EU AID VOLUNTEERS

MID-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Alianza
por la
Solidaridad

EU Aid Volunteers
We Care, We Act

"More to care: encouraging certification and strengthening EUAV management capacities of European sending organisations"

2017 - 3565 / 001 - 001

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS INDEX

CSO: Civil society organisation

DG ECHO: Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (European Commission)

EACEA: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (European Commission)

ESC: European Solidarity Corps

HO: Hosting organisation

HQ: Headquarters

SO: Sending organisation

PRESENTATION AND SCOPE

The new +CARE project has brought together organisations with experience in the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative in the same consortium since its pilot phase (such as Alianza por la Solidaridad and GVC), other organisations certified and with experience in different projects of the Initiative (ActionAid Hellas), and others that aim to certified and raise awareness of the initiative, some of them with experience in previous Technical Assistance projects: Volonteurope (Volunteering Matters), Imago Mundi, ActionAid Italia and LVIA.

The consortium organisations are participating in the EU Aid Volunteers (EUAV) Initiative because of a shared belief in the importance of active citizenship as a mechanism for addressing global challenges. In particular, we are convinced that alleviating suffering and building resilience of communities in disaster-prone areas or countries affected by crises, is a worldwide responsibility. The European Union, as major donor for humanitarian operations in third countries, in its intention of being a bastion of solidarity values, is in a good position to lead this type of initiative. As European organisations believing in these values, we are happy to be part of EU Aid Volunteers (EUAV) and are convinced of its importance enough to promote it among other organisations. This commitment is demonstrated by our having raised awareness of the Initiative in at least ten European Member States and twelve third countries, through past and present activities.

These efforts serve to underline our commitment to both the initiative and its ongoing relevance. However, along the way, we have experienced challenges and witnessed those of other participating organisations around the world. With this report and the subsequent recommendations, our intention is to help improve the Initiative to secure its growth and continuity in the future. This document intends to be a base for European Institutions involved (the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, EACEA and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, DG ECHO) to think over certain aspects which could be improved or revised, taking account the points of view of organisations with experience in the implementation of all different types of projects within the Initiative. As a consortium, we are aware of our potential contribution to this improvement and of the aspects in regards to which organisations like ourselves have to improve. That is why we continue to reflect on our role and ways of proceeding and to offer our support to EACEA and DG ECHO for the improvement of any of the highlighted issues.

RAISON D'ÊTRE AND LOGIC OF THIS REPORT

The project **"MORE TO CARE: Encouraging certification and strengthening EUAV management capacities of European sending organisations"** was launched in February 2018. Its specific objectives aim for the reinforcement and creation of EUAV focal points in 6 EU countries, the provision of technical assistance to organisations, and the strengthening of partner organisations (most of them already certified, some of them not) for an optimal implementation of EUAV projects. **That is, the project pursues the dissemination of the initiative and the encouragement for the certification of new organisations, as well as the improvement of the quality in the participation of already certified organisations (which implies all the EUAV standards, including the volunteering cycle management).** Therefore, dealing with deployment issues inevitably come with this technical assistance project.

In line with specific objective 1, EUAV focal points need to rely on comprehensive information of the Initiative, certification mechanism, and practicalities of projects implementation in order to respond to requests by organisations. Furthermore, they have to be able to sustain the relevance, pertinence and quality of the initiative in order to bring more organisations and potential volunteers on board.

Regarding specific objective 2, it is also crucial to have tools and information to attract new organisations, convince them that their efforts for certification are worthy, and that the effects of this effort will go beyond 2020.

As for specific objective 3, internal strengthening implies revising what has been done and improving processes at different levels. This exercise has the potential to benefit not only concerned organisations but also the functioning of the Initiative as such. In most cases, participants will be in charge of reorganising and refining procedures, tools and coordination. In other cases, this work will reflect some aspects where improvement requires action or decisions at a higher level. The partner organisations are aware that different recommendations may require different amounts of time or changes at different levels in order to be materialised. In particular, we are aware that recommendations which imply changes in EUAV regulations may only be viable in a post 2020 scenario.

This project being implemented partially by organisations with a sound background in EUAV is a fact that should be maximised by taking into consideration the experiences and networking of previous projects. Our experience reveals that, in order to improve the incorporation of new organisations in the Initiative and the quality of volunteers deployment management, it is necessary not only to reinforce the standards in the organisations, but also to revise the Initiative in what may be necessary and pertinent.

