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

**How to express EU citizen's solidarity through volunteering: First reflections on a
European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of external relations, the Lisbon Treaty enshrines for the first time humanitarian aid as a separate policy of the EU (Article 214, TFEU). This Treaty article specifically refers to the "European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps" (EVHAC), whose objective is "to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union" (Article 214.5, TFEU).

Implementation of this provision provides an opportunity for Europeans to show solidarity with people in need. This builds on a clear EU trend: Volunteering is on the rise. The last 20 years have shown a significant upward trend in the number of active volunteers, which now stands at close to 100 million adults involved in volunteering in the EU. This implies that around 22% to 23% of Europeans aged over 15 years are engaged in voluntary work¹. As such, volunteering is an important value which has the potential to bring Europe closer to citizens.

The volunteering landscape has become more diverse in recent years with a strong increase in the number of organisations employing volunteers. The different schemes, actors and approaches involved in volunteering in humanitarian contexts make coordination and coherence of paramount importance.

The European Commission, having been tasked to table a legislative proposal for the establishment of the EVHAC, will use this opportunity to include suggestions responding to the new challenges and emerging needs related to issues such as the identification and recruitment of volunteers, their training and their deployment. This can only be done on the basis of an in-depth consultation of stakeholders and a coherent analysis of opportunities and costs, which will pave the way for a future legislative proposal.

Before reaching that stage, the present Communication aims to present the current situation of volunteering in the relevant sectors of activity, with particular attention being paid to the guiding principles, existing gaps, needs, and necessary conditions for the EVHAC to make a positive contribution to the overall response to humanitarian disasters. It also highlights the most immediate issues to be considered in setting-up the EVHAC, and the way forward.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE EU

The voluntary sector in general, and in external aid in particular, has evolved rapidly in the last decade. A large number of voluntary organisations and networks offer different

¹ Study on "Volunteering in the European Union", contracted by the European Commission – DG Education and Culture to GHK, February 2010.

volunteering schemes, depending on the organisational set-up and the philosophy of the individual organisation. Good examples of initiatives focused on 18-30 year olds have been sponsored by the Commission-driven European Voluntary Service (EVS). Equally, most humanitarian organisations involve volunteers in their humanitarian activities. There is much to learn from these experiences, in particular regarding the recruitment, training and deployment processes.

In addition to the general trend, there is an increasing involvement of actors from the private sector. There are in particular several models of volunteering created by private companies which may be of interest for the establishment of the EVHAC, such as allowing staff to provide time and expertise for free through corporate volunteering schemes or by sponsoring others to volunteer. The UN has set up a dedicated web-based service² to match offers from the private sector with needs in development or disaster response operations. The Commission will further investigate the potential of such approaches whilst respecting the specific roles and mandate of implementing organisations in the response to humanitarian disasters.

As a general rule, the involvement of volunteers in actual emergency relief operations is limited to more experienced volunteers, especially when security is a problem. While a broader approach is sometimes applied for development aid volunteers, they are nevertheless often required to have home country experience before being sent abroad, which is another important aspect to keep in mind.

The biggest player in the field of volunteers is the UNV (United Nations Volunteers) Programme, which employs 150 Headquarter staff and more than 7 500 volunteers (2009), plus 9 500 online volunteers. In 2009 UNVs came from 163 different countries (75% of which are developing countries), working mostly on protracted crisis and on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), rather than in emergency relief. Despite its focus on local volunteers, recent years have seen an increasing percentage of expatriate volunteers for difficult missions (crisis prevention, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping and peace building). UNVs equally work in local capacity building, training, and as advisors to local and national aid workers.

A selection of some of the large volunteer-sending organisations working in humanitarian disaster relief and development are described in the table below.

Organisation	Number of Volunteers per year	Assistance area ³	Typical Profile of Volunteer
European Voluntary Service (DG EAC)	6 300 in 2009 in EU and neighbouring countries (10% of assignments in third countries)	Voluntary services for the benefit of the local (host) community (e.g. in the fields of arts, culture, sports, social care, etc.)	18-30 years old, no specific requirements with respect to education, professional experience, etc.
Weltwärts Scheme, German Development Cooperation (BMZ)	3 500 in 2009 / OECD List of Developing Countries	Development Cooperation via local host organisations in developing countries	18-28 years old, completed vocational training / graduated from secondary school

² <http://business.un.org/en>

³ Civil Protection, Humanitarian Assistance, Development Cooperation and other.

