

POWERED BY



Pathways to Solidarity and Other EU Values

EU Comparative Report

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I. Executive Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations

The "EU Comparative Report: Solidarity in Focus and Other EU Values" explores the multifaceted nature of solidarity and EU values within the cultural diversity of five EU countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Denmark, Poland, and Ireland), particularly among youth and civil society organisations (CSOs). The research seeks to unveil cultural perspectives on solidarity, understand how cultural contexts impact the perception of these values, explore youth perspectives in the context of global events, and assess disparities in understanding between CSOs, youth, and EU policies. This comprehensive study combines desk research on EU policies with in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted by partner organisations in each country. By delving into unique cultural narratives, the report aims to highlight both commonalities and differences in the perception of solidarity and EU values, offering valuable insights into the relationship between cultural nuances and youth volunteering and civic engagement.

The research is implemented through **Powered by V: Engaged Volunteering for the Future of Europe project**. The project concept aims to support organisations and youth to use the potentials of volunteering as a driving force for civic education, youth empowerment and engagement in building European society and strengthening democracy, EU values and identity. Led by DKolektiv – organisation for social development, the project is implemented in partnership with Slovene Philanthropy (Slovenia), Volunteer Ireland (Ireland), Centre for European Volunteering (Belgium), FriSe (Denmark) and Regional Volunteer Centre Gdańsk (Poland) and funded by Erasmus+ Programme.

The Key Findings of the EU Comparative Report “Pathways to Solidarity and Other EU Values”

Analysis of EU Policies

- While volunteering isn't explicitly mentioned in the Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024, it plays a crucial role in achieving several priorities, such as sustainable development goals and social cohesion.
- Despite the clear links between volunteering and EU priorities, there is a lack of specific, targeted policies and attention to volunteering. EU's main tool for engaging with volunteering, the European Solidarity Corps, is often seen as the primary focus.
- There is a need for reassessment of volunteering policies, increased attention, and recognition of volunteering as a vital tool for achieving social goals and fostering active civil society participation, especially in light of the rapidly changing landscape, including the rise of micro-volunteering and digital volunteering, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding European Values

- There is a shared commitment to EU values, emphasising unity, equality, and inclusion.
- Youth actively champion values like human rights, equality, and solidarity.
- CSOs display a strong understanding of and commitment to EU values.

Understanding Solidarity

- Solidarity is multifaceted, driven by empathy, unity, and community support.
- External events, like pandemics and wars, catalyse solidarity.
- Initiatives fostering solidarity, cross-cultural understanding, and empathy are vital.

Volunteering's Vital Role

- Volunteering significantly fosters solidarity, democratic engagement, and EU values.
- Youth see volunteering as a means to promote values, social engagement, and community contribution.
- CSOs actively integrate volunteering to promote EU values.

Support Needed for Fostering EU Values

- Education is crucial for promoting EU values, starting at a young age.
- Multi-level collaboration involving decision-makers is vital.
- Adequate funding, reduced bureaucracy, and stable resources that support CSOs.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations

- CSOs contribute to community-building and social change.
- They serve as educational agents, promoting civic engagement and awareness, especially among youth.
- Challenges include bureaucracy and resource disparities.

The Role of Youth

- Youth are active agents of change, driving solidarity and EU values.
- Empowering youth through education and engagement is crucial.

Recommendations for Policy and Decision-Makers

- Recognise Volunteering's Vital Role: Acknowledge volunteering as essential for EU priorities.
- Revise Volunteering Policies: Review and adapt volunteering policies to address the changing landscape.
- Support Education: Integrate EU values education into school curricula.
- Fund CSOs: Allocate funding transparently.
- Collaborate: Involve local/national/EU decision-makers to create holistic approach in shaping policies.
- Youth Engagement: Actively engage youth in decision-making processes.
- Promote Volunteering: Encourage youth-targeted volunteer programmes.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

- Educate and Engage: Continue as educational agents.
- Empower Youth: Involve youth in leadership roles.
- Advocate for Funding: Promote financial support.
- Embrace Inclusivity: Foster inclusivity and flexibility.
- Hands-On Learning: Emphasise practical experiences.
- Promote Critical Literacy: Encourage youth involvement.

Recommendations for Youth

- Active Participation: Engage in civic initiatives.
- Personal Responsibility: Promote EU values in communities.
- Be Role Models: Guide peers towards EU values.
- Drive Change: Recognise your role as agents of change.
- Stay Informed: Seek education and awareness opportunities.
- Collaborate: Work with peers to address challenges.

II. Introduction to the project and project consortium

Unlike the traditional view of volunteering as an act of charity, the modern and innovative approach recognises volunteering as a form of youth activism that strengthens young people's sense of initiative, particularly for the acts of solidarity, significantly increases young people's capacity to be proactive in the community on the democratic principles of inclusiveness, intercultural dialogue, and mutual trust. The project idea starts from this premise and aims to support organisations and youth to use the potentials of volunteering as a driving force for civic education, youth empowerment and engagement in building European society and strengthening democracy, EU values and identity.

The project **Powered by V** aims to:

- 1) Encourage better understanding of cultural, social, political context of relations between youth engagement through volunteering and EU values.
- 2) Support youth volunteering as a transformative force in strengthening EU values and resilience & sustainable communities.
- 3) Strengthen youth organisational capacities for more impactful youth volunteer engagement underpinning EU values.
- 4) Unlock the potentials of national, transnational and EU cooperation on the issue.

To achieve the aims, the project uses the potential of deliberative dialogues creating a space to seek a shared understanding of issues and challenges and searches for common ground and action. The project proposes intensive and transnational capacity building to stimulate and support youth as well as practitioners, researchers, and policy makers by opening a wider dialogue space, bringing more data and knowledge, sharing best practices, new skills and recommendations that will make us more able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The cooperation partnership starts from that approach to volunteering as an active expression of civic participation, which has a potential to strengthen fundamental European values. Led by DKolektiv – organisation for social development, the project is implemented in partnership with Slovene Philanthropy (Slovenia), Volunteer Ireland (Ireland), Centre for European Volunteering (Belgium), FriSe (Denmark) and Regional Volunteer Centre Gdańsk (Poland) and funded by the Erasmus+ Programme.

DKOLEKTIV – ORGANISATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



DKolektiv is a social development organisation built on the 15 years' experience of the Volunteer Centre Osijek in the fields of development of volunteering, civil society, and democratic culture.

dialogue///društvo///diversity

DKolektiv is established on the principles of solidarity, humanity, respect for diversity, non-violence, tolerance, understanding, responsibility, and cooperation. The organisation is socially sensitive and actively encourages dialogue and cooperation. They protect human dignity and human rights whilst contributing to solidarity and social cohesion. DKolektiv actively listens and argues for sustainable development and a humane, open, and democratic society.

The organisation's mission is to inspire and support democratic culture, the development of civil society and volunteerism, the creation of equal opportunities and active participation of citizens.

DKolektiv wants to contribute to the development of, democratic culture, active citizenship, the development of volunteerism, a strong and progressive civil society, good governance, an inclusive society and a better position for minority, vulnerable and marginalised groups. DKolektiv is characterised by independence of action and open presence, the exchange of knowledge and capacities, openness to different opinions and attitudes and sharing knowledge and expertise in the field of activity.

DKolektiv cooperates with civil society organisations and initiatives, citizens, public institutions, public and private institutions, media, the economy as well as European and international organisations. Special attention is given to the creation of targeted and sustainable interventions through projects and programmes that are implemented in cooperation with other organisations and work collaboratively. DKolektiv strives to be innovative in our actions, to promote positive changes, create opportunities for learning and development, foster dialogue and create connections between people, organisations, and communities.

Website: <https://www.dkolektiv.hr/public/hr>

SLOVENE PHILANTHROPY



Slovene Philanthropy, Association for the promotion of voluntary work, is an independent, non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit, humanitarian organisation working in the public interest since 1992. Its programmes are aimed at improving the quality of life in the community and advocating for the vulnerable groups in society. Slovene Philanthropy's central activity is the promotion of volunteering, stemming from the belief that through volunteering we can all contribute to a better and more tolerant society, based on respect towards everyone, no matter their personal or objective circumstances.

The organisation offers training for volunteers, mentors and organisers of volunteers, and educational content for various stakeholders. Its values are Solidarity, Respect towards People and Nature, Tolerance, Equality and Equal Opportunities for All. The organisation groups its various activities into Programme Units. Slovene Philanthropy believes that we are all responsible for the life of our community and it wants everyone to be aware of this, so its work is focused on awareness raising, information, advocacy, and networking. Programmes deal with areas that are not yet covered or not covered sufficiently by state institutions but can be significantly improved by the additional involvement of people - volunteers. These areas are: Helping refugees, the homeless and other people without health insurance by providing health services, advocating for migrant workers' rights, building intergenerational cooperation, etc.

Unfortunately, with the increasing stratification of society, there are more and more areas where people's participation is crucial to ensuring the values of a fair and just society. Slovene Philanthropy's vision is a kind and secure society that offers a safe environment to all, even for those who are, for any reason, unable to provide a comfortable existence for themselves and their families. This will be achieved through true partnership and cooperation of national institutions, the economic sector, and voluntary activities of citizens.

Slovene Philanthropy supports people's initiatives that are in line with the values it represents. The organisation also uses its projects to transfer good practice to developing countries. For 30 years, Slovene Philanthropy has been actively responding to social problems, encouraging, and developing volunteer work and intergenerational cooperation while acting in the area of migration, helping the vulnerable and being a vocal advocate of human rights.

Website: <https://www.filantropija.org/>

VOLUNTEER IRELAND



Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development organisation and a support body for all local Volunteer Centres in Ireland. We work to support, promote and celebrate volunteering. We do this in many ways, working with a variety of stakeholders.

Volunteer Ireland promote and celebrate volunteering in Ireland through campaigns such as National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards. Along with Volunteer Centres across the country, we manage I-VOL (the national database of Irish volunteering opportunities). We also support national volunteer involving organisations by offering bespoke training, consultancy and an extensive range of online guides and resources on engaging volunteers as well as supporting large scale corporate volunteering projects and work with both companies and organisations to develop their corporate volunteering programmes.

There are 29 Volunteer Centre across the country who work with Volunteer Ireland. Volunteer Ireland develops and supports best practice in volunteering and Volunteer Centres, including the evaluation of Volunteer Centres according to a quality standard framework.

Website: <https://www.volunteer.ie/>

VOLUNTEER CENTRE AND SELF-HELP DENMARK (FriSe)



FriSe is the national umbrella organisation for 70 local volunteer centres and 10 self-help organisations across all of Denmark. We are independent of government, party political and religious interests. Together with our members and many collaboration partners nationally and internationally, we are concerned with developing local

volunteering and strengthening the local communities, so that everyone has the opportunity to volunteer and find help and support in the voluntary communities. FriSe works to support, develop, and promote volunteering and to improve the framework and conditions for volunteer organisations. We work to promote and support volunteering and our members through:

- Knowledge building & knowledge sharing
- Capacity building & consultancy
- Partnerships and networking with key stakeholders across all sectors
- Visibility & dissemination of social volunteer work
- Interest Safeguarding & advocacy

In addition, we run a number of projects and initiatives, all of which aim to make it easier to become and be a volunteer and easier to be a voluntary association. For example, we operate Denmark's largest job portal Frivilligjob.dk where volunteers can find a volunteer job amongst the many different organisations, and we provide digital solutions for associations via TechSoup as a part of the TechSoup Global Network. TechSoup runs a donation programme, which provides eligible organisations with donated and discounted software. We are also the coordinator of the national celebration of volunteerism; Volunteer Friday and are responsible for the national distribution of Socialkompass.dk, a database where people can find help and support amongst organisations in the community as well as projects within the public sector.

Website: <https://www.frise.dk/>

CEV - CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING



The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), previously the European Volunteer Centre, was established in 1992. It is a European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion and support of volunteers and volunteering in Europe at the European, national or regional level.

Through our network, we aim to be the leading voice in the values-based volunteering debate in Europe. We aim to influence and share current trends and challenges and those predicted for the future. We develop and provide policy advice and expertise for European policymakers so that volunteering policies and programmes developed at European level are effective and fit for purpose.

Network members are supported to further their own objectives at national, regional and European level by protecting and supporting a free and enabling civil society space, by advocating for suitable European funding support, and by developing supportive policy statements on pertinent volunteering issues at the European level.

In this way, we are reaching out to the many thousands of volunteers and volunteer organisations in Europe as a source of support by bringing the European dimension to their work.

CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Together with other stakeholders, we exchange policies, practices and information in order to reach the outcomes envisaged in the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 (BEV2030).

CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteers are central in building a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. CEV is a European network of organisations dedicated to the promotion and support of volunteers and volunteering; its mission consists of providing collaborative leadership to create an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe.

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

REGIONALNE CENTRUM WOLONTARIATU W GDAŃSKU



**REGIONALNE
CENTRUM
WOLONTARIATU
W GDAŃSKU**

The Regional Centre of Volunteering in Gdańsk was started in 1993 and since 1997 it has functioned as an independent association. It is a non-profit institution based on cooperation, professionalism, and social commitment. The goal of the Centre is to popularise the idea of volunteering and civic activity for organisations, institutions and people, as well as comprehensive support for people and institutions interested in such activity. RCWG cooperates with over 5,000 volunteers.

The mission directs actions to create a strong civil, active and participative society, based on the principles of equality. The goal is to reach the inhabitants of Gdańsk and the surrounding area regardless of their age, gender, education, or social status. The main permanent programmes of the organisation are:

- Coordinating the Gdańsk Volunteer Centre - intermediation between non-governmental organisations and institutions willing to engage volunteers, Volunteering Recruitment Agency.
- Action volunteering - supporting large sports events both in their service and in the city's support in the public space (including the Handball World Championships of Men EHF Euro 2016, Gdańsk Marathons, triathlons), supporting cultural and civil events, conferences, etc.
- Senior Fund of Gdańsk - implemented since 2013, the project is created as a response to the low level of voluntary involvement of older people. The fund is based on a mini-grant mechanism. The purpose of this project is to co-finance initiatives/events proposed by seniors.
- Employee volunteering - as part of the programme, the Centre stimulates and activates representatives of the private sector in order to create actions dedicated for the local community and the city.

