

Statement of the Network of European Voluntary Service Organisations (NEVSO) concerning the stakeholder consultation of the European Solidarity Corps

Who we are

Network of European Voluntary Service Organisations (NEVSO) is a network of organisations actively working within the field of long-term and full-time cross-border voluntary services within Europe.¹

Our recommendations on the ESC at the current stage of planning

First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to the Commission for presenting an issues paper in preparation of stakeholder consultation with a set of very specific questions. The process of stakeholder consultation and the well elaborated paper give us, stakeholders with key experience in the field of cross-border voluntary services, the opportunity to actively participate in the development of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), as requested by us from the beginning of the ESC development process. We underline the importance of a **clear separation between the occupational and voluntary strand** within the ESC. For both strands the objectives should be **clearly defined** as well as the different **status of the participants** (volunteer, student, intern...).

This statement focuses on the voluntary strand, since this is our field of work.

We kindly invite the Commission as well as other potentially interested stakeholders to contact us with questions or remarks on this statement.

Questions from the issues paper:

Which areas of solidarity activities would seem most promising for (i) cross- country activities and (ii) in- country activities specifically?

In the first place, we would like to clarify the definition of “solidarity” regarding the activities proposed by the European Solidarity Corps. From our point of view **all kind of activities related to common good should be qualified as potential ESC volunteer placements. Promising areas are for example** work with handicapped, elderly or sick people, LGBT community, refugees, Roma and other minorities, education, ecological work, cultural work and related areas. In delimitation to other areas the qualifying criteria should be to include **only activities which add value towards a common good**.

Volunteers should not replace payed work. A voluntary service is an orientation and learning time and as such it has to be protected. Therefore, we underline the importance that the ESC provides volunteers **a framework which enables and supports high quality non-formal learning** (pre-departure, on arrival, mid term and evaluation trainings) .

¹ The in 2017 new founded NEVSO network has developed out of the former EU representation of German Voluntary Service Organisations. It currently includes the following member organizations: EDYN Ecumenical Diaconical Year Network, AFS Interkulturelle Begegnungen e.V., Action Committee Service for Peace/Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden e.V. , Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, Evangelische Freiwilligendienste gGmbH, Friends of Waldorf Education/Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V., Internationale Jugendgemeinschaftsdienste e.V.,

The level of achievement of ESC objectives like strengthening awareness of European citizenship crucially depends on whether there is a provided space for the participating young person to share one's experiences, values etc.

We recommend a **high quality level of at large 25 days of seminar and training periods** in case of a 10-12 month ESC voluntary service activity (cross-country as well as in-country activities). We recommend to take the mentioned level of seminar work as well into consideration for the occupational strand.

Would you consider recruiting Corps participants from the country where the project is based and/or from another country?

All of our network members organisations are considering to recruit ESC participants for cross-border voluntary service activities. As sending or coordinating organisations, we are able to involve experienced as well as new hosting organisations in the ESC.

In addition, **some** of our network members would **also** like to recruit participants and cooperate with hosting organisations for **in-country voluntary service activities**.

Naturally the level of involvement into ESC of our network members as well as other voluntary service organisations will depend on whether ESC will provide a regulatory framework suitable for voluntary service regarding quality, organisational and financial aspects.

How can the ESC best complement and further enhance existing schemes at national and/or European level?

Currently there is **no national voluntary service scheme in many European countries**. The ESC has a potential to encourage member states to develop own national voluntary service schemes. **It is important to consider existing national voluntary service structures.**

Cross-border voluntary services within a new ESC scheme will not be in serious competition to those voluntary service schemes, which currently exist. In fact, a cross-border ESC has a high potential to be complementary or even encouraging towards member states activities in that field.

Especially if ESC should offer opportunities for in-country voluntary service activities, the diversity of social welfare systems in the member countries should be taken into account. In case of Germany, for example there is the risk that in-country activities will be included into the social security system including as paying social security contributions. Therefore, the status of the participants of the ESC has to be clarified to avoid extra costs.

We encourage national voluntary services within ESC but we consider the cross-border voluntary service more important from the EU perspective.

To ensure the learning impact for the participants as well as the European dimension of the volunteer services, **we consider the seminar work and the accompaniment of the volunteers of utmost importance.** We recommend that **organizations**, which are able to do so, **should be allowed to organize seminars themselves and receive the necessary funding to do so.** Organizations with a small number of volunteers should be able to send their volunteers to existing seminars offered on national or regional level. We welcome more subsidiarity towards the participating organisations.

We would very much appreciate if the timing of the EVS-seminars could be adapted to the situation of the participating organizations and not only to the agenda of the national agencies. Very often, this is not the case.

Should the focus the ESC be on placements provided by organizations in EU countries for EU nationals/persons legally residing in an EU countries alone OR also enable candidates and EFTA/EEA countries to join?

The EU is in an enlargement process and also in negotiations with other countries. At the same time, there is the accusation of the "EU fortress". **The ESC program should also be open to countries outside the EU**, as is the case with EVS. We should definitely cooperate with countries outside the EU.

Currently placements under the Corps last between 2- 12 months as a general rule. Should this be maintained or should term placements of a least two weeks be possible for specific cases?

In order to achieve the greatest possible impact, we prefer long-term voluntary services (at least 6 month). Since not all young adults are able to participate in long-term services, it is good to offer shorter services in specific cases. Nonetheless, they should not be shorter than one month. It would be interesting to include the possibility to extend these short-term voluntary services.

What are the key elements to provide an attractive package for the placements?

More than 24.000 young people are registered in the ESC platform today. For us it is of utmost importance that they have access to organisations, projects and information about their possibilities. There has to be a link/website to organisations, working in the different fields where the young people can be informed. We think it is a part of non formal education to know about organisations, their values, aims etc.

To interest placements for the ESC it is important to consider the sometimes limited ability of hosting organisations to provide co-funding for the volunteer placement. In our answer on the following questions we give clear indication about the needs for EU funding which would allow participation of placements throughout a wide range of solidarity areas.

How can disadvantaged young people be further supported to obtain a placement?

The organisations need additional support in terms of funding for accompaniment costs and personal costs. Implementing **an additional lump sum for including young people with disadvantages** could be a flexible instrument to support and enable organisations to host and send disadvantaged young people. **In addition it should be possible to receive extra funding like now in EVS for special cases** which cause an unusual amount of additional cost (e.g. participants with need of sign language interpretation). We underline the importance of putting the volunteer with special needs and adequate support within the project first.

How can an effective contact between participants and organisations be ensured? Should organisations also be advertise placements via the IT tool for specific cases (e.g. for placements at short notice or requiring specific competences?)

The process of matching between participant and organisations will always need to include active engagement of both sides: participants as well as organisations. Throughout European Union it is common that **applicants** who are interested in joining all sorts of activities actively **send their application to those organisations which they consider attractive** from their personal point of view. The ESC should build on this basic principle.

The ESC-IT tool should be developed further in a way that young people, after joining the ESC in general terms online, should be asked to search actively for organisations to whom they would like to send their application. In doing so ESC would avoid that young people will join the ESC and after doing so in some cases might never receive any activity offer.

We consider this fact as a serious risk for ESC in terms of impact on the individual applicant as well as in terms of public recognition.

Furthermore the IT tool should be opened to participating organisations in a very flexible way, e.g. enabling coordinating organisations to advertise their placements as well as to invite applicants to join the organisations own specific application processes.

Our member organisations would be willing to take part in a specialized working group on the IT-tool to help developing it best to the needs for all participating stakeholders.

How can the high quality of participating organisations and a sound accreditation process be ensured?

The ESC should always involve a **coordinating organisation which takes overall responsibility for the application in terms of quality and finances**. In addition cross-border activities should always involve a sending organisation, based in the participant home country. It is the responsibility of the coordinating organisation to provide placements which meet the ESC quality criteria.

Coordinating organisations as well as sending organisations should be accredited in an easy on national level. The current EVS scheme can be used as an example.

In order to establish a lean process which is easy to access for new potential placements the **screening of placements/hosting organisations should be given into the responsibility of the responsible coordinating organisation**. There should be no formal accreditation process for hosting organisations.

The **strategic EVS is a very good example of how an effective way of requesting several activities can be applied**: it is much more efficient and encouraging for organisations to do the administrative work for all involved activities in a flexible way in one application.

What are your views and considerations in terms of funding?

The **funding scheme** should be **flexible** enough to enable organisations of different sizes to participate in the ESC. From our perspective it is of crucial importance to create a funding scheme which offers a maximum of funding **sustainability** and **predictability for participating organisations**: organisations who meet the high quality criteria of the ESC should have a sustained access to funding.

