

Following the publication of the reports of the public consultation on the European Solidarity Corps (final and interim evaluations), and in preparation of the upcoming consultation for the next multiannual financial framework (MFF), 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, as well as on the work done in the 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 in 2026, the involved organisations **call for a 5 times increase of the European Solidarity Corps Programme budget and for its permanence as a standalone programme under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.** Building on the reports on the ESC and EU Aid Volunteers Programmes released by the European Commission on 1 April 2025, 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.

A minimum of 5 times increase of the overall budget for ESC, that 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 will also contribute to improving certain aspects of the programme such provisions for volunteering team leaders and mentors within ESC, as well as comprehensive and complete funding for online and blended activities in line with the provisions for face to face activities.

There should be better synergies with other programmes at local, regional, national and European levels to make the most of existing funds. This is particularly relevant in the case of synergies with Erasmus+, as per the commitment in the EU Youth Strategy 2021-2027. This should, nevertheless, be done while keeping the programmes independent from each other with their own distinct identities and objectives.

2. Access, Administration & Programme Governance

We recognize and welcome the improvements that have been made in regards to the simplification of the administrative requirements of the projects. Nevertheless, the programme could benefit from a simpler access for smaller and grassroots organisations by further reducing administrative burdens. The centralized funding call and access for European Networks should be expanded.

More consistency and transparency across National Agencies in regards to 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 to 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. It is essential in this context that the communication with, and involvement of, civil society actors from different fields is strengthened, as well as to ensure the integration of a range of civil society voices in programme development and evaluation.

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 to 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 introduction of simplified procedures as regards visa requirements for example.

Enhancing the scope of the volunteer status, recognition and funding, to include online and hybrid 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 standardized 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. There is a need to prioritize 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. 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.

5. European Civic Engagement and Youth Strategies

The ESC and volunteering in general should be better promoted as pillars of European democracy and solidarity, their contribution to active civic engagement being a central element of the European Project. Placing the ESC clearly in line with the next EU Youth Strategy 2028-2036 and European Youth Goals and as part of a wider EU engagement/ volunteering strategy will enable the ESC to be a clear and coherent element of the forthcoming European Civil Society Strategy and Democracy Shield.

The Humanitarian Aid Strand of the ESC should be evolved 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:

