

An Analysis of European Solidarity Corps' National Networking Activities (NET) 2022-2023

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Abstract

SALTO European Solidarity Corps has done an analysis of national networking activities (NET) 2022-2023. This current work aims to understand how the National Agencies (NAs) use the NET activities in their national context and for national purposes. The data collection consisted of three steps: processing material received from the European Commission from the annual work programmes of the NAs, data collected directly from the national agencies and interviews with seven NA officers.

The result of this analysis shows that the **National Agencies use the national NET activities mostly** as a tool **to attract new audiences** in the Programme and **raise the quality of the applications** through them. It is also a tool to work with national realities and a forum for experienced program users to be more engaged with the program. National NET-activities are seen as a valued channel to **bring NAs and the field closer to each other**.

The target group of these activities slightly varies based on activity types: NET-activities for volunteering activity is more often targeted to organisations and mentors, while activities for solidarity projects more often for young people. One specific target group that was mentioned for both activity types was municipalities.

The content of national NET-activities is for quality implementation of the program and for spreading information about the program by educating potential applicants about the program possibilities. Other popular topics are community building and skills and competence development. The horizontal program priorities are often part of the content. Some of the events have a nature of celebrating the activity and aim to bring together young beneficiaries and make the project results visible, especially with solidarity projects.

Based on this analysis the local and **national NET-activities are highly valued** and the **European dimension is clearly present** in them. This activity gives a forum to talk about European values and priorities with the help of a concrete program - the European Solidarity Corps. In that sense it **brings the EU closer to the local realities**.





The value of the national NET-activities is evident, but using this tool more efficiently by the NAs would need some more **support** in terms of how **to use the activities more strategically** and with a wider outreach to the target groups. **Measuring the impact** of the activities **would require a systematic data collection**, also future development of the activities would benefit from evidence-based materials.

This analysis suggests that NA officers hope to see more overall visibility for the whole program and they also wish for channels to bring local projects together.

The **supporting role of SALTO European Solidarity Corps** is identified in several of the mentioned aspects.





1. Introduction

SALTO European Solidarity Corps has done an analysis of national networking activities (NET) 2022-2023. This analysis is the second part of the series of NET analyses. First part - carried out in 2022 - was exploring international NET activities, while this current work aims to understand how the National Agencies (NAs) use the NET activities in their national context and for national purposes. Analysing the national NET activities is particularly interesting and important, since it was the European Solidarity Corps program that first got the possibility to organise national NET activities. The purpose of the analysis is to get a better and evidence-based understanding of national NET- activities; target group, content, roles, values and impacts, and also support National Agencies in their future planning of NET activities.

2. Data Collection

The data collection consisted of three steps: material from European Commission, data from NAs and interviews with NA officers. As a starting out resource SALTO European Solidarity Corps received from the European Commission the summaries of national NET activities from the work plans of National Agencies for the year 2023. This collection contained a small summary from 32 National Agencies about their national NET activities. In the work plans there are altogether 181 national NET activities planned meaning an average of 5 per NA. From the excerpts of the work plans it was visible that some agencies are more active using the national NET activities and there are some NAs that did not plan to organise any national activities. This material gave us information mainly about the content of the activities.

For a deeper analysis SALTO ESC collected information also directly from National Agencies. Agencies were asked to provide materials about their national NET activities from the year 2022-2023. 13 different National Agencies responded to this inquiry and provided mostly quantitative materials. The data was analysed by using the categories from the NET-Matrix developed by SALTO ESC in 2019 and thus included:





- Number of activities
- Type of the activity (Seminar, Training, Research, Contact making / Partner building activity, Study visit, Exchange of good & bad practice)
- 14 topics/aims that show the content including the horizontal priorities (inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental sustainability, participation in democratic life, and also employability and entrepreneurship, concept of solidarity, quality support and quality improvement, skills and competence development, alumni and post placement support, recognition / certification, dissemination and visibility, community building, European identity and values, the European Solidarity Corps Program in general)
- Target group based on participants role
- Target group based on participants experience about the Program

It is important to articulate that we faced challenges while collecting data from the NAs. Currently NAs have different ways and formats to keep the data, which means they are not totally comparable. For this reason, the quantitative results are indicative and were used as per-data for getting ready for interviews. Hopefully in the future the Cooperation Board as a common tool will be a suitable platform to store the data which would also be helpful for upcoming research needs.

The pre-data provided us some insights into how national activities are used. For getting a deeper understanding, we conducted interviews with NET-officers. The aim was to have a diverse sample of NAs with a variety of sizes and geographical locations. In total we interviewed 7 NA officers. In the analyses you can find quotations directly from the interviews.

This analysis will give a picture of what kind of national NET-activities there are, what are the target groups, and what kind of content the activities are tackling. It will also give insights into the role, impact and value of activities. In the end you can find some tips and tricks for national NET-activities and hopes for the future regarding the program.





3. Role of the National NET-activities

National NET-activities are new innovations¹ therefore, it is interesting to see their typology and understand better what role they play. In the interviews we tried to find answers to how the NAs see the role of these activities and how they use this instrument to increase the accessibility and the quality of the European Solidarity Corps Programme.

The National Agencies use the national NET activities mostly as **a tool to attract new audiences in the Programme** and potential is also seen in **raising the quality** of the applications through them. Many respondents mentioned in the interviews that National NET-activities are “*Step in Activity*” towards European programs. These activities are used as a tool for promoting and informing new audiences about the European Solidarity Corps program. The **possibility to work in one's own language** was highly valued as the language barrier was mentioned as one of the reasons lowering the threshold for showing interest towards the European Solidarity Corps program.

“We use it to really open the doors towards the program.”

“It's important for that, it's in your own language, it's like an easy step into EU programs and it gives you a chance to understand how the program works and so on..”

Some of the interviewees talked about the **real chance to work on national needs** and realities because of the national NET-activities.

“There's no doubt that the value is very high. It gives real support at the national level. It really helps to reach the young people and smaller organisations in rural areas, because it is a really low threshold activity for those who have never used the program and never done it internationally. National is not that scary. ... I would also say that it is only channel for us as NA to support the activities at the local level. ”

¹ National networking activities were introduced in 2019 with the start of the European Solidarity Corps Programme.





The National NET-activities are not just for stepping in activities for newcomers. Many see it as a tool to work with beneficiaries who use the program and maybe want to be more involved in it.

“For experienced ones it’s for networking and for newcomers it’s getting more information and examples. And for potential applicants it’s a way to be more involved, a forum for experienced program users to be more engaged with the program.”

Some appreciated the chance to organise national activities especially because of the nature of the European Solidarity Corps program. The local NET-activities and also local projects make sense in the concept of solidarity.

“It is very good to have this opportunity to have a local project when we are talking about solidarity. It’s more beneficial when it comes to the communities and local level. Local activities and projects make sense in this concept.”

Based on the research findings we can say that the biggest role that the National NET-activities are having is the instrument to guarantee the quality of the projects.

“Importance of national NET activities is really high, without these activities the quality of the projects would not be so high.”

Based on the pre-materials and interviews we can observe that there is a real willingness to **support the quality in the projects** and NAs have a supportive approach towards applicants. It was mentioned in almost every interview that the role of NA officers is to be there for applicants for supporting and guiding them. So the national NET activities also have the role to be a **tool for a supportive approach** from the NAs.





Conclusion:

In summary the following types of roles were listed in the case of national NET-activities:

- step in activity to EU program
- lowers the step - like language barrier
- important tool to guarantee the quality of the projects
- tool to work with national realities
- tool to reaching new audiences and promote
- tool for supportive approach
- forum for experiences program users to be more engage with the program
- local activities and projects make sense in concept of solidarity

4. National NET-activities for both action types

The European Solidarity Corps program has three strands out of which the NET activities **serve the two decentralised action types** - *volunteering activities* and **solidarity projects**. Traditionally the volunteering action has been bigger in budget and application wise. It also has a longer history. Solidarity projects are seen as the newest initiative inside the program. Solidarity projects are always national, local projects. Both action types are strongly linked in the topic of solidarity, but the function and target groups are different. For this reason, we look at the data for the two types separately.

First of all, the data show that the national activities are **almost equally used for both action types**: volunteering and solidarity projects. **Many** of the activities are also **addressing both action types** which also the interviews confirmed. Most of the interviewed NAs have a clear plan or strategic approach on how they use the national activities. Chosen approach is selected in line with the situation the specific NA has concerning the amount and the quality of the applications.

"100% of our activities are considering volunteering. We decided not to put the focus on solidarity projects in the sense we have huge demands on volunteering projects. "

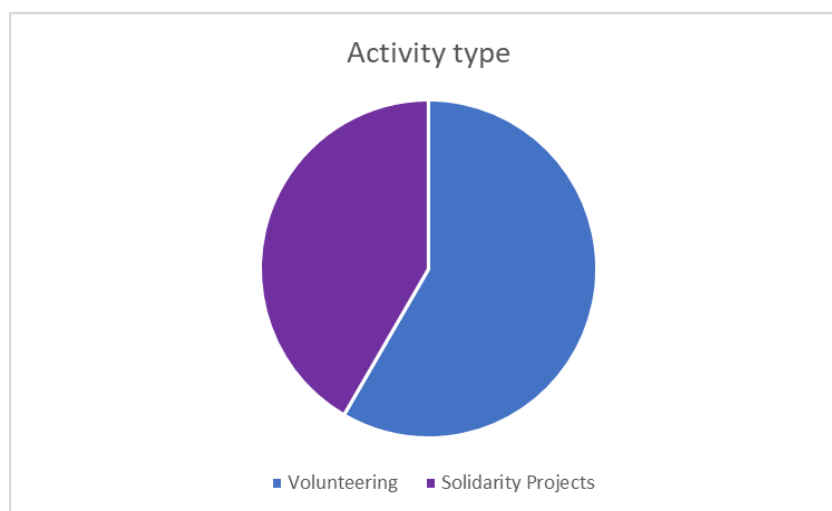
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"In national activities we have two different target groups. We have new organisations, once we want to apply, either solidarity project or quality label. We've been focusing on new target groups in solidarity projects, this is where we need new applicants. In the Quality label the need is not that big."

Figure 1: Ratio of the number of national NET activities by activity type



5. Target groups

Regarding the target groups, we differentiate based on two aspects: one is the level of experience they have with the Programme, second is whether the participant is a young person or a professional, representing an organisation or working as a mentor or a coach.

With this differentiation we can explore by action types how many activities are designed for newcomers and how many for more experienced participants and professionals.

5.1 Target group of national NET-activities for volunteering

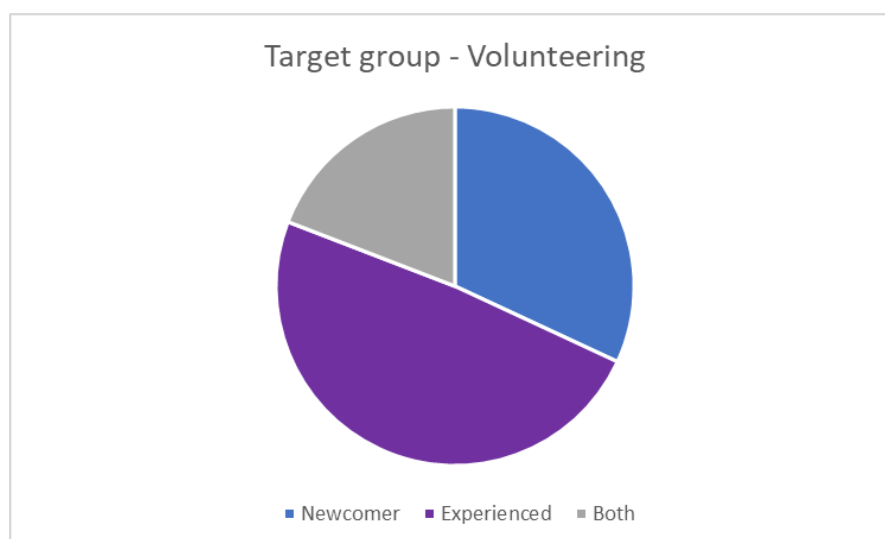
The pre-data showed us that the **target group of national NET-activities** that are **focusing on volunteering** is mainly **experienced program users**. Some of the activities are targeted to newcomers and some for both.





"We do not address activities for newcomers. We are dividing the target group mainly for supporting organisations and lead organisations."

Figure 2: Ratio of target groups of volunteering action

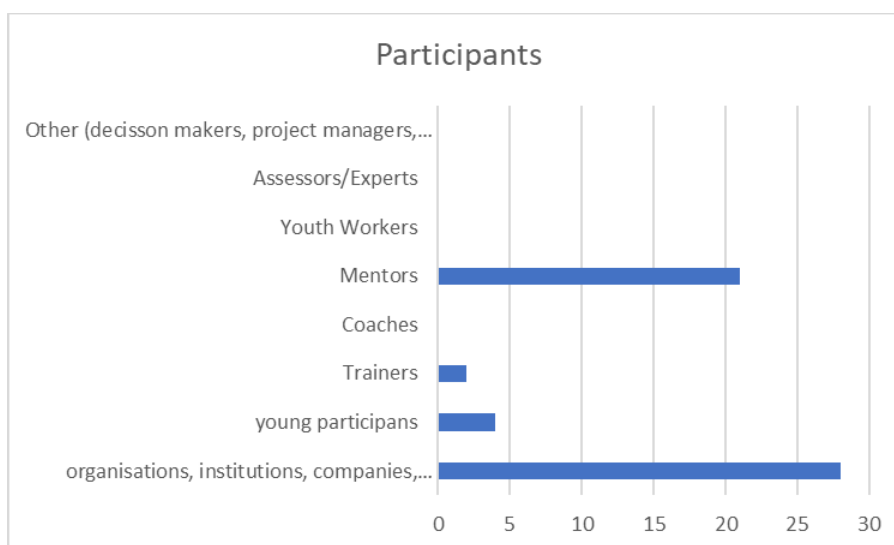


When we are looking closer at the participants, we can see that the activities are **targeted mainly for organisations or mentors**. Only a few were directly to young people. It is worth highlighting that many of the activities are targeted to **mentors**. During the interviews several mentions mentors and the need to target activities to them:

"We have training for mentors. We have a long history with that. This is an important part since we think that mentoring has a huge role in volunteering projects."



Figure 3: Profile of the target groups of NET-activities for volunteering



5.2 Target groups of national NET- activities for solidarity projects

The target group **for solidarity projects** is different from what we could see for the Volunteering projects. The majority of the activities are **targeted for newcomers** and **young participants**. It is in line with the target group of the action which is also newcomers.

Figure 4: Ratio of target groups of solidarity projects

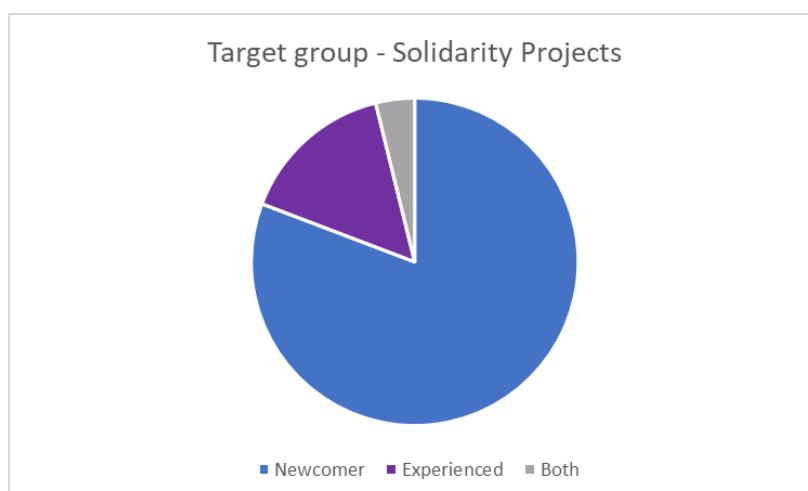




Figure 5: Profile of the target groups of NET-activities for solidarity projects



While talking about the target group of solidarity project NET-activities with the NA officers in the interviews, several of them mentioned that this project type demands that the NA has a new approach. Traditionally NAs are used to working with organisations, while in this case many have chosen to work directly with young participants.

"We do promotion through organisations, so this is what we do traditionally and also in Erasmus, so we traditionally target organisations in our activities and promotion materials so this was lacking. So with a new project type, we didn't have anything to respond to young people so we had to create something new."

Some NAs had identified the target group as young participants with immigrant background or organisations in some specific region.

"Variety is important for us. Immigrant background young people are one big target group. Some young people who have recently come to our country and have not found their own organisation or activity to join. So through these projects they are able to do meaningful things.."

"For solidarity projects we want to find the newcomers in the regions who are really not active."





