

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on 'European Solidarity Corps and the New EU Youth Strategy'

(2019/C 86/15)

Rapporteur:	Matteo Luigi BIANCHI (IT/ECR), Mayor of the Municipality of Morazzone (Varese)
Reference documents:	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Solidarity Corps programme and repealing [European Solidarity Corps Regulation] and Regulation (EU) No 375/2014
	COM(2018) 440 final
	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy
	COM(2018) 269 final

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS

Amendment 1

Preamble (1)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The European Union is built on solidarity, among its citizens and among its Member States. This common value guides its actions and provides the necessary unity to cope with current and future societal challenges, which young Europeans are willing to help address by expressing their solidarity in practice.	The European Union is built on solidarity, among its citizens and among its Member States, <i>as well as among local and regional communities belonging to those Member States.</i> This common value guides its actions and provides the necessary unity to cope with current and future societal challenges, which young Europeans are willing to help address by expressing their solidarity in practice <i>and by developing a long-term commitment to solidarity, something that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.</i>

Reason

The added text highlights the role of the local and regional level in young people's civic engagement, identifying this as a first essential point of contact in the area of solidarity.

Amendment 2

Preamble (5)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Young people should be provided with easily accessible opportunities to engage in solidarity activities, which could enable them to express their commitment to the benefit of communities while acquiring useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability. Those activities should also support the mobility of young volunteers, trainees and workers.</p>	<p>Young people should be provided with easily accessible opportunities to engage in solidarity activities, which could enable them to express their commitment to the benefit of communities, both local and regional, in both normal and emergency settings, while acquiring useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability. Those activities should also support the mobility of young volunteers, trainees and workers.</p>

Reason

The addition makes clear the significance of the regional and local dimension to the commitment of young Europeans, notably in emergency situations where humanitarian aid is required.

Amendment 3

Preamble (6)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>The solidarity activities offered to young people should be of high quality, in the sense that they should respond to unmet societal needs, contribute to strengthening communities, offer young people the opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge and competences, be financially accessible to young people, and be implemented in safe and healthy conditions.</p>	<p>The solidarity activities offered to young people should be of high quality, in the sense that they should respond to unmet societal needs, including local needs, contribute to strengthening local and regional communities, offer young people the opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge and competences, be financially accessible to young people, and be implemented in safe and healthy conditions.</p>

Reason

Stresses the importance of meeting societal needs and of turning voluntary activities into forms of strengthening local or regional communities.

Amendment 4

Preamble (7)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>The European Solidarity Corps provides a single entry point for solidarity activities throughout the Union and beyond. Consistency and complementarity should be ensured with other relevant Union policies and programmes. The European Solidarity Corps is built on the strengths and synergies of predecessor and existing programmes, notably the European Voluntary Service[1] and the EU Aid Volunteers[2]. It also complements the efforts made by Member States to support young people and ease their school-to-work transition under the Youth Guarantee by providing them with additional opportunities to make a start on the labour market in the form of traineeships or jobs in solidarity-related areas within their respective Member State or across borders. Complementarity with existing Union level networks pertinent to the activities under the European Solidarity Corps, such as the European Network of Public Employment Services, EURES and the Eurodesk network, are also ensured. Furthermore, complementarity between existing related schemes, in particular national solidarity schemes and mobility schemes for young people, and the European Solidarity Corps should be ensured, building on good practices where appropriate.</p> <p>[1] Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50).</p> <p>[2] Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative') (OJ L 122, 24.4.2014, p. 1).</p>	<p>The European Solidarity Corps provides a single entry point for solidarity activities throughout the Union and beyond. Consistency and complementarity should be ensured with other relevant Union policies and programmes, adopting a horizontal approach and encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation wherever possible. The European Solidarity Corps is built on the strengths and synergies of predecessor and existing programmes, notably the European Voluntary Service[1] and the EU Aid Volunteers[2]. It also complements the efforts made by Member States to support young people and ease their school-to-work transition under the Youth Guarantee by providing them with additional opportunities to make a start on the labour market in the form of traineeships, forms of apprenticeship or jobs in solidarity-related areas within their respective Member State or across borders. Complementarity with existing Union level networks pertinent to the activities under the European Solidarity Corps, such as the European Network of Public Employment Services, EURES and the Eurodesk network, not to mention social networks such as the European Volunteer Centre and the European Youth Forum, are also ensured. Furthermore, complementarity between existing related schemes, in particular national solidarity schemes and mobility schemes for young people, and the European Solidarity Corps should be ensured, building on good practices where appropriate. Synergies should also be developed, as should an ongoing and direct dialogue with all relevant local and regional authorities, together with all bodies — including inter-regional ones — that have already benefited from solidarity activities and which may, in the light of their experience, be able to offer suggestions and new ideas on solidarity.</p> <p>[1] Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50).</p> <p>[2] Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative') (OJ L 122, 24.4.2014, p. 1).</p>

