

Public consultation on the European Solidarity Corps

YES Forum's Position – Feedback from the field, 2 April 2017

Based on the feedback and experiences of our member organisations, all youth and social NGOs working with and for young people with fewer opportunities at the local, regional, national and European levels, the YES Forum prepared this position paper to complement its reply to the ongoing **Public consultation on the European Solidarity Corps**.

The YES Forum and its members welcome the European Solidarity Corps for the **renewed impetus and commitment it gives to youth and solidarity** policies at the EU level. It brings **greater visibility** to the European Union's efforts towards young Europeans and to create positive social change in European societies. It represents **a great asset to bring European citizens together**, while the current political climate tends to set them apart.

For these reasons, the YES Forum's member organisations have shown enthusiasm and expressed their interest in getting involved in the new European Solidarity corps. However, **to be effective and to avoid jeopardising past and current achievements** in the field of youth and solidarity, the following elements have to be taken into account when preparing the legislative proposal laying ground to the second phase of the Solidarity Corps:

Keep simplification in mind

In December 2016, the European Solidarity Corps was added to an already very complex landscape of programmes and funds supporting mobility schemes in the European Union. Even though it builds upon these existing resources – from Erasmus+ to the ERDF – it created significant **confusion and concerns among youth and social organisations** involved in European cooperation.

The intensive communication efforts carried out by the European Commission since then have created **confusion among young people in the EU** as well. Despite the aim to create a “focal point” for all volunteering and occupational opportunities in the field of solidarity, the Solidarity Corps initiative has for now blurred the main message, especially because it was introduced at the same time as the campaign marking the 30th Anniversary of the Erasmus+ programme.

This confusion comes **at the expense of the simplification efforts carried out in the past decade**. While there is still room for improvement, significant progress has been made, for instance, with the introduction of Erasmus+ in 2014, to the benefit of the participation of both young people and organisations. Simplification should therefore remain a key principle.

To avoid undermining these achievements, **the second phase of the European Solidarity Corps must take into account the objective of simplifying** the current “EU ecosystem”: a whole new programme created in parallel of the multiple, already existing funds dedicated to providing volunteering and occupational mobility opportunities, would create more confusion.

Create synergies rather than an overlapping doppelgänger

As stated in the Communication from the European Commission in December 2016, the European Solidarity Corps **should indeed “supplement [...] rather than replicate existing programme”**.

However, the said Communication also mentions that *“The Solidarity Corps [...] should be financed through its own budget-line on the basis of a separate legal basis [...] and possible budgetary adjustments within the existing financial framework”*.

The YES Forum believes the European Commission should, in order to avoid any overlapping with existing programmes, **seek synergies rather than add a new programme**/fund/scheme to the already long list of financing opportunities in the field of solidarity.

To do so, it could for instance:

- **Secure and even strengthen the funding for existing programmes**, to capitalise on the extensive learning process and administrative procedures organisations have already had to go through to get involved.
- **Build upon the model developed during the Solidarity Corps’ first phase**, which adds no bureaucratic burden to participating organisations, while making it easier to connect engaged young people and relevant organisations and creating a “single window” for all solidarity opportunities;
- **The Solidarity Corps itself should therefore not create brand new funding opportunities itself**, which would come with new administrative and financial procedures, but keep relying on existing programmes while acting as **a focal point, a comprehensive database, and a “solidarity label”**;
- **Incorporate the Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+ in the long run**, and in case the Solidarity Corps eventually comprises new mobility schemes on its own, mimic the existing Erasmus+ administrative, financial and reporting rules to provide a clear frame to interested organisations.
- **Make sure internships and volunteering don’t replace paid employment.**

Above all, the European Commission should secure the achievements made in the past decade in regard to all EU volunteering, solidarity and mobility schemes. YES Forum’s member organisations are indeed **worried the European Solidarity Corps could undermine the EU’s latest efforts**, especially in providing more and better opportunities to young European through Erasmus+

Avoid additional bureaucracy

The YES Forum concurs with the objective of setting up *“a thorough accreditation process while **keeping the process non-bureaucratic**”*, as stated in the Communication on the European Solidarity corps in December 2016.

At the same time, the Commission should be careful not to complicate accreditation: an additional accreditation process, adding up to the long list of accreditations required in the existing programmes – Erasmus+ is just the tip of the iceberg – would come to the detriment of more participation from organisations, as it would in any case involve one more accreditation process, bureaucratic or not.

Instead, the Solidarity Corps could rely on the already established accreditation processes: it should rely on the model set up in the first phase of the Solidarity Corps, which makes it easy for any organisation already involved to join in, without any additional time, cost or administrative constraint. This way EVS accredited organisations are, especially, encouraged to use the Solidarity Corps.

Strengthen the focus on youngsters with fewer opportunities

Finally, while the Communication on the European Solidarity Corps acknowledged that “*Young Europeans need [...] more accessible opportunities*” and that the Solidarity Corps should be “*inclusive and non-elitist [...], supporting the participation of minorities as well as vulnerable groups*”, it **lacks an actual, strong emphasis on helping youngsters with fewer opportunities** in priority.

The Communication on the European Solidarity Corps – and its implementation during the first phase – is indeed focusing much more on matching skills (“*suitable candidates*”) with the needs of organisations. To really provide disadvantaged youngsters with more opportunities, the focus should also be **the other way around: matching the needs of young applicants with the skills of organisations** committed to help youngsters with fewer opportunities.

The accessibility of all opportunities provided through the Solidarity Corps should therefore be a key priority, at present overlooked in the communication. Dedicated **training, language training tools and certification are only part of the required features** to make the Solidarity Corps, and the existing programmes it relies on, actually inclusive.

Other elements are necessary to better include youngsters with fewer opportunities. Inspired of the efforts made under the Erasmus+ programmes, these could involve:

- **A higher priority to project applications focusing on disadvantaged youngsters;**
- **Specific additional funding to reach out, prepare and support youngsters with fewer opportunities,** such as Reinforced mentorship schemes, while making these less bureaucratic than they are currently.

About the YES Forum EWIV – Youth and European Social Work Forum

YES Forum is a European network of 34 NGOs from 18 EU member states working with and for young people with fewer opportunities. Collectively, the network reaches over 650 000 young people across Europe.

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