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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

Annual report on the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2017

I. Introduction

As envisaged by the Treaty of Lisbon¹, the European Union (EU) launched the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2014². It aims to strengthen the EU's ability to provide needs-based humanitarian aid and to strengthen the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in non-EU countries. At the same time, it allows European citizens to show solidarity with people in need by taking part in humanitarian actions in these countries.

This report describes the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2017. It is prepared in line with Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014, which requires the Commission to submit annual reports to the European Parliament and to the Council on the progress made in implementing the Regulation. Previous reports are available online³.

The report is based on data that is collected and analysed in line with a framework for the monitoring of the implementation of actions under the initiative. The framework was drawn up and agreed between the Commission and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency (EACEA), which is responsible for managing most of the operations under the initiative.

II. Objectives and priorities

The activities described within this report were based on the 2017 annual work programme for implementing the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, adopted by the Commission⁴ in accordance with Article 21(3) of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 and Article 84(2) of the Financial Regulation⁵. EUR 20 972 000 was set aside in the budget to implement the initiative, with the following objectives:

- resilience building and disaster risk management in vulnerable, fragile or disaster-affected countries and forgotten crises;
- selection, training and deployment of volunteers;
- capacity building and technical assistance for hosting and sending organisations;
- insurance for EU Aid Volunteers, apprentices, and participants in capacity building activities in the European Union;
- implementation of the training programme and training of candidate volunteers;
- certification of sending and hosting organisations;

¹ Article 214 (5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: 'In order to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union, a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps shall be set up. The European Parliament and the Council, acting by means of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall determine the rules and procedures for the operation of the Corps.'

² Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative') (OJ L 122, 24.4.2014, p. 1), Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1398/2014 of 24 October 2014 laying down standards regarding candidate volunteers and EU Aid Volunteers (OJ L 373, 31.12.2014, p. 8). Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1244/2014 of 20 November 2014 laying down rules for the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative') (OJ L 334, 21.11.2014, p. 52).

³ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/accountability/annual-reports_en

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision C(2016) 8989 of 6.1.2017 concerning the adoption of the 2017 work programme of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

⁵ Regulation (EU, EURATOM) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002. (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012).

- developing and maintaining the EU Aid Volunteers Platform for registration, networking, online volunteering and learning, and undertaking outreach and communication actions;
- carrying out the interim evaluation of the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

III. Actions implemented in 2017

The actions described in sections 1-4 below are delegated to and implemented by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in cooperation with the Commission⁶.

The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency is responsible for the calls for proposals, calls for tender, contract management and implementing the relevant budget appropriations in line with the annual work programmes adopted by the Commission. In terms of managing operations, the Commission remains directly responsible for creating and maintaining the partners and volunteers' network, the online platform, communications and the interim evaluation of the initiative carried out in 2017.

1. Deployment

The deployment of EU Aid Volunteers to humanitarian projects in countries affected by disaster offers a concrete opportunity for EU citizens and long-term residents in the EU to show their solidarity with those in need. Full-time volunteering deployments in third countries are supported by online volunteering offered to citizens, wherever they are in the world.

44 EU Aid Volunteers were deployed through two projects from the 2015 call for proposals, and 162 EU Aid Volunteers were deployed through four projects from the 2016 call. This led to a total of 206 EU Aid Volunteers being deployed to 28 countries by the end of 2017/beginning of 2018. EU Aid Volunteers were deployed worldwide, excluding countries with ongoing armed conflicts. The numbers of volunteers, although increasing, remain well below the initial targets of 4 000 EU Aid Volunteers by 2020. Among the reasons for this are the barriers to participation, such as the certification of organisations or the need to form partnerships with other organisations to apply for EU funding. The interim evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative provides detailed findings in this regard.

The backgrounds of EU Aid Volunteers are diverse and skilled, reflecting a needs-based approach to defining volunteer deployments and selecting potential EU Aid Volunteers. The skills areas requested most often included disaster risk management, communication, finance and accounting, project management and climate change adaptation, gender equality and community-based development.

