



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL HUMANITARIAN AID AND CIVIL PROTECTION - ECHO

ECHO.C - Resources, Partnerships and Operational Support

C/2 - Budget, External Audit, Informatics

Brussels, 13 October 2011

DG ECHO C.2

eTools

when preparing Humanitarian Aid became a burden, or...

... a building stone for the future!

Dear DG ECHO Partners,

A great number of you (39 out of 206) responded to the mail of mid September in which you were asked to share your eTools experiences over the past year. Most to our pleasure it was not only a small list with issues you have sent back, some were quite extensive reports on the impact of the introduction and use of the eTools in Humanitarian Aid projects. In all responses, very useful information was provided. More insight in the different ways you work, the most annoying 'habits' of the eTools, suggestions on the technical and operational way and a very nice wish list.

This document will give you an insight on how the eTools are used by different partners, how the development team is making the tool better for you to use, bearing in mind your comments and requests for change and also how to deal with problems or questions.

As the title indicates, it was not always easy to get started and you got challenged to find a way of working but nevertheless, this year a lot has been improved, and very soon some more improvements you've asked will be available to you in the eTools.

Many thanks to all of you and especially to those who made time to share your practices, and please do keep sending us information on how the eTools can be of better help to your work.

Hans Van de Walle
ECHO eTools Support Team

STATE OF PLAY	4
1. ETOOLS SOME POSITIVE REACTIONS.....	4
2. ETOOLS GOALS AND INTENTIONS	4
3. ETOOLS STATISTICS.....	5
DAILY WORK, IMPLEMENTATION IN YOUR ORGANISATION.....	6
1. PREPARE WITH OFFLINE ETOOLS.....	6
1.1. Positive aspects;.....	6
1.2. Negative aspects;	6
2. PREPARE IN A PRE-DEFINED WORD TEMPLATE.....	7
2.1.1. - copy paste offline and upload into APPEL	7
2.1.2. - copy paste online into APPEL.....	7
2.1. Positive aspects;.....	7
2.2. Negative aspects	7
A BIG CHALLENGE FOR YOU AND FOR ECHO STAFF	8
1. NEW VERSION OF AN EDOCUMENT.....	8
2. TRAFFIC LIGHT STAYS ORANGE.....	8
3. DRAFTING A NEW EDOCUMENT	8
4. CHANGING OR ADDING INFORMATION TO A RECENTLY SUBMITTED EDOCUMENT	8
5. REVISION OF A FINAL REPORT	9
6. DEMAND FOR INFORMATION THAT IS IN THE ANNEXES	9
7. ANY OTHER ISSUE OR QUESTION.....	9
IMPROVEMENTS IN THE OFFLINE ESINGLEFORM 3.8 (RELEASE DATE Q4 2011).....	10
1. COPY / PASTE FROM WORD	10
2. WARNING MESSAGE ‘GO BACK TO THE LOGIN SCREEN’	10
3. AN ERROR OCCURRED WHEN UPLOADING THE XML FILE	10
4. NEW ESINGLEFORM FORMAT	10
5. SPEED IN INTERNET EXPLORER.....	10

6.	UPDATED TABLES	10
7.	MANDATORY FIELDS.....	11
	IMPROVEMENTS ONLINE IN APPEL (RELEASE DATE Q4 2011).....	11
1.	IMPROVED RESPONSE TIME FOR RQ	11
2.	COPY / PASTE FROM WORD	11
3.	NEW ESINGLEFORM FORMAT	11
4.	ADJUSTED VALIDATION RULES.....	11
5.	ADJUSTED SEARCH.....	11
6.	EXPORT OF EDOCUMENTS	11
	FORESEEN IMPROVEMENTS	12
1.	APPEL ONLINE	12
2.	OFFLINE ESINGLEFORM	12
	HELP US TO HELP PEOPLE TOGETHER	12
1.	KEEP UP TO DATE WITH YOUR APPEL DATA	12
2.	SUPPORT SOURCES WHAT AND WHERE.....	12

State of play

1. ETOOLS SOME POSITIVE REACTIONS

“Generally the new eSingleForm is considered a positive tool by all of our colleagues, which once all initial IT problems are resolved, ensures a **more efficient way of working.**”

“The online availability of the latest valid version of the project budget, and document allows **different people involved** in the project, to access required information at all time and **be able to work on the latest version** of the project related documents.”

