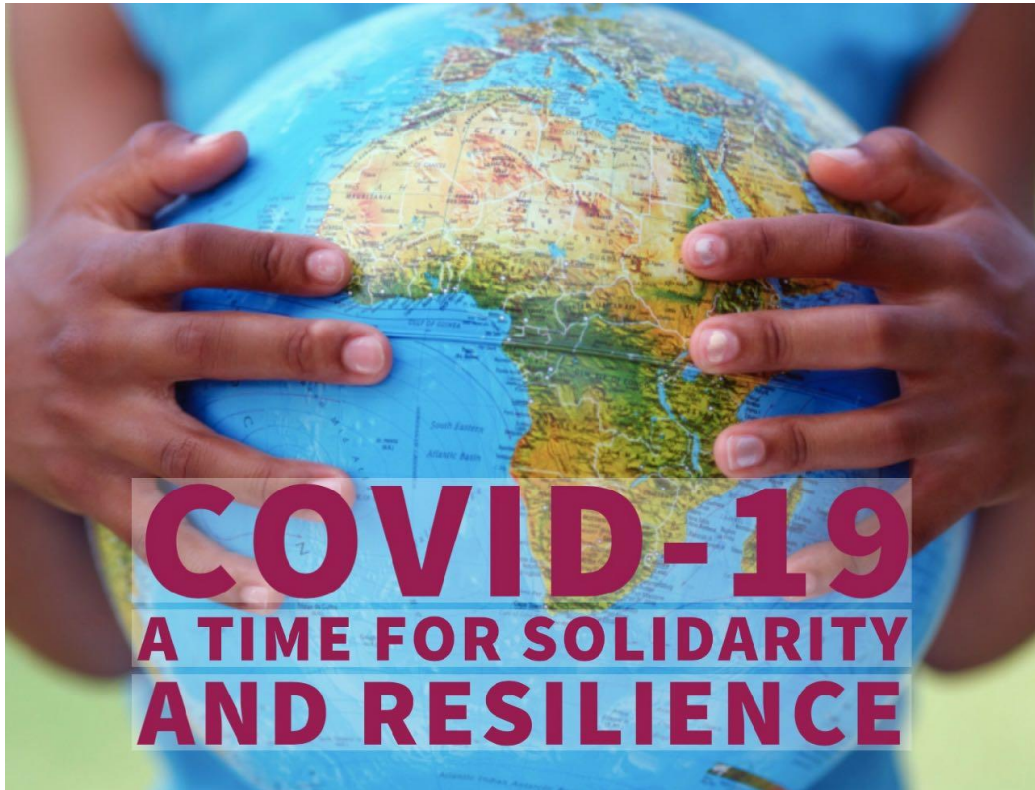


Solidarity Today

**Insights into the
demands and challenges
of solidarity in relation to
young people**

Riikka Korkiamäki
Annika Lehtonen







Solidarity – what is it?

”The feeling of reciprocal sympathy and responsibility among members of a group, which promotes mutual support” (Wilde 2007)

- **Affective** solidarity
 - moral responsibility of people who we are emotionally attached to
 - family members, close friends
- **Conventional** solidarity
 - shared values, views and traditions that unite people
 - those who are 'like us'
- **Reflective** solidarity
 - shared responsibility that is not based on similarity but on the realization of everyone's vulnerabilities, resources and capabilities

(Dean 1995)

Universal solidarity

- non-exclusive moral community “where the ‘we’ covers the whole humanity” (Laitinen 2023)
- solidarity towards unfamiliar people

Young people and solidarity

- Promoting solidarity is an explicit goal expressed in Finnish curricula of young people's formal and informal education, training, freetime activities, youthwork and preventative social work with young people.
- Increasing the awareness and understanding of various types of solidarity and their intended and unintended outcomes is important when aiming to promote solidarity with young people.
- Research on young people that draws on the concept of solidarity has mostly focused on
 - intergenerational solidarity, e.g. familial caregiving or acculturation (e.g. Turjanmaa 2020; Amaral et al. 2023)
 - universal solidarity, such as social activism or volunteering (e.g. Georgeou & Haas 2019; Müller-Bachmann et al. 2022; Walker 2020)
 - solidarity as an element of young people's peer communality
 - resource facilitating social and emotional support
 - loyalty requirement that can lock individuals into group membership, especially in criminal or otherwise undesired youth groupings
- Much less attention has been given to young people's everyday micro-solidarities.

The complexity and ambivalence of solidarity

- Opportunities for solidarity are not equal
 - differences according to social class; social disadvantages may reduce opportunities solidarity
 - Solidarity can cause dependencies and excessive responsibilities
 - solidarity may become a burden and an unhealthy feature in communities
 - Solidarity is a normative expectation
 - may cause conflict
- (e.g. Bognar 2024; Katz & Lowenstein 2022)
- Embedded in oppression – a shared commitment to challenge social vulnerability and (in)justice (Freire 2005; Nikunen 2018).
 - Linked to affiliation – vulnerable groups are especially sensitive to different forms of non-affiliation and social exclusion (Petek, Miloš, and Zelič 2024).

Solidarity in practice (SoliPro)

Young people's everyday
communities as sources of
recognition and spaces of
preventive social work

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Annika Lehtonen, Maaroo Niskanen,
Eliina Vaahensalo, Nina Vanhatalo

- **The aim** is to increase awareness and understanding of contemporary young people's solidarities and how they can be developed in professional work with youths
- **What constitutes 'solidarity'** for young people (age 15 to 18)?
- **How their solidarities are negotiated** in relation to communities, spaces, belonging, togetherness and otherness, and social and societal positions of power and inequality?
- These questions are investigated in three locations representing the central communal environments of young people: **school, street and online.**

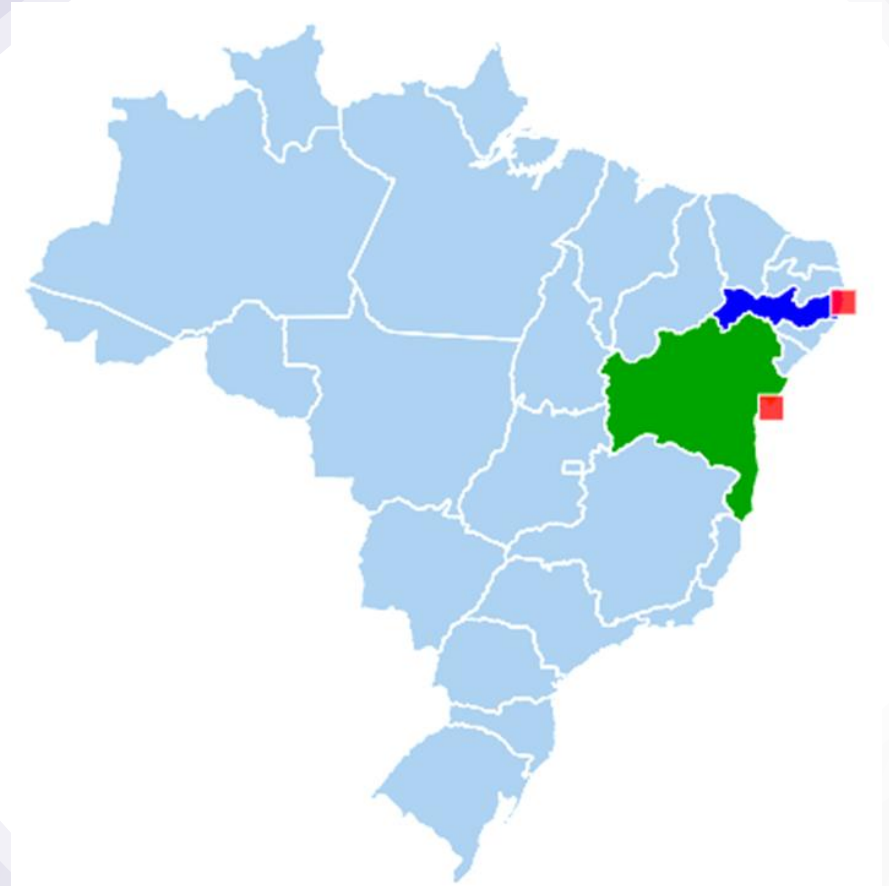
Research team and empiric studies

- **Tiina Määttä:** Forms and grounds of solidarity among students and staff in Finnish basic education
- **Maaro Niskanen:** Street-oriented young people's perspectives to solidarity in Helsinki metropolitan area
- **Annika Lehtonen:** Young people's negotiated solidarity amidst crime and violence in urban Brazil
- **Elina Vaahensalo:** Depictions of solidarity and otherness in Finnish-speaking youth's TikTok content
- **Ayeshah Emon:** Exploring solidarity in EU youth projects in Finland



No One Is Born from the Asphalt: Social worlds of street-connected youth in Northeast Brazil

- **Three fieldwork periods, 12 months**
 - Recife 2018 and 2019 and Salvador 2022–2023
 - Two civil society organisations and a governmental residential care institution
- **Participant observation and interviews** with 16 young people, 3 family members, 6 professionals
- **Multi-sited and mobile ethnography**



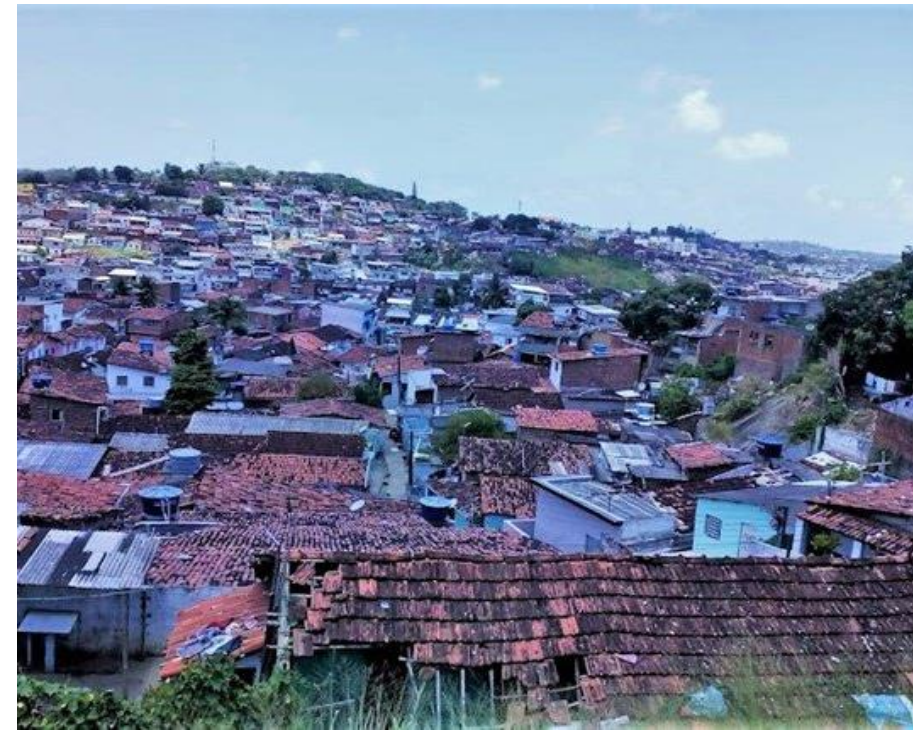


Street-connected youth – a mobile population

- **Depend on the streets for their survival** – whether they live, work, have support networks on the street, or a combination of the three (The Consortium for Street Children n.d.).
- Various **relations beyond the street environment** – fluid, dynamic movement amidst the street, family and community, support systems, 'the world of crime' etc. (e.g. Lima et al. 2021; Santana, Doninelli, and Koller 2010)
- Expectations, moral obligations and desires to **contribute to well-being** of family and meaningful others (Lehtonen 2023)
 - Bruno (12): 'She doesn't make me do it, but I want to help her'
- Challenge the norms of ideal childhood and **resistance** in the face of inequality, yet also **limited livelihood choices** to do otherwise (Lehtonen 2023; Lehtonen 2025a)

Young people's negotiated solidarity in the context of drug-related crime and violence in Salvador, Brazil

- **Structural violence** and neglect has caused Brazilian *favelas* to become major sites of organised crime, drug trafficking and militaristic manifestations (Fernandes 2014; Ryyänen 2011; Ursin 2020).
- Some young people **join gangs** in search for alternative sources of, e.g., respect, protection, affection and financial gain (e.g. Rizzini and Couto 2018; Zdun 2008); others **seek distance** (Ursin 2020).
- Interviews with 15-17-year-old boys in a governmental child protection institution *Casa*; the boys' main pathways to placement in *Casa* were related to crime.
- **What constitutes solidarity and how is it contested** in relation to young people in a living context defined partly, but not solely, by crime and violence? (Lehtonen 2025b)





Negotiating togetherness, trust and support

'They are friends in quotation marks'

•The **everyday solidarities** in an uncertain environment were characterised by **ambivalence**, by a *but*:

Rafael (16): 'The gang always wants the best for me' *but*
'I want to go back to school, to my previous routine' *but*
'I might change my mind, if it doesn't work out'

Miguel (17): 'I used to be in your [the researcher's] place' *but*
'I became like them'

João (15): 'We can talk to each other, make friendships' *but*
'those who mix with pigs eat bran'

Carlos (17): 'There is an ethic among the gang members' *but*
'I cannot trust any of them'

Solidarity beyond immediate relations

*‘Young people especially need it,
to not lose themselves in this world’*

- Expressions of **universal sense of solidarity** with others beyond their immediate environment, mainly other young people living in difficult situations.



João (15): The more bad things leave people's minds, the better. There will be more people doing good things. And the world is grateful. [...] I want to change the lives of others who are on the street, use drugs or kill. I want to change this. It's wrong.

Then what? A way forward...

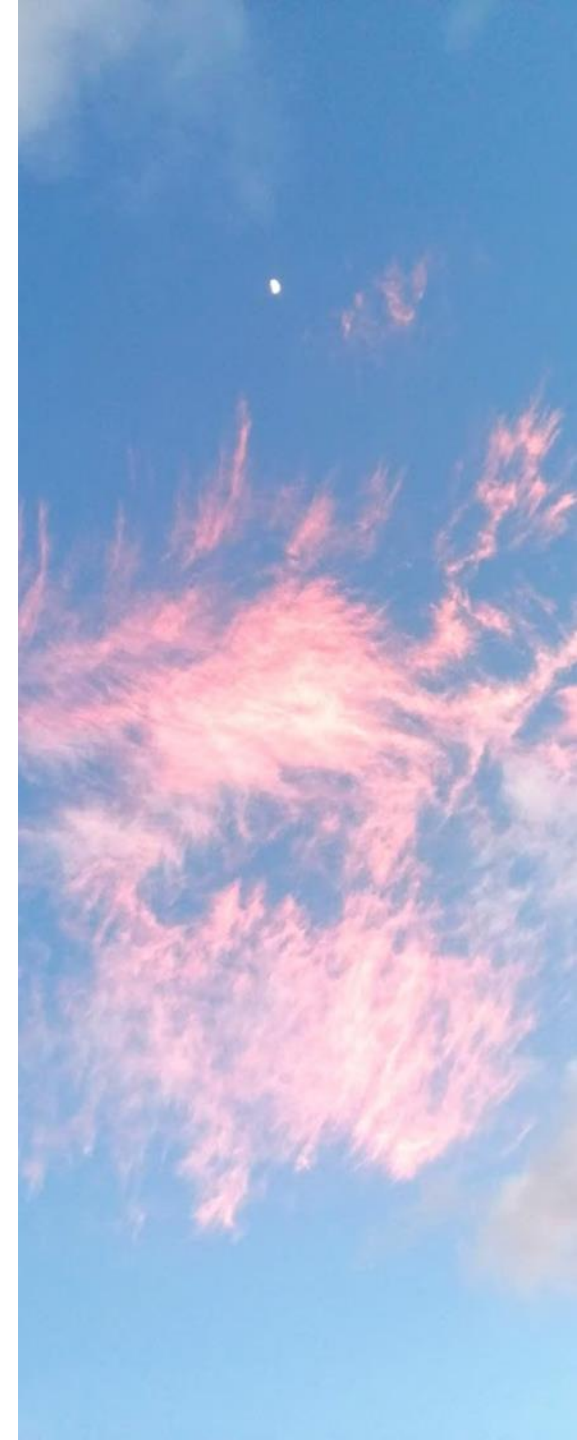
Miguel (17): Now, I should think about what can be done to end it, for it not to happen anymore. What can be done to make these children change their lives? Or actually, this will never end. Because when one dies, ten enter. The criminal, he will go, but crime itself never ends. Because crime is everywhere.

- Young people beautifully expressed the desire to prevent others from falling into crime – yet this is the **responsibility** of the state (also de Castro 2022).
- Brazilian *favelas* have been demonised by the public and controlled by state interventions that **reinforce the cycle of violence** (also Fernandes 2014; Ursin 2020) – e.g. war on drugs and ‘good criminal is a dead criminal’ -rhetoric
- From abandoned children and youth (blaming the individual or the family) towards **reframing the concept of abandonment**
- Young people, families and communities abandoned from sufficient rights-based practice and policy – in Brazil and beyond (Lehtonen, forthcoming 2026)



Conclusion

- While solidarity is a core value within society and many policy frameworks, young people often understand and practise it in more **personal, experience-based** ways.
- Youth solidarity is ambivalent, flexible, and sometimes critical.
- **Young people's engagement with solidarity** tends to emerge from empathy, lived experiences of marginalization, and a desire to create inclusive communities as well as improve personal circumstances.
- Solidarities – especially concerning young people living on the margins – are tied within the **context** in which they are formed.
- There is a need for a broader and more **inclusive understanding of solidarity** that better reflects the diverse experiences, perspectives, and practices of young people, and
- to strengthen the **inclusion, participation** and **citizenship** of young people in their meaningful communities-in-practice through governmental and civil society interventions.



Publications, e.g.

Emon, A. & Niskanen, M. & Korkiamäki, R. (forthcoming) “Sitting into the fire together”: Exploring solidarity in EU youth projects in Finland.

Lehtonen, A. (2025) Young people’s negotiated solidarity in the context of drug-related crime and violence in Salvador, Brazil. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1–16.

Määttä, T. (2025) Potential of schools to promote spatial solidarity by recognising intergenerational power relations: Staff perspective. *Power and Education*, OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438251407198>

Määttä, T. & Korkiamäki, R. (2025) Tracing the rationale for solidarity in teenagers’ post-apocalypse stories. *Childhood* 32(4), 502-518.

Niskanen, M. & Korkiamäki, R. (forthcoming) “Niin kuin jossain lojaalisuusasteikossa” – Ehdottomat, ehdolliset ja osattomat solidaarisuudet katuorientoituneiden nuorten kuvaamana

Vaahensalo, E. Vaahensalo, E. (forthcoming) Multitude of otherness: Depictions of Otherness in Finnish-speaking Youth's TikTok Content

Korkiamäki, R. & Lehtonen, A. & Määttä, T. & Niskanen, M. & Vaahensalo, E. (forthcoming) Solidarity in young people's everyday spaces: Togetherness, otherness and ambivalence on street, in school and online

See more: <https://projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus/julkaisut/>

Solidariteetit käytäntöön – Nuorten arkiyhteisöt tunnustuksen lähteenä ja ehkäisevän sosiaalityön areenana (SoliPro)

ETUSIVU ESITTELY IHMISET AJANKOHTAISTA JULKAISUT PUHEENVUOROT BLOGIT TIETOSUOJAILMOITUS
YHTEISTYÖKUMPPANIT IN ENGLISH

In English

Solidarity in Practice - Young people’s everyday communities as sources of recognition and spaces of preventive social work (SoliPro)

A brief summary

The project examines what constitutes ‘solidarity’ for young people (age 15 to 18) and how their solidarities are negotiated in relation to communities, spaces, belonging, togetherness and otherness, and social and societal positions of power and inequality. These questions are investigated in three locations representing the central communal environments of young people: school, street and online. The project uses digital ethnographic methods together with creative methods to increase understanding of young people’s solidarities and how they can be developed in professional work done with youth.

<https://projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus>

Thank you!

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