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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EX-ANTE EVALUATION**

*Accompanying the document*

**Proposal for a REGULATION**

**laying down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps**

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The EU is built on solidarity: solidarity between its citizens, solidarity across borders between its Member States, and solidarity in its action inside and outside the Union. In response to the political resolve to do more for young people, the Commission initiated the European Solidarity Corps in December 2016; which is followed-up by the proposed Regulation. The European Solidarity Corps aims to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in solidarity activities of high quality accessible to all young people as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion and solidarity in Europe, supporting communities and responding to unmet societal needs.

The proposed legal base is accompanied by an ex-ante evaluation, which examines challenges at two levels: focusing on young people and their opportunities to engage in solidarity activities on the one hand and on broader societal, institutional and organisational needs on the other.

The ex-ante evaluation indicated a need for the EU to address the following major challenges in the framework of a European initiative for youth in the field of solidarity:

- there is a need to overcome fragmentation and provide more opportunities to encourage the engagement of young people and organisations in solidarity activities, namely by bringing volunteering and occupational experiences under one umbrella with a shared quality approach and developing a visible and broad validation of the learning experience gained, regardless of the context in which it took place. There is also a need to ensure easy and equal access through lean procedures, whilst foreseeing appropriate measures to encourage the inclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- there is a need to ensure that the placements and activities offered by a European initiative for youth in the field of solidarity respond to unmet societal needs as well as shared quality standards and a common understanding of the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and competences to be validated across borders.

The ex-ante evaluation focused on two options: 1) to continue implementing the European Solidarity Corps through various existing programmes as it has been the case during the first phase launched in December 2016, whereby eight programmes<sup>1</sup> have been funding solidarity actions, each one through its own legal basis, objectives and budget; 2) to develop a new self-standing initiative with strengthened focus on solidarity, which would build on the experience of existing programmes but would have its own clear set of objectives and ensure more clarity on the purpose and scope of the intervention.

The possibility of using the legal base of one of the existing programmes was discarded due to the fact that this would result in a programme with a complex set of overlapping objectives and limited visibility of solidarity actions in a broader frame. Furthermore, such an approach would lead to the disengagement of stakeholders from the other programmes.

Thus, two options were identified, analysed and compared against the following criteria, which are in line with stakeholders' suggestions during the consultations:

- Accessibility (visibility and clarity for organisations, young people and other stakeholders on how to participate and access funding for solidarity activities);
- Quality (procedures and criteria ensuring quality and safety of placements);

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<sup>1</sup> The Erasmus+ programme, the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI), the LIFE programme, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Health Programme, the Europe for Citizens programme, the European Regional Development Fund (through Interreg) and the Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

- Inclusiveness (measures to ensure the participation of disadvantaged young people);
- Synergy (involvement of and synergies among organisations active in solidarity action regardless of their local, regional, national or European scope);
- Efficiency and simplicity of management provisions and low administrative costs.

Stakeholders during the consultation process welcomed the new opportunities on offer under a self-standing initiative and new funding, whilst ensuring complementarity with other EU and national schemes. Based on this multi-criteria analysis, option 2 (to develop a new self-standing initiative with strengthened focus on solidarity) resulted as the option that would deliver better results against all the considered criteria and was therefore retained as the preferred option. This option will provide a clear and single access point for organisations and young people and will make solidarity actions more visible. It will embed a more inclusive approach through a dedicated inclusion strategy. It will provide overall quality of placements and of preparedness of the young participants through a series of specific qualitative processes and criteria (such as quality label for organisations, training, insurance, etc.). It will bring new synergies between the activities and their recognition as it will put them in one common framework and help create new networks between people and organisations with common aspirations for solidarity. Option 2 will also allow simultaneously decreasing management costs while reaching greater effects (more value for money).

Different delivery mechanisms were considered with respect to the preferred option: direct management, indirect management or a combination of both. The analysis concluded that the latter – a combination of direct and indirect management – would ensure the most cost-effective implementation to reach the envisaged target of mobilising 100.000 young people by 2020. The ex-ante evaluation stresses that sufficient and consistent financial resources are essential in reaching the envisaged target. An overall budget of € 341, 5 million will be required for the period 2018-2020, of which € 294.2 million under Heading 1a being the financial envelope of the Solidarity Corps and € 47.3 million of contributions coming from other Headings and programmes.

The ex-ante evaluation also highlighted the expected positive social impact of the preferred option both at individual level (e.g. improved knowledge, skills and competences for their personal and professional development; increased sense of solidarity and citizenship for their social and civic development) and at societal level (e.g. addressed needs in communities with effects on social welfare and well-being; increased support to organisations committed to solidarity with positive effects on their engagement and on the opportunities offered to young people; contribution to other policy goals such as youth participation, civil protection, social inclusion, cohesion, regional development, environmental protection; improved image of youth on some national media).

Promoting youth participation and social capital is also closely connected with economic growth. Increased participation and employability of young people can have positive consequences for employment and macro-economic growth. However, considering the relatively small size of the proposed intervention as well as the fact that its impact will be spread out throughout Europe and not concentrated on one particular Member State or sector, it was not possible to measure the real impact in macro-economic terms. Similarly, it was not considered relevant to carry out an in-depth analysis of environmental impacts.

The areas of environmental protection and climate action are among the areas where various solidarity activities particularly can make a tangible, positive societal contribution, not only directly – such as through cleaner forests – but also indirectly through increased awareness

and mobilisation for environmental challenges. This positive impact notwithstanding, similarly to other mobility programmes, the European Solidarity Corps will in principle generate an increased demand for transport, which in turn can potentially lead to the increased emission of greenhouse gases. This impact was however considered negligible seen in the context of overall mobility fluxes in Europe.

The ex-ante evaluation underlined that there are well-known close links and spill-overs between many of the societal demands facing EU Member States. While for some areas of unmet demands, such as environmental protection, EU action is prevalent, the responsibility addressing demands in some other areas, such as social protection and education, rests primarily with Member States and regions. In whichever case, however, the EU has a role to play since the objective of the activities of the European Solidarity Corps is to strengthening solidarity between Europeans. The European Solidarity Corps will enhance the European dimension to solidarity, complementing existing policies, programmes and activities and will not generate competition or substitution effects. This complementary effect will be ensured especially since the European Solidarity Corps will address unmet societal needs.