



# Solidarity in Europe

## Alive and Active



*Research and  
Innovation*

## Solidarity in Europe – Alive and Active

European Commission  
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation  
Directorate B — Open Innovation and Open Science  
Unit B.6 — Open and Inclusive Societies

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Manuscript completed in October 2018.

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

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PDF

ISBN 978-92-79-94188-7

doi:10.2777/6935

KI-06-18-199-EN-N

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# Solidarity in Europe

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## Executive Summary

Research from the Horizon 2020 projects SOLIDUS and TransSOL indicates that solidarity is alive and active in Europe. There is clear citizen support for policies to assist the vulnerable and reduce inequalities, but solidarity is nuanced, conditional and often fragile. Solidarity is a moral value, tied to identity. Attitudes vary across policies and States: welfare solidarity receives strong support, solidarity for migrants is more contested. Solidarity actions are largely conducted at national levels but there is also evidence of transnational – European – activities by civil society organisations subject to constraints of political mobilisation and technical barriers such as funding.

EU-level actions to tap the potency of solidarity must address its durability, mobilisation and the need for an appropriate legal framework. Measures to strengthen solidarity should focus on nurturing and embedding cultural change through a mix of immediate and long-term educational and media measures. Support should also be given to civil society organisations and their role in a robust European societal infrastructure, building on the successful and innovative actions identified in the research projects. But there also needs to be an appropriate legal space allowing for social interventions that directly improve citizens' lives. Capturing the potential of solidarity provides a hugely important opportunity for the EU's own relevance, renewal and resilience.

## Background

This policy paper is based on the Horizon 2020 projects SOLIDUS (Grant Agreement 649489<sup>1</sup>) and TransSOL (Grant Agreement 649435<sup>2</sup>), which both ran from 01/06/2015 to 31/05/2018. They form complementary investigations into solidarity, yielding theoretical and empirical insights into the nature, conditions and extent of individual and collective solidarities. SOLIDUS focused upon empowerment, social justice and citizenship with a view to understanding successful solidarity practices. TransSOL explored European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis through the lens of migration/asylum, unemployment and disability.

The headline findings from the research projects are:

1. There is considerable evidence of solidarity actions and support for policies to assist the vulnerable in society, but that solidarity is nuanced, conditional and often fragile. There are variations and cleavages across policy sectors and also between and within countries.
2. Solidarity derives from moral values and has the capacity to alleviate poverty, renew democracy and build social cohesion by bridging communities and countries. But it is primarily tied to identities, which accordingly shape the spaces for political expression.
3. There is strong evidence of attitudes supporting help for people in need (welfare solidarity), reduction of wealth disparities (territorial solidarity) and willingness to support financial help for other countries in difficulty (fiscal solidarity). The positive levels relating to welfare and territorial solidarity are highest in national contexts, but the EU (as distinct from global) is the next most supported focus for solidarity interventions. There is also support for helping refugees but this is not so marked as in the other policy areas. Attitudes across all policy domains vary between countries, but the greatest disparities again relate to refugees, with Eastern European states showing the lowest approval rates.
4. Transnational – European – solidarity actions exist to some degree, strongly dependent on volunteers and civil society organisations (CSOs), but their development has been limited by the lack of a political space and constituency to mobilise support. Feelings and practices of solidarity are primarily driven at local levels and do not find a strong European articulation. Other, more technical, barriers such as funding or organisational matters further limit or inhibit more transnational engagement.

This paper provides a narrative that draws upon the multidimensional and multi-level phenomenon of solidarity (TransSOL) to elaborate the opportunities and challenges for EU-level interventions in the creation of a robust ‘civil society infrastructure’ (SOLIDUS). Policy relevance is discussed in terms of the potency of solidarity, the factors inhibiting its effectiveness and strategies for harnessing its strengths to the direction and functioning of the EU.

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1 [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

2 [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

## The potency of solidarity

Solidarity already has an undoubted presence in the legal framework of the EU, as well as a well-established constitutional tradition in some Member States<sup>3</sup>. The EU Treaties explicitly refer to solidarity in a number of provisions, including the values<sup>4</sup> and objectives of the Union<sup>5</sup> (solidarity ‘between generations’ and ‘among Member States’) and particular policies where the ‘principle’ or ‘spirit’ of solidarity is to be applied<sup>6</sup>. The Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU adopts solidarity as the title of Chapter IV for provisions that include rights at work, family life, welfare provision and health. However, the emphasis of the EU Treaties is upon solidarity at the level of States or public bodies and there is no easily discernible common interpretation of the limits and application of solidarity in legal terms. The work of SOLIDUS and TransSOL accordingly creates the valuable opportunity not only to shift the focus and understanding of solidarity to the real worlds of citizens’ lives but to use their insights for developing existing or new legal tools.

The clear and strong empirical evidence from the two projects is that there is a bedrock of solidarity as a lived experience in Europe, consisting of both attitudes and actions. Solidarity is understood at a general level as the willingness to share resources with others (the starting point for TransSOL) or as practices with a social impact improving the lives of others (SOLIDUS). There is accordingly a conceptual and practical connection between solidarity and welfare, the parameters of one shaping the boundaries of the other. The levels of support for solidarity certainly do not question – and can be seen as endorsing – ideas of a European social model<sup>7</sup>. The Transnational European Solidarity Survey (TESS, part of SOLIDUS) shows overwhelming support in all participating countries for welfare support at EU level and majority support (57% of respondents) for a European Welfare System<sup>8</sup>. Although response rates need to be borne in mind, the positive TESS results are not unique<sup>9</sup>. TransSOL’s survey indicates that almost three-quarters considered the reduction of income inequalities an important public policy goal.

However, the projects also clearly indicate the nuanced and conditional nature of solidarity. The TESS survey suggests variations in attitudes according to policy domain, with more differentiation around refugees. SOLIDUS points to cleavages across and within countries around the capacity to produce effective solidarity, citing different economic crises, social traditions and organisational norms as explanations. TransSOL’s descriptive account of solidarity in eight countries highlights the conditional nature of solidarity, with attitudes to migrants again being the most noticeable point of tension. Across the board, 7% thought migrants should get access to social benefits immediately on arrival, 9% after living in the host country for a year (working or not), 42% after working and paying taxes for a year and 30% only after obtaining citizenship. Even in the state with the lowest levels of support, Greece, 50% still favoured rights being granted by the third tier of these categories. A

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<sup>3</sup> For detail see V Federico and C Lahusen eds, *Solidarity as a Public Virtue?* (Nomos, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Art 2 TEU.

<sup>5</sup> Art 3 TEU.

<sup>6</sup> Eg Arts 80, 122 and 194 TFEU.

<sup>7</sup> TransSOL, “Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings”, Deliverable 7.10, p47, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html), to find this document click on the tab “Results” and subsequently on “Documents, reports”.

<sup>8</sup> SOLIDUS, “Research Report on transnational solidarity in the EU”, Deliverable 2.3, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html), to find this document click on the tab “Results” and subsequently on “Documents, reports”.

<sup>9</sup> See other projects, eg Horizon 2020 EUENGAGE, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194568\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194568_en.html) and FP7 EUCROSS, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/98871\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/98871_en.html)

minority of 12% across all eight countries categorically thought social rights should never be granted to migrants<sup>10</sup>.

These findings indicate that solidarity carries judgments about fairness, deservingness, reciprocity and justice. Moreover, these attitudinal positions are carried over into solidarity practices. TransSOL reports that over half its respondents have engaged in solidarity activities in their own countries, whether donating money or time, protesting or participating in voluntary groups. Engaging in solidarity is not confined to particular groups shaped by gender, age, education or class<sup>11</sup>. As SOLIDUS demonstrates, it is social justice-led values and actions that comprise solidarity initiatives in policy domains such as food banks, debt support, migrant assistance, employment campaigns and housing projects. By combating social exclusion and alleviating poverty whilst supporting the vulnerable towards self-worth and autonomy, solidarity as expressed on the ground is a key contributor to civil society infrastructure.

Whilst clearly spatially gradated, this evidence forcefully suggests that solidarity is a resource to be tapped into – especially as a lever to enact imagined political communities with shared values to counter inequalities<sup>12</sup>. SOLIDUS and TransSOL both contribute significantly to understanding the variety of solidarity actions but also the factors that work at grassroots level. Thus, SOLIDUS provides a guide to elements underpinning successful initiatives with social impact for civil society organisations<sup>13</sup>, together with a ‘toolbox’ for measurement of such success drawn from over 80 case studies across five social areas<sup>14</sup>. TransSOL offers detailed insights into the triggers for innovative transnational solidarity practices through a number of case studies in the fields of unemployment, disabilities and migration<sup>15</sup>. Key factors behind successful practices and innovations particularly highlight the ‘bottom-up’ involvement of beneficiaries so that organisations of people rather than for people are most effective<sup>16</sup>. This kind of inclusion and empowerment<sup>17</sup> is not just vital for democratic and legitimisation purposes; it is also fundamental for the durability and resilience of solidarity, discussed further in the sections on the limitations of solidarity and the potential EU interventions.

