



EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

**Guide for Experts on
Quality Assessment
2024**



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1. Introduction

A large part of the European Solidarity Corps is implemented under the indirect management mode. This means that National Agencies are in charge of the selection of projects to be funded under actions entrusted to them by the European Commission. National Agencies are also in charge of awarding the Quality Labels¹. National Agencies assess proposals² with the assistance of independent experts to ensure that only those of the highest quality are selected for funding and that only organisations fulfilling specified criteria obtain a Quality Label. Thus, the final decision on the selection or rejection of applications and on the awarding of Quality Label is taken by the National Agencies.

This Guide for Experts is a tool for experts when assessing applications submitted under the European Solidarity Corps. It provides instructions and guidance in order to ensure a standardised and high-quality assessment of applications for the actions managed by the National Agencies.

The Guide for Experts provides information on:

- the role and appointment of experts;
- the principles of the assessment;
- the assessment process in practice;
- information on how to assess the award criteria for each action.

This guide applies for the following application forms:

- Quality Label and Quality label for lead organisations (ESC50)
- Solidarity projects (ESC30).

¹ For Quality Label, please refer to the additional information to be published on the website of the National Agencies closer to the relevant submission deadline.

² The terms "proposal" and "application" are used interchangeably in this Guide.

2. Experts

2.1. Role of experts

The assessment and selection of applications is organised based on a peer review system following a transparent process that guarantees impartiality and equal treatment of all applicants.

The role of experts is important to ensure a fair, impartial, consistent and accurate assessment of project applications according to the criteria relevant for each action.

The assessment is an essential part of the selection procedure. Based on the experts' assessment, a list of applications is established, which serves as a basis for the National Agency to take the award decision, following the proposal of the evaluation committee.

Based on the experts' comments, the National Agency shall provide feedback to the applicants on the quality of their application in order to ensure transparency and help non-selected applicants improve their possible future applications.

2.2. Appointment of experts, code of conduct and prevention of conflict of interests

Experts are appointed based on their skills and knowledge in the areas in which they are asked to assess applications. It is encouraged to also include experts with expertise in the inclusion and diversity field.

To ensure their independence, the names of the experts are not made public. Experts are required to perform the assessment to the highest professional standards and within the deadline agreed with the National Agency.

Through the appointment by the National Agency experts are bound to a code of conduct as set out in the appointment letter or contract with the expert. All information related to the assessment process is strictly confidential. Therefore, experts are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment and selection to the public.

The assessment of applications can be undertaken by minimum 1 expert, who can be either internal or external to the National Agency, as following:

European Solidarity Corps Quality Label for host/support organisations:

- the application will be assessed by minimum 1 expert (internal or external);

European Solidarity Corps Quality Label for lead organisations:

- the application will be assessed by minimum 2 experts (internal or external);

Solidarity Projects:

- if the grant requested is less than or equal to EUR 60.000, the application will be assessed by minimum 1 expert (internal or external);
- if the grant requested is higher than EUR 60.000, the application will be assessed by minimum 2 experts (internal or external).

The NAs are advised to involve as much as possible external experts in the assessment of the Quality Label, to increase the objectiveness of the exercise.

Experts can also be appointed from another participating country than the one of the National Agency.

Experts must not be in situation of conflict of interest³ in relation to the proposals on which they are requested to give their opinion. To this end, they must sign a declaration provided by the National Agency that no such conflict of interest exists and that they undertake to inform the National Agency should such conflict arise (cf. template in Annex I to this Guide). The same declaration binds experts to confidentiality. On completion of the assessment, by validating their individual assessment, experts confirm that they have no conflict of interest with respect to the assessment of that particular application.

As the Quality Label call is open and continuous the experts and evaluation committee members should sign declarations before each separately received application for Quality Label. Alternatively, the NA could also accept a single declaration for several Quality Label applications, if the experts assess them in batches.

Persons involved in an application for the action and selection round under assessment (i.e advisors that support the applicant to develop and submit the application form) are considered as being in a conflict of interest for that selection round and will not be appointed experts.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the National Agency by any means, the National Agency will consider the circumstances and decide either to exclude the expert from the assessment of the given application or the whole selection round or allow the expert to take part in the assessment, depending on the objective elements of information at its disposal.

³ Financial Regulation Art. 61(3): « ... a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest.»

3. Assessment of applications

3.1. Preparation for assessment

Before the start of the assessment, the experts need to be briefed by the National Agency on the Programme and the action under assessment, as well as on the assessment process and procedures.

Experts will be provided with the reference documents for the assessment and get access to the online evaluation tool , where they will perform the assessment using the standard quality assessment forms.

Before starting the assessment of applications, experts must:

- have a sound knowledge of the European Solidarity Corps Guide which provides all necessary information to potential applicants on the Corps in general and on the actions for which they can apply for a grant;
- acquire an in-depth knowledge of relevant European policies and quality frameworks, the European Solidarity Corps principles, the action concerned and its objectives;
- have an in-depth understanding of the award criteria applicable to the applications under assessment;
- know the content and structure of the application form;
- be familiar with all the reference documents and tools provided by the National Agency.
- have EU Login account created and access to the IT tools of the European Commission configured by the National Agency.

