



For a better European Solidarity Corps

Updated position of the European Youth Forum on the European Solidarity Corps under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027).

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD
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Executive Summary

The European Youth Forum welcomed the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and its focus on creating more opportunities for young people to engage in quality volunteering and professional experiences across Europe.

The European Solidarity Corps was a rare example of cross-sectorial youth policy-making with the potential to build on the success of previous programmes such as the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and increase the capacity of youth organisations and other organisations to provide meaningful experiences to even more young people.

The following document is an update to the position of the European Youth Forum on the European Solidarity Corps¹ to reflect the changes that the programme has undergone since its announcement and to highlight priorities for the next European Solidarity Corps programme under the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

The following document is the result of consultations and discussions held with Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum and outlines its main political demands towards the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union for the negotiations of this programme.

The European Youth Forum's key demands for a better European Solidarity Corps include:

- A programme with clearer objectives and more connected with the realities young people and youth organisations
- Involvement of youth organisations in the co-design and joint monitoring of the programme
- A budget focused at supporting volunteering in Europe and in the world
- Ensuring the inclusivity and accessibility of ESC placements for all young people
- The ESC as a step towards a more coordinated approach to volunteering policy in Europe
- Ensuring the compatibility of the ESC with the upcoming Erasmus Programme and the new EU Youth Strategy

¹ For a better European Solidarity Corps - 2017

<https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Solidarity-Corps-position-paper.pdf>

I. Assessment of the new proposal

This assessment highlights the improvements proposed by the European Commission's new Regulation proposal for the European Solidarity Corps 2017-2021 in June 2018².

A positive evolution from the original programme

Volunteering plays an essential role in our societies and every person, young and old, has the right to volunteer anywhere in the world.

In order to foster a culture of participation, personal and responsible development, as well as active citizenship in Europe and worldwide, volunteers need to be given access and encouragement to engage in volunteering activities.

With the creation of the European Solidarity Corps in 2017, the European Commission made an important step in creating more opportunities for young people to engage in quality volunteering at local and European level and provide them with the necessary tools to make a positive impact in their communities.

As highlighted in our first position³, the original proposal of the European Commission contained many elements insufficiently explored and many other lacking; hence changes were necessary to make the future programme closer to the realities of young people and youth organisations.

The political agreement reached in June 2018 on the current programme⁴ represents a significant improvement from the original proposal, addressing many of our concerns and including several of our suggestions.

The European Youth Forum welcomes that the European Commission's proposal for the next European Solidarity Corps is built upon the work already done during the discussions for the current programme while still being ambitious, adding new dimensions and further improvements to the programme.

An independent budget to match its ambitions

The European Youth Forum welcomes the increase of the next European Solidarity Corps budget to EUR 1.26 billion⁵ under the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

This new budget represents a considerable increase from its predecessor and from other similar programmes such as the European Voluntary Service and the EU Aid Volunteers. It will provide means for more young people and more youth organisations to benefit from

² Regulation proposal for the European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027 - https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-solidarity-corps-regulation_en.pdf - See more details in Annex I

³ For a better European Solidarity Corps - 2017 <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Solidarity-Corps-position-paper.pdf>

⁴ Strengthening the European Solidarity Corps: Joint statement by Commissioners Navracsics, Oettinger and Thyssen - June 2018 - http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-4024_en.htm

⁵ EUR 376.5 million were allocated for the current European Solidarity Corps (2018-2020) - There is a 16.8% increase in the budget proposal for 2021-2027.

this programme and to have a measurable impact at local and European level. It is also an opportunity to provide larger individual amounts to organisations to support activities.

Providing the European Solidarity Corps with its own budget and decoupling it from other ones, such as Erasmus in the current period, is an important improvement. Investment in new programmes for youth should never come at the expense of other successful youth programmes such as Erasmus and we welcome this development in the new proposal.

A programme with a global view on volunteering but with local roots

The extension of the programme to all Erasmus programme and partner countries as well to third countries through the new European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) strand is a welcome development.

All young people have the right to volunteer anywhere in the world and we fully support the European Commission's proposal to extend the programme's geographical scope beyond the European Union (EU). This will allow more young people and more organisations to benefit from this programme and avoid unnecessary opportunity gaps between young people from different countries. Ensuring the possibility for young people from third countries to participate in European Solidarity Corps placements would also contribute to international cooperation and solidarity.

We also welcome the continuation of the local dimension of the programme, providing more flexibility for both participating organisations and participants to engage in solidarity projects with a strong local dimension and open the possibility for young people who do not have the possibility to travel abroad to fully take part in the European Solidarity Corps. This contributes to an increase outreach of the programme to young people with fewer opportunities.

New ways for young people and organisations to participate in the programme

We welcome the continuous focus of the new programme on providing young people with different paths to engage through in-country and cross-border volunteering, solidarity projects, traineeships and jobs. This flexibility of formats is one of the strengths of the current programme.

The inclusion of a new strand in the form of a new European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps is also welcomed, since it builds on this diversity by allowing young people to volunteer outside Europe and work on projects that are very different from what the programme currently promotes⁶.

Lastly, we fully support the proposal to facilitate the participation of European organisations and networks to the programme by allowing their placements to be submitted to and managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission (EACEA). This was one of the main asks during the negotiations for the current programme.

⁶ For more information on the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, see Annex I

Clearer divisions between the different parts of the programme

The main differences between the two strands of the programme (ESC and EVHAC) and between its volunteering and occupational aspects are much clearer in the current proposal, with different evaluation criteria and different requirements for each part.

The quality aspects of the programme were as well strengthened in the current proposal, with the quality label having a more concrete role in regulating access of organisations to the different parts of the programme depending on their capacity and with stronger conditions for organisations willing to hire young people for job and traineeship opportunities as part of the European Solidarity Corps.

II. For a #BetterESC - Priorities for the next European Solidarity Corps

The following part outlines the main priorities of the European Youth Forum for the next European Solidarity Corps and its main political demands towards the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union for the negotiations.

A programme with clearer objectives and more connected with the realities young people and youth organisations

While the current proposal is clearer and more structured in terms of its objectives and the kind of projects and activities that the programme will support, the European Solidarity Corps continues to feel disconnected from the realities of young people and of the youth organisations engaged in volunteering activities.

As was already the case when the original programme was announced in 2016, the European Commission did not properly consult young people and youth organisations in the development of the programme, leading to an incomplete proposal from the European Commission. As the new proposal was presented before a political agreement was reached by the co-legislator on the current programme, this proposal did not benefit from the lessons learned from the first and second phase of the current European Solidarity Corps. Indeed, no report has yet been produced on the implementation of the current programme, further limiting the possibilities of improving the programme based on sufficient users feedback and hard data.

The current programme does not sufficiently adapt to the realities of organisations engaged in the programme, forcing these to adapt to the new model, while it would have benefited from looking at the specific situations of such organisations. For example, there are currently numerous problems with the use of the database and organisations are struggling to find participants with the right profile for their projects and organisations.

The European Solidarity Corps should act as a multiplier for organisations and young people engaged in solidarity projects, building on top of what is already being provided at local, regional and national level and increasing the capacity of organisations to do more and better. Only by doing this, the European Solidarity Corps would be able to increase the number of organisations interested in joining the programme and provide more opportunities for young people to engage in the programme.

The possibility of European organisations and networks to the programme **to submit their applications at the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission (EACEA)** should be included in the legal proposal to ensure that this will be the way the programme will be implemented.

Involvement of youth organisations in the co-design and joint monitoring of the programme

It is fundamental that young people and youth organisations are involved in the implementation, co-management and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps at

national and European levels. Young people and their representatives should have an effective say on any youth-related policy or programme⁷.

Due to the wide scope of the programme, all relevant stakeholders (including trade unions and other social partners, particularly where occupational placements are concerned) should be involved in the management of the new programme in order to ensure its success. Without the expertise of youth organisations and other key partners, the European Solidarity Corps will not be able to achieve the goal of providing quality placements to 350,000 young people by 2027 as foreseen by the European Commission.

The European Youth Forum should be included as permanent observer without voting rights in the Programme Committee responsible for the management of the European Solidarity Corps; hence foreseeing this in the rules of procedures of the relevant Committee.

At the national level, the bodies in charge of implementing the programme should include representatives from the country's National Youth Council in their governing structures and evaluation processes, as well as relevant partners where occupational placements are concerned.

A budget aimed at supporting volunteering in Europe and in the world

As one of the main programmes with Erasmus promoting volunteering among young people, the European Solidarity Corps should allocate 80% - at least 60% - of the budget to the volunteering strand.

As shown by data released by the European Commission⁸ on the current programme, the vast majority of the current 5000 European Solidarity Corps placements are volunteering placements showing a great interest of young people for this part of the programme.

More funding for the volunteering strand would allow for more organisations to get the sufficient resources (including operational support, access to information via specific info sessions, etc.) to provide more quality opportunities and support (online and offline and pre-, during and post-placements) for participants, as well as to reach out to young people who have not yet benefited from the programme.

We know that the role of supporting and hosting organisation is a core element to ensure the success of the programme and should be better valued in the current proposal. Support for organisations to reach out to participants coming from more disadvantaged backgrounds is particularly necessary, as it helps these organisations to provide to their participants the necessary support to overcome additional barriers and obstacles they may experience.

⁷ Quality Standards for Youth Policy - European Youth Forum - 2017
<https://www.youthforum.org/toolkit-quality-standards-youth-policy>

⁸ European Commission - European Solidarity Corps in action
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-solidarity-corps-in-action_en.pdf

Funding for networking activities currently foreseen should also be available for organisations.

Priority for funding should be given to solidarity projects since these have the most potential to reach out to disadvantaged young people and have a concrete impact a local level.

For the occupational placements, the European Commission should explore the possibility of increasing financial assistance for jobs and traineeships in order to make this strand more attractive for organisations. There is currently little incentive for organisations to apply for this strand since it doesn't provide them with the necessary support to increase their organisational capacity and help them with staff costs besides administration.

Ensuring the inclusivity and accessibility of ESC placements for all young people

The European Solidarity Corps should build upon the experience of EVS in creating the conditions for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people with disabilities to fully participate in the programme. On top of the financial support for participants and hosting organisations, practices from EVS such as advanced planned visits, reinforced mentorship and covering exceptional costs should be kept and expanded upon. This should be coupled with additional measures to prevent discrimination of all form during the selection process and the ESC placement.

The ESC portal should be a one-stop-shop and useful tool for both participants and organisations alike. Participants should have access to information on which organisations are viewing their profiles and other information on ESC accredited organisations (i.e. latest placements, website, contact person, etc.) and organisations should have access to better sorting and filtering tools to allow them to find the right candidates for their activities. The ESC programme guide should be easily accessible via the portal and be developed using experience of participants and organisations in the current programme. The website should be built according to the standards established by the 2016 EU Web Accessibility Directive⁹.

In the case of volunteering solidarity placements and solidarity projects, the age limit to access the ESC should be lowered to 16 years old in order to reflect the reality of volunteering on the ground as well as open up new opportunities for more young people to engage in volunteering.

For volunteering team placements, placements should be of minimum 1 week in order to allow for greater flexibility of formats and events to be organised under this category.

⁹ Directive on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies - 2016
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2016.327.01.0001.01.ENG

The ESC as a step towards a more coordinated approach to volunteering policy in Europe

The European Solidarity Corps a great opportunity for the European Commission to start developing a EU general approach to volunteering, as foreseen by the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe¹⁰.

Efforts should be focused on the EU added value of supporting volunteering, on how the EU can enhance and/or better coordinate with existing national and local schemes and on how to ensure that the rights of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are recognised and respected across Europe, in line with the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers¹¹.

Efforts should also be made towards lifting the existing barriers to volunteering and volunteer-involving organisations and on how the ESC and other EU youth programmes can help promoting a diverse and empowering environment for volunteering organisations and volunteers alike. Furthermore, the ESC should be better linked to other international volunteering programmes and serve as a basis and incentive for the development of volunteering programmes in countries where they are currently non-existing.

Ensure the compatibility of the ESC with the upcoming Erasmus Programme and the new EU Youth Strategy

The European Solidarity Corps should be seen as an integral part of achieving the successful implementation of the next framework for European cooperation in the youth field after 2018 - the EU Youth Strategy. It should be closely interlinked with the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus programme and synergies between some actions (particularly the KA1 Youth Participation Initiatives and KA1 Discover EU) should be explored and incorporated into the programme as blended actions.

The ESC should additionally be seen as an important programme to promote volunteering and youth work, but also the added value of mobility, intercultural dialogue, non-formal education and informal learning of young people in Europe. The learning components of the programme should be central in its development and implementation.

The ESC, when it comes to the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, should find synergies with other EU programmes focused on international cooperation and development as well as external action.

¹⁰ Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe - 2011
https://www.vlaanderenwilligt.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/EYV2011Alliance_PAVE_copyfriendly.pdf

¹¹ European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers - European Youth Forum - 2012 - https://issuu.com/yomag/docs/volunteering_charter_en

Annex I - The European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027 - Factsheets¹²

Architecture of the programme:

- The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) keeps the same structure as the original European Commission proposal. The programme is still divided into two complementary strands (Volunteering and Occupational) with four different actions (volunteering placements, job/traineeship placements, volunteering activities and networking activities). These activities continue to be implementable either cross-border or in-country.
- The EU Aid Volunteers programme has been incorporated into the ESC and forms a separate part of the programme. While it is currently managed under DG ECHO, the EUAV programme will be merged with the ESC under a specific chapter dedicated to Humanitarian Aid, “European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC)”. The merger aims to simplify access to the programme and the better visibility of both ESC and EVHAC opportunities.
- The ESC will continue to be implemented through the Erasmus National Agencies but will be a separate programme with an independent budget.
- The geographical scope has been expanded to cover all Erasmus programme and partner countries. Actions under the EVHAC strand will also cover non-EU countries.
- The programme will be open to all organisations, including public or private entities and international organisations, provided that they have received an ESC quality label.
- The quality label will allow organisations to define their role as hosts, support and/or sending organisations.
- There is a focus on providing quality, inclusive and safe placements for all participants. Specific training and pre-, during and post-placement support will be provided to all participants, with some specificities depending on the type of placement. Specific financial support will be provided to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and special safety training will be provided to participants in the EVHAC strand.
- The EVS Charter has been removed, while references to the ESC charter were removed in this version of the regulation.

Financial provisions

- €1.26 billion for the 2021-2027 period. The European Commission has an objective to reach 350,000 young people with this programme by 2027. There are no specific breakdowns by strand or activity.
- The programme will be operated through a centralised grant application system and management for Europe-wide and international organisations. Generally, the grant request will be submitted to the national agency of the country where the

¹² Source: Briefing for Member Organisations - Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework programmes

organisation is based. Grant requests for 1) activities organised by Europe-wide or international organisations, 2) activities of volunteering teams in priority fields identified at European level and 3) activities in support of humanitarian aid operations in third countries will be submitted to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission. The same rules apply to the Quality Label applications.

New Actions

A. European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

Actions implemented under the strand “European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps” shall in particular contribute to providing needs-based humanitarian aid aimed at preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity, and strengthening the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities. This action will only support volunteering placements in support of humanitarian aid operations:

1. All placements shall include a learning and training component, shall not substitute traineeships or jobs and shall be based on a written volunteering agreement.
2. Volunteering placements under this strand may only take place in third countries:
 - a. where humanitarian aid activities and operations take place; and
 - b. where there are no ongoing international or non-international armed conflicts.