Reason

The Commission should support the most cross-sectoral approach possible and ensure that local and regional authorities are more directly involved in cooperating with the European Solidarity Corps. It also needs to ensure that there is an ongoing dialogue with organisations already working in the sector and that have previously benefited from solidarity activities.

Amendment 5

Preamble (10)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>These activities should be to the benefit of communities while also fostering the individual's personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, which may take the form of volunteering, traineeships and jobs, projects or networking activities, developed in relation to different areas, such as education and training, employment, gender equality, entrepreneurship — in particular social entrepreneurship —, citizenship and democratic participation, environment and nature protection, climate action, disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery, agriculture and rural development, provision of food and non-food items, health and wellbeing, creativity and culture, physical education and sport, social assistance and welfare, reception and integration of third-country nationals, territorial cooperation and cohesion, and cooperation across borders. Such solidarity activities should include a solid learning and training dimension through relevant activities that can be offered to participants before, during and after the solidarity activity.</p>	<p>These activities should be to the benefit of local communities and the wider community building effort while also fostering the individual's personal, educational, social, civic, and professional development, which may take the form of volunteering, apprenticeships, traineeships and jobs, projects or networking activities, developed in relation to different areas, such as education and training, employment, gender equality, entrepreneurship — in particular social entrepreneurship —, citizenship and democratic participation, environment and nature protection, climate action, disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery, agriculture and rural development, provision of food and non-food items, health and wellbeing, creativity and culture, physical education and sport, social assistance and welfare, reception and integration of third-country nationals, territorial cooperation and cohesion, development and restoration of the local and regional cultural and artistic heritage — both tangible and intangible — and cooperation across borders. Such solidarity activities should include a solid learning and training dimension through relevant activities that can be offered to participants before, during and after the solidarity activity.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions highlights the need to facilitate the participation of local and regional communities and any relevant body through programmes and initiatives to develop and restore the local cultural and artistic heritage.

Amendment 6

Preamble (11)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Volunteering activities (both within and beyond the Union) constitute a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context which enhances young people's personal, socio-educational and professional development, active citizenship and employability. Volunteering activities should not have an adverse effect on potential or existing paid employment, nor should they be seen as a substitute for it. The Commission and the Member States should cooperate regarding volunteering policies in the youth field via the open method of coordination.</p>	<p>Volunteering activities (both within and beyond the Union) constitute a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context which enhances young people's personal, socio-educational and professional development, active citizenship and employability. Volunteering activities should not have an adverse effect on potential or existing paid employment, nor should they be seen as a substitute for it. The Commission and the Member States should cooperate regarding volunteering policies in the youth field via the open method of coordination and by devising common tools for preventing what is known as 'undeclared employment' or the improper recourse to voluntary work simply as a means of avoiding paying young people engaged in solidarity activities.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions reiterates the need to devise forms of cooperation between the Commission and the Member States and instruments that make a clear distinction between voluntary work and solidarity activities that are remunerated or where the programme provides for wage support.

