



HUMANITARIAN BOOKING HUB



ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Practice Notes for the Development
Coordination Office
Business Operations Strategy



UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GROUP



January
World Food Programme
humanitarianbooking.org

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ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Executive Summary

This practice note provides information on **the Humanitarian Booking Hub - Accommodation Services**, an innovative **digital platform** for the global operations of United Nations Operational Management Teams (OMTs) and Country Teams (UNCTs) within the Business Operation Strategy (BOS) framework. **The Humanitarian Booking Hub is a UN proprietary online platform** powered by WFP. It allows staff and managers to book field accommodation services and optimise the guesthouse's daily management activities. **It standardises business processes, automates request tracking and improves service delivery through real-time monitoring of customer satisfaction.** At the same time, **it promotes synergies and efficiency gains.** It is truly **a UN solution for the UN**, designed in accordance with the Mutual Recognition, Costing and Customer Satisfaction principles.

WFP initially developed the Hub as a corporate tool to run and manage its field services. Now the platform is offered as a global, inter-agency service to the wider UN. A dedicated team coordinates the implementation of the Hub whilst providing support to participating Agencies in their locations, from the initial contact to service activation and beyond. By implementing their services on the Humanitarian Booking Hub, **Agencies can successfully advance their digital transformation, foster inter-agency collaboration, improve customer satisfaction and contribute to the BOS agenda for common services.**

[Please watch this video for an overview of the Humanitarian Booking Hub.](#)

Introduction: a natural enabler of BOS

The Humanitarian Booking Hub, as a collaborative digital approach tool, is central to scale mature services within the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) framework: BOS is a results-based framework that focuses on joint business operations with the purpose of eliminating duplication, leveraging the common bargaining power of the UN and maximising economies of scale. The BOS was created in 2012 as a response to a call for simplification and harmonisation of the United Nations system. In line with the Quadrennia Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and the repositioning of the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the Secretary-General mandates that all United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) ensure compliance with an improved BOS by 2021, in support of more effective programme delivery.

The Humanitarian Booking Hub is a natural enabler of the BOS, as it supports the quick implementation of the framework with a ready-to-use digital tool, and enhances inter-agency collaboration within the UN system.

The [Humanitarian Booking Hub](#) is the largest UN marketplace for field accommodation, mobility, and wellness services provided by UN Agencies. It supports administrators in digitally transforming their daily activities, aids humanitarian workers in delivering last-mile assistance, automates UN organisational operations data for improved decision-making, and provides emergency preparedness and response services.

The Humanitarian Booking Hub was conceived in 2015 in response to a growing need for digitalised operations handling in the field. At present, already 9 UN agencies are offering their services through the platform, making **the Hub the largest UN marketplace for UN provided field services.** The current Humanitarian Hub platform is digitally transforming field operations in the following ways:

- **Optimises the use of corporate assets** for more effective field operations and management of the services.
- Allows automatic reporting of operational service data and KPIs for more **effective decision making** and clearer **identification of improvement opportunities** for all services offered.
- Provides technical support to **advance the UN Reform Agenda**.

To support the rapid scale-up of COVID emergency response, in April 2020, the Humanitarian Booking Hub expanded its service offerings to include the booking of Global Passenger Air Services. The Hub also rolled out a range of tools and materials for staff and managers, including live travel dashboards and COVID-19 standard preventive measures.



1008 UN field service points in 89 Countries from 10 UN Agencies

- 2,800+ UN vehicles
- 285+ UNHAS flights
- 50+ COVID support flights
- 260+ UN guesthouses
- 110+ UNDSS hotels
- 65+ UN Clinics
- 35 UN Counsellors

The platform can also be accessed via a mobile app, available for Android and Apple phones, and it offers the following services: Accommodation, Driver, Clinic, and Medical services.

Objectives

The Hub aims to **enhance inter-agency collaboration** and achieve the following objectives:

- Provide a **custom-made UN solution to UN Agencies** for common accommodation, passenger mobility, and wellness services in field operations, leveraging on the UN global operations expertise;
- **Eliminate duplication of efforts and leverage economies of scale** by streamlining joint digital operations into a single effort that adopts best practices for the common benefit;
- **Adoption of best practises** by globally streamlining Agencies success stories and service solutions;
- Provide immediate access to a **standardised and digitalised back-office service** with end-to-end service management, including customer booking process, asset allocation, service delivery, electronic invoicing, and automated reporting.