Based on the data the [Europeers](#) are also one of the target groups for national NET-activities. Some are organising specific training or meetings for *Europeers*, but some also connect *Europeers* to be part of training that are targeted for newcomers or even experienced program users and those activities are often tackling the European Solidarity Corps in general, not specifically one of the activity types.

5.3 Reaching a new audience?

An aspect that was emphasised in the interviews was that especially in the case of solidarity projects the Programme needs new potential beneficiaries. Even though the NAs would be ready to use the NET activities for attracting new target groups in the Programme, they struggle with finding the right target group for the national NET-activities.

“With these activities that you should reach new target groups there is a big challenge, but the problem is not the NET activity itself, it is the communication. The activity is good and we have a good structure but the communication part.. it's about the promotion of the activity to a new target group where we fail. If we would be more successful in that part than we would get more participants and then more application. The communication part is failing. We don't reach the people we should reach.”

Some NAs are tackling this issue by working and co-creating the national NET-activities together with other organisations. It has been a strategic decision to find organisations that are closer to the field or closer to the young participants or are some other way good alliance to reach new target groups.

“We have an NGO who co-creates this with us. It is good practice to have someone from the field on board. It is meaningful that we have these organisations to work with. They are able to reach the right target groups. Maybe see a bit of creative ways of approaching. They are more flexible with their working ways and hours. it's not that bureaucratic. It lowers the step also for participants.”





"..so what we have tried for a few times is to find some kind of local partner organisation who is already experienced with the program and which is more known to this local once and ask them to be involved in inviting the local organisations and creating the program. Otherwise we are advertising and advertising.. The program is good and the solidarity projects are simple but still people are not coming. Only if the local person is coming and contacting them, then they are coming."

This co-creating organisation was chosen based on its expertise on the topic of solidarity and its recognized role in the field. Its prominent role in the local area and connection to the young participants were also important aspects of the selection for cooperation.

One specific group that seems to be an important target for many agencies were the municipalities, and this popped out in summaries from work plans and during interviews as well.

"We use the national activities for giving information about solidarity projects for municipalities."

"We invest a lot to support the newcomers and to get as many municipalities to participate in the program. "

It seems that some of the NAs have chosen to support and work with national and regional networks where the municipalities are present also. **Municipalities as one highlighted target group** can reflect the **impact of** the long-term activity (SNAC) [Europe Goes Local](#). The spotlight is on municipalities as an important and partly new target group for the European Solidarity Corps programme.

Conclusions:

- The target group in national NET-activities that are focusing on volunteering is mainly experienced program users.
- The activities are mainly for organisations or mentors. Only a few were targeted directly to young participants.
- Many of the activities are targeted to mentors.





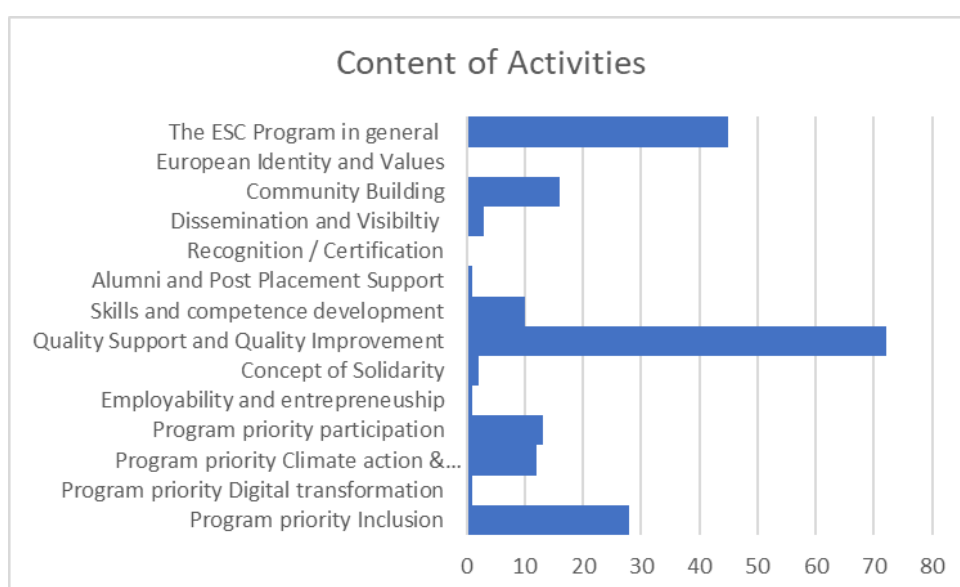
- Activities for solidarity projects are targeted for newcomers and young participants.
- The solidarity project type demands NAs to have a new approach.
- For reaching young participants some NAs are working and co-creating the national NET-activities together with other organisations.
- Municipalities seem to be an important target group for many agencies.

6. Content of the activities - aims and topics

Main aim of the national NET- activities are the **support for quality implementation of the program** and **spreading information about the Program** by educating potential applicants about the program possibilities.

Based on the pre-materials from the Commission and the NAs the content of national NET-activities are focusing on quality support and on sharing information about the European Solidarity Corps Program in general. Other popular topics are **community building** and **skills and competence development**.

Figure 6: Distribution of NET-activities by the content of the activities





This was visible also during interviews.

“Aim is to have good applications and support applicants and young people and also reach new audiences. ”

Community building is a topic that is tackled in several national NET-activities. During the interviews we got some insights into what the topic means. Many NA officers mentioned that one important purpose of national NET-activities is the **networking aspect**. Since networking among organisations within the civil society and volunteering sector seems to be an urgent need and raise at the same time the quality of ESC activities, NAs are supporting local and national networks through national NET-activities. They have set up their own networks for old program users or potential beneficiaries for NGOs or municipalities. The value of these national networks was highly valued - on one hand they are seen as tool to bring NAs and field closer to each other and on other hand offering a platform for NGOs and municipalities to share their experiences among themselves and in that way working as a channel to peer learning and support.

