



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Democratic Republic of Congo

December 2025



## Context

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is governed by a [Constitution](#) adopted on 18 February 2006, with certain articles revised by Law No. 11/002 of 20 January 2011.

On 20 December 2023, the DRC held general elections for the fourth legislature. These resulted in the [victory of](#) Mr Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, who secured a second and final term as Head of State in accordance with Article 70 of the [Constitution](#). The Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) and its allies also [won a large majority](#) of seats in both houses of Parliament. Although the results were confirmed by the Constitutional Court, the elections were marred by numerous [irregularities and incidents of fraud](#), sparking widespread controversy. These included the theft of electoral kits, failures to comply with the electoral calendar, and voting that was officially scheduled for one day but extended over several days. Since then, the ruling party has launched an initiative to [revise the Constitution](#), raising [concerns](#) about potential attempts to extend presidential term limits. These developments echo previous periods of unrest, including the deadly protests in 2015 and 2018 sparked by similar constitutional manoeuvres under former President Joseph Kabila Kabange. Freedom House [classifies](#) the DRC as “*not free*,” giving it a score of just 19 out of 100 in its 2024 report due to widespread corruption, electoral manipulation and restrictions on civil liberties.

Social and political tensions persist, fuelled by deep inequalities, a lack of respect for fundamental freedoms and growing political intolerance. Criticism of the current regime, even when well founded, is often rejected by state leaders. In October 2025, a conclave of several opposition figures in Nairobi led to the creation of a political platform entitled “*Save the Congo*,” aimed at denouncing the poor governance of state affairs. On 31 October 2025, the Minister of the Interior, Security, Decentralisation and Customary Affairs [suspended](#) the activities of 12 opposition parties involved in this meeting.

Despite its promises of reform, President Félix Tshisekedi's administration has been [criticised for](#) its crackdown on dissent and attacks on human rights defenders, civil society actors, journalists and political opponents. In the judicial sphere, there is a two-tier justice system, with legal proceedings generally targeting only opposition politicians and human rights defenders.

Developments in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri are even more worrying : since May 2021, eastern DRC has been under martial law, [transferring](#) civil authority to military authority in response to escalating violence. Under this state of siege, military authorities can search homes, ban meetings and publications, restrict freedom of movement, and arrest anyone accused of disturbing public order.

Furthermore, civilians are tried before military courts rather than civil courts. This exceptional measure, which has been extended more than 20 times, has not improved security, but has instead exacerbated violations of human rights and freedoms. This state of siege has led to abusive restrictions and arbitrary arrests, both against civil society activists and citizen movements during demonstrations and against journalists, also leading to prolonged pre-trial detention and restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

The [conflict in eastern DRC](#), involving [more than 100 armed groups](#), continues to destabilise the region, with civilians and civil society actors being the most affected by violence and

displacement. Intense [fighting](#) between the Rwandan-backed rebel group March 23 Movement (M23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), supported by the Wazalendo (Patriots in Kiswahili) armed militia alliance, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Burundian troops, has exacerbated tensions in eastern DRC, raising fears of a wider regional conflict.

In early 2025, the [M23 rebel group](#), backed by [thousands of Rwandan soldiers](#), [seized control of Goma](#), a strategic city on the border between the DRC and Rwanda, causing massive population displacement and a humanitarian crisis, with up to 2,000 [reported deaths](#) and a [unilateral ceasefire](#) declared by the M23 rebels on 4 February 2025. This escalation, which has its roots in decades of resource-related conflict in eastern DRC, intensified political violence across the country following the [disputed presidential elections of December 2023](#), leaving more than one million Congolese refugees and 21 million people in [urgent need](#) of assistance.

Despite the signing of a [bilateral peace agreement](#) between Rwanda and the DRC on 27 June and the [Doha Declaration](#) with the M23 on 19 July 2025, the [UN OHCHR reported](#) the deaths of hundreds of civilians, highlighting [concerns](#) from humanitarian NGOs that little has changed on the ground.

