

# VOLUNTEERING CONFERENCE

Shaping volunteering  
in Europe and beyond

4-6 October 2023

Podgorica, Montenegro

# FINAL REPORT



## Content

Programme Summary .....	3
Team.....	4
Organisation.....	4
Facilitators .....	4
Technical support .....	4
Programme description .....	5
October 3, 2023.....	5
October 4, 2023.....	6
Opening statements.....	6
Programme.....	6
RAY Research presentation .....	7
Research discussions .....	8
Panel debate on research .....	10
Celebration.....	12
October 5, 2023.....	13
Recommendations presentation .....	13
Better conditions paper presentation.....	15
Recommendations group discussions .....	15
October 6, 2023.....	21
Midterm evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps programme.....	21
Closing of the Conference .....	27
Evaluation of the Conference .....	28
Working documents.....	30

The **Volunteering Conference, shaping the future of volunteering in Europe and beyond**, took place from October 4 to October 6, 2023, in Podgorica, Montenegro. Over a hundred participants (103 respectfully) from 34 countries came together to shape the future of volunteering and celebrate the 5th anniversary of the European Solidarity Corps. Fourteen national agencies and two SALTO centres collaborated to amplify the voice of solidarity.

The Conference featured a diverse range of engaging program sessions, providing insights for participants. Additionally, following sessions encouraged participants to share their experiences and provide feedback.

### Objectives of the Conference

- To support the implementation of the Council Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU.
- To create a space to connect and exchange between different stakeholders of the programme.
- To influence the mid-term evaluation of the program and the forthcoming shaping of the new programme.
- To celebrate the 5th anniversary of the first deadline of the European Solidarity Corps.
- To give visibility to the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps in the partner regions of EU.



## Programme Summary

### October 3, 2023

- 16.30 | Snack provided
- 17.00 | City Tour (optional programme)  
Don Bosco – field visit (optional programme)
- 20.30 | Opening ceremony with opening speeches
- 21.00 | Social gathering with music and chat among the participants.

### October 4, 2023

- 9.30 | Official Opening with opening speeches
- 10:15 | Getting to know each other
- 11.30 | Volunteering Timeline – mapping the timeline of volunteering in Europe
- 12.15 | Ray SOC Research with Andreas Karsten
- 15.00 | SNAC Research group work
- 16.45 | Research Panel  
with W. Koralewska, S. Apitz, J. Randa, B. Eglitis, and A. Karsten.
- 17.45 | Group picture
- 20.00 | Celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Solidarity Corps

### October 5, 2023

- 9.30 | Morning start with the overview of the previous day
- 9.50 | Keynote speech – Andrea Popescu from the European Commission
- 10.30 | Comments and questions
- 11.30 | Council recommendations – group work – critical overview
- 15.00 | SNAC Volunteering Position paper: “Better conditions for Youth Volunteering” with Georg Feiner
- 15.45 | Recommendations in practice group work
- 18.30 | Summing up the group debate

### October 6, 2023

- 9.30 | Discussion on Midterm evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps programme
- 11.30 | Summing up the group debate
- 12.00 | Conference closure

## Team

### Organisation

Jana Randa  
Andrej Troha

### Facilitators

Jelena Ristić  
Elisabeth Einwanger  
Bernard Moreau

### Technical support

Karmen Murn, Rapporteur  
Agne, Visual facilitation  
Mirela Kalamperović, Local coordination  
Eleonora Schultze- Battmann, Communication

### Programme description

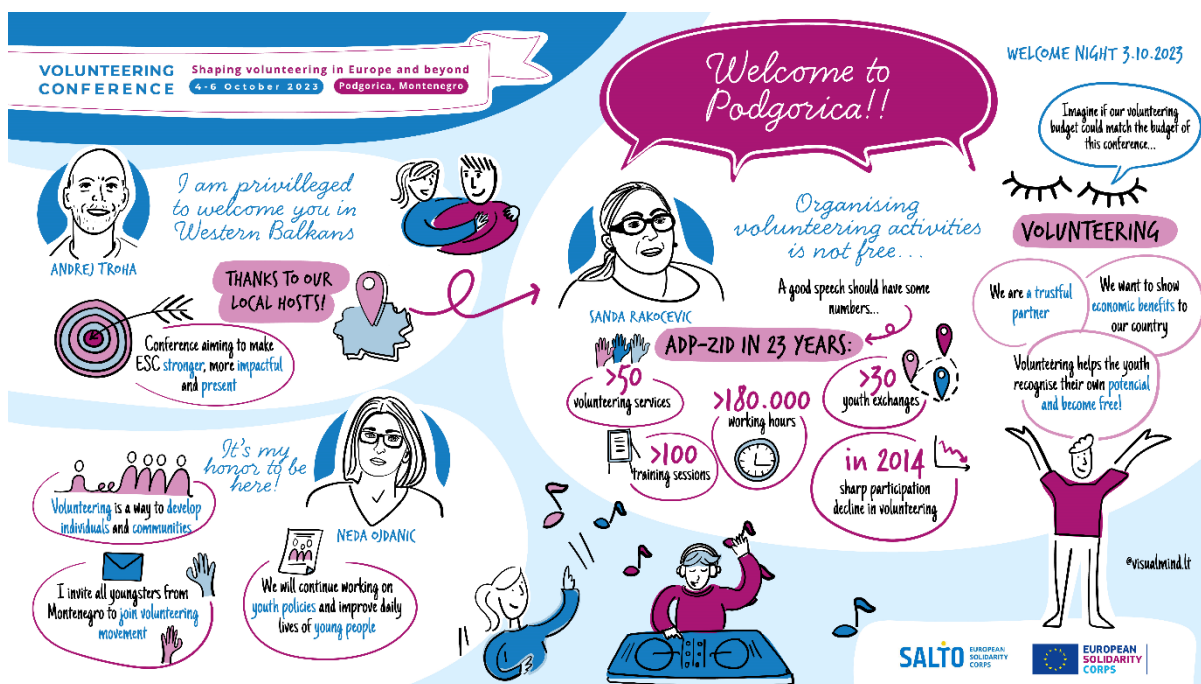
#### October 3, 2023

Andrej Troha, programme officer in SALTO SEE, welcomed participants to the Conference.

Neda Ojdanić, State Secretary at the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Republic of Montenegro. She has highlighted that ... *“Ministry of sports and youth mentioned are continually working on improving youth policy and creating a better environment for all young people in Montenegro and their recently completed Youth Strategy for the period 2023 – 2027 with an Action Plan.”* The Secretary Mrs. Odanić also stressed that *“volunteering is one of the most noble ways to help the community and its people. Young individuals who engage in volunteering activities not only assist others but also develop their skills and gain valuable experiences. Volunteering can have a positive impact on the mental health of young people, as it allows them to feel useful and connect with others in the community. Volunteering can help young people to build self-confidence and a sense of fulfilment. These skills can be useful in the future, both in their personal lives and their careers. Therefore, I invite all young people in Montenegro to get involved in volunteering activities and contribute to community development.”*

Sandra Rakočević, Director of ADP-Zid organisation, who presented achievements ADP-Zid has reached, and challenges youth work and voluntary service is facing in Montenegro.

Mirela Kalamperović, local coordinator of the Conference, ADŠ Zid greeted all to Podgorica.



### October 4, 2023

#### Opening statements

Jana Randa, Coordinator of the Strategic National Agencies Cooperation on Volunteering, mentioned *that it is not always easy to bring messages to the decision makers. 14 national agencies and two SALTO centres stand together to strengthen the voice of solidarity. What have we done so far? Platform to inform decision makers, we have initiated research, and development of the position paper "Better conditions for volunteering"*.

Page | 6

Gerhard Mosshammer, Head of Sector for Erasmus+ Youth, Sports, and European Solidarity Corps at the OeAD GmbH- Agency for Education and Internationalisation (Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps) highlighted: *We believe in a bigger Europe, and we can see how our work makes sense, because 20 years ago, we were only thinking about Youth strategies, and now we can see them being developed even outside Europe. ESC is a young baby with a long history. A lot has changed since. It is good to discuss the good and bad of volunteering in Europe. With agencies, young people, organisation, researchers – further engaged in further development. Volunteering was seen for a long time as something where young people must learn a lot and find themselves. With the birth of the programme, solidarity was put in focus. Engagement in inclusive and democratic Europe. Showing solidarity in Europe and cross-borders. While we are here, policy makers sit in Alicante with evaluation of the ESC and Erasmus +. Outcomes will be a strong focus on democratization and solidary Europe.*

Andrej Troha, programme officer in SALTO SEE mentioned that *this even offers you space, and activity discuss the European Solidarity Corps. How it went so far and how to develop its future. In the last few years European Solidarity Corps stepped into the shadows a bit.*

Ella Bouquet, European Solidarity Corps Chief Officer at The Youth Department of The French National Agency emphasised that *we should not forget the youth; they need to be involved in this discussion. All programmes are under a process of midterm evaluations. The Commission wants to hear from us, to provide feedback. SNAC is to empower all people, young, organisations, and all points of views should be heard to shape the future of this programme.*

#### Programme

**Getting to know each other** in the groups of 12 around round tables, was mainly about the motivation behind each person's participation and sharing reflections and thoughts on volunteering. Participants were encouraged to think of their own experiences in volunteering and what they can contribute to the Conference.

