

Contribution to the Public Consultation on the European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC), announced by the European Commission President Juncker in his “State of the Union” speech in September 2016, constitutes for the European Youth Forum a great opportunity to rekindle the discussion on the role of volunteering play in the promotion of European values in the European Union and in the personal and professional development of its (young) citizens. We also see the potential of the ESC to refocus the debate on current youth issues in the EU and to the need to invest more into quality youth policies that provide an answer to these needs and concerns.

As part of the Public Consultation on the European Solidarity Corps, the European Youth Forum would like to submit the following priorities as part of the Consultation. These priorities are the result of several discussions held with member organisations of the Youth Forum and represent the main elements for the youth sector to be kept in mind in the development of the European Commission’s legislative proposal for the ESC.

- 1. Clear definition of volunteering and occupational strands.** The two strands should be viewed as two complementary but separate elements of ESC. Volunteering must not be used as an excuse to replace real quality jobs with unpaid work. A clear understanding of the principles of quality volunteering and of quality work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships should be at the core of the ESC.
- 2. Definition of solidarity sector i.e field and sector of operation.** A clear definition of the solidarity sector and action is needed to make sure that the impact in each community and the society is measurable and effective. This definition should take into consideration the needs of all major players of the sector and in particular youth organisations.
- 3. Co-ordinated inter service approach in the European Commission.** This approach should aim at developing and connecting a more ambitious and wide-reaching EU volunteering policy. It should contribute to mainstream better volunteering across EU Programmes and at making the initiative more coherent. Moreover, as the European Solidarity Corps is divided in two different strands, volunteering and occupational, a fully coordinated approach should be ensured between DG EAC and DG EMPL.
- 4. Local volunteering as one of the core elements of ESC.** European solidarity should not be promoted only through mobility. This initiative is the occasion to promote and explore also local volunteering by supporting volunteering initiatives at the local level. For the cross-border mobility of ESC, a suitable legal framework ensuring their rights and responsibilities EU-wide should support it.
- 5. Ensure access to the European Solidarity Corps to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or with specific needs.** A specific budget should be allocated to cover costs for personal assistance or extra-support that could be needed for the young person; the EVS could be seen as a good practice in this regard
- 6. Ensure the quality of offers under the occupational strand.** Host organisations should subscribe to a quality Charter comprising agreed objectives and standards such as those outlined in the European Quality Charter on internship and apprenticeship¹; guaranteeing mentorship for young people during their placement, adequate payment, health insurance and clear educational objectives. A corps label could be created for organisations complying with these high quality standards (the process of accreditation of EVS could be used as an example). This would ensure the quality of the placement and ease the monitoring process.
- 7. Clear and sustainable funding for the ESC.** The funding of the initiative has to be clarified, in this vein it is paramount that the Commission clearly states how the ESC will be funded and implemented. The implementation of the initiative cannot in any way endanger or overshadow the objectives of existing successful programmes. Also, Volunteering opportunities should not be eligible for funding aiming at fighting Youth unemployment, such as the Youth Employment Initiative, this is why the clear distinction of the two strands is crucial.
- 8. Involvement of Key stakeholders of the field in the implementation of ESC.** Youth organisations, volunteers based organisations and organisations of the solidarity sector should be regularly consulted in the implementation and monitoring of the initiative. Young people could also be involved in the monitoring process, through a tool to rate their experience for instance.

¹ http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/04/internship_charter_EN.pdf