United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHAS Afghanistan 2018 - 2019
October 2019
United Nations Humanitarian Air Service

UNHAS is managed by the World Food Programme on behalf of the entire humanitarian community. The air service enables aid workers to access locations affected by conflicts, natural disasters, famine and other hard-to-reach areas where domestic air transport and other alternatives are not viable. Since 2001, UNHAS has been the flight choice for United Nations agencies, NGOs, donors, and other organizations responding to humanitarian and development needs across Afghanistan.

**UNHAS Operations**

- UNHAS is based at Kabul international airport with 45 staff members, and 20 additional staff in its field locations: Bamyan, Faizabad, Mazar, Kunduz, Herat, Kandahar, and Jalalabad.
- Each year, UNHAS provides reliable and efficient air service to more than 24,000 aid workers and partners and up to 100 tons of humanitarian cargo, including vaccines and medications.
- Passengers are from 160 humanitarian aid organizations that carry out programme activities reaching thousands of girls, boys, women and men in need of assistance each day.
- UNHAS maintains 24/7 capacity for medical and security evacuations, and conducts many such missions for humanitarian personnel each year.

**Importance for NGOs**

- 57 percent of all passengers transported annually are from NGOs.
- Of all registered UNHAS users, 20 percent are national NGOs and 60 percent are international NGOs.
- Donor support enables all humanitarian workers more reliable access with a small amount of cost recovery for airfares, which lessens the financial burden of smaller international NGOs as well as national NGOs.

**UNHAS Staff 2018-2019**

*Photo: WFP, Wahidullah Amani*
UNHAS - Afghanistan

Regular Air Service
UNHAS Afghanistan provides reliable and efficient air service with 75 weekly flights for humanitarian personnel and cargo to 20 destinations, two to four times per week. UNHAS transports over 97% of passengers on the same day as booked, where security and weather conditions allow.

UNHAS also maintains capacity for medical and security evacuations, which provides a critical lifeline to the humanitarian community.

UNHAS regular network

Funding
In order to support humanitarian activities, **UNHAS requires US$18 million annually**.

Cost recovery from passengers provides UNHAS approximately US$5 million annually, while remaining funds need to be met by donors to allow UNHAS to provide sustainable services.

USAID remains the main donor for UNHAS, with additional valuable support from Japan, Germany and Canada for ensuring operational continuity.

UNHAS operations in Afghanistan
UNHAS - Afghanistan

Users’ feedback

“I would like to thank you all for the fantastic job and support extended by UNHAS for the evacuation of our team from Kunduz.”

“Great availability, reactivity and service, we are grateful we can count on our partners in difficult moments.”

“Thanks to you the team arrived safely in Kabul in good spirits.” (NGO-2019)

“We have managed to repatriate the patient to her hometown where she is getting appropriate medical attention. For the evacuation flight: it has been an impressive response from UNHAS, as already witnessed in past emergencies. Within one hour or so, everything was set. We got an exemplary response, guidance and support from UNHAS.”

“It’s extremely comforting for us to be able to count on your team in critical situations. Our sincere thanks for everything.” (NGO-2019)

“I am sending you this e-mail to thank you - as well as your colleagues involved in this process - very, very much for all your help and support, and above all, your professionalism for handling and processing our request for [a special] UNHAS flight from Kabul to Bamyan on July and back from Bamyan to Kabul. You are such a great team of aviation professionals!” (Embassy-2019)

"Many thanks for your continues support, now access to Herat and Qala-e-Naw became much easier, and we managed to scale up our intervention and support in both locations. I would like to thank you again for addressing our needs.” (UN agency - 2019)

“Dear friends at UNHAS/WFP, Please accept my official thanks, for your willingness to adjust a flight schedule, and for your helpful and positive attitude towards your customers and our flight focal point. We appreciate this continuing ongoing relationship and the service that you provide which enables us to support humanitarian programmes in remote locations. With best wishes” (NGO - 2019)

“It has been one of my life’s professional pleasure working with you all these years. You have never failed to deliver or be world class dependable in all this time.” (UN agency - 2017)

“I want to express my gratitude and deep appreciation for your excellent support and service around the medical evacuation of our staff. For our presence in the many remote areas of Afghanistan that we serve, we count on your services and professionalism, it gives us the ability to provide high quality care to our staff. Thank you as always for facilitating our work for Afghan families and communities and for helping us take care of our team.” (NGO - 2017)

“Congratulations on the brainchild policy for Afghan women to travel on UNHAS. It’s a brilliant initiative.” (UN agency - 2019)
UNHAS operations in Afghanistan

Special flights
Medical and Security Evacuation Capacity

Readiness
UNHAS maintains readiness for users’ emergency needs and prioritises any request for evacuation flights, whether it be for security or medical reasons. With a fleet composed of a helicopter and airplanes, UNHAS is able to timely reach users in most locations across the country.

Security Evacuation (April, 2019)
UNHAS responded to an immediate security evacuation request of NGO staff in a remote field location. UNHAS operated its large, 37-seat aircraft, so all personnel could be airlifted at once.

Medical Evacuation (May, 2019)
A medical evacuation was provided to an NGO upon their urgent request. The organization needed a medical evacuation from a remote field location to Kabul for one of its staff, who was in a stable condition but with a high risk of complications.

Considering the criticality of the staff member, UNHAS immediately planned the flight. Within hours, the patient was picked up and airlifted to Kabul then onwards to an international hospital.

Medical Evacuation (July, 2017)
UNHAS performed a medical evacuation from a field location to Kabul to save a UN staff, who had a road accident and suffered head trauma. Considering the criticality, UNHAS airlifted the patient with a caretaker to Kabul within hours of the request.

Security Evacuation (October, 2018)
An armed clash between two factions erupted in a field location which resulted in a fire accident. During the firefight, at least two civilians died. UNHAS was contacted to support the security evacuation of eight international staff from the field to Kabul. UNHAS rapidly responded by executing an evacuation flight with the helicopter. Once all staff reached Kabul safely within hours of the confirmed request, the embassy of the international staff replied: “Great News! We will stand down. Always a pleasure working with UNHAS.”

UNHAS operations in Afghanistan
Special flights
Charter Flight Capacity

In some cases where special flights are required to reach certain field locations, UNHAS provides air service for the entire humanitarian community.

These charters included diplomatic missions, high level UN missions, interagency missions, implementation missions for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 17), programme and project inauguration, and monitoring and evaluation missions.

Examples of charter flights conducted:

- WFP Executive Director mission to Mazar.
- Interagency (UNICEF, OCHA, WFP, UNMAS and WHO) assessment missions to Kandahar and Lashkar Gah.
- Assessment mission by OCHA, UNHCR, UNAMA and NRC, to Herat and Qala-e-Naw for assessing the humanitarian needs, internally displaced people (IDPs) situation and other emergency responses.
- WHO Executive Director and the high level delegation flight from Kabul to Islamabad.
- High level delegation of UNICEF and the Korean Ambassador to Qala-e-Naw.
- Ambassadors of the Netherlands, China and France separate special flights to Bamyan, Lashkar Gah, Mazar, and Jalalabad.

The special flights have regularly received outstanding feedback:

“The Embassy thanks UNHAS for the great support throughout the processes. H.E Minister and Ambassador conveyed their best regards to UNHAS friends, congratulating their professional and friendly service in Kabul. We are looking forward to further cooperation with UNHAS in the future! Thank you.”

Exceptionally, UNHAS transports journalists, who cover the situation of people affected by crisis and conflict in areas where there are no other flight options. In April, 2019, a BBC team with Lyse Doucet travelled with UNHAS to Helmand for an assignment, “Is peace with the Taliban possible?”
UNHAS - Afghanistan

Contributing stories from our users

We requested organizations UNHAS serves on a regular basis to provide information about their activities and results of their humanitarian activities within Afghanistan, and how they are able to access the beneficiaries.

International NGO Safety Organisation, INSO, has offices in Khost and Kunduz, which cannot be accessed without using UNHAS except at a much higher risk. In addition, ad hoc field trips to visit NGOs in Maimana, Qala-e Naw, Nili and other cities are also carried out by UNHAS.

Project overview and key achievements using UNHAS:

INSO provides advice, analysis and trainings for NGOs and their staff, to enhance situational awareness, support informed decision-making and enable humanitarian access. INSO therefore works with 270 NGOs in Afghanistan.

For 2020 and beyond, INSO may slightly increase field visits to conduct various trainings for NGO staff. UNHAS will continue to provide logistical support to access provinces and fields.

War Child Canada, WCS, an international NGO, operates in eight provinces: Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Logar, Balkh, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Takhar, providing legal aid, contributing to women’s economic empowerment, increasing public awareness to prevent human trafficking and protecting children from abuse and exploitation.

WCS’ local implementing partners conduct monitoring and evaluation and capacity building on a monthly and quarterly basis to field sites. Further, the partners are also required to travel to Kabul to attend certain planning and coordination meetings with WCS and Government ministries.

In many places where commercial flights are not operating, NGOs like WCS will require UNHAS.

With the support of UNHAS, WCS’ country program reached over 186,829 women, children and men (186 percent higher as compared to 2017) in eight provinces supported through its Education, Justice and Opportunity Programs. These humanitarian and development programmes engaged 33,000 community members.

Plans for 2020 and beyond

WCS will be expanding its program in Uruzgan, Helmand and Nimroz in the south, Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan in the north, Herat and Badghis in the West.

“WCS will require UNHAS support, as commercial flights are not available for most of the locations. Our programmes will expand, where land travel is not safe.”
Kabul: War trauma Hospital with 118 beds

Lashkargah: War trauma Hospital with 94 beds

In order to guarantee prompt aid to the injured, EMERGENCY opened 7 First Aid Trauma Posts (FATP) in Helmand province (Grishk, Marjia, Musaqala, Urmuz, Garmsir, Shoraki and Sangin) all connected with the Surgical Centre in Lashkar-Gah operating 24/7.

To decrease the mortality rate of conflict-affected population in the war-torn provinces and districts of Afghanistan (Kabul, Ghazni, Wardak, Paktia, Kapisa, Logar, Laghman and Parwan), UNHAS has been the best option for Emergency to access hard-to-reach areas and provide urgent humanitarian assistance in complex situations. Since no commercial flights have ever been to these provinces and travelling by road is not safe, Emergency is using UNHAS flight to and from Lashkar Gah, Helmand. In 2018, the Hospital recorded the highest number ever concerning the following indicators: War and non war-related admissions, outpatient diagnosis (OPD) cases at Lashkargah Hospital, FATPs’ OPD and referrals from FATPs to Hospital. The main challenge for the implementation of the project is related to the security conditions of the staff travelling to war-torn areas.

“Without UNHAS flights to Lashkar Gah, our activity would be definitely more difficult.”

Overview of the projects using UNHAS

Four CBM (community-based monitoring) programmes of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, IWA: Schools, Health, Infrastructure and Trials have actively engaged with communities in ten provinces, conducting 90 construction projects in three provinces including Balkh, Nangarhar and Herat provinces, supporting 180 schools in five provinces including Nangarhar, Balkh, Herat, Kabul and Kapisa provinces and supporting 51 healthcare centers in four provinces including Kabul, Kapisa, Nangarhar and Herat provinces serving girls, boys, women and men in Afghanistan. The ReCAP program carried out inspection of 7 infrastructure projects in Kunduz, Herat, Helmand, Kandahar and Ghazni provinces. The capacity building and field visit activities of the CBM programmes and a ReCAP (Reconstruction Assessment Program) need occasional support from UNHAS for implementation since commercial flights are not available in hard-to-reach areas and traveling over land is not safe.

