EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

Gottfried Schweiger

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Global solidarity and the responsibility of young people

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY ◦ YOUNG PEOPLE ◦ RESPONSIBILITY ◦ GLOBAL JUSTICE ◦ INFRASTRUCTURES OF SOLIDARITY

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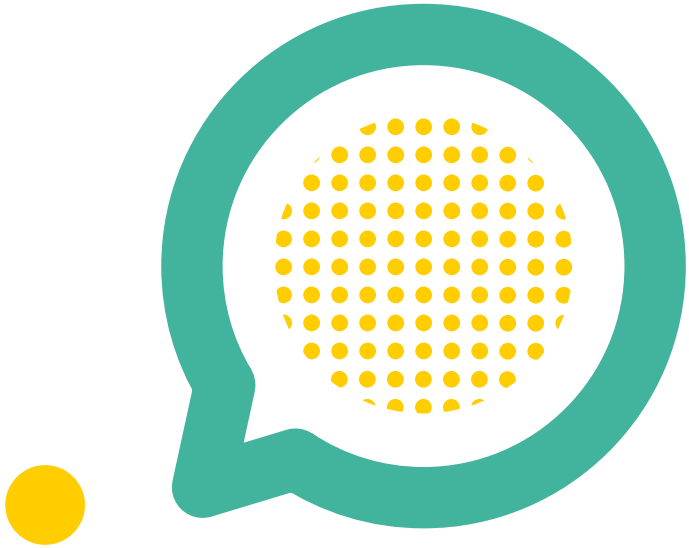
ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of global solidarity and responsibility of young people from an ethics perspective. In a world of injustice, global solidarity is needed to protect the human rights of all and to help in times of need. Success of this solidarity requires infrastructures that help young people act in solidarity by facilitating, pooling, and coordinating activities in the form of structured volunteer programmes, for instance. Being valuable, there is a political responsibility to expand them. The extension of European solidarity to global solidarity results from the universal claim of human rights, which do not end at national borders.



1. Introduction

Unfortunately, we live in a world of inequality, where poverty, exploitation, hunger and displacement are commonplace. The climate crisis, largely ignored by policymakers for years, brings with it a grim outlook on the future that injustices will increase, not decrease. Young people's lives will be affected for a much longer time by the negative consequences. Just as long as there have been global injustices, there have been people and organisations working for a better world. They invest knowledge, time, money and other resources to help people in need. They live global solidarity. From an ethical point of view, global solidarity is a moral responsibility. All people, including youth, are called upon to live up to it. However, they need support to do so, because solidarity can only work well if it is done collaboratively and sustainably. This requires infrastructures that strengthen and promote young people's ability to act. Building such infrastructures of solidarity is the responsibility of politics and its institutions.

2. What is global solidarity and why is it important?

Solidarity is a contested concept (Laitinen and Pessi 2014). A distinction can be made between what is the goal of solidarity, its agents and recipients. Then there is also the question of the reason for solidarity, i.e. why people should act in solidarity with others, and the question of the practices of solidarity as to how solidaristic action should be implemented. These are ethical and political questions. This is an ethical question because it can ultimately only be answered morally as to why people should act in solidarity. The question then becomes a political one, because acts of solidarity are often not of a purely private nature, but aim at political change or are made possible by political structures. Any act of solidarity that aims at changing the social or economic order is political, in particular also the legal safeguarding of claims that were previously only secured through solidarity.

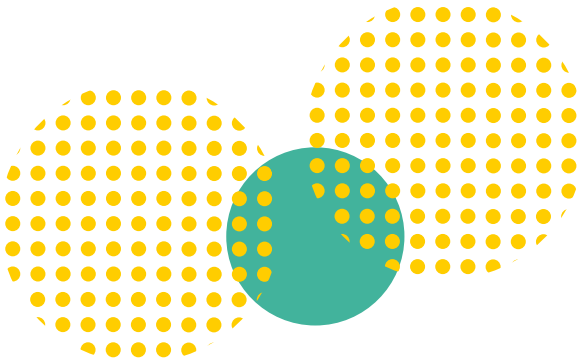
Simply put, the goal of solidarity is to help others who need help. This understanding of solidarity can be justified both ethically, but it is also found in the perception of many people as well as in political documents and declarations. Here, however, I try to work out the normative core of solidarity, which has to be distinguished from the understanding of solidarity people have. There will be disagreements here, as with any moral concept. Nevertheless, from an ethical point of view, solidarity should not

