

Syria – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #69: November – December

Reporting period: 01/11/2024 to 31/12/2024

The ETC was activated in Syria in January 2013 in response to the conflict crisis. Situation Reports are distributed every two months.

Highlights

- From 08 and 09 December, the ETC paused all activities to concentrate on staff safety, relocation, and business continuity—following the collapse of President Bashar al-Assad’s administration, on 08 December, which escalated the security situation across Syria.
- As of 31 December, all ETC personnel remain safe, and the warehouse storing strategic ICT equipment in Damascus is also secure. The ETC services are available in all common operational areas. The cluster in collaboration with its lead agency—WFP Syria country office—continue to monitor the situation.
- On 22 November, the ETC published and share the 2024 ETC user satisfaction survey. The annual survey gathered feedback from humanitarians using ETC services in the response in 2024 and identified areas where the cluster aims to improve in 2025.



The ETC installs back up solar power solution at Al Hol camp. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

On 08 December, President Bashar al-Assad’s administration collapsed, escalating the security situation in Syria. As of 31 December, Hostilities continue to be reported in parts of Syria, including Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, Latakia and Quneitra governorates, as well as in the vicinity of Tishreen dam. Due to the insecurity, humanitarian operations are still on hold in Tartous and Latakia governorates except for a few United Nations (UN) missions. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) remain unable to access Menbij since 08 December.

While the overall security situation is stable, isolated conflict incidents continue to occur, and a sense of uncertainty still prevails, especially in some of the coastal areas, in Deir Ez-Zor, rural Damascus and Qamishli. Amid these challenges, schools are reopening, and people are resuming work. The Jordan-Syria border officially reopened on 20 December. However, the World Food Programme (WFP) continues to prefer the Lebanon-Syria border for staff movements and equipment importation.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) operations using the Damascus airport are suspended until 01 January. Commercial flights using Damascus airport are suspended until 06 January, with no date confirmed for full resumption of flights.

Impact on telecommunications

On 10 December, internet connectivity in some parts of the country such as Hama and Homs, was briefly impacted following partial telecoms disruptions and power cuts during the final days of the Assad administration. Voice call services and internet connectivity in the country's capital, Damascus, Aleppo, and other towns across the country remained largely sustained.

Activities

Coordination

From 08 and 09 December, the ETC and TEC Syria paused all activities to concentrate on staff safety, relocation, and business continuity—following the collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's administration, on 08 December, thereby escalating the security situation across Syria.

As of 31 December, the situation remains stable but unpredictable, with isolated conflict incidents occurring in some of the coastal areas, in Deir Ez-Zor, rural Damascus and Qamishli. Following the events unfolding and change of authorities, the team has been focusing on ensuring staff safety, wellbeing, and access to communications services.

As of 31 December, all TEC and ETC personnel remain safe, and the warehouse storing strategic ICT equipment in Damascus is also secure. The ETC services are available in all common operational areas. The cluster in collaboration with the WFP Syria country office continue to monitor the situation.

Prior to the events of 08 December, the ETC participated in the Emergency Coordination Meeting on the Aleppo Humanitarian Crisis to provide support to all inter-agency efforts. Starting 02 December, all UN personnel were advised to use the alternate work modality, due to the evolving security situation in the country—at the time. By 16 December approximately 50 percent of the staff had returned to the office.

On 22 November, the ETC published and share the 2024 ETC user satisfaction survey. The annual survey gathered feedback from humanitarians using ETC services in the response in 2024 and identified areas where the cluster aims to improve in 2025. The survey resulted in an overall user satisfaction rate of 85% for ETC services and activities, exceeding the 80% target set as the key performance indicator for the ETC. The full report is available [here](#).

The ETC continues to engage the Syria Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SYTRA) to renew the VSAT and Thuraya annual licenses for 2025. Further, a request to relocate the VHF base and satellite phone devices from the current SOC to WFP facilities in Tartous has been submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). The relocation of devices is in support of the ongoing implementation of the Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) in the region which is now planned to be completed by the end of Q1 2025, pending approval from the authorities.

The ETC participated in the ICT Working Group (WG) coordination meeting held on 11 December, to provide updates on ETC services across the country.

ETC is following up with the WFP logistics team to import the cluster's ICT equipment, which is currently in Lebanon, pending the establishment of customs importation clearance formalities on the Syrian border side under the new administration.

The ETC is also collaborating with WFP TEC Syria and TEC Lebanon to explore and test the alternative satellite-based internet connectivity services. The cluster intends to use the devices as alternative data connectivity platforms in the common operational areas across the country.

Since 18 December, the ETC coordinator and technical specialist are in Damascus to provide support to partners and actively monitor the situation.

Security communications

The ETC continues to provide shared security communications services to 721 humanitarian responders from 12 UN agencies, across eight operational areas, thereby enabling secure communications for humanitarians undertaking life-saving response.

The Security Communications System (SCS) remains fully operational across the country, including Deir Ez-Zor, where most UN personnel had been relocated to Qamishli, from 09 to 17 December, due to the escalated security situation. On 18 December, as UN personnel relocated back from Qamishli, the VHF radio network was restored and fully operational in Deir Ez-Zor hub.

HF radio

As per ICAO recommendation, ETC is supporting United Nations Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) to establish radio communication between aircrafts and Security Operations Centres (SOCs). Due to interference faced using HF radio network, the ETC and UNHAS are requesting government approval to import and use secure AirBand frequency equipment for communications between the UNHAS aircrafts and in Damascus and Aleppo. In November, WFP FITTEST¹ in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), procured and packed the Very High Frequency (VHF) Airband equipment for shipment to ETC Syria via Lebanon. Once installed and operational, the Airband network will enhance travel safety and boost operational efficiency.

VHF radio

From 04 - 07 November the ETC, United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} jointly conducted technical missions to Tartous and Homs and set up the Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) technical solution for Tartous. The RSOC is monitored by the Homs SOC, to enhance secure communications for humanitarian responders. The ETC and {TESS+} delivered a training session to capacitate the SOC operators in Homs to operate the newly installed RSOC for Tartous. The ETC continues to collaborate with UNDSS in evaluating the RSOC

¹ Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency Support Team

connectivity between Homs and Tartous to ensure secure communication for humanitarian responders.

The VHF repeater at Jabal Zain Al Abidin, in Hama is still non-operational pending access to the repeater location, currently restricted by the fluid security situation in the location. The remote access to the Hama repeater has been inaccessible since 13 December and the VHF network signal is currently partially provided by the VHF repeater in Homs.

The ETC provided guidance to do pre-wiring in four United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) armoured vehicles.

The ETC has programmed and prepared 11 VHF handheld radio devices and two satellite phones for emergency use in Damascus that ready to deploy. The ETC is also supporting inter-agency operations remotely for VHF and VSAT connectivity in Aleppo.

The ETC has procured and received four new lithium batteries for strategic back-up stocks for SOCs and data centres across all field hubs, as part of preparedness and Middle East emergency response scale-up.

Data connectivity

The ETC continues to provide internet connectivity services to 300+ humanitarians from 12 UN agencies across eight operational sites in Syria.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of service locations.

Funding

In 2024, the ETC requires funding of US\$465,000 to maintain and expand services in eight common operational areas across Syria and Türkiye. The cluster is currently 96% funded out of the required US\$465,000. On 22 October the cluster received a further US\$200,000 from USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) added to another US\$200,000 received in February—to fund ETC activities for the rest of the year and beginning of 2025. Additionally, the ETC carried over US\$50,000 in funding from 2023. The ETC is exploring transition of ETC services and activities as of 2025. The cluster is optimizing its planned activities until the end of the year to match the current funding level.

Challenges

The escalated tension and uncertainty in Syria, the Middle East region and conflict in Lebanon poses challenge to the delivery of cluster services needs to humanitarian responders.

The recent change in Syrian administration may delay some authorization processes as the new administration formulates policies, rules, and regulations. The ETC continues to ensure

availability of ICT services for humanitarian responders to support with the current influx of affected population from Lebanon.

The ongoing power crisis across Syria continued to pose significant challenges and impact the ETC’s ability to maintain continuous services.

Moreover, the Syrian telecommunications standards have affected the importation and usage of communication equipment which means there is need for constant adaptation to changes as well as flexible response strategies. The operation faces ongoing lengthy equipment importation challenges and the need for successful applications for authorizations from relevant authorities to move equipment. This affects the timely implementation of ETC activities across Syria.

Contacts

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

www.etcluster.org/emergencies/syria-conflict

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