

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Movement of Essential Health and Humanitarian Supplies and Personnel in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa

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1. Background and rationale

To contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) encouraged Member States to kindly facilitate air transport and review certain restrictions on air operations for humanitarian assistance, cargo transport and medical evacuations.

In March, 2020, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan against the COVID-19 pandemic was launched under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General and called on Member States to facilitate the movement of humanitarian personnel, through the establishment of an air transport service managed by the World Food Programme (WFP).

In April 2020, the UN Secretary General, in consultation with the African Union, called on Member States to support the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Program (WFP) to establish a global food supply chain and facilitate the movement of cargo and humanitarian personnel on the African continent.

Many Member States have responded favorably to this call as an exceptional measure, if national protocols for the prevention, containment and risk mitigation of COVID-19 are respected.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of these SoP is to guide the management of regional humanitarian flights, while preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and considering national protocols. The SOP outlines the required procedures for passengers before travel, while traveling to the airport, during stay at the airport, on board a flight, at the arrival airport and at the designated facility for quarantine.

The procedures will be reviewed and updated based on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place by Member States.

3. Procedures

Humanitarian Community Assistance Service

- These flights will be operated under the control of WFP and other designated agency as the need may arise who will be responsible for liaison with organizations using the flights.
- The focal point for WFP and or other designated agency will ensure that arrangements are made in time to ensure organizations having passengers on a given flight are informed so that they in advance inform their passengers of the arrangements in place on arrival relating to the administrative, health and handling formalities.
- All passengers MUST comply with all information on bilateral agreements between the Member State and humanitarian organizations, regarding mandatory quarantine and other exceptional situations.
- Any organization that has obtained a specific agreement with a Member State is required to communicate to the transporter or the WFP focal point for timely information sharing with the RC / HC and the Representatives of WHO.

Testing for COVID-19 by RT-PCR before travel

- Current WHO travel recommendations do not require international travelers to prove a COVID free status.
- However, as countries ease lockdowns, testing of travelers, including humanitarian personnel, is likely to become a requirement, even if scaling it up may be challenging. In the event Member States are implementing this additional health measure, all passengers will ensure they are compliant;
- Passengers travelling to countries implementing this additional measure, are required to undergo a COVID-19 test by RT-PCR within a week before travel at an accredited laboratory as part of the pre-deployment medical examination and will be required to travel with a medical report showing a COVID-19 test negative status.

- Passengers should understand that while having a positive test means you have COVID-19 (with a very small, but unlikely chance that this test can be a false positive), a negative test means that the virus was not found in your sample because you are not infected or are in the incubation period.

3.1 Measures to be taken before travel

3.1.1 The agency responsible for passengers travelling

- Explain explicitly the reason for the flight, WFP Global Passenger Air Service, or other service;
- Inform passengers of the compulsory health provisions to be observed as soon as they disembark at the airport of arrival such as;
 - Have a negative COVID-19 screening report before departure,
 - Quarantine in designated facility (UN house, Hotel or Lodge) on arrival,
 - Screening test as specified by Member State protocols,
 - Accept treatment/hospitalization in a dedicated isolation center in the event of a positive test;
- Inform passengers that they WILL NOT be accepted to travel in case they have tested positive
- Enter the complete identity of the travelers and their nationality;
- Provide the reservations for hotel accommodation upon arrival (Get accredited list of hotels in advance) or provide exact address in the country in case the passenger is flying to his/her duty station;
- Consider the duration of quarantine when counting the number of working days for staff at the end of the contract.
- Facilitate the connection with the COVID-19 UN or the national coordination systems/case management group in the visiting country (or at the duty station)

3.1.2 Conveyance operators in collaboration with WFP

- Ensure passenger and crew safety and comply with host country regulations;

- Ensure seating configuration that allows for physical distancing (for instance blocking the middle seats) and request passengers and crew to wear surgical masks;
- Ensure staff operating conveyances are well trained on the detection and management of suspected COVID-19 passengers and in infection prevention and control;
- Provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies for crew to protect themselves and assess/isolate passengers;
- Provide adequate information for passengers and crew about COVID 19 prevention and control;
- Train crew about hand hygiene while aboard the conveyance.
- Ensure mandatory wearing of masks at the airport;
- Ensure to disinfect the aircraft and other accessories before and after each flight;
- Share with the airport authorities in advance the tentative flight arrival date and time and the passenger manifest.

3.1.3 The passenger

- Sign consent acknowledging the passenger is aware of the protocol in force in the country they are travelling to and agree to comply with it;
- Provide the transporter with all the information necessary for the registration of the flight, and complete form indicating movements in the last 14 days;
- Prepare their personal protective equipment (Masks, gloves, alcoholic-based sanitizers) for the duration of their trip and their quarantine time;
- Any passenger with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (cough, fever, fatigue, etc.) must immediately inform the relevant authorities of their condition and their location (house, transit hotel, potential airport staff contacts, etc.) and refrain from traveling;
- Conduct a COVID-19 screening test by RT-PCR at least 7 days before travel from a UN accredited laboratory and travel with the test report (Positive passengers should NOT travel);
- Passengers suffering from any chronic diseases SHOULD carry a stock of their medication (Diabetes, Asthma, Cancer, Hypertension, Sickle Cell Disease, Kidney Failure, HIV, etc.).

3.2 Procedures during the flight

3.2.1 Passengers

All passengers WILL strictly observe the following procedures:

- Maintain hand hygiene with 70% alcohol-based solution or washing hands with soap and water for about 20 seconds
- Wear a recommended surgical mask,
- Observe the public health measures of physical distancing (at least 1 metre apart),
- Avoid touching the face, nose, eyes and mouth.
- Immediately inform the crew members in case of symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 appear during flight (cough, fever, fatigue, etc.)