To meet this principles the funding scheme should

- **be aligned to** the way funding is organised within the **new strategic EVS**;
- allow partner organisation networks of different sizes to include **all ESC activities into one single framework application** either on a European or national level, without obliging the applicant to determine its participating organisations beforehand;
- organise the **allocation of funds regarding European framework applications on a European level**;
- As criteria for access to a European framework application we suggest: including at least four to five program countries as well as defining a minimum number of overall activity days or months.

- ✖ If the criteria of a European framework application are not met, organisations providing different sizes of activities should be able to have the same flexibility of this type of framework application on a national application level.
- ✖ National Agencies could provide the screening work related to European framework applications, whereas the funds available for all European framework applications should be merged on a European level
- the **record of successful conducted ESC activities in the past should serve to create criteria for allocation of funds**. The applicant organisation record of the past three years should be taken into account regarding the number of successfully conducted days/months of ESC activities;
- allow a project **duration of up to 36 months** or even longer
- use a system of **fixed costs by units based on lump sums** wherever it can be applied in an appropriate way

Which costs per placement are you foreseeing?

The following necessary costs per placement will need to be covered to enable cross-country activities:

- board and lodging for the volunteer;
- pocket money for the volunteer;
- seminars and training courses in preparation, during the activity time and after the activity, as well as travel expenses of the volunteer related to participation in the seminars;
- insurance for the volunteer (health, accident, third-party liability);
- local transport for the volunteer during activity time;
- language training costs for volunteers, on-line courses are not sufficient
- coordinating costs for the coordinating organisation;
- coordinating costs for the sending organisation;
- costs to provide a mentor on the level of the hosting organisation;
- costs related to complementary activities including personnel costs for necessary coordinating staff.

Taking into account the existing funding for EVS activities, based on this scheme there is currently a lack of **funding for seminar activities** to provide preparation and refecton for volunteers.

There is a direct link between the number of possible placements within the ESC and the amount of funding per placement.

The current funding framework of the strategic EVS could enable a significant increase of

the number of young participants within the ESC compared to the former EVS. However participating hosting organisations or others will still have to bring in a serious amount of funding per placement, which is not possible in all cases and areas (e.g. education or ecological and cultural work).

Many potential hosting organisations are currently not able to provide co-financing as necessary within the strategic EVS.

Experienced voluntary service organisations expect that the number of potential new placements will be twice as much or even more, if the overall amount of **funding per volunteer** would be **increased with 300 EUR per month** in comparison to the current strategic EVS funding scheme (increasing the funding per day of activity by 10 EUR in comparison to the current EVS lump sum for organisational support). **We would welcome an increase of the overall level of the funding per placement, since this is a strong instrument to raise the number of ESC placements** and in result the number of young people actually being able to participate in ESC.

Would you be interested in taking part in the European Solidarity Corps (and have access to the pool of interested young person) without requesting EU funding?

From our experience with cross-border voluntary services **we consider it to be not realistic, that a serious number of organisations could take part in the ESC just because it offers some access to possible participants.** In fact most organisations do not face serious problems in attracting young people for voluntary services, as long as they are able to offer an attractive package to participants. Possible hosting organisations working in areas of solidarity work usually face a reality of limited funding for their community welfare activities. By experience funding shows to be a limiting factor in development of voluntary services. We recommend a funding per placement as outlined above.

How can we ensure a lean, effective and efficient implementation structure for the European Solidarity Corps building on best practice at EU and national level?

In order to establish a lean process which is easy to access for new potential placements the screening of placements/hosting organisations should be given into the responsibility of the responsible coordinating organisation. There should be no formal accreditation process for hosting organisations.

To ensure a lean, effective and efficient implementation structure the process of funding should be organized as outlined above.

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AFS Interkulturelle Begegnungen e.V., Germany



⌚ Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V., Germany

⌚ ASF Ceska Republica, Czech Republic

⌚ Stichting Vrienden ASF Nederland, Netherlands

⌚ Stowarzyszenie ASF w Polsce, Poland



⌚ Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, Great Britain



⌚ ASF Belgique/ België, Belgium



Diakonia Kosciola Evangelicko Augsburgskiego w RP, Poland



Diaconia Valdese commissione sinodale per la Diaconia, Italy



Ecumenical Diaconal Year Network



Ekumenická rada cirkvi v SR Dobrovol'nický program, Slovakia



Evangelische Freiwilligendienste gGmbH, Germany



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Karpataljai Reformatur Önkéntes Diakonal EV, Ukraine



Living Hope NGO, Ukraine



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Slezská Diakonie, Czech Republic



Service Protestant pour la Jeunesse, Belgium



Time for God, United Kingdom

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