MORE TO CARE was conceived when the results of the EUAV external evaluation in 2017 had not yet been published, with the intention of complementing them and highlighting a few aspects. In particular, EUAV external evaluation was conducted in a moment when few deployment projects were in place and/or they were at an early stage of the deployment cycle; thus, this report brings further insights and experiences. Also, it envisages the future of the Initiative and includes some topics that were not considered in the official evaluation, such as inclusion.

All the aforementioned is what justifies the work to issue these recommendations and their scope.

METHODOLOGY

The project **"MORE TO CARE: Encouraging certification and strengthening EUAV management capacities of European sending organisations"** foresaw a related conference in Brussels in order to reinforce the visibility of the initiative as well as contribute to the programme's ongoing evaluation (SO1 A4). The objective was to issue a complementary document of recommendations that took into account the experiences of organisations who had implemented their first round of EUAV projects, allowing more specific and informed feedback. This report would be presented to DG ECHO and EACEA after an internal process of evaluation. Different organisations and stakeholders, within or outside the initiative, were invited to participate.

As a first step in this process, 'Volonteurope' network and Alianza por la Solidaridad, (project leader) held a preparation meeting to identify, discuss, and prepare the key points for evaluation and the corresponding recommendations, regarding future action lines to promote visibility and sustainability of this initiative.

At a second stage, all partners contributed to the programme's evaluation by responding to 11 questions and collecting responses from several stakeholders in the Initiative. These questions are key in the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative and, together with the experience and practices of different organisations that have been participating in it in different ways, respond to the main findings and conclusions of the Final Report Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EUAV.

The topics covered in the questionnaire are:

1 · **Relevance and added value;**

2 · **Efficiency/regulation (economic and administrative issues);**

3 · **Effectiveness (For CSOs and volunteers);**

4 · **Inclusion;**

5 · **Scope of Humanitarian Action;**

6 · **Architecture post 2020;**

7 · **Communication.**

In total, 26 organisations -sending (SO), hosting (HO) and not-yet certified entities (see Annex 1)- have responded to the questions, including the project partners, who conducted interviews via telephone, Skype, Zoom, etc. A written summary of each was shared in a common interface. The participation of stakeholders out of the consortium is considered important for gathering more experiences and viewpoints. The inclusion of organisations aiming at getting certified is also paramount to the framework of a technical assistance project.

Answers differ from one participant to another, depending on their experience and different factors such as: their belonging to an EU member country or to a third country (18/8); whether they are independent third country organisations or linked to a head office in Europe; specialisation in managing volunteers or in humanitarian aid, etc. However, there are certain issues which were common to all of them. This report intends to reflect the diversity of opinions when it exists, while highlighting the common views. A brief reflection on each of the aforementioned topics is complemented by recommendations at different levels and for different stakeholders.

Preliminary results were shared with EACEA and DG ECHO representatives in an open event on June the 19th, 2018 in Brussels, with the aim of reflecting on ideas and efforts jointly made to further strengthen the EUAV initiative, and to adjust the recommendations so that they are pertinent and practical.

Accordingly, this report is a review of the working document that was presented in Brussels. From the point of view of civil society organisations, it is expected that the document will give support to the EUAV initiative, and also buttress the EU capacity to offer humanitarian aid. That is in addition to strengthen vulnerable communities facing disasters, or conflicts, and building a European citizenship based on the values of solidarity and cooperation.

The expected outputs of these recommendations and all the whole process involved, in connection with the objectives of the project, are:

- Organisations reflect on their participation in the EUAV Initiative, strengths and weaknesses, and possible solutions.

- Certified organisations make efforts to improve the points which are in their hands for a better implementation of EUAV projects.

- Information is shared with not-certified organisations, including post-2020 scenario.

- Organisations share their experiences with EACEA and ECHO, supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

1
RELEVANCE AND ADDED VALUE

As a first important point, these recommendations should to be understood as an effort to contribute and support the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, and its continuity. That is to say, undoubtedly, that all the partners under +CARE consider that the Initiative is very positive and has a lot of potential, hence our interest to continue working on its improvement. The interviews show that many other organisations also value it positively.

To a greater extent, respondents value the capacity building and technical assistance gained through the participation in the initiative: improvement at a policy and procedural level (equal opportunities, health and safety, safety and security...), better knowledge and capacities (volunteering management, humanitarian aid...), systematisation of practices, development of quality standards and mutual learning between them and other participating organisations.

Networking and connection among organisations of different sizes and types, from different countries and continents has been created or fostered, as well as the creation of synergies. Also, the Initiative has enhanced the work between hosting organisations and CBOs and CSOs.