Following the introduction of the participants, programme overview and general information were presented. Facilitators introduced the general informational document which has been used throughout the entire Conference. Some information regarding hotel and working spaces were given.

After the break, participants were invited to join the **European Volunteering History** that was presented in a form of timeline in the hotel patio. Everyone brought a picture from their life connected with volunteering, share about it in smaller groups and place it to the timeline.



### RAY Research presentation

Following the timeline session, Andreas Karsten from the RAY Research Team presented the preliminary findings of the **RAY solidarity research**. During his presentation, he highlighted that the data collection for this research would be completed by October 31, 2023, and already included over 1,400 responses. The preliminary analysis painted a positive overall picture of all project types. However, distinct differences emerged when comparing solidarity projects to volunteering, as well as between volunteering teams and individual volunteering schemes.

The analysis revealed that participants in solidarity projects exhibited a greater interest in civic engagement, while those in volunteering projects leaned more towards personal development. Despite these differences, the overall project experience was positive across all project schemes. Solidarity projects garnered a more enthusiastic response compared to volunteering, though the latter still received positive feedback.

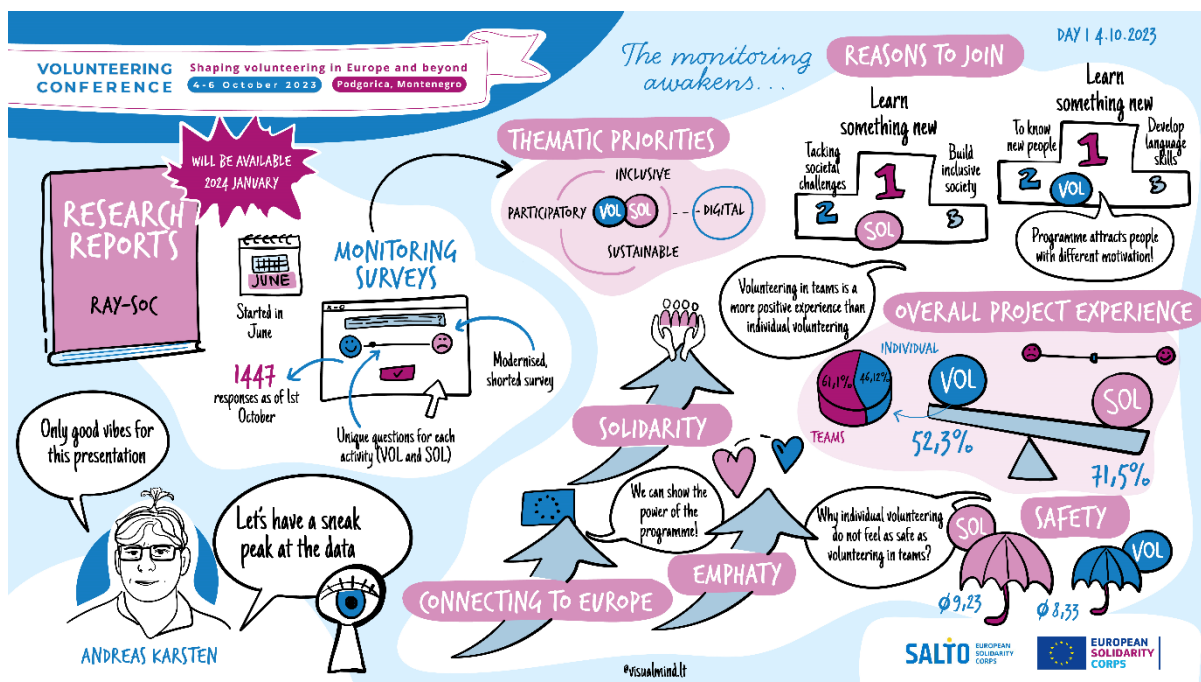
In terms of priorities, there was a consistent distribution across all project schemes, with high emphasis placed on inclusion, sustainability, and participation. Conversely, digitalization scored notably lower in terms of how much this priority has been present in their projects.

A positive aspect noted was the widespread sense of safety among participants of solidarity projects, with the majority feeling either safe or very safe. There is an improvement potential in this regard in the Volunteering projects. Regarding the development of solidarity and empathy, participants in solidarity projects reported a higher positive change in their attitudes and behaviour compared to those in volunteering.

Addressing contemporary crises such as the war in Ukraine, climate emergency, pandemics, and inflation, participants across all project schemes were impacted evenly. Notably, participants felt a stronger sense of European identity after their projects, developed a greater appreciation for cultural diversity, and agreed that their projects had a meaningful impact on the local community.



His presentation can be found in this [LINK](#). The whole presentation has also been streamed live and is available to be seen on [YouTube](#).



This presentation concluded the morning sessions and lead to lunch break.

### Research discussions

Afternoon activities started with the review and **debates on various research**. Participants joined the research panel fitting their interests. They were able to choose from four different research with some comments recapped below:

- **Exploration of the Complementarity and Synergies of the European Solidarity Corps Programme with other EU Youth Programmes, by Weronika Koralewska.**

Most of the thoughts in this group focused on the recommendation to the organisations to use Erasmus + programme for capacity building of their European Solidarity Corps experience. Group specifically mentioned to be wise to apply for KA2 for innovations in volunteering, developing training opportunities and to promote volunteering, solidarity, and European Solidarity Corps better. It has been brought to the attention, that not all the organizations, that are part of the ESC programme, are eligible for the E+ programme. Group also identified the need for more KA 1 Training opportunities, especially for mentors and coordinators. They even proposed future volunteers to join KA1 training courses to get better idea about the volunteering. Group also mentioned the need to connect European Solidarity Corps and Discover EU better. In addition to the complementary relationship between European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus +, they suggested to shorten the time for managing application and to restructure Youth Portal to be more user friendly.

- **Explore Needs of Young People and Organisations in the Volunteering Field That Lead to New Trends in Volunteering and Solidarity, by Sabrina Apitz, Daniele Nubile, Lotte Vermeire. Presented by: Sabrina Apitz**

This group managed to talk about several different topics. The group mentioned that in many countries, the programme is not really known well. They believe that tailored communication to reach young people is needed and that national agencies are not the ones to do it, because they do not have connection to young people. Promotion of the programme and its opportunities should be done in schools as well.

Group mentioned that the expression civic engagement is hard to understand. This term should be simplified. However, it was underlined, that European Solidarity Corps programme promoted it during the 5 years of its existence much better than its predecessor (European Voluntary Service) did. Young people do care a lot about the civic engagement.

Group highlighted the struggles of and with the partner countries: there is not enough support and promotion offered to the organisations and potential volunteers. Visa process takes too long, and it is expensive. Group mentioned that there is not enough funding for partner countries, and they depend on the programme countries and regional SALTO centres. They also stated that many young people do not wish to come back to their country of origin, which is an additional struggle.

Hosting organisations are facing their own struggles such as insufficient funds caused by the inflation. They also mention the fact that mentors are not paid, however the emotional support is needed much more every year. Group mentioned that different countries face different reality. In some countries there is not enough funding for the programme, because there is a high demand and fierce competition. It causes the National Agencies stopping promoting the programme to possible beneficiaries, since there is not funds enough to cover the projects by the organizations, that are already part of the programme. This influences the sustainability of the programme. Group also criticized behaviour of some organisations which search only for high skilled volunteers, which indicates their job substitution strategy.

There has been a debate about opening programme to digital volunteering. Group believes that while there is moderate interest in digital volunteering, this interest is significantly higher among young people who can be counted towards a marginalized group and/or have fewer opportunities to travel.

Group suggested to conduct the research about the necessity to lower the age of volunteers to 16 years of age.

- **Mapping and Analysis of Research on Youth Volunteering in Europe, by Federica Demicheli, Davide Tonon, Michelangelo Belletti, Dragan Atanasov. Presented by Jana Randa.**

Group discussed that there is a discrepancy between the priorities of hosting organisations and priorities of young people. The primary motivation for participation is often centered around the desire to travel and gain new experiences, with a lower emphasis on acting in solidarity or creating community impact. Increase on the solidarity attitude of the young people comes during or as a follow up of their participation. How to measure it? A long-term study would be needed.

Group argued that the mindset influenced by past or historical factors plays a significant role in how volunteering is acknowledged in a specific country or region. The recognition of skills acquired through volunteering tends to be more prominent among privileged young individuals rather than those with diverse backgrounds, such as those with less language skills or lower educational degree. Disparities in recognition exist not only between different local communities but also among various countries.

Participants acknowledged that the motivations behind young people's volunteering efforts need support, emphasizing the importance of recognizing solidarity over charity. Already the preparatory phase of the volunteer is very important for that and needs to be properly taken care of. Unfortunately, the role of supporting organizations in the new program has decreased and is undervalued. Pre-departure training is essential for cross-border volunteering, ensuring that volunteers are adequately prepared to meet the needs of the communities they will be serving. The preparatory phase especially with the young people with barriers to join the programme starts way earlier than with the predeparture training. Organizations need to be provided a sufficient funding as well for this phase.

