

Syria & the Surrounding Countries

ETC Situation Report #36

Reporting period 01/06/2019 to 31/07/2019

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 30/09/2019.

Highlights

- The fibre link installed by the ETC at the UN hub in Homs is now fully operational meaning connectivity services are now accessible to UN staff.
- In Deir ez-Zor, Internet Service Provider (ISP) SyriaTel has finalized the installation of a new ISP link for the UN hub, funded by the ETC. This solution will provide reliable Internet connectivity services for the humanitarian community.
- A Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS) mission has been completed across 8x sites in Turkey to review the Security Communications Systems (SCS) used by UN agencies and NGOs in country, including for humanitarians responding to the Syrian crisis.



ETC Telecommunications Associate Muhammad Khaled installs tower for improved radio coverage in Damascus.

Photo credits: ETC

Situation Overview

Fighting across north-western Syria continued unabated in northern Hama, southern Idlib and western Aleppo governorates. On 22 July, Idlib saw one of the deadliest attacks on civilian areas seen since the upsurge in fighting began three months ago. The recent escalation in conflict has so far displaced more than 330,000 people, many of whom were displaced for a second or third time. Since late March, approximately 15,600 people have left the Rukban settlement and arrived in Homs governorate. Displacement into densely populated areas is putting a strain on service delivery for humanitarian actors. The majority of ETC activities have not been affected. However, a planned humanitarian convoy to Manbij settlement camp – which the ETC would have supported – has been postponed due to the deteriorating security situation.

Response

- The fibre link installed by the ETC at the UN hub in Homs is now fully operational meaning connectivity services are now accessible to UN staff.
- The ETC has completed the installation of a new telecommunications tower at the UNDSS Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Damascus to improve radio services performance and coverage.
- In Deir ez-Zor, Internet Service Provider (ISP) SyriaTel has finalized the installation of a new ISP link for the UN hub, funded by the ETC. This solution will provide reliable Internet connectivity services for the humanitarian community.
- Coordinated by the ETC, SyriaTel completed a first site assessment at the UN hub in Aleppo with the aim to implement a new point-to-point microwave link to improve connectivity.
- A Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS) mission has been completed across 8x sites in Turkey (Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Reyhanli, Antakya, Kilis and Sanliurfa) to review the Security Communications Systems (SCS) used by UN agencies and NGOs in country, including for humanitarians responding to the Syrian crisis. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS)-requested mission was conducted jointly by TESS, WFP's Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST), ETC, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP. Telecommunications services in Turkey is currently funded by ETC Syria and is to be phased out by 2020.

Planned Response

- 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 is ready to implement the migration of all radio equipment in Syria once the necessary approvals have been received.
 - To support the migration of security communications systems, the ETC has confirmed radio communication capacity building to be held in France from 10-12 September (postponed from June). 21x participants from 8x UN agencies will take part. The training will build technical capacity for WFP and other agencies in using the new equipment for VHF radio within the country.
- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has requested the ETC to support the UN-mandated evacuation of the Rukban settlement camp with portable connectivity solutions and communications equipment. The ETC will collaborate with Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) to acquire the necessary equipment to support the request. The portable connectivity equipment will be utilized by the ETC to support future UN convoys.
- The ETC together with UNICEF are planning a mission to Homs to dismantle and relocate connectivity equipment to Deir ez-Zor.

- Security telecommunications equipment ordered by the ETC arrived on 25 July to set up 2x Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in Deir ez-Zor and Tartous. The ETC is now planning an installation mission at each of these 2x sites pending approval from the Syrian authorities. The SOCs will be managed by UNDSS.
- Planning continues with WFP FITTEST Training Services to deliver a capacity building session in Dubai in late November/early December that will provide ICT staff based in Syria with the skills to deploy and manage data and voice connectivity services during emergency operations. This workshop will be the second capacity building activity planned as part of the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).
- Staffing:
 - An interview took place on 24 June for an IT Associate position to support the ETC operation in Deir ez-Zor. The new recruit will start in early August. As a result, Deir ez-Zor will become the first fully staffed and funded ETC site in Syria.
 - The interview for a fixed term position in Al Qamishli took place on 23 July.
 - The ETC plan to hire a local ETC Information Management (IM) Associate.

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 equipment into Syria remains a challenge.

Meetings

- The next Global ETC Joint teleconference on Libya, Mozambique, Syria and Yemen operations will take place on 18 September 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/10158>



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Acronyms

ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FITTEST	Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IM	Information Management
ISP	Internet Service Provider
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
S4C	Services for Communities
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SCS	Security Communications Systems
SOC	Security Operations Centre
TESS	Telecommunications Security Standards
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
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