The Centre also implements other programmes in order to reach the largest possible audience, including such programmes as School Volunteering, Volunteer Week in Gdańsk or Volunteer Programme at the European Solidarity Centre.

Website: <https://wolontariatgdansk.pl/>

II. Introduction to the EU Comparative Report: Purpose and Methodology

Within the ever-evolving European landscape, the pursuit of solidarity and the promotion of shared European values remain pivotal aspirations for the European Union and its member states. The intricate tapestry of cultural diversity within the EU inevitably influences how these ideals are perceived and enacted by different segments of society. This EU Comparative Report embarks on a journey to delve into the multifaceted realm of solidarity and other EU values as perceived through the lenses of cultural variation. The overall objective of the EU Comparative Report is to analyse and understand the cultural differences in five EU countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Denmark, Poland and Ireland) that shape the perception of volunteer engagement for solidarity and the embrace of common EU values, particularly among youth and the organisations that work with and involve them.

The "EU Comparative Report: Solidarity in Focus and Other EU Values" seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the concept of solidarity within civil society, with a specific emphasis on volunteer engagement. The key objectives include:

- **Unveiling cultural perspectives:** Partners explore how professionals within civil society organisations (CSOs) comprehend the notion of solidarity and other EU values within their unique cultural contexts. This endeavour sheds light on the diversity of interpretations and actions undertaken to promote these values.
- **Contextual impact:** Partners understand the extent to which the specific comprehension of these values in different cultural contexts influences the work of civil society, especially during times of crisis. Whether it be the pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, or the refugee crisis, partners investigate how these events have influenced the sense of responsibility for actions related to solidarity, human rights protection, and calls for peace.
- **Youth perspective:** The research delves into how young individuals, including those facing fewer opportunities, understand the concept of solidarity. Partners scrutinise how global events such as the pandemic and crises have shaped their attitudes towards taking responsibility for various acts of solidarity and their commitment to upholding human rights and promoting peace.
- **Policy and perception:** Lastly, partners assess whether disparities exist in the understanding of the concept of solidarity between CSOs and youth on one side and EU policies on the other. By comparing these perspectives, potential gaps and opportunities for alignment have been identified.

Methodology and Research Activities

The development of the "EU Comparative Report: Solidarity in Focus and Other EU Values" is guided by a meticulous and multi-faceted methodology. The research is conducted through various forms of dialogues and a desk research of existing EU policy.

The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) has conducted in-depth desk research to provide valuable insights into EU policies related to solidarity, social inclusion, active youth participation, and volunteering, while also analysing their reflection at the national level.

Partners consortium, comprising DKolektiv, FriSe, Slovene Philanthropy, Volunteer Ireland, and the Regional Volunteer Centre in Gdańsk (RCWG), collaborated to implement research activities in the rest of the five partner countries.

In 5 partner countries, 12 in-depth interviews (2 in Croatia, 3 in Slovenia, 2 in Poland, 3 in Ireland and 2 in Denmark) with actively engaged young individuals (aged 18 – 30) and 15 in-depth interviews (3 in Croatia, 2 in Slovenia, 2 in Poland, 6 in Ireland, 2 in Denmark) with organisations actively working with or involving youth have been conducted.

Each partner organised one focus group with active and engaged youth (in total, 5 focus groups, 43 participants) and another with organisations working with or involving youth (in total, 5 focus groups, 25

participants). The focus groups were organised live or on-line, depending on the possibilities of participants for participation aiming to reach young people and organisations across the country to have geographical representation in the research.

These research activities have immersed in the cultural contexts of specific countries, enabling them to grasp the unique narratives of solidarity and EU values. The goal is to paint a vivid picture of each country's perspective and uncover both similarities and differences among them.

The findings derived from these interviews and focus groups provide a richer understanding of the cultural, social, and political contexts surrounding solidarity among volunteer-involving organisations and youth in the five involved countries. Moreover, these insights shed light on the relationship between cultural nuances and youth volunteering and civic participation.

In the following chapters, the report presents the key findings, analyses the implications, and offers recommendations to further strengthen solidarity and promote shared EU values across the European Union.

III. Solidarity, European Values, and Volunteering: An Analysis of EU policies

This document will take an overview to gain a broad understanding of the current issues related to volunteering and the voluntary sector, at the EU institutional level, particularly looking at policies, the priorities for institutions and how volunteering fits into this, as well as the impact and changes brought about by the various crises Europe has faced in recent years.

The Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024, 2022/C 491/01¹, outlines the main areas of focus for the EU institutions over the next two years. On first look, it appears as though volunteering is missing from these priorities, and indeed there is no explicit reference to volunteering within the declaration. However, volunteering is a mechanism through which many of these priorities can be achieved. For example, the sustainable development goals are mentioned throughout, in the context of “generalised scheme of tariff preferences, and a reformed customs code.”, and “to accelerate the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development”, and while the link to volunteering isn’t made explicit in the declaration, it is made more explicit by the *UN Volunteers and Sustainable Development Goals* themselves. It is highlighted that volunteering is an important vehicle for sustainable development, that social cohesion and participation are increased through volunteering, and that volunteers themselves can gain crucial skills and build resilience through their voluntary experience.²

Further looking at these priorities, for example point 5, the commitment to promoting the European Way of Life, and point 6, protecting democracy and values, which together explicitly encompasses, the European Year of Skills, mental health, pluralism and inclusion particularly for those with disabilities, as well as democratic resilience, and intergenerational solidarity³. These are all areas and topics which the voluntary sector is either already strong in or has the potential to be a crucial actor in helping to achieve these goals with the right support and involvement from institutions. Going to a more EU level, we can look at the “new push for democracy” agenda, which brings in many elements of the UN SDGs mentioned above. For example, the need for equal participation and opportunities for disabled people is highlighted, and volunteering can be a crucial positive force for increasing inclusion, participation, and accessible opportunities for engagement, as shown in the following case studies from the European Project Volunteering as a “Tool for Inclusion”⁴.

Yet, despite all these links between volunteering and the explicit goals and priorities of the European Union’s institutions, volunteering is strikingly absent in terms of specific, targeted policies and opinions. It is difficult to find a concrete focus on volunteering dating past the surge of research and attention the sector received during the 2011 European Year of Volunteering, with the exception of the European Solidarity Corps which has become the EU’s main way of engaging with volunteering.

We see a similar sentiment, whereby volunteering is present and a tool towards achieving social goals but is not addressed explicitly or given a strong focus, throughout EU policies and institutions. For example, the *Own-initiative opinion “Implementation of citizenship education actions”* which was adopted by the Parliament⁵, looks at the shortcomings in the EU’s citizenship education, and argues for enhanced lifelong learning development for EU citizens, a field in which volunteering can be hugely relevant. The paper also briefly mentions the European Solidarity Corps, which is the EU’s main volunteering tool targeting young people, and the fact that this contributes to the active provision of citizenship education however, it argues

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022C1223%2801%29>

² <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism-and-global-goals>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022C1223%2801%29>

⁴ https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/VTI-GoodExamples_reduced.pdf

⁵ <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1700528&t=d&l=en>

that there is lacking a “systemic, lasting impact”⁶, which links to the issue of a lack of research and common methodology for measuring volunteering and its impact across Europe.

This can be applied to many of the European Union’s priorities and plans, such as the *European Democracy Action Plan*⁷. The action plan focuses on methods to ensure a free expression of views, wide and active public participation, and ways of combating misinformation or democratic interference. In view of this, the plan explicitly states that “a healthy democracy relies on citizen engagement and an active civil society, not only at election times”. So, while much of the plan focuses on how the EU can legislate to protect democracy (implementing transparent funding rules, curbing SLAPP (Strategic lawsuit against public participation) lawsuits, for example), there is some acknowledgement that this is not the only way, legislation alone cannot create an active civil society, but it can foster the environment and support the growth of one.

Volunteering naturally is a partner in ensuring a strong, and importantly active, civil society and citizenship. It is, at its core, an expression from citizens on the issues they care about, be it in their local communities or on cross-border, Europe-wide issues. Volunteers mobilising on an issue, aside from signalling priorities to policy makers and other citizens, of course also has the benefit and impact of the direct action performed by volunteers, which is in and of itself a key method of democratic participation. Similarly, we can look at the EU Citizenship report 2020, which highlights that on the point of strengthening democratic participation, the inclusion of EU citizens in EU society is a key goal. Volunteering can be a tool for inclusion in two ways, both by volunteers supporting vulnerable or at risk of exclusion groups, and through involving at risk groups as volunteers themselves, to strengthen their capacity to participate in democratic life. This element of seeing volunteering as a way of better engaging vulnerable people is indeed crucial and something which was implemented into the EU’s European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme following consultations with civil society organisations such as the European Disability Forum⁸.

To bring this together, volunteering is again at the core of these two EU plans, but lacking an explicit focus, with the plans preferring to focus on the concrete legislative action that can be taken. Instead, volunteering is delegated to the ESC, which is seen as a tool for achieving the goals of the European Democracy Action Plan and EU Citizenship Report 2020.

The wealth of research and policy focus generated in 2011 with the European Year of Volunteering, which was drawn together within the policy document “Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe” (PAVE)⁹, provided an excellent base for further developing policy, however from the European Institution’s side this has seen a limited follow up, and campaigns from civil society to reaffirm this focus on volunteering policy, have not been met with the same momentum and enthusiasm as was seen during the 2011 Year. The “Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030” (BEV2030)¹⁰, aimed to address this, bringing together a new campaign to highlight how volunteering can be enabled to reach its true potential across Europe, within 5 thematic groupings, while building upon the previous 2011 year and its outputs. Looking at the 2011 document we can clearly see relevance and parallels to the challenges facing Europe now, it begins discussing the “economic and social crisis”, the reliance of volunteering as “replacement vehicles for delivery of services”, and yet also stressing the trend of an ever-increasing number of volunteers. These are things all still relevant to European society, the economic and social impacts of the Migrant Crisis, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and War in Ukraine, are being felt at a fundamental level, and volunteering has played a huge role in the response to each of these crises. It is for this reason that the revisiting of a European wide policy discussion on volunteering, facilitated through the framework of the BEV2030 document and its guidelines to policy makers, is a crucial step in reflecting on past lessons, as well as defining the next steps.

⁶ As above

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250

⁸ EDF <https://www.edf-feph.org/blog/the-european-union-promotes-inclusive-volunteering/>

⁹ https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/_files/ugd/3ec99c_38c7cd0ec9b4490fbd96230430959e35.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/_files/ugd/3ec99c_0e028c421bd14adcbd69bdbe744a0313.pdf

Despite this situation at the broader European level, with a lack of institutional support in spite of robust campaigns from civil society, this is not to say that there aren't specific actors within the institutions who are pushing for the necessary attention on volunteering. The European Economic and Social Committee, for example, has been extremely engaged with civil society actors in particular on the topic of volunteering, and cooperated with voluntary organisations and networks to develop concrete recommendations and opinions.

One such opinion, published in 2022, echoes the sentiments regarding the absence of volunteering from the agenda in a post-EYV 2011 Europe, stating:

“The EESC regrets that after the end of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV2011), volunteering began to gradually disappear from the European agenda. In official documents it featured only sporadically — during the creation of the EU Aid Volunteers and the European Solidarity Corps, and as a priority theme in the Europe for Citizens Programme.”

Through this same document, the EESC also affirms its support for, and calls on the Commission to declare 2025 the European Year of Volunteers, as part of a joint initiative with the Centre for European Volunteering, a civil society organisation. The reasoning behind this year follows much of the same sentiments expressed throughout this research, that volunteers have made a huge contribution to society, the document in particular highlights the response of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that this should be celebrated and recognised. This need for recognition goes hand in hand with the necessity to put focus back onto volunteering, to develop a strong research base to better understand and quantify the crucial role of volunteers, not just in crisis moments when they receive the most public attention.

This wealth of research is limited by just how rapidly the voluntary sector, and indeed Europe as a whole, has transformed in the years since this period of intense policy focus. There is simply a vastly different context now to at the time when this research was created, thus necessitating a re-assessment. For example, one of the biggest trends and indeed challenges for the voluntary sector is the rise of informal, sporadic, and digital volunteering, sometimes referred to as micro-volunteering. In the 2011 UN State of the World's Volunteerism report¹¹, micro-volunteering is mentioned as a fast-growing trend, but without much focus and no figures provided, however, by 2018 the UN State of the World's Volunteerism report estimated 70% of all global volunteer activity occurs informally¹², and one must consider that this report pre-dates the pandemic and huge surge of digital, informal, and micro-volunteering. Similarly, informal volunteering is built explicitly into the 2022 UN State of the World's Volunteerism report¹³, as a theme throughout various sections. This is showcased in a broader sense, highlighting that twice as many people of working age volunteer informally rather than formally (14.3% vs 6.5%), and in a narrower sense built as a focus within other research, such as highlighting that within the Global South (the only data set of the report with data post-COVID-19) informal volunteering was seen as the dominant method, before, during and after COVID-19.

Linked to this, the expansion of micro-volunteering received a particular focus with the context of the pandemic, as the need for volunteers rose dramatically but the ways in which volunteers could engage physically was limited by the various health and pandemic regulations at the time, a shift only accelerated by the boom of digital technologies to facilitate online activities.

¹¹ <https://www.unv.org/publications/2011-state-worlds-volunteerism-report-universal-values-global-well-being>

¹² <https://www.unv.org/publications/swvr2018>

¹³ https://swvr2022.unv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UNV_SWVR_2022.pdf

The 2021 EESC study “New trends in the development of volunteering in the European Union”¹⁴ for example explicitly addresses the need for a deeper understanding and reflection on the “new volunteering infrastructure”, namely spontaneous (micro) volunteering which tends to be associated with crises, including the challenges faced in maintaining this volunteer energy.

