



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Annual session
Rome, 23–26 June 2025

Distribution: General

Agenda item 8

Date: 10 June 2025

WFP/EB.A/2025/8-D

Original: English

Operational matters

For information

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Update on the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service

Executive summary

Since 2004, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service has played a crucial role in facilitating humanitarian responses. In its twentieth year of service, the air service remains indispensable in ensuring safe and timely access for humanitarian workers amid escalating conflict, displacement and funding constraints.

In 2024 the air service maintained its core functions – including passenger and light cargo transport, medical evacuations and security relocations – across 21 countries. Managed by the WFP Aviation Service, it transported more than 355,000 aid workers and nearly 5,000 metric tons of relief cargo to 394 hard-to-reach locations for 612 organizations. It also supported the humanitarian community by conducting 1,455 medical evacuations and security relocations.

To further enhance the agility and efficiency of its emergency response capacity, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service improved fleet readiness, optimized flight operations and continued to make the most of innovation and technology across its operations. Aviation security and safety remained overarching priorities amid increasing risk in WFP's operating environments.

Operational efficiency improved, with cost per passenger kilometre falling 2.5 percent from USD 2.08 per passenger kilometre in 2023 to USD 1.98 in 2024. User satisfaction reached 97 percent as a result of ongoing service enhancements.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service's centralized funding mechanism played an essential role in maintaining stable funding and operational continuity in 2024. The WFP Aviation Service used lessons learned from the roll-out of the mechanism to revise its standard operating procedures to ensure that the mechanism continued to provide critical funding flexibility.

In 2025 the air service remains committed to innovation, efficiency and safety in support of humanitarian efforts worldwide.

Focal point:

Mr F. Frimpong

Chief

Aviation Service

email: franklyn.frimpong@wfp.org

Introduction

1. Today, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) plays as important a role as ever. The year 2024 was marked by over 120 active armed conflicts – the highest number since World War II – and it was the deadliest on record for humanitarian workers. Throughout intense and unpredictable conflicts, widespread displacement and increasing humanitarian need, UNHAS continues to facilitate humanitarian response, providing safe and timely access to the world's most difficult to reach locations, which are unserved or underserved by commercial operators.
2. In 2024, UNHAS facilitated passenger and light cargo transport, medical evacuations and security relocations. Operational agility was a top priority, and UNHAS sharpened its ability to respond swiftly to emergencies; enhancements to that end included improved fleet readiness in field operations, emergency deployment mechanisms and digital booking systems that optimize flight operations and improve efficiency. Progress was also made in deepening UNHAS' use of innovation and technology in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and reinforcing aviation security amid increasingly high-risk operational airspace.

Highlights from 2024

3. Conflicts continued in 2024, while humanitarian access was restricted and funding constraints further complicated operational stability. In many places where WFP works, there was a lack of – or even a total absence of – commercial air service providers. This brought a range of challenges but UNHAS rose to the occasion, providing reliable support to humanitarian workers and communities alike.
4. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the humanitarian and security situation worsened as armed conflict soared in the east of the country. UNHAS was instrumental in ensuring that aid workers could travel to areas where needs were the highest and in relocating them to safer areas when necessary, especially in the east. UNHAS expanded its no-fly zone in the country to more than 32,597 square kilometres – over half the size of North Kivu province – in order to mitigate risks associated with the dynamics of the conflict. In response to an outbreak of monkeypox, UNHAS transported vaccines to curb the spread of the disease.
5. In Haiti, an escalation of violence and the closure of the Port-au-Prince airport left UNHAS as the only available air service provider for the humanitarian community. UNHAS established an airbridge between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in March 2024 to facilitate the seamless delivery of humanitarian aid and ensure the safe movement of personnel in and out of Haiti. UNHAS was also indispensable for medical evacuations and security relocations. When the security situation deteriorated in late 2024, UNHAS moved hundreds of aid workers to safety and to the field ensuring that the humanitarian community could stay and deliver.
6. In the Sudan, UNHAS re-established internal flights between Port Sudan, Dongola and Kassala. Required risk mitigation measures were instituted, including refinement of the flight notification process and coordination with other partners, which was necessary to protect against navigation errors and security amid challenges including cyberattacks on global positioning system platforms. Plans are under way to expand UNHAS' reach in the Sudan based on the needs of the humanitarian community and if the security situation improves.
7. In Mali, an attack on 17 September at Bamako airport damaged two UNHAS aircraft, temporarily reducing capacity. UNHAS nevertheless continues its operations in the country, serving the aid community despite increased war risk insurance premiums and high fuel costs resulting from border closures.

