

USE Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0

*Using Practical Tasks to Increase
Participation in European
Solidarity Corps Projects*

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...'Support and Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes'

The European Commission has created a network of seven SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres to enhance the implementation of the EU Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes, which provides young people with valuable non-formal learning experiences.

SALTO's aim is to support the implementation of the European Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps Programmes with regard to priorities such as Social Inclusion, Diversity, Participation and Solidarity. SALTO also supports co-operation with regions such as EuroMed, South-East Europe or Eastern Europe and The Caucasus and co-ordinates all training and co-operation activities, as well as information tools for National Agencies.

In these European priority areas, SALTO-YOUTH provides **resources, information and training** for National Agencies and European youth workers. Most of these resources are offered and disseminated at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net. Find online the European Training Calendar, the Toolbox for Training and Youth Work, the database of youth field trainers active at European level (Trainers Online for Youth or TOY), links to online resources and much, much more...

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THE SALTO-YOUTH INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY RESOURCE CENTRE WWW.SALTO-YOUTH.NET/INCLUSION/

The SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre (based in Belgium-Flanders) works together with the European Commission to support the inclusion of **young people with fewer opportunities** in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes and through that to contribute to social cohesion in society at large. SALTO Inclusion and Diversity also supports the National Agencies and youth workers in their inclusion work by providing training, developing youth work methods, disseminating information via the newsletter, etc. By offering opportunities for training, exchange and reflection on inclusion practice and diversity management, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity works towards the visibility, accessibility and transparency of its inclusion & diversity work and resources, and towards making 'inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities' and 'positive diversity management' a widely supported priority.



For more information and resources, have a look at the Inclusion & Diversity pages at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Inclusion/

THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS RESOURCE CENTRE
WWW.SALTO-YOUTH.NET/RC/SOLIDARITY/

The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

The Resource Centre's mission is to:

- Explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European studies;
- Promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity;
- Co-ordinate networking activities (like trainings, seminars and events) that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact;
- Contribute to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations

The Resource Centre is based at IZ, the Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, in Vienna, Austria.



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INTRODUCTION

Launched in December 2016, the European Solidarity Corps is the new European Union initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people around Europe.

The Solidarity Corps builds on the success of its predecessor, European Voluntary Service, and is now the main EU programme providing volunteering opportunities for young people.

The European Solidarity Corps aims to promote solidarity as a value in order to increase and improve the involvement of young people in solidarity activities as a way to strengthen cohesion, democracy and citizenship in Europe. These activities should respond directly to current societal challenges and serve to strengthen communities across Europe.

The programme offers young people the possibility to carry out volunteering activities, traineeships and jobs as well as to run their own solidarity projects. The programme supports the principles of equal treatment, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and aims to promote social inclusion. To do this, the European Solidarity Corps has implemented a series of extra support measures so as to facilitate access to the all Actions in the programme (and especially to the Volunteering strand) for young people with fewer opportunities (that is to say, those young people who, for a variety of reasons, would not normally take part in such activities).

Yet despite this focus and the extra support measures put in place, the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in Solidarity Corps Volunteering activities remains low. This is due to several different factors including a lack of information, knowledge and understanding about the programme, but is above all due to the lack of hosting projects suitable for young people with fewer opportunities. This is particularly the case for young people facing specific socio-economic obstacles.

Over the last 20+ years there has been extensive discussion and experimentation in the youth field to find ways for more young people from these backgrounds to be included in international volunteering activities. One way which has proven highly successful is using the “personal pathway” approach in combination with the methodology of practical tasks. The “pathway” approach helps to fit a Solidarity Corps project within a wider frame of learning and personal development for a specific individual while the practical tasks serve as a catalyst for the development of a whole range of soft skills which the young people often need in order to move forward in their lives. In this way, the young people can “use their hands to move ahead”.

The original “Use Your Hands to Move Ahead” booklet (2004, updated 2009) described how organisations could use the pathway approach and practical tasks in the context of European Voluntary Service projects. Now, **“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0”** builds on that knowledge and shows how it can be implemented in the European Solidarity Corps. “Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” explains the reasoning behind the approach and the methodology and gives concrete examples of how different volunteering projects across Europe use practical tasks to promote the development of soft skills.

The examples include innovative and new project ideas but they also describe ways that organisations can use their already existing programmes on local level to create volunteering opportunities to help young people overcome obstacles.

“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” is aimed at organisations who are new to the European Solidarity Corps as well as to those with previous Supporting or Hosting experience. The SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre and the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre hope that this document will inspire more organisations to adopt the methodology of practical tasks and use it to create new hosting projects for young people facing socio-economic obstacles. The booklet is also aimed at National Agencies and funding bodies with the intention of raising awareness about the usefulness of practical tasks. Ultimately, the Resource Centres hope to contribute to a greater appreciation and recognition of the educational value of practical tasks for young people with fewer opportunities.

The European Solidarity Corps is more than just a way to go abroad. In the proper context, it can be a powerful tool for change.

“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” was written by Kathy Schroeder (Schroeder Intercultural Consulting) and co-edited by Marija Kljajic (SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre) and Melanie Jacobs (European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre).

The team would like to express its deep thanks to all the organisations and youth workers, both past and present, whose contributions made this document possible “If we have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.”





What is the European Solidarity Corps?

The (European) Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities... in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

-Article 2, Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union

The European Solidarity Corps (referred to also as “Corps”) is a programme funded by the European Union for young people aged 18 to 30. The programme aims to foster solidarity in European society, engaging young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities.

The European Solidarity Corps creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe. Activities in the programme span a broad range of areas such as integration of migrants, environmental challenges, prevention of natural disasters, education and youth activities, and much more. Such activities can be inspiring and empowering experiences for young people – giving them the chance to help others while at the same time gaining useful experience, skills and competences.

The programme also aims to support young people and ease their school-to-work transition by providing them with additional opportunities to make a start into the labour market in the form of traineeships or jobs within their own country or across borders.

The Solidarity Corps builds on the achievements of more than 20 years of European programmes in the field of youth and solidarity, and in particular on the success of European Voluntary Service.

WAIT – what is “solidarity”?!?

Solidarity is one of the key elements which define the European project and one of the most important components of the European Solidarity Corps, but it is an abstract idea which can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this booklet, we can think of solidarity as **a feeling or an action of unity, togetherness or one-ness between people who have the same interests and goals.**

A study commissioned by the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre emphasizes that although **there is no one single definition of solidarity**, there is a solid common ground of an understanding of solidarity within the field of youth work. This common ground of solidarity is built on four cornerstones: active citizenship, human rights, empathy and inclusion. Important elements of solidarity include strengthening local communities, mutual support, active participation, social justice, equality of opportunities, responsibility and volunteering.



The European Solidarity Corps puts the idea of solidarity into action by bringing young people together to build a more inclusive society, supporting vulnerable people and responding to societal challenges and crises. One of the main tools the programme uses to do this is volunteering.



OK – so what is “volunteering”?!?

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

Volunteering is unpaid work, where a person shares their skills and time to help others in the community. Volunteering is a form of civic participation which enriches the well-being of the overall community and the lives of the volunteers participating.

Volunteering can take many forms - teaching people to read, visiting elderly shut-ins, coaching a local sports team, providing meals for the homeless or being a member of a rural fire department. No matter what form it takes, volunteering involves working for the common good. Volunteering is therefore a concrete way of being and acting in solidarity with others. It is an important way to build a more just society.

In the context of the European Solidarity Corps, **volunteering is a solidarity activity** where young people take part in a project full-time for a period from 2 weeks up to 12 months, involving at least 30 and not more than 38 hours per week. The volunteering activity is unpaid and it is expected that it will bring positive and long-lasting effects to the participants, the participating organisations and to the community where the activity takes place.

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Where does the programme come from?

The European Solidarity Corps can trace its roots to many EU professional and volunteering programmes for youth but it is particularly strongly linked to the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme (1996-2018).

The EVS programme was first conceived in the 1990's, when Europe was undergoing significant geopolitical, social and economic changes. EVS was originally designed to address problems of social exclusion and long-term unemployment among young people. It did this by opening up the world of international (or "cross-border") voluntary work to include young people who may not have the high-level skills or financial means to take part in more traditional programmes. Cross-border volunteering provided young people of all backgrounds with an intercultural learning experience – stimulating their active participation, promoting their skills, learning and personal development and giving them the opportunity to show solidarity with others.

In turn, the European Solidarity Corps was designed to cope with current challenges in Europe – for instance, climate change, natural disasters, the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, the refugee crisis, disappearing cultural heritage – and to give young people the chance to play a direct role in responding to those challenges. Cross-border volunteering remains an important pillar in the Solidarity Corps, but the programme includes other activities as well.

Activities in the programme

The European Solidarity Corps offers young people the chance to take part in a range of different activities which are divided into three main strands or "Actions":

- 1. Volunteering** – in this Action young people can choose to take part in an **individual volunteering project** (lasting from 2 to 12 months) or in a **volunteer team project** (lasting from 2 weeks – 2 months). Volunteer teams are groups of 10 to 40 participants from at least two countries who work together on a common project whereas individual volunteers are typically given a set of tasks to carry out more independently. Both individual and team projects can take place either in-country (that is, in the participant's own country) or cross-border (in a country abroad).

2. Traineeships and Jobs – in this Action young people can take part in solidarity activities that provide them with full-time work practice or employment, helping them to enhance their skills and experience which in turn helps them to transition into the labour market. A European Solidarity Corps **traineeship is a period of paid work practice** of between 2 to 6 months. A European Solidarity Corps **job is a solidarity activity in the form of paid employment** lasting a minimum of 3 to 12 months. Just as in the Volunteering Action, traineeships and jobs can take place in-country (in the participant's own country) or cross-border (in a country abroad).

3. Solidarity Projects – a Solidarity Project is an in-country activity initiated, developed and implemented by group of 5 or more young people for a period from 2 to 12 months. Solidarity Projects allow young people to respond to issues and challenges they see around them and to take responsibility for bringing positive change to their local community. The project should have an impact by addressing local issues, targeting a specific group or developing local opportunities. Solidarity Projects can result in the creation of new tools, products or services that benefit the local community or society in general.

The programme also supports a series of other activities and measures designed to improve the quality and accessibility of each Action, including networking, offline and online training, language support, administrative support for participants and participating organisations, complementary insurance, support before and where necessary after the solidarity activity, etc.

The above Actions are expected to bring positive and long-lasting effects on the participants and participating organisations involved, as well as on the communities in which the Actions take place.

Each of the three Actions in the European Solidarity Corps offers exciting opportunities for young people but **this booklet focuses solely on the Volunteering strand.**

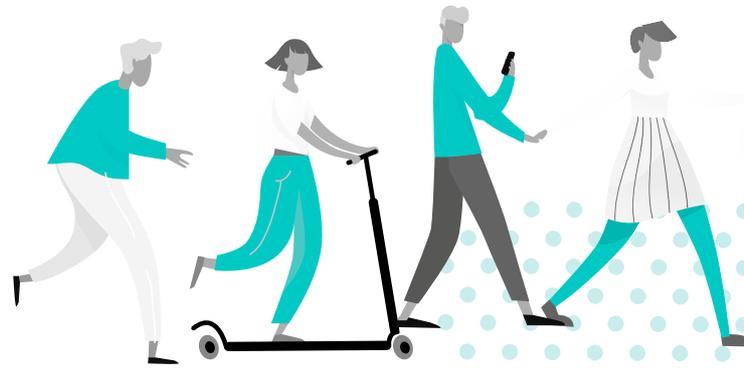
To learn more about the European Solidarity Corps, go to the European Youth Portal at https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

To find out more about the specific activities in each Action, their requirements, conditions, funding amounts, how to apply, etc., refer to the current version of the European Solidarity Corps Guide at https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps/how-to-apply_en



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Why should a young person volunteer?



European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects (both in-country and cross-border) offer a variety of benefits to young people as well as to their organisations. Volunteering can be a dynamic and fun learning experience. It is a unique alternative to formal learning settings (e.g. schools or institutes) which may have little to offer young people facing serious challenges or difficulties in their lives.

BENEFITS

Young people who take part in Corps volunteering projects have an opportunity to travel, to learn about other cultures and learn new languages. They can gain a variety of new skills, both on personal and practical level. Perhaps most importantly, they have the possibility to help others and actively contribute to the local community. European Solidarity Corps projects give young people the chance to do something they can take pride in. They can help others, feel needed, and discover that they too have something to contribute to society.

It is easy to imagine how young people can gain from volunteering projects, but organisations (both those who send/support the volunteers as well as those who host them) can also benefit from the experience. The Solidarity Corps can serve as a pedagogical tool to support the day to day work with young people. By taking part in Corps projects, organisations can offer their youngsters a new type of activity and a new level of challenge. The programme is a means to encourage young people to take responsibility for themselves and for their own communities. Corps volunteering projects are an investment in individuals but the impact of the experience goes far beyond the young people themselves; local youngsters, staff workers, families, and friends will all be impacted by the Solidarity Corps experience.

THE STRENGTH OF VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS – Soft Skills

People who are unfamiliar with international voluntary work may confuse the European Solidarity Corps with a vocational training programme. While some young people do decide to professionalize the practical skills they learned during their experience, the real strength of volunteering is its ability to help young people develop their personal or “soft” skills.



In-country and cross-border volunteering projects in the Solidarity Corps are a form of non-formal education which focuses on an individual's personal development. Volunteering is an excellent way for young people to improve skills like communication and self-discipline. They can increase their self-confidence and gain a sense of independence. Corps projects also teach young people to respect others and to take responsibility for their own lives. This development of soft skills is quite different from what is learned in more formal settings like vocational training. This form of personal development is especially useful for young people whose professional development may be blocked by their lack of social and inter-personal skills.

LIMITATIONS

With all the potential benefits, it is important to bear in mind that the European Solidarity Corps does have limitations.

As stated above, **the volunteer experience should not be confused with vocational training.** It is not possible for young people to gain official qualifications during Corps projects. Instead, the Solidarity Corps is a context where young people can try out a variety of new skills, explore new fields and discover new talents.

For some young people, volunteering projects can be used as a way to "take a break" from their regular lives; a period in another town or country can help them step away from difficult situations at home. However, keep in mind that when a young person travels, they take their emotional baggage with them. Problems in the home environment do not disappear just because the young person goes abroad. Therefore **Solidarity Corps projects should not be seen as a means to escape from serious issues.** At best, a volunteering project can give young people some breathing room, but they still need help to deal with their personal issues, both during the project as well as when they return home.

Volunteering in the European Solidarity Corps is a method that can help young people gain life experience, but **it is a method that offers no guarantees.** It is impossible to predict how an individual will react once they begin their actual project. The learning that takes place in Corps projects comes from both positive and negative experiences. Volunteers will need help from their organisations to process this and to recognize how negative experiences are just as important to their learning process as positive ones. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind that cross-border or in-country volunteering are not always appropriate steps for every young person. Sometimes leaving home can actually do more harm than good.

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Special attention for social inclusion

One of the specific objectives of the European Solidarity Corps is “to ensure that particular efforts are made **to promote social inclusion** and equal opportunities, in particular **for the participation of young people with fewer opportunities** through a range of special measures such as appropriate formats of solidarity activities and personalised support”.

HOLD ON – what is “social inclusion”?

Social inclusion is an on-going process which ensures that people at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. This process is made up of a wide variety of experiences and opportunities that can give an individual a sense of belonging, a sense of citizenship, and a sense of identity. Elements like having a good education, having a job and a decent standard of living are important aspects of social inclusion, particularly for young people, but perhaps even more important is **the breaking down of barriers to social opportunities** caused by factors like low income, discrimination, fear of the unknown and a lack of access to relevant learning experiences.

AND – who are “young people with fewer opportunities”?

“Young people with fewer opportunities” are young people who need additional support due to the fact that **they are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because of the obstacles they face every day**. The term “young people with fewer opportunities” is very broad; it includes many different profiles.