be subjectively arbitrary. The goal of solidarity to help others in need can be set low or high. A minimal goal is to ensure that everyone's human rights are protected (Derpmann 2009). That goal can, for example, also be found as a core dimension of solidarity in the study 4Thought for Solidarity (Knoch and NIcodemi 2020). A more comprehensive goal would be that all people on this planet can live a sufficiently good life. Of course, there are always questions of interpretation, i.e., what it means to protect and ensure human rights. In particular, social human rights are controversial, that is, what constitutes a decent standard of living or which social rights should be universally protected. In any case, a sufficiently good life for all people on this planet requires more than just basic food and clothing or schooling. The ethical point is that it is unfair that hundreds of millions of people have much less than others. Why should not everyone have roughly the same amount of money, leisure time, material goods, education or life chances? Global solidarity that aims to ensure the minimal human rights of all is better than the current state of the world, but that world would still not be just.

The agent and recipient of solidarity have an asymmetrical relationship that can become problematic (Georgeou and Haas 2019). Those who can be agents of solidarity have more power, resources, or opportunities than those with whom they are in solidarity. Two conditions must apply in order to have a legitimate claim of an individual to solidarity with others. There must be an injustice, for example a violation of my human rights or severe poverty, and the individual is not in a position to escape from this injustice, and there are also no functioning and contributory state structures. Of course, it is also possible and good to show empathy with victims of injustice who were able to help themselves or who were helped by the state. However, insofar as this help has addressed the problem sufficiently well, no further acts of solidarity are morally required. Voluntary help is always possible, but it should be separated from an understanding of solidarity that sees it as an ethical responsibility. So, those who are in need of solidarity are in a situation of need, while those who are supposed to act in solidarity are in a better position. However, this asymmetry must not be misinterpreted. Indeed, it does not mean that the agent and recipient of solidarity are of different moral worth or should not have equal rights. Nor does this asymmetry mean that recipients of solidarity should be treated like supplicants or children, or that they do not have valuable knowledge, or that they are not capable of action. Global solidarity is based on the ethical claim of the equality and equal worth of all people, of recognition and respect for those who are worse off. All people are called to become agents of global solidarity if they have the opportunity and resources to do so. We can all do something, some more, others less. Nevertheless, there are of course people and organisations who can do more and who therefore

also bear greater responsibility. Unfortunately, this is often barely acknowledged or not all. We can all find ourselves in a situation where we are dependent on the solidarity of others. This is a lesson learned from the COVID pandemic. We can all become ill, unemployed or poor and then depend on the social and state infrastructures to support us. If there are no such infrastructures, which is the case in many countries around the world, then it takes the help and support of private people and organisations. Even in the European Union, some people rely on the solidarity of others, NGOs and civil society, because the state does not help them sufficiently.

Everyone, who is capable, has the responsibility to act in solidarity with others who are in need. There are many good moral reasons for this. To act in solidarity with others in need is an expression of the equality of all human beings. When human rights are at risk, every human being deserves solidarity and that too regardless of what he or she has done. This is grounded in universal human dignity. Solidarity with the victims of injustices such as human rights violations, poverty, exploitation or displacement should be shown especially by those who themselves live in a privileged position. Privilege and the responsibility to show global solidarity are linked. Global solidarity, like all moral responsibility, is not free of preconditions. Not all people can act in solidarity, as they are sick, needy, imprisoned, or are very poor and lack resources. However, those who are clearly better off, and by that, I mean the average citizen in the Global North or even the wealthy citizens in the Global South, have the opportunity to take actions of global solidarity. Many of these privileges, such as power, money, status, education, or legal security, are predetermined by the frameworks, social groups, or families into which people are born. They are therefore privileges that have largely not been earned by people themselves, but by the happy coincidence of which country, which family, which social group they were born into. Many people who depend on the solidarity of others did not have this luck and had to face worse challenges of life from the beginning. People who are privileged have the responsibility to use their privileges to support others. Another reason of solidarity is that the injustices of this world are generated by other people and the economic and social order like unfair trade relations,



cheap labour and raw materials from the Global South (Mieth 2013). A world in which no one has very much less than others, in which at least deep forms of poverty and exploitation are abolished, is possible. However, those who benefit from injustice and do their small part to maintain this system have a responsibility to show solidarity with those who are worse off.

Even if global solidarity is a moral responsibility, this does not mean that individual or collective acts of solidarity always lead to desired results or improvement. For this to happen, it is necessary to reflect on the means of global solidarity and ask whether they are efficient, whether they have (unintended) side effects, or whether they are morally permissible. It is reasonable to require that acts of global solidarity should help effectively and not cause more harm than good. However, calculating this trade-off is not always straightforward, insofar as not only monetary costs and gains are used, but also personal or social ones. It may also be doubted what changes can be achieved by the commitment of a few people, given the depth and breadth of global injustices. To this, I will respond that moral responsibility does not cease to exist even when one's own moral actions do little to improve the situation. After all, global solidarity is a collective responsibility that requires the individual to participate, but not to solve all problems alone.

3. The moral agency of young people

Young people have a responsibility to show global solidarity. This is a call to act and an empowerment. It is a call to act because young people should take responsibility as far as they can as they are agents of global solidarity. They are such actors from an ethical point of view, which means they have the responsibility to act in solidarity. And young people do indeed and evidently act in solidarity in many ways, be it in the context of NGOs or social movements or also individual charity. To say that young people are actors of global solidarity and have such a responsibility is not only a statement and an ethical imperative. It is also a form of empowerment of young people as it emphasises that they should see themselves as agents and be respected as such by others. In many societies, there is a privileging of the middle and older years of life, while young people are not yet recognised as full-fledged actors. Young people are underrepresented in politics and so are their interests and concerns. Children develop a moral consciousness in the course of childhood and only adolescents are able to show reflected solidary behaviour. It is not possible to give an exact age limit here, but it would be overtaxing younger children, say younger than ten, to demand that they can sufficiently understand or set acts of global solidarity. They do not have the knowledge and resources to advocate for victims of suffering and injustice in other

countries. Young people are capable of action, even as adolescents, and through these actions shape their status as citizens (Staeheli, Attoh, and Mitchell 2013). In modern societies, young people's life phase is often characterised by finding one's bearings, finding oneself, pursuing and completing educational pathways, and finding one's place in work and society.

Moral agency is not monolithic but is composed of various aspects. First, it requires knowledge and education. Education here does not necessarily mean schooling, but any form of education, whether by parents, siblings or other people. Moral development is a complex process that is still not sufficiently understood, but without positive experiences with other people and without education by others, it cannot take place. Young people need knowledge and education to understand themselves as moral agents, to be informed about suffering and injustice - their causes and effects. They also need knowledge about what they can do. But knowledge alone is not enough to generate global solidarity. Neither are moral appeals. Solidarity must be practised, internalised and perceived. It thus requires empathy and the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others (Yamniuk 2017). Putting one's own selfish interests aside and giving space in one's life to concern for others. These are all educational processes that young people go through in school and family. Second, global solidarity requires real opportunities for action. It is not enough to know about the misery of the world. It needs organisation and activity. It needs room to manoeuvre. Young people have this capacity for action. It is obviously not equally distributed among young people. There are great inequalities and privileges even within the group of young people in Europe. Nevertheless, almost all young people can act in solidarity. They can get involved in many different ways. They can join NGOs, they can make conscious decisions of political participation, they can adapt their consumption behaviour, they can initiate petitions, demonstrate or go to other countries to provide local support. One of these opportunities is the European Solidarity Corps, which offers a structured programme for young people to work in different areas and countries. It is a challenge to support young people to recognise and implement their agency as actors of global solidarity. Programmes that actively reach out to young people, which I will describe as infrastructures of solidarity in the next part, can help. Such coordinated programmes, which are provided

