

# EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE REPORT

**10-13 September 2024**  
**Bratislava, Slovakia**

The contents of this report are based on the inputs and discussions in the conference and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the SALTO European Solidarity Corps and the National Agencies organising it.

# About Europe Talks Solidarity Conference 2024

Europe Talks Solidarity 2024 was the second residential edition of Europe Talks Solidarity Conference, coordinated by SALTO European Solidarity Centre and hosted by the Slovak National Agency for Youth and Sport (NIVAM) (represented by Matúš Zibala), and partners:

- SALTO Participation and Information (represented by Kelly Hrupa),
- OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, Austria's National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (represented by Kriszta Molnar and Miguel Tabera),
- Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), Finnish National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (represented by Jutta Kivimäki),
- Agenzia italiana per la Gioventù (AIG), Italian National Agency for Youth and Sport (represented by Anna Villani).

The conference was led by a team of three facilitators: Elisabeth Einwanger, Anna Yeghoyan, and Diana Kovačić. Graphic facilitator Juraj Víg created the graphic recordings of both days of the conference (Annex 1). Report of the conference was prepared by the event rapporteur Aleksandra Mangus.

The conference took place on September 10th-13th at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava. Together with the keynote speakers and facilitators, the participants were offered yet another chance to deepen their understanding of the potential of solidarity in the past, present and future, and its value for the European democracy.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Europe Talks Solidarity Conference 2024

## Programme

The two days of intensive knowledge exchange and discussion offered an overview about solidarity with a special focus on the youth field, as well as presented a space for open dialogue and sharing different perspectives on solidarity. Keynotes from the invited experts were followed with buzz talks, discussion groups and collaborative sessions (Solidarity Labs) where the participants shared own experiences and expertise. Attendees were offered to use various digital tools for participation in the conference: LineUpr (for navigating the conference schedule), Padlet and Mentimeter (for contributing to discussions).

arrival day	day 1	day 2
	<p>Welcome address, Katarína Kožuchová, Youth Work Support Department of Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, and Peter Kupec, Director of the Slovak National Agency of Erasmus+ Youth programme</p> <p>Keynote, <b>“EU values &amp; Youth and solidarity”</b>, Birgit Klausser, Federal Chancellery of Austria, Department of European and International Family and Youth Policy</p> <p>Keynote <b>“Everyday spaces for solidarity among and across young people”</b>, Riikka Korkiamäki, University of Tampere</p>	<p>Keynote, <b>“Building the Better Future: Youth Solidarity and Alternative Participation in Europe”</b>, Marko Kovačić, Bernays University of Applied Sciences</p> <p>Keynote, <b>“Democracy innovation and the quest for solidarity”</b>, Corina Pirvulescu, EYCA, Social DOers</p> <p>Keynote, <b>“How the freedom of media is connected to solidarity and how does it impact democracy?”</b>, David Diaz-Jogeix, ARTICLE19</p>
	<p>Keynote, <b>“How does volunteering succeed &amp; fail in promoting solidarity in Europe?”</b>, Stuart Fox, University of Exeter</p> <p>Thematic input, <b>“Changing the world in times of crisis – but how? Solidarity Projects in Europe”</b>, Kriszta Molnar &amp; Miguel Tabera, SALTO ESC</p> <p>Discussion groups</p>	<p>Discussion groups</p>
	<p>Solidarity laboratory 1 Solidarity laboratory 2</p>	<p>Solidarity laboratory 3 Harvesting from Solidarity Laboratory</p>
Welcome evening	<p>Discussion groups Panel discussion</p>	<p>Keynote, <b>“Future perspectives on volunteering / solidarity / active citizenship in Europe”</b>, Gabriella Civico, Center for European Volunteering</p> <p>Thematic input, <b>“Future opportunities supported by SALTO ESC”</b>, Kriszta Molnar &amp; Miguel Tabera, SALTO ESC</p> <p>Evaluation and wrap up</p>

# Participants

Conference attendees formed an active and engaged group of 50 professionals coming from diverse backgrounds of volunteering, youth work, research, policy advocacy. The full list of participants can be found in Annex 2.

- There were 45 unique organisations or professional backgrounds represented;
- A wide range of countries was also represented: Slovak Republic: 10 attendees, Finland: 6 attendees, Italy: 5 attendees, Poland: 3 attendees, and other countries, including Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Egypt, Germany, and Turkey, among others.
- more than 50 % of the participants have been involved with the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes, many of those for more than 5 years;

Here are some examples of individual motivations for attending the conference, which illustrate the diversity of interests and goals among the attendees:

## 1. Learning about Solidarity Projects:

- "Participating in this activity for me means an opportunity to get inspired, explore, learn and reflect on how to link the elements of solidarity in different kind of project that aim to foster democracy and other human rights."
- "New information and insights on the topic of solidarity."
- "I'm really intrigued by the 'Europe talks solidarity' concept and want to contribute."

## 2. Professional Development:

- "As my tasks and duties in our organisation are related to the topics discussed, I find this conference highly relevant."
- "As a person working in the International Office, I am interested in gaining new insights."

## 3. Research and Academic Interests:

- "Our research project has been invited to give a talk, and I am eager to present our findings and engage with other experts."
- "As a journalist, I am working on topics like humanitarianism, and this conference will provide great context."

## 4. Networking and Knowledge Sharing:

- "I believe that I will gain a lot of useful insights and connect with like-minded professionals working in similar fields."
- "I look forward to learning about practical tools, methods, and best practices that can be applied to enhance solidarity initiatives within my community".

These responses demonstrate a blend of curiosity, professional alignment with the conference themes, and a desire to network and collaborate on solidarity initiatives.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Europe Talks Solidarity Conference 2024

## Welcome evening

On the evening preceding the first day of the conference the organisers held a welcome session where they informally introduced the conference team and offered the arrived participants an activity to get to know each other. The participants were invited to explore different perspectives on the concept of solidarity. For example, they could review and contribute to a Padlet board of the powerful songs that have inspired solidarity movements throughout history.



Picture source: Padlet

As a part of ice-breaking activities, participants also created Europe Talks Solidarity crossword and used sticky notes to visualise solidarity and mark themselves on a map of Europe.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Welcoming address from the Slovak Ministry and the National Agency

Head of the Youth Work Support Department of Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Katarína Kožuchová opened the conference with a welcome speech in which she highlighted the importance of youth participation, solidarity, and building a shared future in Europe, focusing on the European Solidarity Program as it reflects core EU values—peace, democracy, and human dignity—by offering young people opportunities to volunteer and engage in community projects, fostering both personal growth and societal well-being.

Katarína emphasised the government's role in ensuring young people's voices are heard in policymaking and that resources are dedicated to supporting their involvement in the European Solidarity Corps. National agencies play a crucial role in administering and improving the program to ensure it remains beneficial and relevant.

Katarína stressed the need to integrate national youth policies with European solidarity goals, encouraging coaching, listening to youth, and addressing their aspirations through responsive policies. She also highlighted the importance of receiving feedback from participants and organisations to enhance the program. She called to invest in youth work, and a vision of Europe where solidarity is a way of life, urging collective action to build a stronger, more united future for all.