Amendment 7

Preamble (12)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Traineeships and jobs in solidarity-related areas can offer additional opportunities for young people to make a start on the labour market while contributing to addressing key societal challenges. This can help foster the employability and productivity of young people while easing their transition from education to employment, which is key to enhancing their chances on the labour market. The traineeship activities offered under the European Solidarity Corps follow the quality principles outlined in Council Recommendation on establishing a Quality Framework for Traineeships[1]. The traineeships and jobs offered constitute a stepping stone for young people to enter the labour market and are accompanied by adequate post-activity support. The traineeship and job activities are facilitated by relevant labour market actors, in particular public and private employment services, social partners and Chambers of Commerce, and are remunerated by the participating organisation. As participating organisations, they should apply for funding via the competent implementing body of the European Solidarity Corps in view of intermediating between the young participants and employers offering traineeship and job activities in solidarity sectors.</p> <p>[1] Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1).</p>	<p>Traineeships, apprenticeships and jobs in solidarity-related areas can offer additional opportunities for young people to make a start on the labour market, providing them with an opportunity to develop a long-term spirit of solidarity in their private lives as well. This can help foster the employability and productivity of young people while easing their transition from education to employment, which is key to enhancing their chances on the labour market. The apprenticeship and/or traineeship activities offered under the European Solidarity Corps follow the quality principles outlined in Council Recommendation on establishing a Quality Framework for Traineeships[1] and are accompanied by adequate post-activity support. The traineeship, apprenticeship and job activities are facilitated by relevant labour market actors, in particular public and private employment services, social partners, relevant local and regional institutions that are more sensitive to real needs in the area and Chambers of Commerce, and are remunerated by the participating organisation. As participating organisations, they should apply for funding via the competent implementing body of the European Solidarity Corps in view of intermediating between the young participants and employers offering traineeship, apprenticeship and job activities in solidarity sectors.</p> <p>[1] Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1).</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions recognises the value of these traineeships as a tool of making it easier for young people to enter the world of work, but stresses the need for meaningful, regular contacts with local and regional bodies, both public and private, that are well-placed to grasp the reality of social needs in their areas.

Amendment 8

Preamble (13)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Young people's spirit of initiative is an important asset for society and for the labour market. The European Solidarity Corps contributes to fostering this aspect by offering young people the opportunity to devise and implement their own projects aimed at addressing specific challenges to the benefit of their local communities. These projects are an opportunity to try out ideas and support young people to be themselves drivers of solidarity actions. They also serve as a springboard for further engagement in solidarity activities and are a first step towards encouraging European Solidarity Corps participants to engage in self-employment or setting up associations, non-governmental organisations or other bodies active in the solidarity, non-profit and youth sectors.</p>	<p>Young people's spirit of initiative is an important asset for society and for the labour market. The European Solidarity Corps contributes to fostering this aspect by offering young people the opportunity to devise and implement their own projects aimed at addressing specific challenges to the benefit of their local communities. These projects are an opportunity to try out ideas and support young people to be themselves drivers of solidarity actions that benefit local communities and to foster civic engagement, something that will also counter social exclusion and migration from rural areas to urban ones. They also serve as a springboard for further engagement in solidarity activities and are a first step towards encouraging European Solidarity Corps participants to engage in self-employment or setting up associations, non-governmental organisations or other bodies active in the solidarity, non-profit and youth sectors.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions underlines the importance of a solidarity strategy that encourages young people to go on afterwards to undertake entrepreneurial activities that benefit the local community and that are more inclusive.

