

Public Consultation on the European Solidarity Corps

EPHA Response
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european public health alliance





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European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps will create opportunities for young people to support communities and people in need. These opportunities will include volunteering and solidarity-related jobs, traineeships and apprenticeships, both in young people's home countries and abroad. Participants will have the opportunity to be placed with a project either for volunteering or for a traineeship, an apprenticeship or a job for a period between 2 and 12 months.

Participants will be able to engage in a broad range of activities such as education, **health**, social integration, assistance in the provision of food, shelter construction, reception, support and integration of migrants and refugees, environmental protection or prevention of natural disasters. Young people registering for the European Solidarity Corps will need to subscribe to the European Solidarity Corps Mission Statement and its Principles. Each participating organisation will need to adhere to the European Solidarity Corps Charter, setting out the rights and responsibilities during all stages of the solidarity experience.

Young people between 17 and 30 can register with the European Solidarity Corps on <http://europa.eu/solidarity-corps>. The minimum age to participate in a project is 18. The aim is to have 100,000 young people joining the European Solidarity Corps by the end of 2020.

European Solidarity Corps in the Health Programme

In 2017, beneficiaries of operating grants will be encouraged to use the European Solidarity Corps. An estimated EUR 60,000 will be available for these NGOs to actively involve participants in the European Solidarity Corps in the health sector. Based on the outcome of a targeted outreach with health stakeholders further proposals could be developed.

Public Consultation

The Commission is now consulting stakeholders and the general public to define key priorities and shape the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps.

The timeframe of the public consultation is 6 February 2017 - 2 April 2017

The consultation results will inform the Commission's legislative proposal to be presented in Spring 2017. The Commission will summarise the replies and publish them shortly after the end of the consultation period.

You can access the public consultation on https://ec.europa.eu/info/content/public-consultation-european-solidarity-corps_en



General comments

(to be uploaded as 'final comments' at the end of the questionnaire – 1000 characters maximum)

EPHA and our members have been consulted as partner organisations.. The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) can be described as a "top down" attempt to promote the social dimension of Europe, alongside the Social Pillar process. This is not necessarily negative - youth need employment, volunteerism can promote solidarity and bring new skills.

However, the ESC needs to be a "triple win": for young people, for the participating NGOs / agencies, and most of all for local communities and local authorities.

EPHA is concerned that the process is too rushed since there was no opportunity to provide more in-depth inputs prior to the recent stakeholder meetings. As discussions are now taking place in various fora (including the Health Policy Forum in the health sector) and involving various DGs – including DG SANTÉ, many NGOs would welcome continuous involvement in the evaluation and improvement of the process in light of this experience, and to further explore how the health sector could contribute.

Positive points

EPHA understands that the plan is to build up a roster of candidates with specific, useful profiles. Such an approach might be particularly useful for organisations operating in crisis situations and who require specific volunteer profiles (e.g. translators, mediators).

Although we understand that there will only be a transnational dimension during the pilot phase in 2017, it is important to ensure that foreign volunteers do not "compete" with local unemployed youth, e.g. in Greece: involving foreign volunteers can sometimes send the wrong message and it can create tension. Hence it would be welcome if the volunteers could indicate whether they would like to participate in the Corps in their home countries or abroad.

Developing a spirit of solidarity has to be the driving factor - this could also be attractive to young migrants who wish to make a difference in "their" communities.

Promoting mobility within the EU in times of crisis / high youth unemployment.

Could create a better image for Europe; similar to Erasmus, which remains very popular.

Potential for peer support.

Providing work opportunities based on lived experience is a positive thing.

Clear guidelines for employers and volunteers would be beneficial.



Some concerns

Volunteerism should not become "social dumping" - young people may in reality be over- or underemployed during their placements. ESC should by no means result in existing jobs being replaced.