3.2.2 The transporter -

In collaboration with the WFP should:

- Enforce physical and social distancing by having the middle seats blocked.
- Isolate the passenger showing signs of COVID-19 at a less crowded part of the cabin and report the incident to the landing airport.

3.3 Procedures at landing of the aircraft and exit from the airport

3.3.1 The passenger

- When disembarking the plane, must wear the protective mask and when required by national protocols gloves,
- Always respect the physical distancing measures -when getting off the plane, in the lanes and corridors and on the shuttle,
- Comply with ALL public health measures instituted at the point of entry such as thermal/temperature screening, washing hands, filling in health declaration forms, undergoing the COVID-19 screening test, where applicable,
- Collect luggage, go through customs and return to the dedicated meeting point for a group departure to the hotel, or other destination in coordination with the respective agency focal point.

3.3.2 Health and airport authorities

- Be available in the reception hall for thermal/temperature screening and provide hand disinfection for all passengers,
- Provide information sheets and briefing on barrier measures and any screening tests where applicable,
- Facilitate the orientation of passengers to airport services, in collaboration with the authorized services,
- Ensure the organization of the required tests at the airport health post,
- Take charge of passengers with signs suggestive of COVID-19 according to the protocol of the Ministry of Health,
- Organize the disinfection of passengers and luggage at the exit of the terminal or before getting onto the shuttle,
- In the event of a health alert from the aircraft, prepare the Rapid Response teams (Ambulance, personnel with PPE,) and activate the appropriate communication chain.
- Inform passengers on the connection with UN support system/group/mechanism if any

3.3.3 Quarantine duration or not quarantining travellers

- Ideally there shouldn't be a requirement by the host country to quarantine travellers who have a negative COVID-19 test medical report. Such travellers should be allowed to self-quarantine at their hotel or at home under the supervision of the UN medical team in collaboration with the host country medical team;
- Should the host Member State require mandatory quarantining for travellers with a COVID-19 test negative report, such travellers should be quarantined and observed for 7 days (or in line with the national policy) at a location designated by the United Nations or WHO in collaboration with the host Member State government to ensure that quarantined personnel can continue to provide critical remote support for their mission.
- All passengers will be transported, by agency accredited shuttles to a designated facility, such as hotel or lodge.
- Transport will be organized by the passengers' respective agency.

- At all times the COVID-19 related protocols of the host Member State MUST be adhered to for travel to the location of quarantine.
- After 7 days (or as otherwise stipulated by national protocols) the personnel should be released from the quarantine facility with or without the need for negative COVID-19 screening test, depending on local regulations.
- Customs and immigration formalities will be followed as per regulations.

3.3.4 General recommendations for passengers in quarantine

All passengers WILL consent to:

- Scrupulously respect the quarantine measures (no exit, no visitor, etc.)
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Regularly disinfect hands with a hydro alcohol-based solution.
- Wear a protective mask while outside their room.
- Observe physical distancing measures.
- In case of fever, cough or difficulty breathing call their agency emergency medical toll-free number without delay.

3.3.5 Organization of passenger transport from the airport to the quarantine facility (UNDSS / Agency representative)

- Ensure the practical facilitation of the routing and transportation of travelers by accredited shuttles from the airport to approved hotels;
- Communicate with agencies and transport companies providing means of transportation to ensure availability of hand washing supplies, safety and disinfection after each use.

3.4 Transit Arrangements

- For transit passengers, Member States are urged to consider fast-tracking transit visa issuance by the immigration at the host country International Airport and other points of entry upon arrival.
- In many countries the transit visa is issued on arrival at no cost for UNLP holders.
- Passengers transiting through the country with a confirmed onward travel schedule should be allowed to transit without observing quarantine, if their transit time is less than 72 hours.
- If there is no immediate connecting flight, all transit passengers will be taken to a designated quarantine facility for the duration of the transit period.
- Passengers will be transported by the respective agency accredited shuttles to and from the designated facility to the International Airport or other point of entry and will at all times abide by the physical and social distancing protocol of the host country.
- Road Transport: Passengers travelling by road to the destination country will make use of designated and agreed upon border crossings, for the respective countries.
- Passengers will be transported to the border point and will go through the customs and immigration procedures and will be picked by a relay driver and shuttle hired by the respective agency.
- At all times during road transport there will be strict adherence to the host nation's physical and social distancing measures, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Upon arrival, such passengers will be subject to quarantine for 7 days or as deemed by the host country at the UN designated quarantine facility.

4. Special provisions

- Any organization registering a passenger on regional humanitarian flights undertakes to comply with the procedures described above;
- Organizations with special bilateral arrangements / agreements with health authorities in any Member State should transmit share such agreements for communication / information to the Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator, WFP Representatives and WHO.
- Appropriate solutions for specific cases and exceptions by a Member State as part of the response to COVID-19 will be decided by an

appropriate strategic committee comprising of the MoH, the UN Resident Coordinator, WFP and the WHO Representatives.

- All common charges (transport from the airport, strengthening the security of premises, accommodation for health workers) will be recovered from all organizations that have had staff assisted and / or supported in the part by this SOP.
- Each organization will have financial and moral responsibility for each of its staff during the quarantine period.
- These provisions are enforceable for all agencies and Member States that have endorsed them;
- These measures can be adjusted according to the evolution of the pandemic situation.