

FPA Watch Group Meeting – Exchange with ECHO

	MINUTES
DATE	27.10.2016
TIME	14.00 – 16.00
PLACE	IFRC rue de Trêves 59-61
PARTICIPANTS	cf. List of participants ECHO: Charles Pirotte (Deputy HoU D1), Albert Garralon Perez (Unit D1, Finance and Contracts officer), Anne Simon (Unit A2), Virginie Jonet (Unit D1, Budget assistant)

Thursday 27 of October was the last meeting of the FPA Watch Group for the year 2016. As usual partners had the opportunity to exchange with ECHO on specific issues linked to the FPA Watch Group work plan and the current humanitarian agenda.

1. Exchange on ECHO’s training

ECHO’s trainings are currently provided by the organization Punto Sud, which contract is ending in September 2017. ECHO is considering extending the training contract of one year in order to align with the 2014 FPA duration.

ECHO already started to collect statistics on training provided in the framework of this contract and assessing partners’ training needs for the future.

Figures: 3025 places for ECHO training from November 2013 to April 2016

Amongst ECHO first findings:

- Field training tend to have a weak attendance. Allowing only one NGO representative per training could explain this trend.
- ECHO identified two profiles of participants: first NGOs who have a lot of contracts sending only few people to the training, second, NGOs submitting few contracts but sending a lot of participants.

Partners’ feedback:

- The FPA WG considers face to face training to be more efficient and positive than online training.
- The two new modules recently proposed to partners did not reach their expectations. However, partners appreciate that ECHO develop trainings from a thematic angle.
- Access to training materials would be welcomed, especially for NGOs duplicating training inside their organisation.

- Partners suggest a wrapping up session with ECHO staff to answer more substantial questions at the end of the training week.
- Some partners also requested more seats, the training sessions are quickly fully booked on the helpdesk and waiting list is updated only at the very end.
- Partners recommend that TAs assist to the training to strengthen their understanding and knowledge of the FPA.
 - ➔ ECHO reminded that TAs do not have the mandate to provide answers linked to legal or financial issues that may commit ECHO. Thus, partners should never act out of a TA's answer linked to these issues.
 - ➔ ECHO will look at the registration issue and see how to improve access to partners. ECHO policy unit also asks for more thematic trainings; however this raises challenges since the standard training week is limited to 5 days; introducing thematic trainings would imply reducing the duration or the number of modules of the basic training week.

Next steps: ECHO will do a survey before next summer to collect more input from partners regarding ECHO training.

ECHO is also interested in getting the FPA WG feedback on food aid / food security online training.

AP: ECHO will share statistics on training with the FPA WG once finalised.

2. ECHO Guidance note on the Simplified allocation method:

- ➔ For 2017, ECHO reminds partners that: organisations already having an audited ex-ante key allocation methodology can share it with ECHO for approval. For partners having a methodology that has not yet been audited need to use the ex-post method. They can then apply for the ex-ante approval by ECHO preferably in June 2017 while doing the annual assessment.
- ➔ ECHO also recalls that it is the responsibility of partners to inform ECHO of any changes in their procedures (including on shared costs).
- ➔ ECHO agrees to keep the guidance note on SAM as flexible as possible.
- ➔ Partners should use their own auditors to valid the key allocation method and share the ex-ante certificate with ECHO for final approval as soon as received.
- ➔ ECHO and DEVCO will both accept ex-ante approval method validated by one or the other.

AP: The FPA WG to share an example with ECHO on the multiple keys

AP: ECHO will send the final version of the guidance note on SAM to the FPA WG as soon as finalised.

3. Working in Consortia:

- ECHO confirms the coordinated approach will still be valid in the coming HIP 2017.
- ECHO explains that they need to be confident the lead organisation of a consortium would be able to recover money from the implementing partner (IP) in case ECHO claims for reimbursement on non-eligible costs. In principle partners, should all sign MoUs with their IP providing them with the legal means to recover money in case of non-compliance with the FPA.
- ECHO recommends members of a consortium to exchange financial information among them. However partners highlighted that in some situations they were forced to join a consortium making it inappropriate to ask for partners financial details.
- Partners suggest that ECHO considers working with consortia where FPA partners would proportionally share the financial risk and responsibility towards ECHO (and not only the lead). ECHO will look into this request and get back to the FPA Watch Group.
- Currently partners are witnessing that organisations holding a threshold are often forced to give away the lead. The FPA WG expresses concerns about this trend since thresholds were not intended to impact on operational responses and in case of consortia, financial strength is at least equally important as other considerations to define who should take the lead (e.g. thematic expertise or geographic coverage).
- It is possible that ECHO requires a minimum amount per proposal in 2017 in certain cases.
- Partners explained that an organisation can be audited several times for the same project, especially for significant project undertaken in consortia, which is heavy to deal with. ECHO reminds partners that if they have already been audited by another donor they should share the information to ECHO. However they recall that ECHO audits often look at several actions in the same time.

AP: FPA WG to prepare specific questions or issues related to the interpretation of the FPA when working through consortia

AP: ECHO to check internally with colleagues regarding the current messages being sent to partners holding thresholds.

4. HIPs process 2017:

Following the engagement of the FPA Watch Group in relation to the HIP process over the last months and the positive dialogue held with representatives of ECHO over the summer, the FPA Watch Group asked ECHO for an update. Indeed, many NGOs reported informal discussions mentioning important reduction to be expected in certain HIPs which would impact many field operations. Also, the Watch Group expected the HIPs (at least the narrative

parts) to be published on APPEL around mid-October. At time of the meeting none had been released.

- ECHO was not in position to provide any further information on the allocation per HIP since its budget for 2017 was not yet secured. HIPs are expected to be released during **the week of 7th of November**. Moreover, ECHO informed partners that some technical annexes could ask for a minimum amount per proposal (as per the HIP under the ESOP).

The FPA Watch Group was very concerned by this announcement. Given the impact this may have on FPA partners operations on the ground, it asks ECHO to make sure HIPs are released as early as possible and that sufficient time is given to partners to submit their proposals. A dialogue ahead of introducing new requirement affecting the FPA and the partnership with NGOs is necessary for both ECHO and its partners to understand each one's perspectives and to jointly seek to address respective challenges.

Also, partners comment the progress in organising field consultation while drafting the HIPs; even if in some regions only partners holding ECHO grants were invited. However, the FPA Watch Group reminded its request to avoid asking for extra requirements within HIPs (e.g. weekly planning, detailed information on budget, organisational chart).

- ECHO will look internally how to satisfy this request. However, in light of the Grand Bargain and the increasing interest in capturing how much beneficiaries receive from an action, partners should expect some questions on proposals' budget and the cost effectiveness of the action.

Next steps: Regarding the 2017 EU budget the EP has made a proposition to increase the Humanitarian aid line of 340 million compare to the EC draft proposition. Negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council will take place in November-December. VOICE will engage its members at national level to support the EP proposal.

5. ECHO Partners conference:

Following the 2015 survey, partners submitted feedback and recommendations mainly asking for more interaction and space for Q&A at the next partners 'conference.

Registrations are now open and the draft programme can be seen [here](#).