

## Good practices around DG ECHO HIPs and contracting cycle

### November 2022

The Humanitarian Partnership (HP) Watch Group has regularly discussed, in the last couple of years, the annual HIP process, and the contractual cycle, sharing lessons learned and suggestions for improvement. Several meetings and exchanges with DG ECHO on the issue have taken place – and progress has been noted by DG ECHO NGO partners.

With this note, the HP Watch Group would like to reiterate some of its former recommendations based on identified good practices and wishes to highlight the **vital partnership between DG ECHO and certified NGO partners that needs to be translated into a permanent dialogue at all levels** – country, regional and Brussels – not only around project implementation, but also around strategy.

Therefore, the HP Watch Group recommends the following points:

#### Consultations for the HIPs

- Based on positive experience during the last years' HIP processes (e.g. in West Africa), DG ECHO should systematically **organise consultation meetings at country level** to allow **all its certified partners** (not only those already funded by DG ECHO), **as well as local and national actors**, to share their experiences and views on priorities before the HIPs are drafted.
- Contributions to the HIPs development could also be made **via inputs in writing**, using online tools such as Survey Monkey or MS forms.
- The list of all HIP consultation meetings and processes should be **published in a timely manner** on [DG ECHO's website](#) to allow a transparent process. Consultations modalities and logistics (in person/online/hybrid format; choice of venue; language) should ensure meaningful inclusion of all stakeholders.

#### Publication of the HIPs

- The HIP documents (not only the Technical Annex) should be **available in English, French and/or Spanish** depending on the relevance for the regions.
- **Clear dates and timeframes (HIP presentations, evaluation meetings, etc.)** should be included in the HIPs themselves and mentioned during the HIP presentations at country level.
- The practice of **releasing early the HIP documents (even if without the amounts)** is welcomed as it gives more time for DG ECHO partners to prepare proposals. When the HIPs are published on APPEL, **we welcome that notifications are systematically sent to DG ECHO NGO partners for each release.**
- DG ECHO should ensure **systematic HIP information sessions to all its certified partners (not only those already funded by DG ECHO), with the possibility for both field and HQ staff to attend, as well as local and national actors**, with interpretation in relevant languages. The presentation and all Q&A should be shared with all after these sessions.
- The list of all HIP presentation meetings, wherever they take place in Brussels, in the region or in country, should be **published in a timely manner** on [DG ECHO's website](#) to allow a transparent and inclusive process.

- Further information about the existing DG ECHO portfolio within a specific country would be welcomed, including transparency around Programmatic Partnerships allocation. This information could eventually be shared during the HIPs presentation.

### Proposals submission

- As in previous years, it is important to stagger the submission deadlines across HIPs and countries to not overburden both partners and DG ECHO over a short period. Submission deadlines should also avoid Christmas and New Year holidays. Therefore, **a minimum 6 weeks for general HIPs and 3 weeks for emergencies** should be ensured between the publication of the HIP and the deadline for the submission of proposals. Tight deadlines generally impact the quality of proposals and consequently generate lengthy back-and-forth exchanges between DG ECHO and partners on proposals. e.g.: very tight deadlines for the Ukraine crisis might have sometimes led to poor needs assessment, unrealistic proposals, and implementation challenges.
- It is crucial that **no changes in the Single Form, associated templates (budget) and APPEL** are introduced during the period starting at HIPs releases until the end of submissions.
- Partners would recommend that DG ECHO shares a Word version of the ESF in French and English, as well as the French version of the Budget and an excel version in English and French of Chapter 2 (Data overview).
- **No extra requirements should be requested as part of proposal submission** (detailed budget, additional annexes with beneficiary numbers broken down by result/activity etc.)
- **The possibility to submit a modification request of ongoing grants** rather than new requests can sometimes be welcomed. However, it has not proven to be significantly more efficient nor conducive to a more timely start of implementation. **Faster proposal evaluation and contracting process (building on the previous approval of the current grant and project design) in such instances** should be ensured to take full advantage of such an option. Modification requests should remain the partner's choice.
- For urgent actions, and since the simplified version of the Single Form does not exist anymore, **more consistent guidance and practice on which sections of the Single Form do not need to be filled out** should be developed and shared with all partners.
- **24 months as the initial standard duration** for all proposals is welcomed and should always be ensured where relevant.
- In the case of 24 months long **education in emergencies** projects, more centralised guidance, and discussion, on **cost-effectiveness criteria** that need to be met to extend the programme funding for the second year, are strongly welcomed. This is essential to be able to work with local partners and therefore advance the localisation agenda and sustainability of the activities.
- DG ECHO should more **consistently limit co-financing requirements to non-urgent actions** and **accept financing in full for any urgent action, forgotten crisis or when other funding sources are not readily available**.
- If for operational reasons or budgetary constraints, some **specific DG ECHO partners (or proposals from previous rounds) have been preidentified**, DG ECHO should consistently specify these in the HIP, as well as specify the rationale behind the pre-identification and the amounts pre-allocated.

### Evaluation of proposals

- As standard, DG ECHO partners should **receive initial feedback (preselected/on hold/rejected) on their proposal within the 4 weeks following initial submission.**
- As a best practice, **rejections should be notified to DG ECHO partners as early as possible**, while the letter containing detailed explanation can be sent later on. Rejection letters should systematically provide information on the number of proposals received and total amount requested for the relevant HIP. DG ECHO partners are also **encouraged to further debrief the reasons for rejection** ideally with both country and Brussels DG ECHO teams.
- As a best practice, proposals that are **put on hold/reserve, should be consistently notified to partners, officially outlining the conditions under which they might be considered again for funding.**
- For proposals that are preselected for funding, DG ECHO (field and HQ) should **consistently provide a clear plan with a timeline and instructions** to the partner for the revision/negotiation process. A minimum of 2 weeks should be ensured for partners to perform any significant revision of a proposal.
- Once a proposal has been positively assessed by DG ECHO operational teams and the contracting phase moves to the legal units, **this should be notified to partners.**

### Proposals revision

- In order to frame the proposal revision process, triangulate information between the different stakeholders, and limit the number of revision rounds, **a proposal revision kick-off meeting with DG ECHO (field and HQ) and partner teams (field and HQ) should be organised** to set the parameters of the negotiation and agree on timeline and steps.
- In order to streamline proposal feedback which can very much vary in length and level of detail, DG ECHO should develop **general guidance on the expected and useful level of feedback to be provided both on the narrative and financial elements** of a proposal during the revision stage. The guidance could distinguish for instance issues that need to be improved to enhance the quality of the proposal/project design and elements that would need to be improved throughout implementation and that will constitute an ongoing dialogue with DG ECHO field.
- If overall budget limitations mean that DG ECHO needs to ask a partner to significantly reduce the budget of its proposal, DG ECHO should recognise that this will also mean a corresponding significant reduction in either the scope or the duration of the project. **In general, it is not realistic to expect partners to deliver the originally proposed project, on a significantly reduced budget.** If DG ECHO feels that the proposed budget was unduly high for the scope and duration of the proposed project, they should provide clear guidance on where they feel savings could be made.
- DG ECHO is encouraged to **refrain from initiating ‘forced marriage’ between proposals from two (or more) different partners**, as that typically leads to extensive negotiations and revisions. This includes agreeing clearly with a certified partner in advance as to whether DG ECHO would support a new proposal or a modification request.