

Following the publication of the proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), presented by the European Commission in July 2025, and in preparation for the public consultation on the proposed Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028-2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021.817 and (EU) 2021/888, , this document gathers the input from several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who engage with the European Solidarity Corps programme as a joint initiative to respond to the EC Public consultation and is supported by a wide range of volunteering organisations (see annex). This initiative builds on the inputs submitted for the 2024 evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps Programme, on the “Building Blocks for a More Impactful European Solidarity Corps” of May 2025, as well as on the work done in collaboration with the SNAC and in the framework of the ESC Resource Centre Advisory Group. With this position, and in light of the 10th anniversary of the programme and the 30th anniversary of European youth volunteering in 2026, the involved organisations **call for a 5 times increase of the European Solidarity Corps Programme budget**, for clarity on aspects pertaining to the European Solidarity Corps Programme by means of dedicated articles in the proposal that provide a greater emphasis on volunteering and solidarity as the main aims of the ESC mission in the new proposal for Erasmus+.

Building on the reports on the ESC and EU Aid Volunteers Programmes released by the European Commission on 1 April 2025, as well as on the proposal for the regulation establishing the Erasmus+ programme 2028-2034, we suggest:

1. Funding

The report on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 European Solidarity Corps and final evaluation of the 2018-2020 European Solidarity Corps, released by the European Commission in April 2025, has shown that the ESC funding is low when compared with the programme’s needs and objectives. Even though the proposal for the new Erasmus+ Programme envisions an increase in the budget, this is not meaningful in the face of the foreseen prices and inflation applicable for the envisaged implementation period of the programme. Furthermore, the current proposal lacks clarity in regards to the concrete allocation of budget for volunteering activities and for the European Solidarity Corps Programme, specifically.

A minimum of 5 times increase of the overall budget for ESC, which is also more resilient to economic shocks and fluctuations, is fundamental to improve the quality of ESC experiences and better enable the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities who need additional resources. This increase, which should be earmarked in the programme budget, would also contribute to improving certain aspects of the programme, such as clearer and better-resourced provisions for volunteering team leaders and a significantly reinforced mentoring system within ESC. This would not only provide a critical intergenerational component to the experience but should also draw diversity (in terms of any discriminating factors, such as age, gender, background), and provide both mentors and hosting organisations with clearer guidance on their roles, proper recognition of their work, accessible training opportunities, and dedicated spaces to meet and exchange with peers. It would also ensure comprehensive and complete funding for online and blended activities in line with the provisions for face-to-face activities.

Furthermore, considering the high impact of large Lead organisations, the financial support for coordination should be increased. More experienced Lead organisations would also benefit from a multi-year funding decision to increase the quality and sustainability, as well as to develop new working methods.

2. Access, Administration & Programme Governance

We recognise and welcome the improvements that have been made in regards to the simplification of the administrative requirements of the projects. Nevertheless, the future programme could still benefit from simpler access for smaller and grassroots organisations by further reducing administrative burdens. The centralised funding call and access for European Networks should be expanded beyond the current ESC Teams possibilities.

More consistency and transparency across National Agencies regarding project proposal evaluation and funding is necessary to strengthen the programme. Administrative measures should be in place to ensure the participation of young people from partner countries in the Programme, providing them with access to solidarity activities in the framework of EU values.

The ESC Resource Centre Advisory Group should be maintained and strengthened, and an overall ESC Advisory Council mirroring the management structure of the programme should be established, made up of interested stakeholders representing diverse groups and implemented for ongoing programme guidance, oversight and future programme development, especially in the context of the proposal to merge the European Solidarity Corps Programme with Erasmus+. It is essential in this context that the communication with, and involvement of, civil society actors from different fields is strengthened, as well as ensuring the integration of a range of civil society voices in programme development and evaluation.

With the European Solidarity Corps being included in the newly formed pillar “Learning opportunities for all”, the stakeholders involved in this consultation process have demonstrated concerns that the programme will be understood only as a learning mobility opportunity, rather than having a mission focus on solidarity and volunteering. Furthermore, with youth participation activities and ESC Solidarity activities being envisioned to be merged under this same pillar (“Learning opportunities for all”), we consider that the European Solidarity Corps branding should be maintained for this action to ensure that the focus on civic participation and solidarity is kept at a high level.

