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Standards of accommodation for air travel

Forty-fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for 2025

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel ([A/79/628](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee was provided with additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 16 December 2024.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolutions [42/214](#), [45/248 A](#), [53/214](#), [63/268](#), [65/268](#), [67/254 A](#), [69/274 A](#), [71/272 B](#), [72/262 B](#), [74/262](#), [75/253 B](#), [77/263 B](#) and [78/252](#) and decisions 44/442, 46/450 and 57/589, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit his report to it on a biennial basis. The report provides information on air travel for the two-year period ended 30 June 2024 and comparative statistics for the two-year period ended 30 June 2022, as well as trend analyses for the past 10 years (*ibid.*, summary).

II. Standards of travel accommodation and air travel activities

A. Exceptions authorized by the Secretary-General

3. Paragraphs 8 to 17 of the report of the Secretary-General provide information on instances of exceptions granted by the Secretary-General to travel in a higher class than that authorized under normally applicable standards. In its resolution [72/262 B](#), the General Assembly decided to eliminate the use of first-class travel of United Nations staff members for their official travel, with the discretionary authority of the Secretary-General exercised in accordance with section 4.8 of administrative instruction [ST/AI/2013/3/Rev.1](#). **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution [77/263 B](#), section I, paragraph 5, requested the Secretary-General to make additional efforts to encourage all individuals who qualify for first-class or business class United Nations-funded air travel to**



voluntarily downgrade from their entitled class, where possible (see also resolution 75/253 B, sect. V, para. 5, and para. 19 below). The Committee considers that travellers should be made aware of the possibility of voluntary downgrades (see also A/77/7/Add.41, para. 11, and A/75/7/Add.39, para. 12).

4. The statistical information provided shows that exceptions are authorized for the following reasons (A/79/628, para. 8 and tables 1–4):

- (a) Prominent traveller (a current or former cabinet minister, or a significant international figure providing free services to the Organization);
- (b) Eminent traveller (a current or former Head of State or Government);
- (c) Medical condition;
- (d) Arduous journey;
- (e) Regular standard not available;
- (f) Security (one member of the security details of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General travels in their cabin) (see ST/AI/2013/3/Rev.1, sect. 4.3 (a)).

5. With regard to the cost of the exceptions, the information provided shows that, for the Secretariat for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, the exceptions amounted to a total additional cost of \$2,010,645, including for: prominent travellers, \$1,382,461 (68.7 per cent); security, \$261,612 (13 per cent); medical condition, \$142,432 (7 per cent); eminent travellers, \$141,362 (7 per cent); arduous journey, \$63,621 (3.2 per cent); and regular standard not available, \$19,157 (1 per cent) (A/79/628, table 3).

6. In terms of exceptions due to medical conditions, according to information provided to the Advisory Committee, these conditions are first reviewed by the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health, which then advises the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance on whether the requests are supported or not. Persons with permanent medical conditions or disabilities undergo a one-time review by the Division. Once the Division determines that a person has a permanent medical condition or disability that warrants upgrades to business class irrespective of the duration of that person's trips, the case is classified as falling under reasonable accommodation (see ST/AI/2013/3/Rev.1, sect. 4.9). Furthermore, there is potential for simplification if the standard travel entitlement for such persons could be changed to business class, following which their trips would no longer be considered exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel.

7. With respect to the exceptions granted to eminent travellers, according to information provided to the Advisory Committee, a traveller who is a current or former Head of State or Government is considered an eminent person. Since the requests for eminent persons are routinely approved, there is potential for simplification if their standard travel entitlement is changed to business class, following which their trips would no longer be considered exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel.

8. The Advisory Committee notes the potential for simplification with respect to persons with relevant medical conditions and eminent travellers. The Committee, therefore, considers that the standard travel entitlement for such travellers could be changed to business class and looks forward to the respective proposals. The Committee trusts that updated information on the exceptions authorized by the Secretary-General will continue to be provided in future reports.

B. Lump-sum option for home leave

9. In its resolution [67/254](#) A, the General Assembly decided, as an interim measure, to set the lump-sum payment for home leave at 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy class fare. The Secretary-General indicates that the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) is conducting a comprehensive review of the common system compensation package (including the lump-sum option), pursuant to Assembly resolutions [76/240](#) and [77/256](#) A ([A/79/628](#), paras. 70 and 71).

10. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that ICSC had established three working groups, on the general overview of the structure of the current compensation package (working group 1), dependency-related benefits, including education grant (working group 2), and field-related allowances (working group 3), respectively. The working groups held their first meetings in the first half of 2024 and presented their progress reports to ICSC at its 2024 sessions. At its ninety-eighth session, ICSC decided to take note of the progress made by the working groups and requested the organizations, through the Human Resources Network, to provide to the ICSC secretariat detailed data on estimated expenditures by the next round of working group meetings in 2025 (see the ICSC annual report for 2024 ([A/79/30](#))).

11. The Advisory Committee looks forward to the outcome of the comprehensive review of ICSC regarding the lump-sum option for home leave.

C. Information on air travel volume and cost

12. In terms of travel volume, the Secretary-General provides information on commercial travel by standard of accommodation over the reporting period, as shown in table 1 below (see [A/79/628](#), table 8).

Table 1
Commercial air travel volume by standard of accommodation, 1 July 2022–30 June 2024
(Number of trips)

Standard of accommodation	2022	2023		2024		Total	Percentage
	July–December	January–June	July–December	January–June			
Economy class	51 589	48 748	56 727	46 740	203 804	88	
Business class	5 146	5 638	5 578	5 121	21 483	9	
First class	3	6	6	2	17	–	
Multiple classes of service (including first-class travel)	8	6	4	6	24	–	
Multiple classes of service (excluding first-class travel)	1 471	1 529	1 468	1 377	5 845	3	
Total	58 217	55 927	63 783	53 246	231 173	100	

13. The Secretary-General indicates that the overall volume of air travel increased (138 per cent) compared with the previous reporting period (from 2020 to 2022), when 97,306 trips were recorded. That increase suggests that post-pandemic travel has returned to the pre-pandemic volume recorded from 2018 to 2020 (216,456 trips) (*ibid.*, para. 21).

14. With regard to air travel costs, the report of the Secretary-General provides information on costs by Umoja travel category, as contained in table 2 below (see also *ibid.*, table 9).

Table 2
Travel cost by Umoja travel category, 1 July 2022–30 June 2024
 (Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Travel category</i>	<i>July–December 2022</i>			<i>January–December 2023</i>			<i>January–June 2024</i>		
	<i>Ticket</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Ticket</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Ticket</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
Official travel	71 862	62 350	134 212	154 246	136 361	290 606	72 406	62 334	134 740
Entitlement travel	1 401	215	1 616	1 246	220	1 466	366	58	424
Human resources travel	6 911	1 224	8 135	12 212	2 475	14 688	5 826	916	6 742
Uniformed personnel travel	6 097	335	6 432	10 972	785	11 757	4 616	311	4 927
Total	86 271	64 124	150 395	178 676	139 841	318 517	83 214	63 619	146 833

15. In its previous report, the Advisory Committee recognized the difficulties of using “old normal” travel data as a benchmark to assess new “new normal” travel data and to establish trends, keeping in mind that the disruptive nature of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had shifted staffing needs and organizational working methods overall, including a focus on the use of various means of communication technology in lieu of in-person meetings ([A/77/7/Add.41](#), para. 8).

16. The Advisory Committee considers that data for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024 represent the return to a “new normal” in terms of air travel, which could be applied for benchmarking and comparative purposes in the post-pandemic era. The Committee reiterates its view that applying lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and making use of the investments in communication technology, including videoconferencing and enhanced capability to access online databases, should have an increasing impact on the ability to communicate, to consult and to gather data, thereby keeping expenditure for the travel of Secretariat staff to a minimum (see also [A/79/7](#), para. 50, and [A/77/7/Add.41](#), para. 23).

17. The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution [77/263 B](#), reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to hold managers accountable for the judicious use of travel resources, in particular by encouraging the use of alternative methods of communication and representation (see also [A/79/628](#), para. 39).

D. Voluntary downgrades

18. The Secretariat includes a provision in its official travel policy to encourage voluntary downgrades by offering “premium economy cabins or premium seats” if a staff member voluntarily downgrades (see [ST/AI/2013/3/Rev.1](#), sect. 4.4). The Secretary-General indicates that, during the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, a total of 2,318 trips requested in Umoja included a voluntary downgrade, accounting for 8.5 per cent of all eligible trips by commercial aircraft purchased by the United Nations. Based on the actual cost savings per ticket recorded in Umoja, the related total savings are estimated at \$6,817,611 ([A/79/628](#), paras. 23–25). According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the Secretariat, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [77/263 B](#), section I, paragraph 5, is actively considering additional ways to incentivize all individuals to voluntarily undertake official business travel in a lower standard of accommodation and is developing guidance on this issue (see also resolution [75/253 B](#), sect. V, para. 5).

19. The Advisory Committee expresses its appreciation to travellers who voluntarily downgrade and looks forward to proposals to further incentivize voluntary downgrading (see also [A/77/7/Add.41](#), paras. 11 and 17).

E. Performance against the 16-day advance purchase policy for travel

20. The Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat's performance against the advance purchase policy for travel by aircraft increased in a sustained and continuous manner during the reporting period. The overall performance was 47 per cent, the highest ever reported, representing an increase from the 33 per cent rate from the previous reporting period. During the period, the positive quarterly performance trend showed an increase from 37 per cent (third quarter of 2022) to 56 per cent (second quarter of 2024) ([A/79/628](#), para. 28 and figure IX).

21. The Secretary-General also indicates that the Secretariat remains committed to improving performance against the advance purchase policy. The Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance wrote to all heads of entities stressing the importance and requirements of the policy. Actions that entities have taken to improve performance include preparing and monitoring quarterly travel plans, escalating late travel requests to senior leadership within the entity, and regularly communicating to staff the process to comply with the policy. Entities are also regularly reminded of their responsibility to monitor their real-time performance against the policy using corporate dashboards. Furthermore, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [77/263 B](#) and [78/252](#), the administrative instruction on official travel was amended to require that travellers submit their travel requests at least 21 calendar days before starting official travel. Failure to do so by travellers who are entitled to travel above economy class (not including staff at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above) will result in the loss of eligibility to travel above economy class (*ibid.*, paras. 30 and 31, and [ST/AI/2013/3/Rev.1](#), sect. 3.3 (a)).

22. According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the existing 16-day threshold falls within the range of industry norms and balances operational requirements with cost optimization objectives. Furthermore, while early booking does not guarantee cost savings, it generally increases the likelihood of obtaining lower fares. Airlines still tend to typically offer lower fares for tickets purchased in advance; prices tend to rise as the travel date approaches due to higher demand and limited seat availability.

23. The Secretary-General further indicates that the Business Transformation and Accountability Division of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance is piloting a response mechanism to carry out targeted analysis and outreach to help select Secretariat entities improve their performance ([A/79/628](#), paras. 32–38, and [A/78/678](#), para. 67 (c)). According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the selected entities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Environment Programme, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Economic Commission for Africa, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Mission in South Sudan) represent 54 per cent of global travel volume, and 59 per cent of the non-compliant travel for the reporting period. A breakdown of their performance against the policy is contained in table 3 below (further information on the rate of compliance with the advance air purchase policy, by budget section and office, from 2019 to 2023 is contained in [A/79/7](#), table 30).

Table 3
Response mechanism project: performance against the advance purchase policy by entity

<i>Entity</i>	<i>Total travel volume</i>	<i>Percentage of global travel volume</i>	<i>Total non-compliant travel requests</i>	<i>Percentage of global non-compliant travel requests</i>
UNODC	67 833	28	45 715	36
UNEP	25 914	11	8 145	6
OHCHR	13 670	6	8 206	6
ECA	8 020	3	6 087	5
OCHA	9 394	4	5 784	5
UNMISS	5 368	2	1 770	1

Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; OCHA, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; OHCHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme; UNMISS, United Nations Mission in South Sudan; UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

24. According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, “external” travellers, such as meeting participants and external experts, who represent 42 per cent of total travel by volume, have consistently displayed lower levels of performance against the advance purchase policy than “internal” travellers. The specific challenges include the following:

- (a) Delays in confirming the external traveller, notably for a government representative to a meeting;
- (b) Delays in receiving the confirmation from the external traveller needed to finalize the travel, such as confirmation of the proposed itinerary;
- (c) The need to create an Umoja business partner record for the external traveller, including banking details.

