

Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps: two programs, one shared ambition

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Understanding their differences, leveraging their complementarities, and strengthening their synergies

1. Introduction and context

Youth engagement is a **strategic priority** for the European Union. In France, two key programs structure this engagement: **Civic Service** and the **European Solidarity Corps**, both overseen by the French Civic Service Agency (Agence du Service Civique).

While both initiatives are guided by common values of social cohesion and solidarity, they differ in their **implementation modalities, legal frameworks, and funding mechanisms**. This study, financed by the **SNAC Volunteering** European interagency cooperation body and conducted by **Orisha Consulting** for the **French Civic Service Agency**, aims to **analyze the complementarities** between these two programs, highlight their synergies, and propose recommendations to **optimize their alignment**.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Are the two programs **complementary**?
- What are the **challenges and opportunities** for both volunteers and host organizations?
- How can their **visibility and coordination** be improved?
- Can the French model serve as a **source of inspiration** for other countries?

The objective of this study is to provide an **operational and structured analysis** that enhances the impact of both Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps in France and across Europe.



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2. Key Findings

The study has demonstrated that **Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps are not competing programs**, but rather complementary ones. Their combination **enhances the impact of missions** and **enriches the volunteers' experience**.

More Effective Programs When Combined

Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps complement each other by **offering young people both local and international engagement opportunities**, which are accessible to **diverse profiles** and aligned with **both national and European priorities**.

Natural pathways have emerged between the two programs, enabling young people to engage in complementary experiences that alternate between local and international missions, short-term and long-term formats, as well as individual and collective projects, **depending on their aspirations and personal development**.

A Synergy Built by Organizations and Volunteers

Findings from the study indicate that **beyond centralized institutional management**, host organizations actively **leverage** the strengths of each program to maximize their impact. By combining Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps, they diversify their initiatives, tailor their projects to the profiles and objectives of volunteers, enrich their teams, and foster knowledge exchange among young people from diverse backgrounds.

As a matter of fact, the study highlights that the complementarity between these programs relies **primarily on their adoption by host organizations** and volunteers themselves, who integrate them into real-world contexts as a complement to institutional guidelines.

The interconnection between Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps is therefore not limited to a simple theoretical complementarity. It generates **significant impacts** on institutions, volunteers, and society as a whole.

Tangible impacts

This **bottom-up approach** must be encouraged and reinforced, as it allows for a **better adaptation to local realities** and a **smoother integration** of volunteers into both local and international projects.

The study highlights several concrete benefits of aligning Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps:

→ **Institutional:** Strengthened **local and international cooperation** for sustainable engagement.

→ **Policy-Level:** Enhanced connections between **citizen participation and public policies**, promoting solidarity and inclusion.

→ **For Volunteers:** Greater **skills development, increased intercultural awareness, and more active youth participation**.

→ **Societal:** The creation of **resilient communities** through knowledge-sharing and collective action.



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3. Recommendations for Strengthening Synergies and Maximizing Impact

Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps are **two complementary programs** that provide young people with enriching engagement opportunities. While they are based on distinct legal frameworks, its own administrative and regulatory constraints and under distinct legal frameworks, **strategic adjustments** can **enhance their**

articulation and accessibility.

In this respect, the study identifies **four key areas for improvement** to increase the efficiency, inclusivity, and long-term impact of both programs, while respecting their institutional specificities.



Operational Recommendations

- ✓ **Harmonize and streamline administrative tools** to reduce redundancies and errors, fostering **efficient interconnectivity** between programs.
- ✓ **Simplify procedures** (accreditation, certification, volunteer management) and develop shared databases for optimized tracking of volunteers and host structures.
- ✓ **Enhance knowledge-sharing and collaboration** through joint training sessions and dedicated communication platforms.
- ✓ **Modernize digital platforms** by **integrating mission impact tracking and evaluation tools.**
- ✓ **Encourage collaborative projects** by facilitating joint Civic Service and European Solidarity Corps missions and promoting resource-sharing and best practices among host organizations.
- ✓ **Strengthen cross-border mobility** by removing administrative barriers and promoting environmentally sustainable solutions for European volunteer missions.

1



Social Recommendations

- ✓ **Increase accessibility** by developing tailored support measures for disadvantaged youth and clarifying beneficiary status.
- ✓ **Establish an alumni network** to foster mentorship, experience-sharing, and the recognition of volunteer engagement.
- ✓ **Recognize acquired skills** by creating a joint certification system between Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps, facilitating their recognition by employers and academic institutions.
- ✓ **Facilitate post-mission transitions** by creating pathways to employment and education through partnerships with businesses, universities, and NGOs.
- ✓ **Promote environmental engagement** by integrating more missions focused on climate and ecological challenges.

2



Strategic Recommendations

- ✓ **Introduce more flexibility** by developing **short-term engagement options** within Civic Service to better accommodate young people's constraints.
- ✓ **Expand eligibility criteria** to diversify access to volunteering, including career changers and individuals from non-traditional backgrounds.
- ✓ **Align national and European priorities** by reinforcing coherence between both programs, avoiding overlap and optimizing coordination.
- ✓ **Develop structured engagement pathways** between Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps, allowing volunteers to **alternate** between national and European experiences.
- ✓ **Prioritize strategic thematic missions** in key areas such as mental health, digital education, and environmental sustainability, while reinforcing partnerships with public and private stakeholders.

3



Legal Recommendations

- ✓ **Harmonize volunteer rights** by establishing a **common regulatory framework**, particularly regarding compensation and social coverage between Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps.
- ✓ **Enhance legal recognition of volunteer-acquired skills** by integrating them into academic and professional certification systems (e.g., ECTS credits).
- ✓ **Support rural and overseas volunteering** by implementing incentives for host organizations and adapting programs to local realities.
- ✓ **Simplify access to European funding** by **clarifying co-financing rules and reducing administrative burdens** for host organizations.
- ✓ **Establish a unified European volunteer status** ensuring **harmonized rights** in social protection, stipends, and skill recognition to facilitate youth mobility and engagement across borders.

4

The French model: a source of inspiration?

The French model demonstrates the possibility of strengthened coexistence between national and European volunteer programs by **promoting their complementarities and synergies**, while offering young people a wide range of mission opportunities, both in France and internationally.

Its centralized governance, overseen by the French Civic Service Agency, ensures overall coherence, facilitating access to engagement opportunities while creating a **resonance chamber** that enhances their visibility and maximizes their impact for both volunteers and host organizations.

This unique structure, while allowing significant ownership by local stakeholders, serves as a **source of inspiration** for other European countries seeking to better coordinate their volunteer programs.



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Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps embody an **ambitious and innovative vision of youth engagement**. By linking a national program with a European initiative, they provide young people with a **wide range of experiences** that **strengthen their civic commitment, skills, and employability**.

This model, unique in its complementarity and scope, offers a **relevant response to the challenges of a rapidly evolving society by combining local solutions with international perspectives**. The recommendations outlined in this report follow a **continuous improvement approach**, aiming to **maximize the potential** of these

programs while meeting the expectations of stakeholders.

By strengthening their alignment, enhancing accessibility, and amplifying their impact, Civic Service and the European Solidarity Corps can become key drivers for a youth that is engaged, united, and actively shaping its future, both in France and across Europe.

This study is therefore intended to be replicated and adapted to other national contexts, taking into account local specificities and the unique dynamics of each territory.