

4. Develop Early Action Protocol

Summary

The development of the Early Action Protocol is the central activity and output of FbF. The EAP contains information on triggers, early actions and funding allocation, and describes the step-by-step process for the implementation of early actions once a trigger is hit. Similar to a Standard Operating Protocol (SOP), it defines clearly who takes action when, where, and with what funds.

The activation of the protocol is triggered when a forecast reaches a certain impact level that indicates there could be severe negative impacts. For the FbA by the DREF, the Early Action Protocol also serves as the document justifying the chosen triggers and early actions and thus contains analysis in this regard.

This chapter builds upon the previous guidance offered to Commit and Assess Feasibility, Engage Your Stakeholders in FbF, Make Your National Society FbF Ready. The steps and criteria as detailed in this chapter and its sub-chapters provide guidance for the development of EAPs for submission to the FbA by the DREF (see Approve and Finance). Core components to guide your EAP development process will be discussed in further detail in the sub-chapters to follow:

- [4.1 Set the Trigger](#)
- [4.2 Select Early Actions](#)
- [4.3 Design M&E Plan](#)
- [4.4 Simulate](#)

Step 0: Get to know EAP requirements

It's important you familiarize yourself with the EAP template and key FbA by DREF criteria. National Societies can access the EAP template [here](#) and full criteria [here](#).

For EAPs to be developed or financed via other funding sources (e.g. government), or through own National Society funding – the criteria are not obligatory, however, we encourage your National Society to utilize the components of the EAP template as a guide.



The FbA by the DREF is an ex-ante financing instrument that automatically allocates funding once a forecast is triggered, which enables the effective implementation of early actions. The FbA by the DREF provides multilateral funding to National Societies who have an already developed EAP. The

funding is pre-agreed in advance for the implementation of the EAP, according to the key criteria below.

Download the FbA by DREF EAP Template [here](#).

Key EAP Criteria of FbA by the DREF

- Early actions seek to reduce the risks and the humanitarian impact and can be implemented in the time between the forecast and the impact of the extreme event.
- The EAP shows that the implementation of the early actions is possible within the lead time available.
- For each early action selected the EAP should include a Theory of Change and demonstrate that the action chosen is appropriate to reduce the specific risk.

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- Data is provided that shows that an event of the magnitude/strength of the event that the trigger is based on, has caused disastrous humanitarian impact in the region in the past.
 - Triggers are based on a combination of the analysis of risk factors and the forecast in line with the steps of the approved trigger methodology.
 - There is a map or a clear methodology that will tell the NS where action should be taken based on a combination of vulnerability, exposure, and the forecast, when the EAP is activated based on the trigger model.

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- The EAP addresses extreme events with a minimum **5-year** return period.

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- The EAP should reach ideally a minimum of **1000 households** if applying for **250,000 CHF** or a minimum of **2,000 households** if applying for **350,000 CHF**.

Maximum 25% of the budget for readiness activities.

Maximum 40% for prepositioning of stock if justified.

Budget for all costs related activation.

Step 1: Complete risk analysis and select hazard

Building upon your feasibility study results (see [chapter 1. Commit to FbF and assess feasibility](#)), complete your analysis of the risk analysis. For a thorough understanding of risk, extensive analysis of the impact of past extreme events as well as vulnerability and exposure data is required. Once your analysis of risks and past impact is completed, it should become clear which hazard should take priority for FbF in the country.

For more information on risk analysis see [chapter 4.1 Set the trigger](#) (particularly steps 1-5). [Chapter 4.2 Select early actions](#) provides guidance on how to collect data on past impacts.

Step 2: Identify available forecasts

Once hazards have been selected, it must be verified whether they can be accurately predicted by the forecasts available. There might be hazards that cause significant impact for vulnerable populations but that cannot be forecasted with enough accuracy. Conversely forecasts with high accuracy might be available, but only with a lead-time of 12 or 24 hours, which does not leave much time for early action implementation, other than warning and evacuation. In those cases, it must be determined whether the forecasts can be improved.

The analysis of available forecasts and the establishment of an inventory of forecasts is explained in [chapter 4.1 Set the trigger](#).

Step 3: Define your impact level

While a good forecast will tell you how much rain will fall and when, for FbF we would need to know how much rain is likely to cause a flood? And what level of flooding has caused a disastrous impact in the past? FbF is meant to reduce the impacts of extreme events of a strength or magnitude that have required humanitarian assistance in the past. Based on detailed analysis of risks associated with the relevant hazards, impact assessments of past events and vulnerability data, “impact levels” for a region are identified, e.g. this amount X of rainfall over 3 days has caused severe destruction of houses in the past. When the selected forecast indicates that the impact level will be reached, the EAP is triggered.

Trigger development is done in line with the impact-based forecasting approach. [Chapter 4.1 Set the trigger](#) outlines necessary steps a National Society must take to define their impact level and set triggers.

