

# 4Thought for Solidarity

SUMMARY



## Background of the 4Thought project and the meaning of solidarity

In September 2016, the former president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker delivered his annual State of the European Union speech, in which he said:

“The European Solidarity Corps will create opportunities for young people willing to make a meaningful contribution to society and help show solidarity - something the world and our European Union needs more of. For me, this has always been the very essence of what the European Union is about. It is not the Treaties or industrial or economic interests that bind us together, but our values. And those who work as volunteers are living European values each and every day.”

By the end of 2016, building on the success and quality developments of the European Voluntary Service, a new programme, the ‘European Solidarity Corps’, was launched. In November 2018, the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre was established. One of the first tasks of the Resource Centre was to commission a project, a study on the meaning of the concept of solidarity. This project was called **‘4Thought: Finding a Common Narrative on the Concept of Solidarity from Research, Practice, Policy and Young people’**. Its main aim was to create a vision of what the concept of solidarity means to different people, all the while assisting in the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps by making clearer what is meant by a ‘solidarity activity’.

## The need for solidarity

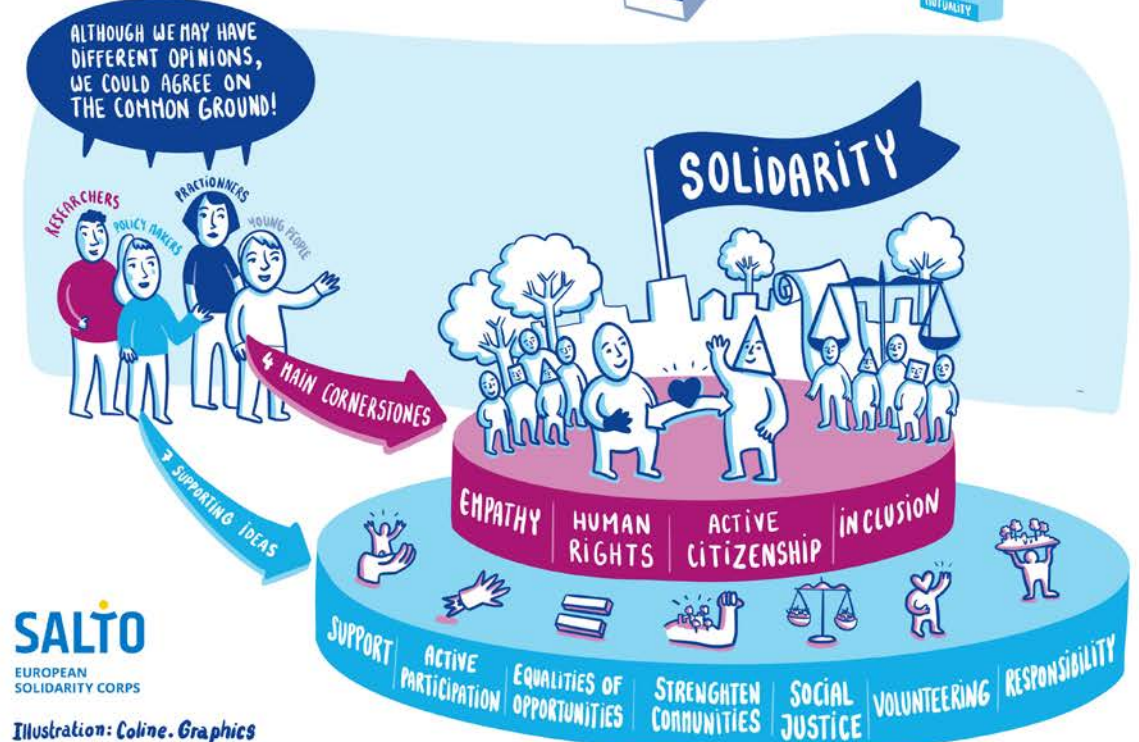
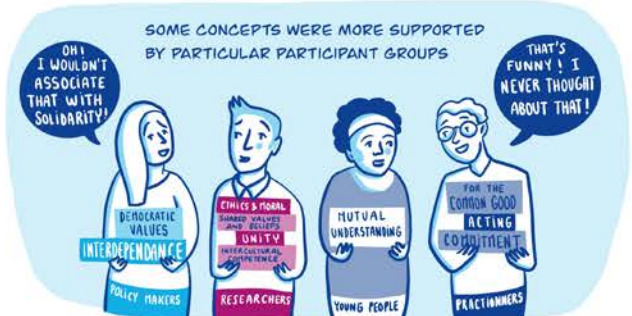
Through surveys, interviews and consultations, 4Thought reached out to several hundred practitioners, young people, researchers and policy makers. They all agreed that there is a **very strong need for solidarity in Europe today**.

One of the main reasons for this is integral to human nature - needing other people around and supporting others. Many people said the need for solidarity is existential and it is the key for the survival of humankind. Finally, it is part of the human sense of belonging, to feel in solidarity with those who are in our circles. In the narrowest sense, these are the closest people around us. And in the widest, all human beings.

The current need for solidarity comes from **identified challenges faced by society**. The main ones being:

- a focus on individual needs without caring for the needs, rights and challenges of others;
- the rise of right wing populism and turning inwards within national borders and in closed groups of solidarity;
- the climate crisis and lack of action for a sustainable future.

# WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?



**SALTO**  
EUROPEAN  
SOLIDARITY CORPS

Illustration: Coline. Graphics



## (No) common definition

While everyone agreed that there is a need for solidarity, through the study, it became very clear that there is no common definition and no common understanding of this concept at the European level. Not in the official documents, not in the research, not in practical manuals and publications and not in direct conversations with young people, practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

The understanding of solidarity very much **depends on a persons' personal and professional background**, as well as the context(s) in which they have been living. Any concept that relates to personal experiences and views makes it very difficult to have a common understanding and to find common ground with others. It is culture-specific and each culture can shape a different understanding of solidarity - and that's not just 'national culture' related to countries, nations and languages but also to subcultures and cultures of communities of people and their values.

What solidarity does is highlight the diversity there is in 'European culture'. You can see the different walks of life that are drawn together for shared values and a shared approach. **Unity in diversity** seems to underpin the concept of solidarity.

## Solidarity has always been present in youth work

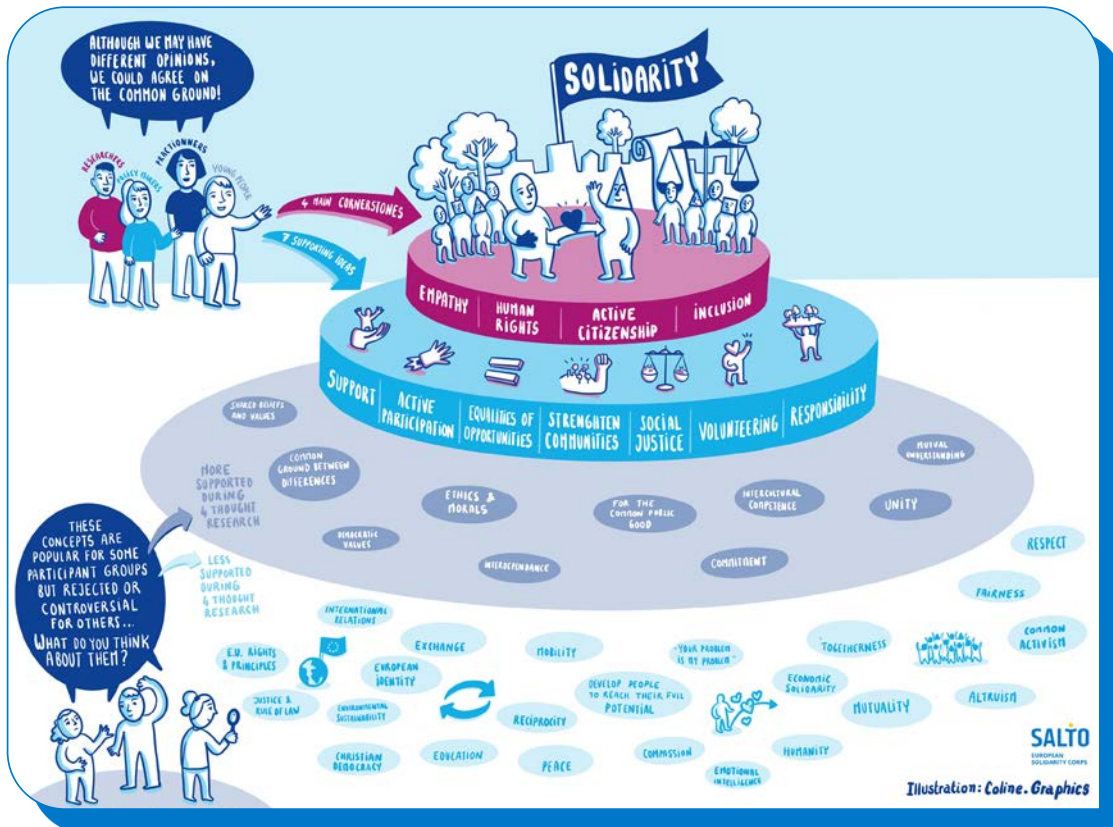
For many of those that took part in the interviews and survey for this project, 2016 was seen as the year that the European institutions 'officially' launched solidarity as a concept to be promoted - even perhaps 'institutionalising' it through policy and programmes. However, for many involved in international youth work, the concept has always been there but under different names. Organisations would practice solidarity values or have them as part of their code of practice. To start with, solidarity between youth workers and young people or amongst youth workers themselves has always been there. But, even more than that, **solidarity as a value** has been nurtured as part of civic awareness and engagement. As one respondent to the survey said: "I believe youth work values imply solidarity. When we aim to develop skills and knowledge for young people to act in multicultural communities, that involves solidarity actions."

Although the European Solidarity Corps and the focus on solidarity that arrived with it, seems to shift the focus, the good news is that the experience, the practice and competence is already there in the field. It is ready to channel solidarity to the furthest communities in our continent through youth work.

## Concepts that relate to solidarity

Since solidarity was present, but somehow never uniquely defined, it made sense to look for concepts that would somehow relate to it and would help (potential) beneficiaries of the European Solidarity Corps orientate themselves and find the solid ground to utilise the programme.

Based on the surveys, interviews and consultations, and taking into account the number of responses and the levels of disagreement between different views, there are four cornerstone concepts which are the most supported by all four sectors (policy, research, practice and young people):



- **Human Rights**

Acting to promote and protect other people's rights. Standing and acting in solidarity with people who are not able to claim their rights and using privileges less for oneself and more for someone else;

- **Empathy**

Understanding and feeling with others, recognising when someone is in need, sharing the sense of injustice and being motivated to act. Not empathising only with close ones and those with shared values and beliefs, but feeling empathy with every living being, including the environment as a whole;

- **Active Citizenship**

Action is the core element of solidarity. Being a responsible citizen, part of the society and ensuring greater good for everyone. The willingness to engage, to contribute to society and the eagerness to show solidarity towards people and places in need;



- **Inclusion**

Reaching out and including **all** young people. Going beyond the usual circles and in-groups. Including even those young people who do not necessarily feel or agree with what solidarity implies because they are probably the ones that might be needing it the most.

## 4Thoughts that came up from the process

One of the reasons why it was not easy to agree on a common definition or even common ground, was that many dilemmas, controversies and open questions came out of the process. Even though none of them could be seen as common ground, they generated a lot of perspectives and food for thought and they represent a fruitful soil for further discussions:

- **Motivation for solidarity**

What is behind the motivation of people to feel and act in solidarity? Can solidarity be based on pure altruism, without implication of any type of reward? Or does solidarity go beyond altruism and is about the common good and other different types of personal reward/gain? Where is the balance between altruism and reciprocity?

- **Group boundedness**

If group boundedness is one of the main reasons for solidarity and solidarity is mainly shown to those with whom we feel a strong bond, how to ensure that bonds are created with people that are very different to ourselves? Does the solidarity activity help form a group or does the group feeling increase the solidarity between its members?

- **Uncomfortable aspects of solidarity**

With group boundedness creating the feeling of 'Us and Them', can solidarity be a truly inclusive concept? How to ensure solidarity with those who are the most 'out-grouped' and yet who probably need solidarity the most?

- **Solidarity and (international) youth work**

Did the new programme bring solidarity into focus or is it just a new name for the same old things? Where is the place of solidarity in youth work principles, values and practical approaches? Should youth work bear the pressure of unlocking solidarity for young people?

- **Combining practice, policy, research and young people**

To what extent are the 4 groups of practitioners, policy makers, researchers and young people working, thinking and dreaming together in the field of solidarity? Do policy makers have more ownership for solidarity than others? How familiar are the 4 groups with each other and how much are bottom-up approaches 'allowed' in the solidarity field? How to ensure the balance of power when the 4 groups are put together in one place?

- **Community Impact and Life Long Solidarity**

With the European Solidarity Corps bringing back the focus on solidarity in the community, will it be possible to keep the balance between community impact and personal learning? How will individualism among young people interconnect with the needs of the community? How can the European Solidarity Corps go beyond individual and short-term (mobility) acts and ensure the development of lifelong solidarity among young people?

- **Employability and Jobs and Traineeships**

With the majority of the international youth work community excited about solidarity replacing employability as the main focus, how do we recognise the potential of jobs and traineeships?



Where are the links between solidarity and employability? How to bring more solidarity into the workplace?

- **Sustainability and solidarity for the future**

Should sustainability and the climate crisis become the main focus of solidarity in Europe (and globally)? Does it make sense to talk about any other form of solidarity when the planet is in danger? How can we ensure solidarity with future generations?

## What does 4Thought mean for the European Solidarity Corps?

Looking at the need for solidarity, as well as challenges that lead to it and those that pose the threat to solidarity in Europe and beyond, the 4Thought process has led to some key considerations for the European Solidarity Corps and all those involved in it:

- **Understanding the future of solidarity**

Solidarity cannot be seen outside of the context in which it is set. Individualism, Education and Information, Right Wing Populism, Climate Crisis, etc. are among the main elements that are influencing it. Solidarity needs to be a link between the generations and the enabling ground for acting against emerging threats. It is essential for all involved to be compassionate, have empathy and feel and act together. Information and education, including online digital tools, need to equip and empower young people for whatever the future has to bring;

- **Using the European context wisely**

The European context is an important home for solidarity. Solidarity needs to be present from local to European level. Existing limits to solidarity within countries and closed groups should be brought down. The focus should be on strengthening European solidarity and going beyond it. Global solidarity has an important role to play;

- **Organised and State Solidarity**

Among many, it was considered that solidarity was brought in with a top down approach from the EU level. Promoting solidarity among young people and other generations is welcome news. However, there is a risk of institutionalising it and making it 'too' organised. Solidarity is an action based on feeling and not an iron rule and it should be promoted as such;

- **Reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities - Solidarity with ALL**

Tackling discrimination and 'ingroup' mentality. Developing solidarity with wider circles and groups and acting in solidarity with those who don't necessarily share the same values and beliefs. Strengthening European solidarity and going beyond it;

- **Solidarity in Jobs and Traineeships**

Links between solidarity and employability should be explored and utilised. Jobs and Traineeships are enabling opportunities to bring solidarity into the workplace. Social and solidarity economy initiatives are already present in the practice and need to be mapped and promoted;

- **Solidarity as a gift**

Putting solidarity on the agenda on the European level is a special opportunity and a rare chance. Youth work is able to contribute to solidarity with its values, experience and enthusiasm. Everyone involved in international youth work should use this momentum and make sure that we act in solidarity now and in the future.



## Overview of the process

# 4Thought for Solidarity

*Careful consideration of what is needed for the future*

*From four angles: practice, policy, research and young people*



## Common Ground

Creating a vision of what the concept of solidarity means, to different people. Building the vision with contributions, desk mapping, interviews and survey results to create a solid fertile base for the European Solidarity Corps to grow from.



## Network of Supporters

Helping to find the contacts from practice, policy, research and young beneficiaries, to feed into the 4thought process. Giving feedback, or supporting the process, where resources allow.



## People Research

Ideas, expectations, feedback, contributions, directly from the field. Channelling what's important to YOU, and other people, into the next steps.



## Stakeholders

Who is out there in the field? Who has a stake in the concept, and the development of this new programme? Mapping of these, to give the whole picture. Prioritisation of these to be involved in the next steps.



## Desk Mapping

Unlocking the secrets of the solidarity concept. What is out there already? What angles does it include? Building the practical understanding of solidarity relevant for the European Solidarity Corps.



## Narrative Report

Showing the evidence and developments until now, the gaps, and the possible ways forwards for the Resource Centre

Source: Nicodemi/Baclija Knoch



## The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

The European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

The Resource Centre's mission is to:

- Explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European society;
- Promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity;
- Co-ordinate networking activities (e.g. trainings, seminars and events) that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact;
- Contribute to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations

The Resource Centre is based at IZ, the Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+ : Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, in Vienna, Austria.

“IZ – Vielfalt, Dialog, Bildung” is an independent NGO. It has been founded in 1987 and currently engages in three working fields: International Initiatives – civil society projects in regions bordering the EU – Caucasus and Western Balkan in particular, IZ Academy - Trainings in Diversity and Intercultural Competences & Communal Integration and Austrian National Agency for the European Union Youth Programmes - administration of the two EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth in Action, European Solidarity Corps as well as offering training and support for youth workers and youth organisations .

The Solidarity Corps RC is part of the European SALTO-YOUTH network. SALTO stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities. The Resource Centres provides resources, information and training for National Agencies and European youth workers. The network cooperates with other actors in the European youth field, among them the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, trainers and training organisers.

More information:

<https://www.salto-youth.net>

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity>

<https://www.iz.or.at/rc>

Find out more about „4thoughts on Solidarity“ in the context of Europe talks Solidarity:

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/solidarity-concepts/europetalks>

## Editorial info

### Title

4Thought for Solidarity

### Publisher

IZ – Verein zur Förderung von Vielfalt, Dialog und Bildung, Vienna, April 2020  
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With many thanks to all the persons that answered to our questionnaires and interviews!

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This publication was possible with the support of the European Commission, the European Solidarity Corp programme.

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