

HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (HIP)

ECHO Air Transport Operations

The full implementation of this version of the HIP is conditional upon the necessary appropriations being made available from the 2021 general budget of the European Union.

AMOUNT: EUR 8 800 000

The present Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) was prepared on the basis of financing decision ECHO/WWD/BUD/2021/01000 (Worldwide Decision) and the related General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid (Operational Priorities).

The purpose of the HIP and its annex is to serve as a communication tool for DG ECHO's¹ partners and to assist in the preparation of their proposals. The provisions of the Worldwide Decision and the General Conditions of the agreements and contracts concluded with the European Commission shall take precedence over the provisions in this document.

0. Major changes since previous version of the HIP

Modification 1 – August 2021

The COVID-19 emergency resulted in a dramatic and sudden decrease of the level of transport demand and the rhythm of expenses of the Humanitarian Air Transport Operations (ECHO FLIGHT). Consequently, HIP 2020 budget remains still available to cover the current level of operations until the end of 2021. The delegation agreement with WFP which implements the ECHO Flight project has been extended until the end of 2021 (Ares(2021)666149).

Given this budgetary surplus from the previous year, the HIP 2021 initial amount of EUR 14.8 million has therefore been reduced by EUR 6 million. This amount was given back to the Operational Reserve at mid-term.

The remaining amount under this HIP (EUR 8.8 million) is therefore allocated to:

- WFP/UNHAS operations in Nigeria (EUR 2.82 million);
- An important pilot logistic project in Mali with Humanité et Inclusion (HI) for EUR 0.6 million which will serve as a pilot for the Logistics Policy and is also supporting the ECHO Flight ongoing operation implemented in Mali. HI is the only partners offering this logistics service in Mali. This project would be also partially funded by the Country HIP;

¹ Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

- Ad hoc flights via our broker to implement EU HAB operations in particular to Haiti, Afghanistan and Ethiopia or any other countries if a specific situation confirms the need for a HAB operation (EUR 5.38 million).

1. CONTEXT

1.1. Humanitarian air transport objectives and needs assessment

Through the ECHO Flight project and support to other humanitarian air transport operations, DG ECHO aims at providing air transport options for humanitarian partner organisations working in challenging contexts. Air transport is essential to enable humanitarian access by providing safe, reliable and cost efficient humanitarian flights. This is particularly relevant in specific contexts to: (i) reach remote locations that would otherwise be cut off from the rest of the world; (ii) provide common services and pooling cargo of different partners; (iii) help humanitarian partners and cargo to reach countries when transport options are scarce or disrupted. This is true in specific protracted humanitarian contexts but also in specific emergency response contexts such as pandemics, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis.

These air transport operations should be flexible and agile to respond to changing environments in protracted contexts, to air transport needs in sudden onset disasters and to medical and security evacuation requests. Humanitarian air transport operations, in particular the ECHO Flight project, should be able to scale up to meet requirements when additional needs for dedicated, safe and cost-effective air transport in support of EU funded humanitarian projects are identified in existing or new operational contexts.

Through its field experts and country offices, DG ECHO monitors evolving situations and works to identify potential new needs in other areas/countries to support DG ECHO partners' and the humanitarian community's air transport needs in collaboration with WFP/UNHAS. Some contexts may give rise to air transport needs which do not fall under the traditional programming of ECHO Flight (e.g. a priority system or access to dedicated scheduled flights). Other operations could be organised or partly supported as deemed necessary in other African countries and in the rest of the world, e.g. for short-term operations to facilitate the initial air transport needs of an emergency response or reinforce the capacity in protracted crises.

The focus of the ECHO Air Transport Operations HIP is the implementation of the ECHO Flight project and the support to specific WFP UNHAS operations. DG ECHO also has a framework contract with the private logistics transport company DAMCO, based in Denmark, for the provision of transport and logistic services worldwide. Specific operations such as the EU HAB could also be implemented under this HIP and through this framework contract, as well as any transport or logistics services, which would be assessed as a priority for ECHO humanitarian aid operations.

1.2. Priority areas in 2020

Humanitarian air transport operations mostly take place in sub Saharan Africa. For the time being, ECHO Flight is implemented in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya, where scheduled destinations and ad hoc flights are proposed to humanitarian organisations. Destinations in the surrounding countries can also be covered, if relevant, for DG ECHO humanitarian actions or for emergency evacuations operations.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there are no regular, safe or reliable links either by air or overland between a number of major population centers, in particular in the entire Eastern border area of the country. ECHO Flight air transports were, for example, essential in the response to Ebola in North Kivu and Ituri and for the rapid response mechanism implemented by humanitarian organisations in different sectors. It facilitates the movements of essential staff, medical items and allows medical evacuation.

