

Starting the Solidarity Corps

European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre Need Analysis

IZ - Verein zur Förderung von Vielfalt, Dialog und Bildung
European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

presents the

Need Analysis of NAs and SALTOs

regarding the main challenges NAs face within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps programme and their needs towards the new Resource Centre

*European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre
May 2019*

Introduction

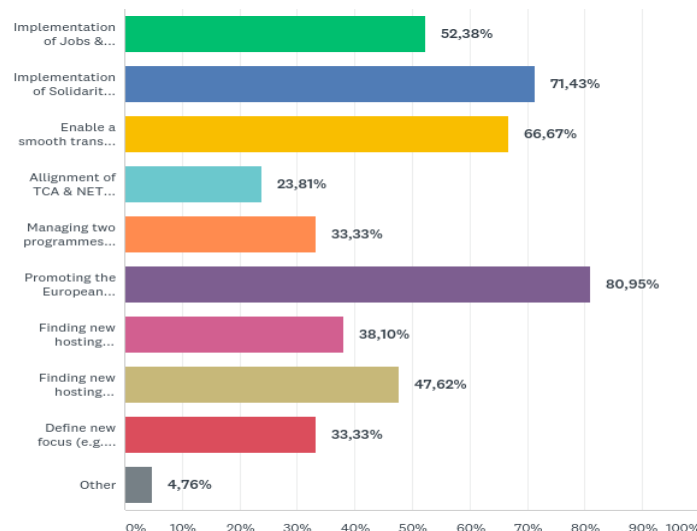
The mission of the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre (RC) is to provide the Network of National Agencies, SALTOs, the Commission and beneficiaries with support in the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps, especially regarding its new focus on solidarity, the identification of societal challenges and the new formats like the occupational strand and in-country projects. Aligning and establishing synergies with Erasmus+ as well as guaranteeing the visibility of the Solidarity Corps are essential tasks for the RC.

In Spring 2019, the RC set up a survey collecting the immediate needs of the NAs towards the programme and the Resource Centre. The survey was filled in by 21 network stakeholders - National Agencies for Erasmus Plus and European Solidarity Corps programmes (NA) and SALTO Resource centresⁱ. The survey focused on the main priorities identified by NAs in the first phase of the implementation of the programme, especially regarding the new programme elements jobs and traineeships, in-country projects and volunteering projects. The summary also highlights the expectations of NAs towards the new Resource Centreⁱⁱ.

Next to presenting the results of the survey, the RC will comment of the activities it will undertake to answer to the needs expressed by the NAs.

Main priorities

What are the main priorities of your NA in the first phase of the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps? ⁱⁱⁱ



Based on the priorities identified, the primary focus for NAs in the first phase of the programme has been the **promotion of the European Solidarity Corps**. Other main areas for NAs, in descending order, are: implementation of **Solidarity Projects**, enabling a smooth **transfer** from EVS to volunteering projects in the Solidarity Corps and the **implementation of Jobs & Traineeships**, including finding new hosting organisations. Prioritised after that were “finding new hosting organisations for volunteering”, “managing two programmes parallel (find synergies, define distinctions)” and “define new focus (e.g. solidarity, social cohesion, societal challenges)” or “alignment of TCA & NET activities”.

Main challenges in the implementation of the Solidarity Corps

Jobs & Traineeships

One of the main challenges mentioned in the context of the occupational action is to promote the added value of the strand to potential stakeholders and to attract new applicants and new stakeholders (partly outside the well-known youth field). According to a majority of the NAs, the action in its current form is not very appealing to potential beneficiaries: the EU funding for this action is considered low, especially considering the relatively high administrative burden. Some NAs

mention that it is difficult to establish a clear distinction between volunteering and traineeships – an additional challenge considering that more funds are provided for volunteering. In some countries the occupational action competes with other national schemes that are more easily accessible.

In addition, there are difficulties regarding the legal framework of traineeships: either because the legal framework for traineeships under the specific conditions of the Corps does not exist – thus eliminating this sub-action in several countries, or because other legal obstacles hinder NAs to implement traineeships.

Whereas the network faces challenges when it comes to the definition of solidarity in the programme in general, this is a specific issue when it comes to defining solidarity in the context of Jobs and Traineeships, especially with regard to finding new hosting organisations. Several NAs also mention the challenge they face when it comes to monitoring the quality of jobs and traineeships. It was also highlighted that the occupational action is not applicable to partner regions which creates inequalities for the organisations from the regions in the programme implementation.

Together with the NAs the RC puts specific effort in promoting Jobs and Traineeships, underlining its benefits and opportunities, while considering different national realities and limitations. Good practice examples will serve as inspiration and for promotion purposes. The RC will advocate for further adaptations and improvements of the programme features to be taken up by stakeholders.

Volunteering Projects

A general challenge in volunteering is to attract more and new organisations to participate in the programme. The budget is increasing but the number of accredited organisations currently stagnates in many of the countries participating in the survey. As examples for obstacles for organisations, the administrative burden and too many different IT tools are highlighted.

A majority of NAs mentions the challenges in the transition from the strong brand of EVS to Solidarity Corps as well as the shift from individual learning to tackling societal challenges and community development. Above all, there is a need to create a common understanding of the concept of solidarity in the Solidarity Corps, and how this affects the volunteering placements.

Next to these concerns, a range of challenges were mentioned by individual NAs: the monitoring and quality assurance of the projects, a high administrative burden and partly lack of clarity and guidance in the implementation of their tasks (e.g. regarding insurance, IT problems, access to participant data for the organisation of trainings in the frame of TEC).

The RC has an emphasis on creating support structures for NAs to enable them to strategically approach the uptake of increasing budgets. With networking activities focusing on capacity and community building, e.g. partner finding activities, new organisations should be attracted, and experienced ones trained to use the full potential of the Solidarity Corps.

New fields of engagement will be identified and effectively integrated in the Solidarity Corps environment to tackle societal challenges and enable NAs to maximise the usage of funds.

The RC functions as intermediate between NAs and the COM to report difficulties and challenges in all areas that might hinder a high-quality implementation of the programme. It takes over an advocacy role for an inclusive, effective use of the different elements of the Solidarity Corps in participating and partner countries.

In-country projects

The Solidarity Corps offers the opportunity to implement EU-funded projects on a local level. Volunteering and the Occupational Actions can not only take place on a transnational basis but also in an in-country context. The new action of Solidarity Projects funds local initiatives of young people. Whereas some general challenges regarding in-country projects were presented, some responses are specific for the different formats.

In general, for NAs a definition of the European dimension in in-country projects is challenging. For the promotion and implementation of in-country projects a wish for more guidance is apparent. The communication strategies of NAs need to be adapted to promote the benefits of in-country opportunities. Several NAs also mentioned the existence of national schemes, both for volunteering and for funding of local initiatives of young people as a challenge – in general these are usually more easily accessible. Good practice examples would be welcome to support the internal and external communication and promotion.

In-country volunteering projects

This possibility is still unknown to relevant stakeholders. In the youth field intensified promotion is needed as well. The thematic shift of the projects from intercultural learning to inclusion and solidarity requires a reorientation in the implementation of projects. NAs are in need of more detailed information about eligibility criteria for national projects.

For in-country volunteering, the use of the Solidarity Corps IT tools pose an additional administrative burden for NAs and for beneficiaries, especially compared to similar national volunteering schemes.

The RC aims to provide guidance for NAs wherever possible, focusing on creating space to share experience and (good) practises. Niches (e.g. specific target groups or thematic areas) for in-country projects can help to promote the possibilities effectively. The RC supports the network in better understanding and translating for the beneficiaries the shift from individual and intercultural learning to solidarity and tackling societal challenges.

Solidarity projects

The specificity that Solidarity Projects can be applied for by informal groups of young people requires adaptations from NAs in their communication and outreach as well as in their administrative procedures. The outreach to young people over 18 is estimated as difficult by several NAs, as well as the fact that the programme information and guidance is too difficult to understand for informal groups of young people, in particular if the documents are provided in English only. The entire application process is very complex (URF, PASS, EU Login...) and too complicated for young persons who have never been involved in any organisation. For informal groups of young people, the waiting period between project application and implementation start is considered too long, while national funds are more flexible. One NA mentions the wish for a change in funding format (project lump sum instead of a lump sum/month). For the promotion of this action, again, the need for a common narrative on solidarity is evident.

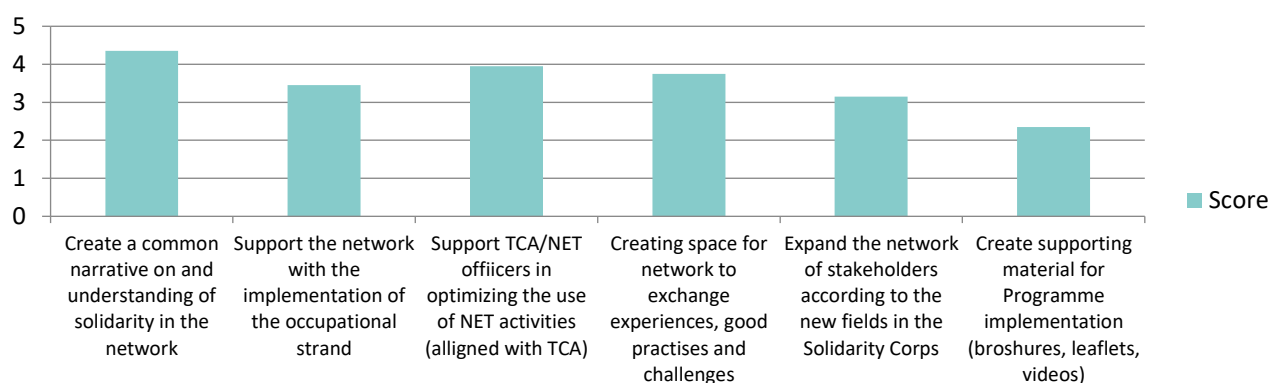
This specific action focuses on local youth-led activities. Nonetheless, the RC sees its role in creating support structures, e.g. offering NET-activities for generic features of the action, like coaching or participation. The question of the European dimension in local projects concerns the whole network, and addressing that on European level might support the process of finding a common understanding.