Amendment 9

Preamble (14)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Young people and organisations participating in the European Solidarity Corps should feel that they belong to a community of individuals and entities committed to enhancing solidarity across Europe. At the same time, participating organisations need support to strengthen their capacities to offer good quality activities to an increasing number of participants. The European Solidarity Corps supports networking activities aimed at strengthening young people and participating organisations' engagement in this community, at fostering a European Solidarity Corps spirit, as well as at encouraging the exchange of useful practices and experience. These activities also contribute to raising awareness about the European Solidarity Corps among public and private actors as well as to collect feedback from participants and participating organisations on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps.</p>	<p>Young people and organisations participating in the European Solidarity Corps should feel that they belong to a community of individuals and entities committed to enhancing solidarity across Europe. At the same time, participating organisations need support to strengthen their capacities to offer good quality activities to an increasing number of participants. The European Solidarity Corps supports networking activities aimed at strengthening young people and participating organisations' engagement, at fostering a European Solidarity Corps spirit, as well as at encouraging the exchange of useful practices and experience. These activities also contribute to raising awareness about the European Solidarity Corps among public and private actors as well as to collect feedback from participants and participating organisations on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps and its capacity to respond to the needs and expectations of local communities.</p>

Reason

Active cooperation between the European Solidarity Corps and all relevant stakeholders is paramount. This should include replying to any requests for information they may have as well as forwarding updates and briefings so as to ensure a more integrated approach and qualitative assessments of projects.

Amendment 10

Preamble (15)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Particular attention should be given to ensuring the quality of the activities and other opportunities offered under the European Solidarity Corps, in particular by offering training, language support, insurance, administrative and post-activity support to participants as well as the validation of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through their European Solidarity Corps experience. Security and safety of the volunteers remain of paramount importance and volunteers should not be deployed to operations conducted in the theatre of international and non-international armed conflicts.</p>	<p>Particular attention should be given to ensuring the quality of the activities and other opportunities offered under the European Solidarity Corps, in particular by offering training, language support, insurance, administrative and post-activity support to participants as well as the validation of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through their European Solidarity Corps experience, using specific certification criteria. Volunteering activities should involve for-profit and non-profit organisations, foundations, other non-for-profit entities, associations and social enterprises, developing specific rules regarding what are referred to as ‘occupational placements’. These make it possible to support solidarity projects that may benefit from tax exemptions/relief on the independent initiative of Member States. In addition, security and safety of the volunteers remain of paramount importance and volunteers should not be deployed to operations conducted in the theatre of international and non-international armed conflicts.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions stresses the need to encourage volunteering, traineeships, apprenticeships and paid work-related activities among all those who promote projects under the European Solidarity Corps, and to evaluate the possibility of Member States introducing tax exemptions/relief initiatives as an incentive.

Amendment 11

Preamble (18)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Any entity willing to participate in the European Solidarity Corps should receive a quality label provided that the appropriate conditions are fulfilled. The process that leads to the attribution of a quality label should be carried out on a continuous basis by the implementing bodies of the European Solidarity Corps. The attributed quality label should be reassessed periodically and could be revoked if, in the context of the checks to be performed, the conditions that led to its attribution were found to be no longer fulfilled.</p>	<p>Any entity willing to participate in the European Solidarity Corps should receive a quality label provided that the appropriate conditions are fulfilled. These should include an assessment of the entity's level of awareness of local and regional needs, the presence of an integrated approach and active and fruitful cooperation with all local and regional authorities and/or associations or entities working in the solidarity sector. The process that leads to the attribution of a quality label should be carried out on a continuous basis by the implementing bodies of the European Solidarity Corps, in close cooperation with national agencies and taking account of the main fields where solidarity is developing in the Member States. The attributed quality label should be reassessed periodically and could be revoked if, in the context of the checks to be performed, the conditions that led to its attribution were found to be no longer fulfilled.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions highlights the importance of ensuring maximum cooperation on the part of national agencies, organisations that already exist or local and regional institutions active in the area of solidarity. Examples include the numerous sports associations that promote innovative voluntary initiatives, fostering an integrated approach and cooperation at all levels of governance with stakeholders wishing to participate in the European Solidarity Corps.

