



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Baseline Snapshot

Senegal

October 2025

Context

Despite relative political and institutional stability in Senegal, with three democratic transitions in the past years (2000, 2012 and 2024), problems remain in relation to deepening democracy, meeting social demands and an institutional imbalance, with the executive branch exerting influence over the legislative and judicial branches.

The "Senegal 2050" Transformation Agenda, a new economic and social policy framework, and the 2025-2029 National Development Strategy (SND) 2025-2029 embody the ambition of a sovereign Senegal and set the course for development based on a rethinking of the economic model, inclusive social transformation, renewed governance and balanced regional development. Senegal has a diverse civil society that is very active in various development sectors, engaged in governance issues and very vocal on human rights, justice and equity issues.

The country, which went through a period of unrest and political and social tension from 2021 to 2024, saw the Senegalese vote on 24 March 2024 for the third time for a change of government with the election of His Excellency President Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar Faye, thus expressing their aspiration for change and the advent of governance based on ethics, transparency and accountability.

However, the country is still experiencing deepening divisions in the political arena, despite the dialogue initiatives that continue to be a hallmark of Senegalese democracy.

It is in this context of a shrinking civic space, characterised by the arrest and imprisonment of journalists and columnists for crimes of opinion, that civil society organisations (CSOs), in all their diversity, are assuming their crucial role in promoting political and civic awareness and engagement. Through their engagement, these CSOs contribute to public policies as well as the improvement of governance and living conditions, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The [Constitution of Senegal](#), in Title II, which deals with "fundamental rights and freedoms and the duties of citizens" in Articles 8 and 12, guarantees the right to freedom of association to all citizens (Article 12: All citizens have the right to freely form associations, economic, cultural and social groups, as well as companies, subject to compliance with the formalities laid down by laws and regulations). Groups or associations whose purpose or activity is contrary to criminal laws, such as the promotion of LGBTQIA+ groups or violent extremism, are prohibited. This reference document is the basis for laws and regulations that also guarantee freedom of expression and assembly, as well as freedom of the press, which are often touted as major democratic achievements.

With regard to freedom of association, the declaration system (Art. 812 [of the Civil and Commercial Obligations Code](#)) in force allows CSOs that have filed their administrative paperwork with the prefecture to operate without waiting for written authorisation from the Directorate-General of Territorial Administration of the Ministry of the Interior. This decentralisation of procedures is one of the factors promoting the exercise of freedom

of association. The same declaration regime applies to public meetings and demonstrations.

The central role of the press in public life is recognised, but the changing media landscape, amplified by social networks, poses new challenges. While journalists have sometimes become partisan actors and misinformation has been increasing, allegations of spreading fake news and infringing on the privacy of those reported on have been used to file charges against critical journalists in a recent crackdown on freedom of speech. In this context, media outlets, journalists and political actors have been [arrested and questioned](#) by the criminal investigation division and tried in court.

During election periods, such as the presidential elections in March 2024 and the legislative elections in November 2024, which are times of major political turmoil and unrest, there have been [significant restrictions on freedoms, with bans on gatherings and demonstrations](#), as well as increased surveillance of CSOs, some of whose leaders are accused, rightly or wrongly, by the government or the opposition of being "politicians in disguise". *Between March 2021 and February 2024, the country experienced* restrictions on internet access, jeopardising the fundamental rights to freedom of association, assembly, expression and access to information, with [frequent internet cuts](#). *These restrictions occurred in a* [tense political climate](#) linked to legal challenges against main opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and the postponement of the February 2024 presidential election. The situation has had a significant impact on civil society's willingness and ability to make its voice heard in order to protect and defend the environment.

The National Assembly's vote on 26 August 2025 on [laws concerning access to information and the status and protection of whistleblowers](#), among other things, constitutes a major step forward in strengthening transparency and realising the fundamental right of access to information, which has always been a problem for CSOs.

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

The regulatory framework for the creation, operation and intervention of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is governed by a set of general and specific texts according to their type and status. These include associations, NGOs, INGOs, collectives or networks, citizen movements, religious organisations, trade unions, research institutions, media, charitable organisations and social movements, and are supervised by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security.