Amidst a complex and protracted conflict in eastern DRC, civil society actors, journalists and other human rights defenders [have faced](#) increasing threats and atrocities [from the M23 rebel group and its allies on the one hand, and government actors, including the armed forces and authorities](#), on the other. Atrocities, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions, have been committed, highlighting the shrinking space for civil society in eastern DRC. Many have been forced into hiding or displacement due to direct threats against them and their families. Internet shutdowns, movement restrictions and censorship have severely limited their ability to document abuses. Those who continue their work operate under [constant threat](#) of [physical attack](#) and surveillance, further reducing the space for civil society.

The socio-economic context in the DRC is characterised by moderate economic growth ([around 5.1% to 5.3%](#)), resilience in the non-extractive sector despite the slowdown in mining activity, sustained confidence in the private sector and the adoption of new programmes with the IMF to support reforms. The country's economy remains extroverted. The local currency has appreciated against the US dollar, but the purchasing power of Congolese citizens continues to deteriorate. The Democratic Republic of the Congo now ranks first in the world in terms of extreme poverty. According to a World Bank report, [85.3%](#) of Congolese live on less than £3 a day, the highest rate in the world.

The very high [unemployment](#) rate particularly affects young people and women.

*\* This overview is longer than the other overviews published as part of the EU's SEE project, as it is the result of the work of two members of the network, who together cover the different provinces of the DRC. Particular attention is therefore often paid to the specific situation in the eastern provinces.*

Period covered by the report: January 2025 – December 2025.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The Constitution of the DRC of 18 February 2006, as amended by Law No. 11/002 of 20 January 2011, which revises certain articles, guarantees fundamental freedoms such as freedom of assembly, press, expression, association, thought, conscience and religion. Despite the President's [inauguration speech](#) in January 2019, in which he pledged to make respect for human rights his priority, the exercise of these rights remains highly selective and favours civil society actors and political parties close to the government. The government's decision in 2024 [to lift the](#) moratorium on the death penalty has also raised concerns among civil society about the state's commitment to respecting human rights. The enabling environment has also [deteriorated significantly](#) in eastern DRC, and the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) classifies DRC as "[repressed](#)", citing both state and non-state actors for widespread violations of civil liberties.

Freedom of assembly is often violated, sometimes with bloody repression of peaceful demonstrators critical of the government, while demonstrations by government allies take place without hindrance. The DRC Constitution requires the organiser of a peaceful public demonstration to notify the competent authority in writing. Demonstrations are often banned or suppressed on the pretext of lack of authorisation and security concerns. For example, on 17 May 2024, Ms Gloria Sengha, a pro-democracy activist and founder of the Tolembi pasi movement, along with two other activists, Robert Bunda and Chadrack Tshadio, were [arrested](#) for organising a demonstration denouncing the high cost of living and the inaction by the public authorities. In November 2024, [demonstrations](#) organised by [CSOs](#) against proposed [amendments](#) to the Constitution, widely seen as an attempt to extend the presidential term, were violently [dispersed](#). On 18 December 2025, ten pro-democracy activists from the Citizen Movement for Change (LUCHA) were [arrested](#) and detained at Matadi Central Prison by members of the Congolese National Police (PNC) for organising a sit-in outside the office of the governor of Kongo-Central province to denounce the inability of the mayor of Matadi and the urban commander of the Congolese National Police to find solutions to security problems in the city.

Since May 2021, demonstrations and gatherings have been violently suppressed, particularly in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, under the state of siege that was declared and is still in force. Several human [rights defenders](#), activists and journalists have been arrested, prosecuted in military courts and subjected to lengthy pre-trial detention, while others continue to [languish in prison](#). For example, Jack Sinzahera, a member of the Amka Congo citizen movement who has long campaigned for the lifting of the state of siege in North Kivu and Ituri, and Gloire Saasita, 27, a member of the Génération Positive movement, which defends human rights in the DRC, [were both placed in detention](#) without being brought before a competent judicial authority within the 48-hour period required by Congolese law. The resumption in 2022 of [the war](#) of aggression against the DRC by M23 rebels, [supported by](#) the Rwandan army, continues to have a [negative impact](#) on fundamental freedoms. Serious [violations](#), including the [persecution](#) of civil society actors, [targeted killings](#) and [massacres](#) of the population, have been observed in areas conquered by the rebels. In 2025, the rebels [advanced](#) into several mineral-rich towns and territories in North and South Kivu provinces.