The Initiative promotes active citizenship, facilitates opportunities for volunteering for EU citizens, and promotes local volunteering and engagement in third countries. In doing so, it also provides junior and senior volunteers the opportunity to gain experience in the field of humanitarian action in third countries. Sometimes, it is their first experience in the field or working for an NGO, even if they have professional expertise. This allows them to re-direct their careers towards the humanitarian sector. In sum, it attracts more professionals to the humanitarian sector, while improving the provision of humanitarian aid.

EUAV also provides visibility to the EU and its support of humanitarian operations and draws attention to the organisations involved therein.

As for the EU Aid Volunteers' support, most organisations recognise their value and good qualifications, and the importance for the delivery of the HO, as well as for the beneficiary local communities in third countries.

In sum, all partners agree that the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative:

- Is positive for the European Union, in as much as its humanitarian aid operations are reinforced and its solidarity image is strengthened.

- Is positive for participating organisations, not only in third countries but also for sending organisations, given that their visibility and social base increase and their management procedures improve.

- Is positive for communities in disaster-prone or crises contexts, who benefit from capacity building and better implementations of humanitarian projects.

- Is positive for civil society, which is encouraged to think globally and actively participate in changes.

- Is positive for European citizens and long-term residents that want to support humanitarian and solidarity actions, gain professional skills or apply them to the humanitarian context.

- Technical assistance and capacity building actions are paramount. They bring new organisations to the Initiative while strengthening vulnerable communities and strengthening organisations internally.

- The deployment of volunteers is a comprehensive action with multiple positive effects on the EU, participant organisations, volunteers themselves and on society in general.

2
EFFICIENCY AND REGULATION

Financial and administrative matters:

Many organisations consider the functioning of the Initiative to be efficient. However, some challenges have been found regarding financial and administrative issues. Most organisations agree that the implementation of projects (including deployment ones) is very demanding in terms of human resources. Even though the budget allowance for human resources in deployment projects has increased, organisations have suggested that it should still be more flexible. Among other aspects, there are many partners from different countries and with different organisational cultures that have to be coordinated. This impacts the final report, which takes a lot of time to be consolidated, given that information from different organisations, with different ways of working and levels of understanding of the specificities of these projects, has to be put together. Accordingly, the deadline for the final report is considered to be very short (2 months), which is proven by the fact that lead organisations generally have to ask for

an extension of the deadline. Other projects related to development or humanitarian action in third countries allow up to 6 months deadline to submit the final report.

Regulations and requirements, especially in financial terms, are considered excessive to some of the organizations, particularly for small hosting organisations who experience problems in financial reporting and justification. In particular, for some of them it is impossible to gather tickets for some expenses, such as transport. That is, the Initiative is more exigent than other programmes the organisations are used to, and it is difficult to comply with all the documentation in certain contexts.

● Projects Application and follow-up (templates):

From a practical point of view, the Excel templates for the submission of new projects or their economic reporting are too restrictive (protected), especially depending on EACEA for any minor eventuality (such as needing more lines in Excel files).

When facing the submission of project proposals, application e-forms generate a lot of problems and turn out to be very difficult to read and open. The generated document is too heavy and difficult to manage and read. Additionally, there are recurrent technical problems in completing or submitting the form (it usually freezes while being filled in or when saving and submitting). The process could also be simplified if certified hosting organisations do not have to generate new PIC numbers.

● General management:

Taking into consideration the general management of the initiative, involved organisations have identified that there is some confusion over the roles of EACEA and DG ECHO and how they are coordinated for newcomers. It is important to highlight that DG ECHO and EACEA have an open attitude for discussion and are willing to solve any questions posed by the organisations.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO

- ● Allow higher percentage of budget for human resources in deployment projects (e.g. establishing no funding limit, like in technical assistance and capacity building projects).

- ● Extend the deadline for the presentation of final reports from 2 to 4 months (with the possibility to extend it 2 more, meaning a maximum period of 6 months for reporting).

- ● Create lighter and more manageable application forms.

- ● Facing post-2020 scenario: Continue funding technical assistance and capacity building activities to ensure better compliance with administrative and financial procedures.

For participating organisations

- Showcase properly the roles of EACEA and DG ECHO when communicating the EUAV Initiative to other organisations

- For lead organisations: Train and put emphasis on administrative and financial requirements for partners from the beginning of the project and be an active focal point in case of doubts.

- Use internal midterm report to evaluate the understanding of financial rules.

