



# Volunteering

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During its current mandate, The European Parliament has played an important role in scrutinizing the work of the Commission in relation to volunteering through producing evidence based assessments of active volunteering initiatives. It has used these reports to call for improvements to the EU's volunteering policy and volunteering initiatives to increase the uptake and impact of volunteering across Europe.

## Erasmus +

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The European Parliament has closely followed the implementation of the EU funding programme dedicated to education, training, youth and sport, Erasmus +, which was launched in 2014. A conference hosted by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and a hearing hosted by the European People's Party in 2015 gave stakeholders the opportunity to welcome the programme while **raising several issues** which included a lack of consistency in the application of regulations in different member states.

The European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) decided to undertake an implementation report on the Erasmus+ Programme, for which Milan Zver (EPP, Slovenia) was appointed rapporteur in September 2015. In support of this work the European Parliamentary Research Service carried out a European Implementation Assessment looking at centralised and decentralised implementation while the EP Policy Department did a study looking specifically at decentralised implementation. The studies which were published in July 2016 praise the project for its balanced objectives but express concern that the lack of funding and low applicant success rate could have a negative influence on uptake of the programme in the future.

### **Barriers to cross-border volunteering**

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In 2015 The European Parliamentary Research Service carried out an [analysis of cross-border volunteering](#) and concluded that the costs associated with barriers to cross-border volunteering amount to an estimated average of around €65 million per year. It highlighted barriers such as the lack of legal recognition (leading to the loss of social security and unemployment benefits), lack of consistent recognition of the skills and diversity in recruitment, and inadequate training for cross-border volunteers and called for EU action to address these issues

### **The European Solidarity Corps (ESC)**

In October 2016 The Policy Department for Structural Cohesion Policies produced an assessment of the legislative proposal for the establishment of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) on the request of the Committee on Culture and Education.

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produced **an assessment** of the legislative proposal for the establishment of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) on the request of the Committee on Culture and Education. This study highlighted the value of the ESC, the complementarity to paid employment and the linkages to other EU programmes. While it welcomed the initiative in principle, it highlighted several concerns about the proposal. Some of the most serious concerns raised include the level of engagement of stakeholders, feasibility to achieve 100,000 solidarity activities, ability to assure participation of disadvantaged groups, and a lack of a monitoring system.

Also in October 2016, members of the European Parliament passed a resolution on Volunteering and the European Voluntary Service. This resolution called on the Commission to enable people of any age to include those outside the 18-30 age bracket, and also include people living outside the EU to take part in volunteer programmes such as the European Voluntary Service (EVS). It highlighted that barriers to volunteering needed to be removed through creating a volunteering legal framework with clear rights and responsibilities for all stakeholders, and increasing funding for volunteering programmes such as EU Aid Volunteers, EVS and ESC. It also called on the Commission to better publicise its volunteering programmes and create a simpler application process for both volunteers and organisations.

## **Towards 2019**

The work of the European Parliament during this mandate has played an important role in monitoring various volunteering initiatives and related policy, and calling for improvements and increased allocation of resources to make volunteering more accessible and impactful for European citizens. However to ensure that substantive changes are made, the Parliament needs to exert increased pressure on the commission in a few key areas. The Parliament must encourage Member states and the Commission to set up a single point of contact in the form of a service with responsibility for volunteering policy and coordination between the Commission and various institutions. At present this responsibility is shared between several DGs including the including DG Education and Culture and DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.

Furthermore the Parliament must do more to highlight the need for a European legal framework for volunteering as this would contribute to a more equal treatment of volunteers, enhancing their mobility within the EU.

Finally the Parliament should set up a European Parliament Volunteering Intergroup. The establishment of this intergroup is necessary to support an on-going commitment of the European Parliament towards the further development of a comprehensive EU agenda on volunteering and to foster citizens and civil society organizations' involvement in democratic life in Europe.

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