

European Solidarity Corps

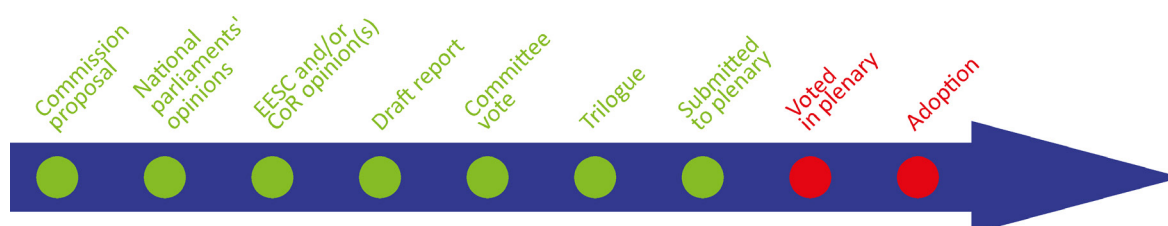
OVERVIEW

The Commission launched the European Solidarity Corps in a December 2016 communication, and the present proposal for a regulation would set its legal basis, define the budgetary and implementation arrangements, specify objectives and define key terms. The Corps would have a volunteering strand on the one hand and a smaller occupational strand (traineeships and jobs) on the other. All placements focus on solidarity actions and will last between 2 to 12 months.

The proposal set a target of 100 000 participants, with a proposed budget of €341.5 million, for the 2018-2020 period. In its resolution on the issue in April 2017, the European Parliament had insisted that the initiative should not drain other programmes. Notwithstanding that, the Commission proposed that only 25 % of the budget would be new money. Parliament reiterated its position in its resolution of July 2017 and again in the report adopted by the CULT committee ahead of trilogue negotiations. Council, however, came to the negotiating table seeking a budget that was totally dependent on redeployments. Finally, the European Parliament negotiators managed to secure €76 million (20 %) fresh money, complemented by a redistribution that favours volunteering more strongly, and the inclusion of safeguards to avoid exploitation for profit-making purposes.

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps and amending Regulations (EU) No 1288/2013, (EU) No 1293/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1305/2013, (EU) No 1306/2013 and Decision No 1313/2013/EU

<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Culture and Education (CULT)	COM(2017) 262 30.5.2017
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, Germany)	2017/0102(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Michaela Šojdrová (EPP, Czech Republic) Silvia Costa (S&D, Italy) Morten Messerschmidt (ECR, Denmark) Maria Teresa Gimenez Barbat (ALDE, Spain) Isabella Adinolfi (EFDD, Italy)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	First-reading vote in plenary	



Introduction

The European Solidarity Corps was announced during the 2016 [State of the Union speech](#). In his address, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stressed the importance of investing in young people by providing them with new opportunities to engage in solidarity projects, make a perceivable contribution to society and to develop a range of skills. The intention is both to encourage a sense of belonging to the European project by fostering one of its most basic values and to help young Europeans improve their job prospects, given the persistent coexistence of high levels of youth unemployment and skills mismatch. The official launch on 7 December 2016 presented the [initiative](#) as part of a package with two other items: the communications '[Investing in Europe's Youth](#)' and 'Improving and [Modernising Education](#)'. The legislative proposal was published on 30 May 2017.

The [explanatory memorandum](#) introducing the proposal mentions the Rome Declaration in which the leaders of 27 Member States, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission stated that solidarity strengthens the European Union and makes it more resilient. The European Solidarity Corps was endorsed by the European Council in its conclusions of 15 December 2016 and it was indicated as a priority in the Joint Declarations on the EU's legislative priorities for both 2017 and 2018.

Existing situation

The explanatory memorandum points out that not enough has been done to match young people who wish to do something for society with entities seeking collaborators to carry out voluntary activities in situations of need. A 2015 [flash Eurobarometer](#) survey indicates that while 25 % of young people across the EU had participated in organised voluntary activities in the previous 12 months, 88 % of those interviewed had not volunteered because they had not found the opportunity to do so. Only 6 % of young Europeans ever volunteered abroad. Furthermore, by analysing information from the [Eures portal](#) the Commission became aware that 50 000 job-seekers were interested in working in solidarity-related sectors abroad. The failure to match demand and supply at both ends is due to a high degree of fragmentation in the sector and a lack of resources to increase visibility. To address this situation, the Commission is proposing to allocate €341.5 million to involve 100 000 young people in the European Solidarity Corps between 2018 and 2020.

Parliament's starting position

In a [resolution](#) of 6 April 2017, the European Parliament asked the Commission to define the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps clearly, to ensure an enriching experience both for the young participants and receiving communities. A sound legislative framework would avoid the risk that placements are misused to replace jobs or structured civil protection and humanitarian aid. The Parliament insists that the Corps needs its own funding and should form part of a broader strategy on volunteering and youth employment policies in the Member States. MEPs also called for a clear distinction between the volunteering and employment strands. High quality opportunities should be genuinely accessible to all, including differently abled young persons and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The resolution recommended proper coordination between the Commission, European and national institutions, as well as effective consultation of key stakeholders – who should be involved regularly in the implementation and monitoring of the initiative.

Council starting position

Commissioner Tibor Navracsics presented the European Solidarity Corps, as part of the new European Youth Initiative during the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council [meeting](#) held in Brussels in November 2016. Ministers generally welcomed the initiative and agreed on the importance of reaching young people using 'their' tools of communication. Ministers were in favour

of increasing opportunities for mobility and volunteering, to embody European civic values more concretely. They thought this fostered social cohesion and made it possible for young people to experience the value of the European project.

Council [conclusions](#) of 17 February 2017 highlighted the potential of the European Solidarity Corps to widen opportunities for volunteering and participation in social initiatives. The conclusions valued the fact that such opportunities help young people build the necessary soft skills to transit smoothly into gainful employment and to participate actively in an inclusive and democratic society. Therefore, they urged the Commission to come forward with an appropriate and evidence-based legislative proposal and a clear framework that covers funding, implementation and evaluation. The conclusions pointed out that the Corps should reach its objectives in a cost-effective way, by providing placements which are rich in opportunities to learn and which improve prospects of personal, social and professional development without causing undesirable effects on the labour market.

Preparation of the proposal

The European Commission did not provide an impact assessment with its proposal, as the European Solidarity Corps had already been established by a communication presented in December 2016. However, an [ex-ante evaluation](#) was carried out to examine whether the initiative was useful in providing young people with opportunities to participate in solidarity actions which address unmet social, institutional or organisational needs. This evaluation was necessary given the financial outlay of the initiative.

The evaluation identified issues with the piecemeal approach that currently characterises the field of solidarity, making it difficult for young people to engage. On the other hand, the Corps could provide young people with a highly visible single access point. The evaluation also confirmed the usefulness of the initiative in offering the same opportunities to young people across the Member States to put solidarity and citizenship into practice, and to benefit from the same quality standards and recognition of acquired learning. The evaluation claimed that youth participation can be positively associated with economic growth, but given the small size of the intervention and its spread across different sectors in all the Member States, it would be impossible to measure any economic impact. The increase in demand for transport, and consequently of greenhouse gas emissions would be negligible compared to the overall mobility flux in Europe. On the other hand, the potential for engagement with environmental issues was seen as beneficial. The proposal was also deemed to respect all relevant articles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

The ex-ante evaluation also examined whether it would be better to maintain the arrangement adopted for the first phase (the launch of the portal and sending out the first volunteers) or to introduce an autonomous initiative with its own objectives, even if this built on the experience of existing programmes. For the time being, the application mechanisms, the rules to award grants to organisations, the geographical scope and the evaluation rules of each programme associated with the European Solidarity Corps [apply](#). The option of using the legal basis of one of the contributing programmes was immediately eliminated as this was deemed to lead to overly complex arrangements. It would have also limited the visibility of the initiative and led to disengagement from other programmes. Using the criteria of accessibility, quality, inclusiveness, synergy, efficiency and simplicity of management, an autonomous initiative was the preferred choice. This would offer a single access point making the initiative more visible. It was also seen to offer better possibilities to be inclusive and to be more cost-effective.

The evaluation further concluded that a combination of direct and indirect management would be more cost-effective, but it also noted that sufficient and consistent resources were needed to reach the target of mobilising 100 000 young people by 2020.

The changes the proposal would bring

The proposal sets out the legal framework for the European Solidarity Corps, giving it the mission to offer young people opportunities to engage in solidarity activities which will help them improve their skills and competencies on a personal, educational, social, civic and professional level. At the same time, the activities need to address real unmet societal needs by strengthening communities. They also need to be of a high quality and properly validated. The activities of the European Solidarity Corps need to be consistent with and complementary to equivalent EU and national policies, programmes and schemes in the fields of youth, solidarity, education and vocational training. The Commission proposed that around 80 % of the solidarity placements would be of a full-time voluntary nature, while 20 % would come in the form of traineeships or jobs.

Young people would already be able to register on the European Solidarity Corps [portal](#) at age 17 but they will only be able to take up a placement when they are between 18 and 30 years old. Special measures are to be put in place to promote the participation of disadvantaged young people and to counter the constraints of remoteness. Participants could also form informal groups and propose their own solidarity projects, which could be carried out locally, provided they have a European dimension.

Accredited organisations were able to start using the database to find potential candidates for their voluntary placements in [March 2017](#), while the jobs and traineeships track was kicked off with two projects led by the Italian and French public employment services in [July 2017](#). The first group of volunteers arrived in Norcia, Italy in [August 2017](#), to help rebuild the earthquake-hit region.

Entities that want to offer placements in the Corps must adhere to the [charter](#) which sets out what is expected of them, and undergo conformity checks in order to receive a quality label. This gives access to the portal, but does not automatically lead to funding. A process of periodic reassessment could lead to revocation of the label if conditions are no longer met. However, this procedure does not apply to natural persons who seek financial support for an informal group of participants proposing their own solidarity project.

The implementation structures are charged with identifying measurable and realistic indicators to monitor and evaluate performance in light of the Corps' spirit. They are also responsible for publicity with the support of other key stakeholders, which includes both outreach and dissemination activities. The European Solidarity Corps will use the same management arrangements as Erasmus+ to maximise efficiency and efficacy: the Commission draws up and updates policy; the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency is in charge of running centralised actions; national agencies are charged with running the decentralised actions; national authorities are designated to monitor the Corps closely at national level and to choose an independent audit body to ensure legal certainty and the sound use of finances. These structures are identified in Chapter III of Regulation (EU) No [1288/2013](#) establishing the education, youth and sport funding programme, Erasmus+. The proposal also refers to Regulation (EU) No [182/2011](#) to confer implementing power on the Commission to ensure uniform implementation, and Regulation (EU, Euratom) No [966/2012](#) on the drawing up of a work programme in conformity with the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the EU.

The Commission proposed that sections in Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 related to the European Voluntary Service be amended to avoid overlap with the European Solidarity Corps. The distinction was one of geographical cover: the European Solidarity Corps would be charged with all projects that only involve the 28 Member States, while the European Voluntary Service would only cover projects that include non-EU programme and partner countries. The two types of volunteering placements were to be considered equivalent, and any references to the [European Voluntary Service](#) in EU legislation would also apply to the European Solidarity Corps. Consequently, some of the appropriations financing the European Voluntary Service were redeployed to the European Solidarity Corps to reflect the transfer of activities.

The proposal called for a total budget of €341.5 million in current prices, for 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020. Of this, €86.5 million would be new money from the commitments reserve. An envelope of €255 million would be diverted from a number of programmes: €197.7 million from [Erasmus+](#), €35 million from the [European Social Fund](#), €10 million from the [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation](#), €6 million from the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#), €4.5 million from the [LIFE programme](#) and €1.8 million from the [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development](#). A participating country can also make additional national funding available to beneficiaries, which needs to be managed in accordance with the rules of the Corps through the decentralised structures of the European Solidarity Corps.

Member States and other participating countries are expected to remove any legal and administrative barriers which hinder the proper functioning of the Corps.

