



Recommendations of the Youth and Volunteering sectors on the European Solidarity Corps

European Commission President Juncker announced in his State of the Union last September the idea of a European Solidarity Corps, which should be launched by the end of 2016 with the first 100,000 young Europeans taking part in its activities by 2020. This October, the European Parliament has adopted an important Resolution¹ on European Voluntary Service and the Promotion of Volunteering in Europe framing the main actions to be implemented to reinforce volunteering in Europe. The European Parliament has stated that the European Solidarity Corps should be developed in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

Ahead of the official announcement of the European Solidarity Corps, the Youth Intergroup of the European Parliament and the undersigning MEPs, together with the main stakeholders in the youth and volunteering field, wants to stress the importance of including the following recommendations in the implementation of the initiative.

Build on the activities and experience of volunteering organisations and schemes

Europe is witnessing an overwhelming willingness from its citizens to be engaged in solidarity actions throughout Europe. The European Solidarity Corps may represent a great opportunity for the European Union to re-launch its project, particularly among young people who are the main target group for the Corps. The initiative should rely, however, as much as possible on the **existing volunteering opportunities already provided by civil society organisations** and should be conceived in such a way as to be complementary to those. The European Solidarity Corps should also focus on locally based volunteering rather than solely on cross-border opportunities that require international mobility. The vast majority of volunteering takes place at the local level, meeting local needs, and the European Solidarity Corps should also contribute to those activities whether through volunteering or through internships, apprenticeships or jobs in the solidarity sector.

The European Solidarity Corps as a part of a wider strategy on volunteering

Volunteering has value and importance as one of the most visible expressions of solidarity promoting and facilitating social inclusion, building social capital and producing a transformative effect on society. In order to make the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) a success, we believe the European Union should integrate it in a **wider strategy aiming at creating an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe**. This would include secure and sustainable funding for volunteer-involving organisations and for the volunteering infrastructure and support organisations, such as volunteer centres. Volunteering can be further strengthened by a suitable legal framework giving a European status for volunteers assuring the protection, offered nationally by the member states governments, and which

¹<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0425&language=EN&ring=B8-2016-1126>

identifies the rights and responsibilities for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

In addition, **volunteering** should be better **mainstreamed across European Programmes**, such as the Erasmus+, the Europe for Citizen programme, the LIFE programme, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the EU external action programmes, and access for volunteer organisations should be ensured in the European Structural and Investment Funds. The introduction of the European Solidarity Corps should not be to the detriment of existing volunteering opportunities provided due to funding from those Programmes. Support for volunteering for people of all ages should be further strengthened in the current MFF review and in the development of the post 2020 financial framework. Volunteer time should be accepted as eligible co-funding in all EU Programmes accessible to Civil Society Organisations.

Link with European Voluntary Service (EVS)

The European Solidarity Corps will have a strong link with the European Voluntary Service (EVS), at least in its first pilot phase of implementation. This phase should be used to further strengthen the European Voluntary Service prior to the foreseen establishment of a separate programme for the European Solidarity Corps.

Moreover, in line with the spirit of the EVS, the initiative should equip young people involved with the necessary training and mentoring throughout the experience, emphasising a **strong citizenship education and intercultural dialogue dimension**. This could be best done by the organisations that are offering the volunteering opportunity to the young people through a specific supporting scheme.

To conclude, a **clear definition of the solidarity action** is needed to make sure that the impact in each community and the society is measurable and effective. Whilst the learning experience and the impact on the individual volunteer are important elements, the most important goal to be achieved is impact on the needs of the community as a building block of European solidarity.

Keeping it simple

The ESC should be conceived in a way to reduce as much as possible the administrative burden for the participants, as well as for the civil society organisations that will implement the initiative.

The ESC should be designed in a way to provide prompt support to the organisations active in places where solidarity actions are needed and to equip them with the necessary resources to offer quality volunteering and placement opportunities to the young people involved.

This can be done by simplifying as much as possible the accreditation and placement process and by establishing a simplified access to funding for the organisations that would be benefiting from solidarity support from young people across Europe.

Volunteering and Occupational strand as two complementary but separate elements of ESC

The European Commission has announced that it wants to develop the ESC through two work strands: A volunteer strand and an occupational strand. These two should be complementary but clearly separated work strands, volunteering and gaining work

experience through a job placement or an apprenticeship or internship are distinct ways in which young people can contribute to solidarity actions and have different characteristics and requirements for quality and success.

The volunteer strand should be underpinned by a clear understanding of the principles of quality volunteering such as those outlined in the *European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers*². In this strand, the tasks to be performed by the volunteers should be in line with the focus of the specific project, should be benefiting the local community, as well as contributing to the mission of the organizations involved, and contribute to the development of skills, knowledge and experiences of the volunteers involved.

The second strand should focus on providing quality jobs, traineeships and apprenticeships in the solidarity sector. This will benefit both the professional development of young people, as well as the capacity and sustainability of the solidarity sector in Europe. EU funding for youth employment such as the Youth Employment Initiative should be used exclusively for this occupational strand and not to offer volunteering opportunities. Volunteering must not be used as an excuse to replace real quality jobs with unpaid work. For placements that involve international mobility, organisations should be provided with suitable incentives in order to include young people taking up employment opportunities in their organisations as part of the European Solidarity Corps, such as a financial contribution to salary costs.

Both strands should ensure that the skills and competences acquired during the experience can be recognised and validated and can also contribute to sustainable placement of young people in the labour market.

Further development of the European Solidarity Corps

With the ambitious announcement of sending out the first 100,000 participants by 2020 the expectations have been raised to a high level. We need to make sure that the expectations of young people that want to engage in this opportunity are met. To avoid that this is only achieved by either rebranding current initiatives such as EVS or redirecting funding from existing volunteering, training or employment opportunities provided under EU programmes, fresh money needs to be invested. The ESC should have specific dedicated funding.

Following the results of the first pilot phase of implementation of the ESC, the European Commission should involve relevant stakeholders by setting up a structured dialogue to involve them in the development of a proposal for a suitable legal basis for the initiative, as well as in its full implementation, taking into account the conclusions from the pilot phase. Having a dedicated legal basis and funding line would ensure the greater sustainability of the Corps and enable its development without negative consequences for other actions and programmes.

A specific identity of the initiative should be developed on the basis of the results of the first phase of implementation to differentiate to similar initiatives, such as the European Voluntary Service and the EU Aid Volunteers. The development of the initiative should be linked to the principles of volunteering, non-formal education, informal learning, intergenerational solidarity, intercultural dialogue and youth work in order to reinforce the learning and educational dimension of the initiative.

² http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering_charter_en.pdf

In the long run, the initiative should be opened to EU candidate countries and to EFTA members as well.

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Organisations:

European Youth Forum, *the Platform of Youth Organisations in Europe*
European Alliance for Volunteering, *the hub for European, national and regional organisations promoting volunteering*
European Volunteer Centre, *the European network of over 80 national, regional and local volunteer centres and volunteer support agencies across Europe*
AEGEE, *Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe*
Alliance, *The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations*
Allianssi, *The Finish National Youth Council*
EEE-YFU, *European Educational Exchanges - Youth for Understanding*
EFIL, *European Federation for Intercultural Learning*
IFMSA, *The International Federation of Medical Students Associations*
LSU, *The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations*
OBESSU, *Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions*
ÖJV, *Austrian National Youth Council*
WAGGS, *World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts*
WOSM, *The World Organization of the Scout Movement*
YEU, *Youth for Exchange and Understanding*
YMCA, *The Young Men's Christian Association*