Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #38
Reporting period: 16/07/2024 to 22/07/2024

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 31 October 2023 in response to the conflict crisis in Gaza. Situation Reports are published weekly.

Highlights

- On 21 July, the ETC coordinator joined the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) in the inter-agency security assessment at multiple sites in Gaza City to identify a joint operating base for humanitarian organizations in Gaza City.

- On 17 July, the ETC Field Coordinator attended an Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) meeting in Deir Al Balah and highlighted the urgent need to prioritise fuel allocation to telecommunications and internet service providers to keep their critical telecommunications infrastructure operational.

ETC field coordinator engaging with affected population during inter-agency assessment in Al Maghazi Prep Boys B School in Deir Al Balah. Photo: OCHA/Husam Saleh

- During the reporting period, the ETC received approval from the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for 36 lists containing 82 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment, including 33 Track24[1] devices for five UN agencies and auxiliary equipment and accessories. The ETC is coordinating with the Access Support Unit (ASU) for the clearance of transportation of the approved equipment into Gaza.

Situation overview

Intensified hostilities, access constraints, fuel shortages, and the breakdown of law and order continue to create a highly volatile and risky operating environment for aid workers, further disrupting the delivery of life-saving assistance across the Gaza Strip and forcing aid actors on some occasions to cancel planned activities.

The Kerem Shalom border crossing, which was operational at a limited capacity for transporting humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza, is now suspended due to security incidents. Erez West is the only crossing for importing humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza.

Telecommunications Overview

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[1] Track24 is a satellite-based staff tracking device pre-approved by COGAT for use in Gaza.

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at limited capacity due to limited fuel and a congested network as a result of very few operational telecommunications towers. Both MNOs do not offer internet connectivity, as was the condition before the onset of hostilities in October 2023. Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

Internet connectivity remains a primary communications challenge across the Gaza Strip and is worsening as displaced people relocate from Rafah to other locations in the North. Internet Service Provider (ISP)—Paltel—continues to provide limited internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City amid the destruction of critical telecommunications infrastructure and a lack of fuel and spare parts.

ETC Activities

Coordination

On 21 July, the ETC coordinator joined the UNDSS, UNRWA and WHO in the inter-agency security assessment at multiple sites in Gaza City to identify a joint operating base for humanitarian organizations in Gaza City. The ETC will share the assessment report highlighting the gaps in the security communications system (SCS) and the way forward with UNDSS and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

On 18 July, the ETC followed up with OCHA on transporting four solar-powered kits into Gaza, which are currently in Jerusalem. OCHA aims to facilitate the transportation of these solutions on 24 July with the WFP Regional Director (RD), Country Director (CD), and OCHA Special United Nations Official (SUNO) mission.

On 17 July, the ETC Field Coordinator attended an ICCG meeting in Deir Al Balah and highlighted the urgent need to prioritise fuel allocation to telecommunications and internet service providers to keep their critical telecommunications infrastructure operational.

The ETC received an invitation from the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology (MTIT) to a meeting scheduled for 07 August in Ramallah. The team is exploring opportunities for collaboration to facilitate MNOs and ISPs in enhancing their services in Gaza.

During the reporting period, the ETC received approval from COGAT for 36 lists containing 82 ICT equipment, including 33 Track24 devices for five UN agencies and auxiliary equipment and accessories. The ETC is coordinating with ASU for the clearance of transportation of approved equipment into Gaza.

Internet connectivity

The local ISP—Paltel—faces multiple challenges, including reduced staff, lack of fuel and spare parts, and safe access to repair and maintain the remaining network services. The ISP is unable to meet the high demands of the humanitarian agencies in providing new or strengthening connectivity services at their offices and guesthouses in Deir Al Balah.

To address the urgent need for connectivity services, the ETC is engaging with the local ISP to prioritize strengthening internet connectivity services in Deir Al Balah. The ETC is liaising with agencies and partners for technical advice and assessments and is coordinating with the ISP to establish connectivity services at their new offices and guesthouses in Deir Al Balah.

