

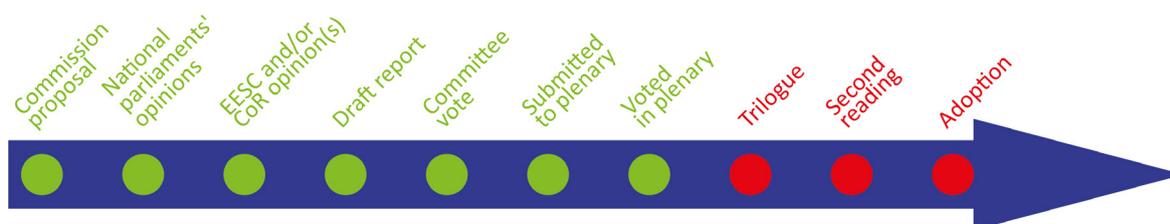
European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027

OVERVIEW

The financial allocation for the European Commission proposal for a European Solidarity Corps programme is €1 260 million at current prices. Projected to offer opportunities for 350 000 18 to 30 year olds from 2021 to 2027, the programme is included under Heading 2 'Cohesion and Values' of the multiannual financial framework covering the same period. In its initial phases, the European Solidarity Corps suffered from unsuccessful branding and communication, as it came into direct competition with two similar programmes, the European Voluntary Service and the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative. The new proposal merges these programmes. The distinctive feature of the European Solidarity Corps today is that it brings together volunteering, traineeship and job opportunities for young people with a clear focus on solidarity projects and uses existing management structures to maximise focus on delivery and performance. In view of the importance of solidarity to the wider European project, and the potential of this programme to contribute towards this spirit, a report by Parliament's Culture and Education Committee adopted in plenary points out that the definition of solidarity should be the unifying principle in the programme's implementation.

Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Solidarity Corps programme and repealing [European Solidarity Corps Regulation] and Regulation (EU) No 375/2014

<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Culture and Education (CULT)	COM(2018) 440 11.6.2018
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Michaela Šojdrová (EPP, Czech Republic)	2018/0230(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Silvia Costa (S&D, Italy) Angel Dzhambazki (ECR, Bulgaria) María Teresa Giménez Barbat (ALDE, Spain) Curzio Maltese (GUE/NGL, Italy) Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, Germany) Isabella Adinolfi (EFDD, Italy) Dominique Bilde (ENF, France)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Launch of trilogue negotiations	



Introduction

On 11 June 2018, in the context of proposals for the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, the European Commission published a proposal for a regulation establishing a European Solidarity Corps programme, with a financial allocation of [€1 260 million](#) at current prices, included under Heading 2, '[Cohesion and Values](#)'. The Commission projects that the 2021-2027 programme will offer opportunities to 350 000 persons between the ages of 18 and 30 years. The main objective of the programme is to tap into some young people's propensity to act in solidarity as a way to boost their engagement with the world, offer them opportunities to develop their skill set, and help them improve their employability.

Context

The [European Solidarity Corps](#) was established in two phases following the Commission President's [State of the Union](#) address of 14 September 2016. In the first phase, eight different EU programmes were mobilised to offer volunteering, traineeship or job opportunities targeting 100 000 participants by 2020. Subsequently, during the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the signature of the [Treaty of Rome](#), EU leaders reiterated their commitment to the shared values of unity and solidarity in the [Rome Declaration](#), lending further endorsement to the Corps.

During its plenary sitting in September 2018, the European Parliament [adopted](#) the agreement it had reached with the European Council to give the Corps a legal framework for the 2018-2020 period. This launched the second phase of the programme, which brought in fresh money, in addition to contributions from funding programmes such as [Erasmus+](#). The proposal for the 2021-2027 period therefore further consolidates the initiative, with new, completely autonomous funding, introduces a uniform set of rules and a wider scope of activities.

The new proposal includes merging the Corps with the [EU Aid Volunteers Initiative](#), with which it shares similarities. The aim of the EU Aid Volunteers programme is to provide needs-based humanitarian aid and to strengthen the capacities and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries. The Commission indicates that stakeholders welcome the merger, and that the number of EU aid volunteers was less than initially hoped. The Commission argues that if the humanitarian aid dimension is promoted properly, it could become a stepping-stone to a professional career in the humanitarian sector.

