



## European Solidarity Corps Programme (2021-2027) *Integration of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative in the ESC*

### VOICE and the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative

NGOs active in humanitarian aid have a long experience of working with volunteers across the world. While striving for high quality standards of professionalism and expertise in delivering humanitarian aid, NGOs have continued to offer opportunities to young people willing to support people in need.

Since the Lisbon Treaty VOICE has engaged in shaping the European Humanitarian Aid Voluntary Corps which then became the EU Aid Volunteers (EUAV). VOICE has facilitated the engagement of its members in this initiative. Many took part in the pilot phase and are now undertaking projects under the EUAV. VOICE also participated in the [Interim Evaluation of the EUAV in 2017](#) and ensures regular dialogue with DG ECHO with the aim of constantly improving its functioning.

This paper gathers a number of remarks on the European Commission's proposal for the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Programme under the next financial period (2021-2027) which includes the integration of the EUAV into this larger EU Programme, building on the VOICE network's positions over the last years.

### VOICE key messages on the new proposal

The VOICE network

- welcomes the proposal to merge the EUAV activities into the European Solidary Corps,
- insists on the need to safeguard specific features for the humanitarian strand of the Programme in the **quality label, training** of volunteers and **communication** activities,
- calls for the ESC to build on existing **simplification** efforts under the EUAV,
- recommends stronger focus on **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** and **resilience** for the humanitarian strand and relevant links with development policy and actors,
- recalls the importance of the support for **Capacity Building activities** under the EUAV,
- supports the focus on **young people** while insisting on careful attention to existing practice under the EUAV.

### Background elements

- **VOICE welcomes the proposal to merge the EUAV activities into the European Solidary Corps**

Indeed, the lack of synergies and coordination with other existing EU volunteering Programmes was one of the weaknesses that VOICE and the Interim Evaluation Report pointed out. The merging should bring simplification and also has the potential to give more visibility to the voluntarism opportunities in the humanitarian sector under a bigger Programme and therefore attract more volunteers.

- **VOICE insists on the need to safeguard specific features for the humanitarian strand of the Programme in the quality label, training of volunteers and communication activities**

It is crucial that the humanitarian strand of the future Programme safeguards specific features to remain consistent with the EU Treaties and policy objectives in the field of humanitarian aid. VOICE insists on the importance to refer to **the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence** with which actions undertaken must be compliant. It is also welcomed that actions implemented under the humanitarian strand shall contribute to providing **needs-based humanitarian aid** aimed at preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity and to strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities.

**Humanitarian specificities must also be reflected in the certification (quality label).** It is welcomed that for organisations applying for the humanitarian strand, specific attention will be given to the safety and security of volunteers. In addition, proven capacities and experience in humanitarian action should also be assessed in the certification process.

**Concerning training for volunteers** to be deployed under the humanitarian strand, a specific focus should be put not only on safety and security but also on humanitarian principles, DRR and community resilience. Moreover, VOICE reiterates its recommendation to avoid duplication and make the link with existing and specialized training structures such as the NOHA network on humanitarian action, which would also contribute to attracting more volunteers. VOICE also recalls that the Interim Evaluation of the EUAV noted that the training provided is sometimes not enough connected to projects in which volunteers are then involved.

**The communication and visibility objectives and requirements** should take due account of the humanitarian principles and emergency contexts. Communication activities should focus on media campaigns in the EU rather than in the field.

➤ **VOICE calls for the ESC to build on existing simplification efforts under the EUAV**

The new proposal is presented as a way to simplify the volunteering programme in particular thanks to a single web portal, harmonized rules for organisations from application to reporting and less administrative work for the EC and the Agency. **VOICE underlines that to maximise the potential for simplification, the implementation of the future Programme must build on improvements and the Interim Evaluation of the EUAV.** Indeed, a lot of work has been done to simplify the EUAV since its launch and it has been crucial to bring more organisations on board. It is hoped that this trend will continue in 2019 and 2020.

Above all, the **application for the quality label should be simplified for organisations already certified under the current EUAV and for ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) holders.** Indeed, organisations which have signed a FPA with the Commission are already assessed in depth for a number of criteria that will be covered by the quality label.

➤ **VOICE recommends stronger focus on DRR and resilience for the humanitarian strand and relevant links with development policy and actors**

Under the current EUAV, many volunteers have been deployed to contribute to projects on Resilience and DRR. This focus has been welcomed and should be reflected more explicitly in the description of the humanitarian strand of the next ESC Programme or in the Implementation documents. In relation to this, VOICE reiterates its recommendation to establish more direct links with the EU's relevant development policy objectives and DG DEVCO in terms of management of the programme.

➤ **VOICE recalls the importance of the support for Capacity Building activities under the EUAV**

It is noticeable that support for Capacity Building actions is not as prominently included in the proposed Regulation as in the current EUAV Regulation. Capacity building components of the initiative have helped local organisations to develop their capacities in Disaster Risk Management and resilience. Overall, this possibility has partially filled a gap for funding for Capacity Building activities at local level which could make an important contribution to the localisation of aid following the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain to which the EU is a signatory.

**VOICE recommends maintaining the possibility to support Capacity Building through the ESC and its humanitarian strand, while emphasizing that further and more ambitious opportunities should be developed in the framework of a comprehensive approach of the EU towards the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation.**

➤ **VOICE supports the focus on young people while insisting on careful attention to existing practice under the EUAV**

The current EUAV Regulation does not set an upper age limit for volunteers. Under the next ESC the age limit would be 30 years including for the humanitarian strand. VOICE previously noted that many senior positions were offered, which seemed in contradiction to the initial focus on young professionals of the EUAV. While supporting the focus of the new proposal on opportunities for young people, VOICE recommends looking carefully at the number of senior volunteers deployed so far and their added value for hosting organisations, before closing completely the possibility in the next Programme.