

# The EU in Times of COVID-19 – Together into a Future Based on (more) Solidarity?



*The outbreak of the COVID-19-pandemic in spring 2020 put solidarity within the European Union to the test and called for far-reaching responses by all member states to mitigate the pandemic's effects. But how does this crisis affect public support for transnational solidarity in the European Union? Are EU citizens willing to collectively overcome a financial crisis caused by the COVID-19-pandemic? And what is the public opinion on the establishment of a fictional EU-wide fund to mitigate future crises? Those questions have been addressed by a multi-country survey run by the 'Solikris'-project. A resulting analysis in the project's [Policy Brief #5](#) shows that particularly the macroeconomic differences between countries correlate with attitudes towards solidarity policies and that transnational solidarity is higher in situations of acute crisis.*

Der Ausbruch der COVID-19-Pandemie im Frühjahr 2020 stellte die Solidarität innerhalb der Europäischen Union auf die Probe und erforderte weitreichende Reaktionen aller Mitgliedsstaaten, um die Auswirkungen der Pandemie zu mildern. Doch wie wirkt sich diese Krise auf die öffentliche Unterstützung für transnationale Solidarität in der Europäischen Union aus? Sind die EU-Bürger\*innen bereit, eine durch die COVID-19-Pandemie verursachte Finanzkrise kollektiv zu bewältigen? Und wie ist die öffentliche Meinung zur Einrichtung eines fiktiven EU-weiten Fonds zur Abfederung zukünftiger Krisen? Diese Fragen wurden in einer länderübergreifenden Umfrage des 'Solikris'-Projekts untersucht. Eine daraus resultierende Analyse im [Policy Brief #5](#) des Projekts zeigt, dass insbesondere die makroökonomischen Unterschiede zwischen den Ländern mit den Einstellungen zur Solidaritätspolitik korrelieren und dass die transnationale Solidarität in akuten Krisensituationen höher ist.

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## New Crisis, New Chances for Solidarity?

The challenges the European Union is facing under the imprint of the Covid-19-pandemic are huge. In order to prevent a pandemic-induced financial crisis within the EU, various policies were discussed. Some more prominent financial measures are the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) which encompasses economic stimulus packages and crisis support for countries severely affected by the pandemic and the 806,9 billion Euros Reconstruction Fund NextGenerationEU (NGEU). The measures taken by politicians at the national and EU level are, however, dependent on the support or at least the acceptance of citizens in order to politically legitimize their implementation. The Solikris project thus conducted a multi-country survey to research EU citizens' opinions on policies that require solidarity within the community, so-called transnational solidarity.

### The Survey

By the end of 2020, an international online survey was carried out in ten EU states: Germany (DE), Netherlands (NL), France (FR), Italy (IT), Greece (EL), Austria (AT), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Hungary (HU) and Poland (PL) with 1000 respondents per country. As part of the survey, citizens were asked whether they agreed on two policies demanding transnational solidarity:

1. A common European solution to the emerging financial crisis **after the COVID-19-pandemic**, in which each member state makes a financial contribution, measured in terms of economic output.
2. The establishment of a permanent fund that is financed by a new European tax and that can support states in **future** financial crises.

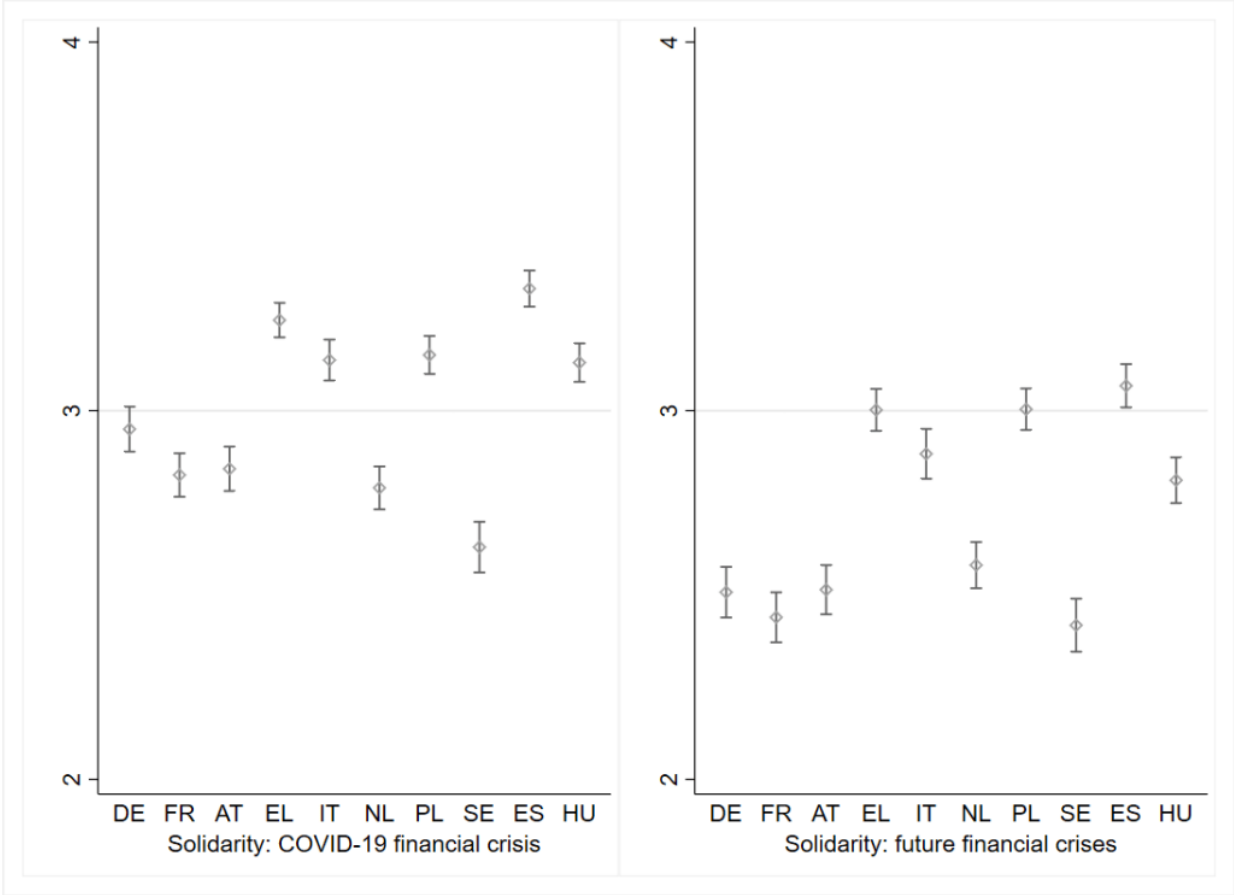
The approvals were queried using a four-point scale (ranging from 'completely agree' to 'completely disagree'). In the first step of the analysis, the number of approvals for the two measures within the population was examined. In a second step the approval rate was analyzed depending on a) countries' COVID-19 consternation and b) the economic performance of the countries.

### Economic Performance as a Decisive Component for Differences Between European Countries

The research of the agreement on solidarity policies regarding the COVID-19-pandemic has shown that the majority of respondents from all countries is willing to support solidarity measures in the EU. Moreover, it should be noted that support for a common European solution in times of the pandemic is greater than support for the establishment of a more permanent fund. A possible cause could be that a permanent tax burden on all EU-citizens could have a deterrent effect on the citizens in all countries. Another reason could be that this type of tax-based fund has no specific reference to a crisis and is thus connected to a stronger overall integration of the European Union which might not be regarded positively as much as immediate crisis support.

With regard to correlations between the approval of solidarity policies and the number of COVID-19-cases, as well as the GDP, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, while there is no correlation between attitude towards solidarity policies and the number of cases of COVID-19, we find a clear link between citizens' transnational solidarity and the economic performance of the countries. Secondly, when looking at the differences between the

countries it shows that in the economically weaker countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, approval is greater than in the countries which are economically stronger.



The Y-axis shows the average approval per country. Values range between 1-4. 4 indicates the highest agreement. 95 % confidence intervals. Weighted according to gender, age and education of the respondents.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the results in the Policy Brief show that there is a tendency for EU-citizens to approve policies of transnational solidarity. However, people are more skeptic towards the implementation of long-term and less-event-based policies. Differences between the EU countries under investigation are evident in terms of economic output. Citizens in economically stronger countries are less willing to assist fellow states in current and future financial crisis.

It should be noted that the available data only represents a snapshot from the end of 2020. Trends may change over the course of the pandemic. Future scientific publications based on the Solikris survey will analyze the identified solidarity patterns in greater detail.

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