

Exploring the implementation
of the **European**
Solidarity Corps
during its first year

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary of the final research report in the context of a consultancy for the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre and a pre-study for the RAY Network

The 'European Solidarity Corps' is a Programme of the European Union and supporting youth projects with a European dimension fostering solidarity in Europe. The 'Research-based Analysis of European Youth Programmes' (RAY) is conducted by the RAY Network, which includes the National Agencies of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and their research partners in 34 countries*.

This study explores the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps during its first year and was conducted in the context of a consultancy for the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre and a pre-study for the RAY Network. The study was conducted by the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the RAY Network and the National Agency of the European Solidarity Corps in Austria.

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* In 2019: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Northern Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom.

Introduction

The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre commissioned the Generation and Educational Science Institute (GENESIS) to conduct a consultancy process in the framework of the European Union programme 'European Solidarity Corps'. This consultancy process was conducted in cooperation with the RAY Network in the context of a pre-study for the Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps. In order to create a solid foundation for the further implementation of the programme, GENESIS has carried out a research project employing a mixed-methods approach. The objective of the research project was to analyse the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps so far and to explore several aspects that need further attention from the viewpoint of the programme's stakeholders. This Executive Summary presents an overview of this research project's main findings in terms of:

- data of the first three application rounds with respect to actions, project characteristics, profiles of applicant organisations etc.;
- topics and objectives addressed through European Solidarity Corps projects;
- opportunities, challenges and obstacles related to the programme as perceived by relevant stakeholders;
- needs of actors involved in the European Solidarity Corps;
- training measures;
- examples for the programme implementation;
- mapping of European Solidarity Corps stakeholders at European level.

Application data

The analysis of the application data for the first three application rounds revealed that the vast majority of project applications were for Volunteering and Volunteering Partnerships (64% and 8% respectively) while around a quarter was for Solidarity projects and 2% were for Traineeships and Jobs.

More than half of Volunteering applications (58%) and 72% of Traineeships and Jobs applications indicated the planned involvement of young people with fewer opportunities. Though not available in the application data, the survey with applicant organisations showed that the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities was indicated in more than 80% of Volunteering Partnerships and Solidarity Projects.

As for the profiles of applicant organisations, a large majority are non-profit organisations (more than 90%). A relatively small percentage of organisations are public bodies (11% of project grant applicants, 22% of Quality Label applicants). In terms of the types of organisations, a broad range can be identified with more than half being non-governmental organisations/associations.



With respect to the organisation's level of activity, (between local and international) data from the survey with applicant organisations revealed that organisations are usually active at multiple levels for they have ticked on average 2-3 levels. A large majority, though, indicated to be active at local level (77%), suggesting that they generally have the potential to contribute to the development of local communities.

71% of applicant organisations had been involved previously in a project funded by Erasmus+ Youth in Action (or a previous EU Youth Programme), with Volunteering Partnerships showing the highest percentage (94%), followed by Volunteering (85%), Traineeships and Jobs (75%), Quality Label (48%) and Solidarity Projects (46%). These findings indicate that the vast majority of organisations applying for Solidarity Projects have no prior experience with an EU Youth programme suggesting that Solidarity Projects attracted a high percentage of newcomer organisations. Furthermore, the relatively high percentage of 'new' organisations applying for a Quality Label suggests that there might be more 'new' organisations applying for Volunteering and/or Traineeships and Jobs in the future.

Project topics and projects' correspondence to programme objectives

Applicant organisations were asked to select up to three topics (from a list with 22 topics) addressed by their project. The responses show a broad scope of topics, with inclusion ranking highest (32% of all projects), followed by youth work (27%), community development (25%), education and training (23%) culture (22%), citizenship and democratic participation (21%). All other topics were selected by less than 20%.

