

Policy Brief

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REVITALIZING MULTILATERALISM: CIVIL SOCIETY'S AGENDA FOR THE G7



CIVIL SOCIETY 7 (C7) is an official engagement group of the Group of Seven (G7) that brings together voices from G7 countries and beyond. In 2026, under the French presidency, C7 is coordinated by Coordination SUD, the platform of French civil society organizations working for global solidarity.

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The world in 2026 is experiencing a dangerous convergence of crises unprecedented in the post-war era. Armed conflicts are proliferating and becoming more brutal; climate-driven disasters are displacing millions; civic space is shrinking across continents; and geopolitical rivalry is undermining the institutions meant to protect people and the planet. As 2026 begins, the United Nations warns that more than 239 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance due to entrenched conflicts and an accelerating climate crisis, and more than 117 million people have been forcibly displaced by conflict and violence¹. Human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organizations face escalating threats, while financial pressures are weakening multilateral institutions at the very moment they are most needed.

At the same time, new technologies are reshaping warfare and politics. The rapid proliferation of drones and autonomous systems risks scaling civilian harm², while the digital sphere is increasingly vulnerable to misinformation, surveillance exports, and weakening global cooperation on artificial intelligence³. Meanwhile, official development assistance (ODA) is declining just as needs rise⁴: in 2025, total ODA by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members fell to USD 174.3 billion, equivalent to 0.26% of their combined gross national income, a 23.1% real-terms decline over 2024 and the largest annual contraction on record⁵.

1 United Nations, [Crisis and Emergency Response](#) (2026).

2 Humanitarian Action, [Trends in crises and needs: a world at breaking point | Global Humanitarian Overview 2026](#) (2026).

3 EU SEE, [The Enabling Digital Environment for Civil Society: Global Trends in Repression and Resistance](#) (2025).

4 Concord, [AidWatch 2025 | Ending short-sightedness, restoring ODA's purpose](#) (2025).

5 One Data, [Official Development Assistance \(ODA\)](#) (2026).

This paper is prepared by the civil society organizations engaged in the Civil 7 (C7) process. Drawing on community experience and recent evidence, it calls on the Group of 7 (G7), under France's 2026 presidency, to move beyond rhetorical support for multilateralism and deliver a small set of concrete commitments at Évian.

KEY ASKS AT A GLANCE

Civil society urges the G7 to:

- **Defend the UN Charter and international law** consistently and support accountability mechanisms for serious violations.
- **Sustain multilateral resources and reverse aid retrenchment:** pay UN assessed contributions in full and on time; reverse planned aid cuts; and set credible timetables to reach 0.7% ODA/GNI while improving ODA integrity (including limiting the inflationary impact of in-donor refugee costs).
- **Advance reforms that make multilateralism more legitimate and effective,** including UN reform (UN80) and the Pact for the Future, while safeguarding civil society participation and human rights.
- **Ensure multilateralism delivers for communities by supporting locally led approaches,** reducing inequalities, and strengthening transparency and accountability.

The analysis below provides context and evidence; the calls to action at the end translate this into concrete steps that the G7 can deliver through UN funding, ODA commitments, influence in international financial institutions, and diplomatic leadership.

A WORLD AT BREAKING POINT

Humanitarian crises and conflict, soaring inequalities, and shrinking civic space underscore why multilateralism is a life-saving necessity. Key trends include:

- Escalating humanitarian needs with violence, hunger and disease devastating communities from Haiti to Myanmar and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).
- Deadlier and more protracted conflicts: at least 56 000 civilians were killed in conflict between January and mid-October 2025⁶. Explosive weapons in populated areas cause

6 Humanitarian Action, [Global Humanitarian Overview | Trends in crises and needs: a world at breaking point](#) (2026).

catastrophic harm; civilians account for 90% of casualties⁷ and the number of drone attacks increased by 4,000% between 2020 and 2024⁸. The withdrawal of some states from conventions prohibiting mines and cluster munitions signals a retreat from humanitarian law.

- Record food insecurity and displacement: in 2025, an estimated 318 million people were facing high acute food insecurity, including more than 1 million at catastrophic levels⁹. Conflict is the primary driver of food insecurity for 44% of the acutely food insecure populations, and in 14 of 16 hunger hotspots identified¹⁰. More than 117 million people are forcibly displaced by conflict and violence; As of June 2025, Sudan hosts nearly 900 000 refugees¹¹.
- Gendered and generational impacts: 520 million children live in conflict¹². Explosive weapons are killing and maiming children at unprecedented levels, and violations such as recruitment and sexual violence are surging. 676 million women live within 50 km of deadly conflict, and conflict-related sexual violence has increased by 87% over two years¹³. Girls continue to face high levels of sexual violence, while boys increasingly suffer recruitment and maiming.
- Climate-driven disasters compounding crises: 2025 was the third hottest year on record¹⁴. Floods, droughts and heatwaves, alongside hurricanes and earthquakes, have displaced millions and caused thousands of deaths. Three in four people who are forcibly displaced live in countries facing high climate hazards¹⁵.

These realities underscore why a functioning multilateral system is not optional, it is a lifesaving necessity. Yet, the international community's response remains inadequate and inconsistent. Conflicts are lasting longer; humanitarian budgets are stretched; and early-warning systems are ignored. The failure to uphold international humanitarian law, including by some powerful states, sets dangerous precedents. Without decisive action, protracted crises will intensify and new emergencies will erupt.

7 OCHA, [Explosive weapons in populated areas](#) (2025).

8 Just Security, [Drones are Changing How Wars Harm Civilians](#) (2025).

9 WFP, [Global Food Security Overview](#) (2025).

10 FAO, WFP, [New FAO-WFP report warns of shrinking window to prevent millions more people facing acute food insecurity in 16 hotspots](#) (2025).

11 UNHCR Sudan, [Overview of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Sudan Dashboard as of 30 June 2025](#) (2025).

12 Save the Children, [Stop the War on Children: Security for whom?](#) (2025).

13 UN Women, [Wars on women escalate as global conflicts reach record highs](#) (2025).

14 Copernicus, [Copernicus: 2025 was the third hottest year on record](#) (2026).

15 UN Sustainable Development Group, [No Escape: Climate change is a growing threat to people already fleeing war](#) (2024).

WHY MULTILATERALISM MATTERS FOR COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Despite its flaws, multilateral cooperation remains indispensable. International organizations provide frameworks for law and rights, channels for dialogue, and mechanisms to respond to crises that no state can solve alone. For civil society actors, especially where domestic civic space is closing, multilateral forums also provide legitimacy, visibility, protection, and routes to influence.

Yet, multilateral institutions must evolve if they are to remain credible and effective. Reform should strengthen inclusivity, accountability, and rights-based approaches, not justify austerity or exclusion. The UN Charter, international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and the Sustainable Development Goals remain essential foundations for collective action. Violations, including attacks on civilians, illegal annexations, and other breaches of international law, must be addressed consistently and without double standards.

For the G7, these challenges are not abstract. Its members are among the most influential actors in UN financing, development cooperation, international financial institutions, and global diplomacy. Their choices can either reinforce a rules-based international order or deepen fragmentation and mistrust. Governance structures created in the mid-20th century no longer reflect current geopolitical realities, and reform must expand representation, strengthen legitimacy, and limit the abuse of veto power.

FINANCIAL PRESSURES ON MULTILATERALISM

Multilateral cooperation cannot succeed without adequate and predictable funding. Yet, official development assistance is declining just as needs are rising.

Three pressures are particularly urgent:

- **Declining aid levels and widening gaps:** Total DAC ODA fell to USD 174.3 billion in 2025, equivalent to 0.26% of combined gross national income, a 23.1% real-terms decline over 2024¹⁶ and the largest annual contraction on record. 26 of 34 DAC members reduced ODA, and the five largest providers (France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) accounted for 95.7% of the total fall in 2025¹⁷. G7 donors accounted for 69.1% of total ODA in 2025, first time this share has fallen below 70% since 2012, while remaining far from the 0.7% target¹⁸.

- **Cuts spread across humanitarian, multilateral and core development finance:** In 2025, in-donor refugee costs still absorbed USD 23.0 billion, representing 13.2% of total ODA. But the more significant trend is that cuts spread across the full aid architecture: humanitarian assistance fell by 35.8%, multilateral ODA by 12.7%, and net bilateral development programmes, projects and technical co-operation by 26.3%, the largest decline on record for that core development component¹⁹.

- **Skewed aid allocation:** Bilateral ODA to Africa fell by 23.9%, to sub-Saharan Africa by 26.3%, and to LDCs by 25.8%. When EU Institutions are included, Ukraine received more ODA from DAC members in 2025 than all LDCs combined and more than all countries in sub-Saharan Africa combined, underscoring how allocation is increasingly shaped by geopolitical priorities rather than by need alone²⁰.

These are not merely technical accounting issues. They signal a broader retrenchment of development cooperation: a sharp contraction in overall aid, deep cuts to humanitarian and UN financing, pressure on core country-level development programming, and allocation patterns increasingly shaped by geopolitical priorities. The G7 can help reverse this trend by establishing credible pathways to 0.7%, strengthening ODA integrity, and ensuring predictable financing for UN mandates and multilateral action.

16 OECD, [A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data](#) (2026).

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND NORMATIVE EROSION

The multilateral order is being tested on multiple fronts.

Great-power rivalry has repeatedly paralyzed collective action, including within the UN Security Council, while selective application of international law has eroded trust in the system itself. At the same time, some governments are stepping back from multilateral institutions and agreements, creating damaging precedents and encouraging others to treat global norms as optional.

This comes at a moment when reform opportunities are already on the table. The Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact, and the Declaration on Future Generations, adopted in 2024, set out important commitments on peace and security, digital governance, financing, and inclusion. The UN80 process has also opened a debate on how to make the UN more effective and fit for purpose. These processes must not become vehicles for austerity, exclusion, or technocratic reform detached from rights and participation.

The G7 has a particular responsibility here. Its members should use their diplomatic weight to:

- Champion implementation of the Pact for the Future, including the Global Digital Compact, and align G7 policies with these commitments.
- Support UN reform (UN80) with predictable financing and clear safeguards for human rights, gender equality and meaningful civil society participation.
- Advance discussions on Security Council reform and promote restraint in the use of the veto, while strengthening accountability mechanisms.

A G7 SUMMIT AMID TENSION AND OPPORTUNITY

France assumes the G7 presidency in 2026 at a time of economic strain, geopolitical fragmentation, and declining confidence in multilateral cooperation. Its presidency will be tested on whether the G7 can still act collectively in defence of international law, solidarity, and accountable global governance.

This context makes it all the more important for the G7 to show constructive leadership anchored in rights, equity and solidarity. If the G7 wishes to present itself as a defender of multilateralism, it must match rhetoric with concrete political, financial, and institutional commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE G7

If the G7 is to send a credible signal at Évian, civil society urges it to prioritise three deliverables in the communiqué and follow-up process: first, a clear commitment to international law and accountability without double standards; second, concrete steps to sustain UN and development financing, including assessed contributions and credible ODA pathways; and third, support for UN reform and implementation of the Pact for the Future in ways that strengthen participation, human rights, and legitimacy.

In view of the evidence and principles outlined above, civil society urges G7 leaders to commit to the following six actions that will revitalise multilateralism and strengthen the UN:

→ **Reaffirm commitment to the UN Charter and international law**

- Reaffirm unequivocal commitment to the UN Charter, international human rights treaties and international humanitarian law. Condemn violations consistently and adopt measures against perpetrators of war crimes and mass atrocities, such as targeted sanctions and arms trade restrictions.
- Use diplomacy and multilateral bodies to prevent and resolve conflicts. Reject unilateral military interventions and extrajudicial actions. Support accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and UN investigative bodies.

→ **Meet financial obligations and sustain UN resources**

- Fulfil financial obligations to the United Nations by paying assessed contributions in full and on time. Ensure that reform efforts are matched by predictable, sustainable financing so the UN can deliver on its mandates.
- Uphold the 0.7 % ODA/GNI target and establish timetables to reach it, with a view to increasing support beyond that level. Exclude in-donor refugee costs and other domestic expenditures from ODA statistics to focus aid on poverty reduction and crisis response.
- Reverse planned cuts to aid and humanitarian budgets. Increase contributions to flexible, pooled funding mechanisms that prioritize locally led programmes and early action in crises.
- Support broader international financial reforms that expand fiscal space for sustainable development (such as wealth taxation for the ultrarich, a global tax treaty and reform of international financial institutions) to mobilize resources for sustainable development and strengthen the capacity of multilateral institutions to respond to crises fairly and effectively.

→ **Protect and expand meaningful civil society participation**

- Create and safeguard an enabling environment for civil society. End legal and administrative restrictions on association, assembly and expression; stop surveillance, intimidation and reprisals against activists; and provide legal protections for human rights defenders, journalists and whistleblowers.
- Institutionalize structured civil society participation in G7 and UN processes. Recognise national and regional CSO platforms and enable grassroots organizations, including women, youth and indigenous-led groups, to inform decisions and hold institutions accountable.
- Support the creation of a UN civil society envoy to champion public participation in UN processes. Ensure participation is genuinely inclusive by addressing intersectional barriers faced by women and girls, youth, indigenous peoples, LGBTQIA+ persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees. Provide tailored funding, translation and security measures so that these groups can safely engage.

- Provide flexible, long-term funding for CSOs, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and ensure that protection mechanisms (digital security, legal support, emergency assistance) are well resourced.

→ **Make multilateralism work for people: localize, include and be accountable**

- Move decision-making and resources closer to communities. Strengthen decentralized UN offices and regional organizations, and support programmes that prioritize locally led solutions and empower women and young people.
- Adopt metrics and accountability mechanisms that track progress on reducing inequalities, reaching those most affected by crises, protecting human rights, and ensuring transparency. Civil society should be involved in designing and monitoring these metrics. Particular attention should be paid to SDG 16 targets on access to justice, accountable institutions, and fundamental freedoms, which underpin inclusive and rights-based multilateralism.

→ **Safeguard human rights, democracy and gender equality**

- Defend the universality of human rights and the centrality of gender equality as non-negotiable. Ensure that multilateral spaces remain accessible and responsive to women, girls and marginalised groups. Guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and invest in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.
- Protect civic freedoms and democratic space at home and abroad. Promote inclusive governance and rule of law, and support initiatives that foster social cohesion, protect minorities and combat discrimination.

→ **Choose UN leadership that can meet this moment**

- Support transparent, inclusive and merit-based selection processes for the next UN Secretary-General and other senior UN leaders. Strongly consider qualified women candidates and individuals from underrepresented regions to send a clear signal that the UN serves all of humanity.
- Ensure that the UN80 Initiative and other reforms strengthen the UN's capacity to prevent conflict, protect civilians and deliver on sustainable development rather than shrinking its mandate. Oppose budget cuts that undermine human rights, gender equality, humanitarian assistance and development programmes.

CONCLUSION

The G7 faces a stark choice at Évian: perpetuate a multilateralism of convenience marked by selective engagement and shrinking commitments, or lead a renaissance of cooperation anchored in rights, equity and solidarity. The evidence is clear: humanitarian needs are soaring, aid is declining and misallocated, and international norms are under attack. Reforms that prioritize austerity, exclusion or narrow national interests will further erode trust and deepen crises.

The upcoming G7 should not produce yet another rhetorical defence of multilateralism while financing shrinks, double standards persist, and participation narrows. The G7 can help restore trust if it matches language with action: defending international law consistently, financing the institutions it depends on, opening multilateral spaces to civil society, and supporting reforms that make the UN more representative, accountable, and effective.

Civil society stands ready to work with the G7, the United Nations and all partners to seize this moment. The credibility of multilateralism will be judged not by declarations alone, but by the lives protected, the injustices addressed and the hope restored in communities worldwide.



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