

TA Consultants United carried out a survey among its supporters of delays in tender procedures for EuropeAid contracts. The period examined was from 1 January 2010 to end-October 2011. Submissions were received from experts covering just under 100 tenders for service contracts and 100 tenders for framework contracts. Separately, results of a poll of contractors covering a further 160 FWC tenders were also included.

In the survey of experts, the results for service contract tenders show that 62% of these tender procedures were delayed and took more time than the (already considerable) maximum term of 90 days. On average these delays took two months (62 days).

Experts were also asked about the tender with the biggest delay that they had personally experienced. The average time overrun of the 30 most delayed tenders was 105 days, 3.5 months.

Framework contracts – shorter, less expensive contracts – also showed a high level of delays: according to the experts' reports 58% overran by an average 12 days delay – almost twice the time scheduled (14 days) by the regulation. Again, experts were asked about the tenders with the biggest delay: the average longest delay was 63 days, more than four times the maximum term.

These results should be considered as indicative, rather than representative, as it is probable that experts having experienced delays would be more likely to report on their experiences than others. However, delays in these contracts are also confirmed in a random survey among contractors: this found 43% delays in tender evaluations.

The survey also generated a lot of comments about the procedures for the replacement of experts: procedures of 3 months and longer are no exception.

The Balkan countries and Turkey were mentioned most as 'countries known for their delays' in all categories.

Experts experience severe financial damage because of these delays, as Statements of Exclusivity and Availability do not allow them to take up other work. These practices therefore imply periods of forced unemployment without any income or compensation for lost income.

Although not statistically precise, these numbers indicate a very poor state of affairs. TA Consultants United therefore sees in the results further proof that the Statements have to be abolished and that procedures have to be dramatically shortened. CAs that cannot meet their own deadlines should be penalized.

Stephen Dewar & Henry Leerentveld