



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Jordan

March 2025

Context

Since 2022, Jordan's civic space has been categorised by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) as 'repressed'. Jordan's shrinking of civic space in 2024 is largely due to the escalation of crackdowns by authorities, as well as the increase in legislation that facilitates them. These add to longstanding bureaucratic and regulatory restrictions on forming associations, receiving foreign funding, and coping with the constraints of donor dependence.

In 2024, Jordanian authorities infringed on freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, mostly through clamping down on pro-Palestine protests and political advocacy. This included large-scale arrests and detentions. By exercising the wide-ranging scope of criminal offences granted by the [2023 cybercrime](#) bill, security forces were able to target activists and journalists based on their online expression, especially those that critiqued Jordan's policies towards Israel. Despite accepting a OHCHR recommendation in January 2024 to reconsider the bill, Jordan's government and Parliament have made no discernible progress on the matter.

2024 also saw legal consolidation of [funding restrictions on Jordan's civil society organisations \(CSOs\)](#) at the same time as a global cooling of development aid, including from the United States, Jordan's largest donor. These two events place the financial position of Jordan's civil society in great jeopardy.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Jordan's [Constitution](#) (Article 15; 16, ii and iii) specifies that exercising one's freedoms of association, expression, and press must adhere to prevailing legal regulation. Constraints to free assembly include a 48-hour notification period for public meetings/marches and their routes (thus making spontaneous demonstrations illegal), slogan and imagery prohibitions, with assemblies subject to dispersion by authorities, per the Constitution (Article 16, i), [Assembly Law No. 7 \(2004\)](#), and [Instructions Regulating Public Assemblies and Demonstrations](#) (2011).

Pro-Palestine demonstrations in Jordan continued into 2024. Violent dispersion and detention of peaceful demonstrators have been key incursions on freedom of association and peaceful assembly. In March 2024, security forces employed [increasing force at protests](#) around Amman's Israeli embassy, including tear gas and beating, and [ultimately detaining about 500 individuals](#). In April 2024, Jordanian police [arrested and ordered the unlawful deportation of a Syrian university student](#), who was on the way to film a pro-Palestine protest. Apart from the pro-Palestine protests, freedom of association has also been violated through discretionary dissolutions of various political parties, which [Jordanian courts upheld in 2024](#), despite [2022 electoral law reforms](#).

In practice, Jordan's surveillance, intimidation, and persecution of activists and journalists has had a significant cooling effect on the scope of public and political expression. In 2024, crackdowns on freedom of expression commonly invoked the 2023 cybercrime law, particularly related to online speech and advocacy. Between August 2023-24, Jordanian authorities charged [hundreds of people](#) under the cybercrime law for social media posts, such as those that criticised Jordan's policies towards Israel. Throughout 2024, [reporters were arrested](#) for covering pro-Palestine protests. In May 2024, the police [raided the offices of Al-Yarmouk Television](#), shutting them down. In June 2024, [Hiba Abu Taha](#) became the first journalist sentenced to prison under the 2023 cybercrime law, followed by [Ahmad Hassan al-Zoubi](#) as the second in July 2024.

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

The legal environment for civil society is quite restrictive. Prior government approval is legally required for most legal forms of CSOs. Different legal forms are governed under different laws and ministries — societies by the [Societies Law No. 51 \(2008, amended in 2009\)](#); labour unions and business associations by the [Labor Law No. 8 \(1996, last amended 2023\)](#); non-profit companies by the [Companies Law No. 22 \(1997, last amended 2023\)](#). Almost all CSOs in Jordan are societies. The corresponding Societies Law gives authorities considerable power over registration processes (enabling them to approve or reject applications without needing to provide explanations) and includes constraints on operational freedom, such as prohibitions of ‘political or religious goals’ and allowing government representatives into meetings. Receiving foreign funds requires prior approval from the Council of Ministers.

Most CSOs can be dissolved by relevant authorities without judicial oversight. For example, the Minister of Social Development ([Societies Law, Article 19](#)) possesses significant authority to dissolve or suspend societies, and the Minister of Labor ([Labor Law, Article 116](#)) has similar powers over labour unions and business associations.

Near the end of 2023, the contentious [Cybercrime Law No. 17 \(2023\)](#) was passed despite [local](#) and [international](#) pushback. By criminalising vaguely-defined offences such as ‘false news’, ‘promoting strife’ and ‘defamation of religion’, the law allows for broad interpretations to restrict freedom of expression and suppress dissent.

2024 has seen authorities increasingly applying the cybercrime law to crack down on activism (see Principle 1), even amid [renewed civil society calls in 2024](#) to revoke it. Jordan accepted an early 2024 [recommendation](#) during the Universal Periodic Review to reassess the law, but there has been no advancement from government or Parliament to date. The cybercrime law further constrains already-limited press freedoms; for example, the [Publication Law's 2012 amendments](#), which had [added](#) further government authorisation constraints on electronic publications.

Finally, administrative detention ‘allows authorities’ to legally detain anyone without charge (under the rationale of them being a threat to public order), which was amply used in the 2024 pro-Palestine protest detentions (see Principle 1).

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society actors in Jordan face a weak domestic philanthropic sector, with [increasing legal constraints on fundraising](#), and limited available government funding. Instead, local CSOs are heavily dependent on international donors.

Receiving foreign funding requires prior approval from the Council of Ministers. This time-intensive process often results in delays, discretionary application, and occasional denials — [especially during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Formerly, after 30 days had passed with no response from the Council after submitting a foreign funding request, the request would automatically be approved; this clause was [removed in December 2023](#).

Donor reliance of CSOs also compromises their operational independence, as CSOs must prioritise donor-set agendas rather than autonomously addressing local needs and aspirations. International donors typically prefer short-term projects and allocate funding accordingly, and their hesitance to cover operational expenses or invest in long-term capacity building ultimately restricts CSOs’ ability to enhance their governance structures and develop their staff. This [ongoing lack of sustainable funding](#) has sidelined local CSOs as mere ‘subcontractors’ to international NGOs.

Local CSOs also face financial access challenges in Jordan’s private sector. A lack of clear signals from financial regulators means that banks’ treatment of CSOs is not uniform. For example, uneven de-risking measures, associated with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing initiatives, complicate basic financial transactions.

Finally, 2024's global cooling towards development aid, including from the upcoming Trump administration in the US, had already begun to fan fears of funding shortfalls in Jordan's CSO sector — to be more fully realized in 2025. The political conditions of aid also came to the fore in 2024 as [donors pressured local CSOs to remain 'neutral' on the Israeli assault on Gaza](#).

4. State openness and responsiveness

Relationships in Jordan between civil society and government are limited. Some of Jordan's international processes do procedurally solicit civil society input, such as the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (under the UN Human Rights Council), the [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) (under the Paris Agreement), and [Voluntary National Review](#) (under the Sustainable Development Goals). In these venues, a handful of CSOs often participate. However, the scope of these formal consultations, especially those for *government-led* policy processes, is often constrained and perfunctory. There is [no institutionalised framework](#) for requiring civil society input. Government officials frequently perceive CSOs as mere service providers instead of collaborative partners in governance. Within CSOs, royal NGOs and INGOs are prioritised for government engagements (often depending on pre-existing personal connections), whereas local CSOs, especially those outside of Amman capital centre, are [marginalised](#).

Communications with civil society are not transparent, as in the then-Prime Minister's blanket [denial](#) of civic freedom violations in arrests over pro-Palestine demonstrations. Technical details in legal frameworks governing CSOs and civic freedoms are used as pretense for crackdowns, as in the [May 2024 shutdown of Al-Yarmouk Television](#). A [2024 report revealed](#) that at least 35 civil society members in Jordan have been targeted with Pegasus spyware, including activists, lawyers, and journalists. The Jordanian government is believed to be responsible for this digital surveillance, which facilitates already-longstanding harassment and persecution of civil society actors.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

The ballooning of Jordan's CSO sector in the last decade has overlapped with the entrenchment of widespread sectoral donor-dependence, including its constraints on the development of independent priorities, agendas, and capacities. CSO grassroots mobilisation remains weak, primarily due to public scepticism and limited engagement with local communities. This couples with [perceptions](#) that CSOs are at 'high-risk' of corruption and their being maligned as a political vessel for foreign agents. Civil society as a whole is generally a weakly understood concept with low visibility; Jordan's media coverage of CSOs remains limited and [heavily monopolised by royal NGOs](#), who enjoy a far better public perception than that of 'civil society'. The civil society sector is also often perceived as being on the sidelines of political reform and processes, most recently during 2011. However, in the last decade, a handful of CSOs, and CSOs organised in coalitions, have established more public credibility and visibility, particularly through their advocacy and service work.

Over the past year, the civil society sector has seen some [mobilisations](#) in support of the Palestinian cause. In October 2023, prominent civil society organisations in Jordan issued a [unified condemnation](#) of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and Western support, and have continued their advocacy for the Palestinian cause throughout their 2024 [engagement](#) with international organisations.

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next months, Jordan's civil society will likely face increased application of the 2023 cybercrime law to repress fundamental freedoms, including through persecution of

journalists and activists. Jordan's CSO sector will feel the effects, in immediate sectoral job losses and stopping of important public service programmes, of the recent USAID funding cancellations and shrinking of many European donor aid budgets. As at only 7 February, [395 jobs had already been lost at Jordan's INGOs, and a minimum of 35,555 individual beneficiaries](#) will receive disruptions to USAID-supported services. Finally, as the new Trump administration makes clear its stances in the Middle East and policies towards Israel and Gaza, Jordan's civil society will have to adapt and prepare to mobilise effectively if necessary.

As the vast spillover effects on beneficiaries and beyond begin to surface for Jordan, civil society has an opportunity to reflect on its donor reliance and refocus discussion on what operational and financial localisation will mean in a changing aid landscape. This can also be read as an opportunity for more inter-CSO alliances and for addressing transparency and internal governance concerns.

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