“The most important thing is that we provide for our national target group, national stakeholders, a space where they can interact with each other and where they can develop partnership on a national level and where they can find common paths and share with us their expectations or their challenges. These are networks that are developed within the program.”

The wish for further independent networking and capacity building possibilities for beneficiaries similar to KA1 or KA2 in Erasmus+ was also as mentioned in the previous analysis² by NET officers as well as requested in the position paper “Better conditions for youth volunteering”³ developed within the LTA Volunteering.

² SALTO ESC Analysis of international NET working activities 2020-22 available for NA officers [here](#)

³ <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4485/Concept%20paper%20SNAC%20-%20Final%20-%20dec%2023.pdf>

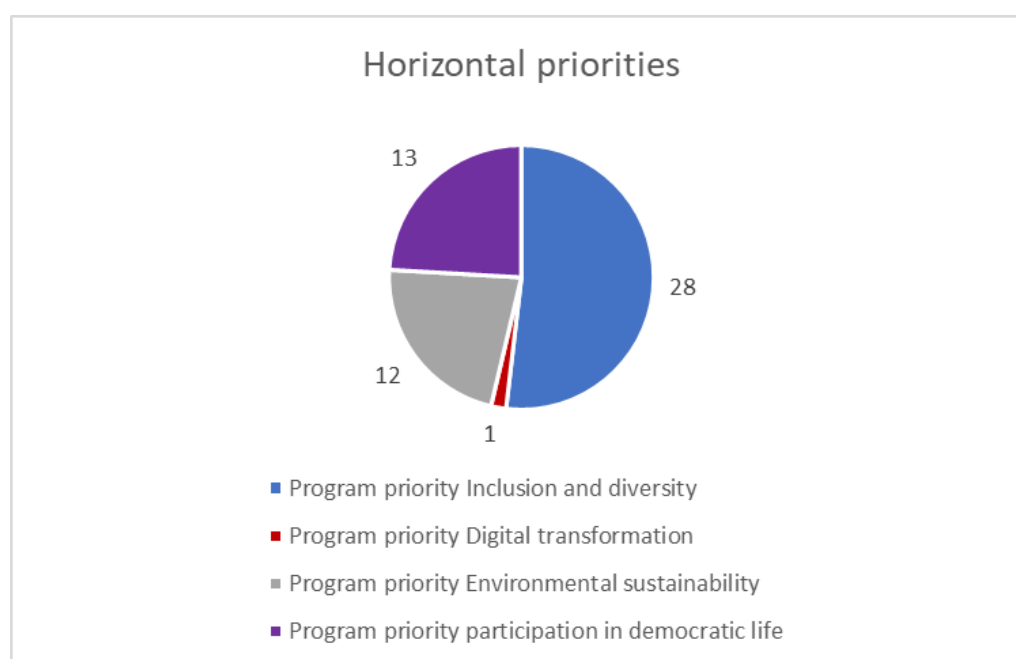




The horizontal program priorities are inclusion and diversity; digital transformation; environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action; and participation in democratic life. Based on the pre-data, the **most popular horizontal priority** for national NET-activities is **inclusion and diversity**. This is in line with results from “An analysis of NET-activities 2020-2022”, which focused on international NET activities. It indicates that inclusion is a firm part of the program and can be seen as an impact of the Inclusion and diversity strategy and the work of SALTO Inclusion & Diversity which has worked intensively for several years with the topic.

“Then we have very specific training for inclusion, we targeted it for inclusion organisations who don´t know so much about the program and we also help them to network and find new partners and we try to convince them to use the program.”

Figure 7: Ratio of national NET activities targeting the horizontal priorities



It was interesting to notice that from the new priorities participation in democratic life and environmental sustainability has a role as well. Participation in democratic life was mentioned often together with solidarity projects.





“Other focus is priorities; inclusion – to inspire and to understand. Then we have green priority, what is green and how can I make my project more green. And participation – we are engaging Europeans.”

6.1 Content of national activities for improving the volunteering activities

If we are looking closer, what does the data from NAs and from the Commission tell us about national activities for volunteering, several of the activities are focusing on quality and support. Many of the activities are **targeted to Quality Label organisation** and the activities are focusing on how to deal with qualitative ways the administrative aspects of the projects like writing the application, general project management, quality partners, how to use needed tools and portals and reporting. Knowing that the volunteering activity demands several steps and elements, it is understandable that the national NET- activities are focusing directly on these topics.



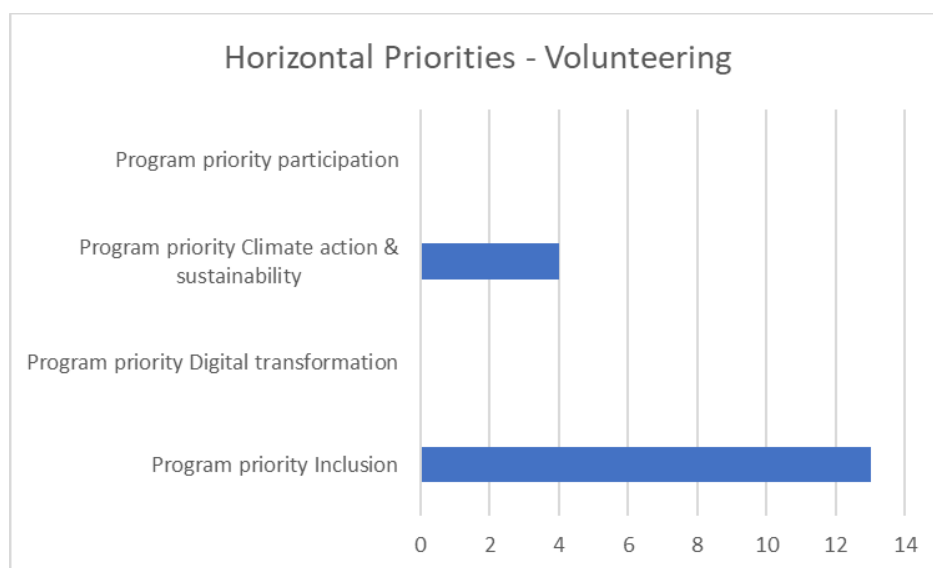
“The other activity is for giving support training for QL holders or for those who are in the process of getting QL. That is much based on the needs of the QL organisation. – It's about quality!”