Step 4: Select early actions

The aim of FbF is to reduce suffering and losses by assisting vulnerable populations to protect themselves and their livelihoods before an extreme event occurs. To achieve this objective, it is crucial to select early actions that have the highest potential to reduce the identified impacts. The identification of good early actions is one of the most challenging aspects of EAP development. Not only should they be very likely to significantly reduce the negative impacts of the extreme event, they also must be feasible to implement in the short lead time the forecast provides and with the capacities and resources available to the National Society. Given that FbF acts where the forecasts indicate the most severe impact, the actions must also be appropriate for different regions and communities.

Chapter [4.2 Select Early Actions](#) provides you with guidance to identify, prioritize and select appropriate early actions.

The use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) as an early action should be considered where possible. It has many advantages; cash provides families with more flexibility as to how to best protect themselves and their livelihoods and can significantly simplify the logistics of early action implementation (e.g. by reducing the need to preposition and transport items). See [chapter 4.2.1 Cash-based early actions](#) for more information.

In countries with good existing social protections systems, integrating CVA early actions using those can be an ideal way to assist the population at risk before the event occurs. See [chapter 4.2.2 Link early actions to social protection](#) for guidance on how this could be done.

Step 5: Start the drafting process

Once the trigger and early actions as core elements of the EAP have been defined, you can start drafting your EAP.

The EAP constitutes your overall action plan for activation. The following components ensure your NS is well-prepared to activate and monitor early actions once a trigger has been reached. In addition to the risk analysis, inventory of forecasts, trigger model and early actions, your EAP should contain the following elements to enable everyone involved to know what will be done, where, when and by whom.

M&E plan

Building evidence about the impact of FbF systems is a priority. Therefore, the EAP should include an M&E plan to 1) assess the impact of the early actions and the extreme event after each activation and 2) identify if all activities were carried out as planned and document how early actions were implemented 3) and to learn from the process to improve the system in the future.

Chapter 4.3. Design M&E plan provides guidance on the development of the plan and available tools.

Activation plan or implementation process chart

One of the most important objectives of the EAP is to clearly define all steps, roles and responsibilities for EAP activation. For this, an implementation process chart or activation plan should be drafted outlining all activities from the moment the trigger is reached (Day 1) to the completion of post-impact surveys (Day X) with clear timelines and responsibilities. Each step of the activation must be considered, from staff/volunteer deployment, to transport, distribution and post-impact assessments. Ideally for most steps and activities, there should not only be a Plan A, but also a Plan B or even C, taking into account scenarios such as rapidly worsening weather conditions and limited access.

In order to ensure everyone is aware of their tasks, it can be a good idea to distribute the plan or process chart widely, or design tailored training materials for staff and volunteers, such as a “pocket EAP”. Example of the Latin America FbF Pocket EAP “PAT de bolsillo “ [here](#).

See also chapter 3. Make your National Society FbF ready.

Stop mechanism

For forecast triggers with a lead-time exceeding three days, the EAP must include a stop mechanism. This means that if a later forecast – prior to the start of activities related to the early action implementation indicates that the event is no longer likely to occur, or will occur with less strength or in a different location, the activation of the EAP should be stopped to avoid generating further use of resources, and reduce reputational risks of distributing assistance in a location in which it is no longer needed.

For example, if the 6-day forecast on Day 1 of the activation indicates high risk of heavy rainfall and thereby triggers the activation of the EAP, but the updated 6-day-forecast released on Day 3 indicates that the risk has significantly lowered, the trigger level will no longer be reached. If the start of distributions was planned for Day 4, activation should be stopped. Items that have been purchased based on the trigger being reached should no longer be distributed due to the stop mechanism, and rather stored in the warehouse for a future activation.

For forecast triggers with a lead time of less than 3 days, the EAP should consider what the National Society would do if the forecast changes in strength or location within the last three days before the event. The stop mechanism should be included in the activation plan/implementation process chart.

Contact list/ Communication protocol

Given the very limited time available for the implementation of the early actions, efficient and timely communication is essential. The communication plan or protocol, indicates who should communicate to whom, what and when (from the forecast monitoring, trigger activation, fund release, warning messages, implementation of early action(s), monitoring through the evaluation and lessons analysis of the intervention). This can also be part of the activation plan.

Distribution plan (including targeting and selection of people served)

The distribution of relief items or CVA assistance to families at risk is often the key component of early actions. However, given the short lead time for many hazards, related distribution activities must be carefully planned beforehand.

The distribution plan should clearly answer questions such as:

- Which criteria will be used to identify the targeted households?
- How many and which staff and volunteers will be needed?
- How will local authorities and community groups be included in selection of households and distribution?
- Who will register the target families with which tools (e.g. paper forms or digital systems)?
- What information is needed from people served (signature, name, age etc.)?

The distribution plan may also be included within the activation.

Security plan

Assuring safety of staff and volunteers and not creating risks for communities and vulnerable population is key for all Red Cross and Red Crescent activities. A security plan should be in place addressing identified security risks, and detailing safeguard measures and respective roles and responsibilities. In some countries, security conditions might already be fragile before an extreme weather event approaches and special considerations should be taken into account, for example for distribution, in others, past events might have shown that security incidents increased as soon as there was a warning of an extreme event. These factors should be considered.