In conclusion, this brief overview of the current situation of volunteering policies at the European level, shows that there is a respect and recognition for the contribution of volunteers, and that volunteering offers a way to achieve many of the EU’s social goals in a sustainable, impactful way. Furthermore, volunteering is often leaned on and given a surge of attention during a crisis, when the contributions of volunteers are most visible, but this is a sentiment which often fizzles out after the crisis has passed.

A lack of real focus is the biggest hindrance to the voluntary sector, it is difficult to find current, up to date research and data, a situation even more complicated by the lack of a solid, common framework for research. In light of this, while some EU stakeholders collaborate with the sector and push for more volunteer-focused policies, there is a difficulty in really communicating the value and need for recognition for volunteers.

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<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/new-trends-development-volunteering-european-union>

IV. Understanding European Values

The research shows that while there are nuanced perspectives and varying levels of awareness across 5 countries, there is a common thread of commitment to EU values and a shared recognition of their significance in promoting unity, equality, and social inclusion. Diversity, inclusion, and respect are common threads in the understanding of EU values across all countries.

Youth often emphasise values like human rights, equality, and solidarity and view their role as active citizens in promoting and challenging the implementation of these values. Exposure to various projects, experiences, and global events often prompts re-evaluation and discussion of these values among young people. In Denmark, while specific EU values may not be well-known, there is a strong emphasis on commitment, collaboration, and community building in line with EU values. CSOs exhibit a strong understanding of EU values, with a commitment to promoting and upholding these values in their work. Ireland showcases a commitment to EU values while highlighting the need for adaptability in response to evolving challenges.

Both youth and CSOs share a commitment to these values, but there is also a degree of critical reflection, particularly regarding the practical implementation of EU values in Slovenia and Poland. The adoption of a global perspective is notable in Slovenia, where CSOs question Western democracy in the context of global exploitation.

Understanding European Values in Croatia

In Croatia, there is a noticeable difference in the understanding of EU values between young people and youth organisations. The key difference lies in the depth and comprehensiveness of their awareness of EU values. While young individuals display varying levels of awareness and often focus on specific values like human rights and peace, youth organisations possess a more comprehensive understanding of a broad spectrum of EU values and actively work towards promoting these principles in their activities. This contrast highlights the vital role that youth organisations play in fostering a deeper understanding and commitment to EU values among young citizens.

The perception of youth and understanding of European values is characterised by varied awareness and more emphasis on human rights and equality, which is also visible in their motivation for volunteering.

- Young people's responses indicate varying levels of awareness and knowledge regarding EU values. Some participants mentioned the EU's motto of unity in diversity, while others identified specific values like freedom, choice, voting rights, and education. This diversity in responses highlights the need for ongoing education and awareness-building efforts among citizens to promote a more comprehensive understanding of EU values.
- Young participants emphasised the importance of human rights, diversity, equality, and human dignity as crucial EU values. These values were seen as essential for fostering social inclusion and creating stronger, more connected communities.
- The motivation among young people to engage in activities related to EU values stems from a commitment to social inclusion and a desire to create more connected and harmonious communities. Some participants drew inspiration from experiences abroad, such as youth exchanges, which exposed them to better opportunities and motivated them to work towards positive change.
- Peace was identified as the most important EU value, extending beyond the absence of war to encompass the promotion of values that ensure future peace. This broader perspective on peace leads to an understanding of its interconnection with other values like solidarity, tolerance, and equity.

Well, if we're talking specifically about EU values, it would be I guess human rights. But to me the focus is diversity. I really like the values of equality and human dignity as well in the EU and I think that. This big connection to everyone and everywhere kind of mentality is something that's really close to me because I think that the more diverse we are, the more we can do together and accepting each other regardless of our diverse views is something that I think that you are pushing.

Nora, 26, Croatia

Values of peace. This is somehow the most important and not only that peace in the sense of the absence of war, but the promotion of values that ensure peace in the future and in fact it leads to all other values, such as solidarity, tolerance, and some equality. In the sense that not everyone gets the same, but everyone gets as much as they need, that would be equity in English.

Saša, 24, Croatia

Representatives of CSOs on the other side, have more comprehensive understanding:

- CSOs in Croatia exhibited a comprehensive understanding of EU values. Their responses highlighted a wide range of fundamental EU values, including solidarity, access to information, democracy, freedom, equal rights, inclusion, and the promotion of equality and cultural diversity.
- CSOs demonstrated a strong commitment to these principles in their work. Their recognition of the diverse and inclusive nature of EU values reflects their dedication to promoting and upholding these values within Croatian society.

Understanding European Values in Slovenia

In Slovenia, there is a collective recognition of the importance of EU values, with both youth and CSOs emphasising their significance. Both youth and CSOs recognise the importance of EU values, including solidarity, human rights, freedom, and equality. They share a commitment to these values as essential foundations. However, there is also a critical examination of the practical implementation of these values and concerns about potential contradictions. CSOs, in particular, adopt a global perspective and express scepticism about the genuineness of Western democracy in the context of exploitation in other parts of the world. These perspectives collectively highlight the complex and nuanced understanding of EU values in Slovenia, encompassing both commitment and critical reflection.

The understanding of EU values among interviewed youth and youth organisations reveals also nuanced perspectives.

Youth perspective and understanding of the European values could be summarised as:

- Young individuals exhibit a critical perspective on EU values, viewing them as important but questioning their actual implementation. They emphasise that when these values are correctly implemented, they hold significance, but they express scepticism about whether the EU genuinely prioritises these values in practice.
- Youth participants recognise the complexity and potential contradictions within EU values. They note the tension between equality and human rights on one side and the rule of law and democracy on the other, suggesting that the latter two may serve the interests of capital.
- Young people see their role as active citizens who should not only draw attention to the lack of proper implementation but also challenge the empty or selective application of these values. They believe it's essential to address situations where a part of society does not adhere to these values and work towards change.
- Youths acknowledge that crises, such as the war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis, can lead to swift changes in the system and highlight the importance of political will. However, they also note that crises can sometimes divert attention from basic values.

On the other side, CSOs in Slovenia demonstrate a strong understanding of the core EU values, but some of them observe values from a critical angle:

- CSOs demonstrate a strong understanding of the core EU values, with solidarity, human dignity, human rights, freedom, peace, community building, gender equality, religious and racial diversity, plurality, and the rule of law being recognised and prioritised.
- Some CSOs, such as "Youth for Climate Justice," exhibit a critical stance toward EU values. They point out issues with the implementation of democracy, alleging it is often used to serve the interests of capital. They highlight the patronising attitude of the Western world and criticise Western exploitation of other countries, which they claim enables the Western way of life.
- CSOs also adopt a global perspective, suggesting that the Western democracy and way of life are possible due to the exploitation of other countries. They critique countries like Israel for proclaiming to be democratic while occupying Palestinian territories.

Through volunteering we try to encourage reflection on how the starting point is not the same for everybody in the society. Even if we are all from the same cultural environment we do not share the same starting point in life.

I feel the values can look great on paper, but are more or less empty in reality. It is hypocritical of the EU to promote its values through all the grants and on the other hand it's a fortress, its values do not reach the people in the Mediterranean, on boats, they are of no use to them.

Urška Breznik, Pekarna magdalenske mreže, Slovenia

Understanding European Values in Poland

Both youth and CSOs in Poland recognise the importance of various values related to EU values and there is a common understanding of the significance of these values in the context of the European Union.

Youth mentioned values such as human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of mobility, solidarity, and the rule of law. They emphasised the significance of human rights, equality, and solidarity, connecting these values to the well-being of all individuals:

- Youth in Poland listed several values as important, including human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of mobility (no borders), solidarity, and the rule of law.
- During the discussion, it was emphasised that respect for human rights and equality are crucial. Participants argued that everyone should have the opportunity to live comfortably, and violating someone else's rights should be avoided, as one would not want it for oneself.
- Solidarity was considered a fundamental value that is closely connected to other values, such as democracy and caring for the common good. Caring for everybody's interests was seen as a form of solidarity.

I'd say respect for human rights and equality. Regarding first, everyone should be in a situation in which they can live comfortably. We are human and we all have emotions, and when someone else's rights are violated, we wouldn't want that for us, so why would we want it for others? Same is for equality: everyone should be able to have the same opportunities in life.

Zachary, 18, Poland

The solidarity one would be really high. I think most of them are connected to solidarity, like democracy is people caring for the common good and the majority of people deciding what should be done for the common good. Caring for everybody's interest is also a way of solidarity.

Witold, 18, Poland

CSOs highlighted the importance of values like freedom, the rule of law, and solidarity in their work and personal perspectives - values that are fundamental to them personally.

Understanding European Values in Denmark

In Denmark the specific EU-values are not well-known but respondents in general still seem to understand what they are. The most common values were Human Rights, Equality, Freedom, and Democracy and more generalisations like "human dignity and freedom" and "democracy, human rights, and equality."

Both youth volunteers and organisations in Denmark recognise and embrace EU values. They emphasise the importance of commitment, inclusivity, intergenerational connections, and collaboration as means to promote these values and foster solidarity at the local and national levels. There is a shared commitment to working together toward common objectives and creating a sense of community in line with EU values.

Youth perception:

- Important EU values include those related to community and democracy. They believe these values guide their work and contribute to solidarity, both locally and nationally.
- One participant highlights the importance of thinking beyond national borders and fostering cooperation across countries. While it can be challenging to transfer culture, the respondent emphasises the significance of sharing knowledge, especially in supporting youths.

As a volunteer, you can get an insight into the EU's values, but you can also help them along the way to be part of an organisation that sheds light on these values.

Clara, 24, Denmark

Organisations perception:

- Organisations indirectly operate in accordance with EU values and solidarity, emphasising the importance of commitment from volunteers.
- Community and democracy have been seen as important EU values, contributing to a better balance when working together on various projects.

Understanding European Values in Ireland

In Ireland, both young people and organisations demonstrate a commitment to various EU values, including human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and inclusion. They also emphasise the adaptability of these values in response to changing circumstances and evolving challenges, while the core principles of respect, unity, and fairness remain constant in their pursuit of positive change in their communities.

Young people's perspectives on understanding EU values:

Focus group participants discuss fundamental EU values, including democracy, the rule of law, equality, peace, and stability. They emphasise the importance of respect and unity in relation to these values. They also mention how exposure to different projects and experiences inspired them to bring positive changes to their communities. Additionally, they note that global events like the pandemic and conflicts prompted re-evaluation of values and beliefs, leading to discussions about refugee acceptance and biases.

Interviewed young people emphasise the values in line with their beliefs, experiences and identity. While one participant emphasises the importance of human rights as a LGBT and ethnic minority individual, underscoring the need for safety and the prevention of attacks based on identity, highlighting a strong commitment to inclusion and non-discrimination; the other one values freedom, particularly the freedom to travel and explore different countries within the EU and the worldwide Scouting network.

Equality and human rights. I think that's what I really use all the time. My main passion, because I'm. I'm from a rural area. I'm also a person of colour. I'm also a woman, and I'm also hearing impaired. So I have a disability as well. So with all of that, I have faced a lot of barriers. And I'm also a young person. So with that, you know, there's there's. I'm kind of like an onion. There's a lot of layers to me. But so with that, you know, I've always faced those barriers and that's what motivated me a lot in trying to make those opportunities available for. Other people who might have the same similarity who might face similar challenges to me, such as equality for instance, are making sure that the opportunities for them are available and that and that they are. They do have those options for them, no matter what background they come from or or what their gender is, or or what their age is. And kind of like that whole kind of value has always been something I've been motivated in because of my experience and because of the way I was brought up as well.

Caitlin, 19, Ireland

From the perspective of CSOs, the European values are understood in terms of their scope of work and values they nurture, which are in line with the common European values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. The values mentioned the most were diversity and acceptance of people from different countries and religions, care, compassion, and respect. Then inclusion, person-centred interactions, equality, and equity. One organisation emphasises that the values of equality and fairness remain constant within the organisation. They acknowledge that the delivery of services may vary based on circumstances, such as the pandemic or issues like homelessness. However, the core values of equality and fairness remain unchanged, even as specific challenges evolve.

V. Understanding Solidarity

Solidarity is a multifaceted concept with commonalities across the 5 partner countries, emphasising empathy, unity, community support, and a sense of shared responsibility. However, nuances and variations exist, influenced by factors such as cultural context, political climate, and individual experiences. Solidarity is viewed as a crucial value for addressing societal challenges, fostering a sense of community, and promoting social justice and equality. The role of external events and crises, such as the pandemic or war, is frequently mentioned as a catalyst for increased solidarity.

The multifaceted nature of solidarity is evident, with various aspects such as empathy, crisis response, community development, and inclusivity being emphasised in different contexts. CSOs in partner countries often associate solidarity with crisis response, democracy, inclusivity, and fostering a sense of collective action and responsibility. Denmark's perception of solidarity is closely linked to its welfare state and culture of volunteering, but it also reflects diverse perspectives influenced by cultural, economic, and individual factors.

The concept of global solidarity is also present, with some CSOs in Slovenia and Poland adopting a more critical stance, particularly regarding the practical application of EU values and the global context in which solidarity operates.

Challenges to solidarity, including political polarisation and reluctance toward certain groups (e.g., migrants), are recognised as obstacles to building strong and cohesive societies. Ireland highlights the importance of initiatives that promote solidarity, cross-cultural understanding, and empathy, especially in the context of addressing societal challenges and supporting marginalised communities.