25. The entities involved in the pilot proposed some potential solutions, namely:

- (a) Working with external counterparts on the timely confirmation of travellers;
- (b) Better explaining the United Nations travel policy to external counterparts;
- (c) Reviewing their internal processes to streamline and ensure efficiencies within the travel request approval process.

26. Upon enquiry regarding the possibility of creating a portal containing real-time data on the performance of the United Nations departments and offices in respect of the advance purchase policy, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Administration would need to carefully assess the feasibility of developing such a portal, considering that the resources available to develop new information and communications technology tools are extremely limited.

27. **The Advisory Committee recalls resolution 78/252, paragraph 28, in which the General Assembly expressed its serious concern at the low rate of compliance with the advance purchase policy. The Committee notes, however, the recent progress made in this area and the ongoing efforts to further increase the compliance rate, including the response mechanism pilot project, and looks forward to its subsequent findings and implementation proposals. Moreover, the Committee encourages the Secretary-General to continue exploring additional**

possibilities of using the data available in Umoja to further increase compliance with the policy.

F. Cancelled trips

28. The Secretariat conducted an analysis of cancelled trips for the reporting period, from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024. During this period, a total of 11,697 cancelled trips across the Secretariat were recorded in Umoja, which represents approximately 5 per cent of all trips. The estimated ticket costs associated with the cancelled trips totalled \$15,575,772, while the sum of the ticket refunds obtained amounted to approximately \$7,225,563 (A/79/628, paras. 49 and 50). Upon enquiry regarding this discrepancy, the Advisory Committee was informed that other travel expenses incurred due to trip or event cancellations such as hotel reservations, conference venues, catering, or the shipment of equipment would either be claimed/reimbursed through expense reports (with related supporting documentation) or associated with a purchase order through the procurement module. According to information provided to the Committee, the refund or credit eligibility for each ticket is determined by the airline based on the fare rules applicable to the ticket. However, at United Nations Headquarters, the contracted travel management company provides an advanced tool that uses technology to scan accounts and identify unused tickets, ensuring that they are promptly submitted for refund processing. This technology is not yet available at all duty stations or through all travel management companies, which may occasionally limit the ability to recover funds in certain situations.

29. The Secretary-General's analysis also indicates that 72 per cent of the cancelled trips were related to the travel of non-staff members (*ibid.*, para. 49). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Secretariat would intensify its efforts to provide enhanced guidance to non-staff and staff travellers.

30. The Advisory Committee notes the high number of trip cancellations and the discrepancy between the estimated ticket costs associated with the cancelled trips and respective reimbursements. The Committee trusts that efforts will be made to decrease the number of trip cancellations and to maximize refunds for cancelled trips and that information thereon will be provided in the next report.

III. Air travel management services

A. Monitoring of the air travel management services

31. According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the current travel management company at United Nations Headquarters, American Express Travel/American Express Global Business (known as "Amex"), provides comprehensive travel management services, including air and rail reservations, quotations, ticketing, customer support and related travel services and tools in accordance with the statement of work document. It is responsible for providing all the necessary personnel, supervision, technology, licences, transport, equipment, materials, consumables, supplies, account management and arrangements to ensure uninterrupted support to the United Nations traveller and that all tickets are issued at the lowest available fares compliant with United Nations travel policy. As part of its contracted services, Amex employs a technology that automatically scans for price reductions on issued tickets within certain parameters. Different methods are used at other duty stations, for instance at the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda.

32. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that United Nations Headquarters placed a strong emphasis on effective vendor management of its

contracted travel management company, including conducting both external (third party) fare auditing and internal operational auditing activities to ensure that the company offers the most economical fares in accordance with business requirements, International Air Transport Association resolutions, carriers' conditions of carriage and United Nations travel policies. A post-purchase audit, commonly referred to as a "blind audit", requires the travel management company to route all ticketed reservations to a dedicated queue, without knowing which tickets will be audited. Communication during the audit is strictly between the audit firm and the United Nations, which determines the number of ticketed reservations and the time frame for the audit. According to the information provided, blind audits are resource-efficient, requiring only a statistically relevant sample of transactions to provide actionable insights. For the period from 2019 to 2023, United Nations Headquarters spent \$43,800 for third-party, external fare audits.

33. With respect to ticket costs, according to the information provided to the Advisory Committee, fare prices are primarily determined by the respective airlines based on their fare structures, inventory availability, and demand – not by the travel management company. However, to address situations in which the travel management company is perceived to have not provided the most economical routing or fare, pursuant to the 2019 information circular on official travel ([ST/IC/2019/16](#)), travellers are requested to report fare discrepancies promptly, with supporting evidence, to allow for thorough investigation and rectification.

34. With regard to cooperation with other United Nations organizations, the Secretary-General indicates that 18 United Nations entities, in Geneva, Copenhagen and various cities in Italy, benefit from joint airline negotiations, which leads to savings on ticket costs ([A/79/628](#), para. 48). According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the United Nations Secretariat actively participates in the Inter-Agency Travel Network, a multi-entity forum that seeks to address policy alignment, share best practices and promote standardization of service provision, share outcomes of airline agreements, and explore methods to reduce the average ticket price, including exploring opportunities for other intangible benefits. Furthermore, the Secretariat is a member of a review team comprising representatives of the various entities of the United Nations system, which prepares recommendations on identifying and implementing enhanced economies of scale, consolidation and standardization of requirements, streamlining of service provisions and better-negotiated airline agreements, further utilization of technological advancements and strengthened service provision from the travel management companies servicing the United Nations system. The Committee was also informed that the principal locations of the Secretariat accounted for approximately 80 per cent of its travel volume (information on the air travel services provided at other duty stations between 2019 and 2024 is annexed to the present report).

35. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution 77/263 B, requested the Secretary-General to take measures to ensure that the existing process of booking of air tickets through the contracted travel agency is cost-effective (see also [A/79/628](#), para. 52). The Committee reiterates its view that a transition to a single threshold for business class may lead to wider acceptance of self-ticketing. It considers that resources made available by the transition could partially be used for internal ticket auditing in order to enhance and harmonize the monitoring of air travel management services across Secretariat entities (see also para. 45 below). The Committee also reiterates its trust that detailed information on the implementation of the air travel management contracts, including financial expenditures, volume and comparative data on travel services provided by individual travel management companies, by duty**

stations, will be provided as supplementary information in all future reports (see also [A/77/7/Add.41](#), paras. 25 and 27).

B. Procurement of air travel management services

36. The Secretary-General indicates that Amex, the current travel management company at United Nations Headquarters, was selected and awarded the contract in 2005 following the established procurement process, which includes a competitive bidding process. Since 2005, there have been three distinct procurement processes and separate contracts with this company. In May 2024 the Procurement Division launched a new solicitation exercise ([A/79/628](#), para. 41). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, following responses received on a request for expression of interest, a request for proposal for the provision of travel management services for United Nations Headquarters in New York had been issued to 19 vendors. Four proposals were received. Since none of the proposals received were technically acceptable, the request for proposal was cancelled on 2 December 2024. A new request is estimated to be issued in the first quarter of 2025. The Committee was also informed that the current contract with Amex would expire in June 2025 and that any need for contract extension would be considered, depending on the progress of the new solicitation for travel management services. Further market research and vendor outreach activities will be conducted, seeking to identify additional qualified travel management companies and to increase the list of invitees to the upcoming solicitation.

37. With regard to the possibility of using multiple vendors, the Secretary-General indicates that the International Air Transport Association states in its resolution 830a, on consequences of violation of ticketing and reservation procedures, that deliberately making duplicate reservations for the same customer is a violation that can result in action being taken under the provisions of the Sales Agency Rules and Passenger Sales Agency Agreement. It is thus not feasible to use multiple travel management companies for each ticket. However, the Secretary-General also indicates that:

(a) Two Geneva-based entities, namely, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Meteorological Organization, transitioned from using off-site travel agents at travel management companies in Poland to a hybrid service model that combined both on-site and off-site agents to enhance quality of service;

(b) The Global Procurement Support Section in Entebbe, which supports the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, awarded contracts to three vendors based on the geographic distribution of travel requirements in the East Africa region, the Central Africa region, and the North and West Africa regions (*ibid.*, paras. 43, 44 and 47).

38. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution [77/263 B](#), reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that the procurement process for all air travel management services contracts is conducted in full compliance with general procurement principles as set out in financial regulation 5.12, namely, (a) best value for money; (b) fairness, integrity and transparency; (c) effective international competition; and (d) the interest of the United Nations, and to ensure that the procurement process includes the option of awarding a contract to multiple vendors to allow for greater competition among selected vendors. The Committee trusts that updated information on the procurement process at United Nations Headquarters, including the options of awarding contracts to multiple vendors and promoting self-ticketing, will be provided to the Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report and in the next report.**

IV. Single threshold for the use of business class by staff below the level of Assistant Secretary-General (and eligible family members)

39. The Secretary-General indicates that the United Nations Secretariat is currently using a dual threshold (9 hours direct flights/11 hours indirect flights with a maximum of 2 hours of connection time) for the use of business class by staff below the level of Assistant Secretary-General (and eligible family members) (*ibid.*, para. 75).

40. The General Assembly, in its resolution [72/262 B](#), requested the Secretary-General to include, in his report to the Assembly at its seventy-third session, an analysis and recommendations concerning a single threshold for the use of business class. In his previous reports ([A/73/705](#), [A/75/654/Rev.1](#) and [A/77/629](#)), the Secretary-General submitted detailed proposals to replace the existing dual threshold and simplify a key aspect of the official travel policy. Following the presentation of the report of the Secretary-General at the seventy-seventh session, the Assembly decided in its resolution [77/263 B](#) to consider the proposals of the Secretary-General on a single threshold for official travel with any updates, if applicable, at its seventy-ninth session ([A/79/628](#), para. 72).

41. The Secretary-General argues that the dual threshold results in an administratively burdensome and labour-intensive process, as its provisions are not supported by airline ticketing systems or online booking tools. According to information provided to the Advisory Committee upon enquiry, the dual threshold affects the Secretariat in two ways:

(a) It negatively affects the efficiency of the overall travel process, since manual calculations need to be made by travel units and by the contracted travel agencies, requiring resources;

(b) It prevents further automation of United Nations travel processes supporting travellers, including the use of, and integration with, the online booking tools used in the travel industry.

42. Consequently, it is recommended in the report that the single threshold be set at 9.5 hours total flight time (i.e. total flying hours must exceed 9.5 hours for a trip to qualify for business-class standard of accommodation). The Secretary-General considers that the implementation of a single threshold model would result in the following key benefits:

(a) A simplified methodology would facilitate the travel approval process, thereby increasing compliance with the advance purchase policy and generating further savings opportunities;

(b) Travellers would have a better understanding of the official travel policy, thereby improving compliance through transparency;

(c) Automation would be more easily achieved through online booking tools and within travel management companies;

(d) The Umoja trip request and approval process could be streamlined, reducing time spent by travellers, approvers and travel processors, thus facilitating a more expedited overall end-to-end process (*ibid.*, paras. 82 and 84–86).

43. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that increasing the adoption of online booking tools would not only lead to improved process efficiency but also increase client satisfaction, as such tools provide the convenience of a self-service solution and empower travellers by enabling them to manage their own travel.

According to the information provided, the widespread adoption of online booking tools would lead to the following reductions in processing time:

(a) An estimated reduction of 10 minutes per transaction for United Nations approving staff would free up 11,039 hours annually to allow these staff to focus on higher-value travel-processing activities such as auditing, vendor management, data accuracy and traveller safety;

(b) An estimated reduction of 15 minutes per transaction for the staff of the travel management company would yield savings of 16,558 working hours.

44. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that it should be possible to closely integrate online booking tools with the Umoja travel module, which would yield further efficiencies. An integrated online booking tool would streamline the approval process and more closely align the United Nations travel process with the process used by many entities.