Amendment 12

Preamble (22)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>European Solidarity Corps Resource Centres should assist the implementing bodies, the participating organisations and the young people taking part in the European Solidarity Corps in order to raise the quality of the implementation of the activities of the European Solidarity Corps as well as to enhance the identification and validation of competences acquired through these activities including through producing Youthpass certificates.</p>	<p>European Solidarity Corps Resource Centres should assist the implementing bodies, the participating organisations and the young people taking part in the European Solidarity Corps in order to raise the quality of the implementation of the activities of the European Solidarity Corps as well as to enhance the identification and validation of competences acquired through these activities through producing exclusive European Solidarity Corps certificates for activities completed and making use of tools such as Youthpass and Europass, i.e. measures in the field of vocational apprenticeships for identifying and defining the knowledge and skills thus acquired.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions recognises the importance of further assisting young volunteers in their search for jobs by providing them, upon completion of an activity, with an exclusive European Solidarity Corps certificate describing the competences acquired, including specific assessment indicators, which they can use for professional purposes both nationally and internationally.

Amendment 13

Preamble (27)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>The European Solidarity Corps targets young people aged 18-30, and participation in the activities offered by the European Solidarity Corps should require prior registration in the European Solidarity Corps Portal.</p>	<p>The European Solidarity Corps targets young people aged 18-30, without any filters regarding, for example, social, economic or educational background, and participation in the activities offered by the European Solidarity Corps should require prior registration in the European Solidarity Corps Portal. It should also be possible, via its portal, to follow a multi-lingual online training course in preparation for the solidarity activity chosen, with the additional aim of selecting the field that can make the most of each person's solidarity ambitions and enhance their attractiveness in terms of future job prospects.</p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions suggests creating a multilingual portal where it will be possible to download specific information and training material for the different types of solidarity experience on offer, designed to assist young people in their choice with a view to making them more 'marketable' when they are looking for a job in the future.

Amendment 14

Preamble (28)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Special attention should be given to ensuring that the activities supported by the European Solidarity Corps are accessible to all young people, notably the most disadvantaged ones. Special measures should be in place to promote social inclusion, the participation of disadvantaged young people, as well as to take into account the constraints imposed by the remoteness of a number of rural areas and of the outermost regions of the Union and the Overseas Countries and Territories. Similarly, the participating countries should endeavour to adopt all appropriate measures to remove legal and administrative obstacles to the proper functioning of the European Solidarity Corps. This should resolve, where possible, and without prejudice to the Schengen <i>acquis</i> and Union law on the entry and residence of third-country nationals, administrative issues that create difficulties in obtaining visas and residence permits, as well as the issuing of a European Health Insurance Card in the case of cross-border activities within the European Union.</p>	<p>Special attention should be given to ensuring that the activities supported by the European Solidarity Corps are accessible to all young people, notably the most disadvantaged ones. Special measures should be in place to promote social inclusion, the participation of disadvantaged young people, including those with disabilities, as well as to take into account the constraints imposed by the remoteness of a number of rural areas and of the outermost regions of the Union and the Overseas Countries and Territories. Similarly, the participating countries should endeavour to adopt all appropriate measures to remove legal and administrative obstacles to the proper functioning of the European Solidarity Corps. This should resolve, where possible, and without prejudice to the Schengen <i>acquis</i> and Union law on the entry and residence of third-country nationals, administrative issues that create difficulties in obtaining visas and residence permits, as well as the issuing of a European Health Insurance Card in the case of cross-border activities within the European Union.</p>

Reason

The addition is intended to highlight the inclusion of young people with disabilities in the activities of the European Solidarity Corps, notably in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by the EU.

