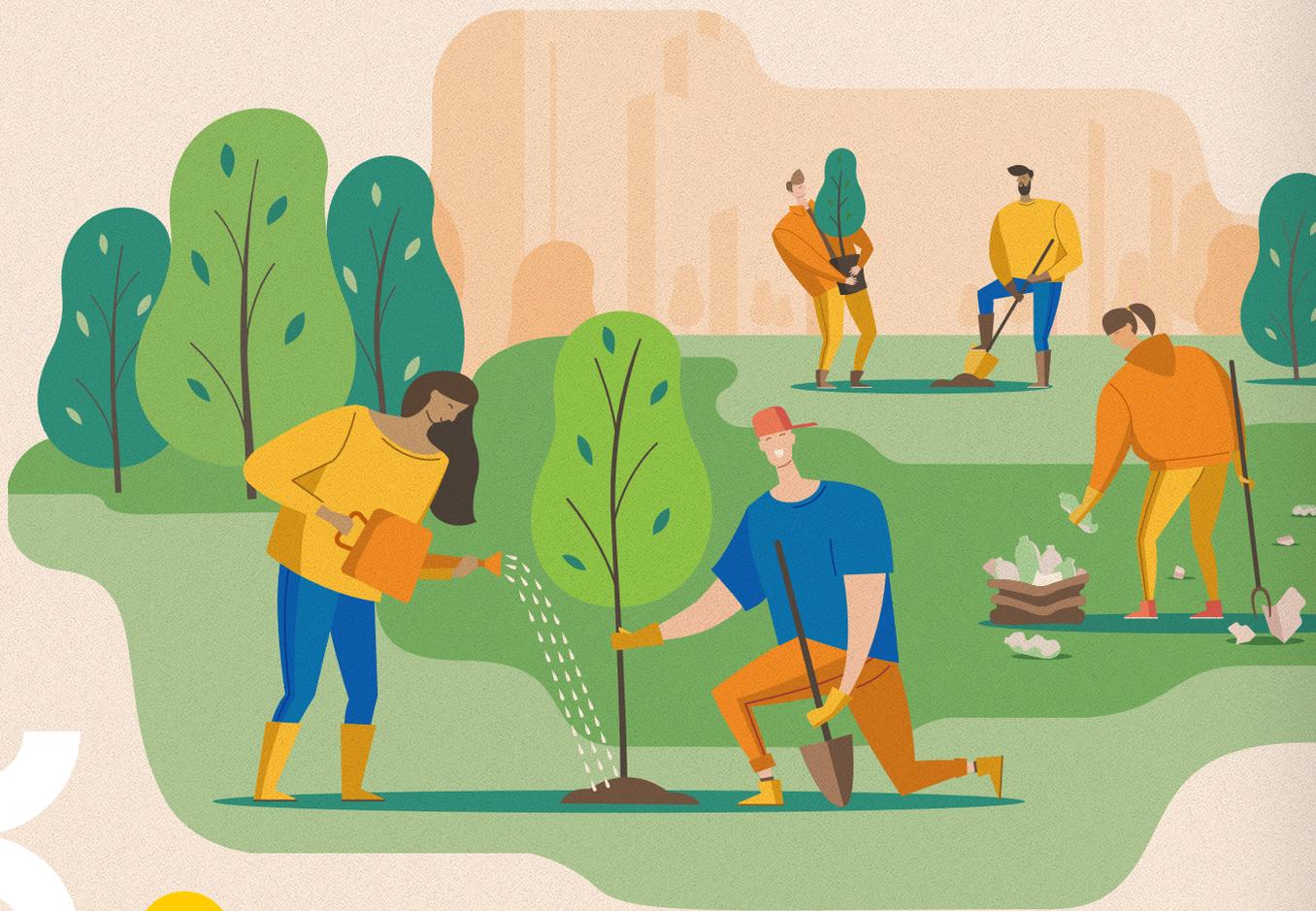


Showing Solidarity for ...



**Thematic Priorities in the European
Solidarity Corps Programme**

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SALTO European Solidarity Corps

SALTO ESC supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO ESC coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO ESC contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations.

SALTO ESC is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO ESC is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the EU youth programmes as well as to support and develop European youth work.

Find us online at www.salto-youth.net, www.oead.at and www.salto-youth.net/solidarity

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Introduction

This research explores how the thematic priorities of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme can be supported by ESC funded projects. It was conducted by People Dialogue and Change and commissioned by SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre.

The paper showcases 9 project case studies of solidarity and volunteering projects, funded under European Solidarity Corps (ESC). All of the featured projects focus on one or more of the following thematic areas contained within the 2021 ESC programme¹:



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action



Digital transformation



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health

Whilst the above themes were the priority focus of this research, where the selected projects contributed to the remaining two thematic priorities, this was also explored in the case study:



Participation in democratic life



Social inclusion

¹ See page 8 European Solidarity Corps Guide: 2021 Call, https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2021.pdf

The links between each project and the ‘four cornerstones of solidarity’ (human rights, empathy, active citizenship, and inclusion) are also explored. This builds on the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre’s *4thought for Solidarity* research², which showed that there was not a shared concept of solidarity across the European Youth Sector, but a number of emerging ideas could be identified.

The four cornerstones of solidarity



It also makes connections to the ‘Showing Solidarity with...’ research³, which showed that an important dimension of solidarity shown by the project participants is their target audience, and how their project impacts people outside of the projects.

An overview of each project is given in Chapter 3. This is followed by a full discussion of what can be learnt about each of the thematic areas from the case studies in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 outlines concluding messages and a set of recommendations on how the thematic priorities can better be supported within the ESC programme. These recommendations are based on a workshop held with staff from National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corp (NAs) to consider the early findings of the research. An outline of the research methodology is given in Chapter 2.

2 Nicodemi & Bačlija Knoch (2020) *4Thought for Solidarity*, Vienna, European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre, <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4046/4TDS%20Study%2020200421.pdf>

3 Moxon and Serban (2020) *Showing Solidarity with...*, Vienna, European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre, <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4087/Best%20Practise%2020200917%20small%20%28002%29.pdf>

Methodology



Case study selection and creation

The featured projects in this research were all identified through the European Solidarity Corps projects database⁴. The research team reviewed all projects linked to the three programme themes (health, environment, and digital transformation) within this database. Projects were reviewed from a broad range of countries across Europe as much as possible.

After selecting interesting and promising practices, a final selection of 15 potential case studies were identified by the research team and SALTO ESC. National Agency officers were then contacted for further feedback, and a small number of substitutes were made to this lengthy list.

The 15 project leads were then invited to take part in 1-to-1 interviews with the research team to share more details about their project and how it linked to the European Solidarity Corps 2021 priorities. This resulted in 9 projects whose participants were willing and able to participate within the time frame. Following interviews, the final case study was sent to each project for checking and corrections.

Limitations of case studies

A limitation of this methodology is that it meant identifying links between 2021 programme themes in projects that were initiated and funded 2020 and earlier. The ESC project database is not a real-time updated database. Very few 2021 funded projects were available on the database at the time of the research. This is likely to have only had minimal effects when it came to the themes related to digital transformation and the environment. These topics were common amongst ESC projects prior to 2021. However, for the topic of health, which is strongly connected to the COVID-19 pandemic it has meant projects that were designed to respond specifically to COVID-19 were not generally identifiable for inclusion in the research. However, as all of the projects took place throughout the pandemic, they were all affected by it, and most had to adjust their modes of delivery. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

This research is non-evaluative. It is beyond the scope of this research to extensively evaluate any of the nine project's claims of success or impact. The liaison with National Agencies was used to confirm the project was generally of satisfactory quality and suitable for inclusion in the research. It can be assumed that all projects were delivered as described. However, it is important to note we have taken all project's claims of impact at face value. Therefore, we have assumed that projects which aim to make an impact on the wider community (for instance, by improving the environment, or addressing a social issue) are successful in doing so. This assumption, which may also be common in the ESC programme is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Workshop with NA staff

To shape the conclusion and recommendations, a half-day workshop was held with NA staff who are directly involved in the ESC programme. 14 people attended from 11 NAs.