“The **freedom to choose** the budget line items in the financial overview gives us the ability to **ensure cohesion with** our own **internal accounting systems** making it very simple to complete this information in subsequent MR and IR.”

“...we appreciate DG ECHO’s efforts towards paperless offices. We agree this is the **right way to go for the future** and think that in **the longer-term** this process will **ease many things.**”

“...we appreciate that when preparing interim and final reports, it is now **easier to compare** the **latest** report with the **previous** one, as information is collected per activity and per result”

“APPEL has introduced positive changes such as the visibility on the status of the proposal / report, the **insurance** that **all the sections are completed** or the **automatic checks** for the financial parts.”

“...We appreciate the new eSingle file, mainly because you always know what is the last version and the **exchange with DG ECHO is much easier** than before.”

“From a HQ perspective we find Appel easy and flexible to work with. We also appreciate that the **system is often updated** and **errors that occurred** previously **have been corrected.**”

Of course not all feedback was positive, you provided us with a lot of issues to be fixed, requests for improvements and recommendations. These will all be taken into account when updating the eTools. Some major issues are solved or implemented in the eTools Release for Quarter 4. More information can be found later in this document.

2. ETOOLS GOALS AND INTENTIONS

- Compliance of Single Form based documents transmitted to ECHO with operational framework agreements and implementing rules.
- Increased quality of Single Form documents; some common errors can be avoided by using the system: consistency of the financial information, respect of mandatory fields, right format of sections, usage of standard lists (sectors, beneficiaries).

- Increased consistency and coherence in the manner that the different Units of DG ECHO treat project related documents
- Instant dissemination of information; the project proposal is registered and accessible for your Desk Officer in DG ECHO immediately after submission.
- Increased efficiency by providing a “knowledge base” that can be processed, compared and exploited.

3. ETOOLS STATISTICS

Some facts about the use of the eTools as from January 2011 until October 15th;

- number of partners who have submitted a proposal:	138
- number of initial proposals submitted:	901
- number of approved proposals resulting in an Agreement:	560
- number of e-documents;	
Requests:	2974
Modification Requests:	203
Intermediate Reports:	258
Final Reports:	47
- number of partner staff with access to APPEL:	1732

Daily work, implementation in your organisation.

Bear in mind, certainly when you start using the eSingleForm, that you need to foresee some more time to finalise the proposal compared to the word version of the Single Form. (this stretches from at least an extra 2 hours to sometimes 14 hours depending on the user experience with the eTools system it seems) At the same time it must be noted that proposals sent via APPEL pass automatically a first quality check due to the business rules implemented in the system, this means that the number of revisions decreases (and the corresponding exchanges of documents).

Fortunately the amount of time spent lowered as the user is getting more used to it and also upon the reporting stages or for modification requests time spent was reduced and the project (eSF), once in APPEL was easier to handle.

Several factors, besides the knowledge of the user, do affect the time in processing the eSingleForm. For example the copy/paste mechanism and the limit of characters that can be used, the 'please go back to the login screen' message when working in the result details, etc. See further chapters for more information on how we are trying to minimise this.

As there is an online and offline system available to create and follow up on an action, different working methods can be used, besides working only online in APPEL. Out of the reactions received two basic approaches are in use;

1. PREPARE WITH OFFLINE ETOOLS

Field and HQ make the preparations in the offline eTools, once the final file (the generated pdf format) is approved for submission, the xml file is uploaded into APPEL, annexes are attached and the eSingleForm is submitted.