Other than that, many of the national activities have a different approach. Some NAs have chosen to use the possibility to **dive deeper into** the new **horizontal program priorities** or other relevant topics.





Figure 8: Horizontal priorities in national NET activities for improving volunteering activities



Here you can find summary of the content of the national NET-activities based on work plans:

- Focusing on new priorities
- Tackling mental health topics
- Seminar about Inclusion for QL organisations
- Focusing on NGO's working with disabilities
- Focusing on rural areas
- How to support learning process
- Recognition of competencies gained in volunteering
- Supporting regional networking

Other purposes to use national activities were **training for mentors and trainers**. Many of the NAs are offering specific national activities for mentors to support them in their work. The content of these activities is to offer group consultations for mentors to share or reflect their mentoring work or offer tools and methods for specific topics like wellbeing and mental health.





"We have training for mentors. We have a long history with that. This is an important part since we think that mentoring has a huge role in volunteering projects. The training module works well; it's partly online and partly residential... we have two new topics included – sexual harassment and mental health."

"We have also had training for mentors about how to be a good mentor - how to reflect, how to use the Youthpass and everything that is part of the journey."

6.2 Content of National activities for solidarity projects

The national NET-activities for solidarity project are often **targeted directly to young participants**. The data showed that the content is often different kinds of project **writing Labs** or events where **young people** can **create project ideas**.

Another part of the activities is focusing on project management or other administrative aspects. Among those are activities **targeted to coaches**, who **are supporting young people to implement the project**.

"Training for coaches is very needed and based on real need from the field. There are young people who are interested in the project and even ready to write the application, but when they start to work more they need support and help. So we created this training and info-kit for potential coaches and maybe one day we will have a pool of coaches and we can connect the coaches with young people who need help with the project."

Some of the events have a nature of celebrating the activity and aim is to bring together young beneficiaries and make the project results visible. It is interesting to notice that when the activity is targeted to solidarity projects and directly to young people the non-formal methods (like *storytelling, treasure hunt, cinematic showcase*) of the activity is mentioned more often than in the information about the activities targeted to the volunteering or for organisations.





6.3 Trainings and network meetings - online and residential

Most of the activities are defined as training, seminar, network meeting or info session. Some of the activities are single, one time happening activities, but some of them are modules that are repeated regularly. One innovative activity that popped out during the interview was a national study visit among inclusion organisations. The aim was to inspire organisations to use the program through good examples and practices.

Data from NAs did not show in all cases how the activity was organised – on-line or residential. The interviews showed that **NAs are using both online and residential activities** smoothly and the format is chosen based on the nature of the activity.

“Some training is online and some residential, it depends on the target group and aim of the activity. One thing that is very important is that participants know that the NA is there for them. When they see you and can talk to you, it sends that message.”

It seems that COVID-times and fast transition to online activities left a permanent impact on NET-activities and nowadays NAs are using all formats when organising activities.





Conclusion:

- The content is focusing on quality support and the ESC Program in general.
- Other topics are community building and skills and competence development.
- NAs are supporting local and national networks through national NET-activities.
- Horizontal priorities are part of the content – inclusion is most popular.
- Some of the events have a nature of celebrating the activity and aim is to bring together young beneficiaries and make the project results visible, especially with solidarity projects.
- NAs are using both online and residential activities smoothly and it is based on the nature of the activity.

7. European dimension and link to international activities

The European Solidarity Corps is one of the programs of the European Commission, therefore the European dimension such as the horizontal program priorities and European values constitute part of the program. Actions that are funded under this program can be local and the biggest focus is on solidarity. One topic that was tackled during the interviews was how the national NET-activities are linked to the international activities and how the European dimension is present in national activities and also how the national activities feed international activities.

Based on the data from interviews, **direct link from national activities to international activities is rather weak**. Some officers mention promoting international options during the national activity, for instance if the national event is for mentors, it is often wise to promote similar international possibilities. Some NAs approach the **national activities as a pilot activity**. The national activities can be transformed to international if they turn out to be successful in national context.

"..but also preparing for international activities, like if the study visit at the national level is working well then we could next year start to organise the same activity internationally. So for us national activities can also be like preparing activities."





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"Our national project labs are on a digital platform so it would be very easy to make them international. We just need to take that step. I believe that would be a good way to do it. It's an inner discussion we are having now."

The **European dimension** instead seems to be more **clearly present in national NET-activities**, even though the answers were divided as well. In general interviewees told that since the national NET-activities are always about the European Solidarity Corps the European dimension is present through the Program. Looking deeper the content - interviewees explained that example the Youth Goals and horizontal priorities are often tackled.

"For solidarity projects infos we do talk about the program in general and the main goals of the program and that is the European dimension."

"..but the European dimension is definitely there, we go through Youth Goals and Solidarity aspects."

