

## **Opinion of the German Association on the European Solidarity Corps**

The opinion (DV 05/17) was adopted on 27 April 2017.

**Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.  
(German Association for Public and Private Welfare) – the forum for  
the social sector since 1880.**

The German Association for Public and Private Welfare (Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.) is the joint forum of municipalities and non-statutory social welfare organisations and their social services in Germany, the Länder (federal states) and academia in all fields of social work and social policy. Through its experience and expertise, it monitors and shapes policy and legislation in relation to children, young people and families, the social insurance system, social assistance, assistance for the elderly, care and rehabilitation, social volunteering, the planning and management of social work and social services as well as international and European social policy and social legislation.



Deutscher Verein  
für öffentliche  
und private Fürsorge e.V.

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## Preliminary Remarks

With its communication from 7 December 2016, the European Commission began with the implementation of a European Solidarity Corps.<sup>1</sup> The European Solidarity Corps consists of two strands – volunteering and occupational strand – and is aimed at young people under the age of 30.<sup>2</sup> For 2017, initial measures are already underway and are financed via existing EU programmes. In addition, the Commission has announced a proposal for a legal basis which should justify an independent strand within the EU household in order to secure funding for the European Solidarity Corps beyond 2017 as well. In light of this announcement, the Office of the German Association for Public and Private Welfare gives its opinion on the volunteering strand of the European Solidarity Corps. The opinion is aimed at the European Commission, the Council of the European Union (EU) and the government of the Federal Republic of Germany in relation to its actions within the Council of the EU.

The German Association has already expressed its support for a stronger socio-political focus of the European Union on several occasions<sup>3</sup> and in this context supports the Commission's goal to strengthen solidarity within and between European societies with the European Solidarity Corps. The German Association endorses the idea of the European Solidarity Corps to enhance social cohesion by supporting social commitment and encourage a European identity among young people, in particular, through the international exchange. With regard to the implementation, however, it criticises the lack of early and broad-based involvement of civil society.

## Clear distinction between volunteering and occupation

In the opinion of the German Association, labour market neutrality is one of the core principles in the area of volunteering.<sup>4</sup> Civic involvement may not replace employment subject to social insurance contributions. Accordingly the close link between the voluntary strand and the occupational strand in the European Solidarity Corps should be viewed critically. The key feature of volunteering compared to employment is its intrinsic value as an educational and training function. Volunteering fosters personality development and offers biographic and professional orientation. Accompanying educational programmes that go beyond the qualification for the respective placement of the volunteers are thus a necessary requirement.<sup>5</sup> Designing it as a learning service is also relevant against

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1 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A European Solidarity Corps, 7 December 2016, COM (2016) 942 final.

2 The European Solidarity Corps is intended to support solidarity among young people in Europe. Those interested can register via an online web portal and are put in touch with the organisations offering a placement. Their projects can last between two and twelve months and can be designed either as a volunteer project or employment, internship or training. The areas of placement range from environmental and nature conservation over culture and sport to social work and the inclusion and integration of refugees.

3 Opinion of the German Association on the Consultations on a European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://www.deutscher-verein.de/en/uploads/dateien-stab-internationales/dv-21-16-opinion-consultation-epsr.pdf> (06.06.17).

4 Positionen und Handlungsempfehlungen des Deutschen Vereins zur verbesserten Ausgestaltung der Freiwilligendienste und deren Einbindung in eine Gesamtstrategie zur Stärkung und zur Förderung des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements, NDV 2013, 104 ff.

5 Ibid.



the background of integrating low educated and disadvantaged young people. The European Solidarity Corps should, in particular, also be laid out attractively for those young people who are typically underrepresented as volunteers – on a national level as well as across Europe. These so-called uninvolved groups would especially profit from the function as a learning service because they acquire important key qualifications as well as discover their potentials and interests.

The German Association calls for a constantly monitoring of the effects of volunteering on the labour market.<sup>6</sup> In view of the close connection between voluntary and occupational activities, it is also important that the European Solidarity Corps is connected with suitable measures ensuring labour market neutrality. Germany has had good experience with organisations serving as an official placement officer between the volunteer and the final placement (“Trägerprinzip”). These placement officers have a consulting and brokering function which includes the maintenance of labour market neutrality.

## **Take advantage of the strong interest: Make sufficient funds available**

From the perspective of the German Association, sufficient funding for volunteering must be ensured in a long term perspective in order to avoid negative effects on the motivation of volunteers, placement and other involved organisations.<sup>7</sup> The multitude of interested young people who have already registered online for the European Solidarity Corps would be bitterly disappointed if their interests were crushed because of a lack of funds for the programme. This experience would not only be extremely counterproductive for the future willingness to volunteer, but it should also be avoided in light of the fact that the European Solidarity Corps shall strengthen young people’s European identity. The voluntary commitment in another European country may not fail because sufficient funds are not available. Therefore, the German Association highly welcomes the Commission’s announcement to make additional funds available for the European Solidarity Corps.<sup>8</sup>

## **Clearly regulate the relation to the existing infrastructure in the Member States**

The German Association recommends that volunteering shall be imbedded in an overall strategy of civic involvement.<sup>9</sup> Here the various forms of civic involvement should be given recognition equally. For this, citizens who get involved in society voluntarily need stable framework conditions. Therefore, the diverse infrastructure to support civic involvement in the Member States must be taken into consideration when implementing the European Solidarity Corps. In the

<sup>6</sup> Forderungen des Deutschen Vereins zur Weiterentwicklung der Freiwilligendienste, NDV 2012, 155 f.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Announcement by the Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, Günther Oettinger, on the stakeholder forum at the EU Commission on 12 April 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 6

German Association's view an unproductive competition with other forms of volunteering must be avoided at all costs,<sup>10</sup> both with existing national programmes as well as with the European Voluntary Service. In order to effectively achieve the goals and to avoid a crowding-out effect, the placement of volunteers should be across borders. The Commission's communication<sup>11</sup> is not clear on the question of the placement country for the volunteers. While the German version speaks about the placement abroad, other language versions among them English and French contain an indication that the placement is also possible in the home country. The German Association requests the Commission to remove existing ambiguities in the wording. It is recommended that the effects of volunteering with regard to parallel structures and to the development of other forms of civic involvement are carefully observed.<sup>12</sup>

## **Enhance a broad culture of recognition**

The German Association promotes the enhancement of a broad culture of recognition in the area of civic involvement.<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging the commitment to societal issues can come in many forms like for example taking recognition when young people apply for a university place or when certificate the qualifications acquired during volunteering. For the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps, the German Association suggests to enhance a broad culture of recognition from the beginning and to implement procedures of acknowledging the volunteering.

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10 Stellungnahme des Deutschen Vereins zum Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Einführung eines Bundesfreiwilligendienstes, NDV 2011, 266 ff.

11 See footnote 1

12 See footnote 4

13 Empfehlungen des Deutschen Vereins für den Ausbau einer Anerkennungskultur in den Freiwilligendiensten, NDV 2016, 347 ff.



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Published by:

Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.

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