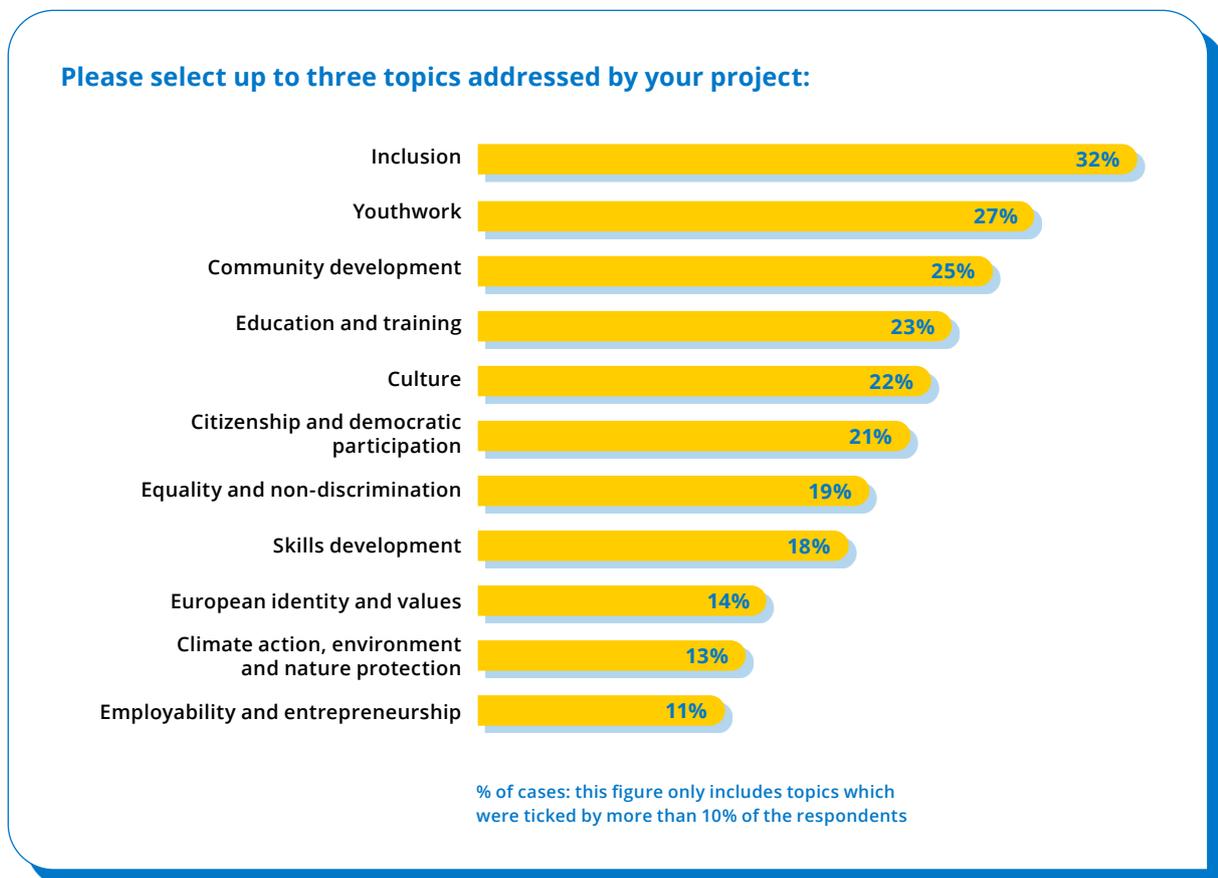


Figure 1: Topics addressed by the projects applied for



These topics reflect in some way challenges for societies in Europe such as fostering democracy, human rights and social cohesion at all levels. The relatively low percentages for some topics with links to the programme objectives are, however, surprising especially because some of them (e.g. the reception and integration of third-country nationals) have been ranking high on the agenda of challenges for European societies for several years and are also particularly mentioned in the European Solidarity Corps programme guide. A closer look at country comparisons, however, reveals that there is a great cross-country heterogeneity when it comes to project topics. For some topics, differences reach up to 40 percentage points between countries.

Applicant organisations were also asked in the online survey to which extent their project/activity is aimed to contribute to the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps, described in twelve different statements. The responses show, that a large majority of the respondents agree or strongly agree with these statements, the strongest agreement being indicated for the competence development of young people. Other programme objectives that are also scoring above 95% ('agree' or 'strongly agree') are: responding to societal challenges, providing young people with easily accessible opportunities for engagement in solidarity activities, promoting active citizenship and participation, promoting solidarity in Europe or strengthening (local) communities in order to promote social inclusion. Even the lowest ranking programme objective – which is 'to foster employability with young people and their transition into the labour market' – reaches 88%.

Opportunities

The stakeholders interviewed for this study reported that, in general, they see great opportunities in the programme, its focus and its actions. The data analysis has also revealed some opportunities of the European Solidarity Corps. These opportunities can be summarised as follows:

- The programme's explicit focus on solidarity, in particular in the face of current political developments such as Brexit, the refusal of many countries to accept refugees and the rising support for far-right parties.
- The in-country option across action types for it can be an important tool to address local issues and a great way to introduce 'newcomers' without prior experiences abroad to the programme.
- The diversification of action types; young people are provided with more options when it comes to projects they can engage with and a diverse set of action types is also believed to better correspond to the variety of needs and preferences of young people at different stages of their lives.
- Solidarity projects are seen as an important opportunity for young people to become active – independently from organisations – for any societal challenge that really matters to them.
- For a large majority of projects (95%), an involvement of the local community in the project is reported. This provides for an opportunity to contribute to strengthening local communities.
- The European Solidarity Corps attracts new applicant organisations, in particular the Solidarity Projects with 54% applicant organisations, which were not previously involved in Erasmus+ Youth in Action.



- Many applicant organisations see an opportunity in bringing together the interest of society and of their organisations through the European Solidarity Corps.
- When it comes to Traineeships and Jobs, many stakeholders consider the action Traineeships and Jobs in the European Solidarity Corps as an opportunity to the extent that it may help prevent job-replacement through volunteering projects.
- Some stakeholders also see in the action Traineeships and Jobs a great opportunity for the creation of a safe and controlled environment for young people to work in and they see the potential that the action Traineeships and Jobs of the European Solidarity Corps might help address exploitation of young people who are taking on unpaid work to gain experience.

What was the interest of your organisations for submitting an application? Check all that apply.

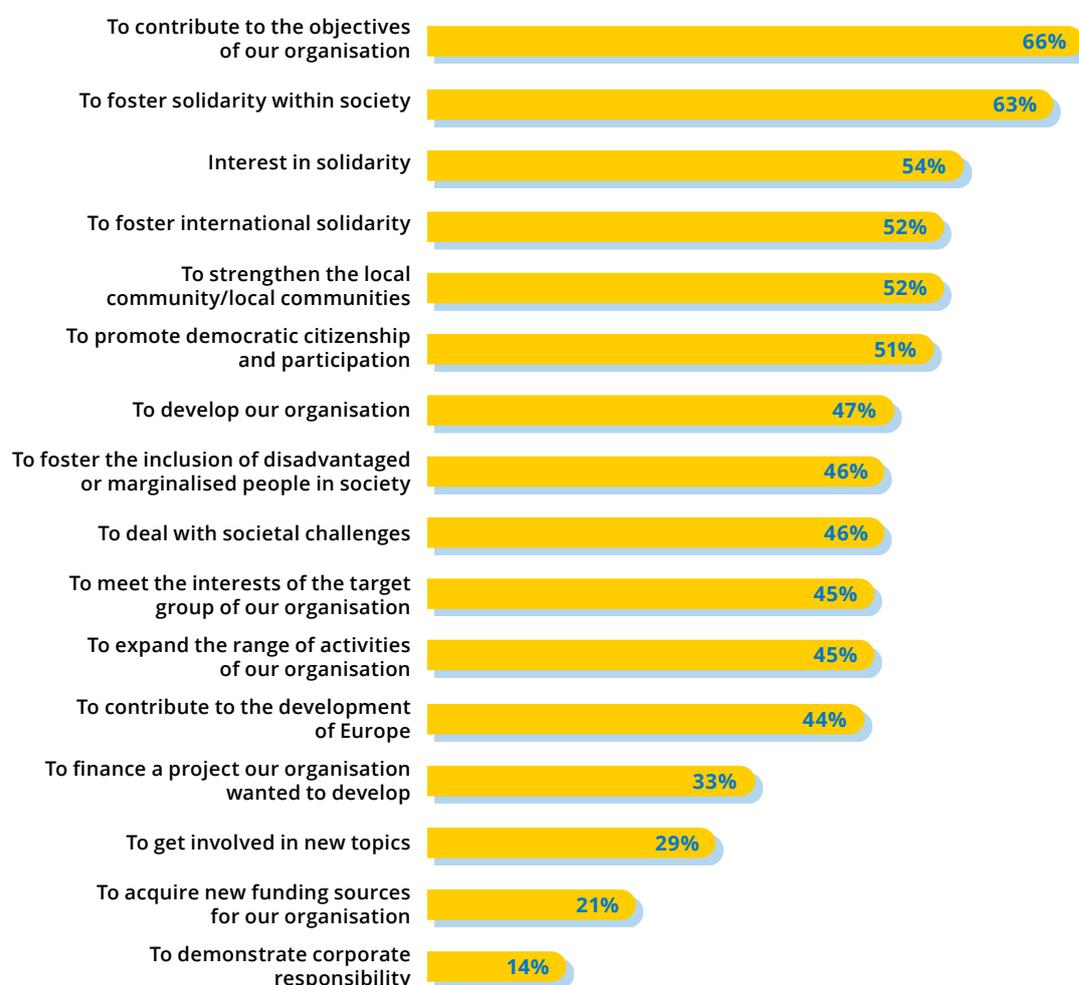


Figure 2: Interest for submitting an application in the context of the European Solidarity Corps