Some mentioned that they tried to bring the European dimension concretely present:

"Last time we had an organisation from another part of Europe on board to participate in our national activity.. that strengthened the European dimension. But I don't think we had it as a specific topic.. But last time we had this partner finding element on it."

Especially when interviewees talked about solidarity projects in general they mention that in many cases it is not clear for young participants that they are part of a bigger program:

"It is a bit challenging how we make the participants understand that they are part of a bigger program."

This topic led us to discuss what interviewees think about the fact that the European Solidarity Corps has the project type and other possibilities that are purely local. The view of the





interviewees was unanimous in saying that it is a good direction. It is especially reasonable because the program is about solidarity and topics related to that are often very local. **Local activities are also seen as a tool to bring the EU closer to local communities.**

"It is super great to have a program type that can be run locally! In some projects it is clear that they have this European dimension but in some projects it is more hard to find that connection.. in local projects maybe that should not be so important.. I mean the solidarity action is more important than the European dimension. But that's my opinion."

"In general it is a nice direction that we have national project types – it helps to bring the EU closer. But at the same time it is a challenge since you are forced to find an international level. It is easy to understand the European part of the project if it is international... but anyways it helps to bring the EU closer to the local communities."

Even when the local activities are seen as very valuable activities, many interviewees mention that for strengthening the European dimension it is good that there are international activities that are bringing local projects together like the "International Solidarity Project Meet-up" coordinated by SALTO ESC.

"..well yes the "Meet up" activity is nice!"

"It was really useful to have this Meet up! The wall of fame of solidarity projects was created, and that really shows that different countries have different ways of delivering the projects but the themes are the same!"





Conclusion:

- Even though some of the NAs are promoting international options during the national activity, the direct link from national activities to international activities are mainly weak.
- The European dimension instead seems to be more clearly present in national NET-activities; example the Youth Goals and horizontal priorities are tackled often
- For strengthening the European dimension it is good that there are international activities that are bringing local projects together like “Meet ups”.

8. Benefits, impacts and value

Assessing the benefits, impacts and value of the activities is essential, at the same time it is **very challenging**. With adequate number of activities in our sample and with a properly designed data collection carried out in the long run a quantitative study could be realised. Within the frame of this analysis we tackled the topic of impact in a qualitative way and asked several questions in the interviews to understand some aspects of the impact of the national NET- activities.

The interviews showed that the **impact of the national NET-activities is not systematically followed** by the agencies participating in this research, although many of them **recognize the need** to follow the impact more carefully.

“We should have more, I don't know more data, more statistics to follow up in different ways. We do use an evaluation form and ask “Do you feel more secure now to continue the implementation?” Based on the feedback the activities give more confidence to continue. More practical info and more tools for delivering quality projects.”

Some of the NAs suggest that the impact of the national NET-activities can be **seen in the increasing number of applications**.

“Most of the participants who join the activity will leave the application so it that sense the results and impact are clear, I would say 95% of them will be approved.”





In many cases **following up the impact is complicated** and often there are several layers, and it takes time to see what is the real impact in the end.

"I'm not sure if we have seen the results yet. This and that organisation applied or .. we see that sometimes but we could definitely check up that more carefully. But it is long-term, we don't see the result right away with organisations. It is also a bit difficult to measure.."

For that reason, we ended up talking about general insight about the values and impact of the national NET- activities, and how NA officers see the value. **Everyone recognizes the value of the national NET-activities** even if there is not necessarily any statistics about the impact and results while this analysis is also an attempt to support to capture the impact evidence-based. It is a firm part of the activities to collect feedback from participants and reports from co-creator organisations or trainers. The interviewees highlighted that the feedback is often very good and participants are valuing these activities.

"When I meet participants in general they are really satisfied. And we always have a small evaluation in the end and the message is that they want more."

Another positive impact of the national NET-activities are the national networks. Inside the networks **new partnerships are created** and **peer sharing and learning** are happening. These networks are built up for relevant youth work stakeholders or other important stakeholders regarding the European Solidarity Corps. The impacts of this kind of local networks would affect not just better use of the program but also the local or national youth work itself. Unfortunately, this analysis is not diving into that direction, but it is an interesting question to be further investigated.

"It's again the networking issue and exchanging experiences. Or getting them more inspired for further engagement. And that leads to better quality applications and projects – it is the overall aim of networking activities."





Another impact or result of national NET-activities is the supportive approach from NAs perceived by the applicants. Emphasised in the interviews, that these activities are **opportunities for the NAs to get closer to the field** and to tackle in the national needs and realities. These activities are one **channel for NAs practising and implementing the supportive approach**.

"It brings a lot of value. for some groups it would be possible to apply without this process they take part. Our NA is quite far from young people or the idea of solidarity. To understand that there is this kind of funds you need to open many doors, nobody is coming by accident to us. So we need to find a way to reach these target groups."

"They are very valuable to us. If we could have time, it would be wise to offer it even more! You can never offer too much support, I feel. And also the connection."

It is a way of creating the connection with the NA also. They are closer to us and are more comfortable to contact us with questions and so on.. And with this we reach people we would not reach with international NET activities and give specific support. It would be impossible with international activities at this level at least. "

These activities are highly appreciated by participants but also by NA officers. The **impact** can be seen as **better quality of the projects and increasing amount of the applications**. We dare to say based on the interviews that there is a fair chance that the **impact goes beyond** this, toward the direction that is harder to measure - to the working practices and approaches of NAs and even further to the local and national networks.

Conclusion:

- The impact of the national NET-activities is not systematically followed. Many recognize the need to follow the impact more carefully.
- Some of the NAs could recognize the impact of national NET-activities on increasing the number of applications.
- Another positive impact of the national NET-activities are the national networks; The impacts of this kind of local networks would affect not just better use of the program but also the local or national youth work itself, therefore this implies an indirect impact of the activities.