The current European Solidarity Corps regulation is based on Articles 165(4) and 166(4) of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#). These articles come under Part 3 of the Treaty, dealing with 'Union policies and internal action by the Union'. This places the Corps in the education, training and youth policy fields, which are the sole competence of the Member States. The European Parliament and Council therefore only enact legislation to create incentive measures that fall short of harmonising the laws and regulations of the Member States. On the other hand, the EU Aid Volunteers regulation is based on Article 214, which falls under Part 5 of the Treaty: 'External action by the Union'. At the same time, Article 4 of the Treaty establishes humanitarian aid as a shared competence between the EU and its Member States.

However, as the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps and the EU Aid Volunteers are similar, the Commission argues that the two can be incorporated in one programme if the objectives are modified to increase the geographical scope. The new proposal includes the legal basis for both programmes and deals with 'Aid' actions in a separate chapter, so as not to dilute the action of the EU Aid Volunteers.

Existing situation

The Commission's explanatory memorandum clarifies that some Member States have national civic service programmes, while others facilitate activities carried out by civil society. However, the opportunities available remain uneven among Member States, and fragmentation hinders access to

them. At EU level, the [European Voluntary Service](#) has run for 20 years and [EU Aid Volunteers](#) for 5 years. Other EU initiatives, such as the [Youth Guarantee](#) and [Your First EURES Job](#) aim at helping young people find employment. The distinctive feature of the European Solidarity Corps is that it brings together volunteering, traineeship and job opportunities with a clear focus on solidarity projects, using existing management structures to maximise focus on delivery and performance.

However, the programme inherited a number of challenges from the first and second phases of implementation. In addition to communication and branding issues, opportunities under the occupational strand are lacking. A networking platform is still missing and the system to report results is not yet developed. The [ex-ante evaluation](#) attached to the Commission proposal also points out that the current EU Aid Volunteers scheme application procedure is deemed cumbersome and insufficiently reactive to evolving needs, and that more specifically there is an issue with delays in deployment.

Comparative elements

Two well-established international organisations offer large-scale volunteering opportunities in the solidarity field. The [United Nations Volunteers programme](#) mobilised 6 501 volunteers on the ground (83 % of volunteers were from the global south) in 2017, covering 100 professions and another 17 892 online volunteers (70 % from the global south). Virtual and online volunteering allow volunteers and non-profit organisations to collaborate from any device, anywhere in the world. Both types of volunteers participated in 23 000 assignments. Activities under this programme pursue the [2030 Agenda for sustainable development](#). The programme also seeks to engage citizens through volunteering and to strengthen south-south cooperation.

The [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#) is a humanitarian network guided by seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, universality and unity. In 2017, it mobilised 12 million volunteers from 190 national societies, totalling 166 000 branches. Virtual volunteers carry out some activities.

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 and to provide a sound legislative framework to avoid the risk that placements are misused to replace jobs or structured civil protection and humanitarian aid. Parliament insisted that the Corps needed 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. The resolution recommended proper coordination in the implementation and monitoring of the initiative.

Council starting position

During the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council [meeting](#) held in Brussels in November 2016, ministers welcomed the initiative to increase opportunities for mobility and volunteering. 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 to help young people build the necessary soft skills to transit smoothly into gainful employment and to participate actively in an inclusive and democratic society.

Preparation of the proposal

The European Commission did not carry out an impact assessment to prepare its proposal, which is consistent with the existing Corps. However, it carried out an [ex-ante evaluation](#) in line with the financial regulations due to the level of spending. The European Commission used its ex-ante evaluation to reflect on its experience with running a number of related EU programmes and to draw some lessons. The Commission proposal reports on consultations concerning 'EU funds in the

area of values and mobility', where respondents considered the promotion of solidarity, social inclusion and skills development through mobility to be important. They saw clear EU added value in this area, even though limited budgets and administrative burdens diminish the potential impact.

The evaluation identified a number of challenges that need to be addressed. In its first phase, overlap with some national schemes, confusion regarding the role of the Corps among participants, and its lack of coherence hindered communication. Uptake of occupational activity opportunities was slow, due to insufficient choice. The evaluation notes that action is needed to improve the reporting of results, simplify the application process and improve the efficiency of deployment in humanitarian aid activities. As the Corps consolidates, the need to develop a system of community-building that maintains links between different generations of participants to transmit experiences begins to be felt. The proposal addresses these challenges.

On the positive side, the implementation of the current European Solidarity Corps programme is more accessible than the European Voluntary Service, thanks to greater visibility through pooling of activities. The synergies that resulted from a common framework brought the development of new networks, lower management costs and better results, thanks to economies of scale. As the programme builds on the experience of the European Voluntary Service, it can ensure high quality placements, and has adopted clear and simple conditions and application procedures to make it inclusive. The Commission indicates that 25 % of participants in the European Solidarity Corps currently come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The [initial appraisal](#) by Parliament's staff of the European Commission's impact assessment of the 2012 proposal for a 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps' identified the lack of a structured EU approach to volunteering, poor EU humanitarian sector visibility, a lack of sufficiently qualified volunteers, and the inability of host organisations to ensure that volunteers leave a long-lasting impact, as issues hampering volunteering. It also noted that at the time of its proposal, the Commission had disregarded the possibility of extending the European Voluntary Service to include the 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps'. The initial appraisal had voiced concerns over the potential impact on other humanitarian aid organisations. Later, the set of [European standards](#) on the management of humanitarian volunteers developed by the European Commission for all sending and hosting organisations was seen as an additional guarantee.

The Commission identified a non-exhaustive list of areas that could be supported by the Corps' solidarity and humanitarian activities in a [concept note](#), including setting out provisions on the duration of solidarity activities, and the definitions of volunteering, traineeships and jobs.

The Commission indicates that the proposal respects the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity. The choice of a regulation as a legal instrument does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve its objectives. The Corps achieves its objectives more cheaply and with better results than separate national initiatives. It improves the quality of experiences and the validation of learning outcomes thanks to the [quality label](#) and the [quality framework for traineeships](#). The proposal is fully in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

The changes the proposal would bring

In its third phase, the European Solidarity Corps will have its own budgetary envelope, and its activities will come under the same set of rules and conditions, independently of the policy field. The objectives of the proposal contain the cross-cutting objectives of the [multiannual financial framework](#) (MFF) for 2021-2027, including flexibility, coherence, synergies, simplification, focus on performance, relevance, effectiveness and EU added value.

The proposal seeks wider participation through opening the programme to countries outside the EU, both associated and not, to the programme. Participating organisations – public or private entities and international organisations that carry out solidarity activities and that have received the quality label – can host and send participants.

Merging two programmes, aimed at a similar population, from 2020 will simplify EU volunteering. A single [portal](#) provides the widest possible outreach and expands choice with new opportunities, increased visibility and greater impact. The portal itself is to undergo continual development to make support services more user-friendly, in line with the [European Interoperability Framework](#), reducing the administrative burden for organisations, and leading to fewer [calls for proposals](#).

Solidarity activities under the Corps are defined as being of good quality when they respond to unmet societal needs, contribute to strengthening communities and offer opportunities to acquire valuable knowledge and competences. Young people should be able to afford to volunteer in safe and healthy conditions. Participants should be provided with opportunities for [non-formal](#) and informal learning. Volunteering should not substitute a paid job, or adversely impact one.

Volunteers will be supported with online linguistic support, training in ethics and integrity, including child safeguarding and protection, roles and responsibilities, values, democracy, inter-cultural awareness, health and safety, both pre-departure and on site. All participants will receive insurance cover and their travel expenses will be paid. Disadvantaged young people will be offered additional support to overcome barriers. Third-country nationals will be assisted to obtain visas, residence permits, and the European Health Insurance Card, without prejudice to the [Schengen agreement](#). Members of the [European Economic Area](#) may participate in the framework of the cooperation agreement. Other third countries will participate on the basis of other legal instruments, with an obligation to set up a national agency to manage some actions at a decentralised level. In such cases, the [European Anti-Fraud Office](#) (OLAF) and the [European Court of Auditors](#) are competent. EU level [resource centres](#) will assist implementing bodies such as national agencies, participating organisations and young people, to improve the quality of activities. They will also identify and validate acquired knowledge, skills and competences by producing [Youthpass](#) certificates. The programme will share management and implementation arrangements with Erasmus+.

In considering project financing methods, the proposal acknowledges that they need to help achieve specific objectives and weigh the costs of controls against the expected risk of non-compliance. The proposed regulation therefore considers the use of lump sums, flat rates and scales of unit costs.

Advisory committees

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted its [opinion](#) on 17 October 2018. The Committee welcomed the renewal of the Corps, the increase in budget and greater participation target, and the proposed merger with the EU Aid Volunteers programme. The EESC suggested two independent support programmes in the future, one for youth and another for volunteering. It recommended strict regulation and review of the employment strand. The committee was also against age restrictions for individuals and thought the programme should be open only to non-profit-organisations. It stated that the [European Youth Forum](#) and the [European Volunteer Centre](#) should be central in the regulation and oversight of the Corps.

The Committee of the Regions adopted its [opinion](#) on 5-6 December 2018. It called for regular meetings with the [EU Youth Coordinator](#) and formal cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. It welcomed the systematic tracking of youth financing programmes and hoped for increased funding. It called for a clear distinction between the voluntary and employment strands. It also drew attention to the importance of recognising skills and suggested that quality labels are attributed to the most original and effective activities.

National parliaments

The subsidiarity deadline, which is the time limit for national parliaments to react, was 13 October 2018. The senate of the Czech Republic delivered a [resolution](#) in which it supported the general objectives of the European Solidarity Corps, and acknowledged that merging the Humanitarian Aid Service with the European Solidarity Corps is an opportunity to raise requirements

for organisations and improve the training of volunteers. However, it expressed concern that the regulation did not offer sufficient safeguards for volunteers in humanitarian aid operations. It also requested that criteria for associating third countries to the programme are specified in the proposal.

Stakeholders' views

The [European Volunteer Centre](#) (CEV) recognises the benefit of European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps and requests opportunities for people of all ages. CEV thinks that the European Solidarity Corps should collaborate with local volunteer organisations to ensure complementarity with existing provision and properly identified needs within the hosting communities. It also suggests offering the possibility to undertake part or all of a placement online.

The [European Youth Forum](#) welcomes the fact that the new proposal builds on improvements following discussions on the implementation of the programme. It also welcomes the increase in budget and its decoupling from other funding programmes. However, it would like the regulation to specify a large percentage of funds allocated to volunteering. It also welcomes the inclusion of a new strand, the 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps', which widens the geographical reach both of the activities and participants. Conversely, local group volunteering is also seen as a good way to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities.

The Forum considers the new proposal to be clearer than the 2018-2020 regulation in the distinction it makes between its different strands. The role of the quality label is also stronger. It welcomes that its request for European organisations and networks to be able to submit their placements to the [Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency](#) (EACEA) was taken up, but argues for greater consultation with and participation of young people's organisations. It also advocates that the Corps should be integral to the EU youth strategy's efforts to help raise the standards of volunteering, to promote a diverse and empowering environment and to create international links that incentivise the development of volunteering programmes where they do not yet exist.

Academic views

A [conference](#) on volunteering in Europe remarked that perceptions on the value of volunteering differ between eastern and western Europe. In the east, there is a shift from the massive and collective volunteering actions controlled by the state to an emphasis on the proactive individual. Changes in the conditions in which volunteering takes place has led to shifts in the motivation for and interest to engage in volunteering, with an observed trend of short-term commitments, micro-volunteering and motivation based on the notion of personal gain.

A study on the [European Solidarity Corps and volunteering](#)¹ confirmed that there are differences in the way volunteering is defined according to Member State and organisation. The study identifies three types of barriers to participation in volunteering for individuals and organisations: dispositional, such as lacking necessary skills; situational, such as lack of time; and institutional, such as lack of organisational capacity to support volunteers. The study indicates that in its initial phases, the Corps did try to mitigate some of the barriers.

A [study](#) on apprenticeships, internships and volunteering concluded that in general internships and volunteering are less regulated than apprenticeships and offer less secure working and learning conditions for participants. However, in the case of the European Voluntary Service, the quality of the volunteering experience depended on the reciprocal trust built between sending and receiving organisations. A [Cost of Non-Europe report](#) on cross-border volunteering in 2015 estimated that the costs due to barriers rose to €65 million a year. These were identified as loss of social security and unemployment benefits from lack of legal recognition, inconsistencies in the recognition of acquired skills and lack of standard recruitment or adequate training.

Legislative process

The European Parliament's Committee for Culture and Education (CULT) nominated Michaela Šojdrová (EPP, the Czech Republic) as rapporteur on 1 June 2018. Both the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and the Committee on Development (DEVE) are associated under [Rule 54](#), with the latter having exclusive competence on the provisions under Chapter IV (Articles 10 and 11 European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps).

The Development Committee (DEVE) opinion relating to humanitarian aid volunteers suggests that the upper age limit of 30 years should not apply to this strand, to allow more experienced individuals to contribute and benefit from training. As the accreditation of organisations has been very cumbersome, they should be allowed to retain the label under the new regulation, while smoother procedures should be established for new applicants. The DEVE committee also insists that the humanitarian strand of the Corps must be complementary to and consistent with other humanitarian aid activities undertaken by the EU and respect the European consensus on humanitarian aid, in full respect of humanitarian principles.

The rapporteur presented her draft report on 20 September 2018. Amendments were tabled in November 2018, and the vote to adopt the [report](#) in committee took place on 4 February 2018. The CULT committee's [report](#) points out that the definition of solidarity should be the unifying principle in the programme's implementation. To have a real impact, activities undertaken need to strengthen cohesion, democracy and social inclusion. They also need to meet real societal and humanitarian needs. As solidarity is best represented by volunteering, a more accurate definition of this term is necessary.

In the report, the rapporteur sought to reintroduce elements that were included in the regulation covering 2018-2020, but which were not incorporated in the current proposal by the Commission. For instance, the new proposal should partition the budget between different strands of activities in the same way as the regulation covering 2018-2020. While maintaining some flexibility, the partitioning should correspond to the objectives of the programme, and place volunteering at the core.

Other changes aim to establish clearer objectives and a better connection with the realities and needs of young people and society. One way to achieve this in practice is to involve stakeholders throughout the cycle of the programme and gather feedback from participants. The report also wants to ensure effective synergies with the [Erasmus programme](#), other relevant programmes, and a renewed [EU youth strategy](#), by aligning the objectives.

The report also seeks to improve inclusiveness and accessibility by taking account of the diversity of socio-economic environments and potential obstacles. It is clear that in-country activities should be limited to instances where they contribute to the aim of reaching participants who would otherwise have been excluded. It should also be possible to provide part-time solidarity activities for those unable to engage in full-time volunteering. Increasing visibility also improves accessibility.

The report was subsequently debated in plenary on 11 March 2019, with Parliament adopting its [first-reading position](#) on 12 March 2019, with 513 votes in favour, 95 votes against and 64 abstentions.

In parallel, the Council had reached a partial general [approach](#) (i.e. not addressing the financial figures pending agreement on the overall MFF) on 26 November 2018. It proposes that in Article 2(8) the lower limit for job placements should be three months rather than two. Council also proposes to create an analogy to Article 24(7) in the proposed [Erasmus](#) regulation. The added reference deals with [national agencies'](#) responsibility to manage and wind up the financial agreements of the predecessor programme during the transition period.

Trilogue negotiations on the proposal could start in the new legislative term.

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

[The European Solidarity Corps programme 2021-2027](#), European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEIL).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The study was commissioned by the European Parliament Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies to help the Parliament prepare its position on the legislative proposal for the 2018-2020 period.

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