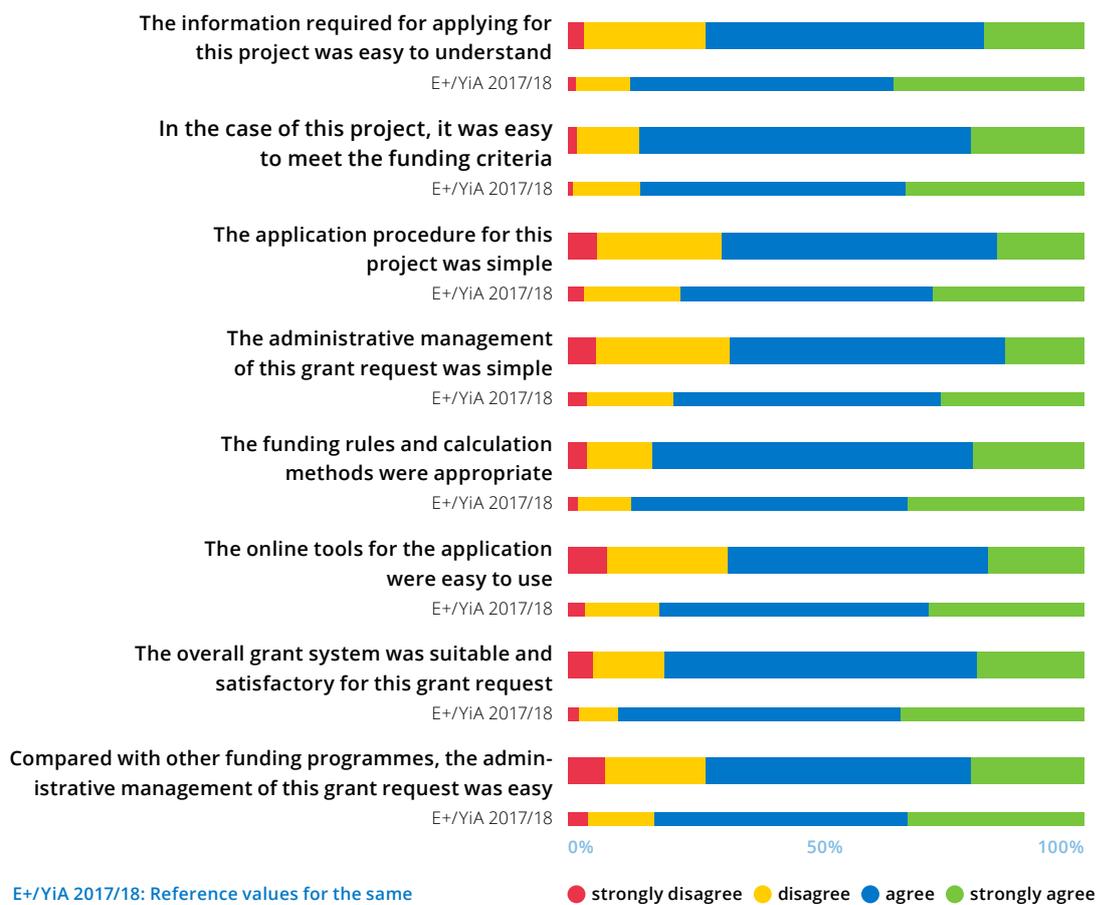
Challenges and Obstacles

Even though many respondents were excited about the European Solidarity Corps, there were also some challenges that came with the new programme. These were:

- Overall, it has been a significant challenge so far to develop a common understanding about the concept of solidarity.
- One challenge was the promotion of the new programme, in particular for some National Agencies who have limited financial resources or could not allocate sufficient time and resources to that aspect.
- Overall, the development of projects was reported to be difficult by a considerable portion of applicant organisations, in particular with respect to finding partners, and 26% considered the workload for the project development not to be reasonable (compared to 7% in Erasmus+ Youth in Action).
- The age restriction of the European Solidarity Corps (18+) is perceived as a challenge.
- Overall, the dissatisfaction with the project application procedure was – partly considerably – higher than in Erasmus+ Youth in Action, e.g. with respect to meeting the funding criteria, the funding rules and calculation methods, the administrative management of the grant request).
- In particular, technical challenges regarding IT tools, e.g. portals and applications forms were also reported.
- One of the greatest challenges for Traineeships and Jobs that most stakeholders, but especially National Agencies, have emphasised was the fact that no sufficient financial incentives are given to organisations to actually apply for Traineeships and Jobs because the programme covers only certain project costs (e.g. for travel and re-location of participants, organisational support, inclusion support etc.) while requiring the payment of at least the minimum wage of the respective country by the beneficiary organisation. This was also reflected in the survey responses of applicant organisations with almost 40% of applicants considering the funding not being adequate.
- Another challenge in terms of Traineeships and Jobs as reported by the national agencies especially is the high bureaucratic burden on top of low financial incentives. National Agencies have experienced that it seems easier for organisations to hire employees or trainees by themselves without having to commit to the requirements of the European Solidarity Corps and without having to go through the entire process of applications.



What was the interest of your organisations for submitting an application? Check all that apply.



E+/YiA 2017/18: Reference values for the same statements in the RAY Monitoring surveys for Erasmus+ Youth in Action in 2017/18

● strongly disagree ● disagree ● agree ● strongly agree

Figure 3: Project application procedure

Needs Analysis

The following needs of actors involved in the European Solidarity Corps were expressed:

Needs expressed by National Agencies

- Support which takes into account the different needs of National Agencies in terms of size, funding and experience.
- Creation of more opportunities for exchanging experiences between National Agencies.
- Direct access to the European Solidarity Corps database (PASS).
- Early communication of any changes of the digital platforms.
- Creation of a feedback platform for project participants.
- In terms of Traineeships and Jobs, the provision of an overview of each country's employment policies.
- More financial incentives for organisations to apply for Traineeships and Jobs.



Needs expressed by applicant organisations

While the survey with applicant organisations did not include any specific questions concerning their needs with respect to the European Solidarity Corps, the following needs of organisations interested in the European Solidarity Corps can be interpreted from their responses

- Effective instruments and support for finding partners for a joint project.
- Advice and training as to how to involve young people in the development of a project in the context of the European Solidarity Corps.
- Easily accessible and understandable information on how to apply.
- A simple application procedure.
- User-friendly online tools for submitting an application.

In terms of Traineeships and Jobs, these needs were expressed:

- Regular updates on the profiles of young people interested in the European Solidarity Corps on the European Solidarity Corps database (PASS).
- Traineeships and Jobs should be made more attractive either through an increase in funding and/or a decrease in bureaucracy.

Training measures

Training measures aimed at supporting the implementation of the programme were primarily addressed towards organisations interested in submitting an application to the European Solidarity Corps, in particular for those not having been involved in Erasmus+ Youth in Action. Topics were mostly the objectives, structure and funding criteria of the new programme, but also the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the projects. There was a broad scope of training formats including webinars and online trainings as well as special workshops aimed at supporting organisations in developing a project eligible for funding through the European Solidarity Corps and for developing a respective application (project labs/clinics’).



Further training needs of different actors in the programme can be concluded, such as concerning

- understanding solidarity in a conceptual way – and how to integrate it into projects;
- fostering the local impact of funded projects;
- learning support for participants in funded projects;
- the development of partnerships for projects;
- all aspects of Traineeships and Jobs, including legal aspects as well as responsibilities of and relationships between the different actors in funded projects;
- the implementation of the programme, in particular through needs-oriented training for staff of National agencies.

Finally, there is a need for training of trainers in order to satisfy the training needs outlined above.

Further findings

The study also presents a broad scope of examples for the implementation of the programme by National Agencies, in particular related to the promotion of the new programme (including through social media), attracting new applicants, supporting organisations in developing a project and submitting an application, inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities etc.

Furthermore, the study includes a mapping and a list of more than 50 European Solidarity Corps stakeholders at European level, including their objectives and links to their web pages.

The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

The Resource Centre's mission is to:

- Explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European society;
- Promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity;
- Co-ordinate networking activities (e.g. trainings, seminars and events) that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact;
- Contribute to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations

The Resource Centre is based at IZ, the Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+ : Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, in Vienna, Austria.

More information:

<https://www.salto-youth.net/>

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/>

<https://www.iz.or.at/rc>