Peter Kupec, the Director of the Slovak National Agency, concluded the welcoming address with expressing his gratitude towards the facilitators, partners and his team at the agency for the efforts they put into organising the conference and wished the participants a fruitful and meaningful experience at the conference.



**Katarína Kožuchová**

**Head of the Youth Work Support  
Department of Ministry of Education  
of the Slovak Republic**



**Peter Kupec**

**Director of the Slovak National Agency**

# EU values & youth and solidarity

In her keynote, Birgit Klausser, a representative of the Austrian Federal Chancellery, reflected on the role of solidarity and European identity in shaping programs for the next generation of youth. She took her audience on a walk to discuss the origins of a civilised society and formation of one's identity.

She began by discussing her experience managing European youth mobility programs, emphasising the need for a common understanding of the values these programs represent. As the EU prepares for new youth initiatives post-2027, Birgit underscored the importance of conferences like this one as **opportunities to reflect on and improve these programs.**

*"Solidarity is an ancient value: it grew with humanity and it made humanity grow",* Birgit explored the concept of solidarity, illustrating its deep historical roots with a story attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead, who noted that a healed bone was the first sign of civilisation, showing that someone helped the injured person survive. This act of caring is, to her, a metaphor for how **solidarity has been central to the development of human society and civilisation.**

Birgit continued on to discuss what identity is in different contexts - personal and societal. She defined identity as a set of qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance and expressions that characterise a person or a group. She highlighted that, **identities are formed through heritage and experience and shaped by social and cultural factors through life.** Thus, she concluded that **identity is not a final product, but a continuous process.**

Shifting to the present, Birgit emphasised that solidarity, along with other European values such as freedom, democracy, equality, and human dignity, form **the foundation of the European Union's identity.** These values are codified in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union, and have been shaped by Europe's historical experiences, particularly the lessons learned from war.

Birgit pointed out that while solidarity is a European value, it transcends cultural and national boundaries, as seen in its presence across various civilisations throughout history. The European motto, "United in Diversity," which emerged from a youth contest in 1999, captures this idea and is shared by other countries like Indonesia and South Africa, reflecting a global resonance of these values.

Birgit emphasised the role of European youth mobility programs, like the European Solidarity Corps, in promoting these values among the next generation. These programs introduce solidarity to young people, helping them internalise this value and make it a lifelong practice. Birgit argued that **solidarity, like other core European values, shapes behaviour and serves as a foundation for democracy, freedom, and human rights.**

As she concluded, Birgit called for a continued investment in and cultivation of solidarity. She highlighted that values like solidarity evolve over time and must be actively maintained to remain powerful. **By fostering solidarity in today's youth, Europe ensures that future generations will continue to uphold and spread these values.** Ultimately, Birgit stated solidarity as an ancient yet vital principle that has shaped humanity and continues to be a driving force for European identity and future policymaking.

*"Let us be proud of being shaped by solidarity, not only of ours, but of the solidarity that was carried out through this development of human civilization. Because we are products of it, this way or another. Let us continue to use it and carefully cultivate it for those in the future."*



**Birgit Klausser**

**BKA—Federal Chancellery of Austria, Department for International Youth and Family Policies**

The implementation of international youth exchange and European youth mobility programmes in Austria has been among her responsibilities, including the creation of stakeholder networks in Austria and the cooperation with the National Agencies and DG EAC. She has been actively involved in negotiating the new Union Youth programme generations since 1997 and is a member of the Council Working Party of Youth.

# Everyday spaces for solidarity among and across young people

Professor of Social Work, Riika Korkiamäki shared her insights on solidarity, drawing from personal and professional experiences. She opened her keynote with the story of herself working with marginalised girls in the early 2000s, noting how, despite frequent conflicts among them, a tragic event—the death of a group member's brother—united them in a display of mutual support. This profound moment of unity made the professor reflect on the concept of solidarity, though at the time, they hadn't explicitly considered it as such.

Riika then explored the evolving notion of solidarity, particularly in today's fragmented, diverse society. She contrasted conventional solidarity, which assumes shared values and common backgrounds, with the current complexities young people face. **Today, young people are often placed in social environments – schools, neighbourhoods – where they don't necessarily share common values or backgrounds.** Unlike in the past, when communities were more homogeneous, young people now belong to multiple, diverse social groups simultaneously. This challenges traditional understandings of solidarity, which often expect people to bond based on similarities.

Riika emphasised that solidarity may not always be based on positivity or inclusivity. It can also polarise, as group identities formed in communities often delineate an "us" versus "them." This duality can unintentionally reinforce inequalities, with solidarity among some leading to the exclusion of others.

Then the discussion shifted to contemporary perceptions of solidarity, particularly among young people. Riika highlighted how **young people's engagement with solidarity can differ from the expectations adults place on them.** While there is a desire for young people to engage in activism or support causes like aiding disabled individuals, she questions whether this coincides with the majority of young people's interests in their customary everyday life. Hence, her team's research project "Solidarity in Practice" seeks to explore how young people define and enact solidarity in everyday settings, particularly in schools, public spaces, and online.

Through research involving storytelling exercises, the team identified various forms of solidarity among young people. The first is "**preexisting solidarity**", where alliances are formed with familiar individuals like friends and family. However, the most prominent form was "**reflexive solidarity**", which involves building new alliances based on interdependence and diversity. This form of solidarity prioritises individuals with different skills and backgrounds, as young people rationalise the need for a diverse group to create a functioning community.

Another key type identified was "**affective solidarity**", emerging from struggles and negotiations between alignment and misalignment, often motivated by negative feelings like distrust or vulnerability. These forms of solidarity underscore how difference and adversity can, counterintuitively, foster stronger bonds.

Finally, Riika introduced "**spatial solidarity**", where unity arises simply from sharing a common space, rather than shared values or goals. This suggests that solidarity can emerge from proximity and shared experiences, even if individuals have different perspectives.

In conclusion, Riika emphasised that **solidarity is multifaceted, shaped by both positive and negative emotions, and does not always rely on shared values.** There is potential for solidarity in diverse settings, and understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective social work practices with young people.



**Riika Korkiamäki**

**Professor in Social Work, Researcher, Tampere University, Finland**

Riika Korkiamäki is a Professor in Social Work at Tampere University, Finland. Her main research focus is on teenage young people and, specifically, on peer relationships, friendship, social support networks, and communities and communalities among young people. At the moment, she is leading a [research project 'Solidarity in Practice – Young people's everyday communities as sources of recognition and spaces of preventive social work \(SoliPro\)'](https://projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus/in-english/) (1), funded by the Research Council of Finland, 2022-2026.

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1 <https://projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus/in-english/>



# How does volunteering succeed & fail in promoting solidarity in Europe?

In his keynote address, Stuart Fox, a senior lecturer at the University of Exeter, explored the relationship between youth political participation and volunteering, particularly focusing on how volunteering can promote European solidarity and active citizenship. His research centers on the evolving nature of political engagement among young people, especially millennials and Gen Z, and highlights the challenges and opportunities for fostering political engagement through volunteerism.

Stuart began by emphasising the importance of political participation, defining it broadly as any action aimed at influencing political decisions, from voting to protesting. He explained that political participation is vital for active citizenship, a core value of European democracy, which entails individuals exercising their rights and responsibilities to contribute to governance. Active political involvement is essential to achieving solidarity, which means more than advocating for change – it requires people to take action as agents of solidarity.

Stuart identified a concerning trend: **younger generations, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, are less likely to vote than their predecessors.** Despite being politically active in non-electoral ways, such as protesting or signing petitions, millennials and Gen Z exhibit lower voter turnout, compared to older generations. He pointed out that voting is habitual, and low turnout among young people today is likely to persist as they age, deepening the generational divide in voter engagement. This problem is further compounded by socioeconomic disparities, with young people from poorer households being the ones least likely to vote, resulting in their underrepresentation in political decision-making.

Turning to the role of volunteering, he discussed whether it can mitigate low political participation among disadvantaged youth. Historical research shows that volunteering correlates with higher voter turnout, but recent studies suggest that this effect may be overstated. Often, young people who volunteer are already predisposed to political engagement due to their upbringing in politically active households.

However, Stuart's research, based on data from the UK and Switzerland, reveals that **volunteering does positively impact young people from poorer backgrounds, young men especially.** For these individuals, volunteering increases their likelihood of voting in their first election, which is crucial since voting in early elections fosters a lifelong voting habit.

Despite these successes, Stuart identified two major failures in the current volunteering landscape. First, volunteering benefits young men more than young women in terms of political engagement. He suggested that this may be due to gender differences in the types of volunteering activities, with men more likely to participate in politically oriented organisations. Second, there is a **persistent socioeconomic bias** in volunteering, with wealthier, more educated individuals being more likely to volunteer, leaving those from poorer backgrounds—who stand to gain the most—underrepresented.

In conclusion, Stuart called for more effort to address these failures, suggesting that **we need to explore ways to engage young women and disadvantaged youth in politically productive forms of volunteering.** He challenged the audience to consider difficult questions, such as whether mandating volunteer participation or targeting volunteering opportunities specifically at disadvantaged youth might help address the socioeconomic imbalance. Ultimately, he argued that while volunteering can help reduce generational inequalities in political participation, more must be done to ensure that its benefits are shared equitably across all youth demographics.



**Dr Stuart Fox**

**Senior Lecturer, Researcher, University of Exeter**

Dr Stuart Fox is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Exeter. His research examines generational differences in political behaviour, and particularly the growing divides between both younger and older generations, and young people from poor and wealthy backgrounds (1). His current projects examine the effects of volunteering on political engagement, and examine the potential for volunteering programmes to reduce inequalities in young people's electoral participation.

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# Discussion Groups

## Summary

The discussion groups at the Europe Talks Solidarity Conference 2024 examined perspectives on solidarity, challenges in youth engagement, and approaches to fostering active participation across diverse contexts. Here is a one-page summary of the key points:

### Insights on Solidarity and Civic Engagement

Participants agreed that solidarity is multifaceted, encompassing humanitarian support, community-building, and addressing crises. They recognised solidarity as vital to society, often emerging in response to crises, and highlighted its role in uniting people across political, cultural, and geographic divides. Yet, perspectives varied by sector: NGOs and civil society saw it as community-driven and action-oriented, while private sectors often focused on brand-related social responsibility.

### Challenges in Youth Participation

Youth engagement presents specific challenges, with young people often disillusioned with traditional politics, particularly when politicians appear detached from their concerns. Key obstacles include a lack of trustworthy representatives and insufficient encouragement for civic involvement. Participants emphasised the need for genuine youth representation and early critical thinking education, noting that youth participation is closely tied to personal motivation and visibility of impact.

### Dominant Participation Trends

Young people increasingly favour alternative and non-hierarchical forms of engagement, such as protests, flash mobs, and digital activism, preferring cause-specific actions over broad political affiliations. The influence of media and technology on participation is complex: while social media fosters connectivity, it can reinforce echo chambers. Participants noted that digital spaces have significant potential for mobilising youth but must balance influence with critical thinking education.

### Fostering Active Participation and Solidarity

To foster solidarity, participants advocated for more inclusive and accessible programs that encourage youth ownership. They emphasised empowering youth to act as change agents through initiatives like the European Solidarity Corps, which offers team-based solidarity projects aligned with local needs. Programs should ensure that participation feels relevant and authentic, as personal investment in projects drives ongoing engagement.

### Recommendations for Future Solidarity Initiatives

- 1. Enhance Civic Education:** Incorporate topics like solidarity and critical thinking into school curricula to instil these values early.
- 2. Provide Structural Support:** Implement supportive frameworks that offer youth resources, mentorship, and a sense of agency.
- 3. Diversify Engagement Options:** Recognise diverse participation forms, from short-term, task-oriented volunteering to long-term commitments.
- 4. Promote Inclusivity:** Design projects that involve underrepresented groups, ensuring a mix of voices in solidarity initiatives.
- 5. Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Establish robust guidelines for volunteering that address online engagement, data privacy, and safety checks.

In conclusion, the discussions highlighted solidarity as a key value that binds communities and emphasised that meaningful youth engagement depends on accessible, diverse, and authentic opportunities that align with young people's interests and values.

# Solidarity Labs

## Round 1: practices from Slovakia

Solidarity Labs offered a place for sharing knowledge and good practices. The Labs were structured as 3 parallel sessions of 45 minutes featuring a project or practice that was pre-selected by the conference organisers followed by a group discussion and reflection. The 1st round of Solidarity Labs featured the practices specifically from Slovakia:

"Theatre for hOmeless peRsons" - Theatre and art as a medium to achieve solidarity with all (presented by Patrik Krebs) - a small partnership project (KA2) implemented by the Slovak organization "Divadlo bez domova" in partnership with the Italian partner AMA Sutta Scupa APS ETS. The goal of the project was the exchange of experience in the field of theatre art aimed at disadvantaged youth and homeless young people, between the partnering countries, and to use this tool to motivate social inclusion.

Wear.the.StreetArt: Transforming Fashion with Creativity, Sustainability, and Inclusion, (presented by Soňa Sadloňová & Tomáš Brichta) - an initiative by young artists who have merged graffiti and street art with sustainable fashion to raise environmental awareness. Supported by the ESC, the project team established a shared screen-printing workshop in a rural area, organised creative workshops for youth, school presentations, skill development for team members, and team building activities. The project not only highlights the environmental impact of consumer fashion but also fosters creativity and a responsible approach to fashion among young people.

Defenders of the riverscape, (presented by Karla & Silvia Paulíková) - a solidarity project led by a team of 5 young people with an objective to draw attention to the issue of the disappearance of natural rivers and other aquatic ecosystems and its impact on the biodiversity. The specialty of this project was that its impact went way beyond the activities regarding the river protection. There were occasions when during the course of cleaning the riverside, the local Roma community was involved and their first aversion towards the project group was smoothly changed into positive attitudes and caring for their environment. The project owners also did a lot for awareness raising through local, regional and national media, thus the solidarity project was not only beneficial because of changing the riverside, but because it brought long-lasting changes in groups of people, who continue caring for the environment.



# Solidarity Labs

## Round 2: international practices

2nd round of Solidarity Labs featured the practices from other countries of Europe:

EDUACTIVE (presented by Pietro Fochi, EDUACTIVE) - a social enterprise in Italy providing impact-oriented services and consultancies aimed to achieve a more efficient response to the needs of young people worldwide. The Solidarity Lab session presented the participants with an interactive game where they had to resolve team challenges connected to execution of ESC Solidarity Projects.

Leaders of Solidarity (presented by Kamil Oleszkiewicz, EuroPeers) - a Polish solidarity project (winner of the SALTO Award 2023) aiming to activate young people in fostering social integration and inclusion by including refugees from Ukraine through initiatives in their local community. The project is hosted in Zabrze, a post-industrial city associated with coal mining. Young volunteers of the Oratory Community Center starting their civic engagement journey were engaged to independently design an event, "Solidarity Picnic", to improve the integration of citizens and Ukrainian refugees into their local community.

"Brewing Solidarity: Our Recipe for ESK Success" (presented by Virna Hadziosmanovic, JUGEND:INFO NÖ) - a Solidarity Lab session that showcased an example of successful organisational practice implemented by Jugend:info Niederösterreich (Youth Information Centre Lower Austria). In Austria the National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps has representations in all of the federal states. The function of these regional offices is to provide information and give advice to young people and organisations working with young people on applications and the programme. This service is free of charge for interested parties and potential applicants. The Jugend:info NÖ is thus a bridge between the National Agency and the potential applicants, being able to cater for needs in a tailor made form while being 'closer' to the applicants. The Solidarity Lab participants learnt how Jugend:info NÖ has been promoting and developing inclusivity, community vibes, and social responsibility - an effort that has been rewarded with the ESCorps Award in 2023.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Changing the world in times of crisis – but how? Solidarity Projects in Europe

Kriszta Molnar and Miguel Tabera from SALTO European Solidarity Corps discussed their work in promoting solidarity and civic participation through various youth programs, particularly solidarity projects. Their primary mission is to **understand how young people practice and perceive solidarity, how it translates into action, and how it contributes to democracy and society.**

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme offers opportunities for young people to engage through three key actions: volunteering, volunteering teams, and solidarity projects. **Solidarity projects are grassroots initiatives where young people identify problems in their local communities and work to solve them.** This hands-on approach gives them the power to be agents of change, fostering ownership and motivation. The speakers noted that solidarity projects can be particularly useful for involving young people with fewer opportunities.

A critical part of their presentation focused on the cost-effectiveness of solidarity projects compared to other youth programs like Erasmus+ and ESC volunteering. Based on calculations from data from the European Commission's DG EAC Dashboard, the approximated “cost” of reaching one person through a solidarity project is considerably lower than other programs. Certainly, solidarity projects do not include the cost of mobility, where the mobility itself has an added value on participants and community, however the numbers highlight that **impactful change can come from low-cost, community-driven efforts, where understanding the needs of the community and having a strong sense of ownership are key.**

The speakers presented a study done by a researcher, Eva Feldmann-Wojtachnia from University of Munich. Drawing on the 50 solidarity projects in the past three years, the study found out that 64% of the them implemented the idea of **solidarity through active participation.**

Kriszta has been working for embedding solidarity and strengthening other common European values in various areas of life. She has worked in schools, universities, European networks, and funding agencies and set up and inspired numerous international cooperations. She is currently a team member of SALTO ESC, in OeAD – Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation.

With over 15 years of experience in the youth sector under his belt, Miguel worn many hats in the ESC world, from being a mentor to becoming a key person in youth organizations. His journey has been a rich tapestry of learning and growth, since 2023, Miguel is part of the ESC Resource Center, and plays a special role in the community building of Solidarity Corps practitioners by listening to them, having dialogue with them and by coordinating events and resources with them. Miguel is also part of the Europe Talks Solidarity team, helping to disseminate SOLIDARITY all over Europe.  
[solidarity@salto-youth.net](mailto:solidarity@salto-youth.net)

Through their participation in solidarity projects, young people develop essential skills such as entrepreneurship, project management, and funding acquisition. They benefit from peer-to-peer experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their community’s challenges. This fosters a sense of belonging—not only to their community but also to Europe as a whole.

**The speakers underscored that young people view solidarity as the core of European values and are willing to act when they see that they are in danger of infringement.** Although volunteering is traditionally more popular among privileged groups, solidarity projects are often diverse, offering opportunities for various groups to work together.

Kriszta and Miguel concluded by encouraging attendees to explore the publications available on their website, particularly **"4Thought for Solidarity" report**, which links academic discourse on solidarity with practical applications in the field of volunteering. This report serves as a valuable resource for understanding and fostering solidarity in European communities.

*“Real transformation, it’s the effort, creativity, and passion we put into it that make things happen. The best changes often come from simple, powerful actions.”*



**Kriszta Molnar    Miguel Tabera**

**SALTO European Solidarity Corps, in OeAD**

[1 https://www.talkingsolidarity.eu/our-podcasts/](https://www.talkingsolidarity.eu/our-podcasts/)

[2 https://www.talkingsolidarity.eu/publications/4thought-for-solidarity/](https://www.talkingsolidarity.eu/publications/4thought-for-solidarity/)

# Panel Discussion

## Insights from Day 1 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs



From left to right: Anna Yeghoyan, (Moderator), Virna Hadziosmanovic, Jaya Tiwari, Beata Kowal, Andrea Rega

Photo credit: Marek Hallon

The panel discussion was centred around the multifaceted concept of solidarity, with participants sharing their experiences, reflections, and insights from various discussion groups and keynote presentations. The conversation revolved around the complexity of solidarity, its various interpretations, and its practical implications at both local and international levels.

The panel consisted of representatives from different discussion groups, each bringing a unique perspective:

- Virna Hadziosmanovic (JUGEND:INFO NÖ),
- Jaya Tiwari (Culture Goes Europe),
- Beata Kowal (STOWARZYSZENIE MŁODYCH ARTYSTÓW - SMART ECO POWER), and
- Andrea Rega (ConTatto Impresa Sociale - Taranto)

Their group members came from diverse professional backgrounds, ranging from youth workers and social entrepreneurs to volunteers and academics. The diversity in these groups contributed to rich discussions that explored solidarity through different lenses.

### Key Insights from the Day's Discussions

The moderator's first question asked the panelists about the key insights from the day. Andrea highlighted the connection between solidarity and political participation. The group found this connection intriguing, discussing how **solidarity can exist even within ideologically harmful groups**, like Nazi groups, despite the negative connotations. This led to a realisation that solidarity is subjective and can be used for negative purposes just as well as for the positive.

Virna built on this by discussing unintended solidarity, where **actions meant to promote solidarity may have unintentional consequences**. She shared an example of a Christmas gift project for refugees, which inadvertently overlooked the fact that the refugees might not celebrate Christmas and lacked the financial resources to use the wallets they were given.

# Panel Discussion

## Insights from Day 1 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs

Beata's group delved into the **complexities of compensating volunteers**, particularly in countries where paying volunteers is legally prohibited. They discussed whether alternative forms of compensation, such as gifts or education opportunities, were morally justifiable. Beata also expressed concern about **political manipulation** of volunteers and how difficult it can be to encourage them to participate in voting when there are no trustworthy candidates.

Jaya's group discussed the **different regional interpretations of solidarity**. In some regions, solidarity is politically motivated, while in others, it is about volunteerism and helping others. Jaya pointed out that solidarity has become a "big word," but at its core, it represents basic human values. She emphasised that solidarity is about accepting differences rather than finding similarities, and it's a fundamental aspect of society that many regions are lacking.

### Exploring the Concept of Solidarity

The conversation shifted to how solidarity is perceived differently based on national versus international contexts. Jaya noted that while each individual sees solidarity through their personal priorities (such as climate change or gender equality), **it ultimately comes down to helping others and accepting differences**. She shared an example of a project mentioned in her solidarity lab where participants from different countries came together in support of Ukraine, highlighting how international solidarity can unite people during crises.

Beata emphasised the **importance of local acts of solidarity**, sharing her own experience of hosting Ukrainian refugees in her home for two years. For her, solidarity is about **basic human decency and helping those in need**, even without expecting anything in return.

Virna compared the definition of solidarity to how people define beauty – everyone has a different understanding based on their background, experiences, and values. She noted that solidarity is often driven by both personal motivation and external circumstances, but it is difficult to measure the social impact of such actions. She expressed **hope that the European Commission continues to recognise and promote solidarity as a separate programme**.

Andrea's group highlighted the **role of creativity and art in fostering solidarity**. They discussed two projects from the Solidarity Labs, one focusing on upcycling and the other on theatre for homeless individuals. Both projects demonstrated how art can bring people together, treat people and objects as resources, and promote inclusivity.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Panel Discussion

## Insights from Day 1 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs

### Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Solidarity

The panel also discussed some of the challenges of promoting solidarity, particularly when it comes to engaging young people. One audience member noted that **young people often prioritise their professional ambitions** over social causes like equality. This observation led to a broader reflection on how solidarity can be perceived differently by different groups and how it might not always resonate with younger generations.

Virna introduced the concept of "**solidarity washing**," akin to "greenwashing," warning that some actions might be portrayed as acts of solidarity without truly benefiting those in need. This concept resonated with the panelists, sparking a conversation about the **ethics of solidarity projects** and whether such actions are truly for the benefit of others or for self-gratification.

Andrea raised the point of privilege in volunteering, agreeing with a statement from the earlier keynote that **volunteering is often a privilege available to a select group of people**. He emphasised the need to find ways to make volunteering more accessible to everyone, particularly those who do not have the same privileges.

### Audience Contributions and Broader Reflections

The audience contributed to the discussion by questioning whether solidarity is limited to those we can see and know. One participant pointed out that society often overlooks marginalised groups like prisoners, who are almost invisible in daily life. This raised an important question: **how can we extend solidarity to people and groups that we do not directly interact with?**

The panel ended with a reflection on the **importance of proactive solidarity**. Virna and Andrea emphasised the need to address problems before they become crises and to foster solidarity as a preventative measure rather than a reactive one. The audience agreed that solidarity is not just about responding to immediate crises but also about building a sustainable culture of empathy, respect, and inclusion.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

### Conclusion

The discussion highlighted the complexity of solidarity, with each speaker contributing different perspectives on how it manifests in various contexts. Whether on a personal, local, or international level, **solidarity is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that requires active participation, empathy, and a willingness to accept differences**. The conversation underscored the importance of continuing to explore and promote solidarity in diverse and inclusive ways, while being mindful of its potential unintended consequences.



# Building the Better Future: Youth Solidarity and Alternative Participation in Europe

In his keynote on youth participation and solidarity, Ph.D. Marko Kovačić, Vice-Dean for Research and International Cooperation at Bernays University of Applied Sciences, explored alternative ways of youth participation across the EU. He emphasised that youth engagement extends beyond traditional methods, such as voting and protesting, and involves diverse, often informal forms of participation.

Marko began by outlining the numerous challenges young people face today, such as mental health struggles, housing crises, underfunded youth sector, and overreliance on Erasmus+ programs. He argued that these issues stem, in part, from neoliberal policies that have resulted in public service cuts, including in education and youth work, particularly in Scandinavia and other European countries. In addition to that, the rise of technology further amplifies the inequalities, making it harder for marginalised young people to engage in civic life.

Marko introduced the sociological concept of **"double transition"**, which describes the unique challenges young people face as they simultaneously navigate personal development and societal crises. In this context, youth participation becomes more complex, as they struggle to form their identities while facing economic and social uncertainties.

Contrary to common perceptions, Marko argued that **young people are politically active, but their participation often takes alternative forms that are not always recognised by traditional frameworks.** These forms are typically informal, issue-based, and non-hierarchical. They often occur in spaces created by young people themselves, particularly online, rather than in established political arenas. Examples include School Strikes for Climate and online movements focusing on specific issues like gun control.

Marko presented the idea of a **"democratic paradox,"** where young people are both critical of political systems and idealistic about democratic participation, but often disengaged from formal political processes. While many express a desire to influence politics, fewer take actions such as voting or protesting. This paradox reflects **a gap between young people's expectations of democracy and their participation in traditional democratic activities.**

**Motivation for youth participation is often driven by proximity to real issues, the opportunity to be heard, and the desire for social interaction.** For example, the 2021 EU Youth Survey found that 85% of young people discuss politics with friends and family, showing significant potential for civic activism.

Finally, Marko raised the challenge of integrating these alternative forms of participation into democratic structures. While youth participation can manifest through volunteering, cultural exchanges, and advocacy, traditional institutions often struggle to recognise and support these activities. He emphasised **the need to balance listening to young people's voices while ensuring that democratic values are preserved and passed on to future generations.**

Marko concluded by calling for more inclusive definitions of participation that reflect contemporary youth engagement and urges ongoing dialogue to explore these evolving forms of civic action.



**Ph.D. Marko Kovačić**

**Vice-Dean for Research and International Cooperation Research  
Bernays University of Applied Sciences**

Asst Prof. Dr Marko Kovacic is a former youth worker turned academic currently acting as a vice-dean for research and international cooperation research at the Bernays University of Applied Sciences where he teaches classes in youth studies and methodology. He is a founder and lecturer at the first academic youth studies program in Croatia, run at the University of Rijeka. Kovacic is a member of the European Pool of Youth researchers, a body jointly governed by the European Commission and Council of Europe, and he was a first Youth Wiki correspondent for Croatia. In the last 14 years, he has been engaged in most national and European youth policy processes. Marko authored more than 70 papers on youth and education and managed numerous youth and education projects.

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1 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/youth-survey-2021>

# Democracy innovation and the quest for solidarity

In her keynote, Corina Pirvulescu, Membership & Programme Manager at EYCA and Co-Founder of Social DOers, raised critical questions about the state of democracy and the opportunities for young Europeans to engage in meaningful ways, especially as the EU prepares to draft a new youth strategy for 2028 onwards. She advocated for the inclusion of future generations in policymaking and called for deliberative democracy initiatives to ensure that EU policies are future-proof. Ultimately, she stressed the need for solidarity not only with today's youth but also with the generations to come, in the quest to build a more inclusive and resilient democracy.

Corina began by acknowledging the growing **disillusionment with democracy globally**, as only 8% of the world's population lives in full democracies. She warns against the complacency that can arise in economically stable, non-democratic regimes, which may seem to offer prosperity while failing to protect civil liberties. This disconnect between economic success and democratic values can lead citizens to underestimate the importance of democracy, making it essential to focus on deeper measures of societal well-being, such as education quality and social safety nets.

Corina emphasised the importance of youth participation in shaping the future of democracy, especially in this year with significant global elections, including those in the EU, the U.S., and India. However, she questioned whether electoral democracy truly delivers solidarity for young people. **The disconnect between political candidates and young voters is apparent in the age gap between heads of state and the younger population.** Furthermore, young people tend to engage with issues that resonate with their values, such as climate change, mental health, and housing, rather than aligning with traditional right or left political ideologies. She argued that young people are disillusioned with the way politics is organised, finding it unrelatable and lacking in spaces that encourage their participation.

Corina Pirvulescu has over 12 years of experience in youth programmes and electoral engagement of young voters in Romania, USA and at European level. Over the years, she had different roles, starting as a youth representative and continuing as a professional, advising public institutions, international organizations and co-authoring various publications on youth (electoral) participation. Recently she co-founded Civics International, a Brussels-based non-profit aiming to connect the experiences of activists and young voters in Europe and USA.  
[corina.pirvulescu@gmail.com](mailto:corina.pirvulescu@gmail.com)

Corina reflected on the role of youth programs, such as Erasmus+, in fostering solidarity through volunteer activities and exchanges. While these initiatives promote cross-border solidarity, she questioned whether they are enough to drive political participation and structural change. She called for innovation in youth policy to **create new pathways** for young people to engage in democracy, emphasising the need for **spaces that empower youth to build political power.**

Corina highlighted the need for solidarity with future generations, noting that **the next 8 billion people will predominantly live outside of Europe, in regions with high inequality and low human development.** She stresses the importance of incorporating long-term thinking into policymaking, particularly in relation to climate change and social justice. While 81% of global constitutions recognize the rights of future generations, **there are few legal tools to enforce these rights, making it crucial for the youth sector to advocate for future-focused policies.**

Corina suggested that youth participation should be about power and resources, emphasising the need to include marginalised voices in decision-making spaces. She points to examples (1) of innovative democratic practices, such as citizens' assemblies and initiatives like Run For Something, which train young people to run for public office. She argues that Europe lacks similar infrastructure to support young leaders in gaining access to political power, and calls for the development of programs that equip young people with the tools to become stronger agents of society.



**Corina Pirvulescu**

**Membership & Programme Manager at EYCA,  
Co-Founder and Vice-President of Social DOers**

1 Nets4Dem, Missions Publiques, Run For Something, Democratic Society, Nece Labs, Apolitical Foundation, Civitates

# How the freedom of media is connected to solidarity and how does it impact democracy?

In his keynote, David Diaz-Jogeix, Senior Director of Programmes at ARTICLE 19, emphasised the critical relationship between freedom of expression, media freedom, and solidarity in building democratic societies. He began by exploring the concept of solidarity and its connection to freedom of expression, arguing that **solidarity thrives only in an environment where individuals are free to express themselves and access information**. Without media freedom, citizens are deprived of essential knowledge, and this directly hampers the ability to build solidarity across borders.

David raised the point that autocratic governments fear the media because it holds them accountable. Autocrats often employ divide-and-conquer strategies, creating enemies out of marginalised groups such as ethnic and sexual minorities. This tactic, which fosters division rather than solidarity, distracts us from uniting to demand justice and equality. He encourages the audience to **evaluate the freedom of the media in their own countries, particularly independent investigative outlets, as a litmus test for identifying autocratic tendencies**.

Until recently, measuring freedom of expression was considered impossible, but ARTICLE 19's Global Expression Report (GxR) (1) has made significant strides in quantifying it. Using data from the Varieties of Democracy Institute, the GxR tracks freedom of expression across 161 countries. Countries are categorised as Open, Less Restricted, Restricted, Highly Restricted, or in Crisis. This allows for a clear picture of how much freedom individuals have to express themselves and participate in society.

David painted a concerning global picture: **80% of the world's population now experiences less freedom of expression** than they did in the year 2000, with over 4 billion people living in countries classified as in "Crisis." In India, for example, the freedom of expression has deteriorated sharply with widespread censorship of social media, suppression of independent media, and an increase in internet shutdowns.

David has an extensive professional experience on human rights with the UN, IGOs and INGOs. David joined in 2013 ARTICLE 19, an organisation that works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination. As Senior Director of Programmes, he oversees the programmatic work in Europe, Asia-Pacific, Bangladesh and South Asia, MENA and West Africa, governance and security issues. Prior to joining ARTICLE 19, David worked for Amnesty International for ten years, primarily as Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia. He worked in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia during and after the armed conflict for 7 years, mainly for the OSCE. David lived and work for 4 years in various countries in Africa, including post-genocide Rwanda, Liberia and Burkina Faso. [david.diaz-jogeix@article19.org](mailto:david.diaz-jogeix@article19.org)

Despite the global decline, there are hopeful signs. Brazil is cited as a success story, where the election of President Lula da Silva in 2022 led to significant improvements in freedom of expression. Brazil moved from a "Restricted" to an "Open" category in the GxR, improving in 17 out of 25 indicators. These advances were achieved through government reforms that included the creation of ministries for Indigenous populations, human rights, and women.

Turning to Europe, David noted that 48% of the region's population lives in "Open" countries, but a worrying 51% of countries in Europe and Central Asia have seen declines in freedom of expression over the past decade. He points to Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia as countries where media pluralism has been systematically eroded.

David highlighted Italy as an example of a country where journalists face legal harassment, with politicians using defamation laws to silence critics. Similarly, he discusses France and Germany as countries where the right to protest has been restricted, particularly concerning protests related to Palestinian solidarity. David emphasised that **freedom of expression, including the right to protest, is essential to democracy, even when the views expressed are disturbing or controversial**.

*"Democracy needs to discuss things that disturb, and my appeal to you as youth leaders, is to foster this environment in which we need to debate."*



**David Diaz-Jogeix**

**Senior Director of Programmes, ARTICLE 19**

1 [globalexpressionreport.org](http://globalexpressionreport.org)

# Future perspectives on volunteering / solidarity / active citizenship in Europe

In her keynote, Gabriella Civico, Director of the Center for European Volunteering, discussed the role of volunteering and solidarity across Europe, focusing on the infrastructure supporting volunteerism and its impact on society.

Gabriella emphasised the importance of empowerment in volunteering, noting that volunteers and organisations play a key role in shaping active citizens who engage in their communities locally, nationally, and globally. They, as she said, are key actors in strengthening democracy by contributing to more inclusive and cohesive communities.

The centre part of Gabriella's presentation was the **volunteering ecosystem**. It includes two types of volunteering:

1. Continuous volunteering, where individuals volunteer regularly, such as in education or social services.
2. Sporadic volunteering, which occurs during specific events like festivals or crises such as natural disasters, where trained volunteers provide support.

She also highlighted a **significant shift in the way people volunteer, moving away from role-based volunteering** (committing to an ongoing role) to task-based volunteering, where individuals participate in specific tasks on a temporary basis. This shift presents a challenge for programs like the European Solidarity Corps, which focuses on role-based engagement.

Gabriella underscored the importance of structure in volunteerism, pointing out that **while young people may have the drive to help, they need the right frameworks—legal, financial, and organisational—to fully participate**. She warns against a growing trend among youth to feel disempowered, leading them to accept the status quo rather than actively trying to change it.

Addressing global trends, Civico mentioned the upcoming International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development in 2026. She stressed that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires collaboration between civil society, governments, and businesses, with volunteers playing a crucial role.

Gabriella also highlighted **the need for updated legal frameworks that reflect modern volunteering, especially online and in sectors involving vulnerable populations, where background checks and protection mechanisms are often lacking**. She called for continued advocacy and education to combat misconceptions about volunteering and to emphasize its value not only in service delivery but in fostering human connection and solidarity.

In conclusion, Gabriella advocated for aligning volunteering with the **EU's strategic priorities of democracy, security, and competitiveness**. She viewed volunteering as essential to building democratic engagement, community resilience, and skills development, which contribute to a more competitive and secure Europe. Finally, she highlighted the inclusivity of volunteering, emphasising that it can and should be accessible to everyone, regardless of background or identity: *"There is no model of it, there is no style. There is no person who is a volunteer who looks like a volunteer. Everyone can be a volunteer. And if we think about future perspectives and future strategies, that's one of the essences of volunteering that we need to protect."*



**Gabriella Civico**

**Director of Center for European Volunteering**

Gabriella Civico is from the UK, but lived in Spain and Portugal for many years before moving to Belgium and becoming a Belgian citizen. She has a degree in Social Policy and Education from the University of Surrey (UK), and a Masters in Education in E-learning from the University of Hull (UK). She worked with CEV in her role as Project Manager for the EYV2011 Alliance from July 2010 until the project's completion in March 2012, when she became CEV Director. There, she takes a leading role in advocating for better volunteering policies, contributing her expertise at the European level in various European Union expert & advisory groups, such as EQF, Europass, Mobility of Young Volunteers, as well as in the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre Advisory Group. She also represents CEV in the EESC Liaison Group for European Civil Society Networks and has been further involved in establishing Civil Society Europe in 2014 where she is currently the President.

1 <https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/>

# Future opportunities supported by SALTO ESC

In this thematic input session, Kriszta Molnar and Miguel Tabera from SALTO ESC presented a number of opportunities supported by SALTO ESC. They invited the participants to subscribe to the SALTO's **monthly newsletter** and **SALTO's Training Calendar**, and reviewed the upcoming plans.

## Plans for the remaining 2024:

1. [SolIDARE](#) facebook community of practitioners that host regular meetings once a month in Poland.
2. [Coaching in solidarity projects](#) on November 4th-8th Lithuania (Call for applications closed on September 18th).
3. [Mentoring / Framework Training](#) by [Mentoring Under Construction community on Facebook](#) - November 25-29, Romania (Call open until September 29th)
4. [Europe Talks Solidarity webinars](#) - will explore connection of EU Strategic Priorities 2024-29 with volunteering and solidarity (Call opens in the end October)
5. [A Massive Online Open Course \(MOOC\)](#) on European Solidarity Corps including webinars on community impact will be available between October 22 and December 6. Two webinars on the topic of Community Impact will be happening on November 11th and 25th.

## Plans for 2025

1. [Conference on Volunteering](#) on February 3rd-6th 2025 in Paris
2. Coaching in solidarity projects in Slovakia (dates TBC)
3. Europe Talks Solidarity: podcasts, articles, webinars
4. Trainings on Community Impact (Belgium, (dates TBC)
5. SolIDARE (SALTO EuroMed)
6. Solidarity Projects Meet Up (Finland, dates TBC)
7. Mentoring Under Construction (France, dates TBC)



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Plenary Session

## Insights from Day 2 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs

In the final plenary session of the conference, participants gathered to harvest ideas and conclusions from their Discussion Groups and Solidarity Labs. Seven audience members presented summaries of their discussions, covering a wide range of topics related to youth participation, solidarity, volunteering, and how these concepts intersect with political, social, and economic issues. Below is a summary of the key points expressed by each of the speakers during the session.

### 1. Volunteering vs. Civic Engagement: Free Will vs. Compulsion

The first audience member highlighted the importance of **volunteering being based on free will**. They argued that if an activity requires compulsion to engage people, it should not be called volunteering but rather civic engagement or community service. This distinction is important in maintaining the integrity of the concept of volunteering, which should be driven by personal choice and motivation rather than obligation.

### 2. Political Involvement of Disadvantaged Youth

The second speaker shared insights from a Solidarity Lab that focused on the political involvement of young people and the barriers faced by disadvantaged communities in participating in volunteering. A major point of discussion was how to attract young people from these communities into volunteering projects, given that those who benefit most from volunteering are often the least likely to engage in it. The Solidarity Lab participants explored strategies for **making volunteering more accessible and appealing to marginalised groups** and considered how solidarity projects might serve as a gateway for greater political involvement.

### 3. Political Orientation, Media Freedom, and Critical Thinking

The third audience member shared reflections from their Discussion Group, which addressed the topics of political participation, freedom of speech, and media freedom. The group explored the political orientation of young people, their engagement in political activism, and the media freedom crisis. They also discussed the importance of critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in contexts where young people are often influenced by biased or restricted media outlets. One conclusion was that **young people should not feel the need to ask for permission** to stand up for their rights, particularly when protesting or engaging in political activism. The group also reflected on the safety of journalists and the need for more mainstream discussions on critical thinking and protesting.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

# Plenary Session

## Insights from Day 2 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs



Photo credit: Marek Hallon

#### 4. Youth Participation and Solidarity: The Power of Togetherness

The fourth speaker discussed the theoretical connection between youth participation and solidarity. They noted that these concepts are often abstract, but the Solidarity Lab session encouraged participants to think about how these ideas manifest in real, concrete actions. The group discussed **youth-washing**, a phenomenon where organisations superficially engage youth without genuine inclusion. They also explored the idea of **togetherness** as a core link between solidarity and youth participation, reinforcing the motto of the European Solidarity Corps: "the power of together." This takeaway emphasised that collective action and shared responsibility are central to building solidarity through youth involvement.

#### 5. Resource Allocation and Trust-Building with Marginalised Youth

The fifth speaker focused on the allocation of resources in solidarity projects and the issue of private vs. public funding. They argued that while philanthropy by wealthy individuals is often praised, the real focus should be on **taxation and public funding**, which would allow young people to decide what is important in their communities. Additionally, the speaker highlighted the importance of trust-building with marginalised youth. They emphasised that short-term projects are often insufficient for building the trust necessary to engage these groups, advocating for **longer project durations** that allow for **deeper connections with marginalised communities**. This approach would ensure that meaningful relationships are formed, enabling more effective participation.

#### 6. Mental Health and Digitalisation

The sixth speaker brought attention to the increasing need for mental health support among young people. They stressed that many young individuals are expressing a desire to discuss their personal feelings and mental well-being. The group concluded that **future programs should focus on addressing mental health issues**, and that digital platforms could play a key role in facilitating these discussions. They explored the potential for digitalisation to not only raise awareness about mental health but also provide new ways to offer support to young people in need.

#### 7. Engaging with the System: The Dilemma of Youth Movements

The final speaker summarised a discussion about the dilemma faced by youth movements: whether to work within the system or to remain outside it. Many young people initially engage in movements that challenge established systems, but at some point, they need to decide whether to formalise their efforts by joining organisations or seek support from structured institutions. The group discussed the cultural relativity of solidarity and how young people from different countries and backgrounds might approach this dilemma differently. The speaker also reflected on the importance of **unity in movements**, noting that **while disagreements are inevitable, they should be embraced** as part of the collective effort to achieve shared goals.

# Plenary Session

## Insights from Day 2 Discussion Groups & Solidarity Labs

### Additional Reflections

Throughout the session, several common themes emerged. One of the most prevalent was the idea that **youth participation is not limited to traditional forms of activism or political engagement**. Instead, young people are finding new, innovative ways to express solidarity, whether through volunteering, community service, or grassroots movements. The role of mental health and emotional well-being was also highlighted as a growing concern that should be integrated into future solidarity projects and youth programs.

Another key point was the **need for structural changes to existing programs to better accommodate young people from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds**. This includes longer-term projects and more targeted efforts to build trust with communities that are often overlooked or excluded from mainstream youth initiatives.

The session closed with a reflection on the importance of recognising diverse perspectives and approaches to solidarity. Participants acknowledged the challenges posed by cultural differences and political contexts, but also emphasised the shared values that underpin solidarity efforts across Europe.

In conclusion, the plenary session served as a valuable space for participants to share their insights, reflect on the challenges and opportunities of youth participation, and explore new ways to strengthen solidarity through collective action. Speakers emphasised that **young people are not passive recipients of policies; instead, they are active agents of change**. This marks a shift from traditional views of youth participation, where young people were seen merely as beneficiaries of programs. Today, they are involved in co-creating solutions, driving solidarity projects, and influencing policies at local, national, and European levels. The discussions highlighted the complexity of solidarity, the power of youth-driven initiatives, and the ongoing need for structural support to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to engage and make a difference in their communities.



Photo credit: Marek Hallon



# Annex 1: Graphic Recordings



Drawings by: Juraj Víg  
Photo credit: Marek Hallon

## Annex 2: List of participants

First name	Last name	Country of Residence	Organisation
Nigar	Kerimli	Azerbaijan	EU Neighborhood Young European Ambassadors
Harold	Koxha	Albania	Peace Volunteering Network - PVN Albania
Saeed	Ullah	Austria	ACTIVE Austria
Plamena	Kolarova	Bulgaria	I am applying individually. However, I am an avid volunteer in various organisations.
Olya	Djakova	Bulgaria	Sofia University St. Kliment Ochriski
Tea	Majic	Croatia	Association for Youth Empowerment and Security - AYES Croatia
Milena	Bošková	Czech Republic	CTU -Czech Technical University, employee , Nadani a dovednosti ops., volunteer
Salma	Abbass	Egypt	Africa Alpbach Network
Annika	Lehtonen	Finland	Tampere University
Tiina	Määttä	Finland	Tampere University
Ulla	Saalasti	Finland	Nuorten Akatemia
Tareq	Abunahel	Finland	Mirsal ry
Maaro	Niskanen	Finland	Tampere university
Katherine	Cao	Finland	JEF Helsinki
1 assisting person for Katherine, name of that person: Malla Annu			Adalmina Rahkola
Beatriz	Martinez	France	CONCORDIA
Jaya	Tiwari	Germany	culture goes europe
Ksenija	Smolovic	Germany	Plan International Deutschland
Manos	Banousis	Greece	HYP - Hellenic Youth Participation
corey	sherlock	Ireland	localise
Andrea	Rega	Italy	ConTatto Impresa Sociale - Taranto
Paolo	Schetter	Italy	Moby Dick ETS
Eleonora Lisa	Schulze Battma	Italy	
Pietro	Fochi	Italy	EDUACTIVE
Edoardo Luigi	Macri	Italy	Comune di Melissano
Blend	Selmani	Kosovo	TOKA
Avgustina	Alibekova	Moldova	The Association of Young Diplomats from Moldova
Christiaan	Rozendal	Netherlands	Christiaan Rozendal
Hege	Hermo	Norway	Indre Østfold Kommune
Aleksandra	Pojeć	Poland	Polsko-Białoruskie Stowarzyszenie Inter-Akcja
Beata	Kowal	Poland	STOWARZYSZENIE MŁODYCH ARTYSTÓW - SMART ECO POWER
1 assisting person for Beata, name of that person: Aleks Bezginas			
Zuzanna	Kliś	Poland	Independent Student Monthly Magazine of the School of Economics Magiel
Patrícia	Gama	Portugal	Câmara Municipal Lisboa
Gustavo	Baptista	Portugal	Associação CAIS
Alessia	Carrino	Romania	COSI - Civic Orientation and Social Integration
Matúš	Maršalko	Slovak Republic	Coworking with community
Lucia	Uhrinová	Slovak Republic	Bratislavské dobrovoľnícke centrum
Zuzana	Grochalová	Slovak Republic	Transparency International Slovakia
Tomáš	Kubiš	Slovak Republic	Divadlo bez domova
Zuzana	Sevčíková	Slovak Republic	TeCeMko – Trenčianske centrum mládeže o.z.
Denisa	Behúlová	Slovak Republic	Trenčianske centrum mládeže o.z.
Alena	Húdeková	Slovak Republic	Krajské centrum voľného času v Trenčíne
Natália	Gurská	Slovak Republic	Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava
Zuzana	Wallnerová	Slovak Republic	Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava
Dominika	Repko	Slovak Republic	Slovak University of Technology
Irem	UGUR	Turkey	Ilk Sen Ol Foundation
ICLAL	BAKLACI	Turkey	Erzurum Yakutiye Youth Center
Dr Stuart	Fox	Great Britain	University of Exeter