Organisation	Number of Volunteers per year	Assistance area ³	Typical Profile of Volunteer
UNDP Junior Professional Officer Programme (JPO)	Around 360 per year / various countries with UN operations / projects (funded by 25 donor countries)	Different areas including Development Cooperation and Humanitarian assistance (mainly in country offices)	Younger than 32 years, Master Degree and 1-2 years of professional experience
VSO/UK and members	Around 1 500 active volunteers over the year (long-term and short-term placements) / world wide	Focussed on Development Cooperation (six development goals)	18-75 years old, minimum of 2 years of professional experience
Malteser International (Young professional career entry programme)	80 000 trained volunteers and 20 000 staff (plus 13 000 members) / world wide in projects operated by Malteser	Civil Protection, Humanitarian Assistance, Rehabilitation and Development Cooperation	University degree, some experience with working in foreign countries, driver license (and membership in Catholic church)
Johanniter International (JOIN Brussels)	In Germany alone: around 29 000 volunteers, 13 000 staff	Civil Protection, Humanitarian Assistance and Development Cooperation	Various professional profiles including social services, health care; and humanitarian aid and civil protection activities in third countries.
IFRC	Red Cross movement has around 97M. members world wide of which 20M. are active volunteers (at national level) Use volunteers of the national societies – only professionals are employed for overseas missions in developing countries	Civil Protection / Disaster Preparedness and Prevention / Humanitarian Assistance / Development Assistance	Various profiles (including youth sections at national level) International volunteering for young people (18-30 years) via cooperation with EVS (in the EU and neighbouring countries – and third countries)

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following aspects should guide the reflection on the establishment of the EVHAC:

- **Solidarity.** Humanitarian action is a fundamental expression of the European value of solidarity with people affected by disasters. The setting up of the EVHAC should be a concrete expression of this value of solidarity. It could equally contribute to the development of a more cohesive European society by creating new opportunities for participation for European citizens, especially younger ones.

- **Humanitarian principles.** The EU has a firm commitment to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as established in the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid⁴. The perception and credibility of humanitarian actors is directly linked to the way in which these principles are adhered to in a context of humanitarian response. All EU actors involved in a crisis, including volunteers, must work in respect of these principles.
- **Professionalism and Safety.** One of the major trends in humanitarian aid aims at increasing the professionalism of aid actors, to better respond to increasing challenges from the field. Security and safety conditions become more and more serious concerns for humanitarian organisations and their workers, especially in conflict areas, and there is the need to address these issues appropriately. The changing nature of volunteers (profiles, motivations, aspirations), and in particular the increasingly professional nature of staff employed in the voluntary sector entails new challenges in terms of management of human resources within organisations engaging volunteers. Volunteers are also confronted with increasingly demanding tasks that require specific competences and skills, creating a potential tension between, on the one hand, demands placed on volunteers and, on the other hand, the ability of volunteers to meet these demands and become operational rapidly.
- **Added value.** Special consideration will be given to coordination and cooperation with existing voluntary organisations. In order to avoid duplication and ensure a cost-efficient use of available resources, EVHAC should build as much as possible on existing structures.

4. NEEDS AND CONDITIONS

Needs

Despite the large number of existing schemes, there are nevertheless a number of common challenges for volunteer sending organisations and some clear gaps inside the existing systems that deserve further analysis.

- (1) There is a need for clear and tested criteria to identify the volunteers who will be able to rapidly acquire the ability to contribute to EU humanitarian efforts. While many Europeans are highly interested in humanitarian aid and want to contribute to operations of the Union, not all are aware of the conditions and the skills required.
- (2) There is also a need for more structured training, common standards and good practices. The minimum training of volunteers needs to include different basic aspects of humanitarian systems and principles, security and self-care, as well as conditions in the country volunteers will be deploying to such as language, key relevant cultural issues etc. A series of relevant training courses, institutes and educational platforms already exist, both in the humanitarian and in the private sector⁵. At the same time

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/consensus_en.htm

⁵ The training providers include NOHA (which provides a European Master in International Humanitarian Action), not-for-profits organisations such as Acción Contra el Hambre, RedR (UK), Bioforce (France), DTalk (Ireland), AgeH (Germany), ATHA (Sweden) or UNHCR's e-centre. There are also specialist for-profits organisations which might offer specific modules such as CSD

many organisations consulted by the European Commission feel that some commonly agreed benchmarks and training modules would be of help to avoid situations where less experienced volunteer sending organisations deploy staff without the minimum skills. In any event, any training activity potentially to be developed under the EVHAC must ensure complementarity and coherence with existing training courses.

