European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (‘EU Aid Volunteers initiative')

2012/0245(COD) - 19/09/2012 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: the establishment of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

BACKGROUND: in the face of the increasing number and magnitude of humanitarian crises (natural catastrophes and man-made crises), the Union has to ensure adequate humanitarian aid.

As envisaged in Article 214(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), this proposal establishes the framework for the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, which should enable joint contributions from European volunteers in humanitarian aid operations. Its objective is to **express the Union's humanitarian values and solidarity with people in need whether within or beyond the Union’s borders**. Improving the mobilisation of the volunteering capacity of European citizens can also **project a positive image of the Union in the world** and foster interest for pan-European projects in support of humanitarian aid activities.

The proposal builds on the 2010 Communication "How to express EU citizens’ solidarity through volunteering: First reflections on a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps". The Communication presents the guiding principles, gaps and necessary conditions to make a positive contribution to Union humanitarian aid. The Council and the European Parliament have expressed strong support for the initiative, reaffirming the key role of the Union in promoting volunteering and identifying some of the key components of the Corps.

This proposal will, moreover, contribute to:

- the objectives of the Union's external policy and, in particular, the Union's humanitarian aid objectives; and
- reinforcing the benefits delivered to the hosting communities in third countries and the impact that the volunteer activities have on the volunteers themselves.

Furthermore, the training and informal learning experience volunteers will acquire is a strong investment in human capital which would improve their employability in global economy and thus contribute to the Europe's 2020 objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: interested stakeholders, including the main humanitarian aid organisations (NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family, UN agencies), mainstream volunteer organisations, individual volunteers, Member States' representatives and other relevant actors were specifically consulted at two dedicated conferences[5] and through a public on-line consultation.

An impact assessment report was prepared to examine policy options and their potential impacts. The main problems identified are: (1) lack of a structured EU approach towards volunteering; (2) poor visibility of EU humanitarian action and solidarity with people in need; (3) lack of consistent identification and selection mechanisms across Member States; (4) insufficient availability of qualified volunteers for humanitarian aid; (5) shortcomings in the surge capacity of humanitarian aid; and vi) weak capacity of hosting organisations.

The impact assessment examined a number of policy options resulting from the combination of different modules and mode of management:

- ***Policy Option 1***, including: (1) Development of standards for identification, selection and training of volunteers and (2) Development of certification mechanism for sending organisations;
- ***Policy Option 2***, including the modules under Option 1 plus (3) Support to training for EU volunteers in humanitarian aid, (4) Creation of an EU Register of trained volunteers, (5) Development of standards and a certification mechanism for volunteer management in hosting organisations;
- ***Policy Option 3***, including all modules under Option 2 plus (6) Support to deployment of EU volunteers, (7) Building capacity in third country hosting organisations, (8) **Establishment of an EU Network of humanitarian volunteers**. This Option would be implemented in partnership with humanitarian aid organisations which should identify, select and deploy the volunteers.
- ***Policy Option 4***, including all modules under Option 3 implemented in a direct management mode by the European Commission.

Based on this assessment of the potential economic, social and environmental impacts, **Policy Option 3** was recommended as the most efficient and effective option for addressing the problems identified.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 214(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

CONTENT: the proposal lays down the procedures and the rules for the operation of the EU Aid Volunteers. It follows an enabling approach and is limited to the essential elements necessary for the implementation of the Regulation, including specifying its general and operational objectives, the principles and the actions of which it consists, the provisions for financial assistance and the general provisions for its implementation.

General objective and operational objectives: the objective of the EU Aid Volunteers shall be to express the Union's humanitarian values and solidarity with people in need, through the promotion of an effective and visible EU Aid Volunteers' initiative, which contributes to strengthening the Union's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and to building the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster affected communities in third countries.

The EU Aid Volunteers shall pursue the following **operational objectives**:

1. Increase in and improvement of the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid;
2. Improvement of the skills and competences of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid and the conditions under which they are working;
3. Building the capacity of hosting organisations and foster volunteering in third countries;
4. Promotion of the visibility of the Union's humanitarian aid values;
5. Enhancement of coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid activities and operations.

Progress towards the achievement of this operational objective shall be assessed on the basis of key indicators, which shall be used for monitoring, evaluation and review of performance as appropriate. They are indicative and may be amended in order to take into account experience from the progress measurement.

General principles: EU Aid Volunteers' actions:

- shall be conducted in compliance with the humanitarian aid principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence;

- shall respond to the need of local communities and hosting organisations and should contribute to the professionalization of the provision of humanitarian aid.

In this context, **the safety and security of volunteers shall be a priority**.

The EU Aid Volunteers shall promote common activities and **participation of volunteers from different countries** and foster j**oint projects and transnational partnerships** between implementing organisations.

Types of actions undertaken by the volunteers: the EU Aid Volunteers shall pursue the above-mentioned objectives through the following types of actions:

- development and maintenance of standards regarding candidate and EU Aid Volunteers;
- development and maintenance of a certification mechanism for sending and hosting organisations;
- identification and selection of candidate volunteers;
- establishment of a training programme and support for training and apprenticeship placements;
- establishment, maintenance and updating of a Register of EU Aid Volunteers;
- deployment of EU Aid Volunteers in third countries for humanitarian aid activities and operations;
- capacity building of hosting organisations;
- establishment and management of an EU Aid Volunteers' Network;
- communication, awareness raising and visibility;
- ancillary activity that furthers the accountability, transparency and effectiveness of the EU Aid Volunteers.

These different actions can be supported with financial assistance and implemented by different beneficiaries based on a Commission annual work programme.

As regards certain specific actions, the proposal specifies the following types of actions:

- **Standards regarding candidate and EU Aid Volunteers:** the Commission will develop standards which will set the policy framework and minimum requirements to ensure effective, efficient and coherent **recruitment and preparation of candidate volunteers** and **deployment and management of EU Aid Volunteers** which are the main actions of this initiative. The standards will ensure duty of care and cover notably responsibilities of the sending and hosting organisations, minimum requirements on the coverage of subsistence, accommodation and other relevant expenses, insurance coverage and other relevant elements.
- **Certification:** sending organisations that would like to select, prepare and deploy EU Aid Volunteers will have to be **certified for compliance** with these standards. They should meet different eligibility requirements and follow a differentiated certification procedure (to be defined in implementing acts), taking into account their nature and capacity (e.g. Member States' public bodies, NGOs). Civil protection and development cooperation actors acting in the field of humanitarian aid shall also be considered eligible. A differentiated certification mechanism will be established for eligible hosting organisations. Although **private companies** are not eligible as sending or hosting organisations, they can be a**ssociated with projects** and co-finance part of the costs of the volunteer to encourage corporate volunteering.
- **Identification and selection of candidate volunteers:** the EU Aid Volunteers are open for participation to Union citizens as well as nationals legally residing in the EU on a long term basis. Subject to agreements as referred to in the proposal, citizens from candidate and potential candidate countries and from partner countries from the European Neighbourhood Policy may apply to become EU Aid Volunteers. On the basis of an annual work programme, the Commission will publish calls for proposals for the identification and selection of candidate volunteers by certified sending organisations. Sending organisations that have been awarded the contracts in response to these calls will identify and select candidate volunteers **for training** after prior assessment of the needs in third countries by sending or hosting organisations or other relevant actors.

- **Training and pre-deployment preparation:** the selected candidate volunteers will undergo tailor-made training, taking into account their prior experience. The training programme will be organised by the Commission and will be implemented by organisations with specific training expertise. In addition, as part of their training and depending on their training needs, candidate volunteers will be able to gain practical experience through **apprenticeship placements** or other forms of short term **predeployment preparation** given by certified sending organisations.
- **Register of EU Aid Volunteers:** candidate volunteers should be assessed for their preparedness to be deployed in third countries. If successful, they should be included in a **Register of EU Aid Volunteers eligible for deployment** which will be managed by the Commission. The Register will also include volunteers who have already been deployed, if they are willing to be considered for future deployment.
- **Deployment of EU Aid Volunteers in third countries:** on the basis of its annual work programme, the Commission will publish calls for proposals for the deployment of EU Aid Volunteers by certified sending organisations. Sending organisations that have been awarded the contracts in response to these calls can select volunteers from the Register and deploy them to hosting organisations. The Commission may also deploy volunteers from the Register to the Commission's humanitarian aid field offices or in response **operations in third countries through the Emergency Response Centre** that facilitates the Union response to disasters. The specific terms of deployment will be set-out in a contract between the sending organisation and the volunteer.
- **Capacity building of hosting organisations:** through this action, the Commission can support capacity building actions of the hosting organisations so as to ensure effective management of the EU Aid Volunteers and sustainable impact of their work, including the promotion of local volunteering.
- **EU Aid Volunteers' Network:** this action envisages the **establishment of an EU Aid Volunteers' Network which will be managed by the Commission**. It will consist of and facilitate interaction between the EU Aid Volunteers and will also carry out specific activities, notably through knowledge sharing and dissemination of information. It shall also support activities such as seminars, workshops and alumni activities.
- **Communication, awareness raising and visibility:** this action will support public information, communication and awareness raising actions to promote the EU Aid Volunteers and to encourage volunteering in humanitarian aid. The Commission will develop an information and communication action plan, which will be implemented by all beneficiaries, in particular sending and hosting organisations.

Financial provisions: provisions are envisaged for laying down the framework for actions that are eligible for financial assistance and the potential beneficiaries of financial assistance. In this context, the Commission may consider the added-value and management advantages of creating an **EU Trust Fund**.

Work programme: in order to implement this Regulation, the Commission shall adopt an annual work programme which will set out the objectives pursued, the expected results, the method of implementation and their total amount. It shall also contain the description of actions to be financed, an indication of the amount allocated to each action and an indicative implementation timetable. For grants, they shall include the priorities, the essential evaluation criteria and the maximum rate of co-financing.

Coherence and complementarity: in implementing the Regulation, coherence shall be ensured with other areas of Union's external action and with other relevant Union policies (in particular, development policy) and with the actions undertaken in the Member States and/or with relevant international organisations.

Report and evaluation: the Regulation shall be regularly evaluated, in particular in an interim report in 2017 and in the context of a final report preparing the ground for a communication on the continued of the implementation of the Regulation (by no later than 31 December 2018)..

BUDGETARY IMPACT: the Commission communication entitled "A Budget for Europe 2020" provides, for the creation of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, with budgetary commitments amounting to **EUR 239.1 million** (current prices).

DELEGATED ACTS: the Commission is empowered to adopt modalities of some of the actions through delegated acts on standards and amending indicators for operational objectives, or through implementing acts regarding the certification mechanism and modalities of the training programme.