- **Mapping Study of European Civic Engagement Frameworks and Their Links with Youth Volunteering, by Miguel Ángel García López. Presented by: Barbara Eglitis**

This group focused mostly on the term volunteering. They concluded that the term has no common European ground. They agreed that volunteering should be a part of a political and/or civic education. They mentioned that this type of education is quite different in different countries, which influences understanding of volunteering, policy development and overall civic education. They argued that civic engagement steps in where the politics fails.

They also discussed the topic of activism, emphasizing that it isn't inherently negative. They pointed out that numerous politicians began their careers as activists, and many ideas stemming from activism have led to significant civic advancements.

Group also talked about the volunteering status, mentioning responsibilities and privileges that derive from it. They argued that these privileges should be aligned with the national realities. Their general suggestion is to research and describe different volunteering schemes and to map these realities.

### Panel debate on research

Followed by the group discussion, facilitators invited Jana Randa, Barbara Eglitis, Weronika Koralewska, Sabrina Apitz, and Andreas Karsten to a **panel debate** to summarize their thoughts from the group work.

During the debate, the discussion touched on the broad impact of volunteering beyond the youth sector, extending into adult and other educational realms, introducing a new level of complexity. Emphasis was placed on the evolving definition of volunteering, with different interpretations noted in both national and international contexts. The need for ongoing debate was highlighted, drawing parallels with the 20-year process it took to define youth work.

Meta-level research was introduced, citing over 40 studies on volunteering. Key trends were identified, including the diminishing significance of altruistic values and a shift towards personal interests, which was found disheartening. Additionally, it was pointed out that many participants come from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

The discussion turned to envisioning the future of volunteering, citing both potentials and obstacles. The effectiveness of National Agencies as channels to promote voluntary work was discussed. Increased civic engagement, enhanced support (including financial), and the critical importance of mental health and solidarity were emphasized.

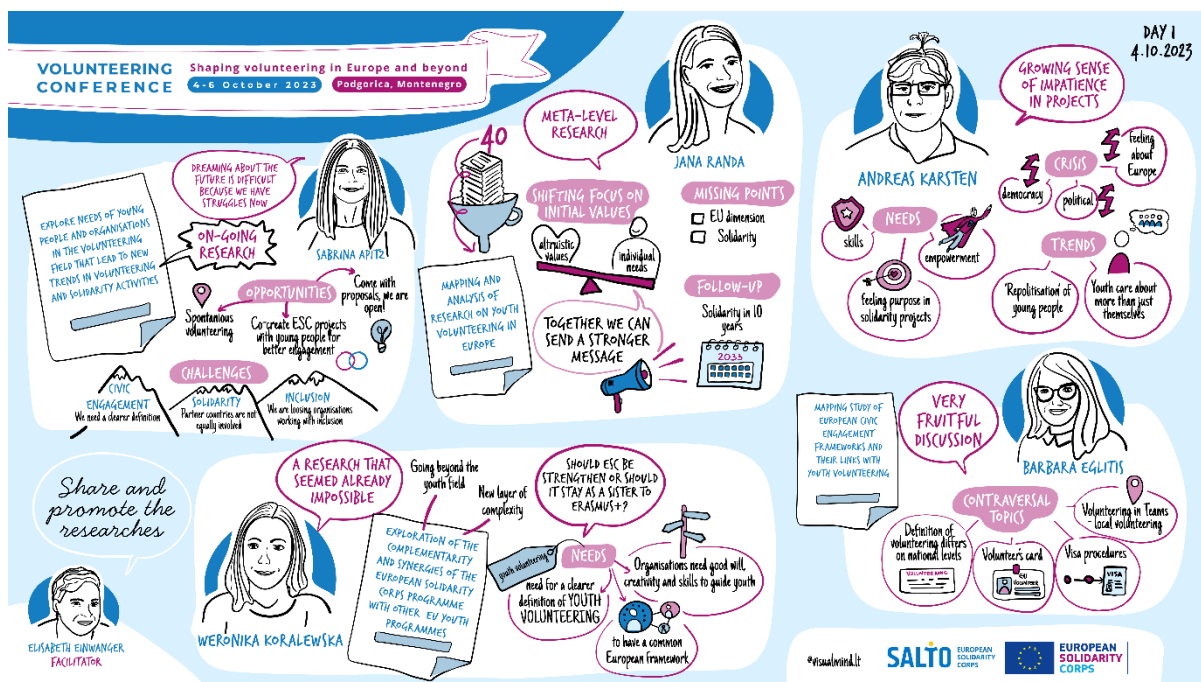
Several debatable topics were raised, including concerns about the definition of volunteering, the emergence of volunteering exclusivity, and the proposition for solidarity teams to become full-time positions.

The current difficulty of the times, with democracy under threat in Europe, was deemed intriguing, giving volunteering and solidarity special importance. A crisis in motivation was noted, where emotions rather than developing skills to address the challenges that cause these emotions were put in focus by young volunteers, even within projects.

A shift in activism and the need to re-implement inclusion and strengthen the aspect of solidarity were emphasized. The distinction between volunteering and solidarity within the European Solidarity Corps, with a difference in motivation and a higher sense of purpose behind solidarity, was pointed out.

The discussion turned to the policy framework these initiatives belong to, with debates around civic engagement and youth volunteering. The question of links to research presented and the importance of raising the quality of solidarity volunteering were emphasized.

Challenges of navigating the vast array of volunteering opportunities were discussed, emphasizing the need for organizations to adjust and support the creativity of participants. Changes in trends from previous research were noted, with a trend towards the reengagement of young people in politics.



Issues of decision-making in the program, its perception as not solely for the youth, and the privilege that some participants cannot change were raised. The importance of considering the European dimension and solidarity in the discourse was highlighted.

The growing importance of sharing experiences with policymakers to enhance communication was mentioned, along with a note about spontaneous volunteering opportunities that participants were urged to check online for more information.

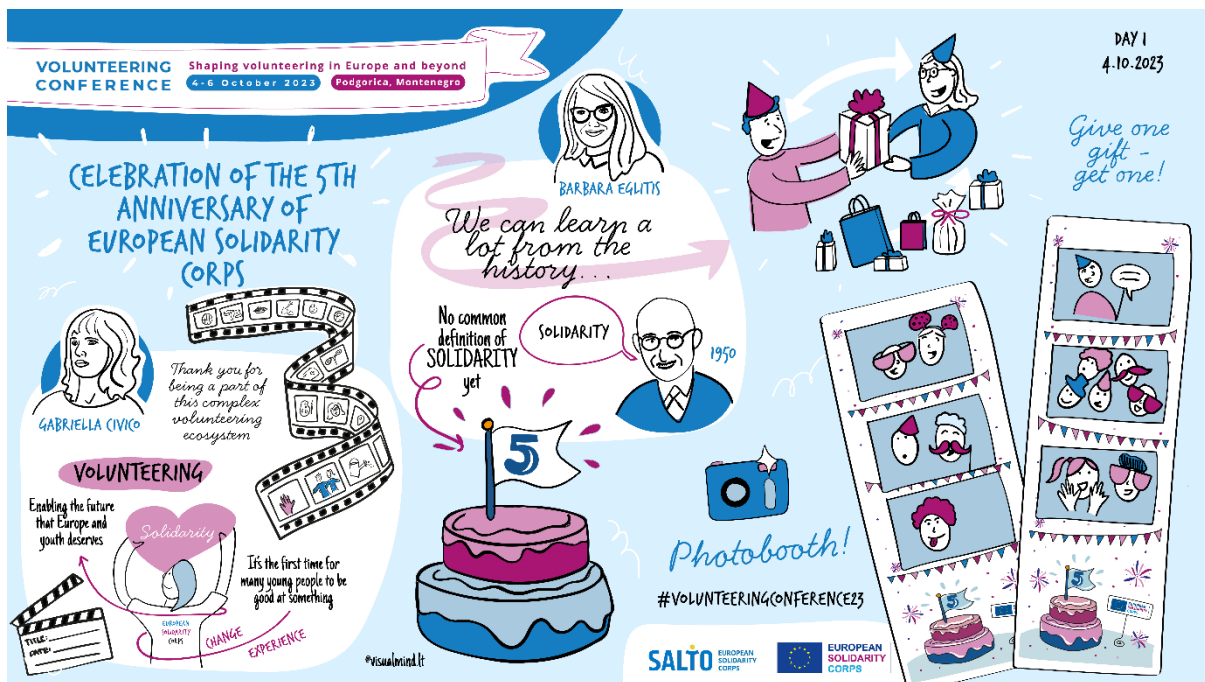
To summarize some of the conclusions:

- Voluntary work and solidarity activities have a huge potential to be spread beyond the youth sector, to adults and to formal education.

- There are still some discrepancies in the definition of volunteering. There are differences in the (inter)national context. Debate should continue, because even debate about youth work has taken more than 20 years.
- National agencies are not the right center to promote voluntary work, however, many organisations do not know about it enough to promote it.
- There is a higher level of civic engagement and community building than before.
- It seems that projects, organisations, and young people are more focused on handling emotions that derive from certain situations, instead of learning skills to overcome these situations.