Amendment 15

Chapter III, Article 7

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>Volunteering as referred to in Article 4.1, point (a) shall include a learning and training component, shall not substitute traineeships or jobs, shall not be equated with employment and shall be based on a written volunteering agreement.</p>	<p>Volunteering as referred to in Article 4.1, point (a) shall include a learning and training component, shall not substitute traineeships or jobs, shall not be equated with employment and shall be based on a written agreement on volunteering, apprenticeships or any other arrangement that gives a full description of the planned activity.</p>

Reason

The Commission document should recognise the volunteering activities for each type of stakeholder, whether public or private, profit or non-profit, fully reflecting the spirit of solidarity which is part and parcel of volunteering. It is vital to draw up monitoring instruments to prevent precarious work, moonlighting and recourse to voluntary work as a way of avoiding paying those involved, highlighting the most innovative and original contributions and introducing incentives for the most dynamic and proactive stakeholders.

Amendment 16

Chapter VI — Article 16(2)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	<p><i>The assessment criteria should also take into consideration any integrated forms of cooperation between the entity concerned and bodies already active in promoting youth policies, including sports policy, which is undoubtedly of growing importance and interest. Cooperation with the EU Youth Coordinator and any forms of participation within the EU Youth Strategy Platform, as proposed by the European Commission in Communication (2018) 269 final, will be of particular value in this respect.</i></p>

Reason

The European Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission's proposal to establish an EU Youth Coordinator and an EU Youth Strategy Platform, and hopes that a system of ongoing cooperation will be developed, with scheduled study meetings between the coordinator and the European Committee of the Regions in order to involve the local and regional level across the EU in an effective manner.

Amendment 17

Chapter VI — Article 17

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p data-bbox="177 723 632 757"><i>Access to the European Solidarity Corps funding</i></p> <p data-bbox="177 857 783 1137">Any public or private entity established in a participating country as well as international organisations may apply for funding under the European Solidarity Corps. In the case of the activities referred to in Articles 7, 8 and 11, a quality label shall be obtained by the participating organisation as a pre-condition for receiving funding under the European Solidarity Corps. In the case of the solidarity projects referred to Article 9, natural persons may also apply for funding on behalf of informal groups of European Solidarity Corps participants.</p>	<p data-bbox="810 723 1265 757"><i>Access to the European Solidarity Corps funding</i></p> <p data-bbox="810 857 1418 1193">Any public or private entity established in a participating country as well as international organisations may apply for funding under the European Solidarity Corps. In the case of the activities referred to in Articles 7, 8 and 11, a quality label shall be obtained by the participating organisation as a pre-condition for receiving funding under the European Solidarity Corps. In the case of the solidarity projects referred to Article 9, natural persons may also apply for funding on behalf of informal groups of European Solidarity Corps participants. <i>Projects entailing a high level of added value in terms of the regional and local dimension should in any case be rewarded.</i></p>

Reason

The added text serves to highlight projects with a major impact on regional and local settings.

Amendment 18

Chapter XI — Article 28(2)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	<p data-bbox="810 1839 1418 2067"><i>The Commission should give as much support as possible to national authorities and national agencies in disseminating information regarding all the initiatives that can be proposed in the framework of the European Solidarity Corps, thereby ensuring that local and regional bodies are fully informed and that there are appropriate direct or indirect forms of technical support at the registration stage and when funding is subsequently requested.</i></p>

Reason

It is essential to increase the involvement of local and regional entities, ensuring more active participation and a regularly updated network that also serves as a reference point for technical and training information.

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments — EU Youth Strategy

1. emphasises the need for youth policy to be built into all European Union policies by means of a horizontal approach, fostering cross-sectoral, interregional and cross-border cooperation;
2. warmly welcomes the European Commission's proposal to introduce an EU Youth Coordinator and to develop the EU Youth Strategy Platform, boosting its information role and making it a platform for ongoing, effective dialogue with all stakeholders;
3. calls for regular meetings with the EU Youth Coordinator to be planned and for the institution of formal cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions, as the voice of all local and regional social demands in the area of youth policy;
4. welcomes the new Youth Work Agenda, highlighting its particular social value for young people of all backgrounds, including those who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and those who belong to indigenous national or linguistic minorities, and pointing to the need to ensure greater involvement of young people, including the most vulnerable, through the reinvigorated EU Youth Dialogue;
5. recommends maximum inclusion of young people from all backgrounds in order to ensure equal opportunities, social integration and support in job-seeking, guaranteeing that they can play an active part in the most dynamic sectors, such as sport;
6. welcomes the application of systematic tracking of EU expenditure under the different youth financing programmes, and hopes that there will be further long-term increases in financing for youth policies in the future. This aspect is of particular importance also for those EU Member States or regions worst hit by brain drain.

European Solidarity Corps

7. recommends that local volunteering be strengthened through different means of funding and communication, pointing out that many young people take part in local community projects whose contribution to political and civic engagement, social inclusion and countering migration from rural to urban areas should be highlighted⁽¹⁾;
8. calls for a clear distinction to be made between the voluntary and employment strands of the European Solidarity Corps, while recognising their complementarity, in order to avoid insecure or unpaid forms of work;
9. draws attention to the importance of recognising the skills acquired through voluntary work by issuing specific European Solidarity Corps certificates, while also using other similar instruments such as the Youthpass and Europass certificates, in other words the defining criteria adopted for apprenticeships;
10. calls for effective monitoring of participating organisations, in order to ensure full compliance with the standards set out in the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships⁽²⁾;
11. calls for specific criteria to be devised to assess projects involving pre-accession countries, where previously existing difficulties may have had a negative impact on the perception of solidarity-based commitments and volunteering, reducing young people's openness to these values.

⁽¹⁾ One such example in Italy is the recent experience of the Lombardy Region, which has successfully promoted initiatives to support solidarity-based sport (e.g. the Lega Civica).

⁽²⁾ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6779-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

Specific recommendations

12. agrees with the Commission's aim of increasing the impact of the EU Youth Strategy at local level;
13. agrees on the importance of the EU Youth Coordinator and its strategic role, entailing regular meetings with the European Committee of the Regions and more robust channels for training and information with the relevant national agencies;
14. also acknowledges the importance of the private sector for occupational placements whilst urging, however, that solidarity-based activities always be remunerated;
15. considers that, in order to ensure maximum quality of project implementation, it is crucial to speed up as much as possible the assessment phase of such projects, enabling the organisations involved to access funds more rapidly, and to have straightforward, rapid and flexible project registration procedures, with special attention to those with restricted internet access and/or language difficulties;
16. points out that, in order to ensure maximum promulgation of the European Solidarity Corps at local and regional level, there must be constant interaction with national stakeholders and practical, effective efforts to publicise the solidarity opportunities available;
17. considers that, when granting quality labels, value should be attached to the most original and effective volunteering activities (such as those conducted in cooperation and synergy with sports associations), as they can spur young people to maintain lifelong solidarity-based commitments, and also hopes that the organisations taking part can benefit from tax relief at the independent initiative of the Member States;
18. stresses that the proposal of the European Solidarity Corps should be implemented in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementing phase of this proposal is extremely important. Calls on the Commission to take in consideration the needs and expectations of local communities as they are closer to the people concerned; underlines that education, professional training and youth matters are within the competence of the Member States and that the European Union, in accordance with Article 6 TFEU, must support, coordinate and supplement national measures given that boosting employment is a matter of common interest. Thus, the success of relevant EU measures, which must comply with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, depends on the cooperation with local and regional authorities;
19. regrets the lack of a shared, standard Europe-wide definition of 'social economy enterprises', from which the proposal for a regulation nevertheless requires guarantees in terms of outreach, publicity and dissemination of opportunities and results of the actions supported by the programme (Preamble, recital 38) and support for European Solidarity Corps activities;
20. suggests that the common volunteering parameters recognised by the European Volunteer Centre be included in the evaluations of solidarity activities.

Brussels, 6 December 2018.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ
