

Syria & the Surrounding Countries

ETC Situation Report #34

Reporting period 30/11/2018 to 28/02/2019

The ETC operates under the 'Whole of Syria (WoS)' approach which comprises activities in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for an effective humanitarian response inside Syria. The next report will be issued on or around 31/05/2019.

Highlights

- The ETC has managed to secure a seat for an ETC telecommunications assistant on the next WFP mission to Deir ez-Zor planned and approved for 10 March. The ETC is planning to install a connectivity solution to support the UN hub in Deir ez-Zor.
- The ETC in Syria provided security communications and power solutions to UN staff to support the delivery of a convoy – the largest of its kind to be delivered in Syria – of lifesaving assistance to 40,000 people at the remote IDP camp in Rukban on the border with Jordan.
- WFP FITTEST training services and the ETC delivered an IT Emergency Management workshop in Damascus from 1–6 February, to support the professional development of UN agency and NGO staff in the region.
- During the user satisfaction survey carried out at the end of 2018, humanitarians in Syria and surrounding countries expressed an overall user satisfaction rate of 86% among the ETC core communications services.



ETC Coordinator for Syria, Balamine Outtara, delivers IT Emergency Management at an inter-agency capacity building workshop in Damascus, alongside WFP FITTEST.

Photo credits: WFP / Ryan Twitney

Situation Overview

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be dire, and has been exacerbated by harsh winter conditions, including torrential rains. Many humanitarian challenges persist, including the vulnerability of three million people in Idleb, the fate of up to 6,000 people who remain trapped by ongoing hostilities in armed group-controlled areas in Deir ez-Zor and those who have fled the area, and difficulties in securing sustained

humanitarian access. Efforts to reach 40,000 people stranded in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp of Rukban near the border with Jordan in December 2018 were unsuccessful. With ETC assistance, a humanitarian convoy was able to reach the camp in February 2019.

In September 2018, international actors signed an agreement to jointly implement a 15-20km wide demilitarized zone free of heavy weapons along conflict lines in North-West Syria, along the border with Turkey. Recent fighting in areas in and around the demilitarised zone continue to result in civilian deaths, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and displacement that now numbers nearly 15,000 people.

Response

Syria

- The ETC in Syria provided security communications and power solutions to UN staff to support the delivery of a convoy – the largest of its kind to be delivered in Syria – of food and other lifesaving assistance to 40,000 people stranded at the remote IDP camp in Rukban on the border with Jordan. Following the successful deployment of emergency communication services, WFP and the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Syria have requested for the ETC for prepare to support further humanitarian convoy deliveries to IDP camps across Syria with connectivity and power services.
- Given the current regulations in country, not all types of radio communications equipment are authorised to be imported or operated. WFP, as lead of the ETC, has engaged with other UN agencies to identify the best interoperable security communications system to be used in future. ETC has confirmed they will use the UNHCR radio communications systems and the associated Long Term Agreement (LTA).
- WFP FITTEST training services and the ETC in Syria delivered an IT Emergency Management workshop in Damascus from 1–6 February, to support the professional development of UN agency and NGO staff in the region. 14 participants from 9 organisations attended the course, which aimed to expand their skills to efficiently manage the IT response in humanitarian emergency operations. There was a demand among participants for further training.
- During the user satisfaction survey carried out at the end of 2018, humanitarians in Syria and surrounding countries expressed an overall user satisfaction rate of 86% among the ETC core communications services (Internet connectivity and security communication-related services).
- The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2019 for Syria and the surrounding countries is complete and the ETC has submitted its narrative and activities for this year. The ETC's total budget for Syria and the surrounding countries for 2019 is US\$995,000.

- An ETC mission to the UN hubs in Tartous and Homs carried out radio equipment maintenance and installation upgrades to support the entire humanitarian community and provided end user radio communication training to 13 participants in Homs and 12 participants in Tartous, from 7 UN agencies.

Turkey

- Following an ETC assessment mission to the UN hub in Gazientep, it was confirmed that ETC services are no longer required at the Turkish border with Syria, particularly at the UN hub in Gazientep as some agencies have established offices outside the hub. In 2019, the ETC will scale down services in the UN hub but will continue to provide support to cross-border operations to Syria from Qamishli and Reyhanli.
- An ETC repeater on the border between Turkey and Syria – in Reyhanli – has been denied a renewal permit by MOFA and so the repeater has now been dismantled, funded by the ETC in Syria. UN VHF services will therefore be shut down in Reyhanli whilst the remaining ETC services will continue as normal.

Planned Response

Syria

- At the request of the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the ETC was asked in late 2018 to establish security communications infrastructure and services in Deir ez-Zor where a UN hub is now operational. However, due to the security situation in Deir ez-Zor, an ETC assessment mission has not been possible to date. This is becoming an urgent issue as UN staff in Deir ez-Zor have no access to security communications or Internet connectivity. To address the issue, the ETC has managed to secure a seat for an ETC telecommunications assistant on the next WFP mission to Deir ez-Zor planned and approved for 10 March. The ETC is planning to install a connectivity solution to support the UN hub in Deir ez-Zor.
- In collaboration with UNDSS and UNICEF, the ETC has finalised plans to upgrade the connectivity links in both Homs and Aleppo.
- As part of the 3x UN hubs to be established in Daraa, Hama and Raqqa in Syria, the ETC will map the common Information and Communications Technology (ICT) requirements in these three locations to be ready to support the provision of shared communications services.
- An additional new UN hub will be established in Sweida in the south of Syria as part of the anticipated scale up of the humanitarian response in 2019 as many returnees come back to the country. The ETC is ready to install and deploy communication services as required.

- The ETC is planning to install radio repeaters and fully manned radio rooms to increase emergency telecommunication services in all UN operational areas and to enhance the safety and security of the UN, humanitarian agencies and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC).
- Installation of solar power solutions will take place in 2019 to ensure continuous operations of Communication Centres (COMCENS) inside Syria.
- The ETC will deliver security communications technical training in 2019.

Lebanon

- The ETC continue to work on clearing the store of equipment based in Lebanon and aim to complete this clearance in 2019. The team is waiting for government approval to dispose of the equipment.

Challenges

- Lack of access to operational areas and receiving the deployment authorisations from relevant authorities is a major issue which frequently affects the timely implementation of ETC activities across Syria.
- Importing telecommunications-related equipment into Syria remains a challenge.

Meetings

- The next Global ETC Joint teleconference on Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen operations will take place on Wednesday 13 March 2019.

Information

- Humanitarian ICT responders supporting the Syria operation across the region are encouraged to share their contact details with Syria.ETC@wfp.org to facilitate coordination efforts.
- A dedicated information-sharing space has been created on the ETC website <https://www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-civil-unrest>. Organisations involved in the ICT response are encouraged to share updates with the ETC community to support the overall humanitarian response.



Shared ICT Services

ETC Dashboard: <https://www.etcluster.org/document/etc-syria-dashboard-january-2019>

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Acronyms

COMCEN	Communication Centre
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FITTEST	Fast IT and Telecommunications Intervention and Support Team
HF	High Frequency
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IT	Information Technology
LTA	Long Term Agreement
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SMT	Security Management Team
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
WFP	World Food Programme
VHF	Very High Frequency
WoS	Whole of Syria



All information related to ETC operations can be found on the ICT Emergency website: www.ETCluster.org

For more information, or to be added or deleted from the mailing list, please contact: Syria.ETC@wfp.org