

## European Solidarity Corps

2017

### Key messages

Our modern societies are characterised by their diversity and complexity, and we must actively work towards social inclusion to face the future challenges. A successful European project needs to include all its citizens, and to be built upon shared values of inclusion and solidarity. Solidarity is not only the willingness to do volunteer work for those in need, but it is also the development of a common sense of European belonging, and the various strands of the Corps will be beneficial to the development of shared values and ideals. In this regard, EASPD welcomes the Commission's proposal for the implementation of a European Solidarity Corps as a useful tool to promote a more social Europe.

Nonetheless, it is important the legal framework of this important initiative ensure the programme achieves its intended objectives and indeed helps the most disadvantaged in Europe. EASPD thus particularly welcomes the Parliament's EMPL draft opinion on the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps and recommends that the Commission

- Ensures the traineeship and job strand of the initiative isn't used as a substitute for employment programmes;
- Ensures that the quality of care and support is not affected by the programme;
- Earmarks 25% of the funds to be allocated to more disadvantaged young people;
- Includes a mechanism similar to the ex-ante conditionality to prevent European funding going to institutional services;
- Ensures the accessibility of the registration and participation procedures.

### Traineeships and jobs in solidarity-related areas

The social sector in several European countries is marked by important staff shortages, and this strand could represent a **valuable opportunity for the sector** to reach young people, broaden its appeal to passionate individuals, and support the development of a skilled workforce.

The European social sector, and particularly the sector of support services for persons with disabilities, is however also often characterised by disadvantaged working conditions including low wages, difficult working hours, gender imbalance and limited career perspectives<sup>1</sup>. The **inclusion of jobs or traineeships within the European Solidarity Corps creates a risk** that young volunteers are used as substitutes to the existing staff. This would on one hand increase the already important pressure on working conditions in the sector, without solving any of the issues related to training, working hours and staff retention the sector is facing. On the other hand, using participants with low or no relevant qualifications risks lowering the quality of care provided to those most disadvantaged in Europe.

EASPD thus considers the occupational strand is a potentially valuable and positive mechanism both for the social sector and for disadvantaged young people, under the condition **appropriate guarantees are included** to avoid weakening its objectives and results. The Commission needs to ensure that the traineeship and job activities lead to concrete acquisition and certification of skills,

<sup>1</sup> Jane Lethbridge, [Care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – expanding the social care workforce for people with disabilities](#)



similar to on-the-job learning activities, and respect the conditions of traineeship and employment in the country where they are being carried out.

### Quality of care and support

In the same perspective, the **Quality Label** of the European Solidarity Corps should ensure that participants in the programme are not expected to deliver care on their own. **Pre and post-placement** support is needed to ensure the participant can have a successful experience and ensure the ongoing quality of care and support in the services they are joining.

### Dedicated budget for disadvantaged young people

In order to ensure the European Solidarity Corps indeed reaches and benefits those that need it the most, 25% of the Corps budget allocated to each National Agency should be **earmarked for projects involving more disadvantaged young people**. A **specific and sufficient budget** should also be allocated to participating organisations to facilitate the participation of young people with specific needs and ensure an appropriate level of support, as was done in the European Voluntary Service through the 'Special Needs' budget category.

### Ex ante conditionality

Since 2013, the European Union has steadily moved towards deinstitutionalisation of services, with the inclusion of an **ex-ante conditionality** in the European Structural and Investment Fund, according to which these funds couldn't be dedicated to institutional services<sup>2</sup>. It is crucial that the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps includes a similar mechanism, for example through a list of excluded activities attached in the Staff Working Document.

### Accessibility of the European Solidarity Corps

Finally, for the European Solidarity Corps to reach the most disadvantaged young people in Europe and develop a truly inclusive programme, it is paramount that every step of the **registration, application and reporting of the volunteering experience is made accessible**. Online training and the European Solidarity Corps Portal in particular should be fully accessible and in line with the principles of the proposals for a European Accessibility Act. It is also important to allow a flexible, **tailor-made approach of registration** to accommodate the specific needs of individuals.

### Conclusions

EASPD is convinced the European Solidarity Corps is an excellent opportunity to develop social and civic values across Europe. We however hope the Commission will take the necessary steps to make it impactful and successful in its stated objectives of **reaching the most disadvantaged in Europe while supporting and helping the social care sector**.

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<sup>2</sup> EASPD, [Making community-based services a reality – Roadmap on deinstitutionalisation](#)

## Who we are

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EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation and represent over 15,000 social service provider organisations across Europe and disability. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

EASPD is registered at the Transparency Register under the following number: 120906010805-50

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