



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Republic of Congo

January 2025

Caveat

Some of the information presented in this document is based on the researcher's experience and engagement with civil society organisations. Although no online source was available for these points, the information reflects professional and practical knowledge gained through direct interaction with the actors concerned.

Context

Between 2024 and 2025, the Republic of Congo continued to face major [economic challenges](#), mainly due to [fluctuating](#) oil prices on the international market, and poor [governance](#). [The World Bank](#) has indicated that the economy should grow by 3.8% in 2025, driven by the oil and non-oil sectors. However, poverty remains widespread, but the poverty rate is expected to fall gradually as GDP per capita increases.

This difficult socio-economic context has a direct impact on civic space. Citizens' demands for greater accountability, better governance and improved public services have led to restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. [Strikes](#), protests and advocacy efforts by civil society actors are often met with arbitrary arrest, detention and stigmatisation, particularly for organisations perceived as independent or critical of the government.

At the same time, civil society is still a key player in promoting transparency, human rights and democratic governance. NGOs, social movements and community groups continue to defend justice, monitor public policy and encourage reform, even in a constrained environment. However, unequal treatment persists within the CSO community: CSOs aligned with government priorities enjoy preferential access to consultations, while CSOs independent of government are excluded from decision-making processes, limiting their influence on public policy.

The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2026, a context likely to have an impact on civic space, government engagement with civil society and public debates on governance and human rights.

1. Respect and protection of freedoms

Freedom of assembly and demonstration is guaranteed by Article 27 of the [2015 Constitution](#), but its exercise remains limited in the Congo. Civil society organisations (CSOs) may meet, but preferably in closed spaces. [Ordinance no. 62 of 1962](#) on demonstrations on the public highway prohibits any meeting on the public highway without prior authorisation, thus introducing the prior authorisation system in place of the declaratory system, which opens the way to repression of public demonstrations. On 26 July 2024, the police [arrested](#) activists in Brazzaville who were demonstrating against poverty. A number of [CSOs raised these](#) issues of [restrictions](#) in relation to this Ordinance at the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Congo on 25 January 2024. In response to these concerns, the Executive has undertaken to [repeal](#) this provision. However, no action has yet been taken in this regard at this stage, although several civil society organizations took the initiative to [validate](#), during a workshop held on 17 and 18 July 2023, a draft bill on the regulation of demonstrations and public

meetings in the Republic of Congo, with the aim of moving from a system of prior authorization to one of prior notification.

Freedom of expression and opinion, although guaranteed by Article 25 of the Constitution, is subject to serious restrictions. The pressure exerted on certain independent media, the growing self-censorship in editorial offices and the difficulties in accessing public information and sources support this observation, thus justifying the country's regression in the world press [freedom ranking](#) established by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Online media, [broadcasting](#) and the written press are monitored by media regulatory institutions, and reports/articles by media considered critical of the government are subject to censorship. This was the case with Tsieleka MEDIA, which was [reprimanded in July 2024](#) by the Conseil Supérieur de la Liberté de Communication (CSLC) for allegedly publishing a report considered to defame the Prime Minister and undermine political stability. An operation to combat organised crime, known as "Coup de Poing", was launched on 14 May 2024. This operation resulted [in numerous acts of violence](#) against the population and [threats](#) to freedom of expression due to the denunciation of the practices of the forces of law and order. The Ministry of the Interior, in order to justify the impunity of the perpetrators of the police force's abuses, invoked the legal basis, or even the legal foundation, for the action taken by the police force.

Mention should also be made of the [attempted assassination](#) of journalist Ghys Fortuné Ndombe in September 2024 in Paris, France, presumably because of his work as a journalist. Ndombe was exiled in France, mainly because of his criticism of the government. As a result, the media and even some CSOs tend to censor themselves to avoid reprisals.

2. A legal framework favourable to the work of civil society players

Although freedom of association is guaranteed by the Constitution, NGOs and associations are required under the [law of 1 July 1901](#) to register with the Ministry of the Interior. In return, the Ministry must issue them with a receipt attesting to their existence and validated by the government, whereas the law of 1901 establishes a declaratory system. This registration procedure can be [cumbersome](#) and tainted by government discretion, particularly for groups that are critical of the authorities. CSOs, particularly those working on human rights, governance and environmental issues, face considerable obstacles: their registration may be delayed or rejected, they may be subject to arbitrary arrest and many practise self-censorship to avoid reprisals.