## Celebration

Afternoon concluded with the group photo and the preparation for the **Celebration** of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The celebration started with the note from Gabriela Civico from CEV that *we are privileged to be able to volunteer*. She also stressed that we could strive to practice solidarity the way we want and fits our needs. Barbara Eglitis from SALTO ESC shared some fun facts and history about voluntary work with us and then opened official celebration evening with some music, exchange of presents and infamous photo booth to record our memories.



October 5, 2023

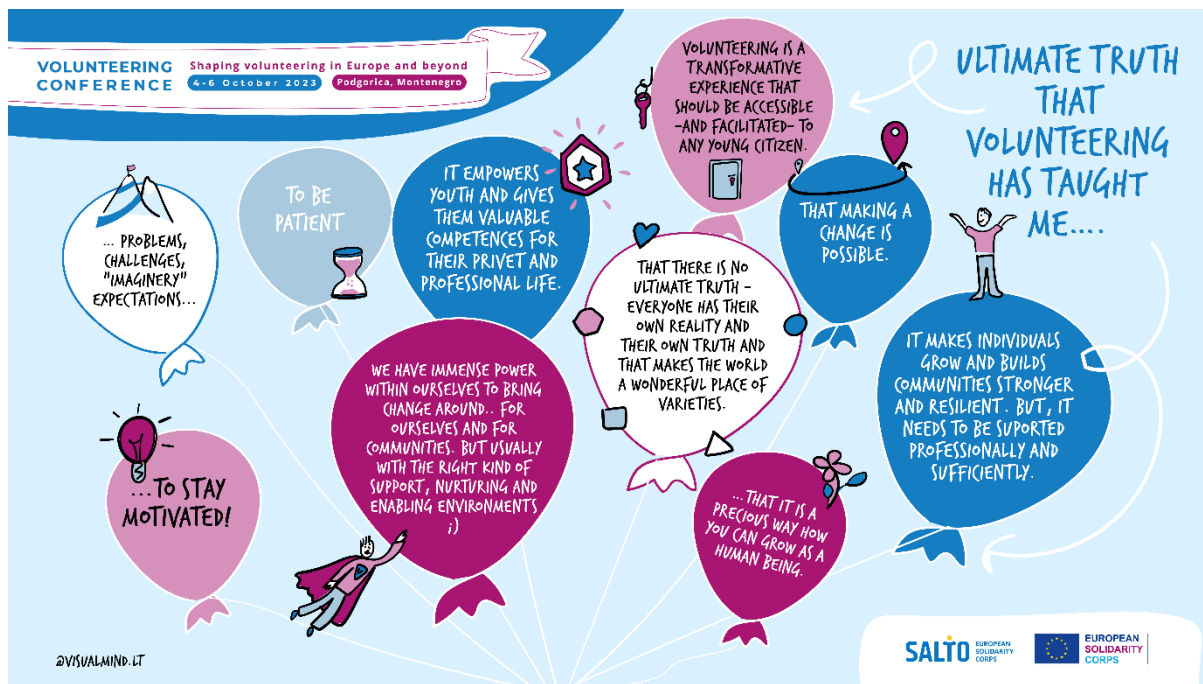
**Recommendations presentation**

Day two started with the **presentation on the Recommendations to the European Commission**, made by Andrei Popescu, representative of the European Commission. He mentioned some of the challenges the European Commission is facing such as inadequate implementation of the previous recommendations. Significant *milestones* in volunteering history such as the European Youth Strategy were mentioned alongside with the need for *capacity building* particularly in terms of promotion and information dissemination. Mentioned was also the unsatisfactory implementation of previous recommendation from 2008.

He highlighted the following: Volunteering serves as a crucial avenue for developing skills and competencies that enhance employability. Member states are urged to follow recommendations, creating political expectations, and fostering elevated standards in volunteering. However, the Commission faces various challenges in this pursuit.

Ensuring the implementation of recommendations by member states is a primary challenge, as past recommendations have not been fully realized. The dynamic landscape of volunteering, coupled with the commitment to maintaining high standards, presents an ongoing challenge. Issues such as social benefits, health insurance, and the recognition of learning outcomes add further complexity, compounded by the fact that volunteering is not fully known or understood.

Several milestones have been achieved in alignment with the recommendations. The establishment of a European youth doctrine known as Youth strategy, urging member states to fulfil their commitments, and the development of laws governing the European Solidarity Corps have been significant.

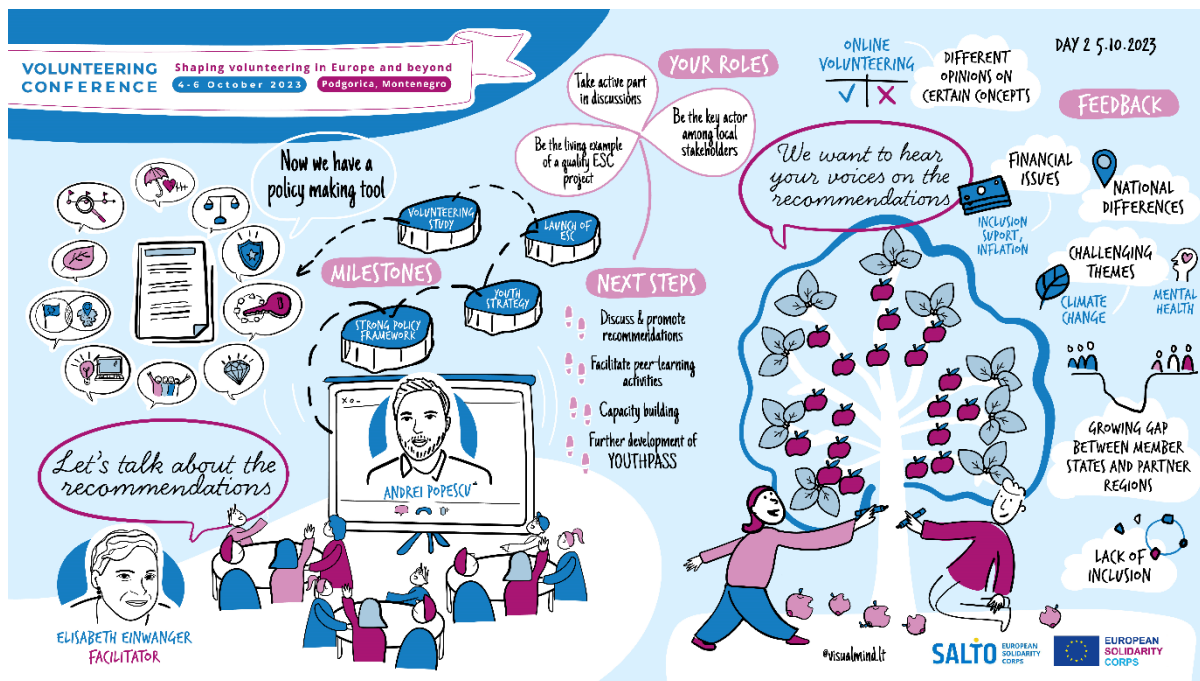


Potential outcomes and next steps include not only expecting member states to implement suggestions but actively supporting and facilitating their efforts. Mutual learning opportunities will be fostered, and awareness of existing opportunities will be better promoted. Essential tools like Youthpass will be further developed in collaboration with entities like SALTO Training and Cooperation.

Spreading Recommendations and providing support involves crucial steps. Ongoing discussions, like the one conducted, are vital for exchange and cooperation. National Agencies play a prominent role in this regard, acting as key liaisons between various stakeholders. Engaging with national governments responsible for volunteering and youth can further amplify the impact. The core tool unifying these efforts is the successful demonstration of the European Solidarity Corps as a showcase for cross-border volunteering, illustrating its potential and encouraging broader adoption.

Before participants moved to smaller groups to comment on the Recommendations, a short **presentation of the online sessions** was presented. The online sessions conducted in September 2023 as a preparation for the Volunteering Conference gave a chance to the participants to get deeply acquainted with the Recommendations, before they join the debates during the Conference. The intention was to maximize the quality of the outcomes created at the Conference in Podgorica. Already during the online sessions participants brought topics of inadequate funding, different understanding of the volunteering, introducing alternative format of volunteering such as online volunteering, the fact that some practices do not reflect the values of the programme such as inclusion, challenges of the partner countries etc.

Following the online sessions presentation, participants moved to the nine smaller groups, each **commenting on one of the recommendations** from the political and organizational level as well as from the perspective of young people. This debate was to continue after the lunch break.



## Better conditions paper presentation

Our afternoon started with the presentation of the Position paper of the SNAC Volunteering: “**Better conditions on youth volunteering**”, presented by Georg Feiner. The paper has the ambition to start the debate on volunteering and the necessary future steps that need to be taken in order to create better conditions for youth volunteering in Europe and beyond. Georg Feiner highlighted three points of focus for better volunteering:

Page | 15

- 1) Introducing an EU volunteer status such as visa solutions, recognition of volunteering, involvement of people younger than 18, impact visibility, better recognition, information accessibility, social and legal status.
- 2) Introducing a renewed quality charter for volunteering to improve processes and volunteering such as focus on solidarity, health, safety and security, support measure for mental health, inclusivity, digital forms, environmental aspects, recognition of skills, paid staff, and volunteers.
- 3) Fostering capacity building to enhance organizational frameworks such as solidarity, online volunteering, complementarity between schemes, programme priorities, community, and networking.