1.1. Positive aspects;

- No need to copy/paste in APPEL
- No need to have an internet connection
- Immediate upload into APPEL
- Validation of the single form guidelines and rules

1.2. Negative aspects;

- Users need to learn how to work with the offline eTools
- Sometimes the xml file is treated as a virus by certain mail applications and is removed from the message

2. PREPARE IN A PRE-DEFINED WORD TEMPLATE

Some partners opt to use the Word Single Form to draft the proposal. Once the file is approved there are two different ways partners use to submit it;

2.1.1. - *copy paste offline and upload into APPEL*

2.1.2. - *copy paste online into APPEL*

2.1. Positive aspects;

- Use of track changes while preparing the document
- No need for the user to be trained and have the offline eTools installed
- Spell check is done
- Organisation specific information and guidelines on 'how to' draft proposals or reports can be added to the word template.

2.2. Negative aspects

- Needs a lot of correcting while copy/pasting the information in the eSingleForm because of the limitations in the fields and the calculation that is done in computer bytes instead of in characters.
- The copy/paste process adds an extra step and time in the submission process.
- Saving in APPEL is sometimes slow.

A big challenge for you and for ECHO staff

It happened - and will happen - that sometimes the desk or expert involved in your project asks you to undertake some action and... you just cannot even start to begin with it! (the eTools does not work!)

The eTools support team will also help to overcome the following scenario's;

1. NEW VERSION OF AN EDOCUMENT

You may have noticed that DG ECHO asks for a revision or a small change in your proposal... and then your search for the 'New Version' button starts...

You (almost) all know where to find it; it should be part of the tree-view of the last submitted document.

If it is not where you expect it, it can have several reasons, one of which, the follow up was not done accordingly at DG ECHO side. If it is the case, contact your desk (and put echo-is-support in copy) in order to get this corrected.

2. TRAFFIC LIGHT STAYS ORANGE

You may have already started your project/action, and the traffic light is still orange... and the status in APPEL is still 'underneg', even though you already sent back the signed agreement...

If it is the case, contact your desk (and put echo-is-support in copy) in order to get this corrected.

3. DRAFTING A NEW EDOCUMENT

You want to create your Intermediate or Final Report or want to create a Modification Request, and all the buttons to achieve this are inactive...

Once again, it can have several reasons, one of which, the appraisal was not completed in the system accordingly. If it is the case, contact your desk (and put echo-is-support in copy) in order to get this corrected.

4. CHANGING OR ADDING INFORMATION TO A RECENTLY SUBMITTED EDOCUMENT

You just submitted an eDocument and forgot to add the annexes...

At this moment you will have to wait until the desk involved activates the document. If you would like to be notified, contact your desk (and put echo-is-support in copy).

5. REVISION OF A FINAL REPORT

You get notified by DG ECHO that your Final Report is not complete, and thus not submitted on time. Now you want to send a revised report, but the button 'Final Report' is not active.

If it is the case, contact your desk and put echo-is-support in copy, as it can have implications on your submission date (and as a consequence the payment/liquidation term).

6. DEMAND FOR INFORMATION THAT IS IN THE ANNEXES

Your desk or expert asks for more information, but you actually provided this information in the annexes.

Just point out that the information is in the annexes, and ECHO Support will highlight this issue during the trainings. It is part of getting to know how to use the eTools.

7. ANY OTHER ISSUE OR QUESTION

Once again, and eTools Support will and shall repeat this, whenever in doubt or not sure if you're handling things right, do not hesitate to contact echo-is-support!

Improvements in the offline eSingleForm 3.8 (release date Q4 2011)

The Q4 release of the offline eSingleForm will address no less than 92 issues, including fixes of defects and new features.

These are the most significant ones (some not even visible)

1. COPY / PASTE FROM WORD

When you paste text that is above the field limit (e.g. 3800 bytes), your text will stay in the eSingleForm but you need to reduce the text in order to be able to save the information.