- Allow all agencies in the same country to use the platform, improving **comparable UN service delivery KPIs and asset sharing opportunities**. (i.e., offering spare guesthouses capacity to other agencies that do not have an accommodation service presence in the Country).
- Provide **comprehensive client feedback services** to continuously monitor customer satisfaction of services, support the UN Reform and promote a client-focused mindset.
- Provide a cost-recovery model for **effective, fair and precise inter-agency cost recovery** solutions and for invoicing.

Potential challenges

Any process involving digital transformation invariably leads to a change management process with its associated challenges:

- Resistance to change in switching from a consolidated manual process to automated digital ones.
- Fear of job losses due to digitalisation.
- Fear of increased service accountability of established practices.

An effective change management support structure and team are in place with extensive expertise in digitalising field service operations to manage such challenges with:

- Comprehensive online trainings for staff, guesthouse managers, and administrators.
- Online manuals and video-recordings for step by step support for daily activities.
- 24/7 customer service for questions or concerns.

All services on the Humanitarian Booking Hub are very mature and used by numerous agencies.

Key stakeholders

The Humanitarian Booking Hub is targeted towards the following main UN stakeholder groups:

1. Travelling personnel

Staff travelling in the field receive real-time information to plan trips and book the required accommodation services. At the same time, they obtain automated booking notifications and are given a chance to provide their feedback on the service.

To encourage broad adoption, the Hub is available both in English and French. For security reasons, only humanitarian partners such as UN Agencies, NGOs, stand-by and governmental partners are granted access to the digital platform. Most UN agency staff can access the website using their own corporate credentials. Other users are required to create new accounts. Private email addresses are blocked.

2. Service administrators

Guesthouse managers can benefit immensely from a dedicated suite of digital services called the Digital Office. The Digital Office automates daily management activities, increases service accountability, and reduces the number and/or the duration of manual clerical tasks.

Access to the Digital Office is restricted to designated service management personnel. Through the digital back-office, bookings (for each service) can be accepted, edited, or rejected. Confirmations and invoices can be sent to guests, and country and location based reports can be retrieved. Through the Digital Office, managers can also access dedicated service training, manuals, and other documents



Guesthouse dedicated back office

3. Senior management

The platform offers numerous reporting features to assist senior managers in monitoring and managing data related to service usage and status for a more informed and effective decision-making process. By facilitating data sharing (including customer feedback) between agencies, the use of assets can be optimised, and services improved.

Benefits

With just a few clicks, the UN Accommodation Service on the Humanitarian Booking Hub makes the booking process simple and effective. The service is already operational in 31 countries with 260 UN guesthouses.

The benefits of the system architecture are:

- **Seamless smooth booking process** and enhanced user experience
- **Automated reporting system to manage KPIs** for informed decision making
- Improved **customer satisfaction** through feedback collection
- **Efficient use of resources and assets through common services**

Accommodation user services

The Un Accommodation section provides a convenient world map showcasing all the countries and locations where the service is active, allowing the user to book the desired guesthouse. Each guesthouse has a dedicated page providing information about pricing, available services, photos of inside and outside the guesthouse, security, and surroundings. Staff can book for themselves or on behalf of a colleague, and personal information is stored in the system and retrieved for future bookings. When using the mobile app, frequently booked locations can be marked as favourites and rebooked with just one tap. Once the booking has been processed, the accommodation details are emailed to both the customer and the guesthouse management.

Accommodation management services

Appointed personnel from each guesthouse manages bookings from the system's back office: the Digital Office. Here, the designated guesthouse focal point can rapidly process bookings by accepting, editing, or rejecting them as required. The Occupancy Calendar provides a visual overview of real-time allocation of rooms and absences registration permits to temporarily re-assign rooms and boost occupancy rate. In the case of a shared compound, it is possible to create invoices for other UN agencies' visitors. The system automatically retrieves all the customer's data, deducts absences, or adds extra services. All the invoices are stored on the platform and are monitored through the automated monthly report. It is possible to register the guesthouse's expenditures and generate net revenue reports and monitor all relevant KPIs by country and location. The Maintenance section requires accommodation managers to complete the digital Quality Checklist, based on the UN Common Standards for living conditions in the field.

Key Performance Indicators

The digital platform automatically generates major service KPIs based on Agency, country and office levels for increased accountability, more effective service delivery and continual service improvement. Managers can monitor progress and compare performance pre-and-post platform implementation performance with the following key country-level indicators:

- Generated income
- Net revenues
- Capacity (number of beds)
- Number of bookings
- Occupancy rate
- Number of visitors (by Agency vs. non-Agency visitors)
- Customer satisfaction index and individual guesthouse review scores

Common Accommodation Services

The platform allows UN agencies to extend field accommodation services to other UN entities and recover the total cost of the service provided through the platform's detailed country reporting. Agencies can indicate the number of guesthouses they wish to share and offer through the Hub as part of Common Accommodation. These guesthouses will then be available through the digital platform. Agencies with no guesthouses can benefit from using the platform by leveraging other agencies' accommodation capacities.

Efficiency Gains

The use of the digital platform can be transformational in the way accommodation services are delivered in the field as it provides:

- **Time savings**
It reduces or eliminates numerous activities through automation (i.e., online bookings with automatic client data retrieval, automatic booking confirmation emails to users, automated services KPIs and monthly reporting).
- **Cost avoidance (cash savings)**
It generates efficiencies for the UN system, reduces overhead costs and releases, as a consequence, funds for mission-critical activities. It allows to optimise the accommodation assets by merging guesthouses to reduce overhead costs.
- **Cost recovery**
It allows UN Agencies to increase their guesthouses' occupancy rate, and therefore income, by sharing any spare capacity with other UN Agencies and eventually gathering crucial service data for future optimization.
- **Quality improvements**

It significantly improves the customer experience of the service by offering bookings and confirmation emails with service details.

It also improves the service administrators' experience in managing their daily operations. In line with UN Reform Client Satisfaction Principles, it allows tracking of customer feedback for continuous service delivery improvement. It streamlines best practices across the UN family.

The UN proprietary field delivery platform on full cost-recovery

WFP first developed the Hub service in-house for its internal operations before transforming it into a UN proprietary platform for the delivery of humanitarian field services. The platform is offered to UN Partners via a service setup fee, together with an annual operational support flat fee per location, based on the number of assets (guesthouses, vehicles and drivers, clinics). No cost recovery for past digital transformation investments is required. Currently, only UN Agencies can provide services via the Humanitarian Booking Hub.

Implementation

Should a UN Agency decide to offer the Accommodation Service through the Humanitarian Booking Hub, the following steps apply:

1. The Agency contacts the Humanitarian Booking Hub management by writing to global.accommodation@wfp.org.
2. The Global Accommodation Team sets up an initial meeting for the interested Agency to include both a demo of the system and a joint assessment of service requirements (i.e., number of guesthouses, number of focal points to be connected to the platform, specific service information, etc.).
3. The Agency then completed a form detailing its accommodation composition.
4. The Agency would then go through a trial use of the platform, following which a Service Agreement is signed between WFP and the Agency.
5. The Global Accommodation Team begins rolling out the service on a country-by-country basis (or location-by-location basis depending on the type of agreement signed: Headquarter or Country Office level) The team provides the required information and relevant documents to start the onboarding process and create the Accommodation Hub.
6. The Global Accommodation Team trains the guesthouses' managers and appointed personnel on the use of the Accommodation Platform through online trainings and remote support.
7. The Global Accommodation Team guarantees its full support throughout the whole process by providing bespoke training material (manuals and training recordings) and tailored advice, assisting the digital transformation of all operations.

The implementation phase can take as little as one week or more than one month, depending on the work needed to stock-take the UNCT's or agencies' guesthouses and the speed at which the onboarding process can take place.

BOS 2.0 Implementation

The following recommendations should be considered in the implementation of the Accommodation Service within the BOS 2.0 stages.

a) Kick-Off: Identify participating agencies for this service. The Service Agreement will provide the accountability framework for this service.

b) Stock Take: Identify UN Agencies in the Country that is running accommodation services and UN staff that already accommodate the Country's guesthouses to assess and map the performances and existence of practices or common services related to accommodation services. The Humanitarian Booking Hub already maps 260 guesthouses from 7 UN agencies.

c) Opportunity Analysis: The Accommodation Service of the Humanitarian Booking Hub can boost each UNCT/OMT's inter-agency collaboration efforts by offering a UN common platform to provide accommodation services to Agencies' staff and offer the extra capacity to other Agencies as a common service.