The occupation of Goma by the M23 in February 2025 marked a turning point, with the group [banning](#) all civil society mobilisation and citizen action in areas under its control. Internet shutdowns, media blackouts and targeted violence forced many human rights defenders and

journalists into hiding, severely limiting their ability to report abuses or engage with affected communities.

Freedom of expression remains restricted despite recent legislative developments, such as the Press [Ordinance 23/009](#) of 13 March 2023. The [continued criminalisation of press offences](#) in the DRC, such as the prosecution of online media under general criminal law (Article 113), vague penalties for the publication, dissemination or reproduction of "false news" punishable under the Penal Code or the Code of Military Justice if done in "bad faith" or if it has "undermined the discipline or morale of the armed forces or hampered the nation's war effort" (Article 123), and the application of the Criminal Code to press offences against public officials (Article 124) - undermine media freedom. Defamation is criminalised under section 74 of the Penal Code, which applies beyond the press, and is punishable by eight days to one year's imprisonment and a fine, and additional restrictions have been introduced to the Digital Code adopted in 2023.

The absence of binding guarantees regarding source confidentiality, editorial independence and journalist safety further weakens the legal framework protecting press freedom. This weakness is reflected in an escalation of threats and restrictions targeting the media. For example, on 9 January 2025, the national Minister [of Justice stated on X](#) that "any political actor, member of civil society, journalist or religious figure who reports on the activities of the Rwandan army and its M23 supporters will now be subject to the full force of the law (death penalty)". This statement follows [the suspension](#) of the moratorium on the death penalty in March 2024. [Additional pressure has been exerted](#) on national and international media.

On 30 January 2025, during a press conference, Mr Bosembe, President of the High Council for Audiovisual and Communication (CSAC), [issued a stern warning](#) to national and international media covering the conflict, asking them to report in a "professional" manner in order to avoid spreading fear among citizens. Any media outlet giving a voice to M23 supporters to "justify the seizure of territory" would be subject to sanctions, including closure. The CSAC also [imposed](#) restrictions on media coverage of discussions about military operations in the DRC, stating that these topics could only be addressed in the presence of a military expert.

In 2025, the CSAC suspended or summoned the following channels or journalists:

- On 13 January 2025, the CSAC [suspended](#) Al Jazeera throughout the DRC for a period of 90 days as a preventive measure for broadcasting an interview with Mr Bertrand Bisimwa, leader of the M23 terrorist movement, on the grounds that the content undermined public order, national security and safety.
- On 7 April 2025, the CSAC [summoned](#) Daniel Safu and journalist Israël Mutombo to a hearing for discussing the war in the east of the country during a broadcast. On 20 April, Israël Mutombo, journalist and presenter of the popular programme "[Bosolo Na Politik](#)", was summoned to the public prosecutor's office of the Kinshasa-Gombe Court of Appeal.
- On 10 July 2025, RTNC journalist Jessy Kabasele was [suspended from his duties](#) by his superiors for [discussing](#) information about AFC/M23 rebels in the east of the country during his programme.

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

Freedom of association is governed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, at the national level, by the Constitution of 18 February 2006, as amended by Law No. 11/002 of 20 January 2011, revising certain articles (Article 37), and Organic Law No. 004/2001 of 20 July 2001, containing provisions applicable to non-profit associations (ASBL) and public utility institutions. Article 23 of this law provides that the Minister of Justice or the provincial governor may suspend, for a period not exceeding three months, the activities of any non-profit association that has disturbed public order or violated public morality. However, there does not appear to have been any suspension in 2025.

In June 2024, former Justice Minister [Constant Mutamba](#) suspended "Folio 92", including religious authorisations. This register allowed associations to automatically consider that the requested legal personality had been granted if the ministry did not issue a favourable decision within six months. This measure compromises the ability of CSOs to function effectively by threatening their legal status and autonomy. It calls into question a process that has been established and regulated for more than 24 years.

