Syria & the Surrounding Countries

ETC Situation Report #35

Reporting period 01/03/2019 to 31/05/2019

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 31/08/2019.

Highlights

- The ETC project received a total of USD 850,000 to carry out its 2019 activities. With this recent contribution, the ETC in Syria is now 95% funded.

- The ETC deployed to Deir ez-Zor on an assessment mission to establish ETC services at the UN hub.

- The source of very poor radio performance communications throughout Syria has been identified by an ETC assessment carried out in Damascus.

- The ETC is preparing training in Beirut on the UNHCR security communications system that will be used by World Food Programme (WFP) in Syria going forwards to build technical capacity for WFP and other agencies in using the equipment.

Al-hol refugee camp, Deir ez-Zor, north eastern Syria.

In May, the ETC carried out an urgent assessment mission to the UN hub in Deir ez-Zor to provide connectivity services for humanitarians operating there.

Photo credits: OCHA

Situation Overview

The humanitarian community is working to respond to the needs of hundreds of thousands of Syrians following a recent escalation in hostilities in and around Idlib and the de-escalation zone along the border with Turkey.

The UN continues to receive daily reports of the violence, including of military operations and aerial attacks on population centres and civilian infrastructure, as well as the usage of barrel bombs. Much of the areas affected are situated along the international Latakia-Aleppo and Hama-Aleppo highways. An explosion incident near the WFP distribution point in Aleppo did not halt UN operations. Movements of WFP personnel in Hama and Homs have been restricted. As security infrastructure around the WFP office in Damascus is no longer in place, WFP considers this location high risk and has urged all staff – including ETC staff – to relocate if security measures are not restored. An alternative office on the outskirts of Damascus has been identified.

Response

- The ETC project received a total of USD 850,000 to carry out its 2019 activities. This allocation comes from the German Government to the WFP Syrian office and was allocated by WFP to ETC. With this recent contribution, the ETC in Syria is now 95% funded.

- The ETC Coordinator successfully presented the ETC operational plan at the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) meeting attended by the Humanitarian Coordinator and Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria. As a result, the ETC 2019 project for the HRP was approved.

- The source of very poor High Frequency (HF) radio performance throughout Syria has been identified through an ETC assessment carried out in Damascus. Corrective actions will be carried out in partnership with UNFPA to adjust the HF radio equipment located at the UNDSS Security Operations Centre (SOC) to provide much-needed improvements in HF communications throughout Syria.

- After many months of seeking access approval, the ETC deployed to Deir ez-Zor on an assessment mission to establish ETC services at the UN hub. The first assessment report has been submitted on the set-up of a SOC. Full agreement was reached with the UN hub premises owner for the installation of outdoor equipment (VHF and HF mast and antennas, satellite dish). An ETC technician has successfully operationalized a temporary connectivity solution (ADSL link) to provide Internet services. Further, the ETC held a meeting with UNICEF to coordinate the deployment of a permanent connectivity solution for the humanitarian community based at the UN hub in Deir ez-Zor.

- ETC connectivity services are being upgraded to fibre link in Aleppo and Homs which will provide faster connectivity. Humanitarian organisations will cover the costs of the bandwidth required to support their operations. Next steps are to confirm capacity requirements for participating UN agencies and to proceed with the link installation at the UN hubs in Aleppo and Homs.

- In Tartous, the ETC has identified a suitable location to deploy a radio repeater, as the current VHF radio communications are very limited due to a damaged repeater.

- The ETC participated in the 2020 Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) kick-off workshop in Beirut to hold preliminary discussions with the humanitarian community regarding priorities for the 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The ETC needs to be aware of these priorities to align its response with other clusters.

Planned Response

- The ETC participated in a 'Collective Community Engagement' workshop on 13 May in Beirut to assess the possibility of implementing Services for Communities (S4C) services in Syria. The ETC is fully ready to engage with other clusters if technical services (such as call centres, community radio stations) are needed.

- Due to current regulations in country, some brands of radio communications equipment are not authorized to be imported or operated. Following consultation with other UN agencies, the ETC will use UNHCR interoperable security communications systems going forward. The ETC held a meeting with UNHCR on 26 April to ensure full support regarding the urgent deployment of these systems to Tartous and Deir ez-Zor.

  o The ETC is setting up training on this system to be delivered in Beirut from 18 – 20 June in close collaboration with the Syria Corridor office. 8x UN agencies (21 participants) have submitted their nominees for the training. The training will build technical capacity for WFP and other agencies in using the equipment for VHF radio within the country.

- Discussions have started with WFP FITTEST Training Services based in Dubai regarding the possibility of delivering additional technical (data connectivity and voice) capacity training for IT staff in Syria. It will be the second capacity building activity planned as part of the 2019 HRP.

- The ETC is deploying a connectivity solution to the new WFP office in Hama and are ready to deploy security telecommunications services if required. The ETC will also map the common Information and Communications Technology (ICT) requirements in Daraa, Raqqa and Sweida where a further 3x UN hubs are planned, to be ready to support the provision of shared communications services.

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 Libya, Mozambique, Syria and Yemen operations will take place on 12 June 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/node/10093

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Acronyms

ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
HF	High Frequency
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan

IT	Information Technology
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IT	Information Technology
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
S4C	Services for Communities
SOC	Security Operations Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
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