

# Benin

## Country Focus Report 2025



Credit: Yannick Folly



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# A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

An environment conducive to civil society refers to the set of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and encourage the actions of organisations and engaged citizens. In such an environment, civil society can express itself freely, participate actively in political and public life, and contribute to the decisions that shape its context, without fear of reprisals. This implies the existence of a protective legal and regulatory framework, access to sustainable and flexible resources, and the guarantee of safe spaces, both physical and digital. A favourable environment is also characterised by openness and responsiveness in state governance, transparency and accountability in decision-making, and a culture of inclusive participation. Positive values, norms and practices of state and non-state actors towards civil society reinforce and consolidate this environment.

To assess the state of this environment, this report draws on six enabling principles, each analysed through a combination of quantitative scores, qualitative observations and recommendations developed by members of our network. Rather than ranking countries according to a single index, the approach adopted distinguishes between strengths and areas requiring particular attention, thus offering a nuanced and accurate picture of the enabling environment for civil society.

To assess the state of the enabling environment, we use the following six principles:

## SIX PRINCIPES HABILITANTS



**Respect et protection des libertés fondamentales de la société civile**



**Cadre juridique favorable au travail des acteurs et actrices de la société civile**



**Ressources accessibles et durables**



**État ouvert et réactif**



**Culture publique et discours favorables à la société civile**



**Accès à un environnement numérique sécurisé**



In this thematic report, each enabling principle is assessed using a quantitative score and supplemented by analysis and recommendations written by members of our network. Rather than proposing a single index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, distinguishing between strengths and areas requiring particular attention.

The conclusions presented in this report are based on the diverse knowledge and perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with civil society representatives to discuss and assess the state of the enabling environment in August 2025. Their collective contribution enriches the report with a participatory and informed assessment. This main contribution is then supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and reinforce the analysis. This explains why elements relating to the attempted coup d'état of October 2025 have been included in the "context" section. However, this event and its consequences are not reflected in the scores that had been adopted previously.

## Brief overview of the national context

To understand the situation in Benin in 2025, it is essential to place it in the context of the political, institutional and legislative trajectory that began in 2018 under the presidency of Patrice Talon, whose governance has profoundly reshaped the country's political and civic environment. Since then, several major reforms have gradually contributed to a significant restriction of civil liberties and a strengthening of state control over the civic sphere. The revision of the Constitution, led by President Patrice Talon, the adoption of the Digital Code criminalising certain forms of online expression, the limitation of the right to strike to ten days per year under penalty of dismissal, and the entry into force of the 2018 Penal Code, particularly through its Articles 240 and 241, have considerably strengthened the legal constraints on fundamental freedoms. These legislative and institutional developments have created a climate of fear, legal uncertainty and deterrence, which has profoundly changed the ways in which citizens, workers, journalists and civil society organisations (CSOs) express themselves, organise and mobilise.

This tightening of the political and legal framework was particularly evident during the 2019 parliamentary elections, which were marked by the total exclusion of the political opposition from the electoral process. This exclusion, widely condemned at national and international level, led to widespread popular protests, which were violently suppressed by the security forces, resulting in several deaths.

[At least five people were killed during the 2019 protests in Benin](#), mainly around the parliamentary elections on 28 April. On 26 February, at least one person was shot dead in Kilibo during clashes between protesters and security forces, and between April and June, four others, either protesters or bystanders, were shot dead. This period was marked by the militarisation of law enforcement and the excessive use of force, including live ammunition against demonstrators, while dozens of people were arrested and prosecuted for peaceful demonstrations. The lack of effective prosecution of the alleged perpetrators of these serious human rights violations has contributed to a lasting sense of impunity. The post-election crisis of 2019 thus marks a major turning point in Benin's political governance under President Patrice Talon, resulting in a further closure of the political space, the judicialisation of political activities, the detention or prosecution of several opposition figures, and a structural weakening of democratic pluralism.

The subsequent presidential elections, organised with only two candidates from the same political movement supporting President Patrice Talon, reinforced perceptions of a gradual closure of the democratic process and a concentration of executive power. This already tense political context worsened further as the next elections approached. On 7 December 2025, an attempted coup, which resulted in several deaths, heightened national tensions and reinforced

the climate of security concerns. The main person responsible for this attempt, Colonel Pascal Tigri, has not been arrested and remains at large. At the same time, several arrest warrants have been issued against members of the political opposition living in exile outside Benin, fuelling serious concerns about the possible use of the justice system for political ends and the restriction of fundamental political freedoms.

With the presidential election scheduled for 26 April 2026, the electoral context appears particularly closed. The political opposition has been excluded from the electoral process for failing to obtain the required number of sponsorships from members of parliament, a mechanism introduced under Patrice Talon's governance and widely criticised by national and international actors for its restrictive and discriminatory nature. In addition, several members of parliament initially elected under the opposition banner were forced to resign from their parties before being repositioned within political groups aligned with the president.

Added to this political and institutional context are growing security challenges in northern Benin, marked by the spread of insecurity linked to transnational armed groups. Under Patrice Talon's presidency, these security challenges have served as justification for a substantial strengthening of security measures and exceptional measures, sometimes to the detriment of civil and political rights. In this climate of increased control, physical mobilisations and public demonstrations have become extremely rare since 2020, while the dynamics of repression have shifted in part to the digital space, characterised by increased surveillance of social media, legal proceedings for critical opinions and widespread self-censorship among citizens, journalists and civil society actors.

This cumulative context helps to explain why, despite the existence of legal frameworks that are formally favourable to CSOs and official rhetoric promoting citizen participation, civic space remains severely restricted. Civil society organisations operate in an environment marked by successive restrictive reforms, high legal risks, informal political and administrative pressure, and a general climate of intimidation, which significantly limit their capacity for action, expression, mobilisation and effective contribution to the promotion of human rights, inclusive governance and public accountability.

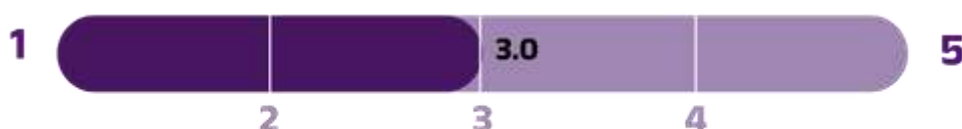
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# B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score:



The human rights situation in Benin has been described as in sharp decline. Although the 1990 Constitution guarantees freedom of association (Art. 25), expression (Art. 23) and peaceful assembly (Art. 25), the implementation of these rights is severely hampered by new restrictive legislation. In May 2021, Benin's civic space was downgraded from "obstructed" to "repressed" by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). This deterioration is due to the adoption of repressive laws, notably the Digital Code (2018) and the Penal Code (2018), whose vague provisions are used to prosecute journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders (HRDs).

Freedom of association is one of the fundamental pillars of civic space in Benin. It is enshrined in Article 25 of [Law No. 90-32 of 11 December 1990 on the Constitution of the Republic of Benin, amended by Law No. 2019-40 of 7 November 2019](#). This same principle is also enshrined in Article 25 of the new [Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025](#) and guarantees everyone the right to freely associate without prior authorisation. However, while the creation of an association is free, access to legal personality requires an administrative declaration, which is an essential condition for fully exercising the rights associated with associative status.

#### 1.1 | Freedom of association

Under the provisions of Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Benin, any person may create an association without seeking prior authorisation. This fundamental principle is reaffirmed by the new Law of 2025 on associations. However, an association that wishes to

exist officially as a legal entity and have legal personality, in particular to open a bank account or sign contracts, must complete an administrative declaration procedure. This procedure enables it to obtain a receipt certifying its legal recognition. There is therefore no formal legal recognition for "de facto associations". They are tolerated but do not enjoy any protection as legal entities: they cannot take legal action, sign contracts or engage in collective liability.

In practice, the administration imposes model statutes and internal regulations on associations wishing to register, even though these are the sole responsibility of the internal body responsible for adopting them. These requirements, which are often arbitrary, serve as implicit grounds for refusal. In the event of non-compliance, the application for a receipt is rejected without the issuance of a document formally certifying this refusal, which deprives the association of immediate recourse.

Article 25 of Law 2025-19 confirms this freedom by removing all prior controls, while requiring a declaration in order to obtain legal recognition. The text specifies that associations are formed freely without prior authorisation. This provision makes the creation of associations accessible to all and demonstrates a genuine desire to strengthen freedom of association and stimulate civic engagement. Members of unregistered groups are not automatically prosecuted simply because they have not made an official declaration. However, they remain particularly vulnerable to administrative harassment, refusals of authorisation, and practical obstacles that hinder their activities and limit their capacity for public action.

Since 2019, trade unions and human rights organisations have been subject to increasing restrictions. The right to strike has been significantly curtailed by Article 13 of Law No. 2018-34 of 5 October 2018, amending and supplementing Law No. 2001-09 of 21 June 2002 on the exercise of the right to strike in the Republic of Benin.

Opposition party activities and gatherings have been regularly banned or dispersed by the authorities. On 1 December 2024 in Ouénou, the police [prevented](#) a meeting of activists, MPs and leaders of the *Les Démocrates* party from taking place, even intervening at the private residence where the meeting had been moved. On 25 January 2025, an activity organised by the DAV Assouka movement, affiliated with Les Démocrates, scheduled to take place on private land in Adjagbo, was [prevented](#) by the local authorities, who deployed the republican police to stop it from going ahead. On 9 February 2025 in Abomey-Calavi, an accountability demonstration organised by the party's MPs was also [banned](#) by the police, prompting protests from *Les Démocrates* against the restriction of their political freedoms. During the same month, MP Nourénou Atchadé's accountability tour in Ouaké, intended to meet with his constituents, was [prevented](#) by local authorities, despite public venues having been previously identified and notified to the administration. Another tour by the party to meet and report to its activists in the same municipality was blocked, with the authorities prohibiting access to the public venues planned for the activity. On 22 March 2025, a training activity organised by the party at its departmental headquarters in Dassa-Zoumè was [interrupted](#) by the republican police on the pretext that it was not authorised, which the party denounced as an obstruction of its political activities.

Targeted restrictions also apply to thematic demonstrations. In 2018, a demonstration against taxes on the use of social media was blocked in Cotonou. Student and trade union movements have also been targeted: in 2019, trade unionist Joseph Aimassè was sentenced to two months in prison for calling for an unauthorised demonstration, and in 2020, student gatherings at the University of Abomey-Calavi were suppressed on the pretext of COVID-19 health measures, resulting in the death of one student who was shot. In June 2024, protests against the cost of living were banned and dispersed by the authorities.

These examples show how the systematic use of bans, often justified on administrative or security grounds, severely restricts freedom of peaceful assembly in Benin and affects both the political opposition and citizen or social movements.

## 1.2 | Freedom of peaceful assembly

The right to demonstrate is not fully guaranteed in absolute terms; the law provides for fairly broad criminal offences that leave considerable room for interpretation by the authorities. With regard to demonstrations, several provisions of [Law No. 2018-16 on the Penal Code](#) allow for extensive repression. Article 237 "prohibits any unarmed gathering that could disturb the public peace". Other articles regularly denounced in debates on freedom of demonstration are [Articles 238, 239, 240 and 241 of the Penal Code](#). Among the legal texts often cited as problematic for freedom of expression and citizen participation, Article 240 of the Penal Code, also used in the context of the Digital Code, occupies a central place. Its broad and ambiguous wording opens the way to extensive interpretations that could disproportionately restrict freedom of expression online and offline. Article 240 states that:

*"Any direct incitement to an unarmed gathering (...) shall be punishable by imprisonment for one (01) year if it has been followed by effect, and if not, imprisonment for two (02) to six (06) months and a fine of 100,000 to 250,000 CFA francs, or one of these penalties only."*

*"Any direct provocation (...) to an armed gathering shall be punishable by imprisonment for one (01) to five (05) years if it has been followed by effect, and if not, imprisonment for two (02) to six (06) months and a fine of 200,000 to 1,000,000 CFA francs, or one of these penalties alone."*

This provision raises serious concerns for several reasons. Firstly, it does not provide any clear definition of key concepts such as "direct provocation", "gathering", "followed by effect" or "unarmed gathering". This lack of precision leaves a very wide margin of interpretation to the authorities in charge of investigations and prosecutions, thus paving the way for arbitrary applications. Secondly, the text carries a real risk of criminalising citizen expression. A simple Facebook post, a call for a peaceful demonstration or even a message relaying social criticism could be interpreted as a form of "provocation", unduly exposing citizens, journalists or civil society actors to criminal sanctions. The severity of the penalties provided for – up to one year's imprisonment, or even five years in certain circumstances, accompanied by heavy fines – also has a significant deterrent effect. Faced with this threat, many civil society organisations opt for self-censorship and avoid speaking out publicly on sensitive issues, which considerably weakens democratic debate. Finally, in the digital context, this provision is often linked to articles of the Digital Code that punish content deemed to be disruptive to public order. This combination increases the vulnerability of internet users, exacerbating restrictions on digital rights and freedom of expression online.

The consequences for civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders are particularly worrying. Faced with legal uncertainty and the risk of broad interpretations, many organisations are now reluctant to call for citizen mobilisation, even when it is strictly peaceful and falls within the normal exercise of public freedoms. This fear is also reflected in the digital space: publications on public reforms, governance or human rights violations tend to be reduced or written with extreme caution. Committed actors often prefer to self-censor to avoid any accusations of "provocation" or disturbing public order. In this context, journalists, activists and whistleblowers become particularly vulnerable. A misinterpretation of their words by the authorities can be enough to expose them to significant legal risks, thereby reinforcing a climate of legal uncertainty and constant pressure on freedom of expression and action.

Articles 237 to 241 of the Criminal Code give the authorities broad powers of interpretation to classify demonstrations as disturbances of public order, even when they are peaceful or symbolic. Although no formally documented cases were recorded in 2024–2025, these provisions have a structural deterrent effect due to previous precedents and broad administrative interpretations. They perpetuate a climate of legal fear in which non-violent citizen mobilisations could, in theory, be equated with serious offences or even security threats. This context contributes to the gradual erosion of the right to protest and reinforces self-censorship within the civic sphere.



The right to peaceful assembly is guaranteed in principle by the Constitution, but practice since 2019 has seen severe restrictions (bans, increased administrative requirements) and excessive use of force during the 2019 election period and subsequent years, resulting in deaths and injuries during demonstrations. The African Commission expressed its formal concern in 2019 about the human rights situation in Benin. During the legislative elections of 28 April 2019, the repression of demonstrators was marked by a disproportionate use of force by the Beninese Defence and Security Forces. The military and security forces were equipped with firearms, sometimes heavy weapons. The adoption on [7 November 2019 of Law No. 2019-39 granting amnesty for criminal, tortious and contraventional acts committed during the April 2019 legislative elections](#) deprived victims of excessive use of force by the police and their beneficiaries of their right of recourse, thereby promoting impunity for the officers involved.

With regard to public gatherings, the new Penal Code provides, in Article 237 read in conjunction with Article 240, for penalties of two months to one year's imprisonment for any person who publicly makes a speech, prepares or distributes writings or printed matter during an unarmed gathering likely to disturb the public peace. In its concluding observations in 2020, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern about these legislative changes, stressing that the provisions on assembly risk discouraging human rights defenders and restricting their freedom of action, as indicated in these [comments](#) by experts from the International Labour Organisation.

We often refer back to the years prior to 2024 in this document because the current context and events cannot be understood without mentioning the events that took place, particularly from 2019 onwards. Most of the laws currently in force stem from the political crisis of 2019, when the police and army used lethal weapons to suppress protests. The extensive application of Articles 237 to 241 of the Penal Code is regularly denounced. [According to Amnesty International](#), these provisions allow many peaceful gatherings to be arbitrarily classified as disturbances of public order. The organisation recommends a review of these articles, which, as they are currently worded, leads to the criminalisation of simple peaceful meetings. Critics point out that the restrictions do not always take the form of explicitly prohibited areas but are based on a very broad interpretation of concepts related to maintaining order, which can deter the population from exercising their right to demonstrate. And this is precisely what has happened. On 27 April 2024, two demonstrations organised in Cotonou by trade unions to protest against the high cost of living were [dispersed](#) by security forces, who used tear gas to disperse small groups of demonstrators. More than 30 participants, including three trade union leaders, were briefly detained. Among them were Anselme Amoussou, general secretary of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Benin (CSA-Benin), Moudassirou Bachabi, president of the General Confederation of Benin Workers (CGTB), and Noël Chadaré, general secretary of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Benin.

On 1 May 2024, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Benin (CSTB) organised another demonstration in Cotonou, which was also banned by the local authorities. Security forces again dispersed the participants, arresting 72 people, 20 of whom were released later that day. On the same day, police were deployed around the Labour Exchange to prevent a meeting planned by four other trade unions from taking place.

Since the adoption of the new Penal Code, civil society organisations have observed a marked phenomenon of self-censorship. Demonstrations have become extremely rare, and the few protests expressed on social media are often severely repressed.

### 1.3 | Freedom of expression

The criminalisation of the dissemination of "false information" in Benin is mainly covered by Article 550 of Law No. 2017-20 of 20 April 2018 on the Digital Code. This text provides for criminal penalties against any person who, by electronic or digital means, publishes,

disseminates or relays information that is presented as false, misleading or likely to disturb public order. The penalties incurred can be up to several years' imprisonment and fines, particularly when the acts are deemed to constitute a threat to public peace, security or the authority of the State.

However, the Digital Code does not precisely define the concept of "false information", leaving a wide margin of interpretation to the judicial and administrative authorities. This lack of a clear definition creates legal uncertainty, particularly for journalists, activists and civil society organisations, and encourages the courts and tribunals to apply the law extensively. In practice, this situation contributes to self-censorship and limits the effective exercise of freedom of expression online.

Ignace Sossou, an investigative journalist, was sentenced on 19 May 2020 to twelve months' imprisonment for harassing a person through electronic communications, pursuant to Article 550. Paragraph 3 of this article provides for a sentence of one to six months' imprisonment, accompanied by a fine, for the dissemination of false information against a person via social networks or any other electronic medium. The problem here is that the journalist reported in full the remarks made by the Public Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance of Cotonou at the end of an international symposium on disinformation. Since these remarks compromised the Prosecutor, he prosecuted the journalist. In its Opinion [No. 46/2020](#), the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that the journalist had been arbitrarily detained while peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. The Working Group also noted that the provisions of Article 550 of the Digital Code lack clarity and can be used to punish the peaceful exercise of human rights, as mentioned in [paragraphs 53 and 54 of report A/HRC/WGAD/2020/46](#). Thus, Article 550, in particular its third paragraph, is commonly used to prosecute or convict individuals who peacefully express political opinions or challenge the established political, social or economic order.

Several journalists, cyber activists and political figures in Benin have been prosecuted or imprisoned on the basis of provisions in the Digital Code relating to cybercrime:

- Investigative journalist Ignace Sossou, a contributor to Bénin Web TV, was convicted on 19 May 2020 for "harassment via electronic means of communication" and imprisoned for six months, according to [Reporters Without Borders](#).
- Casimir Kpédjo, a journalist and editor of the newspaper *La Nouvelle Économie*, was [arrested](#) on 18 April 2019 for "false information" disseminated on social media on the basis of Article 550 of the Digital Code; he was released on 24 April 2019 and his trial began on 17 July 2019.
- In January 2020, journalist and blogger Aristide Fassinou Hounkpevi was [arrested](#) for a tweet criticising the Minister of Foreign Affairs and prosecuted for electronic harassment under Article 550-2 of the Digital Code.
- On 6 September 2021, journalists and bloggers Gilbert Dagan, Anatole Adahou and Argos Adihounda were [arrested](#) and then convicted on 22 September 2021 under Article 550 of the Digital Code for posts on social media.
- Journalist and cyber activist Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè, founder of the online media outlet *Olofofo*, was [kidnapped](#) from Côte d'Ivoire to Benin on 10 July 2025 and prosecuted by the Court for the Suppression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET) for "incitement to rebellion", "electronic harassment" and other charges; he is being held in solitary confinement, with no right to visits, including from his lawyer or doctor.
- A few days later, on 16 July 2025, Ali Moumouni, a colleague at the same media outlet, was arrested and, according to RSF, faces charges of "electronic harassment", "incitement to violence and rebellion" and "apology for terrorism", and remains in prison.
- [Digital activist and political opponent Steve Amoussou](#), known as "Brother Hounvi", was sentenced in 2025 to two years in prison and a fine of two million CFA francs for "politicised insults" and "spreading false information" via his Facebook page. Initially prosecuted for "electronic harassment", "incitement to rebellion" and "spreading false information" under the Digital Code, his case is currently pending appeal.

- In addition, Julien Kandé Kansou, an activist, writer and member of the opposition party *Les Démocrates*, was [remanded in custody](#) on 12 June 2025 for "spreading false information" and "harassment via electronic communication" under the Digital Code.
- Journalist Maxime Lissanon was [sentenced](#) in 2023 to twelve months in prison for "inciting rebellion" following a Facebook post, also under the Digital Code.
- Finally, Virgile Ahouansè, a journalist and director of an online radio station, *Crystal News*, was given a 12-month suspended sentence on 15 June 2023 for "spreading false information" via electronic media.

Independent media outlets continue to exist, but they are regularly subjected to harassment, sanctions and suspensions by the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC). Protections for journalistic sources remain limited, particularly because prosecutions under Article 550 of the Digital Code expose media professionals to imprisonment or pressure to disclose their sources. Freedom of expression is also affected by extensive administrative measures targeting several media outlets. On 21 January 2025, the HAAC [suspended](#) various media outlets such as L'Audace Info, Le Patriote, Reporter Médias Monde, Crystal News, Les Pharaons and the TikTok account "Madame Actu", citing breaches of regulatory obligations and the publication of unauthorised content. On 12 March 2025, it suspended Bénin Web TV, ruling that two of its articles contained unfounded claims and violated the Press Code of Ethics. On 11 February 2025, the HAAC also issued formal notices to media outlets that did not have legal status, based on Articles 182 and 252 of the Information Code, which require prior notification for the publication of newspapers and prior authorisation for the operation of online news sites.

These decisions have drawn widespread criticism from human rights and press freedom organisations. Amnesty International has denounced a wave of attacks on independent media. The Committee to Protect Journalists has [called](#) for the suspensions to be lifted and the press cards to be returned.

This illustrates the extensive use of the HAAC's regulatory power, which imposes strict legal requirements for accreditation and authorisation. NGOs consider that these mechanisms can be used to restrict media space and weaken the independent press, even if some decisions have subsequently been lifted.

Following the analysis of this first principle, it should be noted that Benin's legal framework presents major contradictions with international standards, in particular with the obligations arising from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With regard to the Digital Code, it is important to note that, although press offences were officially decriminalised in 2015, in practice this text allows this progress to be circumvented by reintroducing heavy criminal penalties, including prison sentences of up to two years, for comments made online. This situation creates a clear regulatory inconsistency and undermines the principle of proportionality enshrined in international human rights law.

The second observation concerns political control of the judiciary, which seriously affects the independence of the justice system. The High Council of the Judiciary (CSM) is largely dominated by structures and actors outside the judiciary, with representatives of the judiciary being in the minority. In this context, any attempt at independence on the part of judges is severely punished. In this regard, Robert Dossou, a lawyer and former president of the Constitutional Court, publicly denounced this situation at a conference while defending a magistrate brought before the CSM for not following the public prosecutor's instructions. Robert Dossou cites this case to illustrate the political pressure exerted on judges. He recounts a specific case in which a magistrate was brought before this body, sitting as a disciplinary council. According to his account, the judge was accused of failing to follow the prosecutor's instructions. Dossou emphasises that, despite his pleas as a lawyer, the judge was punished and his career was set back by several years. Mr Dossou thus highlighted the fact that the political control of the CSM leads to judges being punished for their judicial decisions, in violation of the principle of judicial independence.

Added to these abuses is the creation of the Court for the Suppression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET), a special court whose functioning and powers raise serious concerns about fair trial guarantees. This court is regularly perceived as an instrument of repression of the political opposition, particularly in view of the convictions of major political figures such as [Joël Aïvo](#), sentenced to ten years in prison, and [Reckya Madougou](#), sentenced to twenty years in prison, in proceedings widely criticised by national and international observers.

Finally, the last observation concerns the increasing militarisation of law enforcement, characterised by the use of armed forces and live ammunition during public demonstrations. These practices have resulted in several deaths, particularly during the events of 2019 and 2021, and raise serious concerns about compliance with the principles of necessity, proportionality and accountability in the use of force, as enshrined in international standards on law enforcement and human rights.

## Case study

In April 2024, two demonstrations against the high cost of living, organised by trade unions in Cotonou, were dispersed by the police. On 1 May 2024, a CSTB demonstration was also [banned by the local authorities](#). On 20 August 2025, access to the Cotonou Labour Exchange was [blocked](#) by Republican Police officers, preventing anyone from entering. This operation was aimed at preventing a group of aspiring teachers (AME) from holding a press conference. These events illustrate the recurring tensions between certain trade unions and the authorities, as well as the effective restrictions on the right of assembly and demonstration in certain circumstances.

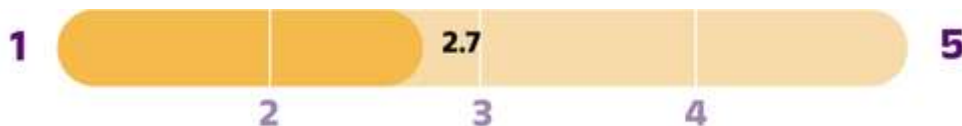
In short, the situation of freedoms in Benin remains marked by a profound paradox. The new law on associations appears to reflect a desire to relax civic space: it simplifies the creation of organisations and reaffirms the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. However, this legal openness contrasts sharply with practice. Arbitrary suspensions of associations, restrictions on the right to demonstrate and pressure on critical media create a climate of uncertainty and fear. These dynamics hinder citizen participation, particularly that of human rights defenders and vulnerable groups. Thus, despite constitutional and legal recognition of freedom of association, its effective exercise remains fragile, hampered by intrusive administrative mechanisms and the discretionary power of the administration. The real challenge now lies in ensuring an environment where the law does not merely proclaim rights, but where those rights can be fully exercised by all without fear of reprisals.



## PRINCIPLE SCORE

# 2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



For several years, civil society in Benin has been operating in a complex context, marked by a formal legal framework that is not conducive to freedom of association and is limited by restrictive administrative and political practices. The law of 1 July 1901 guaranteed in principle the free creation and operation of associations upon simple declaration, providing a flexible and protective framework. However, since 2019, arbitrary obstacles and increasing pressure on critical organisations have weakened this civic space. Delays in issuing receipts, additional requirements imposed by the administration and the repression of demonstrations or advocacy have restricted the effective exercise of fundamental rights. In this context, the new Law No. 2025-19 updates the legal framework, aiming to strengthen the protection of CSOs while introducing control and transparency mechanisms. An analysis of registration, the operating environment and protection from interference makes it possible to assess the real capacity of CSOs to operate freely and contribute to the democratic and social development of the country.

### 2.1 | Registration

The legal framework for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Benin has deteriorated significantly since 2019, in a context marked by increasing repression of freedom of assembly and expression. Although the law of 1 July 1901 guarantees freedom of association in principle based on a simple declaration to the prefecture or the Ministry of the Interior, administrative practices have gradually introduced arbitrary obstacles. The authorities have imposed the use of model statutes, required re-registrations not provided for by law and refused to issue receipts without justification. These practices have weakened civil society, particularly critical or protesting associations.

With regard to the existence of clear laws favourable to the registration of CSOs, the situation remained relatively stable before 2025. Associations were governed by the 1901 law, inherited from the colonial period, which allowed the free creation of organisations without prior

authorisation. A simple declaration filed with the prefecture or sub-prefecture was sufficient to obtain a receipt confirming the legal existence of the association.

In terms of accessibility, speed and cost of registration procedures, Benin's legal framework remains, in theory, relatively unrestrictive. Until 2025, registering an association only required the provision of articles of association, a list of directors and a definition of the association's purpose. The official time frame for obtaining a receipt varied from a few days to a few weeks. In practice, however, numerous obstacles are regularly reported. Prolonged delays and even unjustified refusals are observed, particularly when applications come from associations perceived as critical of the authorities or informal groups. In such cases, registration times can range from three to six months, compromising the effective start of activities. Financially, the formalities represent a significant burden for civil society organisations. Before 2025, administrative fees amounted to approximately 50,000 CFA francs for associations (approximately 76 EUR or 83 USD) and 75,000 CFA francs for umbrella organisations (approximately 114 EUR or 125 USD), which are prohibitive amounts for organisations with limited resources.

Since July 2025, Benin has introduced a fully digitalised registration mechanism. Applications are now submitted via an online government platform, without direct contact with administrative officials. The official registration cost has been reduced to 40,000 CFA francs, or approximately 61 EUR or 67 USD. As this system is very recent, there is not yet sufficient data to assess its effectiveness or identify any malfunctions, technical obstacles or de facto exclusions.

Certain categories of CSOs face additional obstacles. Associations deemed critical are faced with unjustified refusals to issue receipts, repeated requests for allegedly missing documents or administrative harassment. The case of political parties illustrates this trend: several of them have had their registration suspended following the adoption of the new law on political parties, [Law No. 2018-23 of 17 September 2018](#) on the Charter of Political Parties in the Republic of Benin, amended by [Law No. 2019-41 of 15 November 2019](#), preventing their leaders from meeting.

With regard to the reasons for refusal and the possibilities for appeal, the legal framework theoretically allows any decision to be challenged before the administrative court. In practice, refusals to register CSOs are not always accompanied by detailed explanations, and CSOs do not appeal because of the cost, the slowness of the procedures and the perceived risks. Most ended up complying with the administration's requirements, even if they were illegal, in order to obtain their receipt.

The adoption of the new Law No. 2025-19 does not fundamentally change the general principles governing the creation and registration of associations. Freedom of association remains guaranteed, and the receipt remains essential for acquiring legal personality. However, the real impact of this reform will largely depend on the publication and implementation of the implementing decrees, which will determine whether there will be any practical changes to the procedures, deadlines, costs or obligations imposed on CSOs.

Finally, it should be noted that some marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, are reluctant to register due to hostile social norms, which increases their vulnerability and limits their access to legal recognition.

## 2.2 | Operational environment

In Benin, civil society organisations (CSOs), including local NGOs incorporated under Beninese law, do not automatically benefit from tax exemptions. As a general rule, local CSOs are subject to the ordinary tax regime and must pay the applicable taxes and duties, while complying with all the reporting obligations provided for by the legislation in force.

The tax exemption regime is determined each year by the Finance Act, which specifies the exemptions granted by law and the cases in which exemptions do not apply. Consequently, identifying the tax benefits applicable to civil society organisations (CSOs) requires consultation of the tax laws in force, in particular those published by the Directorate-General of Taxes (DGI). National NGOs that are duly constituted and managed on a non-profit basis enjoy certain tax benefits under common law, without the need for a specific agreement with the State. As such, they are exempt from corporation tax (IS) or income tax, in accordance with [Article 4 of the General Tax Code \(CGI\)](#), and from value added tax (VAT) on services provided free of charge or at a price equal to or lower than the cost price ([Article 229 of the CGI](#)). It should be noted, however, that this exemption does not extend to VAT on purchases of goods and services granted to NGOs that have a framework agreement with the Government. These agreements provide, in particular, for exemption from duties and taxes payable on entry, including VAT, on materials, equipment and vehicles imported or acquired locally that are necessary for the NGO's mission, with the exception of Community Levies, statistical tax, customs stamp duty and road tax, technical and educational materials and imported books, with the exception of road tax, personal effects imported by expatriate staff within the first six (06) months of their arrival, with the exception of road tax.

Foreign NGOs benefiting from a headquarters agreement enjoy broader exemptions, both at customs and under domestic regulations. At customs, they may be exempt from duties and taxes, with the exception of road tax, on donations and bequests, used materials, equipment, supplies and other items, imported or locally purchased vehicles, imported technical and educational materials, and personal effects of international staff imported within the first six months of their arrival. Under the domestic regime, these NGOs may benefit in particular from exemption from VAT on services, materials, equipment, vehicles and purchases made in the context of their projects, exemption from Motor Vehicle Tax (TVM) (Article 167 of the CGI), exemption from Corporation Tax (Article 4 of the CGI), exemption from VAT on services provided on a voluntary basis or at a price lower than or equal to the cost price (Article 229 of the CGI), exemption from income tax on salaries and wages (ITS) for expatriate staff, where provided for in the headquarters agreement, exemption from employer's contributions on salaries (VPS) (Article 192 of the CGI). Regardless of the exemptions they may benefit from, NGOs remain subject to a set of tax obligations, including registration for a Unique Tax Identification Number (IFU) (Article 460 of the CGI), reporting any substantial changes within thirty (30) days (Article 461 of the CGI), annual declaration of salaries by 30 April at the latest (Article 472 of the CGI), declaration and payment of the VPS and withholding taxes by the 10th of the following month at the latest, annual submission of moral and financial reports before 1 May to the relevant tax authorities, declaration of results for CSOs carrying out profit-making activities through entities created for this purpose, the declaration of suspension or cessation of activities, the registration of deeds and contracts with the National Registry ( ), and the obligation to obtain standardised invoices for all purchases of goods or services.

Ultimately, in Benin, local CSOs governed by Beninese law do not benefit from automatic tax exemptions solely on the basis of their status. They are subject to the common law tax regime, except where they have a headquarters agreement, a framework agreement or a specific agreement duly approved by the competent authorities. In the absence of such legal instruments, exemptions remain limited to those expressly provided for by the tax law and the finance law in force.

The laws in force recognise the autonomy of civil society organisations in terms of governance, in particular through the obligation to set up a board of directors responsible for registration and internal management. In practice, however, few CSOs are fully operational due to a lack of human, technical or financial resources. The best-resourced organisations, such as WANEP-Benin, ALCRER, Social Watch, GAPP-Africa and the Maison de la Société Civile, have the necessary capacity to ensure active, structured and standard-compliant operations.

Arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression, advocacy and demonstration persist. Since 2019, public demonstrations have been systematically suppressed, and none have been allowed to take place freely. The right to strike is heavily regulated, limiting the action of trade

unions and social movements. Many activists and political opponents who express their opinions on social media are prosecuted or even imprisoned, often on the basis of the Digital Code or other provisions interpreted in a restrictive manner.

These practices have had a considerable deterrent effect on advocacy initiatives, citizen mobilisation and critical expression. They mainly affect CSOs engaged in political, governance or anti-corruption issues, while those working in sectors such as health, education, the environment or social services generally remain immune to state pressure.

CSOs must produce annual work plans and sometimes financial reports, especially in order to receive funding. These obligations are more burdensome for small or informal CSOs, while large, structured CSOs comply with these requirements using tools such as procedure manuals and auditors (e.g. WANEP-Benin). Overall, reporting remains proportionate for those with sufficient resources but can be burdensome for less well-equipped CSOs.

CSOs enjoy recognised autonomy in defining their objectives and activities. Consultation mechanisms exist with certain ministries. However, Article 50 of Law 2025-19 restricts the ability of CSOs to take a position on political or governance issues. Reporting and transparency requirements (Articles 21, 22, 23 - Sycebnl) are strict. State control is mainly limited to financial management in the case of public funding.

Until 2025, the legal framework was mainly that of the 1901 law, inherited from the colonial era, supplemented by a few specific texts. The suspension or dissolution of a CSO could only take place by judicial decision, which was a guarantee against arbitrary closures. This regime was flexible: a simple declaration to the prefecture was sufficient to create an association, without heavy administrative compliance requirements.

Since 2019, activists, opinion leaders and members of CSOs involved in governance, democracy or human rights have been regularly targeted by police or judicial pressure. There is real repression of activities on social media. Hundreds of young opposition activists and pan-Africanist movements have been arrested, prosecuted or imprisoned, often on the basis of the Digital Code or offences related to "contempt", "spreading false information" or "subversion". Notable cases include [Schadrac Watowédé Houngnibo](#), national coordinator of Kemi Seba's NGO *Urgences Panafricanistes*, and [Apollinaire O. Adjallah](#), president of the pan-Africanist movement *Rassemblement des Démocrates à l'Écoute du Peuple (RaDEP)*, who was sentenced in March 2025 to seven months in prison for inciting rebellion via an electronic system.

These practices create a climate of self-censorship and deter some organisations from carrying out critical advocacy work. CSOs providing services (health, education, environment, social) are generally not targeted.

## 2.3 | Protection against interference

Remedies exist against abuses by the authorities, particularly before the administrative courts and the Constitutional Court. Over the past five years, the case law of the Constitutional Court, the court of last resort for the protection of civic space, has been very unstable, offering no legal certainty. The few appeals lodged by civil society actors have been unsuccessful. The most notable examples include:

- ✓ [Appeal DCC 24-238 \(trade unions/demonstrators\)](#): On 19 December 2024, the Constitutional Court handed down a decision (DCC 24-238) in an appeal on grounds of unconstitutionality brought by several individuals (Miguèle Houeto, Landry Adélakoun, Romaric Zinsou, Fréjus Attindoglo, Conaïde Akouedenoudje, Virgile Bassa and Fayçal Nadey Dango) against a ban on a march by trade union federations and confederations scheduled for 27 April 2024. In this decision, the Court declared itself incompetent, thus refusing to analyse the communiqué from the Prefect of the department of Cotonou prohibiting a peaceful march.



- ✓ La Gazette du Golfe, Benin's leading private media outlet, has lodged an [appeal against the HAAC before the Constitutional Court following its suspension](#). In fact, the HAAC suspended, by decision No. 23-031/HAAC of 8 August 2023, "all means of mass communication" of the La Gazette du Golfe press group: this includes Golfe FM, Golfe Télévision, and the weekly newspaper. Five lawyers (Angelo A. Adélakoun, Fréjus Attindoglo, Romaric Zinsou, Conaïde Akouedenoudjè, Miguèle Houeto) brought the case before the Constitutional Court to challenge the suspension as unconstitutional. In its [decision DCC 23-234 of 2 November 2023](#), the Court ruled that the HAAC had not violated the Constitution, as argued by the applicants: it considered that the suspension, although significant, did not contravene the constitutional provisions invoked.

The only other avenue that would have allowed citizens to protect themselves against arbitrariness was to refer the matter to regional courts such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights or the ECOWAS Court of Justice. However, Benin [withdrew](#) the optional declaration that allowed individuals and NGOs to refer cases directly to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2020, thereby depriving citizens of this external remedy against state abuses, increasing judicial pressure and significantly limiting the protection of civic space.

### **Case study**

In the case at the heart of decision [DCC 24-238 of 19 December 2024](#), trade unions had declared a peaceful march to protest against the high cost of living. The Prefect of Littoral demanded prior authorisation, even though the Constitution, notably Articles 23 and 24, guarantees freedom of assembly and demonstration upon simple declaration. The applicants denounced a serious violation of public freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration. They emphasised the absence of evidence of a breach of public order, the violation of the Court's established case law distinguishing between freedoms requiring authorisation and those subject to simple declaration, and the contradiction with international instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Court declared itself incompetent, considering that the prefectural communiqué had no normative value and was a matter for the judge of legality. In reality, this refusal reflects a desire not to contradict the prefectural authority and, indirectly, the position of the Head of State, who is hostile to public demonstrations.

Appeals do exist, and citizens and CSOs can refer cases to the Constitutional Court. However, protection remains insufficient because the Court, out of institutional caution or political alignment, avoids censuring the actions of administrative or regulatory authorities, even when these actions restrict public freedoms. The legal framework therefore remains fragile and depends largely on political will rather than on firm case law in favour of freedoms.

## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



An analysis of the accessibility, effectiveness and sustainability of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Benin highlights a sector that is undergoing rapid restructuring but faces significant constraints. While CSOs play a key role in local development, governance, awareness-raising and social service delivery, their functioning depends largely on external financial resources and heterogeneous organisational capacities. International funding is the main source of support, while local resources remain limited and unstructured, affecting CSOs' ability to plan and execute their activities independently. New legal requirements for accounting and reporting, while essential for enhancing transparency and credibility, also expose CSOs, particularly small organisations or those based in rural areas, to operational and financial challenges. This situation highlights the need to combine regulatory oversight, technical support and capacity building to ensure a resilient, effective and sustainable civil society sector.

#### 3.1 | Accessibility of resources

CSOs have access to local and international funding without excessive restrictions. It should be noted that banks do not obstruct or block funding. However, they do require proof of the lawful source of funds. For example, CSOs submit the grant agreement for each fund received. Otherwise, the funds are returned to their source. To date, no CSO has been prosecuted for reasons related to funding sources.

Funding for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Benin remains largely insufficient. Human rights CSOs receive no public funding, let alone support from private corporate foundations. Regional and international philanthropy exists, but it is difficult to access. International funding, which is the main source of funding for many CSOs, is declining significantly. Recent budget cuts, notably the withdrawal of USAID funding, have had a particularly significant impact on all CSO sectors. This situation further disadvantages CSOs based in non-urban areas and small or newly established organisations, which face great difficulties in accessing international funding due to limited administrative capacity, restricted access to the internet and a lack of equipment to submit competitive projects.

The main challenge for these CSOs remains covering their operating costs. Furthermore, critical organisations, social movements and those involved in governance receive no local support: the culture of philanthropy in Benin remains underdeveloped and these CSOs are often perceived as political opposition organisations, which further limits their access to resources.

### 3.2 | Resource efficiency

In Benin, funding for civil society organisations (CSOs) remains limited and is mainly linked to specific projects. The funds available are few and highly competitive. Donors, whether bilateral, multilateral or from private foundations, generally impose strict conditions to ensure the proper management of resources and compliance with their use. These requirements include rigorous financial procedures (audits, detailed justification of expenditure, compliance with procurement procedures), narrative and financial reporting obligations, which are often burdensome for small CSOs, strict alignment with the donor's thematic priorities, limiting the flexibility of local actors, additional compliance conditions relating to the fight against terrorism, money laundering prevention and data protection, and the obligation to give visibility to the donor, including the use of logos and communication of results.

Although these conditions are intended to ensure transparency and accountability, they often restrict the manoeuvrability and flexibility of local CSOs. This situation particularly disadvantages small organisations, rural or newly established CSOs, which have limited administrative capacity, restricted access to the internet and insufficient equipment to submit competitive projects. Operating funding, which is essential for the sustainability of CSOs, remains largely inaccessible, especially for critical organisations involved in governance or social movements, which receive no local support due to the weak culture of philanthropy and their political perception.

Since the adoption of the requirements of the West African Financial Action Task Force (GIABA), notably through the BCEAO, strict rules related to the fight against money laundering, terrorist financing and fraud have been put in place. Banks now require CSOs to provide a number of documents, including the traceability of funds, proof of their origin and information on partnerships.

These measures, which aim to ensure transparency and compliance with regional standards, have had the effect of introducing practical restrictions on the management of foreign funding by CSOs, with tighter administrative and fiscal controls and stricter reporting requirements.

In most cases, funding conditions reflect the strategic priorities of donors rather than those of CSOs. Calls for projects are often designed around international agendas, forcing CSOs to adjust their missions and reformulate their objectives to meet these expectations if they wish to remain eligible. This dynamic creates a gap between the real needs identified by actors on the ground and the programmes that are actually funded. Smaller, less structured organisations or those focused on local issues struggle to access funding, while larger or more experienced CSOs become more professional in drafting projects that meet donor agendas. Although some donors are adopting more participatory or flexible approaches (notably through multi-year grants or institutional strengthening programmes), the margin of autonomy for CSOs remains generally limited, with their actions often dependent on priorities defined in advance by donors.

The flexibility of donors varies greatly from one actor to another. According to the NGO GAPP Benin, which has received funding from various donors, the European Union, Canadian and Scandinavian cooperation agencies, and several private foundations offer a relatively wide margin for adaptation: the possibility of modifying planned activities, revising indicators, adjusting the budget (often by 10 to 20 per cent) or proposing amendments when the context changes. This allows CSOs to respond to political crises, changes in operational priorities or

unforeseen events in the field. Conversely, other donors such as USAID, GIZ and certain United Nations agencies apply very strict rules, whereby any changes must go through a long and complex formal process, which limits the responsiveness of local organisations. In unstable environments, during election periods, civic restrictions, or security risks, this lack of flexibility can compromise programme effectiveness. Overall, even when flexibility exists, processes often remain bureaucratic. CSOs must therefore anticipate well in advance and carefully justify each change, which burdens their day-to-day management.

Donors are increasingly recognising the importance of the physical and digital security challenges faced by CSOs, especially those engaged in advocacy or human rights defence. Several donors now include budget lines dedicated to cybersecurity, temporary relocation of staff, security of premises, and legal protection. Some emergency programmes, such as ProtectDefenders.eu or special funds from international foundations, enable a rapid response to direct threats. However, this responsiveness remains uneven: procedures are often lengthy, and local risk analysis is not always well understood by donors operating from abroad. In some cases, administrative requirements (data protection, compliance, reporting) can even increase the vulnerability of CSOs by exposing them to the risk of state surveillance. In summary, although awareness is growing, responsiveness remains limited by bureaucracy, and protection mechanisms are still insufficiently adapted to the security realities on the ground.

### 3.3 | Resource sustainability

Dependence on external funding remains a major characteristic of the civil society sector in Benin. The majority of CSOs rely on foreign funding, which creates significant financial instability. The main donors include the European Union, the former USAID, the French Embassy, GIZ, the World Bank, UNDP, Global Affairs Canada and various religious and international foundations such as Liliane Fonds and Amici di Francesco. However, this funding is highly competitive, and access is particularly difficult for small CSOs. Local funding, meanwhile, remains virtually non-existent, with public subsidies almost non-existent. Only a few organisations working in education, health, youth and sport manage to benefit from targeted programmes, often funded by international partners such as the WHO or UNESCO, or by certain sectoral ministries. The end or time limitation of long-term support programmes, such as the European Union's Civil Society Strengthening and Participation Programme (RePaSOC) under the European Development Fund (EDF), affects the continuity of projects and exacerbates the financial precariousness of CSOs.

Local funding, whether from philanthropy, corporate social responsibility or member contributions, remains very limited. Some corporate foundations and service-oriented CSOs, such as MTN, Moov, the Zinsou Foundation, the Lions Club, Rotaract and Junior Chamber International, provide occasional support by financing infrastructure such as schools or health centres, or by conducting awareness campaigns in the areas of health and the environment. Agricultural and craft cooperatives also generate income through the sale of products, but these activities remain limited and unstructured and are insufficient to ensure the financial autonomy of the organisations.

Innovation in income generation remains marginal. Few CSOs develop alternative initiatives such as crowdfunding, the creation of social enterprises or the conclusion of public contracts. The capacity to raise funds from individuals remains very low, and compliance with new accounting requirements, in particular [SyCEBNL](#) certification ("Accounting System for Non-Profit Entities") in the OHADA (Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa) area (a harmonised accounting standard for non-profit organisations) represents an additional cost of around 400,000 CFA francs for some NGOs, which is a significant obstacle for small organisations.

However, the sector benefits from a support infrastructure that facilitates capacity building and access to useful information. The Maison de la Société Civile (Civil Society House), located in Bohicon and Parakou, offers advisory services, room rentals, a library, training and a CSO



certification programme. The Centre de Promotion de la Société Civile (Civil Society Promotion Centre) encourages CSO participation in development, promotes cooperation and disseminates useful information. The CSO portal, launched by the Ministry of Justice in 2021, promises better access to information, although its real impact remains to be assessed. CSO networks and coalitions, often supported by donors, enable small organisations to participate in projects subcontracted by larger structures, thereby strengthening their capacity for action.

Among the strengths, the Maison de la Société Civile's certification programme is a capacity-building tool, offering technical and financial assistance and serving as a model for other CSOs. Some well-organised structures have an active board of directors, procedural manuals, audits and financial reports, which gives them greater institutional resilience.

However, the sector has several persistent weaknesses. Almost total dependence on foreign funding, limited diversification of income sources and limited local mobilisation are major vulnerabilities. Small CSOs face significant financial constraints in complying with accounting standards and accountability requirements. The lack of strategic plans and permanent staff limits the sustainability of actions, undermining programme continuity and the impact of interventions.

However, the sustainability of associations and foundations in Benin is supported by a strict legal framework for accountability, notably through Articles 21 and 22 of Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025. These provisions require CSOs receiving public or private, national or international funding to comply with transparency obligations by preparing and submitting detailed reports on the use of funds and the activities financed to the competent authority within a reasonable time frame. This mechanism ensures the traceability of resources and compliance with the missions of CSOs, thereby strengthening the confidence of donors. Annual reports must now be published in the Journal of the Register of Associations and Foundations, contributing to public transparency and responsible management. However, this register is currently being created. Article 50 prohibits any political stance or incitement to violence, insults or sedition; non-compliance is punishable by imprisonment for 6 months to 1 year and a fine of approximately 1 million CFA francs. Article 148, paragraph 3, provides that associations or foundations that do not bring their statutes into compliance with the law within the specified time limit shall be automatically dissolved. Other provisions provide for measures such as administrative suspension, withdrawal of approval or judicial dissolution in the event of serious breaches.

Thus, Law No. 2025-19 supports the resilience of civil society actors by combining strict accounting, transparent reporting and disclosure requirements. These measures are essential to strengthen relations with donors, secure the necessary resources and ensure the long-term continuity of CSO actions.

## Case study

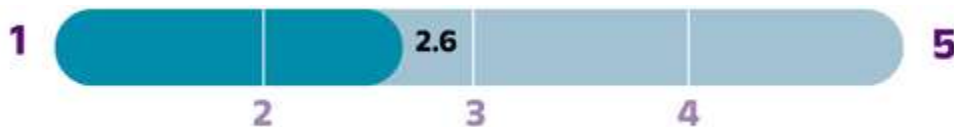
In April 2025, [the NGO Droit de l'Homme Paix et Développement \(DHPD\)](#), which was required to certify its accounts under the new regulations, had to hire the services of a chartered accountant. However, the high cost of 400,000 CFA francs (approximately 600 euros) for this certification significantly slowed down its activities. Without sufficient funding to cover this expense, the organisation was forced to temporarily suspend some of its activities, delaying the submission of its financial report, an essential document for applying for new funding.

This case illustrates the financial vulnerability of CSOs and highlights the risk that administrative requirements, although legitimate in principle, can have counterproductive effects when applied without appropriate support or consideration of the real financial constraints of organisations.

# PRINCIPLE SCORE

## 4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



Public governance in Benin is governed by a legal and institutional framework that theoretically promotes transparency, citizen participation and accountability among public actors. The national budget is voted on by Parliament and made available online, laws guarantee the right of access to information, and independent mechanisms are in place to sanction arbitrary administrative decisions. Furthermore, [Benin's membership of the Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) demonstrates a political commitment to open and accountable public management. However, despite these formal instruments and initiatives, the practical application of these principles remains limited. Civil society organisations and citizens face administrative, political and technical obstacles that restrict access to information, participation in decision-making processes and the possibility of effective recourse in cases of abuse of power. The contrast between legal provisions and their actual implementation illustrates the complexity of strengthening open and participatory governance in a context where transparency remains partial and accountability difficult to exercise.

### 4.1 | Transparency

In Benin, [Law No. 2015-07 of 22 January 2015 on the Information and Communication Code](#) theoretically guarantees the public's right to access government information, including budgets, decisions and public contracts, and requires administrations to respond to citizens' requests. The key articles are:

- Article 7: recognises the right to information and obliges the State to guarantee access to public sources.
- Article 70: authorises any citizen to request and obtain documents held by a public body.
- Articles 71 to 74: define the terms of access, the need to justify a refusal and list legal exemptions, including:
  - national security and defence;
  - judicial secrecy and information relating to ongoing investigations;
  - the protection of privacy and personal data;

- the confidentiality of economic and financial information sensitive to the State or businesses;
- other information protected by specific legal texts.

In practice, effective access to information remains very limited: [requests concerning ministers' salaries](#), public contracts or other sensitive documents are often refused or ignored. The law does not set a deadline for the transmission of documents; it only stipulates that organisations have five days to decide on the admissibility of a request, with no obligation to actually provide the information within a specific time frame. These broad exemptions and the absence of binding deadlines severely limit the effective exercise of the right of access to information.

The national budget is voted on by Parliament and [is available](#) online. However, [CSOs and opposition parties](#) have long demanded the publication of the income and assets of ministers and the Head of State, but their demands have not been met. Faced with pressure from journalists, [the Government has attempted to reassure journalists without providing reliable details](#).

CSOs do not have easy access to the public information necessary for advocacy or monitoring. Any request for government-related information is blocked or kept secret, and journalists who attempt to publish sensitive information are prosecuted for spreading false information and some are imprisoned, as reported by several Beninese newspapers such as [BeninWebTV](#) and [Africa-Press](#). Benin's membership of the Open Government Partnership (OGP, 2024-2025) ([Annual Report 2024-2025](#)) demonstrates a desire for openness, but implementation remains partial and effective transparency largely depends on political will.

## 4.2 | Participation

In theory, certain consultation mechanisms exist, such as ad hoc sectoral dialogues or thematic meetings with ministries. However, these are neither systematic nor institutionalised.

A prime example is the process of adopting Law 2025-19 on associations and foundations, which forms the legal basis for the existence and functioning of CSOs in Benin. No official consultation with CSOs was organised during the drafting of the Bill, and associations were not even able to obtain a copy before the parliamentary vote. After the law was adopted, CSOs were not consulted on the drafting of the implementing decrees, which limited their influence and the relevance of regulatory measures for the sector.

[In 2024](#), the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum (EMP) [held sectoral dialogues](#) with CSOs in the departments of Borgou and Donga. Similarly, Social Watch Benin was consulted on the national budget, allowing for some citizen participation in financial decisions.

However, these collaborations are not always formalised through permanent, institutional mechanisms, limiting the predictability and continuity of participation. Article 50 of Law 2025-19 also restricts the capacity of CSOs to take public action on governance issues, which weakens the impact of these consultations.

Thus, despite the existence of some ad hoc dialogues, there are no permanent and institutionalised mechanisms guaranteeing genuine and continuous consultation with CSOs on legislative and regulatory decisions.

The participation of marginalised CSOs remains very limited. Organisations based in rural areas or from discriminated groups (such as LGBTQ+ people) are often not included in national decision-making processes. Their access to meetings or consultations depends largely on the individual willingness of ministries or financial partners and is not ensured by institutional mechanisms.

In practice, the lack of consultation with CSOs during the drafting of Law 2025-19 shows that even the most impactful decisions for civil society are taken without including the voices of the most affected actors, which weakens inclusion.

Finally, the use of digital technologies to improve citizen participation is still in its infancy. Some online platforms and applications have been set up by public institutions for consultation and project monitoring, but they remain inaccessible to the majority of CSOs, particularly those in rural areas, and do not guarantee effective monitoring of contributions. Examples include platforms such as [RéCi \(Réflexions Citoyennes\)](#), which facilitates public debate and citizen expression online, and digital tools for [monitoring local governance](#) implemented in certain municipalities with the support of programmes such as the European Union's RePaSOC.

CSOs also use digital applications for [citizen monitoring of public services](#), particularly in the education and local development sectors. However, these initiatives remain sporadic and poorly institutionalised. Access to them remains limited for the majority of CSOs, particularly those located in rural areas, due to poor connectivity and a lack of digital equipment and skills. Furthermore, these platforms do not guarantee effective follow-up on citizen contributions or systematic consideration of feedback by public authorities, which limits their real impact on citizen participation and governance. However, the government has made considerable progress in digitising public administration, facilitating the dissemination of information and the electronic management of administrative procedures. A concrete example is the national [online public services](#) platform set up by the Government of Benin. This platform enables citizens, businesses and organisations, including CSOs, to carry out many administrative procedures electronically: requests for civil status documents, tax services, administrative formalities, online payments and file tracking. It helps to reduce travel, improve the transparency of procedures and speed up administrative processing, illustrating the significant progress made by Benin in the digitisation of public administration. Nevertheless, this digitisation creates [a form of exclusion](#) for populations and CSOs in rural areas, who have [limited access to](#) the [internet](#) and digital tools.

### 4.3 | Accountability

The Beninese government does not provide detailed feedback to CSOs on how their contributions are incorporated into decision-making processes. Consultations are often ad hoc and limited to sectoral dialogues or specific projects, with no formal follow-up or public documentation. Under Law 2025-19 on associations and foundations, CSOs were not consulted, and no public report was published explaining why their contributions were not considered.

The few consultations that do take place, for example in the education, health or energy sectors, do not result in publicly available reports, which limits transparency on the use of CSO feedback.

The reasons for rejecting CSO contributions are not systematically communicated. CSOs have no official channel for demanding explanations or challenging the non-integration of their proposals into public decisions. The absence of institutional monitoring and accountability mechanisms prevents CSOs from formally holding the government to account. The only recourse available is individual or media interventions, which are often ineffective and expose CSOs to administrative or political pressure, particularly those that criticise the government.

The government does not provide clear spaces for civil society actors to monitor the use of their feedback and hold the government accountable for how their contributions are incorporated (or not) into policies and decisions. There are no institutionalised spaces for CSOs to monitor the consideration of their contributions. Online consultation platforms or sectoral dialogue initiatives remain ad hoc and non-permanent, providing no follow-up mechanisms. CSOs must rely on informal channels or ad hoc requests, which significantly reduces their ability to exert real influence and ensure transparency in government decisions.



Currently, there is no formal mechanism for monitoring the government's compliance with its commitments to CSOs. Initiatives to evaluate citizen participation are rare and generally carried out by international partners or NGOs themselves, without official recognition by the state. Benin's accession to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2024 is a positive sign, but the concrete implementation of accountability and monitoring of citizen contributions remains limited and largely depends on political will. CSOs therefore have no secure institutional process for documenting, monitoring and reporting on how their feedback is taken into account in public policy.

### Case study

In December 2022, Beninese journalist [Virgile Ahouansè](#) published an investigation reporting alleged extrajudicial executions attributed to members of the police. Shortly after publication, he was arrested and prosecuted before the Court for the Suppression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET). In June 2023, he was given a 12-month suspended prison sentence and fined for spreading false information, according to several media sources.

This case illustrates the structural difficulties of accessing public information in Benin. Sensitive data related to security, governance or public finances remain largely inaccessible, while journalistic investigation is criminalised when the information published is deemed sensitive by the authorities. Such prosecutions have a chilling effect on the media and civil society organisations (CSOs), creating a climate of fear that limits citizen oversight of public action. The Ahouansè case also highlights the vicious circle in which CSOs find themselves: deprived of reliable official information, they rely on journalistic investigations, which in turn are penalised, thus reinforcing the institutional opacity regularly denounced by the national and international press. This situation is a lasting obstacle to citizen participation and the promotion of transparency in Benin.

## PRINCIPLE SCORE

### 5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Benin is central to governance, citizen participation and the promotion of human rights. Their work involves defending rights, community mobilisation, monitoring public policy and promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups. However, the environment in which they operate is marked by significant contrasts. Media coverage of their activities remains partial and sometimes selective, while their recognition by the government largely depends on their sector of intervention and their stance towards the authorities. Public perceptions range from moderate trust to mistrust of certain structures that are perceived as distant from the daily concerns of citizens. Furthermore, CSOs working on inclusion, minority rights and the promotion of gender equality have to contend with a favourable but incomplete legal framework and a social context still marked by prejudice and discrimination. This analysis explores the dynamics of public discourse, perceptions of civil society, citizen engagement and inclusion, in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities for strengthening civic participation in Benin.

#### 5.1 | Public discourse and constructive dialogue on civil society

Media coverage of civil society organisations in Benin remains partial. Public channels, such as SRTB (Service de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Bénin), open their spaces to CSOs, but this openness is not uniform. Organisations that criticise the government or certain opinion leaders engaged in critical advocacy are often denied access to public media outlets. As for the private media, all of them, with the exception of *Matin Libre*, have communication contracts with the government, which limits their editorial freedom. Several media outlets choose self-censorship to avoid sanctions, particularly when it comes to issues related to governance or human rights.

The work of CSOs is recognised, but only selectively. The government highlights the role of CSOs in areas such as health, public services and community action. Ad hoc consultations are organised, such as [CSO contributions to the draft finance Bill](#). However, organisations

involved in governance, transparency or civil rights issues are less recognised, sometimes ignored, or even equated with the opposition.

Populist or anti-CSO rhetoric, such as stigmatisation as "foreign agents", is not widespread. There are no official campaigns of this kind. There is no major populist rhetoric accusing CSOs of acting as "foreign agents". [Freedom House](#) reports indicate that NGOs, including human rights groups, "generally operate freely" in Benin, suggesting that there is no official "foreign agency" campaign against them, even though activists are sometimes arrested. [The US State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023](#) does not mention any official campaign specifically targeting CSOs as 'foreign agents', but it notes that freedom of the press and expression is hampered by regulatory or punitive measures, which can have a chilling effect on CSOs and independent media. Data from [the UPR \(Universal Periodic Review\)](#) and human rights associations indicate that human rights defenders and critical actors face challenges and a reduction in civic space, although this is not articulated as a populist attack targeting CSOs as 'evil foreign agents'. Some human rights organisations are indirectly stigmatised, sometimes equated with the opposition or considered "troublemakers".

Despite these limitations, the media generally cover CSO activities, particularly during public events, consultations or major advocacy campaigns. The active participation of structures such as [Social Watch Benin](#) in budget meetings and government consultations receives media and online coverage, highlighting their role in budgetary democracy, as was the case during the meeting with the Directorate General of the Budget.

Nevertheless, challenges remain in ensuring broader and more transparent coverage of all activities, particularly those of marginalised or less publicised CSOs.

To date, there are no major trends suggesting that CSOs are systematically targeted by populist rhetoric portraying them as "foreign agents". The regulatory framework and awareness campaigns tend to promote a climate of cooperation. However, constant vigilance remains necessary, as tensions may arise from time to time, particularly in the context of the upcoming elections scheduled for 2026. The political context in Benin is marked by tensions and significant institutional changes, which have repercussions on civic space and political participation.

## 5.2 | Perception of civil society and civic engagement

Recent opinion polls, notably the [Afrobarometer \(2024\)](#), provide accurate data on Beninese citizens' perceptions of civil liberties. According to this study, approximately 58% of Beninese citizens say they feel "fairly" or "completely" free to express their opinions, a figure that represents a massive decline of 28 percentage points compared to 2014. Furthermore, although 77% of respondents say they are free to join a political organisation of their choice and 83% believe they can vote without pressure, these indicators of democratic participation have fallen significantly by 13 points and 9 points respectively over the last decade. The survey also highlights strong demand for a free press, supported by 69% of citizens (a 25-point increase since 2017), and for media capable of investigating corruption and government mistakes, an expectation expressed by 68% of respondents. However, this desire contrasts with the perceived reality: 53% of Beninese now believe that the media are "not very free" or "not at all free" to report and comment on the news without censorship or government interference. This perception of a lack of media freedom has increased by ten points since 2020. In short, these data reflect a deep sense of regression in fundamental freedoms, fuelling growing dissatisfaction (60%) with the functioning of democracy in Benin, a dissatisfaction that has increased by nine points since 2020. The study also highlights that citizens who feel deprived of their freedom of expression or association are the most likely to criticise the implementation of democracy in the country.

Many CSO leaders have joined political parties that support the government's actions, creating confusion among the population, who suspect possible collusion between certain civil society organisations and political actors. [Political scientist Joseph Djogbénou](#), for example, is a

former leader of an organisation called *Alternative citoyenne (Citizen Alternative)* who was subsequently integrated into the political framework (as minister and president of the Constitutional Court), which is perceived as a mechanism for co-opting civil society actors. Similarly, other civic activists such as [Orden Alladatin](#) have taken up parliamentary positions, which is seen as a possible dilution of civil society's independence in public debate. This trend has also materialised in the creation of the political party "Alternative Citoyenne", founded by former civil society actors (including Rock David Gnahoui, Séraphin Agbangbata, Urbain Amègbédji, Joseph Djogbénou and Orden Alladatin).

These developments reinforce the perception among part of the population that civil society is becoming increasingly politicised, to the detriment of its traditional role as an independent actor in advocacy, citizen oversight and representation of social concerns.

Perceptions of CSOs as legitimate or as disconnected elites are mixed. Some organisations are recognised for their proximity to communities, particularly those that support women's economic activities and are involved in the health, environment and education sectors. Other CSOs, considered professionalised and elitist, are heavily dependent on international funding and are sometimes perceived as disconnected from the daily concerns of citizens. This distinction strongly influences the legitimacy perceived by the population and the ability of CSOs to mobilise local support.

Citizen mobilisation remains underdeveloped. A culture of volunteering exists, but it remains informal, and local private donations are rare. Most CSOs depend primarily on international partners for their funding. Citizen participation is more visible on online platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok, but it remains largely un-institutionalised and scattered.

### 5.3 | Civic equality and inclusion

In theory, marginalised groups, such as LGBTQI+ people or ethnic minorities, can create CSOs without discrimination, but in practice, this is only partially true. The Beninese legal framework, particularly Article 26 of the Constitution, guarantees equality for all before the law. However, there are no legislative provisions that explicitly recognise the rights of LGBTQI+ people. The Penal Code does not criminalise homosexual relations, which allows for the existence of LGBTQI+ CSOs or pro-human rights structures working for the inclusion and protection of these populations. Among the Beninese associations active in this field are Bénin Synergie Plus (BESYP), a national network of LGBTIQ associations; Hirondelle Club Bénin, an NGO defending sexual minorities by offering accommodation and socio-legal support; Affirmative Action Bénin, a member of ILGA active in sexual health, HIV and LGBT rights; AFRO Bénin (Alliance des Femmes pour une Relève Orientée), a feminist association that supports lesbian, bisexual and trans women, Les Flambeaux, which works with LGBTI people with disabilities, Réseau Sida Bénin, an association bringing together key populations including LGBT people, and Synergie Trans Bénin.

Several CSOs are fully committed to inclusion. Organisations such as WiLDAF-Bénin, Hinvi Hèdo, ABPF, GAPP Bénin and others are working hard on issues of inclusion, sexual and reproductive rights, minority rights and gender equality.

[The US State Department's 2023 Report on Human Rights Practices](#) indicates that in Benin, consensual same-sex relations between adults are not criminalised, but that the law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The report also notes that LGBT people face hostility and social discrimination, including denial of healthcare and verbal attacks, although the authorities have not recorded any specific criminal prosecutions related to sexual orientation. The report therefore highlights that, despite the absence of repressive laws, there is an incomplete and unprotective legal framework and persistent social hostility towards LGBT people, particularly outside major cities.



During [Benin's Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council](#) in 2022, states and NGOs highlighted that, although the Beninese Constitution guarantees equality and prohibits discrimination, LGBT people continue to face very little legal protection and forms of social discrimination. Recommendations received by Benin included incorporating protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity into domestic law.

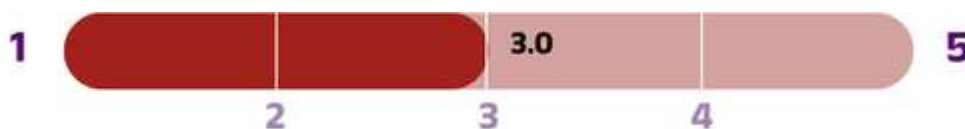
Many civil society organisations are actively working to promote social and civic inclusion, often with the support of partners such as UNDP Benin. Actors such as the Federation of Associations of Persons with Disabilities in Benin (FAPHB) and WiLDAF-Benin are taking concrete action to protect the rights of vulnerable people, women and minorities. Organisations such as Hinvi Hèdo and the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) are cautious in their involvement in the area of LGBT+ rights, but their involvement nevertheless contributes to changing social discourse and gradually strengthening inclusion. Conservative discourse remains prevalent and continues to limit the full freedom of marginalised groups, illustrating that despite significant progress for certain vulnerable groups, there are still setbacks in the social acceptance of LGBTQI+ populations.

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## PRINCIPLE SCORE

# 6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Digital technology has become a central pillar of citizen expression, governance and social participation in Benin. Civil society organisations, journalists and citizens use digital tools on a daily basis to inform themselves, communicate and advocate for human rights and sustainable development. However, this dynamic is part of a complex legal and regulatory framework. The Digital Code (Law No. 2017-20), while modernising the electronic communications sector and securing digital services, contains broadly worded and ambiguous provisions that limit freedom of expression and the protection of personal data. In this context, the ability of CSOs to take full advantage of digital technology while ensuring the security and confidentiality of their activities remains a major challenge. Access to digital infrastructure is improving, but remains uneven, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups remains insufficient, raising crucial questions about the balance between innovation, regulation and respect for fundamental freedoms.

### 6.1 | Digital rights and freedoms

[The Digital Code \(Law No. 2017-20\)](#) has modernised the legal framework for electronic communications in Benin, but it contains several provisions that are broadly worded, ambiguous and criminalising, particularly with regard to the dissemination of "false information", "insults", "harassment" or breaches of "public order". These provisions are frequently invoked in prosecutions against journalists, whistleblowers or internet users, leading to widespread self-censorship, including among civil society organisations.

The last internet shutdown dates back to the 2019 election period, which was marked by violence and several deaths among protesters. Since then, there have been no reports of internet shutdowns or targeted blocking of social media, unlike the practices observed during elections in other countries in the region. The technical environment therefore remains relatively stable and reliable for digital uses.

No specific ban on the use of VPNs, encrypted messaging or other digital security tools is mentioned in the legal texts, and these technologies remain fully accessible. However, digital surveillance is constant and legal proceedings remain unpredictable. Prosecutions against [activists and internet users](#) on the basis of the Digital Code, for acts related to online

publications or messages posted on social media, fuel a sense of constant surveillance and judicial unpredictability. This climate contributes to self-censorship and the reluctance of many CSOs, particularly those active on sensitive issues such as governance, anti-corruption or human rights, to make full use of advanced digital security tools. In this context, CSOs are still hesitant to make full use of advanced protection tools, particularly those working on sensitive issues such as governance, corruption or human rights.

As mentioned earlier in the analysis of the other principles, human rights activists are subject to increased surveillance on social media, and any statement deemed unfavourable to the government results in heavy sentences. What was initially a major reform of Benin's legal framework for the digital sector, the Digital Code, adopted by Law No. 2017-20 of 20 April 2018, has turned out to be a sword of Damocles hanging over the head of every citizen who uses social media. It aims to provide greater legal certainty for businesses and investors, while protecting citizens and their personal data, with the aim of strengthening confidence in digital services.

The Code modernises civil, commercial, criminal and administrative rules relating to digital technology and takes into account current issues related to digitalisation. However, some of its provisions have been criticised for their potentially repressive nature and the lack of precision in certain formulations, leaving considerable room for interpretation by the authorities responsible for their enforcement. This ambiguity creates a climate of mistrust and encourages self-censorship among users and digital players.

To date, no CSO has been investigated or prosecuted on the basis of this law. However, many journalists have been prosecuted for online publications, illustrating the particular sensitivity of the digital space when it comes to public expression.

## 6.2 | Digital security and privacy

[The Digital Code](#) contains provisions on cybersecurity, the fight against cybercrime and the protection of personal data, but in practice, civil society organisations remain particularly vulnerable. They lack the human and financial resources dedicated to IT security and have a high level of ignorance about digital risks, whether phishing, espionage, email hacking or unauthorised access to their social media accounts. Several CSOs report suspected intrusions or surveillance, but they lack the tools, skills to document or technically confirm these incidents. Most CSO leaders communicate via applications such as Signal or Telegram because, according to popular belief, these two cannot be hacked.

To date, there is no systematic national cybersecurity training programme for CSOs or human rights defenders. Training opportunities remain limited and sporadic, mainly provided by international partners, which is insufficient to cover the entire sector. In this context, CIVICUS has offered its partners three digital security training sessions as part of the EU SEE project, but these initiatives remain marginal in relation to the needs.

The protection of beneficiaries' personal data is a critical issue for CSOs, particularly those working on sensitive issues such as human rights, sexual and reproductive health, or support for LGBTQI+ people and people living with HIV. In Benin, a legal framework exists to regulate the protection of personal data, notably through the provisions of the Digital Code (Law No. 2017-20 of 20 April 2018), which establishes a set of rules designed to guarantee the collection, processing, storage and security of personal data. These rules are detailed in Book V, Title II, Chapter 1 et seq. of the Digital Code, which impose principles of legality, transparency, purpose limitation and data security, and define the obligations of the data controller and the rights of data subjects.

The implementation of these provisions is ensured by a [Personal Data Protection Authority \(APDP\)](#), which is responsible for monitoring processing operations and ensuring compliance with legal obligations. However, the lack of systematic internal best practices within many CSOs, such as data encryption, secure password management, or protected hosting of

information, exposes this sensitive data to risks of leaks and unauthorised access. In a context where digital surveillance is perceived as constant and legal proceedings unpredictable, the lack of technical and organisational capacity for data protection is a significant vulnerability for CSOs, particularly those working on highly sensitive issues.

Benin's legal framework guarantees the security of communications, but effective data and privacy protection remains insufficient in a context of rapid digitisation of services and social interactions. A lack of awareness of cybersecurity issues, combined with a lack of dedicated resources, leaves CSOs vulnerable to cyberattacks and digital espionage. Paradoxically, the Digital Code provides for strict rules on cybersecurity, cybercrime and personal data protection, as well as severe penalties, which reinforces the sense of risk and the urgency of investing in robust security practices within CSOs.

### 6.3 | Digital accessibility

Internet access in Benin is growing significantly thanks to the ongoing rollout of fibre optics. Currently, 50 out of 77 municipalities are already connected, and the government's goal is to cover all municipalities by 2025. These data are confirmed by several sources, including [WeAreTech](#), which highlights the desire to roll out broadband across the country, [the Ecofin Agency](#), which mentions the same 50 municipalities served and the vision of a comprehensive network, and the World Bank, which indicates that by 2023, approximately 2,500 km of fibre optics had been deployed, with the aim of covering all 77 municipalities. According to information gathered on the STATISTA website, the Internet penetration rate in Benin was [32.2% in 2025](#).

Despite this progress, penetration rates remain relatively low and access to digital technology remains uneven. Civil society organisations generally enjoy functional access in urban areas, but those located in rural areas face persistent constraints, such as unstable connectivity, high costs, limited access to equipment and digital literacy challenges. There is no information to suggest that public digital platforms and services are adapted to people with disabilities, particularly those with visual or hearing impairments, highlighting that digital inclusion remains insufficient.

Furthermore, there are no known government programmes offering subsidies or specific support for the digitalisation of CSOs, whether in terms of equipment, software or training. However, access to a secure digital environment is guaranteed, supported by the constant expansion of internet coverage and a legal framework protecting freedom of access.

Unlike the restrictions observed during the 2019 and 2021 election periods, no Internet limitations have been reported since then, reflecting the relative stability of the technical infrastructure.

The expansion of digital infrastructure is also reflected in usage. In June 2024, [the Electronic Communications and Postal Regulatory Authority \(ARCEP\)](#) counted 11.06 million mobile Internet subscribers and 20,000 fixed Internet users for an estimated population of approximately 13.7 million according to the World Bank. The number of mobile phone subscriptions stood at 17.8 million, compared with only 1,363 for fixed telephony. [Penetration rates](#) at the end of 2023 were 33.8% for the Internet and 53.9% for mobile telephony, according to the ITU.

### Case study

The implementation of the Digital Code is causing serious concern among civil society. Some of its provisions are perceived as repressive and have a deterrent effect on the free use of information. These include:



- ✓ Articles 257 et seq. of the Criminal Code, incorporated into various sections of the Digital Code, relating to offences such as fraudulent access to computer systems, dissemination of false information or breach of confidentiality;
- ✓ Article 635 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which grants expanded powers to authorities in the investigation and prosecution of digital offences;
- ✓ Articles in Book VI of the Digital Code concerning criminal penalties, including imprisonment and heavy fines, whose broad wording may infringe on civil liberties;
- ✓ Legal provisions governing the surveillance of electronic communications, interception and data monitoring, which offer authorities broad scope for interpretation.

These articles are perceived as repressive, generating fear and self-censorship within civil society due to their potential impact on freedom of expression and the free use of information.

At the same time, [several environmental CSOs](#) produce critical reports on natural resource management, contributing to awareness-raising and advocacy for sustainable governance. These include:

- ✓ Nature Tropicale NGO, active in the fight against environmental crime;
- ✓ JVE Bénin (Young Volunteers for the Environment), involved in various environmental protection actions;
- ✓ CEBEDES (Benin Centre for Education for Sustainable Development and the Social Environment);
- ✓ YIMMA-Benin, which works to raise awareness and provide environmental education;
- ✓ CPN Les Papillons, committed to raising eco-citizen awareness.

These CSOs often collaborate in coalitions to raise awareness about unsustainable practices and advocate for better management of natural resources in the face of threats such as deforestation, pollution and illegal exploitation. Their actions demonstrate the importance of CSOs in citizen monitoring and the promotion of environmental sustainability, despite a legal and regulatory context that can limit their freedom of expression.

Digital developments in Benin offer significant opportunities for civil society, both in terms of communication and citizen mobilisation and advocacy for social and environmental causes. Infrastructure is developing and digital tools are widely accessible, but CSOs continue to face persistent challenges related to IT security, data protection and ambiguities in the legal framework. While the Digital Code represents progress in terms of modernisation and regulation, some of its provisions are still perceived as repressive and create a climate of self-censorship, particularly for actors working on sensitive issues. For digital technology to become a true vehicle for inclusion and citizen engagement, it is essential to strengthen training, resources and security practices within CSOs, while clarifying the legal framework to protect fundamental freedoms and promote safe and responsible use of the digital space. The experience of environmental CSOs and human rights organisations shows that, despite these constraints, it is possible to use digital technology as a tool for social transformation, provided that vigilance, skills and civic engagement are combined.

# C) Recommendations

## I. To the Government

(Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Communication)

### 1. Improvement of the administrative and legal framework

- ✓ Simplify and harmonise CSO registration procedures by clarifying the documentation required, reducing processing times and ensuring fair treatment throughout the country.
- ✓ Make administrative control mechanisms more transparent and accountable by ensuring accessible channels of appeal and considering an independent body to mediate between the administration and CSOs.
- ✓ Clarify the provisions on political neutrality (Articles 34 and 50 of Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025 on associations and foundations) and clearly distinguish between citizen advocacy and "prohibited political positions".

### 2. Dialogue and participation

- ✓ Improve the transparency, regularity and quality of State-CSO consultations by creating formal mechanisms for dialogue and ensuring that contributions are taken into account in public policies.

### 3. Fiscal framework and financing

- ✓ Introduce tax incentives, including a national fund to support CSOs, and encourage donations through tax breaks.
- ✓ Protect international funding (Articles 55 and 89 of Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025 on associations and foundations) by prioritising transparency over restriction, clarifying reporting requirements and guaranteeing donor confidentiality.

### 4. Specific measures relating to the new law on associations

- ✓ Adjustment of the compliance deadline (Article 148):
  - Adopt longer deadlines for CSOs to comply with the new law.
  - Replace automatic dissolution with a formal notice.
  - Establish a national support programme (training, model statutes, administrative assistance).
- ✓ **Strict supervision of administrative suspensions (Articles 60–62):**

- Limit suspensions to serious and objectively justifiable cases.
- Make an adversarial procedure mandatory before any decision is taken.
- Set a maximum duration of 30 non-renewable days, with automatic referral to a judge.
- Systematically publish suspension decisions.

✓ **Guarantee the genuine autonomy of CSOs:**

- Revise Articles 27 and 28 of Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025 on associations and foundations in the Republic of Benin to allow rehabilitated persons to associate freely.
- Reduce the time limit for issuing receipts to a maximum of 30 days, with effective recourse.
- Limit excessive discretionary power by establishing an independent supervisory body.

## **II. To donors and the international community**

### **1. Funding and sustainability**

- ✓ Support the diversification and sustainability of CSO funding, favouring multi-year structural support over project-only funding.

### **2. Capacity building**

- ✓ Support the development of CSOs' skills in internal governance, digital technology, cybersecurity, data management and administrative compliance.

### **3. Dialogue and cooperation**

- ✓ Promote multi-stakeholder dialogue by supporting neutral forums for consultation between government, CSOs, technical partners and the private sector.
- ✓ Encourage mediation initiatives, particularly in contexts of administrative or political tension.

## **III. To Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)**

### **1. Internal governance**

- ✓ Improve transparency, financial management, accountability and professionalisation, while strengthening member training.

### **2. Resource mobilisation**

- ✓ Develop diversified funding strategies, including innovative economic models and increased local fundraising.

### **3. Advocacy and coordination**

- ✓ Strengthen monitoring, advocacy and documentation of obstacles, and pool efforts to increase collective impact.

## **IV. Collective and cross-cutting mechanisms**

### **1. Creation of an inter-CSO advisory working group**

Objective: to ensure the inclusive implementation of Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025 on associations and foundations in the Republic of Benin, in accordance with international standards. This working group would enable

- ✓ Maintain a structured dialogue with the authority in charge of the Register;
- ✓ Identify and monitor critical points in the law and Decree No. 2025-575;
- ✓ Systematically include small local CSOs in consultations;
- ✓ Publish regular reports to ensure transparency.

## **2. Proportionality of administrative and financial obligations**

- ✓ Adopt differentiated regimes according to the size and resources of CSOs.
- ✓ Exempt low-income associations from administrative fees.
- ✓ Standardise reporting formats, adapting them to the actual capacities of organisations.



## D) Research Process

The Development of the Enabling Environment Report (EER) is based on a participatory, rigorous and transparent methodology, structured in several complementary stages:

- ✓ Data collection and analysis: an active observation system covering the entire national territory made it possible to document incidents, legislative developments and dynamics affecting civil society.
- ✓ Panel of experts and CSO representatives: this panel met in August 2025 to evaluate the six principles of the EU SEE project, using a collective scoring method enriched by qualitative exchanges that allowed for the cross-referencing of perspectives from various actors in the civic sector.
- ✓ Mobilisation of external sources: specialised reports, academic publications and institutional documents were used to contextualise the data collected, enhance the quality of the analysis and ensure a comparative approach.
- ✓ Collaborative writing with the EU SEE consortium: several rounds of proofreading, validation and harmonisation were carried out to ensure the reliability, accuracy and neutrality of the final report.

This mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data, primary and secondary sources, as well as national and international contributions, provides a holistic, contextualised and up-to-date assessment of the enabling environment for CSOs in Benin. Its iterative nature ensures that the conclusions accurately reflect developments in the national civic context.

### **Principles rating system**

Each principle is assessed on several specific dimensions which, once aggregated, allow a quantitative score to be assigned on a scale ranging from: 1 = totally unfavourable, 2 = unfavourable, 3 = partially favourable, 4 = favourable, 5 = totally favourable.

This rating is accompanied by an in-depth narrative analysis, highlighting strengths, weaknesses and developments observed.

For Principle 1, data from the CIVICUS Monitor is incorporated into the assessment. For Principles 2 to 6, as external quantitative indicators are limited or non-existent for the 86 countries in the EU SEE programme, a national panel meets annually to provide a structured assessment based on guiding questions, enriched by sources such as V-Dem, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, the CLD's RTI rating, and other reliable resources.

Final scores are obtained using a weighted average to reflect the relative importance of each dimension in the assessment of the principle.

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# EU SEE

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