2. WARNING MESSAGE ‘GO BACK TO THE LOGIN SCREEN’

This warning message is in place to prevent data loss. Especially when working in the chapter 4.3.2 Result details, this message is displayed a lot. The underlying problem has been fixed resulting in a more stable eSingleForm.

3. AN ERROR OCCURRED WHEN UPLOADING THE XML FILE

The problem with the upload of an xml file, resulting in a partly uploaded file online and an error message has been fixed. The problem was due to errors in the xml language when adding and deleting indicators, activities and means and costs.

4. NEW ESINGLEFORM FORMAT

The eSingleForm format has been updated to reflect the changes in the original word document. For example, you can now add indicators for the specific objective, chapter 13 for comments and derogation requests has been added, new sectors and subsectors list, etc.

5. SPEED IN INTERNET EXPLORER

When working in Internet Explorer with the offline eTools, the speed has now increased and is similar to working in FireFox.

6. UPDATED TABLES

In the tables for the ‘Other costs’ and ‘Financial Overview’ a column has been added to reflect the ‘initial budget’ and next to it the ‘revised budget’.

7. MANDATORY FIELDS

The mandatory fields and chapters have been updated depending on the kind of emergency you select. This way for e.g. Primary Emergency only the most essential information needs to be completed.

Improvements online in APPEL (release date Q4 2011)

The Q4/2011 release in APPEL will address 65 issues.

These are the most significant ones (some not even visible)

1. IMPROVED RESPONSE TIME FOR RQ

For the eRequest, all screens/chapters have been updated to reflect the offline eSingleForm and at the same time to improve the response time.

2. COPY / PASTE FROM WORD

When you paste text that is above the field limit (e.g. 3800 bytes), your text will stay in the eSingleForm but you need to reduce the text in order to be able to save the information.

3. NEW ESINGLEFORM FORMAT

The eSingleForm format has been updated to reflect the changes in the original word document. For example, you can now add indicators for the specific objective, chapter 13 for comments and derogation requests has been added, new sectors and subsectors list, etc.

4. ADJUSTED VALIDATION RULES

For the Intermediate and Final report, validation rules have been adjusted in case of over spending or a derogation. This way the initial value is no longer taken into account.

5. ADJUSTED SEARCH

New fields have been added in the search screen, e.g. sector and subsector. The speed for finding projects has been improved.

6. EXPORT OF EDOCUMENTS

The export from APPEL to work offline has been corrected and now all fields for all eDocuments are exported correctly.

Foreseen improvements

1. APPEL ONLINE

- Improvement of the response time for all other eDocuments (IR, MR, FR)
- Possibility to indicate if an annexed file is still valid or not when submitting a new version of an eDocument.
- Track changes functionality to compare two eDocuments will be corrected and refined.

2. OFFLINE eSINGLEFORM

- Updates on the pdf creation
- Implementation of the real 'logical framework'

More improvements will be added in the releases of 2012 based upon the issues mentioned in the reactions you have sent.

Help us to Help People Together

1. KEEP UP TO DATE WITH YOUR APPEL DATA

Update when needed your APPEL administrative data in order to avoid bad encoding of the eSingleForm e.g. the legal representatives.

Also keep up to date the information for the different users who have a role to encode eDocuments e.g. when colleagues are no longer working for your organisation.

2. SUPPORT SOURCES WHAT AND WHERE

For all your questions regarding the Single Form and working with DG ECHO please visit the Partner Helpdesk site <http://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu> Whenever there is new information on the eTools, this will be added in the 'News' section of the helpdesk site.

From here you can also subscribe to the eTools Distance Learning platform to have a training on the online and offline system.

In the menu 'download' in APPEL you can download the manual in pdf format.

When working in APPEL, click the question mark icon at the right to consult the online manual.

For operational questions send an e-mail to: ECHO-FPA-PARTNERS@ec.europa.eu

For technical questions send an e-mail to: ECHO-IS-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu