



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing more than 80 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

July 2011

## VOICE POSITION PAPER

### EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN AID CORPS

#### VOICE response to the Council Conclusions on EVHAC adopted on 17 May 2011

As the main NGO interlocutor of the European institutions on humanitarian affairs, the VOICE network has actively participated in the processes of creating the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) since its first inception. With the legislative proposal on the Corps approaching, the network has expressed its appreciation of the Council Conclusions on EVHAC adopted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2011<sup>1</sup>.

Recognizing that crisis-affected populations are primary actors in disaster response, the network is pleased that the Conclusions acknowledge the need to support local capacities in disaster prevention, preparedness, humanitarian response and post-disaster setting. Furthermore, VOICE welcomes in particular the stated need for EVHAC to be cost-effective and not encroach upon the Commission's existing humanitarian aid budget. Volunteerism is a long-established feature of the humanitarian NGO community; the reiteration that EVHAC should build upon existing national and international voluntary schemes without duplicating them is therefore appreciated.

With the Commission Communication<sup>2</sup> of November 2010 and the recent Council Conclusions, VOICE recognises the framework of principles developed to date for the establishment of the Voluntary Corps. VOICE members are pleased to participate in pilot projects for the corps, including using partnerships between organisations from different Member States to further develop a pool of qualified volunteer input to support humanitarian assistance. This however should not compromise the trend towards continually increased professionalism in the humanitarian sector, nor replace or undermine local capacity building efforts.

Above all, the network is supportive of the Council's emphasis on the need for EVHAC to provide added value to the work of professional humanitarian ECHO partners by addressing concrete needs and gaps in the humanitarian field. While we recognize the EU's concern for visibility, this should not overshadow the fundamental needs-based nature of EU humanitarian assistance as per the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. With the constant goal of increasing the effectiveness of European humanitarian aid to crisis-affected populations, VOICE will continue to engage with the EVHAC initiative as it develops further.

#### VOICE Comments on EVHAC in draft EU Budget 2014-2020<sup>3</sup>

VOICE welcomes the establishment of a budgetline for the Voluntary Corps which is separate from operational expenditure on Humanitarian Aid, in keeping with previous VOICE recommendations. VOICE notes that, while the Corps is still in a pilot phase, this budgetline in the first draft of the MFF is forecast to rise year on year to total 210 million euros over a 7 year period. This is a significant sum in the context of increasing pressure on the overall EU budget for humanitarian aid. As humanitarian needs are expected to continue to rise, due to the increasing frequency of disasters, VOICE underlines the need for constant evaluation of the Corps as it develops. This is necessary to ensure that the Corps provides added value and represents best use of resources to provide EU assistance to crisis-affected populations.

<sup>1</sup> Letter sent to Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 16 June 2011

<sup>2</sup> COM(2010)683/3, November 2010

<sup>3</sup> COM(2011)500, June 2011

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