Advisory committees

In May 2017, the European Committee of the Regions adopted an [opinion](#) on 'Investing in Europe's youth and the European Solidarity Corps' (Rapporteur: Paweł Grzybowski, ECR, Poland), in which it drew attention to the need to promote the European Solidarity Corps through administrative simplification for participation in volunteering activities. It welcomed the emphasis on interregional and cross-border cooperation but underlined the need for a focus on local volunteering. The activities of the European Solidarity Corps should be designed in such a way as to harness the potential of youth organisations and voluntary work present in Europe.

The European Economic and Social Committee organised a [public hearing](#) in July 2017, in preparation of its [opinion](#) on the European Solidarity Corps due to be adopted in October 2018 (Rapporteurs: Michael McLoughlin, Diversity Europe - Group III – Various Interests, Ireland; and Antonello Pezzini, Group I – Employers, Italy). The [draft opinion](#) welcomes the effort to raise awareness of European citizenship and that the legal basis features priorities that had been expressed by civil society organisations. However, youth organisations and social partners need to participate in the co-management of the initiative. The opinion expresses concern over the merging of the Corps's goals with employment policies. The draft opinion also seeks support for youth organisations to prepare young people, including disadvantaged ones, better prior to placements.

National parliaments

The deadline for the submission of 'reasoned opinions' on the grounds of subsidiarity was [1 September 2017](#). Four national parliaments opened political dialogue on the proposal, although none adopted a reasoned opinion on the question of subsidiarity.

The senate of the [Czech Republic](#) did not agree that the financing of the Corps should depend heavily on redeployments, it suggested that third countries be included, particularly those of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans. It did not support the removal of the Member States from the European Voluntary Service which would lead to its termination. It also requested a clear distinction between voluntary activities and job placements, to safeguard against cheap labour.

The [Bundesrat](#) in Germany upheld the value of solidarity and personality formation in both the European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps. It advised against mixing voluntary work with employment in the social sector. It also pointed out that Erasmus+ already suffered from a lack of funds and the situation should not deteriorate further.

Following the opinion of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Prime Ministerial and Home Affairs, General Organisation of the State and the Civil Service, the Italian Senate endorsed the Corps, suggesting that it should focus mainly on supporting those states which are more likely to face emergencies.

Following the opinion of the Commission of Culture, Communication, Youth and Sport, the Portuguese Parliament identified no issues of subsidiarity and so concluded the scrutiny procedure.

Stakeholders' views¹

The Commission received almost 700 replies and about 80 position papers during its online public consultation. It also organised a forum attended by 700 participants and carried out targeted consultations with Member States and key stakeholders such as voluntary and solidarity organisations, youth representatives, social partners, companies, beneficiaries, national authorities, and national agencies of the Erasmus+ programme.

In general, positive comments focused on the political recognition of young people's engagement and the potential for new opportunities. They also highlighted the initiative's potential in fostering inter-generational and inter-European solidarity, in promoting common values and in encouraging integration. However, stakeholders pointed out that clear efforts needed to be made so that the Corps would be truly inclusive and would offer real possibilities to all young people. Therefore, stakeholders were favourable to solidarity activities that took place locally, as this makes it easier for disadvantaged young people to participate.

Most stakeholders insisted on the need for sufficient additional funding to meet current and future needs, and many requested a separate budget so as not to deplete existing programmes. Stakeholders agreed that the European Solidarity Corps could use existing structures but the roles of different implementing bodies needed to be clarified to achieve efficiency and effectiveness and avoid unnecessary administrative burdens.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns over the risk of redundancy. This could be avoided if the European Solidarity Corps built synergies with existing schemes having similar aims, such as the Youth Voluntary Service. Representatives of voluntary organisations argued that the Corps should have a stronger focus on solidarity than the 'Youth Voluntary Service', with a clear definition of 'solidarity activities'. Participants at a [conference](#) on the European Solidarity Corps held by the S&D group in June 2017 at the European Parliament pointed out that the experience of helping others in need would be emancipatory for disadvantaged young people who are more often at the receiving end.

At the same time, voluntary activities can bring about informal learning, as young people develop skills and competencies. Stakeholders also indicated the need to train volunteers prior to placements, and to issue a certificate afterwards. These elements would in turn form part of the volunteers' non-formal education.

