

MEPs support solidarity action by young volunteers

- New European Solidarity and Voluntary Service supports volunteering, traineeships and job placements
- Young people aged between 17 and 30 and non-profit organisations can take part
- 341,5 million Euros for the period 2018-2020

The “European Solidarity and Voluntary Service” (ESVS) supports young people to volunteer or work in EU-wide solidarity schemes, e.g. on education, health and environment.

The initiative, endorsed by Members of the Culture and Education Committee on Wednesday, will be the main entry-point of solidarity activities within the EU. 341.5 million Euros will be made available between 2018-2020, with 95% financing volunteering and 5% for traineeships and job placements. This will help participants to gain skills and knowledge for their future long-term prospects.

The ESVS will support young people and non-profit organisations from all over Europe to engage in a wide range of solidarity-related activities related to education, health, protecting the environment, disaster prevention, provision of food and non-food items, reception and integration of migrants and asylum seekers. Young people should be over 18, but not more than 30 at the beginning of the volunteering or work activities, while hosting organisations have to be awarded the “ESVS quality label” in order to participate and ask for financing in the framework of the initiative.

A multilingual and interactive web portal will be made available for both young people and organisations to advertise or search for volunteering, traineeships or job placements, but also to get language training, financial and administrative support, for example for travel, accommodation and health and social insurance, as well as post-placement support. It should also ensure that the quality of placements and participant organisations are evaluated.

Participation of disadvantage people is essential

MEPs insist that those with less opportunities, such as persons with disabilities, or those from isolated or marginalised communities LGBT people, young people with learning or health difficulties should have easy access to the programme. The European Commission and member states have to put in place special measures and a tailored-made guide and placements for them.

They should also benefit from specific administrative support and all the supplementary costs related to their participation is 100% financed by the programme.

Avoid exploitation of young people

Members call for a clear distinction between volunteering activities and job placements, to ensure that no participating organisation uses young people as unpaid volunteers when potential quality jobs are available. Participant organisations should subscribe to a quality charter setting out agreed objectives and principles.

To support young people, skills and competences acquired during their placement will be recognised and validated by a Youth Pass, including also the total number of hours volunteered.

Quote

“We want this initiative to be a flagship programme, like Erasmus+” said rapporteur Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, DE). “We want to really focus on disadvantaged people, to give them a real opportunity to engage in cross-border volunteering activities. We are very committed to fighting against unemployment, but for this programme we want a clear balance between volunteering and jobs”, she added.

Next steps

The text approved by the CULT Committee and the mandate to enter into negotiations with the Council and the European Commission should be confirmed by the plenary. After that, EP negotiators can begin talks for the final legislation.