In 2017, a bill amending and supplementing Law No. 004/2001 was submitted to the National Assembly by the former Minister of Justice, Mr Alexis Thambwe Mwamba. This bill was [criticised](#) and deemed repressive by civil society actors because it contains several restrictive provisions. For example, Article 2 of the bill authorises the Minister of Justice to dissolve associations accused of compromising security or public order or discrediting political institutions. Furthermore, the bill does not define the conditions and criteria for such dissolution. There is therefore concern that this article could be used to penalise human rights organisations working to promote fundamental rights, democracy and good governance. Under Article 15bis of this draft law, non-profit associations will [be required to](#) declare the origin of any funds exceeding US\$5,000 to the Ministry of Justice within eight days of receipt. Failure to comply with this obligation could result in the dissolution of the association. Article 30bis stipulates that foreign associations will not be allowed to engage in political activities, but does not specify what these activities consist of.

In addition to the law regulating the functioning of civil society organisations, the DRC has specifically strengthened the protection of human rights defenders by adopting [Organic Law No. 23/027 of 15 June 2023](#) on the protection and accountability of human rights defenders. This law is supported by [Decree No. 001-2016](#) of 10 February 2016 on the protection of human rights defenders and journalists in South Kivu province, and by [Decree No. 001/2019 November 2019](#) (on the protection of human rights defenders in North Kivu province).

[However, the law has the following weaknesses](#): Article 7, Section 2 requires human rights defenders who work outside legally constituted associations to register with the National Human Rights Commission in order to obtain an identification number allowing them to exercise their right to defend human rights. This provision is contrary to the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and could restrict the right to freedom of thought, expression, opinion and participation in the governance of public affairs for citizens who are not members of civil society organisations, even though anyone can be a human rights defender depending on the actions they take to promote and protect human rights. This requirement risks excluding informal or local defenders, particularly those in remote areas or

who lack administrative capacity. Furthermore, Article 3(1) does not recognise that human rights defenders may act formally or informally, registered or unregistered, which reduces the scope of action of legitimate human rights defenders. Only human rights defenders, and not "everyone", are granted the right to assess the human rights situation, in accordance with Article 3(6). The last part of Article 3 empowers the Minister for Human Rights to determine, by ministerial order, the conditions under which human rights defenders may carry out their activities. If not subject to careful scrutiny, this order could further restrict certain human rights.

Furthermore, [Article 11](#) requires human rights defenders to submit an annual report on their activities to the National Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Justice, among others. This imposes an administrative burden on defenders and paves the way for state surveillance of civil society programmes, which could stifle independent activism. The vague restrictive clauses in the law, which require human rights defenders to act in accordance with public order, morality and public health (Articles 3 and 7) and to contribute to "the preservation and strengthening of national solidarity, as well as the strengthening of independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Article 8)", open the door to arbitrary restrictions. Alarming, Articles 26 to 28 introduce criminal penalties for non-compliance with the obligations, which critics say could be used as a weapon to suppress dissent and criminalise legitimate human rights work.

Although Article 5 guarantees the right to solicit and use resources, and Article 21 criminalises reprisals against human rights defenders, these progressive clauses are undermined by the absence of a robust institutional protection mechanism. Article 16 merely empowers the CNDH to ensure respect for rights, without specifying the structures responsible for their enforcement. Magistrates often resort to restrictive provisions of [the Penal Code](#) in cases involving human rights defenders. The [case of Ezéchiel Namegabe](#), who was detained for 28 days in 2024 for opposing land grabbing despite legal protections, illustrates the gap between law and practice. These gaps in the application of the law and its restrictive provisions compromise the autonomy of civil society and expose civic actors to state interference and criminalisation. In its current form, Law No. 23/027 risks reducing civic space rather than preserving it, and civil society actors are increasingly [calling](#) for [its revision](#) to ensure that it truly promotes, rather than restricts, human rights work in the DRC.

