



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Benin

March 2026



GRUPE D'ACTION
POUR LE PROGRÈS
ET LA PAIX

Context

Period covered by report: September 2025 to March 2026

In November 2025, the National Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment ([Law No. 2025-20 of 14 November 2025](#)). The presidential and legislative terms were extended from five to seven years, renewable once. The new constitution also established a Senate comprising members appointed by the president as well as former heads of state, without a referendum or public consultation.

The trend towards restrictions described in the [first snapshot](#) of the enabling environment intensified in late 2025 and early 2026. In December 2025, an attempted coup was foiled when soldiers briefly announced that they had taken control of the government before the authorities reaffirmed the maintenance of constitutional order. The [coup attempt of 7 December 2025](#) was swiftly quashed thanks to military support [from Nigeria, ECOWAS, and French and Ivorian special forces](#). It was nevertheless followed by a wave of arrests targeting opponents and civilian activists, including former minister [Candide Azannai](#) and [Alassane Tigri](#), Vice-President of Les Démocrates, the sole opposition party. President Talon, nearing the end of his second and final constitutional term, is due to step down following the presidential election on 12 April 2026, which is taking place against a backdrop of unprecedented political stifling: [the opposition lost all parliamentary representation following the legislative elections of 11 January 2026, with a turnout of 36.73 per cent](#) – the lowest turnout in any election in Benin over the past twenty years. In the parliamentary elections of 11 January 2026, the opposition won no seats in the National Assembly due to the thresholds imposed by a new electoral code, which requires a party to obtain at least 20% of the vote nationally and in each of the 24 departments to be represented. These results come against a backdrop where electoral rules, combined with security incidents and the exclusion of key opposition figures, have significantly reduced political competition, influencing democratic dynamics in the run-up to the presidential election.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The civic space has been further restricted by [Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025](#) on associations and foundations, which repealed the 1901 law. This law requires existing associations to comply by June 2026 or face deregistration, and subjects foreign organisations to prior authorisation to operate. Article 50 prohibits any association from taking political positions, raising serious concerns about the ability of CSOs to fulfil their role in democratic oversight. Freedom of expression also remains under threat due to the imprisonment of cyber-activists such as [Steve Amoussou \(Frère Hounvi\)](#), who was sentenced on 2 June 2025 to two years' imprisonment by the Court for Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET) for "incitement to rebellion" and "publication of false news", a sentence upheld on appeal on 15 December 2025. The suspension and freezing of the accounts of the entire La Gazette du Golfe media group — radio, television, print newspaper and online platforms — for "glorifying a coup d'état", decided in December 2025, led to the dismissal of the entire staff and illustrates the persistent censorship.

Several decisions handed down by the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) since November 2025 are having cumulative restrictive effects.

On 13 November 2025, the HAAC issued a series of decisions during its second ordinary session: [suspension of Océan FM](#) for one week (advertising deemed illegal regarding healing practices); withdrawal of press cards from 130 journalists (123 from the print media, 7 from radio) who no longer met the legal requirements; withdrawal of operating licences for the radio stations Couffo FM, Aïfa FM, Urban FM, Nostalgie FM and Mifon FM for failure to comply with contractual obligations; withdrawal of the DTT package for Canal 2 Star, Imalè Africa TV and Tunde Agric TV due to the unavailability or absence of programmes.

In January 2025, the HAAC suspended Le Patriote and its website for an editorial critical of the government's security strategy and, in March 2025, [Bénin Web TV](#) for reports deemed "inaccurate" regarding the HAAC's budget.

On 25 March 2026, the HAAC provisionally suspended the online channel [ESAE TV \(Decision No. 26-009/HAAC\)](#) for a programme deemed to contravene the rules on the right of reply, referring the matter to the ARCEP (Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and the Post) and the CNIN (National Centre for Digital Investigations) for the enforcement of the measure. On 24 March 2026, the HAAC also reminded the media of their obligation to notify it without delay of any changes to their programming during the election period, with a deadline set for 27 March 2026.

The accumulation of these decisions since November 2025 has significantly reduced the number of independent media outlets in operation. Several observers, including RSF and Amnesty International, highlight that the systematic use of the most severe sanction (the outright withdrawal of a licence) acts as a deterrent to newsrooms still in operation and encourages self-censorship.

Arrests linked to the coup d'état of 7 December 2025: names and profiles

In the days and weeks following the attempted coup, the authorities carried out several waves of arrests targeting both military personnel and civilian opposition figures:

- Military personnel: on the evening of 7 December, a dozen soldiers involved in the coup were arrested. Lieutenant-Colonel Pascal Tigri, the alleged leader of the Military Committee for Rebuilding (CMR), fled to Burkina Faso and then to Niger; the Republic of Benin issued a wanted notice offering a reward of over €30,000 for information. In total, around 100 suspected participants were in pre-trial detention in March 2026.
- [Candide Azannai](#), a former Deputy Minister of Defence who became a fierce opponent and founder and leader of the Restaurer l'Espoir party, was arrested on 12 December 2025 at his party's headquarters in Cotonou. He had, however, publicly condemned the attempted coup as early as 10 December.
- [Chabi Yayi \(Didier Abioyé Chabi Yayi\)](#), son of former President Thomas Boni Yayi and a member of the Les Démocrates party, was arrested during the night of 13–14 December 2025, briefly released, then summoned again and held under judicial investigation.
- [Alassane Tigri](#), a former minister and vice-president of the Les Démocrates party, was the subject of an arrest warrant and was arrested on 28 January 2026 at his home in Mènontin (Cotonou). He appeared before the CRIET on 29 January and was remanded in custody.
- [Soumaïla Bouké Sonon](#), a Member of Parliament, was also arrested and remanded in custody as part of the investigation.