3. Inclusion and Accessibility

The Inclusion & Diversity Strategy reinforces the inclusion and diversity dimension of the European Solidarity Corps, helping to reach out to and support young people with fewer opportunities. Building on this, it is fundamental that a five times increase of the ESC budget strengthens efforts to include young people with fewer opportunities as defined by the programme and ensure the involvement of a wider range of participants and organisations from partner countries in the programme. Furthermore, tailored support in the form of, but not limited to, additional financial and ethical requirements necessary for the inclusion of people with disabilities in terms of physical infrastructure, other material support and organisational understanding and knowledge should be provided.

In addition, ensuring equal funding conditions and insurance coverage for in-country activities & expanding in-country volunteering opportunities with equal funding and protection should be ensured, as well as broadening the participation of young people by removing unnecessary barriers in regards to residency and nationality. This can be achieved through measures such as the introduction of simplified procedures as regards visa requirements, for example. The age threshold for ESC “Solidarity activities” should be lowered to a minimum of 13 years old, in line with the minimum requirement for the current youth participation activities, so as to ensure that, in the context of the proposed Erasmus+ programme for 2028-2034, no one is left behind who under the current programme, would have been able to participate. In this context, the provision of one team member of at least 18 years old should also be included. Enhancing the scope of the volunteer status, recognition and funding, to include online and hybrid volunteering formats, is also needed alongside strengthened and clearer roles for the Lead, Supporting and Hosting organisations. This will contribute to ensuring the conditions and capacities for inclusion and accessibility before, during and after the volunteer engagement period, enabling improved quality and meaningful participation in the programme.

4. Quality and Recognition

Introducing a formal “European Status for Volunteers in Voluntary Service Programmes” would provide tangible benefits and recognition for individuals dedicating their time and skills to EU volunteering programmes, and contribute to more fully realising the potential of the role volunteers play in European society. This status could encompass a standardised framework for rights and responsibilities, including provisions for social security contributions, social service & care provisions, health insurance coverage during placements, and facilitated visa processes for participants from third countries. In this way, it would make a considerable contribution to making the programme more inclusive and accessible to a wider range of participants. Online volunteering, when chosen as the best and most meaningful option by the ESC volunteers concerned, should be fully taken into consideration in quality and recognition pathways and standards.

There is a need to prioritise coordination, training, and long-term impact over numerical targets. Enhancement of the coordination among the Lead, Supporting and Hosting organisations is crucial to ensure well-structured and meaningful opportunities aligned with the skills and interests of volunteers. ESC organisations should be provided with clear pathways within Erasmus+ to access Capacity Building opportunities within that strand of the programme.

Furthermore, the role of Supporting Organisations should be duly recognised as they are necessary in ensuring high-quality volunteering projects.

5. European Civic Engagement and Youth Strategies

The ESC opportunities within Erasmus+, volunteering, and solidarity should be promoted as pillars of European democracy and solidarity, their contribution to active civic engagement being a central element of the European Project. Solidarity should also become a horizontal priority for Erasmus+ as a way of expanding volunteering and solidarity across the programme. This will also make an important contribution to the European Democracy Shield.

The ESC should be strategically aligned with the **EU Youth Strategy 2028-2036** and the European Youth Goals, the **EU Intergenerational Strategy**, the **EU Civil Society Strategy**, and the **EU Democracy Shield** to ensure coherence, impact, and sustainability across Europe’s democratic and social fabric. By linking the ESC’s volunteer and solidarity actions to these complementary policy frameworks, the programme can better empower young people as active citizens, foster intergenerational understanding, strengthen the resilience and inclusiveness of civil society, and protect democratic participation. This would enhance policy synergies and resource efficiency, as well as reaffirm the ESC as a cornerstone of a participatory, cohesive, and values-driven European Union.

The Humanitarian Aid Strand of the ESC should evolve to reflect true reciprocity in solidarity with other parts of the world and play a key role in ensuring that volunteering maintains a fundamental role in the context of resilience and recovery efforts in Europe and beyond. The ESC programme should be streamlined as an essential component of the preparedness agenda for the EU and considered as a component of the Readiness 2030 strategy, with measures that ensure the programme contributes both internally and externally to intergenerational solidarity.

This position is endorsed by the following organisations:

