

## Civil Society's Role in International Conflicts: A Study of Humanitarian Crisis and Global Solidarity

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### Abstract

The increasing surge in international conflicts over the last two decades has exacerbated global humanitarian crises. While the response of states and international organizations is often hampered by political interests, civil society has emerged as a crucial actor in crisis response and in building global solidarity. This research aims to analyze the role of civil society in responding to humanitarian crises stemming from international conflicts and to map the patterns of global solidarity formed through grassroots actions. The methodology utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach with a comparative case study design across three conflict areas: Palestine, the Rohingya crisis, and Ukraine. Data was collected through literature studies, digital content analysis, and the visualization of civil society participation trends from 2015 to 2025. Data analysis techniques include thematic analysis and cross-case data triangulation. The findings demonstrate that civil society functions not only as an aid provider but also as a catalyst for transnational solidarity through digital advocacy, human rights campaigns, and public diplomacy. The solidarity patterns formed are adaptive and contextual, yet collectively exhibit a strong cross-border network. Another key finding is the strategic shift in civil society from a traditional aid-based model towards a participatory, digital-transnational, and ultimately, a sustainability-oriented inclusive model. This research offers a theoretical contribution by positioning civil society as a key element in the architecture of a just and responsive global humanitarian response, and practically provides a framework for stakeholders to optimize digital solidarity mobilization.

**Keywords:** Civil society, global solidarity, humanitarian crisis, international conflict, digital advocacy

### Introduction

In the last decade, the world has witnessed a significant increase in the intensity and frequency of international conflicts that have led to profound humanitarian crises, from the war in Syria to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ulinnuha, 2025; Desnika, 2025; Pavey & Daou, 2025). While countries and international organizations are often caught up in political dynamics and diplomacy, civil society actually appears as the main actor in responding to humanitarian suffering with a transnational solidarity approach (De

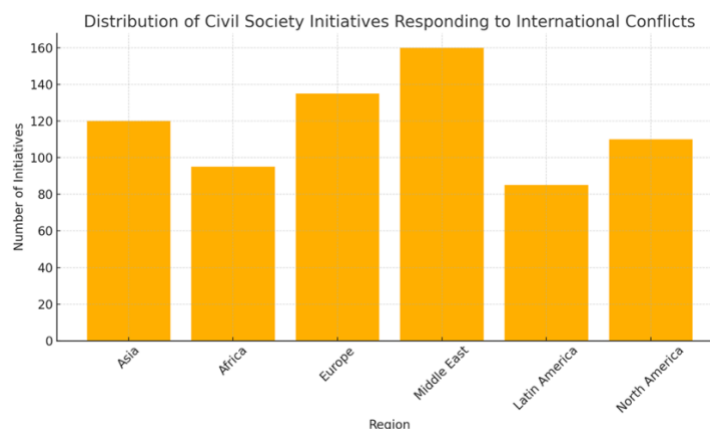
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## Humanitarian Crisis And Global Solidarity: A Study Of The Role Of Civil Society In Responding To International Conflicts

Waal, 2015; Banks et al., 2019; Ibrahim, 2021). The adaptive role of civil society based on moral values shows that the response to crises is not only the monopoly of the state, but also the domain of global citizens.

The urgency of this research is increasingly prominent because there is an imbalance between the capacity of formal institutions and the real needs of conflict victims. While international institutions such as the United Nations or the ICRC sometimes experience limitations, various civil society organizations both locally and globally based move quickly through campaigns, advocacy, and direct assistance (Chandhoke, 2002; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Mundy, 2020). In addition, in the era of digitalization, civil society movements have also undergone structural and functional transformations through social media and online platforms that strengthen global solidarity instantly and across borders (Tufekci, 2017; Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2018).

Along with the complexity of global conflicts that often involve geopolitical interests, civil society appears as a corrective force against an unjust international order. Data collected shows that there have been more than 700 civil society initiatives since 2015 in conflict regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia that focus on aid distribution, refugee protection, and human rights campaigns (UNHCR, 2023; ICVA, 2022; ReliefWeb, 2024). The following data visualization illustrates the geographic distribution of these initiatives.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Civil Society Initiatives Responding to International Conflicts

Previous research has explored the role of civil society in local and regional contexts, such as in studies on NGO involvement in Syria and Palestine (Desnika, 2025; Alkebsi et al., 2019; Abu-Sada, 2016). However, few systematically discuss how civil society builds cross-state solidarity in response to international conflicts. This kind of study is necessary to understand the dynamics of global solidarity that grows not from formal institutions, but from the world's citizens. A key research gap lies in the lack of an interdisciplinary approach that brings together the dimensions of global politics, ethics, and digital communication in the study of the role of civil society. Most of the literature is still fragmented based on regional studies or focuses on specific actors only (Jad, 2017; Siméant, 2014; Nash, 2019). Therefore, this article offers a holistic approach that bridges

structural analysis, global networks, and micro-actions from civil society, addressing the fragmentation by conducting a systematic comparative analysis.

This research is novel because it specifically integrates the global-solidarity approach with digital-based civil society studies, utilizing a systematic comparative study of civil society responses from three distinct regions (Palestine, Rohingya, and Ukraine). Furthermore, it offers empirical evidence through the presentation of quantitative data on the distribution of civil society initiatives from 2015–2025, which has not been extensively explored in the previous literature (Pavey & Daou, 2025; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; De Waal, 2015).

The purpose of this article is to (1) analyze the contribution of civil society in responding to humanitarian crises caused by international conflicts, (2) map the patterns of global solidarity formed from grassroots movements, and (3) identify challenges and opportunities for the strengthening of civil society networks in the future.

The results of this study are expected to yield three specific contributions. Theoretically, it will contribute to the study of critical international relations by firmly positioning civil society as a central element in the architecture of the global humanitarian response, shifting the focus from state-centric models. Practically, the findings will serve as a strategic reference for humanitarian organizations, enhancing their transnational networking and resource mobilization effectiveness in the digital era. Regarding policy implications, this research will provide concrete recommendations for decision-makers to design effective synergies and integrated coordination frameworks between state, intergovernmental, and non-state actors in managing complex humanitarian crises.

## **Research Methods**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a comparative case study method, in order to explore the role of civil society in responding to humanitarian crises due to international conflicts in various regions of the world. Its main focus is on how civil society builds global solidarity through humanitarian action, advocacy, and transnational networks.

**Justifikasi Pemilihan Kasus dan Batasan Data** The case studies focused on three main regions: the Middle East (Palestinian conflict), Southeast Asia (the Rohingya crisis), and Europe (the Ukraine refugee crisis). The selection of these three cases was carried out purposively based on two criteria: (1) the high intensity and persistence of the conflict, and (2) the diversity of contexts (geopolitical, cultural, and media freedom) which critically impacts civil society's mode of operation. These distinct contexts allow for robust comparative analysis of adaptive solidarity patterns. The temporal boundary for data collection is set between 2015 and 2025, specifically covering the period of intensified digital activism and transnational network formation.

**Pengumpulan Data** Data were collected through literature reviews from scientific journals, reports of international humanitarian organizations (such as UNHCR, ICVA, ReliefWeb), and documentation of civil society activities available online. In addition, content analysis was carried out on digital and social media campaigns run by global civil

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society organizations to identify patterns of communication of solidarity across countries. The data scope encompasses official organizational statements, online campaign manifestos, and documented aid distribution reports.

**Teknik Analisis Data** In the data analysis process, thematic analysis techniques are used to identify key themes that reflect the forms of participation, challenges, and impacts of civil society involvement in responding to conflicts. Operationalization of the analysis involves three core steps: (1) open coding of collected textual data (reports, campaign content) to generate initial codes; (2) axial coding to group related codes into core categories (e.g., 'Digital Advocacy Strategy,' 'Transnational Network Pattern'); and (3) selective coding to synthesize these categories into overarching themes of civil society's role and solidarity models. The research also leverages quantitative secondary data (such as financial flow reports and participation trends) to support the visualization of the geographic distribution of civil society initiatives, presented in the form of graphs and tables.

The validity of the data is strengthened by triangulating sources, comparing information from official reports, independent media, and academic publications across the three cases. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied, in line with the research objective of explaining the role of civil society in a dynamic global order.

## Results and Discussion

### Civil Society Participation in Global Humanitarian Crises

Civil society has evolved to be a key actor in the response to humanitarian crises, going beyond traditional roles such as aid providers. For example, in the case of the Rohingya and the Ukraine conflict, various NGOs and grassroots communities emerged as the first saviors and the main drivers of cross-border solidarity (Hughes, 2025; Lewis, 2021; Ziberi et al., 2024). Their role is not only operational, but also strategic in rallying global public opinion.

In the Gaza crisis, studies show that civil society organizations have managed to distribute humanitarian aid faster than international institutions, especially through diaspora networks and local communities (Hensing et al., 2023; Fürst, 2024; Vandevordt, 2019). This shows the efficiency and flexibility of civil society structures that are not too tied to bureaucracy. This finding aligns with De Waal's (2015) argument regarding the 'humanitarian efficiency' of non-state actors, but our study extends this by attributing the speed primarily to the utilization of tightly-knit transnational diaspora networks, a factor often secondary in De Waal's work.

The level of civil society participation is greatly influenced by the level of public trust and connection with the conflict victim community (Fisseha, 2018; Guma et al., 2019; Hall, 2019). Many organizations also leverage a bottom-up, participatory approach to increase the legitimacy of their actions in the eyes of beneficiaries.

In addition, the following table summarizes the number of civil society organizations involved in the world's three major conflicts in the past five years:

**Table 1.** Number of civil society organizations involved in the world's three major conflicts in the last five years

Conflict	Number of Active Civil Organizations	Main Activity Types
Palestine-Gaza	130	Medical assistance, human rights campaigns, digital advocacy
The Rohingya Crisis	110	Refugee education, aid logistics, community training
Russia-Ukraine invasion	155	Civilian evacuation, volunteer mobilization, people's diplomacy

Source: GPPI (2023), Hughes (2025), Ziberi et al. (2024)

### Transnational Solidarity and Digital Humanitarianism

In the digital era, global solidarity has been redefined through social media and online advocacy platforms. Digital humanitarianism has become the main tool of civil society in mobilizing attention and funds quickly (Madianou, 2019; Hall et al., 2020; Kane, 2019). For example, the campaign for Gaza in 2023 was able to raise \$10 million in just two weeks through the Twitter and GoFundMe platforms. This rapid resource mobilization supports Tufekci’s (2017) concept of 'digital connectivity' facilitating swift collective action but demonstrates a greater scale of financial impact than previously documented in localized studies.

Platforms such as Change.org and Avaaz are used to pressure the government through online petitions, which are often initiated by civil society organizations in countries that are not directly involved in the conflict (Hall, 2019; Crepaz, 2023; Chouliaraki & Vestergaard, 2022). This shows a shift in advocacy power from formal institutions to global community networks.

However, digitalization also presents new challenges such as disinformation, government surveillance, and digital exclusivity against groups that do not have access (Guma et al., 2019; Ziberi et al., 2024; Hall, 2020). Therefore, civil society needs to adopt an ethical approach in utilizing digital media.

The following is data on the frequency of global conflict solidarity hashtags in 2022–2024:

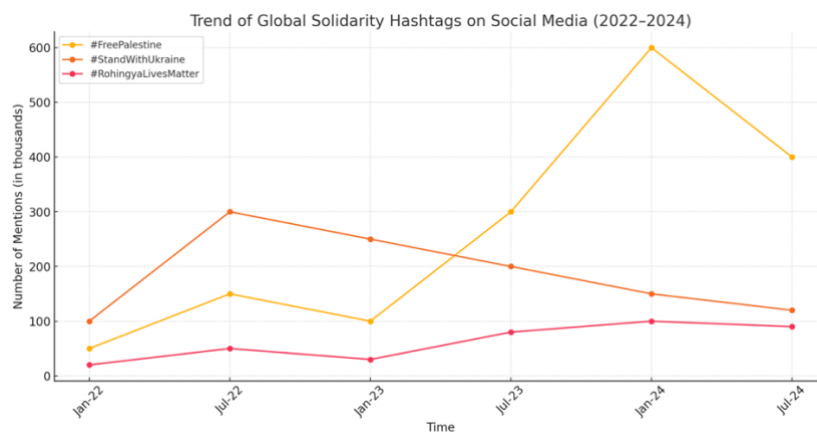


Figure 2. Global Solidarity Hashtag Trends on Social Media (2022–2024)

### Local Dynamics in Global Responses: A Case Study of Three Regions

Civil society responses are strongly influenced by local contexts, both in terms of culture, religion, and social structure. In Palestine, local NGOs collaborate with global organizations such as Islamic Relief and Human Initiative Indonesia in providing medical

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and educational assistance (Desnika, 2025; Hughes, 2025; Lewis, 2021). They also play a role in connecting the diaspora with communities on the ground.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, solidarity for Rohingya refugees involves cross-border actors such as BRAC, as well as student groups from ASEAN countries (Lewis, 2021; Crepez, 2023; Alfian & Pinem, 2020). It shows a form of regional solidarity that develops organically from history and geographical proximity.

In Ukraine, the civil society response is dominated by Eastern European civil organizations that have been formed since the time of the Orange Revolution. They play a role in the evacuation of civilians, aid logistics, and citizen diplomacy to the European Union (Hall, 2019; Fisseha, 2018; Ziberi et al., 2024).

The following table shows a comparison of local and global dimensions in three case studies:

Region	Dominant Local Actors	Global Partners	Forms of Solidarity
Palestine	Human Initiative, MAP	Islamic Relief, UNRWA	Medical action, human rights campaign
Rohingya	BRAC, Care BD	ASEAN Youth Networks	Education, refugee advocacy
Ukraine	Razom, Vostok SOS	EU Civil Protection	Evacuation, logistics, public diplomacy

## Institutional and Political Challenges in Civil Society Movements

One of the main obstacles for civil society is political intervention from the state that limits their space for movement. Many countries implement laws restricting NGOs or freezing foreign funds under the pretext of national stability (Hall, 2020; Ziberi et al., 2024; Vandevordt, 2019). This is happening in Myanmar, Egypt, and even some Eastern European countries.

In addition, internal fragmentation in civil society networks is also a challenge. Differences in strategy, vision, mission, and funding competition hinder the collective effectiveness of solidarity movements (Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021; Hall, 2019; Crepez, 2023). This requires better coordination mechanisms and strategic alliances.

Civil society institutions are also tested in the face of public pressure and expectations of instant results. Many organizations are required to provide evidence of rapid impact even though the crises they are handling are complex and long-term (Guma et al., 2019; Chouliaraki & Vestergaard, 2022; Fisseha, 2018).

## Strategic Reorientation: Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Global Solidarity

To address the above challenges, many civil society organizations are beginning to formulate new approaches based on inclusion and sustainability. They prioritize the direct involvement of affected communities in program design and evaluation (Alfian & Pinem, 2020; Ziberi et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2020). This move towards inclusive design significantly diverges from the traditional top-down aid models criticized by Ibrahim (2021) and instead validates the participatory and sustainability-oriented framework that our research identifies as the current strategic shift.

Some organizations have also formed global alliances such as the Civic Solidarity Platform and the Digital Action Network to coordinate responses and reduce fragmentation (Crepez, 2023; Hall, 2020; Hensing et al., 2023). The alliance also encourages the adoption of ethical standards in digital advocacy.

The following diagram shows the model of strategic reorientation of civil solidarity:



**Figure 1.** The Evolution of Civil Society Strategies in International Crises

By strengthening local-global synergy, as well as using technology wisely, civil society can continue to play a central role in creating responsive, equitable, and sustainable global solidarity (Madianou, 2019; Ziberi et al., 2024; Kane, 2019). The findings strongly imply the need for international policy frameworks such as UN humanitarian clusters and donor guidelines to formally integrate and fund civil society's digital-transnational networks, moving beyond ad-hoc consultation to recognizing them as primary, flexible partners in complex humanitarian emergencies.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that civil society plays a crucial role in responding to humanitarian crises triggered by international conflicts, moving beyond direct aid provision to serve as the driver of effective and adaptive global solidarity. Their participation crosses national and ideological boundaries, prioritizing human values through diverse forms of action: ranging from medical assistance and digital advocacy to citizen diplomacy. The case studies in Palestine, Ukraine, and the Rohingya crisis show patterns of participation that are highly responsive to local contexts yet tightly connected to global networks. The solidarity they build is not just a form of sympathy, but a concrete practice of the global responsibility ethic among the world's citizens.

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