### 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

In the DRC, there is no specific law defining the conditions for access to resources other than Law 004/2001. Only administrative requirements apply, namely statutes, legal personality, F92 and the financial and management procedures manual. Legally constituted civil society organisations will encounter serious difficulties in obtaining financial support from international donors and private foundations and will face major challenges with public authorities if the government decides to amend Law 004/2001 in accordance with [the controversial bill](#) proposed by the former Minister of Justice Alexis Thambwe Mwamba. If this fear materialises, many civil society organisations will struggle to obtain the financial resources they need to implement effective programmes within their communities.

Access to sustainable resources remains a major challenge for civil society organisations in the DRC, despite support from international donors and small grant initiatives. Although funding is available from actors such as the US Embassy's [small grants programme](#), CAFI's [REDD+ Civil Society Support Programme](#) (a programme linked to reducing deforestation) and various UN agencies, the landscape is largely dominated by short-term, project-based

funding. This compromises the long-term sustainability of CSOs and limits their autonomy in designing programmes tailored to community needs rather than donor priorities. The lack of core or unrestricted funding means that many organisations are forced to adapt their missions to donor frameworks, which can weaken their impact and responsiveness at the local level.

Furthermore, access to information and funding networks is uneven across the country. CSOs in urban centres such as Kinshasa and Lubumbashi are better positioned to engage with donors and access opportunities, while rural and local organisations often lack the digital infrastructure, language skills or administrative capacity to compete for funds. This geographical disparity exacerbates inequalities in civic participation and weakens the fabric of national civil society.

Local funding remains minimal and largely inaccessible. The Congolese government has not institutionalised financial support mechanisms for CSOs and, despite repeated advocacy efforts, there is no indication that public funds are being allocated to strengthening civic space. Tax exemptions for CSOs are also not clearly defined. While the [investment code](#) offers tax incentives to private investors, it contains no specific provisions for non-profit civil society actors, who remain subject to standard tax obligations, further straining their limited resources.

The absence of a coherent national strategy to support civil society funding – through tax breaks, local grant programmes or fundraising capacity building – raises serious concerns about the sustainability of civic engagement in the DRC. Without structural reforms to diversify and stabilise funding sources, civil society risks becoming dependent on donors and vulnerable to political and economic changes. This requires a rethinking of the resource ecosystem to ensure that CSOs can operate independently, inclusively and sustainably in all regions of the country.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

The absence of a formal and inclusive consultative framework means that civil society engagement in policy-making is often ad hoc, selective or symbolic. Government consultations tend to favour actors already aligned with official positions, marginalising dissenting voices and grassroots organisations. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the government systematically reports back to civil society on how its contributions are used in public policy.

Civil society actors frequently report that their recommendations are ignored or watered down, and there is no institutional mechanism to track the influence of civil society contributions on final decisions. This lack of transparency and responsiveness erodes trust and weakens the legitimacy of participatory processes. The government has not demonstrated its commitment to consultative governance, even on issues directly affecting CSOs, such as the enactment of [Law No. 23/027 of 15 June 2023](#) on the protection and accountability of human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Furthermore, while informal mechanisms such as participatory budgeting have emerged in some provinces, there is no institutionalised national platform for collaboration between civil society and government. Civil society's contribution to public policy is often sought selectively and without meaningful feedback, raising questions about the sincerity of the government's commitment. In this context, civil society's ability to influence policy and drive reform is limited not only by legal and administrative barriers, but also by a political culture that views

independent civic action as a threat rather than a partner in development (see Principle 5 below).

Dialogue between public authorities and CSOs is institutionalised by [Decree No. 09/35 of 12 August 2009](#) on the creation, organisation and functioning of the Liaison Entity for Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although this liaison entity has been somewhat inactive to date, it remains a framework for consultation and collaboration on human rights issues in the DRC.

This liaison body comprises institutions, ministries, public services and organisations whose mission and activities contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights, with the objectives, among others, to assess national activities in the field of human rights, to suggest guidelines necessary for the proper protection of human rights, to ensure that all parties comply with human rights obligations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to examine the underlying problems of human rights violations and to propose solutions.

It is thanks to this collaboration that authorities, when invited by CSOs, attend as participants or facilitators/speakers in activities organised by civil society actors. Similarly, civil society actors from all sides also participate when invited to activities organised by public authorities. For public authorities, CSOs are valuable interlocutors because they act as an interface between them and the population.

To this end, in 2025, several meetings were held between civil society actors and public authorities in the DRC, including a meeting between civil society organisations and African Union co-facilitators on security, a ministerial conference on the human rights crisis in the east of the country, and exchanges between the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and civil society actors. These meetings addressed a range of topics, from security to the human rights situation.

- On 18 February 2025, a conference was held at the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN). This event brought together the Minister for Human Rights, the Minister for Higher and University Education, representatives of the United Nations, academics and civil society experts. The aim of the conference was to discuss the human rights situation in the east of the country and identify measures to be taken.

- From 25 to 26 February 2025, the National Human Rights Commission organised a regional strategic workshop that brought together the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and civil society leaders so that the latter could contribute to discussions on the issue of peace in eastern DRC.

- 22 July 2025: Meeting between representatives of Congolese civil society and African Union co-facilitators, during which the "Women's Parliament" proposed solutions to strengthen security in the DRC.

- 10-11 October 2025: The first National Human Rights Forum was held in Kinshasa, organised by Congolese Minister for Human Rights Samuel Mbemba Kabuya, who committed to establishing ongoing dialogue with civil society human rights defenders. According to the minister, this forum, which brought together several actors from the sector, marks the beginning of a new era of collaboration between the government and human rights organisations.

- On 22 October 2025, on the sidelines of the 85th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, Congolese Minister for Human Rights Samuel Mbemba received a delegation from civil society in the DRC. The delegation raised two major concerns: firstly, the arrest and six-month prison sentence handed down to Jedidia Mabela, an activist with the citizen movement *Lutte pour le Changement* (LUCHA), by the Makiso public prosecutor's office in Kisangani, in Tshopo

province; secondly, the controversial decision by former Justice Minister Constant Mutamba to cancel Folio 92 for NGOs, which was used as a document of legal recognition in the absence of a specific decree. Minister Mbemba had pledged to intervene, and on 28 October of the same year Jedidia Mabela was acquitted on appeal. Subsequently, the decision cancelling the value and granting of Folio 92 was suspended. These developments illustrated constructive collaboration and dialogue between the government and civil society on these sensitive issues of rights and freedoms. On 26 November 2025, Minister of Human Rights Samuel Mbemba met with Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kinshasa, to discuss the country's socio-political situation.

- 27 November 2025: as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the government and civil society joined forces to combat digital violence. This opening up of institutional space strengthens the partnership between the state and civil society and brings the expertise and social roots of civil society actors to public policy. A framework for consultation between public institutions and civil society organisations must be proactive in order to ensure structured, inclusive and regular dialogue.

In addition to these partnerships, in order to better take into account the contribution of civil society to the governance of public institutions, two structures supporting democracy have been set up and are working with civil society actors within them. These are the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), which is partly composed of representatives of civil society.

With regard to the right to information, despite the constitutional guarantees provided for in Article 24 of the DRC Constitution, the country does not have a comprehensive access to information (ATI) law that would implement this right and enable CSOs to effectively access public data. [A draft ATI law](#) adopted by the Senate (the upper house of Parliament) in 2015 has not been ratified by the National Assembly.

In the absence of a dedicated ATI framework, CSOs face significant obstacles in obtaining timely, accurate and comprehensive information from public institutions, which compromises their ability to monitor governance and advocate for accountability. Institutionalised platforms for collaboration between civil society and government are limited in the eastern provinces. Although participatory budgeting initiatives in provinces such as South Kivu have shown promise, allowing citizens to vote on local spending priorities via mobile platforms, these mechanisms are not yet standardised or scaled up nationally.

The talks between the DRC government and Rwanda on the one hand (in Washington) and with the M23 on the other (in Qatar) are the latest examples of [the lack](#) of [inclusion](#) and consultation of civil society actors who are calling for justice as the foundation for lasting peace. Civil society in all its diversity is also protesting against the non-inclusive nature of the process.

In summary, while the DRC has made progress in recognising the role of civil society, the absence of a robust law on access to information, institutionalised collaboration mechanisms and accountability structures continues to limit meaningful civic engagement and state responsiveness. Addressing these gaps is essential to establishing a more inclusive and democratic governance framework.

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

In the DRC, there is collaboration between civil society organisations and public authorities. For some political actors, civil society plays an important role as an intermediary between public authorities and the population, ensuring effective respect for fundamental rights.

However, certain dominant official and media discourses tend to [discredit](#) civil society organisations. Despite civil society's long-standing contributions to governance, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding, it is often portrayed as [politically subversive](#) or [under foreign influence](#). For example, the government, through its [political representatives](#), ruling party [spokespersons](#), [traditional leaders](#) and even the military, has repeatedly spoken out in the media, describing civil society actors as politically motivated, corrupt and influenced by foreign forces and opponents. This discourse, particularly during periods of heightened political tension, such as [protests or electoral disputes](#), undermines public confidence and delegitimises the role of civil society.

The demonisation of civil society actors by political elites, including threats of criminal sanctions for reporting on sensitive issues such as foreign military intervention, reflects a broader political culture that [is hostile to accountability](#) and pluralism.

Although civil society has played a central role in promoting citizens' interests and providing essential services, its contributions are rarely formally recognised in public policy or public education. There is little evidence that the role of civil society is integrated into school curricula or civic education programmes, perpetuating young people's lack of awareness of the importance of this sector. This omission weakens the social foundations of civic engagement and democratic participation.

In terms of inclusion, marginalised groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, have gained greater visibility in civil society. And to guarantee the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, the DRC has implemented Organic Law No. 22/03 of 3 May 2022 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. In addition to this law, on 15 July 2022, the DRC published Law No. 22/030 on the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous Pygmy peoples. Despite these legislative advances, obstacles remain and marginalised groups still struggle to make their voices heard in political discussions.

Civil society continues to play a vital role in promoting inclusion and participatory democracy, particularly for women and indigenous Pygmy peoples.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

With regard to digital environment security, on 25 November 2020, the Democratic Republic of Congo adopted [Law No. 20/017](#) on telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICT) in order to secure personal and public data. In addition to this law, with a view to strengthening this sector, the Head of State signed [Law-Ordinance No. 23/010 on 13 March 2023, which regulates the digital sector](#), addresses several issues related to the IT system and provides for criminal penalties for those who do not comply with it. One of the positive aspects of this ordinance is the punishment of legal persons for certain offences related to digital law. This punitive aspect is a distinctive feature of this code, which

complements other legal texts establishing the criminal liability of legal persons in the Congolese legal landscape. In order to further strengthen security in the digital sector, [on 27 June 2025 the DRC officially ratified the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection, commonly known as the "Malabo Convention"](#). Despite the DRC's ratification of the Malabo Convention, the entry into force and implementation of this instrument, in accordance with Article 8 of the Convention, remain pending. This article stipulates that "Each State Party undertakes to establish a legal framework aimed at strengthening fundamental rights and civil liberties, in particular the protection of physical data, and to punish any offence relating to any invasion of privacy without prejudice to the principle of the free movement of personal data."

These laws recognise the right to internet access and prohibit arbitrary disconnections, guarantee cybersecurity and personal data protection, but their [enforcement is weak](#) and civil society actors continue to face digital insecurity.

Internet access remains [limited](#), with a penetration rate of [only 30.6%](#) in 2025, or 34 million users out of a population of 111 million, according to [statistics from Datareportal](#). Slow connections, [high costs](#), sometimes reaching 1.5% of monthly income for 1 GB, and a lack of infrastructure in rural areas, exclude a large part of the population. This price gap, combined with often poor service quality, prevents a large part of the population, including civil society actors, from accessing digital services.

