



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Tajikistan

June 2025



International
Partnership
for Human Rights

Context

International human rights groups including [International Partnership for Human Rights](#), [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) have persistently raised concern that fundamental freedoms are severely suppressed in Tajikistan, despite constitutional guarantees for freedoms of expression, assembly and association and the country's obligations as a state party to international human rights treaties. In its [Freedom of the World 2025 report](#), assessing civil and political freedoms worldwide, Tajikistan scored 5 out of 100, putting it in the “not free” category. The CIVICUS monitor ranked Tajikistan [“closed”](#).

In recent years, the government has restricted [fundamental freedoms](#) by clamping down on the political opposition, independent media and civil society. Hundreds of political activists, independent journalists and critics of the authorities have fled into exile, been imprisoned on politically-motivated charges or stopped voicing criticism for fear of reprisals. Those who remain in Tajikistan and their families are at risk of harassment, intimidation and imprisonment for raising topics deemed sensitive by the authorities. Tajikistan has sought the deportation or extradition of persons in exile who are linked to banned opposition groups, and there have been credible reports of torture following some returns.

Authorities continue to interfere in media freedom – maintaining tight control over broadcast and social media content – and restrict media access to official information.

There has been no accountability for human rights violations committed by law enforcement officials during the violent suppression of mass protests in the eastern Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in 2021 and 2022. Civil society activists, lawyers, bloggers and independent journalists imprisoned on politically-motivated charges following the protests in GBAO remain behind bars despite appeals from the international community, including the European Parliament, which issued resolutions in [2022](#) and [2024](#) on GBAO and media freedom. Authorities have subjected civil society in GBAO to particularly tight control, forcing CSOs to close.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

As freedoms of expression, association and assembly are restricted, civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists struggle to work in the shrinking space. Dozens of civil society activists have left Tajikistan recently because of increasing government interference in their work, harassment, intimidation, and threats of reprisals, including against family members.

Following the [GBAO protests](#), authorities intensified intimidation of the media and civil society. *Asia Plus*, one of the few remaining independent media outlets in Tajikistan, [announced](#) on 17 May 2022 that it had been forced to cease covering events in GBAO after being threatened with closure by the Prosecutor General's Office because of alleged “one-sided” reporting on the GBAO.

Civil society activists, lawyers, bloggers and independent journalists imprisoned on politically-

motivated charges following the 2021-2022 protests in GBAO serve prison sentences despite numerous appeals from international human rights bodies and intergovernmental organisations. These [include](#) defenders and journalists Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Khushruz Djumaev, Daler Imomali, Abdulloh Ghurbati and Ulfatkhonim Mahmadsheeva.

Since 2022, [hundreds of CSOs have been closed](#) and those remaining face tight scrutiny. This restrictive trend is especially evident in GBAO, where only 35 registered organisations remain (many are branch offices, e.g. Red Crescent) and CSO leaders have been coerced into closing their organisations. Courts have ordered the closure of others based on unfounded and politically-motivated allegations of criminal ties. The [Ministry of Justice](#) has also arbitrarily rejected or delayed numerous applications for registration from CSOs, particularly in GBAO.

However, authorities continue to cooperate with UN human rights institutions. On 5 August 2023, Tajikistan adopted its National Strategy for Human Rights, providing a road map on UN treaty body recommendations, national legislation and Sustainable Development Goals. It covers fundamental freedoms, fair trial, non-discrimination and disability rights, amongst others. A National Action Plan for 2023-2025 sets out indicators and timelines for implementation which are gradually moving forward.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

Tajikistan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees fundamental freedoms, and the country's Constitution includes guarantees for freedoms of assembly, association and expression.

However, provisions in domestic legislation restrict the work of CSOs, in particular when it comes to the registration of new groups, reporting requirements and funding. [Amendments introduced on 10 October 2018](#) to the Law on Public Associations obligates CSOs to register foreign grants and provide project implementation plans to the Ministry of Justice, which has the right to conduct unscheduled inspections of CSO activities.