## Recommendations group discussions

Programme continued with the group work of participants. Their **comments about the Recommendations** were summarised as follows.

### Health, insurance, and security

Many volunteers face mental health challenges either before applying for projects or during their stay in a new country with a different culture, language, and no established social network. One effective way to address these challenges is by proactively **assessing volunteers' mental health** prior to their involvement and offering in-person conversations to discuss their needs and provide support.

Additionally, providing **comprehensive training courses and clear guidelines for mentors and coordinators** on how to identify and manage mental health issues is essential. Resources like <https://www.mhfa-ersthelfer.de/de/> can be valuable references.

Supporting volunteers in building a physical social network is crucial to reduce feelings of loneliness. Experienced peers can play a significant role in assisting.

Access to **psychotherapy should be covered by insurance policies**. The comparison of insurance companies (Henner, Cigna, Axa) revealed differences in coverage. Volunteers often struggle to understand the terms and conditions of their insurance. **Simplifying the documentation** and presenting hypothetical scenarios in a more understandable manner can help volunteers make informed decisions.

Moreover, EU volunteers frequently lose their social security rights, including health insurance and pension benefits, when they leave their home country. While Henner coverage can be helpful in some cases, it is not always accepted as primary coverage due to national insurance requirements. **Addressing these gaps in social security** is crucial to providing comprehensive support to volunteers.



### Information Technology

Many IT solutions face *functionality issues*, often taking months to be corrected. Conference participants have recommended a comprehensive **reassessment of various IT tools**, including the Beneficiary Tool, Youth Portal (especially sections for organizations and young people), Dissemination platform (Erasmus+ project results platform), and Henner platform. Their suggestions encompass:

- Implementing a functional Intellectual data platform
- Adopting modern IT management tools
- Enabling online signing for volunteering agreements
- Developing user-friendly software beyond basic Excel sheets
- Creating inclusive, volunteer-friendly tools
- Establishing a functional Online Language Support (OLS) platform
- Establishing a portal showcasing volunteering opportunities for both national and international schemes
- Creating a platform for organizations to exchange good practices.

**Involving users in the development of these tools** is highly recommended. The current European Youth Portal falls short in meeting networking needs due to excessive information overload and a lack of visual appeal.

Additionally, there is a need for **simplification in both language and format on the platform**. Language used in promotional materials, application forms, program guides, and supporting documents appears overly rigid and can be enhanced by incorporating more diversity and reducing complexity, particularly for individuals with hearing and visual impairments. To enhance transparency, it is suggested to provide an organigram explaining the structure and responsibilities of each department in national and executive agencies.

Furthermore, there is **overlap in information** between the European Youth Portal and the websites of national agencies. Conference participants propose that organization-related information should be housed on national agency websites, while information for young people should be available on the European Youth Portal. For this approach to work effectively, it is crucial not to delete content from the Youth Portal. Additionally, the Youth Portal requires improvements, addressing outdated information and outdated terminology.

### Quality and Support

In the 2023 Recommendation, there is a section addressing the need for **supporting integration** in the host community and facilitating reintegration upon the volunteers' return. However, the European Solidarity Corps programme and its funding appear to be moving in the opposite direction. Significant cuts in sending funding have severely limited organizations' capacity to provide adequate support. Many organizations are often having to rely on their own resources, and success is largely contingent on the goodwill of those involved. There is a pressing need for increased support in this regard.

Creating guidelines for pre-departure trainings is essential. One of the major challenges faced by volunteers is the time gap between their arrival and the on-arrival training. During this period, volunteers lack crucial information, such as the country's regulations, details about the transport system, and essential survival tips. Addressing this gap is paramount to better prepare volunteers for their experiences.

Improving the visa process is another area that requires attention. **National Agencies could play a more active role by engaging with embassies** at a higher systemic level, informing them about the European Solidarity Corps programme, and providing letters of support. The frequent turnover and lack of information among embassy staff pose challenges to organizations. Participants at the Conference emphasized the risks associated with hosting individuals from third countries, as they often inadvertently violate visa regulations by overstaying their permitted period in the EU. This situation creates complications for hosting organizations that need to be addressed.

It seems there are plenty of **bad organisations** that should not be a part of the European Solidarity Corps. They appear to exploit difficult situations by charging exorbitant fees for services like arranging visas for instance. Currently, these organizations cannot be blacklisted.

**Mentoring standards** must be incorporated into the Quality Charter, and better guidance, along with specific funding, should be provided for mentoring. Establishing a **unified quality label** recognized by both national and European schemes would streamline the process. Organizations could undergo a single quality label evaluation.

**Partner organizations** in various countries lack support and guidance on how to prepare volunteers. Young organizations in their vicinity lack suitable examples to learn from. Partner countries should have the option to apply for their own funds.

The role of sending organizations has diminished on the European Youth Portal, even though they play a crucial role in the sending procedure. This is where future volunteers gather the most information and personal support. Sending and supporting organizations can help explain and overcome obstacles and navigate complicated situations. It is vital to **reinstate the role of sending organizations**. By eliminating the supporting organization's role from the program, organizations lost a significant part of the support in the preparation, implementation, and follow-up phases, which are crucial for full partnership collaboration throughout the project life cycle. Building partnerships is left for the organizations to handle on their own.

Emphasizing the volunteer's status within the organizations is crucial. **Volunteers should not replace paid positions**. Conference participants emphasized the distinction between a job and volunteering, highlighting the difference in the level of responsibility. They also stressed that organizations should not rely on volunteers to fulfill essential roles. Volunteers should add value to the program, and the success of the program or organization should not solely depend on volunteers.

## Sustainability

Green travel should be the **primary mode of transportation**, with exceptions made for long distances (e.g., more than 1500 km). To achieve sustainable goals, structural measures are crucial, not solely relying on the goodwill of organizations. It is important to recognize that many young people lack travel experience. Local transportation is well-organized in some countries but not in others, emphasizing the need for green travel solutions tailored to diverse cultural realities. Moreover, **the distance in kilometres does not always accurately represent travel time and its complexity**.

Transnational volunteering has a negative environmental impact. Therefore, promoting sustainable behaviour should be an integral part of the European Solidarity Corps programme. This can be achieved by **encouraging eco-friendly practices**, financing initiatives that reduce carbon footprint, and engaging in activities that positively contribute to the environment. Volunteers, through their organizations, should

receive additional benefits for their sustainable behaviour, such as green vouchers or extra free days per month. Furthermore, including extra **educational sessions on sustainable practices during the on-arrival training** is essential.

### Budget

The structure of the European Solidarity Corps does not facilitate stable financing, compelling organizations to explore alternative funding sources. The program mandates an increase in workload while maintaining the same financial resources. The budget remains static throughout the program's seven-year duration, failing to account for financial inflation. In certain countries, it has become impossible to rent even in rural areas, historically more affordable than cities. Frequently, the entire budget is allocated to volunteers, leaving no funds for management. This scarcity of funds adversely affects the quality of work as organizations are compelled to seek external funding, leaving them with less time to support volunteers. It is imperative to include staff costs in the budget, considering their essential role in providing services.

Conference participants agreed on the necessity of conducting comprehensive research to comprehend the actual costs and challenges organizations encounter when executing volunteering projects. They underscored that existing research often concentrates on the situation and impact on volunteers, neglecting the strain it places on organizations.

### Inclusion

There appears to be a significant **imbalance between the supply and demand** of European Solidarity Corps projects. This imbalance likely results in a **biased selection process** (when organisations are seeking highly skilled volunteers), favouring privileged youth and further widening the gap in access to opportunities and decreasing inclusion. The solidarity program and volunteering should be developed with the flexibility to adapt to the realities of young people and to **expand the number of available opportunities** to address this issue. On the contrary, volunteers frequently find themselves without meaningful tasks within organizations.

Conducting research to determine the number of young **individuals who might have missed** out on volunteering experiences due to rejections would be highly beneficial.

To enhance the quality of inclusion, there is a need for more **organized training and support**. This includes increasing partnership-building activities (PBA) and providing Training and Support for Organizations Active in the Solidarity Corps (TOSCA) in every country. Specialized training sessions should be conducted for mentors and sending organizations, focusing not just on technical aspects but also on fostering synergies.

Young people often **do not identify themselves as individuals with fewer opportunities**, making it challenging to profile them in advance. Sending organizations should strive for a better understanding and a more significant role in defining the profiles of young participants.

It is crucial to acknowledge the **same level of recognition to non-formal learning** in the European Solidarity Corps as in the Erasmus+ program.

### Innovation and trends

Emerging **trends in volunteering** raise essential questions, particularly regarding the efficiency and meaningful impact of online/virtual or blended volunteering. It is evident that online volunteering requires specialized consideration to maximize its potential. Volunteering tourism poses challenges, as it may sometimes deviate from the core principles of meaningful volunteering. To fully comprehend this recommendation, investing in research is essential. Mapping various volunteering schemes at the local level requires understanding the supporting sectors, the nature of volunteering involved, historical context, age groups, and whether the volunteering is paid or unpaid.

