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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 2020

I. Introduction

Acting in accordance with Article 214(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU launched the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2014¹. This report describes the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2020. It is prepared in line with Article 27(4) of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014², which requires the Commission to submit annual reports to the European Parliament and to the Council on progress made in implementing the Regulation. Previous reports for 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 are available online³.

The report is based on data collected and analysed in line with the Framework for the monitoring of the implementation of actions under the initiative. This framework was drawn up and agreed between the Commission and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, which is responsible for managing most of the operations carried out under the initiative.

II. Objectives and priorities

The activities described in this report were based on the Commission's 2020 Annual work programme to implement the EU Aid Volunteers initiative⁴ in accordance with Article 21(3) of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014. A budget of EUR 19 355 000 was set aside to implement the initiative.

The objective of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative is to contribute to strengthening the EU's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid aimed at preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity and to strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries, particularly by means of disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and by enhancing the link between relief, rehabilitation and development. At the same time, it allows European citizens to show solidarity with people in need by taking part in humanitarian actions in these countries.

III. Actions implemented in 2020

The actions described in Sections III.1-III.4 of this report are delegated to and implemented by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, in cooperation with the Commission⁵.

¹ 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).

² OJ L 122, 24.4.2014, p. 1-17.

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

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision C (2020)59 of 13.1.2020 on the financing of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative and the adoption of the work programme for 2020.

⁵ 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*

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency is responsible for the calls for proposals, calls for tender, contract management and implementing the budget allocation in line with the Commission's annual work programmes. In terms of managing operations, the Commission remains directly responsible for creating and maintaining the partners and volunteers' network, the online platform, communication activities, and the ex-post evaluation.

III.1 Deployment

The deployment of EU Aid Volunteers to humanitarian projects in countries outside of the EU has been impacted considerably by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. The measures adopted in many countries to restrict the mobility of citizens and increase social distancing hampered the regular implementation of most of the ongoing and planned activities. In many cases participants were either unable to travel from their home base, or were faced with difficulties to find travel opportunities to return from their place of deployment to their home countries.

When the pandemic broke out, some organisations still succeeded to organise travel for their volunteers from their place of deployment on regular flights, others agreed with their deployed volunteers to stay in the host country and work from their place of accommodation until an opportunity for a repatriation was available. Others decided in agreement with their volunteers that volunteers should remain in the country of deployment because it was still safe and possible to carry out the activities as planned.

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency provided guidance on the financial and organisational consequences for activities under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative to participating organisations and monitored the situation closely. Exceptionally repatriated EU Aid Volunteers were allowed to continue their deployment activities remotely from their home countries.

Between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2020, 105 EU Aid Volunteers were deployed to projects funded through the 2018 and 2019 budgets and 23 apprenticeship placements at the headquarters of organisations in the EU took place during this period. More information on the type of projects and organisations involved can be found on the website: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/echo/eu-aid-volunteers_en/.

Since the launch of the initiative, 322 online volunteering assignments were published, of which 117 in 2020. The most frequently requested tasks included translation, proofreading and support to communication activities.

Due to the duration and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU Aid Volunteers initiative could not be carried out in compliance with the requirements of the Regulation and within a reasonable timeframe. The call for proposals for deployment 2020 published in April 2020 was therefore cancelled.

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.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agency allowed projects to exceptionally request extensions going beyond the maximum duration foreseen in the call, up to a maximum duration of 36 months. In 2020, such extensions were mainly granted to projects funded from the 2018 budget.

III.2 Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

Technical assistance and capacity building projects⁶ supported through EU Aid Volunteers initiative funding strengthen the capacities of organisations intending to deploy EU Aid Volunteers and ensure that they comply with the standards and procedures set through the initiative.

No call for proposals for technical assistance and capacity building was foreseen to be published in 2020.

The ongoing projects were impacted by the COVID-19 situation and many of their activities had to be transformed into online events. As for deployment projects, extensions going beyond the maximum duration foreseen in the call were granted.

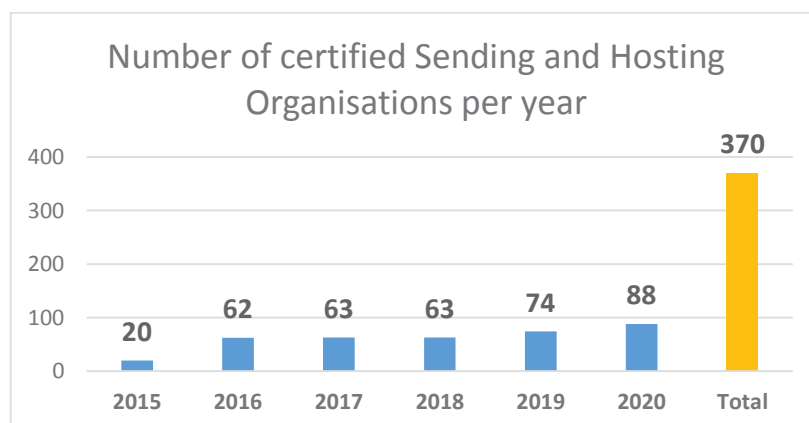
Overall, the 2015-2019 calls resulted in the funding of 32 capacity building projects and 13 technical assistance projects, involving 440 beneficiaries/project partners.