⁴ https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects_en



Case study projects

This section gives an overview of each of the 9 case study projects explored for this study.

Project overview

Digi-woods of Eastern Finland



Individual volunteering project

Solidarity for a Sustainable Environment



Individual volunteering project

Tech it Easy!



Solidarity project

Ambassadors of European and Olympic Values



Individual volunteering project

Together for Climate Justice



Solidarity project

Geöblær (Sunny Side)



Solidarity project

Water You Waiting For?



Team volunteering project

Awareness campaign: Sexting in School



Solidarity project

Empowering Youth for a Sustainable and Strong Europe



Individual volunteering project



Project

Digi-woods of Eastern Finland

Finland



Organisation

Nuorisokeskus Metsäkartano
www.metsakartano.com

Length of project

24 months
(01/01/2019–31/12/2020)

Project contact

Maija Jeskanen

Relevant thematic priorities



Inclusion and diversity



Digital transformation

Countries involved

Italy, France, Germany, Portugal

Project type

Individual volunteering project

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/2018-1-FI01-ESC11-060142>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Metsäkärtano Youth Centre and Hyvärilä Youth Centre jointly developed the DIGI-WOODS project to address the current employment situation all around Europe and to provide the opportunity for young people living in the rural areas of Finland to communicate with young people from other countries. Taking a long-term approach, the project aimed to promote international youth work and its possibilities as well as to activate young people in and around North Savo and North Karelia. In these areas, young people do not often have the chance to interact with young people from outside Finland, to practise their foreign language skills or develop their intercultural learning abilities.

Four volunteers were hosted in the two youth centres, where they helped plan and run youth activities, assisted youth workers and worked with other local stakeholders in the community such as schools and local youth groups. The project volunteers had access to a professional mentor, trained within the NA's ESC training activities for mentors. The volunteers helped

run the informal learning projects of youth centres as well as other activities such as school group youth camps. Their roles included organising intercultural activities (international dinners, presentations of their countries, etc.) delivering workshops on soft skills for pupils in the local schools and helping local volunteers run community events. Volunteers also undertook media-related tasks to make youth centre work better known in regional, national, and international levels. The youth centres offered learning activities on digital marketing.

The new skills acquired were then used by volunteers to promote youth centre activities on social media channels. This was intended to give the volunteers the chance to improve their employability by developing real working skills, creativity, and social media skills. Overall, both the international volunteers and local young people benefited a lot from the project. The international volunteers had the opportunity to develop their digital marketing skills that would then help their future employment. The local young people had the opportunity for intercultural interactions and to engage with people from outside of their region.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Inclusion and diversity were ensured from the recruitment phase - the application process was open to young people with different social, cultural or economic backgrounds and the aim was to have a diverse group of volunteers. Essential throughout the whole project was that activities would fulfil the learning needs of the volunteers, thus also possibly enhancing the intercultural exchange between the international participants and the local youth groups. For this purpose, volunteers were encouraged to create their own projects, with the support of the local networks. Local schools especially were happy to work with the international volunteers.



Digital transformation was one of the main priorities of the project. Volunteers had the chance to acquire skills on digital marketing and to get familiar with practising by using different social media platforms. Volunteers promoted the activities they had organised for the community and could easily reach their local peers through social media. With the commencement of project activities running during the pandemic, the youth centres started to plan a platform, where volunteers could communicate both within their group and with other groups in the community. This later enabled digital interaction between volunteers, the youth workers in the host organisations, mentors, the schoolteachers and other youth groups.



LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



The project encouraged active citizenship of international participants. In addition, it is also focused strongly on intercultural learning and breaking stereotypes which can be related to inclusion. Young people in the region have limited opportunities to interact with young people from outside Finland. Therefore, this project provided an opportunity to build and develop understanding between communities and identify common interests amongst European young people.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Different challenges were posed by the pandemic – the regular activities of the youth centres were temporarily suspended. A digital platform was put in place to communicate with the volunteers and to deliver youth work services as a solution. Although this was successful, the digital approach could not fully replace all elements of the youth centres face-to-face programme.



Project

Solidarity for a Sustainable Environment

Scotland



Organisation

Scottish Wildlife Trust
www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

Length of project

24 months (31/05/2019 – 31/05/21
extended until 31/12/2021)

Project contact

Peter Gilbert

Relevant thematic priorities



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health

Countries involved

Spain, France, Hungary, Germany

Project type

Individual volunteering project

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2018-1-UK01-ESC11-060141>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Scottish Wildlife Trust ran the long-term volunteering project aiming for positive change in the communities in Scotland by facilitating the engagement of European volunteers in meeting local environmental challenges and wider environmental targets. These volunteers had the opportunity to improve their knowledge, skills, cross-cultural awareness, and employability. They took part in different training activities, developing their ability to operate effectively in a team and in another culture, while also being inspired and empowered to stay involved in the conservation field. Volunteering places were planned with Reserve Project Groups⁵ based in four locations in Scotland. With a duration of 12 months, the field learning offered volunteers the chance to gain skills across all seasons by being part of conservation activities on nature

⁵ A Reserve Project Group is a roving/mobile group of 1 member of staff (Reserve Project Officer) plus volunteers who work on several different nature reserves (on average 15-20) within their geographical location.

reserves (i.e., woodland management, peat bog restoration, footpath and boardwalk construction). Volunteers supported the management of the nature conservation sites and had the chance to experience different working tools and projects in environmental protection. They worked directly with the local volunteers in several different sites, during all seasons, and showed their support and solidarity with the local communities by completing over 50 tasks during their stay. They were also encouraged to undertake a self-led project, focusing on a specific aspect of environmental conservation that is of interest to them personally, or the team they were part of. Essential to their learning experience was the participation in the residential conservation trip on Handa Island. For the volunteers, the project was a career developing experience, with cultural elements and language elements included.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action: the project is perfectly in line with the mission and main activities of the organisation. The Scottish Wildlife Trusts is responsible for 116 nature reserves within Scotland. The organisation's 'ideal' volunteers have some basic relevant academic background, or experience in activities promoting sustainability and nature protection, allowing them to benefit from the Trust's experience and from a well-designed training process. Moreover, the volunteers worked directly in the key locations of the organisation and gained genuine experience in nature conservation. The project was intended as a steppingstone for young people to enter environmental or conservation work. The induction followed by training at the headquarters of the organisation made the volunteers familiar with the cause and stimulated their motivation to advocate for nature conservation and protection.



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health: in addition, the project had a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of these volunteers as they spent most of their time outside in nature and biking to reach different sites.

LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



The project was implemented, based on the four cornerstones of solidarity, empathy and active citizenship. Solidarity was shown both with the local community through the actions implemented with local volunteers and with the cause, as well as with the organisation's goals to involve volunteers interested in nature conservation. Volunteers lived and worked in the local community. They interacted directly with this community and developed activities with local volunteers.

COVID - 19 IMPACT

Owing to the COVID pandemic, whilst events were planned to include ten volunteers, only six volunteers could join the learning activities and only one volunteer completed the entire project. The completion was possible because the volunteer could cycle to some local nature reserves and work. Most of the work was outside and respected all the social distance requirements. For the other volunteers in other locations who could not travel to our reserves, online training and education were designed, but some essential experiences were not possible due to the limitations caused by COVID.



Project

Tech it Easy!

Greece



Organisation

Social Hackers Academy
www.socialhackersacademy.org

Length of project

6 months (01/07/2020-31/12/2020)

Project contact

Damian Vavanos

Relevant thematic priorities



Inclusion and diversity



Digital transformation

Project type

Solidarity project

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2020-1-EL02-ESC31-005613>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project aimed to contribute to the focus of the organisation: to end the exclusion of refugees, migrant and unemployed citizens in the hosting community by providing employment routes into the tech industry. It started from an urgent need for IT specialists in Greece, a demand that could not be covered due to the lack of a tech-literate workforce and migration of skilled professionals outside of Greece (so called brain-drain).

The project itself was run by young people who are part of the Social Hackers Academy (the solidarity project participants). These groups worked to bring together the local community and the third-country nationals (TCNs) living in Athens to increase cooperation and the exchange of ideas between these groups whilst also developing essential employment skills for TCNs. The activities included individual sessions and mentoring workshops delivered by professionals from the job market and refugees/migrants as well as a promotional campaign. The tech professionals in Athens played a significant role as they prepared and delivered workshops for the TCNs and acted as ambassadors of social change.

Over 1000 members of groups with fewer opportunities were informed about the skills required in the tech market through the campaign. This included information about the channels they can use to seek job opportunities, networking and skills development. As a result of the campaign over 250 people joined the 40 workshops on digital and entrepreneurial skills. In these workshops, TCNs were trained in digital and entrepreneurial skills, giving them the chance to acquire a competitive advantage that would enable them to search for better-paid jobs and to have better chances towards social and economic integration. Through these sessions, the TCNs gained highly demanded digital and soft skills, increased their network and their personal contacts, planned their career paths and increased their chance to get a job. These intercultural learning and communication sessions were also designed to contribute to their inclusion and promote more equal opportunities for all.

The team of young people running the project also got the opportunity to increase their entrepreneurial skills, their management competencies and to learn more about the values of solidarity, active citizenship, and social inclusion. NGOs in Athens also had the chance to contribute to the development of the project and to support the initiatives developed by the beneficiaries.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Inclusion and diversity were enacted from the beginning as the project was designed to support TCNs, refugees and migrants to develop their skills and to have better chances to access the Greek labour market. The project started from a local need which was translated into an opportunity for vulnerable groups. The workshops and the interaction with experts in the IT field essentially contributed to helping the beneficiaries acquire skills and test their potential employment. In addition, intercultural learning and intercultural communication were at the core of the project.



Digital transformation was one of the main priorities of the project. Over 750 working hours were invested into the development and implementation of the 40 workshops that aimed to support TCNs to gain digital skills and develop their employment opportunities. The beneficiaries were part of digital learning workshops and the team implementing the project had the chance to test inclusive formats of digital education.



LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



In the project, based on the four cornerstones of solidarity, the project fostered empathy between locals, Greek volunteers and professionals, towards TCNs, migrants and refugees, and the inclusion of marginalised groups. Alongside developing and implementing digital learning activities, the intercultural bond and learning were constantly highlighted as part of the project. In the project, solidarity was seen as a process trying to offer equal opportunities to everyone and to enable and make the world more inclusive and accessible.

COVID-19 IMPACT

The organisation was already prepared for remote work before COVID-19. Therefore, it was easy to have all the activities developed and delivered. However, they reported having the chance to meet physically would have facilitated social interactions. But the fact that the expectations were set from the beginning of the process and that descriptions of each activity were clearly presented helped with the smooth implementation of the project.



Project

Ambassadors of European and Olympic Values

France



Organisation

Maison de l'Europe Bordeaux - Aquitaine
www.europe-bordeaux.eu

Project contact

Lucia Dobrocsanyiova

Countries involved

Germany, Spain, Italy, Romania, Portugal,
Slovakia, Georgia, Finland, Cyprus

Project type

Individual volunteering project

Length of project

15 months (01/07/2019-30/09/2020)

Relevant thematic priorities



Prevention, promotion and support
in the field of health



Inclusion and diversity

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2019-1-FR02-ESC11-015616>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project was inspired by the series of projects called "Ambassadors of European values" in 2015-2016 and aimed to think together about a way of accompanying the future Paris 2024 Olympic games, so that they would have a real impact on the whole territory of the Gironde Department. Based on a well-developed cooperation with local stakeholders, the organisation aimed to create a context where international volunteers would cooperate with the local community to promote the content and meaning of Olympic and European values. The young volunteers completed interventions (workshops) in schools, universities, leisure activity centres, sports' clubs, associations and various community groups promoting both the European values and the importance of the European cooperation but also preparing the ground for the Olympic Games (2024), while promoting the importance of practising sports for the wellbeing and health of the general public. One of the most important supporters of the project is the Departmental

Olympic and Sports Committee who helped introduce the general public to the world of sport and to understand the complementarity in the core values of the EU and Olympism. Volunteers started their mobility experience with a two-month training that included modules on intercultural communication, video and audio editing, health and sports, Olympism and the Olympic Charter, human rights and tolerance and visual and graphic facilitation. Around 70 partners were involved with the project, the international volunteers having the chance to work with the local volunteers on designing and delivering activities for the general public around the Bordeaux metropolitan area. Activities conducted included educational workshops, conferences and debates, cultural events, and sport competitions, all designed to promote common above-mentioned values driving this project. One of the highlights of the project was the fact that volunteers also ran activities that touch upon the importance of fair play in sports, equal conditions for access to sport, human rights in sports or practising sports to secure personal health and wellbeing.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health: the international volunteers prepared and delivered educational activities for the general public and for the young groups. These sessions aimed to promote the core values of Olympism as well as the importance of practising sports for general well-being. In addition, sessions focused on subjects like values in sport, the importance of fair play, the need for equal payment for male and female athletes, the need to develop accessible infrastructure for sports activities and the need to facilitate greater access to sports for young people with fewer opportunities.



Inclusion and diversity: were at the core of the project. The application process was opened to young people with different social, cultural, or economic backgrounds, priority being given to young people with fewer opportunities. From the beginning – from the training phase – intercultural communication, tolerance and intercultural exchange were essential elements of the volunteers' experience. Moreover, international volunteers worked together with the local volunteers on delivering educational activities and projects for the local community, preparing the ground for the 2024's Olympic Games, with the aim of promoting the importance of practising sports for a healthy lifestyle as well as of the core values of sports to the general public. The workshops that the volunteers delivered were tailored to the needs of the participants, mostly school pupils aged 6-18 years and young people from youth or social centres aged 18-25 and tackled the importance of European cooperation by explaining the European values in a way that catered to a young audience.



LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



In the project, based on the four cornerstones of solidarity, the project tackled inclusion and human rights. The two months of training introduced volunteers to the basics of human rights, breaking stereotypes, conflict resolution and the importance of tolerance. During their 12 months service, volunteers developed their intercultural learning competencies working with local actors, both authorities and volunteers, to promote Olympism.

COVID -19 IMPACT

The organisation managed to transfer part of the induction online. Also, during the lockdown, volunteers worked with the schoolteachers to design online sessions that brought the European values and Olympism closer to pupils and students. The project reported that whilst sessions did not have the same impact as those that were face-to-face, they worked as a strong alternative during the pandemic.



Project

Together for Climate Justice

Slovenia



Organisation

Informal group of young people, called the Youth Climate Justice Movement

Length of project

12 months (01/01/2020-31/12/2020)

Project contact

Melanie Vuga

Relevant thematic priorities



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action



Participation in democratic life

Project type

Solidarity project

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2019-3-SI02-ESC31-015365>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Youth Climate Justice Movement is well-known in Slovenia and a lot of people (especially young people) joined their rallies for climate change. They believe that advocating for action to reduce the effects of climate change continues to be a metropolitan phenomenon and visible mainly in the biggest cities. Consequently, this project aimed to spread the Youth Climate Justice Movement to local communities and develop solidarity and community practices around Slovenia. By organising actions and activities the goal of the ESC participants was to involve a wider population in promoting a theme (climate change) moving beyond just the city-based communities of young people. Strengthening solidarity and raising awareness around climate change were at the core of the programme.

The project was intended to create opportunities for climate justice action groups in different towns and cities to connect, to share knowledge and develop skills as well as to activate other new groups and connect them to the Youth Climate Justice Movement. ESC Participants aimed to organise joint multi-day socialising 'festivals' to bring groups of young people together as well as educational 'content workshops'.

Participants to the workshops had the chance to expand their knowledge on broader environmental issues and were encouraged to be more active in their local communities. Various partner organisations of the Youth Climate Justice Movement got involved with processes and had the chance to better connect to the local actors, including the local business sector. Local communities also took part in the organised activities and local partners, municipalities' representatives and high schools, were involved in some actions. Consequently, the project helped empower the movement and make it more impactful at a local level while also assisting its national development.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action: advocating for climate change was the core theme of the project. The team managed to get local authorities and different action groups around Slovenia interested in promoting the cause to the general population. The project promoted individual action on climate change as well as responsible consumption and local activity. Through this, the team managed to connect the action groups of the movement, to develop a sharing exercise and learn from each other.



Participation in Democratic Life: this project is built around a social movement rather than formalised structures of participation. The project created the opportunity to expand the activities of climate change action from a metropolitan movement to one that was represented in a variety of Slovenian towns and rural communities. It strengthened the movement and laid the foundation for further growth in new areas. Other action groups were inspired to create their own activities, to get people on board and to get closer to the youth groups in these respective communities. Often, various obstacles (social, economic, etc.) keep people away from engaging with topics such as climate change or environmental protection.

LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



In the project, based on the four cornerstones of solidarity the group mainly tackled, through the activities, active citizenship and inclusion. They identified that in Slovenia, being environment-friendly became a trend and one that was not contained solely within the youth population. People would look for opportunities to engage with environmental protection activities and the movement offered this opportunity. Within the project, distinct parts of the movement supported each other, shared their knowledge on organizing local actions and pooled their experiences and skills to strengthen the national movement. A key part of the project was inclusion, in that it was seeking to broaden and include young people from outside of metropolitan areas into the movement.

COVID - 19 IMPACT

Different challenges were posed by the pandemic and some of the movement's festivals style activities could not take place. But the final action of the project brought the groups together and allowed them to reflect on the importance of coordinated actions on a topic (climate change) that affects all of their communities.



Project

Geðblær (Sunny Side)

Iceland



Organisation

Informal group of young people

Length of project

8 months (01/08/2020 - 31/03/2021)

Project contact

Sóley Berg Victorsdóttir

Relevant thematic priorities



Digital transformation



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2020-2-IS01-ESC31-065848>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Currently in Iceland there are many facilities that help with mental illness. However, the group of young people behind this project believed that there is more to learn about mental health, mental illness and the appropriate facility. The team believes that in a society where mental illness continues to endure, clear options and assistance should be more accessible. The main goal of the project, Geðblær, was to help those who do not know where to turn to when it comes to mental health. The activities were designed to increase well-being, open up discussions on subjects that are taboo in society and to create a platform, where individuals can, in an accessible way, learn more about mental illness, mental health and the resources available in Iceland. To address this, ESC participants developed a digital application on the theme of mental health.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Digital transformation Geðblær is a smartphone application. The purpose of the app is twofold: Firstly, the user will receive a daily task (which can range from giving someone a compliment to taking a 30 min walk outside). When the user has finished some of these

tasks then a picture will appear on their feed. This allows the user to write their own personal diary (which will only be available to them) under each photo. Secondly, Geðblær worked closely with three mental health services in Iceland; Hjálparsíminn 1717, Píeta and Bergið Headspace to support the design. These facilities are also able to send advertisements to the app which are posted on the user's feed. In the application, users can access a video recording of an interview with Sýlvía Rún who tells the users about her experience living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Anxiety and Depression.



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health: the main goal of the project was to support the access, especially of the youth group, to mental health services. The group that designed and implemented the project aimed to bring the subject closer to young people and to encourage the ones who need these services to seek them through a youth-friendly tool – an online application. The group developed an application that had a two-folded approach: it provided users with 'daily tasks' that may improve user's well-being and distributed the stories of people living with different mental health problems through recorded interviews. During the pandemic, the need for mental health support was higher and the importance of such an application grew.

LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



Based on the four cornerstones of solidarity, the group mainly tackled inclusion and the promotion of human rights. As stigma and exclusion are often associated with mental health issues, young people, even if in need of support, would hesitate to look for specialised help. Through the application, the group also wanted to give people with mental illness a platform to tell their stories. This was intended to destigmatize mental illness and raise awareness. Obstacles may arise when accessing mental health services in Iceland related to information and advertisement. By presenting the application Geðblær in a youth-friendly manner, the accessibility of these services is improved, and users learn more about the available facilities.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Different challenges were posed by the pandemic – the regular activities of the youth centres were temporarily halted, and schools were closed. But the team continued to work on the app and to communicate with the three mental health centres that offered to promote their services on it.

Project

Water You Waiting For?

Croatia



Organisation

Savez Izvidaca Hrvatske
(Scout associations of Croatia)
www.scouts.hr

Project contact

Dan Spicer

Countries involved

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Project type

Team volunteering project

Length of project

5 months (01/05/2020-31/10/2020)

Relevant thematic priorities



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action



Participation in democratic life

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2020-1-HR01-ESC11-077596>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project aimed to contribute to the conservation of forest biodiversity through voluntary actions for the common good and to strengthen the solidarity of the local community. The project was inspired by the Boranka Campaign⁶, a large initiative of the Scout and Guide Association of Croatia. The campaign started to support the forestation in the areas that were affected by the summer vegetation fires in 2017. In this campaign, so far, over 100,000 trees were planted, more than 7500 volunteers were involved and over 20 planting actions took place within the campaign. The ESC project was a continuation of the campaign, aiming to involve 160 volunteers to ensure the sustainability of the previous actions. The volunteers were responsible for ensuring that over 80% of the newly planted trees survived, which compares very favourably to the 20-30% survival rate that would have been registered without the volunteers' participation. Volunteers acquired specific competencies in environment protection and biodiversity conservation but also better understood how each one can make a significant difference in combating

⁶ www.boranka.hr

the effects of climate change. Moreover, the groups of volunteers were part of a series of workshops on environmental protection, biodiversity or ethical environmental behaviour and could also reflect on how to transfer the acquired knowledge to their sending communities.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action: the project is a continuation of a well-known campaign of the organisation based on an emergent need of the community – the need for rapid reforestation in the aftermath of the massive summer vegetation fire. Volunteers were trained on matters related to environment protection and climate change and had the chance to work with professionals and experts in the field. Also, with the local community, they greatly contributed to increased awareness of the potentiality of individual and group action to combat the effects of climate change.



Participation in Democratic Life: working with different stakeholders in the community made a difference – it contributed to having a greater impact in the community. Media was a great supporter of the project. As the Campaign had a profound impact locally, nationally and internationally, the media players were also eager to promote the project and to disseminate the information about the activities. Volunteers were brought closer to ESC philosophy. The hosted volunteers, except for delivering the activities in the local community, were also introduced to the objectives of ESC, to its actions and granting opportunities and could also reflect on how to create their own projects back in their communities.

LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



The project was designed to contribute also to the well-being of the citizens and of the society. Volunteers spent two weeks in the community. In addition to watering the trees the young participants took part in educational activities. Solidarity was a 'practised concept' as volunteers were hosted in the same location, could spend time together and had the chance to interact with the local community. By practising empathy (one of the four cornerstones of ESC), each group acted as a family, they could support each other and could also better interact with the locals. Focal points of solidarity reported by the project were:

- solidarity between the group members (volunteers) enacted in the actions and activities
- solidarity with the local community affected by the fires
- solidarity arising from working with different stakeholders in the community – the national company in charge of forest protection or the national civil protection agency. Volunteers and professionals worked together for the same cause.

COVID-19 IMPACT

The project was initially designed for four groups of volunteers: four groups, 160 volunteers from Croatia, France, Belgium, North Macedonia and the UK. It still required the physical presence of volunteers to plant and water trees but because of the pandemic only volunteers from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina could participate. The objectives of the project were fully completed except for the intercultural dimension of the project that suffered from the lack of diversity within the group of international volunteers. The organisation plans to continue the initiative and to work with international volunteers in the future.



Project

Awareness campaign: Sexting in School

Belgium (German Speaking Community)



Organisation

Council of the German-speaking Youth

Length of project

10 months (10/05/2020-31/03/2021)

Project contact

Mona Locht

Relevant thematic priorities



Digital transformation



Participation in democratic life

Project type

Solidarity project

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2020-1-BE03-ESC31-059713>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project aimed to raise young people's awareness of the consequences of sexting. Still considered a taboo subject, sexting is an urgent problem. Moreover, when becoming victims, young people do not know where to turn for support and adults and educators need resources to help them tackle the subject. ESC participants developed a website (www.rdj.be/sexting), pedagogical materials to help educators to approach the subject in a youth friendly way, including a video interview with prosecution services and police, floor stickers & beer coaster with the QR-code leading to a survey. A virtual conference organised for parents was also organised. They used the project to inform young people through educational activities and social media posts how to deal with specific situations where sexting is present and how to seek support in these situations. Both the potential victims and the potential perpetrators were targeted through the actions as young people should know it is illegal to distribute photos of minors, or to distribute photos of adults without consent, and the distribution is liable to prosecution. The ESC granted project was a great opportunity to approach the subject, especially within a school context. Parents and teachers were also partners in the project and learnt to better understand how to support young people in understanding the consequences of sexting through the pedagogical materials provided.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Digital transformation: the project collaborated with a professional design studio, which allowed the youth group to develop their competencies on design as well as on digital marketing as they had the opportunity to promote these educational materials on social media channels. Young people (as the target group) were constantly consulted and involved with the development of the activities. It used a variety of digital tools such as a survey that they could access with the QR code that made them aware of the fact that they might have been exposed to the phenomenon without knowing it. The project identified that sexting is not a metropolitan phenomenon, it happens in smaller communities as well. So having the nine municipalities covered through the activities brought the subject closer to a bigger population (both adults and young people) and widened the digital transformation.



Participation in Democratic Life: intergenerational and inter-professional cooperation was also enacted. The youth group worked with teachers and parents in developing the educational activities and in disseminating the information, while parents' councils were also promoting the activities and the need for rapid action. Different stakeholders in the community were informed about the considerable media coverage of the phenomenon, adults being also active in disseminating the information about the project and in using the educational materials developed. The online conference targeting the parents' groups was a great success and teachers were the great supporters of continuing the actions at the end of the project.

LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



In the project, based on the four cornerstones of solidarity the group tackled human rights (especially rights in the 'public' digital space). The main concept of the project was shaped around a theme that is still a taboo but the discussion about it is very necessary. Through the project, young people got to understand that a lot of their peers are victims of sexting and could see that a support structure is put in place. More than this, by working directly with parents and teachers, intergenerational solidarity was secured.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Different challenges were posed by the pandemic. But the activities were adjusted and adapted to the new context. The conference for parents that was initially planned within the application, became a virtual exchange event and it was said to work successfully. Also, the educational materials that were distributed in schools helped the promotion of the project as the materials adapted to the new digital context.

Project

Empowering Youth for a Sustainable and Strong Europe

Belgium



Organisation

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements - EU Group (IFOAM Organics Europe)
www.organicseurope.bio

Project type

Individual volunteering project

Length of project

21 months (01/03/2019-31/12/2020)

Project contact

Francesca Lilliu

Relevant thematic priorities



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action

Countries involved

Spain, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, France



Participation in democratic life

PROJECT ON THE ESC PROJECT DATABASE

<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project/2018-1-BE05-ESC11-002543>

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Agriculture is the backbone of European society and an important driver for sustainable, regional development, which is reflected in its representation within the European budget. This project aimed to bring together a group of young volunteers from all over Europe to encourage them to engage in the field of sustainable agriculture. Besides the focus on environmental topics, the volunteers got to know the work of the EU institutions, their policy-making processes and experience the importance of being an active citizen within the European community. Five volunteers were placed in different units of the organisation and had the chance to develop individual projects and a group project under the supervision of the organisation's experts and professionals. The individual projects were either small-scale initiatives in line with IFOAM Organics Europe's mission and vision or events linked to organic agriculture and sustainability. As part of the project, volunteers received several training sessions. Training included both technical sessions on specific topics, such as climate change, organic agriculture, or specific EU

environmental or agricultural policies (e.g., the Common Agricultural Policy), but also training on soft-skills and EU policymaking. Consequently, volunteers gained relevant knowledge and skills during their stay at IFOAM Organics Europe that will be useful for their professional future and to engage in the field of organic agriculture or environmental issues – either at European, national, or local level. This also contributes to raising awareness among other young people about the importance of these issues, such as the importance of organic, pesticides free and fair agriculture for a climate neutral and non-polluted Europe. Also, volunteers could connect to the national members of IFOAM Organics Europe (about two hundred from all over Europe) and spent one to two weeks on an organic farm in Belgium as a practical learning experience. While working for IFOAM Organics Europe, volunteers also gained insights into how NGOs work and learned about the different working areas/teams. On top of that, volunteers were encouraged to attend workshops, participate in discussions with other environmental NGOs and European institutions, and were provided with a fruitful learning environment. A basic interest in environmental topics was the only requirement for becoming a volunteer, to avoid any discrimination.

LINKS TO THEMATIC PRIORITIES



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action: the project follows the strategic mission and objectives of IFOAM Organics Europe by bringing the importance and positive impact of organic agriculture on our environment and climate closer to young Europeans. Through the project, young people from across Europe learned about environmental values and organic agriculture (including a practical experience at an organic farm). Organic agriculture plays an important role in fighting climate change and biodiversity loss and regenerating the environment. Therefore, empowering young Europeans and bringing them closer to this topic is essential for a sustainable and strong Europe.



Participation in Democratic Life: working and living in Brussels on a cause that is a priority for the European institutions enabled volunteers to better understand European values as well as the policy-making mechanisms and processes of the EU. Volunteers also got to know other partners of IFOAM Organics Europe - both public and private. At the end of the project, volunteers remained involved in organic farming or in environmental projects - either at local, regional or at European level and continued spreading the word about the importance and benefits of organic food and farming.



LINKS TO THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF SOLIDARITY



The project focused on the solidarity cornerstone of active citizenship. Working closely with the European institutions, the organisation aims to raise awareness on the importance of solidarity and a unified Europe. Through the promotion of the project by IFOAM Organics Europe and its network, the sending organisations and the volunteers, more young people got to be interested in joining the Erasmus + and ESC opportunities and new possibilities of cooperation can arise for all involved organisations. Additionally, the organic movement is based on the four Organic Principles (Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care), which were at the core of the project. The recruitment was based on equal opportunities and the whole learning mobility activity was based on fair and equal treatment for volunteers.

COVID -19 IMPACT

As the project started before the pandemic, volunteers got the opportunity to experience the organisation before the 'new normal'. They were able to join different events and activities, work in the office, meet the employees and initiate their individual projects. Once the pandemic started, volunteers were offered to return to their home countries but chose to stay in Brussels. They continued working remotely, finished their individual projects and joined online conferences and events using digital tools.



What can be learnt from the case studies?



This section explores how the three ESC thematic priorities that are the focus of this study are represented across the case studies. It is split into three sections by theme:

- Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action
- Digital transformation
- Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health



Environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action

The European Solidarity Corps can make a meaningful contribution to the Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges. To contribute to the European Green Deal, the Programme aims at integrating green practices into all projects and activities as well as promoting environmentally sustainable and responsible behaviour among participants and participating organisations. Thus, organisations and participants should adopt an environment-friendly approach when designing and implementing their activities. The programme also supports projects and activities addressing the topic of environmental protection, sustainability and climate goals and aiming to protect, conserve and enhance natural capital, to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and to enable behavioural changes for individual preferences, consumption habits and lifestyles.

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Projects and activities addressing environmental issues

Within the case study projects, there are two approaches to the environmental theme. The first is conservation, and the second is advocacy. They can be understood as different dimensions of youth participation in democratic life - voice and action⁷. In conservation work, young people take direct action to address an environmental issue in a practical sense. In advocacy work, they use their voice to encourage change.

The conservation approach is shown in the Water You Waiting For? and the Solidarity for a Sustainable Environment projects, both volunteering projects. These projects allow young people to volunteer in concrete practical activities that improve the physical environment. Their volunteering has a direct impact on the environment itself through their activities such as tree planting and peat bog restoration.

7 SALTO Participation and Information (2021) Youth Participation Strategy: a strategy for enhancing youth participation in democratic life through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Tallinn. SALTO Participation and Information, https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4089/20200929_ParticipationStrategy_Online_Final_02.pdf

By contrast, Together for Climate Justice, and Empowering Youth for a Sustainable and Strong Europe are advocacy projects with an environmentally related theme. Through these projects young people work to raise awareness of an environmental issue or cause. In the case of Together for Climate Justice the participants aim to widen the climate justice movement by targeting their advocacy work at other young people and members of the public. In the case of Empowering Youth for Sustainable and Strong Europe participants work closely with an advocacy organisation to target advocacy messages about organic farming at EU institutions.

The case study projects all fit into the second half of the ESC thematic priority 'projects and activities addressing the topic of environmental protection...'. They essentially focus on enabling young people to be active on an environmental theme and might be understood as an intersection between the youth participation and the environmental priorities.

Projects aimed at integrating green practices

Integrating green practices into the work of host organisations does not seem to be a strong element of environmental projects. It was not discussed as an explicit goal by the interviewees. In the case studies we can see two types of organisations using the environmental theme:

- environmentally focused NGOs using ESC to work with young people,
- youth-focused organisations and groups using ESC to work on environmental topics.

The second group seem to be the ones most likely to benefit from the concept of integrating green practice through ESC. It could be argued that the Together for Climate Justice Project and Water You Waiting For? project help the youth sector integrate green practices into its work. This occurred by youth organisations undertaking environmentally focused projects where they might not have done so previously - they also seemed to have a greater focus on educating and influencing participants behaviour. Considering the first group, it seems likely that environmentally focused NGOs may already have strong approaches to green practices in their core work and may not require the support of ESC projects to adopt them.

Summary: The environment and solidarity

Across the case study projects, the link between solidarity and the environmental theme is connected to youth participation. It seems clear that the emphasis of the projects is about enabling young people to act on environmental issues or use their voices as part of advocacy work. Thus, the projects speak strongly to the cornerstone of active citizenship.

Showing solidarity with other groups or communities is a dimension of only one of the projects. The Water You Waiting For? includes an element of disaster relief, allowing scouts to rebuild and repair environmental damage that is affecting a specific community. In other projects it seems that they can mainly be said that participants show solidarity with the environment or planet as a whole.





Digital transformation

“The political guidelines of the European Commission underline the need for Europe to lead the digital transition. The European Solidarity Corps can play a role by supporting Europeans, regardless of their gender, age and background to live and thrive in the digital age through projects and activities that aim to boost digital skills, foster digital literacy and/or develop an understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital technology. The European Solidarity Corps also promotes the use of virtual components such as information, communication and technology tools in all projects and activities”

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Use of virtual components such as information, communication and technology tools in projects and activities.

The part of the thematic priority promoting ‘the use of virtual components such as information, communication and technology tools’ is well represented in many of the projects. Either as an explicit focus, or a reaction to COVID-19.

Several of the projects were planned before, or during, the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. As restrictions were introduced, like many parts of the youth sector, organisations receiving ESC funding were faced with a need to quickly digitise their delivery and use digital tools for the purposes of delivering their work. Thus, activities previously designed as face-to-face events were instead delivered as virtual meetings or online training to work around social distancing limitations. In these situations, the digital transformation that occurs can be said to have focused on how the ESC funded project activities are delivered. In most cases this involved switching physical delivery and events to online remote events.

Understandably, projects often attempted to deliver (as far as possible) the same style of activities they had originally planned for the ESC funded project or had delivered in previous projects adapting them to online form. They recreated their existing styles of delivery in online events and platforms rather than delivering them physically. Thus, the level of transformation involved was only moderate. The digitalisation of activities was an attempt to preserve and continue existing modes of project delivery, rather than to create something radically different. In this context, it seems likely that many of the organisations will return to face-to-face delivery after the pandemic. The digital transformation, therefore, might only be a temporary one. However, there may also be some innovations and new approaches that developed during the ESC funded project, which continue to influence the organisation’s future work and projects.

A more substantial potential for digital transformation can be seen in the projects which developed digital platforms as an outcome of project activities. In these projects the end the platform created is the element that holds potential for significant digital transformation. Geðblær and Sexting in schools are clearest examples of this. Both projects created digital platforms (an app and a website) designed to offer support to young people. Thus, by creating new digital tools the projects have the potential to transform the way that young people, who are not project participants, are able to access support around mental

health or sexting respectively. Geðblær the project is quite explicit that the purpose of the digital app is to provide mental health support to young people who do not feel able to access existing face-to-face mental health services. Both projects are still underpinned by traditional non formal education style activity. As solidarity projects, they are based on ESC participants working in small groups to develop and design these platforms. Thus, the project activities themselves are not radical digital transformation (although they were still moderately affected by COVID-19 as described above). Instead, it is the output of the project activities that potentially enables substantial digital transformation. This transformation primarily affects young people outside of the project who go on to access platforms produced. This can be understood as a form of community impact.

A potential limitation in projects which have the goal of producing digital platforms is therefore the extent to which they are able to attract young people to use them. Both the Geðblær and Sexting in schools projects included outreach and promotion activities through youth centres and schools respectively to promote the use of their platforms. However, once the projects close, if such promotional activities are not sustained it seems likely use of the platforms may slow down or stop. Thus, the way the platforms are supported on an ongoing basis by the actors involved will be a key factor affecting the level of digital transformation occurring and the extent of the community impact.

Projects and activities that aim to boost digital skills, foster digital literacy and/or develop an understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital technology.

Two projects within the case studies address boosting digital skills in depth, Digi-woods and Tech it Easy!. The Sexting in Schools project also develops young people's understanding of digital risks. In these projects the link between digital transformation and ESC funded project activities is relatively straightforward, the activities themselves provide training and competence building on various aspects of digital skills to young people or other citizens. It can be understood that across Europe there is a general need to develop digital skills, either to prepare young people for new forms of work, or to enable them to live in an increasingly digitalised society generally.

Digi-woods, a volunteering project, focuses on enabling the project participants themselves to develop digital skills. As well as providing training it also goes a step further to give an opportunity for project participants to apply and practise these skills on an extended basis. Participants ran social media related outreach for the youth centre. Assuming this project was a successful learning experience for participants, it can be said to have contributed to digital transformation by equipping them with the skills necessary for new forms of digital work, improving their career prospects.

Tech it Easy!, as a solidarity project has a slightly different focus, here the project participants themselves take the role of training and supporting other third country nationals to develop digital skills. Whilst it will no doubt have been an opportunity for learning and growth of project participants, the digital transformation is primarily focused on people who are not project participants and is a form of community impact. In addition to this, there is strong consideration for how the project contributes to the local economy as a whole. Tech it Easy! identifies that there is a particular lack of digitally skilled workers within its local reality, and a gap that can fill this but specialised third country nationals such as refugees and recent immigrants. The project participants attempt to reach a relatively wide number of people - over 250. Assuming it is successful in achieving its stated outcomes, the potential for digital transformation is therefore much wider



than just the ESC participants themselves. The Sexting in schools project has a similar model whereby project participants are helping other young people develop understanding of digital risks.

Summary: Digital transformation and solidarity

Across the case studies in this research, there are four different ways that projects funded under ESC link to digital transformation. These are detailed in Table 1.

TYPE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION	WHO DOES THE TRANSFORMATION AFFECT?	NATURE OF IMPACT
1. Organisations adapting their delivery methods to digital forms of youth work, in response to COVID-19 Social distancing restrictions	The organisation delivering the ESC project	Likely to be temporary. Although some aspects of new digital methods may be sustained, organisations may be likely to revert to face-to-face methods after the pandemic.
2. ESC participants developing digital skills and competences by taking part in ESC activities	The ESC participants	If the project is of good quality, it can contribute to longer lasting digital transformation. This is limited to the competence development of ESC participants themselves.
3. ESC participants enabling other individuals to develop digital skills	Community impact - The people that ESC participants are showing solidarity for	If the project is of good quality, it can contribute to longer lasting digital transformation. This primarily affects people who are not the project participants.
4. ESC participants and projects developing digital platforms, to enable other young people to access services or support.	Community impact - The people that ESC participants are showing solidarity for	If the platforms are supported beyond the term of the projects, and of good quality, there is potential for long lasting digital transformation. This primarily affects people who are not the project participants. It can also influence the way organisations delivering services and support for young people operate.

Table 1: Four types of digital transformation in ESC funded projects.

The extent to which a project is successful contributing to digital transformation in any one of these modes will be dependent on its quality. It should be stressed that an ESC funded project can provide a quality learning experience for participants, whilst still struggling to have broader community impact⁸. Thus, the ability of a project to deliver digital transformation is not just dependent on a quality learning experience of the project participants, but on the design and effectiveness of the project and the profile and experience of the organisation or staff. This is particularly the case for projects in types 3 and 4 (Table 1), where the projects seek to create community impact beyond the project participants themselves.

8 See Moxon and Serban 2020, *ibid*.

All projects that incorporate digital transformation can be related to one of the four cornerstones of solidarity⁹. However, it does not seem that there is a strong conceptual link between the thematic priority of digital transformation and the concept of solidarity. Some connection can be seen as follows.

- Projects which promote the digital skills of young people or others could be argued as promoting their 'inclusion' into society. Inclusion is one of the four cornerstones of solidarity.
- As volunteering and solidarity projects, all projects have an element of 'active citizenship'. 'Active citizenship' is one of the four cornerstones of solidarity.
- Projects which enable young people to equip non-participants with digital skills or that produce digital platforms for non-participants to access, are an example of young people showing solidarity with others. They might also be said to be motivated by 'empathy', one of the four cornerstones of solidarity.

Overall, the combination of solidarity and digital transformation as project topics do not seem to have deepened or enhanced each other. A similar level of linkage and overlap might be expected between any two project topics that are quite broad. This is not necessarily a negative finding, nor an issue of quality within the projects studied. However, it seems that working on digital transformation as a theme together with solidarity as an objective does not provide any substantial enhancements to either aspect, beyond simply allowing both dimensions to be addressed.



Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health

The European Solidarity Corps can add a significant value to the work ahead of Europe and beyond in addressing the COVID19's impact and recovery, particularly when it comes to prevention, promotion and support in the field of health. It should play an important role in supporting the health and social care system, under extreme pressure, improving people's experience of care, and building stronger relationships between services and communities. The European Solidarity Corps should also aim at mobilising volunteers around other health challenges, such as those related to cancer, and around health, sport and well-being in general including the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and physical activity.

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ESC funded projects as responses to COVID-19

The timing of this research meant it was not possible to include examples of projects on health and well-being themes that were designed as a direct response to COVID-19. This reflects the fact that the ESC projects database did not contain all projects granted funding in 2021 or late 2020 at the time of the case

⁹ Nicodemi & Bačlija Knoch (2020) ibid

study selection (Spring 2021). As a result, there were only a small number of examples of projects of this type, and it was not possible to identify a suitable one for inclusion in this research.

There are signs that this type of project is still occurring though. At the time of writing (1st October 2021) there are now 27 projects with health and wellbeing themes reference the term “COVID” on the ESC project database¹⁰. Five of these describe projects, which seek to directly address COVID-19-related issues, whilst the remaining 22 only refer to COVID-19 as background context, demonstrating the need for the project. Mental health support seems to be a common theme amongst these. These five projects are shown in Table 2.

PROJECT NAME	SHORT DESCRIPTION	LINK TO ESC PROJECT DATABASE ¹¹
Emotional DIY (ES)	A solidarity project based around a digital platform promoting youth mental health	2020-2-ES02-ESC31-015750
Virtual volunteers in sports (BG)	A solidarity project promoting virtual sports activities	2020-3-BG01-ESC31-094719
Together against the consequences of COVID-19 (BG)	A volunteering project where volunteers spread health promotion messages related to COVID-19	2020-2-BG01-ESC11-079567
You are not alone (UK)	A solidarity project based around providing mental health support to young people	2020-2-UK01-ESC31-078943
Coronavirus and Social Psychology (TR)	A solidarity project with focus on psychology	2020-2-TR01-ESC31-095096

Table 2: Projects addressing COVID-19

Health as an ESC project theme pre-COVID-19

Both case study projects focused on health, as well as the five COVID-19 response projects are all non-medical health interventions. They address the broader aspects of wellbeing and health, and do not seek to provide, or replace primary medical treatment or support.

As an example of health themes within ESC funded projects the case study project Ambassadors of European and Olympic Values is primarily an awareness raising project. Project volunteers delivered educational and awareness raising activities to the youth groups as members of the public. It can be understood as contributing to the elements of the programme theme around mobilising volunteers to promote healthy lifestyles. It does not seek to contribute to supporting the health and social care systems, other than in the broad sense that promoting healthy lifestyles, and advocating for accessible sports facilities, might reduce use of health and social care treatment.

¹⁰ 151 projects also mention “COVID” in their project description but are not categorised as having Health and Wellbeing as a theme on the database. The projects typically refer to COVID as background context.

¹¹ European Solidarity Corps project database: <https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/#project>

The project Geðblær (also discussed in the section on digital transformation) goes beyond awareness raising. This project supports the health and social care system by providing young people with access to mental health support, collaborating with existing mental health services to provide this.

Summary: Health and solidarity

Both case study projects, and the majority of the COVID-19 response projects use a model of solidarity where young people are showing support and solidarity for other groups. The health intervention is not targeted at the project participants, but instead it is a form of community impact; the impact is targeted at other individuals and delivered by the project participants. However, like the digital transformation theme it does not appear that combining a health focus with solidarity produces any significant enhancements or deepening of the two concepts.

The elements of the four cornerstones of solidarity are recognisable in the projects. They both clearly enable project participants to practise 'active citizenship'. Geðblær is arguably motivated by 'empathy' towards young people affected by poor mental health and a desire to promote their 'inclusion'.

The extent to which the projects are successful at providing promotion, prevention and support in the field of health is entirely dependent on their quality. As with the digital transformation theme, it should not be assumed that a quality learning experience for project participants means that the project is also a successful health intervention for the project's target group and successful community impact. There is a wide and rich evidence base on what constitutes successful health promotion and prevention programmes. This indicates there are many environmental, individual, and social factors to be taken into account when designing health interventions successfully.

It would be beyond the scope of small-scale solidarity projects to review and take account of this evidence when designing their projects but might not be unreasonable for larger team volunteering projects to have some understanding of this. Ultimately, National Agencies and SALTO ESC should be cautious about assuming that ESC funded projects are successful health interventions if both they and the project applicants lack understanding of health intervention design.



Conclusions and recommendations for development



In *4thought for Solidarity* Research¹² it was established that there was a limited shared concept of solidarity across the European youth sector as a whole and that the term was understood in a range of diverse ways. The nine practical examples we have explored seem to support this idea. They can all be related to the four cornerstones of solidarity in different ways. However, this is largely due to the breadth of concepts the cornerstones of solidarity cover rather than a strong shared conception of solidarity.

Perhaps because of this, the thematic priorities (environment, health, and digital transformation) neither seem to enhance nor detract from the concept of solidarity in project delivery. In these projects, they mostly represent a theme that sits alongside solidarity. In many cases, they seem to be more important to the project than the concept of solidarity.

When addressing topics such as health, digital transformation, or the environment we saw a number of ways that change and impact were said to be created by the projects:

1. Participant Impact - Project participants developing personal competencies, e.g.:

- developing the digital skills of project participants
- developing their own understandings of the environment
- developing participants' career opportunities.

2. Community Impact - Project participants affecting change in others other groups of people, e.g.:

- project participants developing the digital skills of others
- project participants developing digital platforms for others to access.
- project participants promoting health and wellbeing to others
- project participants raising awareness of environmental issues with others.

3. Community Impact¹³ - Project participants affecting change directly in the environment.

This builds on our previous research¹⁴, where we identified that community impact could be understood as a form of 'Showing Solidarity for' groups of people, or in some cases the planet/environment. It is clear that ESC funded projects function as a non-formal education programme which builds the competencies of participants. However, when the project design is creating community impact and 'showing solidarity for' another social group, there is also a secondary group of individuals who benefit and are impacted upon. The level of community impact which ESC funded projects achieve is dependent on the effectiveness of the project's design and quality of its implementation. Crucially, it is entirely possible for a project to be successful at creating participant impact and learning but still unsuccessful at creating community impact. It should not be taken for granted that an effective learning journey of ESC participants leads to effective community impact.

With this in mind, the European Solidarity Corps programme should be cautious about overstating its impact and effectiveness in addressing thematic priorities. The funding of quality non formal education and volunteering projects based on these themes does not guarantee community impact addressing

12 Nicodemi & Bačlija Knoch (2020) *ibid*

13 Arguably this last category might be better described as 'environmental impact' rather than 'community impact', for simplicity and to harmonise with other discussion on community impact at the time of writing, we have maintained a single term.

14 Moxon and Serban (2021) *ibid*



these topics as social issues. While we have no immediate concerns about the quality of projects featured in this current research, it cannot be guaranteed that ESC funded projects are successful in creating digital transformation, addressing health issues or achieving environmental impact. Even when projects and NAs have identified a project as a good quality learning mobility experience, unless there is also an evaluation of community impact, and/or an evidence-based rationale for how community impact might occur, it is a good faith assumption that community impact is occurring.

The ESC funding and NA assessment systems are set up to focus on volunteering and non-formal education projects. In our workshop with NA staff, it was emphasised that both NAs and fund beneficiaries are unclear about what is expected in terms of the thematic priorities, and that both groups are struggling to evaluate community impact on these themes. They also highlighted that as youth mobility focused organisations, the NAs do not have the expertise to assess community impact in relation to health, digital transformation, or the environment. Furthermore, it may be unrealistic and undesirable to expect them to develop this. This increases the risk that projects which aim to have community impact on the thematic priorities may fail to do so, or worse, have a negative impact, for instance by providing incorrect health advice to young people. At present, there are simple limited tools, expertise, or processes to assess community impact either pre or post grant.

The key finding of thesis research is a need to consider how quality community impact in relation to the thematic priorities can be better supported through the ESC programme. This issue was discussed directly with NA staff during the workshop. A clear message was the importance of not rushing to create benchmarks, checklists, standards, and similar tools for assessing community impact. It was felt that such approaches would be low quality, as the nature of community impact was often very specific to the project. Instead, it was emphasised that there was a need to rely on the experience of applicants to understand and deliver community impact. It was felt that NAs needed to be confident in assessing and understanding the applicant's experience in relation to the thematic areas, which enabled them to trust in the ability to deliver community impact. Two sources of experience were identified as valuable:

- **organisational experience** - when the thematic priority relates directly to the organisation's mission, vision and previous work. For example, environmental NGOs can be said to have strong experience with the environment topics.
- **lived experience** - when the young people applying had a direct experience of the thematic area. For instance, young people with mental health experiences developing a project around mental health. This was identified as particularly important for solidarity projects.

In line with this a light touch **capacity building approach** was recommended by NA staff. It was felt that a valuable way to support was through peer-to-peer exchange and creating collaboration between experienced applicants. There was said to be a need to recognise and support the experience of applicants to address the topic of community impact on the thematic priorities themselves. NAs, rather than developing prescriptive guidance and methods for applicants, should provide support, platforms for exchange and encourage mutual learning.

A number of specific recommendations for how this could be achieved were made:

- **Improving communication on thematic priorities.** Improve the way expectations around thematic priorities are communicated to applicants. Communication should emphasise that thematic

priorities are not prescriptive. It should be communicated that neither the programme, nor NAs have extensive detailed expectation of applicants in relation to priority areas. Instead, thematic priorities should be treated as 'opening up' possibilities within the program, and an invitation for applicants with experience of these themes to become involved. Existing channels of communication should be used to emphasize this message.

- **Clarifying how thematic priorities link to grant assessment.** NAs should focus on the assessment and evaluation of the competencies and experience of applicants in relation to the thematic priorities. Attempts to evaluate and measure community impact on these themes as part of allocating funding should be avoided.
- **Adopting a proportional approach.** The level of concern about assessment/evaluation of successful community impact needs to be proportional to the project grant and project type. Clear distinctions must be made between small grants (particularly solidarity projects) and larger, long-term grants. This should recognise that whilst a substantive, well developed approach, to thematic priorities might be required from large grant applicants, it may be burdensome for smaller, youth led projects.
- **Providing support for applicants to learn how to measure community impact.**¹⁵ There are many applicants who are committed to delivering and evaluating their community impact through ESC. Measures should be put in place to support and bring together these organisations interested around thematic priorities. This could mean peer to peer training, learning networks, exchange programmes and other capacity building approaches. These measures should enable applicants to develop bespoke tools and approaches for impact measurement that fit the needs of their projects.
- **Further research** into community impact on the thematic priorities is needed. This should focus on developing approaches for assessing and evaluating the impact of ESC projects in relation to the themes. These tools and approaches can then be shared with the wider network.

¹⁵ See also the recent publication of the European Platform on Learning Mobility (2021) Community impact – a Practical Guide.
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/community-impact-of-learning-mobility>