Mental health patients are very vulnerable to abuse, inappropriate remarks and behaviours: young people may lack experience to handle certain situations (older volunteers could in some cases be more deployable because they can draw on life experience)

Great attention should be placed on recruitment and training: involving volunteers requires implementation of the same procedures as hiring paid staff and may require additional mentoring and, coaching as well as evaluation of their involvement. Smaller NGOs do not have the capacity to run volunteer programmes

Individuals should not sign up to a "charter" but abide by the host organisation's principles

ESC should not be "elitist" and only attract well qualified / highly educated individuals; it should help long-term unemployed young people to gain appropriate skills

Danger that it could undermine other programmes and budget lines

Giving service to Europe can sometimes pose conflicts of interest, e.g. in CEE patient organisations have received government funding, which may compromise their advocacy work

Hosting organisation will have direct and indirect costs related in engaging with the ESC. These direct and indirect costs – including time and resources allocated to managing the volunteers – should be taken into account and acknowledged.

Suggestions for improvements from a health point of view

Given the existing collaboration between the European Commission and the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region, potential ways how WHO Europe can be involved into this exercise should be assessed Likewise, the extension of the geographical scope to the WHO Europe region could be also assessed.

The ESC can offer a potential for patients to be engaged with volunteers.

The ESC has a potential to contribute to healthcare-specific activities which would contribute for improving the service provided.

Specific attention should be paid to involving ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups (migrants, Roma) and engaging with them via the ESC could facilitate their access to healthcare services.



General questions to all respondents

At present, a European Solidarity Corps placement can be either as a volunteer ('the volunteering strand') or as an apprentice, trainee or employee ('the occupational strand').

At the moment the person needs to be between 17 and 30 years when registering; the actual European Solidarity Corps placement cannot start before the age of 18.

The geographical scope of the European Solidarity Corps currently covers the EU and, where relevant, other countries participating in the various existing financing instruments contributing to the European Solidarity Corps.

What should be the priorities of the European Solidarity Corps?

Strengthening solidarity activities benefitting people and communities in need

Creating more opportunities for young people to express their solidarity

Creating more opportunities for organisations to do solidarity projects

Promoting the engagement of young people in society

How could we foster a common spirit among European Solidarity Corps participants?

Common induction training

Alumni activities

What would be the best ways to facilitate access to the European Solidarity Corps for young people from a disadvantaged background or with special needs?

Additional allowances

Additional training

Additional guidance for registration

Additional mentoring during the placement

How could the European Solidarity Corps be easily accessible for individuals and organisations?

Easy validation or accreditation processes for organisations

Easy funding application processes for organisations

Easy registration processes for individuals

Information and guidance from specialised services



Questions for persons replying on behalf of organisations

Regarding any solidarity related activities that your organisation is engaged in at the moment, are you engaging:

Trainees

Employees

Would your organisation be interested in offering the following types of placements for solidarity related activities to participants from the European Solidarity Corps?

Volunteering placements

Please quantify the number of placements that your organisation might offer on average per year for each type of placement?

Volunteering placements: 1

Is receiving EU funding a prerequisite for your organisation to be able to offer the following European Solidarity Corps placements?

For volunteering placements? - **Yes**

What would be your organisation's motivation to engage the Corps participants for solidarity related activities?

To contribute to change in society

What kind of preparation would you consider essential for a young person from the European Solidarity Corps to be a potential candidate for a placement with your organisation, whether as a volunteer, trainee, apprentice or employee?

Training specific to the tasks that the project will entail

Would you be looking for specific profiles in terms of qualifications, skills and experience?

No specific level of education

Foreign language skills

Intercultural skills

'Soft skills' e.g. communication, team-working or multi-tasking skills

Is it challenging to find the people with the right skills and experience for your solidarity related projects?

No



Questions for organisations prepared to offer placements for training, apprenticeships or employment

Would you be willing to engage European Solidarity Corps trainees, apprentices or employees from:

No preferences (including EU and non-EU countries)

For what duration(s) would you like to offer traineeship, apprenticeship or employment placements?

3-6 months

About EPHA

EPHA is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the EU Civil Society Contact Group and the Better Regulation Watchdog.

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