Resource Centre – Expectations, tasks and responsibilities

The feedback regarding the needs of the NAs towards the new Resource Centre results in the following prioritisation (descending from highest to lowest priority):

1. Creating a common narrative on and understanding of solidarity in the network
2. Supporting TCA/NET officers in optimising the use of NET activities (aligned with TCA)
3. Creating space for the network to exchange experiences, good practise and challenges
4. Supporting the network in the implementation of the occupational strand
5. Expanding the network of stakeholders according to the new fields in the Solidarity Corps
6. Creating supporting material for Programme implementation (brochures, leaflets, videos)

Which of the following tasks of the RC would you identify as most needed for your NA?



The prioritisation shows a primary need from the NAs for support in the transfer and implementation of existing tools and programme elements (volunteering, NET) in the new programme as well as possibilities for exchange on the programme implementation. The new elements of the programme (implementing the occupational action, including reaching out towards new stakeholders) are prioritised as slightly less urgent. The need for new materials to support the programme is rated lowest.

In an additional open question, a wide range of needs and expectations were mentioned.

Aligned with the mandate of the RC were the following expectations:

The RC should offer training opportunities

- for beneficiaries in its coordinating role for NET activities, (e.g. for Community Building, creation of new modules for TEC, new network trainings, trainings for Quality Label...).
- for NA-Staff: The RC should offer activities which support the network in expanding to new stakeholders according to the new fields in the programme, especially in the framework of the occupational action. Staff meetings and trainings on different aspects for Solidarity Corps officers should be coordinated and supported by the RC.

*A wish for an alignment with the work of the thematic and regional SALTOs as well as with the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, the European Training Strategy, the EU Commission Youth Goals and with the future programme Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is expressed. The linkage to other EU programmes and institutions as requested by the NAs is relevant for the whole network, e.g. cooperation with the Council of Europe, European Youth Forum, European Volunteering Service, DG Employment and others.

*For the promotion of the programme different materials and tools are requested by NAs, e.g. online and hands-on, easy-to-read communication materials that promote the added value of participating in the programme, as well as a format to highlight best practises.

Wishes for general support with programme implementation (answering questions of NAs, support with the use of tools), the adaptation of the Training and Evaluation Cycle (TEC) for participants, and supporting the skill development of participants can only partly be catered for by the RC.

Also, the needs to improve IT tools for the programme, the improvement of the general user-friendliness of the programme as well as the provision of online training for participants were expressed towards the RC. The RC acknowledges these needs but considers these beyond its mandate. Nonetheless, the RC sees its role as an intermediate between NAs, SALTOS, the Commission and other relevant stakeholders.

The support of a high-quality implementation of the programme, the promotion of the Solidarity Corps in the youth field and beyond as well as the construction of its own identity are important elements of the work of the Recourse Centre and will be the cornerstones of its future strategy to empower the Solidarity Corps and bring the concept of Solidarity into respective EU programmes.

ⁱ Replying institutions: Agence Erasmus+ France Jeunesse & Sport, France; Agencija za mobilnost i programme Europske unije, Croatia; Agency for International Programmes for Youth; Agency for Mobility and EU programmes; Agenția Națională pentru Programe Comunitare în Domeniul Educației și Formării Profesionale, Romania; Anefore asbl, Luxembourg; Archimedes Foundation Youth Agency, Estonia; Centre for International Cooperation in Education, Czech Republic; Danish Agency for Higher Education, Denmark ; European Union Programs Agency (EUPA), Malta; Finnish Agency for Education, Finland; Foundation for the Development of the Education System, Poland; IUVENTA - Slovak Youth Institute, Slovakia; JINT, Belgium; JUGEND für Europa Nationale Agentur Erasmus+ JUGEND IN AKTION und Europäisches Solidaritätskorps, Germany; Jugendbüro der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft V.o.G., Belgium; MOVIT, Slovenia; Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, Netherlands; SALTO SEE; Tempus Public Foundation, Hungary; Turkish National Agency, Turkey.

ⁱⁱ The summary also includes conclusions from a consultative process of the Portuguese NA in Autumn 2018 that had the aim to look at how the NAs would see a future European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Answering options were:**

- Implementation of Jobs & Traineeships
- Implementation of Solidarity Projects
- Enable a smooth transfer from EVS to volunteering projects in the Solidarity Corps
- Alignment of TCA & NET activities
- Managing two programmes parallel (find synergies, define distinctions)
- Promoting the European Solidarity Corps
- Finding new hosting organisations for volunteering
- Define new focus (e.g. Solidarity, social cohesion, societal challenges)
- Other