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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 2015

I. Introduction

As envisaged by the Treaty of Lisbon¹, the European Union established the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2014². The objective is to contribute to strengthening the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid and to strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries, while giving the European citizens an opportunity to show solidarity with people in need through taking part in humanitarian action in these countries.

Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 requires the Commission to submit annual reports to the European Parliament and to the Council examining the progress made in implementing the Regulation³.

This annual report outlines the main activities and achievements in the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2015 which was a very important year for the initiative to become operational mapping out the next steps in its implementation.

II. Objectives and priorities

The activities in 2015 are based on the Annual Work Programme for the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative in 2015 adopted by the Commission⁴ in accordance with Article 21(3) of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 and Article 128 of the Financial Regulation. The budget for the implementation of the initiative in 2015 was set at EUR 13 868 000 for the purpose of building capacities of hosting organisations in third countries and providing technical assistance for sending organisations based in the EU Member States; contributing to resilience building and disaster risk management in vulnerable, fragile or disaster affected countries and forgotten crises; preparing the selection, training and deployment of volunteers and the public launch of the initiative, establishment of the EU Aid Volunteers Platform, launch of the call for tender for the selection of the training provider, and various communication activities. Activities funded under the Work Programme for 2014⁵ such as the ongoing certification of sending and hosting organisations; the establishment of an insurance scheme for EU Aid volunteers and the selection of projects for capacity building and technical assistance also took place in 2015 following the adoption of the delegated and the implementing acts mentioned above.

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 The first annual report on the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative was submitted in 2014, COM(2015)335 of 13.07.2015.

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision C(2015)1548 of 12.3.2015 concerning the adoption of the 2015 work programme and the financing for the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

⁵ Commission Implementing Decision C(2014)3872 of 16.6.2014 concerning the adoption of the 2014 work programme and the financing for the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

III. Actions implemented in 2015

State of play Selection and Contracting phase - 31st December 2015														
Action	Planned Interventions	Call Reference	Call Deadline	Number of Applications received	Number of ineligible Applications	Number of rejected Projects	Number of selected Projects	% selected Projects of eligible applications	1st Award Decision made	Time to award (in months)	Time to contract (in months)	Sum TTA TTC	Total Actual Grants	
Certification of sending and hosting organisations	100	N/A	30/09/2020	37	0	0	20*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Deployment of EU Aid Volunteers	25	EACEA/25/2015	30/10/2015	2	0	0	2	100%	N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Technical Assistance	20	EACEA/03//2015	01/04/2015	4	1	0	3	100%	10/07/2015	3.57	2.30	5.87	1,327,753.32	
			01/09/2015	3	1	1	1	50%	01/12/2015	3.30	0.23	3.53	196,889.47	
Capacity Building			01/04/2015	7	3	1	3	75%	10/07/2015	3.57	2.53	6.10	1,536,821.07	
			01/09/2015	5	2	0	3	100%	01/12/2015	3.30	0.30	3.60	1,766,251.65	
Total Grants (excl. Certification)	45	N/A	N/A	21	7	2	12	85.00%	N/A	3.44	1.34	4.78	4,827,715.51	

* the remaining 17 applications will be assessed in 2016 ** the award decision will be taken in 2016

1. Certification

All organisations wishing to send or host volunteers under the EUAV initiative must be certified⁶. The certification process verifies that the high standards and procedures of volunteer management set to protect and manage volunteers during their deployment under the EUAV initiative can be fully realised and met by all participating organisations. The certification process in 2015 is funded under the Work Programme for 2014. A call for applications was published in January 2015⁷. The objective is to compile a list of 100 certified sending and hosting organisations wishing to participate in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. 37 applications have been submitted, 13 sending organisations and 7 hosting organisations have been certified and no applications have been rejected by the end of 2015⁸. The remaining 17 applications are being evaluated in 2016. Certification is an on-going process and applications will be accepted until 30 September 2020.

2. Technical assistance/Capacity building

The EU Aid Volunteers initiative provides opportunities for capacity building for hosting organisations and technical assistance for sending organisations⁹. The objective is to strengthen the capacities of the organisations intending to participate in the initiative and to ensure compliance with the standards and procedures regarding candidate volunteers and EU Aid Volunteers. A call for proposals EACEA/03/2015 was published in January 2015¹⁰ providing funding with a total budget of EUR 6 948 000 for the co-financing of projects for capacity building for hosting organisations and technical assistance for sending organisations in different areas such as disaster risk management, volunteer management, capacity to undergo certification, tools and methods of needs assessment, building partnerships, communication activities. The call had two rounds (first deadline for submission of applications was 1 April 2015 and the second deadline was 1 September 2015). 19 applications have been submitted (7 for technical assistance and 12 for capacity building). Ten projects were selected for co-funding with a EU grant of EUR 4 827 715.51: six projects under the first round (three for technical assistance and three for capacity building) for a total amount of EUR 2 864 574.39 and four projects (one for technical assistance and three for capacity building) under the second round for a total amount of EUR 1 963 141.12. 22 organisations under technical assistance projects and 66 organisations under capacity building projects are involved in the implementation to strengthen their management and

⁶ Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 375/2014; Articles 32 and 33 of Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1398/2014

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

⁸ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eu-aid-volunteers/selection-results/selection-results-certification-mechanism-for-sending-and-hosting-organisations_en

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

¹⁰ OJ C 17, 20.1.2015, p. 10.

operational systems, and to work in partnership to implement best practices in humanitarian aid delivery and volunteer management¹¹. The projects are contributing largely to the process of partnership building with 57 non-FPA/FAFA¹² partners participating and 120 new partner relationships created between organisations as a result of the capacity building and technical assistance strand of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

The projects for technical assistance for organisations based in the EU are focused on strengthening capacity in the area of networking. Partnership and alliance building amongst organisations is a clear priority area, which organisations wish to develop. Other thematic areas includes organisational development, project management, ensuring equal opportunity and understanding relevant national laws applying to the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, some of which are features of the standards and procedures of volunteer management under the EUAV initiative, and requirements under the certification process. The projects for capacity building for organisations based in third countries are also focused on partnership-building and alliance formation. The establishment of standards governing the management of partnerships, needs assessments, programme management and local volunteering development are other thematic areas which organisations intend to strengthen.

Case study: boosting local response to floods

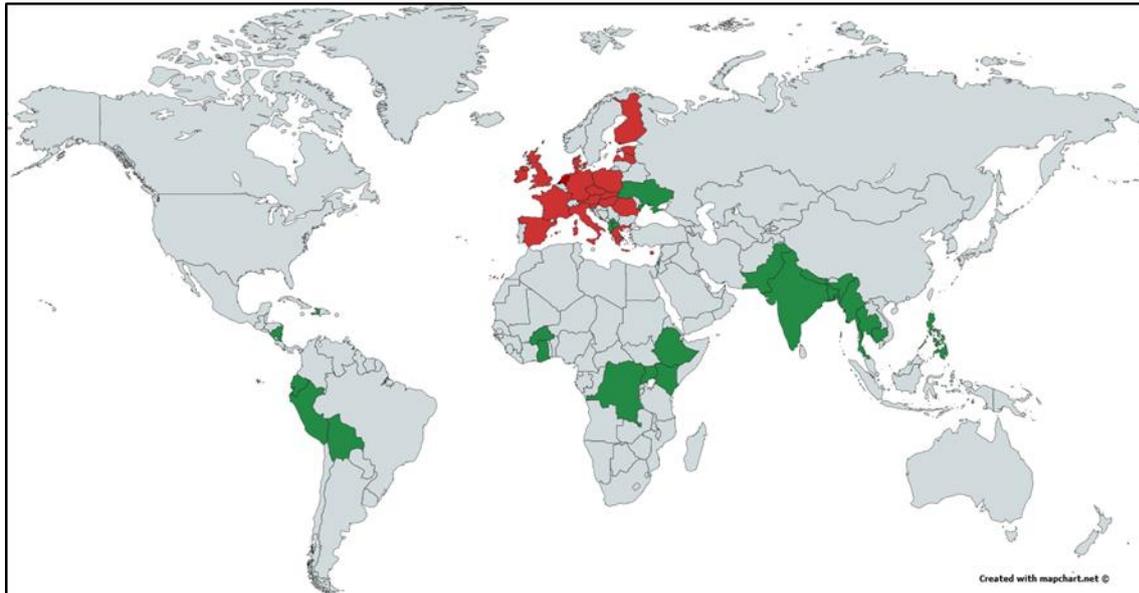
Through the Balkans and Europe for Development of Resilience Initiatives project – BEDRIN - organisations in EU countries and in the Western Balkans are gearing up for involvement in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative while also building up local organisations' capacities to face floods and related risks in the Drin river basin area.

Case study: getting organisations involved with EU Aid Volunteers:

Volunteering in Humanitarian Aid - Sending Organisation (VolinHA-SO) is working with partners across nine EU countries and is using the EUAV standards as defined in the certification process to help to build their capacities, with a particular focus on strengthening volunteer management policy. Through doing this the project aims to strengthen links between volunteering organisations and increase their ability to take part in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

¹¹ List of applications selected for funding under Round 1 and Round 2 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eu-aid-volunteers/selection-results/technical-assistance-and-capacity-building_en

¹² ECHO partners under Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) or Financial and administrative framework agreement between the EU and the UN (FAFA).



Capacity Building and Technical Assistance projects 2015

- Project partners based in EU countries
- Project partners based in third countries

3. Deployment

Deployment of volunteers is one of the main actions under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. The objective is to select, prepare and deploy junior and senior volunteers to contribute to strengthening the Union’s capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid aimed at strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable and disaster-affected communities in third countries. A call for proposals EACEA/25/2015 was published in July 2015¹³ providing funding with a total budget of EUR 8 400 000 for the co-financing of projects for deployment of EU Aid Volunteers, including apprenticeship placement for junior professionals and capacity building and/or technical assistance for implementing organisations. The timing of the call takes into account the progress of the certification mechanism and the need for a pool of certified organisations. As required by the legislation, the volunteers may be deployed (sent and hosted) by certified organisations only. Moreover, in conformity with the Annual Work Programme 2015, the projects are to be implemented by a consortium of at least three certified sending and three certified hosting organisations. By 30 October 2015 (the deadline of the call for proposals) two applications involving 26 organisations were submitted. The evaluation of the applications and the signature of the grant agreements are to be finalised in 2016 with a maximum EU grant of EUR 1 392 442.17 and start of the implementation foreseen for June/July 2016.

4. Insurance

Following the Annual Work Programme for 2014 providing budget allocation of EUR 4 000 000 for the period 2015-2020 for the insurance of EU Aid Volunteers and apprenticeship placements, an open call for tenders was published¹⁴ on 31 December 2014. The objective is to ensure that all volunteers participating in the EU Aid Volunteers

¹³ OJ C 249, 30.7.2015, p. 8.

¹⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/calls-for-tender-eacea/insurance-for-eu-aid-volunteers_en

initiative are covered by a complete insurance plan specifically designed to protect them during the entire duration of their deployment. On 4 November 2015 a service contract was concluded with Cigna International Health Service BVBA for a maximum amount of EUR 2 500 000 setting up an insurance scheme to be applicable as soon as the EU Aid Volunteers are deployed. The first interim report consisting of an implementation plan mentioning the different steps, related activities, and a proposed timeline to establish the necessary service structure was submitted in December 2015 by the contractor.

5. Training Programme

An open call for tender for training was published on 30 October 2015¹⁵. The objective is to develop the training programme for the EU Aid Volunteers initiative; to provide training services to candidate volunteers; and to assess the competences of the candidate volunteers trained pursuant to Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1398/2014 and Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1244/2014. The evaluation of the applications and the signature of the framework contract are to be finalised in the first half of 2016 with a training programme to be available to the candidate EU Aid Volunteers before their deployment.

The actions presented in sections 1-5 are delegated to and implemented by the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Agency (EACEA) in cooperation with the Commission services¹⁶. 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. EACEA is an executive agency responsible for the implementation of the technical aspects of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative through calls for proposals, calls for tender and contract management thereafter and for the implementation of the corresponding budget appropriations in line with the annual work programmes adopted by the Commission.

In terms of operational management, the Commission remains directly responsible for setting up the Network of the EU Aid Volunteers, the central online platform and communications.

The modalities and procedures of interaction are governed by Memoranda of Understanding between Commission services and EACEA. In 2015 the cooperation between the Commission services and EACEA further evolved and resulted in active interaction in the implementation of the programme. As monitoring is a key issue for the initiative, a Framework for monitoring the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative was established and entered into force on 1 October 2015. The framework outlines the distribution of tasks with regard to the data collection and analysis. The data collected through this framework and the relevant analysis shall feed into the reporting process and shall contribute to the interim and ex post evaluation of the initiative. The first joint missions involving representatives of EACEA and the Commission took place contributing to the better monitoring of the projects.

¹⁵ <http://ted.europa.eu/udl?uri=TED:NOTICE:396826-2015:TEXT:EN:HTML&tabId=1>

¹⁶ 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 (as amended by Commission Decision C(2015)658 of 12.2.2015).

6. Support Measures

With the current challenges facing the Union, it has never been more important to ensure effective communication and awareness-raising amongst EU citizens on concrete actions of solidarity supported by the Union, and in particular through the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

The Annual Work Programme for 2015 provides financial assistance of EUR 418 000 for support measures aiming at information and awareness raising of potential beneficiaries concerning the programme.

A Communication Plan (2015-2020)¹⁷ was approved in July 2015 outlining the communication strategy, objectives, key messages and possible communication activities underpinning the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. Implementation is undertaken by the Commission and third parties participating in the initiative primarily volunteers, sending organisations in Europe and hosting organisations in third countries.

An Info and Networking Day was organised in January 2015. The aim of this public event was to explain to the future implementing partners the funding opportunities available under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative and to launch the first activities (the call for proposals for technical assistance and capacity building and the call for applications for the certification of sending and hosting organisations). The event was successful in terms of reaching potential beneficiaries with 108 persons attending, and organisations from 21 countries represented.

A 'Back to Base' conference was held in Brussels in September 2015, with volunteers and partner organisations from the pilot projects coming together to share their experiences and learning¹⁸. The conference provided the opportunity for participants to contribute to the ongoing development of the initiative, including input on the EU Aid Volunteers platform. Participants also shared their stories in a series of video interviews¹⁹, an effective communication product for the future promotion of the initiative.

A short film "Becoming a certified organization and benefit from highly-skilled EU Aid Volunteers" was produced explaining the certification process and helping the organisations to participate in the initiative.²⁰

The EU Aid Volunteers network allows stakeholders to exchange best practice and increase participation. The network has been already implemented through events such as partners' roundtable meetings to allow partners to exchange best practice and learn from their experiences of the programme. The key tool to enable the work of this network is the EU Aid Volunteers platform, which entered production in 2015. The platform under development by the Commission will support partners in the deployment of EU Aid Volunteers through providing a volunteer tracking system, enabling online volunteering and functioning as the database of EU Aid Volunteers. The platform will provide links for the EU Aid Volunteers to the training platform and their continuous learning and development pathway, and a tool to communicate with project partners and other volunteers.

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/euaidvolunteers/EUAV_CommunicationPlan_en.pdf

¹⁸ Conference summary: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/EUAV_report.pdf

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/eu-aid-volunteers_en

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOKqT_xpIXw

The EU Aid Volunteers platform will also provide a way for partner organisations and volunteers to share stories from the field to facilitate knowledge exchange and enable partners and volunteers to work more closely together, supporting better coordination. The platform will be launched in 2016, with its initial phase focusing on support for the first deployment projects.

In 2015 a unique visual identity for the EU Aid Volunteers initiative was developed comprising the EU flag, the name of the initiative and the EU Aid Volunteers slogan 'We Care, We Act'. It is being rolled out across the initiative, to be used by the Commission and all third parties participating in the initiative, such as the implementing organisations in third countries, the sending organisations across the EU, and the volunteers, in compliance with the EU Aid Volunteers visibility guidelines and the EU Aid Volunteers communication plan.²¹

In 2015 several outreach activities involving Member States and international organisations took place aiming to present information on the opportunities provided by the EU Aid Volunteers initiative and to encourage the potential beneficiaries and volunteers to participate in the programme.

The actions presented in section 6 are implemented by the Commission in cooperation with EACEA following the distribution of tasks between EACEA and the Commission services in the context of the delegation of powers.

IV. Conclusions and way forward

Following the adoption of the legislative package on the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, 2015 was the first year of implementation of the full range of activities, including the certification of organisations, the launch of the call for proposals for technical assistance and capacity building, the call for proposals for deployment, the call for tenders for the training of volunteers, the establishment of the insurance scheme and the start of the development of the EU Aid Volunteers Platform. The pilot phase implemented from 2011 to 2014 was closed and the initiative formally launched with a conference attended by volunteers and organisations that had participated in the pilot phase.

Based on this solid foundation, the implementation of the initiative will continue. The concrete actions will be focused on the selection, training and deployment of volunteers; the implementation of the current projects and the selection of new projects on deployment of volunteers, capacity building and technical assistance for hosting and sending organisations; the certification of applicant sending and hosting organisations. The activities related to the application of the insurance scheme and the training of volunteers will continue. The EU Aid Volunteers Platform for registration, networking, online volunteering and learning will be launched.

In line with the Work Programme for 2016²², one of the main objectives will be to contribute to resilience building and disaster risk management in vulnerable, fragile or disaster affected countries and forgotten crises, including actions in the following stages of the disaster management cycle: disaster prevention, preparedness, disaster risk reduction and recovery

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/euaidvolunteers/EUAV_CommunicationPlan_en.pdf

²² Commission Implementing Decision C(2015)9058 of 15.12.2015 concerning the adoption of the 2016 work programme and the financing for the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

from natural and man-made disasters, early warning. The deployment of EU Aid volunteers in third countries and the projects aiming at the capacity building of the local communities will respond to the Commission`s strong political commitment on resilience and will contribute to building better prepared, inclusive, and stable societies, improving services and opportunities, mitigation of risks, and reducing suffering and loss.

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