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Ex-post evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, 2014-2020

Volume 1

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADE	Analysis for Economic Decisions
AWP	Annual Work Programme
CB	Capacity Building
COHAFA	Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DG EAC	Directorate -General for Education and Culture
EACEA	Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency
EUAV	EU Aid Volunteers
ECHO/ DG ECHO	Directorate -General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FAFA	Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPA	Framework partnership agreement
HA	Humanitarian Aid
HO	Hosting organisation
ICCO	ICCO Cooperation
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
GCN	Girl Child Network
HACT	Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INFORM	Index for Risk Management
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD/DAC	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
PACIDA	Pastoralist Community Initiative and Development Assistance
SO	Sending organisation
GBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SVI	Service Volontaire International
TA	Technical Assistance
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
WEFOCO	Western Focus Community Organization

ABSTRACT

The ex-post evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative covers the period 2014 -2020.

After a delayed start-up, the Initiative contributed to the capacity of the EU to deliver humanitarian aid, although on a limited scale and mostly short-term, by increasing participant organisations' capacities, harmonizing standards, enabling new partnerships and the deployment of well-trained volunteers. The Initiative was not sufficiently integrated into the humanitarian aid and development work of the EU, and it was less effective in promoting EU humanitarian principles.

By 2019, only 62% of the EUR 115 million initial EUAV budget had been committed. Heavy administrative processes and procedural requirements initially hampered implementation. The management of the Initiative was however cost-effective overall.

The security management system ensured volunteer security and limited EU reputational risk. However, it substantially reduced volunteer access to humanitarian settings. The Initiative was designed to improve EU volunteering through a holistic approach, but it lacked clarity on the role of volunteering in humanitarian contexts and on the hierarchy of the objectives pursued.

Recommendations suggest clarifying the relationship between design and objectives, re-visiting the security management system, strengthening localisation, facilitating learning, reinforcing communications and interagency coordination, developing a "toolkit" addressing the specific needs of partners and volunteers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation subject, scope, timing and purpose

The European Union commissioned ADE to conduct an independent ex-post evaluation of the European Union Aid Volunteers (EUAV) Initiative for the period 2014 to 2020. This evaluation was undertaken according to the requirements set out in Regulation 375/2014 establishing the EUAV Initiative.

In addition to providing an accountability report for the past activities of the EUAV Initiative, this evaluation looks to the future. It includes findings and recommendations aimed at informing the development of the humanitarian strand of the new European Solidarity Corps, which will be managed by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and operated by the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) as of 2021.

Evaluation context

In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty provided for the establishment of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) with the objective of setting up a "framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the Humanitarian Aid operations of the Union". Design work on a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps started in 2010 and comprised a series of consultations and assessments alongside a pilot phase in the period 2011 to 2013. Following approval of several governing Regulations, the EUAV Initiative was launched in 2014. It was managed by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) and implemented by EACEA. The EUAV Initiative was phased out at the end of 2020 and integrated into the new European Solidarity Corps in January 2021.

It was envisaged that the actions of the EUAV Initiative would be guided by humanitarian aid principles and work in a coherent and complementary manner with the Union's policies and instruments, notably the humanitarian aid policy, development cooperation policy and the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism.

In addition to its overarching aim of contributing to the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid and strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries, the **objectives of the EAUV Initiative** were to:

(i) contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid;

(ii) improve the skills, knowledge and competence of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid, and the terms and conditions of their engagement;

(iii) build the capacity of hosting organisations and foster volunteering in third countries;

(iv) communicate the Union's humanitarian aid principles as agreed in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid; and

(v) enhance the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid activities and operations.

Methodology

The evaluation process was divided into three phases: inception, data collection and synthesis. It was supervised by a Steering Group consisting of EU Commission services.

The evaluation criteria included relevance, coherence, EU added value, effectiveness and efficiency/cost-effectiveness.

A total of 104 individuals were interviewed, drawn from EU staff, Members of the European Parliament, participating agencies, peer volunteering organisations, former volunteers and organisations with a presumed interest in the EUAV Initiative. The evaluation team conducted four surveys with a total of 492 responses: 308 from the volunteer survey, 129 from the hosting organisation (HO) survey, 51 from the sending organisation (SO) survey, and four from the EU Member State representatives' survey. An online Public Consultation was also conducted in line with the EU Better Regulations guidelines, which received 15 responses from NGOs and EU citizens. The research team additionally carried out an extensive desk review of policy and strategy documents, further evaluation reports, reviews, studies and other documents, including an in-depth analysis of a sample of 15 projects.

Most of the main limitations and constraints for the evaluation were anticipated during the inception phase and managed in such a way as to ensure a robust evidence base. This included revising the methodology to incorporate a remote approach due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Findings

A summary of findings based on the judgement criteria for each of the five evaluation questions appears below.

Coherence

The EUAV Initiative experienced challenges in aligning with EU humanitarian aid and development initiatives and engaging with peer volunteer networks. EU Delegation staff were mostly unaware of EUAV-supported activities. There were few direct links with EU-supported humanitarian or development interventions due in large part to security restrictions preventing the deployment of volunteers to areas where DG ECHO was funding interventions.

Alignment with the EUAV Initiative was much more evident with SOs and HOs than with EU-supported humanitarian aid and development interventions. This was particularly the case with SOs specialised in volunteer deployments, as their participation in the EUAV Initiative helped to professionalise their management of volunteers and gave them access to a broader and better trained pool of candidates for volunteer deployments.

There was much less evidence of complementarity with major international volunteer networks outside the EU, including United Nations Volunteers (UNV), although the EUAV Initiative established informal links with some volunteer networks in EU Member States.

EU added value

The EUAV Initiative added value by centralising and standardising systems and processes, which would have been difficult for individual EU Member States to accomplish independently. The EUAV Initiative's efforts to promote EU common standards of volunteering through certification processes fulfilled a key Member State expectation in terms of added value.

Age was not a barrier to becoming an EU Volunteer. This was widely viewed as adding significant value compared to many other volunteer programmes in Europe, as it helped ensure that volunteer profiles met the needs of HOs.

The quality and standard of volunteer training provided by the EUAV Initiative was widely viewed as adding value in comparison to other volunteering schemes in the EU; training was not, however, always adapted to the different operating environments where volunteers were deployed.

The consortia approach resulted in increased collaboration and learning between SOs in different EU Member States. The EUAV Initiative enabled SOs to strengthen their volunteer management competencies and enlarge transnational networks, as well as providing international experience for the first time in many cases.

The profile of the EUAV Initiative was relatively low in the global volunteer network landscape due to a combination of the low number of deployments, low visibility, lack of clarity on volunteers' strategic contributions and limited engagement in international volunteer networks.

Effectiveness

The EUAV Initiative fell short of its expected contribution to increasing the opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian actions. It planned volunteering opportunities for just over a quarter of the original target of 4,000 deployments. Moreover, few of the volunteers were able to engage directly in humanitarian operations; many were engaged in general development activities.

The EUAV Initiative promoted partnerships with new organisations and volunteers' choice to pursue careers in humanitarian assistance. The lack of follow-up systems linking volunteers with potential job opportunities limited the EUAV Initiative's contribution to developing EU capacity in relief or development roles. The central training contributed to developing an "*esprit de corps*" among volunteers. Training was perceived as high-quality, but disconnected from the reality of volunteers' deployment activities, with notably too little attention given to "soft skills" and cultural awareness.

The quality of capacity building and technical assistance contributed to strengthening SO and HO capacities. The results were mixed in terms of matching volunteer skills and profiles to HO needs. The involvement of the HO combined with the high standard of candidates initially ensured the selection of relevant profiles; delays in the deployment process, however, meant that needs were often no longer relevant. Volunteers deployed to small "grassroots" organisations sometimes proved problematic due to differing expectations.

The EUAV Initiative ensured EU humanitarian aid principles were communicated to SO and HO volunteers and staff. The central training included a module on EU humanitarian principles which increased knowledge of this area for 88% of volunteers, according to ADE volunteer survey. SOs and HOs additionally engaged in seminars, workshops and other activities aimed at disseminating EU humanitarian principles. **Communication of EU humanitarian aid principles outside the EUAV Initiative remained limited,** however, with few volunteers engaged in humanitarian aid activities and little interest from EACEA and DG ECHO.

The EUAV Initiative's contribution to increasing coherence and consistency in volunteering across EU Member States is in line with its limited scale. The EUAV Initiative ensured that 76 SOs and 298 HOs received training on respecting standards in volunteering. However, fewer than half of SOs agreed that the EUAV Initiative helped reduce inconsistencies related to international volunteering in EU Member States.

Certified organisations did not demonstrate a consistent quality of volunteer management, although the EUAV Initiative did raise standards for small national organisations in particular. This variance was due to two factors: monitoring was principally the responsibility of HOs and SOs, and the general "one-size-fits-all" approach meant that the same systems and restrictions were applied regardless of the capacities and experience of SOs, HOs and volunteers.

Security restrictions also limited the achievement of the EUAV Initiative's objectives. The combination of provisions in the regulations preventing volunteers from being deployed to conflict zones and an additional security management system managed by DG ECHO at headquarters level meant volunteers were rarely directly involved in humanitarian interventions.

Efficiency

Appropriateness of budget. Due in large part to delays in starting up the EUAV Initiative, lack of funding was not a particular constraint for implementation. By 2019, 30% of available funds had not been used. The budget was set at an activity level rather than at any type of outcome level. Budgets therefore could not clearly be linked back to the five stated objectives for the EUAV Initiative.

Procedural requirements. Despite some positive effects, the complexity and lack of flexibility resulting from overly detailed and prescriptive EU regulations were detrimental to the cost-effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative. The guidance documents developed by the EUAV Initiative were not adequate for organisations to deal with the complex requirements involved. The complex procedural requirements mainly affected consortia with less-experienced SOs and small local HOs.

Monitoring of the EUAV Initiative did not fully utilise the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework developed for the EUAV Initiative. Monitoring of activities focused on outputs only, and not on quality and outcomes. Feedback from SOs and HOs was taken into account where possible and led to some corrective measures being taken. SOs and HOs highlighted the need for formal peer learning and knowledge-sharing activities to contribute to improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness, for example by disseminating good practices in management.

Cost effectiveness. The costs of deployment projects compared favourably with other volunteering schemes. Based on a subsample of deployment projects, it cost the EUAV Initiative on average EUR 3,180 to deploy a volunteer for a month, whereas each deployment of the international United Nations Volunteers programme costs EUR 4,360. A number of obstacles limited the cost-effectiveness of deployment projects at times, including the length of time between selection and deployment of volunteers, a mismatch between volunteers' skills and the needs in the field and a lack of HO capacity in some instances. Limited information on the outputs and outcomes of technical assistance (TA) or capacity building (CB) activities makes it difficult to reach a conclusion on their overall cost-effectiveness. The actual costs per organisation engaged in TA/CB interventions was lower than anticipated, which suggests that some attention has been given to cost-efficiency considerations.

Relevance

The objectives of the EUAV Initiative were in general relevant to the needs of volunteers, HOs and SOs, and were relevant to some extent to the needs of local communities. The actions identified in the Regulation were appropriate to address the objectives as shown below. However, in some cases the actions identified, including fostering local volunteering, promoting the coherence of volunteering across member states and communicating humanitarian principles, highlight specific weaknesses in the design.

- **Objective 1:** The design of the Initiative was appropriate to contribute to increasing the capacity of the Union to deliver humanitarian aid by improving the capacity of existing DG ECHO implementing partners, by enabling new organisations working in the humanitarian sector to apply for DG ECHO and EU funding, and by increasing the number of skilled volunteers participating in EU humanitarian work. However, the security management system put in place limited deployments of volunteers to areas with the greatest humanitarian need.

- **Objective 2:** The design was appropriate for improving the knowledge, skills and competencies of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid through its focus on high-quality training and the deployment opportunities it offered. The objective was relevant both for volunteers and for participating organisations.

- **Objective 3:** The design was appropriate for achieving the objective of improving the capacity of HOs but provided insufficient mechanisms for fostering local volunteering.

- **Objective 4:** The design was appropriate for increasing the knowledge of humanitarian principles for volunteers and participating organisations but did not allow for the promotion of these principles to indirect beneficiaries, including local populations and organisations.

- **Objective 5:** The design of the EUAV Initiative was relevant to promote the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States to a limited extent only. The focus of the EUAV Initiative at organisational level rather than state or inter-state level, and the lack of a comprehensive oversight system, limited the capacity of the EUAV Initiative to contribute to this objective.

The simultaneous pursuit of these five quite different and broad objectives created a degree of a competition for resources which may have constrained progress. However, it also enabled a more holistic approach to improving EU volunteering in the humanitarian aid sector. Progress in each individual objective complemented and reinforced progress in the other objectives, enabling different challenges in EU volunteering in the humanitarian sector to be addressed.

Although the EUAV Initiative was relevant to the specific needs it sought to address in order to improve EU volunteering in the humanitarian sector, its relevance to the broader needs of the humanitarian aid sector in general was more limited. The EUAV Initiative did not incorporate sufficient formal mechanisms in its design to facilitate learning, knowledge-sharing and the use of lessons learned. With the notable exception of SO consortia, lessons were mostly learned in an individual rather than collective manner and were shared through informal, ad hoc and spontaneous channels with limited outreach.

Summary of conclusions and recommendations

A concise summary of the conclusions and recommendations appear below. The complete versions are listed at the end of this report.

On the results obtained

Conclusion 1: The EUAV Initiative has significantly improved the capacities of SOs and HOs and has created a pool of well-trained and highly skilled volunteers in the field of humanitarian assistance.

Conclusion 2: The EUAV Initiative has contributed to increasing the capacity of the EU to deliver humanitarian aid by building the capacity of its partners, promoting the harmonisation of standards, fostering new partnerships and enabling the deployment of

trained EU volunteers. However, this contribution remained limited and for the most part short-term for reasons linked to the design and implementation of the EUAV Initiative.

Conclusion 3: The EUAV Initiative contributed to strengthening the consistency and coherence of volunteering across participating SOs despite certain discrepancies in the implementation of standards. However, its contribution to encouraging a broader coherence across Member States was more limited.

Conclusion 4: The EUAV Initiative contributed to the promotion of EU humanitarian principles across direct beneficiaries but did not succeed in a broader dissemination of these humanitarian principles.

Conclusion 5: The EUAV Initiative contributed to localisation, but only in a marginal way in fostering local volunteering, despite this being an objective. This is largely due to the absence of a clear strategy to foster local volunteering under the EUAV Initiative.

On coherence and EU added value

Conclusion 6: The work of the EUAV Initiative was not sufficiently integrated in the broader humanitarian aid and development work of the EU. Complementarities and opportunities for synergies with other EU activities as well as peer-volunteering schemes were not sufficiently explored.

Conclusion 7: The undertaking of the EUAV Initiative at the EU level was a source of added value due to the EUAV Initiative's centralised and transnational character, its greater capacity to mobilise resources, and its know-how in terms of training and deployment of volunteers in third countries. The Commission and DG ECHO have not, however, fully drawn on their specific role and global presence to create additional value.

On implementation and cost effectiveness

Conclusion 8: The EUAV Initiative prepared quality reference documents that were useful for implementation of the EUAV Initiative. Implementation was hampered, however, by a heavy administrative burden and procedural requirements.

Conclusion 9: The budget was not a constraining factor for the implementation of the EUAV Initiative, given that only 62% of the EUR 115 million available was used until 2019. This is due, among other reasons, to delays in implementation and slow take-up from partners at the start of the EUAV Initiative. The rationale of the budget allocation, however, was unclear and was not set against specific objectives. At the project level, the budget allocation was also sufficient overall, notably after some adjustments to budget restrictions.

Conclusion 10: The average cost of deploying volunteers was comparable to that of other volunteering schemes. Several obstacles limited the cost-effectiveness of volunteers' deployment, however, suggesting that there is room for improvement.

Conclusion 11: The overall management of the EUAV Initiative, notably through its placement within EACEA, was cost-effective. The operational costs provisioned for administering the EUAV Initiative were comparable to the overhead for grant recipients under EU-funded projects and certain UN agencies.

Conclusion 12: The EUAV Initiative was based on a good monitoring and evaluation framework, but in practice monitoring results were limited.

On relevance and design

Conclusion 13: The security management system successfully guaranteed the security of volunteers and limited the reputational risk of the EU. However, it also impacted the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions, as the EUAV Initiative limited engagement with organisations that were providing humanitarian assistance in risk zones, where volunteers could not directly contribute to the needs of the populations.

Conclusion 14: The EUAV Initiative adequately fitted the need to improve EU volunteering in the humanitarian field through a holistic approach. It pursued different complementary objectives of enhancing the capacities of volunteers and sending and hosting organisations and favouring the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States. The EUAV Initiative however assumed the relevance of the volunteering objective itself. It was not clear enough on why volunteering is important in a humanitarian context and why it should be pursued. It was also not clear enough on the hierarchy of the different objectives pursued.

Conclusion 15: The EUAV Initiative was characterised by a lack of contingency planning and a rigidity of regulations that limited its ability to adapt to changing contexts and hampered its effectiveness at times of crisis, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion 16: The design of the EUAV Initiative treated volunteers, SOs and HOs as homogenous groups and did not sufficiently consider their differing profiles and needs. This has hampered the effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative.

Recommendations

The summary recommendations below are targeted at the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (hereafter referred to as "the HumAid Corps") that will replace of the EUAV Initiative starting from 2021. The complete recommendations appear at the end of this report.

R1 **Improve the design of the HumAid Corps by clarifying its overall rationale**: the objectives it pursues, the relation between these objectives and their prioritisation. The design should also clearly establish why the HumAid Corps is the best option to achieve each objective pursued, and how and to what extent it should contribute to each objective.

R2 **Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the HumAid Corps through the development of a suitable European Commission "toolkit"** of mechanisms and tools adapted to the different categories of SOs and HOs; the different levels of needs of volunteers; and the diversity of volunteer roles and operating contexts during deployments.

R3 **Re-examine the European Commission security management system** to ensure that it allows for both risk management and the attainment of objectives relating to humanitarian action.

R4 **Strengthen HumAid Corps localisation efforts**, fostering local volunteering in particular by integrating it more systematically in the design of the HumAid Corps.

R5 **Clarify the budget rationale and develop budgetary measures that promote cost-effectiveness.**

R6 **Enhance communication and coordination with other EU humanitarian aid and development stakeholders,** as well as with peer volunteer networks such as UNV and Member States schemes.

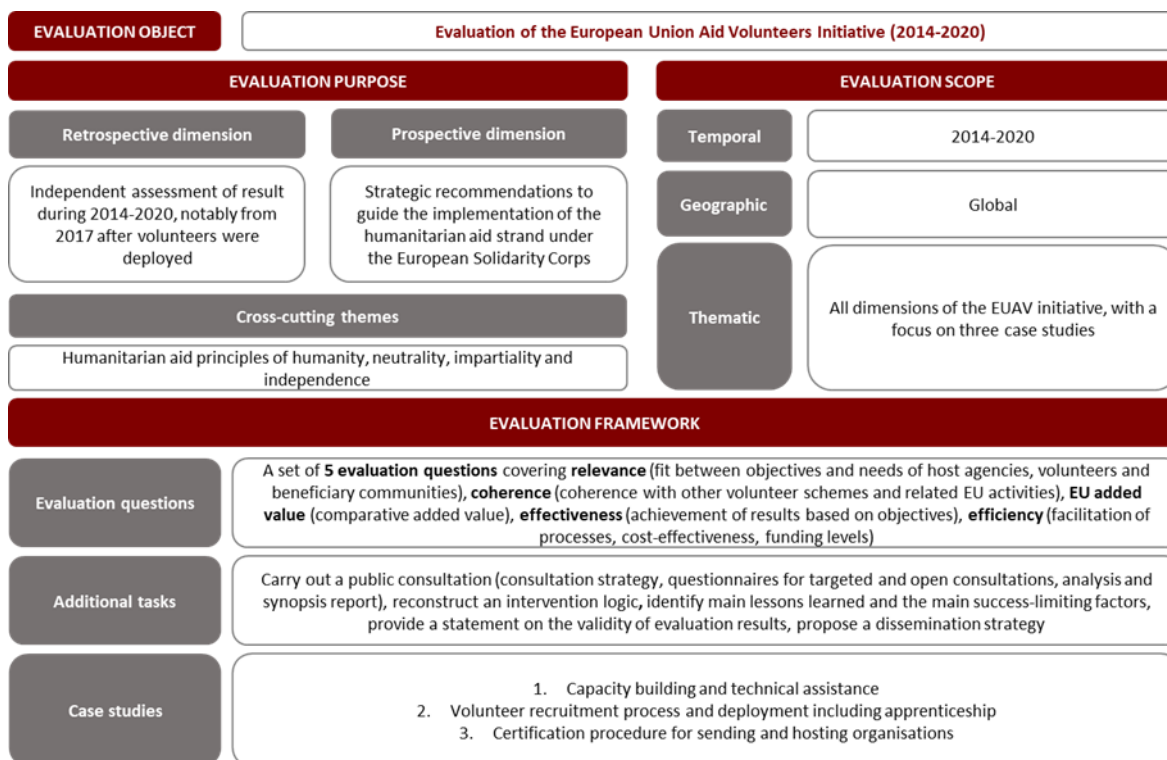R7 **Reinforce communication activities to improve the visibility and appreciation** of the HumAid Corps among European citizens, potential SOs and other EU stakeholders in the humanitarian sector.

R8 **Apply appropriate monitoring and evaluation system** and ensure adequate mechanisms are in place to promote peer learning and knowledge-sharing amongst all stakeholders.

1 EVALUATION PURPOSE, SCOPE AND FRAMEWORK

This is the final report of the ex-post evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers (EUAV) Initiative, covering the period 2014-2020. The purpose, scope and framework of this evaluation are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Evaluation purpose, scope and framework

EVALUATION OBJECT	Evaluation of the European Union Aid Volunteers Initiative (2014-2020)	

EVALUATION PURPOSE		EVALUATION SCOPE	

Retrospective dimension	Prospective dimension	Temporal	2014-2020
Independent assessment of result during 2014-2020, notably from 2017 after volunteers were deployed	Strategic recommendations to guide the implementation of the humanitarian aid strand under the European Solidarity Corps	Geographic	Global
		Thematic	All dimensions of the EUAV initiative, with a focus on three case studies

Cross-cutting themes	
Humanitarian aid principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence	

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK	
Evaluation questions	A set of **5 evaluation questions** covering **relevance** (fit between objectives and needs of host agencies, volunteers and beneficiary communities), **coherence** (coherence with other volunteer schemes and related EU activities), **EU added value** (comparative added value), **effectiveness** (achievement of results based on objectives), **efficiency** (facilitation of processes, cost-effectiveness, funding levels)
Additional tasks	Carry out a public consultation (consultation strategy, questionnaires for targeted and open consultations, analysis and synopsis report), reconstruct an intervention logic, identify main lessons learned and the main success-limiting factors, provide a statement on the validity of evaluation results, propose a dissemination strategy
Case studies	1. Capacity building and technical assistance 2. Volunteer recruitment process and deployment including apprenticeship 3. Certification procedure for sending and hosting organisations

Source: ADE

This ex-post evaluation was undertaken according to the requirements set in Regulation 375/2014 establishing the EUAV Initiative and consistently with the Commission's commitment to evaluate activities financed through the European Union budget.

In line with the Better Regulation Guidelines, the evaluation covers the evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, EU added value, effectiveness and efficiency/cost-effectiveness.

In addition to a retrospective, accountability dimension, the evaluation also has a fundamental forward-looking dimension, as the findings and recommendations will inform the implementation of the humanitarian strand of the new European Solidarity Corps, to be managed by DG EAC and operated by EACEA as of 2021.

The scope is the entire financing period of 2014-2020 with particular attention given to 2017-2020, during which the EUAV Initiative started to gain momentum. The evaluation covers all thematic dimensions of the EUAV Initiative, as identified in the ANNEX to Regulation 375/2014. Evaluation findings are supported by three thematic case studies covering the certification process for participant organisations, the volunteer management cycle and the technical assistance/capacity building (TA/CB) activities.

The audience for this evaluation is expected to be DG ECHO Unit B2, responsible for the management and monitoring of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, and DG ECHO evaluation team, EACEA staff and DG EAC staff who will take over the management of EU Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps. The evaluation will also be of interest to participant and prospective participating organisations; peer volunteer agencies, including at Member States level; and the European public at large.

1.1 *Timing of the evaluation*

This ex-post evaluation was launched following a start-up meeting on 18 August 2020 with the Steering Group for the evaluation. It came at the latest stage of trilateral negotiations that began in 2018 on the Commission's proposal for the establishment of the new EU Solidarity Corps (ESC), which envisaged the absorption of the EUAV Initiative under the humanitarian strand of the ESC. As this report is being prepared, the parties have reached political agreement on the handover of the EUAV Initiative to DG EAC under the new European Solidarity Corps (11 December 2020).[1] Provisions for the implementation of the regulation are expected to be approved over the course of 2021. A monitoring system will also be set up by 2022. Lessons learned from the implementation of the EUAV Initiative and recommendations provided by this evaluation come, therefore, at a critical moment for the design of the future ESC humanitarian strand.

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[1]   https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2385.

2   CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

2.1   Background

In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty provided for the establishment of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) with the objective of setting up a "framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the Humanitarian Aid operations of the Union".

Following the 2010 Commission Communication entitled "How to express EU citizen's solidarity through volunteering: First reflections on a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps", a preparatory action towards the design of EVHAC was launched in 2011. The preparatory action included various rounds of consultations with stakeholders, a series of assessment studies and a pilot phase covering the period 2011-2013. In 2014, the EUAV Initiative was established with Regulation 375/2014. The Regulation stipulated the objectives and actions of the EUAV Initiative and included provisions for its financing. The subsequent Commission Implementing Regulation (1244/2014) laid down the rules for the operation of the EUAV Initiative, while a Commission Delegated Regulation (1398/2014) detailed the standards for the recruitment and training of EU Aid Volunteers and standards governing partnerships between sending and hosting organisations. The EUAV Initiative was managed by DG ECHO, while the EACEA was responsible for its practical implementation (i.e. calls for proposals, contract management, budget appropriation, etc.).

The actions of the EUAV Initiative were to be guided by the humanitarian aid principles (i.e. humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence) and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (Regulation 375/2014, Article 5). The actions should also respond to the needs of local communities and requirements of the hosting organisations, ensure the safety and security of candidate volunteers, promote transnational partnerships, and increase the knowledge and visibility of EU humanitarian action within the European Union and abroad. Moreover, the EUAV Initiative should work in a coherent and complementary manner with the Union's policies and instruments, notably the humanitarian aid policy, development cooperation policy and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Regulation 375/2014, Article 6).

In addition to the overarching objective of "contributing to strengthening the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid […] and strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries" (Regulation 375/2014, Article 4), the EUAV Initiative pursued five operational objectives (Regulation 375/2014, Article 7):

- Contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid.

- Improve the skills, knowledge and competences of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid and the terms and conditions of their engagement.

- Build the capacity of hosting organisations and foster volunteering in third countries.

- Communicate the Union's humanitarian aid principles agreed in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

- Enhance coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid activities and operations.

2.2   Development of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative

The timeline in Figure 2 presents the development of the EUAV Initiative, starting from the pre-2014 preparatory phase until its conclusion at the end of 2020. The launch and implementation of the EUAV Initiative are presented in terms of milestones achieved and in relation to major contextual policy developments in the domain of humanitarian aid, including the Grand Bargain and the introduction of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approach.

**Figure 2 – EUAV Initiative timeline**

Source: ADE
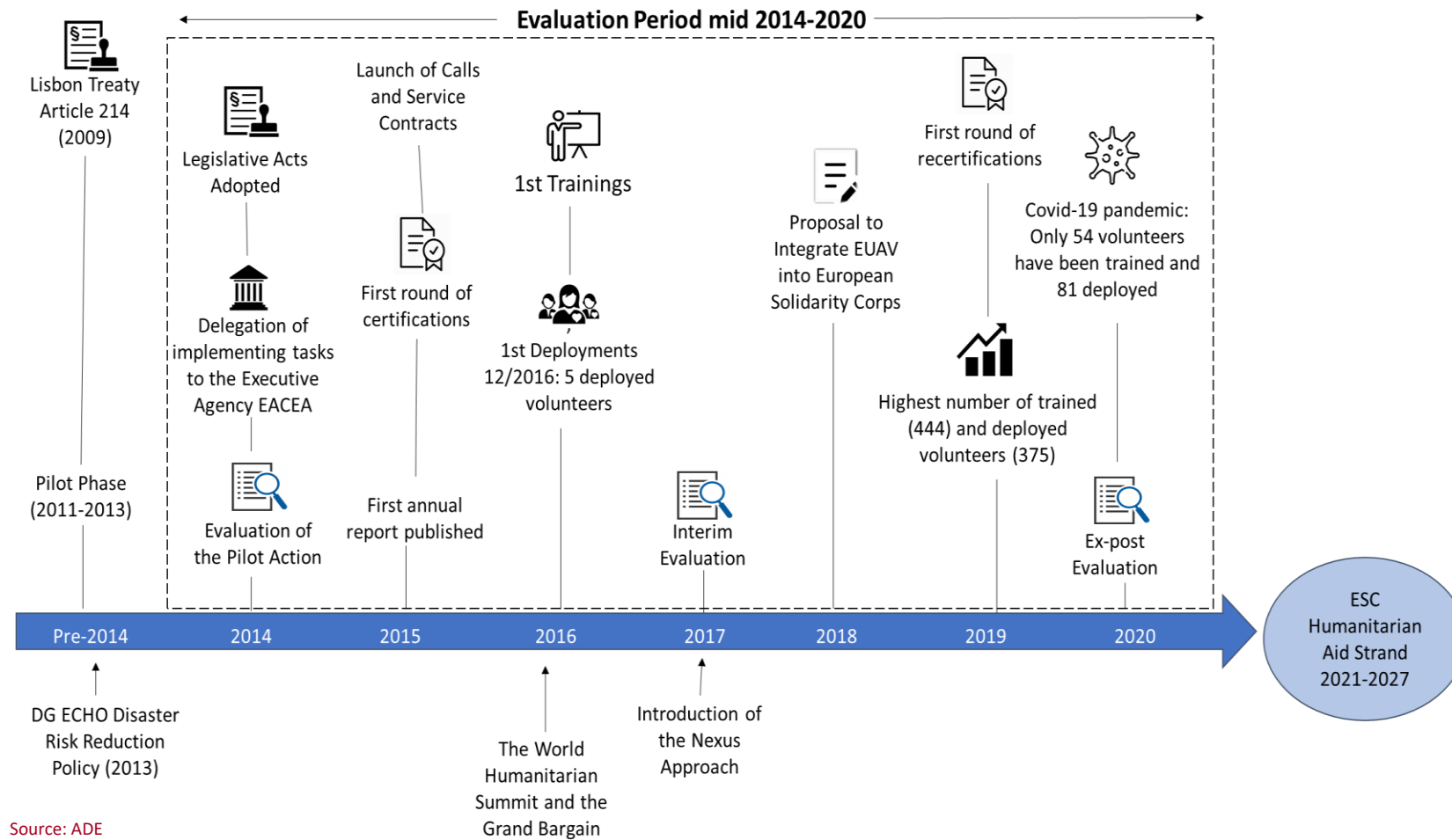
2.3   Facts and figures

Some key features of the EUAV Initiative, including targets, resources allocated and achievements during the implementation period, are illustrated below. As Figures 3 through 5 show, initial targets were not met. Latest data available to the evaluation date from September 2020. The second part of this section focuses on volunteer deployments and provides details on the areas of intervention (Figure 6), geographical coverage (Figure 7) and participants' profiles (Figures 8-10).

For the period 2014-2020, the EUAV Initiative was allocated EUR 141 million to finance the training of an initial target of 4,400 volunteers and the deployment of 4,000 volunteers[2], the provision of technical assistance and capacity building to participating organisations, and the implementation of communication and other support activities. The EUAV Initiative had its own funding through the general EU budget and was not covered by DG ECHO's humanitarian aid budget. Activities in 2015 and much of 2016 mainly focused on establishing systems and building the capacities of participating organisations. From 2017 onwards, EUAV Initiative activities intensified, and the number of volunteer placements funded increased rapidly, while the number of certified organisations continued to register constant growth throughout the implementation period. More recently (as of March 2020), the implementation of the projects, including the training and deployment of EU Aid Volunteers, has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 3 shows the number of certifications awarded to participant organisations and volunteer placement financed per year in the period 2015-2019. The number of funded deployments amounts to the 29% of the initial target. Figures on actual deployments are lower, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 3 – Deployments financed and certifications awarded (2015-2019)
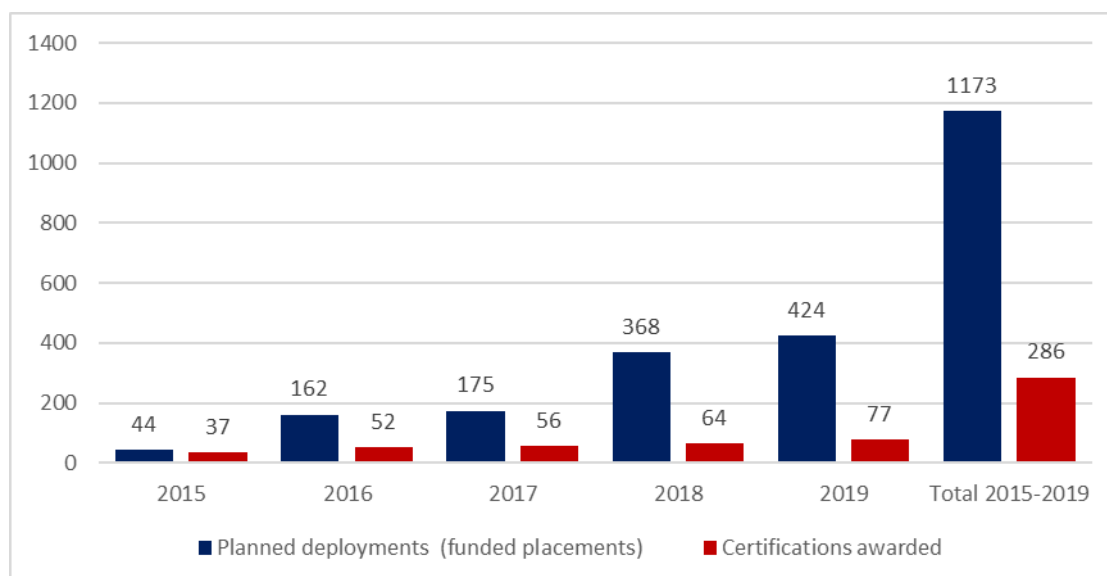
Source: ADE calculations based on data provided by the EACEA.

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[2]   The EU Aid Volunteers training had been conceived as a part of the volunteer selection process and, as such, it was offered to more prospective volunteers than those eventually recruited. Shortlisted candidates for each volunteering position (usually two) were requested to undergo a two-week training (including a final performance evaluation) as a part of their selection and recruitment process. Upon successful completion of the EUAV training, candidates were considered fit for deployment and eventually either deployed by their respective sending organisations or included in a reserve list of trained volunteers available for deployment on short notice who would be mobilised, for instance, in case of dropouts or to meet additional human resources needs. Details on training and recruitment are provided in Annex 2.

Initial targets for the deployment and training of volunteers were not met. As of September 2020, 1,065 volunteers had completed the EU Aid Volunteers training (24% of the target). Of the 1,173 deployments financed, only 788 had actually taken place (20% of the initial target of 4,000 deployments), involving 705 volunteers (some of whom were deployed twice). Due to COVID-19, some 400 deployments planned to take place during 2020 were postponed until 2021. In addition to these, 163 volunteers had participated in online assignments. During the period January-September 2020, only 81 volunteers were deployed and 62 volunteered online. In the same period, 54 volunteers were trained.

Figure 4 – Trained and deployed volunteers by year (2016-2020)
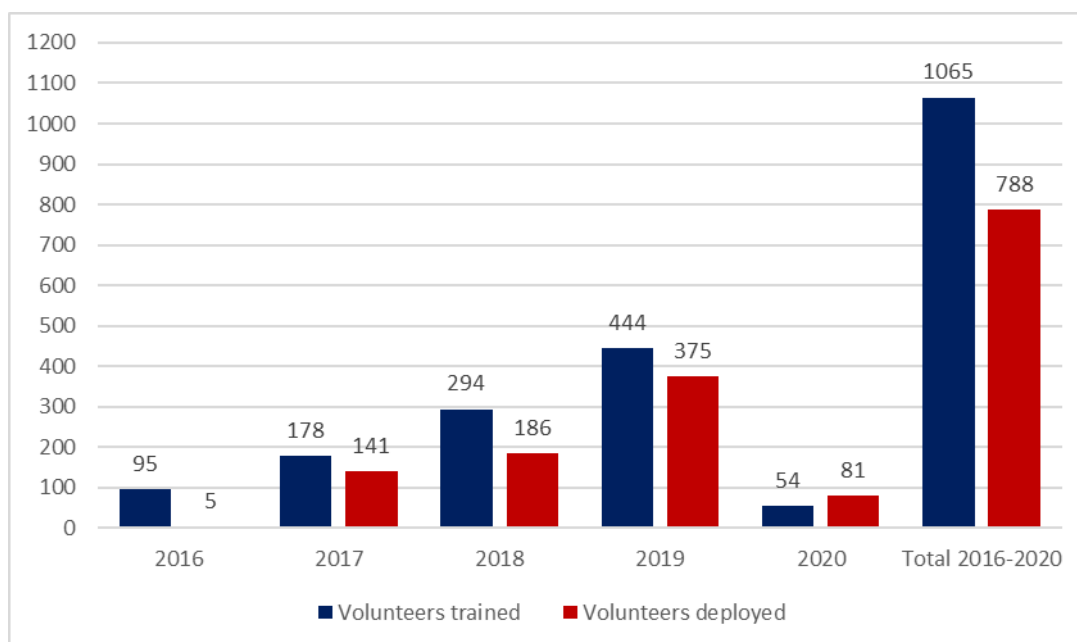
Source: ADE calculations based on data provided by DG ECHO and the EACEA.

For each type of activity (deployment, TA/CB and training), a considerable share of the available budget remained unspent. Deployment activities were seriously delayed at the start of the implementation period, with only 41% of the available budget committed (and 32% expended) by 2017 (Figure 5). From 2018, the deployment of volunteers gained momentum. In 2018 and 2019, the EUAV Initiative even granted more funding (i.e. commitments) to deployment projects than was budgeted. By the end of 2019, 77% of the overall deployment budget for the period 2014-2020 had been committed and 55% spent (though the proportion expended will increase as projects are completed). The allocated budget for TA/CB and training activities also was not entirely used, with 74% and 60% of their available budget, respectively, committed by 2019.

Figure 5 – Cumulated use of available funds by type of activity (2014-2020)[3]
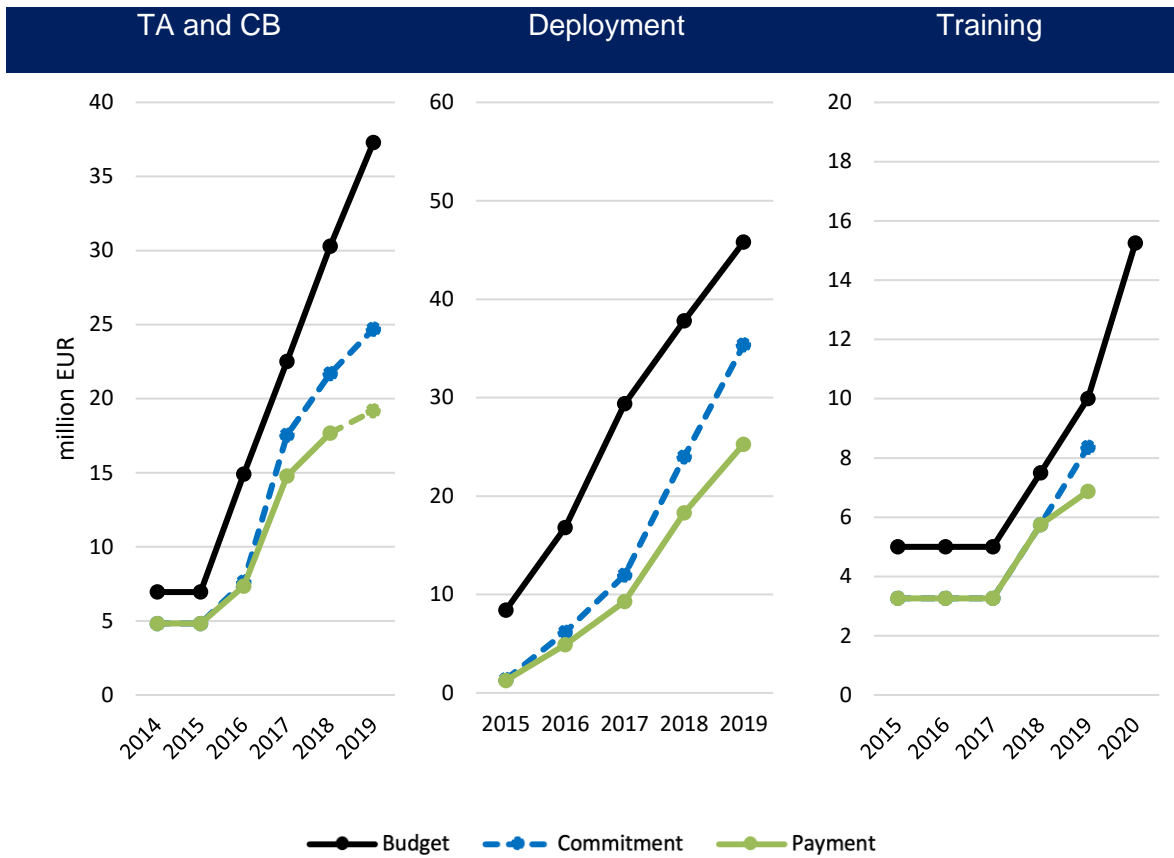
Source: ADE calculations based on EUAV Initiative financial data.

Most deployments aimed to cover cross-cutting positions such as communication; project management and administration; disaster risk reduction, environment and climate change; and finance and accounting (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Deployment vacancies by programme area (2015-2019)
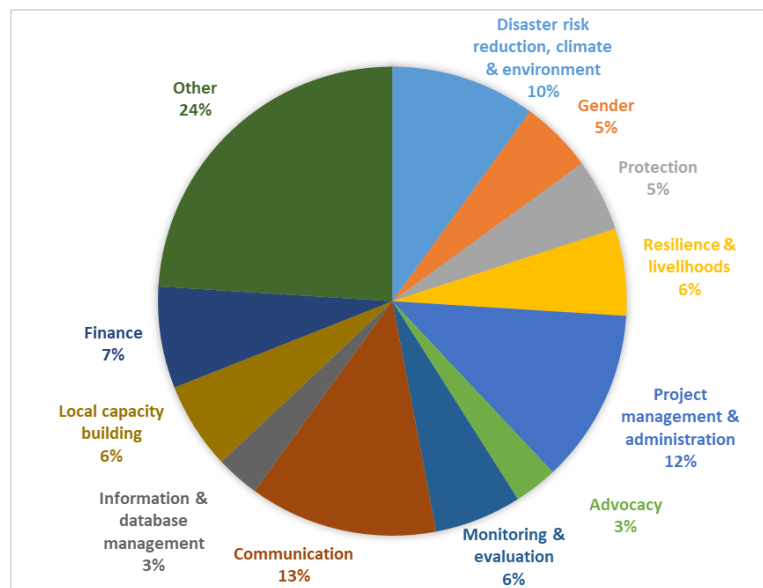
Source: ADE calculations based on EUAV Initiative data.

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[3]   The "budget" figures represent the budget requested by the EUAV Initiative; "commitment" is the amount awarded to specific projects and/or interventions; and "payment" is the amount actually paid out (i.e., expenditures). Payment figures for 2019 are shown with a dotted line as projects are ongoing and the figures are thus not definitive.

The map in Figure 7 shows the number of deployments by hosting country under the EUAV Initiative from 2016 to September 2020. Annex 4 provides details on the context and activities implemented under the EUAV Initiative in Colombia, Kenya and Nepal, which were among the countries that hosted the highest number of volunteers.

Figure 7 – Volunteer deployments by country (2016-2020)[4]
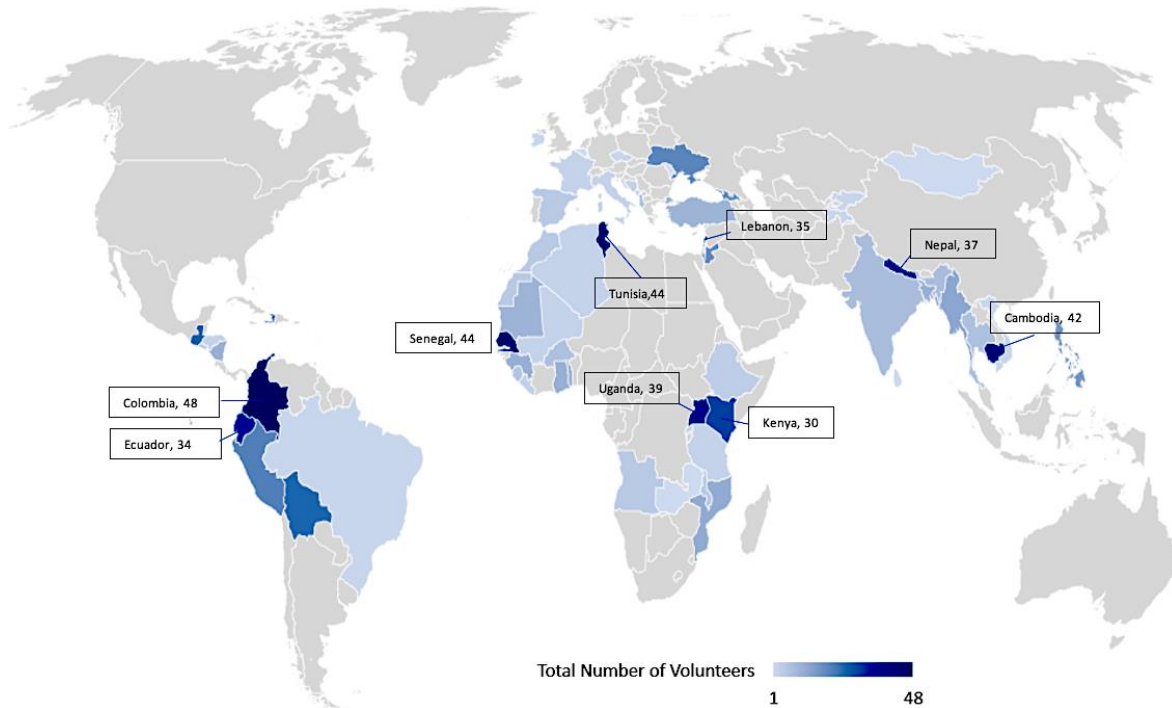
Source: ADE calculations based on data received from DG ECHO.

EU Aid Volunteers deployed up until September 2020 originated from a total of 32 countries. Although the vast majority were EU nationals — with 67% of volunteers coming from Italy, Spain and France — some third-country nationals who are long-term residents in the EU were also deployed. According to eligibility criteria, both EU citizens and third-country nationals who are long-term residents in the EU were eligible for deployment, while people of all nationalities were eligible for online volunteering assignments.

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[4]   Data on deployments based on insurance contracts show a small number of deployments taking place in EU countriesSome SOs decided to repatriate volunteers to the EU and keep them to work remotely on the projects and their place of deployment from April 2020 is somewhere in the EU.In other cases, EU deployments may indicate a change in the initial deployment projects due, for instance, to changed security conditions in the country of destination and subsequent suspension of EUAV activities in the field.

Figure 8 – Number of deployed volunteers by nationality (2016-2020)
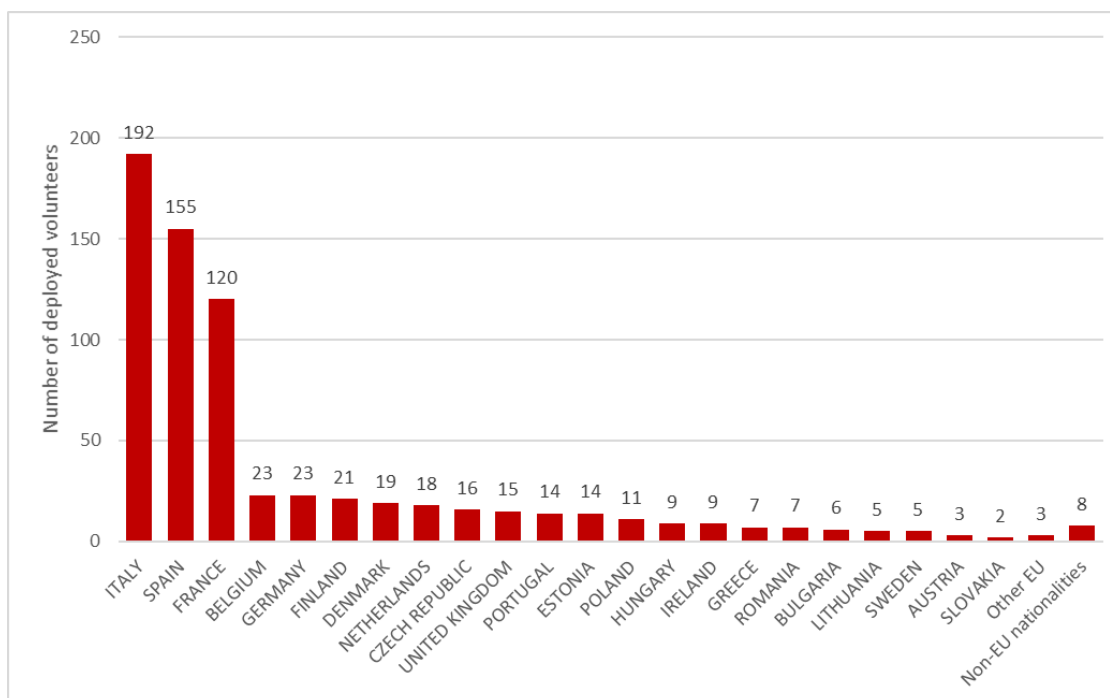
Source: ADE calculations based on EUAV Initiative data.

While prospective volunteers had to be at least 18 years old, the initiative did not set an upper age limit for participation and deployed volunteers of all ages, from 21 to over 65 years old. 67% of deployed volunteers were between 21 and 30 years old. Participants between 26 and 30 years old accounted alone for 48% of the total number of volunteers deployed. Participants aged up to 35 made up 86% of the total number of deployed volunteers; professionals aged between 36 and 45 accounted for another 9%.

Figure 9 – EU Aid Volunteer Deployments by age (2016-2020)[5]
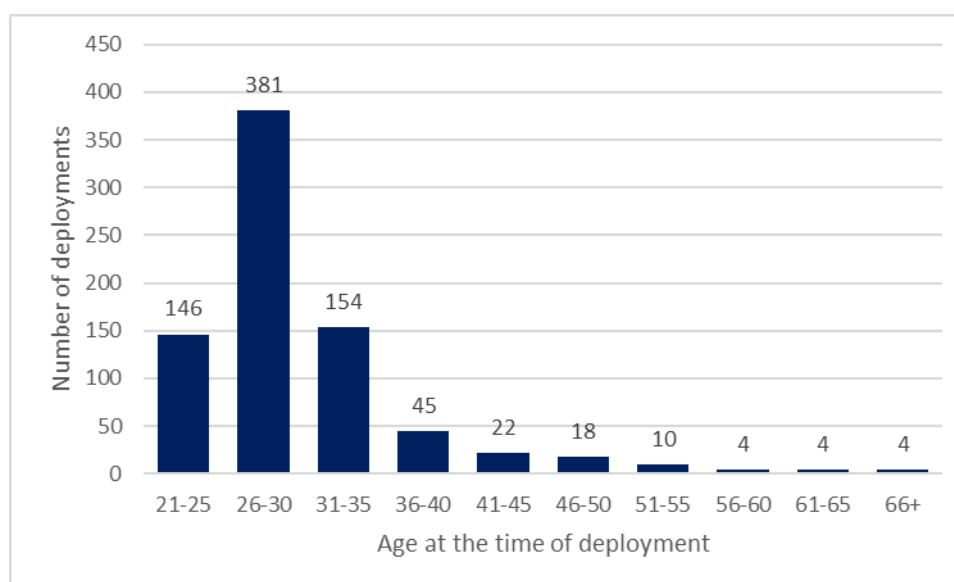
Source: ADE calculations based on data provided by the EACEA.

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[5]   Figure calculated on the total number of deployments (788). When volunteers were deployed twice, each deployment is counted separately.

The majority of EU Aid Volunteers deployed (72%) were women, and in the largest age group of 22–30-year-old, women accounted for 74% of the total participants. The gender representation for older participants was more balanced: 48% of deployed volunteers above the age of 40 were women and 52% men.

Figure 10 – EU Aid Volunteers deployments by gender (2016-2020)
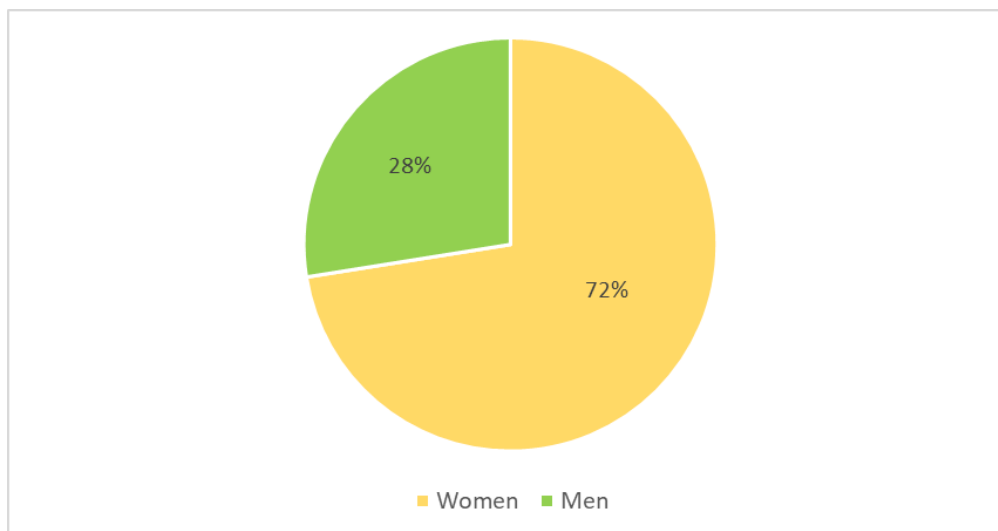
Source: ADE calculations based on data provided by the EACEA.

2.4   Reconstructed intervention logic

The evaluation team developed a reconstructed intervention logic based on the initiative outline provided in Regulation 375/2014. The intervention logic shown in was discussed with the Steering Group during the inception meeting and constituted the reference framework used to evaluate the EUAV Initiative. It starts with a problem statement that follows a series of causal pathways from inputs to activities, outputs and different levels of outcomes, and eventually describes the expected impacts. Assumed causal pathways also show immediate and longer-term outcomes.

Figure 11 – EUAV Initiative intervention logic
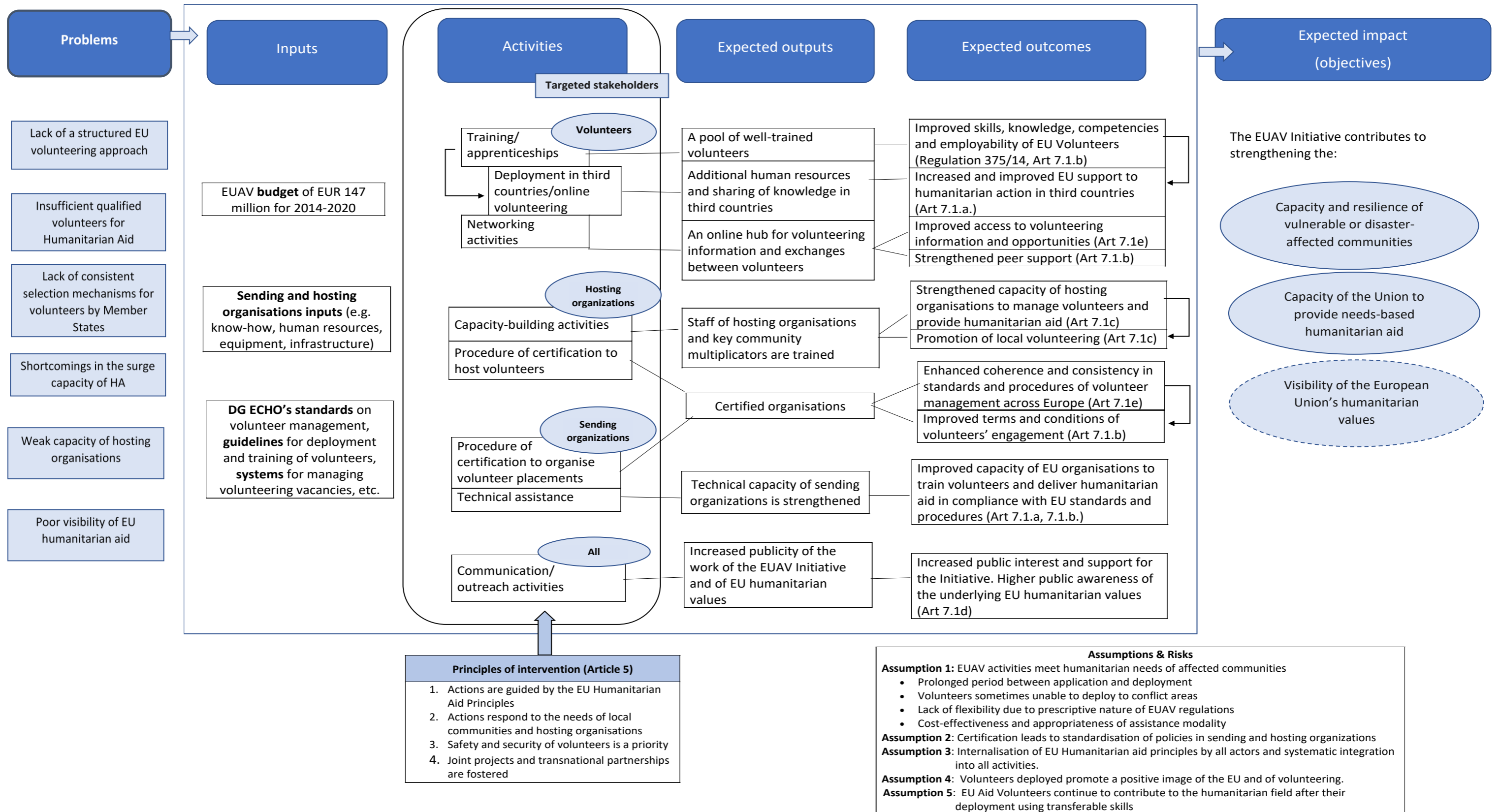
Source: ADE elaborations based on: EU Regulation 375/2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps; "Assessment of needs in the humanitarian sector with regard to knowledge, skills and competences", 2014; Annual Reports on the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative 2014-2019.

3   METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was implemented in three phases with deliverables in agreement with the Steering Group for this evaluation, taking into account the time available. Figure 12 shows the different phases.

Figure 12 – Evaluation activities by phase
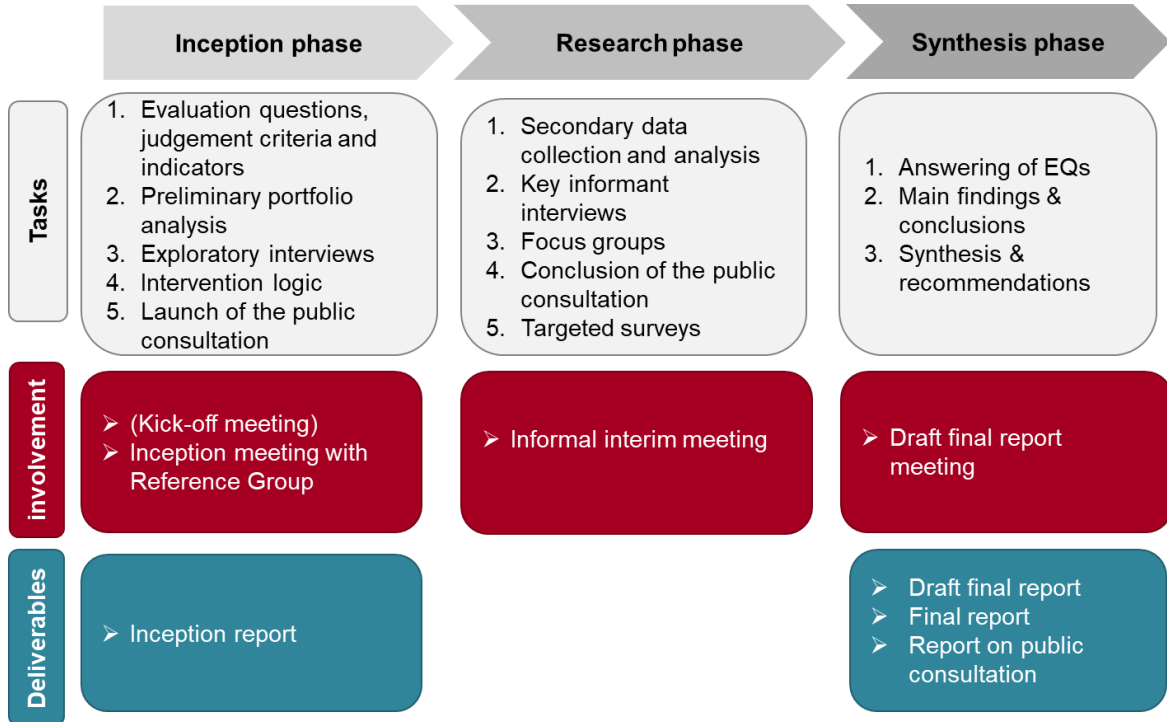
Source: ADE.

An evaluation matrix was developed and discussed with the Steering Group during the inception phase, and it served as a basis for data collection and analysis. A mixed methods approach was used to collect and validate data and findings. Survey questionnaires (see Annex 5) and interview guides (see Annex 7) were also based on the evaluation matrix.

Figure 13 – Evaluation framework
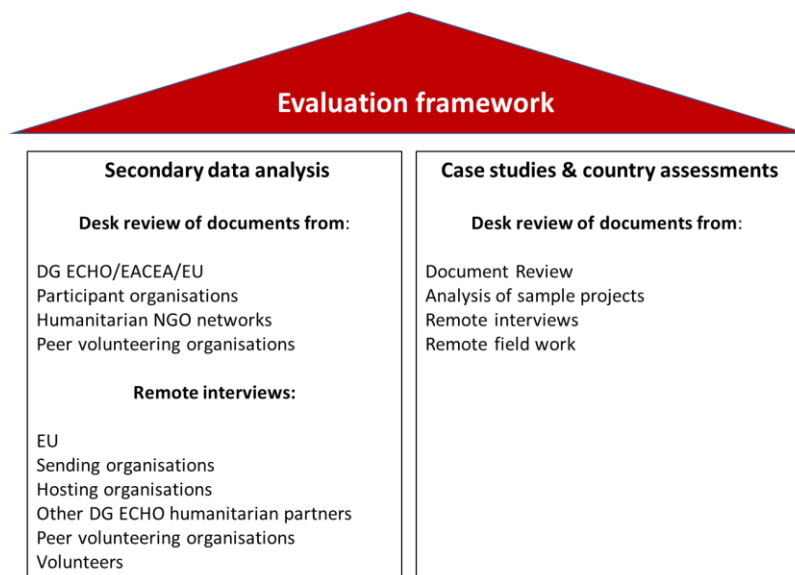
The methodology initially proposed for this evaluation envisaged three country missions and a series of face-to-face interviews with Brussels-based stakeholders. The three countries – Colombia, Kenya and Nepal — were selected during the inception phase to capture a regional perspective and because they hosted the highest number of volunteer deployments.

Due to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and the protracted suspension of international travel, it was necessary to revise the methodology during the inception phase and adapt it to a remote approach with no possibility of undertaking the envisaged field visits.[6] The adaptation of the methodology implied an increased reliance on secondary data, targeted surveys and remote interviews. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted remotely by international team members, with the support of national experts in the case of country-level consultations in Colombia, Kenya and Nepal. A summary of evidence collected from countries is presented in Annex 4. The disruption or suspension of EUAV Initiative-related activities due to the pandemic and the restriction of movement for national consultants in countries allowed limited opportunities for field visits to be conducted at deployment sites.

A total of 104 individuals were interviewed, including among EU staff and Members of the European Parliament (DEVE Committee) and from participating agencies, peer volunteering organisations, former volunteers and organisations with a presumed interest in the initiative. Data on key informant interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), disaggregated by stakeholder group and gender, are presented in Table 1. Due to staff turnover within the EU and participating agencies, retracing the institutional memory of the initiative required, whenever possible, interviewing key informants in their new positions. Despite the time constraints and the difficulties arising from the suspension of several EUAV-related activities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation benefited from a good level of responsiveness on the part of stakeholders that allowed for sufficient access to key informant groups. The team used a "snowball" approach for selecting and prioritising key informant interviews. Additional informants, particularly volunteers, were contacted using contact details provided in their response to targeted surveys or directly with the help of the DG ECHO EU Aid Volunteers Team.

Table 1 – Gender and geographic breakdown of KIIs and FGDs

	Stakeholder group	♂	♀	Total	FGD	
Region, global, other countries	EU interviewees	5	6	11	1	
	Participating agencies	8	21	29	1	
	Peer volunteer agencies	2	3	5	0	
	Volunteers	3	8	11	0	
	Other	4	2	6	0	
	SUBTOTAL	**22**	**40**	**62**	**2**	
	Stakeholder group	♂	♀	Total	FGD	
Colombia	EU interviewees	2	0	2	0	
	Hosting agencies	2	6	8	2	
	Volunteers	0	5	5	0	
	SUBTOTAL	**4**	**11**	**15**	**2**	

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[6] The revised methodology included an observation by Belgium-based team members of one EUAV centralised training in Belgium, but it had to be cancelled following the suspension of all EU Aid Volunteers training sessions until 2021. The suspension was decided in October 2020.

Kenya	Stakeholder group	♂	♀	Total	FGD	
	EU interviewees	3	0	3	0	
	Hosting agencies	3	5	8	0	
	Volunteers	0	4	4	0	
	SUBTOTAL	**6**	**9**	**15**	**0**	

Nepal	Stakeholder group	♂	♀	Total	FGD	
	EU interviewees	1	0	1	0	
	Hosting agencies	6	3	9	1	
	Volunteers	1	1	2	0	
	SUBTOTAL	**8**	**4**	**12**	**1**	

Overall	Summary	♂	♀	Total	FGD	
	EU interviewees	11	6	17	1	
	EU participating agencies	3	20	23	1	
	Hosting agencies	12	19	31	3	
	Volunteers	4	18	22	0	
	Other stakeholders	6	5	11	0	
	GRAND TOTAL	**36**	**68**	**104**	**5**	

Source: ADE.

In addition, four targeted surveys were prepared in the context of this evaluation that were addressed to volunteers, sending organisations, hosting organisations, and EU Member State representatives on the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). Survey questions were formulated based on the judgement criteria and indicators. The surveys have provided significant evidence on different stakeholders' perceptions of the benefits and challenges related to different dimensions of the initiative and contributed to identification of potential areas for improvement. Additional methodological details along with the consolidated survey results are available in Annex 6.

The surveys remained open on the EU Survey Platform for almost three weeks in November 2020. Surveys were published in English, apart from surveys of sending and hosting organisations, which were also published in French. ADE circulated survey questionnaires for sending and hosting organisations and the DG ECHO EU Aid Volunteers Team circulated questionnaires for volunteers and COHAFA members. The evaluation team applied a communication strategy to increase stakeholders' participation and ensure the representativeness of the sample.

Surveys for volunteers and sending and hosting organisations recorded high response rates.[7] A comparison of key population and sample variables allowed the team to conclude that the sample was representative of these stakeholder groups. A lower response rate by Member States Representatives was obtained (with only four respondents). To address the resulting gap in data concerning the perceptions of this stakeholder group, the evaluation used a series of alternative strategies including the organisation of a FGD with Members of the DEVE Committee of the European Parliament, which had been involved in the trilateral negotiations on the new European Solidarity Corps.

The Commission launched an online Public Consultation as part of this evaluation during October 2020. The Public Consultation questionnaire was prepared in collaboration with the evaluation team to complement the evidence collected through targeted stakeholder consultations. A total of fifteen responses were received for the Public Consultation until it closed on 13 January 2020. 8 responses were submitted by EU citizens and 7 were submissions on behalf of NGOs. Of the NGOs, 4 of the 7 organisations responding to the Public Consultation had also responded to the targeted surveys. Due to the small number of responses, the EU citizens responding only represented a limited number of countries. Even though there was a low number of responses, there was a consensus between the results from the Public Consultation and the targeted survey results and there were no significant outliers.

During the inception phase, 15 projects were selected to provide a representative sample in terms of project type and budget, geographical scope, temporal coverage, and type of organisations involved. The sample was analysed against the five evaluation criteria based on the available documentation. The complete list of selected projects and detailed project grids are presented in Annex 8.

Additional documents reviewed included relevant legal acts and policy documents; previous feasibility studies and assessments; annual work programmes and monitoring reports; project-level monitoring and evaluation reports; guidelines and other relevant documents provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including communication products; documentation shared by peer volunteering agencies. A complete list of references consulted can be found in Annex 10.

3.1 Limitations and constraints

Most of the main limitations and constraints had been identified by the end of the inception phase. These are described below, together with mitigation measures taken by the team to ensure the robustness of the evidence base despite various challenges.

The evaluation team had to consult a wide range of diverse stakeholders with different levels of knowledge about the context in which the initiative had been developed and with different levels of interest and engagement. This required the elaboration of targeted outreach strategies and tools as well as reliance on a variety of existing networks, among them the VOICE network and networks developed in the framework of peer volunteer schemes (as in the case of the Italian Civil Service Scheme).

This data collection phase for the evaluation had a limited timeframe and was conducted within a period of less than six months. Uncertainties linked to the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that the evaluation had to be conducted remotely, which further shortened the time available. To ensure sufficient quality of the final deliverables within the initially proposed timeline, it was decided, in agreement with DG ECHO, to combine interim and final deliverables.

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[7] There were 308 responses to the volunteer survey, 51 responses to the sending organisation survey and 129 responses to the hosting organisation survey. Additional details on respondent profiles are provided in Annex 6.

The methodology for remote field work was considered during the proposal stage and was further refined during the inception phase. The fact that key team members had previous experience conducting this type of complex evaluation remotely, including for DG ECHO, facilitated an effective reorganisation of the evaluation approach. In the case of country-level assessments, the evaluation benefitted from team members' pre-existing knowledge of the country and regional contexts and from access to a network of good-quality national consultants in each country. Nevertheless, the remote approach made it necessary to allocate additional time resources to team coordination efforts and to spread field-level interviews over a longer time span.

Data collection posed an important challenge for this evaluation. Complete sample project data, including financial data, were available only for projects that had started no later than 2017. The pandemic outbreak and subsequent suspension or extension of projects were one of the main reasons for the unavailability of complete data for 2018 projects. During the research phase, the team had access to full documentation for nine of the 15 sample projects, while only application forms were available for projects started in 2019.

An additional challenge in data collection was linked to the decentralised management of certain aspects of the initiative (e.g. the recruitment of volunteers) and related decentralised information management systems. In consequence, not all data were available at a single source and some had to be collected at the level of participant organisations. As many key informants and survey respondents noted in the survey and during interviews, the EUAV Initiative portal was not particularly user-friendly, and the evaluation team had to access many documents, such as evaluations commissioned by sending organisation consortia, directly from the agencies. Finally, the database used by the EUAV Initiative was separate from DG ECHO's Framework Partnership Agreement system as the project management is carried out by EACEA in their own IT environment. The team found it relatively more difficult to collect up-to-date and consistent data, which made it important for the team to reach out to participating organisations to access additional secondary data.

To increase response rates to targeted surveys, the evaluation team designed and implemented a communication strategy as a part of its broader consultation strategy, with the support of the EUAV Initiative team. These included the adoption of a user-friendly survey design that was fine-tuned after testing; an extension of the survey deadline, supplemented by the use of reminders, to allow sufficient time for all interested stakeholders to participate; tailored and timely support to address respondents' queries; and identification and use of different networks to disseminate information on the ongoing consultation and promote stakeholders' participation.

The communication strategy helped to ensure that good response rates were received from participating organisations and volunteers. The evaluation team also facilitated a focus group discussion with Members of the European Parliament involved in the negotiations on the Regulation for the establishment of the new European Solidarity Corps, under which the EUAV Initiative will be absorbed.

As significant structural changes in the initiative were expected as a result of the ongoing negotiations on the European Solidarity Corps, the team adapted the research focus to ensure relevant lessons learned from the EUAV Initiative were captured to provide useful recommendations for the future of EU humanitarian volunteering under DG EAC leadership. To this aim, regular consultations were conducted with both the DG ECHO EU Aid Volunteers team and DG EAC staff members involved in the setup of the new EU Solidarity Corps to discuss about needs and expectations and tailor the research focus and recommendations accordingly.

3.2 Validity of the evaluation results

As described above, the major limitations and constraints had been identified during the inception phase and mitigation strategies put in place. The high number of responses to the survey sample for participating organisations and volunteers, supplemented by interviews and FGDs successfully captured the range of direct stakeholder perspectives. When comparing the profiles of the participating organisations and volunteers to those that responded to the survey, it was found that the sample was representative in terms of gender balance, age and geographical distribution.

Once the data collected was triangulated from the targeted surveys, interviews and FGDs, the Public Consultation along with the documented evidence, the analysis showed consistent results between stakeholder groups. The evaluation team thus has a high degree of confidence in the evaluation results.

4   RESPONSE TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This section presents findings relating to the five evaluation questions in the TOR. Findings for each evaluation question are presented below based on the evidence collected from interviews and document reviews based on judgement criteria and indicators in the evaluation matrix. Relevance (EQ1) is presented last, as design and relevance issues are to a certain extent explanatory factors of what is observed for the other evaluation criteria, in particular effectiveness.

4.1   EQ2 Coherence

EQ 2	***To what extent was the Initiative coherent with related EU activities[8], particularly with humanitarian aid, development, and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism?***

An objective in the 2014 Regulation[9] establishing the EUAV Initiative was to "*enhance coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid activities and operations*". This question assesses coherence by examining the extent that the EUAV Initiative:

- adopted a specific approach to ensure coherence with other relevant measures and initiatives, including compatibility and positive contributions to humanitarian aid and development activities supported by the EU; and

- complemented other volunteering initiatives, including initiatives from individual EU Member States and UN Volunteers.

Summary Response to EQ 2
• The EUAV Initiative experienced challenges in aligning with EU humanitarian aid and development initiatives and engaging with peer volunteer networks. EU Delegation staff were mostly unaware of EUAV-supported activities. There were few direct links with EU-supported humanitarian or development interventions due in large part to security restrictions preventing the deployment of volunteers to areas where DG ECHO was funding interventions.
• The lack of alignment was largely the result of issues in the design (see response to EQ1), as well as the tension between the objective of supporting the EU humanitarian agenda and the security restrictions severely limiting the deployment of volunteers to areas where the EU was engaged in humanitarian interventions.
• Alignment with the EUAV Initiative was much more evident with SOs and HOs than with EU-supported humanitarian aid and development interventions or with peer volunteer networks.
• **Complementarity was particularly strong for SOs specialised in volunteer deployments** given that participation in the EUAV Initiative helped professionalise their management of volunteers and provided access to a broader and better trained pool of candidates for volunteer deployments. From 2018 onwards, organisations who had gone through Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) certification processes also found it easier to comply.

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[8] Supporting disaster management capacity & risk reduction/resilience.

[9] Article 7e of Regulation No 375/2014.

- The EUAV Initiative established informal links with some volunteer networks in EU Member States. There was much less coordination or evidence of complementarity with major international volunteer networks outside the EU, including UNV.

The section below examines coherence and complementary of the EUAV Initiative with EU-supported humanitarian aid and development interventions, SOs, HOs and peer volunteer networks.

Coherence and complementarity with other relevant EU initiatives

There were contradictions in the objectives of the Initiative which prioritised support for the EU humanitarian agenda whilst at the same time establishing systems that effectively prevented volunteers from being deployed to areas where the EU was supporting humanitarian intervention due to security concerns.

One of the main findings in the 2017 interim evaluation[10] was that the EUAV Initiative continued to experience difficulties in aligning with EU humanitarian assistance programmes, engaging professional humanitarian actors and communicating the EU's humanitarian principles.

Interviews, survey results and the desk review of the project sample found very few concrete examples of direct links with EU-supported interventions. **EU Delegation staff interviewed were mostly unaware of activities supported by the EUAV Initiative.** Most of the HOs implementing the projects were not DG ECHO partners.[11] Examples given of attempts at coherence were limited to isolated cases where the EU Delegation and/or HOs had proactively sought contact to share information about interventions being undertaken, or where HOs were already implementing partners for EU-funded interventions.[12]

The lack of connection between volunteers and the EU Delegation was illustrated by the relatively high proportion of survey respondents who were unaware of any linkages. A quarter of respondents to the SO and HO targeted surveys felt they lacked the information to judge whether volunteer-supported activities were compatible with or contributed positively to EU humanitarian or development interventions.[13] The proportion of unknowns increased to almost half when asked about links with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)[14] and other EU volunteering schemes such as the Solidarity Corps. At the same time, a majority of SO and HO respondents either "strongly agreed" (some 28%) or "mostly agreed" (some 42%) that volunteer-supported interventions were compatible with EU activities in the field of humanitarian or development aid. This apparent contradiction was probed during interviews and the resulting findings, together with comments in the survey, indicated that the high rate of agreement was based on an implicit assumption that working in areas related to development and humanitarian aid would be likely to support the EU agenda. Responses to the Public Consultation were consistent with this, with 7 of the 15 respondents saying that the EUAV Initiative and EU humanitarian activities were complementary.

At the time that the EUAV Initiative was launched, it was anticipated that volunteers would be supporting ECHO-funded interventions. **In addition to the ban imposed by the regulation on EU volunteers being deployed to conflict zones,[15] there was resistance at various**

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[10] Kunze, M. et al. (2017) Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative.
[11] Interview notes 49149, 44687, 46014, 39893, 16679, 26959, 41178, 30532, 12588, 3700, 37211.
[12] Interview notes 11715, 22908, 10672.
[13] The overarching survey question E4 asked was "*To what extent do you agree that the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative was compatible with and/or contributed positively to the following other activities?*" See annex for further details.
[14] The only examples of complementarity found was in the initial stages of the EUAV Initiative when two capacity building projects coordinated by the Italian Department of Civil Protection were launched which had among their objectives the improvement of civil protection capacities in EU and partner countries participating in the UCPM.
[15] Regulation 375/2014, Article 14.3 states that: *EU Aid Volunteers shall not be deployed to operations conducted in the theatre of international and non-international armed conflicts.* Similar restrictions are planned once the Initiative is taken over by the European Solidarity Corps.

levels of the EU to the concept of young volunteers being sent to emergencies.[16] ECHO staff saw little use in being supported by young volunteers with limited experience. This led to considerably less coherence between the EUAV initiative and other humanitarian actions than was anticipated. Most of the activities were development-focused, as illustrated by this response to the survey: *"Because of security reasons volunteers cannot be deployed in many areas where humanitarian interventions are carried out, thus their contributions may be more related to linking relief to development rather than actual humanitarian assistance."*[17]

In addition to these security-driven restrictions on volunteer deployment, **the relatively long gap between the planning and deployment of volunteers further limited their involvement in humanitarian interventions**. The delay between request and deployment often meant that HO needs had changed and the volunteer had to fill a role that had not been originally planned.[18]

This lack of alignment can be mainly attributed to inherent tensions within the Initiative which, on one hand, prioritised support to the EU humanitarian agenda but, on the other, established systems that effectively prevented volunteers from being deployed to areas where the EU was supporting humanitarian intervention due to security-related restrictions.[19]

There was **no protocol for volunteer on-boarding to facilitate engagement with the EU Delegations in the country of their deployment** and provide orientation focused on EU-supported interventions. Information about volunteer activities within the EU Delegations was mainly limited to periodic email notifications from DG ECHO HQ. In two countries regular interactions were established between EUAV Initiative partners and volunteers,[20] but in the isolated cases where there was contact it was often initiated by the EU Delegation and limited to an information exchange over lunch. Monitoring volunteer activities was the sole responsibility of the SOs and the HOs without any involvement of DG ECHO or the EU Delegation in country.[21] The only exception appeared to be allocating DG ECHO a lead role in 2019 in the event of a volunteer being a victim of a serious crime or becoming involved in a critical incident such as a kidnapping.[22]

There were **few direct links between the EUAV Interventions and the EU-supported interventions**. In the case of DG ECHO interventions, this was due in large part to limits on geographical areas where volunteers could be deployed due to security restrictions. With some exceptions, DG ECHO field offices had very limited information on activities supported by EU Volunteers. In many cases the HOs, notably national HOs, had no contractual links with DG ECHO or other sections of the EU Delegation.

Complementarity with other volunteering schemes

When responding to the conclusions and recommendations of the 2017 interim evaluation, the European Commission acknowledged the need to improve consistency in the approach to volunteering in third countries with other EU volunteering schemes. The recommendation was to seek coherence and synergies with the European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps and to optimise complementarity between the humanitarian aid and development sectors.[23]

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[16]   Interview notes 37361, 46014, 9816, 12588, 43365.
[17]   Interview notes 6925, 23811, 18259, 37211, 36888, 15153.
[18]   Interview notes 3700, 49149, 44687, 39799. The 2017 interim evaluation of the EUAV Initiative also found that the time period between requests and deployments were too long.
[19]   Interview notes 47937, 14920, 9816.
[20]   Interview notes 22908, 41178.
[21]   Interview notes 6558, 16679, 26959, 39893, 29600, 32590.
[22]   EACEA – DG ECHO (2019) EUAV Initiative: Critical Incident Management Procedure. Fortunately, the critical incident protocol was not actually activated since there were no instances when it was needed.
[23]   European Commission (2018) Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Interim Evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative for the period mid-2014 to mid-2017.

Based on interviews and the desk review, **the EUAV Initiative was complementary to the work of SOs and HOs, notably those SOs who specialised in volunteer deployments**. The SO consortia approach to working with other European organisations based on set standards was widely viewed as useful in sharing lessons learned and achieving a more coherent approach to volunteer management.[24] Awareness of volunteers and volunteerism was very limited, with the exception of SOs such as the Red Cross and VSO which have long histories of volunteerism. Based on the survey results and interviews, it was evident that potential for peer learning had not been optimised.

The EUAV Initiative did establish informal links with some volunteer networks in EU Member States, although one representative of an EU Member State felt that the link between EU Aid Volunteers and the European Voluntary Service was unclear despite the decision to merge both bodies to create the European Solidarity Corps.[25] Some EUAV volunteers had previously deployed as volunteers of organisations based in EU Member States.[26]

There was much less coordination or evidence of complementarity with major international volunteer networks outside the EU, including UNV, which has deployed some 8,000 volunteers annually for 18–20 months.[27] UNV provided feedback and insights as the EUAV was being developed and subsequently made attempts to share learning and collaborate on initiatives, such as setting up joint online resources for volunteers. Despite shared objectives and extensive learning,[28] the EUAV unit did not appear to have followed up on these offers to collaborate.

Based on the survey results and interviews **it was evident that potential for peer learning had not been optimised**.[29] Half of the respondents from SOs, HOs and volunteers responded "cannot judge/no opinion" to the survey question "*To what extent do you agree that the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative was compatible with and/or contributed positively to volunteering schemes?*" A number of interviewees and survey respondents felt that more peer learning with established volunteer networks could be valuable,[30] as illustrated by the comment from a survey respondent: *"It could be very useful to explore complementarities with the UN volunteers in the country. Currently this is not being done."*

The fact that peer volunteer networks such as UNV were able to adapt better to the impact of the global pandemic through adjusting their training modalities and updating competencies suggested that more peer learning could have been useful.[31]

Another issue relating to coherence frequently raised during interviews and in survey responses when comparing the EUAV Initiative with peer volunteer networks was the scale of volunteer allowances. **Rates for volunteer allowances under the EUAV Initiative were at the lower end of the scale** compared to other international volunteer programmes[32] and only 54% of EU volunteers responding to the survey expressed satisfaction with their allowance. Allowance scales and their effects are described in more detail in the Efficiency section below.

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24   Interview notes 36831, 935.
25   Interview note 27891.
26   Interview notes 30532, 32590, 33565.
27   Source: UNV.
28   For example, as of December 2020 UNV was maintaining an online "ECAMPUS" and had commissioned and published 74 evaluations on volunteer themes.
29   Interview notes 5992, 16872.
30   Interview notes 49149, 44687, 5992. See also Case Studies and Colombia field study for additional details.
31   Additional details can be seen in the Case Study in the annex on Recruitment, Apprenticeship and Volunteer Deployment.
32   Interview notes 30428, 15358, 49149, 44687.

4.2 EQ3 EU Added value

EQ 3	*To what extent did the Initiative provide EU Added value?*

EU Added value was assessed by examining the extent to which the EUAV Initiative was able to:

- draw upon its specific role and mandate to demonstrate added value in comparison with similar interventions undertaken either by individual EU Member States or other actors; and

- position itself within the humanitarian volunteer network landscape to add value at a global level.

Summary Response to EQ 3
• The Commission drew on its comparative advantages through the application of a centralised approach to add value which could not be achieved by Member States and other actors. **The EUAV Initiative added value by centralising and standardising systems and processes,** which would have been difficult for individual EU Member States to accomplish independently. The EUAV Initiative's efforts to promote EU common standards of volunteering through certification processes fulfilled a key expectation of EU Member States in terms of added value.
• **Age was not a barrier to becoming an EU Volunteer. This was widely viewed as adding significant value** compared to many other volunteer programmes in Europe, as it helped ensure that volunteer profiles met the needs of HOs.
• **The quality and standard of training provided by the EUAV Initiative to volunteers** was widely viewed as adding value in comparison with other volunteering schemes in the EU; training was not, however, always adapted to the different operating environments where volunteers were deployed.
• **The consortia approach has resulted in increased collaboration and learning** between SOs in different EU Member States. The EUAV Initiative enabled SOs to strengthen their volunteer management competencies, enlarge transnational networks, as well as providing international experience for the first time in many cases.
• **The profile of the EUAV Initiative was relatively low in the global volunteer** network landscape due to a combination of the low number of deployments, low visibility, lack of clarity on volunteers' strategic contributions and limited engagement in international volunteer networks.

Comparative added value of an EU approach to volunteering

The Commission drew on its comparative advantages to add value which could not be achieved by Member States and other actors through the application of an integrated approach.[33] While this report describes different components where improvements are needed, the EUAV Initiative succeeded in creating added value for the EU through development of common standards for managing volunteers from EU countries, mandatory training for volunteers, and funding for capacity building and technical assistance.

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[33]   Kunze, M., et al. (2017) Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative.

The consortium model also enabled organisations with different backgrounds and of different sizes to work together.[34] In the survey, 34% of SOs indicated they had needed assistance to complete the certification process. Respondents noted that belonging to a consortium facilitated the process since they could draw upon larger organisations with better developed management systems. Independent evaluations commissioned by SO consortia confirmed that the EUAV Initiative contributed to establishing standard criteria, procedures and management processes for international volunteering as a result of the participation of both SOs and HOs.[35]

Volunteer management standards established by the EUAV Initiative through certification processes may be considered as a European standard given that they are mandatory for all deployment grant applicants and are promoted by the Commission. This evaluation reaffirms the findings of the 2017 interim evaluation that the EUAV Initiative has added value by centralising and standardising systems and processes, an approach which individual EU Member States would have had difficulty in accomplishing independently. **The success of the EUAV Initiative in promoting EU common standards of volunteering has thus fulfilled a key expectation of EU Member States regarding its added value**.[36] The majority (73%) of respondents to the Public Consultation agreed that the EUAV Initiative had played a role in promoting common standards. Volunteers also felt that being able to include experience as an EU volunteer was a positive element to include in a CV. The standard of training provided by the EUAV Initiative to volunteers was widely seen as of higher quality than trainings offered by other existing volunteering schemes.[37] As one volunteer explained: *"Having had a similar experience with my member state I can say that the level of support, training and care that the EUAV Initiative can provide participants is much higher and of much more quality than that of some member states."*[38]

Promoting minimum standards for all organisations in terms of their responsibilities towards volunteers, in particular in terms of duty of care and safety, and establishing minimum requirements on the coverage of subsistence, insurance, accommodation and other relevant expenses, directly affected the terms and conditions of the deployment of volunteers. The relevance of increasing the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States was confirmed by the surveys. Indeed, 74% of volunteers agreed that this was important for the success of a volunteering scheme such as the EUAV Initiative. Most organisations also considered this objective important for the success of the EUAV Initiative (68% of HOs and 57% of SOs), but ranked it as the least important objective among the five. Some SOs interviewed questioned the relevance of aspects of the policy harmonisation, emphasising the need to allow for diversity across organisations to respect differing contexts and experiences; they also criticized what was deemed as an excessive focus on the security of volunteers.

Individual organisations participating in the EUAV Initiative were certified as having met the minimum common standards set by the Initiative, but this did not lead to broader coherence and consistency across Member States. Interviews with some SOs showed that, while in some cases there were policy spillovers from the EUAV Initiative to other schemes, it was not unlikely for the standards of the EUAV Initiative to conflict with those of the national schemes in which they participated. This created several issues for the organisations attempting to reconcile these different standards.[39] Several volunteers commented in the interviews and surveys that the lack of appropriate incentives and an effective monitoring system to ensure

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[34]   European Commission (2018) Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Interim Evaluation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative for the period mid-2014 to mid-2017.

[35]   Lage, P.G. et al. (2020) External Final Evaluation MdM Consortium Capacity Building and Deployment Project – EU Aid Volunteers.

[36]   EU Member survey and interview notes 27891, 39799.

[37]   Although a majority of survey respondents and interviewees felt the mandatory training for volunteers was of high quality, it was not necessarily adapted to the different operating environments where volunteers were deployed. This is discussed in more detail in the response to EQ4 (Effectiveness).

[38]   Comment in targeted survey for EU volunteers.

[39]   For example, interview note 47937.

compliance with standards post-certification hampered the achievement of this objective and resulted in discrepancies across organisations.

An important motivation for participation in the EUAV Initiative was to **improve the public image of the HOs by obtaining certification**. Some 76% of HOs who responded to the survey said this was either very important or important to their decision to participate in the EUAV Initiative.

Age group

There was a strong support for recruitment of volunteers over 30 years of age. There was a strong consensus amongst stakeholders with first-hand experience of the EUAV Initiative that **the lack of an age limit was a distinct added value compared to many other volunteer programmes in Europe.**[40] SOs felt that age diversity helped ensure that volunteer profiles matched the needs of HOs, notably for specialised roles and in those HOs with little volunteer management experience where a more experienced volunteer was required. EU volunteers had an average age of 30 and included examples of older volunteers who were in career transitions and viewed the EUAV Initiative as a useful opportunity to facilitate this. HOs who had experience of hosting volunteers from different organisations felt that **EU volunteers tended to be better prepared and more experienced than those sourced from most Member State organisations.** The following quote from a volunteer responding to the survey is a perspective shared by many stakeholders with experience of other volunteering schemes in Europe. *"I found the programme to be better structured compared to other volunteering mechanisms. Another positive element was the absence of age limit which, in my opinion, increases the chances to interact with people of many different ages with different experiences, backgrounds."*

Interviewees noted that younger volunteers could add value but tended to require more supervision and a well-defined working environment to make up for the lack of experience.[41]

Added value in the global humanitarian volunteer landscape

Based on interviews and survey results, the EUAV Initiative was seen to add significant value to SOs and HOs but **maintained a relatively low profile in the global volunteer network landscape**. This low profile was attributed to four main factors:

- **Relatively low number of deployments**. Less than 1,000 volunteers were deployed throughout the EUAV Initiative, compared to around 8,000 UNVs deployed each year, of which around 20% are European citizens.[42]

- **Low visibility**. As described under EQ4 below, the SOs, HOs, volunteers and the team in EACEA all invested time and resources in trying to raise the profile of the EUAV Initiative and communicate its achievements. At the same time, the lack of strong links between the EUAV Initiative and the EU Delegations and EU-supported interventions resulted in relatively low awareness.[43]

- **Lack of clarity about the strategic contribution of EU volunteers**. Along with the lack of strategic links with EU-supported interventions in third countries, the common feedback from volunteers provided to SOs was a desire to better understand how their

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[40] Interview notes 20828, 14920, 935, 27988, 11715, 30756, 29600, 12588, 6675, 16872, 39799. See the Case Study on Recruitment, Apprenticeship and Volunteer Deployment for more details.

[41] Interview notes 26959, 16872, 20828. See the Case Study on Recruitment, Apprenticeship and Volunteer Deployment for more details.

[42] Source: UNV.

[43] Further details are provided in the response to EQ2 (Coherence). This was similar to the finding in the 2017 interim evaluation of the EUAV Initiative which found that there was "…*no evidence that the EUAV Initiative has significantly enhanced EU visibility and image at public level in the EU*..." (page 4).

contributions would support HO strategies and be sustainable.[44] This did not mean that EU volunteers did not make a strategic contribution. There was comparatively less focus on research and learning than in peer international volunteer networks such as UNV and VSO. There was a broad recognition that the EUAV Initiative has a significant role to play in fulfilling the EU's commitments to localisation through its structured support to HOs.[45]

- **Increased engagement with volunteer networks** could not only have helped in raising the profile of the EUAV Initiative but could have also potentially provided benefits in the form of mutual learning, improved coordination and collaborative initiatives.

The formation of SO transnational partnerships, notably through the consortia approach, was widely viewed as strengthening the EU's role in international volunteerism. The EUAV Initiative has effectively created a network of Europe-based organisations of varying backgrounds and sizes ranging from large operational agencies to smaller voluntary organisations.[46] Consortia members demonstrated varying strengths and weaknesses in their human resources systems, and the openness among members resulted in better quality outputs.[47] Opportunities were taken to share information on, and learning from, the EUAV Initiative more widely throughout Europe.[48] Outside the SO consortia, however, the lack of a forum to share learning and delays in sharing experience across consortia was viewed as a missed opportunity to make full use of learning, resulting in some cases in duplicated efforts.[49]

4.3 EQ4 Effectiveness

EQ 4	*To what extent was the initiative effective? What were the concrete results achieved?*

Effectiveness was assessed by examining the extent to which the EUAV Initiative has contributed to:

- increasing the capacity of the EU to provide humanitarian aid (Objective 1), including by improving Union citizens' opportunities to participate in humanitarian actions, by reaching new organisations and promoting new partnerships between organisations;

- improving the skills and knowledge of volunteers in humanitarian aid along with the conditions of their engagement (Objective 2) notably through participation in the mandatory training and by creating an "*esprit de corps*" among volunteers;

- building the capacity of hosting organisations and fostering volunteering in third countries (Objective 3), including in terms of organisational capacities, project management and human resources management, improvement of recruitment processes, and bringing together the profiles and skills of selected volunteers and the needs of hosting organisations;

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44   Interview note 36831.
45   Interview notes 18259, 38524, 30428, 15358, 37173, 23811. DG ECHO (2018) 2018 Grand Bargain Annual Self-Reporting – European Commission/ DG ECHO "*EU Aid Volunteers programme supports local capacity building through support of local organization capacity grants*" (page 8).
46   Interview notes 11715, 4247. Figure 17 illustrates the increase in number and expansion of SOs in the EU between 2015 and 2019.
47   EREPORT_570011-EUAV-1-2015-2-FR-EUAV-BUILD_CAP. Spiewok, B. (2020) European-Asian Partnership for Building Capacities in Humanitarian Action. PEACH 2 Final evaluation report.
48   EREPORT_566142-EUAV-1-2015-1-IE-EUAV-ASSIS_TECH.
49   Interview notes 4247, 30428, 15358. Case study Process of Certification and Recertification.

- communicating the Union's humanitarian aid principles (Objective 4) and contributing to the communication activities of both EU and non-EU-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs);

- enhancing coherence and consistency of volunteering across EU Member States (Objective 5), impacting volunteer management procedures and standards, giving high priority to safety procedures and security of volunteers and lessons learned for security standards and duty of care for EU Aid Volunteers, and using trans-European partnerships to increase the effectiveness and efficiency.

Summary Response to EQ 4

Increasing capacity of providing humanitarian assistance

- **The EUAV Initiative fell short of its expected contribution to increase Union citizens' opportunities to participate in humanitarian actions.** It planned volunteering opportunities for just over a quarter of the original deployment target (i.e. 1,173 of 4,000), while only 788 deployments took place by the end of 2020. Moreover, few volunteers had the opportunity to directly engage in humanitarian operations and many were engaged in development-type activities.

- The EUAV Initiative contributed to reaching new organisations and promoting partnerships as well as to volunteers' choice to pursue careers in humanitarian assistance in the longer term. However, the opportunities have been concentrated in just a few countries (Italy, France and Spain), although participation started to extend to other EU Member States in 2020. Moreover, the lack of follow-up systems to link up volunteers with potential job opportunities has limited the contribution to developing an EU capacity in relief or development roles.

Improving skills and knowledge of volunteers in the field of HA

- **Overall, the EUAV Initiative increased the skills and knowledge of the volunteers regarding humanitarian assistance.** There is a consensus among volunteers about the high quality of the training and among SOs and HOs about the high level of qualifications of the volunteers. The central training contributed to develop an "*esprit de corps*" among volunteers but was also perceived as somewhat disconnected from the reality of volunteers' deployment activities, and notably with too little attention on "soft skills" and cultural awareness.

Building the capacity of hosting organisations and fostering volunteering in third countries

- **The quality of capacity building and technical assistance activities contributed to strengthening the capacities of SOs and HOs overall.** The certification approach was appreciated and helped SOs and HOs pursue their capacity development strategy. More than 91% of HOs considered that the EUAV Initiative increased their capacity to host and manage volunteers.

- Regarding the matching of volunteers' skills and profiles to the needs of the HOs, the results of the EUAV Initiative are mixed. The involvement of the HO from the beginning of the recruitment process, combined with the high level of candidates, ensure the selection of relevant profiles. The delays in the deployment process meant that volunteers often were not able to address needs that were identified at the time. The deployment of volunteers to small "grassroots" organisations has also proved problematic due to differing expectations between volunteers and HOs.

- There was overall agreement that the EUAV Platform was a potentially useful tool, but it was seen not sufficiently user-friendly and had thus not realised its potential.

Summary Response to EQ 4

Consequently, the EUAV Platform made only a limited contribution to helping SOs recruit and remain informed and did not facilitate project management.

Communicating EU humanitarian aid principles

- **The EUAV Initiative ensured EU humanitarian aid principles were communicated to the volunteers and to the staff of SOs and HOs.** The central training included a module on EU humanitarian principles that, according to 88% of volunteers, increased their knowledge of EU humanitarian principles. Moreover, SOs and HOs engaged in seminars, workshops and various other activities aimed at disseminating the EU humanitarian principles.

- **Yet, communication of the EU humanitarian aid principles outside the EUAV Initiative has been limited,** with few volunteers engaged in humanitarian aid-type activities and little interest from EACEA and DG ECHO.

Increasing coherence and consistency in volunteering across EU Member States

- **The EUAV Initiative's contribution to increasing coherence and consistency in volunteering across EU Member States is commensurate to its limited scale.** The EUAV Initiative ensured that 76 sending organisations and 298 hosting organisations received training on respecting standards regarding volunteering. However, fewer than half of SOs agreed that the EUAV Initiative helped reduce inconsistencies related to international volunteering in EU Member States.

- Certified organisations did not demonstrate a consistent quality of volunteer management, although certification succeeded in raising the bar particularly for small national organisations. Despite the perceived administrative burden, SOs found that certification proved to be a useful training tool. A mostly one-size-fits-all approach meant that the same systems and restrictions were applied regardless of the capacities and experience of SOs, HOs and volunteers.

- The EUAV Initiative placed considerable emphasis on the safety and security of volunteers. However, the security restrictions also constrained the achievement of the EUAV Initiative's objectives. The combination of provisions in the regulations that prevent volunteers from being deployed to conflict zones, together with an additional security management system managed by DG ECHO at headquarters level, contributed to a situation where volunteers were hardly ever directly involved in humanitarian interventions. The system was not seen to take account of the different capacities of the HOs or effectively balance the risks of the humanitarian objectives with reputational risks to the EU.

Monitoring

- Monitoring of implementation was the responsibility of the EACEA, which defined its monitoring priorities according to the risk level of each project. SOs and HOs were responsible for monitoring the performance of the individual volunteers, including their safety and security, but different approaches and standards were applied, resulting in some difficulties.

Objective 1: Increasing the EU capacity to provide HA

The EUAV Initiative had a limited and far smaller than expected contribution to improving Union citizens' opportunities to participate in humanitarian actions. From 2014 to 2019, the EUAV Initiative provided funding for volunteering opportunities for 1,173 EU residents. This is just over a quarter of the original target of 4,000 deployments. Only 788 deployments actually took place by September 2020, while 163 volunteers participated in

online assignments. This low result is partly due to delays in setting up the system and building capacities for the EUAV Initiative, which slowed deployments at the start of the programme. The COVID-19 pandemic also brought volunteers' training and deployment to a halt starting in March 2020, after the EUAV Initiative had already started to gain momentum in 2018 and 2019 and was deploying around 400 volunteers a year. Another major limiting factor was the prolonged time lag — typically several months — between identification of the need for volunteer support and deployment.

The EUAV Initiative provided only limited opportunities to engage in the field of humanitarian aid. Where opportunities occurred, it was in the context of Nexus interventions, as most activities had a resilience or developmental focus. Most volunteers have not been directly involved in humanitarian interventions due to restrictions imposed by governing regulations and the security management system established specifically for EU volunteers (see also EQ1). Consequently, few volunteers were deployed to areas of EU-supported humanitarian interventions and many volunteers ended up supporting development projects. While some volunteers were deployed to nexus-type interventions, including disaster risk reduction or provision of back-office support to humanitarian agencies, they had limited opportunities to undertake project site visits.

Participating in the EUAV Initiative has contributed to many volunteers' choice to work in humanitarian field in the longer term. The vast majority of the 308 volunteer survey respondents (85%) stated that following their experience with the EUAV Initiative, they had worked (43%) or intended to work (42%) in the humanitarian field. Only 3% said they did not intend to do so.[50] Most of those who said they are working in HA were working for NGOs in the field (73%) and/or for international NGOs (59%). Only 3% reported an experience within the EU. Moreover, 94% of the respondents also declared that they decided to participate in the programme to know more about their career choices, and 63% said their motivation was to decide whether they want to pursue a career in humanitarian assistance.

The EUAV Initiative has also been a facilitator of volunteering itself to a certain, limited extent. The existence of the EUAV Initiative has been a critical factor in the decision to volunteer for 16% of respondents, who stated they would not have volunteered without the EUAV. At the same time, 73% of respondents said they would have volunteered in any case, whether through the EUAV Initiative or other means, although 70% of these volunteers indicated that the EUAV Initiative played a role in facilitating their engagement. The insufficient visibility of the Iinitiative may have been a factor contributing to this result, given that the EUAV Initiative did not really get started until 2017. The survey found that 50% of volunteers learned of the EUAV Initiative through DG ECHO and/or EU websites or through the websites of participating organisations that may appeal to volunteers already in the field. Another 28% of volunteers responding said they learned of the EUAV Initiative through friends and colleagues. Only 22% learned of it through social media or other communication channels that the EUAV Initiative used to promote itself.

The EUAV Initiative was particularly attractive to volunteers due to the high quality of its training and high level of professionalism, as well as its EU nature and the prestige and assurance of sufficiently good conditions of deployment that this entailed. A number of respondents linked their decision to continue working or volunteering in the humanitarian field specifically to the EUAV: of the 57% who reported that they continued working or volunteering in HA, 70% stated that the EUAV Initiative had contributed to this decision (Figure 14). A number of volunteers who indicated they had not yet found employment or other opportunities in the sector complained of a lack of support for their efforts from the EUAV Initiative.

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[50]   EUAV survey on Volunteers, question B16.

Several volunteers commented that staff from EU Delegations often did not seem to sufficiently value the EUAV Initiative or regard it as relevant professional experience. These respondents called on the Commission to step up its efforts to increase the visibility and appreciation of the EUAV Initiative. According to interviews, most of the volunteers who managed to find a job in the sector did so within their hosting or sending organisation or in other organisations in their country of deployment rather than in the EU.

The lack of a formal system to link the volunteers (both trained and deployed) to future job opportunities limited the contribution of the EUAV Initiative to developing an EU capacity in HA. The EUAV Initiative did not establish a formal system to connect volunteers to either DG ECHO or the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) recruitment systems or to any EU humanitarian or development partners or other established recruitment or volunteer initiatives. However, as several interviewees noted, volunteers who have functioned well for specific agencies have been offered full-time roles either in country or, in some cases, via that specific agency's recruitment roster. Volunteers were also able to reapply for a second mission as per vacancies announced on the EUAV Initiative's website.

Figure 14 – Careers after volunteering
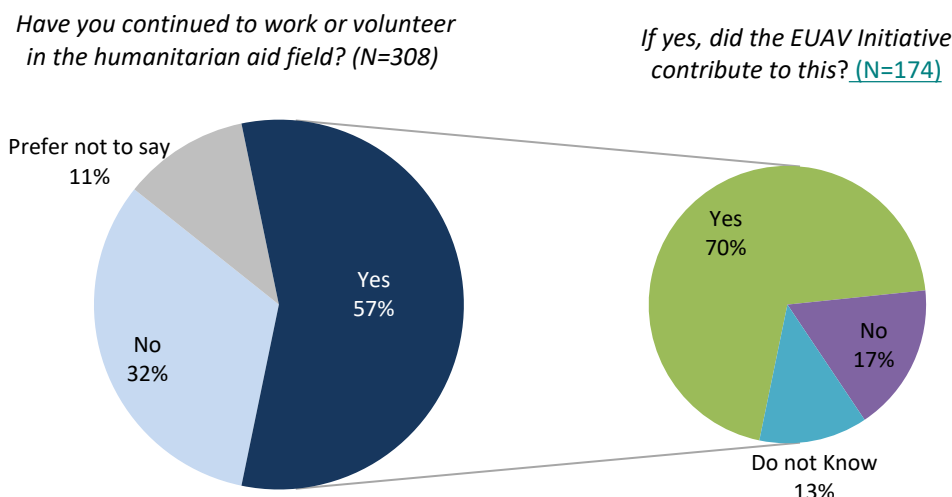
Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers.

The EUAV Initiative succeeded in reaching new organisations without prior experience with the European Commission and promoting new partnerships. For 36% of sending organisations and 28% of hosting organisations, the EUAV Initiative was the first experience with an EU-funded project. The consortium approach was appreciated by several SO representatives, who indicated that it was a rare opportunity to develop new partnerships and strengthen existing ones (see EQ3 for more details).[51] A number of them received ECHO funding for the first time through the EUAV Initiative. Interviews with both sending and hosting organisations revealed that organisations that participated in the EUAV Initiative were very willing to continue engaging with other EUAV Initiative projects and, more broadly, with EU programmes. As one of the interviewed organisations noted, "*The initiative increased our capacity and willingness to not only participate in other EUAV projects but also to apply for other sources of funding including from other donors*".[52]

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[51]   Interview notes 18259, 38524, 30428, 15358, 37173 and 23811.
[52]   Interview note 9967.

However, the EUAV Initiative has been slow in creating volunteering opportunities across the EU, despite a relatively wide geographic coverage of sending organisations. Although 32 nationalities were represented among volunteers, two-thirds of volunteers originated from three countries: Italy (27%), Spain (22%) and France (15%). In comparison, the fourth largest beneficiary was Germany, with only 4% of the volunteers, followed by Belgium (4%) and Poland and Portugal (each 3%).[53] The geographic coverage of certified SOs was broader. SOs were concentrated in nine countries in 2015 and by 2020, coverage had expanded to 24 countries (Figure 15). With six SOs each, Italy and France hosted the largest number of organisations, followed by Spain (five) and Ireland (five). As Figure 15 shows, Denmark, Czech Republic and Estonia hosted between three and four SOs in 2020, although many countries hosted at least one SO. The only area not hosting SOs was southeast Europe, with the exception of Greece, with one SO.

Figure 15 – Trends in certified sending organisations (2015-2020)
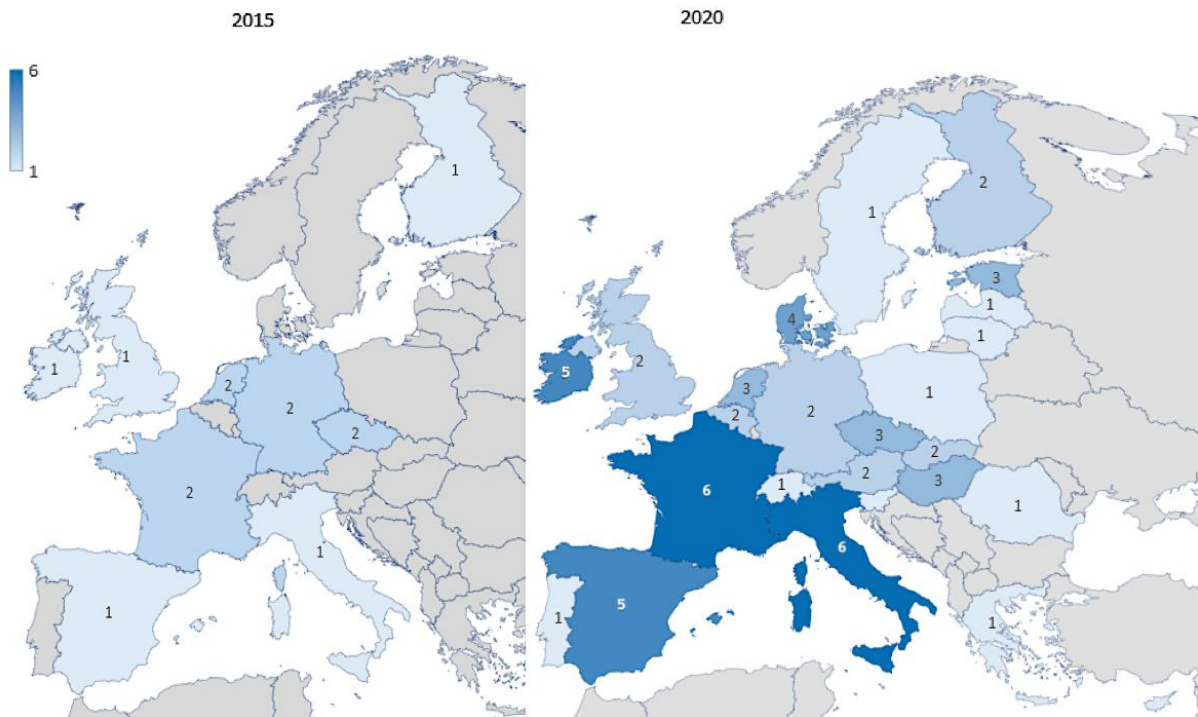
Source: ADE calculations based on EACEA data.

Objective 2: Improved skills and knowledge of volunteers in the field of HA

Improving the skills and competencies of volunteers

Overall, the EUAV Initiative increased the skills and knowledge of the volunteers regarding humanitarian assistance. There was a high degree of satisfaction with the centralised training among the volunteers. Several mentioned that the project management module had been the most useful. The EUAV survey of volunteers found that 93% agreed (and 57% strongly agreed) that they received good-quality training during their experience, and 80% considered the experience they gained will contribute to their career development (Figure 16). Moreover, 95% of the respondents said they were satisfied (and 68% were very satisfied) with the central training provided by DG ECHO and around 72% said they were satisfied with the pre-deployment training provided by SOs. The vast majority of volunteers also reported that the EUAV Initiative contributed to increasing their knowledge about humanitarian aid (92%) and the reality of the HA field (82%); 83% of respondents said it contributed to developing their skills to provide HA. Interestingly, the majority (62%) agreed

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[53]   ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers.

that the EUAV Initiative contributed to increasing the EU's capacity to provide humanitarian aid, while close to a fourth of respondents (23%) disagreed (and 16% expressed no opinion). Moreover, 10 of the 15 respondents to the Public Consultation agreed that the EUAV Initiative contributed to improving the skills, knowledge, competences of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid.

However, the central training was also perceived as disconnected from the reality of volunteers' deployment activities and therefore did not contribute much to the terms of condition of their engagement. Although the volunteers were quite appreciative of the central training, some also highlighted that what they learned about humanitarian assistance and HA principles was not helpful to deal with their daily tasks in hosting organisations. SOs shared this view. They found the training overly prescriptive, that SOs had inadequate involvement and input, that understanding of the operational reality of the host country and HO was lacking.[54] Some stakeholders noted that the two-week training was sufficiently geared to specific needs and should either be shorter or redesigned.[55] The two-week training focuses on technical skills rather than soft skills and attitudes, such as the need to adapt to different contexts and cultures for example. The training tends to increase volunteers' expectations.[56]

Furthermore, trainings devoted little attention to "soft skills" including cultural awareness, according to some stakeholders. Volunteers learned these soft skills during their deployment. However, in some cases, when volunteer expectations were not met, the resulting frustrations led to volunteers leaving before completion of their assignment.

Figure 16 – Volunteer training and career development satisfaction
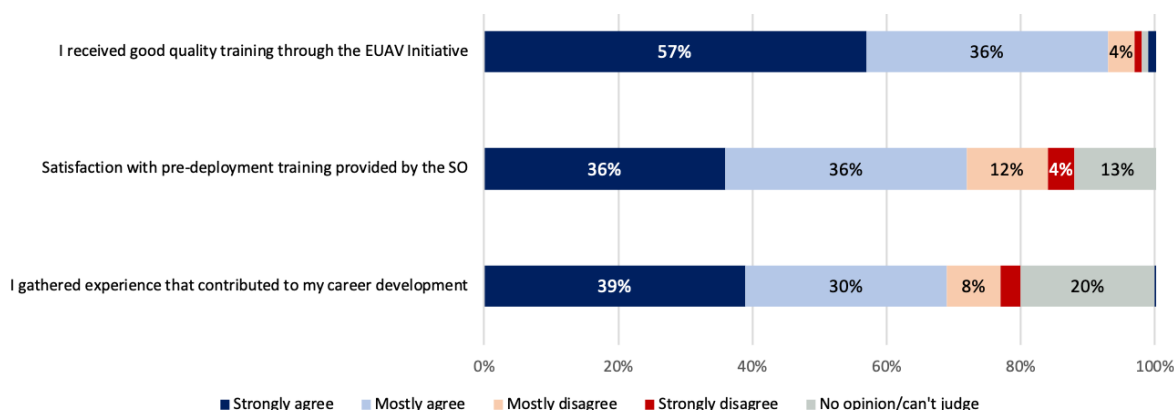
Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers.

Esprit de corps

The EUAV Initiative, and notably the comprehensive two-week training, contributed to develop an "*esprit de corps*" among volunteers. The compulsory training resulted in developing common language, common goals and common understanding among volunteers. Three fourths of volunteers responding to the survey agreed (and 35% strongly agreed) that the EUAV Initiative created an "*esprit de corps*". The EUAV Initiative built a network of volunteers who stayed in touch beyond their participation in the EUAV Initiative. Indeed, 76% of the surveyed volunteers said they remained in contact with other volunteers, with 18% reporting they did so for only a short period.[57] The Platform for the volunteers played a role in this regard, enabling volunteers to post their profiles and connect both with other volunteers and with other organisations, although it was not especially user-friendly. Social networking

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54   Interview notes 6887 and 2215 and case study on deployment.
55   Interview notes 11715, 30756 and 26356.
56   Interview notes 36831 and 4247 And case study on deployment.
57   Case study on deployment.

may also take place at the country level, and a geographic focus may also help to create an *esprit du corps*. It was suggested that deploying volunteers in pairs (rather than individually) contributed to strengthening the links, increased visibility and eased accommodation.[58]

Objective 3: Building the capacity of hosting organisations and fostering volunteering in third countries

Good-quality capacity building and technical assistance activities contributed to strengthening the capacities of SOs and HOs overall. The SOs and HOs were supported by a certification strategy that, in some cases, was used by a consortium to contribute to a capacity development strategy. Moreover, evaluations commissioned by SO consortia have consistently recommended continuing the certification approach.[59] Just about half (7 on 15) of the respondents to the Public Consultation found that the EUAV Initiative had contributed to fostering volunteering in third countries. However, as Figure 19 shows, HO survey respondents reported their volunteer management capacities had significantly increased. Indeed, around 84% of HO respondents agreed (and 37% strongly agreed) that capacity building activities addressed priority needs, and 48% said they would not have been able to host international volunteers without the support of the EUAV Initiative. Moreover, 91% of HOs agreed (and 53% strongly agreed) that the EUAV Initiative increased their capacity to host and manage volunteers and 78% considered that this translated into improvements in the terms and conditions of volunteers' engagement.

Figure 17 – Managing and fostering volunteering
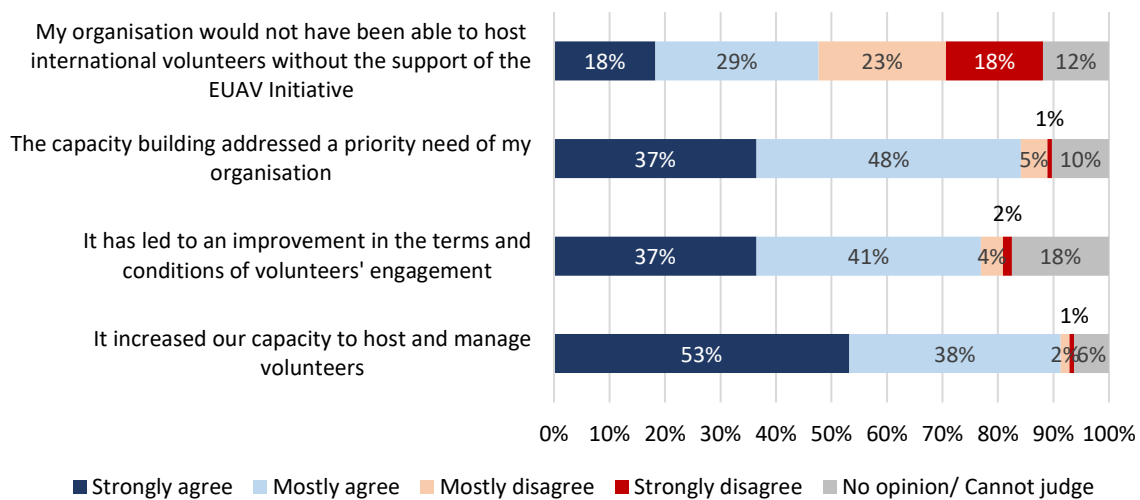
Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers and HOs.

The EUAV Initiative helped HOs strengthen their volunteer management competencies and enlarge their networks. For some HOs, the EUAV was the first international project they were involved in. In this sense, the EUAV supported the internationalisation of their organisation. The EUAV Initiative has supported local capacity building through support of capacity grants contributing to the empowerment of the HOs, notably those with less experience in volunteer management, and has enhanced their ability to mobilise resources to fund interventions. SOs and HOs could not have easily accessed this sort of funding for technical assistance (TA) and institutional capacity building (CB) from other sources.[60]

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[58] Interview notes 41178, 36831 and 4241.
[59] *Alianza por la Solidaridad* (2018) EUAV Volunteers: Mid-Term Recommendations.
[60] Interview note 8520; sampled projects 570011 and 581813; Dinama (2018) External final evaluation: MdM Consortium Technical Assistance Project "Developing technical structure for Aid Volunteer MdM"; and case study on capacity building and technical assistance.

The EU views the EUAV Initiative as helping to fulfil its Grand Bargain commitment to support local capacity building through support of local organisation capacity grants.[61] The positive outcomes of CB and TA are due to the availability of funds that the organisations cannot easily access elsewhere for institutional capacity building. It helps simplify the requirements and information to ensure HOs can absorb and deliver the requirement meaningfully. The process takes considerable effort and commitment from SOs to support strengthening HO capacity.[62]

Exit or transition strategies once volunteers ended their deployments were not always clear. Some HOs arranged a project handover to the team and counterparts that will continue the activities carried out by the EU Aid Volunteer with a view to ensuring sustainability and continuity.[63] Some volunteers said they maintained contact with the HO and occasionally provided advice.

Local volunteering surfaced as something worth pursuing since it serves the dual objective of supporting humanitarian action and building capacities of local communities.[64] While the EUAV Initiative was widely viewed as highly appropriate to support localisation, this potential was not realised as volunteers were rarely linked with DG ECHO-funded projects. UNV and VSO have included national volunteers serving in their own countries. As one survey respondent explained, *"UNV and VSO also have a focus on national volunteering which resonates with a more global understanding of knowledge sharing and equal exchange of skills and allows for more contextualised support."*

The results of the EUAV Initiative regarding the matching of volunteers' skills and profiles to the needs of the hosting organisations are mixed. Several factors contributed to ensuring that the selected volunteers match the needs. First, the HOs were involved from the beginning of the recruitment process in the selection of volunteers. Moreover, the high level of candidates combined with the successive trainings gave SOs and HOs access to interesting profiles that would not have been easy to recruit outside of this scheme.

Yet, the significant delay between the selection of volunteers and their deployment on the ground contributed to disconnect the profile of the selected volunteer from the initial needs. Moreover, some practices regarding deployment prevented volunteers from fully utilising their competencies. Indeed, while the proportion is difficult to quantify, some volunteers sent to HOs were then dispatched to local "grassroots" organisations that often had very limited capacity, were disconnected from the overall EUAV Initiative and were not certified (see EQ5 for more details). The results from the HO survey somewhat reflect these mixed results, with (only) 61% of HOs agreeing that the volunteers addressed a gap in local human resources.

Interviews with **SOs found that many lacked a strategy for their programme** and that volunteers themselves had often raised questions about how they were contributing to the assistance programme.[65] A comment from one respondent to the volunteer survey is representative: while many volunteers felt they were having a positive influence, they also were uncertain that they were contributing to the overall programme and to what extent the latter was sustainable: *The initiative seems positive, but I cannot see the results, so I imagine that helps to foster the EU humanitarian sector. But the results are not so clear."[66]*

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[61]   DG ECHO (2018) 2018 Grand Bargain Annual Self-Reporting. June 2018.
[62]   See case study on deployment for more details.
[63]   Article 23 of EU Regulation 375/2014.
[64]   *Alianza por la Solidaridad* (2018) EUAV Volunteers: Mid-Term Recommendations. Case study certification.
[65]   Interview notes 36831, 6797.
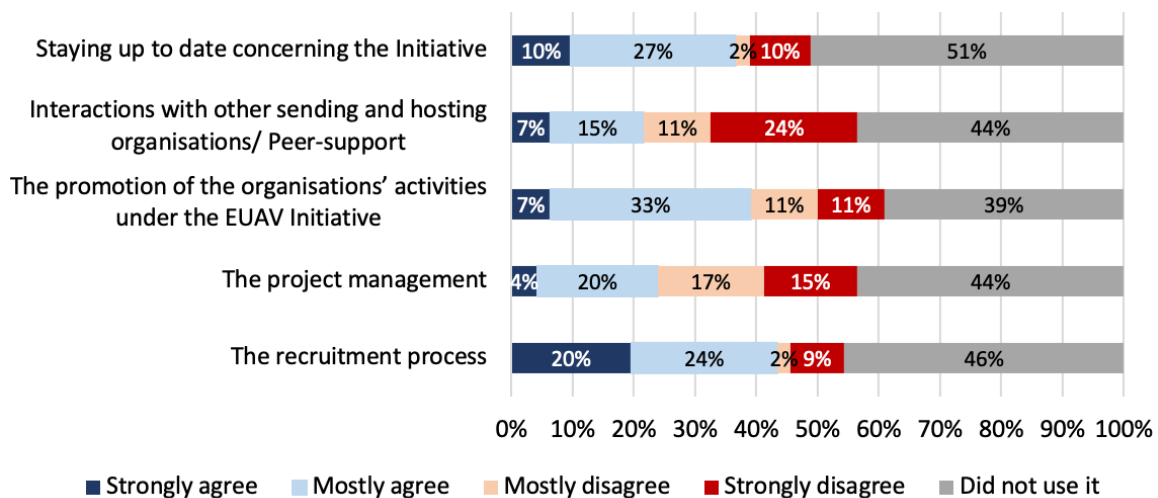[66]   Volunteer comment in the survey.

EUAV Platform

There was overall agreement that the EUAV Platform was a potentially useful tool but that it was not sufficiently user-friendly and had thus not realised its potential. The lack of a user-friendly system had a negative impact on monitoring, learning and overall communications. As noted above, the EUAV did not take up the offer from the UNV to collaborate on a volunteer online resource. This appears to have been another example of performance being adversely affected by a failure to make use of existing learning and resources.[67]

The Platform was set up and managed by DG ECHO with seemingly little feedback from targeted users. Improvements suggested by interviewees included to adapt the Participant Portal and certification guidelines to other languages, at the very least Spanish and French, in addition to English; create a multilingual Help Desk for HOs and SOs to facilitate use of the resources available on the Platform; and provide more specific guidelines on the evidence needed to prove the achievement of specific standards.[68]

Consequently, the EUAV Initiative Platform made only a limited contribution to help sending organisations recruit and remain informed and did not really facilitate project management. Overall, only 50-60% of SOs declared they actively used the EUAV Initiative Platform (Figure 18).[69] They agreed, however, that when they used it, the Platform had helped them stay up to date concerning the EUAV Initiative and promote the organisation's activities under the EUAV Initiative. Most respondents that used the Platform said they did not agree that it was useful for interacting with other sending or hosting organisations (61%) or for project management activities (75%).

Figure 18 – Utility of the EUAV Platform for SOs

	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	Did not use it
Staying up to date concerning the Initiative	10%	27%	2%	10%	51%
Interactions with other sending and hosting organisations/ Peer-support	7%	15%	11%	24%	44%
The promotion of the organisations' activities under the EUAV Initiative	7%	33%	11%	11%	39%
The project management	4%	20%	17%	15%	44%
The recruitment process	20%	24%	2%	9%	46%

Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for SOs.

Contribution to hosting communities and community level

The focus of the EUAV Initiative is primarily on the organisational capacity of the HOs and then on humanitarian outcomes. The emphasis on the HOs rather than the communities led to little information being collected apart from what was collected in country

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[67]   The UNV platform was listed as one of the [10 best volunteering online platforms](#) onBenefit of Volunteering's website. The EUAV Platform did not appear among the ten platforms listed.
[68]   *Alianza por la Solidaridad* (2018) EUAV Volunteers: Mid-Term Recommendations.
[69]   It should be noted that sending organisations had to use the EUAV Platform for a number of activities such as publishing vacancies, closing assignments or the creation of EUAV certificate for example.

studies.[70] As illustrated in Figure 19, most volunteers who responded to the survey felt they had contributed positively to their respective HO but were less confident about the benefits at community level.

Figure 19 – Volunteer perspectives on their contributions
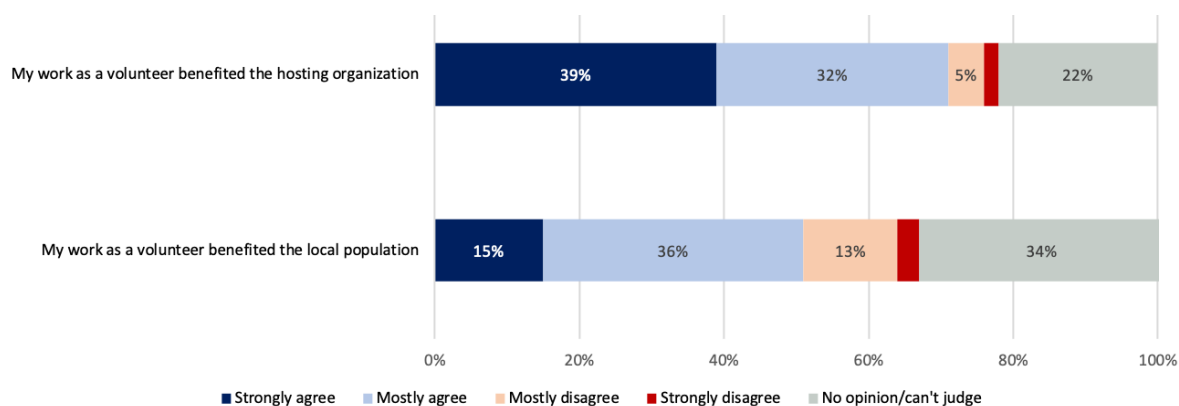
Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers.

Objective 4: Communication of EU humanitarian aid principles

The initiative ensured that EU humanitarian aid principles were communicated to the volunteers and to the staff of SOs and, to some extent, to HOs. The compulsory training for volunteers included a module on EU humanitarian principles, which ensured that they received a comprehensive training on this issue. The EUAV survey of volunteers suggests that they increased their knowledge on EU humanitarian principles, as 88% of the respondents agreed with this statement (and 42% strongly agreed). Moreover, the consortia engaged in a number of technical assistance and capacity building activities with the objective of communicating EU humanitarian aid functioning and principles. A total of 45 activities have been implemented (26 for TA and 19 for CB projects), concerning 5,560 staff for TA projects through capacity strengthening activities and 2,737 staff for CB projects, among which 293 volunteers, mostly through seminars (1,224) and training courses in third countries (1,033).[71] Although limited evidence has been collected on how effectively these activities improve the knowledge of HO staff regarding the principled approach of the EU's humanitarian aid, the EUAV survey for HOs indicates that 81% of the respondents agreed that the training was comprehensive. Some HO representatives also highlighted that volunteers had a good knowledge of EU humanitarian aid principles relevant to their activities.[72]

Yet, communication of the EU humanitarian aid principles outside of the EUAV Initiative has been limited. The small number of projects and volunteers engaged in humanitarian aid-type activities limited the opportunities to disseminate EU HA principles. Volunteers were most likely to be involved in promoting humanitarian principles when deployed to certain types of HOs such as members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent family that promote the humanitarian principles as part of their mandate. There were signs that SOs and HOs that underwent the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) training were more likely to promote humanitarian principles.[73] Moreover, interviews with SO representatives suggest that the focus on monitoring EU humanitarian principles at the beginning of the period was not sustained thereafter.[74]

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[70]   Interview notes 22908, 37457, 4241.
[71]   EUAV (2020), Monitoring Report 2019.
[72]   Interview notes 22908, 49374 and 417.
[73]   See capacity building case study for more details.
[74]   Interview notes 14920, 30428, 14022 and 3700.

The EUAV Initiative has invested in its visibility, though it is difficult to measure the success of communication activities. The EU Regulation 375-2014 indicates that the communication and awareness-raising actions should support the visibility of the EUAV Initiative. Until 2019, as much as EUR 1.1 million (1.6%) of the total budget allocated to the implementing partners (i.e. SOs and HOs) targeted communication activities.[75] The communication strategy consisted in part of encouraging SOs, HOs and volunteers to post stories and blogs on social media and the EUAV Platform. This has resulted in 210 "human interest stories" uploaded on the EUAV Platform by volunteers. Dissemination events, workshops and conferences have also contributed to the visibility of the EUAV Initiative, leading to 3,192 media references to EUAV projects in Europe by 2019.[76] While this suggests that the EUAV Initiative took appropriate communication actions, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative's overall visibility effort.

Objective 5: Increased coherence and consistency in volunteering across EU Member States

Standards

The EUAV Initiative's contribution to increasing coherence and consistency in volunteering across EU Member States is commensurate with its limited scale. Thanks to its certification mechanism, the EUAV Initiative has ensured that 54 sending organisations and 298 hosting organisations have been trained to respect strict standards regarding volunteering. The mechanism clearly contributed to standardising the volunteering approach across the EUAV Initiative participants, although the organisations differed in the application of these standards (see below). The results of the survey targeting SOs found that 45% of respondents agree that the EUAV Initiative helped reduce inconsistencies related to international volunteering in EU Member States. Moreover, 46% agreed that the EUAV Initiative is compatible with and contributes to Member States' volunteering schemes and 39% agreed this is the case with other international volunteering schemes (e.g. UNV and VSO).

Certified organisations did not demonstrate a consistent quality of volunteer management. The standards set at the beginning of the project were very unclear, but with time they have become less onerous. The purpose of the certification was to ensure a "minimum and harmonized standard" of managing and deploying volunteers. However, SOs developed their own templates for certification in parallel.[77] There is evidence that certification was easier for HOs that were international NGOs, particularly those certified in CHS. In addition, interviews indicate that while smaller HOs received some support from the SO to obtain their certification, they could not all apply the standards with the same rigour.[78]

There was positive influence on the establishment, implementation and respect of volunteer management procedures and standards. As described above in the response to EQ3 (EU value added) 64% of HO agencies agree that one advantage was the introduction of common standards across Member States for volunteering. Interviewees[79] and responses to the HO survey indicated that the EUAV Initiative helped them adopt new policies and processes in accordance with the EU standards.

While there were attempts to seek synergies with the Commission's partnership instruments in the humanitarian field and existing humanitarian standards, there was little evidence that the EUAV Initiative sought synergies with existing international standards specific to volunteering and participated in contemporary global debates on volunteering.[80] Greater

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[75] EUAV (2020), Monitoring Report 2019.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Case study on certification.
[78] Interview notes 5729, 11715, 36831 and 14022.
[79] Interview notes 36831, 935, 11715, 27988.
[80] Case study on certification.

engagement with initiatives such as the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development, which some SOs were involved in, may have helped to increase impact.[81]

Safety and security of volunteers

The EUAV Initiative placed considerable emphasis on the safety and security of volunteers. As shown in Figure 20, 78% of the volunteers considered the EUAV Initiative dedicated sufficient attention to the safety of volunteers, 86% said they received sufficient information to deal with safety issues and 76% said they felt safe throughout their deployment.

Figure 20 – Volunteer safety
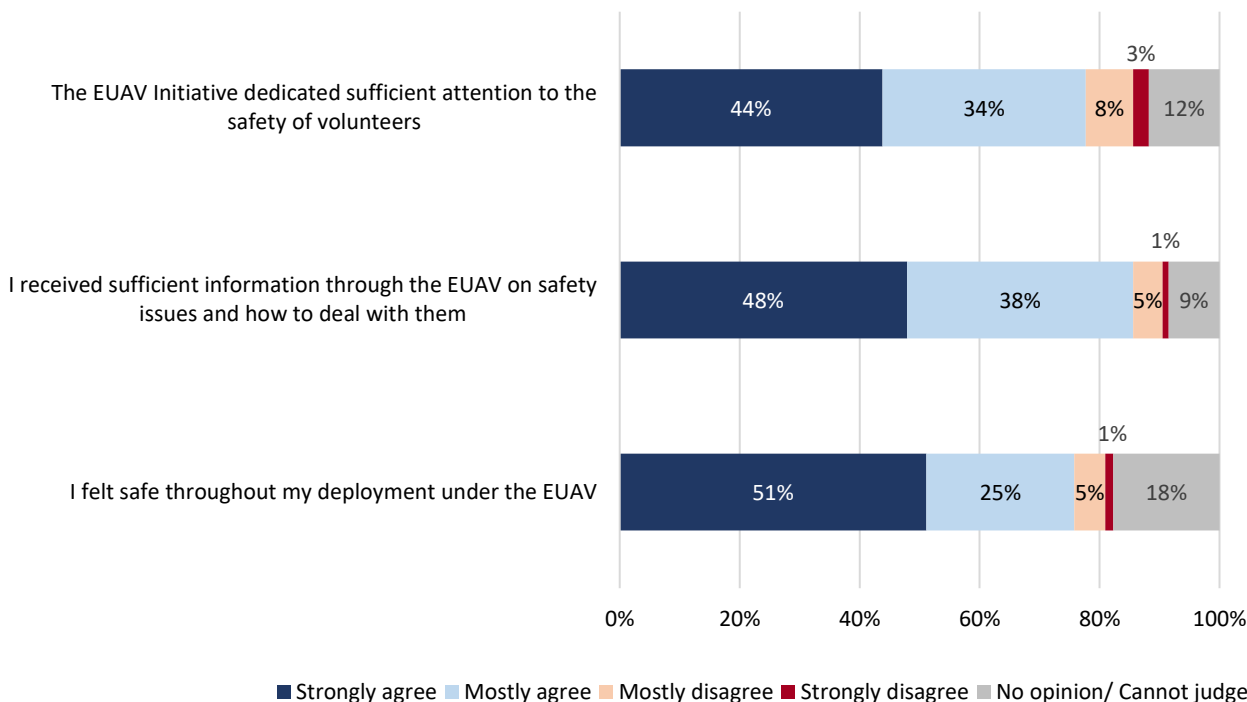
Source: ADE calculations based on data from the ADE Survey for EUAV Volunteers.

However, the security restrictions also constrained the achievement of the EUAV Initiative's objectives. The security system that was established proved to be a significant constraint on achieving the EUAV Initiative's humanitarian objectives. This problem is described in the responses to EQ1 (relevance) and EQ2 (coherence). Provisions in the regulations that prevented volunteers from being deployed to conflict zones, together with an additional security management system[82] managed by DG ECHO at HQ level, combined to contribute to a situation where volunteers were hardly ever directly involved in humanitarian interventions. Even volunteers in back-office support roles had difficulty simply visiting intervention sites due to restrictions imposed by DG ECHO HQ, as one volunteer made clear in a response to the survey:" *My main limitation was not being able to go to the field after my arrival. I barely (i.e. not at all) worked with the beneficiaries"*.

The system was not seen to effectively balance the humanitarian objectives with the reputational risks to the EU[83] and restrictions on volunteer movements did not take into account the security management systems or capacities of the HOs. The perceived tendency to put all HOs (and volunteers) in the same category was a major source of

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[81]   VSO and FORUM, Global Standard for Volunteering for Development, Launched October 2019.
[82]   EACEA – DG ECHO (2019) EU Aid Volunteers: Methodology to define list of countries for deployment 2019.
[83]   European Interagency Security Forum (2018) Security Risk Management: A basic guide for smaller NGOs.

frustration for HOs (see EQ1 and EQ2 for more details) since their staff were regularly traveling to these areas and they were liable in case something happened to a volunteer.[84] The frustration comes through in responses to the surveys, as illustrated by a volunteer response to the survey: "*I was under the security of the IFRC which is way stricter than the EUAV security practices*", and a HO representative: *"In our HO there is a thorough Safety, Security and Evacuation Plan… aligned with major International Organizations in the Country. My suggestion is to rely more on security assessments done in the field (especially if ECHO field is present) and differentiate the HOs depending on the operational capacity and the ability to protect (or mainstream) security procedures in the hosting country"*.

There was a perception from volunteers and sending organisations that DG ECHO was inflexible with security restrictions despite their requests. In some cases, HOs asked SOs to advocate with DG ECHO HQ on their behalf so that volunteers could travel to humanitarian intervention areas. SO consortia sent pleading messages to the EU Initiative team and DG ECHO in HQ justifying why volunteers should be allowed to travel to certain areas. They said these démarches were usually unsuccessful for reasons that were often unclear.[85] The critical incident protocol for the EUAV Initiative, which has yet to be tested, similarly put management of the response under the control of EU HQ without sufficiently recognising that the HO may have the capacity to help in managing the incident and disregards the fact that the HOs bear legal liability and have their own reputational risks to worry about. DG ECHO representatives did however provide examples of locations where the security restrictions had relaxed. They explained that DG ECHO regularly reviewed and updated the EUAV indicative list based on security assessments and monitoring of the security situation and described instances when restrictions had been revised in like Ukraine, Palestine and Tunis.

Many questioned the practicality of the EUAV Initiative security management system for volunteers, not just HOs and SOs but also DG ECHO field staff. This has resulted in restricting the access to locations where EU volunteers could go, which led to the perception amongst partners and volunteers that reputational risk to the EU was a top priority. This was seen to create incentives whereby HOs are being encouraged to request deployments based on where volunteers can be located or travel to, rather than where their support could be optimised to meet humanitarian needs while ensuring adequate security management.[86]

Security monitoring consisted mainly of ad hoc visits to the field by HQ-based EACEA staff when a potentially serious security problem was flagged. Since these were problem-solving visits, the perspective they could provide on HO security management capacities was unrepresentative. Some interviewees suggested a better approach would have been for the EUAV Initiative to have dedicated monitoring staff who, instead of reactive troubleshooting, regularly monitored the extent to which the HO is meeting standards (including for security management) and the quality of the monitoring systems used by the HO/SO.[87]

Overall, the EUAV Initiative's risk management system was perceived as needing improvement to meet several of its humanitarian programmatic objectives. One example was the management of volunteer security, which balanced the reputational risk of the EU and EUAV Initiative partners with programmatic objectives. Another example was the need for a robust contingency plan, as illustrated by the lack of communication about and delayed response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was mentioned by several survey respondents and interviewees.

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[84] Interview notes 49149, 44687, 46014 and 11715. See also the case study on recruitment, apprenticeship and volunteer deployment for more details.
[85] Interview notes 11715, 18679, 26959, 4241, 4247.
[86] Interview notes 16679, 46014.
[87] Interview notes 46014, 26959, 43365, 16679, 4241.

Monitoring implementation of the EUAV Initiative

Different monitoring approaches by SOs and HOs were one of the main reasons for different standards being applied. The EUAV Initiative had a small team based at HQ level and monitoring of implementation in the field was primarily the responsibility of the HOs and SOs (while DG ECHO field offices had no monitoring role). Monitoring of project implementation was the responsibility of the EACEA and involved continuous desk monitoring, kick-off and mid-term meetings, reinforced monitoring for riskier projects and sometimes field visits. Monitoring of volunteer activities varied greatly across SOs and HOs. Some SOs spoke on a regular basis to both volunteers and HOs and made at least one field visit a year. Other SOs had minimal contacts with volunteers and HOs. Some difficulties were mentioned by stakeholders in this respect. This included the view that some NGOs (including bigger organisation) did not implement satisfactory security standard or used volunteers for other purposes not related with the EUAV Initiative. It was also stated that there were cases of volunteers deployed in areas that were not included in the EUAV indicative list. Similarly, some stakeholders mentioned that certified organisations did not always demonstrate a consistent quality of volunteer management, although the EUAV Initiative did raise standards.[88] Satisfaction levels among volunteers deployed to the RCRC Movement and INGOs were generally high since these organisations had guidelines and processes for the volunteers to follow, whereas feedback from volunteers deployed to local grassroot organisations were mixed.[89] Some SO consortia took the Initiative to commission independent evaluations while others did not.[90]

4.4 EQ5 Efficiency

Efficiency was assessed by examining the extent to which the EUAV Initiative has been able to:

- appropriately allocate the budget according to what the EUAV Initiative aimed to achieve;

- adapt the content and structure of reference documents to facilitate smooth implementation;

- ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness through implementation of relevant regulations and processes;

- optimise efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Summary Response to EQ 5
Appropriateness of budget
• Due in large part to the delays in starting up the EUAV Initiative, lack of funding was not a particular constraint for implementation. By 2019, 30% of available funds had not been used.
• The EUAV Initiative's budget was set at an activity level (i.e. the number of volunteers deployed) rather than at any type of outcome level (i.e. the change volunteers were helping to bring about). Budgets therefore cannot clearly be linked back to the five stated objectives of the EUAV Initiative.

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[88]   These problems were also reported by some respondents to ADE Survey for EU Aid Volunteers (see Annex 6, page 126 for additional details). More monitoring of the organisations seems key for many respondents to address cases of organisations unprepared to host volunteers and inconsistencies between the volunteering position's description and the actual tasks assigned to the volunteer during deployment.

[89]   Case study on volunteer recruitment, deployment & apprenticeship.

[90]   Interview notes 37361, 16679, 26959, 46014, 935, 11715 and 36831.

Procedural requirements

- Despite some positive effects, the complexity and lack of flexibility resulting from overly detailed and prescriptive EU regulations have been detrimental to the cost-effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative. Specifically, reporting templates were updated and changed and budget reporting was seen as excessive. In addition, the audit trail requirements were seen as quite difficult to adhere to.

- Although detailed and user-friendly, the guidance documents developed by the EUAV Initiative have not been adequate for the organisations to deal with the complex requirements, notably because they have been produced gradually and are not widely nor consistently disseminated.

- The heavy procedural requirements affected mainly the consortia with less-experienced SOs and small local HOs. There is also a general feeling that systems and processes have now been built, and as time goes on it becomes less of a burden to comply with the audit trail needs.

Monitoring

- The monitoring of the EUAV Initiative did not fully utilise the M&E framework developed for this purpose. Monitoring of activities focused on outputs only, and not on quality and outcomes. However, feedback from SOs and HOs to DG ECHO and/or EACEA has been taken into account when possible and led to corrective measures being taken.

- SOs and HOs highlighted the need for formal peer learning and knowledge-sharing activities, which could have contributed to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness, for example by disseminating good practices in management.

Cost-effectiveness in summary

- The costs of deployment projects compare favourably with other volunteering schemes. Based on a subsample of deployment projects, it costs the EUAV Initiative on average EUR 3,180 to deploy a volunteer for a month, whereas each of its deployments costs the international United Nations Volunteers programme EUR 4,360.

- A number of obstacles have limited the cost-effectiveness of deployment projects, including the length of time between the selection and the deployment of volunteers; mismatch between the volunteers' skills and the needs in the field; and the lack of capacity of the organisations in which the volunteers are deployed, notably when they are sent by the HOs to local "grassroots" organisations.

- Limited information on the outputs and outcomes of TA/CB activities makes it difficult to reach a conclusion on their overall cost-effectiveness. The actual costs per organisation engaged in TA/CB interventions have been lower than anticipated in the budget, which suggests that some attention has been given to cost-efficiency considerations.

- Beyond the certification process, CB activities have contributed to developing partnerships and strengthening the capacity of HOs regarding DRR and local

volunteering activities, although the outcomes have not been documented in detail.

- Despite the evidence of high-quality training services and the cost saving approach, the rigid rules regarding the way training is to be completed led to a lack of flexibility in delivery.

Budget allocations

The allocation of expenditures for the EUAV Initiative were consistent with allocation specified in Regulation 375/2014 on the three thematic priorities.[91] The regulation specifies how the budget should be allocated to different operational objectives organised under three thematic priorities:

- 41% to deployment of EU Aid volunteers;

- 55% to capacity building for hosting organisations and for volunteer training and technical assistance for sending organisations;

- 4% to "support measures".

The EUAV Initiative did not use results-based budgeting or tailor the budget to the three operational objectives under thematic priorities. As a result, the share of the total budget to be apportioned was not linked with expected outcomes or activity levels.[92]

While the budget share allocated to deployment projects (46%) was slightly higher than 41% share requested in the Regulation, commitments closely mirrored the expected percentages overall: 39% of the funds were attributed to deployment activities, 45% to TA and CB activities, 10% to the training of volunteers, and 4% to support measures (Figure 21).

Figure 21 – Budget allocations across thematic areas, 2014-2020
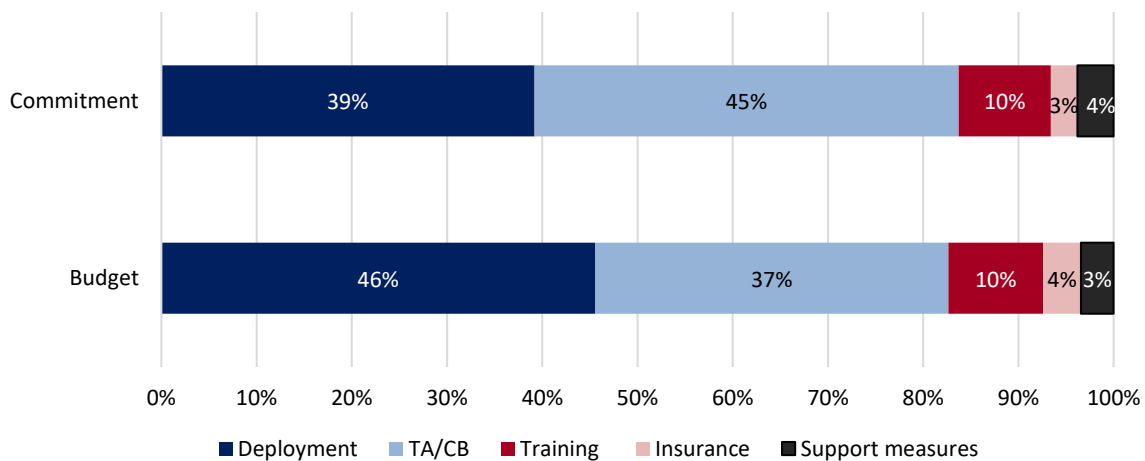
Source: ADE calculations based on EUAV financial data.

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[91] EU (2014), "Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014, establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative')", *Official Journal of the European Union*.

[92] Activity-based budgeting is a planning system under which costs are associated with activities and expenditures are then budgeted based on the expected activity level. The thematic priorities of the EUAV Initiative correspond to various operational objectives of EU Regulation 375/2014. Thematic priority 1 corresponds to the operational objective (a) "*Contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid*", Thematic priority 2 encompasses operational objectives (b) "*the training and apprenticeship placements for candidate volunteers*", (c) "*capacity building of hosting organisations for humanitarian aid, including support to undergo certification*" and (e) "*the certification/technical assistance for sending organisations*". The operational objective (d) "*Communicate the Union's humanitarian aid principles*" is covered in the Thematic Priority 3.

The rationale behind the budget allocation in relation to expected activities and outcomes was unclear. The Annual Work Programmes (AWPs) over 2014-2020 were not specific about the levels of activity that the EUAV Initiative was expected to achieve. Each of the seven AWPs described expected results without providing much detail, and results were mostly expressed as outputs,[93] not outcomes. This made it difficult to judge whether the budget was aligned with the outcomes expected and with the changes that the EUAV Initiative sought to achieve**.**[94]

Successive changes in deployment targets indicate difficulties in estimating the cost of deploying volunteers. Over the implementation period, volunteer deployment targets decreased considerably, while the corresponding budget decreased at a slower pace. This led to more than a doubling of the estimated cost per volunteer (from EUR 21,866 to EUR 49,897). The impact assessment conducted in 2012 estimated the deployment of 9,604 volunteers at a total implementation cost of EUR 210 million for the period 2014-2020 (i.e. EUR 21,866 per volunteer deployed).[95] At the launch of the EUAV Initiative, the target was reduced to 4,000 volunteers, for a total budget of EUR 141 million allocated to the EUAV Initiative (i.e. EUR 35,250 per volunteer deployed). The target was revised downward over time, and the successive AWPs suggest a final target of 2,425 volunteers by 2020 for a total requested budget of around EUR 121 million (i.e. EUR 49,897 per volunteer deployed). Ultimately, 1,173 deployments have been funded in the project proposals until 2019, amounting to a total of EUR 71.5 million of commitments, which corresponds to EUR 60,939 per volunteer, or about three times more than the first estimation.[96]

Moreover, setting targets based on numbers of volunteers did not take into account lengths of deployment. Targets and monitoring systems for the EUAV Initiative have tended to focus on numbers of volunteers trained and deployed rather than the duration and quality of deployments in terms of outcomes.

Delays in starting up the EUAV Initiative contributed to a low implementation rate, with only 58% of the total budget for the 2014-2017 period allocated to interventions. In 2018 and 2019, as implementation of the EUAV Initiative gained momentum, the budget utilisation rate increased to 73% in 2019 (Figure 22). Although commitment figures are not yet available for 2020, the final budget utilisation rate is not expected to improve due to constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, there are indications that gains have been reversed because mandatory trainings for volunteers were cancelled rather than moved online, as some peer volunteer organisations have done.

Availability of funding was hence not a constraint for the EUAV Initiative. Over the 2014-2020 period, a substantial proportion of the funding made available was not used. As noted above, the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) allocated just over EUR 141 million to the EUAV Initiative for the period 2014-2020. From 2018, funding requested was less than funding available. Only 70% of the available budget had been awarded as grants by 2019 and by 2020, around EUR 24 million, or 17% of the total budget available, was unused (Figure 22). This difference was mainly attributed to procedural and administrative processes that are described in more detail below.

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[93]   Most such outputs were the expected number of deployments or the number of SOs and HOs to be certified or whose capacities needed to be strengthened.
[94]   Annual Work Programmes (including Annexes) 2014-2020.
[95]   EC (2012), "Commission Staff Working Document- 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", SWD (2012) 266 final, Brussels, 19.9.2012.
[96]   Note that these calculations of the cost per volunteer use the total implementation budget (or commitments) of the EUAV Initiative and do not focus solely on deployment-related costs.

Figure 22 - Cumulative use of project funds between 2014 and 2020[97]
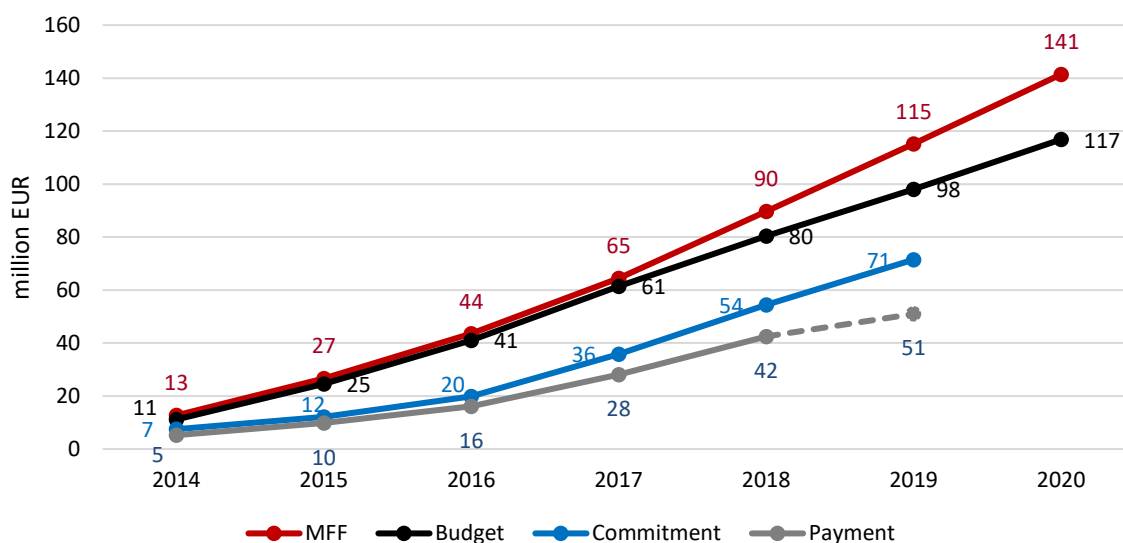
Overall, sending and hosting organisations considered the size of the grants sufficient. According to the SO survey, 58% of respondents considered that sufficient funding was available to deploy volunteers and to conduct TA/CB activities (Figure 23). A considerable share of respondents (39%) stated that they had no opinion on this, and 16% of respondents (25% of those who expressed an opinion) stated that they strongly or mostly disagreed that sufficient funding was available. The results are similar for HOs, with 63% of respondents considering they received sufficient funding for deploying volunteers and 54% reporting they received sufficient funding to conduct TA/CB activities.[98] Interviews with SO representatives also confirmed that the size of the budget was not a constraint and was enough to implement significant TA/CB activities, although it also implied that they would need to work with a limited number of partners in the case of TA/CB projects.[99] It was also mentioned that "although you have to contribute" (i.e. a 15% contribution to the budget), "the costs covered are more comprehensive and include aspects that are not considered by other Initiatives".[100]

At a project level, however, lack of flexibility in allocating funds to different activities constrained implementation. Initially, the call for proposal for technical assistance, capacity building and volunteer deployments was limited to EUR 700,000 for individual projects. However, based on feedback by SOs, it was increased in 2017 to EUR 1.4 million for deployment projects. The main complaint from SOs was that limitations on human resources (HR) costs for deployment projects (initially capped at 20% and then, since 2017, at 30% of the total direct costs) did not allow them to leverage economies of scale or cover the heavy management and coordination workload at a total budget of EUR 700,000.[101] Some SOs also mentioned that there was no rationale for maintaining the cap of EUR 700,000 for TA/CB projects, which limited their scale (notably in terms of the number of HOs engaged in the project). However, compared to deployment projects, TA/CV projects were perceived as successfully contributing to strengthening HOs.

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[97] In Figure 23, "MFF" corresponds to the envelope made available for the EUAV Initiative. "Budget" corresponds to the actual budget received by the EACEA in the framework of the EUAV Initiative. The total budget amount does match exactly the total requested budget as it does not include budget attributed to the DG DIGIT for support measures. "Commitment" reflects the part of the budget awarded by EAEA to specific projects and/or interventions. "Payment" is the amount actually paid to implementing partners (i.e. expenditures). Payment figures for 2019 are shown with a dotted line they are not yet definitive for all budget lines.

[98] It should also be noted that 39% of SO respondents reported they had no opinion or could not judge the statement. These large percentages are likely due to the fact that a substantial share of respondents have not engaged in deployment projects.

[99] Interview notes 38373 and 27988.

[100] Interview note 47937.

[101] DG ECHO (2017), "Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative", Particip, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, DOI:10.2795/58773.

Figure 23 - Sending organisation opinions on budget availability[102]

Statement	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion/ Cannot judge
Sufficient funding was provided to enable my organisation to deploy EUAV volunteers (N=46)	17%	28%	9%	7%	39%
The financial support received was sufficient to implement the TA/CB projects (N=46)	20%	39%	11%	11%	20%

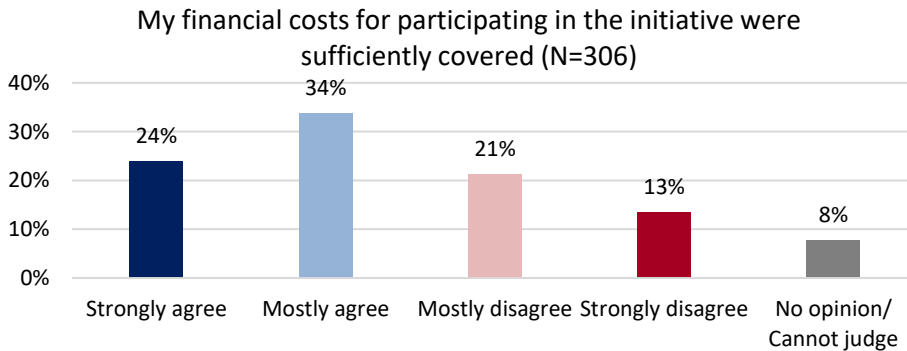■ Strongly agree ■ Mostly agree ■ Mostly disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ No opinion/ Cannot judge

Source: ADE calculations based on ADE Survey for EUAV Sending Organisations.

In some cases, volunteers' allowances were perceived as insufficient to ensure the strong and ongoing engagement of volunteers. SO and HO representatives stressed that in some countries, the allowances were not sufficient for the volunteers to sustain themselves, which led them to drop out before the end of the deployment period. As explained by interviewees, this was most prevalent among volunteers based in urban areas, where costs were higher. Responses to the volunteer survey confirmed this view, with 34% of respondents agreeing that "financial costs were not sufficiently covered" (Figure 24). At the same time, a little more than half (58%) of surveyed volunteers reported they were satisfied with their allowances. Following the complaints, measures were taken to increase the allowances in some countries such as Palestine.[103]

Figure 24 - Volunteers' perception regarding the allowances they receive

My financial costs for participating in the initiative were sufficiently covered (N=306)

Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion/ Cannot judge
24%	34%	21%	13%	8%

Source: ADE Survey for EU Aid Volunteers.

Content and structure of reference documents

The EUAV Initiative invested significant resources in preparing quality reference documents that have been useful to the implementation of the EUAV Initiative. A sequenced, consultative and thorough initial process, including a pilot phase to test the implementation, and several reviews, studies and assessments between 2005 and 2014 have

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[102] SOs were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements presented in Figure 24, which shows the results only for SOs that expressed an opinion and excludes those that answered, "no opinion/cannot judge".
[103] Interview notes 935, 47937, 5729 and 29600.

helped shape the EUAV Initiative.[104] These documents informed the principles, standards and procedures that the EUAV Initiative laid down in the EU Regulation 375/2014 and in the related Delegated Regulation 1398/2014 and Implementing Regulation 1244/2014. This work contributed to the development of key features of the EUAV Initiative, among them the careful considerations for volunteers' security, uniform approach to volunteer training, certification process for SOs and HOs, volunteer management, and the governance of partners. These elements have contributed to the effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative (see EQ4 for more details), notably by mitigating risks and providing consistent and coherent approaches to the different activities.[105]

However, stakeholders have stressed the complexity of procedural requirements for the EUAV Initiative, which are perceived as overly detailed and prescriptive. The complexity of procedures around the EUAV Initiative was acknowledged by both DG ECHO and the EACEA, the latter referring to the requirements resulting from the EU Regulation as "the most complex ever seen".[106] In particular, some interviewees explained that Delegated Regulation 1398/2014 and Implementing Regulation 1244/2014 were perceived as far too precise and detailed, notably in comparison to the EU regulations for other volunteer and/or mobility schemes such as ERASMUS+.[107] These requirements were binding and could not be modified as they originate in EU humanitarian regulations and aid instruments, therefore considerably limiting the scope for adapting to the context for the EACEA in the management of the EUAV Initiative. The SO survey also confirmed this. Indeed, 71% of SO respondents stated that they mostly (30%) or strongly (41%) disagreed with the statement that "participating in the EUAV Initiative required little administrative burden" on their side. Some representatives of SOs and HOs also indicated, and stressed, that "the complexity of the legal and administrative framework constituted the main obstacle to adhere to the EUAV Initiative" for many actors (Figure 26).[108] Such was the case specifically with smaller NGOs and host organisations that lacked capacity to manage paperwork trails, meaning that relatively large international NGOs have been the most successful in implementing the EUAV Initiative.

> **The complexity of requirements hampered the smooth implementation of the EUAV Initiative at several different levels:**
>
> - **Heavy investments by human resources.** The administrative part of the call for proposals was experienced as particularly demanding and time-consuming (in comparison to the actual proposal). In particular, technical issues regarding the access to "e-Forms" have been challenging to grant applicants.[109]
>
> - **The certification process was seen as complex and cumbersome despite the regulation and available guidelines.** Some SOs described reference documents as confusing and lacking in information and guidance on the certification process.[110] However, several organisations with experience managing volunteers did not find the certification process complex in itself; rather they perceived the requirements as cumbersome (e.g. allocating

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[104] The main preparatory or consultative documents include DG ECHO-Prolog Consult (2006), Review Concerning the Establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps; DG ECHO-Germax (2010), Review Concerning the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps; DG ECHO-COWI (2012), Preparatory study for an Impact Assessment on the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps; three "Preparatory Actions" studies to establish a set of basic requirements and standards on training humanitarian volunteers and capacity building in the humanitarian sector (Lot 1), volunteer management standards and certification (Lot 2), and employee volunteering (Lot 3); and, finally, ICF (2014), Evaluation of the Pilot Action of EU Aid Volunteers.

[105] DG ECHO-Particip (2017), "Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, DOI:10.2795/58773.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Interview notes 10136, 28545.

[108] Interview notes 30428, 15358, 36831 (among others).

[109] Interview notes 3096 and 27988; and DG ECHO-Particip (2017), "Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, DOI:10.2795/58773.

[110] Case study – Process of Certification.

information to the different criteria for the self-assessment form was a long and repetitive process).[111] Moreover, several SOs had to provide support and facilitate the certification of HOs (notably local NGOs), which indicated that the available documentation was not sufficient to ensure a smooth implementation at their level.[112] Five of the 15 respondents to the Public Consultation disagreed that the administrative burden of the EUAV Initiative was reasonable.

- **The level of detail of the Implementing Regulation 1244/2014 specifying the modalities of volunteers' training constrained the implementation of the EUAV Initiative.** The Regulation was very prescriptive and did not allow flexibility of implementation. It also specified the number of hours and the content of the training sessions. Such a level of detail has prevented the training provider from adapting the curriculum to the needs of the volunteers. For example, it was not possible to reduce the weight of emergency-related content to focus more on DRR (or development-related) activities that were much more aligned to the actual deployment experience of volunteers.[113] The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the danger of being overly prescriptive: the Regulation required face-to-face training, for instance, and this could not be replaced by alternative (e.g. "remote") options. As a result, all volunteer training was stopped, which resulted in significant delays that could have been overcome using an alternative delivery mechanism.

- **Lack of coherent guidelines and support during the start-up phase, combined with the rigidity and demanding requirements for budget management,** limited efficiency. Examples include:

  - *Reporting templates:* Due to delays in developing the appropriate documentation and templates for budget reporting, SOs engaged at the beginning of the EUAV Initiative have incurred substantial costs.[114]
  - *Budget reporting:* It was not always clear to SOs with limited experience working with the EU how much detail was required for expense reporting and how these were to be allocated to different budget headings. Such reporting was particularly difficult for local HOs to handle. This was particularly the case during the pilot phase of the EUAV Initiative, when the complexity of budget reporting requirements came as an unexpected surprise to many SOs.[115] While the guidance notes on how to prepare a Final Financial Report were comprehensive, organisations required additional guidance from EACEA that, according to SO staff, was frequently slow in coming. Some requests to EACEA for guidance on budget issues were not necessary, for example asking permission for minor budget reallocations.
  - *Detailed audit trails:* SOs encountered difficulties in fulfilling the audit requirements, notably in terms of justifying expenses "to the cent". Although the audit system cannot be adapted as it is an EU requirement subject to specific guidelines, SOs reported that they lacked information and guidance on requirements.[116] They were taken aback by the level of complexity and the detailed audit trail needed and said that better training and clear guidance up front, along with a real understanding of what these meant in practice, would have made a substantive difference. Some SOs reported that they scaled back their deployment targets due to the complexity of the audit processes and transaction costs.

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[111] Interview notes 935 and 30428.
[112] Interview notes 37361, 49374, 19846 and 23811.
[113] Interview note 6003.
[114] For example, some SOs received the reporting format for the budget only several months after the start of the project, which required them to readapt all the processes internally (and for HOs).
[115] Interview notes 27988, 14022, 16415.
[116] Interview note 16415.

The EUAV Initiative did not make the most of available guidance documents. In addition to the guidance documents produced by DG ECHO and the EACEA to address the complexity of the EUAV Initiative, the partners engaged in TA projects developed a set of handbooks and guidelines. Some publications are duplicates or overlap. Examples include GVC (2016), *Alianza por la solidaridad* (2017b) information for certification mechanisms.[117] This indicates a lack of coordination and suggests that partners may have been using different reference documents on similar issues. Interviews suggest that it was challenging to find the relevant information, notably on the EUAV Platform, which is perceived as neither easily accessible or intuitive and took time to be fully functional.[118]

The main difficulties were concentrated on smaller organisations and early on in their involvement. Not all participants experienced similar difficulties with the regulations. Larger international organisations had the experience and capacity to comply with the complex requirements. It was also easier for the SOs that worked with their national agencies as HOs, notably because they shared similar administrative systems and processes. Interviews found that organisations experienced difficulties mainly for their first project with the EUAV Initiative, but they learned from these and could implement subsequent projects. The EUAV Initiative has favoured large organisations with good resource levels, given the complexity of administrative requirements.

Regulations and processes

Organisations had a great deal of flexibility in the way they could structure interventions. Calls for proposal included a wide range of eligible activities for funding, leaving the door open to various possibilities.[119] On one hand, SOs praised this freedom, which suggested that it allowed them to tailor interventions to their needs and therefore contributed to cost-effectiveness. On the other, anecdotal evidence suggests that some SOs expected a greater level of scrutiny, specifically on cost-effectiveness, from the submission process.[120]

The combination of a rigid "paper trail" approach and a lack of focus on the quality of the activities and outcomes provided perhaps wrongly focused incentives for SOs. These encouraged SOs to focus on outputs to meet their targets (e.g. registering a sufficient number of beneficiaries for a capacity-building training) instead of on the quality of activities (e.g. taking the time to identify the most relevant beneficiaries for a capacity-building training at the risk of lower registration levels).

The EUAV Initiative is underpinned by a monitoring and evaluation framework with procedures at the programme level to record M&E data. As mentioned in Article 27 of EU Regulation 375/2014, the activities "shall be regularly monitored, and regularly evaluated through independent external evaluation to assess efficiency, effectiveness and impact against the objectives of the initiative". The EACEA is responsible for the monitoring of the EUAV Initiative[121] and has relied on a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring framework developed at the end of the pilot phase in 2013.[122] The M&E framework proposes several indicators and data collection procedures, not only for inputs and outputs but also for outcomes. The EACEA is required to provide an annual report to DG ECHO and must report every six months.

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[117] DG ECHO-Particip (2017), "Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, DOI:10.2795/58773.
[118] Interview notes 4241 and 7401.
[119] EACEA Calls for Proposals for Deployment, TA/CB Activities (2015-2020).
[120] Interview notes 32824, 14022.
[121] EU (2014), Delegated Regulation (EU) 1398/2014 of 24 October 2014 laying down standards regarding candidate volunteers; and the EU Aid Volunteers Delegated Regulation, Official Journal of the European Union.
[122] DG ECHO - ICF (2014), Evaluation of the Pilot Action of EU Aid Volunteers – Final Report, Ares (2014)3026572.

However, in practice, monitoring activities have not gone into detail, notably due to "light" reporting at the project level and the absence of automated data collection processes. EACEA project officers are required to report project level indicators on an annual basis in the annual monitoring report. Yet, project level monitoring activities are conducted on a continuous basis.[123] However, the monitoring of activities only includes outputs-level indicators. The call for proposal documents requires a "logic of intervention", but the template only focuses on activities and/or outputs, with no reference to outcomes or quality of the activities or to cost-efficiency measures. This is confirmed by interviews with representatives of SOs who felt that the EACEA was chiefly interested in collecting the necessary output indicators and track expenses against budget to fulfil administrative requirements, but less interested in the actual contributions, outcomes, quality and results of activities.[124] This approach resulted in EACEA providing succinct monitoring reports to DG ECHO, with gaps in terms of indicators and lack of consistency in reporting.[125] The absence of an automated data collection process has also probably contributed to the lack of in-depth reporting, as EACEA staff had to manually fetch the relevant information from different sources —a very time-consuming process.[126]

Participating organisations had the opportunity to provide feedback, which led to some improvements, but they felt that there were insufficient opportunities for peer learning and knowledge sharing. SOs provided feedback in different ways —directly to the EACEA staff, during conferences organised for this purpose and through a mid-term recommendation report prepared by one of the consortia. Although the EACEA had only limited room for changing the procedures and processes (given the rigidity of the EU regulations), it adapted some of the requirements to facilitate implementation of the EUAV Initiative for SOs and HOs. The main changes included decreasing the consortium requirements; increasing the maximum share of costs for human resources from 20 to 30% (and then to 35%) in deployment projects; and increasing the frequency of training sessions to reduce the waiting period between volunteers' selection and deployment. SOs also mentioned that formal peer learning and knowledge-sharing activities were not organised but would have been very helpful for sharing good practices regarding the financial procedures, the management of hosting organisations and volunteers, etc.[127] Such exchanges took place informally and on the EUAV platform but only to a limited extent. This represents a missed opportunity to foster learning and improved cost-effectiveness across the EUAV Initiative.

Efficiency and cost effectiveness

The placement of the EUAV Initiative with EACEA has been cost-effective although with some caveats. Two main placement options for the EUAV Initiative were discussed during the pilot phase. One was a suggestion to delegate management of most modules to the EACEA. The second option looked at maintaining the entire management of the EUAV Initiative within the Commission (i.e. within DG ECHO).[128] The decision to opt for the first option was driven by cost-effectiveness considerations. Since the EUAV Initiative entails activities at odds with the type of projects DG ECHO usually manages, delegating the management of most modules was perceived as cost-effective.

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[123] EACEA (2018), EUAV Initiative – Deployment, Instructions for Project Management 2018, November 2017 Version; EACEA (2018) EUAV Initiative – Technical Assistance & Capacity Building, Instructions for Project Management 2017, March 2018 Version.

[124] Interview notes 38373 and 27988.

[125] EACEA - Annual Monitoring Report 2019.

[126] DG ECHO-Particip (2017), "Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, DOI:10.2795/58773.

[127] Interview notes 38373 and 27988,

[128] DG ECHO-COWI (2012), Preparatory study for an Impact Assessment on the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

The operational costs provisioned for administering the EUAV Initiative are comparable to the overheads allowed for EU implementing partners. The EUAV Initiative provisioned around EUR 1 million per year for operations, which corresponds to around 6% of the total requested budget over the period but 9% of the budget spent between 2014 and 2019. This is consistent with the overheads allowed for grant recipients under EU-funded projects (7%) and comparable to the overheads from UN agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (around 7%) or the United Nations Development Programme (6%). Overall, delegating the management of most activities to the EACEA appeared to be a cost-effective approach.

The complexity of the EUAV Initiative has reduced efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative at several levels. The complexity of administrative procedures and rigidity of the processes (notably regarding budget management) have been cumbersome for the staffs of SOs and HOs, therefore limiting their ability to invest in activities that could have contributed more directly to deliver quality. The survey responses of SOs regarding cost-effectiveness confirm that many have perceived these elements as detrimental to the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative (Figure 25). In fact, 71% of SOs disagree — 30% "mostly" and as much as 41% "strongly" — with the notion that participating in the EUAV Initiative carries little administrative burden; 46% (or 58% of those expressing an opinion) considered that they did not receive sufficient support from the EC.[129] There is also evidence indicating that SOs could not engage in cost-efficient ways of working because these would not satisfy the financial regulations (e.g. using an organisation's own accommodation and conference facilities, which was regarded as a "payment to the organisation" under EU regulations). The rigidity of the regulation regarding training activities has also been one of the main causes for the long lag between a position becoming available and a deployment in that country, with important implications for cost-effectiveness.

**Figure 25 – Sending organisations' opinions about cost-effectiveness**
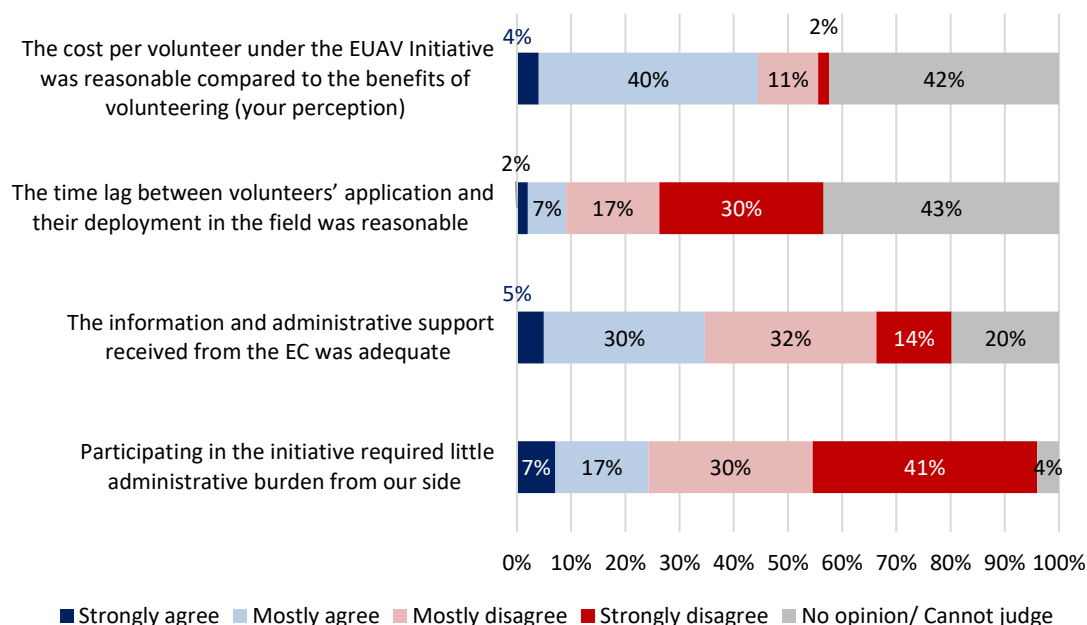
Source: ADE calculations based on the EUAV Survey on Sending Organisations.

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[129] This is also supported by the survey of HOs and volunteers, which found 39% of HOs (41% of HOs expressing an opinion) and 35% of volunteers (36% of those expressing an opinion) disagreed with the notion that participating in the EUAV Initiative involved little administrative burden.

The complexity and heavy administrative workload have contributed to deterring applicants from responding to EUAV Initiative calls for proposals, which in turn has lowered its cost-effectiveness. As noted, interviews found that some potential participants decided against participating in the calls for proposal, notably due to the heavy workload this entailed relative to the expected benefits. In the case of the EUAV Initiative, the small number of applications has reduced the benefits in terms of the quality and cost-effectiveness of proposals that can be expected from competitive tender processes. Indeed, between 2015 and 2017, 85% of eligible TA proposals (11 of 13) and 81% of eligible CB proposals (22 of 27) have been selected for funding. In 2018 and 2019, the corresponding percentages dropped to 20% (2 of 10) for TA and 48% (12 of 25) for CB projects (Figure 27).

All 33 eligible deployment projects were funded between 2015 and 2019, meaning that there was no competition for those projects. The quality of the proposals was nevertheless assessed by an independent evaluator, which should guarantee that they have a minimum quality level. The high rate of success could indicate that the EUAV Initiative was self-selecting.

Figure 26 – Share of eligible applications selected for funding (2015-2019)
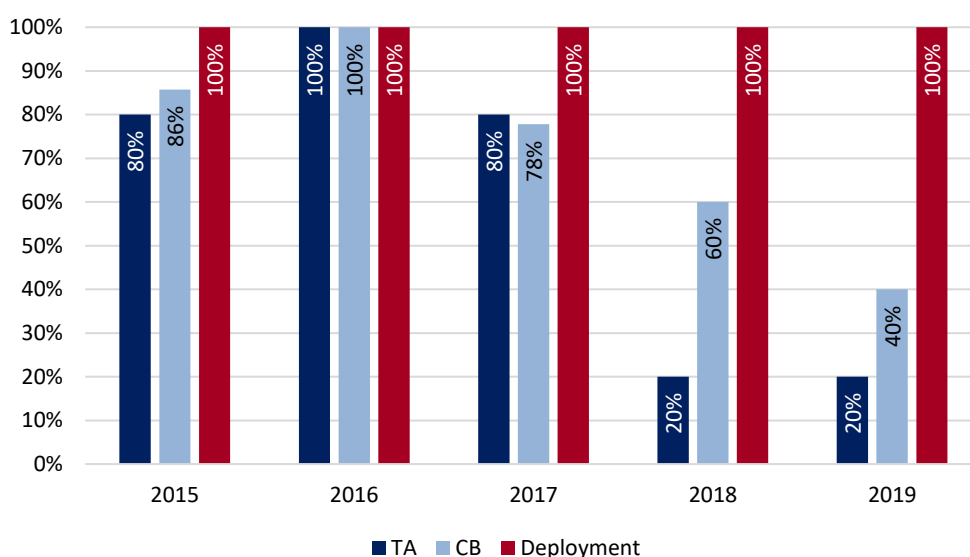
Source: ADE calculations based on EACEA data on project selections.

The costs of deploying volunteers were comparable to other volunteering initiatives. The deployment of volunteers is intended to contribute in particular to operational objective (a) — increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian assistance. While the target in terms of volunteer deployments was missed, the cost of deploying a volunteer for one month did not appear excessive relative to initiatives such as UN Volunteers. A bit more than 2/3 (11 on 15) of the respondents to the Public Consultation found that volunteering abroad is a cost-effective way to support the career potential of young professionals. Based on a subsample of eight (out of a total of 31) deployment projects for which expenditures data were available (covering the period 2015-2018), the average cost of deploying a volunteer for a month was EUR 3,180, which is slightly lower than the amount planned in the budget of EUR 3,279 (Figure 27).[130] By comparison, in 2019, the average pro

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[130] The cost per volunteering month has been computed by dividing the total expenditures for the deployment project (including subsistence allowances) by the number of volunteering months that actually took place.

forma costs of deploying a UN volunteer amounted to about EUR 4,360 for International UN volunteers and EUR 3,220 for International Youth UN volunteers.[131]

Yet, there are important disparities in the costs of deploying volunteers across projects, which suggests that cost improvements are still possible. The achieved cost of deploying volunteers varied from around EUR 2,500 to EUR 4,100 a month depending on the project (Figure 27).[132] Interestingly, as shown in this figure, the planned cost per deployment month increased substantially between two projects led by the same organisation at different times: from EUR 2,317 to EUR 3,467 for projects led by sample sending organisation 1 and from EUR 2,671 to EUR 4,250 for projects led by sample sending organisation 2). Higher deployment, human resources and subcontracting costs per volunteering month drove the increases.

The unit cost of deployment alone is not sufficient evidence from which to conclude there is a lack of cost-effectiveness as the quality of deployment is not observed. The differences in costs per deployment may reflect many unobserved factors, including the quality of volunteering experiences and outcomes achieved. It is not possible to conclude that the projects with higher costs per deployment month are less cost-effective or of different value than the "cheaper" projects. Nevertheless, the large variations point to a key weakness of the call for proposals: the lack of explicit linkage between the budget and the number, duration and characteristics of volunteers' deployment. This could have contributed to a more cost-effective initiative.

Figure 27 – Average costs per volunteer deployment month
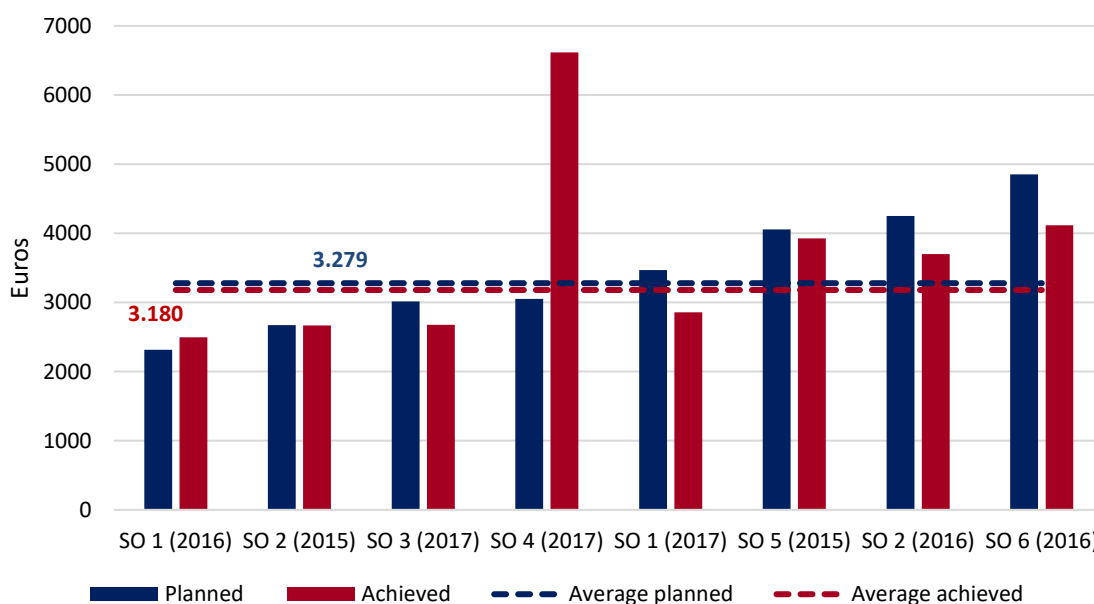
Source ADE calculations based on interventions' budget and financial reports.

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[131] UN Volunteers (2019), "Proforma Cost Overview 2019 for international UN volunteers for Funding Partners", https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/Proforma%20Cost%20Overview-INTL%20Donor.pdf. Proforma costs cover UN Volunteer entitlements (allowances) payable to UN Volunteers, assignment costs (e.g. medical insurance) and management-related costs (e.g. deployment charge). UN Volunteers receive a higher living allowance (a basic rate of USD 1,681 in 2020), but this allowance covers accommodation, transportation, communications and other basic needs (while for the EUAV, accommodation is paid for separately). UN Volunteers are also entitled to additional grants such as resettlement allowance, which accounts for much of this difference. International Youth UN Volunteers is a "junior volunteer" programme funded by the Swiss government for people under 29 years of age.

[132] The figures cover a sample of 6 sending organisations (data have been anonymised). The EUR 6,615 per volunteering month estimated for SO 3 deployments was viewed as an outlier and therefore not considered as a relevant upper bound for the dispersion of costs across projects.

The cost-effectiveness of volunteers' deployment has been limited by several obstacles. The considerable length of time between a volunteer position being advertised and the moment when the selected volunteer was trained and could be deployed to the field clearly lowered the cost-effectiveness of deployment projects. As described in the response to EQ4 (effectiveness), this lag time affected the quality of matching the volunteers' skills with the initial needs of HOs that may have evolved in the interim. As such, the time invested in carefully selecting volunteers, in some cases, was partially wasted. This is confirmed by the survey results, which indicate that 46% of volunteers, 47% of SOs (83% of SOs expressing an opinion) and 23% of HOs (35% of HOs expressing an opinion) considered that the time lag between application and deployment was unreasonable. Another source of inefficiency is related to the low level of subsistence allowances, which has been mentioned (see above) as a source of reduced motivation and in a few cases appear to have led to volunteers ending their deployment before completing a full term.[133]

By sending volunteers to grassroots organisations, some SOs did not make optimal use of the volunteers' competences. As noted in EQ1, some SOs sent volunteers to HOs that in turn dispatched the volunteers to local "grassroots" organisations, often with very limited capacity and disconnected from the overall EUAV initiative. Although this "model" of volunteering can benefit volunteers, it was not in line with the EUAV Initiative's framework, notably the objective of increasing the capacity of the EU to provide humanitarian assistance.

The Initiative did not adapt to the deployment of qualified and sometimes very experienced volunteers who were unable to contribute to the best of their competencies in such small organisations.[134] This is supported by responses to the volunteer survey: 22% of respondents (and 30% of those declaring an opinion) considered that the overall cost of volunteering was not reasonable compared to the benefit for the local population (Figure 28). Moreover, 26% of respondents (and 31% of those declaring an opinion) considered the cost was not reasonable for the benefits it brought to the volunteers themselves. This may mean that the efforts invested in selecting the correct skilled EU Aid Volunteers were wasted by not deploying them to the right place.

Figure 28 – Volunteers' views on the cost-effectiveness of their experience
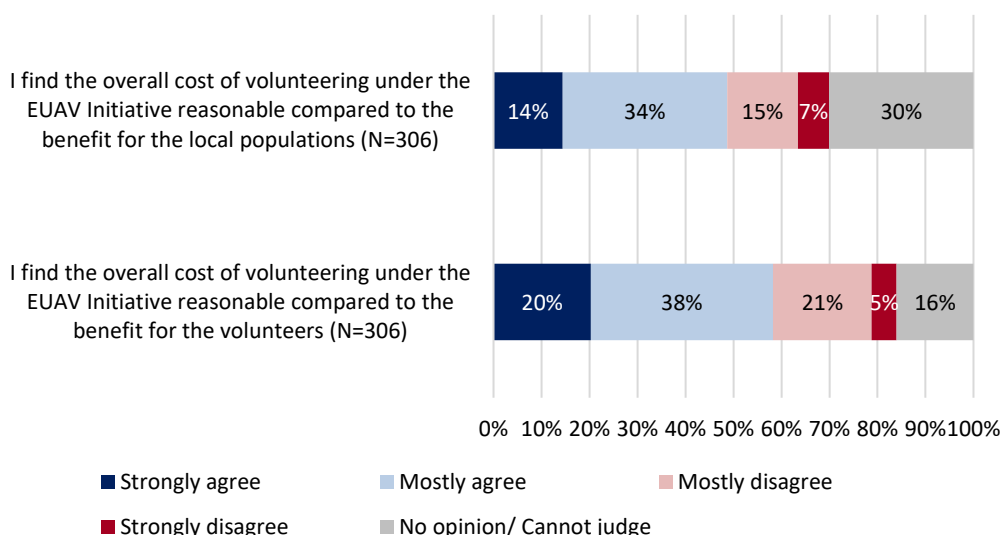
Source: ADE calculations based on ADE EUAV Volunteer Survey

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[133] Exact numbers are unknown, since the data for dropouts was not tracked. The team only heard about isolated cases during interviews or where they were mentioned in project reports.
[134] Interview notes 12588, 34727, 2215, 33565, 34977.

Despite evidence of their high quality and cost-saving approaches, there is room for improving the cost-effectiveness of training services. After a competitive bidding process, the EACEA managed to contract training providers for EUR 8.75 million over the 2014-2019 period, a lower cost than the EUR 14.5 million initially budgeted. The contract for training services is based on the actual number of volunteers trained. As noted above and in the case studies (see Annexes 1 to 3), volunteers have generally praised the training for its quality. Yet, some issues could still undermine its cost-effectiveness. Increasing the frequency of the training, as well as the flexibility of the delivery mode, e.g. online, could reduce the long lag time between selection and deployment. Moreover, the content of the training could be adjusted to better match the needs of the volunteers in the field. Stakeholders stressed in particular that the training should give more weight to contextualized, practical (professional) training that focuses on how volunteers will work in the context of different hosting organisations (including local organisations).

Limited information on the outputs and outcomes of TA/CB activities makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the overall cost-effectiveness of these areas. Given the diversity of projects and activities, no systematic and relevant outputs (and even fewer outcomes) could be analysed at the project level. This limits the analysis of cost-efficiency of TA/CB interventions and shows the importance of clearly identified outcomes for these projects. The original target for certification is unclear. The 2019 annual monitoring report refers to an overall target of 170 certified organisations. This seems low, given the declared objective of strengthening the capacity of 510 organisations by 2019 to enable them to undertake the certification process. Provided these two targets are correct, they should be compared to the 374 certified organisations by 2020 and 439 organisations that received training by 2019.[135] This suggests that TA/CB interventions have been cost-efficient as the average cost to certify an organisation was about EUR 86,000, compared to the planned cost of EUR 220,000 (if the 170 target is valid).[136] Moreover, the average cost per organisation participating in TA/CB activities was around EUR 56,000, against EUR 73,000, as initially planned.

TA/CB activities were less successful in ensuring that participating organisations actually received a certification, as only 64% of organisations (282 of 429) did so. The certification process was judged to be very cumbersome by 22% of SOs responding to the survey, while 19% found it challenging and required assistance. Only 14% of certified SOs found it simple and straightforward. Interestingly, only 6% of HOs found the process very cumbersome, although this is partly due to the fact that 42% needed assistance to complete the process (which they received from SOs).[137] A limitation on the cost-effectiveness of CB projects was related to the size of the consortium and the extent to which the different partners were used to working together. It was challenging for SOs to work with so many and such diverse partners, as the processes and approaches had to be tailored to suit all parties. Yet, there is evidence that CB activities have been successful in developing partnerships and developing the capacity of HOs regarding DRR and local volunteering (see EQ4), although these outcomes have not been documented in detail.

The conclusions and recommendations of previous evaluations and assessments have not been sufficiently considered, although they identified key obstacles to cost-effectiveness. Many of the key obstacles to the (cost-) effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative were highlighted in previous evaluations and preparatory documents. In addition, the 2010 Review suggested subdividing the scheme in three main levels, each contributing in its own way and focused on (i) young unskilled volunteers, (ii) junior professionals and (iii)

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[135]   DG ECHO (2020), Programme Statement: EUAV Initiative, PB2021. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/db_2021_programme_statement_eu_aid_volunteers_initiative_euav.pdf.

[136]   These estimates are based on the number of organisations certified over the period 2014-2019 and do not include the additional 88 organisations certified in 2020 as no corresponding expenditures data are available for 2020.

[137]   ADE - Survey responses from SOs and HOs.

experienced volunteers (professionals) who can be used for surge capacity in disaster response. Implementing learnings from past evaluations and experience could have improved the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative.

4.5 EQ1 Relevance

EQ 1	To what extent was the EUAV Initiative relevant?

The Initiative was designed to improve the effectiveness of EU volunteering in the humanitarian field by enabling progress to be made towards the achievement of the following five objectives:

- Contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid,

- Improve the skills, knowledge and competences of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid and the terms and conditions of their engagement,

- Build the capacity of hosting organisations and foster volunteering in third countries,

- Communicate the Union's humanitarian aid principles agreed in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, and

- Enhance coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid and activities.

This section on relevance analyses the degree to which each of the five operational objectives of the EUAV Initiative was relevant to the identified needs of direct and indirect beneficiaries (including volunteers, SOs, HOs, and vulnerable and disaster-affected communities) as well as the degree to which the design of the Initiative and the selection of activities were appropriate for achieving these objectives.

Summary Response to EQ 1

- Overall, the evaluation concludes that **the objectives of the EUAV Initiative are relevant to the needs of volunteers, SOs and HOs**, and to some extent, local communities.

- All actions identified in the Regulation help to fulfil the objectives to some extent, which justifies their incorporation in the design of the EUAV Initiative. However, **in some cases, the identified interventions were insufficient to effectively promote achievement of the objectives,** including fostering local volunteering, promoting coherence and consistency of volunteering across member states, and communicating humanitarian principles beyond direct beneficiaries.

- **Objective 1**: The design of the Initiative appears to have been appropriate to contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to deliver humanitarian aid by promoting an improvement in the capacity of existing DG ECHO implementing partners, by enabling new organisations working in the humanitarian sector to apply for DG ECHO and EU funding, and by increasing the number of skilled volunteers participating in EU humanitarian work. However, such a contribution was, by design, limited and mostly short-term. Security management systems put in place limited deployment of volunteers to areas with the greatest humanitarian need.

- **Objective 2**: The design of the Initiative was appropriate for improving the knowledge, skills and competencies of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid through its focus on high-quality training and the deployment opportunity it offered.

The Initiative's design was also appropriate for improving the terms and conditions of volunteers' deployment through the high standards it established and the capacity building it provided to involved organisations. The objective was relevant for volunteers but also for organisations involved and indirectly for the local communities.

- **Objective 3:** The design of the EUAV Initiative was appropriate for achieving the objective of improving the capacity of hosting organisations, but it provided insufficient mechanisms for fostering local volunteering. Local volunteering was only promoted on a project-by-project basis according to the interests of involved organisations. This objective, in particular its focus on the capacity building of HOs, was relevant to all stakeholders involved.

- **Objective 4**: The design of the EUAV Initiative was appropriate for increasing the knowledge of humanitarian principles on the part of direct beneficiaries of the Initiative (volunteers, SOs and HOs) but was not appropriate to allow for the promotion of these principles to indirect beneficiaries, including the local population and organisations. Although ensuring that the actions of all actors of the Initiative abide by the EU humanitarian principles is essential, the strong focus on a broader communication of EU humanitarian principles outside direct beneficiaries does not appear to be justified, despite being beneficial for EU humanitarian action and relevant to DG ECHO's commitment under the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

- **Objective 5**: The design of the EUAV Initiative was only relevant to a limited extent to promote the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States. The focus of the Initiative at the organisational level rather than the state or inter-state level, and the lack of a comprehensive oversight system, limited the capacity of the Initiative to achieve this objective.

- While the simultaneous pursuit of these five quite different and broad objectives to a certain extent created a competition for resources that may have constrained the magnitude of progress that could be achieved with respect to each one, it also has enabled a more holistic approach to improving EU volunteering in the humanitarian aid sector. Progress in each of the objectives has the capacity to complement and reinforce progress in other objectives, allowing different challenges in EU volunteering in the humanitarian sector to be addressed.

- **Although the Initiative was relevant to the specific needs it sought to address for the purposes of improving EU volunteering in the humanitarian sector, its relevance to the broader needs of the humanitarian aid sector was more limited.** The volunteering scheme did not emerge as an optimal solution to specific challenges of the humanitarian aid sector. The Lisbon Treaty rendered the establishment of a volunteering scheme the default option, without providing room for alternatives. As such the EUAV Initiative did not emerge as the optimal solution to specific challenges: the specific challenges it could address were rather identified once it was created.

- **The EUAV Initiative did not initially incorporate in its design sufficient formal mechanisms to facilitate learning**, sharing and use of lessons learned. With the notable exception of the SO consortia, lessons were mostly learned in an individual rather than collective manner and were shared through informal and ad hoc channels that were constrained in terms of outreach. This improved over time, and there were some examples where the design had been revised.

Objective 1: Contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid

The EUAV Initiative was well designed so as to contribute to increasing and improving the capacity of the Union to deliver humanitarian aid, albeit in a limited manner and in the short term.

The EUAV Initiative was well designed to enable an improvement in the capacity of existing DG ECHO implementing partners, to enable new organisations working in the humanitarian sector to apply for DG ECHO and EU funding, and to increase the number of skilled volunteers participating in EU humanitarian work.[138]

First, the design of the EUAV Initiative enabled the improvement of the capacities of DG ECHO's existing humanitarian partners. As DG ECHO relies on a network of approved implementing partners for the implementation of its projects, improving the capacity levels and implementation practices of such partners and their staff is clearly key to its operational performance.

The EUAV Initiative's strong emphasis on capacity building, which set it apart from other EU MS schemes, was an important part of its appeal to organisations, and also a key to its effectiveness. Both the FPA and FAFA partners and the non-DG ECHO partner sending organisations indicated in their survey responses that the opportunities to improve their capacity to deliver humanitarian aid and deploy volunteers were the most important reasons for joining the Initiative.

Second, the design of the EUAV Initiative was appropriate to encourage and enable organisations that had not previously participated in either DG ECHO or EU projects to do so. This was a consequence of the EUAV Initiative focus on capacity building and the provision of peer support within consortia. Such organisations participated mainly to develop their capacity for project, funds & HR management. As explained in EQ4, these elements also provided the necessary tools and incentives for organisations to participate in other projects beyond those they originally applied for.

Figure 29 – Incentives for SOs to join the EUAV Initiative
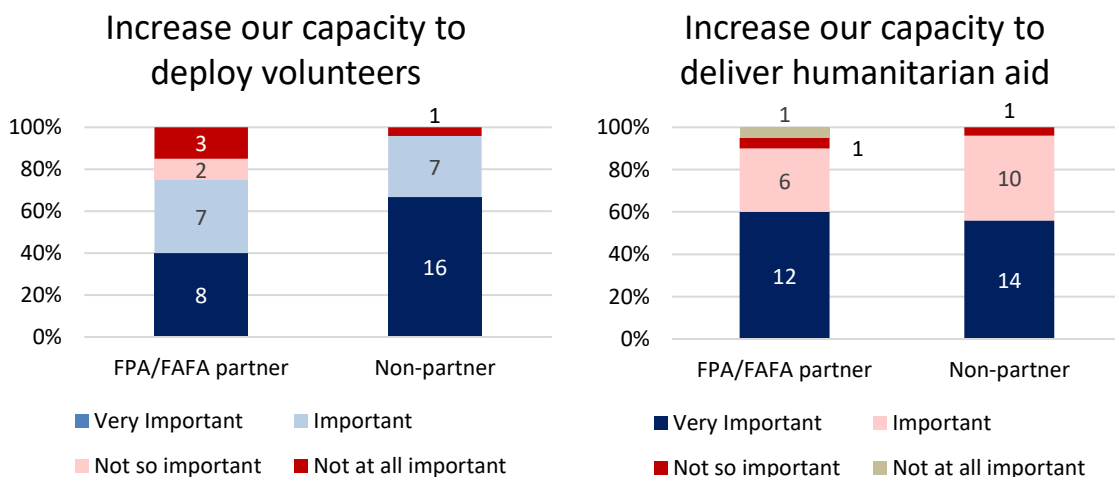
Source: ADE calculations based on the ADE Survey for EUAV Hosting Organisations.

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[138] 73% of the respondents to the Public Consultation also agreed there is a need for the EU to increase its capacity to deliver humanitarian aid, with 60% agreeing that the establishment of a volunteering scheme is a suitable tool to potentially achieve this.

However, certain limitations in the design also constrained the ability to increase the capacity of the Union to provide humanitarian aid.

The security restrictions for the deployment of volunteers were not aligned with some of the EUAV Initiative objectives, notably the development of capacity in regions that often had the greatest humanitarian needs.

From the beginning, the EUAV Initiative put a strong focus on safety. The Regulation established that *"the safety and security of candidate volunteers and EU Aid Volunteers shall be a priority''* (Article 5) and stipulated that volunteers should not be deployed to operations conducted in theatres of international and non-international armed conflict (Article 14). DG ECHO provided a list of countries where deployments could take place and set standards for the contexts whereby volunteers could be deployed even within allowed countries. A precautionary approach was adopted for the determination of these standards aiming at minimising the exposure of volunteers to high-risk environments, taking into consideration complementary factors usually prevailing in today's armed conflict situations, such as elevated crime levels, terrorist acts, kidnapping or high levels of civil unrest.

As stipulated by EU regulation 375/2014, given the specific challenges of the humanitarian context, EU Aid Volunteers should have a minimum age of 18 years. Volunteers were eligible for deployment after following a short two-week preparatory course. In fact the security system was established based on the assumption that volunteers would mainly be young people with limited experience in the field, while in practice volunteers were older and more experienced. Volunteers were indeed eligible for deployment after following just a short, two-week preparatory course, which is by no means comparable to the experience and training of the professional DG ECHO staff sent to the field. However, in practice the average age of volunteers was 30 years old and, according to the survey, over half (54%) of the volunteers already had previous professional experience working in humanitarian aid.[139]

Given the complexities of today's emergencies and the risks that volunteers face, DG ECHO took a cautious approach giving utmost attention to the security and safety of the volunteers, as specified in the EU regulation 375/2014 (Art. 5): "The safety and security of candidate volunteers and EU Aid Volunteers shall be a priority''.

As explained in EQ4, this approach served the purpose in ensuring the safety of volunteers and indeed no serious security incidents had been reported. However, a number of stakeholders interviewed, including representatives from DG ECHO field offices and sending organisations that were already working and deploying volunteers in regions where EU Aid Volunteers were denied access, felt this approach limited effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative. Some volunteers also raised the issue, and a few even reported that their work was constrained by their inability to access certain regions that the rest of their colleagues from the same organisation regularly visited.[140] Although there was a recognition for the need for a high level of security standards, some felt that the standards were excessive.

The current system has created incentives whereby HOs were being encouraged to request deployments based on where volunteers can be located or travel to, rather than where their support could be optimised to meet humanitarian needs while ensuring adequate security management. At the same time, it has created disincentives for organisations that operate in conflict areas to participate in the Initiative and benefit from the capacity building it entails due to the uncertainty linked to their capacity to benefit from the work of volunteers.[141]

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[139]   See Figures B11 and B12 in the Annex.
[140]   Interview notes 8381, 2215, 13316, 13544.
[141]   Interview notes 16679, 46014.

Third, the design of the EUAV Initiative proved to be appropriate for increasing the number of skilled volunteers engaging in EU humanitarian work, although this increase was short term and significantly constrained by the small number of deployments envisaged and the limited capacity of the organisations to attract volunteers who were not already committed to participating in volunteering schemes in third countries.

The design of the Initiative was mainly conducive to a limited and relatively short term rather than long-term increase in the number of skilled volunteers. Firstly, an ineffective communication strategy and insufficient visibility of the Initiative meant that it mainly encouraged volunteers who were already likely to volunteer/work in the humanitarian field. Only 16% of volunteers responding to the survey said they probably would not have volunteered in the humanitarian sector if not for the EUAV Initiative. At the same time, 73% of respondents said they would have volunteered in any case, whether through the initiative or other means, while only 70% of these volunteers indicated that the initiative nevertheless played a role in facilitating their engagement. Interviews confirmed these views: most volunteers indicated they came across the initiative while looking for relevant opportunities or after the direct proposal of organisations they were involved with.

In addition, the EUAV Initiative lacked a mechanism to facilitate the professional integration of former volunteers after their deployment. It did not undertake sufficient efforts to ensure the visibility and appreciation of the Initiative amongst EU employers in the field of humanitarian aid. As a result, several volunteers complained that despite their desire to continue working in the field, they were not able to find a job in the sector. According to them, EU employers did not seem to sufficiently value the EUAV Initiative or regard it as a professional experience (see also EQ4).

The Lisbon treaty's focus on "young"[142] and less experienced volunteers appears to have been the desire to encourage youth to discover the humanitarian sector and enable them to build careers. On the other hand, the EUAV Initiative focused on recruiting more experienced volunteers who can better support the needs of HOs.

The objective of increasing the capacity of the Union was relevant for the EU and in particular DG ECHO. Building the capacity of DG ECHO partners could not only lead to improved delivery of aid through the Initiative but also facilitate the implementation by these partners of other future projects funded by the EU. The objective can also more indirectly be relevant for the local communities, which would be expected to benefit from increased capacity of organisations and the EU to deliver humanitarian aid beyond the EUAV Initiative.

Objective 2: Improve the skills, knowledge and competences of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid and the terms and conditions of their engagement.

The design of the EUAV Initiative proved to be highly appropriate to improving the knowledge, skills and competencies of volunteers in the field of humanitarian aid. As described under EQ4, the high-quality central training provided by the European Commission, the trainings provided by the sending and hosting organisations, and the deployment opportunity were structured to prepare volunteers for work in the humanitarian aid field, develop relevant skills, learn about the humanitarian principles and basic security protocols, and even grow personally. The provision of training and the subsequent preparation and development of volunteers' skills were cited as the most important element for the success of a volunteering scheme like the EUAV Initiative by the volunteers and hosting organisations responding to the surveys. Sending organisations identified these in the survey as the second-most important element for success.

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[142] As described in Article 214.5 (TFEU) of the Lisbon Treaty

The objective of improving the skills of volunteers was highly relevant to the needs of volunteers, with 78% of volunteers responding to the survey reporting that the opportunity to build a career in the humanitarian sector played a central role in their decision to participate in the Initiative. This objective was also relevant to the needs of sending and hosting organisations and of local beneficiaries, although to a lesser extent. For hosting organisations, a sufficiently high level of skills and preparation of volunteers was necessary to ensure that the volunteers could provide them with the required support and capacity building. This had indirect implications for the local beneficiaries as well as for those who directly or indirectly benefitted from the work of volunteers. For the sending and hosting organisations, the development of the skills of volunteers was also relevant given their desire, as documented both in the survey and interviews, to use the Initiative as an opportunity to acquire new talent and/or "fresh blood" for their organisations.

The design of the EUAV Initiative was also highly appropriate for improving the terms and conditions of the volunteers' deployment. A minimum level of quality for the deployment experience of volunteers was ensured by several aspects of the design: the setting of standards regarding the recruitment, preparation, deployment and management of volunteers; the obligation for all organisations to abide by these standards to achieve certification and participate in the EUAV Initiative; and the provision of technical assistance and capacity building to ensure that it is feasible for the organisations to abide by such standards.

The objective of improving the terms and conditions of deployment of volunteers was highly relevant for volunteers. The reason most frequently cited by survey respondents for dropping out of the EUAV Initiative was a failure of organisations to abide by their standards. In this context, the focus on the terms and conditions of volunteering engagement was also relevant to the organisations, in that if these were stricter or non-existent, volunteers would either not apply or their quality would be lower.

Objective 3: Build the capacity of hosting organisations and foster volunteering in third countries

The design of the Initiative was highly appropriate for achieving the objective of improving the capacity of hosting organisations, but it provided insufficient mechanisms for fostering local volunteering.

The development of standards, the certification process, the provision of capacity-building activities, the peer learning process within the consortia, and the deployment of volunteers themselves were key for building the capacity of hosting organisations. The needs assessment, the involvement of HOs in the design of the projects and the selection of volunteers provided the necessary foundations to ensure that both the capacity building and deployment projects could address the specific needs of each organisation, and that the volunteers' skills and profiles would match the needs of the organisations. In the survey, 84% of HOs responding agreed that the capacity building addressed a priority need of their organisation. In the Public Consultation, 14 out of the 15 respondents also agreed with this statement. Further, 61% of HO respondents agreed that the hosting of European volunteers addressed a gap in local human resources, while 48% agreed that they would not have been able to host international volunteers without the support of the EUAV Initiative.

The absence of an age limit for volunteers and the inclusion of both Junior and Senior volunteers also constituted an important aspect of the design of the EUAV Initiative for the capacity building of organisations. Many stakeholders saw these as an important source of added value, given that several other MS initiatives require participants to be under the age of 30. Although the organisations valued the different contributions of both the younger and older volunteers, they were particularly appreciative of the specific technical expertise that senior

volunteers offered and of the immediacy of their contribution.[143] Younger volunteers also reported benefitting from their interactions with older volunteers.

Certain limitations in the design, however, have hampered the pursuit of this objective. The long selection and training process, albeit contributing to the higher quality of deployed volunteers, has led to long delays between when the needs assessment was carried out and the deployment of volunteers. This long process was also the reason why several volunteers often lost interest or dropped out, which further exacerbated delays.[144] A frequent consequence of these delays was that the needs assessment no longer corresponded to the actual needs of the organisation, resulting in inefficiencies due either to the need to redo the assessments or to a mismatch between the implemented activities and the priority needs of organisations. Some organisations suggested that this phenomenon was linked to the complaint from some volunteers that the reality of the tasks they were asked to complete did not match the position to which they had applied.

During the pandemic, the lack of flexibility in the Regulation for the provision of online training when this is deemed the only option, also has led to extended delays in the implementation of deployment projects, with several organisations complaining that the delays created a number of challenges for organisations that were counting on the support of volunteers.

The design to date of the EUAV Initiative has not systematically incorporated mechanisms for fostering local volunteering in the host communities. Improvements in the capacity of HOs to host and manage volunteers and the improved public image of volunteering through the initiative provided favourable grounds for the promotion of local volunteering. However, the degree to which local volunteering was actually promoted depended almost exclusively on the attitudes of SOs and HOs participating in the projects. As a result, while some projects involved the production of guidelines for local volunteering, training of local volunteers, organisation of events for the promotion of local volunteering and even the creation from scratch of local volunteering groups within the HOs[145], other projects had no such relevant activities.

The objective of increasing the capacity of HOs through both capacity building and the deployment of volunteers was seen by all interviewed stakeholders as being highly relevant to their needs. For most of the interviewed HOs, this was the main reason for joining the Initiative. Surveys confirmed this finding: the vast majority of organisations responding cited the increase in the capacity to host and manage volunteers, to deliver humanitarian aid, and to contribute to the resilience of local communities as highly important factors driving their decision to participate (Figure 30). For the volunteers, these factors were seen as key to improving the conditions of their deployment and ensuring that their skills and knowledge could be sufficiently capitalised upon. For the SOs, it was a tool to facilitate and improve the collaboration with the HOs and the implementation of the planned projects. For the local communities, the objective was a means to reinforce, improve and render more sustainable the hosting organisations' contribution to their needs. According to the survey results, SOs considered the provision of capacity building the most important factor for the success of a volunteering scheme like the EUAV, while HOs and volunteers considered it the second most important factor after the provision of training to volunteers (95.6% of SOs found capacity building for HOs to be important, as did 94.5% of HOs and 93.4% of volunteers.

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[143]   In several interviews, e.g.13544 and 5060, it was suggested that Junior volunteers took a couple of months before they could effectively contribute to their organisations due to the need for an adaptation period to the organisational and local community context.
[144]   Survey results.
[145]   See, for example, the final report of the project 593330.

Figure 30 – Reasons for HOs to join the EUAV Initiative
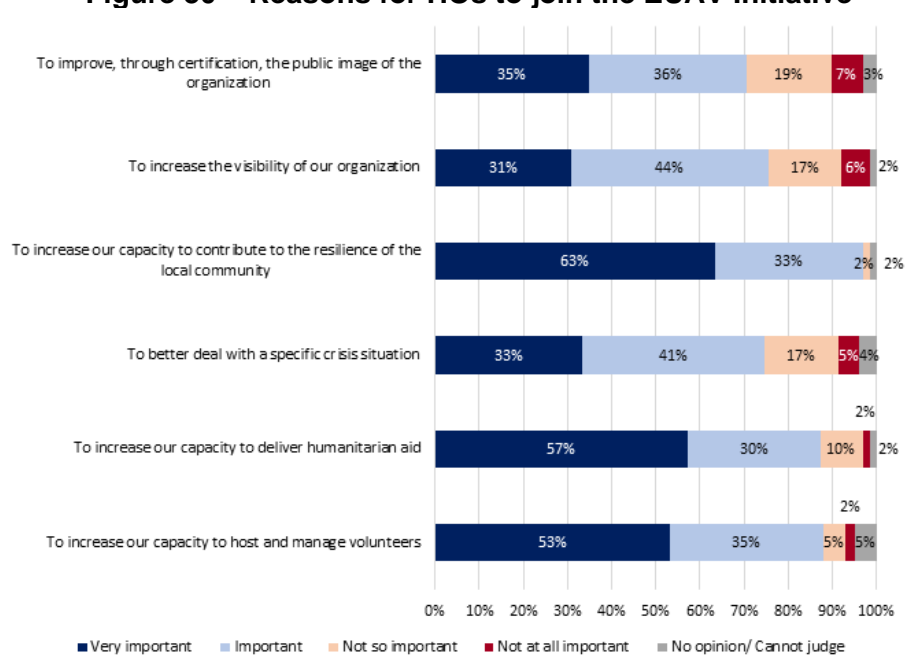
The objective of fostering local volunteering directly addressed the needs of both the hosting organisations and the local communities. It was also particularly relevant in the light of the Grand Bargain and the increased focus of the humanitarian sector on local partnerships and capacity. In some countries, governments are becoming more protective of local employment markets and the recruitment of international volunteers can be perceived as contrary to national employment programmes. For example, in Tanzania, the volunteers' mission was only possible for six months as this was the maximum length of the visas that the government would grant.

Objective 4: Communicate the Union's humanitarian aid principles agreed in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

The design of the EUAV Initiative was appropriate for increasing the knowledge of humanitarian principles of direct beneficiaries (volunteers and sending and hosting organisations). However, it was not appropriate to allow for promotion of these principles to indirect beneficiaries (including the local population and organisations).

The incorporation in the volunteers' central training of modules on EU humanitarian principles and the hosting organisations' obligation to abide by them to achieve certification played a key role in the promotion of this objective. The vast majority of volunteers (87.9%) and hosting organisations (81%) indicated in the survey that their participation in the EUAV Initiative had increased their knowledge of the EU humanitarian principles. However, interviews showed they were less likely to think that the EUAV Initiative effectively promoted the EU humanitarian principles among other stakeholders. Although the communication activities envisaged by the EUAV Initiative could have been used for this purpose, their main focus was increasing the visibility of the EUAV Initiative and of the EU in general. Only one of the hosting organisations interviewed indicated that it actively sought to communicate the humanitarian principles to its partners on the ground when this was not an explicit objective of the project.[146] Volunteers generally indicated that they did not feel that communication was an appropriate task to undertake while doing field work, and some suggested that the requirement to undertake such work often conflicted with their other tasks and imposed an unnecessary strain on them.[147]

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[146] Interview note 5060.
[147] As mentioned in the Colombia case study available in the annexes.

Ensuring that the actions of all actors of the EUAV Initiative abide by the EU humanitarian principles is essential. However, one can question to what extent it is the role of the EUAV Initiative, and in particular of the volunteers, to pursue a broader communication of EU humanitarian principles beyond direct beneficiaries, even if this is beneficial for EU humanitarian action and highly relevant to DG ECHO's commitment under the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. A better suited objective may have been to focus on ensuring that all EUAV Initiative actors understand the EU humanitarian principles and integrate them in their actions. Any resulting broader communication thereof could be considered an additional benefit to be pursued whenever possible (for example, as a specific objective of some projects) rather than an objective of the initiative in and of itself.

Objective 5: Enhance coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States in order to improve opportunities for Union citizens to participate in humanitarian aid and activities.

The design of the EUAV Initiative was only to a limited extent capable of promoting the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States. The capacity of the Initiative to achieve this objective was limited by the focus of the EUAV Initiative at the organisational level rather than at the state or inter-state level and the lack of a comprehensive oversight system.

Setting standards regarding the recruitment, preparation, deployment and management of volunteers (Art. 9); the obligation of SOs to abide by these standards for the achievement of certification and their participation in the Initiative (Art. 10); and the provision of technical assistance to ensure that such abidance is feasible for the organisations played a key role in promoting the coherence and consistency of volunteering across organisations. However, the focus on individual organisations was not the most suitable approach for increasing coherence and consistency across Member States (see EQ3).

This objective was particularly relevant for volunteers. It sought to ensure that minimum standards were respected for all organisations in terms of their responsibilities towards volunteers, in particular in terms of duty of care and safety, but also in terms of the coverage of subsistence expenses, insurance, accommodation and other relevant expenses. These directly affected the terms and conditions of the deployment of volunteers. The relevance of this objective for volunteers was confirmed by the surveys, which found that 73.8% of volunteers agreed that increasing the coherence and consistency of volunteering across MS was important for the success of a volunteering scheme like the EUAV. Although most organisations also responded that they considered this objective important for the success of the Initiative (68.3% of HOs and 56.5% of SOs), they ranked it as the least important objective among the five. Some SOs interviewed questioned the relevance of some aspects of the policy harmonisation, emphasising the need to allow for diversity across organisations to respect their varying contexts and experiences, and also criticized what they deemed an excessive focus on the security of volunteers.

Mechanisms for learning, sharing and use of lessons learned

The EUAV Initiative did not incorporate in its design sufficient formal mechanisms to facilitate learning, sharing and use of lessons learned. Lessons were mostly learned in an individual rather than collective manner and were shared through informal and ad hoc channels that were constrained in terms of outreach.[148] Nevertheless, some aspects of the

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[148] Some events were organized that enabled the participants to network and exchange about the experiences. This included notably 5 info days, 2 events for former volunteers, 2 networking events, 2 deployment kick-off meetings and 1 deployment mid-term meeting. During interviews participants and representatives from organisations explained however that these meetings tended to be focused on project management and compliance issues rather than on reflective learning. Some degree of sharing of lessons learned across organisations took place but this was mainly in a spontaneous manner and driven by organisations that naturally wanted to share the challenges they had faced.

design of the EUAV Initiative facilitated the emergence of such channels and fostered peer learning, notably within consortia.

The focus of the EUAV Initiative on the formation of partnerships and the implementation of projects in consortia of organisations of different levels of experience and areas of expertise was to a large extent selected to promote peer learning across organisations.[149] It was highly effective in doing so.[150] However, a systematised approach to learning and sharing of lessons learned was missing. Such activities were mainly conducted through informal channels and largely limited to the peer-learning mechanisms within consortia.

For volunteers, the in-person trainings conducted by the EU and individual SOs facilitated the formation of informal networks (via channels such as WhatsApp and other social media platforms) through which the volunteers exchanged their experiences during deployment and provided support for one another.[151] However, such informal channels were insufficient and were not conducive to a systematic process of lessons learning and use of lessons learned. The regular assessments conducted during the deployment of volunteers and the debriefing sessions after all deployments nevertheless could have laid the foundation for a formal learning mechanism.

Complementarities between objectives

The simultaneous pursuit of these five very different and broad objectives has enabled a more holistic approach to improving EU volunteering in the humanitarian aid sector. It has also created to a certain extent a competition of resources that may have constrained the magnitude of progress to be achieved with respect to each one of them. Progress in each of the objectives has the capacity to complement and reinforce progress in other objectives, allowing different challenges in EU volunteering in the humanitarian sector to be addressed.

Volunteering as a tool for improving the delivery of EU humanitarian aid.

The Lisbon Treaty foresaw, in Article 214.5 TFEU, that "in order to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union, a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps shall be set up". There is a lack of clarity regarding the original needs that such a volunteering corps was expected to address (beyond the desire to engage European youth in EU humanitarian aid).

The Lisbon Treaty therefore rendered the establishment of a volunteering scheme the default option without providing room for the consideration of alternatives. In this sense, the volunteering scheme did not emerge as an optimal solution to specific challenges. Rather, specific challenges the EUAV Initiative could address were identified once it was accepted that such a scheme should be created, and the EUAV Initiative was shaped accordingly through consultations and the pilot phase. The question posed for the identification of gaps and needs the EUAV Initiative should address was not, "what are the challenges limiting the effectiveness of EU humanitarian aid delivery? Rather, it was, "how to improve the effectiveness of the contribution of EU volunteers to humanitarian action"?[152]

To a large extent, this has rendered the EUAV Initiative inherently relevant to the needs it sought to address but perhaps less relevant, or at least not necessarily the most relevant, to the broader needs of the humanitarian aid sector. This might account for the diverse nature of

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[149] "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". SWD/2012/266 final.

[150] For example, project reports 581813, 593325 and 581813.

[151] For example, interview 34977.

[152] "How to express EU citizen's solidarity through volunteering: First reflections on a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps", COM/2010/0683 final; Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament And Of The Council: Establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps EU Aid Volunteers", COM/2012/514.

the objectives and their broad focus, as well as their insufficient link to the overarching objectives that the EU has defined for its humanitarian action, including "contributing to strengthening the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid […] and strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries" as defined in Article 4 of the Regulation. Although the EUAV Initiative did have the potential to contribute to these overarching objectives, it is not clearly evident that the EUAV Initiative was the most suitable vehicle to achieve these aims.

The inclusion of the incentives for the choice of a volunteering scheme rather than other channels of aid delivery among the objectives, including the importance for the careers of volunteers as well as for promoting and increasing the visibility of EU solidarity values, could have increased the perceived coherence and relevance of the EUAV Initiative and provided a different framework for the assessment of its overall effectiveness.

5   CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the conclusions of the evaluation. They are based on the findings presented in Section 3 and refer to the EQs on which they are based. We distinguish below between four groups of conclusions.

- Conclusions on the results obtained through the EUAV Initiative.
- An assessment of the specific value added brought by the Commission through the EUAV Initiative and of its coherence with other interventions supported by the EU or by other donors.
- Implementation and issues related to cost-effectiveness.
- A final conclusion on design and relevance, considered ex post and in the light of the preceding conclusions.

5.1   On results obtained

The EUAV Initiative was geared towards several objectives. Some of these have successfully been achieved; less significant results were observed for other objectives:

C1. The EUAV Initiative has significantly improved the capacities of sending and hosting organisations and has created a pool of well-trained and highly skilled volunteers in the field of humanitarian assistance.

Based on EQ4, EQ1

Volunteers: As of September 2020, the Initiative led to the training of 1,065 volunteers, the deployment of 705 volunteers (corresponding to a total of 788 deployments), and the online assignment of 165 volunteers. The trainings provided by the EUAV Initiative were considered of high quality, in particular the central training provided by the Commission. Volunteers indicated that it helped them develop skills and knowledge to prepare sufficiently for the deployment and a further career in humanitarian aid. Although several areas for improvement, both in terms of the content and efficiency of training, were identified, both volunteers and organisations described the training as a significant source of added value of the EUAV Initiative as compared to other schemes. The deployment itself, especially given the EUAV Initiative's strong focus on professionalisation, was also an opportunity for volunteers to develop skills specific to their positions and humanitarian field. This depended however also on the hosting organisation they were seconded to. If the hosting organisation was a member of the Red Cross Red Crescent family or an INGO active in humanitarian action, volunteers were involved in some kind of humanitarian action even if DRR or Nexus-related activities. If they were seconded to a national organisation, then there was a significant chance that they did not get much experience in humanitarian assistance.

Hosting and sending organisations: As of September 2020, a total of 76 sending and 298 hosting organisations had been certified under the EUAV Initiative, with many of these organisations receiving, respectively, technical assistance and capacity building. This process enabled organisations to improve their capacity to recruit, manage and host volunteers as well as to deliver humanitarian aid to vulnerable and disaster-affected populations. The formation of partnerships and the peer-learning in the SO consortia significantly contributed to this improvement. Hosting organisations largely valued the direct contribution of both Junior and Senior Volunteers to their capacity development.

C2. The EUAV Initiative has contributed to increasing the capacity of the EU to deliver humanitarian aid by building the capacity of its partners, promoting the harmonisation of standards and fostering new partnerships and by enabling the deployment of trained EU volunteers. However, this contribution remained limited and for the most part short-term for reasons linked to the design and implementation of the Initiative.

EQ4, EQ1, EQ5

The EUAV Initiative has contributed to strengthening the capacity of existing DG ECHO partners in both the management of volunteers and the delivery of humanitarian aid, reaching new organisations, promoting partnerships, and increasing the number of well-trained volunteers deployed in the field of humanitarian aid. It also helped motivate volunteers to pursue careers in humanitarian assistance (HA) over the longer term.

However, a series of limitations limited the magnitude of the Initiative's positive effects:

- Actual deployments (788) were fell well short of the initial target of 4,000 deployments even after considering the effects of the global pandemic during 2020.

- The Initiative mainly succeeded in attracting people who were already committed to volunteering in HA and came from countries with a long tradition of volunteering in humanitarian aid: 67% of volunteers, for instance, came from Italy, Spain and France.

- Though the Initiative contributed significantly to confirming and even increasing volunteers' desire to work in the field of humanitarian aid, evidence is mixed as to whether it also enabled volunteers to work in the field post-deployment. Several volunteers reported they continued working in HA (or intended to) and credited the Initiative for having contributed to this. But volunteers who had not found opportunities in HA complained of insufficient efforts by the Commission to promote the professional integration of volunteers.

- While the Initiative strengthened the capacity of many sending organisations, these were largely concentrated in a few countries (France, Italy, Spain and Ireland), although the EUAV Initiative became more inclusive over time.

- Given the security restrictions, participating organisations did not have the opportunity to contribute to some of the most- affected regions, with the result that support did not always take place in a humanitarian context.

C3. The EUAV Initiative contributed to strengthening the consistency and coherence of volunteering across participating sending organisations despite certain discrepancies in the implementation of standards. However, its contribution to encouraging a broader coherence across Member States was more limited.

EQ4, EQ 1

By establishing a set of standards for volunteering and providing technical assistance, the Initiative promoted an increase in coherence and consistency of volunteering across participating sending organisations in the 54 SOs that were certified under the EUAV Initiative. Despite certain discrepancies in the implementation of standards, as seen in cases when volunteers were deployed more than once by different SOs and reported very different experiences, there is nevertheless strong evidence of convergence across certified SOs.

However, the evaluation also shows that improvements in terms of coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States remained limited. This was attributed both to design

and also implementation. Common standards were promoted on an organisation-by-organisation basis. Given the relatively small number of organisations involved and their concentration in a small number of Member States and in the absence of inter-state dialogue on standards, broader dissemination of standards was constrained. While the certification enabled some SOs to improve their standards due to the EUAV Initiative, some cases were reported by SOs where standards conflicted with the standards of Member State national schemes.

C4. The EUAV Initiative contributed to the promotion of EU humanitarian principles across direct beneficiaries, but did not succeed in a broader dissemination of the humanitarian principles.

EQ1, EQ4

By incorporating modules on EU humanitarian principles in the volunteers' central training and requiring participating organisations to comply to achieve certification, the EUAV Initiative has effectively contributed to increasing the knowledge of humanitarian principles among direct beneficiaries. In particular, it contributed to increasing such knowledge among volunteers and hosting organisations that had initially reported having the lowest levels of knowledge of EU humanitarian principles.

However, the EUAV Initiative has made a limited contribution to a broader dissemination of humanitarian principles among indirect beneficiaries, particularly local communities. Humanitarian principles appear to have been most effectively communicated in dedicated trainings conducted by sending and hosting organisations for other organisations and local staff. The number of projects incorporating such training on humanitarian principles in their activities was very limited.

C5. The EUAV Initiative only marginally contributed to fostering local volunteering, despite the relevance of this objective considering the Grand Bargain and the humanitarian sector's increased focus on local partnerships and capacity. This was largely linked to the absence of a clear strategy to foster local volunteering under the Initiative.

EQ2, EQ4

Although the majority of organisations and volunteers agreed that the EUAV Initiative promoted local volunteering by strengthening the capacity of local organisations to host and manage volunteers, very few could provide examples of the initiative having effectively fostered local volunteering. This was largely linked to the fact that the EUAV Initiative lacked a systematic approach to fostering local volunteering in the host communities. The degree to which local volunteering was actually promoted depended almost exclusively on the attitudes of SOs and HOs participating in the projects. As a result, some projects involved the production of guidelines for local volunteering, the training of local volunteers, the organisation of events for the promotion of local volunteering and some included the formation of local volunteering groups within HOs.

5.2   On coherence and EU value added

C6. The work of the EUAV Initiative was not sufficiently integrated in the broader humanitarian aid and development work of the EU. Complementarities and opportunities for synergies with other EU activities as well as peer-volunteering schemes were not sufficiently explored.

Based on EQ2

Activities supported by the EUAV Initiative were largely seen as positively contributing to other EU activities in the fields of development and humanitarian assistance, mainly through the capacity building of organisations engaged simultaneously in both fields.

However, there appeared to be a lack of synergies between such activities, attributable to the nature of the initiative, lack of awareness on the part of DG ECHO field offices about the EUAV Initiative and a lack of a centralised effort to explore complementarities. These include:

- Security restrictions meant that the volunteers often could not contribute to countries and regions where the rest of DG ECHO activities were focused.

- As a consequence of the implementation delays, the EUAV Initiative could not directly contribute to the emergency response operations of DG ECHO.

- Opportunities for synergies with other DG ECHO and DG DEVCO activities in the fields of resilience, climate change, migration and forced displacement were rarely realised.

- Volunteers were rarely deployed where DG ECHO field offices were supporting operations.

Similarly, there has been very little active effort to pursue complementarities with peer volunteering schemes. The EUAV Initiative succeeded in establishing limited informal links with some volunteer networks in EU Member States with some organisations. However, the organisations also reported that the technical assistance they received through the EUAV Initiative had largely benefitted the implementation of other European volunteer schemes. There was even less coordination and evidence of complementarity with major international volunteer networks outside the EU, including the United Nations Volunteers.

C7.   The EUAV Initiative has added value to the EU level because of the EUAV Initiative's centralised and transnational character, its greater capacity to mobilise resources, and its know-how in terms of training and deployment of volunteers in third countries. But the Commission and DG ECHO have not fully drawn on their specific role and global presence to create additional value.

Based on EQ3

The EUAV Initiative has added value in several ways:

- by contributing to centralising and standardising systems and processes, which is more difficult to accomplish by individual EU Member States;

- by encouraging transnational partnerships whose application has extended beyond the EUAV Initiative network;

- through its capacity to attract volunteers from all over Europe and its emphasis on in-person, common training. Volunteers underlined that this strengthened their sense of EU identity and led to the development of an "*esprit de corps*".

The EUAV Initiative also added value through several of its design elements:

- The quality and standard of the training were facilitated by the Commission's centralised approach and existing know-how, which was widely viewed as an added value compared to other volunteering schemes in the EU.

- The emphasis on capacity building of organisations was an EU added value compared to other schemes that exclusively focused on deployments. This improved both the experience of volunteers and the contribution to local communities.

- The fact that age has not been a barrier to becoming an EU Aid Volunteer was widely mentioned as a distinct value added compared to many other volunteer programmes in Europe. It helped ensure that volunteer profiles met the needs of the hosting organisations.

However, the Commission, and in particular DG ECHO, have not fully drawn on their specific role and global presence to create additional value. The presence of DG ECHO through its regional and national field offices can be a significant source of local expertise. It can also provide an opportunity to reach out to other DG ECHO partners in the country and reinforce and benefit from complementarities with other DG ECHO projects being implemented in the country. However, the DG ECHO field and regional offices reportedly had very limited information on the EUAV Initiative and admittedly no direct involvement in it.

5.3 *On implementation and cost effectiveness*

C8. The EUAV Initiative prepared quality reference documents that have been useful for its implementation. But it suffered also from a heavy administrative burden and procedural requirements that hampered its implementation and, in some cases, participation in the EUAV Initiative.

Based on EQ5

The EUAV Initiative invested significant resources in preparing quality reference documents that have been useful to its implementation. This work contributed to the development of key features of the EUAV Initiative, such as the consideration for volunteers' security, a uniform approach to volunteer training, the certification process for SOs and HOs, etc. These elements have contributed to the effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative.

Different categories of stakeholders, however, also stressed the complexity of procedural requirements for the EUAV Initiative, which were perceived as overly detailed and prescriptive. This was underlined by volunteers and sending and hosting organisations and acknowledged by both DG ECHO and EACEA. Their concerns related to different aspects, among them the heavy human resources investment needed to prepare calls for proposals; the certification process, perceived as cumbersome and with sometimes unclear guidance; and the detail of Implementation Regulation 1244/2014, which did not allow for sufficient flexibility to organise the trainings. These hampered implementation notably for smaller organisation, although larger organisations were more acquainted with working with such requirements. These procedural requirements also limited the ability of the EUAV Initiative to adapt to changes in the operating environment and/or make course corrections based on lessons learned, although changes were made when possible. Some interviewees also emphasised that these had in some cases been an obstacle to participation. Indeed, the complexity and heavy administrative workload have contributed to deter applications to the EUAV Initiative's calls for proposals and diminished cost-effectiveness by diminishing competition.

C9. The budget has not been a constraining factor for the implementation of the EUAV Initiative, as only 62% of the EUR 115 million available was used until 2019. This is due, among other reasons, to delays in implementation and slow take-up from partners at the start of the EUAV Initiative. The rationale of the budget allocation was, however, not clear and was not set against specific objectives. At the project level, the budget allocation was also sufficient overall, notably after some adjustments to budget restrictions.

Based on EQ5, Inventory

The overall budget allocated to the EUAV Initiative for the period 2014-2020 amounted to EUR 141 million (EUR 115 million for 2014-2019). This was meant to finance the training of 4,400 volunteers and the deployment of 4,000. It was more than sufficient, as 1,173 deployments were funded and 788 volunteers actually deployed. A total of EUR 71.5 million was committed for this purpose by 2019.

The Initiative suffered from delays in implementation. In the period 2014-2017, only 58% of the budget was allocated to interventions, although the share increased to 73% in 2019. At the end of the period, implementation significantly slowed down because of the COVID-19 crisis.

The rationale behind the budget allocation was, however, unclear. The budget was allocated based on results expressed in terms of outputs only (e.g. number of volunteers and certified organisations) and not outcomes. The successive changes in deployment targets indicate a difficulty in estimating the costs of deploying volunteers. A good example of this difficulty is that the targets were based on the number of volunteers and did not consider the length of the deployment. Moreover, the "unitary" amount per output evolved significantly without a clear justification. The estimated cost per volunteer, for instance, more than doubled from around EUR 22,000 to EUR 50,000 between the 2012 impact assessment and the target in 2020.

Overall, SOs and HOs considered the size of grants as sufficient, in part thanks to adjustments made to budget restrictions for deployment projects (e.g. a doubling of the total budget size and an increase in the share of human resources costs). Despite some increase in allowances, volunteers still considered these insufficient in certain locations.

C10. The average cost of deploying volunteers was comparable to that of other volunteering schemes. However, several obstacles limited the cost-effectiveness of volunteers' deployment, and these and other elements suggest there is room for improvement.

Based on EQ5, Inventory

The cost per month of deploying a volunteer was comparable to that of other schemes such as UN Volunteers. Based on a sub-sample, the average cost to deploy a volunteer for a month was EUR 3,180 — slightly lower than the EUR 3,279 planned in the budget. In comparison, the average pro forma costs of deploying a UN volunteer in 2019 were about EUR 4,360 for International UN volunteers and EUR 3,220 for International Youth UN volunteers.

Several elements limited the cost-effectiveness of the deployment. The primary factor was the considerable time lag between a volunteer position being advertised and the moment when the selected volunteer completed training and could be deployed to the field. This affected how well volunteers' skills could be matched with the needs of the HOs, given that the initial needs may have evolved in the meantime. Some stakeholders suggested the low level of subsistence allowances reduced volunteers' motivation and, in some cases, led volunteers to

end their deployment before completing a full term. It should also be noted that disparities in the costs of deploying volunteers across projects suggest that cost improvements are still possible. The cost of deploying volunteers varied from about EUR 2,500 to EUR 4,100 a month, depending on the project.

C11.   The overall management of the EUAV Initiative, notably through its placement within EACEA, has been cost-effective, albeit with some caveats. The operational costs provisioned for administering the EUAV Initiative were comparable to the overhead for grant recipients under EU-funded projects and from certain UN agencies.

Based on EQ4, EQ5

Since the EUAV Initiative entails activities at odds with the type of projects that DG ECHO usually manages, delegating the management of most modules was perceived as cost-effective. The operational costs provisioned for administering the EUAV Initiative amounted to about 6-9% and were comparable to the operational costs of overheads allowed for grant recipients under EU-funded projects (i.e. 7%) and comparable to the overheads from certain UN agencies.

C12.   The EAUV Initiative was underpinned by a well-designed monitoring and evaluation framework, but in practice monitoring activities remained limited.

Based on EQ5

The EAUV Initiative is underpinned by a well-designed monitoring and evaluation framework with solid procedures at the programme level. However, in practice, detailed monitoring activities have not taken place, notably due to "light" monitoring at the project level and the absence of automated data collection processes. The framework is mainly used as a tool for collecting indicators related to the implementation of the initiative at an output-level indicators with little consideration of the projects' outcomes and impact.

5.4   On relevance and design

C13.   The security management system successfully guaranteed the security of volunteers and limited the reputational risk of the EU. However, it also impacted the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions, as the initiative could only rarely engage organisations working in the most affected regions and volunteers could not directly contribute to the needs of the populations from those regions.

Based on EQ1, EQ2, EQ4

The EUAV Initiative in both its design and implementation prioritised the safety and security of volunteers. This was confirmed in the survey responses of volunteers and hosting organisations. It was also reflected in the fact that, to the knowledge of the evaluation team, no major security incidents were reported. High security standards protect volunteers and limit the reputational risk of the EU. Yet they also limited the possibilities for volunteers to access many sites where humanitarian interventions were taking place, including those relevant to the completion of their work where hosting organisations already had extensive experience of working. This issue was constantly highlighted as problematic by HOs and SOs working in humanitarian assistance.

The security standards also appear to have discouraged some organisations that were active in humanitarian action from engaging with the EUAV Initiative. As a result, they have constrained the achievement of the EUAV Initiative's humanitarian assistance objectives, limited its relevance to the needs of disaster-affected communities and limited the opportunities for complementarities with other ECHO activities in the field.

> **C14. The EUAV Initiative adequately fitted the need to improve EU volunteering in the humanitarian field through a holistic approach. It pursued different complementary objectives of enhancing the capacities of volunteers and sending and hosting organisations and favouring the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States. The EUAV Initiative however assumed the relevance of the volunteering objective itself. It was not clear enough on why volunteering is important in a humanitarian context and why it should be pursued. It was also not clear enough on the hierarchy of the different objectives pursued.**

EQ1, EQ4

From the perspective of improving the effectiveness of EU humanitarian aid volunteering, the objectives of increasing the capacities of volunteers and of sending/hosting organisations and of promoting the harmonisation of standards and practices addressed real priority needs. The simultaneous pursuit of these different objectives has enabled a more holistic approach to improving EU volunteering in the humanitarian aid sector. Progress on one objective also resulted in progress on others. For example, by improving the skills of volunteers, the EUAV Initiative was better able to support the capacity building of organisations and in doing so, was better able in the long run to improve the terms and conditions of deployment of volunteers.

The EUAV Initiative, however, assumed the relevance of the volunteering objective itself. It did not really make clear why volunteering is important in a humanitarian context and why it should be pursued. In other words, it was not clear what need EU volunteering aimed to address and why a volunteering scheme was the best way to address humanitarian needs.

There also is a lack of clarity on specific goals of the EUAV Initiative. The Lisbon treaty's focus on "young"[153] and less experienced volunteers appears to have been the desire to encourage youth to discover the humanitarian sector and enable them to build careers. The EUAV Initiative's focused on recruiting more experienced volunteers who can better support the needs of HOs. The emphasis on broad and general training that extends beyond the immediate requirements for completion of deployments was not a cost-effective approach to the deployment of experienced volunteers.

Finally, the role of some other objectives is also unclear. It is important that participating stakeholders are aware of the EU humanitarian principles. But it is less clear to what extent it should also be their role to actively communicate on these principles and make sure they are upheld. Similarly, it was not clear to what extent the contribution to resilience of local communities was a primary objective of the EUAV Initiative. The EUAV Initiative was also not clear enough on the role of volunteering as a means of fostering careers in humanitarian assistance called for clarification.

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[153] As described in Article 214.5 (TFEU) of the Lisbon Treaty

C15.   The EUAV Initiative was characterised by a lack of contingency planning and a rigidity of regulations that limited its capacity to adapt to changing contexts and hampered its effectiveness at times of crisis, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on EQ1, EQ4

The EUAV Initiative could not have escaped the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the crisis did provide a stress test of its systems and processes, exposing gaps such as the lack of a contingency plan and an inflexible design that limited intervention options. The result was a confused and delayed response in contrast to the more measured response by peer voluntary organisations such as UNV and VSO. For example, the EUAV Initiative's lack of capacity to undertake online trainings due to the mandates of the Regulation, even during an emergency situation like the pandemic, has significantly constrained deployments and has left several organisations without support.

C16.   The design of the EUAV Initiative treated volunteers, sending and hosting organisations as homogenous groups and did not sufficiently consider their differing profiles and needs. This hampered the effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative.

EQ1, EQ4, EQ5

Organisations participating in the EUAV Initiative had very different levels of experience and expertise. Applying the same standards and requirements to all of them limited the effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative. This was particularly evident in the context of security management, whereby the strict security standards imposed to organisations that already had security management capacities and experience in deploying volunteers in high-risk contexts posed a barrier to the effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative.

Similarly, Junior and Senior Volunteers had very different profiles and needs. Having them go through the same training modules and deployment protocols was not efficient. Many senior volunteers for example questioned the relevance of the extensive training to their needs, given that they were already familiar with a large share of its content.

6   RECOMMENDATIONS

The following set of recommendations is derived from the conclusions and findings of this report. These recommendations aim to provide some guidance on key principles and operational issues. They are targeted at the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (hereafter referred to as "the HumAid Corps") that will replace the EUAV Initiative from 2021.

> **R1. Improve the design of the HumAid Corps by clarifying its overall rationale: the objectives it pursues, the relation between these objectives and their prioritisation. The design should also clearly establish why the HumAid Corps is the best option to achieve each objective pursued, and how and to what extent it should contribute to each objective.**

Based on C13, EQ1, EQ4

As outlined in conclusion 14, there are several ambiguities in the objectives pursued by the EUAV Initiative, their relation to each other and prioritisation. This lack of clarity was a limitation in the design of the activities to be pursued under the EUAV Initiative, and has subsequently affected their efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

It is therefore recommended that the design is improved through the definition of a clear hierarchy of objectives. This should feature the four categories of objectives outlined below.

The overall humanitarian (and development) objectives to which the Initiative should contribute, and what the role of volunteering will be in this respect. Conversely specifying what objectives are pursued through volunteering: to what extent is volunteering about triggering and/or developing careers of young professionals in humanitarian aid and to what extent is it about contributing to humanitarian (and development objectives). This should go beyond stating that several objectives are pursued as there is a tension between different types of objectives.

The **overarching objectives**: identifying why there is a need to improve volunteering and what specific need the HumAid Corps intends to address. This would be useful to clarify the tension between improving the capacities of local organisations and fostering the engagement and careers of young people in humanitarian aid (see C14). Different options are possible between explicitly focusing the HumAid Corps on the careers of young people, on the development of capacities, or on a combination of both. The option chosen will have implications for the design of HumAid Corps activities in areas such as training.

The **operational objectives** that allow the Initiative to contribute to the overarching objective. Some of these are already defined today in terms of developing the skills of volunteers and building the capacities of SOs and HOs. The operational objectives should also specify whether the HumAid Corps is geared towards building the careers of young experts, using the skills and knowledge of more experienced experts in terms of capacity building, or both.

Specific objectives that are not the "raison d'être" of the HumAid Corps, but that should be pursued while establishing the HumAid Corps. These should include communicating humanitarian aid principles, increasing EU visibility, and ensuring the security of volunteers.

R2. Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative through the development of a suitable European Commission "toolkit" of mechanisms and tools adapted to the different categories of SOs and HOs; the different levels of needs of volunteers; and the diversity of volunteer roles and operating contexts during deployments.

Based on C14, C16, EQ4, EQ5

The difficulty of fully considering the diverse characteristics of partners and volunteers hampered the effectiveness and efficiency of the EUAV Initiative.

It is therefore important to address the diversity of characteristics and needs of different beneficiaries of the HumAid Corps through the development of a differentiated toolkit to strengthen the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the HumAid Corps. Issues to be considered in the development of a toolkit of this nature should include those listed below.

- Differing profiles of Junior and Senior volunteer (if the HumAid Corps continues to target both):

  o **Junior Volunteers** should focus on providing young graduates with a first experience in humanitarian/development work, developing their skills in humanitarian and/or development fields, and encouraging and facilitating the pursuit of a career in these fields. A maximum age for eligible candidates would strengthen the emphasis on opportunities for youth; default deployment periods would ensure sufficient time for adaptation and learning; and subsistence allowances should be comparable to those provided under the EUAV Initiative. These volunteers would only be deployed in safe-environment settings and subject to lighter training requirements (including security training). HOs deploying junior volunteers should be carefully selected to ensure they have the ability to provide the additional management and mentoring support required for Junior Volunteers as compared to Senior volunteers.

  o **Senior/Professional European Corps** would target volunteers with some experience of, and/or specific technical expertise in, humanitarian action, and/or working in insecure contexts. Senior Volunteers would be expected to contribute in a more strategic way to strengthening the EU's response capacity and building the capacity of HOs based on the identification of specific needs that could not be met via the work of Junior Volunteers. Training modules should be adapted to take into account volunteers' familiarity with humanitarian aid and expertise in the field of their deployment activity. Consideration should be given to increasing allowance rates for this category to increase the HumAid Corps' attractiveness; involving Senior Volunteers in the mentorship of Junior Volunteers, given how much this was appreciated when it occurred spontaneously during previous deployments; and the development of a roster of Senior Volunteers to streamline deployments when there is an urgent need.

- Differing needs and operating models of different categories of SOs and HOs. The requirements for certification and activities undertaken as part of the HumAid Corps could be differentiated to consider the different levels of experience across organisations.[154] This could include:

  o facilitating the participation of existing FPA partners by removing steps from the certification process already completed as part of their existing partnership with DG ECHO; and

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[154] See, for example, a system that is used by several UN agencies for assessing risk of their partners - Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT).

o the capitalisation of the experience of some organisations in deploying volunteers in high-risk contexts through a tiered quality label system.

R3. Redesign the European Commission security management system to ensure that it allows for both risk management and the attainment of objectives of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

Based on C6, R2, EQ1, EQ2

This evaluation demonstrates that DG ECHO has a rigorous security management system focused on putting safety and security first at all times, enabling to avoid security incidents.

However, the evaluation also shows that these security requirements often led to the EUAV Initiative being unable to deploy volunteers to humanitarian sites. This de facto limited the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative, which is directly aimed at the provision of humanitarian aid.

There is no simple resolution to this tension between guaranteeing sufficient security and being able to deploy volunteers to humanitarian sites. It is of paramount importance that the Commission takes measures to ensure the security of volunteers, both to fulfil duty of care towards volunteers and to limit the reputational risk of the Commission. However, volunteers need to be sent to sites where they can carry out humanitarian work effectively.

It is recommended that the Commission designs a fit-for-purpose security management system to better balance the need for ensuring volunteer protection with the desire to reach those most in need. This system should:

- recognise that security management capacities of SOs and HOs differ. This could be part of a tier-based quality label or certification system as described in R2 above, where organisations with extensive experience working in riskier operating environments may be allowed to deploy volunteers in these areas. Less experienced organisations would still be able to participate in the EUAV Initiative, but with more limited options in terms of the areas of deployment of volunteers;

- Revisit assumptions about the age and maturity of volunteers based on evaluation findings;

- While the country list has proved helpful in helping agencies to plan deployments, refine the approach to defining risk within countries so that decision-making is clearer on and how it reflects field realities; and

- include a contingency plan based on a risk management framework which is regularly updated in consultation with partners, so that roles and responsibilities are clear in the event of a critical incident. This may increase the administrative burden for the Commission but would contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of HumAid Corps without putting the safety of volunteers at undue risk.

R4. Strengthen HumAid Corps localisation efforts, fostering local volunteering in particular by integrating it more systematically in the design of the Initiative.

Based on C5

The EUAV Initiative should more systematically promote localization, in particular in fostering local volunteering, despite its positioning as one of its five operational objectives. This objective is also relevant to the commitments of DG ECHO under the Grand Bargain, to strengthening the resilience of local communities and to promoting the sustainability of outcomes achieved under the EUAV Initiative. This limited effectiveness was largely due to the lack of a systematic approach to achieving this objective and its promotion on an individual project basis alone. It is therefore recommended that the HumAid Corps integrates the following points in its design:

- Developing suitable indicators for localisation and the fostering of local volunteering outputs and outcomes, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

- Encouraging SOs and HOs to pursue the objective of local volunteering more systematically, and to strengthen their capacity to measure relevant outputs and outcomes as identified through the process described above.

- Participating in global debates and forums to share lessons learned from established volunteer networks such as UNV and VSO with extensive experience in the field. Collaborating in joint research on specific areas of interest with these networks and organisations is also recommended.

R5. Clarify the budget rationale and develop budgetary measures that promote cost-effectiveness.

Based on C9, C10, EQ5

As shown by the evaluation, the rationale behind the budget setting for the EUAV Initiative was not clear. The budget of the EUAV Initiative evolved several times without specific explanation of its relation to corresponding changes in the expected results, notably in terms of volunteer deployment and organisation certification. This was also observed at project level, with important variations in volunteer deployment for similar grants. Therefore, to enhance cost-effectiveness, this evaluation recommends:

- clarifying how the budget is allocated with regard to the expected results;

- ensuring that the budget allocation not only focuses on outputs, but also considers outcomes, thereby accounting for potential differences in terms of the quality of interventions; and

- linking the grant provided to the implementing partner to the unit cost of outputs in order to maintain control over the costs of deployments.

> **R6. Enhance communication and coordination with other EU humanitarian aid and development stakeholders, as well as with peer volunteer networks such as UNV and Member States schemes.**

Based on C7, C8

Since DG EAC has limited capacity and no field presence, it will be important for the HumAid Corps to make optimal use of existing networks. SOs will be a key force multiplier here. DG EAC should develop its communication strategy through a consultative process and review it regularly.

Take advantage of the delay in starting the HumAid Corps caused by the COVID-19 situation to host consultations with participating organisations, participate in conferences/webinars with external stakeholders to review the results of this evaluation, refine or develop policies and processes and maintain project momentum.

Enhancing communication and coordination with other EU humanitarian aid and development actors as well as with peer volunteer networks is critical to ensure the coherence of the HumAid Corps. This will also facilitate synergies currently largely unexploited by the EUAV Initiative, contribute to strengthening the visibility of the EU and reinforce EU added value by capitalizing upon its global presence through its network of country and regional field offices.

Communication and coordination with other EU humanitarian actors, and in particular with DG ECHO field offices and DG INTPA staff in each country, should be conducted in a highly regular and systematized manner with the aim of:

- enabling the HumAid Corps to capitalize upon the specific knowledge and expertise of field offices in the local development and humanitarian context;
- fostering coherence and consistency with other EU activities implemented in the country; and
- facilitating the identification of and capitalization upon synergies.

Increased involvement of field offices in the implementation of the HumAid Corps does not appear to be desirable for any of the actors involved; however, improved communication could result in significant improvements in both the effectiveness and coherence of the HumAid Corps. Communication and cooperation with peer volunteering schemes should be strategic with the aim of:

- better understanding the position of HumAid Corps within the international volunteering landscape;
- capitalising upon joint learning opportunities, including identifying best practices and exchanging lessons learnt for both management and deployment of volunteers and addressing context-specific needs in the case of countries where the different schemes are operating simultaneously; and
- facilitating the identification of and capitalization upon synergies.

In the specific context of peer volunteering schemes by Member States, this communication and coordination could play a key role in fostering a broader increase in the coherence and consistency of volunteering across Member States, driven by the identification and exchange of best practices.

R7. Reinforce communication activities to improve the visibility and appreciation of the HumAid Corps among European citizens, potential SOs and other EU stakeholders in the humanitarian sector.

Based on EQ1, EQ4, C2

It is important that the HumAid corps increases and improves its communication work, not only to strengthen the visibility of EU solidarity humanitarian actions but also to directly contribute to the achievement of its operational objectives. Improved communication work is key to addressing several of the challenges identified as limiting of the effectiveness of the EUAV Initiative, including:

- attracting more volunteers from countries without an established tradition of volunteering in the humanitarian field, as well as volunteers not previously committed to undertaking voluntary work of this nature;

- continuing to attract organisations from EU Member States not currently active in the EUAV Initiative; and

- improving the image of the HumAid Corps across potential EU employers in the field of humanitarian aid to facilitate the professional integration of volunteer's post-deployment.

It is therefore recommended that the EUAV Initiative increase the resources available for communication and improve the effectiveness of its existing communication strategy. This could include undertaking a larger share of the communication work, either directly or indirectly via participating organisations, strengthening dialogue with Member States and engaging them in the promotion of the HumAid Corps, and more effectively targeting communication activities towards pools of possible candidate volunteers such as EU-based universities.

The EUAV Initiative has already started expanding its reach to SOs in other EU Member States. This trend should be promoted via the communication strategy and by making use of the consortium model to pair more experienced SOs with those with less experience.

R8. Apply an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system and ensure adequate mechanisms are in place to promote peer learning and knowledge-sharing amongst all stakeholders.

Based on C12

DG EAC is likely to face similar constraints on capacity to those experienced by the EUAV Initiative. Monitoring systems of the HumAid Corps will therefore require attention and could be improved by the following actions:

- Ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation framework developed is applied fully and includes indicators and reflective processes relating to cost-effectiveness at outcome level in addition to the output level. This would enable a more detailed intervention logic at the proposal level and ensure appropriate technical tools and procedures are in place to automate data collection;

- Fostering peer learning and knowledge-sharing between implementing partners by building on successful peer collaboration and learning models in SO consortia within the HumAid Corps. This could be supported by establishing regular focus groups and/or workshops with implementing partners and EC agencies, for example. Joint monitoring with partner organisations, an approach taken by DG ECHO field offices,

would help ensure learning contributes to improving systems, processes and even policies through participatory processes.

- Creating tier-based quality label systems (see R2 and R3) would provide incentives for participating organisations to maintain and improve standards themselves by giving them greater flexibility for a higher tier. Monitoring should be adapted to the quality label, with monitoring (and capacity building) being focused more on those HOs with lower ratings.

- HOs working in insecure environments will require monitoring of their security systems. This should normally be done by their HQ for INGOs and the IFRC but more detailed monitoring may need to be considered for national organisations if they succeed in receiving a quality label that allows them to work in insecure environments.[155] Note that hosting organisations with robust security management systems which have a higher tier rating could also contribute to security monitoring at a country level to help validate and keep the risk register updated.

- Developing monitoring guidelines as part of the "toolkit" described in R2 to provide clear processes and protocols for DG EAC and participating agencies.

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[155] For an example of relevant processes and indicators see, for example, EISF (2013) Security Audits: an EISF Guide for NGOs.