This legal framework governing civil society organisations consists mainly of Law No. 66-70 on the Civil and Commercial Code, specifically [Law No. 68-08 of 26 March 1968](#) amending Chapter II on associations in Book VI of the Civil and Commercial Code and punishing the formation of illegal associations. In the specific case of associations with the status of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the framework for intervention is governed by [Decree 2022-1676 of 16 September 2022](#), which provides for mechanisms enabling the Ministry of the Interior and its decentralised services to ensure better monitoring and evaluation of interventions. This decree is supplemented by [Law 2024-08](#) of 14 February 2024 on the fight against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and

[Uniform Law No. 2009-16 of 2 March 2009](#) on the fight against the financing of terrorism. This implies increased control over the origin of funds and the movements of NGO accounts, which are required to provide supporting documents on the origin of funds.

Since 1 January 2024, this new legal and regulatory framework has been backed by [an accounting system \(SYCEBNL\)](#) to which all non-profit entities, including CSOs based in or operating in an OHADA member state, are subject, unless these entities are already subject to a specific system such as public accounting. This improves transparency in the accounting management of CSOs and accountability through the regular production of financial statements.

With the transfer of oversight of CSOs to the Ministry of the Interior in 2010, the legal framework has become increasingly restrictive in terms of registration, with waiting periods of up to six months, exceeding the regulatory deadline of two months. Although CSOs can operate as soon as their file is registered while awaiting their certificate of recognition, it should be noted that the administration has the discretionary power to dissolve CSOs in the event of a breach of the provisions of the decrees referred to in paragraph 1 of Article 821 of Law 68-08 of 26 March 1968 amending Chapter II relating to associations in Book IV of the [Civil and Commercial Obligations Code](#).

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

CSOs operate in an increasingly competitive environment, marked by a scarcity of financial resources. They operate within a legal framework that is not conducive to access to funding, particularly public resources, within the framework of programme implementation agreements with the government. The majority of the funds received by CSOs therefore come from international partners, with few CSOs able to mobilise funds as service providers (consultants, operators) within the framework of programmes run by the government, local authorities, and technical and financial partners.

The year 2025 posed additional challenges, with [the withdrawal of USAID](#) exacerbating the financial crisis affecting civil society organisations, in addition to [the suspension of funding for certain government programmes](#) that involved CSOs as operators, by the new government that came to power in April 2024. The relationship between CSOs, the state and donors is marked by imbalances in access to information and resources in a context where CSOs are increasingly asserting themselves as forces for change. CSOs, particularly NGOs operating government programmes, have faced a loss of resources due to the suspension of some of these programmes, such as family security grants.

The fact that CSOs are mainly funded by external resources limits their autonomy and the sustainability of their actions, particularly given the pressure to align their priorities with those of the government and private donors. Moreover, this external funding is only available to CSOs with the institutional and management capacity to meet donor requirements and selection criteria. In this context, CSOs are experimenting with new forms and methods of self-financing their activities in a quest for sovereignty and autonomy for more sustainable actions.

4. State openness and responsiveness

The nature of interactions between the government and civil society is based on the existence of legal frameworks for consultation and dialogue on public policies in line with the [2050 vision](#). The trust that civil society organisations enjoy from the government and public authorities in general is an asset. They are regularly involved in consultative bodies and participate in the development and monitoring of public policies, such as in the [National Council for Audiovisual Regulation](#) and the [National Human Rights Commission](#). They are also members of several steering or coordination frameworks for public programmes at national, regional and local levels.

In this process of structured dialogue between the state and civil society, efforts are needed to institutionalise the various mechanisms for consultation and dialogue on public policies. While their opinions are sought in policy design and development bodies, the weakness of consultation and representation mechanisms does not always allow for high-quality contributions from civil society.

Sometimes parallel policy development or evaluation processes are conducted by civil society, which produces contribution documents and citizen or alternative reports. However, the content of these reports is not always taken into account by the government. Sometimes the government unilaterally selects civil society organisations that are "favourable" to it for consultations or discussions on public policies. This leads to parallel processes that can create potential conflicts between state entities and civil society organisations.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Since the new government took office following the presidential election of 24 March 2024, the image of civil society as a whole, portrayed by the government and certain media outlets, has been unflattering. Political leaders are accustomed to changing their perception of the role and actors of civil society depending on whether they are in opposition or in government. This is evidenced by certain perceptions disseminated in public opinion, notably due to statements made by the Prime Minister and President of the ruling party, who referred to a section of civil society, particularly those active in political governance, as "manure". He even announced his [intention to introduce legislation](#) to prohibit CSOs from receiving funds from abroad.

It should also be noted that between 2021 and the 2024 elections, the outgoing government accused CSOs of being behind social unrest aimed at destabilising the current administration.

The media follow and report on the activities of CSOs and regularly publish interviews with representatives of civil society. However, the provisions of the press code are often not respected by certain media outlets, whose journalists or columnists become partisan actors, serving political or economic forces that exploit freedom of the press and freedom of opinion through disinformation and defamation by giving false information about institutions or individuals' private lives and infringing on their privacy. This creates an environment in which the media landscape has

become increasingly polarised, affecting both public discourses and the portrayal of civil society.

As for communities, they generally have a positive opinion of CSOs and their work, which contributes to their inclusion and empowerment in a context of poverty.

In terms of inclusion, marginalised groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, have gained visibility within civil society and their demands have been widely relayed by organisations such as CONGAD and Sight Savers through the promotion and dissemination of the ["Leave no one behind" strategy](#). A large number of women's organisations and associations have [spoken out](#) to condemn the lack of gender parity in the National Assembly and the [low representation of women](#) in the Government (4 out of 25 ministers). Despite some progress, the inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups remain a major concern for civil society organisations.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

In the digital environment, Senegal is experiencing rapid growth in its ecosystem. However, outside urban areas, there are rural areas that are not covered by the internet.

Access to online information is not effective. Between March 2021 and February 2024, internet shutdowns were frequent in a tense political climate linked to legal challenges against main opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and the postponement of the February 2024 presidential election. The government [suspended](#) mobile internet more than a dozen times and blocked access to social networks and messaging applications such as Facebook and WhatsApp following the arrest of Ousmane Sonko in March 2024. Following the announcement on 3 February 2024 by outgoing President Macky Sall of the postponement of the elections scheduled for 25 February 2024 and the protests that followed, the Minister of Communication [ordered the suspension of mobile data](#) for four to five days, citing security measures and the spread of hateful and subversive messages on social media.

The digital environment is not very secure, particularly for many CSOs which, due to a lack of resources, tend to use systems that continue to operate with obsolete software versions that offer little or no protection. These CSOs have not sufficiently developed the skills and capabilities to protect their information systems and data.

Despite regulations [on personal data protection](#), [cybersecurity and cybercrime](#), the advent of social media has exacerbated disinformation, harassment, defamation and invasion of privacy.

Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and X) are used as weapons of intimidation and persecution against journalists and civil society organisations, who may be subjected to threats, harassment and legal proceedings. These civil society organisations are subject to constant cybersecurity surveillance. They advocate for the improvement of the digital civic space through appropriate regulation that takes into account the concerns and specificities of civil society organisations and the most vulnerable communities.

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next four months, civil society will continue to face multifaceted challenges in a context of deteriorating public debate linked to tensions between the government and the opposition, as well as increased social unrest with trade union demands and threats of strikes in the social sectors (education, health, etc.). It must work to improve understanding of the legal and legislative framework for CSO intervention, participate in high-quality public debate, and embrace the principles of sovereignty, particularly digital and financial sovereignty, as well as new laws.

In this context, mobilising and retaining qualified human resources is a major challenge for local CSOs, given that the diverging financial capacities of organisations means that expertise is often drawn towards organisations offering the best working conditions and remuneration.

The environment for CSOs continues to be a source of serious concern. Given the diversity of CSO engagement models, which are often misunderstood by the government, the latter is attempting to restrict the expression of critical voices and increase control over civil society. This lack of understanding requires developing communication with the new authorities, and CSO participation in the development of institutional and legal reforms to promote greater accountability and transparency within the framework of more open governance.

Another challenge for CSOs is to increase their participation in the development and implementation of public programmes, such as family security grants, youth training and mentoring.

To meet these challenges, CSOs could mobilise on advocacy for the signing of decrees implementing laws, particularly those on access to information and on the status and protection of whistleblowers. Among the possibilities for improving the enabling environment are the promotion of the right to information enshrined in the law on access to information, passed in August 2025, and the dissemination and promotion of laws on the status and protection of whistleblowers.



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