

**Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes**

**RESEARCH PROJECT
ON THE RESEARCH-BASED
ANALYSIS AND MONITORING OF
THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS
(RAY-SOC)**

CONCEPT NOTE FOR 2022–2023

18 OCTOBER 2021

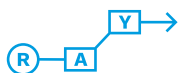


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1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

In 2008, the RAY Network was founded with the aim to contribute to quality assurance and quality development in the implementation of the European Union's Youth in Action Programme (2007–2013). To that end, the initial network partners developed a framework for the first and core research project of the network: standard surveys for project participants and project teams. These standard surveys were further developed at the start of the next programme generation, Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014–2020), resulting in a core research project on the research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY-MON), which was subsequently complemented by this research project on the research-based analysis and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps (RAY-SOC).

Owed to a number of factors, many of which we illustrate in our RAY-SOC research report from June 2020¹, the introduction of the European Solidarity Corps has been bumpy in many countries and for several activity and project types². This jolted start, and in particular the incompleteness and dysfunction of several databases and IT-tools, paired with a lack of procedural clarity with regards to data protection, has also had an effect on our ability to conduct a full-fledged monitoring, because the contact data needed to invite participants and project teams was not available and/or could not be used for survey invitations. The sudden arrival of the coronavirus pandemic has delayed our efforts to resolve these technical and legal issues.

Taking a step back from this snapshot in time, and looking at the wider picture, we recognise that a number of key characteristics framing our work have changed considerably. Crucially, access to the internet has drastically changed in the 12+ years since we started monitoring the European youth programmes. Eurostat reports that the share of EU-27 households with internet access has risen to 90% in 2019, from 64% in 2009³. Young people in particular, Eurostat also observes, access the internet much more frequently with their mobile phones rather than a laptop. In 2019, 92% of young people used their mobile phones to access the internet, compared to 52% using a mobile computer, a device gap that is widening⁴.

Taking all these developments into consideration, the RAY Network will conduct a special programmatic study on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps in 2021, and then allow RAY-SOC to follow the lead of RAY-MON and benefit from our work on modularising and shortening the RAY monitoring surveys, with an emphasis on mobile-first survey design. Monitoring surveys for the European Solidarity Corps will then be conducted in alternation with RAY-MON, with RAY-SOC covering the funding years 2023, 2025 and 2027.

¹ Akarçesme, S. & Fennes, H. (2020). *Exploring the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps during its first year*. Available online at <https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/01-RAY-Report-20200608.pdf>.

² Traineeships and jobs, for example, have been used by less than 100 young people since the start of the programme.

³ Eurostat (2020). *Digital economy and society statistics – households and individuals*. Based on data extracted in September 2020. Accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals.

⁴ Eurostat (2020). *Being young in Europe today – digital world*. Based on data extracted in July 2020. Accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world.



2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project aims to contribute to quality assurance and quality development in the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps (2021–2027), to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development and youth work practice, and to a better understanding of volunteering, learning and youth activism in the context of solidarity actions of young people.

2.2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The key objectives of this research project are to

- explore the effects of projects funded through the European Solidarity Corps on project participants and project teams and their communities, networks and organisations;
- study the profiles of project participants, project partnerships, project teams, and support teams, both at individual and organisational level;
- analyse access to the European Solidarity Corps from the perspective of young people as well as youth and youth sector bodies, groups, networks and organisations;
- explore the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps through the lens of key programme stakeholders, both at project and programme level.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The core research questions of the project are:

- What are the effects of European Solidarity Corps projects on project participants and project teams, on their groups/networks/organisations, and on their communities and contexts?
- What is the environment of European Solidarity Corps projects, in particular regarding access to and the implementation of the programme, the individual and organisational profiles of actors, and the development, implementation, management and support of projects?
- How can the findings of this research project strengthen the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps and support evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development and youth work practice?

3.2. UNDERPINNING RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The underpinning research questions of the project are:

- What are the effects of participating in European Solidarity Corps projects on the development of key competences of project participants and project teams?



- What are the effects of participating in European Solidarity Corps projects on the educational and professional pathways of project participants and project team members?
- What are the effects of European Solidarity Corps projects on the youth work competences and practices of youth workers and youth leaders involved in the programme?
- How and to which extent do European Solidarity Corps projects contribute to the aims, objectives and priorities of the programme?
- How do effects differ between different formats and types of volunteering and solidarity projects, as well as different roles and tasks in these projects?
- What are the profiles of project participants, project partnerships, project teams, and support teams, and what does this say about access to the programme?

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

4.1. SPECIAL PROGRAMMATIC STUDY

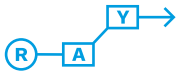
In light of the special circumstances, the RAY Network will conduct a special programmatic study on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps (2018 to 2020) in 2021. The study will be based on the approach of the initial RAY-SOC study on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps during its first year, which will be refined and extended.

4.2. MULTILINGUAL ONLINE SURVEYS

Beyond the special programmatic study, the overall research design is based on multilingual online surveys of key programme stakeholders, including project participants, project teams, support teams and bodies, groups, networks and organisations. This approach allows to survey actors involved in volunteering activities and solidarity projects funded through the European Solidarity Corps several weeks after their activity/project ended. The timing facilitates a more deliberate and nuanced reflection on their experience. It also offers the possibility to ask about initial perceptions of the effects of their involvement in a volunteering activity/solidarity project, whether as a project participant or member of a project team. The surveys will be conducted every two years, covering the funding years 2023, 2025 and, if relevant, 2027.

4.3. CORE SURVEY MODULES

As part of the modularisation of the RAY monitoring surveys, we will develop core modules which every respondent will be asked to complete. These core modules will cover all essential aspects of the programme monitoring that we would like to obtain a full response set for. All other aspects will be covered by strategic or thematic survey modules, and data imputation or respondent matching techniques will be applied. This approach will allow us to shorten the average survey length for each respondent, without decreasing the range, width or depth of our datasets. Core modules will be included in each of the biennial survey cycles (2023, 2025, 2027) for all respondents.



4.4. STRATEGIC SURVEY MODULES

Strategic survey modules will explore how and to which extent European Solidarity Corps activities/projects contribute to (a) the aims, objectives and priorities of the programme itself, (b) programme-specific strategies, and (c) youth-sector-specific strategies that the programme is intended to contribute to, such as the EU Youth Strategy. Strategic survey modules will be included in each of the biennial survey cycles (2023, 2025, 2027) for subsets of respondents, covering all activity/project types.

4.5. THEMATIC SURVEY MODULES

Thematic survey modules will explore various subjects of interest to the RAY Network. Commonly, they will be developed as part of thematic research projects. In RAY-INNO, a thematic survey module on the needs for innovation will be developed; in RAY-LEARN, a thematic survey module on organisational learning and development will be developed for activity/project types involving youth workers and youth leaders; and so on. Generally, thematic survey modules will be developed towards the end of thematic research projects to start monitoring key aspects of the theme in question. Exceptionally, they may also be used to help a new thematic research project gather initial data to kickstart the project, in particular when evidence on the theme in question is scarce.

4.6. MOBILE-FIRST ONLINE SURVEY

As part of the modularisation of the RAY monitoring surveys, we will focus on developing a mobile-first design for the surveys. This work will happen as part of the RAY-MON research project, with RAY-SOC as the trailing monitoring project benefitting from that work.

4.7. STRENGTHENING COMPARABILITY

We will use the modularisation of the RAY monitoring surveys to improve and strengthen the comparability of our datasets with related and relevant research. This will happen partly through using questions from surveys such as the [European Social Survey](#) or the [European Values Study](#). We will additionally draw on other surveys and studies and available datasets, including the [European Youth Wiki](#) and the [European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy](#), to better contextualise and differentiate our own research findings.

4.8. DEVELOPING OPEN DATASETS

In the second half of the RAY Research Programme 2021-2027, we will work on transforming our datasets into open datasets. We already make our data available to interested researchers in and beyond the RAY Network, under the condition that it may only be used for non-commercial purposes. This process is time-consuming for all parties involved, and limits access to the dataset to those researchers aware of its existence. With an open dataset and an online data explorer, we will not only widen access to our data considerably for the youth research community, but importantly also open the dataset up for youth policy and youth work actors.



5. RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The following table provides an overview of main activities⁵ at transnational and national level for the upcoming project phase of the research project (2022–2023):

Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
07.2022 – 06.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalisation of 1st modularised monitoring survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of 1st survey into national languages

6. RESEARCH OUTLOOK

The following table provides an overview of main activities at transnational and national level for the subsequent project phases (2023–2024):

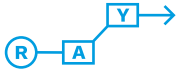
Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
09.2023 – 12.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st survey cycle, 1st wave, covering activities/projects ending between 1 January and 30 June 2023 	
01.2024 – 04.2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st survey cycle, 2nd wave, covering activities/projects ending between 1 July and 31 December 2023 	
05.2024 – 12.2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st transnational analysis with research report, policy report and fact sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National analyses and national reports (optional)

7. PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

The following table provides an overview of basic and optional contributions to the research project by project partners:

Basic contribution of partners	Optional contributions of partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial contribution to the transnational costs of the research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of national datasets and national monitoring reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of survey and module questions into national languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the working group of the research project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support in distributing the findings of the research project at national level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of research reports and/or fact-sheets into national languages

⁵ Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this research schedule is more tentative than usual.



8. RESEARCH PARTNERS

All RAY Network Partners participating in the European Solidarity Corps are partners in this research project. Further partners are always welcome to join.