By using the accommodation service for internal service delivery, the country operations teams can automatically generate KPIs to support future decision-making on long term asset management (E.g., optimise the accommodation assets by merging guesthouses to minimise costs and maximise revenues and service development and increasing bookings and occupancy rate due to the service's enhanced visibility through the platform). Some of the expected key improvements and benefits of the Accommodation Service adoption are improved customer service, delivery accountability, digital automation savings.

d) Cost-Benefit Analysis

A simplified Cost-Benefit Analysis is available in the BOS platform to support UNCT/OMTs calculate cumulative costs avoidance if the Accommodation Service is adopted for local operations.

	Current costs and KPIs					Future costs and KPIs					Cost avoidance and KPIs improvement					Total
	yr 1	yr 2	yr 3	yr 4	yr 5	yr 1	yr 2	yr 3	yr 4	yr 5	yr 1	yr 2	yr 3	yr 4	yr 5	
ACCOMMODATION																
One time cost																
<i>Set up costs for accommodation platform</i>																
<i>Optional cost driver [guesthouse setup]</i>																
Recurring costs																
<i>Platform licence and maintenance costs</i>																
<i>Annual spent on manual invoicing and reporting</i>																
<i>Annual spent on facility and service quality assessment</i>																
Labour cost																
<i>Annual FTE cost of guesthouse management (i.e. bookings, occupancy, invoicing, maintenance, reporting)</i>																
Total costs																
Service KPIs																
<i>Customer Satisfaction on service quality (1 to 5)</i>																
<i>Cost avoidance expectation from this collaboration (USD)</i>																

Setup costs refer to the one-time fee of setting up the platform and eventually setup guesthouse costs.

Recurring costs refer to platform license fees, maintenance, manual invoicing and reporting expenses, annual spending on facilities, and service quality assessment.

Labour costs refer to accommodation service administrations (i.e., booking, invoicing and reporting activities) and any optional savings from reducing staff in future years due to service digitalisation and possible inter-agency collaboration.

e) Planning Framework

Once Agencies have adopted the Accommodation Service, major delivery KPIs will be automatically generated in real-time by the platform for increased accountability.

Examples of KPIs are occupancy rate, generated income, number of visitors per agency versus non-Agency, and customer satisfaction per stay/ location/ Agency/ country.

f) Implementation Plan

The implementation timeframe will vary according to the size of the assets registered on the platform and the local team's speed to provide all the necessary information to roll-out the service. For example, an agency with 5-10 guesthouses may take one week to implement the service, whereas an agency with 50 guesthouses may take a month or more depending on a number of variables. Convenient timelines will be discussed between the Global Accommodation Team and the agency in question.

g) Sign Off

In order to achieve the desired objectives in terms of quality and efficiency gains, a pilot/beta testing phase can be implemented to address the technical and capacity opportunities before launching the agency-wide program.

Sustainability and Scalability

WFP is committed to the long-term development of the Humanitarian Booking Hub and the service lines offered.

Adoption of the Accommodation Service will enable Agencies to digitally transform their field operations rapidly and help define a uniform service for all UN personnel and administrators.

The successful adoption model enables the WFP's Global Accommodation Team to roll out the Hub to other Agencies with a tried-and-tested approach, leading to reduced implementation times and maximum guesthouse-staff engagement.

Other sources of information

More information can be found at humanitarianbooking.org. Please watch this [video](#) for a brief overview of the services available on the Humanitarian Booking Hub and this [video](#) for a demonstration of the back-office services available in the Digital Office.

UN Agencies wishing to use the Humanitarian Booking Hub to offer Accommodation Services should contact global.accommodation@wfp.org.

Conclusion

The WFP Accommodation Booking Hub is an innovative, easy-to-use digital platform providing clear benefits for both travelling staff and guesthouse management teams. It has digitally transformed the way in which UN Agencies provide field Accommodation service. After the rapid and successful roll out within WFP and 6 UN Agencies, this tried and tested tool is ready for adoption by other UN Agencies to enhance inter-agency collaboration and harmonise in field operations within the BOS framework and in line with the Business Innovation Group (BIG) principles of mutual recognition, costing and customer satisfaction.

[Join us in creating the UN Accommodation Service together.](#)