Experts have to read the applications carefully before completing the quality assessment form. It is recommended to read several applications before assessing any one of them in full: this allows experts to benchmark answers in different sections of the applications.

Each expert works individually and independently, gives scores and comments for each criterion and summarises his/her assessment in the quality assessment form in the language specified by the National Agency.

3.2. Assessment

The standard quality assessment forms – embedded in the Online Expert Evaluation Tool/Assessment Module - are established by the European Commission and used in all participating Countries in order to ensure a coherent assessment of applications across the countries.

When assessing, experts have to:

- participate in the briefing organised by the National Agency;
- use the specialised IT tools provided by the European Commission with access granted by the National Agency;
- liaise with the National Agency for any issues related to the use of the IT tools provided by the European Commission;
- examine the issues to be considered under each award criterion;

- enter scores for each applicable criterion and provide comments on each criterion and on the application as a whole;
- fill in the section on 'typology questions' (a set of yes/no questions that concern specific details of the application);
- consolidate the individual assessments if more than one assessor is involved per application
- approve each consolidated assessment where the expert in question is not the consolidator

3.3. Award criteria and scoring

Experts assess applications only against the award criteria defined in the European Solidarity Corps Guide.

Each award criterion is defined through several elements which must be taken into account but must not be scored separately by experts when analysing an application. These elements form an exhaustive list of points to be considered before giving a score for the given criterion. They are intended to help experts arrive at the final assessment of the criterion in question.

In order to give clear guidance to experts on how individual elements of analysis should be assessed, further information is provided in Annex II to this Guide.

When assessing applications against award criteria experts make a judgement on the extent to which applications meet the defined criteria. This judgement must be based on the information provided in the application. Experts cannot assume information that is not explicitly provided. Information relevant for a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application and experts must take all of it into account when scoring the award criterion.

Unless specifically instructed to do so, experts are not allowed to contact applicants directly. In case of any problems arising during the assessment, experts should contact the National Agency. The evaluation committee will decide whether the applicant needs to provide additional information or clarifications, or if the application should be assessed in the form it has been submitted. The evaluation committee (through a functional mailbox) is the only contact point of the applicant regarding his/her application and for the experts regarding any issue with his/her support tasks. Experts must duly consider the type of project or organisation, the scale of the activities and/or the grant requested when analysing the applications. As projects may vary widely in terms of their size, complexity, experience and capacity of the participating organisations, whether they are more process- or result-oriented etc., experts have to apply the proportionality principle when assessing all award criteria.

An application can receive a maximum of 100 points for all criteria relevant for the action, as seen in the table below.

Solidarity Projects		Quality Label for lead organisations	
Award criteria	Maximum scores	Award criteria	Maximum scores
Relevance, rationale and impact	40	Strategic approach	50
Quality of project design	40	Project management and coordination	50
Quality of project management	20		
TOTAL	100		100

Experts assess the application on the basis of the given award criteria and score each criterion with their applicable maximum of points as set out in the table above. The total number of points out of a maximum of 100 for each application is the sum of the scores given for each award criterion. Experts cannot use half points or decimals in their individual assessment.

In order to be considered for funding, an application submitted to a National Agency has to:

- score at least: 60 points in total
and
- score at least half of the maximum points for each award criterion.

These two conditions apply to Quality Label for lead organisations and solidarity projects. Applications for Quality Label do not score points, the result of the assessment can only be positive or negative.

Within the maximum number of points per award criterion, ranges of scores are defined that correspond to a fixed definition of the expected quality standard so that a coherent approach is implemented, across experts and countries. The standards are as follows:

- Very good – the application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully. The answer provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness.
- Good – the application addresses the criterion well, although some small improvements could be made. The answer gives clear information on all or nearly all of the evidence needed.
- Fair – the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses. The answer gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- Weak – the application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information. The answer does not address the question asked, or gives very little relevant information.

The table below shows the ranges of scores for the individual quality standards depending on the maximum score that can be awarded to the relevant award criterion.

Maximum score	Range of scores			
	Very good	Good	Fair	Weak
50	43-50	34-42	25-33	0-24
40	34-40	28-33	20-27	0-19
20	17-20	14-16	10-13	0-9

Experts are expected to give comments on each award criterion and, in their comments, refer explicitly to the elements of analysis under the relevant criterion. The comments on each award criterion have to reflect and justify the score given for it.

At the end of the assessment, experts give overall comments on the application as a whole. In the comments, experts must provide a thorough analysis of the application highlighting its relative strengths and weaknesses and indicating what improvements could be made.

As their comments will be used by National Agencies to provide feedback to applicants, experts must pay particular attention to clarity, consistency and appropriate level of detail.

