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Update on the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service

Executive summary

Aviation plays an essential role in the movement of humanitarian workers and the delivery of critical humanitarian supplies, including food, medical items and shelters. The World Food Programme manages the world's leading humanitarian air service, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), which provides passenger and light cargo transport services for the entire humanitarian and development community, including to some of the hardest-to-reach locations on the planet. The importance of UNHAS is widely acknowledged, particularly in terms of its contribution to the safe and reliable transport of humanitarian and development workers to remote and challenging locations, despite the extreme challenges posed by emergencies, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Indeed, at a time when there is no immediate alternative solution to humanitarian air transport on the horizon, UNHAS remains essential.

When COVID-19 began to spread worldwide in early 2020, global supply chains and transport markets were severely affected. With borders closing, critically limited commercial air transport capacity and restrictions on travel and cargo movement imposed by authorities worldwide to slow the spread of the virus, humanitarian and health partners faced severe challenges in addressing the direct public health and indirect humanitarian consequences of the pandemic. WFP, as a leader in humanitarian logistics, stepped up to the challenge: in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the wider United Nations system and the international non-governmental organization community, WFP leveraged its logistics capacity and expertise to quickly establish a network of response hubs from which passenger and cargo flights could operate. WFP common services enabled the humanitarian community to respond to the massive needs triggered by the pandemic. WFP delivered assistance and transported passengers to 160 countries – 82 percent of the world – and, at one point, even became the most extensive global air service. Within that context, the WFP Global Passenger Air Service was launched on 1 May 2020, when its first passenger flight took off from Addis Ababa for Accra. As of April 2021, over 29,000 passengers

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have been transported on more than 1,500 WFP Global Passenger Air Service flights to 68 destinations. UNHAS has, moreover, continued to support the global response to COVID-19 by quickly implementing preventive measures so that it can continue to fly, securing government authorizations, providing medical evacuation capacity and transporting test samples and medical cargo, including COVID-19 vaccines. UNHAS currently operates more than 100 aircraft and serves over 400 regular destinations in 23 countries.

The unprecedented challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic meant that UNHAS started 2021 with limited carry-over of funds from the previous year, a financial shortfall and funding instability. This came at a time when UNHAS operations had increased significantly and there was increasing demand for new air transport operations. Indeed, three new air transport operations, to Burkina Faso, Mozambique and the Syrian Arab Republic, were launched in 2020, and one new operation, to Guinea, has already been launched in 2021.

The COVID-19 emergency response

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The subsequent steps taken by governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on global air traffic and significantly reduced the number of passenger and cargo flights. Not only did this prevent many humanitarian and health workers from travelling to where they were most needed, it also cut global air cargo capacity by 40 percent at a time when there was unprecedented demand for humanitarian assistance. The establishment of the WFP Global Passenger Air Service has therefore provided critical support to humanitarian and health operations worldwide. Indeed, as of April 2021, 42 percent of WFP Global Passenger Air Service passengers were non-governmental organization partners, 41 percent were United Nations personnel and 17 percent were donors or diplomats. Over and above the logistical support it has provided in the context of the global COVID-19 response, UNHAS has continued to support populations affected by other diseases, natural disasters, insecurity and armed conflict, food insecurity and malnutrition, and other acute humanitarian crises by ensuring the continuation of essential humanitarian operations. In line with its mandate as provider of last resort, WFP has not striven to replace the commercial sector but rather to fill in commercial transport market gaps stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. As airspace reopens and more commercial airlines resume services, WFP is adjusting its operations to reflect the changing circumstances while maintaining its critical infrastructure and strategic capacity so that it takes action as and when required, including as second and third waves of the pandemic sweep the globe. WFP has received earmarked funding from Australia, the European Union, France, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and Switzerland to enable the WFP Global Passenger Air Service to continue to fly to Yangon and Vientiane on a normal schedule of four flights per month until 15 September 2021 and then on a reduced schedule of two flights per month until the end of March 2022; Dili until 30 November 2021; and Asmara until 31 December 2021. Flights to Antananarivo will be discontinued in March 2021 due to a lack of earmarked funding. The WFP Country Director and the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Madagascar have signed a donor appeal document to facilitate the resumption of flights should funding be made available.
2. WFP has played a key role in the United Nations MEDEVAC Cell, which approves, manages and coordinates all COVID-19 medical evacuation requests, since its launch on 22 May 2020. A total of 210 MEDEVAC medical evacuations had been carried out as of 6 April 2021, 131 of which by WFP and 79 by the United Nations Department of Operational Support. WFP has also constructed two COVID-19 treatment centres, one in Accra and one in Addis Ababa. Global-level coordination has been provided through the establishment of the COVID-19 Service Provision Coordination Cell at WFP headquarters, and the Supply Chain Inter-Agency Coordination Cell at WHO headquarters in Geneva, which supports interagency

