



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Haiti

July 2025

Context

Haitian civil society operates in a complex and deteriorating environment marked by overlapping crises. The country remains mired in a prolonged constitutional and institutional [impasse](#), characterised by an undefined transitional governance system that undermines legitimacy and public trust. Security conditions have deteriorated significantly due to the proliferation of armed gangs responsible for widespread violence, including rape, robbery and the destruction of public infrastructure, while national security forces remain ineffective. Humanitarian indicators are alarming, [with more than 4,000 violent deaths](#) recorded between January and May 2025 and [more than 1.3 million](#) internally displaced persons.

Economically, Haiti has experienced six consecutive years of negative growth, reflecting the collapse of its productive sectors. Environmental [vulnerabilities persist](#), exacerbated by the physical degradation of Port-au-Prince and the lingering effects of the 2010 earthquake. Civil society is engaged in discussions with the authorities, the private sector and the international community to find solutions to the crisis. In April 2024, a [political agreement](#) established a framework for political transition, which is currently stalled. Through resolutions [2653 \(2022\)](#), renewed by resolution [2700 \(2023\)](#), and [2699 \(2023\)](#), the United Nations established a sanctions regime targeting individuals who threaten peace and security in Haiti and authorised a Multinational Security Support Mission (MMAS). The still incomplete deployment of this force, combined with a lack of resources to intervene on the ground, appears to explain the mission's failure.

Despite these challenges, Haitian civil society has become aware of its transformative role. It [actively promotes](#) a democratic and inclusive socio-political vision aimed at economic recovery and sustainable development in the ten departments and within the diaspora. Civil society actors are working to influence public policy, advocating for a return to constitutional order and proposing alternative solutions to the challenges of the transition. Their efforts focus on restoring social peace, free movement and revitalising the national economy. However, the effectiveness of civil society initiatives remains dependent on the broader environment, which can either facilitate or hinder their impact.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

In Haiti, respect for and protection of the three fundamental freedoms of civil society – freedom of expression, association and assembly – have deteriorated significantly, despite [constitutional guarantees](#) provided for in sections C and E. The latest indicators show that Haiti's civic space is [repressed](#) and restrictive. The collapse of state authority has left a vacuum filled by armed gangs whose reign of terror has made these freedoms virtually inaccessible. Freedom of expression is under threat, with journalists facing deadly violence and the media being systematically targeted. The [attack](#) perpetrated in December 2024 [by the "Viv Ansanm" gang](#), which killed two journalists and wounded seven others during a public health operation by the Ministry of Health in Port-au-Prince, and the arson attack on Radiotélévision Caraïbes in March 2025, illustrate the perilous conditions in which press freedom operates. The [takeover of Radio Panic FM](#) and its renaming "Taliban FM" by armed gangs in Mirebalais further illustrates the muzzling of independent voices.

Freedom of assembly and demonstration is also being curtailed. Anti-government protests in early 2024 were [violently suppressed](#) by security forces, leaving at least four people dead and 15 injured, including at least eight journalists. However, the most pervasive threat does not come from state repression, but from gang violence, which has become the dominant force,

repressing civic mobilisation and creating a climate of fear that prevents any public mobilisation. The [massacre](#) of at least 207 people in Cité Soleil [in December 2024](#) by the Wharf Jérémie gang, which targeted voodoo practitioners, highlights the indiscriminate brutality that stifles public life.

Freedom of association, essential to the organisation of civil society, is limited by insecurity and intimidation. Civil society groups struggle to operate in an environment where meeting, coordinating or advocating for a cause exposes them to reprisals. The absence of state protection and the dominance of armed actors have eroded safe spaces conducive to collective civic engagement.

In this context, the fundamental freedoms of civil society are not only threatened, they are actively dismantled by a combination of lawlessness, terror and institutional paralysis.

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

Haiti's constitutional framework nominally supports civil society, guaranteeing freedoms of expression, press, conscience, religion, assembly, and association (Arts. 20, 26, 31–31-2). The country has also ratified [key international instruments](#), including the ICCPR and the American Convention on Human Rights. However, the absence of enabling legislation undermines these guarantees, leaving CSOs without clear legal protections or operational guidance.

In practice, the legal environment [remains restrictive](#). CSOs must obtain formal recognition to operate, yet the registration process is often slow, opaque, and vulnerable to corruption and political interference. This disconnect between constitutional rights and administrative realities hampers civic engagement and weakens institutional trust.

The 2024–2025 [criminal law reforms](#), developed with civil society input, including the adoption of a new criminal code and a new code of criminal procedure, promise improved access to justice. The April 2025 establishment of [two specialised judicial centres](#) for financial crimes and mass violence enhances accountability mechanisms. However, the September 2024 formation of the Truth, Justice and Reparation Commission notably excluded prominent human rights organisations, reflecting persistent marginalisation and selective engagement.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society actors in Haiti face persistent resource constraints, primarily due to an overreliance on international donors. Domestic funding mechanisms remain underdeveloped, and even local initiatives—such as those led by the [Volontariat pour le Développement d'Haïti](#) (VDH)—depend heavily on external support. This dependency undermines the autonomy and sustainability of civil society, especially as donor priorities often shape project agendas, focusing on humanitarian aid, security, education, health, and gender-based violence.

While foreign funding is not legally restricted, its accessibility is increasingly compromised by Haiti's deteriorating security and governance. Gang violence impedes mobility and disrupts operations, while political instability erodes institutional trust, making it difficult to form reliable partnerships. In response to these risks, some donors have scaled back or suspended funding, citing concerns over transparency and safety.

Local funding remains virtually absent. There is no coherent framework for tax incentives or exemptions to support CSOs, and funding is typically project-based, offering limited flexibility for institutional growth or strategic planning. Moreover, access to funding information is uneven, and logistical challenges—such as frequent power outages and unreliable internet—further hinder CSOs’ ability to engage with funding opportunities or participate in virtual platforms.

Despite these constraints, some organisations have shown resilience by investing in digital skills and remote networks to sustain operations. However, without structural reforms to diversify and stabilise funding sources, civil society’s capacity to contribute meaningfully to democratic governance and social accountability remains precarious.

4. State Openness and Responsiveness

The Haitian government's openness and responsiveness to civil society actors remains limited and inconsistent, which significantly affects the effectiveness of civil society in shaping governance and public policy. Historically, civil society in Haiti has developed in opposition to authoritarianism and political instability, often taking on a watchdog role to denounce corruption, impunity and human rights violations. This confrontational stance has fuelled mistrust, with the authorities frequently marginalising or repressing critical voices.

While [efforts](#) have been made to include civil society in governance, often under pressure from international donors, these initiatives are sporadic and poorly institutionalised. The 3 April 2024 [agreement](#) on political transition and new governance mechanisms included civil society platforms in the negotiations, and the [Presidential Transition Council](#) (PTC) includes a civil society observer. However, this participation is often symbolic and its influence on decision-making is limited. Marginalised CSOs are frequently excluded and, even when consulted, their contributions rarely influence the final outcome.

Political forums and collaborative efforts, particularly in the area of humanitarian aid and social service delivery, show promise. Local NGOs have established partnerships with public institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and Local Government (MICT) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MAST) to assist displaced persons and promote civil protection. However, these partnerships are largely reactive and lack formal structures, which limits their strategic impact.

Transparency [remains a concern](#). Haiti [does not have a](#) comprehensive law on access to information, and some government entities operate without a clear obligation to disclose information to civil society. This lack of transparency further limits civil society's ability to hold institutions accountable and participate meaningfully in governance.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In Haiti, the public political culture and discourse on civil society are shaped by shifting perceptions that reflect both recognition and mistrust. Government officials and political leaders [often publicly recognise](#) civil society as a key partner in promoting human rights, fighting corruption, and providing essential services—particularly in sectors where the state is absent, such as health, education, and humanitarian aid. This image is common in official

discourse and media coverage when civil society actors are seen as filling gaps in governance. However, this recognition is often utilitarian and conditional.

When civil society organisations move from service delivery to rights advocacy, particularly when they mobilise citizens or criticise government failures, their image changes. Media discourse and political rhetoric may then portray these actors as antagonistic or destabilising, undermining their legitimacy and fuelling public mistrust. This duality in representation creates an unstable environment where the role of civil society is alternately celebrated and vilified, depending on its alignment with political interests.

Non-state actors, including community leaders and private sector representatives, also reflect this ambivalence. While some recognise the value of CSOs in promoting development and accountability, others echo political narratives that portray them as disruptive or influenced by foreign powers.

Although the state is aware of this and [is making efforts](#), the education system offers little structural support for raising awareness of civil society. School curricula [barely address](#) civic engagement, the role of CSOs and democratic participation, which limits public understanding of the contribution of civil society. This [gap](#) reinforces misconceptions and weakens citizen support, ultimately limiting the capacity of civil society to mobilise, defend its interests and influence policies in a meaningful and sustainable way.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

In Haiti, civil society operates in a digital environment characterised by both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Although there are no laws explicitly guaranteeing digital freedoms or regulating online surveillance, civil society actors generally enjoy relative freedom to share and access information online. However, this freedom is [precarious](#) due to weak governance, limited digital literacy, and [the absence](#) of a digitised public administration.

Internet access remains uneven and expensive. In March 2025, only 39.3% of Haitians, or approximately 4.65 million people, [were connected to the Internet](#). This is the lowest penetration rate in the Caribbean region, where the [average is 78%](#). Mobile connections dominate, with 86.0% of the population connected via cellular networks. However, cost remains a major barrier: 1 GB of mobile data can cost up to [4% of monthly income](#). Urban centres such as Port-au-Prince enjoy better coverage, while [rural areas](#) suffer from limited infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply and frequent outages.

Although no government-ordered internet shutdowns have been reported, sporadic outages linked to [political unrest](#), acts of sabotage or technical failures are common. The digital environment is poorly secured, exposing civil society [to risks](#) such as phishing, online fraud and [harassment](#). Although there is no confirmed widespread state surveillance, [vulnerabilities remain](#) due to the lack of cybersecurity legislation and technical capabilities.

The adoption of AI is nascent but growing. Initiatives [such as ProAI](#) aim to develop digital skills and foster an AI ecosystem to support civil society and government innovation. Training programmes are emerging to equip NGOs with ethical AI practices, but overall capacity remains low.

These conditions – limited access, weak protections and low digital literacy – hamper civil society's ability to mobilise, defend its rights and protect itself online, thereby reinforcing broader structural inequalities.

Challenges and opportunities

Over the next four months, the enabling environment for civil society in Haiti will continue to be shaped by a volatile mix of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities. Armed gang violence, marked by rape, looting, arson and the destruction of public institutions, will remain a critical threat to civic space. Environmental risks, including recurrent earthquakes and cyclones, are exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. At the same time, governance remains paralysed: de facto authorities lack legitimacy, public services are virtually non-existent, and the country has not held elections since 2016. Institutional dysfunction, constitutional deadlock and endemic corruption further erode the rule of law.

However, this fragile context offers a strategic opening for civil society. The absence of legitimate governance structures creates space for CSOs to assert their role in public policy-making and democratic renewal. There are growing opportunities to negotiate formal mechanisms for dialogue, consultation and participation in decision-making processes. Civil society can leverage this situation to advocate for inclusive governance frameworks that integrate its contributions into national reconstruction efforts.

To seize these opportunities, CSOs urgently need to strengthen their internal structures and operational capacities. This includes investing in strategic planning, resource mobilisation, advocacy and multi-stakeholder engagement. Improving skills in communication, collective mobilisation and service delivery will be essential to strengthen the legitimacy and impact of actions.

Ultimately, although there are constitutional and international commitments to civil liberties, the enabling environment remains limited by outdated laws and weak institutions. Reforms and modernisation are essential. Civil society must lead the charge and position itself as a central actor in Haiti's democratic, social and economic transformation.

This publication has been funded/co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



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