- (3) There is a need for improved stand-by rosters of experienced volunteers for rapid deployment in crisis contexts (surge capacity, including in key areas such as health), which is essential to have the right people in the right place at the right time. In 2010 this gap has been demonstrated quite impressively through experiences in Haiti and Pakistan (see box below on the case of Haiti), where despite the substantial number of international staff deployed to the emergency there is still a perceived lack of experienced personnel with management and leadership qualities.
- (4) There is a need to strengthen support to back-office functions in implementing organisations, including during a surge phase, in order to temporarily increase organisational capacities and release experienced staff to move closer to the field. Support activities at European level, including advocacy, information and communication have also been identified as possible areas for an increased involvement of volunteers.

Lessons learnt from Haiti

The experience of volunteers involved with the earthquake in Haiti confirmed, on the one hand, the need for skilled and rapidly deployable volunteers for the immediate response to the emergency and, on the other hand, the possibility of using less-skilled volunteers for auxiliary functions.

The majority of volunteers used by agencies in Haiti were paid, either by their companies or governments. Unskilled volunteers who arrived en masse during the early days with good intentions were less effective and in some cases even disruptive, confirming the view that whatever definition is used for the term "volunteer", it has to include a minimum amount of training and preparation prior to deployment.

In Haiti the pre-existing weakness of local structures and the terrible toll of the earthquake on these structures reinforced the need for skilled and experienced expatriate staff, but equally showed opportunities of mentoring and peering with local counterparts, which represent another potentially interesting aspect for the establishment of EVHAC.

Possible tasks to be fulfilled by less-experienced volunteers were also identified, such as back-up field work (reinforcing agency staff on intensive tasks which do not require extensive technical skills), services to NGOs and support to aid workers' accommodation/offices, support to local NGOs, and reporting.

(Netherlands: security), CHP (France: psychosocial), Mango (UK: finance), BOND (UK) and other national networks.

Conditions

Alongside the needs, some clear conditions for the EVHAC have already been identified.

- The use of volunteers in the framework of the EVHAC should be demand-driven and needs-based, in order to avoid an over-supply of volunteers without the right skills. The cost benefit ratio of identifying, recruiting, training, integrating and supervising volunteers is a common concern of voluntary organisations, specifically due to high turnover of staff who only stay for short-term missions. For this reason, the benefit of training and deploying a volunteer in relation to the costs has to be balanced. Sending organisations are more willing to invest in young volunteers if this investment can be seen as a career entry and there is some guarantee that staff will continue to be available for the organisation.
- Any funding for an EVHAC should not divert funds from the core operational budget for responding to people's needs in disasters but rather be seen as an additional investment in the capacity of humanitarian actors, both in Europe and locally. Consequently, costs and benefits of the proposed scheme will have to be analysed carefully, and ambitions adapted accordingly.
- Security aspects are of fundamental importance. The complex political and security contexts in which humanitarian workers are often employed makes great attention to security issues for volunteers essential. 80% of humanitarian aid goes to areas affected by conflicts, and attacks against humanitarian staff have risen considerably in the last years⁶ For this reason, there is a clear consensus amongst volunteer sending organisations to avoid having young and less experienced volunteers in difficult settings, and in any case to ensure a maximum preparation before deployment. In general, most humanitarian organisations employ volunteers mainly in a pre-disaster or post-crisis setting, where there is often a lack of skilled staff that has already moved on to the next big disaster.
- Support to local capacities is of vital importance in disaster preparedness, humanitarian disaster response, and post-disaster settings. Many jobs or support activities can be done by local workers, helping to create cash-for-work programmes and allowing for a re-start of the economy. These kinds of activities should not be taken over by expatriate volunteer schemes. On the other hand, the EVHAC might play a role in reinforcing local volunteering and building capacities through mentoring and twinning approaches, teaming up expatriates with local volunteers, etc.
- The large range of existing voluntary organisations calls for cooperative approaches by the Commission in setting up the EVHAC, including special attention to complementarities in order to avoid duplication and disruption of already well-functioning voluntary schemes such as the general volunteering programmes at the EU level (the European Voluntary Service, the Youth on the Move initiative, EURES job mobility portal, etc.). Cooperation will also be established with all humanitarian actors working with volunteers including the UN, the Red Cross/Crescent family, and the NGOs, as well as relevant schemes run by the EU Member States.