⁶ The division of tasks between the Commission and EACEA is based on *Commission Decision C (2013)9189 of 18.12.2013 delegating powers to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency with view to performance of tasks linked to the implementation of Union programmes in the field of education, audiovisual and culture comprising, in particular, implementation of appropriations entered in the general budget of the Union and of the EDF allocations.*

Volunteering examples

The deployment project 'EU Aid Volunteers in action' is run by two European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (Italy) and Alianza por la Solidaridad (Spain) and 13 third-countries organisations with the support of one associate from the University of Bologna. The project aims at involving European citizens in humanitarian aid operations through the deployment of 38 EU Aid volunteers.

In Haiti the project has supported partner organisations to build partnerships and strengthen the capacity in delivering humanitarian aid since the 2010 earthquake hit the western part of the island: *'We support small local producers and farmers' organisations and their participation in the decision making process in the Municipalities. Our aim is to contribute to a long-term and sustainable local development, in close coordination with authorities, promoters, beneficiaries and local organisations'.* ..(An EU Aid Volunteer in Haiti)

In Lebanon the project's activities complement ongoing operations in humanitarian aid and respond to needs identified locally by partner organisations: *'I moved to Zahle, Lebanon in October 2017.[...] Given the lack of previous expertise in data analysis, my contribution has a distinctive impact on [my organisations'] activities and I feel encouraged to suggest appropriate research solutions and tools. Quantitative analysis informs and supports protection activities'.*..(An EU Aid Volunteer in Lebanon)

The deployment project 'EU Aid Volunteers ACTing against disaster risks (EUAVACT)' is implemented by a consortium of ACT Alliance organisations and involve 38 volunteers' placements. The project aims at contributing to more effective (EU provided) humanitarian response, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and resilience in five countries (Ethiopia, Uganda, Nepal, Bangladesh and Cambodia) through strengthening local NGOs and vulnerable and disaster prone communities members 'aims to support more effective (EU-provided) humanitarian responses, disaster risk reduction and resilience. *'Being based in [the organisation's] Phnom Penh office, field trips such as this provide a great opportunity to see the activities being implemented. In the case of the team's trip to the communities in the Kampong Speu Province, this meant for example increased standards of living and improved diet of the most vulnerable — with a new water reservoir and canal built within the climate change adaptation plan, resilience is improved and the community's daily diet could be enriched by a consistent supply of vegetables such as tomatoes, water melons, cucumbers and eggplants'.*(A story from an EU Aid Volunteer in Cambodia)

Stories from the field:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/echo/eu-aid-volunteers_en/stories_en

Deployment projects: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/echo/eu-aid-volunteers_en/projects_en

2017 marked the third year of the implementation of the initiative. The 2017 call for proposals⁷ was published on 3 March 2017 with a total budget of EUR 12 600 000 for the co-financing of projects. The call aimed to co-finance projects for the deployment of EU Aid Volunteers, including apprenticeship placements for junior professionals and additional capacity building activities carried out by volunteers.

Six projects were selected⁸ for co-funding with a total EU grant of EUR 5 726 880. These will result in the deployment of 175 EU Aid Volunteers starting in 2018.

The first eight online volunteering opportunities were published and completed in 2017.

⁷ EACEA/08/2017, Official Journal No 2017/C 67/09 of 3.3.2017.

⁸ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/list_of_successful_applications.pdf

2. Technical assistance and capacity building

Capacity building and technical assistance projects⁹ that are supported through funding provided by the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, strengthen the abilities of the organisations intending to deploy EU Aid Volunteers and ensure that organisations comply with the standards and procedures drawn up by the initiative.

In 2017, a call for proposals was published¹⁰ providing for the co-financing of projects for capacity building for hosting organisations and technical assistance for EU-based sending organisations, in areas such as disaster risk management, volunteer management and needs assessment methodology. As indicated in the annual work programme¹¹, the 2017 budget allocated was EUR 7 607 000.

18 applications (4 for technical assistance and 14 for capacity building) were selected for co-funding¹² with a total EU grant of EUR 9 909 346.

Overall, the calls in 2014-2017 resulted in the funding of 22 capacity building projects, involving 242 organisations from 18 EU countries and 55 non-EU countries. Eleven technical assistance projects, with a total of 66 beneficiaries from 25 EU countries, were funded. These strengthened the management and operational systems of participating organisations and helped them to work in partnership to implement best practices in humanitarian aid delivery and volunteer management.

Project examples

Capacity building

The "*EU Aid Volunteers — Getting Involved*" project, led by Gruppo Di Volontariato Civile (Italy), brought together EU and non-EU partners with the goal of strengthening the capacities of organisations to respond to disasters, develop local volunteering, and reach the volunteer management standards required to participate in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. The project was implemented through a combination of activities including training of trainers, exchange visits, regional workshops and toolkits tailored according to needs identified at local level.

The *ACT for Humanitarian Capacity Development in EU Aid Volunteers initiative* project, led by Stichting Interkerkelijke Organisatie Voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, (The Netherlands), brought together a large consortium of organisations from countries including Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda and Bangladesh. Through a combination of e-learning, organisational capacity assessments and emergency preparedness & resilience building plans and training, among other activities, project partners worked towards achieving the certification requirements of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, and building the humanitarian capacities and increased leadership capacities of local and national NGOs in disaster-prone countries.

The *Volunteering in Humanitarian Aid — Host Organisations* project, led by Association France Volontaires (France), carried out activities to improve community resilience by building the capacity of local volunteers, and worked towards the certification of hosting organisations by strengthening their volunteer management and developing a culture of 'humanitarian volunteering'. In addition to the objective of project partners becoming certified as sending or hosting organisations under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, the project has also boosted

⁹ Article 10 (6) and Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014.

¹⁰ EACEA 09/2017, Official Journal No 2017/C 67/09 of 3.3.2017.

¹¹ C(2016) 8989 final of 6.1.2017.

¹² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eu-aid-volunteers/selection-results/technical-assistance-and-capacity-building-eacea092017_en. This exceeded the amount initially allocated for this activity strand (EUR 7 607 000) and funding was re-allocated from the underspend on the deployment strand. Initial figures from the application stage were adapted later on.

their ability to work in partnerships within the structure of the EU Aid Volunteers project consortium, and to benefit from access to networks in other organisations.

Technical Assistance

The *Technical Assistance for Humanitarian Aid Organisation from Central Eastern Europe to Enable Efficient Deployment of Volunteers* project, led by Polska Akcja Humanitarna Fundacja (Poland), brought together organisations from Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia. The project's main objective was to assist the consortium in the certification process of becoming sending organisations within the framework of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. It carried out focused training that resulted in an increase in the number of people trained in human resources, volunteer management, knowledge management, and project management. It also aimed to make improvements to knowledge management within each organisation, to help prevent the knowledge drain which occurs due to staff rotation, and to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and experience among employees and volunteers.

Strengthening Human Resource Capacity for Volunteer Management and Humanitarian Response, led by Concern Worldwide (Ireland), aimed to strengthen the human resources systems of sending organisations to improve the capacity of participating organisations in volunteer management to reach EU Aid Volunteers certification standards, and to share learning and experience from the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. The consortium partners have become certified sending organisations and are currently participating in projects to deploy EU Aid Volunteers.

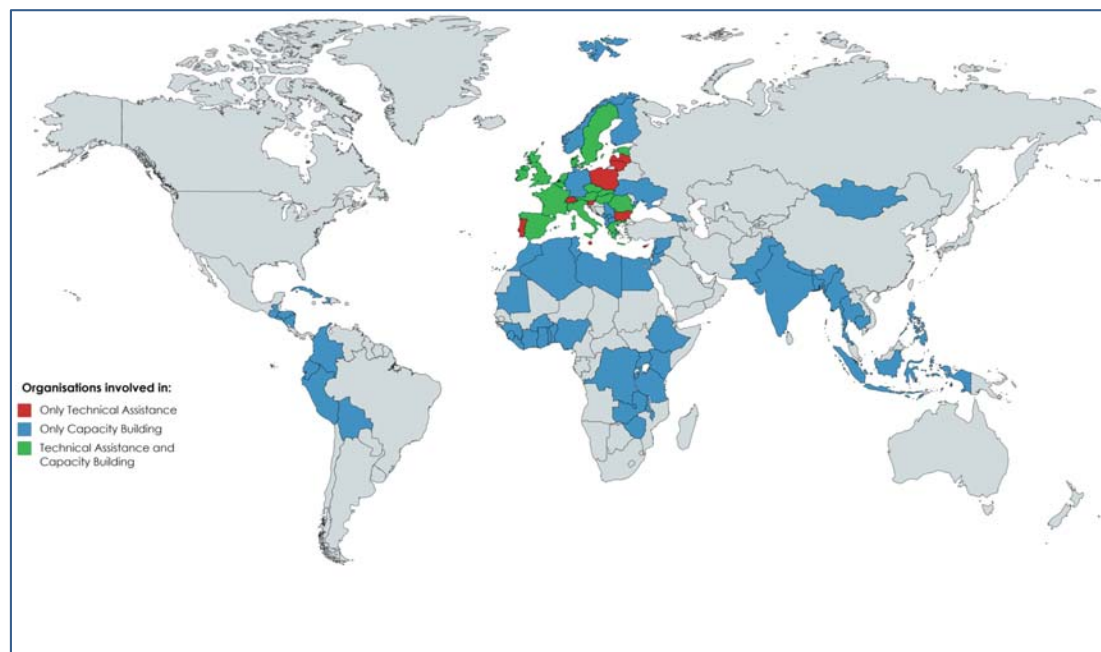


Figure 1: Technical assistance and capacity building EU Aid Volunteers projects 2015 – 2017

Organisations involved in:

- Only technical assistance
- Only capacity building
- Technical assistance and capacity building

3. Certification

Organisations that wish to send or host EU Aid Volunteers must be certified as sending (non-governmental organisations or public bodies based in the EU) or hosting organisations (non-governmental organisations and public bodies based in non-EU countries, or international organisations) under the certification mechanism in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. This checks that participating organisations are fully able to apply the volunteer management standards drawn up by the EU Aid Volunteers initiative to manage volunteers before and during their deployment.

An open call was published in 2015, allowing for ongoing applications until 30 September 2020¹³. In 2017, 63 new organisations were certified which brings the total number of certified organisation under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative to 145 (36 sending and 109 hosting).

4. Training programme

The training programme for EU Aid Volunteers is delivered by a consortium led by the company ICF. In 2017, training was delivered for 178 candidate EU Aid Volunteers in training centres in Austria and the Netherlands. As in previous training rounds, a number of reserve candidates attended the training to ensure that substitute volunteers may be chosen to replace candidates if they resign or are no longer available. Final selection then takes place following the training.

The EU Aid Volunteers training programme is based on a competence framework laid down in Delegated Regulation 1398/2014 and is delivered through a combined learning approach, with online preparatory learning and face-to-face classroom training, comprised of mandatory and optional training modules, and a scenario-based exercise¹⁴.

While the course had previously only been delivered in English, in 2017 for the first time, one group of volunteers was instructed in Spanish. Candidate EU Aid Volunteers' satisfaction with the training remains high, with an average score of 9 out of 10 points.

5. Support measures

Communication work around the initiative in 2017 included the production of a series of videos aimed at potential EU Aid Volunteers and EU Aid Volunteers organisations, and the provision of information on the initiative to the general public. A communication package that highlighted the work of EU Aid Volunteers on the ground and their solidarity with those in need was used by the Commission, partner organisations and other external media and non-governmental organisation outlets for the International Volunteer Day.

¹³ <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/certification-call-announcement-012115.pdf>

¹⁴ Annex II of Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1244/2014.

The **EU Aid Volunteers platform** provides details of vacancies for full-time deployment volunteering and online volunteering. It also provides tools for managing EU Aid Volunteers, a database of successfully trained volunteers, tools to manage online volunteering assignments, collaborative spaces for volunteers and projects, a public forum where updates about the initiative are posted, the possibility of posting stories from the field, and reporting and survey tools. The platform is consulted by visitors worldwide and the subscriptions service for volunteering vacancies had around 1 500 subscribers at the end of 2017.