Security communications

On 17 July, the ETC handed over five Very High Frequency (VHF) digital radios to UNRWA and 15 radios to UNDSS as a loan until 15 June 2026. UNDSS assigned four radios to its staff and distributed the remaining units to other UN agencies. The remaining 10 of the 30 radios imported into Gaza on 16 June are assigned to WFP.

The Area Security Management Team (ASMT) finalized the Gaza Security Risk Management (SRM) process, with a mandatory recommendation to use a satellite-based staff tracking system for missions in Gaza. The ETC and WFP are following up with all UN agencies regarding the use of COGAT-approved Track24 devices and facilitating the consolidated procurement of these devices for WFP and 11 other UN agencies operating in Gaza. UNDSS is also contacting the UN agency's security focal persons to seek the details of the Garmin devices they use to incorporate them into one platform.

Corrigendum: Eight Track24 devices (not 29 as reported in the ETC Sitrep#37) have been approved for the use of four UN agencies, totalling 33 Track24 devices approved so far, including 25 devices approved earlier for the WFP operations in Gaza. The ETC is following up on the approval of the remaining devices.

Staffing

There are currently three dedicated ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator has been in Deir Al Balah since 11 July, following a short break to support the coordination of telecommunications needs of partners and agencies operating in Gaza.

- The ETC field coordinator has been in Deir Al Balah since 06 June to strengthen face-to-face engagements and support partners with technical advice and guidance.

- A dedicated ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) continues to support the mission while based in Cairo.

Dashboard

See the **ETC Dashboard** for an overview of planned and operational services.

Infographic

See the **ETC Infographic** for an overview of activities data, information, and location of planned and operational services.

Factsheet

See the **ETC Factsheet** for further information and funding requirements.

Funding

The ETC requires a total of US$1.8 million requested in the revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024.

On 13 May 2024, the ETC received US$415,000 from the Government of Poland to set up common ICT services. A further US$158,228 from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) was received on 21 May 2024 to support the maritime logistics project with communications services.

Currently, the ETC is 31.8% funded out of the US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake cluster activities and address the immediate communications needs in Gaza.

Challenges

Lack of fuel: The lack of fuel continues to severely compromise the operation of critical telecommunications infrastructure, causing MNOs and ISPs to operate at a limited capacity and pushing them to the verge of shutting down their services completely. The Gaza Strip continues to be under an electricity blackout since October 2023. The situation has severely disrupted humanitarian aid operations and communication with humanitarian responders on the ground.

Safety of staff: The safety of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza is a primary concern and priority. Due to insecurity and a lack of safe access, the deployment of shared ETC communications services and face-to-face technical support to other humanitarian responders remains a challenge.

Limited telecommunications services: Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages due to damaged infrastructure, a lack of fuel, cash liquidity and spare parts, and insecure conditions for carrying out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network.

Lack of telecommunications equipment: The availability of telecommunications equipment on the ground is severely restricted, and much has been damaged or destroyed. Further, the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is restricted and prolonged. Only 20 satellite phones, 33 Track24 devices, 30 digital VHF radios, four VHF repeaters and four solar power solutions have been approved for importation into Gaza by COGAT since 07 October 2023.

Internet connectivity: The lack of internet connectivity in Deir Al Balah is hampering the reactivation of the SCS network. The SCS network is unavailable across the rest of Gaza due to damaged equipment and restrictions on SCS equipment importation.

Funding: Insufficient funding has limited the ETC in addressing the immediate life-saving communications needs of humanitarian responders in Gaza. The ETC continues to appeal for funding from varied potential donors.

Cybersecurity continues to be a pressing issue. Caution should be applied when using technology platforms, including social media and press platforms.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **Wednesday 24 July 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 09 July 2024. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

Contacts

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

www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

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