Understanding Solidarity in Croatia

The difference in understanding solidarity between young people and CSOs in Croatia lies in the breadth of their perspectives. While young individuals emphasise the multifaceted nature of solidarity and its role in fostering a sense of community, CSOs have a broader view that encompasses crisis response, democracy, and a commitment to inclusivity and community development. Both perspectives underscore the importance of solidarity in addressing societal challenges and promoting cohesion, but they emphasise different aspects and priorities within the concept of solidarity. In Croatia, there is a noticeable difference in the understanding of solidarity between young people and youth organisations. Here is a summary of the distinctions:

Young people's perspective of solidarity has a multifaceted nature, refers to active engagement and collective efforts, as well as on community building:

- Young people perceive solidarity as a multifaceted concept encompassing acceptance of differences, empathy for issues beyond personal concerns, and the importance of mutual assistance and support in communities. They view solidarity as crucial for community survival and addressing societal issues, particularly in a developing system.
- According to young participants, active engagement and collective efforts are necessary to bring about positive changes, especially in areas where formal institutions may fall short. They believe that solidarity means empathising with people from diverse backgrounds and considering their challenges. It involves recognising and helping others who lack certain opportunities to empower the weaker and striving for equal basic conditions.
- Overall, the young people's perspective emphasises the vital role of solidarity in fostering a sense of community and addressing societal challenges. Solidarity is seen as a means of building bridges across differences and promoting equality.

Solidarity to me is listening to people that I might not think of or might not agree with and actually think of what they are saying or what they're doing. Solidarity to me is kind of like thinking about the situation of others that are completely different from my situation. That is solidarity to me. So for example, thinking of how stairs could be like a place with stairs could be an obstacle to many people with certain disabilities. That is solidarity to me. Or thinking of how blind people would navigate in the world or thinking of how voiceless people who have any kind of situation with their voice might have a hard time communicating with others thinking of those things. Just the fact of thinking of those things is a kind of solidarity to me.

Nora, 26, Croatia

A person is in solidarity when he has certain opportunities and then realises on his own and with the help of someone that another person does not actually have that opportunity and then helps him to get those opportunities. More precisely, to ensure the same opportunities for the other person.

Saša, 24, Croatia

CSOs have a broader understanding of solidarity, which encompasses individual solidarity for the community, including helping both people and animals. They emphasise inclusivity and aim to develop local communities based on cultural heritage and natural resources. Their perspective on solidarity extends beyond community survival to encompass social and environmental concerns.

- CSOs in Croatia associate solidarity closely with responding to crises and disasters, both domestically and internationally. They view it as a vital component of a democratic society, promoting cohesion, interconnection, and support within the community.
- Solidarity is seen as playing a crucial role in fostering a sense of responsibility and collective action, making it essential for addressing various challenges and maintaining a strong and democratic society.

We understand solidarity quite broadly in this context. In such a way that on some kind of moral level solidarity should not only include the help of man to man, but in the wider context of helping man and animals. Let's say, in the context of ecology, for the planet earth to be as developed and natural as possible, so that animals have the best possible conditions for life. In the same way, as towards man and that man has better conditions for life in his community.

Silvestar, Association PRIZMA, Croatia

Understanding Solidarity in Slovenia

In Slovenia, solidarity is broadly understood as a voluntary and empathetic act of helping others in need. Both young people and CSOs emphasise the importance of community-oriented solidarity and the need to address societal inequalities. Both young people and CSOs emphasise the importance of empathy and voluntary action in solidarity. They share the view that solidarity should be driven by genuine need rather than external pressures. Both groups exhibit a complex understanding of solidarity, acknowledging its various forms and its potential to address societal issues and inequalities. They highlight the role of solidarity in community building. While there are commonalities in their perspectives, some CSOs adopt a more critical stance, particularly regarding the practical application of EU values and the global context in which solidarity operates. These perspectives collectively illustrate a multifaceted understanding of solidarity in Slovenia, encompassing both local and global dimensions, empathy, and the pursuit of a more equitable society.

Youth perspective of solidarity is very much connected their individual experiences and engagement:

- Young individuals perceive solidarity as influenced by both national context and personal experiences. They emphasise the role of empathy as a foundational element of solidarity.

Solidarity is seen as more prevalent in less individualistic societies where people are more interconnected.

- Solidarity, according to youth, is characterised by its organic nature. It is viewed as a voluntary act of people helping one another based on genuine need, rather than being compelled by external forces or trends. Some participants connect solidarity to the fight against capitalism and see it as a means of addressing systemic inequalities.
- Youth participants recognise the diverse manifestations of solidarity, from supporting workers' strikes to environmental activism. They view volunteering as a form of solidarity, emphasising the act of giving back without expecting monetary gain.
- Some participants extend the concept of solidarity beyond human interactions to include the environment, nature, and animals. They emphasise the importance of doing something good for a greater cause, regardless of whether it involves people or other aspects of the world.

Solidarity can be a lot of things: from supporting a workers' strike, helping workers get organised, or even just raising awareness. It is also working against the system when the system oppresses weaker members of society.

It is through the average worker that we should strive to understand rights and values.

As soon as you depend on funding to exist, the EU values set your limits.

Gaj, 21, Slovenia

Understanding solidarity from the perspective of CSOs in Slovenia:

- CSOs predominantly relate solidarity to community and express the importance of understanding and addressing the needs of various social groups. They stress the value of stepping into the shoes of others, such as different generations or cultures, to foster solidarity.
- These organisations connect solidarity with a political understanding of life, emphasising that volunteering encourages reflection on societal inequalities and the unequal starting points for individuals. They note a trend among privileged youth to overlook the importance of free education and healthcare.
- Some CSOs adopt a global perspective and critique the promotion of EU values. They express scepticism about the practicality and effectiveness of these values, including solidarity, in addressing issues like immigration and whistleblowing.

Understanding Solidarity in Poland

Both youth and CSOs in Poland share a common understanding of solidarity. They define solidarity as collective efforts directed toward common goals, emphasising support, unity, and a sense of co-responsibility. Events like the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have highlighted the importance of solidarity in society. However, they also recognise challenges related to political polarisation and growing reluctance toward migrants. Solidarity, for them, extends to providing equal opportunities for vulnerable groups and is closely tied to values like human dignity and equality.

Youth perspective and understanding solidarity in Poland:

- Youth described solidarity as the collective effort to work together towards a common goal. They mentioned the sense of unity and support within their organisation, highlighting how they have become like a family despite not knowing each other well initially.

- Participants noted that events such as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine had increased the level of solidarity in Polish society. Before these events, solidarity was perceived as less prevalent among people.
- It was acknowledged that political polarisation within the national political elite is not conducive to building solidarity in society. Such divisions can hinder unity and cooperation.
- There was a noticeable change in responses when comparing the period "before" the pandemic and "after." The perception of solidarity seemed to have evolved over time.
- Some participants mentioned the historical context of the 1980s, specifically the time of "Solidarity." Although they did not personally experience those times, they learned from their parents that Polish society united for change during that period. They compared the crisis caused by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine to those times.
- Concerns were raised about growing reluctance and fatigue toward migrants, not only in Poland but also in other places. Participants emphasised the importance of combating such attitudes through education and by setting examples of positive cooperation.

I can get once again to the example of the Ukrainian refugees: we were helping people in need, basically their whole lives were destroyed. They had to escape their country and they needed help. Solidarity is helping others when they need it.

Witold, 18, Poland

Understanding of solidarity from the perspective of Polish CSOs:

- CSOs worked together to define solidarity as a sense of co-responsibility in the face of someone's need or misfortune. It involves providing help and support without expecting gratitude. Solidarity is closely linked to empathy and compassion, particularly for vulnerable groups such as minors, people with disabilities, those with fewer opportunities, and those from different backgrounds.
- CSOs stressed the importance of providing equal opportunities for individuals facing various challenges, whether historical, social, disability-related, or related to health or mental issues. They highlighted the need to support these individuals in their development and integration into the community.
- Organisations emphasised that solidarity involves common actions focused on common goals. In their context, the main goal is to create an independent and satisfying life for people with intellectual disabilities. These organisations also emphasised the importance of EU values like human dignity, equality, and respect for human rights in their work.

Understanding Solidarity in Denmark

Solidarity is a concept that is often associated with social and political movements that aim to promote equality, justice, and mutual support among individuals and groups. It is a complex concept that can be understood and practised in different ways depending on the context and perspective. Whether in organisations, youth groups, or national contexts, solidarity is an important value that promotes a sense of community, mutual support, and shared responsibility and is viewed as the foundation for building stronger and more inclusive communities that promote social justice, equality, and well-being for all.

In the context of Denmark, solidarity is often associated with the country's welfare state and redistribution of goods. The welfare state is based on the principles of social equality and solidarity, which means that the state provides social services and benefits to ensure that all citizens have access to education, healthcare, housing, and other basic needs. Solidarity is also reflected in the Danish culture of volunteering and community engagement, which is an important aspect of social life and often seen as a way of contributing to the common good and learning about democratic participation.

However, the perception of solidarity in Denmark is not uniform and can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural differences, economic inequality, and individual values. Some people may prioritise individualism and self-reliance over collective action and shared responsibility, while others may have different cultural backgrounds or experiences that shape their understanding of solidarity. In order to build a more inclusive and cohesive society, it is important to foster a culture of empathy, mutual understanding, and respect for diversity.

In the context of organisations, solidarity is often seen as a core value that promotes a sense of community, mutual support, and shared responsibility among members. It is an important aspect of building strong teams and creating a sense of belonging among volunteers and employees.

Solidarity is about putting oneself in the shoes of others - sometimes at the expense of what is 'best' for oneself.

Cecilie, Save the Children, Denmark

Solidarity provides cohesion across demographic divides.

Mads, Mentorbarn, Denmark

Solidarity is a basic premise of being human.

Daniel, Wonder, Denmark

In the context of youth, solidarity is often seen as a way of standing together as a group and helping each other out. Many young people are motivated by a sense of social responsibility and a desire to make a difference in their communities. They are often involved in volunteer work, community service, and activism that promote social justice and equality. Through these activities, young people can develop a sense of belonging, purpose, and empowerment, which can have a positive impact on their personal development and well-being.

Solidarity means that you stand together and help each other when needed, even when one does not want to.

Emma, 24, Denmark

Solidarity is that everyone should have the same fundamental rights, opportunities, and prerequisites, and we must all support that. Therefore, it is the broadest shoulders that are bearing the greatest burden.

Amalie, 30, Denmark

Understanding Solidarity in Ireland

Both youth and organisations acknowledge the importance of initiatives and interventions that promote solidarity, cross-cultural understanding, and empathy, especially in the context of marginalised communities. The emphasis on unity and support runs through both perspectives, highlighting the shared value of solidarity in fostering stronger communities and addressing societal challenges.

From the youth perspective, the solidarity is seen as:

- standing with others and offering support, irrespective of political views. They see it as a reassuring sense of community support, emphasising an example of participating in a solidarity march for refugees with Amnesty Ireland.
- people coming together and sharing common enjoyment or experiences. The strong sense of community and solidarity is highlighted, created during the county competition in the Scouts.

- Focus group participants discuss the significance of volunteering in Ireland, where solidarity is seen as a strength through unity. They underline the importance of initiatives and interventions that promote solidarity and cross-cultural understanding, especially concerning refugees and marginalised communities.

So I try to make my activism as inclusive and inter Cultural as possible, as a young person. My activism is usually focused on young people, particularly inequalities in schools and other. Any inequalities that young people face, and I believe that the only way to combat inequalities is by working together and spreading information on the problem will help increase this support and increase unity. And Unity is the way. To overcome anything really

I'd also think that, like in organisations and NGOs, could try incorporating solidarity training into their organisations, activism and leadership programmes because, like there's a difference between solidarity and pity. Like especially in. Your reaction, like if you pity someone, you feel bad for them, and you might say sorry and like, maybe throw money at the organisation or something. But if you're standing with them and you're standing, it's all there with them, you're actually taking action and you're actually trying to help them.

Bel, 18, Ireland

From the perspective of CSOs, solidarity within the organisation is fostered through collaboration and a sense of community among volunteers and staff members. While specific EU values like equality, democracy, and human rights are not explicitly mentioned, they naturally manifest through the organisation's structure and operations. One participant discusses solidarity through the lens of intersectoral work and community collaboration within the Ballina 2023 Youth Programme. The participant highlights the work of OutWest, an LGBTQIA+ support group, in advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights and providing support and education to the community.

VI. Volunteering's Vital Role: Fostering Solidarity, Democratic Engagement, and EU Values

Volunteering plays a significant role in fostering solidarity, democratic engagement, and EU values across all the mentioned countries. While there are differences in the extent to which EU values are associated with volunteering, there is a shared recognition of the positive impact of volunteer engagement on fostering a more inclusive, democratic, and value-driven society.

Volunteering is seen as a way to address inequalities, build unity, foster empathy, support marginalised groups in various contexts particularly during crises such as wars, refugee crises, and pandemics. Youth often perceive volunteering as a means to actively participate in society, an opportunity to express solidarity, promote values such as human rights, freedom, and equality, and contribute to the community. CSOs actively integrate volunteering into their programmes and initiatives, recognising its potential to promote EU values like human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and human rights.

Both youth and CSOs emphasise the importance of raising awareness and promoting inclusivity and collaboration in volunteering efforts, improving the promotion of volunteer opportunities to reach a broader audience and enhance the impact of volunteer work.

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Solidarity and Other EU Values in Croatia

In Croatia, the responses from young people and CSOs collectively illuminate the significant role and contribution of volunteering to solidarity, active participation, democratic engagement, and EU values, while also highlighting distinctions in their perspectives. While young people emphasise personal responsibility and diverse motivations for engagement, CSOs play a pivotal role in promoting EU values, solidarity, and civic education through their programmes and initiatives. These perspectives collectively underscore the critical role of volunteering in shaping a more inclusive, democratic, and value-driven society.

