

FPA Watch Group Meeting – Exchange with ECHO

	MINUTES
DATE	18.10.2018
TIME	14.00 – 16.00
PLACE	ECHO 86 rue de la loi
PARTICIPANTS	cf. List of participants

ECHO representatives: MIEGE Béatrice (C3), VAN DRIESSCHE Gérard (C1), DMITRIJEWA Anna (C1), CALVO Jorge (D1), JONET Virginie (D1), MINCHEVA Elitsa (D1).

1. Exchange on the Key Result Indicators & Key Outcome Indicators (KRI & KOI)

Following the exchange on the same topic held in March 2018, the Watch Group invited ECHO to share feedback on the use of the KRI and KOI, on the purpose and conclusions of the aggregation of the data collected. As the KRI and KOI require a lot of work from both Partners and ECHO, the Watch Group highlighted the importance of having clarity on current challenges and opportunities in the use of the KRI and KOI.

Feedback from ECHO:

- The KRI and KOI were designed as both a management and communication tool. ECHO recalled that the KRI were aimed at providing a result framework and produce communicable data to show what ECHO achieves on the ground, in particular in its reporting to the European Parliament and EU member states.
- ECHO noted a discrepancy on the level of use of the standard KRI according to the sector considered. In some sectors, partners tend to use more often custom indicators. ECHO shared interest in understanding the motives to choose custom indicators over standard KRI (is it linked to the indicator itself or to the action – multidonor actions for example?).
 - o In particular, in the Disaster Preparedness sector for more than 50% of activities, custom indicators were used. In the Protection sector, the use of custom indicators concerns 60% of activities.
- ECHO indicated that the large use of custom indicators prevents them from having quality aggregated data for the macro-reporting (while it is not necessarily a problem at project management level).
 - o Having at least one standard indicator per result would allow better visibility of all activities that partners perform towards institutions to which ECHO is accountable.
 - o The draft results of the aggregation of KRI are promising and could be a very powerful tool towards the budgetary authorities. But since 1/3 of activities might not be reflected in these results, if ECHO was to publish the results now, it would send the wrong message and would not reflect what partners really achieve.
- The KRI are more relevant in terms of communication but the same challenges are faced with the KOI.
- ECHO acknowledged that in some areas one also might have to agree that it is too difficult or not relevant to have macro reporting.

Remarks from the WG:

- In reaction to the presentation, the Watch Group explained that NGOs often have their own standard indicators, which tend to be logically more suitable to the proposed action.
- NGOs also highlighted that some KRI are hard to measure and actually entail a multitude of sub indicators difficult to collect in emergencies.

- The WG also argued that it would be useful to access the consolidated data, maybe by organisation, in order to improve their use. Shared on an annual basis, this could also encourage colleagues on the ground to use standard indicators and refer to ECHO targets in their communication over achievements.
- The WG underlined that while reporting to the EP and the Council is important, the standard of reporting requirements should not be set by marginal / excessive requests disconnected from operational realities.

Action points:

- The Watch Group will collect more information on the reasons for using custom indicators, gather examples of the most challenging indicators and possible alternatives.
- ECHO will get back to the WG on the possibility extracting data per organisation.

2. Exchange on the 2018 contracting process and the 2019 HIPs

Feedback from the Watch Group on the 2018 and 2019 HIPs:

The Watch Group shared some **feedback on the 2018 HIP process** and in particular linked to the contracting period. The Task Force of the FPA WG conducted a survey on a sample of 78 proposals under the 2018 HIPs. The preliminary conclusions are the following:

- An average of 6 weeks between the first proposal and the first feedback (be it for rejection or request for adjustments)
- For accepted proposals:
 - o an average of 16 weeks between the first proposal submission and the signature of the contract,
 - o an average of 10 weeks between the first and the last submission of the proposal,
 - o an average of 6 weeks between the starting date and the actual signature.

The Watch Group reiterated the importance of receiving timely and meaningful rejection letters: rejection letters could be used as a learning tool for partners to improve their proposals.

On the 2019 HIPs the Watch Group welcomed:

- the early publication (mid-October) of some HIPs and technical annexes without the amount, as it was the case for last year,
- the publication of the new policy annex,
- the upcoming consultation on the Education in Emergencies Guidance note.

However, the WG noted short deadlines for some countries or regions (less than the 6 weeks for which the WG has been advocating for over the last years).

In general, the Watch Group noted:

- the relevance of the ALERT mechanism and its good functioning so far, including with its recent triggering for Indonesia,
- that none of the NGOs which had submitted proposals for the ERC has received any feedback from ECHO so far.

ECHO's comment:

On the 2018 HIP contracting process:

- ECHO recalled the process of proposal selection (analysis by ECHO HQ and field (both country office and Regional office for thematic expertise), selection of relevant proposals, , endorsement of selection by managers including the Operational Director).

- ECHO took note of the problem of late rejection letters, mentioning however that in some units, refusal letters are given priority after the selection of proposals and the staff is required to provide sound justification for the rejection.
- ECHO emphasized that the 'on hold' status can be related to different situations (a top up expected for example) and that this status does not necessarily mean that the project will be selected later on.
- ECHO recalled that delays can also stem from late partners' resubmission after ECHO's feedback on a proposal. The number of back and forth could also be reduced through increased dialogue between desk officers and field staff before resubmission.
- ECHO encouraged the Watch Group to complement its survey on contracting periods with qualitative elements, identifying typical challenges and good practices.

On the 2019 HIP:

- ECHO strongly encourages partners to read both the Technical and the policy annexes.
- ECHO highlighted the possibility to submit proposals for truly follow up action through a modification request only, rather than submitting a new proposal. It has been clearly indicated in the Africa HIP Technical annex for the Horn of Africa, Sudan and South Sudan, Great Lakes and Southern Africa/Indian ocean.
- It was also mentioned that all HIPs in Dir. C include a remark in the Technical Annex saying that preference will be given to projects of a certain size, the aim being not to have too many projects for small amounts but rather prioritising the interventions .
- About short deadlines for some HIPs, two main reasons were mentioned:
 - o Operational reasons in particular for the Horn of Africa and South Sudan – avoid a gap between ending actions under 2018 HIPs and next HIPs. Field staff from NGO partners were, in principle, aware of the deadline some time in advance.
 - o The attempt to spread deadlines of different HIPs/countries in order to avoid a bottle neck both in ECHO and at partners' level.

On the ALERT Mechanism and ERC proposals:

- ECHO welcomed the Watch Group positive comment on the ALERT mechanism, stressing that it has been sometimes difficult to keep it very quick and reactive if too many proposals are received and thus encouraging partners to coordinate.
- On the feedback on ERC proposals: indeed, the feedback on proposal is delayed. Information should come.

3. Update on the next FPA consultation process and next steps

Following the multiple brainstorming meetings that gathered the FPA Watch Group's Task Force with ECHO representatives between March and September to discuss different aspects of the next FPA, the Watch Group was eager to receive a state of play, feedback on suggestions made and information on the next steps.

Update from ECHO:

- It is still not clear what will be the general architecture and vision of the next FPA. This is still under discussion at the management level. The only aspect that is already very clear is to move on with a Programmatic Partnership, though the modalities remain undescribed at this stage.
- Meanwhile, ECHO has never the less worked on exploring further some opportunities such as:
 - o Meeting with QUAMED to discuss the quality of medicines (further to the discussion on Procurement rules),
 - o Meeting with US representatives to explore the possibility to enlarge their respective certified HPCs list via joint recognition.
 - o Setting up of an Internal Task Force working on improving reporting.

- The question of externalising the application process (for FPA applicants) seems to be agreed upon but it remains to be decided who will do the assessment and who will pay for it.
- ECHO also has to consider the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors Report on NGOs' transparency. ECHO received the day before the FPA WG meeting the draft recommendations. The final report is expected to be released in December or January.

The FPA Watch Group raised a number of questions and concerns on the update provided, asking ECHO to:

- Provide more clarity as soon as possible on the prolongation of the current FPA,
- More clarity on the main elements of the next FPA or a debriefing of the consultation sessions ahead of the Partners Conference,
- Provide an opportunity to discuss the transition between current and next FPA. Transition was one of the topics the FPA WG had asked to discuss, but no session has been planned so far. The WG asked ECHO to be very clear on the renewal, if they want partners to be ready by 2020.

ECHO noted these remarks, however arguing that the panel on the future FPA at the Partners Conference would rather discuss trends and other models of partnership. ECHO representatives also indicated that at the moment, the timeline with regards to **FPA renewal is to have detailed Terms of Reference published by March in order for the assessment of partners to be complemented by the end of 2019.**

The Watch Group noted that this timing is ambitious.

4. Exchange on the application of the GDPR in preparation of the Partners Conference

This exchange with ECHO was aimed at preparing the Information Point foreseen at the Partners Conference on the General Data Protection Regulation, where DG JUST is expected to answer some questions regarding the concrete application of the GDPR to the humanitarian sector and ECHO partners. ECHO noted that they still receive a lot of questions from partners both at HQ and field levels.

The Watch Group shared the following questions:

- Does the Regulation apply in the case of non-EU citizens' personal data processed in a third country by an FPA partner (established in the EU)?
- Is ECHO looking strictly at the GDPR compliance or considering more broadly the issue of protecting personal data in the framework of ECHO funded actions?
- Partners shared some concerns regarding safeguarding measures/requirements to prevent and handle sexual exploitation and abuse cases (existing and possible ones) and compliance with the GDPR. The same question also applies to fraud and corruption measures.
- The WG asked whether the EC audit requirements remain the same following the entry in to force of the EU GDPR (in terms of storing and sharing personal data, mainly of staff and beneficiaries).

5. General info sharing on the upcoming Partners Conference (19-20 November)

ECHO gave an overview of the agenda of the Partners Conference to be held on 19 and 20 November. The agenda is still under discussion.

- Possible keynote speeches:
 - o David Miliband – CEO of the International Rescue Committee
 - o Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO
- Panel I – the focus will be on trends and other donors' partnership models, in particular on Programmatic partnership

- Panel II – the focus will be on IHL and counter terrorism measures
- The workshop on the opportunities and challenges of the new Financial Regulation will also touch upon the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Regular update of the agenda will be published on the ECHO helpdesk website.