- National NET-activities also provide NAs the opportunity to become closer to the field.

9. Tips and tricks for NA officers

In the end of the interview we talked about good practices and tips and tricks that would be nice to share among colleagues. Here are some tips and tricks for you!

"Our process has been strategic to do something long term and repeat it and repeat it. If you lose one application deadline, there is another coming, so you always have something to offer. So this is my advice, you need to always have something to offer for the people who are interested."

"We targeted one activity for inclusion organisations. We have been invited for informal meetings with inclusion organisations, and we found out that there are a lot of organisations in the inclusion field, but they don't have any experience about the programs. During the training we focused on the inclusion inside the program and how we can combine their experience with the program. We had also experienced program users involved."

"My tip is to give space and time to participants to exchange experiences and challenges to let them speak. It's their space to meet and get to know each other."

"Very focused activities are working well .. like we had one just for sending volunteers and it was successful."

"The municipality network we have I think is something positive and also a network connecting other types of organisations depending on the needs to reach more and support and get that personal connection. I think that is a key for more quality applications."

"For us it is good to work with trainers. It's been a big added value to the training."





"Our good practice is to work with very narrowed and specific target groups. Then you can avoid the "tourist" even in national activities. Then you can achieve good results."

"For solidarity projects it is almost a must to have these regional partners to spread the information, it would be perfect if these regional partners could act like consultants and coaches afterward."

"Coaching for mentors, this is something that is really helpful. We have 4 coaching groups throughout the year. Two online, two residential. It really helps to support the mentors and through them the volunteers."

10. Hopes for the future

In the end of the interviews it was time to share the hopes for the future regarding the national NET-activities and regarding the whole European Solidarity Corps program. It was delightful to notice that throughout the interviews NA officers talked about the program with passion and excitement. Many mentions that the local, smaller projects are very important and valuable - even if they are small there is a big value when all over Europe young people are doing local projects or volunteering - doing good. They saw that now is the momentum for visibility - bringing this solidarity action on the spot light and spreading the word more. The hopes were towards the Commission to make these actions part of the official communications.

"I think it is good and valuable that we have this chance to support very local projects but I think we are losing the.. momentum.. we are not making a fuss about it. There's so much of this small solidarity action in Europe, we should bring it out much more. I don't see Commission communication ever mention solidarity projects. They are small and individual, but they are many so somehow maximise the effect. Especially the word of solidarity since we have it in the program and seeing how cruel the world is and getting cruller.. and there is this kind of (solidarity project) happening. Young people want to change Europe to be better. The momentum is here and the value is the mass effect that there are many projects around Europe, but no one is talking about them."





The one hope was generally saving the idea of solidarity also in the future. Some were referring to the possibility of combining Erasmus+ and Solidarity Corps. The fear of losing something that is achieved with the European Solidarity Corps program was mentioned.

"I hope that all the achievements that are there.. solidarity - the essence of the program, that it will not be forgotten. We don't know what the future holds, but in the case there will be changes in 2028 that still the idea of solidarity and communities would stay."

Some of the hopes were really practical about NET or funding rules or hopes for more budget in general. One specific hope was to bringing local actions together and organise more this "Meet up"-events.

"It would be nice to have some channels, some ways of solidarity projects youngsters from different countries could connect to each other and discuss together about different solidarity actions. They could also inspire others, I think solidarity is that as well."

"And meet ups! More meet ups for solidarity projects, both national but also European."

Based on the result of this analysis it is clear that national NET-activities are an important element of the European Solidarity Corp program. They are valued by participants and NA officers. Even though there is still room for improvement like following up more systematically the results and impacts and creating tools to find the new audience easier, it is an instrument to directly affect the quality of the projects.

"For us it is an important budget to use on specific needs we know exist in our country. It would be different if we would need to use that money in international activities. Because we would have to select less participants. We would have to respond to the needs that are not that close to. With the national participants we have a closer





approach – we can also use our own language. It is a totally different approach.. it is a good space to create something and connect with specific target groups.”

Main element from the wishes of NA colleagues:

- More Visibility for the European Solidarity Corps program
- Saving the idea of Solidarity
- Some of the hopes were really practical about NET or funding rules or hopes for more budget in general.
- One specific hope was mentioned couple of times was to bringing local actions together and organise more “Solidarity project Meet-ups´ s” – national and European editions





Conclusions and the way forward

The **national NET-activities** are used in many ways but the key role of these activities is to **ensure the quality of the project implementation**. Based on this analysis, the value of the national NET-activities is evident, but using this tool more efficiently by the **NAs** would **need** some more **support** in terms of **how to use the activities more strategically** and with a wider outreach to the target groups.

The analysis revealed some good practices (eg.: co-creating national NET-activities together with the organisations from the field, organising national study visits) which could be more widely spread among the members of the NA Network. Sharing how NAs are planning and implementing the National NET-activities, could be an interesting topic for NET-officers during their common meetings.

For measuring the impact of the activities would require a **systematic data collection**, which may come to reality with the establishment of the Cooperation Board. That could benefit not just the follow up of the impact but also future development of the activities with evident-based materials.

Based on this analysis we can conclude that **SALTO European Solidarity Corps has a role in several aspects** in how the national NET funding is used. The hope for overall visibility of the program, organising activities that are bringing local activities together like “Meet ups” and connecting NA officers for sharing and learning from each other and also producing materials that support NAs work - are all areas where the SALTO has a role of glueing and connecting different pieces.

As this piece of work could not come to life without the contribution of the colleagues, in the very end, **many thanks to the NA colleagues and to the Commission** helping us conduct this analysis!





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