

Timor-Leste

Country Focus Report

October 2025

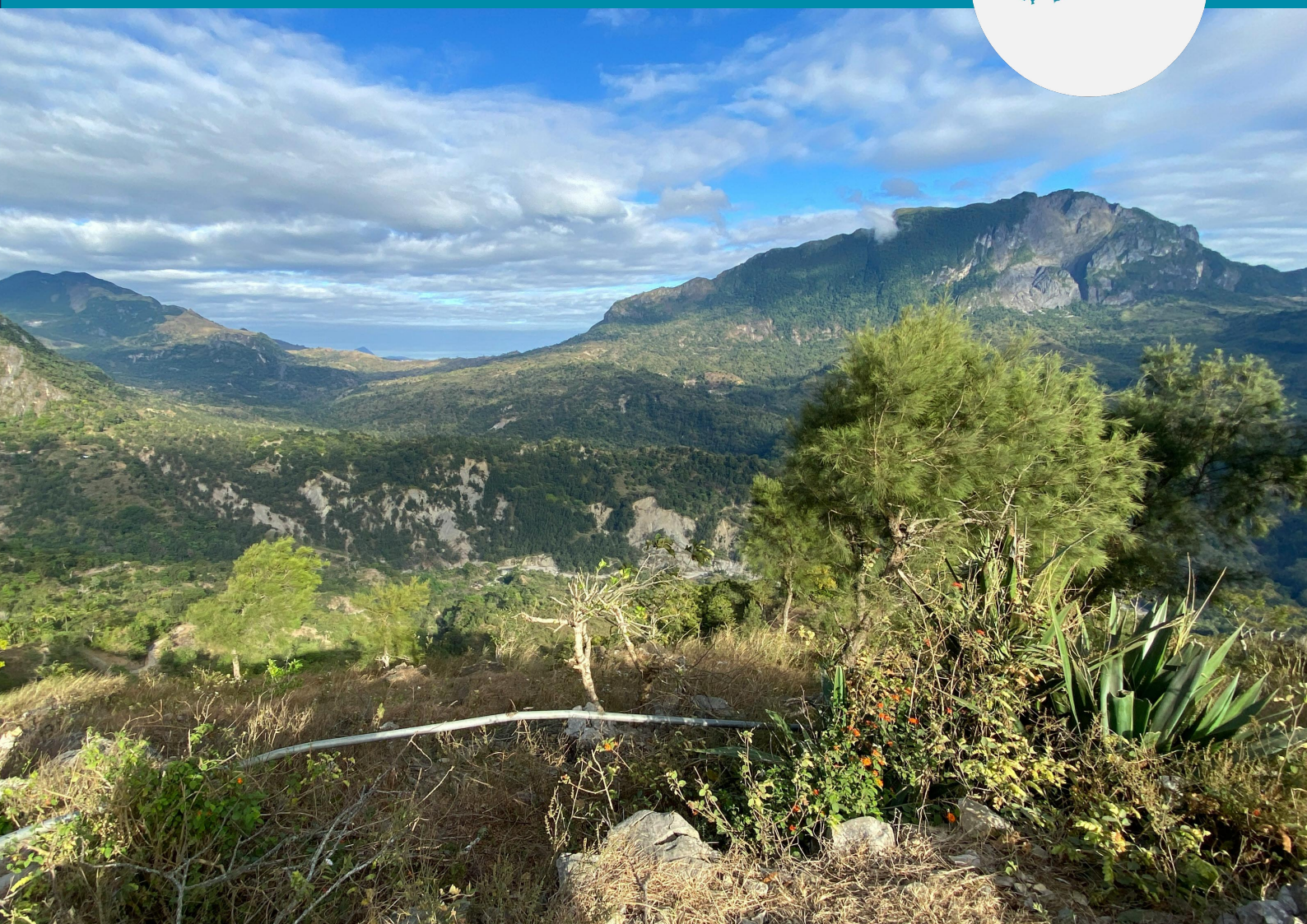


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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES

- 1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms**
- 2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework**
- 3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources**
- 4. Open and Responsive State**
- 5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society**
- 6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment**

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further

supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

In 2002, Timor-Leste (East Timor) became an independent nation after more than four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule and two decades of Indonesian annexation. Independence came after a [1999 UN-supervised referendum](#), which triggered widespread violence, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure—roads, schools, hospitals, and utilities were almost entirely ruined. Since then, the government has prioritised political stability and economic recovery, but structural challenges persist. Despite progress, [42% of the population](#) still lives below the poverty line, and [unemployment remains high](#), particularly among youth.

Timor-Leste is often regarded as a democratic success story in Southeast Asia. It consistently ranks as “Free” in Freedom House’s [Freedom in the World index](#) for 2025—the only country in the region with this status. The [Constitution](#) guarantees fundamental freedoms, including expression, assembly, and association (Articles 40–43), and the country is [party](#) to seven of nine core international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Timor-Leste also performs strongly in global press freedom rankings, placing [39th worldwide](#) in 2025.

However, civic space remains fragile and “narrowed” according to CIVICUS Monitor. While civil society organisations (CSOs) operate relatively freely, there are recurring concerns about restrictive laws and practices. For example, Law No. 1/2006 [restricts demonstrations](#) near government facilities, a measure invoked to [ban protests](#) during Pope Francis’s 2024 visit. Draft laws on criminal defamation and cybercrime have periodically resurfaced, [raising fears](#) of curbing free expression, even though some proposals have expired without adoption. Journalists, despite constitutional protections, face sporadic harassment, fostering self-censorship. These dynamics illustrate that formal democratic norms coexist with discretionary practices that narrow civic space and undermine the robustness of rights protections in Timor-Leste.

The enabling environment for civil society reflects similar contradictions. Timor-Leste’s legal framework, including [Decree Law No. 5/2005](#) and the Civil Code (Law No. 10/2011), facilitates CSO registration and operation, and CSOs have historically shaped policy on peacebuilding, fiscal reform, and human rights. However, sustainability is a critical challenge. Donor funding has declined sharply since the post-independence period, and government support remains minimal. From a peak of 450 registered CSOs in 2008, [only 339 remained](#) by 2019, with fewer than 100 considered viable long-term. This attrition weakens advocacy capacity and limits citizen participation at a time when structural vulnerabilities—such as reliance on oil revenues, and governance dominated by independence-era elites—persist. Without renewed investment and institutional reforms, Timor-Leste risks a deterioration of the civic resilience that has underpinned its democratic success.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: 3.8/5 ¹



Timor-Leste's [Constitution](#) provides a strong legal foundation for civic freedoms, yet practical implementation reveals persistent gaps that constrain democratic participation. Reflecting these challenges, the CIVICUS Monitor currently rates Timor-Leste's civic space as Narrowed, signalling that while formal guarantees exist, systemic gaps and restrictive practices continue to constrain the full exercise of fundamental rights. Freedom of association, enshrined in Article 43 and supported by Decree-Law No. 5/2005, provides a robust legal foundation for civil society, but bureaucratic hurdles and weak enforcement mechanisms limit accessibility for smaller organisations. Similarly, while the right to peaceful assembly is protected under Section 43 and operationalised through Law No. 1/2006, restrictive provisions such as the 100-metre rule and inconsistent policing practices have led to arbitrary dispersals and excessive force during protests. Freedom of expression remains comparatively vibrant, with Timor-Leste ranking among Southeast Asia's most open environments; however, recurrent legislative attempts to introduce restrictive measures and informal pressures on journalists underscore the fragility of these gains. Reflecting these challenges, the CIVICUS Monitor currently rates Timor-Leste's civic space as [Narrowed](#), signalling that while formal guarantees exist, systemic gaps and restrictive practices continue to constrain the full exercise of fundamental rights. Collectively, these dynamics highlight a tension between formal legal protections and systemic weaknesses that risk shrinking civic space unless institutional capacity and regulatory safeguards are strengthened.

1.1 | Freedom of Association

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2024.

Freedom of association in Timor-Leste is constitutionally guaranteed under [Article 43 of the Constitution](#), which affirms the right of all individuals to form and participate in associations without prior authorisation, provided they pursue lawful purposes and respect democratic principles. This constitutional safeguard is complemented by [Decree-Law No. 5/2005](#), which establishes the legal regime for non-profit corporate bodies, including associations and foundations. The law frames associativism as a cornerstone of democratic participation and social integration, recognising its role in enabling citizens to organise around shared interests, advocate for rights, and contribute to public policy. It also imposes accountability requirements to ensure transparency in the management of funds, particularly those originating from state contributions or international donors.

In practice, all CSOs must register with a notary to acquire legal personality as either an association or a foundation, a process that confers rights and obligations under national law. While this requirement provides a formal structure for CSO operations, it also introduces bureaucratic hurdles that can disproportionately affect smaller or community-based organisations with limited resources. Moreover, the regulatory framework, though aligned with international norms such as the [ICCPR](#), lacks robust enforcement mechanisms to guarantee equal access and prevent arbitrary restrictions. This tension between formal guarantees and practical implementation underscores a broader challenge. Sustaining an enabling environment for civil society is difficult in a context where institutional capacity remains weak and political dynamics can influence regulatory discretion.

1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Freedom of peaceful assembly in Timor-Leste is constitutionally guaranteed under [Section 43 of the Constitution](#), which affirms that all individuals may assemble peacefully and unarmed without prior authorisation, and recognises the right to demonstrate in accordance with the law. This provision aligns with international standards, notably Article 21 of the ICCPR, which Timor-Leste ratified in 2003. To operationalise these rights, the National Parliament enacted [Law No. 1/2006 on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration](#). While the law affirms that assemblies do not require prior authorisation, it introduces significant restrictions, most notably the “100-metre rule” under Article 5, which prohibits demonstrations within 100 metres of government offices, residences of state officials, military installations, diplomatic missions, political party offices, and critical infrastructure such as ports, airports, and power stations. Demonstrations [must also occur](#) between 8:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., and organisers are required to notify authorities at least four days in advance.

In practice, these restrictions have had a chilling effect on civic activism. Security forces often interpret the 100-metre rule broadly, dispersing protests and, in some cases, using excessive force. For example, during Pope Francis’s visit in September 2024, [authorities banned](#) solidarity demonstrations related to West Papua, citing national security concerns, and detained activists who defied the ban. More recently, [student-led protests](#) in September 2025 against parliamentary plans to purchase luxury vehicles escalated after police deployed [tear gas and rubber bullets](#), injuring several demonstrators. These incidents underscore systemic gaps in law enforcement training and the absence of clear operational guidelines to balance public order with constitutional rights. Civil society organisations, notably [JSMP](#), have repeatedly called for amendments to Law No. 1/2006 to bring it into full compliance with international standards, recommending a review of Article 5 and the adoption of safeguards against arbitrary dispersal. Without such reforms, the legal framework risks perpetuating a pattern where formal guarantees of assembly coexist with restrictive practices that undermine democratic participation.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in Timor-Leste is constitutionally guaranteed under [Articles 40 and 41 of the Constitution](#), which affirm the right of all citizens to express opinions and disseminate information freely. In practice, the country is widely regarded as one of Southeast Asia's most open environments for free expression, ranking among the top globally for press freedom according to Reporters Without Borders. However, this right is exercised with caution. Criticism of political leaders or state institutions can trigger investigations by authorities, creating a climate of self-censorship among journalists and activists. Such cases highlight the tension between formal guarantees and informal pressures that shape the boundaries of permissible speech.

The regulatory framework governing media and expression is anchored in the [Social Communications Law \(Law No. 5/2014\)](#), which seeks to balance press freedom with other constitutional rights, including privacy and reputation. The law establishes standards for journalistic ethics and provides for the creation of the Press Council under [Decree-Law No. 25/2015](#), tasked with oversight and dispute resolution. While these mechanisms aim to professionalise the media sector, they have also been criticised for potential overreach. In August 2025, the [government withdrew a controversial clause](#) in a proposed revision of the Social Communications Act that could have criminalised certain forms of reporting, following strong opposition from civil society and international watchdogs. Earlier attempts to introduce criminal defamation and cybercrime legislation have similarly raised concerns about shrinking civic space, even though these proposals ultimately lapsed. These episodes underscore the fragility of expressive freedoms in Timor-Leste. While the legal framework is broadly protective, recurrent legislative initiatives and selective enforcement practices pose latent risks to media independence and democratic discourse.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score: 3.7/5



The legal framework governing civil society in Timor-Leste is broadly permissive but marked by operational and enforcement gaps that affect inclusivity, autonomy, and protection from interference. Under [Decree-Law No. 5/2005](#), any person or entity can establish an association or foundation, and registration procedures are legally clear. However, [practical barriers](#)—such as the absence of online systems, high reliance on in-person notarisation, and indirect costs—disproportionately affect rural and marginalised groups. Appeal mechanisms for denied registration exist in theory but remain opaque and rarely utilised. Compliance obligations, including quarterly tax identification renewals and mandatory social security contributions, add administrative burdens that smaller CSOs struggle to meet.

Once registered, CSOs enjoy formal autonomy over internal governance and activities, with no legal requirement for prior approval of programmes. However, organisations working on sensitive issues—such as human rights and LGBTIQ+ rights—face informal pressures and heightened scrutiny. While there are no statutory restrictions on domestic or foreign funding, donor dependency and informal gatekeeping through umbrella bodies like [FONGTIL](#) constrain access to resources. Protections against arbitrary dissolution are codified in law, and judicial review is available, but enforcement is weak. [Reported cases](#) of police dispersing peaceful protests and detaining activists highlight how security agencies exercise broad discretion, undermining constitutional guarantees under [Section 42](#). Without stronger safeguards against politicised interference and clearer inspection protocols, the operational environment risks perpetuating a gap between formal rights and practical realities.

2.1 | Registration

Timor-Leste's legal framework for civil society registration is primarily governed by [Decree-Law No. 5/2005](#) on Non-Profit-Making Corporate Bodies, complemented by provisions in the [Civil Code \(Law No. 10/2011\)](#). These laws allow any person or entity—including marginalised

groups—to establish an organisation as either an association or a foundation, provided the entity pursues lawful purposes and respects public order and morality. Law no. 5/2005 stipulates that CSOs must register and obtain a certificate giving them a legal status. There are no explicit legal restrictions based on ethnicity, gender, or social status, and the framework aligns broadly with international norms under the ICCPR. However, practical barriers persist. Registration requires in-person submission of notarised documents to the National Directorate of Registries and Notary under the Ministry of Justice, and all founders must attend interviews with registration officers. This process is cumbersome for rural or marginalised communities, particularly given the absence of a fully functional online registration system—a gap [noted by civil society monitors](#). While the government introduced municipal-level registration offices in 2024 to decentralise access, awareness and capacity remain uneven outside Dili.

The procedures for registering a CSO are relatively clear in law but less accessible in practice. Documentation requirements include statutes, identification of founders, and proof of address, which can be challenging for informal community groups or organisations representing vulnerable populations. Although registration fees are nominal, indirect costs—such as travel to municipal centres and notarisation—[can be prohibitive](#) for grassroots actors. Once registered, organisations receive a legal certificate and a Tax Identification Number (TIN), which must be renewed quarterly with the Ministry of Finance. Compliance obligations include payroll tax (10% on salaries above \$500) and mandatory social security contributions (6% by the employer and 4% by employees), as stipulated under the [Social Security Law](#) and reinforced by the [INSS mobile registration system launched in 2025](#). These requirements, while promoting fiscal accountability, add administrative burdens that smaller CSOs often struggle to meet. Furthermore, although the law does not explicitly restrict registration for any group, the requirement for recommendation from umbrella bodies such as [FONGTIL](#) for NGOs seeking government or donor funding introduces an informal gatekeeping mechanism that can disadvantage new or non-affiliated organisations.

Appeal mechanisms for denied registration are not clearly codified, and while decisions can theoretically be challenged through administrative courts, the process lacks transparency and is rarely utilised ([CSO Sustainability Index](#)). This regulatory ambiguity, combined with bureaucratic inefficiencies, underscores the need for reforms to streamline procedures, enhance digital access, and establish clear, independent review mechanisms to safeguard the right to association for all groups.

2.2 | Operational Environment

Timor-Leste's legal framework generally permits CSOs to determine their internal governance, objectives, and activities without prior government approval, as stipulated in Decree-Law No. 5/2005 on Non-Profit-Making Corporate Bodies. Once registered with the Ministry of Justice, CSOs enjoy autonomy in defining their statutes and internal policies, consistent with constitutional guarantees under [Section 43](#). However, this autonomy is not absolute. Organisations working on sensitive issues—such as human rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and disability advocacy—[report informal pressures](#), including heightened scrutiny and delays in administrative processes. While CSOs do not require permits for routine activities, public demonstrations and advocacy campaigns are subject to restrictions under [Law No. 1/2006 on Freedom of Assembly](#), which imposes advance notification requirements and spatial limitations that can indirectly constrain operational outreach.

Administrative oversight is moderate but can create operational bottlenecks. Registered CSOs must maintain compliance with fiscal and labour regulations, including quarterly renewal of Tax Identification Numbers (TIN) and mandatory contributions to social security (6% by

employers and 4% by employees), as mandated by the [Social Security Law](#). Reporting obligations include annual financial statements and activity reports, which are essential for transparency but burdensome for smaller organisations lacking technical capacity. Failure to comply can result in suspension of legal status, limiting access to donor funding and government partnerships.

Regarding funding, the legal framework does not impose formal restrictions on receiving domestic or international resources, and foreign funding remains a critical lifeline for most CSOs. However, donor dependency has created structural vulnerabilities. As external aid declines, organisations face sustainability crises, with fewer than 100 CSOs considered viable long-term out of 339 registered in 2019 ([Belun CSOSI](#)). While there are no explicit legal barriers to foreign funding, informal practices—such as requiring FONGTIL certification for access to government or donor grants—introduce gatekeeping mechanisms that can disadvantage emerging or unaffiliated groups. These dynamics reveal a paradox: the formal legal environment is permissive, yet operational realities—bureaucratic inefficiencies, compliance burdens, and donor dependency—constrain the independence and sustainability of civil society.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

Timor-Leste's legal framework provides formal guarantees against arbitrary interference with CSOs, but enforcement remains inconsistent. [Decree-Law No. 5/2005](#) establishes the legal personality of associations and foundations and outlines grounds for dissolution, which are limited to violations of law or public order. These grounds are explicitly defined, and CSOs theoretically have recourse to judicial review through administrative courts if dissolution is contested. However, in practice, [appeal mechanisms are rarely used](#) due to limited institutional capacity and lack of awareness among CSOs. There are no documented cases of formal dissolution for political reasons, but informal interference—such as surveillance and intimidation—has been reported, particularly against organisations working on human rights and governance issues. For example, in 2023 and 2024, police [detained activists](#) during peaceful demonstrations, including former teachers protesting at the Ministry of Education, and [human rights defenders](#) displaying flags at Nicolau Lobato Airport. These incidents illustrate how security agencies exercise broad discretion under the pretext of maintaining public order, undermining constitutional protections under [Article 42](#).

Legal provisions intended to safeguard CSOs from state interference are weak in operational terms. While the law does not mandate prior approval for CSO activities beyond registration, state inspections and interventions are regulated only minimally. Organisations are subject to compliance checks on financial reporting and labour obligations, including social security contributions, under the [Social Security Law](#). These inspections, though legitimate for accountability, can become burdensome when applied selectively or without clear procedural safeguards. Human rights organisations [report instances](#) of disproportionate scrutiny compared to service-delivery NGOs, reinforcing perceptions of politicised oversight. Furthermore, intelligence agencies have been accused of monitoring CSO activities, particularly those advocating for LGBTQI+ rights or governance reforms, creating a chilling effect on civic engagement. While Timor-Leste has ratified international instruments such as the ICCPR, domestic enforcement mechanisms to prevent arbitrary interference remain underdeveloped. Without stronger judicial remedies, clearer inspection protocols, and independent oversight, the risk persists that state power can be leveraged to constrain organisations perceived as politically sensitive, even in a legal environment that formally guarantees autonomy.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score: 3.5/5



Civil society organisations in Timor-Leste operate in a resource environment that is legally permissive but structurally fragile. While domestic and international funding is accessible—including government allocations through the [Cabinet for Civil Society \(GASC\)](#) and donor support from the [EU](#), UN agencies, and INGOs—accessibility and effectiveness vary widely. Urban CSOs benefit from digital connectivity and proposal-writing capacity, while rural organisations face significant barriers. Donor conditions, including strict reporting and thematic alignment, often constrain autonomy and flexibility, particularly for rights-based groups. Funding remains predominantly short-term and project-based, with minimal core support, creating gaps between cycles that disrupt operations, staff retention, and long-term planning. Tax policies offer no incentives for philanthropy and impose compliance burdens, while banking access is uneven and perceived as vulnerable to surveillance. Although some CSOs are experimenting with income-generating activities and crowdfunding, these efforts remain limited in scale. Without systemic reforms—such as expanding flexible funding, incentivising local philanthropy, and strengthening financial resilience—the sustainability of Timor-Leste’s civil society will remain precarious.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Civil society actors in Timor-Leste have access to a mix of government, donor, and multilateral funding streams, but sustainability remains a critical challenge. Access to resources for CSOs in Timor-Leste is legally permitted and structurally possible, including for those working on sensitive issues or with marginalised groups. The legal framework imposes no restrictions on domestic or international funding, and CSOs are generally free to seek financial support from diverse sources. The government allocates approximately USD 6–8 million annually through mechanisms such as the *Fundo ba Sociedade Civil* (Civil Society Fund), managed by the [Cabinet for Civil Society \(GASC\)](#). These grants are distributed via open calls for proposals, with recent allocations prioritising governance, civic education, and community development.

Additional support comes from ministries such as the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) and the [Secretary of State for Equality \(SEI\)](#), which fund gender and disability-focused initiatives under commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. International donors—including the [European Union](#), UN agencies, and INGOs such as Hivos, Oxfam, and Care International—remain critical sources of funding, though donor dependency and declining aid have led [to sector contraction](#) ([Belun CSOSI](#))—from 450 registered CSOs in 2008 to 339 in 2019, with fewer than 100 considered sustainable.

Information on funding opportunities is accessible through donor websites like [fundsforNGOs](#), social media, and networks like [FONGTIL](#) and the Conflict Prevention Network. However, rural CSOs face digital and capacity barriers, relying on peer networks for updates. Government calls for proposals are typically simplified and available in Tetun, easing participation, while international donors—especially the EU—use complex formats in English, disadvantaging smaller organisations. Calls for proposals from donors such as the EU and UN require detailed compliance with thematic priorities and reporting standards, which can disadvantage grassroots organisations with limited administrative resources.

Tax policies do not provide incentives for charitable donations, but CSOs must comply with payroll tax (10% on salaries above USD 500) and social security contributions (6% employer, 4% employee), creating operational burdens without fiscal benefits ([Social Security Law](#)). These costs, combined with quarterly renewal of Tax Identification Numbers, create [operational burdens](#) without corresponding fiscal benefits for nonprofit entities ([Belun CSOSI](#)). Banking and financial services pose additional challenges: while CSOs can open accounts under [Banco Central regulations](#), rural organisations face barriers due to limited branch coverage and digital infrastructure.

Banking access is generally available under [Banco Central regulations](#), but rural CSOs face infrastructure gaps, and rights-based groups report concerns about financial surveillance, though systemic account freezes have not been documented. These structural and procedural constraints underscore the need for reforms to enhance fiscal incentives, simplify compliance, and expand financial inclusion to ensure equitable access to resources for all CSOs, particularly those serving marginalised communities.

3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

Donor funding remains the primary lifeline for CSOs in Timor-Leste, but conditions attached to these resources often shape organisational priorities and autonomy. Most donors—including the [European Union](#), UN agencies, and INGOs such as Oxfam and Hivos—require structured reporting, financial audits, and adherence to thematic priorities such as governance, gender equality, and human rights. While these conditions are standard for accountability, they can create tension when donor-driven agendas diverge from local cultural norms or community needs. For example, CSOs working on LGBTQI+ rights or anti-corruption initiatives [report](#) difficulties aligning donor frameworks with grassroots realities, which can undermine programme sustainability.

Flexibility varies significantly across donors. UN agencies and INGOs often allow adaptive programming to respond to emerging needs—such as shifting resources to COVID-19 response in 2020—while regional donors like the [EU maintain](#) rigid compliance structures that limit programme evolution. Security concerns are increasingly recognised, particularly for rights-based organisations operating in politically sensitive contexts. INGOs such as Asia Foundation have introduced risk mitigation measures, including flexible timelines and remote monitoring, but smaller CSOs report gaps in donor responsiveness to threats such as [harassment or surveillance](#) during advocacy campaigns. Overall, while donor-CSO

relationships are collaborative, the effectiveness of resources is constrained by compliance-heavy funding models, limited flexibility for contextual adaptation, and insufficient integration of security safeguards—factors that disproportionately affect organisations working on governance and human rights.

3.3 | Sustainability

Civil society actors in Timor-Leste operate in a resource environment dominated by short-term, project-based grants from foreign donors, creating structural fragility. Access to a diverse and reliable pool of funding remains limited; most organisations depend on one or two major donors, leaving them vulnerable to sudden funding withdrawals. For example, the [suspension of USAID](#) programmes in 2025 led to the downsizing or closure of several governance-focused CSOs, illustrating the risks of single-source reliance. Domestic alternatives are minimal: government grants through the [Cabinet for Civil Society \(GASC\)](#) are modest and highly competitive, while local philanthropy remains informal and underdeveloped.

Funding gaps between project cycles are common, resulting in operational delays, staff attrition, and programme discontinuity. This instability undermines strategic planning and long-term impact, as CSOs must constantly pivot to align with shifting donor priorities rather than local needs. The predominance of project-based funding over core or flexible support constrains institutional growth and innovation, leaving organisations unable to invest in capacity building or contingency planning. Tax policies exacerbate these challenges: while CSOs are exempt from corporate tax, they face payroll taxes and social security obligations without incentives for charitable giving, limiting prospects for domestic fundraising.

Despite these constraints, some CSOs are experimenting with self-reliance strategies, including income-generating activities such as renting office space, agricultural ventures, and social enterprises, alongside crowdfunding and volunteer engagement. These efforts remain small-scale but signal a growing recognition that financial diversification is essential to resilience. Without systemic reforms—such as expanding core funding, incentivising local philanthropy, and strengthening financial management capacity—the sustainability of Timor-Leste’s civil society will remain precarious.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score: 2.8/5



Timor-Leste's governance framework formally guarantees transparency and participatory rights under [Sections 40 and 43 of the Constitution](#), yet implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent. While some ministries proactively publish budgets and reports through platforms like the [Budget Transparency Portal](#), the absence of a dedicated Access to Information Law means disclosure practices vary widely, and there are no standardised procedures for requesting information or appealing denials. Civil society participation in policymaking is recognised but often tokenistic, with consultations occurring late in decision-making and rarely influencing outcomes—particularly on governance and rights-based reforms such as the [Public Order Law](#) and proposed [defamation bills](#). Opportunities for engagement remain concentrated in Dili, with limited digital options for rural CSOs. Accountability for the use of CSO input is the weakest link. There are no formal mechanisms for documenting how feedback shapes policy, no published rationales for disregarded recommendations, and no structured spaces for follow-up or monitoring. Timor-Leste's recent accession to the [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) offers a critical opportunity to institutionalise transparency and participatory governance through clear feedback loops, early-stage consultations, and public reporting. Until these reforms are operationalised, civil society's ability to influence policy and hold government accountable remains constrained by ad hoc practices and systemic gaps.

4.1. | Transparency

Timor-Leste's Constitution explicitly guarantees the right to freedom of speech and access to information under [Article 40](#), affirming that “everyone has the right to freedom of speech and the right to receive information, including accurate information,” and prohibiting censorship. This constitutional provision establishes a strong normative basis for transparency, complemented by the [Social Communication Law](#) (Law No. 5/2014), which regulates media and public information dissemination. However, Timor-Leste [lacks a dedicated](#) Access to

Information Law, leaving gaps in enforcement and clarity on procedures for requesting information.

Proactive disclosure is uneven. Some ministries—such as Finance, Justice, and the [National Institute of Statistics](#)—publish laws, budgets, and reports on official websites and through the [Budget Transparency Portal](#). For example, [draft state budgets](#) for 2025 and 2026 were made [publicly](#) available online. However, other agencies, including the GASC, rely primarily on [Facebook](#) for announcements, limiting accessibility and archiving. There is no standardised requirement for publishing draft laws, audit reports, or procurement data across all institutions, [despite commitments](#) under UNCAC to enhance transparency in decision-making.

Procedures for filing information requests remain unclear, as Timor-Leste has not adopted a formal RTI mechanism with defined timelines, fee waivers, or appeal processes. While [judicial review](#) of administrative acts is possible under constitutional provisions, there are no explicit sanctions for unjustified denial of access or failure to disclose information. This regulatory gap leaves civil society and media reliant on informal channels and advocacy to obtain critical data, undermining accountability and public participation.

Without a comprehensive Access to Information Law, standardised disclosure protocols, and enforceable remedies, transparency in Timor-Leste remains partial and inconsistent, limiting the effectiveness of civic oversight.

4.2 | Participation

Civil society participation in policymaking in Timor-Leste is formally recognised but remains inconsistent and often superficial. CSOs are included in consultative structures such as the *National Development Plan Group* and thematic advisory groups, and they are invited to budget consultations and sectoral policy discussions. The Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) acknowledges CSOs as key partners in implementing the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2011–2030 and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, evidence suggests that these engagements frequently occur late in the decision-making process, leaving limited time for meaningful input. For example, consultations on the [General State Budget \(OJE\)](#) are typically held after draft allocations are finalised, reducing CSOs' influence on fiscal priorities. Similarly, advocacy around controversial legislation—such as the [Public Order Law](#), amendments to the life pension law, and proposed [criminal defamation bills](#)—has been met with resistance or tokenistic engagement, highlighting a pattern where participation is treated as a formality rather than a genuine avenue for influence.

Discrimination in participation is not codified in law but, in practice, CSOs working on governance, accountability, and rights-based issues face greater barriers than those focused on service delivery sectors such as health or education. Opportunities for engagement are primarily in-person, concentrated in Dili, with limited digital platforms for remote participation, disadvantaging rural organisations. While networks like [FONGTIL](#) and thematic coalitions help disseminate information, the absence of standardised consultation protocols means timelines and accessibility vary widely. The recent decision by Timor-Leste [to join the Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP) in September 2025 signals a commitment to institutionalise transparency and participatory governance. If implemented effectively, OGP could introduce structured mechanisms for early-stage consultations, digital engagement tools, and accountability measures to ensure CSO input is reflected in policy outcomes. Until such reforms materialize, civil society participation remains constrained by ad hoc processes, limited inclusivity, and insufficient timeframes for meaningful feedback.

4.3 | Accountability

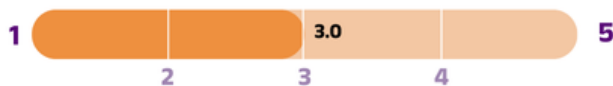
Timor-Leste lacks a formalised system for providing feedback to civil society actors on how their input is integrated into policy decisions. While the Constitution guarantees participatory rights under [Article 40 and 43](#), and recent commitments under the [Open Government Partnership](#) aim to institutionalise transparency, current practice remains ad hoc. Consultations on major policies—such as the [General State Budget](#) and fiscal diversification strategies—rarely include mechanisms for documenting how CSO recommendations are adopted or rejected. Research by [Oxfam](#) confirms that government-led consultations often function as information-sharing exercises rather than genuine co-creation processes, with little evidence of CSO input reflected in final policies.

When feedback is disregarded, explanations are seldom provided, and there are no statutory requirements for publishing rationales or maintaining public records of consultation outcomes. This absence of transparency limits CSOs' ability to hold government accountable. While judicial review of administrative acts is theoretically available, [it is rarely pursued](#) due to procedural complexity and resource constraints. Spaces for follow-up are informal, typically through advocacy networks such as [FONGTIL](#) or donor-supported platforms, rather than government-mandated mechanisms. The government's [recent pledge under OGP](#) to create a multi-stakeholder dialogue mechanism and publish a National Action Plan offers an opportunity to institutionalise feedback loops, including commitments to disclose consultation reports, provide clear justifications for decisions, and establish monitoring dashboards for civil society oversight. Until these reforms materialise, accountability for the use of CSO input remains weak, undermining trust and limiting the effectiveness of participatory governance.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score: 3.0/5



Civil society in Timor-Leste is generally perceived positively, with citizens recognising CSOs' contributions to service delivery, advocacy, and accountability. However, scepticism persists among rural and marginalised communities, where CSOs are sometimes viewed as urban-centric or politically aligned. Media coverage is largely balanced, highlighting development roles but offering limited visibility for governance advocacy, while social media amplifies both engagement and polarisation. Citizens demonstrate strong electoral participation—79.28% turnout in the 2023 parliamentary elections (UNDP)—yet engagement beyond voting remains weak, constrained by geographic isolation and limited civic education. Although the Constitution guarantees equality under [Article 16](#) and reforms such as gender quotas and ratification of the CRPD signal progress, systemic barriers—poverty, cultural norms, and stigma—continue to restrict participation for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ communities. CSOs mitigate these gaps through inclusive programming and local-language outreach, but structural inequalities and weak enforcement of anti-discrimination laws limit impact. Without stronger institutional mechanisms for participatory governance, comprehensive civic education, and targeted inclusion strategies, civil society's potential to foster democratic resilience and equality will remain under-realised.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

The government and political leaders in Timor-Leste publicly acknowledge CSOs as development partners, particularly in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. Official statements often frame CSOs as contributors to service delivery and community empowerment, but their role in governance and rights-based advocacy is more contested. For instance, during debates on the [Public Order Law](#) and proposed [criminal defamation legislation](#), government rhetoric portrayed CSO opposition as politically motivated, signalling a tendency to marginalise critical voices rather than treat them as equal stakeholders.

Media coverage of CSOs is generally balanced, with independent outlets such as GMN TV and Tatoli reporting on civil society initiatives alongside government activities. Positive narratives dominate in development contexts—such as CSO-led disaster response and community health programmes—while advocacy on sensitive issues receives less visibility. Although the media does not systematically undermine CSOs, limited investigative journalism and reliance on official sources can reinforce government framing, reducing public awareness of civil society’s watchdog role.

Dialogue between CSOs and policymakers oscillates between constructive engagement and tokenistic consultation. While CSOs contribute evidence-based recommendations in budget hearings and sectoral forums, their input is rarely integrated into politically sensitive reforms. For example, consultations on pension law amendments and anti-corruption measures were criticised for being rushed and lacking transparency. Social media platforms amplify these dynamics. While they enable CSOs to mobilise support and share research, they also expose activists to harassment and polarising narratives, particularly during election periods. Overall, the culture of public dialogue remains constrained by hierarchical governance norms and limited institutional mechanisms for incorporating civil society perspectives, despite Timor-Leste’s recent [Open Government Partnership](#) commitments to strengthen participatory governance.

5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perception of civil society in Timor-Leste is generally positive, though nuanced. Surveys and qualitative assessments indicate that citizens value CSOs for their contributions to service delivery, advocacy, and community development, particularly in health, education, and disaster response. For example, CSO-led initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-flood recovery in 2021 strengthened trust in their role as development partners. However, scepticism persists among rural and politically marginalised communities, where CSOs are sometimes perceived as urban-centric or aligned with opposition politics. This perception is reinforced when advocacy focuses on governance or anti-corruption reforms, which are often framed as [adversarial by political elites](#).

Citizens’ belief in their ability to influence political decisions is mixed. While voter turnout remains high—[79.28% in the 2023](#) parliamentary elections—active engagement beyond elections is limited. Participation in community initiatives and local governance forums is stronger in urban areas, while rural engagement is constrained by geographic isolation and limited access to information. Civic education is available but fragmented. The national curriculum includes basic content on rights and responsibilities, yet comprehensive civic learning is largely donor-driven and concentrated in Dili. Programmes by CSOs and INGOs, such as Asia Foundation and UNDP, provide community-based civic education, but coverage remains uneven, leaving rural populations with poor understanding of democratic processes. The absence of systematic civic education in schools and limited outreach in municipalities perpetuate gaps in political literacy, undermining citizens’ confidence in their capacity to influence governance. Without stronger institutional integration of civic education and inclusive engagement mechanisms, civil society’s potential to foster participatory democracy will remain underutilised.

5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion

Timor-Leste’s legal framework provides strong formal guarantees for equality and non-discrimination. [Article 16 of the Constitution](#) affirms that all citizens are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, language, social or economic status, and physical or mental condition. The country’s ratification of the UN Convention on

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2023 marked a significant step toward inclusion, reinforcing commitments to equal participation for persons with disabilities. Electoral reforms have also advanced gender equality: the 2006 Electoral Law introduced a quota requiring one woman for every four candidates on party lists, later strengthened to one in three, positioning Timor-Leste among the most progressive in Southeast Asia for women's political representation.

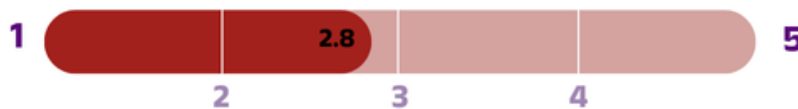
Despite these legal protections, structural and social barriers persist. Poverty, geographic isolation, and limited access to education and technology disproportionately affect women, youth, and people with disabilities, particularly in rural areas. For example, while women hold 38% of parliamentary seats, their participation in local governance remains minimal due to cultural norms and resource constraints. Similarly, persons with disabilities face physical and informational barriers that hinder civic engagement, despite formal rights guarantees. Social attitudes toward diversity are improving but remain uneven; LGBTQI+ communities and ethnic minorities encounter stigma and exclusion in public discourse, limiting their visibility in civic spaces.

Civil society organisations play a critical role in bridging these gaps. Many adopt inclusive approaches, using local languages and participatory methods to engage marginalised constituencies. Initiatives by groups such as Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) and [FONGTIL](#) promote disability rights and gender equality through advocacy and community-based programmes. However, without stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, targeted investment in rural outreach, and cultural change initiatives, civic equality in Timor-Leste will remain aspirational rather than fully realised.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score: 2.8/5



Timor-Leste is one of the last countries in the region without an active submarine fibre optic internet connection. Low-earth-orbit satellite internet (Starlink) became available in the country in late 2024, and the long-awaited submarine fibre optic internet cable is expected to come online later in 2025. In April, the government approved the establishment of a new state-owned enterprise tasked with managing the cable connection, setting wholesale prices and delivering services to government agencies and telecommunications providers.

The digital rights landscape reflects a paradox of strong constitutional guarantees for privacy and data protection that coexist with significant regulatory gaps that leave online freedoms vulnerable. While Article 38 of the Constitution affirms the right to access personal data and restricts processing without consent, the absence of a comprehensive Internet Freedom Law and unified data protection framework exposes citizens and civil society to risks of surveillance, harassment, and informal censorship. Proposed cybercrime legislation, selective blocking, and opaque enforcement practices underscore latent threats to free expression, despite rare instances of nationwide internet shutdowns. At the same time, structural barriers—low connectivity, high costs, and limited digital literacy—compound these challenges, restricting civic participation and advocacy in an increasingly digital world. This chapter examines the interplay between legal protections, emerging risks, and socio-economic constraints shaping Timor-Leste’s fragile digital rights environment.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

Timor-Leste’s Constitution guarantees privacy and data protection under [Article 38](#), granting citizens the right to access personal data and prohibiting processing of sensitive information without consent. However, the country lacks a comprehensive Internet Freedom Law, leaving digital rights vulnerable to regulatory gaps. Civil society has played a critical role in safeguarding online freedoms, notably during debates on the proposed [Cybercrime Bill](#) in

2021, which raised concerns about criminalising whistleblowers, imposing liability on legal entities, and granting broad investigative powers without clear thresholds. Advocacy by CSOs such as La'o Hamutuk and Asia Centre led to revisions, but the bill remains a latent risk to free expression online.

Internet shutdowns are rare in Timor-Leste, with no documented nationwide disruptions during elections or protests, unlike patterns observed in other Southeast Asian states. However, selective blocking and surveillance have been reported during politically sensitive periods. For example, activists advocating for West Papua solidarity in 2024 faced online harassment and monitoring by security agencies. While there is no evidence of systematic content filtering by the state, the absence of transparency in enforcement practices raises concerns about potential misuse of cybercrime provisions for political purposes.

Private platforms such as Facebook dominate the digital space, but their moderation practices lack local accountability. Reports indicate that harmful content—including disinformation during elections—remains inadequately addressed, while legitimate advocacy occasionally faces takedowns under opaque community standards. There are no formal mechanisms requiring platforms to disclose moderation decisions or cooperate with independent oversight. Cases of persecution for online activity are limited but notable: journalists and activists have faced intimidation for social media posts critical of government policies, reinforcing fears of informal censorship. Without a robust legal framework for internet freedom, clear safeguards against surveillance, and accountability for both state and private actors, Timor-Leste's digital rights environment remains fragile despite constitutional guarantees.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

Timor-Leste lacks a comprehensive data protection law, relying instead on constitutional guarantees under [Article 36 and 38](#), which affirm the right to privacy and regulate personal data processing. While sectoral laws—such as [Law No. 17/2011 on Anti-Money Laundering](#) and health regulations—address specific data handling requirements, there is no unified framework for safeguarding digital privacy or defining redress mechanisms for breaches. Consequently, CSOs and journalists remain vulnerable to surveillance and hacking risks without clear legal remedies.

Evidence of state-sponsored cyberattacks or spyware use in Timor-Leste is limited, but concerns persist. Advocacy groups such as La'o Hamutuk and Asia Centre have warned that proposed cybercrime legislation could enable intrusive monitoring by granting broad investigative powers without judicial oversight. While no large-scale hacking campaigns have been documented, reports of targeted phishing and unauthorised access attempts against rights-based CSOs suggest emerging threats, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as elections or protests.

Disinformation and intimidation via social media are growing concerns. Analysts have noted the presence of government-linked accounts and coordinated narratives aimed at discrediting activists advocating for governance reforms and West Papua solidarity. These campaigns exploit the absence of transparency requirements for platform moderation and lack of accountability for state actors. Private platforms like Facebook dominate Timor-Leste's digital space but apply global content policies inconsistently, often removing legitimate advocacy posts while failing to curb harmful misinformation.

Currently, there are no formal appeal mechanisms for CSOs facing online harassment, surveillance, or data breaches. Judicial recourse exists in theory under constitutional

provisions, but enforcement is weak and resource-intensive. Without a dedicated data protection law, independent oversight, and clear sanctions for misuse of digital tools, the security and privacy of civil society actors remain precarious, exposing them to risks that undermine their ability to operate safely online.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Timor-Leste's digital access remains among the lowest in Southeast Asia despite recent infrastructure improvements. As of early 2025, [internet penetration](#) stands at just 34.5%, meaning roughly 486,000 people are online while 900,000 (65%) remain offline. The urban–rural divide is stark: [67% of the population](#) lives in rural areas, where connectivity is scarce and costs prohibitive. While mobile coverage is widespread—with 1.75 million active SIM connections (124% of population)—most subscriptions are for voice/SMS only, not internet.

Affordability is a major barrier. Timor-Leste ranks among [the most expensive](#) markets globally for internet: average fixed broadband costs exceed USD 107/month, while mobile data averages USD 1.92 per GB, compared to USD 0.12 in Cambodia. For households earning less than USD 100/month, these costs are prohibitive. Speeds remain slow—4.85 Mbps for mobile and 6.10 Mbps for broadband—despite the rollout of a submarine cable and [Starlink's satellite service](#) in late 2024, which promises improvements but still requires costly hardware.

Digital literacy is equally constrained. A 2023 [UNCDF survey](#) found low ICT competency among both citizens and CSO staff, with rural populations particularly disadvantaged. While initiatives like Asia Foundation's digital literacy programmes and [UNDP's ICT](#) training for youth have improved skills in urban centres, rural outreach remains minimal. Emerging technologies such as AI are entering policy discourse through the [Timor Digital 2032 strategy](#) and [UNESCO's AI](#) readiness roadmap, but CSOs and citizens lack the infrastructure and skills to leverage these tools effectively.

Overall, high costs, poor connectivity, and low digital literacy perpetuate structural inequalities, limiting CSOs' ability to engage in online advocacy, deliver services, and access global funding. Without targeted investment in affordable broadband, rural infrastructure, and nationwide digital literacy programmes, Timor-Leste risks deepening the digital divide and excluding marginalised communities from civic participation and economic opportunities.

C) Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Government

- Adopt a comprehensive Internet Freedom and Data Protection Law that consolidates constitutional guarantees, includes safeguards against surveillance, judicial oversight, and remedies for breaches.
- Enact an Access to Information Law with clear procedures for requesting information, defined timelines, fee waivers, appeal mechanisms, and sanctions for unjustified denial.
- Amend Law No. 1/2006 on Freedom of Assembly by removing restrictive provisions such as the “100-metre rule” and introducing operational guidelines for law enforcement to prevent excessive force.
- Institutionalise structured consultation and feedback mechanisms by standardising early-stage engagement protocols, publishing summaries of CSO input with justifications, and creating digital platforms for remote participation.
- Establish formal multi-stakeholder advisory councils and mandatory public consultations to ensure CSO input is integrated into governance reforms, particularly on rights-based issues such as anti-corruption and public order laws.
- Implement a fully functional online CSO registration system and strengthen municipal offices to reduce bureaucratic barriers for rural and marginalised groups.
- Introduce tax incentives for local philanthropy through deductions or credits for individual and corporate donations to registered CSOs to encourage domestic resource mobilisation and reduce donor dependency.
- Streamline payroll tax and social security reporting for small CSOs through mobile or online platforms and partner with banks to improve rural access to financial services.
- Invest in affordable connectivity and nationwide digital literacy programmes, prioritising rural infrastructure and subsidies for broadband and mobile data to reduce structural inequalities and enable inclusive civic participation.
- Embed civic education in the national curriculum to strengthen citizens’ understanding of democratic processes and their role in governance, reducing reliance on donor-driven initiatives.

2. Recommendations for Civil Society

- Mobilise coalitions to advocate for adoption of an Access to Information Law, implementation of Open Government Partnership commitments, and reforms on assembly and expression.
- Provide legal and administrative assistance for grassroots CSOs on compliance, registration, and fiscal reporting through resource hubs or partnerships.
- Develop income-generating activities, social enterprises, and crowdfunding strategies to reduce reliance on short-term donor grants and ensure financial resilience.
- Train CSOs—especially rural groups—on proposal writing, budgeting, digital tools, and evidence-based advocacy to improve access to funding and policy influence.
- Strengthen digital security and advocacy capacity by providing training on cybersecurity, privacy tools, and safe online practices, while building coalitions to promote accountability in cybercrime legislation.
- Establish independent monitoring and reporting platforms to document online harassment, surveillance, and content takedowns, creating evidence-based advocacy for policy reform.
- Expand outreach to marginalised groups—women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities—using local languages and culturally sensitive approaches to ensure inclusive advocacy.
- Build partnerships with independent media and train CSOs in strategic communication to amplify watchdog roles, counter adversarial narratives, and promote balanced coverage of governance issues.
- Create rapid response networks for documenting and reporting rights violations such as protest dispersal, intimidation, or censorship, enabling timely engagement with media and international watchdogs.
- Form coalitions to eliminate informal gatekeeping practices, such as mandatory endorsements from umbrella bodies for funding eligibility, ensuring fair access for unaffiliated or emerging organisations.
- Invest in capacity for policy analysis and consultation processes to enable timely and substantive contributions to governance reforms.

3. Recommendations for Donor Community

- Shift from short-term, project-based grants to multi-year core funding that supports institutional development, staff retention, and long-term planning.
- Simplify application and reporting processes by providing templates in Tetun, reducing compliance complexity for small and rural CSOs, while maintaining accountability standards.
- Remove informal requirements for umbrella body endorsements and prioritise grants for rural, grassroots, and marginalised organisations to ensure equitable access to resources.

- Provide technical and financial assistance for drafting and implementing rights-based legislation, including Access to Information Law, and support civil society campaigns promoting transparency and accountability.
- Finance government efforts to implement online CSO registration systems and develop digital portals for proactive disclosure and participatory consultations.
- Invest in platforms that enable remote engagement and feedback loops, and fund civic tech initiatives that strengthen CSO monitoring of government commitments.
- Support nationwide civic education programmes and CSO training on participatory governance, digital advocacy, and inclusive engagement to ensure sustainability beyond project cycles.
- Fund projects that expand affordable internet access in rural areas and finance digital literacy programmes targeting marginalised communities and CSOs.
- Provide resources for independent media outlets to enhance investigative journalism, diversify sources, and reduce reliance on official narratives.
- Offer training for journalists and activists on digital security and safe protest coverage to mitigate risks of harassment and violence.

4. Recommendations for International Community

- Encourage Timor-Leste to meet transparency and participatory governance obligations under Open Government Partnership and UNCAC through multilateral platforms.
 - Provide technical assistance to harmonise national laws with ICCPR standards on association, assembly, and expression, and support reforms to streamline CSO registration and clarify appeal processes.
 - Advocate for protection of civic space and compliance with human rights norms using diplomatic channels and UN mechanisms, particularly during debates on restrictive laws.
 - Monitor and report on civic space restrictions through regional and global platforms, addressing informal interference and ensuring protection for rights-based CSOs.
 - Facilitate regional peer learning and knowledge exchange on best practices for Access to Information, participatory governance, CSO sustainability, and financial diversification.
 - Organise multi-stakeholder dialogues involving government, CSOs, and technology companies to address platform accountability, disinformation, and surveillance risks.
 - Support legal and policy reforms that promote resource mobilisation, including tax incentives and frameworks for sustainable CSO financing.
 - Promote alignment with international norms on data protection and internet freedom through capacity-building programmes and regional cooperation.
-

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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