



# Position Paper

December 2017

## European Solidarity Corps

### In summary, EUROCHAMBRES:

- Supports the overall aim of the European Solidarity Corps as proposed by the European Commission: to address concrete societal challenges while increasing youth employability and mobility
- Considers that the volunteering component and the occupational component should be further differentiated in the legal framework, in particular as far as the quality label is concerned
- Recommends that the scope of activities included in the solidarity corps is further clarified
- Advocates a strong stakeholder partnership and inclusive approach in the implementation
- Highlights that adequate funding should be secured without undermining the funding of other programmes

### Introduction

EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry - represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe, 98% of which are SMEs, through members in 43 countries and a European network of 1700 regional and local Chambers.

Chambers of Commerce and Industry are key players in connecting people to traineeships and jobs. Chambers have extensive experience in particular in providing information on the needs of the European businesses, in identifying, assessing and recognising skills, in upgrading skills, in informing and advising businesses on specific initiative such as the European Solidarity Corps, in matching candidates with traineeship and job opportunities, as well as in ensuring quality during the placement and follow-up after the placement.

In this context EUROCHAMBRES has supported the overall aim of the European Solidarity Corps since the initiative was launched in December 2016. EUROCHAMBRES is part of the project led by the French Public Employment Service, Pôle Emploi, the European Solidarity Corps for Youth (ESC4Y), which falls under the occupational strand of the European Solidarity Corps. The aim of the project is to provide 4000 jobs, apprenticeships and traineeship offers in solidarity-related areas to young people (18-30). Further to the publication by the European Commission of a [proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps](#) on 30 May 2017 and the on-going discussions at the European Parliament and Council, EUROCHAMBRES would like to highlight the following points:

## **Support for the overall aim of the EC proposal: solidarity and employability are two compatible objectives**

EUROCHAMBRES has supported the overall aim of the European Solidarity Corps since its launch last year. EUROCHAMBRES sees in this new initiative an opportunity to address concrete societal challenges while increasing youth employability and mobility and reducing youth unemployment. We strongly believe that solidarity and employment objectives are compatible and one can strengthen the other one. Working in a profit-oriented company is compatible with the concept of solidarity. The European Solidarity Corps aim is more than bringing together organisations and young people around solidarity, it should also improve young people skills and competences for their personal, social and professional development as well as their employability. The work experience gained by the trainees or young workers in the context of the European Solidarity Corps is an important entry point into the labour market. In addition to acquiring new skills they can benefit by orientating their career and building networks of contacts

EUROCHAMBRES considers that the occupational strand is important in particular for young Europeans in more precarious situation: they can be engaged in solidarity activities while being paid. Only a socio-economic category of young people can afford to participate in volunteering. The occupational component will guarantee that the European Solidarity Corps is inclusive.

## **Further differentiation between the volunteering component and the occupational component required in particular regarding the quality label to engage private companies in the European Solidarity Corps**

The occupational and voluntary components are very different in their nature, in the actors involved, in their implementation and expectations. For these reasons, EUROCHAMBRES believes that they should be further differentiated in the legal framework.

To avoid any confusion, the volunteering component should be limited to public authorities and NGOs, while private companies should be involved in the occupational component, along with NGOs and public authorities.

The differentiation between the two components should extend to the methodology, criteria and process to obtain the quality label. The quality label for the occupational component cannot just be “cut and paste” from the experience of the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

If companies, in particular SMEs, are to be involved in the European Solidarity Corps, the quality aspect should be addressed also from the company perspective. Hosting young people requires financial, human and organisational investments from companies, in particular SMEs. The traineeships/job placements need to be cost effective for SMEs, even if they are working in the solidarity area. This implies no administrative burden for applying or hosting a trainee, no additional cost linked to extra insurance, adequate learning base of skills and competences prior to placements, and financial and non-financial support for companies.

## **The scope of activities included in the solidarity corps should be further clarified**

The unclear definition of the scope of activities as “solidarity-related” makes it difficult to motivate and recruit companies to propose traineeship and job offers in the context of the European Solidarity Corps. It might be difficult for SMEs to justify that they are active in the “solidarity-related” fields unless this is more clearly defined. Larger companies with CSR departments/services are better equipped to deal with this ambiguity.

## **Strong partnerships between all the stakeholders to be emphasised**

All the relevant stakeholders - youth associations, volunteering organisations, social partners, public employment agencies, intermediaries organisations such as Chambers and other civil society organisations - must be involved in the management of the European Solidarity Corps. The partnership between public employment services and the business community is in particular crucial to reaching the expected outcomes of the occupational component. The matching cannot be achieved only via a web platform. A strong network is needed for successful outreach and awareness raising among the business community. Chambers can play this role and generate interest among the business community as well as facilitate the matching between young people and traineeship or job opportunities.

## **Adequate funding should be secured without undermining other programmes**

EUROCHAMBRES argues that adequate funding should be secured to implement the European Solidarity corps. This will be crucial to ensuring that not only the quantitative targets are reached but that the placements provided are of the quality expected by both the participating young people and the organisations/companies involved.

EUROCHAMBRES considers that the current budget allocation (80% for the volunteering component and 20% for the occupational component) doesn't take into account the specific support which will be needed to secure the involvement of companies and in particular SMEs in the European Solidarity Corps. We therefore recommend a shift in this allocation: 70% of the budget to the volunteering component and 30% to the occupational component.

Moreover, the overall funding of the European Solidarity Corps should not be to the detriment of other existing programmes, in particular ERASMUS+. In this regard, it is crucial that the European Solidarity Corps is not funded only from budgetary redeployments from existing programmes on competitiveness for growth and jobs (heading 1a of the Multiannual Financial Framework), but that it is also funded by other sources, such as margins in the European budget that have not been used.

*EUROCHAMBRES is following closely the on-going discussions on the European Solidarity Corps, both in the Council and the European Parliament.*

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