- [International arrest warrants](#) have also been issued against the Franco-Beninese activist Kémi Séba (leader of the Urgence Panafricaine movement) and against Sabi [Sira Korogone](#), president of the Mouvement Populaire de Libération (MPL), for “glorifying terrorism” and “inciting rebellion”.

These arrests, carried out against a backdrop of almost unanimous political rallying behind the candidate Romuald Wadagni, the heir apparent chosen by the current President, Patrice Talon, have been widely perceived by civil society and international observers as an exploitation of the security crisis to silence opposition voices in the run-up to the presidential election. The charges relate to “treason”, “murder” and “attacks on state security”, according to judicial sources.

National legislative initiative to protect human rights defenders

In February 2026, a [roundtable](#) bringing together organisations such as Tournons la Page, ACAT Benin, Agir Ensemble pour les droits humains and the Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CDDH) Benin led to the adoption of a concrete roadmap towards the adoption of a national law on the protection of human rights defenders. The history of the process was outlined, current barriers to the adoption of such a law were identified, and participants agreed on advocacy steps. The Beninese Human Rights Commission (CBDH) is playing a leading role in this process, having relaunched advocacy efforts with Parliament via the national broadcaster.

During a webinar organised by the Consortium’s human rights group, key actors from Beninese civil society — including Professor Gilles Badet, former African Special Rapporteur Reine Adélaïde Sophie Alapini-Gansou and Commissioner Serge Prince Agbodjan — discussed the need to adopt a national law protecting human rights defenders in Benin. The participants noted that a draft bill, drawn up since 2018 by the Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CDDH) with the support of the Defenders Foundation, had been tabled in the National Assembly without ever being placed on the plenary agenda. With the renewal of Parliament and the government expected in spring 2026, the speakers identified several priority areas for action (see Recommendations section below).

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

The legal framework governing civil society has undergone a worrying evolution. In April 2025, a draft law on associations and foundations was tabled without prior consultation, repealing the 1901 Act. This draft was adopted as [Law No. 2025-19 of 22 July 2025](#). This law requires existing associations to comply with its provisions by June 2026, failing which they face administrative dissolution. It subjects foreign organisations to prior authorisation and, under Article 50, expressly prohibits any association from taking political positions or encouraging acts contrary to public order.

Furthermore, Law 2025-19 was supplemented by [Decree No. 2025-637 of 8 October 2025](#), which sets out the conditions, procedure and terms for concluding framework agreements between the State and associations, foundations or NGOs. This decree specifies that CSOs that have signed a framework agreement with the State may benefit from advantages including tax and customs exemptions. However, this provision remains conditional upon the signing of

a framework agreement — a lengthy and selective administrative process — and does not apply to private donors (individuals or companies), who still do not benefit from any tax incentives encouraging the funding of CSOs.

CSOs in Benin enjoy a degree of autonomy in their governance, but face difficulties in accessing funding. The strict enforcement of anti-money laundering laws has led to the closure of bank accounts, complicating transfers and threatening their financial viability.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

The financial sustainability of CSOs is generally stable but relies overwhelmingly on foreign funding. The main foreign partners were the governments of Germany, the United States, Switzerland and the Netherlands, Global Affairs Canada, and the European Union. Several corporate foundations, such as [MTN](#) and [MOOV Africa](#), fund CSOs or implement social projects directly. Many CSOs, particularly new organisations and those operating in rural areas, struggle to cover their operating costs.

No major national initiative is in place to promote sustainable domestic funding. A few international programmes still support local governance, notably the [Accountability Initiatives Support Fund \(FoSIR\)](#), but their scope remains limited. This dependence on external aid undermines the stability and independence of CSOs in Benin.

Donors (individuals, businesses) still do not benefit from standard tax incentives to support CSOs. Only Decree No. 2025-637 of 8 October 2025 (implementing Law No. 2025-19) provides for tax and customs exemptions for CSOs that have signed a framework agreement with the State — a selective measure that benefits only those organisations able to meet the necessary administrative requirements and does not apply to private donors.

4. State openness and responsiveness

The issue of the openness and responsiveness of the Beninese State remains marked by numerous contradictions. Although some progress has been made, notably through the digitisation of public services, these efforts remain insufficient. The lack of transparency in the management of public affairs, illustrated in particular by the failure to publish official documents such as the [salaries of government ministers](#), is regularly criticised by civil society and opposition parties.