**Expanding volunteering opportunities** for both younger and older individuals align with the broader proposal to extend volunteering beyond youth work. Introducing **flexibility in volunteering durations** can empower Youth with Fewer Opportunities (YWFO) to engage in long-term initiatives. A new initiative allows volunteers to utilize their allocated 12 months of service more flexibly, enabling multiple contributions through shorter projects within the 12-month timeframe. The former Future Capital program (a successor to European Voluntary Service) could potentially reintegrate into the European Solidarity Corps program.

The European Solidarity Corps Buddy app (<https://www.European Solidarity Corps-buddy.eu>) was mentioned as a pivotal tool, fostering communication and connection between volunteers and organizations in the European Solidarity Corps through a mobile application. Already in use by multiple active organizations, it holds the potential to become the official European Solidarity Corps App. Designed to enhance communication and information sharing, it empowers organizations to better engage volunteers, ensuring they are well-informed and involved in their projects. Several other successful projects created within **strategic partnerships in the Erasmus+ program** could benefit significantly from additional dissemination support from National Agencies.

Conference participants also recommended allocating **extra funding for small innovative initiatives** and a special **channel for Organizations to Collaborate and Exchange Ideas could be created**. It is imperative to enhance organizational capacity by facilitating the exchange of valuable practices among different organizations.

### Status

The EU **Volunteer status is essential** to address immigration and social security challenges. However, volunteering cards/labels should be exclusively issued to participants within the European Solidarity Corps program to clearly define volunteer work. This status should distinguish volunteers from trainees and facilitate procedures such as obtaining residence permits and addressing taxation on pocket money. The volunteering status should come with specific benefits, such as free transport, as seen in Austria. Additionally, the volunteering status should be adaptable to national realities.

Conference participants contended that volunteering should be **offered additional benefits**, including discount cards, free transport, leave entitlement akin to maternity leave, retirement points, extra vacation days, recognition of volunteering as equivalent to an internship in academic settings, and more.

The current **definition of volunteering lacks clarity** and is subject to debate. It is crucial for young people to understand what to expect from their placements. There is a need to differentiate between volunteering as a hobby and full-time volunteering.

Youthpass and Europass currently focus on identifying goals and documenting learning outcomes but **lack validation**. Youthpass, as an instrument, only serves to track competences already achieved, without providing pedagogical support throughout the service. Mentors can and should have tools to define individual learning objectives for each volunteer at the service's outset and track their progress. The PASS certificate should be expanded and adjusted to allow organizations to input data related to knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours. This could be guided by a tool like ([www.aki-app.org](http://www.aki-app.org)).

### Promotion

The European Solidarity Corps program should allocate **special funds for dissemination efforts**, expanding its reach beyond the framework of the youth work sector. While the EuroPeers network has been successfully implemented in some member states, its coverage remains incomplete.

It is crucial to **compile and share best practices** from organizations involved in hosting and supporting European Solidarity Corps activities. Youth workers often lack practical references in their day-to-day interactions with volunteers, especially in areas concerning personal and social support, managing living spaces, engaging with locals, facilitating intercultural learning, activating peer support to foster inclusion of Youth with Fewer Opportunities (YWFO), and promoting environmentally friendly practices at home. Documenting and disseminating these good practices are essential. The SALTO resource center website should offer **more practical guidelines and materials** derived from projects showcasing exemplary practices, accessible for all organizations to benefit from.

To enhance the inclusivity of the European Solidarity Corps program, promotional efforts need to be more comprehensive and widespread. Volunteering opportunities should also be **actively promoted within the formal sector**.

### Networks

Conference participants identified various challenges and positive aspects in **establishing a volunteer network**:

- It could be highly beneficial, as seen in certain cases, for former volunteers to act as mentors for new volunteers before their departure. These mentors can continue to support the new volunteers online throughout their projects.
- The question arises: Who should oversee the creation of such a network? Should it be managed and funded by a national agency, or could this responsibility be outsourced to one of the active organizations? If the latter, how would this organization be selected?
- Is it wise to establish an official association, or should the community be built around the practical aspects of volunteering?
- Despite the visibility of national networks, a community formed at the local level, encompassing multiple organizations, can have a more profound impact.

Organizations often lack awareness about the Europeers network. SNAC Europeers can take the initiative to promote the existence of the Europeers network to national agencies and beneficiary organizations throughout Europe.

**Last comments** of the day before the day`s closing was addressed as a missed opportunity to talk face to face to the European Commission, and to talk about the political situation in European Union. Many organisations currently host Ukrainian and Russian volunteers. There were also inspirations to organise

youth work and youth workers more as a union, to diversify our funding, and to build regional capacity building offices.

## October 6, 2023

### Midterm evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps programme

Strategic National Agencies Cooperation on Volunteering (15 National Agencies of European Solidarity Corps programme and SALTO European Solidarity Corps and SALTO Southeast Europe) organized in the beginning of October 2023 Volunteering Conference with the subtitle “Shaping volunteering in Europe and beyond”. One of the objectives of the Volunteering Conference has been to provide input for the Midterm evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps Programme. Here under is the summary of the discussions held during the conference by over 100 participants (21 National Agencies representatives and 82 practitioners from in total 34 countries).

Many of the topics raised are reflected in the paper “Better Conditions for Youth Volunteering”, a position paper written by the partners of SNAC Volunteering to be found back as well in the Council Recommendation on Mobility of Young Volunteers across European Union.

European Solidarity Corps programme is a programme that offers to young people, including those with fewer opportunities, accessible opportunities for engagement in solidarity activities that induce positive societal changes in the Union and beyond, while improving and properly validating the competences of young people, as well as facilitating their continuous engagement as active citizens.

On the preliminary results of [RAY SOC](#), that were introduced during the Volunteering Conference it is visible, how the programme manages to reach the priorities. On a scale 0=“not at all” and 10=“very much” the young people participating in volunteering projects answered 8-10 about their projects in following percentage: Was the project overall inclusive 62,8 participatory 67,2 and sustainable 55,3. The only priority ranking low was digital with 22,1% young people rating it 8-10 on the mentioned scale. The participants of the Conference see the program as a valuable opportunity for young people with diverse background to contribute to the society, act out solidarity, grow personally and become active citizens in the future. Through the participation in the Programme young people gain the connection to Europe: 60,9% rating that they feel close to Europe after their project in comparison to 33,6% before participating in the European Solidarity Programme.

Nevertheless, participants of the conference identified several aspects, that is necessary to improve or follow upon:

### Insurance and security

#### Health insurance

Many volunteers are afraid to go to the hospital because they must pay for their treatment in advance and then get reimbursed only after. Insurance needs to be more in line with the reality of the volunteering and the needs of the young people taking part in the programme. Access to psychotherapy should be covered by insurance policies.

All three insurance companies (Henner – Cigna – Axa) were compared by the participants. They have clarified that these three insurances offered different coverage. Volunteers often do not know what they sign, hence the documents provided by the insurance provider needs to have a simplified version and *what if* cases need to be displayed in a more understandable way.

### Social security

EU volunteers often lose social security rights (health insurance, pension) when they leave their home country. Young people need to have a social security when dedicating their energy within the transnational volunteering programmes. Henner coverage helps in some cases but isn't always accepted as primary coverage due to national insurance requirements.



Accordingly, to the presentation of the preliminary results of the RAY SOC research at the Volunteering Conference (4.10. 2023): 12,1% respondents did not feel that overall safe during their project. (Respondents answered 5 and less on the scale 1-10, where 1=not at all, 10=very much). On this picture it is mean put in contrast with the mean from Solidarity projects respondents, which is an in country volunteering). It would be valuable to research, if

the situation around insurance plays a role in the overall safe feeling.

### Information Technology

Volunteers and the organisations involved in the programme, as well as the National Agencies, need IT tools, that are functioning and reliable. Many IT solutions do not function properly, or they need months to be fixed. Participants of the conference suggest reassessing all IT tools such as Beneficiary Tool; Youth Portal – especially the sections for organisations and young people; Dissemination platform – Erasmus + project results platform, Henner platform etc.

Supporting IT is not stable enough to meet the needs of organisations and volunteers. It takes too long to fix or update something and it in does not respond to the needs of the users. All IT should be designed with the users to ensure the practical value of the IT, to use the right language, to cluster important information according to the user experience.

### Language support

Language support must be improved. Online versions are not user friendly, and it does not work without someone physically assisting volunteers in using online learning. Language is the biggest exclusion criteria on the project, and the support does not work properly. Also, considering different learning preferences, some people will not thrive with online learning. “Smaller languages” have an additional disadvantage because practitioners can only learn A2 level. It would be beneficial if the language courses could also be done in physical way with the proper financing. This can work well especially in the organisations with several volunteers.

### Budget

The budget does not reflect inflation. The response needs to be fast, and it should be recalculated every year.

The budget does not support administrative support. The salaries of the coordinating organisations cannot be paid from the grants because there is not enough money. This makes it difficult to improve the quality of the support provided. There is also a problem with the high costs of accommodation for the volunteers. In certain countries, it has become impossible to rent even in rural areas, historically more affordable than cities. Without a change in budget, impactful projects will be cut because they are too expensive. Participants of the volunteering conference suggested that the final financial budget should or could be calculated and adjusted to the amount of work organisation are able to do. More they can provide, more finances they get.

