



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment

## Snapshot

### Côte d'Ivoire

### December 2025

## Context

In Côte d'Ivoire, civic space has long been governed by [the 1960 law on associations](#). Deemed outdated and unsuited to current realities, this legislation has been repeatedly challenged by civil society actors. In response to their recommendations, the government has initiated a reform process aimed at modernising the legal framework for civil society organisations. However, despite the proposals put forward by civil society, the President of the Republic issued [Order No. 368 of 12 June 2024 on the organisation of civil society](#) without prior consultation.

This ordinance, adopted by the Ivorian parliament ([the National Assembly](#) and [the Senate](#)) despite protests and requests for amendments from civil society actors, further restricts civic space. It introduces significant constraints on the functioning of organisations, reducing their autonomy and freedom of action.

The period leading up to the October 2025 presidential election was marked by several worrying incidents. There were reports of political [activists being kidnapped](#), particularly following comments made on social media. In addition, peaceful demonstrations were banned, notably on the basis of [an interministerial decree](#) and a [prefectural decree](#) issued by the prefect of the department of Abidjan.

In the same context, gatherings were dispersed by the security forces using tear gas, leading [to the arrest and conviction of activists and demonstrators](#). These events reflect a climate of high political tension, fuelled by mistrust between political actors and persistent disputes over the electoral process.

In general, civic space in Côte d'Ivoire remains under pressure. It is characterised by increased surveillance of dissenting voices, the criminalisation of critical opinions and frequent recourse to administrative or police measures to restrict freedom of expression, assembly, demonstration and association.

### 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly, association and expression enshrined in the [Ivorian Constitution of 8 November 2016](#) (Articles 19, 20 and 25), the effective exercise of these rights remains subject to recurring restrictions. Demonstrations organised by civil society actors and political parties have been dispersed by the security forces, sometimes with the use of tear gas, leading to arrests and convictions.

In April 2025, teacher Dugarry Assi was arrested and convicted for mobilising and raising awareness among his peers to continue demanding their bonuses. He was abducted from his home by hooded individuals, before being tried, sentenced to two years in prison, then released on bail and placed under judicial supervision. In April 2025, three members of the NGO CICO were arrested and imprisoned without trial, following a complaint against the organisation by the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). The organisation had sent a letter to the CEI requesting

information on the management of the institution's database. They are still in detention. In September 2025, activist Ibrahim Zigui was arrested at his home and placed in detention, and his house was also searched.

On 26 September 2025, the Public Prosecutor met with bloggers, page administrators and influencers to warn them about the risks of disinformation and illegal comments. He warned them that they would now be responsible for the content published on their platforms, including comments made by internet users, and that they could face up to 20 years in prison if they failed to comply. While this measure aims to protect public order, it raises serious concerns about the limits of freedom of expression and the risk of political manipulation in the run-up to the elections.

During the presidential election period in October 2025, peaceful demonstrations were banned, notably by [interministerial decree](#) no. 0755/MIS/MEMD of 17 October 2025, prohibiting public meetings and demonstrations by political parties or groups throughout the national territory for a period of two months, with the exception of those taking place within the framework of the presidential election process on 25 October 2025. In addition, the Prefect of the Department of Abidjan issued [a prefectoral decree](#) on 10 October 2025 prohibiting the march planned for 11 October 2025 by the Common Front in the territory of Abidjan. [Several young leaders of opposition political parties](#) and more than [700 demonstrators were arrested](#). About [50 of them were sentenced to three years' imprisonment](#), some were released, while a large number remain awaiting trial. These individuals are being prosecuted for disturbing public order because of their participation in demonstrations organised despite official bans. In a statement issued on 27 October 2025, the National Human Rights Council of Côte d'Ivoire (CNDH) assessed the pre-election situation between 11 and 21 October 2025. It reported six deaths during the opposition demonstrations.

This wave of arrests and bans on gatherings has provoked strong reactions from Ivorian civil society organisations and international human rights organisations, including the IHRC, the West African Network for Peacebuilding ([WANEP](#)), the [Ivorian League for Human Rights \(LIDHO\)](#), [Amnesty International](#), and [the FIDH-OMCT Observatory](#). These organisations have published reports and press releases and given interviews to the international media calling on the Ivorian state to promote dialogue and respect its international commitments on civil and political rights.

Finally, we must also mention a worrying case of transnational repression. On the night of 10 to 11 July 2025, Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè, a Beninese journalist, whistleblower and human rights defender, founder and editor-in-chief of the investigative newspaper Olofofo, was [arrested](#) by the Ivorian authorities in his hotel room in Abidjan. He was then taken directly to the VIP lounge at Abidjan airport, where a small private plane chartered for the occasion flew him to Benin. Mr Sossoukpè was in Abidjan to participate in a forum on new technologies, the Ivoire Tech Forum (9-11 July), at the invitation of the Ivorian Ministry of Digital Transition and Digitalisation. Upon his arrival in Benin, Mr Sossoukpè – who had been granted refugee status in Togo in 2021 – was taken into custody, handed over to the Beninese authorities and placed directly in police custody at the economic and financial brigade. The following morning, he was brought before an investigating judge who read him the arrest warrant

issued by the Court for the Suppression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET). The warrant contained three charges against him: "harassment through a computer system", "rebellion" and "apology for terrorism". Mr Sossoukpé was immediately transferred to the civil prison in Ouidah, near Cotonou, where he remains in detention.

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

Civil society is governed by [Ordinance No. 2024-338](#) of 12 June 2024 on the organisation of civil society. Despite [the reservations expressed](#), the amendments and withdrawals proposed by civil society organisations were not adopted and this ordinance was passed by the Ivorian parliament. Several provisions restrict fundamental freedoms enshrined mainly in Articles 19 and 20 of the 2016 Constitution, in particular freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, religious belief or worship, freedom of association, peaceful assembly and demonstration, as well as international texts to which Côte d'Ivoire is a party, such as Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7 of the African Charter on the right to have one's cause heard, Article 10 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly in Africa. Article 22 of this ordinance has been described as "extremely dangerous" in a civil society analysis, in that it provides for the dissolution of organisations whose activities "constitute a threat to public order and security, the integrity of the national territory and the republican form of the State, or which are likely to compromise social cohesion, incite hatred between ethnic or religious groups, cause political unrest, discredit political institutions or their functioning, incite citizens to break the law, and harm the general interest of the country", without the possibility of appealing against such dissolution.

This ordinance, and in particular Article 22, served as the legal basis for the [dissolution of student associations and unions in 2024](#), raising concerns about freedom of association and pluralism in the citizen movement. Indeed, on 30 October 2024, following [the assassination](#) of student Mars Aubin Déagoué, known as Général Sorcier, a member of the Student and School Federation of Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI), the government issued a decree dissolving pupil and student associations during the Council of Ministers meeting on 30 October 2024 "with a view to preserving public order and security and ensuring lasting calm and social cohesion in schools and universities". A government communiqué read by its spokesperson stated that the dissolution of these associations was pronounced in accordance with Article 22 of the ordinance on associations.

Côte d'Ivoire distinguished itself on the African continent by adopting, on 20 June 2014, [Law No. 2014-388 on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders](#), followed by its [implementing decree in 2017](#), amended in 2021. This legal framework has made the country a pioneer in Africa in terms of the recognition and protection of human rights defenders. Subsequently, [a national mechanism](#) for the protection of human rights defenders called the "Committee for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders" was established in March 2022. After several advocacy efforts to ensure effective representation of defenders within this mechanism, the Ivorian State took measures to respond. This development resulted in the election in June 2025 of the

National Coordinator of the CIDDH by her peers as the representative of defenders within the Committee.

### 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

In Côte d'Ivoire, funding for civil society actors remains relatively accessible, thanks to the support of international donors, private foundations and certain local contributions. This support enables many organisations to mobilise the resources necessary to implement effective action and advocacy programmes.