The problem of [poor internet accessibility](#) in the DRC is also highlighted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which, according to its 2024 [report](#), reveals that the DRC scores 37.6 points out of 100, ranking it 40th out of 46 countries assessed, reflecting poor infrastructure and high costs.

The [internet shutdown in January 2025](#) in Goma, following the activities of M23 rebels, illustrates how connectivity can be arbitrarily restricted, silencing civil society at critical moments. Furthermore, in eastern DRC, particularly in North Kivu province, internet connectivity was [completely cut off](#) for more than a week from late January 2025, when M23 rebels occupied the city of Goma, depriving the population of their right to internet access at a critical moment. According to the KeepItOn coalition and media sources, the social media platforms X and TikTok have also been blocked since 1 February 2025. On 3 February 2025, NetBlocks [reported](#) that data indicated that Google Play Store was restricted, apparently to prevent users from downloading VPN services to circumvent restrictions on X and TikTok. The government [restricted](#) access to X and TikTok in February 2025 in several major cities, including Kinshasa, Goma, Bukavu and Lubumbashi, in order, it said, to curb the spread of false information on these digital social networks about the actions of the M23 in eastern DRC. According to [Radio Okapi](#), the government said it wanted to prevent the spread of false information attributed to the Rwandan army and its M23 auxiliaries. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in the DRC [described](#) the restriction of access to certain social media platforms in the DRC as a "serious violation of the right to information".

Digital security is also a concern. Cases of surveillance, metadata collection, application blocking and digital attacks, including location tracking, were [reported](#) in an investigation into internet shutdowns, censorship and surveillance in the DRC before, during and after the 2023 elections, with no recourse mechanisms in place. This further illustrates the vulnerability of activists and journalists. The digital divide hinders civic participation, advocacy and access to information. During the 2023 elections, [75% of users surveyed](#) reported not having access to the internet, and platforms such as Signal were likely blocked. This marked digital divide,

particularly between urban and rural areas, limits civil society's ability to mobilise, communicate and access information.

Although the government launched a promising £500 million plan in 2025 to connect 30 million people by 2030, civil society actors remain constrained by high data costs, slow speeds, and arbitrary restrictions. Without robust implementation, inclusive infrastructure, and legal safeguards, digital rights in the DRC risk remaining an aspiration, limiting civil society's ability to thrive in the digital age.

## Challenges and opportunities

Civil society will continue to face the following challenges:

- Incomplete implementation of legal texts: [the ordinance](#) on the digital code and the Malabo Convention remain without concrete enforcement measures. This shortcoming exposes civil society actors to the risk of arbitrary arrests, criminalisation of digital activism, or prolonged deprivation of their digital rights.
- Lack of a formal framework for collaboration mechanisms between the government and CSOs. Exchanges are occasional, often linked to diplomatic visits or external funding, and do not allow for the sustainable co-construction of digital policies.
- Weak collaboration with certain leaders of public institutions.
- The obligation for human rights defenders to submit an annual report to the CNDH does not constitute collaboration, but rather a vertical relationship, without feedback or institutional support.
- Lack of understanding of the actions carried out by CSOs within communities by certain political actors.
- Weak financial resources.
- Restriction of civic space by public authorities.
- Poor enforcement of the law on non-profit organisations.
- Insecurity, particularly in the east of the country, is hampering initiatives such as the one announced at the end of 2024 by the Carter Centre in South Kivu, which aimed to create a (pilot) framework for consultation between human rights actors.

**Over the coming months, the following opportunities could be seized:**

- Civil society coordination offices and provincial human rights networks can play a leading role in documenting violations and promoting law enforcement.
- Awareness campaigns on digital rights, cybersecurity and state obligations can increase citizen pressure and broaden the support base.
- Visits by partners such as the European Union delegation or the World Bank, which are levers of influence to demand concrete commitments from the government.
- The next session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR): this would provide a unique opportunity to raise issues related to an enabling environment for civil society, including cybersecurity, equitable access to the internet and collaboration between authorities and civil society at the continental level, by advocating for the effective implementation of the DRC's legal commitment.

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