A new law on non-commercial organisations is being drafted. CSOs in Tajikistan are concerned that the new legislation may result in new restrictions on their operations, and require them to re-register. It is not yet clear if the new draft law would apply to all non-commercial organisations or just those who were previously registered under the simplified registration scheme in the tax committee. A Working Group was set up in 2025 under the Ministry of Justice, and representatives from CSOs are regularly invited to participate in discussions.

The 2022 [Law](#) on non-discrimination allows CSOs to represent victims and monitor the implementation of the law in practice. Tajikistan is working to bring other legislation into line with the provisions of the law.

Should [draft legislation](#) discussed in parliament in May 2025 be approved, NGO registration fees could increase from approximately 750 somoni to 1500 (from 75 to 150 USD).

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

CSOs in Tajikistan face significant challenges in maintaining institutional sustainability. The majority struggle with limited financial and human resources, and lack stable and accessible funding. These barriers hinder the long-term effectiveness of CSOs and their ability to respond to emerging issues adequately and consistently. The absence of platforms for collaboration, joint initiatives, and coordinated action further weakens the resilience and effectiveness of the civic sector.

In Tajikistan, CSOs face burdensome and complicated reporting obligations, especially with respect to their funding. Authorities have often used small mistakes with regard to reporting requirements as pretexts to put pressure on or silence CSOs. Recently, many groups have been subjected to intrusive inspections of their activities by the Tax Committee, national security services, the Ministry of Justice and various other state bodies. Particularly, regulations pertaining to foreign sources of funding are part of a broader arsenal used to put pressure on CSOs, with them being required to report all foreign grants to the government.

Since 2022, [several hundred CSOs](#) have been forcibly closed or pressured to self-liquidate, leading to a sharp decline in service provision to the most vulnerable. Alongside increasing repression of some CSOs who were outspoken on issues considered sensitive, authorities have forced many smaller grassroots organisations to close, pointing to the fact that they had declared zero income for three months and therefore were inactive. This was widely seen as an attempt by the state to crack down on CSOs operating in the GBAO in particular.

The departure from Tajikistan of major donors exacerbated this crisis. The situation deteriorated sharply following US President Trump's January 2025 decree suspending US external assistance, entailing the suspension of all US-funded projects in Tajikistan. A recent survey found that out of 38 organisations surveyed, 22 identified US donors as their primary source of funding over the past three years.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Public access to official information remains limited. A 2005 Presidential Decree required state agencies to hold quarterly press conferences to promote transparency. However, a 2011 amendment reduced this to twice yearly and conferences now often involve superficial data, refusals to elaborate or allow follow-up questions.

Despite the restrictive environment, some government – civil society cooperation opportunities exist. CSOs provided input into the drafting of the Law on non-discrimination and the National Strategy for Human Rights. In 2025, the Working Group drafting the new Law on Commercial

Organisations includes at least two CSOs. CSOs were also included in the Interagency Working Group on the draft Unified Media Law and related public discussions.

However, authorities do not routinely share draft legislation on human rights related topics with CSO representatives and activists are sometimes excluded from participating in working groups developing legislation in their field of expertise. The lack of a legal framework for public councils has hindered meaningful civil society participation in decision-making, leaving local organisations excluded from shaping policies and holding the government accountable, despite efforts in 2020 to institutionalise such mechanisms through proposed legislation that was ultimately blocked. When CSOs support the development of legislation through international grants—covering study tours for government working group members or other activities—there are generally more opportunities for them to participate in the process by organising public hearing, and providing comments and recommendations.

While CSOs are not involved in drafting the new Criminal Code, they are allowed to attend Working Group sessions, providing feedback but without access to the full draft.

In September 2024, the government halted work on the Unified Law on Mass Media, developed since 2023 by a joint state–civil society expert group. Authorities criticised the draft for neglecting state security, territorial integrity, and tradition. The Working Group was set up under the Action Plan (2023-2025) for implementing the National Human Rights Strategy.

In January 2024, the Human Rights Centre NGO signed a [memorandum with the Ministry of Justice](#) to conduct independent monitoring of eight penitentiary facilities. The fact that civil society representatives could visit these institutions and jointly discuss the monitoring findings has changed the attitudes of prison administrations, who increasingly view CSOs as partners. This collaborative approach allows CSOs to support the state in fulfilling its human rights obligations and contributes to better treatment of detainees.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In Tajikistan, public officials and state-controlled media often [portray civil society actors as “agents of foreign influence”](#) who promote “alien values” such as gender equality, women’s rights, or LGBTIQ+ rights and claim that their work is running contrary to national traditions and interests. This rhetoric reinforces public distrust and marginalises civil society. State-aligned media rarely highlight the positive contributions of civil society.

In addition, civil society activists, particularly women, and independent journalists are frequently targeted by online harassment campaigns aimed at discrediting them and discouraging public support for them. Pro-government “troll factories” (also known in Tajikistan as “factory of responses”) flood online forums, social networks, and the comment sections of internet media with personal attacks, slander and ridicule. Trolls frequently weaponise personal information or spread rumours to damage their reputation and intimidate them into silence.

At the same time, regional and Tajikistani independent media outlets regularly share information about CSO work and their essential role in supporting the most vulnerable groups in the population, including women, children, people with disabilities, and victims of torture, ill-treatment, and domestic violence. This information is also frequently reflected in the [annual reports](#) of the Ombudsperson's office.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Public criticism of the government, including on social media, is [frequently met with reprisals](#). Numerous journalists, bloggers and other social media users have been arrested, and there have been credible reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention.

In May 2024, the Supreme Court published a list of 29 organisations, movements, groups and associations which it recognised as terrorist and extremist and whose activities are prohibited in Tajikistan. The authorities warned that any online engagement with these organisations—such as liking or sharing their content – can be deemed illegal. In May 2025, Tajikistan took steps to decriminalise “liking” on social media. The changes are still to take effect at the time of writing.

Since Tajikistan ratified a [cooperation agreement](#) with the Russian Federation in February 2024 aimed at facilitating cooperation on combating threats to national security in the online space, there has been serious concern that transnational repression will increase as states use it to detain and extradite persons expressing their opinions or exercising their rights to peaceful assembly on the Internet. One area of activity considered as a particular threat is the “dissemination of information harmful to the socio-political and socio-economic systems, spiritual, moral and cultural environments” of the two states.

Broader online censorship and digital surveillance continue however, and CSO actors have their online activities monitored, accounts flagged, and they risk being targeted under vague [extremism](#) or disinformation laws. Article 307 of the Criminal Code, “Public calls for the violent change of the constitutional order of the Republic of Tajikistan” has been applied to several cases of HRDs unfairly charged with dissemination of disinformation aimed at undermining the foundations of the state.

Challenges and Opportunities

Upcoming challenges for civil society include:

- [Draft legislation](#) to double the state fees for registering an NGO, society or political party, international organisation or other non-commercial structure such as unions of lawyers was discussed in parliament in May 2025. If the legislation is approved, NGO registration will increase from approximately 750 somoni to 1500 (from 75 to 150 USD).
- Continued enforcement of restrictive dress codes, especially affecting women and CSOs working on gender rights or religious freedom, who may face pressure.
- CSOs working on minority rights, including sexual minority rights, may face further reprisals and restrictions. CSOs and independent media may face further challenges regarding financial reporting, foreign funding restrictions, etc.

Opportunities for improving the EE in Tajikistan:

- CSO monitoring of penitentiary facilities is allowed.
- CSO representatives are involved in various State working groups, even if not in a systematic fashion.
- The National Strategy for Human Rights and its Action Plan have been adopted and CSOs have a role to play to ensure that the provisions are implemented in practice.

What is needed for CSOs to be able to address challenges and utilise opportunities?:

- Stable sources of funding, including covering core costs for CSOs.
- Improved public awareness about the role of human rights defenders and civil society's contribution to society.
- Increased technical and management capacity-building opportunities.
- Increased opportunities for joint advocacy and exchanges with other CSOs in Central Asia.
- Support from highly placed officials for civil society initiatives.
- Public and private diplomacy efforts on behalf of imprisoned human rights defenders and other civil society activists to secure their immediate release.

EU SEE

REPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



Funded by
the European Union



DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL



European
Partnership for
Democracy



forus
EUROPEAN UNION
AGENCY



TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL
Transparenztidningen - Transparency