45. The Secretary-General estimates that a threshold at 9.5 hours would result in an overall reduction of 4.5 per cent of trips flown in business class and savings of 0.7 per cent in overall ticket expenditures, as shown in table 4 (see also *ibid.*, para. 94 and table 15).

Table 4

Estimated impact of single threshold (total flight time) alternatives

(Number of trips)

Standard	Under current dual-threshold policy ^a	Under a single threshold				
		9 hours	9.5 hours	10 hours	10.5 hours	11 hours
Business class	21 753	22 484	20 778	19 104	17 486	15 505
Economy class	81 680	80 949	82 655	84 329	85 947	87 928
Total	103 433	103 433	103 433	103 433	103 433	103 433
Business class trips net impact (<i>percentage</i>)		3.4	(4.5)	(12.2)	(19.6)	(28.7)
Overall ticket expenditure net impact (<i>percentage</i>)		1.5	(0.7)	(2.9)	(5.3)	(8.7)

^a Derived from travel data for the July 2016–June 2020 period and July 2022–June 2024 period.

46. The Advisory Committee continues to support, in principle, a 9.5-hour single threshold limit for the use of business class by staff below the level of Assistant Secretary-General (and eligible family members). It reiterates its view that the determination of the number of hours of travel time of a single threshold is a policy matter to be decided by the General Assembly. Should the Assembly adopt such a threshold, the Committee trusts that information on its implementation and envisaged benefits will be included in the next report (see also [A/77/7/Add.41](#), para. 33, [A/75/7/Add.39](#), paras. 28 and 30 (c), and para. 40 above).

Annex

Air travel services provided at the main United Nations duty stations, 2019–2024

(United States dollars)

Entity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total	Services	TMC	TMC2	TMC3, etc.
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	55 605.31	37 342.12	23 881.51	222 739.27	302 413.69	302 762.95	944 744.85	Air travel reservations, air travel quotations and issuance of air tickets	American Express Global Business Travel		
Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	520 894.00	Contracted TMCs provide comprehensive travel management services, namely full air travel reservations, ticketing, and related standard travel. The services are provided on an all-inclusive basis where the TMCs are required to provide personnel, supervision, transport, equipment, material, consumables, supplies and all necessary arrangements to meet the requirements of the contract. The flat transaction fee paid for tickets issued covers the cost of ticket processing and issuance, processing of cancellations, refunds, exchanges, voids, reissuances, rebookings and 24/7 emergency support, etc.	Satguru	FCM	Blueberry
United Nations Office at Nairobi	127 735.00	37 529.95	36 580.00	96 876.00	90 886.00	84 974.00	474 580.95	For official business travel: ticketing on any commercial travel – international and domestic, and different modes of travel (air, rail, sea, car)	Express Travel Group		
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	127 287.00	Issuance of air and train tickets	Allegro Tours (Santiago)	Allegro Tours and Flight Centre Travel Group (Mexico)	Allegro Tours and Going Places (Port of Spain)

Entity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total	Services	TMC	TMC2	TMC3, etc.
Economic Commission for Africa	86 692.00	20 725.00	27 659.00	90 883.00	90 755.48	70 424.45	387 138.93	Mainly travel management services, tickets sales	Safeway Travel	Airlink Travel	
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	180 637.00	Travel services	Worldwide Travel and Tourism	Satguru	Alkoun Travel
United Nations Office at Geneva	Not provided	Not provided	199 440.00	577 180.00	734 582.00	Not provided	Not provided	Air and rail travel ticketing services, visa services and various reporting	Carlson Wagonlit Travel		
United Nations Office at Vienna	519 165.87	103 418.24	201 039.29	409 878.55	499 237.40	470 257.25	2 202 996.60	Air and train tickets	American Express		
Kuwait Joint Support Office	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	23 818.00	24/7 support Free extra baggage allowance Seat bookings Online check-in Arrange for extra baggage, as requested by staff members Visa services to certain countries Arrange for luggage transfer between terminals (Marhaba Services) Request for meals, when requested by staff members in advance Missing luggage tracking	Satguru	Jumbo	Kanoo, Sky

Abbreviation: TMC, travel management company.