The youth perspective:

- Young people recognise a strong connection between volunteering, solidarity, active participation, and EU values. They highlight the positive impact of volunteering, particularly during emergencies, and emphasise the role of organisations like the Red Cross in promoting unity and togetherness through volunteering. These sentiments align with key EU values.
- While acknowledging the potential of volunteering to enhance solidarity and uphold EU values, young participants express concerns about reaching a broader audience. They call for improved promotion of volunteer opportunities and cultural events to increase awareness and accessibility.
- Perspectives on the connection between personal engagement or volunteering and EU values vary among young individuals. Some view volunteering as a personal duty contributing to community well-being, while others question the direct link between their actions and EU values within their national context.
- Young participants highlight the universality of values such as solidarity, suggesting that these principles extend beyond the EU and are applicable to all individuals. They underscore the motivational power of awareness regarding the impact of their personal engagement, emphasising the importance of recognising the impact of individual efforts in fostering solidarity and upholding EU values.
- The responses reflect a strong sense of personal responsibility among young people to contribute to solidarity and uphold EU values, primarily through volunteer activities and helping others in times of need. They recognise the role of individuals in fostering solidarity and EU values, especially during crises.

CSOs' perspective:

- CSOs perceive volunteering as a tangible expression of solidarity and active participation in society. They emphasise its instrumental role in promoting EU values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and human rights. These values are integrated into local initiatives, projects, and volunteer centres, serving as platforms for educating and engaging young people.
- CSOs actively integrate volunteering and discussions on solidarity into their projects, recognising the importance of addressing gaps in civic education and building a democratic society. They play a significant role in promoting EU values and solidarity, even if not explicitly labelled as such.
- Solidarity and EU values play a fundamental role in shaping the work of organisations and their members. Their programmes and initiatives underscore the importance of promoting these values in society, particularly in the context of integration, social inclusion, and support for vulnerable groups.
- Organisations highlight the vital role of civil society organisations and spontaneous solidarity during crises. However, they emphasise the need for more structured and coordinated responses to ensure efficient assistance reaches those in need. Continuous awareness and solidarity efforts beyond crisis periods are also encouraged.
- Some organisations actively empower youth to contribute to EU values and solidarity while fostering inclusivity and openness. They provide training, intergenerational projects, and programmes that encourage political participation and information sharing about volunteering opportunities.

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Solidarity and Other EU Values in Slovenia

In Slovenia, both young people and organisations view volunteering as a powerful means of fostering solidarity, democratic engagement, and EU values. They recognise its role in building communities, promoting personal growth, and encouraging the internalisation of shared values. Both groups emphasise the interplay between solidarity and community. CSOs play a pivotal role in transmitting these values to young individuals, and there is a shared emphasis on the need for systemic support and recognition of volunteer efforts within the existing systems. However, there are some nuanced differences in their perspectives.

Youth perspective on the role of volunteering in fostering solidarity and EU values:

- Young people emphasise the reciprocal relationship between solidarity and community, highlighting that they mutually enhance each other. They see the formalisation of solidarity, such as through organised volunteering, as a positive development because it presents individuals with various opportunities to express solidarity. However, they caution against excessive formalisation, suggesting that the essence of solidarity should not be lost in bureaucracy.
- Youth acknowledge specific local and national initiatives like "Mladi za podnebno pravičnost" (Youth for climate justice) for their volunteer engagement. They believe that these initiatives fill roles that could ideally be fulfilled by the EU. Additionally, they view any form of protest as a call for volunteer initiatives.
- Some young people critique the Western notion of solidarity, suggesting that it is overly liberalised and may inadvertently exacerbate inequality by focusing solely on marginalised groups. They argue that these values do not sufficiently account for the historical and environmental context of nations, potentially leading to misunderstandings among the average workers.
- Young people express concerns about hyper individualisation in Slovenian society, where they believe it's challenging for individuals to genuinely support and feel happiness for their neighbours. They contend that the radical concept of solidarity is not fully developed in Slovenia and cite a lack of real support among workers, particularly in response to strikes.
- Young people integrate EU values into their daily lives. They emphasise the importance of equality, non-discrimination based on gender, nationality, or other factors, and personal responsibility. They see volunteering as an embodiment of solidarity and freedom.

- Youths acknowledge that some young people may view volunteering as free labour and suggest that changing this mentality is a challenge. They believe that volunteering should be more valued in society and seen as a personal growth opportunity.

I think volunteering is in itself a form of solidarity. Doing something where you get a lot in return. Volunteering itself is solidarity, in my opinion. The bigger problem is how to invite people. I can see that volunteering has value in our society, but still not a lot of people decide to volunteer. There's still this conviction that this is free labour, exploitation, people feel everything should be valued in money.

Pia, 26, Slovenia

I really love the feeling of community that I got from this involvement. Before I somehow did not have any sense of belonging to Kamnik, I did not feel I knew the town or that I wished to belong there. I feel like I am a part of something bigger than myself. To build my identity as well as my community. This is what helps me stick with it. I find solidarity a sort of abstract notion, still fairly familiar ... in essence, it's about helping. It's easiest to just define it as helping others, those close to you or far away, it does not matter. You give a part of yourself for the good of something bigger than you.

Eva, 24, Slovenia

CSOs perspective on the role of volunteering in fostering solidarity and EU values:

- CSOs acknowledge that young people may initially engage in volunteering for personal benefits, but the experience inevitably influences their personal development and understanding of core values. They stress the importance of providing opportunities for reflection and self-awareness during volunteering activities.
- Volunteers form a community through their shared experiences. Within this community, common values, with solidarity at their core, develop. These values are subsequently disseminated through social circles, workshops, and projects.
- Volunteer assistance, according to CSOs, plays a significant role in empowering young people with disabilities. It offers them opportunities for independence, inclusion, and improved quality of life, especially for those who rely on home assistance.
- Volunteering is perceived as a direct response to what cannot be achieved within the existing system. Organisations highlight that the NGO and volunteering sectors play a crucial role in enhancing EU values and raising awareness of solidarity, particularly among young people who may initially be focused on personal benefits.
- CSOs recognise that volunteering should not be a substitute for systemic infrastructure and public services. They point out that public services sometimes fail to support volunteers adequately, particularly young volunteers who carry the brunt of the workload. Their proposals and contributions may be overlooked or dismissed.
- CSOs integrate EU values into various programmes, such as critical literacy workshops, social skills training, project work, and self-confidence training. These values are woven into the fabric of their activities, and youth are encouraged to embrace them in their daily lives.

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Solidarity and Other EU Values in Poland

Both youth and CSOs in Poland recognise the vital role of volunteering in fostering EU values. Youth highlight the connection between volunteering and values like human rights, freedom, and equality, though they may not directly associate it with building a democratic society. CSOs emphasise the restoration of human dignity through volunteering, the importance of freedom and equality in volunteer work, and the role of volunteering in democracy and NGO operations. Local initiatives in Gdańsk serve as practical examples of how volunteering can promote EU values. Discussions also consider the future growth of volunteering formats such as activism, non-formal groups, and e-volunteering.

From the perspective of youth, the role of volunteering in fostering solidarity and EU values is perceived as it follows:

- Youth participants recognised a strong connection between volunteering and important values such as human rights, freedom (because it is done voluntarily), and equality (because it is inclusive and open to everyone).
- While youth acknowledged the role of volunteering in promoting values, they did not directly associate it with building a democratic society. They tended to view democracy more in the context of political and party systems, which they sometimes regarded with reluctance.
- Youth participants agreed that participation in volunteering reflects a conscious social attitude and can translate into greater involvement in public life. They noted that the organisation they are part of promotes the idea of solidarity on a daily basis.
- Youth mentioned various charitable organisations like hospices (related to human rights) and scout organisations (linked to equality) as examples of volunteering that align with important values.
- Political parties and commitment to them were not indicated as a means of promoting values.

CSOs unanimously agreed that volunteering is closely connected with EU values. They highlighted the following connections:

- Volunteering is seen as a way to restore human dignity, both for those who receive support and those who provide it.
- Volunteering must be based on freedom and voluntariness, ensuring that volunteers are free to choose how, to whom, and for what purpose they help.
- They emphasised that volunteering is integral to democratic principles, as NGOs often rely on the work of volunteers.
- Participants from organisations pointed out various local initiatives in Gdańsk that exemplify volunteering's role in promoting EU values. These initiatives include efforts to help Ukraine during the war and migrant crisis, local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting diversity, and advocating for the rights of sexual minorities.
- Discussions included various forms of volunteering, including activism, non-formal groups, and e-volunteering. The popularity and growth of these formats in society were subjects of interest.
- CSOs represented various fields of work, from charity and working with minorities to promoting diversity and supporting people with disabilities. They agreed that their organisations engage in volunteering and solidarity missions, such as workshops for disabled people and intergenerational activities.

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Solidarity and Other EU Values in Ireland

Both youth and organisations in Ireland recognise the role of volunteering in fostering solidarity and EU values. Youth see volunteering as a means to combat inequalities and promote unity and respect for others. Organisations actively engage in inclusive practices and community collaboration through volunteering. They prioritise individual needs and preferences, dignity, and informed decision-making. These organisations also emphasise raising awareness among youth about their role in building solidarity and EU values, often through various initiatives and interventions. They recognise the value of inclusivity and openness in their activities and programmes, with a focus on creating a supportive and collaborative environment.

Youth perspectives on the role of volunteering:

- Volunteering is a way to combat inequalities, especially those affecting young people. One participant emphasises the importance of working together, spreading information, and increasing support and unity. Their activism with organisations involves actions in solidarity with various causes, including LGBTQ+ rights and the right to host pride events. The participant strives to make their activism inclusive and collaborative, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard.
- Focus group participants highlight the strong connection between volunteering and solidarity, emphasising how volunteering promotes unity and respect for others.

Organisations' perspectives on the role of volunteering:

- CSOs promote solidarity and EU values through inclusive practices and community collaboration. They engage service users in decision-making processes, striving to provide support based on individual needs and preferences, focusing on dignity, freedom of choice, and informed decision-making.
- Activities and programmes like regional and national panels, town hall meetings, and online platforms facilitate community building, face-to-face interactions, and a sense of belonging and shared purpose among volunteers.
- Different organisations make efforts to promote youth engagement and contribute to these values: democracy, respect, openness, equality, diversity, and inclusion that are incorporated into their strategic plans and projects. E.g., initiatives like the Nelson Mandela Anti-Racism Week and anti-racism training promote awareness and engagement in activities combating racism. Other interventions include equality conferences and initiatives to encourage student registration and understanding of the voting process.

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Solidarity and Other EU Values in Denmark

Both youth and organisations in Denmark perceive volunteering as a significant contributor to fostering solidarity and promoting EU values. They highlight the role of volunteering in promoting active participation, empathy, and community building, particularly in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the refugee crisis. Youth volunteers, in particular, emphasise how their volunteer engagement allows them to contribute to society and align with EU values like democracy, equality, and human rights. Organisations recognise the impact of their daily work on promoting solidarity and view voluntary communities as bastions of solidarity. However, opinions vary on how directly EU values and solidarity should be applied to civil society work.

Key points from youth:

- Many Danish youth acknowledge that their fellow citizens have shown solidarity during crises like the war in Ukraine, but they also highlight disparities in solidarity efforts among different countries and situations.
- Youth perceive volunteering as a means to dedicate themselves to society and contribute to a community without expecting anything in return. They see volunteer engagement as an expression of solidarity, active participation, and democratic commitment.
- Youth volunteers relate their personal engagement in volunteering to EU values and solidarity by emphasising giving back to the community and supporting minorities. They believe volunteering provides opportunities to promote values like solidarity, equality, democracy, and human rights.
- Some youth volunteers believe their volunteer engagement contributes to EU values, particularly human dignity, by providing a sense of belonging and meaning to individuals.
- Youth volunteers express that solidarity and EU values inspire them to create better conditions for specific groups or the community in general.

Voluntary work is an expression - or product - of solidarity, active participation and democratic commitment - and at the same time voluntary work is also a prerequisite for all those values.

Marie, 19, Denmark

Key points from organisations:

- Organisations in Denmark believe that volunteering promotes active participation, empathy, and solidarity. They conduct activities related to solidarity and view their voluntary communities as based on solidarity.

- Some organisations believe their daily work impacts solidarity and EU values in Denmark, particularly by involving various age groups in collaborations that support active democratic participation and pathways to employment and education.
- A few organisations acknowledge that solidarity and EU values indirectly support their professional efforts and motivate joint collaboration across professional groups.
- Organisations are divided in their views on how to apply EU values and solidarity to promote the work of civil society. While some suggest entering into partnership agreements with municipalities, others are sceptical about the direct impact of EU values set on their work.

Volunteering is a good way to meet other people who do not resemble yourself, and in that sense to experience cooperation and cultivate trust and equality in practice.

Julie, Kalaallit Meerartaat, Denmark

VII. Support to the Development of EU Values and the Role of Local/National/European Decision Makers

Education is a common focus across all countries, with both young people and CSOs recognising its importance in promoting EU values and solidarity. Starting this education at a young age is seen as crucial. Incorporating volunteering-related education into the school curriculum is seen as important in both Slovenia and Croatia.

There is a shared emphasis on financial support, either indirectly through suggestions for resource allocation or directly by highlighting the need for financial assistance to develop innovative approaches and sustain initiatives related to EU values. Concerns about EU-funded projects, bureaucratic overload, and alignment with actual needs are raised in Slovenia, indicating the need for more effective use of EU resources.

A multi-level approach involving local, national, and EU stakeholders is advocated by CSOs in Croatia, aligning with the idea of active citizen engagement. State intervention is seen as essential in addressing societal issues and supporting the development of EU values. Involvement of decision-makers, including politicians and local authorities, is considered instrumental in shaping policies and initiatives that promote EU values. In Poland, young people expect the EU to act as a guardian of EU values, while CSOs focus on the role of politicians and local authorities in supporting these values. In Denmark, both youth and organisations call for easier access to funding opportunities, involvement of vulnerable young people, and new partnership agreements between civil society and municipalities. In Ireland, there is a strong emphasis on improved communication, transparency, and accessibility of information regarding EU values and opportunities. Youth input, government support, and youth engagement are also highlighted as important factors in promoting EU values and solidarity.

There is a desire for greater unity, common solutions, and increased support for youth activism and leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity within the EU.

Support needed for the development of EU values in Croatia

In Croatia there is a convergence of perspectives between young people and CSOs on the importance of education in nurturing EU values and solidarity. While CSOs highlight the need for financial support and advocate for a multi-level approach involving various stakeholders, young people's suggestions revolve around grassroots education. Both viewpoints collectively underscore the significance of education and active engagement in promoting these values within Croatian society:

- Education as a common focus: Both groups place significant importance on education as a foundational element for promoting EU values and solidarity. They agree that starting this education at a young age is crucial for building a cohesive and empathetic society.
- Financial support: CSOs specifically highlight the need for financial support to develop innovative approaches. While young people may not explicitly mention financial aspects, their suggestions indirectly point to the allocation of resources for teacher training and educational initiatives.
- Multi-level approach: Organisations advocate for a multi-level approach involving local, national, and EU stakeholders, emphasising active citizen engagement. Young people, on the other hand, may not directly mention this approach, but their focus on grassroots education aligns with the idea that promoting EU values and solidarity should begin at the local level and extend upwards.

While young participants may not be extensively familiar with specific EU initiatives, their suggestions align with the idea that education serves as a key driver in developing and nurturing solidarity and EU values. Their perspective emphasises the grassroots level as the starting point for instilling these values. Among

young participants, there is a consensus on the pivotal role of education in promoting EU values and solidarity. They emphasise the significance of starting this education at a young age, preferably in kindergarten, and providing resources for teacher training. The observation of solidarity among children in schools underscores the belief that fostering these values from an early age is essential for building a more cohesive and empathetic society.

CSOs emphasise the need for financial support to further develop innovative approaches. They recognise that financial backing is crucial to implementing effective programmes and initiatives that promote EU values and solidarity at various levels. In conclusion, organisations advocate for a multi-level approach that involves engagement from local, national, and EU stakeholders. They stress the importance of active citizen engagement in conjunction with decision-makers' support. CSOs believe that such an approach is necessary to effectively promote EU values and solidarity in society.

Support needed for the development of EU values in Slovenia

In Slovenia, both youth and organisations perceive challenges and opportunities related to EU-funded projects and efforts to support EU values. They share concerns about project sustainability, bureaucratic overload, and the alignment of projects with actual needs. Both groups also emphasise the importance of incorporating volunteering-related education into the school curriculum. They highlight the significance of state intervention in addressing societal issues such as housing and capitalism's role in opposing solidarity. Both groups advocate for greater solidarity and common solutions within the EU. Overall, there is a shared desire for greater ambition, unity, and orientation toward the future within the EU.

Main conclusions:

- EU-funded projects: There is a concern about the abundance of projects and initiatives aimed at vulnerable groups, some of which appear to exist solely to utilise EU funding. They note that some projects lack alignment with the actual needs of their target populations, often due to the involvement of individuals who are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the issues. Moreover, they mention that the complexity of calls for proposals can make EU funding inaccessible to smaller organisations.
- Sustainability of projects: The issue of project sustainability is highlighted, with the observation that EU-funded projects, typically spanning one or two years, may not be sufficient to address long-term issues adequately. They stress that funds operators should consider extending the funding duration to around 15 years to ensure the sustainability of projects.
- Bureaucratic overload: Youth voice concerns about bureaucratic overload and excessive demands from donors, which can be detrimental to the success and enthusiasm of projects. They believe that the needs of the beneficiaries should take precedence over bureaucratic requirements.
- Educational trips: Youth criticise short projects, such as educational trips, for attracting participants who may not be genuinely interested in the topic but are primarily motivated by the opportunity to travel. They question the effectiveness of such trips in terms of actual learning outcomes.
- Need for basic state support: Youth emphasise that the state should provide basic care to those in need, which would enable organisations and individuals to focus on solidarity activities rather than struggling for survival. They note that volunteering should be about companionship, solidarity, and expanding social networks, rather than being perceived as unpaid labour.
- Education on volunteering: CSOs emphasise the importance of integrating volunteering-related subjects into the school curriculum, from primary school to university. They believe that students should be familiar with volunteering and the workings of civil society. While there have been some improvements in this regard, further efforts are needed to encourage volunteering, such as proposing a volunteering year with guaranteed income for young people.
- Housing and community spaces: They highlight the role of the state in addressing the housing crisis and creating community spaces within local environments. They stress that the state should act in this regard, as NGOs are already operating at their maximum capacity.

- Challenges of capitalism: Organisations point out that capitalism itself can oppose solidarity. They suggest that moving away from capitalism would be a significant step toward a more solidary society. They also emphasise that solidarity cannot be limited to one nation or continent in today's globalised world. They call for greater ambition and orientation toward the future within the EU.
- Fragmentation and national interests: They note the fragmentation within Europe and the dominance of national interests, hindering greater solidarity and common solutions. They question the effectiveness of the EU, particularly in socially important areas, and highlight the need for a more unified and solidary approach.

Support needed for the development of EU values in Poland

Both young people and organisations recognise the importance of supporting the development of EU values. Young people value EU programmes like Erasmus+ and student exchanges as avenues for cultural exchange and value promotion. They also expect the EU to act as a guardian of these values, even though recent challenges have been noted. Direct support for aid organisations is seen as a valuable way for the EU to promote values. On the other hand, CSOs focus on the role of politicians and local authorities as key stakeholders in supporting EU values. They emphasise the effectiveness of local and regional campaigns in engaging communities and stress the importance of panel discussions to encourage citizen participation and dialogue on these values. Both perspectives highlight the need for active engagement and support at various levels of governance to nurture and promote EU values.

Youth perspective:

- Young participants highlighted EU programmes like Erasmus+, youth exchanges, and student exchanges as mechanisms that enable them to discover new countries and people. These programmes are seen as a way of promoting cross-cultural understanding and EU values.
- They also noted that sometimes the media reports on the EU supporting regions affected by disasters, such as earthquakes. This suggests that the EU's role in helping in times of crisis is recognised by young people.
- Participants expressed a belief that the EU should serve as a guardian of EU values. However, there was a sense that the EU has faced challenges in fulfilling this role recently.
- There was agreement among youth that the EU should provide more direct support to organisations like "Pomagamy nie ziewamy" and other aid organisations, potentially through financial assistance and supplies.

CSOs' perspective:

- Organisations identified politicians and local authorities as key stakeholders in supporting the development of EU values. They likely view these decision-makers as instrumental in shaping policies and initiatives that promote these values.
- They emphasised the importance of local and regional campaigns for promoting values. Such campaigns allow for direct engagement with local communities and residents, facilitating discussions and awareness.
- Panel discussions were mentioned as a means of enabling citizens to voice their opinions and contribute to discussions on EU values. This approach encourages active participation and dialogue.

Support needed for the development of EU values in Ireland

In Ireland, both youth and organisations recognise the need for improved communication, transparency, and accessibility of information regarding EU values and opportunities. Youth emphasise the importance of youth input in decision-making processes and call for increased financial support and the removal of barriers to access. Organisations stress the need for better coordination and support for volunteering and suggest that awareness of opportunities may vary among young people. Both youth and organisations

stress the importance of government support, increased funding for volunteering programmes, and innovative approaches to support youth activism and leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity. Overall, both groups highlight the significance of youth engagement and leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity.

Youth perspectives:

- Youth mention the need for involvement of youth organisations in the EU Parliament and the exchange of ideas among like-minded individuals as crucial for fostering EU values. They call for more follow-ups, cross-generational dialogues, and opportunities for young people to have direct input in decision-making processes.
- They highlight EU initiatives like the European Solidarity Corps, European Youth Forum, and interrail programmes as effective ways to promote solidarity and cross-cultural understanding.
- Youth express difficulty in finding information about opportunities and events at the European level, suggesting a need for a centralised source of information. Youth recommend creating accessible and centralised information sources about EU initiatives, opportunities, and decision-making processes to ensure transparency and awareness. They promote transparency in EU decision-making processes and increasing communication channels between policymakers and young people.
- Youth point out the challenges of understanding EU policies and decision-making processes due to their complexity and inaccessible information. They desire more transparency and communication from policymakers regarding young people's roles and expectations at events.
- Youth encourages continuous learning and mutual exchange of knowledge between young people and decision-makers. They suggest developing educational programmes and initiatives to promote a better understanding of EU values, history, and the benefits of EU programmes like Erasmus+.
- They emphasise the need to increase financial support for programmes like Erasmus+ to ensure equal opportunities for young people from all backgrounds. Youth advocate for addressing travel expenses and other financial barriers that may hinder access to EU programmes and initiatives.
- Youth stress the importance of ensuring that young people have the opportunity to provide feedback, ask questions, and receive follow-ups on their contributions and concerns.

CSOs' perspectives:

- Participants highlight challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, emphasising the need for better communication and decision-making processes to address volunteer recruitment and retention issues.
- They advocate for greater support and recognition of volunteering, as well as improved communication within organisations.
- Some participants express unfamiliarity with specific programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps and suggest that awareness of such opportunities might vary among young people based on their background and context.
- Participants mention the need for youth-led initiatives and the importance of young leaders or advisory roles to facilitate open discussions.
- Participants suggest that additional funding and resources would be beneficial to support innovative approaches for activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity.
- They stress the importance of resources and the need for a volunteer software platform to streamline administrative tasks and enhance communication.
- They suggest providing more opportunities for students to engage with larger institutions, such as the European Commission and national and local governments.

Support needed for the development of EU values in Denmark

Both youth and organisations in Denmark see the need for easier access to funding opportunities for youth volunteering and emphasise the importance of involving vulnerable young people. They acknowledge challenges in identifying the right support but suggest new partnership agreements between civil society and municipalities. To promote EU values and solidarity, there is a call for new solutions in the social field and systematic support for existing civil society organisations. Key actors in this change include Danish municipalities, welfare organisations, educational institutions, larger nonprofits, and politicians. Positive interactions between general society and civil society are also seen as essential for strengthening support for civil society initiatives.

1. Support for youth volunteering:
 - Youth respondents suggest that there should be easier access to information about funding opportunities across EU borders to facilitate youth volunteering. They emphasise the importance of involving vulnerable young people themselves and listening to their perspectives when designing support programmes. Youth acknowledge challenges in identifying the exact support needed and the appropriate type of support but suggest that new partnership agreements between civil society and Danish municipalities could be a solution.
 - Organisations suggest that youth need specific support measures, including easier access to funding opportunities and basic operating funding to sustain their volunteering efforts. They highlight the need for stable operating support rather than temporary funding, which can divert effort away from the organisation's objectives. Organisations express a need for financial means and organisational assistance to connect with the right channels and effectively utilise EU-supported projects.
2. Promoting EU values and solidarity:
 - Youth respondents admit a lack of specific knowledge about the local measures needed to promote EU values and solidarity. They suggest the need for more specification of EU values to make them more transparent. Some youth emphasise the importance of cooperation across countries, especially in light of recent events like the war in Ukraine, as a means of promoting EU values and creating a sense of solidarity and community.
 - Organisations suggest the need for new solutions in the social field that involve civil society in municipal tasks to promote EU values and solidarity. They emphasise the importance of systematically supporting existing civil society organisations and promoting cultural understanding through various projects.
3. Key actors for change:
 - Organisations highlight key actors such as Danish municipalities, welfare organisations, educational institutions, larger nonprofits, and politicians in pushing for the needed changes to improve conditions for youth in civil society.
4. Actions to Support Civil Society:
 - CSOs stress the importance of involvement and co-creation across civil society and Danish municipalities to develop innovative solutions for future welfare challenges.
 - Organisations advocate for financial support, making physical locations available, competence development, and political interest in including civil society perspectives.
 - They highlight the need for positive interactions between the general society and civil society to enhance support for civil society initiatives.

VIII. The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Contributing to and Promoting Solidarity and EU Values

In all 5 countries, civil society organisations are seen as essential contributors to promoting EU values, with a focus on community building and advocacy for social change. Civil society organisations play a vital role in promoting EU values and solidarity, especially among young people, by providing education, support, and opportunities for practical engagement.

Education and awareness-building are common themes across all countries, with CSOs and young people recognising the role of civil society organisations in educating and informing the public, especially youth, about opportunities for civic engagement and activism related to EU values and solidarity.

There is a shared emphasis on involving and empowering young people in leadership roles and activities related to EU values and solidarity, with a focus on practical experiences and inclusivity and emphasis on creating opportunities for young people to contribute to the organisation's goals.

The benefits of youth engagement include empowerment, self-discovery, networking, curiosity, openness, awareness of global issues and critical thinking, which contribute to fostering solidarity and EU values.

Challenges such as bureaucracy, resource disparities, and access to facilities are acknowledged by CSOs in their efforts to promote EU values and solidarity. Challenges related to youth engagement include addressing hesitancy among young people to engage in real-world activities and the need for greater visibility and information about civil society organisations supporting activism and youth leadership. Financial support, reduced bureaucracy, responsive approach, and stable funding are consistently highlighted as crucial factors for the effective operation of civil society organisations across these countries.

The vital contribution of CSOs in nurturing solidarity and promoting EU values, particularly among young people, across different countries can be summarised as follows:

1. Educational agents: CSOs serve as educational agents, providing information and awareness about opportunities for civic engagement, activism, and the promotion of EU values and solidarity, especially among young people.
2. Youth mobilisers: CSOs play a crucial role in mobilising youth leadership and activism in support of EU values. They encourage young people to actively participate in activities and initiatives aligned with these values.
3. Advocates for financial support: CSOs advocate for financial support and stable funding to sustain their programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting EU values and fostering solidarity among diverse groups.
4. Inclusivity promoters: CSOs foster inclusivity and flexibility in their activities, making sure they accommodate different working styles, involve a wide range of young individuals, and provide opportunities for youth to explore their interests.
5. Promoters of practical learning: CSOs emphasise practical learning experiences, including cross-cultural exchanges, hands-on activities, and mentorship, to make EU values tangible and engaging for young people.
6. Advocates for critical literacy education: CSOs stress the significance of critical literacy education to encourage youth involvement and help young individuals critically understand and engage with EU values and solidarity-related issues.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Croatia

In Croatia, both young people and organisations perceive civil society organisations as crucial in promoting solidarity and EU values through education, awareness, and youth leadership development. They share

common perspectives on the educational role of civil society, the need for financial support, and the importance of fostering inclusivity and flexibility.

- Educational role of civil society organisations: Young people recognise a crucial role for civil society organisations in educating and informing the public, particularly youth, about opportunities for civic engagement and activism. They emphasise that awareness of these opportunities can inspire greater participation and contribute to the promotion of EU values and solidarity.
- Mobilising youth leadership: The responses underscore the significance of outreach and education in mobilising youth leadership and activism in support of EU values. To enhance such programmes, young people suggest involving more youth, raising awareness about EU values and volunteering, and providing youth with the freedom to explore their interests. Encouraging open-mindedness and accommodating different working styles is also considered essential for youth leadership.
- Promoting relatable activities: To enhance volunteer programmes supporting youth activism and leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, young people suggest creating relatable activities for young individuals, introducing them to European programmes and funds, and fostering associations that serve as platforms for young people.
- Financial support: To develop innovative approaches further, CSOs seek financial support for space rental and content creation. They emphasise the advantages of fostering solidarity among diverse groups of young people.

However, organisations recognise both challenges and benefits in their role in contributing to and promoting solidarity, especially when it comes to young people. Challenges include young people's fears and self-imposed expectations. Benefits encompass empowerment, self-discovery, networking, and critical thinking. Even though organisations acknowledge the need for basic education on solidarity, tolerance, and European values, they state that it should be ideally provided by educational institutions and families. They highlight the importance of financial stability, long-term support, reduced administrative burden, and more flexible co-financing options to enhance their work.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Slovenia

Both youth and organisations in Slovenia acknowledge the importance of personal motivation and internal values in driving volunteer efforts and activism. They recognise the role of CSOs in enhancing social spheres, advocating for values, and promoting active citizenship. While they emphasise different aspects, such as the individual's role and mutual solidarity in youth perspectives and advocacy and the benefits of NGOs in organisational perspectives, they share common themes. These themes include the need for financial support, stable funding, a reduction in bureaucracy, and the importance of critical literacy education to encourage youth involvement and promote EU values and solidarity. Encouraging youth to be active citizens and engage in their communities remains a central goal for both groups.

Youth perspective on the role of civil society could be summarised as:

- Youth highlight the varying degrees of solidarity in different types of volunteering, with some forms seen as more directly related to human rights and community-building. They believe that volunteering should complement, not replace, essential services provided by the state and the EU.
- They emphasise the importance of mentors who are patient and experienced in educating young volunteers. They also believe that external support, such as crediting volunteering in schools, is welcome as long as it does not overly burden young volunteers.
- Young people highlight the role of youth organisations in promoting EU values and principles. They believe that these organisations effectively convey these values to young individuals through workshops, training, and practical experiences. They mention that these organisations create communities that foster the internalisation of EU values.

CSOs' perspective on the role of civil society could be summarised as:

- Organisations highlight the importance of mutual solidarity in their work and see it as a way to empower the community, address inequalities, and advocate for change. They emphasise that actions speak louder than words when it comes to promoting values.
- Organisations acknowledge that the concept of solidarity can be interpreted in various ways, leading to different understandings of values. They believe that civil society organisations play a vital role in promoting values, particularly through advocacy.
- NGOs see themselves as enhancing the social sphere, including the most vulnerable, and advocating for active participation of all members of society, aligning with EU values. They believe that civil society has the capacity to move things forward and represent those neglected by the system.
- Organisations aim to encourage youth involvement through actions in social media, supporting other organisations, and offering space and security for new projects. They believe in practical, solution-oriented approaches and stress the importance of critical literacy education.

In terms of needed support, organisations express the need for financial support, stable funding, and material resources. They also emphasise the importance of local community support, positive media portrayal, and political backing. Reducing bureaucracy, fostering trust, and addressing the income dilemma for activists and volunteers are also mentioned as essential.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Poland

Both young people and organisations recognise the importance of personal commitment to solidarity and EU values. However, they often lack awareness of organisations supporting activism and youth leadership. Organisations view their work as closely aligned with EU values, particularly human dignity, equality, tolerance, and solidarity. They highlight the influence of crises on their activities, with an emphasis on the need for financial support. Both perspectives highlight the challenges posed by a post-pandemic generation of young people who may be hesitant to engage in real-world activities after extended periods of isolation.

Young participants indicate that they do not know many civil society organisations that support activism and youth leadership. They suggest the need for greater visibility and more information about such organisations. Some participants believe that organisations could better utilise social media to reach and engage young people, making them aware of opportunities for volunteering.

The role of civil society organisations is perceived in the following ways by the organisations:

- Organisations see a strong connection between their work and EU values, particularly human dignity, equality, mutual understanding, tolerance, and solidarity. They view their mission as contributing to a better society based on these principles.
- Solidarity is a core value for these organisations, which they apply in their work, especially in supporting vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.
- Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine influenced their activities, pushing them to take responsibility for solidarity, human rights protection, and peace initiatives.

In terms of challenges recognised, organisations state the need for financial support to continue their work effectively. The organisations also acknowledge the challenges posed by young people who have grown up during the pandemic, noting difficulties in getting them to leave their comfort zones and engage with the real world.

In terms of the recognised benefits, these organisations highlight the importance of involving youth in their programmes. They see the benefits of youth engagement, such as developing a moral core, curiosity, openness, and awareness of global issues.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Ireland

Both youth and organisations recognise the importance of civil society organisations in promoting EU values and solidarity. Youth emphasise the need for practical learning experiences, the role of technology, and the importance of education about the EU projects. They also stress the value of grassroots organisations and the involvement of young people in European politics.

Organisations point out benefits such as community collaboration, youth empowerment, and creating safe spaces for discussions. They also acknowledge challenges related to resource disparities, access to facilities, and recognition of volunteers. Additionally, they stress the importance of providing resources and supporting innovative approaches to youth engagement.

Both youth and organisations emphasise the significance of fostering youth participation in promoting EU values and solidarity. They recognise challenges related to public opinion, access to institutions, and resource constraints but highlight the benefits of inclusivity, diversity, and community building. Efforts are made to raise awareness among youth about their role in building solidarity and EU values through initiatives like presentations in schools and placements for students. However, there is a recognition that more needs to be done to actively promote volunteering among young people, including greater government support and recognition.

Innovative approaches to support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity are emphasised. This includes government support, increased funding for volunteering programmes, and initiatives like Action Panels that engage young people in consultations and campaigns.

Youth perspectives:

- Young participants suggest designing programmes based on EU values to raise awareness and understanding. They propose incorporating solidarity training into programmes to encourage active engagement and youth participation within the EU.
- Practical experiences are emphasised, such as connecting with young people from different EU countries, experiencing equality, and embracing freedom, as ways to make EU values tangible and engaging for young people.
- Youth highlight the importance of grassroots organisations and local branches working coherently to support EU values and solidarity.
- They stress the need for education about the EU project and its benefits for younger generations.
- Youth emphasise the role of technology in promoting accessibility and improving learning styles.
- Youth stress the importance of education in promoting EU values and implementing them in various fields.

Organisations' perspectives:

- Participants emphasise the significance of recognising and appreciating the efforts of volunteers, providing hospitality, and acknowledging their contributions.
- Interventions to raise awareness are recognised. One participant recalls discussions held with young people to address their questions and concerns, striving to provide honest answers and counter divisive narratives.
- They emphasise the importance of youth-led approaches and community building.
- In terms of benefits, participants point out benefits such as community collaboration, LGBTQIA+ support, youth empowerment, education, and creating safe spaces for open discussions, a sense of belonging, community, unity, and shared purpose.
- In terms of challenges, they are recognised related to disparities in financial support and facilities, emphasising the need for accessible and free facilities for youth engagement. Furthermore, there are challenges related to resource constraints, limited capacity to look beyond the organisation itself, and concerns about sharing volunteers or opportunities with other organisations. Safeguarding the organisation's safety and ensuring funding stability are also identified as crucial

challenges. One participant identifies challenges in gaining access to larger institutions and overcoming local obstacles to change. Students may face resistance from businesses or encounter a perception of cronyism.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Denmark

Both youth and organisations in Denmark recognise the important role of civil society organisations, particularly those working with or engaging youth, in promoting EU values and solidarity. They suggest involving young people in leadership roles, providing education and good working conditions, and fostering a sense of community. Civil society's contributions to solidarity and EU values are acknowledged, and their daily work often aligns with these values, making them valuable actors in advancing these principles in Denmark.

Youth respondents suggest that civil society organisations can support activities and youth leadership by giving young people more responsibility within the organisations. This involvement allows them to contribute to the organisation's goals. They believe that civil society organisations should adopt a responsive and inclusive approach that considers young people's perspectives, making it easier for them to engage in activities related to EU values and solidarity. Youth propose increasing volunteer engagement to expand value-creating work within organisations. More volunteers can lead to a broader impact on promoting EU values and solidarity. It is essential for organisations to show understanding for the needs of young volunteers. Creating a supportive environment that recognises their unique requirements can enhance their engagement. Youth suggests that involving young people in board-level activities can provide them with a framework to participate in and update traditional procedures. This inclusion allows the organisation to benefit from their fresh perspectives.

Organisations emphasise the importance of showing young volunteers that their involvement is part of a journey, and there are opportunities for them to explore different ways of volunteering within the organisation. Organisations, like Muskelsvindfonden, stress the importance of education and providing good working conditions to retain volunteers. This includes offering management training, creating courses for volunteers, and organising social events to build camaraderie and a sense of community.

Civil society contributions to solidarity and EU values

Both youth and organisations recognise the significant contributions of civil society to solidarity and EU values in Denmark:

- Youth acknowledge that collaborations between civil society and the public sector are crucial for maintaining the Danish welfare model. They see civil society as essential for fostering humane commitment, solidarity, cooperation, trust, equality, leadership, and engagement, particularly for young people.
- Organisations highlight that civil society's activities inherently stem from solidarity, often working for the betterment of specific target groups, which aligns with EU values.

IX. The Role of Youth in Strengthening Solidarity and EU Values

Youth are seen as active agents of change and drivers of solidarity and EU values who can make a positive impact on their communities and society as a whole. There is a shared sense of responsibility among young people to contribute to the betterment of society, and they are viewed as integral to shaping the future. Active participation of youth in civic initiatives, protests, and volunteer activities is highlighted as a means to make their voices heard and contribute to these objectives. Crises, such as the Ukraine crisis or climate change, can motivate young people to become more engaged in initiatives that promote solidarity and EU values.

The role of youth is not limited to the present but is also considered crucial for shaping the future, and young people are viewed as catalysts for positive change. While young people are recognised for their potential and commitment, challenges such as pressure, uncertainty about their long-term roles, and the need for support and education are also acknowledged. Empowering young people through education, engagement, and trust-building is emphasised as a key strategy to strengthen solidarity and promote EU values.

The role of youth can be summarised as it follows:

1. **Active participation:** Youth play a vital role in promoting solidarity and EU values through active participation in civic initiatives, protests, and volunteer activities. Their engagement allows them to make their voices heard and contribute to positive change.
2. **Personal responsibility:** Youth are encouraged to take personal responsibility for promoting solidarity and EU values. They see individual engagement as a crucial driver of change, and they actively commit to actions that support these principles.
3. **Role models and motivators:** Young individuals who participate in voluntary tasks and engage in civil society activities often serve as role models and motivators for their peers. They inspire and guide others toward education, employment, and engagement in activities that align with EU values.
4. **Agents of change:** Youth are recognised as key agents of change in fostering solidarity and promoting EU values. They are seen as essential contributors to shaping the future of society, and their values, attitudes, and actions are expected to significantly influence the world in the years to come.

The Role of Youth in Croatia

In Croatia, there is a shared understanding that youth play a vital role in strengthening solidarity and promoting EU values. Both young people and CSOs recognise the potential impact of youth engagement. While young people have diverse views on the approach to youth engagement, youth organisations emphasise the importance of empowering young individuals through education, engagement, and trust-building to achieve these objectives. These perspectives collectively highlight the significance of involving youth in initiatives that foster solidarity and uphold EU values within Croatian society.

Young people acknowledge the crucial role that youth can play in strengthening solidarity and promoting EU values. They recognise the potential impact of youth engagement in volunteer activities and the early instillation of these values in contributing to a more cohesive and empathetic society. While some participants believe that young people are already involved in volunteering when needed, others emphasise the importance of cultivating a culture of daily solidarity among the youth. This diversity of perspectives highlights the complexity of motivating and engaging young individuals in initiatives that promote solidarity and EU values.

On the other hand, organisations emphasise the vital role of young people, both in the present and the future of society. They emphasise that empowering young individuals through education, engagement, and trust-building is key to strengthening solidarity and promoting EU values.

The Role of Youth in Slovenia

Both youth and youth organisations in Slovenia acknowledge the crucial role of young people in strengthening solidarity and EU values. They agree on the importance of empowering young people with information and tools to act. Youth emphasise their active participation in protests and civic initiatives as a means of making their voices heard. They also highlight the need for volunteer organisations to pay more attention to young volunteers' concerns. Youth organisations stress the importance of empowering young people and recognise their potential as catalysts for change, especially in addressing critical issues like the climate crisis. Overall, there is a shared belief in the positive impact that young people can have in promoting values and advocating for important causes.

Youth perspective in Slovenia:

- Youth emphasise the importance of their active participation in protests and civic initiatives as a means of voicing their opinions and concerns. They see these actions as opportunities to make their voices heard and contribute to promoting solidarity and EU values.
- They also mention that volunteer organisations should be more attentive to the fact that young volunteers often feel unheard due to their age and volunteer status, which may make them feel less important than paid staff.
- Youth express that their values of solidarity and activism stem from their own internal values, upbringing, and personal experiences rather than being primarily influenced by formal EU values. They stress the importance of personal motivation and urgency in driving their volunteer efforts.