8. In Yemen, amid escalating violence, UNHAS continued to serve 105 aid organizations, operating air services from Amman (Jordan), Djibouti (Djibouti) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to Aden and Sana'a, with connections to Marib, Mukalla and Seiyun. In December an attack at Sana'a airport affected a UNHAS aircraft on the ground while a delegation including the Executive Director of the World Health Organization was waiting to board. A UNHAS crew member was injured in the incident.
9. In South Sudan UNHAS continued to support the humanitarian community as it responded to the spillover effects of the violence in neighbouring Sudan. UNHAS rehabilitated the airstrip in Renk, the main point of entry for refugees and returnees from the Sudan, realizing annual cost savings of USD 1.7 million and allowing UNHAS to increase the frequency of flights. On 9 August a UNHAS aircraft arriving from Maban conducted a controlled belly landing at Malakal airport after its landing gear became inoperable during take-off in Maban. All passengers and crew disembarked safely, and no injuries were reported.
10. UNHAS remains steadfast in its commitment to the highest safety standards across all operations. To that end it reinforced measures to mitigate risk, including enhanced airstrip assessments and increased familiarization of flight crews with the operational environment, among others. These actions reflect UNHAS' ongoing dedication to continuous improvement and operational excellence in support of humanitarian efforts.
11. In Nigeria, UNHAS facilitated aerial assessment missions in response to devastating floods in Maiduguri. This enabled the humanitarian community to evaluate damage and plan the delivery of assistance, as well as monitor water levels for planning future deliveries by road. UNHAS also transported tons of life-saving cargo to the newly opened Muna landing zone in Maiduguri to facilitate the delivery of urgent assistance. UNHAS continued to transport life-saving relief items to deep field locations affected by the floods such as Ngala and Rann. In total UNHAS transported over 28,500 aid workers and 416 metric tons of relief cargo for over 154 humanitarian organizations.
12. In Madagascar in 2024, UNHAS continued to explore innovative ways of enhancing the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and in early 2025, it piloted the use of unmanned aircraft to deliver assistance in the southeast of the country. UNHAS will continue to improve this service to advance the humanitarian community's last-mile delivery capabilities.

Operational key performance indicators

13. In 2024, UNHAS was active in 21 countries where needs were highest and/or there were access constraints. It transported over 355,000 aid workers and nearly 5,000 metric tons of relief cargo to 394 hard-to-reach locations for 612 organizations. In addition, it completed 1,455 medical evacuations and security relocations for aid personnel (table 1).

TABLE 1: UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN AIR SERVICE: KEY OPERATIONAL INDICATORS, 2022-2024			
Operational indicator	2022	2023	2024
Passengers	> 395 000	> 388 000	> 355 000
Cargo (<i>mt</i>)	> 7 000	4 500	> 4 900
User organizations	732	647	612
Destinations	540	437	394
Medical evacuations and security relocations	1 547	1 555	1 455

14. Other key metrics include cost efficiency, user satisfaction and environmental efficiency (table 2).
- **Cost efficiency:** Operational cost per passenger kilometre was USD 1.98, down from USD 2.08 in 2023. This reflects efficiency measures on the ground and the negotiation of lower war risk insurance premiums.
 - **User satisfaction:** UNHAS conducts two surveys every year. One is the provision of access survey, which evaluates UNHAS performance in helping aid organizations to reach the areas with the greatest need, based on the views of the humanitarian community. The other is the passenger satisfaction survey, which measures the quality of services provided by UNHAS. Both are used for continuous improvement. This year the aggregate score was 97 percent, continuing the trend of significant improvement since 2020, when the score was 83 percent.
 - **Environmental efficiency:** Carbon dioxide emissions from all WFP chartered aircraft have been falling steadily since 2021 and in 2024 stood at 129,244 mt. This reflects the commitment of the WFP Aviation Service to the implementation of its environmental programme.