Budget

For an EAP to be approved for financing, the EAP budget must consist of all the costs linked to the activation of the EAP, as well as readiness and prepositioning costs. For FbA by the DREF, the budget cannot include costs for the development of the EAP and the setting up of the FbF system in a country (e.g. initial trainings of volunteers, etc.). This process should be financed by other sources of longer-term funding. The maximum amount of funding available for each EAP from the Forecast-based Action by the DREF is 250,000 Swiss francs.

Readiness costs: cover costs related to the upkeep/maintenance of the FbF system in-country once it has been established and the EAP has been developed. This refers to the required costs to ensure that the NS is “ready” to implement the EAP at any point during the five-year lifecycle of the EAP. These could include, for example, costs for refresher trainings, warehouse costs, and costs for staff to keep the system ready and update data. , Readiness costs are limited to 25% of the total EAP budget over the EAP’s lifecycle.

Prepositioning costs: In order to ensure the feasibility of the rapid distribution of items in the short timeframe between forecast and event, prepositioning of goods might be necessary. They should normally have a lifetime of at least the lifecycle of the EAP and should only be replenished after an activation. The FbA by the DREF covers these costs to a maximum amount of 40% of the EAP budget.

Early action costs cover all expenditures that are linked to the activation of the EAP, once the trigger has been reached. This can cover identification of target populations; CVA; distribution of items and/or cash, and provision of services; deployment of volunteers and staff; reporting and M&E, such as implementation monitoring; and impact survey data collection and analysis.

For more information on the budget requirements of FbA by the DREF, see [chapter 5. Approve and Finance](#).

Step 6: Simulate

Once drafting of an EAP has been finalized, it needs to be put to the test to ensure the early actions identified are feasible in the lead-time foreseen and roles and responsibilities in case of an activation are clear. Simulations and drills are crucial to testing the effectiveness of plans, protocols, guidelines and the capacity of those responsible for carrying out early actions. Based on learnings from simulations and tests, the EAP draft can be adapted before it is submitted to the FbA by the DREF.

[Chapter 4.4 Simulate](#) introduces simulations and drills, applications of both to FbF EAPs, and steps necessary for their implementation.

Step 7: Approve and finance

It should be ensured that at the point of the trigger being reached no further authorizations are needed before the National Society can act. The EAP must be endorsed by the leadership of the submitting NS and should have prior approval from all stakeholders, whose authorizations will be needed. The EAP should also be validated by other key relevant stakeholders, such as the NHMS and the respective DRM authorities. If technical working groups have been created for FbF, their members should also endorse the final version of the EAP before submission.

Each EAP must then be submitted to the IFRC for review. IFRC offices, extended reviewers, and the Validation Committee (a body of FbF practitioners and scientists who will review the protocol based on the EAP criteria) assess new EAPs that are submitted for acceptance. Before you submit, check that your EAP meets the quality criteria, answers all the required points in the EAP template and your budget is in the right format.

Take into account that the approval process will take at least 30 days and upon validation further time will be needed for finalizing funding allocations and agreements. Therefore, it is recommended to submit well in advance of the start of the season for your NS's selected hazard.

See [chapter 5. Approve and Finance](#) for guidance on how to submit your EAP to FbA by the DREF and links to criteria, as well as relevant forms and templates.

Step 8: Monitor forecasts and be ready to activate

Once your EAP has been approved and all the agreements are in place, make sure you are ready to activate. Preposition the items for distribution, carry out necessary trainings, ensure financial and logistical arrangements are in place and roles and responsibilities are well understood.

When everything is set, what is left is to monitor the forecasts. It must be clearly defined who gives the signal to start the activation. Ideally, there is a system in place to automatically monitor the forecasts and send an automatic message of alert to relevant actors as soon as a trigger is reached. In case this system does not yet exist, it must be clear who is responsible for monitoring the forecast and informing all relevant actors that the trigger has been reached.

For more details on the activation process, see [chapter 6. Activate, Monitor, Evaluate](#).

Step 9: Revise/resubmit

After your National Society has triggered the forecast-based early actions in its EAP, your NS can subsequently re-submit a revised EAP for re-validation. The revised EAP should include lessons learned from the EAP activation. The re-validation process follows the same acceptance procedure with a review timeframe of up to 30 days.



Adapt EAP for target audiences in the creation of training materials.

A complete EAP submitted to FbA is comprehensive document. It is recommended to adapt your EAP for specific target groups within your NS's FbF training materials. For example, presenting key information on what will be done when, where and by whom in a simpler and shorter document or powerpoint that can be shared with volunteers and staff.

For example, the FbF team in Peru developed a PAT de bolsillo or a pocket EAP to distribute to volunteers and staff to ensure everyone knew what to do when, where and how.

Toolbox

-  PAT de bolsillo olas de frío, Perú-comprimido
 -  Pocket EAP
 -  FbF EAP Template (07/2022)
 -  Quality criteria for Early Action Protocols (05/2022)
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