



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Mauritius

September 2025

Summary

Mauritius upholds constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, assembly, and association. However, civil society actors, particularly human rights defenders and LGBTIQ+ groups, face growing restrictions. Assemblies are increasingly monitored, and legal ambiguities in the Public Gathering Act create uncertainty around notification requirements. Arbitrary arrests, censorship, and reprisals—such as job discrimination—are reported. Oversight bodies like the National Human Rights Commission and Independent Police Complaints Commission suffer from limited independence and resources. The legal framework for registering civil society organisations (CSOs) is generally supportive. Access to sustainable resources remains a challenge. International funding remains accessible, with support from organisations like UNDP.

State engagement with civil society is mostly ad hoc. While CSOs contribute meaningfully to service delivery and advocacy, there are no formal mechanisms for collaboration. Coordination among CSOs is weak, and systematic monitoring of government performance is rare. Civil society is viewed as a cornerstone of democracy in Mauritius, promoting participatory governance and social change. However, civic participation is low, particularly among rural populations and those with limited education. Public trust in political freedoms is limited, with many citizens hesitant to engage in political activities.

Digital freedoms are generally protected. However, in 2024, access to social media was briefly suspended, and journalists were silenced online. These practices have ceased under the current government, but vigilance remains essential.

Despite challenges, Mauritius remains a multicultural and socially cohesive society, with active civic platforms and interfaith dialogue promoting inclusive engagement.

Context

Unlike many African countries, Mauritius achieved independence without violence or repression. Civil society engagement on the island has experienced periods of both heightened activity and decline. Notably, the 1970s saw activism led by women and the declaration of a state of [emergency](#). However, civic activism waned during the mid-1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the rise of a market-driven economy and near full employment. While the new government in power since November 2024 has pledged to expand civil liberties and democratic space, civil society faces several persistent and emerging challenges that must be addressed to fully realise these promises. Additionally, while Mauritius has successfully acquired sovereignty over the Chagos Islands, the plight of the Chagossians living in Mauritius since their displacement has been the subject of [criticisms](#). In 2025, Mauritius was classified as "[Free](#)" by Freedom House, with a Global Freedom Score of 86 out of 100—an improvement from 85 in 2024. This upward trend reflects ongoing progress in protecting fundamental freedoms for civil society. In recent years, civil society has shifted toward thematic advocacy, exemplified by the creation of platforms such as [No To Coal](#) (2013) and [Aret Kokin Nu Laplaz](#) (2019).

Mauritius remains a multicultural and socially cohesive society, with the [last major ethnic riot](#) occurring in 1999. The Council of Religions [encourages](#) interfaith dialogue and coordinates religious leadership, although religious nationalism and identity politics persist as underlying

currents. While civil society rights are constitutionally protected, they face increasing threats, including arbitrary arrests, privacy violations, censorship, and a lack of investigation into gender-based violence—particularly under the previous regime in 2024. There is no dedicated legal framework that supports or protects CSOs working specifically on human rights, and access to resources is limited. Since 2019, 75% of corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding has been centralised under the National CSR Foundation. Although international funding is available, there is no legal framework to facilitate access.

Political leadership tends to be opportunistic, with civil society consultations largely limited to election periods. Despite playing a role in policy formulation, CSOs lack a formal platform for engagement with the state. Civic participation remains low, especially among men, rural populations, and those without formal education. Key challenges include advocating for legal reforms and strengthening institutional support for human rights defenders.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Civil society actors in Mauritius are constitutionally guaranteed the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly under Sections 12 and 13 of the [Constitution](#). The Supreme Court has generally upheld these rights, interpreting them in ways that limit government overreach. However, these freedoms are increasingly constrained in practice. Legislation such as the [Public Gathering Act \(1991\)](#) and the [Prevention of Terrorism Act \(2002\)](#) provides the state with broad powers to restrict public assemblies. Although the Public Gathering Act aligns with Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by requiring only notification—not permission—for public meetings, authorities have frequently [denied](#) gatherings, even those exempt from notification (e.g., with fewer than 12 participants, [as per Section 2\(a\)12](#)). This has created legal uncertainty and a chilling effect on public demonstrations.

Human rights defenders [face growing threats](#), including arbitrary arrests, invasive surveillance, censorship, and a lack of investigation into gender-based violence. LGBTIQ+ activists, in particular, [report](#) reprisals such as job loss and employment discrimination. The government's failure to prosecute religious groups that [blocked](#) the 2018 Pride Parade further illustrates the selective enforcement of rights. The [National Human Rights Commission \(NHRC\)](#), whose leadership is appointed by the Prime Minister, has adopted [internal policies](#) that restrict human rights defenders working with detainees from submitting complaints or accessing prisons. This raises concerns about its independence. Similarly, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), established in 2018, has struggled with limited resources and allegations of political interference, leaving many complaints unresolved.

Overall, while constitutional protections exist, the operational environment for civil society in Mauritius is increasingly restrictive, particularly for those working on sensitive human rights issues. Mauritius' Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but media freedom faces [challenges](#) due to government viewpoint dominance in state-run media and legal pressure on journalists and critics. The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) often reflects government viewpoints, while private media offers competition but can face legal pressure. [Legal restrictions](#) on hate speech and incitement, such as the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Act, can stifle political speech and criticism of the government. The ICT Act has led to government pressure on journalists and critics, [concerns](#) about misuse of social media for disrespectful comments, limited access to information, and potential undue influence of money in politics due to the absence of laws on electoral campaign financing.

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

The legal framework governing civil society in Mauritius is primarily established through the [Registration of Associations Act \(1979\)](#) and the [Foundations Act \(2012\)](#). These laws provide the basis for the creation, registration, and operation of civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations and charitable foundations. Registration is mandatory for associations seeking legal recognition and access to funding or public engagement.

The Registration of Associations Act requires a minimum of seven individuals to form an association, with a formal constitution and governance structure. While the registration process is generally accessible, the Registrar of Associations holds broad discretionary powers, including the authority to refuse registration if an association is deemed contrary to public interest. This introduces a potential barrier, particularly for organisations working on politically sensitive or rights-based issues. The law also imposes significant administrative obligations, such as annual audits, general meetings, and financial reporting. While these requirements promote transparency and accountability, they are burdensome for smaller or community-based organisations with limited capacity. Moreover, the Foundations Act 2012, which governs charitable foundations, includes similar provisions for registration, governance, and reporting, but does not provide specific protections for advocacy-based or rights-focused foundations.

Importantly, there is no dedicated legal framework that supports or protects CSOs working specifically on human rights. This gap has been [acknowledged](#) by the Law Reform Commission, but no legislative action has followed. Furthermore, the current legal regime lacks explicit safeguards against state interference. The Registrar has investigatory powers to inquire into an association's affairs, and oversight bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission are appointed by the executive, raising concerns about institutional independence.

While Mauritius offers a generally enabling environment for CSO registration and operation, the lack of legal protections, discretionary powers of authorities, and absence of a human rights-specific framework undermine the independence and security of civil society actors. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure a truly supportive and protective legal environment for civil society.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Access to sustainable resources remains a critical challenge for civil society in Mauritius. While the legal framework [requires](#) that businesses allocate 2% of their annual profits to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, 75% of these funds have been [collected by the State](#) through the National Corporate Social Responsibility Foundation since 2019. This shift has significantly reduced direct access to CSR funding for many NGOs, limiting their financial autonomy and flexibility. Many [organisations](#) have publicly expressed concerns about their inability to fully implement programmes, which may be against the government or its actions and policies, due to fear of losing state-controlled funding.

The National Social Inclusion Foundation (NSIF), operating under the Ministry of Social Integration, is the main body responsible for allocating public and CSR funds to NGOs. While its mission includes promoting transparency and accountability, many NGOs report that

the application process is administratively burdensome, involving complex paperwork and lengthy procedures. This diverts time and resources away from core programmatic work. Moreover, NGOs have been reluctant to voice concerns about the process, fearing that criticism could jeopardise their funding.

While the NSIF publishes general [funding frameworks](#) and eligibility criteria, there is limited public data on actual disbursements, approved projects, or funding decisions. This lack of transparency can hinder strategic planning and equitable access to resources.

In terms of foreign funding, there are currently no legal restrictions preventing NGOs from applying for or receiving international support. Organisations such as the UNDP [continue to fund](#) projects in Mauritius. However, there is no dedicated legal framework to facilitate or protect access to foreign funding, which may expose NGOs to future regulatory uncertainty. Auditing and reporting requirements are another area of concern. A [national study](#) found that many NGOs struggle with compliance due to the lack of NGO-specific accounting standards, limited financial expertise, and insufficient regulatory guidance. These challenges hinder transparency and weaken public trust. Regarding banking access, there are no formal restrictions on CSOs opening bank accounts, and Mauritius maintains [a well-regulated](#) financial system. However, informal or unregistered groups face difficulties accessing banking services due to due diligence and compliance requirements. While financial inclusion is high overall, informal organizations often remain excluded from formal financial systems.

While Mauritius provides some avenues for CSO funding, the centralisation of CSR funds, administrative burdens, lack of legal protections for foreign funding, and limited financial transparency collectively constrain the enabling environment for civil society. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that CSOs can operate independently, sustainably, and effectively.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Mauritius [lacks a dedicated](#) Access to Information (ATI) law, despite repeated commitments by successive governments to introduce one. As a result, civil society entities do not have a legally enforceable right to access public information. Instead, information remains governed by outdated laws such as the [Official Secrets Act of 1972](#), which restricts access to government records and Cabinet proceedings. Without a formal ATI framework, requests for information are often processed inconsistently and without clear timelines, and there are no formal grievance mechanisms for CSOs to appeal denied requests.

While CSOs are [occasionally consulted](#)—particularly during pre-budget discussions or on sector-specific issues such as health, education, and gender—there is no institutionalised mechanism for their participation in policymaking. Engagement is largely ad hoc and dependent on political will. Although some CSOs have made notable [contributions](#) to service delivery and advocacy, government feedback on whether their input is incorporated into policy is rarely provided, limiting transparency and accountability.

Initiatives like the Civil Society Network Against Corruption and the [Partnership Approach](#) under the Independent Commission Against Corruption show some promise for structured engagement, but these remain issue-specific and do not represent a broader framework for CSO participation.

The absence of a formal participatory infrastructure, combined with limited access to information and lack of feedback mechanisms, undermines the enabling environment for civil society. Strengthening legal guarantees for transparency and institutionalising CSO

participation would significantly enhance democratic governance and civic engagement in Mauritius.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In Mauritius, civil society is seen as [a vital part](#) of democracy, promoting participatory governance and social change. CSOs and NGOs are [recognized](#) for their involvement in human rights advocacy, community development and [environmental protection](#). However, there is a need to strengthen their capacity and influence, particularly in ensuring sustainable development and addressing social inequalities. Positive portrayals include [active participation in public life](#), advocacy for human rights, community development, environmental stewardship, and resistance to state overreach. Areas for improvement include enhancing CSO capacity, addressing social inequalities, improving collaboration and coordination, and promoting civic participation.

A [survey](#) reveals that Mauritians, particularly men, rural residents, and those without formal education, are less likely to participate in civic and political activities, with only 30% attending community meetings in the previous year. Additionally, 71% feel political rights are constrained and are cautious about joining political organisations and voting.

In Mauritius, civil society is generally viewed as a [constructive](#) force in democracy, [contributing](#) to human rights advocacy, environmental protection, and community development. Public discourse in government statements and mainstream media often reflects this positive framing, especially when CSOs are involved in service delivery or non-political causes. However, this support is not uniformly extended to all civil society actors. Organisations addressing politically sensitive issues—such as governance, corruption, or minority rights—often face exclusion from public dialogue and policy processes. While there is no widespread use of disparaging language by state officials, the absence of consistent recognition and inclusion of minority-led or rights-based CSOs reflects a selective engagement approach.

Civic education is formally included in the school curriculum under the banner of citizenship education, but its implementation is limited and often avoids critical engagement with civil society's role in democratic accountability. This contributes to a broader political culture where civic participation remains low. [Surveys](#) show that men, rural residents, and individuals without formal education are significantly less likely to engage in civic or political activities, with only 30% attending community meetings and 71% expressing concerns about constrained political rights.

The lack of institutionalised engagement, combined with weak public discourse around inclusive civic participation, undermines the enabling environment for civil society. To strengthen this environment, Mauritius would benefit from more inclusive public narratives, structured participation platforms, and civic education that empowers citizens to engage meaningfully in democratic processes.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Mauritius has made significant strides in digital access, with internet [penetration](#) reaching 79.5% in 2025 and mobile broadband subscriptions exceeding the population. However, access remains uneven, with a persistent rural-urban digital divide, as 59% of the population

lives in rural areas where infrastructure and affordability challenges persist. While mobile data is [relatively affordable](#) (averaging \$3.09 per GB), costs remain a barrier for low-income and rural communities.

The legal framework governing digital rights includes the [Data Protection Act](#), [Cybercrime and Cybersecurity Act](#), and related ICT policies. These laws provide a foundation for digital security and privacy, and Mauritius has been [praised](#) for aligning with international standards such as the Council of Europe's Convention 108+. However, implementation gaps remain, and civil society has raised concerns about surveillance and data misuse, particularly following the 2024 [social media blackout](#) during the general elections. The government [blocked access](#) to platforms like Facebook and TikTok for 24 hours in response to leaked recordings involving public officials. Though the ban was lifted after public backlash, it raised serious concerns about freedom of expression and digital repression. Reputed journalists such as Nawaz Noorbux, Jean Luc Emile, Al-Khirz Ramdin and Krish Kaunhye in Mauritius were [silenced](#) by the government, with some being discredited online and denied access to prisons. However, such practices have discontinued since a new government came into power in November 2024, but it is important to remain on guard.

Proposed amendments to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Act in 2021 also sparked [fears](#) of mass surveillance, including plans to intercept and decrypt social media traffic via proxy servers. While these proposals have not been implemented, they signal a trend toward restrictive digital governance.

Overall, while digital tools have empowered civil society, surveillance risks, temporary shutdowns, and legal ambiguities undermine trust and limit the secure use of digital platforms. Strengthening protections for digital rights and ensuring equitable access are essential to maintaining an enabling environment for civil society in Mauritius.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the 2024 government in Mauritius has pledged to expand civil liberties and democratic space, civil society faces several persistent and emerging challenges that must be addressed to fully realise these promises. One major concern is the lack of a dedicated legal framework for civil society organisations, particularly those working on human rights and governance. Without legal protections against state interference and clear guidelines for foreign funding, CSOs remain vulnerable to political shifts and regulatory uncertainty.

Digital rights and freedoms also require urgent attention. Although civil society actors have leveraged digital platforms effectively, 2024 incidents—such as the temporary social media blackout and proposed surveillance legislation—highlight the fragility of digital freedoms. Ensuring secure, affordable, and equitable access to digital tools, especially in rural areas, is essential for inclusive civic engagement.

Access to resources remains constrained by the centralisation of CSR funding and burdensome administrative requirements. Many NGOs fear losing financial support if they voice concerns, which stifles transparency and advocacy. Additionally, the absence of formal mechanisms for CSO participation in policymaking and limited feedback from government institutions weaken trust and reduce the impact of civil society contributions.

Despite these challenges, there are clear opportunities. The current political transition offers a window to advocate for legal reforms, institutional safeguards, and structured CSO-state collaboration. Investing in capacity building and civic education can empower CSOs and

citizens alike. By addressing these gaps, Mauritius can foster a more resilient, inclusive, and enabling environment for civil society to thrive.

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