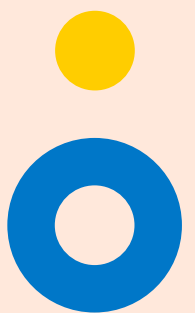
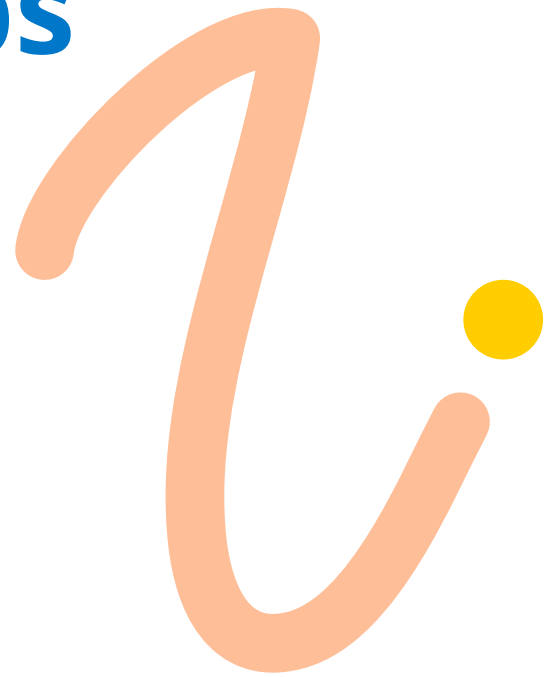
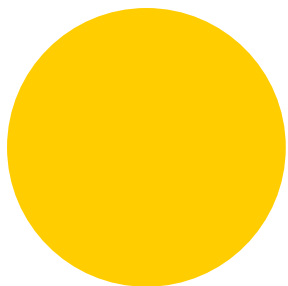
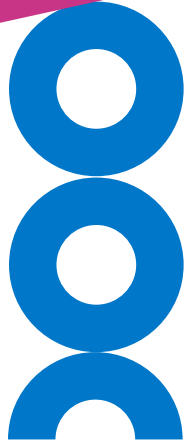


# The European Solidarity Corps programmes

as a tool for responding  
to the Russian invasion  
to Ukraine





## Valeriia Shchotkina

---

Project manager in AEA – a Spanish NGO, working with local and European projects in the sphere of education. Valeriia comes from Kyiv, Ukraine. She has a Master degree in business management and another one in International communication. She is a former participant of Erasmus+ youth exchanges and student conferences, and a former volunteer at such European events as Eurovision Song Contest and UEFA Champions League Finals.

She has a passion for international relations, research, languages, interpretation and writing. Valeriia speaks 5 languages and is planning on learning more – to be able to reach more audiences. She also has a certificate in English language teaching and has worked as a teacher and tutor for 10 years.

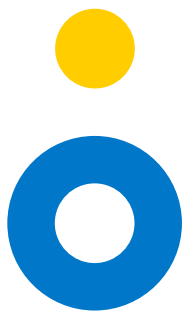
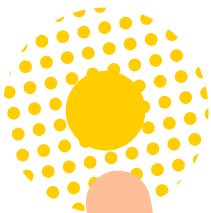


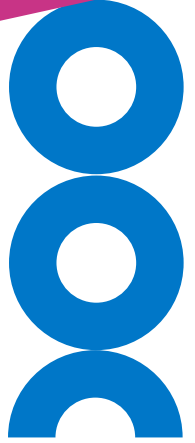
The main area of projects Valeriia is currently managing is cognitive development, assistance to immigrants and youth work. Boosting opportunities for youth is one of her principal interests. She always tries to make learning dynamic, with introduction of gamification and modern technologies.

### Social Media:

[www.linkedin.com/in/valeriia-shchotkina-a5758419a](https://www.linkedin.com/in/valeriia-shchotkina-a5758419a)

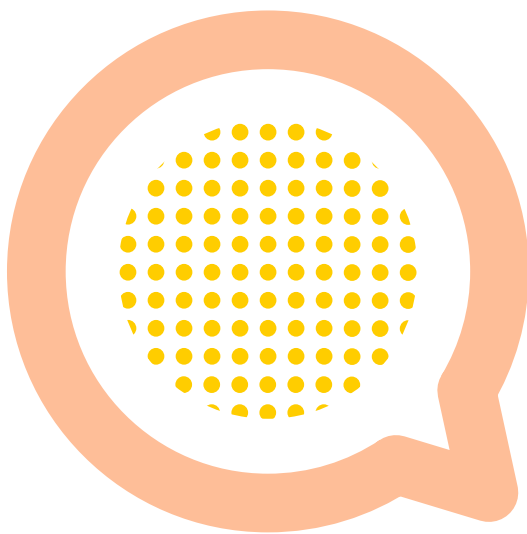
<https://www.facebook.com/lerun.leo>

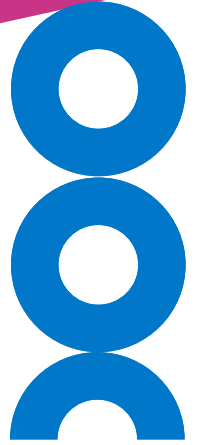
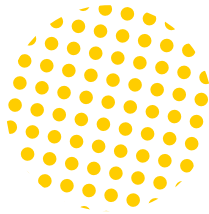




## ABSTRACT

In this article it is explained how solidarity was shown around all the European Union towards Ukrainians who had to flee as a result of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. While millions of Ukrainians were fleeing the war, we could see an unprecedented unity and solidarity expressed by people across different countries, and we looked at their motivation to defend European values. We will talk about the events and projects of the European Solidarity Corps directed to support Ukrainians, especially actions taken by young people across the EU to show solidarity and empathy to the Ukrainian youth. We will explain how the model of solidarity was applied in practice and stress its importance in the conditions of war in Europe.



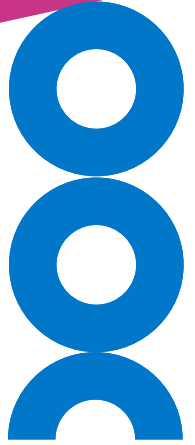


## 1. Solidarity model brought to life

Solidarity has been especially tangible and visible in Europe these months, starting from the 24th of February 2022, when millions of Ukrainian people were forced to leave their country as a result of the Russian invasion. In order to save their lives, these people had to leave their home behind, give up jobs and everyday activities. From the very first day of invasion, the Russian troops started to violate basic human rights of Ukrainian civilians, depriving them of their property, disseminating fear, panic and propaganda, and launching massive missile attacks, resulting in numerous injuries and deaths.

All this has led to many Ukrainians, especially females, youngsters and mothers with kids, to seek temporary shelter across European countries. For these women, this was a very hard decision to make, as they were separating from their fathers, brothers and husbands (men were not allowed out of Ukraine under the state of martial law). They did not know what was waiting for them out there. For some of them, it was then when they discovered the significant role of volunteers from all over Europe, thousands of people serving to provide food, accommodation, interpretation, and psychological help for Ukrainian refugees. Some of these were European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteers, which led the Ukrainian refugee to also discover the role which an ESC volunteer can have in such hard times. Therefore, the European society has shown empathy, and readiness to offer their support to Ukrainians.

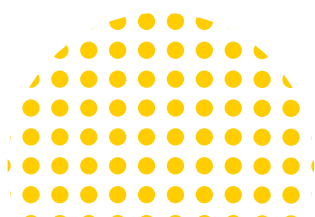
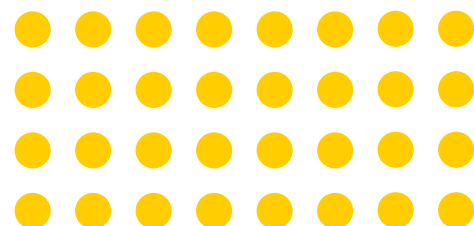
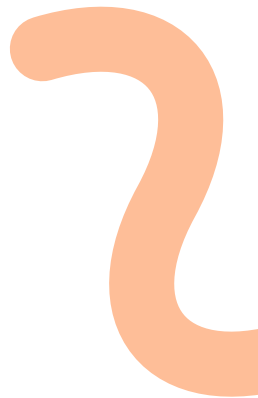


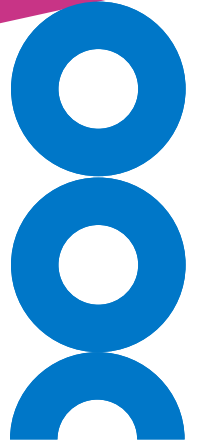


However, life had to continue, and refugees from Ukraine needed help with their inclusion in their new societies. Many volunteer initiatives were introduced from the very first days of the invasion, and then more and more projects emerged. This was not only highly beneficial for Ukrainians, but it was also a great chance for the people in the EU, to practise active citizenship. Examples of practical cases of those initiatives will be explored in this article.

It is important to note that the reaction of the EU member states towards the war, on human and governmental levels, is a practical illustration of the Solidarity model, proposed in the 4Thought for Solidarity report<sup>[1]</sup>. Human rights, empathy, inclusion, and active citizenship are the main concepts that make up the model and are known as the '4Cornerstones'. Those concepts were defined as main elements of solidarity after a number of interviews with people from different backgrounds, when they were asked to define solidarity, and the majority mentioned the listed words as the crucial elements that solidarity stood upon.

The 4Thought report also differentiates levels of solidarity, particularly the interpersonal level and the level of welfare. The level of welfare is more important, as this does not mean empathy or help for a particular person in need, but for the whole society. "Welfare is the field where solidarity is most keenly felt and, accordingly, the most potent terrain for positive European impact."<sup>[2]</sup>





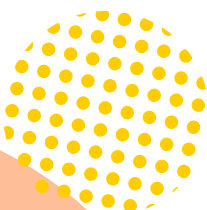
## 2. Why should they?

Before describing some examples shown by the European civil society for assisting Ukrainians in their new temporary countries of residence, we will take a view into the motivation of EU youngsters to direct their effort to help. Someone has their personal motivation (solidarity at interpersonal level, as it is phrased by the 4Thought report), because they have some friendships and acquaintances from Ukraine, which makes them feel affinity towards the country. But people also seem to have ideological reasons as they see Ukrainians share the same values they do (it will be explained in detail further in this article), and are actually interpreting this war as an attack from one totalitarian neighbour to another democratic one. This idea was best summarised by a volunteer from Poland, the leader of the Polish Women's Strike, Marta Lempart: "Ukrainian soldiers are fighting for all of us. I know the West doesn't believe that, and I know the West doesn't care. But this is the fight for European values".<sup>[3]</sup>

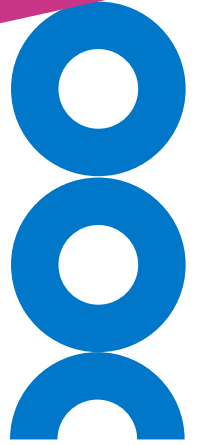
What do we refer to, when we mention European values? According to Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty, 'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights'.<sup>[4]</sup> Those are not only values of the EU, but also basic fundamentals of functioning of any state or supranational entity, otherwise that would be an anarchy.

European countries differ from each other in many ways, but actually the war of Russia in Ukraine is a reason for the EU's unprecedented unity. Russia is violating basic principles that the EU stands upon, and this creates ground for profound solidarity with Ukrainians, who, on the contrary, are fighting and giving their lives for the very core idea that defines the EU: the values mentioned in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty.

EU youngsters are motivated to show their solidarity because the war in Ukraine the origins of which goes back to 2013, when the pro-Russian president failed to sign the EU-Ukraine Association agreement. Thousands of Ukrainians went to the central street of Kyiv to protest. Peaceful demonstration soon turned violent – around 100 civilians were killed by the governmental forces. Later the government changed, meanwhile Russia annexed Crimea and created anti-Ukrainian terrorist groups in Eastern Ukraine, which resulted in a war between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the anti-Ukrainian terrorist groups supported by Russia, prior to full-scale invasion.





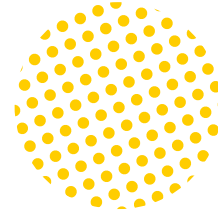
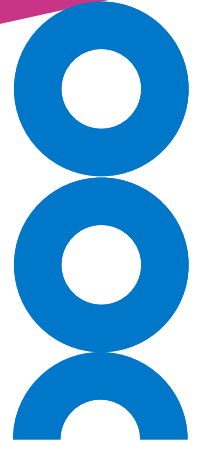


After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine started moving away from Russia and getting closer to the EU. It has been manifested in many forms, starting from political and economic reforms on the governmental level to various educational opportunities for Ukrainian youth. Ukrainian youngsters have always been extremely motivated to have an opportunity to study in European universities, participate in exchanges and conferences, do internships and form part of a scientific community. Their dream would have been to live in a peaceful, flourishing EU-Member Ukraine, but this all was ruined by the events of November 2013, which was the point of bifurcation. As a consequence of that, Ukrainians are now forced to flee to the countries of the European Union.

Let's see what European people and organizations are already doing and can still do to help their peers in the current situation – and also, how Ukrainian migrants can help Europeans (apart from already fighting for common values on their ground).

First of all, let us illustrate the opinions in the EU towards Ukraine with some statistics. In the EU, they support Ukraine's ambitions. According to Eurobarometer,<sup>[5]</sup> 66% of EU citizens agree that 'Ukraine should join the EU when it is ready', and 71% are sure that Ukraine belongs to the European family.





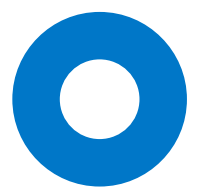
### 3. European Solidarity Corps: initiatives to support Ukraine

2022 was the European Year of Youth. Within the framework of this initiative, a lot of events were conducted to support Ukraine. 'Solidarity with Ukraine' has become another important theme of the European Solidarity Corps, together with education, climate change, digitalization, etc. So, what are these practical steps taken by European youngsters to support their Ukrainian fellows in such difficult times?

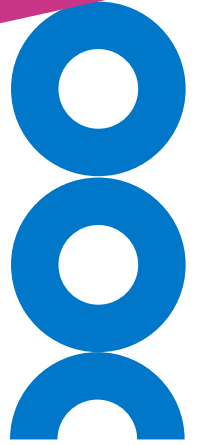
First of all, in the framework of activities supported by the European Solidarity Corps, European volunteers held community meetings with the participation of local youth with Ukrainian refugees.<sup>[6]</sup> One of those took place in Děčko area, Czech Republic – it was called 'We are solidary with Ukraine' and aimed at receiving and integrating refugees and migrants. The refugees were given information about the area they were residing. The community and the refugees were connected through various interactive activities, which were prepared by the volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus participants from Děčko. As part of the event, food aid was also handled to refugees, and Ukrainians were introduced to local cuisine. Similar events were in different cities throughout the EU.

Another event organized by a Czech NGO, was a cultural festival focusing on different aspects of Czech and Ukrainian culture. The event was part of the European Solidarity Corps 5th anniversary celebration. The participants enjoyed songs, games, paintings, and could familiarise themselves with the European Solidarity Corps. There have also been held on the regular basis, and the artistic productions which were created in the course of the project will go on sale and the money will be used for donation to the needs of Ukraine.

There was a great initiative by the NGO called Timis County Youth Foundation in the framework of the Solidarity Corps. They made up of a series of meetings held in Timisoara, Romania. Youth workers inaugurated cultural trips for Ukrainian refugees, weekly sports activities (football, volleyball, table tennis, billiard). They also held a workshop on emotional intelligence and coordinated a job fair to facilitate job search for Ukrainian youngsters. It is interesting to note that they always involved Ukrainian-speaking people to the events, and announced them in three languages: English, Romanian and Ukrainian.







European NGOs organized a lot of thematic workshops within the framework of European Solidarity Corps. There was one in Manchester called 'Campaigning for Ukraine and beyond: How young activists can make a difference during the European Year of Youth', dedicated to fighting disinformation about Ukraine. In Portugal, youth workers held a training session 'Ukraine-European Union: Solidarity prevails'. This activity was inspired by the speech of the President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on 2 March 2022, where she said: 'More Ukrainians will need our protection and solidarity. We are and we will be there for them' <sup>[7]</sup>. The main aim of the activity was to discuss which practical steps can be taken by youngsters to address the current situation in the EU and Ukraine.

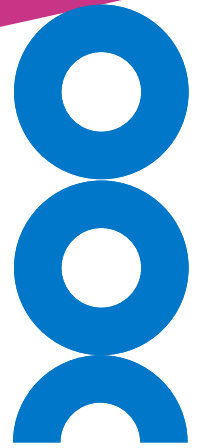
The European Solidarity Corps also provided its platform for organizations to post positions for volunteers<sup>[8]</sup>. There you could find an offer by Foundation 'Ukraine' from Wroclaw, for a young volunteer to come to this Polish city for a year and help the organization in their practical activities aimed at helping refugees.

## 4. European Solidarity Corps: an opportunity for Europeans to discover Ukraine

If we analyse the issue profoundly, we can see that Europeans started feeling curious about Ukraine even before the war started – when Ukraine joined some European initiatives, a lot of people were eager to discover this kind of mysterious Eastern European country – and youngsters did it through volunteering in the European Solidarity Corps <sup>9</sup>. Apart from work they also discovered a lot about Ukraine.

While volunteering in Ukraine and performing a wide range of services for the community, young people from all around EU discovered the richness and uniqueness of Ukrainian traditions. Following are just a couple of testimonials from volunteers: for instance, Francesco from Italy swam in frozen water on January 19th. This date is the Holiday of Epiphany, and swimming in the frozen water is a Ukrainian way to celebrate it. According to ancient beliefs, this 'washes your sins away' and tempers yourself. Jemma from the UK adds to this comment, confirming she really enjoyed celebrating Ukrainian New Year.



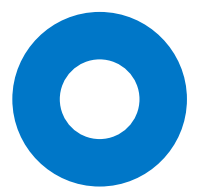
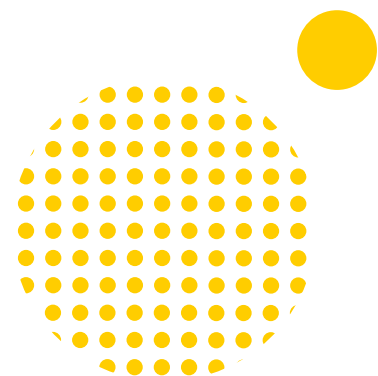


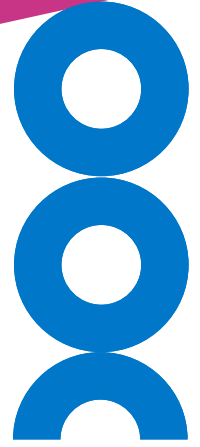
European Solidarity Corp participants from different countries have also been fascinated by Ukrainian nature. For example, Lidia from Portugal really admires snow – she even poetically compared it to ‘feathers falling from the sky’. Ukraine’s nature is really rich and diverse. Another great admirer of Ukrainian winter and the diversity of activities it offers is Zlatko from Macedonia who tried skiing for the first time while doing his ESC in Ukraine and had great impressions.

European Solidarity Corps has given the young Europeans an opportunity to try and enjoy Ukrainian food. Marlene from Portugal was in love with borsch, which is a typical Ukrainian dish (it is a soup with plenty of ingredients, the main of which is beetroot and with the addition of one spoon of sour cream). In Ukraine, it is not just a daily meal, but part of culture and a symbol of unity. In Europe, there was even launched a campaign, where different restaurants across the continent offered this meal with a view to raising money to help refugees.

From our point of view, still the main resource of Ukraine are its people, and personal ties created with them were the main reason for foreigners to fall in love with the country. Just a few examples: Alec from the UK celebrated his birthday in Ukraine – and it was for the first time in his life that he didn’t have a family and friends gathering, rather new friends in

a foreign country. Yet he felt at home and this was one of the best celebrations in his life. Gaby from the Netherlands had the same idea of Ukrainian people – she said she had met plenty of wonderful people during her volunteer stay in Ukraine, with whom she shared numerous memories. Ukrainians are intelligent, friendly, kind and hospitable – yet they remained strangers to the people in the European Union because of different historic pathways in the 20th century, when Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union, ‘behind the Iron Curtain’. Now Ukraine is fighting so as not to have another ‘curtain’ again, and of course, people are the most essential resource of any country’s disposal. Young EU people don’t see young Ukrainians as strangers anymore<sup>[9]</sup>.





## 5. Changing the nature of the volunteering projects

The war against Ukraine also changed the nature of volunteering activities in the European Solidarity Corps. The experience of Franziska, a volunteer from Germany who came to carry out her solidarity service in the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, is different from others.

She started in October 2021, providing German and English speaking clubs to local youngsters, integrating those languages into board games and various other activities. She was also spreading information about Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps – although those programs are known in Ukraine, young people still lack necessary information and the application process is not easy for them. On the other hand, Franziska was also absorbing Ukrainian culture, listening to folk music, celebrating important holidays and making friends for life among Ukrainians.

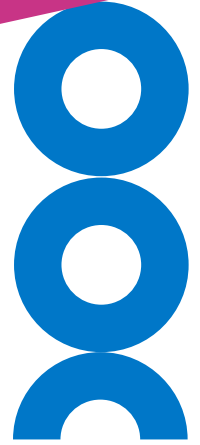
She had lots of ideas on her mind, to continue this amazing interchange of cultures, travelling around Ukraine, creating more unforgettable moments with new friends – but the outbreak of war made her evacuate to her country. She was frustrated and broken – but she kept on her volunteering, in Germany. She helped Ukrainian refugees with different

issues and taught them German. She continued doing it even after the formal end of her ESC experience. But she says that she would do all she can to be able to meet all her Ukrainian friends again so that they could show her around through beautiful and peaceful Ukrainian cities<sup>[10]</sup>.

Franziska was doing her voluntary service together with another volunteer from Germany, Juliusz Meyer. A youngster from Leipzig was fond of Ukraine even before visiting it- and felt grateful for an opportunity from the European Solidarity Corps to go to the country and discover it in person<sup>[11]</sup>. He was performing very diverse tasks – from a free German language club to renovating houses, from journalism to the promotion of tourism in a local village. He took Ukrainian classes and enjoyed his advancements, regularly practising it with his friends and in the street.

He felt very comfortable in Ukraine, also in the city of Winnytsia, where the main part of his voluntary service took place. Starting from February 24th, he continued his voluntary service in Germany. Just like Franziska, Juliusz wanted to continue volunteering and be of help to Ukrainian people fleeing the war. And he did - mainly serving as an interpreter for Ukrainian people arriving in Germany, for whom the language barrier was hard to overcome.



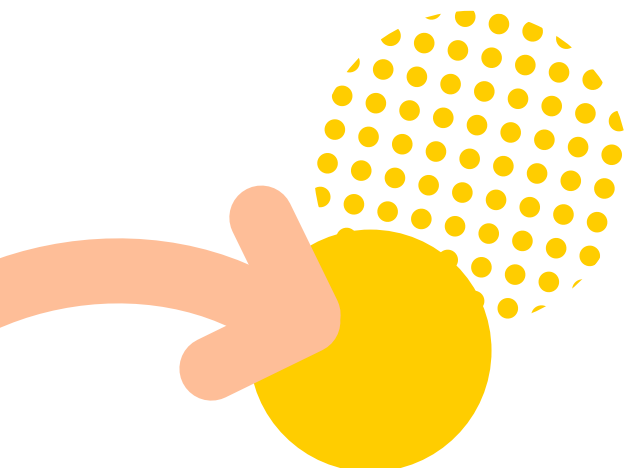


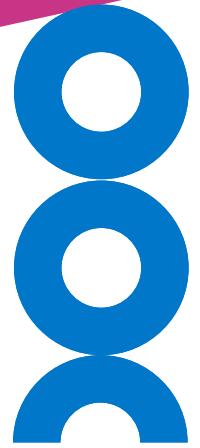
## 6. Conclusions

Volunteering projects supported by the European Solidarity Corps, are being held in different countries and contexts, but the idea of helping and providing people with some opportunities for growth remains the same. The European Solidarity Corps gives a chance to learn about yourself and educate others, develop skills for personal growth and contribute to their development by other people, live an

adventure, celebrate diversity, feel at home when you are abroad, admire another culture and its people. It can be illustrated by Juliusz Meyer's words: 'I think now is the time to show people the splendour of Ukrainian art, culture, language, folklore, history. This project was a wonderful experience, and only the beginning of my work with and in Ukraine. I can only say: without Ukraine, the world would be a sad place'<sup>[1]</sup>.

And that is true. Also, **the world would be a sad place without solidarity**. Helping people feel at home in their country is the most profound understanding and the true solidarity. Problems occur, disasters happen, wars are started – yet the people who stand for democracy, freedom, peace and dignity, must stay united to offer support to those who are in a real need. A world where empathy prevails over a person's or country's economic benefits, where human rights are above all, where active citizenship is practised and encouraged to facilitate inclusion of everyone who shares your values – this world is certainly worth advancing and prospering.





## REFERENCES

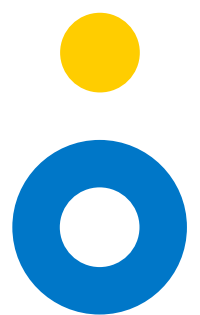
- [1] Knoch, Snezana Baclija Knoch, and Susie Nicodemi. Rep. 4Thought For Solidarity. Vienna, Austria: IZ – Verein zur Förderung von Vielfalt, Dialog und Bildung, 2020.
- [2] European Commission DG RI B.B.6 (Oct 2018) Solidarity in Europe – Alive and Active [https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy\\_reviews/solidarity\\_in\\_europe.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_reviews/solidarity_in_europe.pdf)
- [3] Berger, Miriam. “400,000 Ukrainians Flee to European Countries, Including Some That Previously Spurned Refugees.” The Washington Post. WP Company, February 28, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/26/europe-welcomes-refugees-ukraine-russia>
- [4] The Treaty of Lisbon (OJ C 306, 17.12.2007).
- [5] Ukraine, Visit. “66% Of Europeans Are in Favor of Ukraine's Accession to the EU: Poll.” Visit Ukraine – RULES OF SAVE VISIT TO UKRAINE, 2022. <https://visitukraine.today/blog/390/66-of-europeans-are-in-favor-of-ukraines-accession-to-the-eu-poll>
- [6] Activities, ESC. “Activities: European Youth Portal.” Activities | European Youth Portal, 2022. [https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth/activities\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth/activities_en)
- [7] “Press Corner.” European Commission – European Commission, 2022. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech\\_22\\_5964](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech_22_5964)
- [8] Volunteering at Foundation Ukraine 2022-2023 – European Commission, 2022. [https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/placement/30004\\_es](https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/placement/30004_es)
- [9] What Pleased and Surprised the Volunteers of the European Solidarity Corps in Ukraine. YouTube. European Solidarity Corps in Ukraine, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_T2jgbMJK9U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_T2jgbMJK9U)
- [10] Bärthele, Franziska. “Ich Hoffe, Dass Sie Mir Irgendwann Ihre Heimat Zeigen Können, Nachdem Ich Ihnen Geholfen Habe, in Meiner Zurecht Zu Kommen.” Jugend für Europa, August 2, 2022. Accessed October 5, 2022. <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/news/11181-ich-hoffe-dass-sie-mir-irgendwann-ihre-heimat-zeigen-koennen-nachdem-ich-ihnen-geholfen-habe-in-meiner-zurecht-zu-kommen>
- [11] Meyer, Juliusz. “Europäisches Solidaritätskorps: Ich Wollte Einfach in Die Ukraine.” Jugend für Europa, August 17, 2022. Accessed October 5, 2022. <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/news/11185-europaeisches-solidaritaetskorp-ich-wollte-einfach-in-die-ukraine>

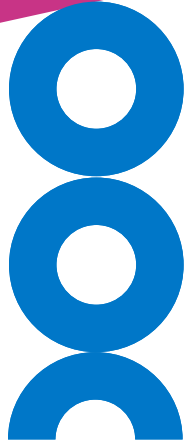


### Photos

Page 4: Miha Rekar, unsplash.com

Page 7: Gayatri Malhotra, unsplash.com





## EDITORIAL INFO

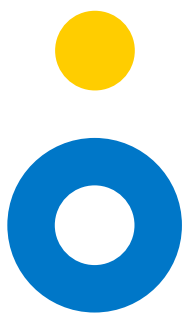
Editor and Publisher: OeAD-GmbH | Ebendorferstraße 7 | 1010 Vienna | Headquarters: Vienna FN 320219k | Commercial Court Vienna | ATU 64808925 | Managing Director: Jacob Calice, PhD  
Author: Valeriia Shchotkina | Coordination: Krisztina Molnar & Barbara Eglitis – SALTO European Solidarity Corps | T + 43 153408-0 | [rc-solidarity@oead.at](mailto:rc-solidarity@oead.at) | Graphic Design: Schneeweis Wittmann ≈ [www.schneewiswittmann.at](http://www.schneewiswittmann.at) | Vienna, February 2024

### **SALTO European Solidarity Corps**

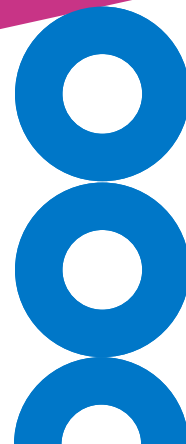
SALTO ESC supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO ESC coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO ESC contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations.

SALTO ESC is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO ESC is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the EU youth programmes as well as to support and develop European youth work.

Find us online at [www.salto-youth.net](http://www.salto-youth.net), [www.oead.at](http://www.oead.at) and [www.salto-youth.net/solidarity](http://www.salto-youth.net/solidarity)







## EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

---

This article is part of “Europe talks Solidarity” – a series of events and publications that offers a platform for the exploration of the concept of Solidarity, initiated by SALTO ESC. The discussion on Solidarity benefits from inputs from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds.

This publication was created with the support of the European Solidarity Corps programme of the European Commission. The support of the European Commission for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission, nor SALTO ESC can be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

---

Creative commons licence



This work is published under licence:

Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



000