A **network workshop** was held in February 2017 for organisations that are involved in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative through deployment projects, certification under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative or in technical assistance or capacity building projects. The key aim of the workshop was to gather lessons learnt, experience, advice and opinions from participating humanitarian aid and volunteer organisations to shape the future of the EU Aid Volunteers' programme. 93 participants from 45 EU and non-EU countries attended the workshop. Participating organisations were also invited to nominate other organisations with whom they were interested in working in partnership to attend, in order to raise awareness of the initiative. The network workshop was supplemented with outreach events in EU countries during the year.

An **info day** was organised by Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency on 5 April 2017 to explain the 2017 funding opportunities available under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. The event gathered 83 participants and was also followed via web-streaming.

As set out in Article 27(4)(b) of the Regulation, the Commission is required to submit an **interim evaluation** report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the results obtained and the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of Regulation No 375/2014 on the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. A report compiled by an external contractor was finalised in 2017¹⁵ and provided an assessment of the results obtained and the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the Regulation. It included assessments of the initiative's impact on the humanitarian sector and the cost-effectiveness of the programme during the first three years of implementation, following its establishment in 2014. The overall conclusion is that the initiative provides added value and its objectives are relevant to stakeholders. Among the challenges that need to be addressed are the simplification of processes and administrative procedures, reducing the time for deployment, further synergies with existing Commission programmes and projects and shift of focus from funding processes (supporting volunteer management or organisational capability and capacity) to humanitarian impact-oriented activities. The report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on interim evaluation of the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative provides more details on the results and potential areas for further development of the initiative.

IV. Conclusions and way forward

Progress on the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2017 was marked by the ongoing implementation of the deployment and capacity building/technical assistance projects funded in previous years. Six new projects for deployment of volunteers, four for technical assistance and fourteen capacity building projects were selected in 2017. The number of EU Aid Volunteers deployed to third countries is further increasing: the 2017 call resulted in 175

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations/thematic-evaluations_en

deployment placements while the numbers in the previous years were 44 from the 2015 call and 162 from the 2016 call.. The training programme has again achieved high satisfaction rates among volunteers and more training sessions are planned for 2018 than were carried out in 2017. In addition to training in Spanish, training in French is also planned.

The ongoing certification process in 2017 resulted in 63 certified organisations (in addition to 20 in 2015 and 62 in 2016). By the end of 2017, there was a total of 145 certified sending and hosting organisations. This means the initiative has now made promising progress towards reaching a critical mass of certified organisations to deploy a larger number of volunteers. Further simplification of the certification process was carried out in 2017, and the simplified forms were made accessible online in 2018.

The EU Aid Volunteers platform has been further developed and hosted its first online volunteering vacancies. The platform is now also able to offer online volunteering opportunities that support capacity building and technical assistance projects' activities, for example through research. It is therefore expected that online assignments will increase in the coming months. In 2018, the EU Aid Volunteers platform will increasingly be used to publish stories from volunteers and will be further adapted to respond to the needs of organisations in relation to managing volunteers.

In 2018, in line with the objectives and priorities of the initiative as set by the annual work programme¹⁶, the activities described above will continue to provide opportunities for more hosting and sending organisations to benefit from capacity building and technical assistance activities and more EU Aid Volunteers will be deployed in countries outside the EU.

Communication activities will continue to promote the EU Aid Volunteers initiative and further evidence will be gathered about the impact of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative on participating organisations and volunteers. Work will continue on strengthening the EU Aid Volunteers network, including a network workshop for organisations that participate in the initiative and a workshop to allow EU Aid Volunteers to share their experiences of their deployment in the field and build closer links with the humanitarian sector. Lessons from both these events will support the further development of the initiative.

These actions are envisaged within the current implementation period until the end of 2020. The aim is to speed up processes, simplify administrative procedures, improve support for interested organisations, further promote the funding opportunities and share success stories.

In the context of preparing the way forward in the next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021 – 2027, the Commission proposed to integrate the EU Aid Volunteers initiative into the European Solidarity Corps to maximise synergies and impact and achieve greater simplification.

More information on the EU Aid Volunteers initiative can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/eu-aid-volunteers_en

¹⁶ Commission Implementing Decision C(2018)165 of 22.1.2018 concerning the adoption of the 2018 work programme.