For instance, a young person may be considered to have fewer opportunities because of where they live (an isolated village or in a poor urban area), because of a lack of opportunities (no social services, youth bureau, or government agencies), because of a disability (mental, physical, or both) or because of their background (for example young people who face prejudice and/or discrimination due to their ethnic background and/or religion).

The Solidarity Corps has put several special support measures in place to break down as many barriers as possible and make it easier for young people with fewer opportunities to access the Volunteering strand of the programme. These measures (some of which have been taken over from EVS, some of which are new) make it for possible for the young people to:

- Go abroad for a shorter duration (from 2 weeks to 2 months rather than from 2 to 12 months)
- Volunteer in teams (rather than on their own)
- Volunteer in-country (as some young people, for different reasons, may not be able to travel abroad)
- Participate in an additional project (which would allow, for instance, to do a shorter-term project first, then progress to a longer-term project afterwards)

As well, the programme has allocated additional funding for:

- Inclusion Support – for “reinforced mentorship” (i.e. the additional time required for organisations to prepare and support the young people before, during and after their project)
- Exceptional Costs – for special needs support (due to disability or health, e.g. the costs of a personal assistant or the rental of assistive equipment) or for costs incurred in addition to regular organisational support (e.g. for Advanced Planning Visits, items needed for going abroad such as travel documents, visa costs, vaccinations, translation/interpretation, specific clothing needed for the project if the volunteer does not have the means to provide it themselves, etc.)
- Complimentary Activities – relevant “side activities” such as job shadowing, meetings, seminars, training courses, coaching, etc., designed to raise awareness of the value of volunteering and improve the overall quality, results and impact of the projects.

Participants in Corps projects also have the possibility to use **Youthpass** – a certificate designed to help young people reflect on their learning and the competences they have gained during their volunteering project.

In addition, the European Commission has developed a specific **Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** to bring the European Solidarity Corps programme even more within reach of young people with fewer opportunities. The strategy aims to invest in young people's and youth workers' intercultural and interpersonal competences to manage and work with diversity in all its forms. The strategy emphasises that extra efforts should be made by **all** stakeholders – project organisers, participants, trainers, National Agencies, and so on - to reach out and support young people from the fewer opportunity target group. This should ultimately have a positive impact on young people with fewer opportunities and their situation.



Interested to know more about the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy?

You can find the most recent version at: www.salto-youth.net/inclusionstrategy/

The challenge

The addition of all of these special measures shows that the Solidarity Corps has made serious efforts to include young people with fewer opportunities in Volunteering activities. But do all these measures actually work? How easy is it for these young people to take part in Corps projects? Although the measures have certainly been successful in eliminating some of the hurdles to the programme, there is still a long way to go.

Reliable numbers showing the level of participation of young people with fewer opportunities are difficult to find. However, at the time of writing of this booklet, data collected through the European Solidarity Corps Dashboard showed that for the period 2014-2017, **young people with fewer opportunities made up about 30% of all participants** taking part in Erasmus+ volunteering projects (EVS and Solidarity Corps projects). For the period 2018-2019, the first two years of the European Solidarity Corps as a stand-alone programme, **this percentage rose to 36%** (although this is a first estimate as the data collection for 2019 was not yet fully complete). In those first two years, young people with fewer opportunities made up **43% of participants in the volunteering team projects** (2 weeks to 2 months) and **31% in the individual volunteering projects** (2-12 months - again, a first estimate as the data collection for 2019 was not yet fully complete).

Drawing conclusions from these numbers depends on whether one sees the glass as half empty or half full. On one hand, the numbers of young people with fewer opportunities remain low, but on the other hand the numbers seem to be slightly increasing.

Unfortunately it is not possible to say which, if any, of the special measures are contributing to this increase (i.e. is it the shorter project duration, the possibility to volunteer in teams, the additional funding... or “all of the above”?) or whether the increase is due to other factors.

It is, however, relevant to ask why - with all the known benefits of volunteering and with all of the support measures available (some of which have been in place for over 15 years) – why the level of participation of young people with fewer opportunities is still relatively low?

In fact there are many reasons. It is easy to forget the larger underlying obstacles which continue to block many organisations and young people from taking part in the Solidarity Corps (not just those from fewer-opportunity backgrounds). Some of these include:

A lack of information – many young people and organisations have never heard about the European Solidarity Corps. This may be because they do not have easy access to information (e.g. because they live in an isolated area, because there are no EU-related agencies close by, no local presentations on the programme, etc.) or because they do not make use of the digital forms of information where the Solidarity Corps is advertised (e.g. e-mail, websites, specific social media pages, EU youth portals, etc.)

A lack of understanding – although cross-border volunteering has existed in many forms for many years, it is still relatively unknown. As a result, organisations may not easily see how to use it and they may have no idea how to go about setting up volunteering projects. Young people, for their part, may not understand how time spent volunteering can benefit them.

A lack of resources – youth workers and youth organisations, especially those working with youngsters with fewer opportunities, may not have the financial means, the manpower or the time needed to get involved with a programme like the Solidarity Corps or to provide the young people with the extra support they need during their projects. Organisations might not be aware of the extra financial support available through the programme... or they may find it insufficient for their needs.

A lack of confidence – many organisations, and in particular those who are not familiar with young people with fewer opportunities, may feel they do not have enough (or do not have the “right”) experience to take on the responsibilities involved in a Solidarity Corps project. They may be afraid of “doing something wrong” or of putting a young person (or themselves) in a situation they are not able to handle.

For those young people with fewer opportunities who do find their way to the European Solidarity Corps, **certain elements within the programme itself can also pose serious obstacles.** For instance:

The application procedure – young people interested in taking part in Corps projects must register online, then find a suitable project, then write their own application (CV), and then be selected over other candidates based on their qualifications, competences and ability to “market” themselves to a hosting project.

The types of projects on offer – specific hosting projects may request/require candidates to have previous experience abroad, to have experience in the field in which they will volunteer, to have foreign language knowledge, to be able to work independently, and so on.

On this basis, many fewer-opportunity youngsters conclude that the European Solidarity Corps is not for them.

These and other obstacles within the programme are not new. In the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2018), in its “Summary of main findings” on the Effectiveness of the programme, the report stated that:

*“The (Erasmus+) programme reaches out to those who can be seen as more easy to reach among the disadvantaged learners. **Participation of people who are disengaged or at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or dropping out is likely to be minimal.** This is in particular because the education and training organisations that implement the actions **tend to select those who are motivated and have good performance.** Selectivity is also present in the youth sector in EVS.”*

When all the data and different factors are taken into account, a definite pattern emerges: although there are signs of improvement, it is clear that participation in Volunteering projects in the European Solidarity Corps (and in the earlier EVS) still consists largely of traditional “classic” or “student” profiles of young people – those with the information, competencies and self-efficacy needed to access the programme – and this despite the fact that many of the measures developed to encourage more inclusion have been in place and well-established for many years.

While the various special measures seem to be having an impact, they are not always enough to compensate for the fundamental obstacles blocking the participation of more young people with fewer opportunities. After more than 20 years of European-level volunteering programmes, there are still not enough hosting projects available which are suitable for young people with fewer opportunities and still not enough organisations with the know-how and the confidence to initiate and carry them out.

The challenge, therefore, is to find ways to address these issues and start to change the perceptions of potential Hosting and Supporting Organisations. The next sections of this booklet aim to do just that.

Of course, a booklet cannot change the structures or procedures of the European Solidarity Corps programme, nor can it magically increase the amount of funding available for projects. However, it can try to take away some of the fears and doubts around working with fewer-opportunity youngsters by showing how other organisations across Europe use the Solidarity Corps as a pedagogical tool.

The following pages will look at a very specific group of young people with fewer opportunities and present a methodology and an approach which have proven successful in including them, not just in European Solidarity projects, but in society as a whole.

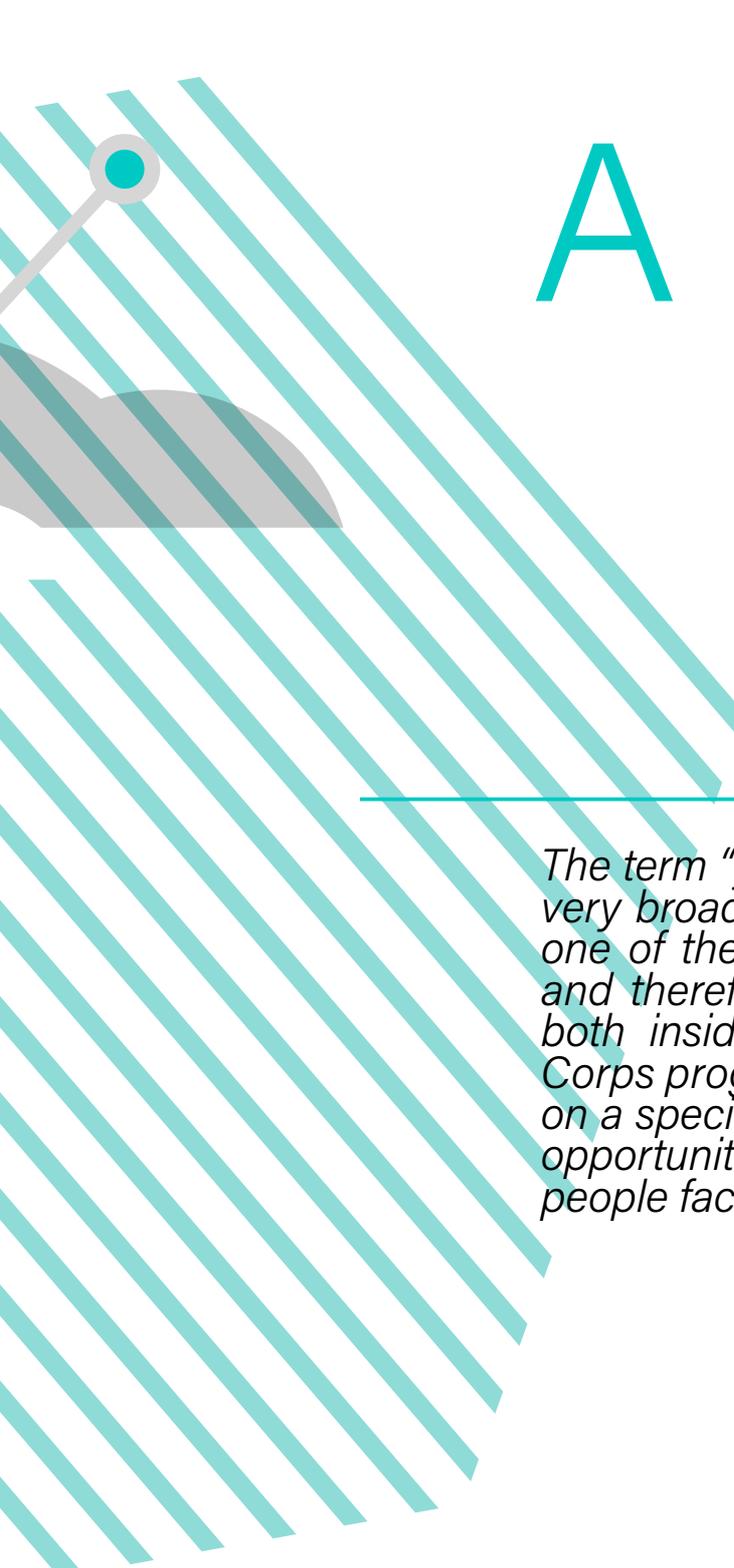
MYTHS

“Social inclusion” in the European Solidarity Corps project is something “special”

“Organisations may think that “social inclusion” means that Corps projects have to be designed specially for a particular profile of young person. If you imagine, for instance, a volunteer with a disability, it is often expected that that volunteer will clearly know their specific needs, then find a possible hosting place, then share information about themselves with the host, then wait for a project to start or wait for a custom-designed place to be made for them. But actually it should be the other way around. A project shouldn't be made for a young person with fewer opportunities – it should be made to be accessible to them. There is a big difference and to me THAT is inclusion - when the starting point is the same for everyone and when a project is as accessible as possible to young people of different abilities and backgrounds right from the start.”

*Diana Ponaskova, Project Co-ordinator, RB Café, Riga, Latvia
A Specific Target Group*





A Specific Target group

The term “young people with fewer opportunities” is very broad; it includes many different profiles. Each one of these profiles has their own specific needs and therefore requires their own different approach both inside and outside the European Solidarity Corps programme. The rest of this booklet will focus on a specific sub-group of young people with fewer opportunities. This group is referred to as “young people facing socio-economic obstacles”.

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Young people facing socio-economic obstacles

This term is used to describe young people with a particular set of needs linked to their social and/or economic situation. Young people facing socio-economic obstacles include those who may:

- have left school early or who have only low-level qualifications
- come from economically poor areas
- come from areas of high unemployment with few future job prospects

As a result of their situation, these young people may be suffering not only from a lack of opportunities, but also from a serious lack of practical and social skills. Young people facing socio-economic obstacles may have emotional and/or behaviour problems. They may lack maturity, self-confidence, and basic social skills. They may be economically and emotionally dependent on their family.

The socio-economic target group also includes profiles that can be described as “youth at risk” or “young people in severe difficulty”. These young people face extreme situations in their lives.

For example, they may:

- have drug or alcohol problems
- have been involved in criminal activities
- come from broken families
- come from a background of violence or abuse
- have anger or aggression problems
- be diagnosed with depression or other mental illnesses
- be at risk of exposure to bad influences in their area (criminal behaviour, extremism, etc.)

Clearly, young people in this specific target group face personal obstacles which are quite different from other “fewer opportunity” youngsters. These obstacles not only block the young people from taking part in European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects, they also block them from many other opportunities like living independently, successfully completing a course of study or finding and keeping a job.

What good can European Solidarity Projects do for young people with such difficulties? What is the sense in a cross-border or in-country volunteering project when an individual has to cope with an addiction, a troubled past or extremely low self-esteem? In fact, there is more sense than first meets the eye.

Past experience has shown that voluntary activities can in fact be a dynamic method which can help young people overcome their obstacles. An educational approach has been developed which places a European Solidarity Corps project inside a framework designed to respond to an individual young person's most urgent learning objectives. This is often called the "pathway approach". The next pages will present this approach in more detail.

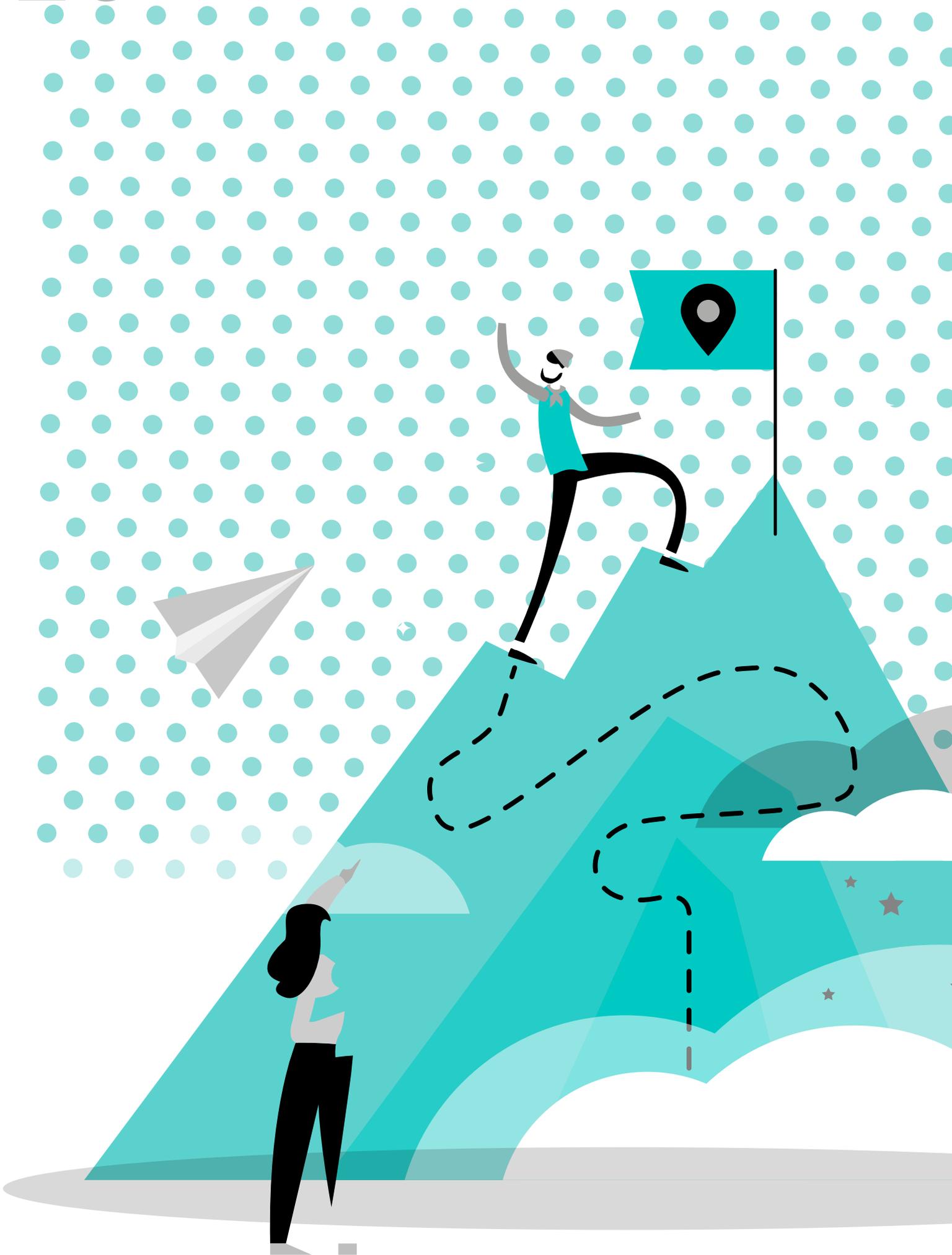


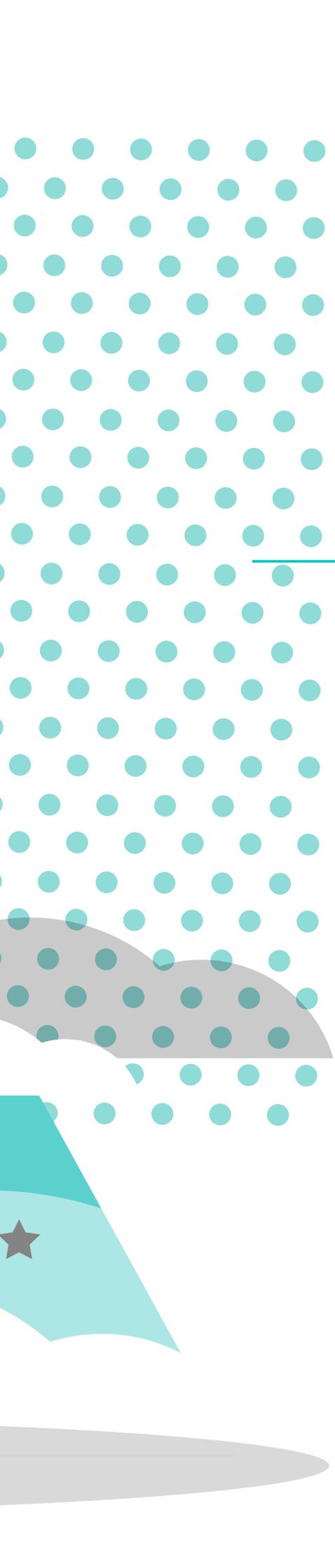
MYTHS

A European Solidarity Corps project is too big a risk

"In my experience, organisations are often reluctant to take part in European Solidarity Corps projects because they fear the level of risk is too high for a young person facing socio-economic obstacles. Going abroad is always risky for these young people, no matter how well prepared they are. But risk can be positive; it is what leads the young people to new challenges and opportunities. A large amount of the risk can be reduced or controlled by anticipating problems before they come up and by having a reliable partner organisation abroad that you know well, who you can trust and who you can count on. But in spite of this, there is always risk involved in a Corps project. You have to accept that as part of the package. If an organisation and their young person can accept a controlled amount of risk, then a project can go forward. If not, then this type of activity is not the right choice."

Trena Ratcliffe, Aftercare Worker, Northern Area Health Board, Ballymun, Ireland





A Specific Approach

A young student who is actively seeking out ways to travel abroad may think they have hit the jackpot when they discover the European Solidarity Corps. A chance to live in another country, to get to know a new culture and to learn a foreign language... all for free?!?! What more could you ask?

This is usually not the case for young people facing socio-economic obstacles. These young people do not share the same motivation as “traditional” or “classic” volunteers (i.e. students). They are unlikely to actually go looking for a programme like the Solidarity Corps. For them, leaving home for a volunteering experience is not a fun challenge but is rather a frightening proposition. Young people facing socio-economic obstacles often have difficulty understanding the sense of spending a period abroad. They do not see the benefits of leaving the safety of family and friends to go to “work for free”.

In fact it is often the youth workers and youth leaders working with this target group who first recognize the potential benefits of European Solidarity Corps projects. But while there may be many good reasons to encourage the young people to take part, it should be kept in mind that the benefits described earlier are not self-evident; they do not just occur on their own. The simple act of travelling does not ensure that a young person will make contact with a new culture or learn a new language. A two-week period as a volunteer does not guarantee that an individual will feel that they have made an active contribution or that they will take steps to develop their soft skills.

For some young people, living in different surroundings and/or in a new culture can be a destabilizing and confusing experience. Sending a young person on a European Solidarity Corps project as a substitute for a holiday or as a stop-gap solution can often do more harm than good. A young person can return home more destabilized than before they left. Such approaches are of little value to the individual volunteer or to their organisation.

If a young person cannot recognize how the Solidarity Corps experience directly relates to their needs and their situation, then there is a danger that the project will take place in a vacuum with no link to the individual’s real life: past, present or future. To avoid this, an approach has been developed to help young people and their organisations implement Corps projects in such a way as to be able to gain the maximum benefits of the programme. This approach works on the basis of an individual’s “personal pathway”.



VOLUNTEER?!?! WHY should I?

“If an organisation has a clear view how to include a volunteer and they set up structures and procedures for good communication, then I can imagine more excluded young people taking part in the European Solidarity Corps.

But organisations need a clear view why these young people should take part. You don’t want a young person to feel exploited or pressured in a situation where they don’t know what their purpose is. For example, if a volunteer has to build a fence or clean a room or file some papers... and they wonder “why am I doing this, why do you need that, why in this organisation, why in this country... basically, why am I here?” then the organisation needs to do a better job of describing why the tasks are what they are - the reason behind the tasks needs to be made clear. I think this may also be an important reason why young people are sometimes scared to go away for a long period of volunteering - because they don’t really understand why they should.”

Liva Voronina, Team Leader, RB Café, Latvia

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Pathway Approach

Taking part in the European Solidarity Corps should not be seen as a goal in itself. Volunteer projects offered through the programme are most effective for this specific target group when they compliment the work being done with young people on local level. The pathway approach takes the European Solidarity Corps out of the vacuum and links it directly with a young person's needs and long-term learning objectives. This approach takes into account an individual's past development, assesses their current situation, and then gives the Solidarity Corps project a place which relates directly to a young person's future aims and goals.

To better understand the pathway concept, imagine a young person walking along a path. This path symbolizes the road they are following through life. Behind them are their past experiences in the family, in school, in work and within their peer group. Right beside them are issues which they are struggling to overcome (for example, being long-term unemployed, trying to become independent from their family, beating an addiction, avoiding bad influences in their environment, etc.) In front of them are their long-term goals (for instance finding work, finding a place to live, gaining a formal qualification, staying "clean", etc.) Depending on their situation the young person's path may have many twists and turns. It may be full of dead ends. They may be facing a long uphill climb.

The European Solidarity Corps can be used as a tool to help the young person take steps forward along this path and bring them closer to their long term goals. In a sense, the Corps can form a stepping stone along the pathway. It can be used to overcome specific obstacles in the path or it can be a means to jump-start a journey which has stalled.

In this way, participating in the European Solidarity Corps is not the goal but is rather the means to an end. If a young person can see how a period abroad directly responds to their needs and where it is taking them along their pathway, they are more likely to be motivated to try a Solidarity Corps project.

MYTHS**The European Solidarity Corps is extra work**

"This is a common reaction from youth workers who are unfamiliar with the European Solidarity Corps. Often their first impression of the programme is that it is a nice idea, but they feel they don't have the time or resources for something so new and different. I see the Solidarity Corps from a different perspective. I work with the socio-economic target group everyday. My job involves helping young people to overcome difficulties and to try to move forward. This is a long-term process. To do this, I use a variety of methods. Sometimes a Solidarity Corps volunteer project is the right method, and sometimes not. For me, the Solidarity Corps is a vehicle which can stimulate the youth work process. I won't say that it's easy; it does take time and effort. But I will spend that time and effort on my young people anyway. I think youth workers need to see the European Solidarity Corps as an extra weapon in their arsenal against exclusion and not as extra workload."

Sebastian Norman, Centre de Beaumotte, France



How does the pathway approach work?

Marie Laure Lacroix, project co-ordinator with Soldarités Jeunesses, France, talks about how they apply the pathway approach:

“Youth workers should not get a false idea of the pathway. When we speak of defining “steps”, it does not mean we make a five-year plan. This would not be realistic with this target group. The pathway approach involves youth workers trying to get a whole picture of their young person in order to know which steps are now needed to help them move ahead. The pathway approach is all about taking the right steps at the right time.

Many youngsters facing socio-economic obstacles first hear about the European Solidarity Corps at a time when they are already deep in difficulties. At this stage they have often lost faith in general social programmes. The Solidarity Corps can be a potential alternative for these young people because it offers them a direction which is totally unlike anything they have done before. But in order to find a suitable hosting project, the Supporting and Hosting Organisations require some information about the volunteer’s personal situation. We try to get to know our volunteer’s home environment, the family situation, and the kind of difficulties the volunteer is facing. It is useful to know what they have done in their life up to this point. At the same time, we talk about the volunteer’s vision of the future – their hopes and dreams, their interests, their needs, and so on. Depending on the outcome, we then try to make a plan where the volunteer can take steps which are big enough to be a challenge but still small enough that they can be realistically achieved. A Solidarity Corps volunteer project can be one of those steps.

Collecting this information can take some time. It is not only up to the youth worker to find answers to all of these questions. Youth workers need to focus on the fact that a youngster preparing to take part in the European Solidarity Corps is taking a big risk to change their life, therefore it is important to work together with the other professionals involved in an individual’s general education process (like a doctor, a psychologist, a representative from the unemployment agency, etc.)”



The pathway approach requires professionals to think together with their young people instead of for their young people.

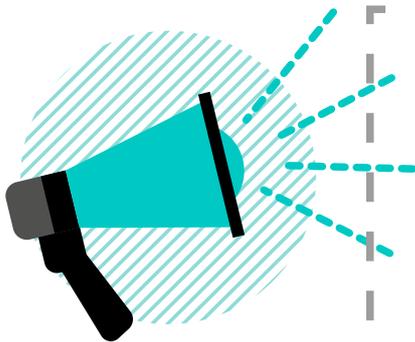
An Example of the Pathway

FEKETE SEREG YOUTH ASSOCIATION (HUNGARY) - www.fekete-sereg.hu

Fekete Sereg is a non-governmental organisation located in the rural village of Nagyvázsony, Hungary (1800 inhabitants). Its mission is to provide local young people (mainly aged 13-30) with useful free time activities and to support grass-roots initiatives. It also aims to provide local youngsters with the same possibilities as other young people in the European Union and to represent their interests on regional, national and international levels.

The association works with different target groups including students, the unemployed, young people with disabilities, and minority groups (mainly Roma). Their regular activities include organising events, trainings, study visits and seminars. In 2013 they launched an "afternoon school" for children aged 6-18 with a focus on developing social competencies. Fekete Sereg has hosted and sent international volunteers since 2006.

Rita Kandiko, chairperson of Fekete Sereg, describes the challenges facing the local Roma community and the pathway followed by one their volunteers.



"There is a lot of prejudice and discrimination against the Roma in Hungary; they face a range of economic and cultural problems. Many adults in the community are early school leavers with very low levels of literacy which then limits their chances of finding good employment. Roma children often have a difficult time in school. They can suffer from a lack of discipline and self-control. The teachers easily get impatient with them, for instance if their homework is not complete. The teachers don't always understand that the reason a child didn't do their homework may be, for example, that their family is so poor they don't have a table for the child to work at. Roma teenagers often want to start working early in order to help support their families. Even those who do start a study or a vocational training often break off their studies and return home because making money is seen as more important than earning a diploma. Without any qualifications it is easy for them to fall into the black market.

It is unusual for Roma youngsters to take part in an activity like the European Solidarity Corps - the community tends to keep their children close in order to protect them. It is a big success to get these young people into the programme, but even once they are in, they still face many challenges along their path. Take, for instance, the example of our volunteer "L."

L. was young man of Roma descent, the eldest of four brothers. He was a talented football player, a member of the local folk dance group and a regular participant in Fekete Sereg's "afternoon school". L.'s father suffered from schizophrenia and was cared for at home. When L. turned 14, the family found themselves in serious financial difficulties and were living in squalid conditions. L. and his brothers were on the verge of being put into care.

L. began a course of vocational training but the other pupils bullied him – making fun of the way he spoke, calling him racist names, saying that he was "bad" because of his dark skin. L. reacted with aggression and started to fight with the other pupils. It cost him a lot of effort to try to control his anger, so eventually he decided to switch to a new school where he managed to finish his studies and earned his qualification in heating and plumbing systems.

Now 18, L. wanted to start living more independently. Fekete Sereg proposed a 6-week volunteer team project in Finland. Although he wanted to take part in the project, L. was reluctant to go away on his own. He had never been abroad, never been away from his family, and spoke no foreign languages. His family was also concerned about him going so far away so it was arranged that another volunteer, a girl from the village (who could speak English), would go to the project as well and the pair would travel together with a mentor. The organisation felt that 6 weeks would be long enough to challenge L. but short enough not to overwhelm him. The tasks in the project involved physical work like cutting wood, painting buildings, etc. – tasks L. could relate to as they were not so far away from his vocational training. The project went well and L. became very interested in learning English.

After coming home, Fekete Sereg offered L. the chance to work in their organisation for six months as a mentor to the volunteers coming to do projects in the village. The six months were intended to serve as a kind of practicum/job training and to give L. the chance to decide what his next step would be – finding a job or trying a longer term volunteering project. L. was a big help with the mentoring, but having no previous work experience, it was a challenge for him to learn to respect the rules of a work environment (for instance, coming to work on time each day).

Working with the incoming volunteers gave L. an idea of what longer-term volunteering was like. As he still wanted to learn English, he decided to give it a try himself. A project was found for him in Palermo, Italy for nine months where he would help care for disabled adults. It was hoped that the placement would be a good match because L. had experience in caring for his father and he knew something about mental disabilities. While L. enjoyed the tasks, the other aspects of the project proved very difficult for him. Since he spoke no Italian and little English, he had difficulty communicating in the beginning of the project and was very lonely. It took him some time to get used to being in a big city with lots of people. Economically it was also difficult – some of the other volunteers had their own spending money and L. wasn't able to join in free time activities with them.



As a result he often stayed home alone which was emotionally very hard. But he was determined to stay until the end of the project to prove to himself that he could do it.

After coming home from Palermo, L. and three other young people from Fekete Sereg were invited to make a presentation on their experiences as volunteers (in English) to a meeting at the European Youth Center in Strasbourg, which was a big boost to his self-confidence. Fekete Sereg offered him a 3-month work contract financed by the Youth Guarantee scheme and used this time to help him look for a more permanent job. But reintegrating at home with his family was not easy. While he was away, L had lived together with other volunteers and had observed how they lived and took care of themselves. It was all new for him and he learned a lot – how to manage his money, how to shop, how to cook, how to wash dishes, how to clean his living space and so on. Now returning home felt like taking a big step backwards. L. didn't want to find himself in a position where, for instance, he would start teaching his mother how to clean the house, so he felt the time had come to go out on his own.

As he could now speak English, he chose to go the Netherlands to work. He found a job in a slaughterhouse but again had to cope with a lot of racism from his co-workers. It was like being back in school and again he had to struggle not to respond with aggression. Although he earned enough to be able to send money back home to his family, the racism ultimately became too much and he decided to return to Hungary.

L. is now 24 and has his own room in a small flat. He has worked on and off in a variety of jobs and for a time was leading a team of 4 people. He currently lives just 20 km away from his home village and is working in construction.

L's story shows that a Solidarity Corps project is just one of many steps along a young person's pathway. It also shows how small steps can build and lead to bigger steps – in L's case, for instance, his experience in the 6-week project led to him being able to mentor incoming volunteers for 6 months, which in turn gave him the confidence to take on a 9-month project, etc.

It is not easy to plan with young people from the socio-economic target group and it is difficult to judge whether the European Solidarity Corps is the right option for a specific individual. However, as L's example shows, a Solidarity Corps volunteering project can be an important stepping stone on the pathway that can lead to all sorts of new future directions.

The "personal pathway" is an approach which helps place a volunteering activity in a clear context designed to help a young person move forward in their life. The pathway approach is extremely effective because it uses the Solidarity Corps to respond to a young person's most urgent learning objectives. But the pathway is only an educational approach. To be put into practice, an approach must be accompanied by a methodology. The next section describes a methodology which has proven extremely successful for young people facing socio-economic obstacles.



A Specific Methodology

A European Solidarity Corps project involves a partnership between a volunteer, a Supporting Organisation and a Hosting Organisation. The Hosting Organisation is responsible for putting together a programme for the volunteer. At the heart of this programme are the volunteer's daily activities, which are also referred to as daily "tasks".



A VOLUNTEER'S TASKS

In the Solidarity Corps, a volunteer does not “work”; rather they have daily “activities” where they carry out “tasks”. This subtle but important choice of words is meant to convey the message that a volunteer is not “working” (i.e. competing with paid labour, receiving money for their efforts), but that they are taking part in a learning experience while showing solidarity with others.

A volunteer’s tasks should be set up so as to achieve two global aims. First, the tasks should contribute to the development of the local community. Second, the tasks should offer the young person a chance to develop their competencies. This should, of course, be linked with the young person’s pathway and their long-term personal goals.

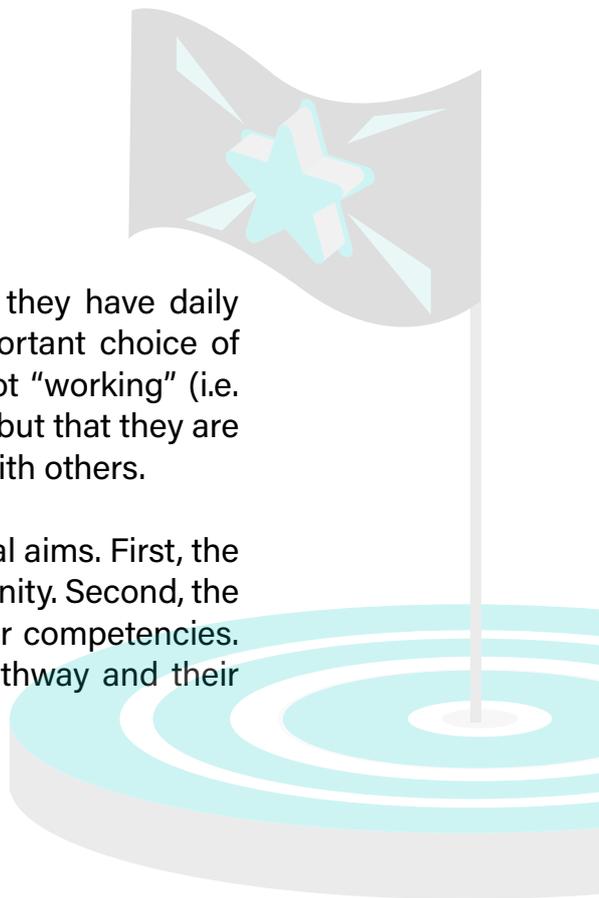
HOW “CLASSIC” PROJECTS EXCLUDE THE TARGET GROUP

It is often the case that Solidarity Corps hosting projects are designed for “classic” volunteers, which is to say for volunteers who are typically from a student background and who plan to stay abroad for 6-12 months. Young people from classic student backgrounds have many practical skills that they can give to a project, so Hosting Organisations do not just gain an intercultural experience, they also benefit substantially from the volunteer’s contributions.

Many Solidarity Corps hosting projects are linked to the social-cultural sector and involve working with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, refugees, etc. These types of projects can be loosely described as involving social tasks. In most cases, young people facing socio-economic obstacles are excluded from such projects. There are several reasons for this.

Some of these young people are not motivated to take on social tasks. This may be due to different factors including fear of the unknown (for instance, never having seen a person with a severe disability before or never having met a person from a different ethnic or religious group), or just simply a lack of interest. There are also many specific situations within social-themed projects where it might not be appropriate to place a young person in difficulty (for example, an individual who has a problem with alcohol may not be a good choice to run the bar in a youthcentre; a frequent drug user may no be a good choice to work with children, etc.)

Another difficulty is the young people’s lack of skills. The majority of hosting projects with a socio-cultural theme are looking for “do-ers” – that is to say for volunteers who are in a position to concretely contribute to their local-level projects. Many of these types of projects are not set up to accommodate young people who are at a much earlier stage of their professional and personal development.



This situation is both ironic and realistic at the same time: ironic because the European Solidarity Corps actively strives to offer more opportunities for young people with few or no skills and realistic because host projects often do not have the means to accept young people who can offer little support and who are, in fact, in need of support themselves.

The nature of “classic” hosting projects proposing social tasks therefore poses a serious hurdle for young people facing socio-economic obstacles. Young people from this target group lack many of the practical skills that their “classic” counterparts take for granted. In addition, their lack of social skills makes them unappealing for hosting projects that do not have the skills or know-how to cope with their needs. The result is a kind of multi-sided exclusion from a considerable number of hosting projects.

However, it is a mistake to think that young people from this target group have nothing to contribute, or that they are unable to learn the skills which they lack. Given the profile of the target group, it is necessary to adapt the “classic” Solidarity Corps project framework and implement a methodology which responds to their strengths rather than highlights their weaknesses. One method which has proved extremely successful is the use of practical tasks in a volunteer’s daily programme.

Practical tasks

The term “practical tasks” takes a very specific meaning in the context of a European Solidarity Corps project. In this framework, “practical” refers to manual or hands-on activities. Practical tasks can include physical activities like building, renovating, hauling, gardening, etc., but it also includes other forms of manual activities like sport, art, handicrafts, music and even dance.

Practical tasks can be more attractive to young people facing socio-economic obstacles than social tasks. This is largely because practical tasks (at least at first glance) require aptitude of the hands rather than of the head. This can be appealing for young people who have had bad experiences in school or who have gone through life being told they “are not smart enough”.

Another advantage is that the young people can easily visualize what is involved with practical tasks. This helps make the idea of the project abroad more concrete. For instance, most young people know what is involved with building or gardening whereas they might not know what is involved in “working in a youth centre” or “assisting in an information office”. Even if they have no direct experience, they can imagine what the practical tasks would look like. This goes a long way to removing doubts and easing their fears.

Furthermore, practical tasks do not require strong communication skills. Simple activities like using a shovel, a hammer or a paintbrush are easily understood through signs and non-verbal communication. Social tasks, like working with teenagers or young children, usually require considerable language skills. Practical tasks are ideal for young people with no knowledge of foreign languages.

Most importantly, virtually every young person from the socio-economic target group has some kind of practical skill whether it be knowing how to fix a leaky faucet, a talent for cooking or experience in making hand puppets. When the young people can find a hosting project that meets them on their own level, where they can put their own skills to use, they become “do-ers”. They feel that they are not just a burden but that they have something to give, that they can be useful and that they are needed. This is an extremely important shift in perception and vital to the individual’s development. The young people are taken out of the role of passive consumers and given a chance to make an active contribution to society.

CAN A PERSON “SHOW SOLIDARITY”... when they are in need of solidarity themselves?

“The young people I work with face extremely difficult life situations, yet they are very interested in the idea of “going to help people”. They are in need of help, but they also want to go and help others. “Helping” is not just an abstract idea for them - some of our older participants (18-19 yrs) do social internships with us, so they have already had some experience and a kind of introduction to what volunteering is. Solidarity sometimes goes in two directions – sometimes the volunteer helps and sometimes they get help. Depending on an individual’s background, the flow might be more in one direction than in the other but this is not important. One young person might not be able to give as much as another, but they can still give something. Everyone can give something.”

Nele Steeno, Co-ordinator, De Wissel, Belgium-Flanders



The educational value of practical tasks

The secret strength of practical tasks is that they offer a two-sided learning experience. On one level, practical tasks give volunteers the opportunity to try different kinds of hands-on activities. Through these tasks they can learn many types of practical skills which can be used later in life (for example, painting, wallpapering, cleaning, cooking, using tools, etc.) On another level, the practical skills gained through these tasks are accompanied by a wide variety of soft skills. In this way, practical tasks do not just develop a young person's manual skills but they serve to develop their social skills at the same time.

This two-sided learning is particularly beneficial to young people facing socio-economic obstacles. Improving their soft skills is often the first step in a larger process to help them reach long-term goals. The advantage of practical tasks as a method is that they are a powerful yet subtle teaching tool. Soft skills develop steadily in and around the practical tasks. A young person may not be conscious of the learning process itself, but they cannot help but notice the changes in their personality and their general outlook on life.

Practical tasks in practice – Examples

Listed below are three different examples of how volunteering projects put the methodology of practical tasks into action. Each example provides an overview of how the volunteer's daily activities lead to the development of practical as well as soft skills.

"Magic Forest of Trolls"- YOUTH CENTRE VILLA ELBA, FINLAND

www.villaelba.fi

Description: Villa Elba is one of nine national youth centres supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland. Its mission is to promote the well-being of young people by supporting their growth and providing a diverse, functional and secure environment for positive experiences. The organisation runs many activities including youth exchanges, training for youth workers, courses and seminars as well as a nature school and nature camps which provide environmental education for school classes. In addition, Villa Elba co-ordinates approximately 20 long-term volunteers each year.

Target group: Villa Elba organises volunteering team projects for youngsters facing a range of social and/or economical difficulties for whom it is difficult to find placements elsewhere. These include the unemployed, school drop-outs, young people from isolated areas, and those with low-level language skills.

The volunteer's activities: The organisation typically runs 3-6 volunteer projects throughout the year lasting from 3 to 7 weeks. One example of these is the "Magic Forest of Trolls" project. Here the volunteers create a community attraction in the forest aimed at local families with young children. The volunteers set up a "troll forest" complete with troll houses, troll models and a series of games along a path the visiting children follow. Sometimes the volunteers even dress up as trolls to entertain the visitors.

How practical tasks lead to soft skills: the chart below lists some of the volunteer's tasks in the "Magic Forest of Trolls" project. The chart then goes on to show how those practical tasks lead to the development of practical skills as well as soft skills.

Volunteer's Daily Practical Tasks	Learning Elements Resulting From Practical Tasks	
	PRACTICAL SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS
Building small houses (walls, roof, etc.)	Using hand and electric tools (e.g. hammer, saw, drill)	Logical thinking Teamwork How to divide tasks equally
Sculpting figures	Mixing concrete & pouring moulds	Keeping to a schedule Health & safety
Dressing and acting as trolls	Non-verbal communication	Self-confidence
Writing instructions for visitors, setting signs along the path	Writing, lay-out, design skills	Communication and (foreign) language skills
Creating games and tasks for children	Planning; decision-making	Estimating levels of difficulty; learning to see through someone else's eyes
Living in group accommodation	Household tasks (shopping, cooking, washing dishes, laundry)	Adapting to new situations Making compromises Doing your fair share

In this context, how do practical tasks respond to a young person's needs in real life?

Sari Juvani (Youth Worker) and *Sarianne Lokasaari* (Social Youth Work Co-ordinator) describe the process: "Usually the young people who come to our projects are trying to find jobs but first they need to learn basic life skills like how to be on time, how to be a member of a team, how to make compromises, how to ask for help, and so on. To do this, they need concrete tasks that are clear and easy to follow. In our project there is a daily rhythm to the tasks which is directly linked to wellness – we work according to a schedule, we eat regularly and do chores every day to maintain the common living space. This is something lacking in the young people's daily lives so we help them to understand the benefits of physical work and of taking care of yourself and your surroundings. These are skills they can take back with them to their everyday lives."

"The most important aspect of doing practical tasks is that the young people are able to achieve something – there is a visible result that comes out of the work they do. They feel proud when they see the local children enjoying what they have created. That feeling of achievement, of getting something done, is something that the youngsters really need. The confidence, the positive strength and growing self-esteem that the young people gain is what they need to go forward in life, to, for example, apply to a school or apply for a job."

"Olive farming"- LAS NIÑAS DEL TUL, SPAIN - www.lasdeltul.net

Description: Las Niñas del Tul is a cultural association in the city of Granada. Run largely by local youth and students on a voluntary basis, the organisation supports and helps young people and groups to create projects and activities, providing them with information on forms of active participation. Las Niñas del Tul promotes the mobility of youth and young people with fewer opportunities, particularly on European level. Their regular activities include theatre and related activities, an information point and international youth exchanges. Las Niñas del Tul has experience as both a Supporting and a Hosting Organisation.

Target group: The association works with both urban and rural youth. Some of the youngsters have difficult family situations, educational, cultural, social and/or economical difficulties – these include unemployed young people and school drop-outs. Including these young people as active members of society is the main aim of the association.

The volunteer's activities: One young man (18 yrs) was caught in a bad social and family situation. Unable to go on with his studies, he was at risk of falling into even worse problems without some support.

The volunteering projects on offer at that time were not suitable for him, so the organisation asked him what he thought he could do and what he had to offer. As he had some previous experience working with olive trees, the young man asked for support to create a new project connected with agriculture and culture.

A four-week project was set up with the help of Las Niñas del Tul and partner organisation AJMEC in Tunisia. The volunteer's tasks consisted of making presentations on the value of olives, olive oil and other olive oil-based products, helping on an olive farm, participating in the International Olive Festival, making presentations on Spanish culture (poetry, music, food, art, etc.) and writing a daily weblog and digital comic describing his experiences.

How practical tasks lead to soft skills: the chart below outlines the practical tasks involved in the project and the soft skills that can result from them.

Volunteer's Daily Practical Tasks	Learning Elements Resulting From Practical Tasks	
	PRACTICAL SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS
Making presentations on the value of olives, olive oil and other olive oil-based products; participating in the International Olive Festival	Researching information; preparing presentations; prioritising & decision-making; public speaking	Sharing knowledge; analytical and critical thinking Self-reflection Self-confidence
Making presentations on Spanish culture	Preparing music, pictures, food;	Cultural/historical awareness
Helping on the farm	Growing & harvesting olives Preparing process for making oil	Teamwork
Daily household tasks	Shopping, budgeting, cooking, washing dishes, laundry	Responsibility Adapting to new situations
Writing a daily weblog & comic	Writing and language skills Digital competencies	Communication; (foreign) language skills

In this context, how do practical tasks respond to a young person's needs in real life?

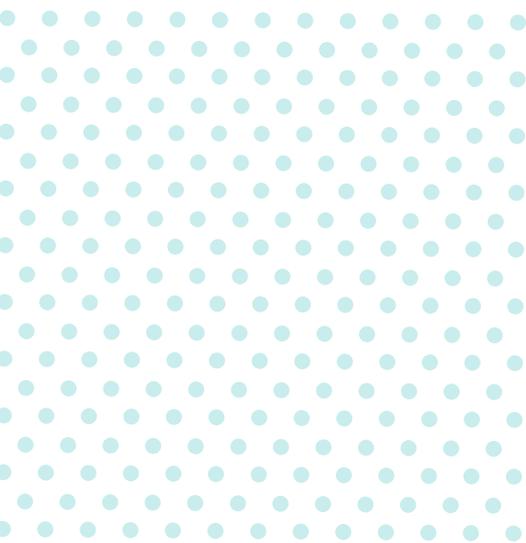
Carmen Maria Ramos Espejo (volunteer in charge of Inclusion and European Solidarity Corps projects) talks about the link: "Often the main problem for young people in this target group is that they are caught full-time in their situation and in their problems. Going "out" or "away" is a way for them to discover new chances. This is something adults don't always recognise.

These young people are constantly in a negative atmosphere – you have no work, you can't study, you are told constantly that you are stupid and no good – and this makes an already bad situation worse. So to get out of that situation, even for just 4 weeks, is a big step forward. But how do you convince a young person to leave what they know and jump into the unknown? The key is to find them something which they like to do, which motivates them. If a young person can do tasks which make them feel useful for something or someone else, they develop self-esteem and self-confidence. It helps them to grow up."

"Boat building and Cycle Cinema"- CUBIC, AUSTRIA - www.cubic-online.eu

Description: CUBIC is a non-profit organisation which aims to support young people and their own initiative. CUBIC organises activities like youth exchanges and training courses that promote international exchange, intercultural processes and integration. They also offer places in the European Solidarity Corps (Supporting and Hosting). CUBIC tries to embed the Solidarity Corps experience into a youngster's personal development so that it has a long-term effect. To do this, they developed the "Rückenwind" ("Tailwind") strategy with 10 European partners. Rückenwind is a highly individualized approach where the focus is on each individual's motivation.

Target group: The organisation is open to all young people but they particularly target those youngsters who would not normally travel abroad on their own (due to lack of possibilities, lack of resources, low self-confidence, etc.) so that they can also enjoy and benefit from European mobility projects. This can include, for instance, young people who do not know what to do after finishing school, long-term unemployed youngsters, young people living on the street, young people on probation, etc. CUBIC aims for equity in its activities – meaning that they strive to give all young people the chance to participate in their projects (regardless of their profile or background) and provide extra support for those who need it.



The volunteer's activities: for 14 years, CUBIC (with the support of the Arbeiterkammer Tirol (Chamber of Labour Tirol) has sent individual volunteers to a boat building/renovation project in Cornwall (United Kingdom) hosted by their partner, the Kona Foundation.

Here the volunteer spends one month as part of a team overseen by 75-year old fisherman Malcolm Baker. The volunteers renovate and restore a 3-5 metre clinker boat following designs dating back 100-150 years. They use traditional techniques to repair and decorate the boat and sometimes get the chance to row out on the water. When the boat is finished, it is sold or raffled off with all the profits going to charity.

Intrigued by the positive results of the boat building project, Leo Kaserer, the founder and CEO of CUBIC, decided to make a film together with filmmaker James Stier to document the volunteer's activities along with the individual and group processes that take place in an international volunteering project. That film, which won several awards in Europe and America, led to the creation of a spin-off project called the "Cycle Cinema".

In the Cycle Cinema project, a team of 10 volunteers first repairs bicycles, then prepares snacks for the audience made from "waste" food discarded by supermarkets (e.g. bruised fruit and vegetables, day-old bread, etc.), then travels by bike to remote areas where people have usually not heard of the European Solidarity Corps or of cross-border volunteering. The team sets up a "cinema" powered with electricity generated by the bicycles. After a short presentation explaining volunteering and sustainability, members of the audience are invited to ride the bikes (if they wish) and the film is shown.

Afterwards, a discussion session is held where the audience can ask the team questions about volunteering in general and/or about their own experiences.

How practical tasks lead to soft skills: the chart below shows how very practical tasks in the boat building and Cycle Cinema projects lead to a range of practical as well as soft skills.

Volunteer's Daily Practical Tasks	Learning Elements Resulting From Practical Tasks	
	PRACTICAL SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS
Boat building/renovation: Cleaning the boat Removing broken parts Replacing planks Sanding, oiling, decorating Testing for seaworthiness	Using various hand tools Traditional boat building techniques Working to a plan Rowing the clinker boat	Following a daily routine Taking instruction Co-operation and teamwork Respect and support for traditional ways of working Intergenerational learning
Cycle cinema: Collecting and repairing donated bicycles Cycling to the location Preparing snacks from "waste food" for the audience Setting up/breaking down the "cinema" Participating in "discussion sessions"	Bicycle repair (patching tubes, cleaning chains, brake checks, etc.) Riding a bike Food preparation Connecting cables, generators, mounting the screen, etc. Public Speaking	Problem-solving Time management Endurance; self-discipline Sustainability Importance of healthy eating Teamwork Self-reflection Self-confidence

In this context, how do practical tasks respond to a young person's needs in real life?

Leo Kaserer of CUBIC explains: "Our young people often lack self-confidence. Practical tasks are a way to build up that confidence but they also make the young people aware of the skills they already have and what they need to improve in order to have a successful life. In the boat project, the young people learn different shipwright and boat working techniques. These tasks also teach a range of other things like the importance of being persistent, of finishing what you start, how to cope with ambiguity, how to accept things you cannot change, and how (and why) we can do things in more traditional and sustainable ways. In the Cycle Cinema project, the volunteers set up cinemas, make snacks, maintain and ride bikes but at the same time they are learning how to do physically demanding work, how to cook, how to be more healthy, how to care for the planet, and much more.

Our experience with the European Solidarity Corps has shown us that young people like to make things. They take great pride in what they create. Giving the outcome of their work for charity, to benefit people in need, makes them feel like heroes because they have done something good for society. For us at CUBIC it's not so important whether or not the practical tasks lead the young people to a job (after all, the young people will probably not build boats or set up cinemas when they are back in Austria). What matters is that the young people feel comfortable in their skin, comfortable in their lives, that they are satisfied with the direction they are going or else that they feel empowered to make changes if they want something different.

Young people need to understand that when they put effort into something, it contributes to a better world and a better way of living together for everyone. Practical tasks and the learning that comes out of them show young people that they can make a valuable contribution. Experiences like this makes them feel that their existence has a purpose – for themselves and for the world.”

The Function of Practical Tasks

The function of practical tasks in a European Solidarity Corps project is often misunderstood. One concern is that by being steered towards projects with practical tasks, the young people may conclude that are “only” good enough to become future carpenters or plumbers. Naturally, it can happen that a volunteer becomes very enthusiastic about the tasks in their project. They may discover that they have hidden talents and a real aptitude for manual activities.

Some volunteers do go on to try to earn their professional qualifications in vocational training programmes after their volunteer project, however, these cases are more often the exceptions rather than the rule.

The real function of practical tasks is that they provide a manageable step into the world of international voluntary activities. They give young people the opportunity to do tasks where they can see a concrete outcome. Practical tasks help young people to recognize their own progress. Over time, they can see that they have skills and something to contribute. This gives the young people something to hold on to and helps build up their self-confidence.

The function of practical tasks within the European Solidarity Corps, however, is not to provide an immediate step into the job market. For many of the young people facing socio-economic obstacles, there are still many steps to be taken along the pathway before they reach that level.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A NON-PRACTICAL TASK FOR A VOLUNTEER?
A quick look at the European Solidarity Corps project database can be somewhat confusing in that every project, whether individual or team, can be said

to involve some form of practical tasks (you would be hard pressed to find a project which proposed impractical tasks...) Because of this, it is important to make a distinction between different types of practical tasks.

The “practical tasks” referred to in this document are those with a hands-on manual or physical nature. These types of tasks respond effectively to the needs of young people facing socio-economic obstacles, whereas other tasks in social-themed projects do not.

To better understand this difference, compare the boat building project described above with a social-themed project, for example working in a youth centre. Both projects involve hands-on activities. Both can accurately be said to involve practical tasks. However, each one of these projects is designed for a completely different profile of young person coming from a specific starting point.

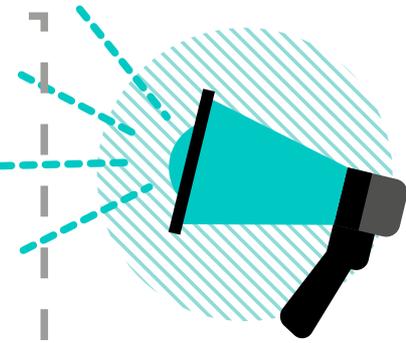
Educational scientist Ansgar Bueter-Menke (Germany) explains:



“To understand the real function of practical tasks, it is important not to forget the characteristics of young people facing socio-economic obstacles. These are young people who lack direction and have almost no sense of identity. They don’t know who they are or what they can do. They have little or no self-confidence. They cannot easily get out of their situation because they have been unsuccessful at school and there are usually few employment options open to them. A lot of the time these young people are running from a bad situation, numbing themselves with an overdose of noise, action, violence or substances.

These young people need a project which gives them something concrete to do. This is why practical tasks are so effective. The young people need to see some immediate positive outcomes from their efforts; practical tasks provide this. When they are painting, the youngsters can clearly see their own progress. When they are building, they see their creation taking shape day by day and hour by hour. This concrete feedback is important because it gives an individual self-confidence which can then lead them on to new steps. Doing practical tasks gives the young people a feeling of accomplishment. They are no longer “a nothing”; practical tasks teach them skills. They are no longer “stupid”, or “just an alcoholic” or “a worthless criminal”; thanks to the practical tasks they know how to use tools, they can make boats, they can tie knots, they can speak English, and so on.

Social-themed projects, like working in a youth centre, are not suited for this profile of young person. Although social projects can involve certain kinds of practical tasks, the nature of such projects is too abstract and vague for this target group. There is no concrete outcome for the young people to refer to. A youth centre environment is too open for these young people and that puts them under a lot of pressure. Consequently, it is too easy for the young people to keep running away in a project of this kind. In contrast, working on practical tasks is something they can do at their own pace. If they spend an entire day working quietly to fit one plank of wood, that's fine because the volunteer can see what they are doing and they see the direct result of their efforts."



It must be stressed that this section on practical vs. non-practical tasks does not mean to generalise. It would be untrue to say that young people facing socio-economic obstacles are incapable of taking part in social-themed projects. It is important to keep in mind that an individual's level of ability is not determined by their background. If a volunteer has enough confidence, maturity and life experience, they may be well suited for social tasks in socio-cultural projects. However, these young people may be further along in their personal development than the youngsters under discussion here.

Issues Linked to Practical Tasks

Although practical tasks can be an extremely beneficial methodology for this target group, youth workers may have to work to overcome a young person's stereotypes about this type of activity. When considering projects that propose practical tasks, youth workers should keep in mind that:

Practical tasks do not automatically mean heavy labour. Be careful that young people do not associate the wrong meanings with certain terms. Some practical tasks can be physically demanding (e.g. building, landscaping, etc.) and certain volunteers, particularly those who like to be active, respond well to this type of activity. However, there are many other types of practical tasks which are less physically demanding, for example arts projects, cooking, furniture repair, decorating, and so on. Different levels of tasks may appeal to different individuals.

Practical tasks need to be linked to an individual's pathway. Young people may not recognize that practical tasks are the means and not the end. If this is the case, they may not be motivated to take part in manual activities. Therefore it is important for youth workers to make the link from manual activities to the longer-term learning plan and the individual's pathway.

They must help each individual recognize the link between the tasks and the learning on practical as well as on social level.

Practical tasks are for women as well as for men. The programme of tasks proposed in Solidarity Corps volunteering projects must be feasible for both men and women. Despite this, it is not uncommon for gender issues to arise in connection with practical tasks. For example, it can initially be difficult to motivate young women to become involved in activities like building and renovation. Similarly, it can be difficult to persuade young men to share responsibility for cooking and cleaning duties. Experience has shown that gender is usually an obstacle in the early phases of a project but over time traditional gender roles can be modified. Both men and women can benefit from the larger educational value of projects with practical tasks.

The methodology of practical tasks can be an excellent teaching tool for young people facing socio-economic obstacles. The learning that comes out of practical tasks involves more than simply developing vocational skills. But it should not be forgotten that within this target group are many different individuals, each with their own specific needs and level of ability. Not every young person is suited to every hosting project.

MYTHS

THE European solidarity corps is a fundraising opportunity

"Some organisations try to make money out of the Solidarity Corps. While the situation may be somewhat different with the longer-term projects (6-12 months), this definitely doesn't work with the shorter 2 week - 2 month projects. Here an organisation is guaranteed to make a loss. They will not actually lose money, but the amount of time required to prepare and support a young person with fewer opportunities is completely out of proportion to the amount the programme pays per volunteer. Organisations who work with fewer-opportunity youngsters and who are interested in becoming involved in the European Solidarity Corps should do so only when they are convinced of the benefits for their young people. If this is the case, then the investment of time and effort will be worthwhile, even if the financial benefits are not."

Clair Brown, Director, Everything Is Possible, UK



Linking in with existing programmes and activities

For many organisations, the Volunteering activities in the European Solidarity Corps “seem like a nice idea”, but they do not easily see how to set up new projects or how to best support young people facing socio-economic difficulties.

Starting a Solidarity Corps project (in addition to all the other work they have to do) can feel like a step too far.



The idea of hosting a volunteer team of up to 40 young people from all across Europe for up to two months is enough to scare any youth worker to death! But it does not have to be this complicated. Many organisations do not realise that a Volunteering project, whether in-country or cross-border, can also be approached in a another way.

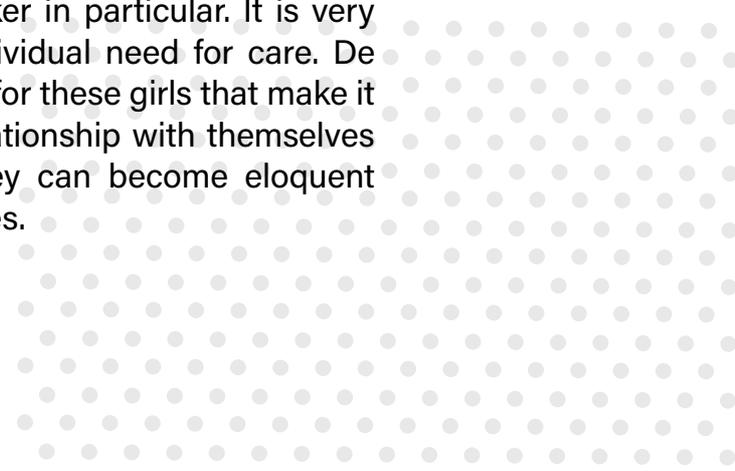
It is possible to link Corps volunteering projects with the work already being done with local young people if the organisation can show how this can benefit a youngster from a fewer-opportunity background. In this sense, a Corps project does not need to be “something new” or to “start from point zero”. Instead, it can build on or link into existing activities and programmes.

Here below are two examples of how organisations use their existing programmes to create volunteering opportunities for this specific target group.

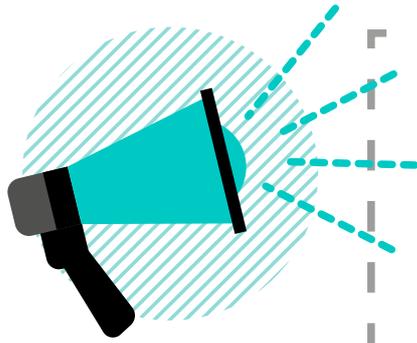
DE WISSEL - LOUVAIN, BELGIUM - www.wissel.be

Description: De Wissel is an organisation for Special Youth Assistance, situated in Louvain (25 km east of Brussels). The organisation provides care and coaching to girls in the range of 14-25 years of age and their families/environment in times of difficulties or conflicts. As well, De Wissel runs “Centrum Molenmoes”, a youth day-centre located on an old farm, for both boys and girls from 12 years of age who have dropped out of the regular school system. The centre offers these youngsters an alternative programme during the day rather than going to school. De Wissel also works in an alliance with different partners to support teenage mothers and their children.

Target group: The organisation’s main target group is girls that, even in special youth assistance, are at high risk of dropping out. Relations and interactions with their family and network are disturbed and full of conflicts. The youngsters have serious behavioural, emotional and mental problems. In their past they have been the victim of mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect.. Their complex personal histories have made them suspicious of adults in general, and of their caretaker in particular. It is very difficult for them to express their individual need for care. De Wissel aims to create an environment for these girls that make it possible for them to develop their relationship with themselves and their environment. This way, they can become eloquent individuals who make their own choices.



Nele Steeno, Co-ordinator of Centrum Molenmoes, outlines the organisation's approach to the European Solidarity Corps:



Generally speaking, we have three “bundles” of activities that we can propose to Corps volunteers. These all come from our regular day-to-day programme and include caring for the therapy horses on site, environmental activities (gardening) or attending the day centre and doing activities with the local young people there. Within each bundle there are lots of specific tasks to choose from (e.g. with the horses: feeding, grooming, mucking out stalls, taking the horses to the riding ring... ; in the garden: planting, weeding, harvesting, cleaning and storing the vegetables... and so on). The volunteers live in group accommodation so there are also lots of daily cleaning tasks, they can try their hand at cooking, etc. We have lots of activities to offer and we can mix and match between the three bundles, depending on what a volunteer wants to try.

At De Wissel, we are used to working with local volunteers with different profiles. When we host incoming volunteers from abroad, it is the same - they all have different abilities and backgrounds. In our experience, there is a big difference between a “student” profile of volunteer and a young person facing socio-economic difficulties. A “student” profile will choose a project (at least partially) based on what they can gain from it (for their study or their future career). Young people facing socio-economic difficulties are different - they often don't know what they want to do. So for those volunteers we set up a programme within our regular programme where they can “taste” a bit of everything (garden, horses, kitchen, day centre, etc.) in order to give them a wide range of experience. The volunteering project is an opportunity for them to find out what they like to do.

This process of trying different things is very important. It can be a challenge for these young people to finish what they start. They are easily distracted and often disappear somewhere, leaving their tasks and their “mess” behind for someone else to deal with. They need to learn to focus, to do a task until it is finished and to have the patience to keep on with tasks that are “boring”.

For organisations who have never hosted volunteers before, it may be hard to imagine what kind of tasks to propose for them. In De Wissel, we don't invent or create "new" projects - we use what we have. The approach we use with our local youngsters is to see each person as an individual and then look to see what can be meaningful for them to do. We use the same approach with the incoming volunteers - what can be meaningful for them and where, within our various activities, can we provide that.

If an organisation is open to working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, that is enough to get started. Organisations don't necessarily need a lot of experience with these youngsters to be able to do Solidarity Corps volunteering projects... but they do need to be aware that things may not go the way you expect them to. They should be prepared to search for solutions when things don't work out.

It may sound strange, but there can be advantages to being in experienced. In organisations that work daily with the target group, the focus can sometimes be too much on "taking care" of the young people but this isn't always what they need. At De Wissel, for instance, we have a team responsible for the garden who know everything about vegetables and flowers... but don't have any experience in dealing with disadvantaged young people. In their interactions, they react to the young people in a "real" way, not "carefully" like a social worker would. If a volunteer has to be told "no", they get told "no". If there is a conflict, then we work together to sort it out in an adult way. This triggers something in the young people - it can help them to get out of the protected bubble they sometimes sit in and to learn how to behave and interact in a new way.



Description: Lahti City Youth Service supports young people with a range of services including regional youth work, youth work in schools and shopping centres, and cultural youthwork (events). They are active in youth policy and support various youth participation and decision-making forums (Youth Council, committees, consultation models, etc.)

They offer Employment Services for young people aged 17-29 which includes career coaching, workshops, outreach youth work, and one-stop guidance services. In addition, they run a Unit for Support for young people from 15-25 in need of mental or psycho-social support. Lahti City Youth Service has experience in supporting, hosting and co-ordinating European Solidarity Corps volunteers.

Target group: The Youth Service works with unemployed young people, but also those with personal debt, with no place to live or at risk of losing their accommodation. They target youngsters with no access to services as well as “outsiders” (youngsters not in education, training or work). They also offer specialised help to young people with addictions, who are being abused, and to those suffering from emotional or mental issues and in need of support.

Riina Pulli, Individual Trainer at Lahti City Youth Service, sets out how the European Solidarity Corps volunteers link in with their activities:



My job is to offer individual training to young people who come to us in search of help to find work. We give a lot of practical tips like how to make a CV, interview tips, and so on but mostly we encourage the young people to see their own strengths - to “see where the gold is”. In our experience many young people nowadays don’t have real contact with adults besides their parents. They are scared to make decisions - even simple decisions like what would they like to eat. They are frightened by choices. We try to increase their courage and help teach them how to behave - how to speak, how to look people in the eye when they talk to them, and so on. The young people don’t recognise that they are good at anything, but they are very aware of all the things they are bad at. These youngsters have often been unemployed for many years and their self-esteem is very low. We try to shine some light on their future and convince them that doors are open for them.



As part of our services for unemployed young people, we offer a series of different workshops: Carpentry, Environment, Media, Drama, Interior Design, Car and Metal, and Upholstery. The workshops are set up like work trials and run for periods of 5-6 months. During the workshops, the young people get information about education, training and job opportunities as well as guidance for making their own plans for the future and how to put them into practice.

The entry level to the workshops is very low – the participants don't need any previous experience, just a willingness to learn. The workshops are essentially communities where young people learn by doing.

In the workshops the participants do all sorts of practical tasks. In Carpentry, for instance, they do repairs on furniture like chairs, tables, bookshelves and doors. They prepare wood, measure pieces, remove old varnish, sand and paint surfaces. Sometimes they even use big machines like industrial sprayers, heavy saws, etc. Some of the young people decide they like carpentry and want to continue with it and some don't. The most important learning result is if a young person can make a clear decision about whether this is or is not what they want to do. Of course it is good if they learn to do something with their hands (then they have gained a lifelong skill), but much more relevant are the other things they learn about themselves. For instance, do you like working in the group, or prefer working on your own? Do you prefer the morning or the evening shift? The biggest impact comes from the young person being part of a group, being important, being noticed.

The European Solidarity Corps volunteers can link in with these workshops; recently they have also started doing tasks in our youth houses. When Corps volunteers work and spend their free time with our young people, they all learn to understand others and learn new ways of thinking and seeing things. When they teach each other new skills and habits, it's a real win-win situation. The volunteers' "contribution" to the project is to integrate into a group and into the city of Lahti as well. They serve to reduce the fear of foreigners – for our young people but also for our organisation.



We take part in the European Solidarity Corps because hosting volunteers is an effective tool for youth work. It increases a young person's self-esteem as well as their working, social and communication skills. For us, the main point isn't what we "gain" as an organisation but rather that we can use this "tool" and offer young people an opportunity to grow by taking part in our programme.

The examples above show that not only does the European Solidarity Corps have room for different types of young people, there is also room for different types of projects. This can be particularly useful for organisations interested in including more young people facing socio-economic obstacles, but who are unsure how to set up appropriate project places for them.

There is no doubt that "crazy ideas" or "big event" volunteer projects can be highly innovative and a lot of fun, but organisations should not feel pressured to propose activities or tasks that they are not familiar with or that are too far away from their regular practice. It is likely that many possibilities already exist within the regular programme on local level where volunteers could link in. If a local young person can do it, why not a young person from abroad, too?



If you think your regular programme of activities might be interesting, accessible and beneficial to young people facing socio-economic obstacles, get in touch with your National Agency to find out how they could be structured into a European Solidarity Corps volunteering project. Contact details for all National Agencies can be found in the European Solidarity Corps Guide at https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps/resources-and-contacts_en.



The Impact of the European Solidarity Corps

In this section, youth workers with extensive experience in Corps projects talk about the impact the programme has had on their young people as well as on others in their organisation.



1. WHAT IMPACT has THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS had on the young people who took part in the programme?

Nele Steeno (De Wissel) – It has a huge impact on them. It gives them meaning. These young people don't have self-esteem and always feel "on the outside". They don't feel that they are a person or that they are worthy to be here. Being able to give something to other people makes them feel "wow, I can do it and be a part of it" - part of the group, part of society. It makes them realise that they are capable of giving something even with the few things they have. This gives them the power and energy to take more steps to bring themselves into society. It triggers something in them that makes them want to go on with their lives, to grab new things, to try to do things by themselves.

Rita Kandiko (Fekete Sereg) - European Solidarity Corps projects are often the very first time our young people experience living without their family. They have to take on tasks like managing their money or cooking for themselves. It is a powerful but protected way to prepare them for real life. Projects as short as 3 weeks can start this process, but longer projects are even better – they are a real training for the young people. It shows them that they are able to survive alone, that the world is much bigger than our village and that there are a lot of opportunities if you open your eyes.

Carmen Maria Ramos Espejo (Las Niñas del Tul) - I think the main impact is that young people get the chance to think about their own situation and how it compares to that of others. Sometimes we are not even conscious about how lucky we are compared with other people. International volunteering projects help young people become aware of other realities and to be more conscious about how things are connected in the world.

2. WHAT IMPACT has THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS had on your organisation as a whole (for instance on the local young people, the staff, etc.)?

Nele Steeno (De Wissel) – When volunteers come to us from abroad it triggers a lot of interest in our local young people. They start to wonder if they should do an activity like this, too. The programme has also helped our organisation learn to deal with different types of people. Every year we ask ourselves anew "what does volunteering mean to us" and which types of profiles we might be able to host in our centre, so the experience has pushed us to reflect a lot more. We see hosting volunteers as a learning opportunity for the organisation; it makes our programme stronger.

Carmen Maria Ramos Espejo (Las Niñas del Tul) - When we first spoke about inclusion in our organisation, people were afraid that we would not be able to do it. Even now the colleagues try to push all inclusion matters to me, thinking I am the "expert". I tell them "Yes, but the things I know I had to learn - so you can learn, too!" There was a lot of fear and a lot of worry. But what we are slowly learning is that social inclusion doesn't follow strict rules - each situation will be totally different. You need to "manage as you go"- you have to adapt to different realities and accept that you cannot control everything. If we make a mistake, it's OK - it's part of the process and we will see how to improve the next time. There is still some worry but bit by bit we are ready to take our next steps and try new profiles of young people which is a learning chance for everyone, on different levels.



Leo Kaserer (CUBIC) - It has helped us become more professional in the sense that we have to analyse and work hard to overcome challenges and difficulties which we might face with the young people. The programme provides a chance for each person in our organisation to grow and gain skills and confidence.

3. WHAT IMPACT has the programme had on the local community?

Leo Kaserer (CUBIC) - We have seen how important it is for a volunteering project to impact the local community. A project is first and foremost about the activity (e.g. building a boat) but it's also about promoting intercultural acceptance and intercultural understanding of others. A project is only a good project when it benefits the local community as well as the young people who participate.

Rita Kandiko (Fekete Sereg) - Many people in rural areas have never been abroad and rarely see foreigners so it is a big event when volunteers from across Europe come to our village to do something for the local community. At first our local people found it all very strange but over time they have become much more welcoming. Now the locals want to talk to the foreigners, the children are curious to know what country they are from. We see that the local people become more tolerant but they also become generally more positive, more pro-active. In our projects the volunteers always make something for the village (e.g. benches, chairs) so they leave something visible and tangible behind and the local people really appreciate that.

4. WHAT IMPACT has it had on you personally?

Sari Juvani (Villa Elba) - Working on Solidarity Corps projects takes a lot of time, but I don't count the hours. I do this job with my heart and give 110%. I try to get to know the young people who come to us without any prejudices. It's amazing – we can have discussions about anything and the young people have really interesting views, ideas and future plans. I personally have gained a lot of positive feedback and positive relationships out of this work.

Riina Pulli (Lahti City Youth Service) - Sometimes a project costs me blood, sweat and tears but I know it's worth it because I see the volunteers when they come back – what they've learned, how different they are, how proud of themselves they are. When you see that, it touches you, and that's why I'm doing it.

Nele Steeno (De Wissel) - Hosting volunteers gives me the chance to help young people get out of their comfort zone. It is so satisfying when you see a young person growing and opening up! Sometimes we host volunteers who are already very mature and independent – they do their tasks and have a great experience but the impact is not as strong. We have a volunteer here now who needs a lot of extra support but I am happy she is here because I know it will be very meaningful for her. That motivates me to keep on doing the work I do.

5. DOES a volunteer project with practical tasks actually achieve the global objectives of the solidarity corps programme like "strengthening cohesion, solidarity, democracy and citizenship in Europe, and promoting social inclusion"?

Sari Juvani (Villa Elba) - The young people get a sense of solidarity because they realise they are doing something active for somebody else, something for the local community - co-operating with local young people and all working together for the same purpose. It's really important to the participants that the results of their work remain in place after they go home, that their contribution will still be there next year for the community to continue to enjoy.

Leo Kaserer (CUBIC) - Practical tasks achieve active citizenship when they help a young person to understand that they have a role in society, that they are valuable and that they can contribute.

Riina Pulli (Lahti City Youth Service) - In our projects, the young people don't just learn how to use tools, they learn what kind of worker they are and what kind of learner they are. They learn to cope in groups and how to trust their environment. This slowly gives them the confidence to make choices and to know what to base their choices on (their preferences, their strengths). For me, this is active citizenship. When you feel that you are a part of Lahti, or of Finland, or of Europe, then you feel you are meaningful. When you can enjoy and benefit from services and opportunities on offer and apply them to your future, this is being an active citizen.

6. WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS would you make to organisations that are new THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS?

Leo Kaserer (CUBIC) - Start from the individual young person first. Learn about and try to understand their needs. Then try something different to attract, motivate and include them. Sometimes it takes a crazy idea to get young people motivated.

Sarianne Lokasaari (Villa Elba) - Think about your youngsters - are they in a place in their lives where they would benefit from this kind of project? The experience a youngster gains from a Solidarity Corps project is very difficult to get elsewhere, so be brave and try it. Volunteer team projects like ours are a quite "safe" way for young people to get started, but there is always a risk involved. Ask your young people what they want. If they want to go to a Corps project, then let them go. Organisations need to keep in mind that even with the best of intentions, sometimes volunteers leave their project early. But this doesn't mean it was wrong to try, it just means that other factors were stronger. In cases like these, we try to give the young person a new chance to try again, for example in a different type of activity.

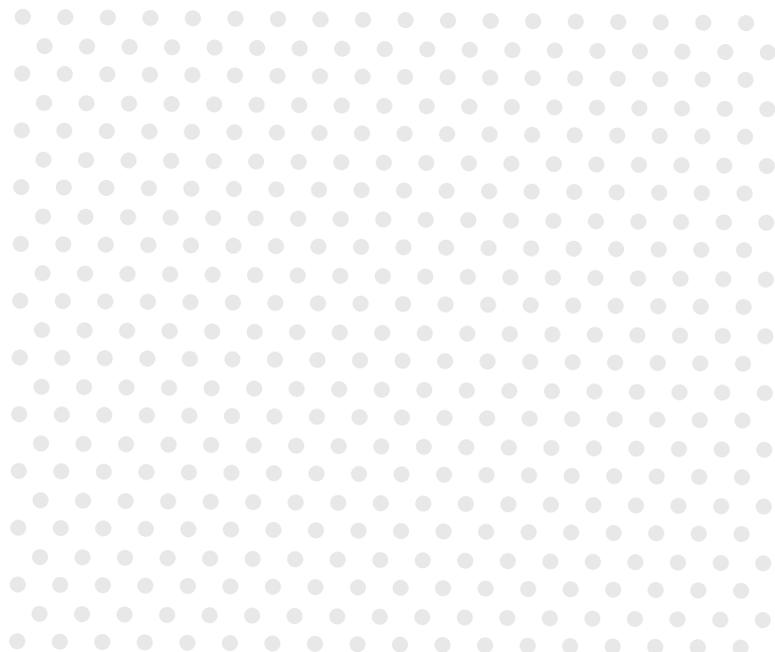
Riina Pulli (Lahti City Youth Service) - I would say "Do it!" Don't be afraid of hosting a volunteer from abroad. You will have to adapt your way of working, especially if you do not share a common language, but this is a good thing. It is like developing a new tool for your toolbox. It can be a challenge but eventually it will become so routine that you may not even notice you are doing it.