III.3 Certification

Organisations that wish to deploy EU Aid Volunteers must be certified as sending or hosting organisations under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative's certification mechanism. This certification checks if participating organisations are able to apply the volunteer management standards to manage volunteers before and during their deployment.

An open call was published in 2015, allowing for ongoing applications until 30 September 2020⁷. By the end of 2020, 370 sending and hosting organisations have been certified (74 sending and 296 hosting organisations), providing opportunities to deploy more EU Aid Volunteers.

The chart below shows the number of organisations certified between 2015 and 2020.



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

⁷ <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/certification-call-announcement-012115.pdf>

III.4 Training programme

The training programme of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative is based on a competence framework set out in Commission Delegated Regulation 1398/2014 and is delivered using a combined learning approach, with online preparatory learning and face-to-face classroom training including mandatory and optional training modules and a scenario-based exercise⁸.

Due to the expiration of the previous framework contract in spring 2020, a new call for tender had been launched in 2019 and the new framework contract was signed in June 2020 with a consortium of training providers led by the company ICF.

The first and only cycle of the EU Aid Volunteers training in 2020 took place from 17 to 29 February in Pisa, Italy and was organised by Scuola Universitaria Superiore Pisa, Sant'Anna, a partner in the training consortium. Fifty-four candidate volunteers (junior and senior, 10 men and 44 women) were trained divided in three groups. The courses were taught in English and all candidate volunteers passed the training successfully.

The training activities were afterwards put on hold. It was initially hoped to resume the face-to-face training in September 2020, but the training had to be cancelled due to lockdowns, travel restrictions and quarantine requirements in many EU Member States. Given that the deployment call 2020 was cancelled there is no need to train 600 new candidate volunteers in 2021 and 2022. From the total training foreseen for 1 200 candidate volunteers resulting from the calls 2019 and 2020, it is still foreseen to train the remaining volunteers from the 2019 deployment call at the end of 2021 if the situation allows.

IV. Support measures

The support measures budget covers communication and visibility activities and the maintenance and helpdesk of the EU Aid Volunteers Platform. In 2020 it also covered exceptionally an ex-post evaluation study.

A volunteering event was planned for spring 2020, but the event had to be cancelled. Other planned promotional activities to accompany the publication of volunteering vacancies and the organisation of further outreach could also not take place because major events (for example the European Development Days) were cancelled and the publication of volunteering vacancies was put on hold. Three newsletters providing updates on the situation of volunteers and the continuation of the programme were published on the Commission's website and sent to the distribution list (February, May and December 2020).

In 2020, ninety new stories from the field were published on the EU Aid Volunteers Platform. The Platform will continue to be used in 2021 for the publication of volunteering vacancies and stories until other tools may be developed under the European Solidarity Corps (https://europa.eu/youth/euaidvolunteers_en).

Article 27 of Regulation 375/2014 foresees that the Commission has to present an ex-post evaluation report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative for the seven-year financial period of implementation no later

⁸ Annex II to Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1244/2014.

than 31 December 2021. A contractor to carry out an evaluation study was selected in spring 2020 and the work started in August 2020. The draft final report was received in February 2021 and will feed into the drafting of the ex-post evaluation report.

V. Conclusions and way forward

The implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers had to be put on hold abruptly in spring 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the uncertainties with regard to travel possibilities and working conditions only very few deployments continued and many of them were carried out remotely. Travel restrictions, quarantine requirements and lack of testing capacities impeded the organisation of face-to-face trainings in a cost-effective and safe way.

By the end of 2020 trainings had not resumed and uncertainty linked to the effects of the ongoing pandemic persisted so that no new activities had been planned. The 2020 call for proposals for deployment was therefore cancelled so that only EU Aid Volunteers of projects selected in 2018 and 2019 continued to carry out some activities. Overall, from the allocated 2020 budget, EUR 16.9 million in commitment appropriations and EUR 14.2 million in payment appropriations could not be used and were transferred to other programmes in Heading 4 of the EU budget.

Since the launch of the initiative, 370 organisations were certified. A number of these organisations were re-certified for another three years and this process will continue in 2021 for organisations that were awarded certification in 2018 and are still active in deployment projects. The call for certification expired in September 2020 and new applications for a quality label under the European Solidarity Corps will be possible in 2021.

In December 2020 a political agreement was reached between the legislators on the renewed European Solidarity Corps legislation that will also include a humanitarian aid strand and replace the EU Aid Volunteers initiative from 2021.