

EU Solidarity Corps not to be funded with Erasmus+ budget, urge culture MEPs

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The new European Solidarity Corps deserves its own budget – it should not be funded at the expense of the Erasmus+ or Europe for Citizens programmes, urge Culture and Education Committee MEPs in a resolution voted on Wednesday. Offering young people an opportunity to take part in solidarity schemes all over Europe would help them to gain experience for future long-term jobs, they add.

The Solidarity Corps, proposed by the European Commission in December 2016, aims to enable young people aged 17 to 30 to take part in all kinds of solidarity activities in areas such as education, health, reception and integration of migrants, social and labour market integration and environment protection. An estimated 100,000 young people could take part in this initiative by 2020, either through volunteering or job placement.

Legislation in the making must include separate budget line

The Commission is expected to table a comprehensive legislative proposal by May. However, the initial 2017 phase of the Solidarity Corps has already kicked off and the Commission wants to fund it with more than €58 million initially allocated to the Erasmus + and Europe for Citizens programmes.

Committee chair Petra Kammerevert (S&D, DE) said: “New ideas need fresh money. Today, we have pointed out that the European Solidarity Corps might work well - if we construct it carefully in the beginning”.

“This carefulness includes allocating the Corps its own funds, not diverting money for it from well-functioning and established programmes, and especially not from Erasmus+ or employment initiatives. We expect the Corps to add real value and so it is crucial that all participants get proper preparation, professional support and care. We would also like to ensure that taking part in this project is a big “plus” in everyone's CV. So it has to be made easy to recognize and to validate participation in this new initiative”, she added.

Avoid exploitation of young people

The resolution also calls for a clear distinction between volunteering activities and job placements, to ensure that no participating organisation uses young people as unpaid volunteers when potential quality jobs are available.

MEPs also underline that Solidarity Corps activities should primarily meet local needs and rely on existing and well-established volunteering schemes. Host organisations should subscribe to a quality charter setting out agreed objectives and principles. To help young people into the job market, skills and competences acquired during the two to twelve months' experience should be recognised and validated, they add.

Next steps

The Culture and Education Committee will table a question to the Commission for an oral reply at the April plenary session. Following a debate, the draft resolution will be put to the vote by the full House.

Background

Press release

The European Solidarity Corps is a new initiative announced by EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2016. The Commission published a Communication in December 2016 establishing the principles, the main participation criteria and the calendar of the full implementation.

The European Solidarity Corps will support young people of 17 to 30 years old carrying out voluntary service for between two and twelve months in their own or another country. It will bring together two complementary strands: volunteering and occupational. It includes a wide range of activities in areas such as education and youth activities, health, social and labour market integration, assistance in the provision of food and non-food items, shelter construction, site construction, renovation and management, reception, support and integration of migrants and refugees, post-conflict reconciliation, environmental protection and nature conservation.

The first phase is to include the use of existing financing programmes and resources: Erasmus+ (€58 million), Employment and Social Innovation programme (€14.2 million), LIFE Programme (€2 million), Europe for Citizens programme (€3.5 million per year starting from 2018), Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, European Regional Development Fund (€1 million) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (€1.3 million from the 2016 budget and up to € 0.5 million from the 2017 budget) and Health Programme (€60,000). The second phase, taking account of input from stakeholders, is planned to be a consolidation process and robust roll-out of the European Solidarity Corps until 2020.

Further information

- Committee on Culture and Education: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/cult/home.html>
- Communication from the Commission - A European Solidarity Corps -: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/COM-2016-942-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>
- European Commission webpage - Solidarity Corps : https://europa.eu/youth/SOLiDARITY_en

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