The role of youth from the perspective of CSOs:

- Organisations stress the significant role that young people play in promoting solidarity and EU values. They believe that it is crucial to empower young people to act in solidarity and provide them with the information and tools they need to respond effectively in crises and in their everyday lives.
- They highlight that young people are often more driven, creative, trusting, and idealistic, making them effective agents for multiplying the idea of solidarity, sharing ideas, forming connections, and acting as spokespersons. They see young people as catalysts for positive change and believe in their potential to enact these values.
- Organisations mention the historical role of youth as a revolutionary force in society and refer to past examples like the student movements of 1968 in France. They acknowledge that youth movements can bring about positive change and advocate for important causes, such as the climate crisis.

The Role of Youth in Poland

The crisis in Ukraine has particularly motivated youth to act. Young people value community engagement as a means of building a more conscious society. Both young people and CSOs acknowledge the significant role of youth in building values and shaping the future. Youth feel the pressure of this responsibility and look to education and positive role models for guidance. They express a desire for international dialogue and collaboration. Organisations underscore the importance of adults in preparing young people for their roles in a rapidly changing world. The uncertain times and ongoing crises contribute to the challenges of envisioning long-term roles for youth.

Youth perspective on their role:

- Youth express a personal commitment to solidarity, emphasising their desire to help those in need. They see this as a fundamental aspect of their engagement and volunteering.
- The crisis in Ukraine, particularly the war, has motivated young people to act. They suggest that crises can lead to increased community engagement and actions to support EU values.
- Young participants believe that their commitment to solidarity contributes to building a more conscious society, one that values reconciliation, forgiveness, and attention to others.
- Some participants admit that they sometimes feel their individual role is insignificant, but they acknowledge the cumulative impact when more people engage in similar actions.
- Youth feel a significant amount of pressure being placed on them, with the expectation that they are the future, and everything depends on them.
- They believe that education and positive role models who demonstrate how to get involved in various aspects of society are important in shaping their role.
- Young people express a desire to connect with peers from other countries, possibly through international forums, to discuss the challenges they face and share perspectives.
- They suggest that organising themselves into teams or groups may be a way to collectively address challenges and drive positive change. Some young people note that many of their peers prefer to focus on themselves and their careers, which can be a barrier to collective action.
- Participants find it challenging to envision their long-term role due to the current uncertain times, economic situations, and ongoing crises.

CSOs emphasise the importance of young people in building values, as they will ultimately shape the future. They believe that adults have a role and duty to prepare young people for various roles and encourage their independence and willingness to act. They also note that the world is changing rapidly, and the impact of young people in shaping values and society may happen faster than expected.

The Role of Youth in Ireland

In Ireland, the role of youth in fostering solidarity and promoting EU values is perceived as significant and multifaceted. In summary, the perception of the role of youth in Ireland revolves around the importance of education, accessibility, inclusivity, active participation, and cross-generational collaboration. Youth are viewed as key agents of change in fostering solidarity and promoting EU values, and there is a strong call for creating opportunities that empower them to contribute to these objectives at various levels.

Several key points emerged from the responses:

- Youth emphasise the importance of personal responsibility and the use of learned tools to help others question and challenge established perspectives. They view individual engagement as a crucial driver of change and a means to promote EU values and solidarity.
- Education is seen as a cornerstone for fostering solidarity and EU values among youth. Cross-cultural understanding is highlighted as essential for building empathy and unity among young people from diverse backgrounds.
- Respondents stress the need for improved accessibility to EU programmes and initiatives, such as Erasmus+, for young people. They acknowledge that many of their peers are unaware of these opportunities, indicating a desire for increased awareness and accessibility.
- The importance of active participation and inclusivity is emphasised. Youth call for platforms where they can have their voices heard and contribute to decision-making processes at local, national, and European levels.
- Fostered cross-generational dialogues are seen as a means to bridge the gap between youth and older generations. These dialogues provide opportunities for intergenerational learning and collaboration in promoting EU values.
- Promoting diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions is recognised as essential. Ensuring representation of individuals from different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences is seen as a way to reflect the diverse nature of society and enhance solidarity.

- Encouraging collaboration and exchange of ideas and experiences among young people from different EU countries is highlighted. Programmes like the European Solidarity Corps, European Youth Forum, and interrail initiatives facilitate networking and promote dialogue and mutual learning.

The Role of Youth in Denmark

Both youth and organisations highlight the vital role and significance of youth in promoting solidarity and EU values. Youth feel a personal responsibility to contribute, engage in volunteering, and see themselves as future leaders. Organisations see young people as role models and motivators for vulnerable individuals, emphasising their substantial voluntary contributions and the importance of their influence on the future.

Youth perspective:

- Youth respondents express a sense of personal responsibility to contribute to solidarity and EU values. They take various actions to fulfil this responsibility, such as sharing knowledge and experiences with others who may benefit from them.
- They perceive youth as crucial in shaping and sustaining concepts of solidarity in the future of the EU. Young people are seen as vital contributors to the development and promotion of EU values.
- Many youth respondents actively engage in volunteering and community activities to support solidarity and EU values. They believe that contributing to different communities is an essential part of fulfilling their personal responsibility.
- Youth see themselves as future leaders who will continue to play a significant role in shaping the direction of the EU and its values.

I think it is important that everyone contributes - including myself.

Amalie, 30, Denmark

Youth is important, youth is the future.

Emma, 24, Denmark

CSOs' perspective:

- Organisations perceive young people who participate in voluntary tasks in civil society as role models and motivators for socially vulnerable young individuals. They serve as guiding peers on the path to education and employment, providing inspiration and support.
- Organisations acknowledge that young people undertake a substantial voluntary task within civil society and association life. They play a pivotal role in carrying out various activities and initiatives.
- While organisations recognise the importance of youth, they also acknowledge that not all young individuals contribute equally. Contributions vary among different age groups.
- Organisations view young people as decisive in shaping the future. They believe that the values, attitudes, and approaches of young individuals will significantly influence the world in the years to come.

Their way of being and approach is what the world will be governed by in the future.

Mads, Mentorbarn, Denmark

It is often in youth that you first become acquainted with voluntary work, civil society and association life, and young people undertake a huge voluntary task.

Sebastian, Kofods school, Denmark

XI. Key Findings and Conclusions

The EU Comparative Report “Pathways to Solidarity and Other EU Values” highlights the importance of shared commitment to EU values, the multifaceted nature of solidarity, the significant role of volunteering, and the vital contributions of both civil society organisations and youth in promoting and strengthening EU values and solidarity across different countries. It emphasises the need for education, financial support, and the involvement of decision-makers to sustain and enhance these efforts. Overall, there is a shared desire for greater unity, common solutions, and increased support for youth activism and leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity within the EU.

Analysis and Overview of the EU Policies through Desk Research:

- While volunteering isn't explicitly mentioned in the Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024, it plays a crucial role in achieving several priorities, such as sustainable development goals and social cohesion.
- Despite the clear links between volunteering and EU priorities, there is a lack of specific, targeted policies and attention to volunteering. The EU's main tool for engaging with volunteering, the European Solidarity Corps, is often seen as the primary focus.
- There is a need for reassessment of volunteering policies, increased attention, and recognition of volunteering as a vital tool for achieving social goals and fostering active civil society participation, especially in light of the rapidly changing landscape, including the rise of micro-volunteering and digital volunteering, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding European Values:

- There is a common commitment to EU values across the studied countries, with a shared recognition of their significance in promoting unity, equality, and social inclusion.
- Youth often emphasise values like human rights, equality, and solidarity and view their role as active citizens in promoting and challenging the implementation of these values. Exposure to various projects, experiences, and global events often prompts re-evaluation and discussion of these values among young people.
- Civil society organisations exhibit a strong understanding of EU values, with a commitment to promoting and upholding these values in their work.

Understanding Solidarity:

- Solidarity is a multifaceted concept with commonalities across the countries, emphasising empathy, unity, community support, and shared responsibility.
- The role of external events and crises, such as the pandemic or war, is frequently mentioned as a catalyst for increased solidarity.
- Challenges to solidarity, including political polarisation and reluctance toward certain groups (e.g., migrants), are recognised as obstacles to building strong and cohesive societies.
- Initiatives that promote solidarity, cross-cultural understanding, and empathy are seen as important in addressing societal challenges and supporting marginalised communities.

Volunteering's Vital Role: Fostering Solidarity, Democratic Engagement, and EU Values:

- Volunteering plays a significant role in fostering solidarity, democratic engagement, and EU values across all countries.
- Youth perceive volunteering as a means to actively participate in society, express solidarity, promote values, and contribute to the community.
- CSOs actively integrate volunteering into their programmes and initiatives, recognising its potential to promote EU values like human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and human rights.

Support to the Development of EU Values and the Role of Decision Makers:

- Education is a common focus across all countries, with both young people and CSOs recognising its importance in promoting EU values and solidarity.
- A multi-level approach involving local, national, and EU stakeholders is advocated, with a focus on active citizen engagement and the involvement of decision-makers in shaping policies and initiatives.
- Financial support, reduced bureaucracy, and stable funding are consistently highlighted as crucial factors for the effective operation of CSOs.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations:

- CSOs are seen as essential contributors to promoting EU values, with a focus on community building and advocacy for social change.
- They serve as educational agents, promoting awareness about opportunities for civic engagement, activism, and the promotion of EU values and solidarity, especially among young people.
- CSOs emphasise the importance of involving and empowering young people in leadership roles and activities related to EU values and solidarity.
- Challenges such as bureaucracy, resource disparities, and access to facilities are acknowledged by CSOs in their efforts to promote EU values and solidarity.

The Role of Youth in Strengthening Solidarity and EU Values:

- Youth are seen as active agents of change and drivers of solidarity and EU values who can make a positive impact on their communities and society as a whole.
- Their role is not limited to the present but is considered crucial for shaping the future, and young people are viewed as catalysts for positive change.
- Empowering young people through education, engagement, and trust-building is emphasised as a key strategy to strengthen solidarity and promote EU values.

XII. Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from the research implemented, the project team brings recommendations for policy and decision-makers, civil society organisations (CSOs), and youth. These recommendations aim to strengthen the commitment to EU values, foster solidarity, and empower young individuals to actively contribute to a more inclusive, democratic, and value-driven society. They highlight the importance of collaboration and support from all stakeholders involved.

Recommendations for Policy and Decision-Makers

1. **Explicitly Acknowledge Volunteering's Role:** Recognise volunteering as a vital instrument for achieving EU priorities, such as sustainable development goals and social cohesion, even if not explicitly mentioned in legislative priorities.
2. **Reassess and Update Volunteering Policies:** Conduct a thorough reassessment of volunteering policies to adapt to the evolving landscape, including the rise of micro-volunteering and digital volunteering, exacerbated by the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Support Educational Initiatives:** Prioritise the integration of EU values education into school curriculums from an early age, emphasising diversity, inclusivity, and critical thinking.
4. **Financial Support for CSOs:** Allocate adequate funding and resources to support CSOs in their efforts to promote EU values and solidarity. Ensure transparency and efficiency in the distribution of funds to maximise their impact. Take into account that many CSOs whose contributions are essential to the implementation of EU values lack the human resources to engage in bureaucratically and administratively demanding projects, so strive to simplify the process as much as possible.
5. **Multi-Level Collaboration:** Foster collaboration among local, national, and EU stakeholders to create a holistic approach to promoting EU values and solidarity. Involve decision-makers, including politicians and local authorities, in shaping policies and initiatives aligned with these values.
6. **Youth Involvement:** Actively engage with youth in decision-making processes, seeking their input and perspectives on policies related to EU values and solidarity. Support youth leadership and empowerment programmes to enable them to take on active roles in promoting these values.
7. **Promotion of Volunteering:** Encourage and facilitate volunteer programmes that align with EU values, emphasising their role in fostering solidarity and social inclusion. Promote volunteer opportunities targeting youth through accessible and widely promoted platforms.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

1. **Education and Awareness:** Continue to serve as educational agents, providing information and awareness about opportunities for civic engagement, activism, and the promotion of EU values and solidarity, especially among young people.
2. **Youth Engagement:** Involve and empower young people in leadership roles and activities related to EU values and solidarity, providing opportunities for practical experiences and decision-making.
3. **Advocacy for Funding:** Advocate for financial support and stable funding to sustain and expand programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting EU values and fostering solidarity among diverse groups.
4. **Inclusivity and Flexibility:** Foster inclusivity and flexibility in activities to accommodate different working styles, involve a wide range of young individuals, and provide opportunities for youth to explore their interests.
5. **Practical Learning Experiences:** Emphasise practical learning experiences, including cross-cultural exchanges, hands-on activities, and mentorship, to make EU values tangible and engaging for young people.
6. **Critical Literacy Education:** Promote critical literacy education to encourage youth involvement and help them critically understand and engage with EU values and solidarity-related issues.

Recommendations for Youth

1. **Active Participation:** Actively participate in civic initiatives, protests, and volunteer activities to make your voices heard and contribute to positive change aligned with EU values and solidarity.
2. **Personal Responsibility:** Take personal responsibility for promoting solidarity and EU values in your communities, recognising the crucial role of individual engagement in driving change.
3. **Role Models and Motivators:** Serve as role models and motivators for your peers, inspiring and guiding others toward education, employment, and engagement in activities that align with EU values.
4. **Agents of Change:** Recognise your role as key agents of change in shaping the future of society, and actively work toward fostering solidarity and promoting EU values.
5. **Education and Awareness:** Seek opportunities for education and awareness-building regarding EU values and solidarity and stay informed about civic engagement opportunities. When such opportunities are lacking, do not hesitate to address the CSOs and decision-makers with your suggestions.
6. **Collaboration:** Collaborate with peers from different backgrounds, both locally and internationally, to exchange ideas and experiences and collectively address challenges.