with sufficient resources at the political level, have the advantage that they also help to avoid many pitfalls of uncoordinated solidarity and can accompany the empowerment of young people in a targeted and professional manner. Third, the moral agency of young people is both individual and collective. The injustices in this world we live in are so vast and varied, their causes so deeply rooted in the political and economic order, that it can seem that individual acts of solidarity cannot change anything anyway. This can be frustrating. It is indeed the case that many injustices need coordination and the cooperation of many people in order to be changed in a sustainable way. Every single act of global solidarity - be it personal involvement in a local project, donations or political activism - contributes to improving the situation of people in need, but sustainable and structural change can only be achieved if many people, young and old, work together. The recipients of solidarity are thus equally addressed. They are not passive objects of help, but active contributors to the improvement of their situation.

Solidarity can be an expression of shared values and a community, and this community need not be limited to a nation-state, but an expression of a European community (Ross 2021). The European Solidarity Corps mentioned earlier is an institutionalised expression of this. The 4THought for Solidarity study (Knoch and Nicodemi 2020) also elaborated on this aspect, that solidarity is closely linked to empathy and the feeling of belonging to a community. Solidarity is an expression of an understanding of active citizenship, which in turn also refers to a community of citizens. Therefore, it is also a particular challenge to show and institutionalise solidarity across community boundaries. The sense of being part of a European community of solidarity needs to be broadened to include the global dimension of solidarity. Global solidarity is an expression of global justice that transcends national boundaries and the boundaries of a state community such as the EU. Global solidarity is therefore always in tension with cultural differences and the great inequalities that exist between the countries of the Global North and the Global South. These inequalities must not be denied and must not be further deepened or reproduced within practices of solidarity. Young people who volunteer to help others in the context of global solidarity are thus both helpers and learners. Their engagement is commendable, and the experiences they gain also have positive effects for their home societies if they carry their positive experiences and continue their engagement there. Nevertheless, a harmonious picture should not be drawn that covers up conflicts. In this sense, young people who volunteer are always learners, in that they learn from those they volunteer for, take on new perspectives, take themselves back, reflect on their privileges.

Volunteering, as is the case, for example, with the European Solidarity Corps, is an important expression of global solidarity, although it must

always be noted that fighting global injustice and protecting human rights cannot be left to volunteerism alone. Rather, programmes of solidarity in which young people are engaged are always only building blocks of comprehensive development cooperation and human rights protection through various political, economic and social measures. Human rights and a sufficiently good life should be secured for all and not dependent on the commitment of young volunteers. However, there are also dimensions of solidarity through volunteering, such as in the European Solidarity Corps, which cannot be fully taken over by the state and its institutions, for example in the field of social support, education or the empowerment of marginalised groups. There is a moral value when people help each other, as this is an expression of recognition and relationship.

4. Infrastructures of global solidarity

Global solidarity relies on infrastructures. Such infrastructures of solidarity have two goals. First, they should enable as many young people as possible to fulfil their responsibilities and make it easier for them to act in solidarity. In many societies, there are already many hurdles and distractions that prevent young people from living global solidarity anyway. There is no culture of global solidarity, instead fast education, success in the job, egoism and consumption are propagated. Infrastructures of solidarity should create opportunities here and empower young people. Secondly, infrastructures of solidarity are needed so that solidarity can be implemented effectively and sustainably in projects, that the commitment and resources that young people put in really reach where they are needed and lead to long-term improvements. Such infrastructures of solidarity are also necessary to avoid frustrations of helping. This requires setting realistic goals, prioritising support, having expert knowledge of feasible support, and involving those who are the recipients of solidarity in a participatory way. Such infrastructures of solidarity are designed to work with the victims of injustice who are to be helped to build structures that ultimately eliminate the need for solidarity.

Different infrastructures of global solidarity have already been mentioned. These are prerequisites for becoming a moral agent. Education and information are part of this. Education is empowering, so it must be made equally accessible to all. The prerequisites of young people's moral agency therefore also lie in their childhood, in schools and how they grow up. Are young people perceived by society and politics as agents and educated to become empathetic citizens who show solidarity? That is a basic prerequisite. Infrastructures of global solidarity must be open to all young people who want to act. So they must not be a programme only for wealthy or well-educated young people, not activism tourism to spice up one's curriculum vitae. Solidarity rests on an understanding of equality, dignity, and inclusion (Knoch and Nicodemi 2020). These values also bind global solidarity practices and their infrastructures. Young people can partly participate in building such infrastructures themselves or initiate them, and they can organise and act in NGOs. The climate crisis, in particular has brought about a renewed surge in activism and organising by young people to advocate for a better world. Nevertheless, it would be unfair if young people were not supported. After all, global solidarity is not just a task for young people, but for everyone, and it is a political responsibility to provide the means and spaces that make solidarity possible. The participation of young people is not a one-way street but generates learning processes for all involved.

Infrastructures of solidarity are located at different levels, ranging from local initiatives, national programmes to international and global networks. Such infrastructures can be bottom-up approaches of civil society or policy-funded, structured programmes to reach as many young people as possible. There is a need for these different forms to work together, as they each have particular strengths, but also weaknesses. A strong infrastructure of solidarity that is as inclusive as possible to cover a wide range of interests and needs will always aim to have a broad impact on society. Structured volunteer programmes, as a complement to other forms of global solidarity, thus aim not only to help people in need, but also to give that help in specific ways, generating positive added value for all involved (Civico 2017). They generate positive effects both for those who help and for those who are helped. The European Solidarity Corps is an example of such an infrastructure of solidarity. It allows young people to become active in various fields and to engage in a structured and accompanied program. It differs from forms of spontaneous and individualised solidarity and it is a programme that has been set up "above", i.e. at the political level. I have already mentioned

that such programmes can, on the one hand, help to cushion pitfalls that may appear especially in acts of development cooperation by intensively accompanying volunteer work, but on the other, they can also try to make global solidarity as effective as possible by channelling and coordinating the actions of many people. The provision of infrastructures of solidarity also pursues goals directed "inwardly", i.e. towards one's own society and the volunteers, in particular the formation of a sense of justice, belonging and inclusion.

Extending such structured volunteer programmes to global solidarity makes sense and has moral value. Global solidarity stems from the fact that we live in a globalised world, with multiple connections, and that many communities and people in this world live in dire need. Their human rights are not adequately protected. Global solidarity in the form of structured volunteer programmes expresses two things: on the one hand, it shows that the political institutions that initiate, sustain and fund these programmes want to fulfil their responsibility. They accept that they play a global role and are committed to human rights that do not stop at their own borders. On the other, structured volunteer programmes are an expression of the need of young people to act in solidarity and to carry their own responsibility for a better world beyond national borders and also beyond continental borders. This clearly distinguishes such structured volunteer programmes from other forms of solidarity that are done privately.

5. Volunteering in the Global South

Volunteering in the Global South is a form of global solidarity. For it to succeed, infrastructures of solidarity are needed that enable young people to carry out this work. The European Solidarity Corps programme is one way of doing this, which differs from purely civil society programmes in its political character, i.e. implementation and funding by the European Union. Volunteering in the Global South, however, brings with it many ethical issues arising from the aforementioned inequalities in resources, power, and privilege (Devereux 2008). Europe's colonial history and the still prevailing rhetoric that the countries of the Global South are in need of help and that these are not recognised as equal partners cannot be ignored. It is especially important for volunteering in the Global South that solidarity does not lead to a reproduction of inequalities and exclusion, of racism and infantilisation. However, the Global South is by no means a monolithic block and the challenges that

arise in concrete practice cannot be solved from the philosophical armchair. This requires the participation of all people involved and the inclusion of the specific knowledge of the common people. People who are affected by injustice and are to be helped to a better life by solidarity-based support are also to be recognised as epistemic agents, i.e. as people with particularly useful knowledge. They are experts of their own kind. If global solidarity is to serve the assertion of the claims of human rights to a better life, then this epistemic recognition as an equal counterpart must not be left out of the equation.

So, in order for infrastructures of global solidarity to be good infrastructures and not to reproduce prejudices and privileges within the framework of voluntary work, reflection on one's own preconditions, opinions and practices is required. For this, there are already a number of proposals that help NGOs, programmes like the European Solidarity Corps, and the people who want to help, to develop such a critical view of themselves and thus avoid mistakes of past, colonial and neo-colonial forms of development aid and volunteering.

This includes, but is not limited to (Schallhart, Vaca, and Weidinger 2021): critical reflection on the privileges of those helping (for example, the privilege to travel, to have the resources, to be able to volunteer), an awareness of the past and present reasons for global inequalities (for example, colonial history, trade treaties, military interventions), and addressing one's own prejudices and reflecting on the motives for helping. These processes of reflection and education will not happen naturally (Macdonald 2018) but need time and space and guidance from experts - they are therefore an integral part of the required infrastructures of solidarity. In such volunteer programmes as the European Solidarity Corps, it is therefore necessary to seriously consider the specifics of global solidarity, especially volunteering that involves concrete help on the ground. Global solidarity is not expressed in deepening existing hierarchies, but in dismantling them, that is, in doing what is good in the right way.

6. Conclusion

All young people, who are capable of being agents of global solidarity, should be ones, and many are already. They have the capacity to act and are morally responsible to act in solidarity as far as it does not overwhelm them. However, the ability to act morally can only succeed if there are infrastructures of solidarity such as education and the communication of information about injustices and possibilities of solidary action, there is a need for organisations and structures in which young people can get involved and take action, and recognition of their solidary action by society and politics. Only a society which values solidarity and does not ridicule or even criticise it as a waste of time will provide the infrastructures that make solidarity possible. Therefore, there is also a responsibility on the part of all those who can set up such infrastructures. Politicians have a responsibility to create and adequately fund such programmes that are as inclusive as possible and open to all young citizens. But there is also a responsibility of rich citizens or companies to get involved here, which can be derived from their special privileges. The advantage of supporting infrastructures of solidarity through the state and its institutions is that it reduces dependence on private benefactors who can end their involvement at any time and, among other things, want to promote their own interests. However, infrastructures of solidarity should by no means be understood only from the top down; they should also emerge from civil society and the self-organisation of young people. Finally, I would like to address the point of social and political recognition of young people's commitment. Young people who show solidarity should be seen as role models and ambassadors. Societies are riddled with conflicts over values and political goals, as can be seen, for example, in the issue of dealing with the climate crisis, where young people have become very active in recent years and have raised radical demands, whereas the older generation and many politicians have been accused of putting the brakes on. Trends of disunification can also be observed both within European societies and beyond, which find their political expression, for example, in the undignified treatment of refugees at the European border or in the electoral successes of right-wing populist parties. So the times to commit oneself to global solidarity are by no means easy, especially not for young people. That is why personal engagement is all the more worthy of recognition when it comes to global solidarity. Especially all those, who are in positions of power and privilege and do not get involved themselves, should reconsider their attitude, assume their own moral responsibility and credit, and support young people for acting in solidarity.

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SALTO European Solidarity Corps

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

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

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EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

This article is part of “Europe talks Solidarity” – a series of events and publications that offers a platform for the exploration of the concept of Solidarity, initiated by SALTO ESC. The discussion on Solidarity benefits from inputs from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. However, the opinions and views expressed in the articles in this series do not necessarily reflect those of SALTO ESC.
With this second round of articles, developed in 2021, SALTO ESC was looking for perspectives on Solidarity connected to the EU humanitarian aid field, as “Volunteering in humanitarian aid field” was integrated into the European Solidarity Corps programme in 2022.

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