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|  | EUROPEAN COMMISSION  Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid |

**Advisory Service in Social Transfers (ASiST)**

**Technical assistance to support partner countries in addressing food and nutrition security through social transfer programmes**

The Advisory Service in Social Transfers (ASiST) of the European Commission offers technical support to government institutions in partner countries for them to increase the impact, quality, coverage and sustainability of social transfer schemes for strengthened food and nutrition security. ASiST is managed by DEVCO C1. To know more about the service and to request support, please contact [Herve.BUSSCHAERT@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Herve.BUSSCHAERT@ec.europa.eu).

# Background

In reaction to global events, such as climate changes and the recent fuel, food and financial crises, food security has again become the subject of prominent policy attention in development cooperation. This was reflected by the adoption of the EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges in 2010.[[1]](#endnote-1) The policy framework sets as a priority to “support countries to establish and operate targeted and flexible social transfer policies adapted to local contexts.” Indeed, social transfers[[2]](#endnote-2) can play a critical role in promoting food security, primarily in supporting the access pillar but also in strengthening the production of nutritious food. In line with the 2010 EU policy framework on food security, EuropeAid launched in May 2010 a study to prepare a **Reference Document on “social transfers in the fight against hunger”** to be used by development practitioners and facilitate the implementation of programmes using the social transfer instrument. This Reference Document and related documents can be downloaded from <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/topic/fighting-hunger-food-security-nutrition>.

Following up on these efforts, the EC Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO) launched in January 2012 an **Advisory Service in Social Transfers** (ASiST) to support partner countries and EC staff (in headquarters and delegations) in the use of social transfers as a response to food and nutrition insecurity. ASiST is operated under a framework contract by HTSPE Ltd. It will operate under current funding arrangements during the **2012 and 2013 calendar years**. The ASiST experts will predominantly operate remotely from their respective home base, but will be available for missions to Brussels and to the field as required, and as authorised by **DEVCO C1**, the unit in charge of rural development, food security, and nutrition.

# Overall objective

The overall objective of ASiST is to provide specific technical support in order to **increase the impact, quality, coverage and sustainability of social transfer schemes in order to strengthen food and nutrition security in partner countries**.

# Specific objectives

More specifically, ASiST technical support is expected to:

1. **raise awareness** among public authorities and civil society in the most vulnerable partner countries and in the donor community, of the factors that contribute to increased impact, quality, coverage and sustainability of social transfers;
2. **promote quality** throughout the project cycle by providing practical examples and circulating lessons learnt in terms of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to strengthen and promote sustainable national social transfer schemes for food and nutrition security;
3. **share lessons learnt** among development partners at the international level, supporting the EC in actively participating in global discussions on social transfers and comprehensive systems for food and nutrition security.

# Expected outputs

Over the 24-month contract, ASiST is expected to deliver six main outputs:

1. Three **regional seminars** (in the Sahel, East and Southern Africa and Central Asia) on the use of social transfers in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.
2. *Ad hoc* **technical expertise and advice** to EC partner countries (either through distance support or in-country short mission) that wish to develop and/or improve social transfer schemes aimed at increasing food and nutrition security.
3. One **thematic paper** on social transfers for nutrition.
4. *Ad hoc* **technical support for policy development** to EC headquarters to contribute to increased harmonisation and alignment of Member States and other actors involved in social transfers for food and nutrition security.

## Regional seminars

Three regional seminars will be held in Burkina Faso for the Sahel (held in April 2012), Mozambique for East and Southern Africa (held in June 2012) and Kyrgyzstan for Central Asia (tentatively scheduled early 2013). These seminars aim at: raising awareness on the potential of social transfers in the fight against hunger and malnutrition; sharing lessons learnt on the design, implementation and evaluation of social transfer schemes; collecting feedback on the content, format and usefulness of the Reference Document; and generating demand for ASiST technical expertise and advise, either through distance or in-country support. These seminars will gather, over three to four days, officials from partner countries that have benefited (or may benefit in the future) from EU-funded social transfer schemes in the framework of food and nutrition security, along with EU member states’ representatives, other members of the donor community and civil society members.

## Technical expertise and advice to partner countries

ASiST will respond to requests from partner countries, and from EC headquarters and delegation staff, for support in social transfer schemes throughout the programme cycle. This support will be reactive and *ad hoc*, in response to demand expressed through DEVCO C1. The resources currently available to ASiST are relatively limited. So the majority of its support will be pragmatic and on a small scale, essentially sowing the seeds for more substantive follow-up work outside of ASiST. For example, especially during the preparation of Country Strategy Plans for the next EDF cycle, ASiST could help to develop Terms of Reference (ToR) for short studies or for the development of identification and action fiches. ASiST will also provide technical backstopping and written replies to *ad hoc* requests from the EU Delegations or partner countries, through DEVCO C1. ASiST does have the resources to undertake three substantive field missions, the focus and location of which will be agreed with DEVCO C1 in response to demand. These field missions will be carried out on the basis of specific ToR that will be provided by the beneficiary of the action, be it a Ministry or any other government institution.

## Thematic paper

ASiST will work in close collaboration with the EC Nutrition Advisory Service (NAS)[[3]](#endnote-3) to conduct a study on “social transfers for nutrition”. Given the relatively limited resources available for this activity, the study will be limited to a desk review of the existing literature. Still, this scoping study could set the ground for more in-depth follow-up analyses outside of the present ASiST contract. Also, new case studies could potentially be conducted as part of field missions. The study findings will be published as a stand-alone thematic paper and incorporated into the updated version of the Reference Document on social transfers in the fight against hunger that will be produced at the end of 2013.

## Technical support for policy development to headquarters

Throughout the duration of the assignment, ASiST will work in close collaboration with DEVCO units to ensure that findings and lessons learnt from the above activities are reflected in EU policies. DEVCO C1 is expected to organise monthly follow-up meetings (by conference call or mission) of ASiST activities with DEVCO C1 operational services, DEVCO D3 (Employment, Social Inclusion, Migration), the Directorate General (DG) for Foreign Policy Instruments Service (EEAS) and the DG for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).

In addition, ASiST will be opportunistic in taking advantage of any chances to feed into the debate around social transfers at DEVCO, global and national levels. Initial examples of this are (i) a paper on the potential for social transfers as a response to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, and (ii) close collaboration with the DEVCO D3 that is responsible for the development of the EC Communication on Social Protection.

Finally, there are also plans for a closing “splash” event of the current contract, which would be an opportunity (i) to deliver a clear political message on the contribution of social transfers for food and nutrition security to sustainable inclusive growth and poverty reduction, (ii) to bring to the forefront of the development debate the need to support social transfers in order to address poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, and (iii) to present the updated version of the Reference Document. The location could be Brussels in the format of a hearing at the European Parliament or an international conference related to aid effectiveness.

1. An EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament (SEC 2010-379). COM (2010) 127 final. Brussels, 31 March 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Social transfers are defined here as non-contributory, direct and regular resource transfers (in cash or in kind) to poor and vulnerable individuals or households, aimed at reducing deficits in consumption and, in some cases, strengthening productive capacity. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The EC Nutrition Advisory Service is also supervised by DEVCO C1. The NAS team can be contacted through the following email address: [DEVCO-NUTRITION-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu](mailto:DEVCO-NUTRITION-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)