In the light of the above, solidarity is undoubtedly alive and active in Europe. Its conditional, contested and relational character means that it can be readily described as ‘soft’. However, soft does not necessarily equate to ‘weak’: the more apposite issue is whether, and how, the strong roots and expressions of solidarity identified in SOLIDUS and TransSOL can be harnessed and channelled for the greater benefit of European society. At present, solidarities gather predominantly around local and national levels. Transnational solidarity, especially voiced through some CSOs, exists but without the same degree of pervasiveness for reasons elaborated below. This distribution of solidarities is neither the manifestation of

10 C Lahusen and M Grasso eds, *Solidarity in Europe*, [https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-73335-7\\_10.pdf](https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-73335-7_10.pdf), p266.

11 Note 10 above, pp 275-276.

12 TransSOL, “Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings”, Deliverable 7.10, p11, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

13 SOLIDUS, “Handbook on fostering solidarity”, Deliverable 10.3, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

14 SOLIDUS, “Research Report on toolbox for social citizenship”, Deliverable 8.2, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

15 See wikisite: [https://www062.zimt.uni-siegen.de/index.php/Main\\_Page](https://www062.zimt.uni-siegen.de/index.php/Main_Page)

16 [https://solidush2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/D1\\_3-Policy-Brief.pdf](https://solidush2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/D1_3-Policy-Brief.pdf)

17 TransSOL, “Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings”, Deliverable 7.10, p79, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

a zero-sum game nor an outcome of conflicting claims. Instead, the ambitious question for the EU is whether the insights into the contours of solidarity offer paths to a different kind of Union less dependent upon market solutions and more focused upon direct or supportive measures around social justice.

## Challenges facing European solidarity

Despite its potency, solidarity is subject to serious limitations exposed by SOLIDUS and TransSQL. If the EU is to play a role either to support the capacity of national solidarities or adopt strategies to promote more transnational ones, it must address the most pressing of these. In particular, solidarity is likely to be inhibited by a potential lack of durability, problems identifying its constituencies and mobilising them, and an under-developed or even absent legal framework.

Solidarity, even in its strongest local settings, faces challenges as to durability. On the one hand, citizen-led actions are dependent on volunteers in many cases. Such commitment may be more precarious in a gig economy. On the other hand, for example where CSOs or other third sector groups are involved, there are barriers around funding, staff turnover through burnout, organisational weaknesses and other operational obstacles<sup>18</sup>. SOLIDUS also sets out contrasting depths of solidarity capacity across countries where there are not only different traditions involving the roles of volunteers, religious bodies and the state but also variations in the scale of crises in need of solidarity responses. SOLIDUS demonstrates the flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness of solidarity – for example, enabling earlier and faster actions in the face of crisis than those provided by the state. However, spontaneous and voluntary engagement to provide short-term critical relief does not constitute a sustainable, systemic or embedded policy framework.

The fragility of solidarity requires resilience-building processes to enable the long-term sustainability of social justice outcomes. The research findings as to successful and innovative practices over time are instructive, suggesting the merits in particular of: democracy in decision-making, transparency and accountability in internal and external relations, plurality among staff/volunteers, recognition and credibility achieved through awards or media attention, performance legitimacy and managing scale<sup>19</sup>. Most of these characteristics are typical approaches in resilience-led thinking, which concentrates on understanding the processes that lead to adaptation or transformation of complex systems. Evidence, context, multi-dimensional connections, diversity and polycentric governance are key elements in resilience<sup>20</sup>. But, as other research projects have concluded, resilience in the context of vulnerable groups is unlikely to be self-generating and will need interventions from national and EU policies and instruments<sup>21</sup>.

The spatial dimension represents a key factor for all solidarities. As SOLIDUS demonstrates, there are spatial differences not just between national and transnational but between core and peripheral regions and even intra-urban inequalities<sup>22</sup>. Understanding the spatial dimension also links to the question of durability, in the sense that any attempts at enhancing sustainability must address how to scale up the advantages held by localised actions. Policy intervention must acknowledge the spatial realities that shape both the targeting of solidarity actions and the boundaries of political orientation in support of solidarity. Effective political mobilisation depends on maximising the congruence of those

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18 <https://solidush2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/D1.3-Policy-Brief.pdf>

19 SOLIDUS, “Handbook on fostering solidarity”, Deliverable 10.3, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

20 D Chandler, *Resilience – the governance of complexity* (Routledge, 2014).

21 In particular the FP7 projects LIVEWHAT [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/111397\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/111397_en.html) and RESCuE [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/111253\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/111253_en.html)

22 SOLIDUS, Research Report on spatial dimension of solidarity, Deliverable 2.2, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

factors. In other words, solidarity is a political arena, with its key actors located in that space. TransSOL concludes that the growth of transnational solidarity is inhibited because of the lack of a developed political space to support and act on it. Solidarities are identity-focused, so that citizens and organisations prioritise immediate concerns, recognising that feelings of social exclusion are likely to be local. As TransSOL notes, CSOs – even if displaying some transnational characteristics<sup>23</sup> – act most frequently at their national level because that is where funding, policies and beneficiaries are located<sup>24</sup>. All the more so in the context of TransSOL where the relevant fields were disabilities, unemployment and migration/asylum, all topics central to welfare and security for the states concerned. In political terms, transnational solidarity represents the weakest of three tiers between national and cosmopolitan/universal concerns. The policy question here is whether that gap between solidarity and political spaces can (or should) be addressed by EU level interventions. Support for educational activities, media presence and scalability of solidarity actions seem particularly pertinent strategies, as detailed further below.

The idea that solidarity is a political arena leads to the question of how to mobilise it. Both SOLIDUS and TransSOL draw attention to the prime importance of civil society organisations (CSOs) at the collective meso-level of solidarity's expression. As with solidarity generally, there are considerable variations in the patterns of organisation and activity. For example, those CSOs concerned with disabilities tend to be less politicised but to have a more established voice in transnational policy networks, whereas those associated with support of migrants have a far more politicised membership<sup>25</sup>. But at the same time what are usually locally focused activities are based on the pursuit of social justice objectives of pan-European relevance: empowerment, understanding and social cohesion in times of crisis. However, as both research projects also point out, there is a heightened risk of an identity dilemma for CSOs – whether they are service deliverers or advocates – which is magnified by the emergence of private sector (especially for profit) providers of social services.

Media activity is a crucial space for the contestation of solidarity values and, arguably, for the mobilisation of solidarity. TransSOL's study of newspaper claims-making and commenting illustrates the challenges, particularly for CSOs. Although the inquiry was limited to coverage of refugees, there are significant implications in the way that the refugee welcoming attitude of 2015 was reversed in a short space of time. This shift is attributed to the high preponderance of politicians in newspaper coverage leading national arguments that turned the agenda away from solidarity into migration management. TransSOL's analysis of Facebook comments on claims suggest a 'backlash' dynamic at work. Whilst conventional wisdom currently indicates that Facebook is neither a barometer of public opinion nor the forum for political activists to target, TransSOL argues that the responsiveness of Facebook commenters may be a phenomenon to be researched further in order to open up a 'civil' debate for a more balanced solidarity discourse<sup>26</sup>.

The above challenges are all closely tied to the existence, means of expression and public sphere portrayal of solidarity. But at the macro level solidarity is ultimately limited by the legal and governance framework in which it is supported, implemented or withheld. The distribution and incidence of solidarity actions currently follows the more general national/

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23 Using criteria based on structures, activities and relations.

24 TransSOL, "Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings", Deliverable 7.10, p95, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

25 TransSOL, "Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings", Deliverable 7.10, p60, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

26 TransSOL, "Policy Brief V", [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

EU relationship. Thus, since solidarity is in a general sense a proxy for welfare provision, solidarity remains housed within the national setting. As the attitudinal surveys confirm, citizens expect to be looked after by their own state in the first instance. However, TransSOL demonstrates that there is a connection between citizens' attachment to the EU and their support for intra-EU fiscal measures<sup>27</sup>. The TESS findings for SOLIDUS show support for European responsibilities in relation to the sick, elderly and unemployed that lags only slightly behind the primary duties of States<sup>28</sup>. On the more specific question of support for the institutionalisation of a European welfare system the 57% figure expressing support contains considerable disparities between States, with respondents from wealthier states being less keen<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, the key inference from these attitudes is that welfare is the field where solidarity is most keenly felt and, accordingly, the most potent terrain for positive European impact. However, the EU's specific powers in the social sphere are limited. Any radical move to 'take solidarity seriously'<sup>30</sup> would require a change to the competences of the EU as explained in more detail elsewhere in the context of an EU social citizenship.<sup>31</sup>

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27 C Lahusen and M Grasso eds, *Solidarity in Europe*, [https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-73335-7\\_10.pdf](https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-73335-7_10.pdf), p272.

28 SOLIDUS, "Research Report on transnational solidarity in the EU", Deliverable 2.3, p14, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

29 Note 28, pp18-19.

30 TransSOL, "Integrated report on policy recommendations", Deliverable 7.9, p3, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

31 See Y Borgmann-Prebil, I Ciornei, M Ross, *Transforming European Citizenship – Policy Review* (European Commission, forthcoming), ch 4.

## Potential EU strategies and measures to make solidarity work

The major limitations of solidarity found by the projects TransSOL and SOLIDUS are susceptible to a range of policy responses, potentially across all levels of governance. This paper confines itself to EU interventions, but it should be understood that the strengthening of solidarity – as a multi-dimensional phenomenon – demands multi-level and multi-actor approaches. The paths sketched below operate along different axes of time, cost, ambition and difficulty but with a high degree of inter-relatedness. The growth of solidarity cannot be seen as a linear, phased construction. Policies must acknowledge the connectivity of actions and effects. As TransSOL emphasises, the micro, meso and macro levels of solidarity are intricately bound up. An individual's views and actions may be influenced by the collective position of a CSO, which in turn may have its behaviour circumscribed or facilitated by a wider legal and institutional framework. To the extent that the suggestions below form distinct strategies, they seek to build on positive individual attitudes through long-term investment in education and media messages, enhance the capacity and resilience of CSOs, boost the 'horizontal' strand of solidarity between citizens transnationally and provide direct support to vulnerable people through measures that have a concrete EU imprint. EU acts that build solidarity – and are seen to do so – can only assist in legitimising the EU itself in the eyes of its populations.

Solidarity only works if people support it; it is first and foremost a value. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in his state of the union address in 2016 pointed out that “[Solidarity] must come from the heart. It cannot be forced.”<sup>32</sup> Education and nurturing of values are accordingly key to the reinforcement and durability of solidarity as a 'good' in European society. The successful and innovative solidarity initiatives reported by the research projects frequently had a strong educational element running through them. Combating discrimination and social exclusion, promoting self-empowerment, increasing tolerance and mutual understanding (especially in relation to migration) all feature strongly among the main aims of CSOs, with raising awareness a key strategy for such groups.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, SOLIDUS points to the value of critical education in unpacking ideologies and enabling citizens to be more discerning regarding information claims and media manipulation, as well as helping the vulnerable to participate in the knowledge economy<sup>34</sup>.

There are numerous options for the EU to facilitate greater awareness and appreciation of solidarity: investing in research missions to explore the link between education and reversing inequalities, profiling the work of CSOs or even (as suggested by SOLIDUS) maintaining a register of solidarity organisations and their impacts, online programmes to raise awareness of inequalities and xenophobia, or establishing a social media presence specifically charged with countering the types of opinion shift detailed by TransSOL in relation to refugees and changing the narrative. Ultimately the educational strategy is the most long-term but likely to prove the most embedded approach to ensuring that a culture change occurs that embraces the positive impacts of solidarity. Innovative methods to engage youth should

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32 Jean-Claude Juncker, Strasbourg, 14 September 2016, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-16-3043\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-3043_en.htm)

33 TransSOL, “Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings”, Deliverable 7.10, pp59-60, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

34 <https://solidush2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/D1.3-Policy-Brief.pdf>

be supported, such as European Alternatives' 'young artists on solidarity' competition.<sup>35</sup> EU institutions too might more explicitly canvas the fundamental importance of solidarity. The establishment of the European solidarity corps<sup>36</sup> in 2016 is an encouraging example, attracting over 40,000 18-30 year-olds in its first year to join humanitarian, social and environmental projects.

The EU could choose to limit itself to maximising solidarity within the existing demarcation of powers and responsibilities between Member States and the EU. On this scenario CSOs represent the potential powerhouse to extend grassroots activities to a transnational level and be a means to address the 'gap' between spatial and political solidarities. Interventions could include measures to support the funding, organisation, training and profile of CSOs. As discussed above, CSOs still think and act locally to a large degree. Greater transnational activity may be possible via collaborations between partners or different organisational structures, together with investment in leadership. Facilitating those steps may in turn require legal obstacles to be challenged at national and EU levels. TransSOL, for example, goes so far as to advocate a 'common legal space' for transnational solidarity<sup>37</sup>. It also urges more long-term financial support for civil society activities rather than a focus just on projects.