Participants at the above-mentioned conference suggested the inclusion of existing voluntary organisations as sending organisations. Their experience would be valuable both in preparing young volunteers and to provide follow-up after a placement. This could encourage young people to keep up some form of voluntary engagement upon their return, and in this way increase the benefits for the young participants and society.

A clear distinction between voluntary and work experience placements is seen as necessary in order to avoid the exploitation of voluntary work as free labour that replaces real jobs. The quality of placements also needs to be assured.

Legislative process

The Commission's proposal was discussed for the first time in the Council on 15 June 2017 at working party level. The European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) nominated Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, Germany) as rapporteur. The Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) and the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) are associated under Rule 54, with the EMPL committee having exclusive competences on some parts of the occupational strand.

The rapporteur published her [draft report](#) on 19 September. It acknowledged the importance of the initiative to promote solidarity among young people. For this reason, the rapporteur was in favour

of removing the employment part from the programme, in order to strengthen the volunteer service as a whole. The rapporteur questioned the compatibility of profit-oriented companies with the concept of solidarity. She also asserted that the proposal created dangerous gaps which could be used to exploit cheap labour or to compensate for a shortage of skilled workers. Furthermore, national agencies working in the youth sector are ill equipped to resolve employment policy issues, as the two policy areas follow different logics. It is also possible that young people would perceive the voluntary strand as 'second best', thus devaluing the very core of the initiative. The rapporteur suggested that a better option would be to expand the 'Youth Guarantee' and the 'Youth Employment Initiative' to address youth employment issues. On the other hand, the voluntary strand should prioritise the inclusion of disadvantaged young people, and efforts needed to be made to involve local individuals and organisations who already organise volunteering, to reach out personally to groups of young people that would not be reached by a portal.

A public hearing took place in Parliament on 10 October 2017 with the participation of Commissioner Navracsics and representatives of youth and volunteering organisations. Participants stressed the need for more fresh money, clearer definitions, a clear distinction between the two strands, easier access for people with disabilities, measures to ensure volunteering does not replace jobs and more involvement of participants.

During its [meeting](#) of 20 November 2017, the Education Council agreed on a general approach on the proposal. The Council's position was that the European Solidarity Corps should be open to citizens aged between 18 and 30, from the EU, acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and European Economic Area (EEA), and European Neighbourhood Policy countries. Solidarity activities would include volunteering, traineeships, jobs and youth-led projects, with a budget that would be 100 % redeployed from heading 1a 'Competitiveness for growth and employment' of the EU multiannual financial framework 2014-2020.

The European Parliament's Committees on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Budgets (BUDG), Regional Development (REGI) and Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) each submitted an opinion while the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) decided not to. These opinions were issued ahead of the vote in the CULT committee which took place on 21 February 2018. The draft report passed by a large majority. The mandate for opening interinstitutional negotiations with the Council was announced during the March plenary session. Negotiations started immediately, with the aim of reaching agreement under the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council.

On 27 June 2018, Parliament's negotiators announced that they had reached an informal agreement with the Bulgarian Presidency. Parliament's negotiators secured that 20 % (€76 million) of the funding would be fresh money, and that no major cuts would be made to Erasmus+. Although less than envisaged in the original proposal, Council had come to the negotiating table reluctant to allocate any fresh money at all. Parliament's negotiators also secured that 90 % of the budget (rather than 80% in the proposal) would go to volunteering activities in a wide range of spheres such as education, health, environmental protection, disaster prevention, provision of food and non-food items, and the reception and integration of migrants and asylum-seekers. It was a top priority for Parliament to ensure that only non-profit activities would be supported, and so it established safeguards within the regulation to avoid any abuse for profit-making purposes. The agreement also extends participation in the Corps beyond the EU Member States to the three EEA countries as well as Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) approved the compromise text during its meeting of 27 June 2018. The text was then endorsed by the CULT committee on 11 July 2018. It is now due to be voted on by Parliament as a whole during its September plenary session, before it can then be formally adopted by the Council.

EP SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

[European Solidarity Corps and volunteering](#), Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, European Parliament, September 2017.

[Youth](#), Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament, September 2017.

OTHER SOURCES

[European Solidarity Corps](#), European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEIL).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'EP supporting analysis'.

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