

Syria & the Surrounding Countries

ETC Situation Report #40

Reporting period 01/02/2020 to 31/03/2020

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 31/05/2020.

Highlights

- The ETC – in partnership with the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) – has enhanced the security communications infrastructure in Tartous to support the use of handheld radio devices for communication between humanitarians.
- On 31 March, the ETC delivered a presentation to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) outlining its planned 2020 activities as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Cluster defence session.
- The ETC 2020 plan will be impacted by the response to COVID-19 due to travel restrictions, staff availability and demand for additional ETC services.



ETC Telecommunications Associate – Muhammad Khaled – carries out upgrades to security communications for humanitarians atop a roof in Tartous.

Photo: WFP/ETC

Response

- There are 10 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Syria, although this is likely to be an underestimate. The first fatality in Syria caused by the virus was reported on 30 March. The authorities have taken a number of measures in response to the outbreak, including an open-ended curfew which came into effect in parts of northern and eastern Syria on 30 March. A further restriction of movement between governorates across the whole country was enforced on 31 March.

- Since 16 March, all WFP offices in Syria are operating via telecommute. At the end of March, critical staff who had still been reporting to the WFP Country Office (CO) in Damascus – including the ETC Coordinator – were instructed by WFP to work remotely from home. The WFP CO is based at a central hotel, which is also the home residence of WFP and ETC staff.
- In response to COVID-19, the ETC Coordinator in Syria – who is also Head of WFP IT – has been requested to significantly scale up connectivity services at the CO to support other agencies. The network has already been extended to cover the Resident Coordinator's (RC) residence at the hotel.
- On 31 March, the ETC delivered a presentation to OCHA outlining its planned 2020 activities as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Cluster defence session. The ETC submitted its narrative to the HRP 2020 on 28 January. There has been a significant delay on the proceedings due to the re-escalation of conflict in northwest Syria at the end of 2019 and early 2020.
- The ETC 2020 plan will be impacted by the response to COVID-19 due to travel restrictions, staff availability and demand for additional ETC services.
- In early March, the ETC in Syria received approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to implement a fibre link upgrade at the UN hub in Aleppo to improve connectivity services for humanitarians operating there. This activity is part of an ongoing process since mid-2019. However, the mission is on hold due to the cessation of all non-essential field missions as a result of COVID-19.
- A planned ETC mission to extend data connectivity at the new UN hub in Deir Ez-Zor is also on hold due to travel restrictions regarding COVID-19.
- As part of an ongoing plan to improve security communications infrastructure in Tartous, the ETC and UNDSS deployed a telecommunications associate to the city from 14–20 March. The associate installed VHF radio services at the field office in Tartous, a service that has been required since the Syrian crisis began, and which will ensure humanitarians have access to security communications through hand-held radio devices. Read more about this [here](#).
- A two-week mission to Syria, in close collaboration with the Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS) project, was due to take place from 22 March – 4 April. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, this mission has been postponed. When held, the mission will train the inter-agency group on optimizing radio frequencies and assist the team in improving the frequencies in Damascus and Homs.
- The ETC was contacted by UNDSS and the WFP field office in Qamishli in northeast Syria to carry out maintenance work on its radio infrastructure to ensure security communications are fully operational due to the deteriorating security situation in that area. The ETC has requested approval from MoFA for this mission. However, travel restrictions are likely to hamper implementation.

Challenges

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has severe concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on Syria's population, particularly in northwest Syria where sustained conflict has crippled healthcare infrastructure and where large numbers of Syrians are living in overcrowded camps along the Turkish border.
- The humanitarian situation in northwest Syria has worsened since November 2019 as hostilities continue to intensify, with an estimated 959,000 people displaced since the situation escalated.
- Lack of access to operational areas and lengthy 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 major challenge.

Meetings

- The next Global ETC Joint teleconference on Libya, Syria and Yemen operations will take place on **8 April 2020**.

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 on Syria can be found on the ETC website: <https://www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-civil-unrest>.

Shared ICT Services

ETC Syria [Dashboard](#) | ETC Syria [Infographic](#)

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