Direct EU measures that address poverty and vulnerability would not only be of obvious practical value to beneficiaries at grassroots level but would bring the relevance of the EU to citizens' attention. The clearest example here would be the introduction of a European minimum income<sup>38</sup>. Whilst likely to prove controversial, there is evidence of public support<sup>39</sup> and the costs may not be prohibitive<sup>40</sup>.

The spatial dimension to solidarity is a very clear characteristic revealed by the projects. Investigating the scaling up possibilities of successful actions should be a priority, with the experience of cities being perhaps the most immediate source for collaborations and innovative ventures. SOLIDUS highlights five strategies for strengthening scalability of CSOs around issues of extending reach, internal governance, effective management, skills and diversity of personnel<sup>41</sup>.

Ultimately, solidarity runs into a constitutional barrier posed by the EU's restricted competences in the social field. Solidarity is an elusive, elastic and contested principle – indeed there are many different national perceptions (and objections) to the term<sup>42</sup>. The obvious housing for solidarity with legal 'bite' would be as part of EU citizenship. But, as elaborated elsewhere<sup>43</sup>, citizenship is beset by limitations and its focus upon 'movers' rather than 'stayers' is not seen as relevant enough for helping vulnerable groups. Solidarity itself is a good reason for a much more ambitious enterprise reconfiguring citizenship in terms

35 <https://euroalter.com/2018/winners-solidarity-contest>

36 [https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en)

37 TransSOL, "Policy Brief VI", [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

38 For detail see the FP7 project BEUCITIZEN, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/108458\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/108458_en.html)

39 Note 28 above.

40 M Seeleib-Kaiser, EU Citizenship and the Case for a European Minimum Income Scheme, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/conferences/minimum\\_income.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/conferences/minimum_income.pdf)

41 SOLIDUS, "Handbook on fostering solidarity", Deliverable 10.3, p22, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194587_en.html)

42 Eg the experiences of SOLIDUS, encountering no recognition of 'solidarity' in the Netherlands and particular connotations in some other Member States.

43 Note 31 above.

that would give the EU a greater social capacity and enable a path away from a 'sense of survival' to a 'sense of purpose' built around social justice<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> F Vandenbroucke, *The Case for a European Social Union: From Muddling Through to a Sense of Common Purpose* (Euroform KU Leuven Policy Paper, 2014), p26.

## Conclusions

Improving lives and having a robust civil society infrastructure ought to be self-evident and incontestable aspects of the European Union's continued objectives. Yet, it has hitherto not been able to make the most effective use of a potent force to serve those ends, ie solidarity. An EU claiming to be based on values is failing to maximise attitudes and actions that actually bring together two of the most important elements of European society – social welfare goals and (often) democratically involved participants. Capturing the strength and potential of solidarity is an immense opportunity for the EU's own renewal.

As SOLIDUS establishes, solidarity initiatives are spaces of poverty alleviation, democratic renewal, social interaction and cohesion – all central to any EU aspiring to be a Union of citizens as well as States. In other words, a strong solidarity is integral to the resilience of the EU itself as a political and social entity. As TransSOL concludes, 'If European solidarity is such a highly-valued force, it is imperative that more care be given to nurturing it'<sup>45</sup>.

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45 TransSOL, "Publishable Synthesis of Main Findings", Deliverable 7.10, p181, [https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194579_en.html)

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Research shows that there is clear citizen support for solidarity actions and policies in Europe. Yet, this is variable, nuanced, conditional, fragile and tied to identity. There is strong evidence of attitudes supporting help for people in need, reduction of wealth disparities and willingness to support other countries in financial difficulty. Levels of welfare and territorial solidarity are highest in national contexts, but are considerably higher in the EU when compared to global contexts. Solidarity with refugees is less marked as in the other policy areas, with considerable geographical variation, whereby Eastern European states showing the lowest approval rates.

European solidarity actions exist, but they are strongly dependent on volunteers and civil society organisations and often manifest themselves at a local level without necessarily finding a strong European articulation. Furthermore, limitations to European Solidarity result from a lack of a political space and constituency. For EU-level actions to tap the potency of solidarity, they must address its durability, mobilisation and the need for an appropriate legal framework. Support for civil society organisations is key in this regard. But, there also needs to be an appropriate legal space allowing for social interventions that directly improve citizens' lives. Capturing the potential of solidarity provides a hugely important opportunity for the EU's own relevance, renewal and resilience.

*Studies and reports*