coordination and information sharing among key responding partners at the upstream level. Staffing has been increased across the board to support all those activities.

3. The United Nations Humanitarian Booking Hub has been leveraged as a critical platform for booking flights and providing users crucial information including country-specific requirements, local arrangements and preventive measures. The global networks and services provided by WFP have been designed to address anticipated needs, but due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation they have remained flexible so that locations, processes and services can be quickly adapted to more effectively meet the needs of health and humanitarian actors and ensure that operations are carried out in order of criticality. Synergies have also been sought with in-country and subregional air transport services, including those operated by UNHAS and viable commercial options, so as to ensure the most efficient use of resources.
4. Despite the extreme challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHAS operations have continued to serve humanitarian and development communities. Significant initiatives have included the following:
 - Within the context of the WFP COVID-19 common services response, an international airbridge connecting Kabul with Doha was opened by the UNHAS Afghanistan office in April 2020 and has since provided transport services to more than 1,000 passengers from 50 organizations, including diplomats, United Nations officials and non-governmental organization staff. During the peak of the pandemic, all commercial international flights were suspended, only resuming on 24 June 2020.
 - The UNHAS Libya operation has transported 320 kg of COVID-19-related supplies from Tripoli to Benghazi on behalf of the International Organization for Migration and 625 kg of vital medical supplies and personal protection equipment (PPE) from Tunis to Tripoli, in coordination with the African Union and the Libyan authorities, in addition to taking part in a series of United Nations solidarity flights across 95 countries.
 - The importance of UNHAS operations in the Sudan in support of the COVID-19 response was highlighted in a joint United Nations appeal to the Sudanese Government, in which United Nations agencies called for humanitarian access to be maintained, inter alia, through UNHAS internal and external flights. In addition, and as part of the COVID-19 response, the UNHAS Sudan office operated a vital airlink connecting Khartoum with Addis Ababa between May and June 2020.
 - By the end of 2020, the UNHAS operation in the Syrian Arab Republic had transported 806 passengers and 15.4 million tons of humanitarian relief cargo, including medical supplies and PPE used in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The UNHAS Yemen office continued to provide essential services during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and, following the suspension of all flights to and from Yemeni airports in March 2020, played a critical role not only in facilitating humanitarian access but also in mediating with the civil aviation authority and other government officials on issues related to visas, COVID-19 testing and quarantine.
 - The UNHAS Cameroon office has supported that country's national authorities by providing air transport services to facilitate COVID-19-related cargo deliveries to Maroua, the capital of the Far North Region.