Reform processes, such as the 2019 constitutional revision, Law No. 2025-19 on associations (July 2025), the constitutional revision of November 2025 extending terms of office to seven years and creating a Senate, as well as the parliamentary elections of 11 January 2026, whose 20% electoral threshold effectively excluded any opposition from the National Assembly, have all been carried out without prior public consultation, which undermines their democratic legitimacy.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Beninese civil society is gaining increasing recognition among the population, particularly for its role in education, health, local governance and the defence of human rights. Many associations are seen as essential actors in complementing public action, particularly in rural and peripheral areas.

The public often values civil society for its responsiveness to social needs. CSO initiatives in the areas of rights awareness, the fight against poverty and women's empowerment enjoy broad popular support.

However, the discourse remains ambivalent: whilst CSOs are seen as essential for development and social justice, some criticism arises due to a lack of understanding of funding mechanisms and suspicion regarding the independence of certain organisations.

Finally, the media play a crucial role in shaping public opinion on CSOs. Media coverage can be positive when it highlights concrete actions, but political polarisation affects the visibility and reputation of organisations.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Law No. 2017-20 of 20 April 2018 on the Digital Code, amended by [Law No. 2020-35 of 6 January 2021](#), provides a detailed framework for access to a secure digital environment in Benin. Within this regulatory framework, the digital environment remains broadly accessible, with no internet outages recorded since 2020.

Nevertheless, the monitoring and criminalisation of critical voices online continue. [The case of Frère Hounvi \(Steve Amoussou\)](#), who was sentenced on 2 June 2025 to two years' imprisonment by the CRIET for "politically motivated defamation and the dissemination of false news" – a sentence upheld on appeal on 15 December 2025 – reveals a climate of self-censorship and persistent online harassment. It should be noted that the aforementioned Steve Amoussou has never admitted to being Frère Hounvi or to being the author of the columns published under that pseudonym.

Furthermore, the case of [Hugues Comlan Sosoukpe](#), a journalist and human rights defender, whose pre-trial detention was extended by six months on 12 January 2026 by the CRIET — without his lawyers having been informed — illustrates the use of the justice system as an instrument of repression. His lawyer, [Dossou Stanic Adjacotan](#), was himself arrested on 25 January 2026 and charged with "advocating a coup d'état".

No specific mechanism exists to protect civil society against cyberattacks, targeted disinformation or the surveillance of communications.

Challenges and Opportunities

The major challenges facing Beninese civil society include the entry into force of Law No. 2025-19 on associations, adopted without consultation with CSOs and imposing severe restrictions on their operations; the increasing criminalisation of critical CSOs' online activities, illustrated by the confirmed conviction of Steve Amoussou (Frère Hounvi) in December 2025; and the absence of incentive laws promoting sustainable funding.

The attempted coup d'état of 7 December 2025, followed by a wave of arrests targeting opposition figures and civil society leaders, has exacerbated the crackdown on fundamental freedoms. The parliamentary elections of 11 January 2026, held without opposition in the National Assembly for the next seven years, cement an institutional stranglehold unprecedented since the return to a multi-party system. The presidential election on 12 April 2026 will take place against a backdrop of heightened repression, with the risk of increased pressure on independent media and CSOs.

Despite this context, opportunities remain. Potential diplomatic and financial support from international partners and donors offers a window for strategic backing. Furthermore, the vitality of local community initiatives in key sectors such as health, education and the environment provides fertile ground for strengthening citizen participation and the impact of CSOs.

In February 2026, a roundtable bringing together organisations such as Tournons la Page, ACAT Benin and Agir Ensemble resulted in a roadmap towards the adoption of a national law for the protection of human rights defenders ([AFCNDH, Feb. 2026](#)). During this meeting, participants identified several priority areas for action:

- Meet with the new President of the National Assembly to bring the proposal back to the forefront,
- Convince the government to champion the bill,
- Mobilise the Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights for a mission to Benin, and extend advocacy efforts to political parties and judicial actors.

The Beninese Human Rights Commission (CBDH) has been identified as a key institutional partner, particularly through its annual reports to Parliament. The stated aim is to secure the adoption of the law before 2028, the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

However, the obstacles remain considerable. The new Parliament resulting from the general election of 11 January 2026 is entirely composed of pro-government parties following the de facto exclusion of the opposition: no independent voice can therefore defend the bill from within Parliament. Furthermore, Article 50 of Law No. 2025-19 on associations — which prohibits CSOs from taking political positions — could be used to hinder the advocacy itself. The chances of success in the short term are therefore limited, unless the next government emerging from the April 2026 presidential election commits to reform. This is precisely why 14 organisations, including Amnesty International, published a [manifesto](#) in January 2026 [calling on the presidential candidates](#) to address the violations of fundamental freedoms. Finally, hosting the World Social Forum in Cotonou from 4 to 8 August 2026 presents a strategic opportunity for Beninese civil society to mobilise and bring its demands to the international stage.

To take full advantage of these opportunities, civil society must strengthen its internal coordination, develop its legal expertise and improve its strategic advocacy with national policymakers and international partners.

This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



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