Over the past year, CIDDH has not observed any obstacles to the accessibility of external financial resources through banking structures.

However, recent international restrictions have had a significant impact on the viability of several local organisations. Measures taken by the US administration in January 2025 to limit funding for certain organisations led to the closure of several structures, staff reductions or strategic reorientation of others, which had to seek alternative funding mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of their activities. USAID was funding several ongoing projects, particularly in the areas of elections, democratic governance, education and development. Funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was discontinued, as was funding from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which had just launched a project called SIECLE, aimed at strengthening the transparency and accountability of electoral processes while increasing the participation of young people and women in political life. In addition, another NDI programme entitled "Strengthening Information Integrity to Counter Democratic Decline in the Sahel and Neighbouring Countries" was affected by this financial restriction, which led to the cessation of support for the Working Group on Combating Disinformation-Côte d'Ivoire (GTLD-CI), led by the CIDDH, to carry out certain activities within the framework of this programme.

In addition to these structures, there are other partners whose funding has been reduced, such as the NGO Indigo.

Furthermore, the strengthening of the national legal framework, particularly through provisions relating to the fight against money-laundering in Chapter 8 of the Order of 12 June 2024 on the organisation of civil society relating to the fight against money-laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, is causing concern within the voluntary sector. These provisions require CSOs to produce detailed financial reports on a regular basis and to justify the origin of their resources. While this is legitimate in terms of transparency, it can also increase their administrative obligations and limit their scope for action.

In addition, in recent years, some donors have been providing funding directly to the government and state institutions, which are required to involve CSOs in the implementation of their activities. This practice does not contribute to the organisational development of CSOs. When selected to participate in these activities, civil society organisations may lose visibility and independence. Furthermore, in this type of partnership, CSOs generally do not receive institutional support to cover their office operating costs, and in the long term this approach weakens CSOs.

### 4. Open and responsive state

There is effective collaboration between the Government and CSOs. Indeed, [consultation frameworks](#) exist between ministries and civil society organisations according to their areas of activity. CSOs therefore participate in discussions and consultations on the development of public policy projects. Gender is taken into account in the selection of CSO representatives invited to participate. Among these consultation frameworks is the Observatory for Solidarity and Social Cohesion, a permanent dialogue framework set up by the [Ministry of National Cohesion](#). Also worth mentioning is the [consultation framework between the Ministry of the Interior and Security](#) and civil society organisations (CSOs), which promotes regular exchanges through workshops and other meetings. Finally, the Interministerial Committee, led by the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, consistently involves CSOs in its activities, particularly in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Furthermore, the election of the National Coordinator of the CIDDH as representative of defenders within the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders is a significant step forward, enabling her to relay cases of violations of fundamental freedoms and to advocate for this mechanism.

However, despite these advances, the real impact of these mechanisms remains limited, particularly because CSO recommendations are rarely considered. As a result, CSOs continue to advocate for the establishment of a more formal, inclusive and functional framework for dialogue to strengthen their contribution to the implementation of the National Development Plan (PND) 2021-2025.

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

Article 26 of the 2016 Constitution recognises civil society actors as development actors. The Government does not fail to mention certain organisations recognised for their objectivity and credibility.

However, the Government often perceives other civil society actors as entities [that could](#) potentially [disrupt public order](#) in collaboration with opposition forces or political parties, especially during protests, as was the case during the 2024 demonstrations against the high cost of living. Political discourse, relayed by the media, has often portrayed these actors as agents manipulated from outside, or even as "agents of destabilisation", which undermines their legitimacy and their ability to express themselves freely. For example, Armand Krikpeu, Secretary General of the Agir Pour le Peuple (AGIP) platform, was imprisoned for initiating a peaceful march against the high cost of living and faced the following [charges](#): "incitement to insurrection", "undermining state security", "disturbing public order" and "illegal occupation of public places".