As part of the quality assessment, experts check the grant application for accuracy and consistency. In particular, they analyse the coherence of the grant request in relation to the proposed activities and results. In case the application is of sufficient quality to receive a grant but such coherence is missing, experts can suggest a reduction of the grant amount requested, specifying clearly the grant items and the reasons why they are considered incoherent, excessive or disproportionate. However, it is the National Agency that ultimately decides on the grant amount that is awarded to successful applicants. Experts may not suggest a higher grant than the amount requested by the applicant.

The National Agency monitors the quality of expert assessments and can require the expert to revise the assessment should the necessary quality standard not be met.

Experts must assess all applications in full, regardless of the score given to any award criterion.

If the experts notice during the assessment that the same or similar text appears in two or more applications submitted under a given selection round, as well as any other indications of possible double submissions and overlaps, they must inform the National Agency about that immediately.

3.4. Consolidated assessment and final score

In case an application is assessed by only one expert, then that expert's assessment determines the final score and comments.

In case of applications assessed by two experts, the two individual assessments will be consolidated in order to arrive at the final score and comments for the application. The final score may not include decimals.

If the difference between the assessments of the two experts is less than 30 points of the total score for the application, one of both experts is requested to prepare a consolidated assessment in terms of scores and comments. The consolidated assessment should always take into account the preceding individual assessments but the final version may differ in terms of numerical score and comments.

The consolidation needs to be based on agreement between the two experts and provides a final recommendation to the National Agency on the grant amount to be awarded to the applicant or if the Quality Label may be attributed to the organisation. In case the two experts fail to agree on the consolidation, the National Agency will decide on the need for an independent assessment by a third expert.

In case there is a difference of 30 points or more in the assessment results of both experts, the National Agency will ask a third expert to undertake an additional independent assessment of the application. This requirement does not apply in case both experts have scored the application under the thresholds for acceptance for the action. The final score will then be determined by the two assessments that are closest in terms of their overall score and the most extreme assessment will not be taken into account for the consolidated assessment. Consolidation of the two closest individual assessments will then follow the same rules as explained above.

The consolidated assessment is considered the final experts' assessment of a given application. It means that in case of applications for a grant, the consolidated assessment forms the basis for ranking the application on the list of eligible grant applications, while in case of applications for Quality Label, it determines if the applicant will receive the Quality Label or not.

3.5. Assessing Quality Label applications – specific guidelines

For the Quality Label organisations can apply in a single application form (ESC50) for:

- Quality Label Host role
- Quality Label Support role
- Quality Label for Lead organisation

The Quality Label for lead organisation can only be awarded to organisations that have already been awarded a Quality Label for host and/or support role.

When assessing this type of Quality Label, the experts may come across two scenarios:

1. The organisation already holds a Quality Label for host and/or support role, which may have been awarded under the previous programme or under the current programme. In this case, a simplified application form is received, containing information relevant for the award of lead organisation type of Quality Label. If needed, the expert may be given access to the awarded Quality Label application and assessment results. This should help the experts gain context to judge and score the Activity Plan proposed by the applicant.
2. The organisation does not hold a Quality Label. In this case, a full application is received, containing all sections relevant for the award of a Quality Label for host and/or support organisation and sections relevant for the lead organisation. The experts will first evaluate whether the applicant should be awarded a Quality Label for host and/or support and then they will proceed to evaluate and score the sections relevant for the lead organisations type.

Experts should note that organisations applying for the Quality Label for host role may encode several locations. These need to be assessed independently, as some may be approved while others may be rejected.

3.5.1. Carrying out site visits and/or interviews with applicants during the assessment of applications for Quality Label

All Quality Label applications are evaluated by the evaluation committee supported by experts (internal or external).

In the second scenario described in the section above, the experts assessing the sections relevant to the Quality Label for host and/or support may perform on-site visits or remote interviews during their assessment.

On-site visits cannot be performed by the experts assessing the sections relevant to the Quality Label for lead organisations. If the expert assessing the host/support role carries out a site-visit to the applicant organisation then the same expert cannot assess the application for lead role.

The National Agency will establish a clear methodology for carrying out site visits in order to ensure equal treatment of applicants. This methodology will be observed by both external and internal experts and will be included in the relevant documents (appointment letter for internal experts or contract for external experts).

The members of the evaluation committee cannot participate in on-site visits. Contacts with applicants before the award is prohibited outside the following circumstances:

- All communications between the evaluation committee and the applicants will take place through the functional mailbox indicated in the call for proposals;
- The purpose of these contacts is to clarify a situation which the committee is not in a position to assess properly, and the clarification does not substantially change the proposal.

The principle of equal treatment of applicants has to be respected at all times. Any contact with the applicant in the cases pointed above may not give rise to any legitimate expectations on the part of the contacted applicants.

The experts (internal and/or external) may not be part of the evaluation committee.

The evaluation committee will take a decision based on the report submitted by the experts and the application submitted by the applicant.

4. Principles of quality assessment

4.1. Quality, cost-efficiency, value for money of the activities

The funding rules of European Solidarity Corps actions managed by National Agencies are largely based on unit costs (i.e. amounts are calculated per day, per participant etc.). Experts may assess that some of the units indicated in an application form are not to be considered, even for projects deserving a high scoring. They may therefore propose a reduction of these units. This may determine a reduction of the grant awarded by the NA, if the project is selected for funding. This approach applies to both solidarity projects and the activity plan of the applicant for Quality Label for lead organisation.

Experts could recommend to remove an activity type from the activity plan if the organisation doesn't demonstrate appropriate understanding of its specificities and measures to implement such activities to high standards.

4.2. Proportionality

Experts shall assess the quality of the planned activities, intended goals, expected impact and results of a project in a proportional way, in relation to the size and profile of the applicant organisations and, if applicable, project partners. Quantity (of activities planned, of priorities met or results produced, etc.) will not be judged in absolute terms but in relation to the capacities and potential of the applicants and partners (where applicable).

5. Interpretation of award criteria

Notwithstanding the general principles of proportionality and quality, cost-efficiency, value for money of the activities, as described in Chapter 4 of this Guide, this section aims to provide further explanation to experts as to how on how to assess the award criteria.

1. Quality Label

1.1. Award criteria for applications for Quality Label for host and/or support role

1.1.1. Relevance

The extent to which:

- the organisation's motives for participation in the European Solidarity Corps are convincing and clearly explained
- the organisation's objectives and regular activities address issues relevant for the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps and have a strong solidarity dimension
- the proposal is relevant for the respect and promotion of shared EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as fighting any sort of discrimination.

By using the relevance criterion the expert is required to assess whether the applicant organisation's objectives, motivation, activities, experience and background correspond to the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps. The expert needs to ensure that the award of the Quality Label to the applicant organisation actually contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the call. For this purpose, the experts shall consider primarily the information in the section 'About your Organisation' and analyse to what extent the organisation already has or intends to carry out activities in the solidarity field. The section on experience can provide additional information about the organisation's background but it should be noted that previous experience in international mobility programmes is not compulsory.

The proposal should demonstrate that participating organisations and activities to be implemented respect the EU values. The following factors could be taken into consideration during the assessment:

- Examine whether the proposal references and integrates EU values into its objectives, methodologies, actions and/or expected outcomes. A clear articulation that the project supports and advances these values is an additional strength;
- Non-discriminatory approach: ensure that the proposed activities are designed to benefit a diverse range of participants and avoid any form of discrimination, based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or any other relevant criteria.
- Consider the presence of educational components that aim to enhance participants' understanding and appreciation of EU values;

Experts must assess relevance strictly. Any public or private entity, whether non-profit or profit making, local, regional, national or international may be eligible in line with the eligibility criteria in the call for proposals. Organisations need to provide a convincing narrative as to why they are applying and explain how their organisation's profile aligns with the objectives of the programme.

Experts should critically evaluate if the information in the application form is rooted in the reality of its everyday work and if the links with the objectives of the call are concrete and tangible.

1.1.2. Quality of measures

The extent to which the organisation respects the programme quality standards by:

- selecting and/or involving participants in activities through a transparent and fair process;
- ensuring adequate practical and logistical arrangements;
- ensuring adequate support for participants before, during and after the activity, as appropriate;
- ensuring that participants meet relevant clearance requirements, and undergo specific preparation, particularly for participants working with vulnerable groups in accordance with applicable national law;
- ensuring adequate personal support for participants;
- ensuring a solid learning component for participants and the recognition and validation of learning outcomes;
- guaranteeing the safety and protection of participants and target groups, in line with the avoidance of harmful activities principle;
- avoiding job substitution, routine tasks and tasks with low learning impact;
- designing and implementing high quality standard activities that respond to unmet societal needs and benefit participants, communities and target groups;
- reaching out, supporting and involving young people with fewer opportunities.

When assessing the quality of measures proposed, experts should:

- refer to the programme principles and quality standards, as outlined in the Quality Label section in the Programme Guide
- assess to what extent the organisation is capable of carrying out the tasks specific to its role and scope, as detailed in the Programme Guide. The applicant must demonstrate adequate capacity and provide detailed information how these tasks will be carried out, before, during and after the activities. The applicant is expected to describe the practical arrangements that they will put in place in order to carry out activities, even though the activities are not defined at this stage.
- pay attention whether the applicant has provided satisfactory answers relevant to each type of activity that they selected (volunteering teams and/or individual volunteering).

The organisation must prove it is capable to make adequate practical arrangements for volunteers, such as travel (including supporting young people with the visa application, if necessary) and accommodation (in case of host organisation) of the

volunteer, as well as local transport. These details should be provided for each location, if applicable.

The applicant should demonstrate a good understanding of what volunteering means and how it is different from paid work. The proposal should show that volunteers will not carry out tasks of professional staff, in order to avoid job substitution and/or excessive responsibility for the volunteers. The applicant explains how the involvement of volunteers will complement but not substitute the work of paid staff. The applicant should ensure that the daily operations of the organisation are not dependent on the participant carrying out their activities. At the same time the applicant should provide sufficient assurance that volunteers will not displace paid staff or undercut their pay and conditions of service.

Experts should also check if the applicant demonstrates that the volunteers will have clear roles assigned and contact with the local community is facilitated. Routine tasks must be limited to the maximum extent.

The issue of protection and safety of participants is very important and should be addressed clearly in the application form. The applicant should explain how they will guarantee a safe living and working environment for the participants. These measures should be described in detail and specific for each type of activity. Applicants should describe how they will identify risks and vulnerabilities and what preventative or reactive measures will be carried out in order to avoid risks and respond to incidents.

The recruitment practices of the organisation must ensure that the selection process will be fair and transparent and respect the programme guidelines (e.g use of portal). The applicant should describe the criteria on the basis of which they will select young people to participate in solidarity activities. One of the key aspects is to ensure that the motivation of the candidate is taken into consideration as the main reason behind their selection.

The organisation should ensure that participants receive good quality preparation before their activity, including linguistic, cultural and/or pedagogic preparation as necessary. Furthermore, if the organisation works with vulnerable groups, it must ensure that participants meet relevant clearance requirements, and undergo specific preparation, in accordance with applicable national law.

Applicants should provide details regarding the personal support, the training and the guidance that they will offer to participants during activities. The answers should be tailored to the role (support and/or host) that the organisation applies for. The organisation should explain how personal and learning support will be offered to participants and how they will help the young people integrate into the local community.

The support offered on return to participants should be described in detail, with regard to how young people will be assisted to:

- make best use of the experience and learning acquired through the project, particularly with regard to accessing the labour market
- remain engaged and active, including through involvement with associations, cooperatives, social enterprises, youth organisations and community centres.

With regard to the learning dimension of the planned activities, the organisation must be capable to guarantee a proper degree of support and mentorship and ensure that the learning dimension is structured in such a way that would permit the participant to track its learning process. The process must include regular exchanges with the mentor or other person assigned for the purposes of tracking the learning experience of the participant. The use of Youthpass and Europass is encouraged. Organisations should use these tools, in combination with others when needed, to validate the learning outcomes of participants. At the end of the activity, the organisation is responsible to issue a certificate for the participant.

Activities also need to provide learning opportunities for all the participants involved and they must be adapted to their profiles in order to ensure the best learning outcomes. Participants should be able to take part on an equal basis, regardless of their language abilities or other skills.

Particular attention should be paid to the inclusion section, as this aspect constitutes of key horizontal priority for the European Solidarity Corps. All applicants are expected to show how they will:

- reach out to specific young people with fewer opportunities, and how they will support them to participate fully and on equal footing with other participants
- support these young people to learn from the experience and capitalise on it to improve their situation.

The additional support that the young people with fewer opportunities would need and will be provided because of their comparative disadvantage must be fully explained and justified.

For applicants that indicate that they have no experience in working with young people with fewer opportunities, the experts should assess what measures they will put in place to reach out, select and support their participation (depending on the role chosen). Alternatively, the organisation may indicate that they will work with specialised partner organisations in order to meet the inclusion objectives of the programme and explain how they will do this.

The section on standard activities is relevant for the host role and is optional for the supporting role. If applicants applying for the supporting role choose to fill it in, the activities described should be those that they will coordinate/support together with host organisations.

Where standard activities are proposed, they should be clear and well-conceived. The experts should evaluate the rationale of the activities proposed and to what extent they are needs-based, responding to a societal challenge. The description can be relatively generic but sufficient for the expert to make a judgement, by also taking into account the profile of the organisation. For each activity, the solidarity dimension should be clearly explained and it should be evident how the participants and target groups/local community will derive benefits from each of the activities proposed.

1.1.3. Organisational capacity

The extent to which:

- the organisation has demonstrated the ability and commitment to allocate appropriate resources to manage the European Solidarity Corps activities in accordance with applicable quality standards;
- the organisation has proposed appropriate steps to ensure continuity of activities in case of organisational changes;
- the organisation demonstrates a good approach towards identifying and working with partners.

The main purpose of this criterion is to determine whether applicants can deliver high quality activities. The experts should judge the answers provided by the applicant by taking into account the role(s) applied for (host/support).

The applicant should demonstrate that sufficient measures will be put in place and appropriate resources are allocated to implement the activities in a qualitative way. The experts should pay particular attention to proportional assessment, as resources to commit would vary depending on the applicant's objectives, size of organisation, etc. The experts should also evaluate the reliability of the commitments made by the applicant, based on the measures described to ensure continuity and the level of involvement of the organisation's management.

The capacity and expertise of the organisations to support participants with fewer opportunities should also be evaluated (e.g. there is support available at the hosting venue and contingency plans for dealing with specific situations/needs that may arise).

How the applicant will identify and involve partners should be suitable to establish quality partnerships, ensuring an appropriate level of cooperation and commitment between organisations. Experts should also assess whether the profile and experience of the partners (if mentioned) are consistent with the set objectives.

1.2. Additional award criteria relevant only for applications for Quality Label for lead organisation

Proposals must score at least 60 points. Furthermore, they must score at least half of the maximum points in each of the categories of award criteria mentioned below.

When assessing the Quality Label for lead organisation, the experts should also take into account the following aspects:

- the long-term importance of the Quality Label: while the Quality Label does not allocate any funding, its award may allow successful applicants to access funding over a long period of time, and in some cases for significant grant levels.
- the resulting score may be used as part of budget allocation formulas when the approved applicants apply for funding. It is therefore necessary to fine-tune the scores to reflect the quality of the application as precisely as possible.
- each proposal should be considered on its own merits. Experts should avoid direct comparison of applications by organisations with a different profile. A similar activity plan presented by two very different organisations should not necessarily yield the same score.

1.2.1. Strategic approach (maximum 50 points)

The extent to which:

- the applicant formulates a convincing long-term framework for achieving well-defined objectives, with clear milestones and adjustment measures;
- the stated objectives will address important societal needs and are relevant to the objectives of the European Solidarity Corps;
- the planned activities are suitable to address the identified needs and objectives;
- the targets proposed are realistic and sufficiently ambitious relative to objectives and capacity;
- the planned activities bring clear benefits to the participants, participating organisations and target groups and have a potential broader impact (e.g. on local, regional, national and transnational level);
- the planned activities and objectives demonstrate European added value;
- the applicant aims to promote environmental sustainability and responsibility and is planning to incorporate sustainable and environmental-friendly practices in the activities
- the applicant is planning to make use of digital tools and methods to complement and improve activities.

The experts should use these criteria to analyse the applicant's longer term objectives and if the planned activities are well suited to reach these objectives and address identified needs. The strategic framework described by the applicant should fit with the objectives and the format of the action as described in the European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide.

The applicant should demonstrate that the proposed objectives will promote solidarity as a value and will aim to tackle important societal challenges while also enabling young people to acquire useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development. The organisation should aim to tackle important societal challenges to the benefit of a community or society as a whole. The applicant should explain why the activities are needed and how they will address unmet needs. The expected impact of the activities should not be limited to the participants in the activities but extend to target groups and beyond.

The experts should carefully examine each proposed objective. If the application is approved, the organisation's overall progress will be measured against these objectives and implemented activities. Therefore, each approved objective must be clear and concrete enough to serve that purpose.

The experts should assess the activity plan in relation to the set objectives but also the size and profile of the organisation and with the management arrangements. The activities represent the means to address the needs and achieve the set objectives.

Previous experience in the programme, the organisation's size, length of the activity plan and the number of objectives proposed should be carefully considered. Experts must pay attention not to apply an over-simplified 'more is better' approach (e.g. longer activity plan or more numerous objectives cannot automatically translate into a higher score). Rather, experts must take into account the organisation's context and the entire content of the application when considering any of the above-mentioned aspects. A good application will demonstrate self-awareness on part of the

applicant, with a realistic outlook about their own capacity, resources and experience. For this reason, when the applicant already holds a Quality Label and a simplified application form is submitted, the experts may check the awarded Quality Label contents, for reference. Similarly, the narrative provided by applicants in the “Standard Activities” section of the application (relevant for host organisations) may also be taken into account by experts in order to gain context about the organisation and its activities.

The activity plan must be filled with numbers referring to volunteers hosted and/or supported by the lead organisation together with its partners. If the applicant is a supporting organisation, they will need to estimate how many volunteers they will include in activities, including those sent/hosted by themselves and those sent/hosted by their partner organisations. Based on the Activity Plan the lead organisation will request funding for these activities and they will be responsible for implementing them.

For both the objectives and the activity plan, a balance should be achieved between being realistic and ambitious enough to achieve impact. The type, number and duration of activities applied for must be appropriate, realistic and match the capacity of the applicant organisation. The organisation’s approach towards environmental sustainability and responsibility, particularly the practical aspect of maximising the use of funding opportunities offered by the Programme to support environmentally sustainable means of travel. Similarly, the applicant’s use of digital tools and methods to complement and improve their planned activities should also be taken into account when establishing the score for this section.

For in-country activities, complementarity to existing national schemes should be clearly demonstrated. If there are any national schemes or local provision in place that may be the same or similar to the proposed project, the applicant clearly demonstrates how their project adds value and does not duplicate this provision. Proposals with in-country activities presenting a weak or a lack of European added value should not be considered as relevant in the context of the Corps.

1.2.2. Project management and coordination (maximum 50 points)

The extent to which:

- the organisation ensures quality project management, including proper communication and coordination measures with partners;
- the measures aimed at disseminating the outcomes of the activities within and outside the participating organisations are appropriate and of high quality;
- the measures for monitoring and evaluating the activities are appropriate and of high quality.

The experts will use these criteria in order to determine the capacity of the applicant to implement the activity plan and achieve its objectives. The applicants are expected to provide a full description of the measures they will put in place in order to ensure sound project management including:

- adequate approach to project design and implementation

- clear methods to monitor progress, manage risks and address any problems encountered
- a description of who will take day to day responsibility for the project, how the applicant organisation is structured and the associated accountability and reporting lines
- business continuity measures
- effective mechanisms to coordinate and communicate between the participating organisations and with other relevant stakeholders.
- sound ways of ensuring effective distribution of tasks and responsibilities between partners
- adequate activities for evaluating the results of the project, in particular the quality of the learning outcomes of activities and the effectiveness of support measures put in place by the participating organisations, as well as the outcomes of the project as a whole
- a clear and good quality plan for the dissemination of the project results and proactive measures that will be taken to make the project results visible

2. Solidarity projects

Criteria		Interpretation
Relevance, rationale and impact (maximum 40 points)	The relevance of the project to the objectives and priorities of the European Solidarity Corps	The project fits with the objectives and priorities and the format of the action as described in Part B of the European Solidarity Corps Guide. The project represents an appropriate means of delivering the objectives and priorities set out in the Call, and it is clear what the project is aiming to achieve. The goal and the objectives of the project are adequately identified, and the key results that the project is seeking to deliver are clearly summarised.
	The degree to which the project takes into account the European Solidarity Corps principles	The applicant should demonstrate that the project will promote solidarity as a value and will address important societal challenges.
	The extent to which the project provides European added value by addressing relevant topics	The project presents a clear European added value, a concept which is explained in Part A of the European Solidarity Guide, especially by having a European dimension with regard to the topics, aims, and expected outcomes. The project should reflect a common concern for issues within the European society.
	The relevance of the project to the needs of members of the group	The project should indicate how this is relevant to the needs of the individual members of the group.
	The relevance of the project to the needs of a target group (if any) and	The rationale for the project should be clearly described. The applicant should explain why the project is needed and how the demand for the project has been identified. The project should indicate how this is relevant to the needs of the

	communities	community that the project is addressing, and a specific target group if there is one.
	The potential impact of the project on members of the group incl. their personal, entrepreneurship skills and social involvement	The project clearly describes the expected impact on the groups' members during and after the lifetime of the project. The applicant should demonstrate the value and benefits created for the members through the project, enabling them to not only make a meaningful contribution and express their solidarity, but also to foster their sense of initiative, creativity, active European citizenship and entrepreneurial spirit.
	The potential impact on the target group (if any) and on communities	The project clearly aims to tackle societal challenges with a view to benefit the local community. The impact on the community is realistically estimated and explained through addressing local issues, targeting a specific group or developing local opportunities (particularly in communities located in rural, isolated or marginalised areas). A potential impact on communities by setting common goals and cooperating on the project can also be attached.
	The proposal is relevant for the respect and promotion of shared EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as fighting any sort of discrimination.	The proposal should demonstrate that participating organisations and activities to be implemented respect the EU values. The following factors could be taken into consideration during the assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine whether the proposal references and integrates EU values into its objectives, methodologies, actions and/or expected outcomes. A clear articulation that the project supports and advances these values is an additional strength; • Non-discriminatory approach: ensure that the proposed activities are designed to benefit a diverse range of participants and avoid any form of discrimination, based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or any other relevant criteria. • Consider the presence of educational components that aim to enhance participants' understanding and appreciation of EU values;
Quality of project design (maximum 40 points)	The consistency between project objectives and proposed activities	The proposed activities are well suited to address the identified needs and reach the objectives that were set for the project. The applicant describes how the proposed activities will be carried out, including their preparation of these activities. The activities are realistic and match the capacity of the group.
	The extent to which the project is designed, developed and implemented by young people.	The proposal shows that the young people have initiated and planned the project. The young people are the ones preparing and implementing the activities. If an organisation is involved, its involvement is minimal in carrying out the project but rather supports the group of young people on

		administrative aspects.
	The extent to which the composition of the group permits to reach the project objectives	The composition of the group is well described. The profiles of each member and how they add value to the project are explained in detail. The objectives of the project match the capacity of the group to deliver.
	The involvement of the members of the group at the various phases of the project;	The proposal shows that young people are fully involved in different stages of implementation of the project and each member of the group has specific role in proposed activities.
	The clarity, completeness and quality of all the phases of the project (planning, preparation, implementation, evaluation and sharing the results)	All the phases of the project have been properly structured in order to realise the objectives of the project. The activities are clearly defined, comprehensive, realistic and linked to the objectives of the project. It provides learning opportunities for the participants involved. Working methods are clearly presented.
	The extent to which learning process and learning outcomes in the project is thought through, identified and documented, in particular through Youthpass	The applicant explains what the participants expect their learning process to be like. The expected learning outcomes of the participants are described and in line with the identified needs. The fact that the participating organisations intend to use the Youthpass process and tool to stimulate participants' reflection on their learning process, is considered as an element of quality of the project.
	The extent to which the project incorporates sustainable and environmental-friendly practices, accessible and inclusive activities, as well as makes use of digital tools and methods to complement and improve activities	The project demonstrates the presence of sustainable and environmental-friendly practices in its activities. The activities should be designed in accessible and inclusive manner, taking into account the needs of participants with fewer opportunities (both members of the group and a target group). The project should incorporate new or alternative practices or tools, be it through digital or other formats.
Quality of project management (maximum 20 points)	The practical arrangements, management, cooperation and communication between the members of the group	The project demonstrates that efficient measures are put in place to ensure that objectives are achieved. The general coordination, distribution of tasks and responsibilities between members of the group, and working methods are put in place to ensure effective management and control of the project. The distribution of tasks and responsibilities demonstrates the commitment and active contribution of all members. The project shows that cooperation and communication among them is effectively planned. The tasks and responsibilities of each member are clearly distributed
	The measures for evaluating the	The project includes adequate activities for evaluating the results of the project and its overall

	outcomes of the project	success.
	The measures for making the project visible to others who are not involved in the project	The project includes a clear plan for making the project's outcomes visible.
	The measures for sharing the outcomes of the project	The project includes a clear plan for the dissemination of the project's outcomes, describes the dissemination activities, and identifies the right target group(s) of these activities.

Annex I - Declaration on the prevention of conflicts of interest and disclosure of information

DECLARATION ON CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

[European Solidarity Corps], [Call for Proposals N° [XXX]] - [Action], [selection round or reporting period [final submission date]]

Conflict of interests

I, the undersigned [FAMILY NAME, first name], having been appointed as an expert for the abovementioned call, declare that I am aware of Article 61 of the Financial Regulation, which states that:

"1. Financial actors within the meaning of Chapter 4 of this Title and other persons, including national authorities at any level, involved in budget implementation under direct, indirect and shared management, including acts preparatory thereto, audit or control, shall not take any action which may bring their own interests into conflict with those of the Union. They shall also take appropriate measures to prevent a conflict of interests from arising in the functions under their responsibility and to address situations which may objectively be perceived as a conflict of interests.

2. Where there is a risk of a conflict of interests involving a member of staff of a national authority, the person in question shall refer the matter to his or her hierarchical superior. Where such a risk exists for staff covered by the Staff Regulations, the person in question shall refer the matter to the relevant authorising officer by delegation. The relevant hierarchical superior or the authorising officer by delegation shall confirm in writing whether a conflict of interests is found to exist. Where a conflict of interests is found to exist, the appointing authority or the relevant national authority shall ensure that the person in question ceases all activity in the matter. The relevant authorising officer by delegation or the relevant national authority shall ensure that any further appropriate action is taken in accordance with the applicable law.

3. For the purposes of paragraph 1, a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, as referred to in paragraph 1, is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest."

I hereby declare that I do not fall under any of the following circumstances in which a conflict of interests might exist. I confirm that, if I discover before or during the performance of my tasks that a conflict of interests exists, I will declare it immediately to the contracting party.

Examples of conflict of interests:

- Direct benefit in case of advice on development of a new policy;
- Involvement in the preparation of the proposal;
- Direct benefit in case of acceptance of the proposal;
- Close family relationship with any person representing a participating organisation in the proposal;

- Director, trustee or partner of a participating organisation;
- Current employment by a participating organisation;
- Current involvement in a contract or collaboration with a participating organisation;
- Any other situation that compromises my ability to evaluate the proposal impartially.

- Employment by one of the participating organisations within the previous three years;
- Involvement in a contract or collaboration with a participating organisation within the previous three years;
- Any other situation that could cast doubt on my ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of a third party (*Ex. Past or current personal relationships, nationality, political affinity, etc.*).

(If applicable) I hereby declare that I fall under one or more of the above circumstances (please specify which and explain)*:

**Ex. In case of employment by a structure including different departments or institutes, please specify the degree of autonomy between them.*

I hereby declare on my honour that the disclosed information is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Confidentiality and personal data protection

I confirm that I have read, understood and accepted the code of conduct for experts established in Annex 1 to the contract sent by the contracting party.

I also confirm that I will keep all matters entrusted to me confidential and will process the personal data I receive only for the purposes of the performance of the present contract. If unnecessary or excessive personal data are contained in the documents submitted during the implementation of the contract, I will not process them further or take them into account for the implementation of the contract. I will not communicate outside the panel any confidential information that is revealed to me or that I have discovered. I will not make any adverse use of information given to me.

Expert: [insert full name]

Date:

Signature: