



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Overview of the Enabling Environment

Venezuela

April 2026

Context

Period covered by this report: January to April 2026

In Venezuela, the year 2026 has been marked by an abrupt reconfiguration of the political landscape following the events of 3 January 2026, [when a U.S.-led operation culminated in the capture and removal from the country of Nicolás Maduro](#) and other high-ranking figures linked to the government. This event substantially altered the existing institutional balance, ushered in a period of high political uncertainty, and [sparked international debates](#) regarding respect for the principle of state sovereignty, the prohibition on the use of force, and the operation's compatibility with international law.

Following these events, the country entered a complex phase of political transition, characterised by realignments within the state apparatus, new dynamics between civilian and military actors, and efforts to ensure administrative continuity. In this context, **Delcy Rodríguez** assumed a central role in government leadership, particularly in economic, administrative, and political coordination matters.

Furthermore, the political crisis continued to overlap with a prolonged social emergency. Significant needs persist in food, health, basic services, social protection, and human mobility. International organisations have indicated that [Venezuela will continue to require a sustained humanitarian response](#) throughout 2026.

At the same time, during the first months of the year, there were partial signs of political détente, including the release of detainees, legislative proposals related to amnesty, and the establishment of public spaces for dialogue aimed at democratic coexistence. However, these developments coexist with an environment that remains fragile, polarised, and marked by limited institutional trust.

Consequently, the overall outlook for 2026 combines three simultaneous trends: an uncertain political transition, the persistence of structural vulnerabilities, and the emergence of limited opportunities for a gradual opening of civic space.

1. Respect for and Protection of Fundamental Civic Freedoms

Throughout 2026, the exercise of fundamental freedoms in Venezuela continued to face structural restrictions, albeit within a context altered by the political transition that began in January. Various national and international actors [have expressed concerns regarding](#) politically motivated [detentions](#), insufficient judicial safeguards, and limitations on the exercise of the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

In March 2026, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [reported the release of hundreds of people who had been arbitrarily detained in previous months](#). However, it also emphasised the need for greater transparency regarding official lists, conditions of release, and a comprehensive review of pending criminal cases.

From the perspective of Venezuelan human rights organisations and relatives of detainees, the releases have been viewed as a positive step, though they are considered insufficient. [Various CSOs have noted that some](#) of the releases have occurred under restrictive precautionary measures, requiring periodic court appearances, or without the definitive closure of criminal proceedings, which limits the full restoration of rights and maintains conditions of legal uncertainty for those released and their families; these are accompanied by restrictions on making statements or public appearances following the release process. A [landmark case](#) in 2026 was that of Juan Pablo Guanipa, who, after being released, was subsequently re-arrested during a public demonstration. Civil society organisations highlighted this incident as an example of the fragility of certain releases when they are not accompanied by effective guarantees for the exercise of civil and political rights, particularly freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and public participation.

Likewise, [national organisations have](#) insisted that release measures must be accompanied by guarantees of due process, investigations into possible arbitrary detentions, reparations for victims, and independent verification mechanisms. They have also warned that, as long as new politically motivated detentions or practices of criminalising dissent persist, partial releases do not in and of themselves constitute a structural solution to the problem.

In this regard, the assessment made by Venezuelan civil society tends to combine recognition of immediate humanitarian progress with caution regarding its sustainability and actual scope. For many organisations, the key indicator is not solely the number of people released, but the existence of institutional safeguards that prevent future arbitrary detentions and ensure full restoration of rights and the guarantee of non-repetition.

Freedom House maintained Venezuela [in the “Not Free” category in its 2026 report](#), highlighting persistent restrictions on political competition, institutional independence, and civil liberties. The situation for journalists, human rights defenders, and social organisations [remains sensitive](#).

During 2026, [incidents were documented involving the temporary detention](#) of journalists, the confiscation of work equipment, the inspection of mobile phones, and restrictions on covering public events of high national interest, particularly in the days following 3 January. Professional associations and international observers warned that these actions undermine press freedom, compromise the confidentiality of sources, and deepen self-censorship within the sector.

In the same vein, concerns persist regarding surveillance, judicial harassment, and the use of the criminal justice system against critics. The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission found in March 2026 that [repressive state structures remained in place](#) and reported new politically motivated arrests following January, suggesting a continuation of restrictive patterns despite changes in political leadership and announcements of laws and initiatives aimed at reducing the polarisation plaguing the country.

In the realm of information, international organisations [have warned that access to reliable public information remains limited](#), while independent media continue to be weakened by political pressure, economic restrictions, and the exile of journalists. This

combination has created information gaps that undermine citizens' right to receive diverse and timely information.

In summary, although lower levels of open confrontation were observed compared to some previous periods, risks of intimidation, surveillance, public stigmatisation, and self-censorship persist.

Meanwhile, in the socioeconomic sphere, despite the gradual rapprochement between the government led by Delcy Rodríguez and the United States, as well as measures that have eased restrictions on the energy sector and facilitated greater circulation of oil revenues, the positive effects on the population's living conditions are not yet widely evident. Various media reports indicate that the expectation of economic improvement generated after January [has not yet translated](#) into substantial increases in purchasing power or a noticeable reduction in daily precariousness.

[Inflation](#) remains one of the main factors eroding economic and social rights. [Recent reports cite](#) extremely high estimates for 2026, while the cost of basic goods remains well above formal labour income. Even with supplementary bonuses, [a significant portion of public sector workers and retirees continue to have insufficient income](#) relative to the cost of the basic basket of goods.

