



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Overview

Venezuela

July 2025

Context

Since 2015, Venezuela has been experiencing a complex [humanitarian emergency](#) that affects access to food, health, basic services and human mobility, while at the same time there has been a rapid [deterioration](#) of civic and democratic space. The political context is marked by high polarisation, institutional conflicts and limitations on citizen participation.

Since 2024, the country has been going through a delicate period due to the controversial presidential elections in July of that year, which were marked by a lack of transparency, repression and international isolation, which has deepened the human rights crisis.

The context described above has led to unprecedented migration in the region. It is estimated that almost [8 million](#) people have left Venezuela, of whom [almost 7 million](#) have been taken in by Latin American countries such as Colombia and Peru.

Mobility remains one of the key focuses of the [humanitarian response](#) programme in the country, as it is one of the markers of vulnerability. Migrants face protection risks due to the conditions in which mobility occurs. [Venezuelan migrants](#) are mostly young people between the ages of 15 and 49, the majority of whom are men. The reasons for migration are the search for better living conditions and, to a lesser extent, family reunification.

These mobility figures have had a significant impact on civic space in Venezuela, as the young and productive population has been reduced, which has a direct impact on active and dynamic participation in the public sphere, reducing social cohesion and community participation in relevant issues such as political and social rights.

In this context, civic space has faced new challenges. The [Law on the Control, Regularisation, Operation and Financing of NGOs and Similar Organisations](#) (NGO Law) introduces strict controls on the operation and financing of social organisations, with provisions that could limit their autonomy and operability. [International organisations](#), as well as international protection mechanisms such as the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#), the [Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression](#) and the [Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela](#) have warned about these measures.

For its part, the draft [Law against Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Similar Expressions](#), approved in its first reading in April 2024, has raised concerns due to its ambiguous wording, [the breadth of its sanctions](#) and its possible use to restrict legitimate expressions of opinion and public action. During its discussion in the National Assembly, [several United Nations rapporteurs sent communications to the Venezuelan government](#) expressing their concern about the bill, due to its potential danger of restricting human rights such as freedom of expression, and urging a review of the text.

Similarly, various organisations have documented legal and administrative actions taken against organisations, human rights defenders and social activists, especially after the presidential elections in July 2024. These actions have included [attacks](#), court summonses, restrictions on mobility, stigmatisation campaigns and an increase in arbitrary detentions, which have raised concerns among national and international organisations.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in July 2025, the National Assembly [agreed to declare](#) the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, [persona non grata](#) and requested the permanent closure of the Office established in Venezuela, which has also suffered in the recent past from [tensions between the government and human rights protection mechanisms](#).

Despite these conditions, Venezuelan civil society remains active, deploying initiatives in defence of human rights, humanitarian assistance, monitoring of public policies and community strengthening, maintaining its commitment to the promotion of an informed and participatory citizenry.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The year 2024 was marked by the context of the presidential election held on 28 July 2024. Both before and after the presidential elections, the environment for the exercise of civic rights in Venezuela has been marked by new legal and institutional developments that affect the enabling environment for civil society, as well as events that restricted the exercise of the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression.

These events, [documented by international organisations](#), range from restrictions and attacks on the work of civil society organisations and defenders, to restrictions, repression of demonstrations and detention of protesters, to censorship and harassment of independent media and journalists, self-censorship practices generated by fear of reprisals, and official narratives that seek to misinform and stigmatise.

According to the organisation [Espacio Público](#), in the run-up to the 28 July election, 98 complaints of violations of freedom of expression were documented. Notable examples include the closure of radio stations and the blocking of digital media. Between [January and August 2024](#), there were 249 cases, representing 507 complaints of violations of the right to freedom of expression, an increase of 89% compared to the number of cases in the same period in 2023. [Espacio Público](#) reports that this trend continues in 2025, with harassment of journalists and professionals such as economists.

Freedom House describes Venezuela as ["Not Free"](#) in its 2024 index, noting the criminalisation of protests and harassment of independent journalists. In January 2025, signal cuts were reported on critical community radio stations in rural areas, affecting press freedom.

[Freedom of assembly and expression in Venezuela](#) continued to deteriorate in 2024. The [Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict](#) recorded an increase in demonstrations in defence of civil and political rights, as well as greater repression by state security forces and other civilian groups. This same situation was highlighted by [Amnesty International](#).

In this context of protests, there was an increase in arbitrary detentions. Human rights defenders were also detained by the state, notably Rocío San Miguel, [detained since 2024](#), and Carlos Correa, detained on 7 January 2025 and [released 16 days later](#).

The [Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict](#) reported 5,226 protests in 2024, 52% of which were related to civil and political rights, influenced by the electoral context of 2024. In fact, July was the month with the highest number of protests recorded by the organisation, as it was the month in which the presidential election took place.

During July, repression and the use of force by state security forces and armed civilians was evident, and [organisations documented deaths, disappearances and detentions in the context of these protests](#).

The Anti-Fascism Bill of April 2024 has been criticised for its ambiguous wording. [Experts](#) have pointed out, among other things, that the law adopts an ambiguous and generic definition of fascism, equating it with other practices such as neoliberalism, moral conservatism, classism, and racism, concepts that do not correspond to the definition of fascism, which could facilitate the persecution of free thought and the repression of political dissent.

A relevant note in the text is that its articles mention some of the higher values of the Venezuelan legal system, enshrined in the National Constitution, but political pluralism is expressly omitted.

This bill provides for prison sentences of up to 12 years, heavy administrative fines, and the closure of political or social organisations. As noted, this text has not yet been enacted as law and is therefore not in force. However, it is a bill that is in line with texts such as the [Constitutional Law Against Hate, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance](#), approved in 2017.

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

Until recently, civil society organisations were not subject to specific regulations, operating under various laws such as the [Civil Code](#), the [Law on Political Parties, Public Meetings and Demonstrations](#) (last amended in 2010), which is only applicable to political parties, the [Law on Registries and Notaries](#) (last amended in 2021), as well as other general tax and labour regulations.

The [Law on the Control, Regularisation, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-Profit Social Organisations](#) (2024) has brought about a new development in the specific regulation of this type of organisation. The law establishes the requirement to declare donors, financial statements and project objectives, and also establishes a set of administrative sanctions in the event of non-compliance, such as the imposition of heavy fines and the dissolution of the organisation by removing it from the register.

Since its entry into force, there have been no documented cases in which the law has been directly applied. However, there have been documented technical closures or pauses in the work of several organisations that have considered that the implementation of the law makes their work unviable. One of the most relevant cases was that of [Alimenta la Solidaridad](#).

The complexity of the [registration](#) requirements—such as the submission of audited quarterly reports, bank statements proving the origin of funds, and the creation of internal compliance committees—has exceeded the capacity of many organisations, especially community and grassroots organisations.

The law responds to a pattern of restrictions on the enabling environment that has intensified over the last five years. [Previously, in 2021](#), an administrative ruling was published for the

Unified Registry of Obligated Entities before the National Office Against Organised Crime and Terrorism Financing, which imposed obligations on CSOs, including the disclosure of the beneficiaries of all programmes implemented by them. Finally, this ruling was reprinted and some of the provisions applied to CSOs were eliminated.

There is currently a [bill to reform the International Cooperation Law](#), which has not yet been discussed, but the known versions reveal [greater regulation of CSOs and, in particular, control over their financing](#).

CSOs [warn](#) that the regulations could dismantle critical human rights and humanitarian aid projects.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society organisations' (CSOs) access to resources has been affected by legal restrictions, cuts in international cooperation and economic difficulties. Although foreign cooperation is essential, its availability has decreased and its management has become more complex.

The situation has worsened following the partial cut in [USAID funding in 2024](#), which later led to the total dismantling of the international cooperation agency, [ending or significantly reducing](#) funding for various programmes worldwide. Venezuelan CSOs [have begun to suffer the consequences](#), and figures such as [Feliciano Reyna](#), president of Acción Solidaria, have warned of the negative impact of the reduction in international cooperation from the United States, which, among other things, contributed 50% of the total funds received for the United Nations Humanitarian Response Programme in the country.

On the other hand, the financial environment is conditioned by regulations derived from the Law against Organised Crime and Terrorism Financing, which involve audits, reports and beneficiary declarations. This has led to bank blockages and delays in project implementation, especially in border communities and rural areas, complicating the operation of CSOs that manage local assistance.

In terms of institutional sustainability, the resource crisis has led to staff cuts, project suspensions and the closure of activities. The inability to access stable funding has forced several CSOs to implement combined models: cooperation networks between organisations, small local donations or self-financing. These strategies have been useful, but are still insufficient to sustain community operations in the medium and long term.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Formal dialogue between the State and civil society remains limited and centralised, with little transparency or follow-up. In general, [opacity prevails](#) in Venezuela. Despite the fact that the right to access public information is regulated in the [Constitution and other laws](#), there is a persistent lack of epidemiological, economic and social data, which hinders citizen participation, accountability and the population's right to make informed decisions.

In 2024, only two official dialogues with CSOs were [convened](#), organised by the Ministry of Popular Power for Internal Relations, Justice and Peace and the Office of Citizen Services. These meetings mainly addressed the distribution of humanitarian aid and emergency logistics, without including issues of political reform or accountability.

According to [OCHA's Venezuela 2025 Humanitarian Report](#), published in April 2025, there are 14 sectoral groups or "clusters" (health, food security, protection, education, WASH, etc.) that meet quarterly to coordinate humanitarian response. However, the participation of local CSOs in these spaces is less than 30%, with priority given to international NGOs and UN agencies. This imbalance limits the representation of specific community needs and weakens the relevance of responses.

The report also notes that in 2024, the government approved USD 1.15 billion for humanitarian assistance, of which only 42% was channelled through NGOs and civil society mechanisms; the rest was administered directly by state agencies, reducing transparency in project implementation.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In official public discourse, independent civil society is frequently stigmatised and discredited. Government officials have used state media to launch stigmatising and harassing messages against civil society organisations. State media outlets such as [VTV](#) and [Radio Nacional de Venezuela](#) have described CSOs as "mercenaries in the service of foreign powers" and "agents of foreign intervention", with explicit accusations on high-reach programmes such as "[Con el Mazo](#) Dando". These narratives fuel a climate of criminalisation and delegitimisation of rights defence work.

In the face of this discourse and the context described above, civil society organisations in Venezuela continue to play a fundamental role in providing assistance to people in need of humanitarian aid, recording and documenting human rights violations, and raising awareness of the situation in Venezuela. This work is recognised in [various spaces](#).

In the digital sphere, campaigns such as #VocesEnResistencia (Voices in Resistance), promoted by organisations such as Efecto Cocuyo, have managed to mobilise thousands of users on Twitter and Telegram, spreading testimonies from vulnerable communities. However, they still face censorship and administrative sanctions that limit their visibility and operability.

This contrast between official and alternative discourses reflects the struggle for public space and the construction of narratives in Venezuela, where civil society seeks to strengthen its legitimacy in the face of the prevailing state narrative.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Internet access in Venezuela is heavily restricted and monitored. [According to Freedom House](#), in 2024 Venezuela is listed as "Not Free" in its *Freedom on the Net* report due to intermittent blockages of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube during protests and key dates. In addition, in March 2025, regional mobile signal outages were reported in Carabobo and Mérida, [documented](#) by Ve Sin Filtro, which left entire communities without connection at critical moments.

Official [blocking](#) orders [have affected](#) independent media websites and CSO organisations—such as El Pitazo, TalCual, Armando Info, and Efecto Cocuyo—forcing internet service providers to deny them access without clear legal grounds. In addition, instant messaging services (Telegram and WhatsApp) have suffered interference and slowdowns in areas of

high social mobilisation, making it difficult for civil society to coordinate. Recently, President Maduro has made statements [against the WhatsApp messaging service](#).

In this context, the [Anti-Hate Law](#) and the Penal Code have been used to charge activists with terrorism and hate crimes for critical messages on social media. Several human rights defenders and ordinary citizens have been arrested for tweets or [WhatsApp](#) statuses [under](#) Articles 19 and 20 of the Anti-Hate Law. These restrictions and constant surveillance erode trust in the digital environment, impede the free flow of information, and hinder the work of civil society organisations.

Challenges and opportunities

New elections will be held in July 2025, this time for mayors and municipal councils, so a tense atmosphere is expected again for CSOs, especially those whose work is related to civil and political rights. Since the presidential election in July 2024, the digital space and access to information have been restricted, and strategies of disinformation and stigmatisation towards defenders, journalists and other relevant actors have increased.

Despite the overall situation, CSOs and defenders are willing to continue operating, implementing new working and security mechanisms to enable them to continue their advocacy work, both inside and outside Venezuela. This requires greater cohesion and networking, applying additional security measures to ensure the continuity of work, not only in the field of human rights defence, but also in humanitarian assistance.

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