- UNHAS in the Central African Republic supported WHO and the Ministry of Health and Population by transporting health supplies and more than 155 COVID-19 test samples from field locations to Bangui, where the country's two diagnostic institutions with the capacity to conduct COVID-19 testing are located. Moreover, during the rainy season, UNHAS transported essential cargo, medical supplies and test samples to the capital by helicopter from hard-to-reach locations without airstrips. The helicopter used was also equipped with isolation chambers to facilitate medical evacuations of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients.
- The UNHAS Chad office has continued to provide uninterrupted air services to its users during the pandemic and has conducted five COVID-19-related medical evacuations.
- In Nigeria, the Government has authorized WFP to continue air operations to all locations served by UNHAS during the COVID-19-related lockdown. Besides maintaining four helicopters and one fixed-wing aircraft, UNHAS preparedness measures included deploying a helicopter equipped for COVID-19 medical evacuations to connect field locations with Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. UNHAS is also supporting WHO by providing air cargo transport for COVID-19 test kits, test samples, and PPE.
- UNHAS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained the only means of air transport available to both the humanitarian and diplomatic communities during the country's COVID-19 state of emergency. UNHAS has also provided crucial medical evacuation capacity.
- UNHAS Ethiopia has provided critical support within the context of the COVID-19 response through the establishment of the Addis Ababa Humanitarian Air Hub. The Hub operates around the clock, provides medical evacuation capacity and, to date, has been used by more than 10,000 air passengers.
- UNHAS Kenya has sought to address increasing demand for cargo transport, including the transport of COVID-19-related medical supplies and PPE, to numerous destinations, including Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps.
- UNHAS Somalia has supported that country's Government by transporting test samples from rural areas to laboratories in Mogadishu and Nairobi. In coordination with the WFP-led logistics cluster, a mechanism designed to ensure efficient and effective emergency responses, UNHAS has carried out airlifts of COVID-19-related relief supplies on behalf of the Government and other partners.
- In coordination with WHO, UNHAS South Sudan has supported the humanitarian community by providing medical evacuation capacity and transporting COVID-19 test samples from field locations to Juba.

Overview of UNHAS operations in 2020

5. In 2020, UNHAS operated in 23 countries: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Haiti, Guinea, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.¹

¹ In 2020, UNHAS also deployed a helicopter to support the humanitarian relief mission in Honduras, following the damage caused by Hurricanes Iota and Eta.

| TABLE 1: UNHAS IN NUMBERS, 2020 | |
|--|----------|
| Passengers | 248 000 |
| Cargo | 4 000 mt |
| Evacuations | 1 000 |
| Users | 800 |
| Destinations | 400 |

6. Until February 2020, UNHAS transported approximately 31,000 passengers each month. In the following seven months, during the peak of the pandemic and the period in which most countries restricted movement, the number of passengers transported fell approximately by half, with only 15,000 people transported each month.
7. In October and November 2020, the number of passengers transported by UNHAS started to return rapidly towards pre-COVID-19 levels, with a monthly average of more than 25,000 people. As for cargo, because certain countries did not restrict cargo shipments by air and because the COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for certain goods, some UNHAS operations transported greater quantities of cargo in 2020 than in 2019. In East Africa, for example, UNHAS cargo shipments increased by some 15 percent.

ECHO Flight project

8. In February 2020, WFP signed an indirect management delegation agreement with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), under the project title “Provision of Humanitarian Air Service in Support of DG ECHO-funded and other humanitarian aid projects in DRC, Kenya and Mali”, also known as the ECHO Flight project. The current fleet for the project includes three dedicated aircraft: one Cessna Caravan in Mali, and one Mi-8 and one Cessna Caravan in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Kenya, WFP is sharing a DHC-8 aircraft for UNHAS operations. The ECHO Flight project aims to be flexible and agile so that it can respond effectively to changing circumstances and can provide dedicated, safe and cost-effective air transport in support of European Union-funded humanitarian projects in ongoing or emerging operational contexts.

Airport rehabilitation

9. In collaboration with its partners, UNHAS plays an essential role in facilitating airport rehabilitation projects. Airport rehabilitation is of critical importance in that it facilitates connectivity and can improve living standards in isolated communities. For example, the UNHAS Mauritania office was involved in the rehabilitation of the airstrip in Bassikounou, a town that is currently the epicentre of humanitarian action in the country. The closure of the aerodrome in 2019 because of the deterioration of the airstrip was a major impediment to the rapid deployment of humanitarian workers to the M'Bera refugee camp. Thanks to generous contributions by donors and the support of the Mauritanian authorities and private-sector actors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Civil Aviation Agency, the Mauritanian Airports Company and the Ministry of Defence, the rehabilitation of the Bassikounou airstrip, which now measures 1,800 metres, was completed on 15 October 2020.

UNHAS and the United Nations Humanitarian Booking Hub

10. The WFP Global Passenger Air Service has made successful use of the United Nations Humanitarian Booking Hub web platform. In 2021, WFP plans to develop a series of easily-updatable web pages for each UNHAS country operation. The new web pages will enhance the experience of users, provide rapid access to important information, and facilitate the booking process and travel planning.

2021 funding outlook and 2020 financial overview

11. As highlighted previously, UNHAS started 2021 with limited carry-over funding from the previous year, a financial shortfall and funding instability. At the same time, requests for new air transport operations have increased.
12. Table 2 illustrates that, as of March 2021, the total financial shortfall stood at USD161.4 million.²

| Country of operation | Budget approved | Funding received | Percentage funded (%) | Operation funded until (2021) |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Afghanistan | 18 788 498 | 8 735 061 | 46 | End of July |
| Burkina Faso | 5 221 807 | 5 712 353 | 109 | End of December |
| Cameroon | 6 912 455 | 2 809 767 | 41 | End of June |
| Central African Republic | 22 540 505 | 10 038 752 | 44 | Mid-June |
| Chad | 16 665 708 | 8 783 504 | 53 | Beginning of August |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) | 32 852 054 | 29 750 405 | 90 | Beginning of December |
| Ethiopia | 4 577 405 | 1 705 921 | 37 | Beginning of July |
| Guinea | 3 453 817 | 998 700 | 29 | Mid-June |
| Haiti | 4 400 000 | 1 420 064 | 32 | End of May |
| Kenya | 5 142 295 | 1 846 457 | 36 | Mid-July |
| Libya | 5 889 079 | 1 717 462 | 29 | Mid-May |
| Mali | 8 716 972 | 7 423 126 | 85 | Mid-October |
| Mauritania | 2 891 849 | 1 534 441 | 53 | End of June |
| Mozambique | 3 487 830 | 428 335 | 12 | Beginning of May |
| Niger (the) | 9 589 156 | 4 504 523 | 47 | Mid-July |
| Nigeria | 24 077 503 | 8 344 311 | 35 | Beginning of May |
| Somalia | 25 222 868 | 14 650 582 | 58 | Mid-September |
| South Sudan | 54 081 097 | 24 464 045 | 45 | Mid-July |
| Sudan (the) | 27 646 736 | 10 861 262 | 39 | End of May |
| Syrian Arab Republic (the) | 8 561 962 | 2 675 803 | 31 | Mid-May |
| Yemen | 33 169 739 | 13 000 505 | 39 | Mid-June |
| Total | 323 889 337 | 161 405 380 | | |

² Funding requirements are currently being updated for certain UNHAS operations. Funding updates that reflect those changes will be made available over the next few months.

Aviation operational key performance indicators

13. Cost efficiency: Operational cost per passenger kilometre.³
 - The operational efficiency indicator, namely the operational cost per passenger kilometre, deteriorated from USD 1.49 in 2019 to USD 1.86 in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.
14. Effectiveness in 2020: percentage of bookings fulfilled in 2020 against booking requests.
 - Average of 90 percent.
15. Environmental efficiency:
 - The WFP Aviation Service established the “Environmental and Sustainability Programme” in May 2021 with the purpose of defining aviation-specific principles, objectives and outcome activities aimed at optimizing operations-related measures on the ground and in the air and improving the efficiency of processes in order to reduce the environmental impact of air transport services.
 - The WFP Aviation Service has developed a CO2 emission calculation methodology aligned with guidelines published by the International Civil Aviation Organization. The methodology, known as the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme Calculation Methodology, to track real-time CO2 emissions, including the CO2 emissions of all UNHAS flights and emissions associated with other WFP air transport services, including airdrops, dedicated ad-hoc flights and COVID-19-related passenger air services;
 - In 2020, total CO2 emissions were 184,559 mt, an increase over the figure for 2019 (148,443 mt). That increase resulted from increased cargo transport during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should however be emphasized that, as recently as 2018, total CO2 emissions stood at 252,112 mt, and WFP Aviation has therefore made significant progress since that date in reducing its carbon footprint. WFP has, moreover, deployed the first-ever humanitarian/civilian version of the CASA-295, a new, fuel-efficient military aircraft, to emergency operations in Mozambique and South Sudan.
16. User satisfaction: Passenger satisfaction survey (PSS) and provision of access satisfaction survey (PASS) rates aggregated at the global level.

| Country of operation | Satisfaction rate (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Afghanistan PASS | 85 |
| Afghanistan PSS | 82 |
| Burkina Faso PASS | 100 |
| Burkina Faso PSS | 75 |
| Cameroon PASS | 100 |
| Cameroon PSS | 85 |
| Central African Republic PASS | 88 |
| Central African Republic PSS | 78 |
| Chad PASS | 81 |

³ The operational cost per passenger kilometre is calculated for each flown passenger. For each aircraft contract costs are calculated per block hour. The actual fuel consumption of the aircraft and the fuel price at the location where the aircraft is based are used to calculate the fuel costs per block hour.

| Country of operation | Satisfaction rate (%) |
|---|------------------------------|
| Chad PSS | 79 |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) PASS | 73 |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo (the) PSS | 78 |
| Ethiopia PASS | 100 |
| Ethiopia PSS | 82 |
| Haiti PASS | 89 |
| Haiti PSS | 87 |
| Kenya PASS | 57 |
| Kenya PSS | 88 |
| Libya PASS | 88 |
| Libya PSS | 86 |
| Mali PASS | 85 |
| Mali PSS | 78 |
| Mauritania PASS | 100 |
| Mauritania PSS | 70 |
| Nigeria PASS | 90 |
| Nigeria PSS | 94 |
| Somalia PASS | 75 |
| Somalia PSS | 85 |
| South Africa PASS | 96 |
| South Africa PSS | 76 |
| Sudan PSS | 93 |
| Syrian Arab Republic (the) PASS | 75 |
| Syrian Arab Republic (the) PSS | 61 |
| Yemen PASS | 82 |
| Yemen PSS | 77 |
| PSS average | 81 |
| PASS average | 86 |
| Overall | 83 |

Progress on external audit recommendations

17. In line with corporate requirements, an external audit of the WFP Aviation Service was carried out from 19 July 2019 to 31 January 2020. The audit focused on WFP Aviation headquarters in Rome and aviation field operations in Mali, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan. Audit activities required physical visits by the external auditor to those locations at various times during the audit process.

18. The external audit highlighted the importance of aviation activities for the United Nations and the humanitarian community. It concluded that an aviation operations policy document should be developed, defining the scope of WFP's mandate, applicable flight coordination mechanisms, criteria for including beneficiaries of such services, the relationship between the Aviation Service and the Aviation Safety Unit and applicable funding rules.
19. The external auditor made 16 recommendations that WFP fully or partially accepted. Considering the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on WFP activities in 2020 and the provision by the Aviation Service of COVID-19-related common air transport services, it was agreed by WFP and the external auditor to extend the timeframe for implementation of the recommendations from 2020 to 2021.
20. The WFP Aviation Service is taking concrete steps on all 16 recommendations: to date, four recommendations have been formally closed and two recommendations are currently being reviewed for closure by the external auditor. Implementation of the other recommendations is in progress, in full conformity with a mutually agreed timeline.