The budget does not reflect the diverse reality of the countries.

Travel distance calculator should be recalculated. Straight line in distance calculator does not always reflect the complexity of the travel.

Participants of the conference suggested distributing the budget among different national agencies. These agencies, if they have surplus funds from their projects, could potentially share the resources with other countries. One possibility might be to establish an intermediary institution to facilitate this process.

A special budget should be allocated for promotional activities, including outreach to small towns and villages. The impact of such promotions may not be immediately apparent; it represents a long-term investment, and reporting mechanisms should consider this aspect.

Programme should allow applications for inclusion as well as exceptional costs.

In addition to green travel, a separate budget line should be created for green support. Any remaining funds from green travel could be utilized in other environmentally friendly initiatives.

The significance of sending organizations should be emphasized in the budgeting process, possibly by allocating a fixed budget for these organizations. (More in the following part Organizations)

While an 80% pre-financing arrangement might be suitable for larger organizations, it may not be feasible for informal groups of young people.

Partner countries are less likely to have external funding to cover their own costs, including work hours, and there are limited opportunities for co-financing.

The financial allocation for team volunteering is insufficient when compared to individual volunteering opportunities.

## Support

There is a significant difference between established, experienced organizations and newcomers. New organizations require extensive support in managing projects. However, even larger organizations need practical assistance and prompt solutions for challenges such as supporting youth with fewer opportunities, addressing worst-case scenarios, and dealing with mental health issues.

Increased training, comprehensive guidelines, and the sharing of best practices would be highly valuable. The preparation of volunteers before their departure needs improvement. Pre-departure training should



be enhanced and made mandatory, conducted in person to ensure effective learning. In many countries, relying solely on an online version has led to volunteers being ill-prepared for their tasks.

### Partner countries

#### *Partner countries*

Partner countries should have the ability to apply for their own funding, without being dependent on the program countries. Engaging partner countries is challenging, especially when budgets are being reduced. In such situations, priority often shifts to mobilities within the country or to program countries, leading to a loss of connections with partner countries over time.

#### *VISA procedures*

Improving the visa process is another area that requires attention. National Agencies could play a more active role by engaging with embassies at a higher systemic level, informing them about the European Solidarity Corps programme, and providing letters of support. The frequent turnover and lack of information among embassy staff pose challenges to organizations. Participants at the conference emphasized at the same time the risks associated with hosting individuals from third countries, as they often inadvertently violate visa regulations by overstaying their permitted period in the EU. This situation creates complications for hosting organizations that need to be addressed.

### Organisations

#### *Sending organisation*

The role of the sending organization has diminished, but it should be strengthened to provide increased support, especially to youth with fewer opportunities. It is crucial for young people to fully understand their commitments, and support organizations play a vital role in mediating and assisting during the project.

#### *Bad organisations*

There should be a mechanism in place to exclude organizations that do not meet the quality standards of the program. This ensures that only organizations aligned with the program's quality are allowed to participate.

#### *Quality Label*

The Quality Label process needs to be more practical and specific. It currently feels too vague. Suggestions for improvement include simplifying the process to make it faster and more straightforward, particularly for smaller organizations.

Establishing a unified quality label recognized by both national and European schemes would streamline the process. Organizations could undergo a single quality label evaluation.

#### *Mentoring standards*

Mentorship within the programme needs better guidance, along with specific funding.

### Objectives and priorities in general



Conference participants argued that the current abundance of priorities places an additional burden on applicants. Many applicants lack expertise in all areas and feel compelled to address every priority. The existing descriptions force organizations to deal with all priorities

instead of focusing on mastering one. Comparing inclusion with digitalization, for example, is not feasible. It would be wise to allow volunteers to choose the priority they want to address in their project.

Potential future priorities could include mental health and fostering dialogue between the EU and neighbouring countries. These objectives are more youth-centric, which is positive. Organisations involved could require capacity building, particularly in areas such as peacebuilding, empathy, and dialogue skills, to effectively implement projects.



Priorities should be integrated into the project's topic, aims, or target group, without the necessity of addressing all priorities in one project. Projects must be implemented sustainably, considering long-term impacts.

#### Digitalisation

Conference participants noted that digitalization was introduced into priorities a bit too quickly, lacking clear guidelines and descriptions. A comprehensive toolkit on this topic would be appreciated. Placing digitalization among priorities did not necessarily attract more young people interested in the digital world. Consequently, many organizations struggle to incorporate this priority into their agendas. Addressing this priority requires the expertise of professionals who should be compensated for their services. Instead of facilitating solutions, this priority often becomes an additional obstacle.

While young people possess valuable knowledge in using social networks, not all are experts, and many struggle with digital literacy. Accessing information on platforms like the European Youth Portal and Henner insurance portal poses challenges for many. Participants also suggested the incorporation of audio-visual materials, including AI, in applications.

#### Participation and Sustainability

Projects should incorporate active participation methods and principles focused on contributing to society. Participation and inclusiveness are core values that should be central to the program.

Sustainability and climate change should not be the top priorities of the program. The current approach places the responsibility on young people, which may not be appropriate. Green travel should be the primary mode of transportation, with exceptions made for long distances. To achieve sustainable goals, structural measures are crucial. It is important to recognize that many young people lack travel experience and might need support.

### Flexibility in duration and age

Volunteers should be given the opportunity to divide their twelve months of volunteering into smaller projects, if they wish. This option can provide volunteers with a more comprehensive overview of their volunteering experience and a more diverse range of activities. However, such flexibility may impose

additional workload on organizations and contradicts the concept of long-term integration into a specific local community.

Additionally, there is a proposal to adjust the age range for volunteers from 16 to 35 years old. However, opinions on this matter were divided among the conference participants.

### Impact

Conference participants emphasized that there is a significant impact on the sending country when volunteers return with increased intercultural openness, a different perspective, enhanced social skills, and a willingness to engage in civic actions within their local communities.

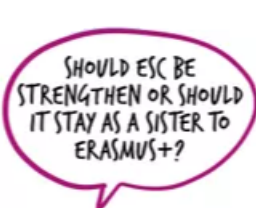
Some argue that short-term projects inherently produce less impact, as the most significant changes often occur after six or more months of volunteering. However, others contend that long-term volunteering becomes integrated into an organization's regular activities, making it harder to measure its impact on the local community. Volunteering teams also enhance visibility and outreach.

It's important to note that the European Solidarity Corps remains a small-scale project, and immediate societal change cannot be expected.

### Other suggestions

**Solidarity projects** play a crucial role in countries lacking financial support for local initiatives. However, their reporting should be more flexible to accommodate the unique characteristics of local projects. The specific needs of local communities should be taken into consideration, both on technical and logistical levels.

Volunteering has been closely observed and monitored by numerous researchers, resulting in a substantial collection of data. Participants have emphasized the necessity for these research findings to be made more publicly accessible, as they believe that many of the outcomes could be effectively executed.



Regardless of the decision to join the program, it is advisable **not to change the name** again.

**Youthpass** appears insufficient in meeting needs, as it lacks value in employability. Efforts should continue towards validating learning.

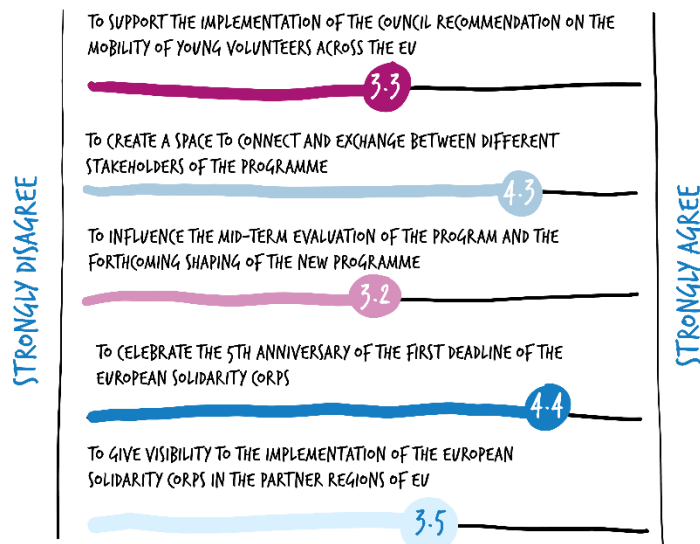
Validating the **status of volunteers** is a positive initiative, but equal attention should be given to validating the experience and status of the coordinators and youth workers who make the projects possible.

It could be a valuable addition to the program if transnational nongovernmental organisations could execute **itinerant projects**. This would enable volunteers to visit other branches of the same nongovernmental organisations in different countries, providing a unique learning opportunity from diverse structures.

### Closing of the Conference

After the session about the midterm evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps programme was done, short on spot **evaluation** was made.

#### THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE WAS FULLILLED...



Most participants market atmosphere on the Conference to be very good (71,6 %) or amazingly good (24,3 %). To the question if the Conference fulfilled the objectives the answers were distributed as follows.

Before the conclusion, Jana Randa outlines **upcoming steps** in evaluating European Solidarity Corps programme. She indicated that the **meeting of the national agencies** will follow to reflect on the Conference, with a subsequent gathering focused on **disseminating outcomes** to ensure the message reaches those who need to hear it. Some of the objectives of the conference will be

still worked on by communicating and promoting the outcomes of the Conference to relevant stakeholders starting with the Business meeting in Madrid in the second half of October 2023.