In Northern Kenya and Mali, ECHO Flight needs to cover remote field destinations that are not easily accessible and where no reliable commercial air company operates or where road access is deemed unsafe due to the security situation. ECHO Flight should also be available for monitoring missions in Somalia and ad hoc flights in the neighboring countries e.g. South Sudan.

In Nigeria, road transport is not an option for humanitarian personnel. Humanitarian aid projects cannot be implemented without air transport services. It represents “a lifeline for humanitarian operations” and plays a crucial role in the safe and reliable transport of humanitarian aid workers to their respective areas of operation.

In 2020, DG ECHO implemented the EU HAB, which contributed to a “Team Europe” approach, an “Emergency response to the immediate health crisis and the resulting humanitarian needs” as outlined in the EU “Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19”. The EU HAB provided dedicated air transportation capacities to Member States and humanitarian partners enabling them to transport COVID-19 related material as well as any inputs needed in sustaining humanitarian actions as well as ensuring the effective movement and rotation of humanitarian staff. Flights (67) were organised to third countries worldwide.

DG ECHO also supported WFP/UNHAS in several countries and the 2020 WFP COVID 19 Common Service Plan, which is part of the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan, to facilitate the transport of medical supplies and humanitarian staff across the world.

1.3. Safety and capacity requirements and ECHO partners

The humanitarian air transport operations can be implemented by the traditional ECHO partners (INGO or UN organisations) having the requested capacity and experience or by specialized private companies operating in the transport sector.

Humanitarian air operations need to meet high standards in terms of aviation safety, security and quality in challenging aviation contexts. Aircraft operators have to meet aviation safety, security and quality requirements and be in line with the ICAO regulations related to this type of air transport project.

To implement humanitarian air transport operations, with the safety, flexibility and agility required, ECHO partners will need to:

- possess extensive knowledge, experience and capacity in the management of humanitarian air services;
- have direct access to many air operators on short notice or through existing framework agreements;
- have already set up or being able to set up at short notice bases from which they can operate in the regions or countries where need exists for humanitarian air transport services;
- have or be able to set up a web-based booking system and IT tools able to provide statistics on flights' performances and passengers;
- ensure aircraft operators meet high standards in terms of aviation safety, security and quality, enabling the services to be provided in challenging humanitarian contexts. As a minimum, the partner will have to perform HQ and field bases audits of the aircraft operators' safety, security and quality management in line with the relevant requirements set out by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and UNAVSTADS rules and requirements.

The only DG ECHO humanitarian partner that currently meets these requirements and is able to operate such a service is WFP. WFP Aviation has direct access to many air operators at short notice, with bases already set up in many African countries, and a dedicated safety and quality assurance unit, the Aviation Safety Unit (ASU) and Quality Unit (QA) dealing with all the issues related to aviation safety and quality management.

The private logistics transport company DAMCO also meets the above-mentioned requirements as they work with companies that meet the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) rules and requirements.

2. DG ECHO SUPPORT TO HUMANITARIAN AIR TRANSPORT OPERATIONS - HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

2.1. Affected people/ potential beneficiaries

Humanitarian air transport operations, in particular the ECHO Flight project, directly assist the staff of various implementing agencies in the regions where the services are offered and indirectly benefit the populations targeted by

humanitarian as well as development programmes. ECHO Flight applies a specific priority system favouring projects funded by ECHO and the European Union.

The EU HAB contributed to sustain the delivery of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. It supported the delivery of humanitarian aid worldwide, with a special focus on Africa.

The support to WFP/UNHAS and in particular the COVID-19 Common Service Plan, contributed to facilitate the transport of medical supplies and humanitarian staff in specific countries and across the world.

Several million people in need of assistance will benefit indirectly from these operations. In sudden onset disasters, access in the early stage of the response is often essential to allow aid workers to reach beneficiaries.

2.2. Description of the most acute humanitarian needs

In DRC and Nigeria, agencies are faced with major challenges in terms of security and logistics as well as the poor state and/or a lack of infrastructure. In particular, there are regularly incidents of aggression against humanitarian aid workers, including abductions. This is particularly true in most of the East regions of DRC and North East of Nigeria (Borno State), due to an upsurge of new conflict situations, an increase of criminality, activities of rebel groups and armed combat.

The security situation is also of concern in Kenya, in particular on the roads and in the regions bordering Somalia, Ethiopia and South Sudan. In Northern Kenya, the main destination is Kakuma, where a very large camp hosts South Sudanese refugees and where many DG ECHO partners are providing assistance. Dadaab is the second most important destination in the area for humanitarian flights, where another large refugee camp is located. Flights, security permitting, could also be foreseen to Somalia to ensure the adequate monitoring of DG ECHO-funded projects.

In Mali, overland transport and movements are extremely unsafe or even impossible due to poor infrastructure and floods during the rainy season. The security situation has been steadily deteriorating. Air transport is therefore the only viable solution to reach some of the regions where EU-funded humanitarian projects are implemented.

Given the tensions and insecurity across the region, humanitarian air transport operations are a key component of the humanitarian response, in particular in Nigeria, Central African Republic and South Sudan. There would seem to be little prospect of humanitarian and security improvements in the near future. In 2021, it is assessed that ECHO Flight project will need to be maintained at least at the same level as in 2020. New destinations and/or countries may also be considered if relevant.

3. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

3.1. National / local response and involvement

For the most part, there are no local commercial air operators that respect the minimum international standards of aviation, which fly to the destinations served by humanitarian air transport operation and ECHO Flight.

3.2. International Humanitarian Response

Only a few organisations provide relevant humanitarian air transport solutions that DG ECHO is aware of, and only four of them open up their flights to the humanitarian community to some extent². In humanitarian contexts, where several of these organisations are operating, respective schedules are built to complement each other as much as possible, taking into account their respective mandates.

WFP/UNHAS³ is the main provider of humanitarian air transport and already has offices to manage air operations in many locations in and outside of Africa, in particular in Goma, Kalemie, Bamako, Abuja, Maiduguri and Nairobi. Their offices enables WFP/UNHAS to perform all the tasks involved in running an air support service, including operational management and reservations for passengers/cargo. In DRC, Kenya, Somalia, Nigeria and Mali, WFP/UNHAS offers humanitarian air services.

In DRC, Mali and Kenya ECHO Flight's focus is more on regions where many EU funded projects are implemented and on deep field destinations with small, light airplanes or helicopters such as in Northern Mali, South and North Kivu and Tanganyika region in DRC.

In Kenya, UNHAS provides air transport to the refugee camps in Dadaab and Kakuma. UNHAS and ECHO Flight schedules complement each other in order to offer a wider number of options to humanitarian actors as per their respective mandates.

In Mali, UNHAS has four aircraft based in Bamako, serving only the main field destinations such as Bamako, Timbuktu, Menaka, Gao and Mopti. ECHO Flight provides air links to remote destinations.

In DRC, MONUSCO⁴ has a large aircraft fleet, but these are only tasked to serve military and political missions. ICRC⁵ charters two aircraft in direct support of only ICRC and MSF⁶ projects. UNHAS operates 11 assets in the country. UNHAS and ECHO Flight schedules complement each other in order

² WFP/UNHAS, MAF-PACTEC, ASF and ECHO Flight

³ United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS).

⁴ United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo.

⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross.

⁶ Médecins Sans Frontières

to offer a wider number of options to humanitarian actors as per their respective mandate.

In Somalia, an air service called EU Flight managed by the European Union Delegation in Kenya operates two aircraft from Nairobi, serving main hub destinations in Somalia.

3.3. Constraints and DG ECHO response capacity

The main constraints of humanitarian air transport operations and ECHO Flight project are linked to the remoteness of destinations, tropical weather, security and fuel availability. Operations also have to be flexible to adapt and react to the various situations and emergencies that need to be faced.

The choice of destinations is based on confirmed humanitarian air transport needs. The operational principle is to provide flexible, safe and reliable humanitarian air transport solutions, which are well coordinated with other humanitarian air services and avoid competing or substituting local commercial air services.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, ECHO Flight reduced its fleet in 2020 from six aircraft to two in DRC, one in Mali and one shared plane with WFP/UNHAS in Kenya. However, the flexibility offered by entrusting the ECHO Flight and ECHO air operations to WFP/UNHAS allows for a reduction or increase the fleet at very short notice and to have access to a wide range of aircraft.

In the case of ECHO Flight, humanitarian aid agencies and in particular DG ECHO funded partners meet at least twice a year in “users group”⁷ to discuss their needs in terms of destinations, number of people and volume of cargo to be transported. DG ECHO field technical assistants and WFP aviation experts will analyse the needs and propose schedules to respond in the best way possible to agencies’ demands, taking into account DG ECHO’s HIP strategy in the country, existing UNHAS schedules, aviation constraints, airstrips specifications and security, but also the available budget. Following these consultation processes, the existing set up is maintained or adapted. This process is also applied for other WFP/UNHAS operations with a reduced involvement from ECHO field offices as operations are only partially funded by ECHO.

3.4. DG ECHO's envisaged response and expected results of humanitarian aid interventions

The geographical coverage and the number of operating aircraft of ECHO Flight in 2020 should be the starting point for the 2021 operation. However, the number of aircraft could be increased and other countries could be considered,

⁷ Users group are regrouping all the organisations using ECHO flight: local and international NGOs, UN and international organisations and also developments agencies.

taking into account aviation specific constraints and the needs of humanitarian organisations, in particular the ones directly funded by DG ECHO.

DG ECHO will entrust the ECHO Flight project in Mali, DRC and Kenya to WFP Aviation and will reinforce the air transport offer in Nigeria through a stronger collaboration with WFP/UNHAS. DG ECHO could also consider supporting other WFP Aviation operations, if budget is available.

Specific ad hoc humanitarian flights could also be funded via the transport Framework contract with DAMCO.

Humanitarian air transport operations, in particular ECHO Flight, facilitate partners' humanitarian response and improve the quality of humanitarian operations by enabling access to cut-off areas and allowing more frequent monitoring and evaluation missions. Field staff productivity is increased because rotations can be organised to allow staff to rest and recuperate on a regular basis. Moreover, the capacity to carry out emergency evacuations by air is for many organisations a prerequisite for the implementation of their projects.

The ECHO Flight project primarily aims to transport humanitarian aid workers but can also accept specific requests for cargo, in particular for high value items. The project should directly support between 200 and 300 projects in the DRC, Kenya and Mali. Up to 2019, the ECHO Flight project target was to transport over 2,100 passengers and 20 tonnes of cargo per month. Due to specific COVID context, only 50% of this target has been reached, at a reduced cost. During 2020, more than 62% of the passengers and 50% of the cargo transported by ECHO Flight pertained to ECHO-funded projects. For 2021, this level should be maintained and an increase is expected if a return to a certain level of “normality” is observed.

ECHO Flight's priority system exists to firstly support EU-funded humanitarian projects, secondly EU-funded development programmes and other humanitarian projects. As a third priority, development projects that are not funded by the EU may also make use of ECHO Flight services, as this enhances the LRRD⁸ and humanitarian-development nexus process.

In Nigeria, due to the complex security situation and following assessment with the geographical unit, needs for additional capacity have been identified to be able to support the humanitarian transport requirements on the ground. An ECHO Flight operation could be therefore designed to support the ongoing Nigeria WFP/UNHAS operation by fully funding an additional crew and a helicopter. This could be funded partly by the (geographical) operational HIP, complemented by an additional, majority contribution through this ECHO air transport operations HIP.

⁸ Linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD).

Given the specific needs and logistics organisation in the area, this operation would differ to a certain extent from “regular” ECHO Flight operations. The Nigeria air transport service would be a joint WFP/ECHO/ICRC operation as all the helicopters would be from the same company for cost efficiency gains. WFP and ICRC have signed a service contract with this company and there is a common agreement that helicopters can back up each other’s programme if required, in particular when helicopters are in maintenance or are experiencing technical issues.

This would allow enlarging DG ECHO’s way of working with WFP and ensure that DG ECHO responds in an agile way to future humanitarian transport needs. With 4 helicopters being heavily relied on operated for UNHAS, one for ICRC and one back up helicopter without crew, providing extra capacity is assessed as being necessary by ECHO country office and by WFP, to avoid disruption of the schedule and have the possibility to respond to ad hoc requests.

This approach would increase ECHO visibility as this helicopter would have only DG ECHO visibility and would be available to respond to ad-hoc needs if required (e.g. ECHO monitoring missions or ad-hoc flights for our partners), while serving also the established Nigeria humanitarian schedule. Inside each helicopter, there is a board with visibility of donors contributing to the funding of this operation. For the helicopter funded by ECHO, only EU visibility would be inside the plane, making very clear that the EU helicopter contributes to the global air transport efforts. There is no outside visibility of any kind for the time being on any of the helicopters for security reasons. In addition, specific visibility would also be placed on leaflets and at checking and boarding points.

During 2021, in addition to a potential operation in Nigeria, other actions can be assessed if needs are identified, in coordination with the field and geographical units.

4. NEXUS, COORDINATION AND TRANSITION

At the global level, ECHO Flight is part of DG ECHO's toolbox when it comes to humanitarian aid air transport operations. In many contexts, DG ECHO also contributes to UNHAS and to NGO's⁹ air services. DG ECHO’s framework contract with the transport broker, DAMCO is foreseen for the transport of passenger and cargo related to civil protection and humanitarian aid interventions. This framework contract has been used in 2020 to implement the EU HAB operation.

Working through WFP UNHAS increases efficiency by facilitating enhanced coordination and better flexibility between WFP and DG ECHO air transport offerings. This increases efficiency through synergies and economy of scale by using the same structures and supply channels, in particular when it comes to air operators, booking, and fuel supply.

⁹ Non-Governmental Organisations.

ECHO Flight and WFP UNHAS operations contribute to the NEXUS efforts, as it is also used by the development community, notably for development projects implemented in the same remote areas as humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian air transport services and ECHO Flight are not in competition with commercial airline companies. If a safe, cost effective and reliable airline company serves identified humanitarian destinations on a regular basis, the services will be gradually phased out using a structured exit strategy.