Carmen Maria Ramos Espejo (Las Niñas del Tul) – Just try!! You may not know anything about inclusion and have no experience, but try it anyway. Don't be afraid of young people with fewer opportunities and their realities. We have hosted volunteers with great CV's and we think their projects will be "easier" or "better" but then we find out that they can be challenging, too. So just try it. When you see how things develop, you will solve any problems as they come up. Remember there are no "experts on everything" and no "magicians" in inclusion. If you need specific information (for instance on a particular profile of young person, on their specific needs, etc.), get in touch with other organisations and learn from each other. Take advantage of all the information, trainings and recommendations that you can. And remember that the best source of information is the young people themselves – ask them!! We need to give more opportunities to those young people who are missing out. Inclusion is possible!



If you would like to find out more about how international mobility projects like the European Solidarity Corps impact young people, visit the homepage of the Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes (RAY) (www.researchyouth.eu). The RAY network produces reliable evidence to better understand processes and outcomes in youth work and non-formal education. RAY's research shows the effects of programmes like the European Solidarity Corps on young people, youth workers and youth leaders - what they learn, which competences they develop and how. Refer in particular to two articles on their website: "International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities" and "International inclusion projects effectively generate more inclusiveness".

www.researchyouth.eu/inclusion





Conclusion

“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” has presented an approach and a methodology which can improve access to the EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS.

The approach of the personal pathway can help youth workers to implement Corps volunteering projects in such a way that they directly relate to the needs or learning objectives of young people facing socio-economic obstacles, and thereby contribute to the larger processes of the personal development and social inclusion of these youngsters.

The methodology of practical tasks in Solidarity Corps projects can have a powerful positive impact. Practical tasks offer a two-sided learning process. By doing practical tasks, a volunteer has an opportunity to improve both their practical skills as well as their soft skills. The educational value of practical tasks is often underestimated, but it deserves a much higher level of recognition from youth workers as well as from European institutions and other funding bodies. Practical tasks not only provide an accessible step into the European Solidarity Corps, they also respond directly to the specific needs of young people facing socio-economic obstacles. Practical tasks, in many ways, help these young people overcome barriers and move forward in their lives. Most importantly, practical tasks take young people out of the role of passive consumers by giving them a chance to feel useful and an opportunity to show solidarity and make their own form of active contribution to society.

The European Solidarity Corps is a valuable learning experience. By applying the methodology of practical tasks and by implementing the pathway approach, organisations and institutions can open the doors to more volunteering opportunities for this target group.



Annexes

Taking the Next Steps

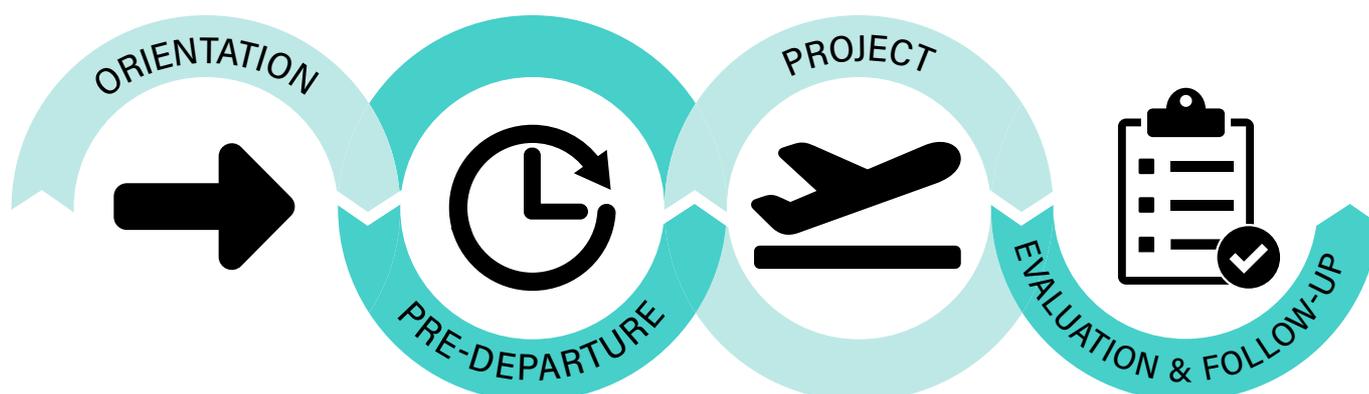
“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” provides a brief introduction to the European Solidarity Corps and presents an approach and a methodology which have proven successful in helping more young people facing socio-economic barriers to take part in the programme.

For those organisations interested to know more about the different aspects of a European Solidarity Corps project, the following Annexes give a quick overview of the project cycle, how to start the partner-finding process and some useful tips for working with the young people before, during and after their projects. These can be useful for both Supporting and Hosting Organisations.

The information in the Annexes is intended to provide a head start into Solidarity Corps projects, but it is by no means complete. For more information or for the answers to specific questions, refer to the Further Reading section of this booklet or contact your National Agency.

Annex 1

The Project Cycle



While organisations are getting to know the European Solidarity Corps, its strengths and its limitations, they are in the orientation phase. Because of the complexity of the needs of young people facing socio-economic barriers, it is a good idea for organisations to collect as much information as possible to help them decide whether Corps projects are the right method for them and for their young people. An important next step for new organisations is contacting the National Agency in their country who can provide them with further resources. The National Agency can also help new organisations learn more through national-level network meetings, job-shadowing opportunities, and European-level training events.

To help organisations go deeper into the orientation process, a list of useful documents is included at the end of this document in the section titled "Further Reading".

The pre-departure phase begins when an organisation decides to get actively involved in the European Solidarity Corps and starts taking concrete steps to organise their project. The pre-departure phase involves a lot of work for both Supporting and Hosting Organisations. In this phase, the Supporting Organisation works to prepare their volunteer for departure while the Hosting Organisation works to design a programme of activities which match the young person's needs and the direction of their pathway.

The project phase starts when the volunteer leaves home for their project and finishes when they return. The bulk of the work in this phase lies with the Hosting Organisation which is responsible for monitoring the volunteer's learning process, but the Supporting Organisation also has a role to play during this stage by keeping in contact with the volunteer, monitoring the home situation, and supporting the Host.

Evaluation and follow-up begins in the last days/weeks that the volunteer is in post and continues once the volunteer returns home. A period abroad as a volunteer can often be an intense experience. Volunteers need support to evaluate their experiences and to recognize the learning that has taken place. In this phase, the volunteer has to find a way to integrate the Corps experience back into their “regular” life and start taking further steps along their pathway.

Organisations that are ready to start developing concrete projects will find some useful suggestions for the pre-departure and evaluation/follow-up phases in Annexes III and IV.

Annex II

Partner-finding

When working with vulnerable youngsters, it is vital to have trustworthy partners.

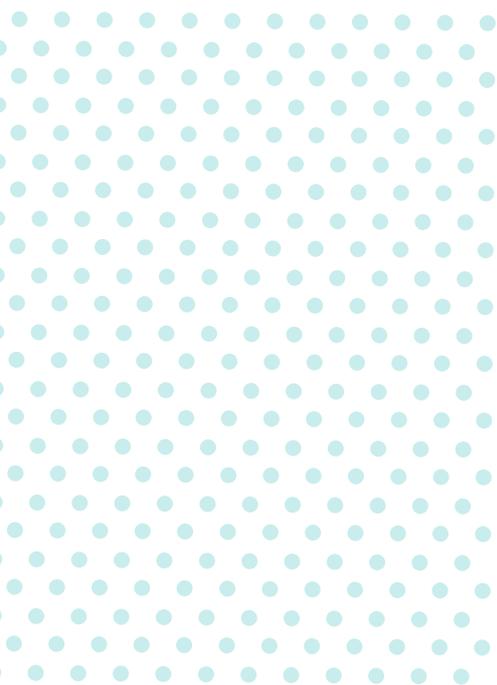
All organisations interested in taking part in European Solidarity Corps volunteering activities need to hold a Quality Label for volunteering. Organisations must also adhere to the Charter of the European Solidarity Corps. In volunteering activities involving young people with fewer opportunities, it is highly recommended that two separate organisations be involved:

- 1. A Hosting Organisation** – responsible for developing and implementing a programme of the young person’s activities and providing guidance and support during all phases of the project as appropriate.
- 2. A Supporting Organisation** – responsible for supporting, preparing and/or training the participant before departure, mediating between them and their host, and providing support upon their return from their activity.

The Hosting and Supporting Organisations should work together to understand the needs and motivations of their participant(s) and to develop a programme to match them. The success of the volunteering project depends greatly on the level of communication and trust between these two partners.

Planning and implementing projects for young people with fewer opportunities is a big responsibility. Organisations need to know their project partners and feel comfortable with their level of knowledge, preparation and commitment to the young people. However, finding an appropriate partner organisation, especially in another country, is not always easy.

In the European Solidarity Corps, there are different ways in which the partner-finding process can be carried out. For instance:



1. Existing networks - Some organisations may already have potential partners, for instance through previous activities or through branches of their own organisation in other countries. Existing contacts and networks can be a good place to start looking for potential partners for Solidarity Corps projects as the organisations may already know one another, their way of working, share a common approach, etc.

2. OTLAS – OTLAS (www.salto-youth.net/otlas) is the online partner-finding tool of SALTO-YOUTH. This database of organisations across Europe can be used to search for partners for international projects using specific criteria like desired country, desired activity, project theme, and so on.

3. Training and networking events – each year the SALTO-YOUTH network, National Agencies and independent organisations across Europe organise a wide range of training and networking events. These may be specific contact-making or partner-building activities, training sessions (e.g. to learn more about how to use the European Solidarity Corps), events focusing on specific target groups (e.g. young people in rural areas, young people with disabilities, young people at risk of extremism, etc.), or events focusing on specific themes (e.g. environmental protection, peace-building, how to use digital tools in youth work, etc.) These events are not just good learning opportunities, they also offer space and time for participants to get to know one another, their organisations, their activities and sometimes even their young people, in more depth.

(To find out about upcoming events, check the SALTO-YOUTH European Training Calendar at

www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/)

4. Support measures for social inclusion – some Complimentary Activities (like job shadowing) or Exceptional Costs (e.g. for Advanced Planning Visits) can also be used with an eye towards building and strengthening relationships between (potential) partner organisations.

No matter what the method, finding a good partner and building up trust takes time. Organisations should feel as confident and secure as possible in their choice of partner before the actual project starts.

Annex III

Methods for pre-departure preparation

“Pre-departure” is the name given to the second phase in the European Solidarity Corps project cycle. This phase begins when an organisation decides to get involved in the programme and starts taking concrete steps to organise their project. In this phase, a volunteer works mostly with their Supporting Organisation to prepare for their project abroad. The Hosting Organisation can also play a role in the pre-departure phase. For instance, they can help the volunteer prepare themselves by passing along information about the project, the host country and local traditions. They can tell the volunteer what they need to bring with them and also teach them their first words in the host language.

The volunteer is expected to play an active role in all stages of their project and this includes the pre-departure phase. This involves, for instance, registering in the European Solidarity Corps portal. As well, the volunteer is expected to meet regularly with their Supporting Organisation before they travel abroad. The Supporting Organisation should be available to assist when and as necessary, but the volunteer should be given an appropriate amount of responsibility in the preparation process.

Organisations that are new to Corps volunteering projects can find some tips and methods to use in the pre-departure phase here below. This is by no means a complete list of all the preparation steps which need to be taken, but it should provide a good overview of the various categories of preparation which need to be dealt with.

PREPARING THE APPLICATION

1. Think carefully about the different aspects of the volunteer project (e.g. the general framework, the daily tasks, the location, the accommodation and any special or extra demands that might be made on the young person taking part). On that basis, consider which, if any, of the extra support measures for social inclusion should be included in the application. Keep in mind that it is usually not possible to increase the amount of funding retroactively, so any special costs need to be identified early. Some National Agencies are flexible and will grant some budget for Exceptional Costs based on the general framework of the project even if the actual volunteer is not yet known or confirmed. (Contact your National Agency to find out what possibilities exist in your country.)
2. If appropriate, encourage the volunteer to contribute directly to writing part of the project application themselves. For instance, have them write out the description of their Supporting Organisation, or the description of the daily tasks they will do in the Hosting Organisation. Being part of the application process gives the volunteer extra “ownership” of the project.

ARRANGING INSURANCE COVERAGE

3. Participants in European Solidarity Corps activities must have adequate insurance coverage. To learn more about what this needs to include and how to arrange it, organisations should review the information in the European Solidarity Corps Guide and check with their National Agency to ensure that their volunteer is fully covered. Be sure to make arrangements for insurance well before the volunteer is scheduled to travel.

COLLECTING INFORMATION



4. Encourage the volunteer to collect information on their host project and about their host country in order to have a better idea of where they are going. The Internet is a good tool; other options include the local library or travel books. There may also be students or other locals from the host country in your area who would be happy to meet and talk about their country with the volunteer before they travel.
5. The Hosting Organisation may have promotional materials like videos, brochures, photographs, etc., which can be useful for giving a first impression of the project. Volunteers also appreciate information about the local situation – for example, a description of the local young people in and around the project, information about the free time possibilities, and so on.
6. The volunteer might need help in drawing conclusions from the information they receive. For example, if they discover that winter temperatures in Finland are below zero, they should conclude that they need to take warm winter clothing with them. The Supporting Organisation and the volunteer should discuss the implications of the information collected.

DECIDING WHAT TO PACK

7. Make a list of clothing to be taken along. Think of working clothes as well as free time clothes. Take the time of year and the weather into account. The Hosting Organisation should advise the volunteer on what they should bring with them and what will be provided by the project.
8. People in the host project will likely be very curious to learn more about the volunteer and where they come from. Help the volunteer prepare information about their own country (for example, how many people live there, what are the main cities, what are the main tourist attractions, etc.) They can also take some typical food to share (cookies, chocolate, typical drink, etc.).

Many projects ask the volunteers to cook, so it is useful to learn how to make one simple typical national or regional dish. It is also handy to take along photographs from home (for example, of family, of friends, of their local neighbourhood, etc.) both to share with people in the host project and also just as an extra comfort.

9. Check which, if any, special documents or special-purpose items the volunteer will need to take with them. For example – what kind of personal identification will they need to travel (passport, national ID card)? Will they need a visa (for non-EU countries)? Will they need to take some extra emergency cash, a debit or credit card? Do they need to take any special medicines or materials (like an asthma inhaler, prescriptions, extra contact lenses, etc.)
10. The volunteer will likely want to take their mobile phone with them to their project so check the requirements and conditions for using a mobile phone in the host country (e.g. country dialing codes, possible roaming charges, data plan/data bundle amounts, is a converter or adaptor needed for the phone charger, etc.) Keep in mind that costs and conditions which apply for mobile telephones in EU countries may be very different in non-EU countries.
11. Remind the volunteer to double-check that they have the contact details (home addresses, mobile phone numbers, e-mail addresses, social media, etc.) of family and friends so they can stay in touch while abroad. The volunteer should have a paper copy of their most important contacts (e.g. parents, the Supporting and Hosting Organisation, the volunteer's accommodation, etc.) in case their phone is lost or damaged.

GETTING READY FOR A NEW CULTURE

12. Intercultural learning is not only related to national cultures. Look at differences within your own country or even within your own city. Are there different ways of doing or behaving in different situations? Help the volunteer make a list of do's and don'ts for those situations. If possible, try to do this on national level (for example, how do you greet someone in our country? How do we eat? How do we spend our free time? Etc.)