Following this, efforts of SNAC Volunteering will be directed towards **advocating for better conditions of volunteering** incorporating the insights shared by participants in this Conference. The Position paper will be reread with the knowledge of the topics raised at this conference and amended if necessary.

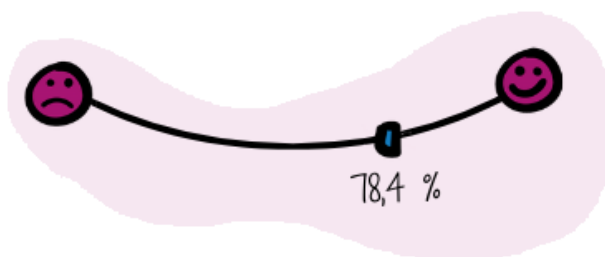
Within the SNAC Volunteering the efforts will take place to work on the three key focal points for enhancing the conditions of volunteering by introducing the **EU Volunteer status**, followed by an emphasis on improving the **quality chapter** for volunteering. Additionally, specific suggestions for **capacity building** within the European Solidarity Corps will be developed.

It is crucial for organizations to play a role in these next steps. Connecting with national agencies and supporting their efforts to **spread the word about the European Solidarity Corps** should be a collective endeavour.

### Evaluation of the Conference

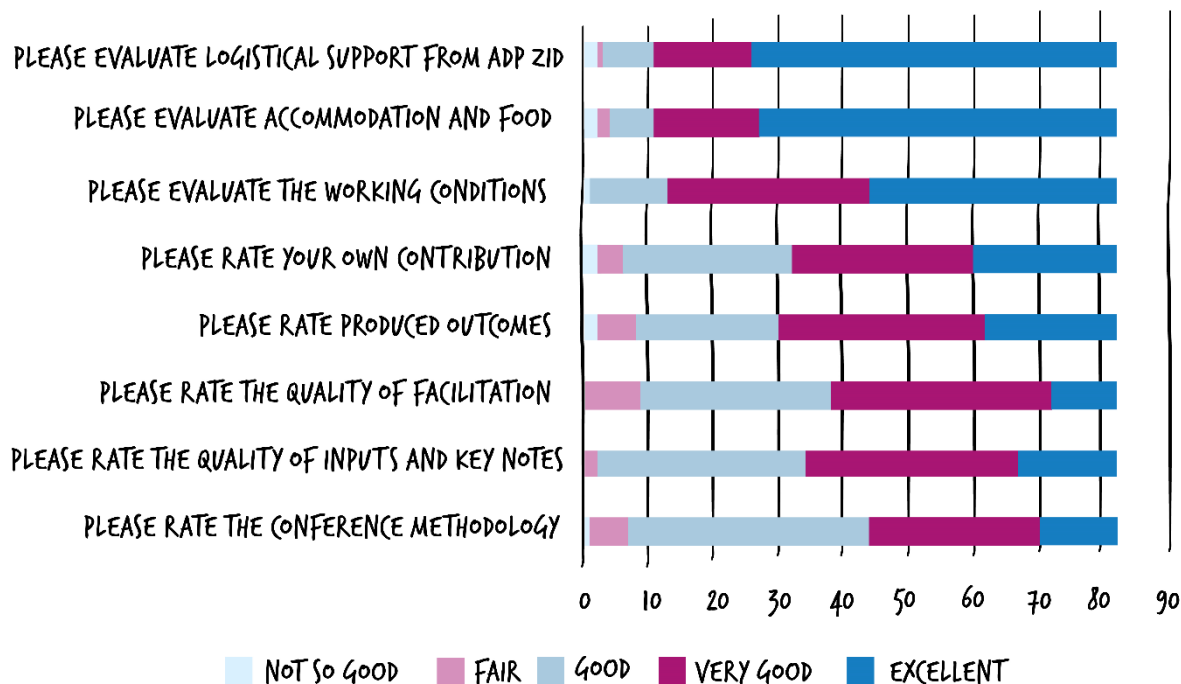
Participants of the Conference were asked to fill in the evaluation form. There were 24 participants representing national agencies or Salto centres filling up the evaluation form, 48 representatives of organisations, 6 young people, 3 researchers, and one municipality. Here is the summary of the evaluation. Impressions of the conference from interviews with some participants can be viewed in a short [video](#).

Overall, 78,4 % of the Conference participants expressed a positive view, describing the Conference as mostly to amazingly successful. Overall, 78.4% of conference participants expressed a highly positive view, describing the conference as remarkably successful. Their feedback highlighted the event's **excellent organization**, **rich content** relevant to the European Solidarity Corps Programme, opportunities for extensive **information and idea sharing** among participants, and an overall **inspirational atmosphere** that persisted throughout the conference.



Participants identified the Conference's primary benefit as the extensive opportunities it provided for sharing and exchanging thoughts, experiences, and ideas. They appreciated not only the chance to engage with peers but also the valuable interactions with officers from national agencies. Participants expressed satisfaction in establishing new partnerships, gaining deeper insights into the program's processes, and having an active role in contributing to the development and enhancement of the program's quality.

Quantitative evaluation of the Conference organisation as well as the content can be seen on this graph.



However, participants did highlight some of the points that could be improved in the future. Here is their feedback and **suggestions for improvement**:

- *Redundant Opening Speeches*: Many participants felt that the opening speeches were repetitive and could be streamlined to save time for more substantive discussions.
- *Lack of Diverse Representation*: Some participants noted the absence of key stakeholders, such as researchers and representatives from the European Commission, which hindered comprehensive discussions.
- *Choice of Venue and Travel Challenges*: Concerns were raised regarding the choice of a luxurious hotel and the long travel required to reach the Conference, which contradicted the sustainability priorities of the program and overlooked the financial constraints faced by participating organizations.
- *Insufficient Time for In-depth Content Exploration*: Participants expressed the need for more time dedicated to delving deeper into the program's content and concrete discussions.
- *Desire for Increased Networking Opportunities*: Many participants highlighted the importance of having more time for networking among participating organizations.
- *Overwhelming Plenary Sessions*: There was a consensus that the Conference had a lot of plenary time, leaving less room for interactive sessions or smaller group discussions.
- *Separation of Representatives for Better Topic Discussions*: Suggestions were made to separate representatives of national agencies and youth organizations here and there for more focused and specialized discussions on specific topics.
- *Facilitation in Smaller Groups*: Participants suggested facilitating discussions in smaller groups to prevent the influence of power structures and encourage more inclusive participation.
- *Need for Varied Methodologies*: The feedback emphasized a need to diversify methodologies used in the Conference to avoid repetitiveness and engage participants more effectively.
- *Connecting with Local Organizations*: Participants proposed the inclusion of opportunities for Conference participants to connect with local organizations to foster potential partnerships.
- *Enhanced Input Gathering Infrastructure*: Suggestions were made to improve the infrastructure for gathering inputs from participants, advocating for physical posters and offline methods to encourage a collective experience of contribution, and sharing, rather than relying solely on digital platforms.
- *Collaborative Formulation of Recommendations*: A process for collectively formulating recommendations was suggested to ensure broader consensus and involvement.
- *Addressing Serious and Controversial Topics*: Participants expressed a desire for more open and honest discussions on controversial topics related to the program, feeling that some critical issues were avoided, leaving them wanting more substantive dialogue.

Participants of the European Solidarity Corps Conference also highlighted several **positive elements** of the Conference. Appreciation was expressed for the Conference's *high-quality research interpretations*, demonstrating a depth of understanding and analysis that enriched discussions. Participants commented the *motivation and engagement levels* observed among participants, noting their enthusiasm and eagerness to actively contribute valuable insights and perspectives. The *outputs generated* from discussions were viewed positively, representing a balanced mix of practical, to-the-point solutions, as well as more abstract, innovative ideas that stimulated forward-thinking. The Conference witnessed *dedication, passion, and belief in the European Solidarity Corps program*, fostering an *atmosphere of collaboration and commitment among participants*. Overall satisfaction was voiced regarding the outcomes of the Conference, reinforcing the value gathered from the discussions and exchanges despite the identified areas for improvement.

### Working documents

[Presentation](#) of RAY research by Andreas Karsten.

[YouTube presentation](#) of RAY research by Andreas Karsten.

[Link to research](#) Exploration of the Complementarity and Synergies of the European Solidarity Corps Programme with other EU Youth Programmes, by Weronika Koralewska.

[Link to research](#) Mapping and Analysis of Research on Youth Volunteering in Europe, by Federica Demicheli, Davide Tonon, Michelangelo Belletti, Dragan Atanasov.

[Link to research](#) Mapping Study of European Civic Engagement Frameworks and Their Links with Youth Volunteering, by Miguel Ángel García López.

[Link to research group discussions.](#)

[Link to group discussion on recommendations.](#)

[Presentation](#) of Better Conditions on youth volunteering.

[Presentations](#) of Recommendations.

[Working presentation of the Conference](#) by facilitators of the Conference.

[Visuals](#) by Agne Rapalaite.

[Link to InfoPack](#)