



# PROJECT “CELEBRATING SOLIDARITY”

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## RESEARCH ON SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

COMBINED REPORTS FROM POLAND, HUNGARY,  
SERBIA, BULGARIA, MACEDONIA and ALBANIA



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## About the survey

In order to contribute to the understanding of solidarity in Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, Macedonia and Poland, the Foundation Ana and Vlade Divac with partner organizations from these countries has implemented the project "Celebrating Solidarity", supported by the Program "Europe for Citizens". The main objective of this project is to contribute to the understanding of European values and the importance of solidarity for both socioeconomic and political development. In addition, the project aims to:

1. To improve conditions for direct civic and inter-cultural participation of citizens,
2. To explore solidarity on a transnational level, in different occasions and times, with focus on intergenerational solidarity,
3. To contribute to better understanding and discuss the value of solidarity in different times of crises and from national point of view,
4. To promote and advance solidarity within societies and on EU level.

Previous studies have pointed to a variety of problems in all countries related, inter alia, the lack of tolerance and solidarity between people. There is a there is a lack of studies in the field of solidarity, through all countries even though citizens of all countries are generally recognized as generous and tolerant people. Young people have the potential for the development of solidarity and therefore young people can be seen as the driving force for the development of solidarity in society.

To further examine the perceptions and attitudes of young people on this subject the partners from every country have organized two focus group discussions, by country, through which the opinion of young people was heard directly, especially the young people who are turned towards the values of solidarity. In addition, the aim of the discussions was at the same time to raise the awareness of the various aspects of solidarity at the same time. This report will present the research methodology, and the most important results of the focus group discussions by countries will be displayed and in the end, the main conclusions will be summarized. Description by countries are mostly viewed through one response that represents general position of FGD participants in that country.

## Methodology

Researching on solidarity among young people was conducted by a qualitative methodology. This method was used in order to identify ways of understanding and comprehending the concepts that are related to solidarity, such as crisis, volunteerism and humanitarian actions. It should be noted here that qualitative research methods do not provide statistics data which establish the regularity of the occurrence of certain phenomenon, but reveal possible causes and explanations. For this project, every partner organization used the method of focus group discussions (FGD), which represents the researching procedure similar to interviewing that encourages discussion among the participants. This method was chosen because it provides the best perception on the ways of thinking and therefore perceives different insights.

For the purposes of this research two FGDs by country were conducted with young people who are currently living, studying or working in Albania (Flora and Tirana), Bulgaria (Sofia), Poland (Krakow), Hungary (Budapest), Macedonia (Skopje) and Serbia (Belgrade). Every country has one FGD with youth from the age of 15 to 20, and the other with the elderly from 21 to 30 years old. In each country, two focus groups were conducted, one FGD with younger people (15-20 years of age) and the other with slightly older participants (21-30 years of age). Total number of participants in all countries were 85, of which 44 in younger group, and 41 in "older" group. This division was necessary in order to detach the younger participants who are still attending high school or have just started college and the elderly who are already in college or work. It is assumed that participants from the older group would possess deeply built attitudes that would be the right way to look at a different way of thinking of both groups. Among the participants of the FGD both boys and girls were equally represented, as well as a balanced division by age. Both focus groups were conducted in accordance with the rules of anonymity to protect the identity of all FGD participants.

The main topics of these discussions were:

- Participants' perception of solidarity
- Perception of solidarity in each country
- Activism: Social engagement, volunteerism, shared values towards vulnerable groups.

However, it should be noted that this research method is flexible and that leaves plenty of space for discussion and topics that can be developed in the group. This was also the action research that made possible not only to hear different opinions, but also to raise awareness of the participants on the theme of solidarity.

## YOUTH AND SOLIDARITY: Research Findings

Solidarity as a term represents mutual assistance and responsibility in moments of crisis. So, it encompasses crisis, responsibility, empathy and active assistance. In that way, the research itself upgraded on this and focused on topics such as crisis, poverty, empathy and various forms of activism. Special attention was paid to education and solidarity as well as the relation between the state and solidarity.

### Crisis

In order to examine the notion of solidarity, it was necessary to start from the understanding of the crisis, namely on how young people understand the crisis. Focus groups have pointed to various aspects of understanding the crisis among participants. As the first association to the crisis both groups had mainly a crisis of an economic nature, in terms of lack of money and personal resources. In addition, participants in both groups also listed under the crisis the various social and natural crises, such as migrants. Listed below are a few reasons mentioned by FGD participants from countries:

	What is crisis for you?	
	<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The older 15-20</i>
SERBIA	<i>"When we used to have something in abundance and then it suddenly disappears."</i>	<i>It's a long-term problem, for which we do not have a solution."</i>
POLAND	<i>"Having issues with learning in school and being depressed about it is a form of crisis." "...earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters."</i>	<i>"Having no money is a crisis" "Crisis is an emergency state in which lives of many people are endangered."</i>
ALBANIA	<i>Crisis are related to natural disasters.</i>	<i>Crisis are massive situations of emergencies, or natural disasters.</i>
MACEDONIA	<i>"The crisis presents a lack of resources required to satisfy your own needs, depending on the type of needs and type of resources, we have different types of crises"</i>	<i>"Crisis is something that goes out of the margins of 'normality', it presents a lack of something, a condition or relations in the society when the people feel endangered"</i>
BULGARIA	<i>"Refugee crisis"</i>	<i>"Natural disasters."</i>

## Poverty

Beside the crisis, it was important to find out how they perceive poverty and solidarity.

	<b>What is poverty in your opinion?</b>	
	<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The older 21-30</i>
<b>SERBIA</b>	<i>"For me there are two kinds of poverty, superficial and a deeper one. Superficial poverty is what happens when one cannot afford to get dressed, when there is no money, when someone is just materially poor, while deeper poverty is when someone is greedy, crooked, and when one doesn't have good manners... "</i>	<i>"Poverty is actually an inability to contribute to get the money back."</i>
<b>ALBANIA</b>	<i>Poverty is the impossibility to fulfil the basic needs for daily living.</i>	<i>It is a relative concept, related with the lack of basic conditions such as: food and housing for securing the minimum of living.</i>
<b>BULGARIA</b>	<i>„Poverty is not to live normally and not to fulfil my everyday needs, and not to have the chance to do the things I want, because from one side I have spiritual quests, but, if I do not have material means, I cannot follow them. “</i>	<i>„Not to have the possibility to do what makes you happy. “</i>
<b>POLAND</b>	<i>“Being hungry and walking in raggedy clothes.”</i>	<i>“Poor is someone who is not able to provide economic security for his family.”</i>
<b>MACEDONIA</b>	<i>“Poverty is an essential outcome of the economic crisis in the country. “</i>	

At the first mention of poverty, both groups in all countries recognize poverty to a large extent as a lack of money. However, the discussion highlighted other aspects. The participants of both groups experience poverty on two levels: one is as they say "superficial level" and involves physical shortage of funds for basic needs while "deep poverty" represents qualities that make a man "greedy and corrupt "or as the older group's participants said "poor in spirit". This was the same almost the same thing regarding all the countries.

## Vulnerable groups

In order to have a better understanding of which groups the young people can feel the solidarity with, we examined which groups they recognize as particularly exposed to the crisis and poverty.

	<b><u>Which groups would you single out as poor?</u></b>	
	<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The older 21-30</i>
<i>SERBIA</i>	<i>" The Roma, refugees, the homeless, people with low incomes and those whose countries are affected by war."</i>	<i>" The Roma, refugees and people from villages. "</i>
<i>ALBANIA</i>	<i>" Roma and Egyptian community; Ethnic minorities; People with disabilities; illiterate people; homeless people; people living in informal areas. "</i>	<i>" Students; homeless people; people with disabilities; people that live under the poverty line (4 or 5 \$ per day)"</i>
<i>BULGARIA</i>	<i>" People who do not have money, Minorities who need social benefits, Ethnic minorities. "</i>	<i>" Disabled people, Roma, Refugees"</i>
<i>POLAND</i>	<i>"Families who live in the rural and undeveloped parts of the world"</i>	<i>"People with lack of education who work hard labour jobs such as factory workers"</i>
<i>HUNGARY</i>	<i>" Social exclusion based on ethnicity, victims and refugees of war."</i>	<i>" Economic migrants, employees in the Hungarian healthcare-system"</i>
<i>MACEDONIA</i>	<i>" The Roma, and victims of natural disasters."</i>	

Both the younger and the older mostly segregate the Roma and refugees among the poor. The dominant attitude of participants of both younger and older groups is that poor people are those who are satisfied with what they have and do not progress further, in addition, they point out that it is mostly their individual choice. The poor are used to the situation in which they live, they find it difficult to change patterns of behaviour and some participants point out that they do not even have anyone to see another possible model from. They emphasize that there are still some factors that they cannot affect and they distinguish the situation in the country, as one of those factors. These are almost common responses between FGD participants of all countries.

## The term / word solidarity

	<b>What is solidarity?</b>	
	<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The older 21-30</i>
<i>SERBIA</i>	<i>"To give him what he needs at the moment"</i>	<i>"Tolerance, unity, harmony"</i>
<i>ALBANIA</i>	<i>Solidarity is financial and spiritual support – to help someone in need according to your possibilities.</i>	<i>Solidarity means being human, helping others not only with financial assistance, but also with moral support</i>
<i>BULGARIA</i>	<i>"Type of sympathy towards somebody in need."</i>	<i>"Sympathy, an attempt to unite and do something useful, whether it will be for an individual, for a community or for a whole country."</i>
<i>POLAND</i>	<i>"Knowing how someone feels and doing something about it to help them feel better"</i>	<i>"Understanding the situation in which someone needs assistance of any kind so they can overcome some issues or problems and acting on it."</i>
<i>MACEDONIA</i>	<i>"Solidarity means to show empathy to another person, to give love, that is something that connects us all, that unites us"</i>	<i>"For me, solidarity is responsibility, especially for the highly educated individuals, that have been given a chance to gain education and thereby to learn what being responsible means"</i>
<i>HUNGARY</i>	<i>"Solidarity means readiness to help another person in need"</i>	

The word "SOLIDARITY" is an association for assistance, compassion, understanding among participants of the younger group, while among the older ones that is tolerance, unity and style. They distinguish very clearly the difference between the fact that solidarity is not just about helping in the material sense, but also emotionally.

## Invitations for humanitarian action

Almost all participants from different countries remember some kind of humanitarian action which was conducted in their country regarding solidarity. They usually share various invitations for humanitarian action on the Internet and think that is a good way for "raising awareness" and sharing information. All the different actions are listed in countries FGD report

## Activism and helping others

Generally, all participants in one way or another have helped others. In one way or the other they were the benefactors. They have given money or clothing, sent SMS, or shared some news on social networks with the idea of helping someone. Some of them also participated in the organization of humanitarian actions such as the division of clothing to migrants, actions during the floods, organizing a charity concert at school or participating in different actions.

Although the participants in the FGD had been very engaged in humanitarian activities, they also said that this was not a widespread attitude among their peers. They point out that their peers are largely indifferent to any humanitarian actions, following the idea of personal interest or perhaps general disinterest for any developments in society, which we can confirm by the fact that it was difficult to make such disinterested young people even just to attend FGD, despite calls.

## Solidarity and Education

Participants in both FGDs find it more useful to learn about solidarity through some examples, extracurricular activities, working actions, different exercises that would wake solidarity rather than through lectures. In addition, they point out that it would be better to start with the story of solidarity very early.

According to the opinion of the participants of the younger group, the school should be in contact with various organizations in order to gather resources. They also believe that solidarity is not developed enough and that each school should encourage this. They say it would be a good idea to have a story about it constantly.

## Conclusion

The research has indicated that solidarity is an important topic among young people and that the participants in focus groups were very involved in this regard, they feel empathy with people who are in some kind of trouble.

When it comes to how they recognize the crisis, poverty and vulnerable groups, we can conclude that a great deal of these concepts is associated with a lack of money. Even when they break down the terms to "superficial" and "deeper" poverty, the crisis on the "lack of something" or "long-term problem"- in the end, they point out as vulnerable groups some of the poorest, and more meaningful-when they talk about possible solutions to the greatest extent they point out the possibility of doing any jobs, that again indicates the possibility of earning money.

Then, when it comes to direct actions which are related to other, their or institutional solidarity actions, we can point out that FGD participants are largely engaged and try to be involved to the extent their free time allows.

In order to raise awareness, it is important to show young people a clear interpretation of the word solidarity, especially from the aspect of common good, through all countries. Considering the fact that vast number of focus groups' participants' perception of solidarity equals to individual stories, without the perspective that it should serve the common good of the society. Humanitarian actions should not be just reaction to crisis. Solidarity should be part of everyday life and sent towards all the individuals in the society, with an emphasis on common good.

Government involvement in solving issues is necessary, however citizen, community and NGO actions are seen as more effective in solving problems.