SIMPLE LANGUAGE LEARNING

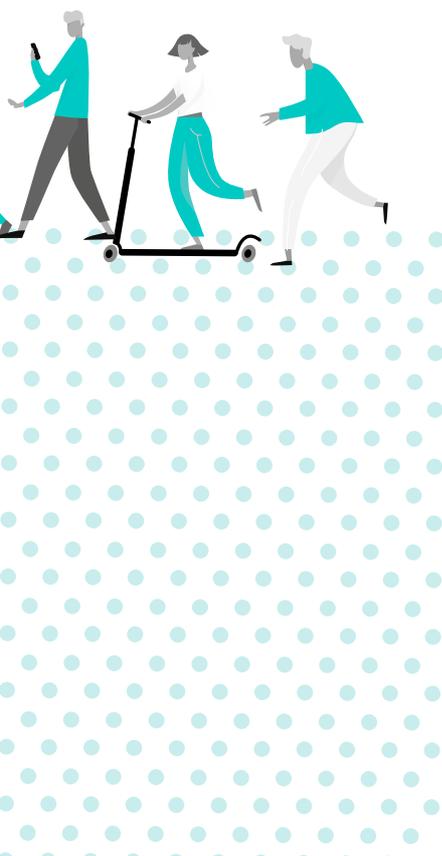
13. You can jump-start the language learning process by helping the volunteer learn some new words in their host language before they leave home. The Hosting Organisation can help out by sending a short list of words (for example, hello, good bye, thank you and the numbers 1-10). Volunteers should also be ready to communicate without language – practice non-verbal communication by using only sign language and mimicry. (Note that while the Solidarity Corps does offer funding for Linguistic Support, this may be subject to certain conditions and the format may not always be suitable for young people facing socio-economic obstacles.)

COPING WITH THE UNKNOWN

14. To help a new volunteer overcome their fears of things unknown, experiment with things that are new - for example let the young person hear a foreign language. Let them try food in a foreign restaurant. Make a visit to a part of the city or region where they have never been before. Encourage the volunteer to talk about what it feels like to try something strange and new. Remember - the volunteer doesn't have to like the new things – what is important is the act of trying.

GETTING MOBILE

15. If the volunteer has never been away from home before, it is a good idea to do some mobility training before they go abroad. This does not have to cost a lot of money. For example, take a group of young people on a day trip to another town, city or on an excursion to the countryside. Organise a camping trip over a weekend to help them get used to being away from home and their family.
16. You can help the volunteer prepare for their actual trip by doing “dry runs”- i.e. make a simulation trip to the airport or to the train station so that the volunteer can get used to how the systems work. An even better method is to plan a short trip (by bus or train) and have the volunteer do the planning, read the timetable, buy the tickets, etc. This can even be done within a large city using the public transport system.
17. If the volunteer is in need of extra support while travelling to their project, it is possible to apply for a person to accompany them (travel and some subsistence costs for the first few days). (See also the point “Preparing the Application” above.)



ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

- 18.** The European Solidarity Corps has some additional funding for Advanced Planning Visits. These visits are meant to help the Supporting Organisation and a new volunteer get to know their Hosting Organisation over 2 or 3 days. The main advantage to such a visit is that the volunteer can see first-hand where they will go and meet the people who will be in charge. Be aware that Advanced Planning Visits can sometimes have an adverse effect – sometimes volunteers can be frightened by what they see and decide not to take part in the project, so youth workers need to approach these visits with care.
- 19.** The volunteer may be invited to take part in national-level preparation events organised by the National Agency. These may be of two types – the first is a pre-departure preparation which takes place before the volunteer leaves for their project. Such events take place in the home country with other volunteers who are also preparing to go abroad. The second type is the on-arrival preparation. This event is for all the volunteers in their new host country in an international group. (Note that not all countries organise pre-departure events, but most do on-arrival events.) Although all volunteers are entitled to participate, it is important to be aware that the majority of volunteers at these events will likely be from classic student backgrounds. This can sometimes be problematic for young people facing socio-economic obstacles, so youth workers should consider carefully whether this is an appropriate setting for their young person.

TIPS FOR THE SUPPORTING ORGANISATION

- 20.** Supporting Organisations should bear in mind that the funding for preparation time is largely symbolic. Pre-departure preparation usually requires a great deal of time, so the Supporting Organisation needs to plan their schedule accordingly.
- 21.** If there are several volunteers departing at once (or at roughly the same time), it can be useful to carry out some of the steps above in a group context. You can also consider using returned “veteran” volunteers as an extra resource. The element of peer support can help make the new volunteers feel more secure and add some extra fun and motivation to the preparation process
- 22.** One week before departure, the Supporting Organisation should do a final check together with the volunteer to make sure that everything is prepared (passport, tickets, insurance, packing, etc.)

ANNEX IV

Methods for evaluation and follow-up

The evaluation and follow-up phase begins in the last days/weeks of a volunteer's projects and continues once they return and re-integrate back into their "regular" home life. This phase can be the most difficult of the entire Solidarity Corps experience because it is in this phase that a volunteer has to process their learning and make their next steps along their personal pathway.

Although some methods of evaluation can be relatively quick and easy to use (e.g. filling in a questionnaire), the larger process of digesting and processing the Solidarity Corps experience can take some time. This is especially the case for young people facing socio-economic obstacles. Volunteers often need support from both their Hosting and Sending Organisations to recognize the learning that has taken place and to guide their next steps.

Listed below are some methods which can be used at different stages of the evaluation and follow-up phase:

CLOSURE

1. A period as a cross-border or in-country volunteer can be a very intense experience. A good first step in the evaluation/follow-up phase is to round-off or close the Solidarity Corps experience. This can be done in the Host Organisation by organising a final farewell party (similarly, the Supporting Organisation can organise a welcome party or welcome event when the volunteer returns home).
2. During the final party, or during a small ceremony, present the volunteer with a certificate to mark their achievement in the project. This could be the volunteer's Youthpass (see below) and/or a certificate issued by the Hosting Organisation.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is a process that needs to start at the beginning of a project. Here are some tips on how to set the process in motion:

3. If the volunteer is fond of writing, have them keep a daily diary. At the end of the project, ask them to review what they have written to see if they can identify any changes in their behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, skills, etc. If the volunteer has difficulties with writing, they could instead draw a daily picture, a comic, or create images on the computer to represent events and emotions.

4. A diary can be personal but it can also be public. The volunteer can keep a web- or video blog to help keep people at home informed about their activities. This can also be reviewed at the end of the project.
5. Encourage the volunteer to think about their future at all stages of their Solidarity Corps project. The future is not something to be kept until the very end. This can be done informally by asking the volunteer what they are thinking, which direction their thoughts are going. In the evaluation stage the volunteer should look back on the plans they had at the beginning and consider to what extent those plans have/have not changed. The effect of this is stronger in longer projects, but even in 2-3 week projects it can be very insightful for the volunteer.
6. The practical aspects of a Corps project experience (daily tasks, accommodation, skills learned, etc.) are easier to evaluate than others (for example, the intercultural experience). But a picture can speak a thousand words... To evaluate the intercultural experience, ask the volunteer to take photos of people, places, and things in their host project which are important to them or which made a strong impression on them. Use the photos to start a discussion about differences and similarities between countries and between cultures.
7. Throughout the project (and particularly at the conclusion), help the volunteer make an inventory (list) of the skills they learned. Help them identify how that learning can help them take their next steps along the pathway (in finding a job, gaining a qualification, within their family situation, etc.)
8. All participants in European Solidarity Corps projects are entitled to receive a Youthpass (www.youthpass.eu/en/). Youthpass is a certificate of participation but it is also an excellent tool for helping a young person to analyze, understand and present the many things they have learned during their project. Youthpass can be used to gather together the outcomes of Points 3-7 above and fit them all together in one framework and one document. Organisations can find out more about how to use Youthpass in the booklets "Youthpass for All!", "Youthpass Unfolded" and "Youthpass in the EVS Training Cycle" (see the section "Further Reading") and find more tools on the Youthpass website.
9. If there are several volunteers returning at once, it can often be very useful to organise a group evaluation. It is very helpful for volunteers to be supported by peers who have had similar experiences and who can understand what each other has "been through".

10. The volunteer will be sent an online questionnaire to fill in as part of the final report of the project. This should be sent a few days before the project ends. This questionnaire can be a good tool for evaluating, but if a volunteer is not strong in reading or writing, they may need some assistance to complete it. For example, a youth worker or support person can work through the questions together with their volunteer offline before answering online.

FOLLOW UP

It is not always easy for volunteers to return home from a project. The longer the period away, the more challenging the return can be.

The volunteer may have grown and changed during their project... but the home situation may have stayed largely the same. Volunteers can sometimes be "homesick" for their projects and their host country, so it is helpful if the Supporting (as well as the Host) Organisation can help them take steps to "fit" the volunteer experience into the home situation and look at new ways they can move forward along their pathway.

SHARING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

11. Invite the local newspaper, TV or radio station to interview the volunteer when they return home. This can also be done in the Hosting Organisation before the volunteer leaves. (The volunteer may need to be prepared ahead of time.) If the volunteer is fond of writing, have them write their own article for the newspaper or for the organisation's newsletter, website, Facebook page, etc. If they are good with digital media, have them make their a short film or presentation to share.
12. When appropriate, give the returned volunteer the chance to talk about their Solidarity Corps experience (for example in schools, in the youth club, etc.) This is a good way to motivate new young people to become involved in the programme.
13. If possible, give the volunteer the chance to show some of the skills they learned during the Solidarity Corps project in the Supporting Organisation (for example, if they took part in a dance project, encourage them to give a short performance or organise a dance workshop; if they learned to cook something typical from their host country, pick a moment when the volunteer can prepare and serve the dish, etc.) Volunteers are also very proud of their Youthpass so consider arranging a moment when they can show/explain it to others.



BUILDING ON THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

14. Arrange opportunities for the young person to volunteer in their own community. This could take a form similar to their Solidarity Corps project or could be in a new direction the young person wishes to try.
15. If appropriate, use returned volunteers in future Solidarity Corps projects. "Veteran" volunteers are an excellent peer support resource - they can help future outgoing volunteers prepare to go abroad, or they can help out with incoming volunteers coming to their organisation (for example, pick up a new volunteer at the train station, take them for a night out, introduce them to local young people, etc.)
16. The volunteer may be invited by the National Agency to take part in an "Annual Event"- such events bring together former, current and potential participants and may serve as an evaluation meeting, an alumni meeting and/or a promotional event. The purpose of this kind of event is to ensure that the National Agency receives feedback about the volunteering projects, the participating organisations, the practical arrangements and the volunteer's overall impression of their activity. A key question will be what learning effect the activity period had for the participant. These can be good opportunities for the volunteers to discuss and evaluate their experiences and to pass them on to current and potential participants. Although all volunteers are entitled to participate, just like with the preparation events it is important to be aware that the majority of volunteers at these events will likely be from classic student backgrounds. This can sometimes be problematic for young people facing socio-economic obstacles, so youth workers should consider carefully whether this is an appropriate setting for their young person.

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE HOST ORGANISATION

17. The Hosting Organisation can play a important role in the evaluation/follow-up phase as well by keeping in contact with the volunteer. This can take the form of short letters, text messages, e-mails, sending photos, birthday cards, copies of the organisation's newsletter, etc. This is a good way to reinforce the volunteer's feeling of contribution and value to the Host after they have returned home. The Host Organisation can also support the volunteer's next steps forward. They should stay in touch with the Supporting Organisation so as to keep informed of the volunteer's progress and plans.

BOOKLET AUTHOR



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Since 1996 Kathy has worked with young people, youth workers, educators and European institutions to explore how young people with fewer opportunities can benefit from international mobility programmes. Along with providing training and consultancy services, Kathy is frequently involved in producing resource materials on inclusion topics. Her other specialities include transnational volunteering and using sport as a method for non-formal learning.

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FURTHER READING

Hunger for More?

OTHER SALTO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS

- ◆ **Inclusion A to Z (reprint 2018)** - a compass to international inclusion projects.
The best of the SALTO Inclusion youth work manuals in one publication.
- ◆ **On Track (reprint 2017)** - Different youth work approaches for different NEET situations
- ◆ **Inclusion through Employability (reprint 2014)**- success criteria for youth projects addressing unemployment, research publication
- ◆ **Urban Solutions (2012)** - tapping the talents of urban youth research
- ◆ **Youth and the City (reprint 2012)** - developing meaningful international projects with young people in disadvantaged (sub)urban areas
- ◆ **Working on Work (2011)** - using international projects to improve the chances of young people on the labour market
- ◆ **Youthpass unfolded (2012)** - explaining the Youthpass process to make learning visible, including practical methods to do so
- ◆ **Youthpass for All! (updated 2010)** - recognition of non-formal learning through the Youth in Action programme for young people with fewer opportunities
- ◆ **Making Waves (updated 2010)** - greater impact with your youth projects through visibility, dissemination and exploitation of your project results
- ◆ **Images in Action (2010)** - running a positive image-building campaign for inclusion groups
- ◆ **Fit for Life (2005)** - using sports as an educational tool for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in youth-work
- ◆ **No Offence (updated 2010)** - exploring opportunities and setting up youth projects with young ex-offenders and those at risk of offending
- ◆ **Village International (updated 2010)** - setting up international projects in rural and geographically isolated areas
- ◆ **Inclusion & Diversity (updated 2008)** - how to make your youth-work and youth projects more inclusive and reach more diverse target groups
- ◆ **No Barriers, No Borders (updated 2008)** - organising international mixed ability projects (including people with and without a disability)
- ◆ **Over the Rainbow (updated 2008)** - creating sensitive projects with young LesBiGays and young people questioning their sexual orientation
- ◆ **E.M. power (2008)** - empowering Ethnic Minority young women through international youth projects
- ◆ **Going International - Inclusion for All (updated 2009)** - practical methods and advice for youth workers organising their first international project for young people with fewer opportunities
- ◆ **Use your Hands to Move Ahead (updated 2009)** - using practical tasks to increase participation by young people with fewer opportunities in "Inclusion" European Voluntary Service projects
- ◆ **Inclusion by Design (2009)** - a manual for youth NGOs to approaching inclusion in a strategic way





T-KIT SERIES

The T-Kits (training kits) are thematic publications written by experienced youth trainers. They are easy-to-use handbooks for use in training and study sessions, published by **the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission**.

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Downloadable from

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership> or
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www.salto-youth.net/inclusionstrategy/
- ◆ **European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre.** (2020), *4thought for Solidarity (future thinking) - Analysis and reflection for a common narrative and strategic future for the Solidarity Corps.*
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USEFUL WEBSITES

- ◆ Erasmus+ Programme Guide:
<http://ec.europa.eu/youth/>
- ◆ European Solidarity Corps:
https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps_en
- ◆ European Solidarity Corps volunteering project database:
https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/project_en
- ◆ European Youth Portal:
https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en
- ◆ EU Youth Strategy:
https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en
- ◆ OTLAS - The Partner-Finding Tool:
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- ◆ Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes (RAY):
www.researchyouth.eu
- ◆ SALTO-YOUTH European Training Calendar:
www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/
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environmentally friendly recycled paper. Order or print this publication only if you really
need it. The Earth says 'Thank you!'

“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0” is an educational document aimed at youth workers, youth leaders, European institutions and all others who work with young people facing socio-economic obstacles.

This booklet describes how European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects can be used to benefit these young people and demonstrates how combining the “personal pathway” approach with the methodology of practical tasks (building, renovation, gardening, art, sport, etc.) directly responds to these youngster’s specific learning needs. Providing an in-depth look at the educational value of practical tasks, the booklet shows how these tasks serve to develop an individual’s social AND practical skills.

“Use Your Hands to Move Ahead 2.0 ” was compiled with the help of individuals and organisations who have many years of experience in carrying out European Solidarity Corps and/or European Voluntary Service projects. Each one has found the methodology of practical tasks to be a positive tool for change. Their real-life examples demonstrate how the theory behind practical tasks is implemented in different organisations.

By sharing their experiences, it is hoped that other organisations will be inspired to develop their own European Solidarity Corps hosting projects. The creation of new projects with practical tasks will allow more young people facing socio-economic obstacles to benefit from the Solidarity Corps volunteering experience.

This booklet is part of the SALTO “Inclusion for All” series.

Download them for free at:

www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Inclusion/