“Integrity Watch has used UNHAS for many years and we are very much happy from the Air service which is provided by UNHAS. We highly appreciate that and would like to continue using UNHA’s Air service for implementation of our programs in the provinces.”

EMERGENCY Plans for 2020 and beyond

Improve access for hard-to-reach areas (extend Catchment Population) by providing free high quality trauma service and referral from Maydanshar, Baraki Barak, Metherlam, Pul-I-Alam (+3 Provinces, +4 Districts).
Shuhada Organization (SO) has projects in different provinces of Afghanistan and most of the projects are in central region like Daikundi, Banyan and Ghazni.

SO has implemented 12 projects in Daikundi from the beginning of 2019. The projects focus on health service delivery, education, human rights and economic development for women. These projects need to be closely monitored and evaluated by SO M&E department and sometimes by donors. For most of the projects, donors visit the project site once or twice a year and the M&E team normally monitor the project quarterly which needs UNHAS to reach the destination. During 2019, SO implemented more than 20 projects annually; most of the project beneficiaries are grassroots community members including women and men, youth and children.

SO implemented projects in 31 provinces of Afghanistan and provided service to more than eight million beneficiaries in hard-to-reach areas using reliable, effective and efficient services from UNHAS.

Islamic Relief Worldwide, IRW, has one field office in Banyan and plans to establish another field office in Ghazni Province in the near future, so implementation of all IRW programs depends on UNHAS in terms of travels to Banyan and Ghazni provinces.

Main activities of IRW are in Banyan, Nangarhar and Ghazni providing accommodation and health services to the orphans.

To implement these projects, it is not safe to travel by road, and commercial flights do not operate in these regions. UNHAS is the best option considering safety and reliability.

Most of the highways connecting Kabul to provinces are insecure. Staff from NGOs normally use UNHAS to reach their destinations.
Nai Qala, NQA, is a non-profit and non-political association headquartered in Switzerland while the operational office in Kabul is run by Afghan nationals. NQA has been operating in Ghazni and Bamyan provinces in the field of education and health. Since commercial flights are not available in Ghazni, for better implementation of activities and considering the needs on the ground, NQA travels to these provinces with UNHAS.

Key achievements using UNHAS:
For the past 10 years NQA has built nine schools for over 8,000 boys and girls, a clinic for a population of 20,000 in one of the most isolated regions of the country, and provided Kankur preparation courses for over 1,000 school students; in addition to preschool education projects for over 500 children in the province of Bamyan and Ghazni.

Plans for 2020 and beyond:
School construction project (2019) for over 400 girls and a preschool project (2019–2021) for over 500 children in the district of Yakawlang of Bamyan province. Operations will remain the same and also planning to expand to Daikundi province in 2020.

“For better implementation of these projects, regular travels in the project areas are needed, and UNHAS is the most trustful and we strongly recommend such services to be continued in the future.”

The programs and activities for Care of Afghan Families, CAF, beneficiaries are:
1) Provision of healthcare service delivery in remote and insecure provinces of Afghanistan, Basic Package of Health Services and Essential Package of Health Services to girls, boys, women and men.
2) Assessment of various provinces to identify the real needs of the related communities and accordingly develop our proposals.
3) Monitoring and evaluation of projects in remote provinces of Afghanistan.

“In regards to UNHAS services, the importance and sustainability of our humanitarian programs, we would like to mention in brief that, without UNHAS services we were unable to reach our beneficiaries and provide them with healthcare services especially in remote provinces such as Badakhshan and Daikundi in the past years.”

During 2018, CAF contributed to 11% of all population of Afghanistan in receiving public health services in Badakhshan, Daikundi and Logar provinces of Afghanistan. A total of 3,137,332 beneficiaries received public health services from CAF projects.
Dacaar, a non-governmental, humanitarian organization that supports sustainable development in Afghanistan through promoting the ability of local communities to decide upon and manage their own development process. Dacaar implements its different projects in 17 provinces of Afghanistan in rural areas of Kundoz, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunar, Herat, Faryab and Bamyan provinces.

The main projects are provision of humanitarian WASH response to refugees, returnees and people affected by conflict or natural disaster, reducing root causes of conflict, instability and irregular migration through sustainable livelihoods, improved governance and functioning rule of law in Afghanistan, and strengthening Emergency Response mechanism. The activities benefited thousands of affected families in rural areas including girls, boys, men and women in 2019. Government employees were also trained as part of WASH project.

All of these were done in the field with the support of UNHAS as travelling over land is not safe and commercial flights are not available in these provinces. Service provided by UNHAS is crucial to these projects in 2020 and beyond.

The Colombo Plan is implementing gender affairs program in Afghanistan, which is divided into two categories: Afghanistan Women Shelter Fund (AWSF) and Afghanistan Children Support Centre Fund. In order to conduct monitoring and evaluation on a quarterly basis, service provided by UNHAS is crucial.

Main activities are to advocate for the women and children’s rights and increase access to justice and to provide a haven for the children and women incarcerated.

Mostly the type of cases are: Incarcerated children, human trafficking, child custody, kidnapping, rape, inheritance, etc.

The Colombo Plan will continue these humanitarian projects in many hard-to-reach areas of Afghanistan in 2019 and beyond.

Green Way Organization, GWO, implemented several projects in Daikundi province where UNHAS provides services and had positive socioeconomic effects on communities (men, women, boys and girls).

Key achievements using UNHAS:

During 2019 GWO has a programme under the title of “Creating Sustainable Profit Through Value Chain” in Daikundi. This aimed to create value chain of almond and apricot, by providing practical training on the use of tools & technologies that adds value to their products and business management training, and creating linkage with market, traders or service providers with 280 direct beneficiaries that would be men, women and youth.

“For 2020 and beyond DACAAR has plans to carry the humanitarian projects in far and hard-to-reach provinces of Afghanistan and considers the existence of UNHAS a big facility to ease the implementation of projects in site visits in the provinces.”
In Afghanistan, UNHAS has launched a new initiative to get more female Afghan humanitarians into the skies and the field.

More than 160 member organizations (including UN and NGOs) rely on UNHAS each year to help them to reach some of the most isolated parts of the country. Around 95% are male passengers, which means only 75 women per month are using UNHAS’ services.

In order to encourage more women to travel to the field, UNHAS implemented a new incentive: female Afghan passengers on official humanitarian missions will fly at a reduced price of US$55 per one-way ticket, while typical ticket prices range from US$155 for NGOs to US$305 for UN and others.

The Chief of UNHAS in Afghanistan, Conny Akerstrom, explained: “At WFP, we advocate for gender equality and understand the importance of having women involved in all areas of humanitarian work. UNHAS is launching this initiative to support women’s participation in activities across Afghanistan, where they can make a big difference.”

There are many reasons for the disparity in travel frequency between men and women in Afghanistan, some due to organizational structures, staffing and nature of work in a country where gender inequality continues to be a major societal issue.
In certain cases, women need to travel with a mahram, i.e. escort, which doubles the price of travelling and is not cost-effective for organizations with tight budget.

The price reduction was rolled out with the goal of increasing women’s participation in humanitarian activities across the country. In a culture where women and men may be separated for certain daily activities, particularly in rural and remote communities, female staff have the most access to other women who may need assistance, and therefore can play an increasingly essential role in field missions.

To support the anticipated increase in female passengers, UNHAS has already initiated the recruitment process for more women to help with check-in and security measures.

15 percent of current UNHAS staff in Afghanistan are women who work as crew, customer and booking representatives, operations and finance.

UNHAS plans to continue the programme to ensure that Afghan women are able to further develop their skills and expand their experiences as humanitarian professionals.

Following their announcement to participating agencies in late March, UNHAS received many inquiries about making new bookings, including a local women’s NGO whose officials stated:

“we really appreciate the initiative which will inspire our female staff to travel more. It is a great opportunity to bring women closer to our projects around the country.”
Users feedback on their UNHAS experience

In our continuous and ongoing endeavour to meet user demands and enhance quality of our services, UNHAS conducts a number of surveys every year to obtain inputs, comments and feedback from the users.

**Online Survey:**
WFP/UNHAS launches two surveys every year:
1) Passenger Satisfaction Survey to obtain inputs, comments and feedback from passengers and their focal points, and
2) Provision of Access Satisfaction Survey to receive the inputs and feedback from the heads of user organizations.

**Inflight Survey:**
UNHAS Afghanistan Passenger Satisfaction Survey provides analysis and evaluation of UNHAS operation all over Afghanistan in terms of measuring its user’s acceptance and satisfaction level for the entire UNHAS experience. Survey is conducted on a weekly basis to passengers in different aircraft flying to a variety of destinations.

Passengers indicate their satisfaction on a scale of 1-5 (1 being Very Dissatisfied to 5 being Very Satisfied). Since the survey started, UNHAS has collected and analysed close to 400 responses from our users.

UNHAS analyses the surveys, and based on users’ feedback applicable actions taken for the improvement of service.

**Feedback:** In general the satisfaction level remained very high, with some feedbacks below:

- “Thanks a lot for all services by UNHAS in Afghanistan especially between province in different situations.”
- “To increase more flight frequencies ”
- “We are very satisfied from UNHAS. I am glad to have flights with UNHAS to all the provinces where NGO has operations in.”
- “Professional staff, smooth flight”
- “It’s good but quite expensive”
- “The process of booking is excellent and not too complicated”
- “We recommend for direct route.”
- “Quick, positive response to last minute request”

98% of passengers select acceptable range
Most are Satisfied to very satisfied

UNHAS operations in Afghanistan
WFP Aviation Standards

To assure the highest aviation standards for the UNHAS operations; our safety and security procedures, staff qualification criteria, flight operations and aircraft contracting procedures are in strict compliance with the WFP Aviation Standards as well as the United Nations Aviation Standards for Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Air Operations (UNAVSTADS).

The entity bringing order and an elevated level of quality and safety to the UNHAS operations on the frontiers of aviation is the WFP’s Aviation Quality Unit and the Aviation Safety Unit (ASU), both headquartered in Rome. ASU maintains regional offices in United Arab Emirates, Kenya and South Africa.

Air Operators

UNHAS is currently contracting three air operators for the humanitarian air service in Afghanistan, National Airways Corporation (NAC) of South Africa, Valan International Cargo Charter from Moldova, and DAC Aviation from Kenya.

**NAC**, with two B1900 aircrafts for UNHAS, specialises in global special mission contracts, operating and managing numerous air support assignments throughout Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Australia, Asia and the Far East. NAC is a WFP registered operator, an ISO 9001:2015 accredited company and Flight Safety Foundation BARS accredited air operator.

**DAC Aviation**, based in Nairobi, operates a DHC 8-200 aircraft with 37 seats and has a fleet of aircraft including DHC8-400 and Cessna Caravans. DAC has current operations in humanitarian missions, mainly in Africa and Afghanistan. DAC Aviation is registered with WFP, with operating approvals from the Kenyan CAA.

**Valan Aviation**, operates an M18-MTV helicopter for UNHAS. Valan was founded in 1990; currently manages and operates a fleet of aircraft consisting of two AN-26 fixed-wing airplanes and eight M1-8 MTV helicopters. Valan is primarily focusing on air operations to provide passenger and cargo transportation.

Capacity Building

UNHAS continuously arranges training for its own staff in all areas of the operation. Here is first aid training performed for our flight monitors by Kabul Ambulance.
Thanks for UNHAS Supporters

Partners
UNHAS collaborations include coordination for humanitarian access, improved capacity for emergency response, capacity building, improved security and safety processes and cost savings.

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