The Congolese civil society movement *RAS LE BOL* was affected by these constraints, as it was required to change its name in order to obtain a receipt, which delayed the process according to information provided by its members. They described the difficulties in obtaining a receipt: deliberate administrative delays to slow down the process of obtaining the said receipt without any valid technical reasons, the requirement by the Brazzaville Prefecture to change the name and purpose of the organisation before being able to obtain the receipt, and the fact that the receipt is not yet available. Despite the payment of fifteen thousand CFA francs (15,000 FCFA) in procedural fees, and despite an appeal filed on 29 December 2021, which remained unanswered, the receipt is still not available to date.

Another concern is the absence of a specific law for the [protection of human rights defenders](#), an issue raised by the Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (RPDH) and the

Service International des Droits de l'Homme (SIDH). These organisations have prepared and submitted to the relevant authorities a preliminary draft law on the protection of defenders, which has not yet been adopted.

Article 238 of the 2015 Constitution establishes the *Civil Society Consultative Council*. In practice, this body - created and governed by *Organic Law No. 32-2017 of 2017* - is considered subservient to the executive. Although it is presented as the umbrella body for Congolese CSOs, it is not representative of the sector's diversity, as the panel of independent CSOs consulted at the start of the drafting of this overview demonstrated. Experience has shown that the management team of the Civil Society Consultative Council and the NGOs that are members of the Council are close to the government, work more to promote rights than to defend and protect them, never criticise government action and do not engage in advocacy. Article 2 of Organic Law No. 32-2017 [stipulates](#) that the Council is placed under the authority of the President of the Republic, which leaves no doubt about its lack of independence.

Independent CSOs that are not members of the Council are often marginalised, stigmatised or portrayed as the political opposition because of their critical stance on governance. In accordance with the provisions of Organic Law No. 32-2017, the President of the Republic regularly refers to the Council when addressing the issue of citizen [participation](#), which consolidates its position as the state-approved voice of civil society.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Funding for CSOs in Congo comes from development partners, foreign governments and foreign foundations. Sources include restricted or open calls for proposals from technical and financial partners such as the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and foreign embassies. In some cases, funding is provided through direct agreements, based on trust and relationships established between donors and CSOs.

However, the Republic of Congo is not a priority country for many international donors. As a result, CSOs often find it difficult to obtain sufficient and sustainable resources, which limits their ability to institutionalise and pursue their activities.

Ideally, a national funding mechanism should be created to support CSO activities and reduce dependency on external sources, but no such mechanism currently exists. The problem of over-reliance on foreign funding was highlighted by the freezing of US funding in January 2025.

The Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (RPDH) saw the suspension of its Stopping Impunity for Corruption in Africa (SICEA) project, run with the support of Transparency International - TI, following the Trump administration's decision on 20 January 2025 to suspend US development aid provided by USAID, for a period of 90 days. This had a negative impact and brought the SICEA project to a screeching halt.

SICEA is a pilot project involving several IT sections in Africa, including two in Central Africa, namely the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo. The US government is the main donor through USAID. In an e-mail dated 24 January 2025, RPDH was notified of the suspension of the project by the new American administration for a period of 3 months. This suspension brought to a halt the efforts made in the fight against impunity for corruption, thanks to actions aimed at encouraging the Congolese authorities and judicial system to deal with more cases of corruption, a scourge that undermines African economies and hampers

their development, causing the continent to lose more than 140 billion euros a year, according to the African Development Bank. This sudden stoppage has had a significant impact on the project's activities, putting a stop to the progress made, but also on the social balance of the project's salaried staff.

Concerns were expressed about unequal access to co-financing agreements between the Congolese government and international partners. In practice, the government appears to favour CSOs affiliated to the *Conseil Consultatif de la Société Civile* (CCS) - a constitutional body considered to be the official umbrella organisation for CSOs - over independent groups.

Another obstacle relates to the treatment of external funds received by local banks. According to CSO representatives, international transfers have sometimes been blocked pending verification of the origin of the funds, the stated purpose of the project and the recipient organisation's compliance with the bank. These checks are sometimes carried out at the request of the *Agence Nationale d'Investigation Financière* (ANIF). Although intended to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism, this process can cause long delays, disrupting planning, implementation, payment of salaries and reporting .