Operational indicator	2022	2023	2024
Cost efficiency (operational cost per passenger kilometre) (<i>USD</i>)	1.86	2.08	1.98
User satisfaction (%)	95	96	97
Environmental efficiency (carbon dioxide emissions from WFP-chartered aircraft) (<i>mt</i>)	142 620	140 159	129 244

WFP aviation environmental and sustainability programme

15. The WFP Aviation Service continued to pursue its commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations through the three pillars of its environmental strategy: “We measure”, “We reduce” and “We offset”.
16. Under the “We reduce” pillar, UNHAS piloted the use of electronic ground power units in Kabul. In the trial, the units reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 63 percent over two months; extrapolated over a year, that represents a saving of 7,886 kilograms of carbon dioxide. These savings could double if the two aircraft based in Kabul both used the power units.
17. The operation saved 1,200 litres of diesel per month. The WFP Aviation Service continues to track the performance of the electronic ground power units, gathering feedback from users to inform continuous improvement. Given this initial success, the WFP Aviation Service may expand the initiative to additional operational bases, including those in Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan.
18. UNHAS also developed an interactive basic environmental training course for internal and external stakeholders, including civil aviation authorities, airport authorities, air service operators and other humanitarian aviation entities. Comprising seven modules, the course prepares participants to implement and actively promote sustainable practices in their roles, whether in the WFP Aviation Service or outside WFP.

19. The WFP Aviation Service played a leading role in the third humanitarian aviation environmental summit, which took place in July 2024. The summits bring together major stakeholders to brainstorm on strategies to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from aviation and to commit to agreed actions. The 2024 summit was hosted by WFP in Nairobi, which contributed to the WFP Aviation Service's objective of not only mainstreaming environmental sustainability in its operations, but also leading related advocacy efforts.
20. The WFP Aviation Service is exploring the possibility of integrating sustainable aviation fuels into its operations, with pilot tests planned to take place in Kenya in 2025.

Funding overview and efficiency

21. Consistent and predictable funding creates the conditions for maximum operational stability – and therefore the best possible conditions for UNHAS to facilitate humanitarian response, especially in emergencies where security becomes unpredictable.
22. In 2024 UNHAS' total requirements amounted to USD 386.5 million. UNHAS received USD 249 million in contributions from 21 donors, who together provided 53 percent of total funding; one donor (the United States of America) accounted for 50 percent of donor contributions. Carryover balances from 2023 totalled USD 122.2 million,¹ or 26 percent of total funding, and cost recovery generated USD 91 million, or 19 percent of total funding.
23. Budget requirements for 2025 currently stand at USD 409 million, with UNHAS facing a shortfall of USD 206 million as of the end of February. UNHAS is focusing on increasing efficiency to adapt to this challenging situation.
24. UNHAS was born out of a need for efficient air services for organizations – both United Nations and non-United Nations – that deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance in areas that are unserved or underserved by commercial air service providers, removing the need for each organization to have its own aviation service. The following efficiency measures have been undertaken with the aim of achieving cost savings and increasing efficiency:
 - *Regular operational performance assessments:* UNHAS carries out regular operational performance assessments, including fleet revisions through the hub and spoke system in which the number and type of aircraft used are adjusted to improve efficiency and safety and meet operational needs. The assessments are undertaken on a regular basis, as the humanitarian situation changes on the ground. This ensures that assets are optimized, with routes served jointly to reduce the number of direct routes needed. This also increases the load factor – the percentage of available seats on a flight that are filled – and allows for routes to be adjusted based on demand from the humanitarian community. This efficiency measure is employed for operations such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.
 - *Asset sharing:* In operations such as those in Kenya² and Somalia, air assets are shared between operations in neighbouring countries. Such sharing of human resources and expertise enhances coordination and efficiency, leading to cost savings.

¹ Cost recovery represented 66 percent of total carryover balances from 2023.

² In Kenya UNHAS serves Kakuma, Dadaab and Garissa.

- *Cost recovery*: UNHAS continuously optimizes cost recovery, adjusting standardized fees to take into account specific operational circumstances. Field teams are provided with guidance on implementing cost recovery and carry out regular reviews based on the dynamic operating environments in which they function, in consultation with their in-country steering committees. In 2024 this was especially the case for operations in Mozambique, South Sudan and Yemen. Cost recovery income covered more than 29 percent of actual UNHAS expenditures in 2024, compared with 26 percent in 2023.
25. UNHAS will continue to explore ways of increasing cost savings and efficiency in order to optimize air services without compromising safety.

United Nations Humanitarian Air Service centralized funding mechanism

26. Operational from 2023, the UNHAS centralized funding mechanism (CFM) allows WFP management increased flexibility in prioritizing funds for UNHAS operations in need of resources, ensuring a faster response at the onset or escalation of a humanitarian crisis. Throughout 2024 the CFM was key to ensuring operational flexibility and bridging funding gaps. This significantly reduced lead times and allowed for immediate life-saving response, including medical evacuations and security relocations. Sixteen UNHAS operations benefited from the CFM in 2024. After more than a year of implementation, the CFM has had significant impact:
- a) CFM funding plays a crucial role in extending operational sustainability and preventing service disruptions that could occur due to funding gaps, ensuring uninterrupted support for the humanitarian community. In 2024 the CFM enabled critical continuity in operations including in the Niger and Nigeria.
 - b) In South Sudan the CFM facilitated the rehabilitation of the Renk airstrip, making it easier for humanitarian aid to reach those affected by the war in the Sudan while improving efficiency through the use of a more suitable aircraft.
 - c) With funds already provided for the CFM by donors, the mechanism allows for faster funding allocation to fill gaps compared with traditional sources, which often involve longer approval processes. Faster access to funds enables more rapid response to urgent operational needs.
 - d) CFM funding offers an additional layer of funding, complementing direct bilateral contributions.
27. Since its inception the CFM has accounted for over 8 percent of the total contributions received for UNHAS operations (other sources include direct contributions to field operations and cost recovery). By providing resources to the CFM, donors enable WFP to prioritize resource allocation based on a rigorous, transparent process with clearly defined criteria. The prioritization process considers the funding status of each field operation, the level of humanitarian needs, implementation of the cost recovery model and overall operational performance, including the effectiveness of efficiency measures and adjustments to fleet configuration made to better serve the humanitarian community.
28. The allocation process is further guided by the following principles to ensure the equitable and strategic use of available resources:
- System-wide scale-up requirements, including emergency responses, are given due consideration.
 - Forecast donor contributions to field operations are factored in prior to allocation decisions.
 - Circumstances such as significant shifts in operating environments or donor policy changes (e.g. funding suspensions) inform final decisions.

- No single operation may receive more than the equivalent of three months of its annual budget from the CFM, ensuring balanced distribution and minimizing funding gaps elsewhere.
 - Each allocation is capped at 20 percent of the total CFM balance at the time of allocation.
 - Total allocations during each allocation round must not exceed 80 percent of the total available funds, in order to preserve a contingency reserve for responding to unforeseen emergencies.
 - The committee also considers the overall impact of proposed allocations on the UNHAS operation concerned.
29. The WFP Aviation Service has been reviewing the operationalization of the CFM within a framework of continuous learning and improvement, including reviewing standard operating procedures to address gaps in the CFM's implementation. This includes enhancements such as a "call-back mechanism", through which funds are recovered, or "called back", from operations that obtain substantial funding from other sources within two weeks of receiving CFM funds. This helps to optimize the use of CFM funds, including to ensure flexibility, encourage the standardization of donor reporting and apply prioritization criteria to ensure that operations most in need are supported as required.
30. In the current context, additional prioritization measures are also being considered to ensure that support is directed to where humanitarian need is greatest.
31. Due to its strategic value the CFM is attracting growing interest among donors. UNHAS is committed to continuously improving the mechanism to enhance its flexibility, ensure that it supports operations that attract less visibility and hence less funding, and sharpen its ability to facilitate responses to sudden crises.