Political leaders, including ministers and members of the ruling party, were quick to label these actions as "disturbances of public order," reflecting a desire to delegitimise their demands.

Media coverage plays a decisive role in this dynamic. Certain media outlets, often aligned with government positions, amplify negative narratives about civil society actors, while positive initiatives or significant contributions by these groups often receive little media attention. However, over the past year, there have been notable

changes in the image of civil society. Although negative perceptions predominate, there has been growing recognition of the importance of civil society actors in promoting inclusion and democratic participation by the population. This has manifested itself in calls for civil society to speak out or denounce certain situations, particularly during the waves of evictions that took place between 2023 and 2024 for major redevelopment projects. At the CIDDH headquarters, they received a delegation of about 20 people who came to ask them to call on the authorities to respect their rights. They gave them advice before referring them to the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) because the issue was not specific to the rights of human rights defenders.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

Ivorian civil society has access to online information and can share it in strict compliance with the regulations in force. The legal framework is based on the following texts: Law No. 2013-451 of 19 June 2013 on the [fight against cybercrime](#), amended by [Law No. 2023-593 of 7 June 2023](#), [Law No. 2017-867 of 27 December 2017](#) on the legal regime governing the press, amended by [Law No. 2022-978 of 20 December 2022](#) and Law No. 2022 – 979 of 20 December 2022 amending Law No. 2017-868 of 27 December 2017 on the legal regime governing audiovisual communication. Article 92 of this law stipulates: Defamation committed through the press or any other means of communication to the public against the courts or tribunals, the armed forces, constituted bodies and public administrations is punishable by a fine of between 1,000,000 and 5,000,000 CFA francs. And Article 93: Defamation committed through the press or any other means of communication to the public against one or more members of the Government, one or more members of the National Assembly, a citizen entrusted with a public service or mandate, a jury on account of their function or capacity, or a witness on account of their testimony shall be punishable by the penalty provided for in the previous article of this law. These articles restrict freedom of expression because they reduce the possibility of publishing information on 'the courts, tribunals, armed forces, constituted bodies and public administrations' and are therefore contrary to the spirit of good governance advocated by the Constitution. This article makes these categories of persons untouchable. The term 'defamation' is used in a subtle way. According to the purpose of the law, whistleblowers and bloggers should not be affected. Journalists should be allowed to report abuses in strict compliance with the exercise of their profession.

According to recent public sources, there is no systematic policy of internet shutdowns. However, the digital space is governed by laws and practices that restrict freedom of expression online and expose civil society actors to risks of institutional control or pressure. In this regard, the government has put in place legislation and institutions to govern digital technology and cybersecurity (national strategy, agencies such as the National Agency for Information Systems Security in Côte d'Ivoire – ANSSI-CI). These frameworks are officially aimed at protecting infrastructure and combating cybercrime, but they also strengthen the capacity for surveillance and control of digital communications. The Ivorian civic space is obstructed by legal and administrative mechanisms that can be used against journalists and human rights defenders.

On 26 September 2025, at the initiative of [the Public Prosecutor, a meeting was held in Abidjan](#) bringing [together bloggers, influencers and CSOs](#) to discuss the theme of

"The responsibility of social media site administrators". Presented as a forum for discussion on the regulation of the digital space, this meeting highlighted deep concerns about freedom of expression and the openness of civic space in Côte d'Ivoire.

## Challenges and opportunities

The parliamentary elections on [27 December 2025](#) will take place in a climate still marked by tensions arising from the October 2025 presidential election. CSOs could face risks of polarisation, restrictions on freedoms and dissolution based on Ordinance 2024-368 of 12 June 2024 on the organisation of civil society.

To this end, CSOs will need to redouble their efforts to promote transparency, social cohesion and inclusive participation, monitor civic space, strengthen their security and readjust their internal strategy. This highlights the need for funding for CSO activities related to the legislative elections.

This new political sequence also represents an opportunity to consolidate collaboration with institutions, expand partnerships between local and international organisations, and revitalise trust between citizens and public actors.

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