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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EX-ANTE EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a

REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing the European Solidarity Corps programme and repealing [European Solidarity Corps Regulation] and Regulation (EU) No 375/2014

{COM(2018) 440 final} - {SWD(2018) 317 final} - {SWD(2018) 319 final}

The EU is built on solidarity: solidarity between its citizens, solidarity across borders between its Member States, and solidarity in its action inside and outside the Union. In response to the political resolve to do more for young people, the European Commission initiated the European Solidarity Corps in December 2016. It followed up with a proposal for a Regulation in May 2017. Given the similarities with the existing EU Aid Volunteers initiative, in 2018 the Commission analysed the possibility of merging the two programmes. This would extend the scope of European Solidarity Corps activities to include those in support of humanitarian aid operations.

The European Solidarity Corps enhances the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high quality solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity and democracy in Europe and abroad, addressing societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with particular effort to promote social inclusion.

The proposed Regulation is accompanied by an *ex ante* evaluation, which analyses the benefits of extending the scope of activities. The evaluation focused on two options:

1) to continue implementing the European Solidarity Corps without including activities in support of humanitarian aid operations, which would continue to be implemented through EU Aid Volunteers; and

2) to extend the European Solidarity Corps to include such activities.

These two options were identified, analysed and compared taking into account relevant evaluations (such as the mid-term evaluations of EU Aid Volunteers and Erasmus+) and the recent public consultation on values and mobility. In particular, option 2 would do the following:

- It would consider all participants under a common roster, improving the transparency and speed of the recruitment process;
- It would have single branding and communication activities. This would increase the outreach of activities to promote the programme, making it the 'one-stop-shop' for solidarity activities carried out by young people;
- It would have a single implementation mechanism. All organisations and projects would use the same e-form to apply for the quality label and funding. This would simplify procedures for the organisations and reduce the overall management cost;
- It would bring significant synergies and cost savings by maintaining a single set of tools and systems.

Based on this analysis, option 2 (extending the scope of the European Solidarity Corps) proved to be the option that would deliver better results. This option will provide a clear and single access point for organisations and young people and will make solidarity activities more visible. It will embed a more inclusive approach through a dedicated inclusion strategy. It will provide quality placements and preparation of the young participants through a series of specific qualitative processes and criteria (such as the quality label for organisations, training, insurance, etc.). It will bring new synergies between the activities and their recognition as it will put them in one common framework and help create new networks between people and organisations with common aspirations for solidarity. Option 2 will also allow management costs to be decreased at the same time as the programme's effects are increased (resulting in more value for money). In particular, four main gains in efficiency are envisaged.

- Insurance, cost per participant: savings achieved through a common contract with insurance, as opposed to having two contracts;
- Management fee per participant: increased efficiency in the use of the management fee thanks to the use of a highly effective delivery mechanism. This is composed of the Erasmus National Agencies (at decentralised level) and the European Commission and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (at centralised level);
- Maintenance of the web platform, including the portal and the online training platform: savings through maintenance of one platform instead of two;
- Outreach and communications: increased effectiveness of the communication (in the number of young people and organisations reached) and its efficiency (in cost per participant).

The *ex ante* evaluation identified several possible challenges for the programme. These can arise, firstly, from implementation of the current European Solidarity Corps (including the slow uptake in the occupational strand, the need to improve cooperation with national schemes and the lack of an inter-generational dimension) and, secondly from the extension of the scope to include activities in support of humanitarian aid operations (the need to simplify the process and procedures governing the programme and to increase the speed at which volunteers can be deployed to carry out humanitarian related activities). Furthermore, a risk assessment was carried out, which identified several risks that the programme faces. The ex-ante proposes, both for the challenges and the risks, appropriate measures to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

With regards to the specific objective, one has been identified. It encompasses the three main purposes of the programme, aiming at a) providing easily accessible opportunities for young people in the field of solidarity, b) to ensuring that those activities are properly validated, and c) ensuring efforts to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities. This specific objective was translated into two main operational objectives, one focusing on the types of placements offered, the other focusing on quality and support measures aiming at guaranteeing the highest quality standards during the implementation.

Finally, the *ex ante* evaluation also provides for a detailed monitoring and evaluation framework which will be used to monitor the outputs of the programme and evaluate its impact. The detailed monitoring framework suggested includes three key performance indicators which measure the outputs of the programme with regards to its specific objective, plus 22 underlying indicators, to monitor the performance of the operational objectives. For future evaluations, the *ex ante* suggests an evaluation matrix which highlights possible questions and data-gathering methods to measure the impact of the programme.