Since 2024, there have been reports that the Civil Society Advisory Council has restarted discussions on a draft law on the regime for associations. Civil society actors warn that early proposals included provisions to criminalise certain forms of external funding and to penalise activities considered to threaten state security. These discussions have gained momentum in the run-up to the 2026 presidential elections, raising fears of further restrictions on civic space.

4. State openness and responsiveness

The Republic of Congo does not have effective laws on transparency and access to information. The main framework is the [2001 law on freedom of information and communication](#), which predates access to information standards and has been [criticised](#) as outdated and too restrictive by the Centre for Law and Democracy. For example, the transparency code (law no. 10-2017) aims to improve the visibility of public finance management, although guaranteeing CSO access to information, particularly with regard to governance of the extractive sector, is difficult as this law remains inoperative for lack of implementing regulations. Government departments are reluctant to share certain information, particularly that relating to governance, resource management or national security, which limits transparency.

Interaction between civil society and the state is sectoral and targeted. Structured engagement exists through constitutional consultative councils for civil society, women, youth, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples. However, these mechanisms are often not very effective. Indeed, this interaction is [not fully inclusive](#) given the limited number of CSOs consulted, the appointment of council leaders is through closed, state-led processes, and the issues discussed tend to avoid politically sensitive topics. For example, the Civil Society Advisory Council is not open to CSOs dealing with sensitive issues affecting public governance and denouncing human rights violations, which limits the pluralism of representation. Given its weight with decision-makers, the Council shapes the perception and treatment of certain organisations, which can lead to the exclusion of critical CSOs from political dialogue and processes.

In the run-up to elections, the government organises political dialogues and often CSOs close to the government - or even organisations created especially for the occasion - are allowed to participate, including as part of election observation missions. For any dialogue or initiative

involving civil society, the Civil Society Consultative Council is the body [consulted](#) to designate the participating CSOs. In practice, it generally only selects NGOs and associations whose activities are favourable to the government, with CSOs critical of public governance [regularly being refused](#) accreditation to observe elections. The Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (RPDH) and other NGOs suffered this exclusion during the 2015, 2016 and 2021 elections.

Positive collaboration between the state and civil society generally takes place within the framework of ad hoc processes launched and supported by international financial institutions and international partnerships. These include the [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(EITI\)](#), forest and climate [governance](#) initiatives (Voluntary Partnership Agreements), [the Letter of Intent](#) of the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) and others. On rare occasions, [civil society has](#) been able to [contribute](#) to the drafting of legislation, such as Law 33-20 of 8 July 2020 on the forestry code in the Republic of Congo and [the law on transparency](#) and accountability in public finance management.

Government accountability to civil society is limited. Civil society organisations - whether acting individually or through networks such as the Publish What You Pay campaign in the Congo or [Turning the Page in the Congo](#) - regularly [publish](#) reports and analyses on public governance. However, they are not systematically invited to take part in official discussions on the issues they raise. There is also a degree of inclusion: for example, NGO recommendations - whether government-aligned or independent - that are taken into account by Member States during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) have been incorporated into public policy and official discourse.

5. Political culture and public discourse on civil society

The public discourse is negative and [stigmatising](#) towards CSOs that are critical of public governance and denounce: human rights violations, electoral governance, following the example of [the comments](#) made by the government spokesperson after the publication of a report by Tournons la Page Congo following the legislative and local elections; acts of corruption, bad governance and the fight against corruption. These CSOs are accused of acting on behalf of the political opposition and of being foreign agents. In this respect, they are discredited and [harassed](#). To a certain extent, they are only tolerated when they are supported by development partners and when they participate in initiatives to improve governance motivated by international commitments. In other cases, the executive acts as if it were unaware of the existence of civil society, while relying on its analyses. This dynamic makes it crucial for CSOs to strengthen their communication strategies in order to increase their visibility and improve public understanding of their work.

Civil society in the Republic of Congo is recognised as a key player in promoting transparency, accountability and human rights. NGOs, social movements and community groups play a central role in raising public awareness, defending justice and democracy, and contributing to sustainable development initiatives. Despite these contributions, civil society faces significant challenges in gaining a voice and acceptance. Government-aligned media and some public institutions often marginalise independent CSOs, portraying them as oppositional or influenced by foreign interests. However, the influence of CSOs is evident when their recommendations are taken into account in international mechanisms such as the [Universal](#)

[Periodic](#) Review (UPR), demonstrating that even critical organisations can influence policy when their work is supported by evidence and receives international attention.

Socio-economic status continues to influence access to opportunities, including civic participation. People from disadvantaged backgrounds may find it difficult to get involved due to a lack of resources, inadequate education or marginalisation. Women and certain ethnic minorities also face additional barriers. Gender stereotypes and racial discrimination limit their access to decision-making and political processes. Despite these obstacles, civil society movements and NGOs are working to promote equal rights and encourage civic participation. These groups strive to raise awareness and educate for citizenship.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Digital rights and freedoms are governed by a number of legislative texts guaranteeing freedom of expression online, access to information and protection against censorship and unjustified surveillance. Article 25 of the 2015 Constitution guarantees every citizen freedom of expression and dissemination of their opinions by word, writing, image or any other means of communication. Law no. 0 9-2009 of 25 November 2009 regulates the electronic communications sector, article 3 of which guarantees the right to benefit from electronic communications services. The Republic of Congo has also ratified the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and the Protection of Personal Data, also known as the Malabo Convention. This convention aims to establish a harmonised legal framework for cybersecurity in Africa, protect citizens' personal data and promote trust in digital services.

However, the implementation of these digital rights and freedoms remains limited by the fact that civil society actors are not totally free to operate online. They are under constant surveillance and are therefore unable to share certain information freely and securely. However, the country's authorities frequently criticise online content, citing the "dangerous manipulation of information", particularly through social media platforms. For example, in a State of the Nation [address](#) on 28 November 2023, the president warned against destabilisation via social networks, echoing earlier comments in [2018](#) about their misuse by citizens.

In June 2020, the President promulgated Law [No. 27 of 5 June 2020](#) on the fight against cybercrime in the Congo, which defines and punishes offences related to information and communication technologies. While the law provides some protection for sensitive personal data, it also creates potential avenues for the authorities to restrict the activities of civil society on digital platforms. Internet and mobile phone networks are sometimes cut off during election periods, as [Le Monde](#) reported [in 2021](#), violating citizens' fundamental rights without clear justification from the authorities or network providers. Such measures create an environment of uncertainty and limit the ability of CSOs to communicate, coordinate and mobilise citizens online.

In the run-up to the 2026 presidential election, these trends suggest a continued interest by the authorities in monitoring, filtering and controlling the digital environment, which has a negative impact on the enabling environment for civil society and limits its ability to operate freely.

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges:

1. Lack of a law to protect defenders and whistleblowers. The draft law submitted by the DPRK and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) was not adopted, leaving human rights defenders and whistleblowers without formal guarantees. This remains a challenge for the security of civil society actors in the coming months;
2. Exclusion of independent CSOs from election preparations: Independent organisations are largely sidelined from dialogues and preparatory acts for the 2026 elections, weakening their ability to influence public governance and electoral transparency.

Opportunities for improvement:

1. State engagement in responsible and accountable natural resource, climate and environmental governance initiatives: CSOs can continue to benefit from forums such as the VPA/FLEGT through [Annex IX](#), the work of the VPA Joint Implementation Committee involving the participation of [CSO experts](#), [the negotiation](#) of the new [CAFI](#) Letter of Intent [on the initiative](#) related to [civil society support](#). These governance processes provide a forum for CSOs to voice a number of concerns to decision-makers.
2. Ownership and effective implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI): through the EITI Civil Society Protocol and Validation processes, CSOs can lobby for commitments to protect civic space and influence transparency in the extractive sector.
3. The [recommendations](#) of [the Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#): CSOs can monitor and follow up on commitments, including the protection of defenders, whistleblowers and [women](#) human rights [defenders](#), in order to force the government to respect [human rights](#) and protect defenders.
4. Civil society actors can also benefit from the Congolese government's commitment to [abolish](#) the system of prior authorisation for peaceful gatherings in July 2024, following the country's fourth Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council. CSOs can use this commitment to mobilise, organise and advocate more freely, thereby strengthening civic engagement.

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