Implementation of the current European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027

2023/2018(INI) - 27/10/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted an own-initiative report by Michaela ŠOJDROVÁ (EPP, CZ) on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme 2021-2027.

Improving the programme's visibility

Members reminded the Commission, Member States, national agencies and volunteer organisations that they must implement and develop the ESC programme in line with the measures and activities defined for this purpose, while helping to simplify procedures and enhance the programme's visibility. The Commission and national agencies are invited to:

- strengthen regular exchanges of best practice, improve their common understanding of programme procedures, deepen cooperation and enhance the promotion of the programme;

- help raise awareness of the program and its individual strands, further develop its brand image and reach out to more youth organisations and young people, particularly the most disadvantaged in society.

The report highlights the need not only to step up communication and raise the profile of the programme, but also to increase the budget to cover new applicants and avoid a low success rate.

New forms of volunteering and bureaucratic simplification

Noting that young people's needs and social trends are evolving, Members called on the Commission to explore new forms of volunteering for the next programming period, such as part-time or mixed volunteering, and to allocate a sufficient budget to participants and organisations.

The Commission is also asked to :

- lower the age limit and the mandatory minimum number of five participants per solidarity project for in-country activities in the next programming period;

- strengthen the ESC's capacity for European civic mobility and transnational volunteering;

- strengthen the specific supporting role of participating organisations, providing them with financial incentives and making their involvement mandatory in volunteering actions;

- implement the inclusion and diversity strategy with the utmost care, in particular to help organisations reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities;

- adopt a more flexible approach to individual volunteering, enabling participants to mix and match countries, areas of activity and experiences;

- develop specific initiatives for EU volunteers to contribute to the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine;

- ensure that the digital tools and systems currently used to manage and implement the programme function properly, and that their full potential is exploited;

- deepen the solidarity experience by encouraging visits by volunteers to sites of memory in the host country, particularly to sites of special significance for the history of the EU;

- simplify and shorten the application process for the new quality label;

- support the extension of mutual recognition of learning outcomes from volunteering activities, including soft and professional skills.

European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

Members welcomed the high number of young people interested in the humanitarian aid strand, with over 42 000 expressions of interests received by May 2023. They called on Commission to maintain the importance of **adequate training, security and protection of volunteers**, which should be subject to regular information sharing and risk assessment, particularly in areas considered to be unstable.

Members are concerned about the **lengthy volunteer selection procedure**, in particular with regard to waiting times for mandatory in-person training, which could lead to candidates dropping out and losing interest. They stressed that volunteers should be able to complete their mandatory training at the beginning of their deployment so that they can become operational faster.

Noting that around two thirds of the selected projects for 2023 are development-centred, the report called for a more balanced humanitarian-centred approach for future selections. It called on the Commission to consider the possibility of revising the regulation to allow volunteering in safe zones of conflict-affected countries, subject to clear security and safety protocols and appropriate training. It insisted that the deployment of volunteers be focused on pre-disaster preparedness and post-disaster recovery settings.

Budget

The Commission and the Member States are called on to provide the ESC with an adequate budget that will be able to accommodate increasing interest in the programme, and to allow more flexibility in the budget's allocation between the project strands so that the programme can address unexpected challenges, such as rising inflation and higher living costs.

Members called, in this regard, for the budget of the ESC to be **at least doubled** in the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034).