio network that remains operational in most locations across the country, apart from El Geneina, Zalingei, Nyala and Ed Daein, which were affected by looting.

The extensive looting of communications assets across the country means that there is a clear need to rebuild and strengthen common humanitarian information and telecommunications technology infrastructure to enable a swift and coordinated response to the crisis.

See the Sudan [ICT Profile](#) for more information on national telecommunications infrastructure.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

Requests for information, technical advice, and connectivity services can be submitted to the ETC through the [Sudan.ETC@wfp.org](mailto:Sudan.ETC@wfp.org) email address. A ticketing system has been established to manage the high volume of requests received. Over 600 requests have been registered so far since 14 May.

The ETC continued to engage with the authorities and obtained the clearances for importation of telecommunications equipment into the country to meet the needs of the response. As of 24 August, the cluster started the movement of the equipment in batches from Nairobi to Port Sudan. The shipment had been delayed in Nairobi for two months.

The ETC continues to work closely with humanitarian partners to ensure ETC common services are deployed in operational locations across the country. On 28 August, the ETC held its fifth ETC Working Group meeting to discuss implementation of ETC activities and challenges, partner requests, and the way forward. The next ETC Working Group meeting will be held on 25 September.

### Internet connectivity

The ETC is fully operational in Port Sudan and continues to provide internet connectivity to 18 UN agencies and 13 NGOs across 11 sites, serving 462 humanitarian users.

Based on ICT needs assessments across 14 sites<sup>1</sup>, the ETC is planning to expand data connectivity services to five operational areas—Kassala, Gedaref, Wad Madani, Kosti, and Damazine. Additional telecommunications equipment is needed to implement the expansion of ETC services.

Although satellite connectivity infrastructure has already been deployed in Gedaref, Kassala, and Wad Madani, more equipment is required to start installing point-to-point links with humanitarian workspaces in these locations, along the same model as the ETC network in Port Sudan.

The newly arrived telecommunications equipment in Port Sudan will support the expansion of data connectivity services. By 31 August, two batches of the equipment had already been shipped.

### **Security communications**

Port Sudan and Kassala have operational UNDSS-managed Security Operations Centres (SOCs) that are staffed 12 hours per day. Kosti and Damazine have partially operational SOCs depending on the availability of staff, power, and internet connectivity. Gedaref has a locally connected SOC and there is no operational SOC in Wad Madani.

Locations currently connected to and monitored from the Remote SOC in Nairobi (relocated from Khartoum at the onset of conflict) include Port Sudan, Kassala, Kosti, Damazine, Al Fasher, El Fula, El Obeid, Ed Daein, Kadugli, and Zalingei. However, the SOCs in Al Fasher, Ed Daein, El Obeid, El Fula, Kadugli and Zalingei were recently looted in August, and the SOCs in El Geneina and Nyala were looted in May.

The ETC plans to support operationalization of the SOC in Gedaref using the newly imported equipment. All preparations to connect the SOC to the network—security communications equipment, devices, and radio programming—are in place.

Although the telecommunications infrastructure in Port Sudan, Kassala, and Gedaref are still in place, very few functional handheld radios are available for use among humanitarian organisations, as many radios were abandoned for security reasons during the evacuation process that took place in April. Presently, there are only eight operational VHF radios in Port Sudan. The ETC and UNDSS continues to manage a 'radio pool' for humanitarians to collect and return for each mission. The ETC is working with the Resident Coordinator's office to resolve this challenge.

The cluster is supporting UNDSS to identify bulk messaging solutions to disseminate security alerts to staff in Sudan.

### **Services for communities**

The ETC is exploring the possibility of establishing platforms to access information for communication between humanitarians and the affected population, such as a Chatbot or an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM), given the serious deterioration of the communications infrastructure across the country. A CFM taskforce has been established by OCHA with participation from UNICEF, WFP, and UNHCR.

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<sup>1</sup> Red Sea state, Kassala, Gedaref, White Nile, Gezira, and Blue Nile.

## Funding

The total requirement for the ETC operation in Sudan is US\$6.3 million to deliver services in up to 10 common operational areas, including data connectivity and ICT helpdesk support, security communications services—radio programming and training—and platforms for the affected population to receive information and provide feedback to humanitarians.

The ETC has secured 68% of its funding needs in Sudan, thanks to a contribution of EUR 250,000 (US\$273,434) from the Government of Luxembourg, US\$2 million from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), and US\$2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Although the cluster is partially funded, additional funding is required to continue to maintain and expand the common services.

## Challenges

The ongoing looting of pre-existing telecommunications assets in-country means that a lack of equipment is one major challenge for the operation.

As a result of the security situation, travel and access is severely constrained across the country.

Difficulties in obtaining visas for travel to Sudan is restricting the ability of the ETC to mobilize the required staff to deploy critical communications services for the humanitarian community.

## Dashboard

See the latest version of the ETC Dashboard for the Sudan operations [here](#).

WFP—as the lead agency of the ETC in Sudan—has been sharing connectivity with humanitarians in Port Sudan since 24 April. Following the activation of the ETC in Sudan on 25 May, the cluster is working to expand common internet services to new sites in Port Sudan and new locations across the country.

## Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the Sudan crisis will take place on **Thursday 14 September 2023 at 15:00 EAT**.

The next Local ETC Working Group meeting will take place online on **Monday 25 September 2023 at 15:00 EAT**.

## Contacts

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Further information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

[www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict](http://www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict)

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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