- When acting as coordinating partner, plan specific activities to promote awareness on technical and financial rules and to foster ownership among all partners.

3 EFFECTIVENESS

Regarding effectiveness of the Initiative, two main points have been identified: the implementation of projects (mainly deployment of volunteers) and the certification/access to the Initiative. Also, some issues concerning EUAV as a whole have been mentioned by the respondents.

3.1 General points:

Working in an international consortium is very enriching, but it also entails some challenges, such as finding a common working language everybody is comfortable with.

In other terms, and related to the previous point, the fact that some organisations are not familiar with EACEA's financial justification procedures and rules often creates difficulties in effective implementation and justification of expenditures.

It has been acknowledged that attaining a mutual level of understanding and ownership of projects by all partners involved is a challenge.

3.2 Projects' implementation:

Deployment:

There are significant main concerns regarding logistics, managing volunteers' security and safety, and finding suitable accommodation for volunteers that meets their and the EU's expectations.

Also, selecting and recruiting suitable volunteers who meet the technical profile but are also motivated and flexible enough to carry out their missions, adapt to the (organisational and local) context, and to not drop out, is not always easy. In particular, there are cases of candidates who drop-out before starting the mission or even the training.

At a more operational level, participating organisations have found that deployments of more than 12 months are very difficult to implement regarding the maximum duration of projects (24 months). Additionally, the procedure to open new vacancies requires a lot of time and is not suitable for unexpected needs for volunteers or urgent missions.

From the organisational point of view, some respondents find that internalising specific rules and procedures requires a lot of resources and is time-consuming. Some organisations are very experienced with international volunteering but have not done it under the EU Aid Volunteers programme, so adaptation may take a while.

There is general consensus that the pre-deployment period depends too much on the availability of EUAV training sessions. Any unforeseen event (dropouts, lack of suitable candidates, etc.) impacts the planned schedule or reduces the possibility of reacting before contingencies. Also, it should be more adapted to the reality volunteers will face; sometimes they have too high expectations after the training. Some of them have informed their SOs that the training is too intense, and some leisure time would have allowed them to better follow the last sessions. Furthermore, some candidates have identified a lack of gender approach during the EUAV training.

Linked to the paragraph above, all organisations in the sample, as well as the Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative done by external experts, agree that the process between the publication of the vacancies and the actual deployment of volunteers is far too long: Normally, a minimum of four and a half months passes from the announcement of a vacancy and the deployment of the selected volunteer. This is sometimes a reason for dropouts before deployment and also brings about the challenge of dropouts during deployment. Understanding the causes and motivations for dropouts would give more clues on what the best solution is. According to their experiences, organisations have provided specific recommendations to shorten the pre-deployment period and to avoid dropouts, which are added to the general recommendations of this chapter.

Regarding CIGNA insurance, even if it has proved to be very efficient in most cases, there have also been problems, such as doubts over coverage, errors in registration, and wrong information regarding direct payment.

The learning and development plan managed through the EUAV platform is complex and too time-consuming to be developed online by the hosting organisations. Internet connection failures also difficult the on-time work within the platform in the HO.

Technical assistance and capacity building:

In connection with these projects, several organisations mentioned how challenging it is sometimes to properly communicate the value of standards so that participant organisations, especially in third countries, experience ownership of them and of the projects.

On other matters, when planning capacity building activities with communities or activities to promote certification among potential sending or hosting organisations not in the partnership, the budget scheme is at times too strict. Mainly, it is not possible to cover transport costs for persons not belonging to a partner organisation, which makes it difficult to organise workshops and events (such as training sessions aimed at potential sending and hosting organisations) or discourages people from attending (e.g. event on the 19th June in Brussels).

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Revise the training system for EUAV candidates. The following suggested alternatives could be included or explored in the future:

  - To provide at least a monthly session, to reduce the waiting period between volunteers' selection and deployment. Some organisations also suggest that it could be interesting to give SO the possibility to organise the training themselves if willing, which has been a successful practice in the pilot phase.

  - Increase the adaptability and flexibility of the training contents (strengthen the focus on soft skills, also providing the flexibility to adapt it to the realities the volunteers will face).

  - Modify the training schedule, so that volunteers are receptive until the end. For example, shortening the duration and intensity or adding a free day.

- Shorten the period between the end of each training session and the reception of results by SOs.

- Conduct a thorough analysis of the dropouts at different stages and the reasons to identify and better address the causes.

- Allow a higher number of candidates in the training per vacancy so that a broader roster can be created.

- Create an open EUAV roster which sending organisations can access easily in case of dropouts during deployment, respecting data protection regulation.

- Facing post-2020: Allow the publication of vacancies for a period of less than one month and the possibility of open urgent vacancies just for reserve list.

- Coordination with governments in host countries in order to establish arrangements to facilitate visa processes.

- Allow more flexibility with the types of costs that can be included in case of activities with local communities or with third organisations (e.g. subsistence and travel costs for beneficiaries or local organisations that do not belong to the consortium when their participation is justified by the objectives of the activity).

For participant organisations:

- Work closely with EACEA and DG ECHO, conveying useful information, such as ideas regarding training scheme, feedback by volunteers, and motivations for drop-out when available.

- Pay special attention to selection process and methods so that they are effective and allow proper assessment not only of candidates' profiles but also their motivation and soft skills.

- Emphasise the importance of commitment to candidates from early stages of the selection process and provide them with information so that they have realistic expectations.

- Plan deployments which don't exceed 12 months.

- Create offline tools to complement and/or facilitate the online learning and development plan.

- When acting as coordinating partner, plan specific activities to promote awareness of technical and financial rules and to foster ownership among all partners.

3.3 Certification and/or access to the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative:

The certification of having achieved quality standards to deploy or host volunteers as well as the basic content of these standards is understandable, and organisations find it necessary. Still, several challenges have been experienced during the certification process or in the attempts to achieve it by different organisations. Most organisations agree that it is very demanding and time/human resources consuming, as well as excessively bureaucratic, and sometimes the specific requirements and evidences are not clear.

The regulations seem to be too strict and detailed, which particularly impacts smaller organisations and local organisations from third countries without EU headquarters, who then doubt in some cases whether it is really possible for them to become certified to receive EU Aid Volunteers in the future. As a result, some organisations express interest in joining the Initiative but become discouraged when learning of the requirements. In particular, among EU-based organisations, some of them have a lot of experience managing volunteers and could become very valuable sending organisations, despite not yet being active in humanitarian actions as such.

On the contrary, the process was generally easier for organisations that are relatively big or are part of an EU-based organisation. Many organisations who achieved certification were aided and relied on the support of other organisations and technical assistance projects for their certification.

Issues with the language and access to assistance along with the European approach to certification requirements are other challenges affecting mainly local organisations in the Global South. For some organisations, even validating their PIC number is problematic because

they have difficulties to understand what is required (sometimes not harmonised with national legislation) and accessing the Participant Portal. Some efforts have been made and some documents -such as self-assessment questionnaires- are available or can be completed in French and Spanish, but the general working language continues to be English.

As for re-certification, some organisations are embarking upon this process currently for the first time. It must be pointed out that different departments have to invest a lot of time reviewing and collecting all the information needed in order to recertify.

Some organisations highlighted as a positive point the possibility of receiving support by volunteers or other experienced organisations to take the route towards certification.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Continue the capacity building and technical assistance approach, which has proven to be very valuable to all participating organisations.

- Provide more information on the re-certifying process, so that organisations can be better prepared. For example, the Certification Mechanism site (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eu-aid-volunteers/funding/certification-mechanism-for-sending-and-hosting-organisations_en) could include the information that is required for re-certification.

- Adapt the Participant Portal and certification/PIC guidelines to other languages aside from English (minimum Spanish and French).

- Create a help desk of direct assistance to organisations, available in several languages.

- Provide more specific guidelines on the evidence needed to prove the completion of certain standards or the requirement of being active in humanitarian action.

- Accept not-direct humanitarian experience from organisations with solid experience in international volunteering management to be qualified as sending organisations within the Initiative. That is, keep the requirement of being active in the humanitarian sector but without the need of being present in third countries, provided that the organisation is aware of HA principles and third country contexts (e.g. working hand-in-hand with partners who have in-presence activities in third countries).

For participating organisations:

- Act as EUAV focal points at the national level providing support to other organizations that want to join the EUAV Initiative and provide them with information adapted to their local language and needs.

- Make use of technical assistance and capacity building projects in order to improve performance regarding the EUAV standards.

4
INCLUSION

As civil society organisations, we are concerned about participation in the Initiative being difficult for persons from backgrounds with fewer opportunities (functional diversity, social and economic vulnerability, etc.). As an example, the platform -where all vacancies are published and through with the applications have to be submitted- is difficult to access for people with visual impairments, by those affected by the digital divide, or people without a good command of English. Also, relying on the non-discrimination principle, sending organisations lack specific guidelines on how to address cases in which people with functional diversity are interested in taking part in the Initiative. Throughout our experience in technical assistance or deployment projects, other organisations or interested persons themselves have put forward this question and there is no agreed response for addressing the non-discrimination and equal opportunities principles.

In connection to that, organisations in the sample were asked their opinion and proposals on how best to improve the inclusiveness of the EUAV initiative, and the responses show that inclusion can be seen and understood in different ways. On the one hand, some organisations highlighted the need to include vulnerable populations in Europe as beneficiaries; on the other hand, many organisations pointed out the need for including volunteers from the Global South as EU Aid Volunteers. Accordingly, all organisations advocate for a more inclusive programme regarding the concept of "global active citizenship", but express different ideas on how best to achieve this.

The partners in this project understand that the Initiative as it is only foresees deployment opportunities for Member State nationals or long-term residents (which some stakeholders find too exclusive) and changing the scope of beneficiaries may imply a change in the objectives and approach of the initiative. However, reflection on the aforementioned proposals can be interesting, especially regarding the possibility of counting on South-South EU Aid Volunteers in order to foster empowerment and capacities in third countries.

It is understood that the nature, objectives, and context of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative influence the degree of inclusion that can be assumed, and that not everyone with functional diversity may be deployable. Still, in line with the non-discrimination principle, this line should be clearly defined and justified.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Starting a process for internal discussion about the inclusiveness of the Initiative, with the participation of civil society organisations.

- Issuance of guidelines to enhance inclusiveness of EUAV candidates from backgrounds of fewer opportunities (functional diversity, social and economic vulnerability, etc.) and to deal with cases when applicants or interested persons have functional diversity.

- Allow the possibility to deploy EU Aid Volunteers who complement and facilitate the deployment of volunteers with functional diversity.

- Reflect on the possibility of including South-South volunteers (from third countries) to counter the North-South divide in humanitarian aid programmes and simultaneously support the 2030 Agenda.

- Enhance promotion of the Initiative among people with social disadvantages, in particular by reinforcing face-to-face and analogic dissemination methods.

For participating organisations:

- Collaborate with EACEA and DG ECHO in the debate about inclusiveness by providing with examples, experiences and points of view as civil society organisations.

- Define more inclusive terms of reference and selection procedures for volunteers' vacancies in third countries and on-line vacancies.

- Enhance promotion of the Initiative among people with social disadvantages, in particular by reinforcing face-to-face, analogic and innovative dissemination methods.

5 SCOPE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The EUAV interim report underlines the importance of establishing coherence between humanitarian aid actions, civil protection and Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. The consortium of organisations and most of the interviewees agree with the relevance of keeping a comprehensive concept of humanitarian aid, in which LRRD and resilience-building activities are included (Art. 3(d) and art.4 Regulation 375/20014). This approach is considered very positive, as it encompasses fundamental activities to prevent further crises or disasters as well as activities directed towards "strengthening resilience and capacity to cope with, and recover from, crises". It is therefore an opportunity for organisations to provide more comprehensive operations and a broader range of activities linked to humanitarian action contexts. In operational terms of volunteers' deployment, it implies that hosting organisations can count on varied volunteering profiles to better respond to the different phases of humanitarian action. In fact, experts in humanitarian action highlight how activities such as arts or sports can play an important role in the resilience construction process in contexts of post-conflict, protection and protracted crises.

In this context, local volunteering appears too as an interesting initiative to be promoted, since it serves the double objective of supporting humanitarian action and build capacities of local communities.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Keeping this approach to humanitarian action and the incentives to local volunteering in the next programs of the EUAV Initiative. Keep and preserve the nature of the EUAV Initiative in the post 2020 period.

For participating organisations:

- Taking a proactive approach to the potential for action that the EUAV Initiative provides in order to respond to different phases and needs along the humanitarian aid continuum.

6
COMMUNICATION

DG ECHO and EACEA are doing valuable work in disseminating and spreading the visibility of the initiative through both their own communications strategies and through organisation's projects. However, there is the general opinion that participation in the Initiative (by both volunteers and organisations) is sometimes hindered by the difficulty in accessing the information. For organisations, the access to information and documentation on certification is predominantly in English, which may be discouraging, especially for small organisations. With regards to volunteers, they may also come across barriers to accessing information, due in part to the sheer amount of information, and to English consistently being the language used to communicate availability of and access to vacancies. The organisations appreciate the last initiative to include vacancies in other languages, which can solve partly the problems while the EUAV Platform is in English.

In fact, the EU Aid Volunteers Platform has a lot of potential for volunteers and organisations but there are still some limitations in its use and promotion. Primarily, as it is hosted by DG ECHO, complementary dissemination is needed since the Initiative looks for varied types of professionals, not necessarily already linked to humanitarian action. Therefore, dissemination among other fora will be beneficial to spread the Initiative, the vacancies, and to address varied profiles of potential volunteers.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Provide organisations and potential volunteers with clear and relevant information that is easy to understand and that focuses on the benefits the initiative can offer for both

organisations and volunteers: for organisations, the strengthening of activities and response; and for volunteers, the benefits of a learning experience while supporting vulnerable communities. For example, a direct link to EACEA's Certification Mechanism website should be easily available.

- Actively involve DG ECHO country offices as dissemination points for the initiative and encourage their role of support and recognition of EU Aid Volunteers.

- Add new languages in the EUAV Platform.

- Promoting the use of the Forum by volunteers to create discussions of their interest.

- Simplify the system to assign vacancies to volunteers in the Platform, so that increasing the number of positions of a published vacancy can be managed easily.

- Improve EACEA website in terms of the ease of accessing information for organisations interested in becoming certified and add new languages to submit the forms (e.g. Portuguese).

- Require completion of self-assessment questionnaire only to pre-selected candidates.

- Provide in-country dissemination campaigns, considering the national context and incorporating national volunteering and humanitarian agencies.

- Communication towards other stakeholders not necessarily linked to humanitarian action but able to connect with potential volunteers: universities, professional associations, etc.

- Make the platform accessible to online and local volunteers, so that the network can be broader and more comprehensive.

For participating organisations:

- Write terms of reference of vacancies that are easy to read and understand.

- Hold face-to-face activities and events adapted to national contexts, including a well-designed dissemination process (to volunteers, to organisations, or both).

- Communicate to DG ECHO problems with the EUAV Platform.

- Diversify the dissemination of vacancies depending on the profile that is sought.

- Reinforce visibility of EU Aid Volunteers experiences and of the impact of the initiative.

- Reinforce visibility of the program and volunteering opportunities among the private/for-profit sector.

- Encourage relations with DG ECHO local offices for the visibility of the Initiative, as well as for a reinforced support and recognition of EU Aid Volunteers.

7
ARCHITECTURE POST 2020

One of the main concerns for the organisations in the consortium is the future of the Initiative after 2020 and the willingness to streamline different solidarity schemes at the EU level.

At the time of reviewing this document, the proposal for a new Regulation on the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) for 2021-2027 period has been presented and adopted at its first reading by the European Parliament. It foresees the repeal of Regulation 375/2014 and the inclusion of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative under the umbrella of the ESC.

While the Regulation Proposal is in the course of ordinary legislative proceeding, some of its core features have been laid down. In this line, the consortium welcomes aspects such as the efforts to improve the speed of the recruitment process and the inclusion of "quality and support measures". However, the consortium is concerned about other issues which put at risk the essence and objectives of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, namely:

● The age limit (18-30):

The organisations in the consortium are aware of the European Commission's endeavour to further promote youth opportunities. Nevertheless, the age restriction in humanitarian missions would make the aid volunteering programme more exclusive in a negative way, losing a lot of potential for high quality contribution to EU humanitarian operations. As a matter of fact, to date there is no other programme funded by the EU that offers citizens and long-term residents over 30 years old the opportunity to volunteer specifically in contexts of humanitarian aid.

Having regard for the main objective of the EUAV Initiative (to contribute to strengthening the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid), the consortium believes it is paramount to showcase the added value and the experience, expertise, and know-how that senior volunteers bring to the programme, especially given the technical and soft skills that humanitarian aid contexts demand.

Last, it is worth noting the uniqueness of the EU Aid Volunteers scheme: the focus on qualified and trained volunteers -with no age limits- responding to the needs of specific organisations operating in humanitarian aid.

● Certification requirements:

The "quality label" conceived under the new ESC framework should not weaken the specificities of different types of volunteering. Organisations involved in volunteering for "Humanitarian aid activities" (Strand 2), for example, should be able to follow certain standards in terms of incident management that for organisations managing volunteers under Strand 1 might be excessive. Also, a certain level of experience in humanitarian-aid-related issues should be a must.

In other words, the aforementioned recommendations regarding the certification process and requirements should always be understood by partner organizations within the pretext that managing volunteers in humanitarian contexts requires high standards of quality, specific knowledge and practices. It is also understood that such requirements may be excessive in other contexts or volunteering actions.

Accordingly, the consortium advocates for differentiated quality labels or certification requirements for organisations depending on the type of activities in which they are going to take part.

● Capacity building activities:

As shown throughout this report, the technical assistance and capacity building activities have proven to be very useful and they continue to have a high potential, not only regarding prospective certification of sending or hosting organisations, but also for the general objectives of the program related to "strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries".

The new framework foresees "quality and support measures" applicable to the 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps' strand; a welcomed addition. However, there is no specification as to which topics can be covered through capacity building activities and which should be addressed to participant organisations.

We consider it of high importance that there be the possibility of addressing humanitarian-aid-related topics that fall under this type of activities, and that local communities can benefit from them.

● Budgetary issues:

The organisations of the consortium are concerned with the changes that the new legal framework may imply budget wise. Although the financial envelope foreseen for the 2021-2027 is higher than the amount foreseen for the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative in the period 2014-2020, the lack of details in the two strands of action and the varied activities included in the framework might imply lesser resources for humanitarian aid activities.

As the report reflects, +CARE consortium considers highly relevant to invest in humanitarian aid activities, and even increase the resources or be more flexible in aspects such as human resources or activities targeting persons out of the consortia. We hope that the new framework will not result in lesser resources, thus in poorer quality of humanitarian aid activities.

● Humanitarian aid essence

The current text does not explain in detail the specific features and management of humanitarian aid activities. While this might imply more flexibility in the implementation of projects, it could also blur the specificities and essence of humanitarian aid volunteering and complementary activities.

Streamlining different solidarity activities may have positive aspects, such as better outreach and costs-saving; however, such framework puts together different activities of distinct characters (volunteering and apprenticeships or jobs, humanitarian action and other expressions of solidarity). +CARE partners are thus concerned about a potential loss of prominence and humanitarian specificity compared to the framework ensured by the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative.

Recommendations:

For EACEA and DG ECHO:

- Maintain the unique characteristics of EUAV Initiative under the new regulation.

- Consider recommending the lift of the age restriction for future "European Solidarity Humanitarian Aid" volunteers.

- Keep differentiated "quality label" or certification requirements for organisations involved in humanitarian aid activities.

- Consider the relevance and specific costs and needs of humanitarian aid activities for the split of the budget among the different strands of action.

For participating organisations:

- Share with EACEA and DG ECHO the added value and differences among the different European volunteering schemes based on their experience, with special emphasis on the added value of senior volunteers, so that it can be taken into consideration when defining the new scheme.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

ORGANISATION NAME	COUNTRY	TYPE	CATEGORY
Acción contra el Hambre España	SPAIN	SENDING	CERTIFIED
ActionAid DK	DENMARK	SENDING	NOT CERTIFIED
ActionAid Hellas	GREECE	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Alianza por la Solidaridad	SPAIN	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Comhlamh - Action for Global Justice	IRELAND	SENDING	NOT CERTIFIED
Médicos del Mundo España	SPAIN	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Focsiv - Federazione degli Organismi Cristiani Servizio Internazionale Volontario	ITALY	SENDING	CERTIFIED
GVC HQ	ITALY	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Folkekirkens Nødhjælp / DanChurchAid	DENMARK	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Gruppo di Volontariato Civile - GVC	ITALY	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Magyar Önkénteskülő Alapítvány - HVSF	HUNGARY	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Imago Mundi	ROMANIA	SENDING	NOT CERTIFIED
La Guilde	FRANCE	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Movimiento por la Paz – MPDL	SPAIN	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Pro Vobis	ROMANIA	SENDING	NOT CERTIFIED
SOS Malta	MALTA	SENDING	CERTIFIED
Területfejlesztők a Vidékért Egyesület	HUNGARY	SENDING	NOT CERTIFIED
Voluntary Service Overseas - VSO	UNITED KINGDOM	SENDING	CERTIFIED
ActionAid Zimbabwe	ZIMBABWE	HOSTING	NOT CERTIFIED
Alianza por la Solidaridad - Colombia	COLOMBIA	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
Alianza por la Solidaridad - Haití	HAITI	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
Ecuasol	ECUADOR	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
GVC Haiti	HAITI	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
GVC Monzambique	MOZAMBIQUE	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
GVC Nicaragua	NICARAGUA	HOSTING	CERTIFIED
GVC Cambodia	CAMBODIA	HOSTING	CERTIFIED

Alianza por la Solidaridad

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