



**CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION PUBLIC CONSULTATION
ON THE EUROPEAN
SOLIDARITY CORPS**

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EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY FOR NON-DISCRIMINATION AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

CONTRIBUTION — CIVIL SOCIETY

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

Making solidarity mobility accessible to all young people

Contribution submitted on 2 April 2017 as part of the consultation launched by the European Commission to define the priorities and implementation arrangements of the European Solidarity Corps and to inform the preparation of its legislative framework.

Purpose and scope

From 6 February to 2 April 2017, the European Commission held a public consultation on the European Solidarity Corps. The consultation followed an initial phase of targeted discussions conducted at the end of 2016. It sought the views of young people, organisations and other stakeholders on the priorities of the future initiative, its accessibility, the forms of engagement proposed and its implementation arrangements.

At that time, the European Solidarity Corps was still in its initial phase. It provided for two complementary strands: a volunteering strand and an occupational strand encompassing jobs, traineeships and apprenticeships. Young people could register from the age of 17, although a placement could only begin at the age of 18. The initiative covered activities carried out either in the participant's country of residence or in another country taking part in the European instruments through which it was funded.

The European Observatory for Non-Discrimination and Fundamental Rights responded to the consultation on 2 April 2017. Its contribution focused primarily on access for disadvantaged young people and those with specific needs, the value of educational support, and the need to prioritise adaptability over formal qualifications alone.

The results of the consultation informed the legislative proposal presented by the European Commission on 30 May 2017. They were also summarised in Staff Working Document SWD(2017) 166, covering the consultations conducted between January and April 2017. This publication presents the OENDDF contribution in a structured editorial format while preserving the positions expressed in the original questionnaire.

Priorities for the European Solidarity Corps

The OENDDF considers that the European Solidarity Corps should first enable young people to put solidarity into practice, create opportunities for cross-border mobility and allow them to develop their skills and competences.

The programme should not select only young people who already possess the cultural familiarity, qualifications or experience needed to operate easily in an international environment. It should also open European mobility to

those who have never travelled, do not necessarily speak a foreign language or have no previous professional experience.

To foster a shared sense of purpose among participants, the OENDDF supports the creation of shared social-media platforms and activities bringing former participants together. These spaces would extend the relationships developed during placements and sustain a European community of solidarity.

Making the programme accessible to the most vulnerable young people

Access for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or with specific needs requires suitable arrangements. The OENDDF recommends additional allowances and training, together with shorter placements and part-time activities.

These measures are not, however, sufficient for the most vulnerable young people. Teams must receive enhanced human support. In certain situations, a youth worker from the participant's country of origin should be able to accompany the young person, help them adjust to a foreign environment and provide continuity and security throughout the placement.

Simplifying procedures for individuals and organisations

Access to the European Solidarity Corps should also be based on straightforward procedures. The OENDDF supports accessible validation or accreditation mechanisms for organisations, simplified funding applications and a clear registration process for young people.

At the time of the consultation, the OENDDF carried out solidarity activities with volunteers. For an organisation to offer volunteering, traineeship, apprenticeship or employment placements within this framework, European Union funding was a necessary condition.

Selecting participants on the basis of their adaptability

The OENDDF does not require any particular level of education. It places particular importance on interpersonal and behavioural skills, including communication, teamwork and the ability to carry out a range of tasks.

The main difficulty is not finding someone with a particular qualification or form of experience. It lies in identifying a flexible person who can adapt to the needs of the project and to a foreign working environment. This capacity to adapt is more important than educational attainment or previous experience.

Participant preparation should therefore focus primarily on the practical tasks assigned within the project. Training directly related to the placement provides operational guidance and facilitates integration into the host organisation.

An inspiring practice supporting young people in reintegration

The French association “Channel”, which supports young people undergoing social reintegration, organises volunteering and solidarity activities with migrants in Calais, in cooperation with the local organisation L'Auberge des Migrants.

It was preparing a new activity in London in which two youth workers would accompany six young people whom they knew well and supported throughout the year. The presence of the youth workers reassured both the partner organisation and the young people themselves, some of whom were too vulnerable to face a new environment alone. For these participants, the activity would be their first experience abroad.

This practice shows that solidarity mobility becomes accessible when support is designed around young people's actual needs. For young people undergoing reintegration, particularly following a criminal conviction, the presence of youth workers from the country of origin may be essential.

OENDDF recommendations

To ensure a genuinely inclusive European Solidarity Corps, the OENDDF recommends that the European Commission:

- **provide enhanced human support** for disadvantaged young people and those with specific needs, including the possibility of being accompanied by a youth worker from their country of origin;
- **offer flexible formats** through shorter placements, part-time activities and appropriate financial support;
- **ensure that qualifications or international experience are not decisive criteria** and value interpersonal skills, flexibility and adaptability;
- **prepare each participant for the practical tasks of the project** in order to facilitate their integration into the host organisation;
- **simplify accreditation, funding and registration** so that young people and organisations can participate effectively in the initiative;
- **sustain the European solidarity community** through shared platforms and activities for former participants.

Conclusion

The European Solidarity Corps fully achieves its purpose when it enables young people who would not ordinarily have access to such opportunities to experience mobility, develop their skills and contribute to an activity that benefits society.

The OENDDF therefore calls on the European Commission to build an inclusive, flexible programme with sufficient support. Educational attainment, proficiency in a foreign language or a lack of international experience should not constitute barriers to participation. The success of the initiative depends above all on recognising young people's abilities and providing them with the human support they need.

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