⁶ 278 humanitarian workers were victims of serious security incidents in 2009 (205 national staff and 73 international), of which 102 were killed (88 national and 14 international staff).

5. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FIRST OPTIONS

The exact definition of a "volunteer" is a subject of much debate amongst practitioners, as it includes – depending on the interlocutor – notions of "young", "inexperienced", "unskilled" and "unpaid" or "underpaid", in variable combinations. For the purpose of the establishment of the EVHAC one or several "types" of volunteers will be defined, in order to be able to define criteria for eligibility and activities, as well as to perform a costing exercise. Given current budgetary constraints, the Commission will aim to strike a balance between the need to make maximum use of existing structures by building on them, and the need to make a proposal that provides solutions to some of the challenges that the stakeholders face in working with volunteers.

Whatever the definition of the skills for a volunteer in the context of the EVHAC, the current economic climate in the EU and the demographic challenges of the coming decades make it essential that these skills can be used as widely as possible, allowing a further professional development of people involved in the EVHAC.

The exact profile of volunteers under a proposed EVHAC will need further consideration. Whilst the Treaty stipulates that the "framework shall allow the young to make a contribution...." there is both a need for more experienced and consequently less young staff, and a clear trend of older, in some cases even retired citizens with the necessary skills wanting to make a contribution. At the same time, the EVHAC should be sufficiently inclusive to allow people from different social backgrounds to volunteer, as some existing schemes are not viable without a considerable financial contribution by the volunteer him/herself. In general the Commission will strive to make the approach as inclusive as possible, whilst ensuring that the scheme clearly remains demand-driven and professional.

The type of activities for volunteers under the EVHAC should cover a large range, not only related to classical humanitarian crisis response. Disaster Risk Reduction activities, aimed at reducing the vulnerability of disaster prone countries and regions, as well as interventions in transition situations, aimed at ensuring a smooth evolution from relief to the development phase, are part and parcel of the aid contiguum, and can provide meaningful and sustainable contexts for volunteer deployment.

Regarding concrete options for the establishment of the EVHAC, the work done so far points generally towards three major approaches:

A first option would mainly consist of addressing the challenges volunteer organisations have indicated regarding generally agreed standards of selection and training for volunteers, including in some specialised niches such as volunteer management, some back-office functions or prevention and preparedness activities. This could include the establishment of an "EU certification mechanism" for organisations respecting those standards.

Another option could combine the approach described above, which focuses on training with work on recruitment and rosters for surge capacities for the benefit of organisations involved in humanitarian disaster relief (NGOs, Red Cross and UN), especially targeting experienced staff to be deployed in key functions.

A further option-that is to say the establishment of a fully-fledged volunteer scheme including selection, training, matching and deployment of volunteers (similar to some of the programmes described above)- would need careful consideration, especially regarding the

appropriate management structure (inside or outside the Commission), though its operational implementation would not present insurmountable obstacles.

All these options will have to be examined while respecting the current ceilings of the relevant headings of the Multiannual Financial Framework. For the period post 2013, they will be examined in the context of the Commission wide debate on all proposals to be made for that period.

Whatever the chosen approach, the concrete results and added value of EVHAC will need to be visible for the European citizen in order to show clearly the expression of Europe's solidarity with people in need.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The first stocktaking phase leading-up to this Communication has allowed the European Commission to obtain a broad picture of the current situation of volunteering, including the identification of challenges, gaps and emerging needs.

Nevertheless there are a number of open questions, and further research and testing of options is needed before a legislative proposal can be tabled.

For this reason, subject to the availability of corresponding appropriations in the 2011 budget, the Commission will launch a preparatory action next year, which will allow further development of the scheme during the European Year of Volunteering. The continuous dialogue with stakeholders will allow the Commission to prepare a proposal for the establishment of the EVHAC responding to real needs and providing an effective contribution to humanitarian disaster response.

The Commission will:

- Continue the consultation with stakeholders through different channels, including an open, on-line consultation;
- Subject to the adoption of the 2011 budget, implement a preparatory action next year, the European Year of Volunteering;
- Analyse further the gaps and opportunities, as well the possible forms of cooperation with relevant actors;
- Look at different options in terms of a sound and fraud-proof management structure and scope of intervention;
- Assess the cost/effectiveness of the different options and social impacts in the framework of an Impact Assessment, while taking into account the above mentioned conditions for the EU financing of this initiative;
- Table a legislative proposal in 2012.