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SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council

Establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

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BACKGROUND AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The Lisbon Treaty foresees the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (art. 214.5) to allow young Europeans to make a contribution to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union. In November 2010 the Commission adopted a Communication on the Voluntary Corps. Council Conclusions and a European Parliament Written Declaration were adopted in 2011. The Commission proposed an allocation of €210 Million for the Voluntary Corps under the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework over the period 2014-2020.

CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Stakeholders, including the main humanitarian aid and voluntary organisations and Member States, have continuously been involved in the process of setting-up the Voluntary Corps since the beginning in early 2010. Information and expertise were also gathered through external studies/reviews, dedicated Conferences and a public on-line consultation.

Stakeholders repeatedly highlighted the need for the Voluntary Corps to be demand-driven and needs-based so to ensure a real impact on the beneficiary populations. The Voluntary Corps should mobilise volunteers to display the values that are at the heart of the European project while providing humanitarian assistance and aligning the use of volunteers with the trend towards increasing professionalism in the sector. Some stakeholders also suggested differentiating between less qualified young people, not to be deployed to humanitarian operations where security is a concern, and experienced volunteers. Finally, the importance of local host organisation's capacity in ensuring that volunteers' contribution has a sustainable impact on the host communities was emphasized.

Based on the outcomes of the reviews and consultations, and in order to test some of the possible features of the future Voluntary Corps, the Commission launched two rounds of pilot projects, running from 2011 to 2013. First lessons learned from the pilot projects have been used to shape this Impact Assessment.

PROBLEM DEFINITION AND SUBSIDIARITY

Recent data reveal a general upward trend in the number of volunteers active in the EU over the last ten years. Eurobarometers (2010) shows that solidarity and humanitarian aid is for Europeans the field where volunteering plays the most important role and 88% of Europeans support the setting up of a Voluntary Humanitarian. While 68% are aware of the EU funding humanitarian aid, only 30% of Europeans feel well informed. Furthermore, despite the increased demand for volunteering to third countries in humanitarian action, the majority of volunteers being deployed outside the EU are still engaged with longer-term development cooperation projects rather than humanitarian aid interventions.

Although a number of voluntary schemes already exist, there are still important shortcomings and gaps that hamper voluntary schemes from reaching full potential in support of humanitarian action. The lack of a systematic and structured EU approach towards volunteering, the significant differences in the level of development of volunteering across Member States as well as the limited visibility of volunteering hinder voluntary activity to fully developing in the EU, and limit the participation of people having the good will or

eagerness to make a concrete contribution to the humanitarian aid operations of the EU through volunteering.

The following specific problems have been identified: (i) the lack of a structured EU approach towards volunteering, including the significant differences in the level of volunteering between Member States; (ii) the poor visibility of EU humanitarian action and solidarity with people in need, that entails limited awareness among Europeans and leads to greater difficulties for those who want to make a concrete contribution to the humanitarian aid in getting involved; (iii) the lack of consistent identification and selection mechanisms to be consistently used across Member States, making it difficult to match supply of volunteers and demand from organisations; (iv) the lack of sufficiently qualified volunteers for humanitarian aid that implies that in some circumstances less experienced sending organisations deploy volunteers without the minimum skills or awareness of humanitarian principles; (v) the shortcomings in surge capacity for humanitarian aid, due to the increased number and magnitude of humanitarian crisis and greater humanitarian needs that make it essential to improve the number of qualified resources to be deployed in crisis contexts where local and international relief capacity are often overwhelmed; (vi) the host organisations' weak capacity to ensure that volunteers' contributions have a sustainable impact on beneficiaries.

The absence of an initiative at the EU level would fail to address the issues raised above. Moreover, the lack of Union action would be inconsistent with the Lisbon Treaty that requires the establishment of the Voluntary Corps.

OBJECTIVES

Mobilising more effectively the volunteering capacity within the EU can provide a useful way to project a very positive image of the EU in the world. It can foster interest in pan-European projects to support humanitarian aid activities, including civil protection activities of a humanitarian character, not necessarily just through more deployments but also through better preparation. This can reinforce the benefits delivered to the hosting communities and the impacts on the volunteers themselves through the development specific skills that are relevant to the humanitarian labour market – but also competences for life such as personal resilience and intercultural awareness and understanding.

Thus, the Voluntary Corps aims to benefit the sending organisations, the communities that they serve, the volunteers, and in this way the EU as a whole. These considerations have been translated into the following objectives:

General objective

- To express EU humanitarian values and solidarity with people in need, through the promotion of an effective and visible European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, as an enhanced EU contribution to the overall capacity to respond to humanitarian crises.

Specific objectives

- To improve the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid
- To improve the skills and competences of volunteers and their working conditions
- To promote the visibility of the Union's humanitarian values
- To build capacities of hosting organisations in third countries

- To enhance the coherence/consistency across Member States in order to improve opportunities for European citizens to participate in humanitarian aid operations
- To strengthen the identification and selection criteria of volunteers

Operational objective

- To establish a framework for joint contributions from European citizens to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union (Lisbon Treaty, Art. 214.5).

POLICY OPTIONS

In the absence of a Voluntary Corps (**no new EU action**) it can be expected that volunteers would continue to be used mostly in longer-term development cooperation, and that the individual national voluntary schemes and NGOs would continue to apply their own identification and selection methods.

This situation would produce an ‘un-harvested’ volunteering potential in humanitarian aid also due to lack of capacity - within the NGO community and with national governments - to develop and offer appropriate training. For these reasons, sending organisations would also continue to deploy volunteers who do not always have the necessary skills, with no insurance as to the quality of the placements or the actual impacts of volunteers’ engagement on local communities. The impact on host organisations and local communities would also be limited and would ultimately depend on the host organisation’s resources that are often very limited.

Finally, the EU visibility would not be enhanced if no new action is taken at the EU level. For these reasons, and in consideration of the fact that the Lisbon Treaty requires the establishment of the Voluntary Corps (Art.214.5), the ‘no new EU action’ option is not considered further.

The challenge is to define the corps in a way that provides the best possible benefits (effectiveness) in a cost-effective manner. Four policy options have been identified, resulting from the combination of different ‘modules’ (the whole range of activities that might be supported) in an incremental manner:

Option 1 would include the (1) development of standards for identification, selection of volunteers, to ensure that the right volunteers are attracted and selected in a fair manner and that they have the right abilities, and (2) development of a certification mechanism for sending organisations that would deliver audited evidence that certified organisations adhere to the EU standards.

In addition to activities already covered in Option 1, **Option 2** would include: (3) the support to training of volunteers, building upon humanitarian aid organisations' experiences, lessons learnt from pilot projects and from the training organised by the Commission as part of Civil Protection policy; (4) the establishment of a Register of qualified EU volunteers who are available to engage in humanitarian aid, providing a platform for a fast identification of suitable volunteer candidates and improved access to volunteering opportunities for people from across the EU; and (5) the development of standards and a certification mechanism for volunteer management in hosting organisations, so to ensure that volunteers skills are adequately used to the benefit of local communities.

Option 3 would add to the activities covered under Option 2: (6) the deployment of EU volunteers to third countries, including 'apprenticeship placements' for less experienced volunteers as part of the training as well as 'regular' deployments in humanitarian aid projects (with a particular focus on prevention/preparedness and recovery interventions); (7) capacity-building in hosting organisations in order to support the implementation of the standards developed under module 5 and improve hosting capacities; and (8) the establishment of an 'EU Network of humanitarian volunteers' through an interactive networking website allowing volunteers to engage without being deployed. It would be implemented through an existing Executive Agency with relevant experience of volunteer programmes with appropriate Commission oversight.

Finally **Option 4** would support the same combination of activities as option 3 (all 8 modules), but assumes that each component is directly managed by the European Commission, including selection, training and deployment. Such an approach for the deployment of volunteers could be organised in a number of ways, including i) allocating supplementary human resources within the Commission services, ii) using an existing Executive Agency to implement (for example the Executive Agency EACEA of DG Education And Culture); iii) establishing a new free-standing EU Voluntary Corps Agency. Given the assumed additional administrative costs of establishing a new Agency in the current economic climate and the potential duplication with existing bodies, this option is not costed-out further in this Impact Assessment.

ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS

The IA assesses the main potential impacts of each option (including the impacts on different stakeholders), the extent to which each option delivers on the specific objectives, and the estimates of the implementation costs (assessment of efficiency), working on the assumption of the adoption of the Legislative Framework for full implementation starting in 2014. The estimates of the implementation costs also includes the costs of management, which are assumed to be around 10% of the overall budget if the activities are managed by the Commission, whereas if the management is outsourced to an existing Executive Agency the costs would be around 8%.

Option 1

Option 1 would create the conditions for an increased transparency and consistency of the recruitment processes and training of volunteers across Member States, and could encourage sending organisations to align their approaches. However, impacts and synergies effects depend on the level of uptake of standards and certification mechanisms across organisations. As for volunteers, Option 1 would mainly enable volunteers to display on their CVs that they have been selected/engaged by a certified organisation, and would provide for a higher level of knowledge about what to expect from volunteering through different organisations.

Impacts on the promotion of EU visibility outside the EU would be very limited, due to the fact that this option does not imply any deployment. For this same reason, there would only be potential indirect impacts on local communities and hosting organisations.

In conclusion, option 1 would have a limited impact on the objectives, depending on the level of uptake of standards and the willingness of voluntary organisations to subscribe to the certification mechanisms.

The implementing costs of option 1 would be around €3.5 million over the period 2014-2020.

Option 2

As for option 1, option 2 would ensure the conditions for a possible improvement of the recruiting system for volunteers. Furthermore, sending organisations would get access to volunteers that have undergone a comprehensive training programme, which would in turn improve the effectiveness of deploying volunteers, reduce the risks of mismatch and facilitate the supervision and guidance of volunteers on the field. The establishment of a Register of trained volunteers would also help recruiting organisations identify suitable candidates.

This option directly contributes to volunteer qualifications via training, and increases their chance of deployment. Training and the Register would also provide a faster entry into volunteering, while the standards for host organisations would help volunteers to maximise their contribution when deployed and increase their job satisfaction. Option 2 would also have an impact on local communities and hosting organisations and on EU visibility in third countries only if and when trained volunteers are deployed.

Overall, option 2 would improve the qualifications of volunteers and would create the conditions for more effective deployments and increased contribution of volunteers to the humanitarian aid sector. However, there would be no guarantee neither that the skills acquired by volunteers would actually be put at the service of the local populations, nor that the EU solidarity is promoted in third countries.

The implementing costs of option 2 would be €53 million over the period 2014-2020.

Option 3

Option 3 would further add to the previous options the support for the deployment of volunteers in humanitarian aid operations, building capacity in local host organisations, and the establishment of the 'EU Network of humanitarian volunteers'.

The proposed approach, according to which an existing Executive Agency would propose appropriate volunteers deployment options to humanitarian organisations, would ensure that the Voluntary Corps is linked with key stakeholders in the sector. The supervision of deployment would be retained by the Commission through a series of means. Firstly, only those volunteers that have passed the EU training course and been placed on the Corps Register would be eligible for deployment. This would ensure that the volunteers deployed are equipped to make a valuable contribution. Secondly, the Commission would keep the control through the Agency's oversight, which would ensure excellence and high EU visibility during deployment. Thirdly, the host organisations that receive the volunteers would be required to comply with the EU standards developed under Module 5.

The links between the different modules and conditions linked to deployment will help to ensure that there is strong EU identity attached to the operations of the Voluntary Corps.

This option would help volunteers to gain a concrete work experience in the sector and further improve their qualifications through deployment, so to become more attractive for subsequent field experiences and increase their opportunities for future jobs as well as the surge capacity of the humanitarian sector. This is also likely to encourage EU citizens wanting to express their solidarity to engage in volunteering and make a concrete contribution to the humanitarian aid cause (including for those who would otherwise have fewer opportunities). The EU Network of humanitarian volunteers would also provide networking opportunities for

those wanting to start a career in humanitarian aid. Finally, this option would bring cultural benefits, as volunteers would get an opportunity to learn about different cultures and ways of living.

The direct presence and support of the Voluntary Corps in the local communities is a central and direct way of displaying EU solidarity and increase EU visibility, in particular if combined with adequate training that ensures that volunteers contribute significantly and positively.

Option 3 would not only enhance the voluntary sector and support to volunteers in Europe, but would also include all the necessary elements for ensuring that volunteers actually contribute to the humanitarian aid interventions in third countries and thus contribute to the overall effectiveness and quality of humanitarian aid.

The implementing costs of option 3 would be €210 million over the period 2014-2020.

Option 4

The fact that each component of this Option would be directly managed by the Commission would imply the following. It would involve the same level of control of the Commission over the training of volunteers and the establishment of a Register as in option 3. As for deployment, the Commission or the Agency would control the final selection and placement of volunteers, who would then be embedded in humanitarian aid projects in the field after being selected. The influence that the Commission can have on EU visibility and ‘marketing’ of the Voluntary Corps would be the same as in option 3.

Option 4 would imply a change in the management of financial support to volunteers in the Voluntary Corps as compared to the aid workers presently financed through partners in EU humanitarian aid. The change would imply additional administrative costs for the Commission in terms of human resources. Commission services are not expected to have the same leverage potential and outreach to place volunteers in the field, and humanitarian partner organisations are likely to feel less overall ‘ownership’, which may hinder the effectiveness of deployment and could reduce the incentive for an enhanced quality in humanitarian volunteering. To compensate this, it would be advisable to develop a robust internal governance structure and day-to-day liaison arrangements in order to ensure that the Voluntary Corps is well integrated into the delivery of humanitarian aid from the EU. It seems likely that the rate at which the scale of Voluntary Corps activities could grow would be somewhat lower under option 4.

At the same time, given the limited ‘absorption capacity’, it is likely that this way of managing would struggle to supply a rising number of deployment opportunities. A smaller scale of deployments would in turn translate into more limited benefits to host communities and to overall capacity in the sector. Furthermore, direct and centralised management could reduce the accessibility and participation to volunteering for EU citizens.

Keeping the implementing costs of option 4 within the limit of the available MFF budget over the period 2014-2020 (€210 million), there would be 60% less volunteers deployed.

COMPARISON OF OPTIONS

When comparing the four policy options, it should be borne in mind that the four options are of increasing ambition or scope i.e. from a minimalist option 1 to an extensive and directly

managed option 4. The comparisons of the options are made by assessing how much more the more extensive options contribute to the specific objectives. This assessment can then be compared to the higher costs of the more extensive options. The varying extensiveness of the different options also gives rise to different risks during the actual implementation.

The table below summarises the comparison of options. This is done by applying a scoring system where scores from +, ++ or +++ are assigned, signifying low, medium or high positive impacts. Note that some of the scores have been enclosed in brackets (), indicating that the assessments are connected with more uncertainty (also linked to the risks identified). The table also contains the total implementation cost figures for the four policy options to enable an approximate cost-effectiveness assessment.

	Baseline scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Specific objectives					
To improve the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid	(+)	(+)	++	+++	++
To improve the skills and competences of volunteers and their working conditions	(+)	(+)	++	+++	++
To promote the visibility of the Union's humanitarian values	(+)	(+)	+	+++	+++
To build capacities of hosting organisations in third countries	-	-	+	+++	+++
To enhance coherence across Member States in order to improve opportunities for European citizens to participate in humanitarian aid	-	(+)	(++)	++	(+)
To strengthen the identification and selection criteria for volunteers	+	++	++	+++	+++
Implementation costs 2014-2020		EUR 3 million	EUR 52 million	EUR 210 million	EUR 212 million
Number of volunteers deployed	-	-	-	9.604	7.045

In conclusion, option 1 would have a limited impact on the objectives, depending on the level of uptake of standards and the willingness of voluntary organisations to subscribe to the certification mechanisms. Option 2 would improve the qualifications of volunteers and would create the conditions for more effective deployments and increased contribution of volunteers to the humanitarian aid sector. However, there would be no guarantee that the skills acquired by volunteers would actually be put at the service of the local populations. Option 3 would not only enhance the voluntary sector and support to volunteers in Europe, but would also include all the necessary elements for ensuring that volunteers actually contribute to the humanitarian aid interventions in third countries and thus contribute to the overall effectiveness and quality of humanitarian aid. Option 4 would imply much higher costs and a limited number of deployment opportunities due to management constraints, and would miss the opportunities arising from implementing through a partnership approach.

For these reasons, **the preferred option is the option 3.**

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring

A standing monitoring system will follow the progress of the programme in the achievement of its objectives. It will be based on a number of indicators, consistently compiled and measured by the implementing body. The monitoring system will allow tracking of the level of achievement of the operational objectives of the scheme, will provide indications as to the achievement of its specific objectives and will provide guidance for adjusting the implementation of the programme in light of experience.

Evaluation

A mid-term evaluation of the scheme will be carried out three years after the actual start of the activities. A final evaluation is foreseen at the end of the programme. Additional evaluation studies on specific aspects of the scheme may be launched at any time during the implementation of the scheme, should it appear necessary to adjust or reshape any part of the scheme.