

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE EUROPEAN CORPS OF SOLIDARITY VOLUNTEERS EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT



Humanitarian Aid
and Civil Protection



ADICE



solidaridad
internacional



IN VIA

The European Commission is developing a global initiative that will create opportunities for some 10,000 people to volunteer worldwide in humanitarian operations between 2014 and 2020. This initiative comes in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty, which envisions a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps set up with the objective of establishing “a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the Union’s humanitarian aid operations” (Art.214.5 TFEU).

The EU Aid Volunteers initiative will provide a path for Europeans eager to provide practical aid where it is most urgently needed. The number of natural and man-made disasters in the world has significantly increased in recent years, and this trend is unfortunately likely to continue. Humanitarian organizations need more well-prepared people to support them by helping communities struck by disasters.

Most existing volunteer schemes have a national focus. EU Aid Volunteers will bring together volunteers and organizations from different countries to work on common projects. European standards in this field will provide a quality label denoting proper training for volunteers, recognizable by interested citizens and organizations, which will increase the impact of humanitarian aid.

With an eye towards implementation of a permanent “EU Aid Volunteers” programme, DG ECHO, the humanitarian office of the European Commission, launched a call for proposals for pilot projects in 2012. ADICE and its partners replied to this call with the following project, which was accepted and implemented.

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I. The project and its evaluation framework

1. AN EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT WITH A CLEAR PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

As initially formulated (cf. application form – 21 May 2012), the EU Aid Volunteers project’s purpose consisted of **developing an innovative, comprehensive framework** for action that would promote recruitment, training, sponsoring and supporting teams of humanitarian volunteers capable of participating in carrying out projects, with the objective of strengthening the resiliency of other countries.

Specifically, this innovative steering and management framework relies on the **partners’** (ADICE, InVia Köln, Solidaridad Internacional) **developing and testing an innovative platform for the recruitment, training and support of volunteers** deployed in other countries.

Implemented over a 15-month period (June 2012 – September 2013), the EU Aid Volunteers project had the following objectives:

- Development of action principles and innovative common tools for identifying and selecting humanitarian volunteer missions, and for recruitment, training, support and evaluation;
- With local partners, determining the framework and objectives of the various missions;
- Selection and recruitment of two types of volunteers (“experts” and “young professionals”) and testing of an innovative mode of intervention based on a principle of actions by teams making use of their different backgrounds and skills to participate in reinforcing the resilience of local communities;
- Preparation of the recruited volunteers and putting them in scenario-based simulations, through training with common content and teaching methods;
- Deployment of 30 volunteers of various nationalities in non-EU countries;
- An evaluation directly bringing together the volunteers and the local partners.

2. ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

The project is headed by ADICE with its two European partners, In Via Köln and Solidaridad Internacional. In Via Köln has been a long-term and reliable partner of ADICE on several kinds of projects relating to volunteerism, and ADICE has worked with Solidaridad on various occasions (working seminar on the topic of support to local communities in Maghreb, professional meeting at ADICE, in Madrid, etc.). Both organisations had experience in the fields of volunteerism abroad, including in Southern countries, and/or in humanitarian aid. The idea was to work with organisations specialised in volunteer deployment and in action in Southern countries, but not specialised in humanitarian aid, in order to avoid duplicating what already exists. Instead, the idea is to create an innovative framework for action through the synergy of each partner’s experiences.

The missions were formulated in collaboration with the local partners identified by the three European organizations. ADICE, Solidaridad Internacional and In Via Köln decided to work with some local organisations/offices they already knew and/or with which they wanted to test a new project.

ADICE, In Via Köln and Solidaridad Internacional collaborated with the local staff of these organisations to create missions suitable for the EU Aid Volunteers project: together they identified local needs in order to develop the volunteer projects.

The missions required strengthening local resilience and building local capacity, which means that they had to be linked to crisis-prevention or post-crisis rehabilitation operations. At the same time, they had to represent an added value for the local organisations.

The missions involved different fields of activity, such as:

Misangre (Colombia)	Area of intervention : Building capacity and strengthening resilience, technical assistance, arts, lobbying efforts, training, community development.
APU (Peru)	Area of intervention : Environment, rural tourism, habitat rehabilitation, eco-construction.
Uganda Pioneers (Uganda)	Area of intervention : Development of local communities and of volunteer service.
OSVSWA (India)	Area of intervention : Environmental preservation, rural development, habitat rehabilitation, social integration, environmental risk reduction, combating sexual abuse of children.
Kilimanjaro Hope Organization (Tanzania)	Area of intervention : Sustainable development, agriculture, job creation, environmental preservation, renewable energy, human rights, health, education, water and sanitation improvement, irrigation system.
Childreach International (India)	Area of intervention : Child protection.
Solidaridad Internacional (Haiti)	Area of intervention : Post-crisis environmental rehabilitation, health, risk reduction.
Solidaridad Internacional (Palestine)	Area of intervention : Promoting women in civil society, local and community development, health.
Solidaridad Internacional (Colombia)	Area of intervention : Local and community development, psychosocial assistance to refugees and displaced population.

Between June 2012 and September 2013, 29 volunteers were recruited, trained and deployed on 10 different missions in 7 countries. The volunteers were deployed in teams of 3 people of different nationalities, for 4 to 6 months.

3. THE DECISION TO CREATE AN AMBITIOUS, OVERALL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

In a pilot project, evaluation plays an important role. Our associate partner COPAS helps us develop an evaluative frame of reference and manage all evaluation steps throughout the project, to enable us make recommendations at the end of the project.

The following section consists of excerpts from the overall final report written by COPAS.

In keeping with our shared desire to evaluate their pilot project jointly, continuously and rigorously, in June 2012 ADICE, Solidaridad Internacional and In via Koln formalized the project's evaluation framework: topics, criteria, indicators, methods, calendar, etc.

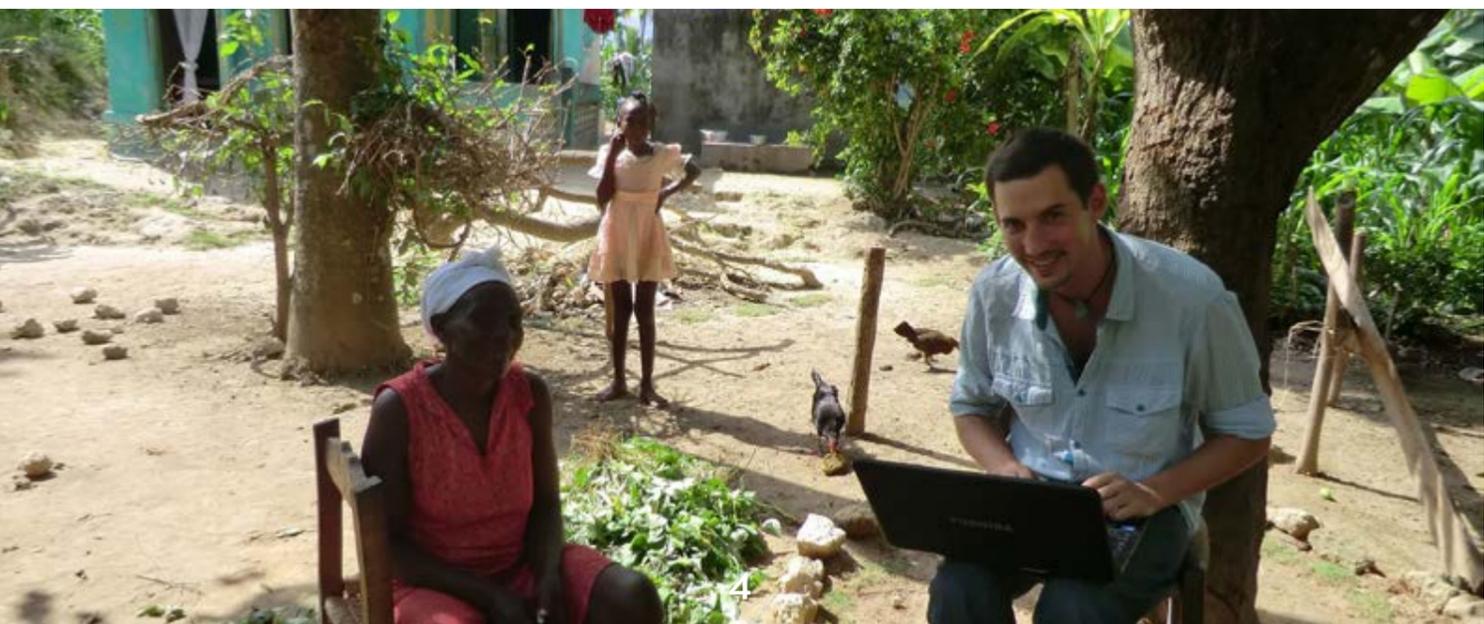
Three key topics for evaluation were included in the project's evaluation benchmarks:

- **The effectiveness and relevance of the deployment system (recruitment, training, support for volunteers on assignment, etc.) tested**
- **The consistency and effectiveness of the missions conducted by the volunteers and their impact on the local communities**
- **The relevance and innovative nature of the management and coordination (processes)**

As was planned, the local partners and the volunteers directly contributed to the evaluation on multiple occasions, through the evaluation questionnaires and directly with the pilot partners during their debriefings.

The judgments and appraisals provided by the volunteers and local partners were discussed in feedback sessions with the pilot partners.

Eu Aid Volunteer in Jacmel, Haiti



II. Results

1. ABOUT THE PILOT PROJECT AS A WHOLE

While the appraisal provided by the pilot partners is often critical (in the “noble” sense of the term), as is appropriate for the high standards and professionalism that characterises each of them, it seemed important to focus on a certain number of factors.

Given the calendar and issues involved in the trial, we list here some of the highlights:

- A significant innovative ambition (with regard to the projects ordinarily carried out by these organisations);
- A project for which the partners cooperated specifically and genuinely, inasmuch as they were not all familiar with one another and had come together based on complementary expertise;
- Substantive and frequent communication, especially at the start of the project;
- A European project in which the partners ultimately went quite in terms of joint production (tools, info, etc.), which led to joint decisions;
- An in-progress evaluation effort carried through to its conclusion that specifically took into account the experimental nature of the project;
- Communication and cooperation between the European and local partners (whom the pilot partners did not always know beforehand – risk-taking) with whom relations were excellent, free-flowing and honest... and many of whom wanted to continue the collaboration (strong partnership impact).

1. THE VOLUNTEER DEPLOYMENT MECHANISM (RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, SEND-OFF AND MONITORING): “AN EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE TRIAL”

- **Innovative and consistent recruitment method**

The evaluation pointed out clearly that the pilot partners for this project developed and co-produced innovative modalities/forms/methods of recruitment that were recognized as such by the volunteers and local partners.

With a total of 1080 applicants (945 for Solidaridad, 45 for In Via Koln and 90 for ADICE), the number of applications and profiles that matched the job descriptions was therefore sufficient to allow relevant recruitments, especially as the local partners were able to give their opinions/viewpoints on two-thirds of the applicants.

- **“Objectively relevant, innovative and improvable training”**

The European partners decided that the training process should provide detailed and complete content on specific topics and issues to give the volunteers the necessary knowledge, ensuring their safety and their understanding of the project. The topics were humanitarian aid, the specific nature of the EU Aid Volunteers project and partnership, and the concept of volunteering. The training process also had to enable the volunteers to develop some skills necessary to carry out their missions, such as fear management, teamwork, project management, intercultural communication in a humanitarian context, and leadership, especially for the experts.

Finally, the training was also intended to foster the emergence of a “European corps” of volunteers.

The partners then agreed on the format of the training, which consisted of **an on-line phase and a face-to-face phase.**

“I believe that the crucial part of the training is also the psychological part. What you should expect on the mission like that, the fact that sometimes due to the situation you won't be able to follow point by point your ToRs.” (a EU Aid Volunteer said)

The volunteers gave high marks to the teaching pace, the quality of the instructors and materials, the inclusion of both theoretical and practical, individual and collective content, etc. The local partners expressed positive opinions on the training and preparation of the volunteers.

- **“Monitoring should be improved in terms of remote support and mission reporting”**

From the start, the deployment plan called for a way to monitor the volunteers on assignment. Each pilot organisation (ADICE, InVia Köln, Solidaridad Internacional) was in contact with “its” volunteers in order to answer any questions and to provide information and remotely monitor the mission's progress.

The results show that the chosen monitoring method promoted informal exchange and responsiveness to the volunteers' requests better than did regular evaluation of mission content.

3. « MISSIONS GENERALLY EFFECTIVE AND RELEVANT, DESPITE THE LIMITATIONS ON EVALUATION AND THE ACTION PRINCIPLES THAT DID NOT MAKE SYSTEMATIC SENSE»

Compliant missions, relevant tools

In the vast majority of cases, the missions as they were carried out complied with what was indicated in the ToR prepared jointly with the local partners. The evaluation indicates however that the volunteers had to adapt the content and objectives of the various missions to local realities and contexts.

Missions generally effective...difficulty in measuring real impact in terms of resilience

There is agreement between the evaluations of the local partners and those of the volunteers, which point to generally effective missions. Mission objectives were for the most part achieved; however, their impact in terms of improving resilience is rather more nuanced, especially since it is difficult to measure in the short term (the appraisal by the local partners is however more positive than that of the volunteers).

The interviews conducted upon the volunteers' return from assignment yielded an oral, qualitative discussion of how the mission went, what actions were carried out, what skills deployed, links and cooperation with the NGO and local populations, etc., but they are insufficient to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of each mission in detail.

Skills deployed and transferred

The main areas of intervention that allowed the volunteers to deploy their skills:

- Construction (building eco-compatible homes);
- IT (creation of databases);
- Marketing and communication (communication strategy and media);
- Environment (raising awareness about eco-construction, etc.), teaching;

Skills transferred:

- Survey methods: writing guides and manuals (for example, for using databases or designing projects).
- Fund-raising and partnership development, by formalising supporting materials, practical guides, leaflets, etc.
- Communication: use of social networks to develop initiatives and make them more visible, and the action of local NGOs through training sessions, etc.

While the volunteers found their human and personal experience rich and satisfying, the evaluation revealed that they mainly made use of skills acquired previously.

The actions carried out, the concrete supporting materials directly usable in the field (surveys, questionnaires, diagnostics, construction, etc.) or by the organisations (communications materials, partner search and contact, fund-raising, etc.) are all indicators pointing to an effective and efficacious application of the volunteer teams' skills.

The evaluation concerning the mutual transfer of skills between volunteers and local associations is rather more nuanced. In fact, the results are very divided, on the one hand among the volunteers, inasmuch as half of them expressed real scepticism about this, and between the volunteers and the local partners, with the latter being far more positive with regard to the mutual exchange and sharing of skills.

This mixed appraisal is explained primarily by the great diversity of content and objectives for the 10 missions and the local NGOs (not readily comparable to one another) and by the weight of certain statements by volunteers and a tendency to minimise and/or underestimate certain skills the local partners think they have.

Missions as the source of multiple instances of cooperation...but dependent on many uncontrollable factors

In most cases the cooperation between the volunteer teams and the local NGOs was productive and contributed to reaching the objectives of the various missions. This cooperation was specifically reflected in joint actions being carried out, and through good integration of the volunteer teams into the local organisations.

Relations with the local communities were closely linked to the type of mission (surveys, organising community efforts, etc.) and depended on the number of interventions in the field that the volunteers were able to make. In these cases, and despite the language barriers, relations with the local populations were judged positive; in particular, the local partners believed that the volunteers had special skills and aptitudes for leading participatory actions.

4. A GENERALLY POSITIVE OPINION OF THE SOCIAL AND CITIZENSHIP DIMENSION OF THE EU AID VOLUNTEERS PROJECT: "POSITIVE LESSONS TO BE CONSOLIDATED"

The volunteers, local partners and pilot partners were able to express their opinions on the following topics:

Was the project an opportunity for implementing the values and principles of volunteerism, Europe, citizenship and democracy?

Many volunteers stressed the fact that their participation in the EU Aid Volunteers project yielded personal results for them: an understanding of the reality of human rights, interculturalism in everyday life, motivation to continue or to begin working in the field of international cooperation.

For the local and/or European partners, opinion is positive for various reasons: the experience is supported by Europe; the missions specifically put European volunteers in touch with local organisations and populations in seven different countries; the cooperation was judged positive.

Did the project bring out "new modes of humanitarian action"?

A majority of the volunteers believe that their volunteer status is a "plus" and is different from "ordinary" humanitarian efforts, with their intervention fitting into a context of crisis (prevention or post-crisis) and development. It was also this unique aspect, this rather poorly defined role at the intersection of humanity and development that posed problems for certain volunteers. Others, who express a more negative opinion, cite the difficulty of explaining and sharing the uniqueness of this "humanitarian volunteer" status with the local associations.

The local partners' more positive opinion is underpinned by the fact that some of them have identified volunteerism as a potentially useful and relevant resource for carrying out their projects and participating in local development. In particular, they cite the value of relying on a team with various skills and aptitudes in carrying out concerted actions with the local populations.

Local partners said...

« From a professional point of view, the results are very positive. All 3 volunteers were very committed to their work. It allowed us to achieve some objectives more rapidly and in some cases more effectively by using new knowledge and techniques »

« For a small structure like ours, the role of the expert volunteer was essential as coordinating a team of 3 more collaborators is a lot of work for us. The work of coordination, communication (and sometimes mediation) did help us in achieving better results in the frame of this process as less experienced volunteers usually need more guidance or attention »

« We consider that sharing one's knowledge with others has been the strongest focus of every participant of this process. And this is for us the main success of the process. Everyone learned new things and techniques about communication, diagnosis, eco-friendly construction techniques, the local reality, project management »

« People in the community learned new techniques like the construction and are able to reproduce it by themselves. They also know that from one culture to another, people can be a little bit different »

Eu Aid Volunteer mission in Same, Tanzania



Eu Aid Volunteer in Cusco, Peru



III. RECCOMANDATIONS - Proposals for the permanent EU Aid Volunteers programme

1. THE DEPLOYMENT SYSTEM

Recruitment phase:

- Clarify the content of the application tools, in particular by attaching a skills reference sheet for the “expert” and the “young professional” humanitarian volunteer, and by more specifically indicating the interdisciplinary skills sought (adaptability, leadership, independence, initiative-taking, etc.);
- Enhance recruitment interviews by bringing the local partners in on them.

Training:

- Training content should include specific topics associated with the humanitarian context, as well as modules concerning interculturalism and the volunteer’s position and role;
- Propose to EU Aid volunteer “veterans” that they lead a session in which they share their experiences with the new volunteers;
- The training curriculum should include research into in-depth information on the country/region where the volunteer teams will be working. These approaches could be included in class presentations and in materials put online on the Web site dedicated to the EU Aid Volunteers project;
- As a complement to the training classes, consider opportunities for direct exchanges between volunteers and local volunteers before departure so as to pave the way for their integration;
- When volunteers arrive in the field, break down the objectives listed in the mission statements into an action plan in cooperation with the volunteers.

Defining missions and preparing for departure:

- Seek out and formulate missions that are continuations of the projects/actions undertaken by the local partners (consolidate and adapt to the local situation);
- To the extent possible, clarify the mission’s purpose (positioning a cursor between crisis and development);
- Attach specific evaluation benchmarks to each mission statement to give volunteers and pilot partners a common tool for evaluating the mission.

Monitoring, guidance, remote support for volunteers:

- Promote more direct networking, sharing of experiences and practices among local NGOs involved in the EU Aid Volunteers project, for example through physical meetings at workshops or an online platform;

- Clarify the responsibilities of the volunteer team’s supervisor within the host organisation, to be specified in the mission statement;
- Make the monitoring of volunteers part of an exchange of practices and mission progress reports; for example, propose three-party (volunteer, local partner and European partner) summaries at the halfway point.

2. PROGRAMME COORDINATION

Strategic management

- Collectively (institutions, volunteer sponsor and host organisations) formalise and validate the key concepts of the EU Aid Volunteers project: expanded definition of the concept of “humanitarian volunteer”; characterisation of a crisis-prevention or post-crisis humanitarian context; skills benchmarks for the expert and young professional humanitarian volunteer, etc.;
- Formalise a communication strategy aimed at raising public awareness about humanitarian volunteering, for example by focusing more intently on the volunteers’ missions and accomplishments within the hoist organisations and their impacts on the local beneficiaries.

Cooperation with local partners

- Arrange opportunities for formal three-party discussions at several key stages (mission definition, monitoring, end-of-mission evaluation) to ensure a common vision and adjust project objectives as needed;
- Consider building bridges to other approaches/projects under way.

Evaluation

- Set up a system of ongoing evaluation, involving all the stakeholders (host and sponsor organisations, volunteers);
- Disseminate and apply the results and lessons learned from the evaluation.

Eu Aid Volunteer in Same, Tanzania



For more informations:

www.ec.europa.eu/echo
www.aidvolunteers.org
www.adice.asso.fr
www.solidaridad.org
www.invia-koeln.de
www.copas.coop/

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