In this context, Acting President **Delcy Rodríguez** [announced on 8 April 2026, a "responsible" wage increase](#), effective 1 May, the first of its kind in several years. Although the amount was not initially specified, the measure was presented as part of a gradual strategy to restore incomes without generating further inflationary pressures. The announcement also included references to labour dialogue forums and future reforms in the area of social protection.

This [announcement has raised expectations among unions](#), professional associations, and civil society actors who have historically advocated for labour rights, a living wage, adequate pensions, and better working conditions. However, caution also persists regarding the measure's actual capacity to address the cumulative decline in income, especially if it is not accompanied by stable macroeconomic policies, institutional strengthening, and sustainable social protection. In particular, although there has been openness to the possibility of protests by these sectors, [barriers and repression of their freedom have been reported](#).

Although some measures may be interpreted as initial signs of political easing, the overall environment for fundamental rights remains fragile and will depend on verifiable and sustainable reforms. While some recent developments could be interpreted as initial signs of political easing, the overall environment for fundamental rights remains fragile. Its improvement will depend on effective judicial independence and sustainable guarantees for citizens and social actors.

2. A favourable legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The Venezuelan legal framework in 2026 presents mixed signals. On the one hand, the passage of the [Amnesty Law for Democratic Coexistence](#) was presented as a tool aimed at facilitating national reconciliation, civic reintegration, and the review of certain cases associated with recent political conflict.

Various sectors viewed the measure as a potential opportunity to reduce political tensions and move toward negotiated institutional solutions. However, it has also been noted that its impact will depend on clear implementation criteria, the actual scope of beneficiaries, access to judicial remedies, and guarantees of non-repetition, with some organisations reporting [its “selective application.”](#)

At the same time, [the Law on the Oversight, Regularisation, Operations, and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organisations](#), approved in 2024, remains in force, continuing to create legal uncertainty for civil society organisations in the country. Its provisions regarding registration, administrative obligations, financial accountability, and potential sanctions continue to raise concerns among national and international organisations due to their potential restrictive effects on organisational autonomy and institutional sustainability.

Although no far-reaching structural changes in the application of this regulation have been documented during 2026, its mere existence continues to have a chilling effect on part of the associative ecosystem, particularly among small, community-based organisations or those with limited administrative capacity.

Consequently, the regulatory environment in 2026 cannot be considered fully favourable. Measures of potential openness coexist with regulatory instruments that continue to generate caution, uncertainty, and significant operational burdens for civil society.

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Civil society organisations continue to operate in a challenging economic environment. Persistent humanitarian needs, political volatility, and the gradual reduction of certain international cooperation flows continue to put pressure on the sector’s institutional sustainability.

The humanitarian response for Venezuela in 2026 continues to require considerable resources to address needs in health, food security, water, education, protection, and livelihoods. [According to OCHA](#), 7.9 million people continue to require assistance, while the Humanitarian Plan prioritises assistance for 5.4 million of those in the most vulnerable conditions.

Many organisations still rely on international cooperation, multilateral partnerships, and short-term financing. This structure limits strategic planning, hinders the retention of qualified staff, and forces organisations to operate under conditions of high budgetary uncertainty. Additionally, internal operational costs (inflation, service failures, connectivity issues, transportation challenges, and the partial dollarisation of the economy) affect the local implementation of projects and the continuity of community programmes.

Multilateral agencies and diplomatic missions present in the country are beginning to open up funding opportunities through projects; greater possibilities for funding are emerging [through cooperation projects](#), technical assistance, and [programmes focused on social recovery](#), institutional strengthening, and humanitarian aid. This trend could expand opportunities for civil society organisations, particularly in the areas of health, food security, education, and livelihoods. However, legal status is crucial for accessing these funds. In Venezuela to date, and following the approval of the Oversight Law in 2024, many organisations that submitted their intent to register

have not received a response, resulting in a negative administrative silence that fails to clarify their legal existence and capacity to operate and access these funds.

Consequently, access to resources in 2026 remains limited and unequal, especially for small, regional, or specialised human rights organisations.

4. An open and receptive state

During 2026, signs of limited institutional openness were observed through the establishment of public spaces for consultation and dialogue linked to [the Programme for Peace and Democratic Coexistence](#), as well as discussions related to the implementation of the Amnesty Law.

Representatives from universities, religious sectors, specialists, activists, and other social actors participated in these spaces. This development can be interpreted as a positive sign of partial recognition of the need for pluralistic dialogue between the State and organised civil society.

A particularly significant development was [the appointment of Feliciano Reyna to the Commission for Peace and Coexistence](#). Given his track record in humanitarian affairs, civil society, and public health, his presence may help strengthen the legitimacy and diversity of voices within these forums. Furthermore, the inclusion of representatives from civil society may open opportunities to address issues such as reducing stigmatisation, protecting humanitarian work, and establishing permanent mechanisms for public consultation.

However, these advances remain in their early stages. Institutional openness will be evaluated by its ability to translate into effective participation, verifiable decisions, and stable monitoring mechanisms.

5. Public Culture and Discourses Favourable to Civil Society

The discursive relationship between public authorities and civil society remains ambivalent. [Recent instances of delegitimisation](#), suspicion, and targeting of independent organisations, activists, and journalists persist.

However, the political tone following January 2026 showed certain shifts toward messages of coexistence, stability, and national reconciliation. In particular, the establishment [of the Programme for Peace and Democratic Coexistence](#), the consultation forums linked to the implementation of the Amnesty Law, and the inclusion of representatives from academic, religious, and social sectors suggest the possibility of a less confrontational narrative than in previous years.

The presence of publicly recognised figures within official bodies may facilitate agendas related to institutional respect, the reduction of stigmatising messages, and the appreciation of humanitarian and community work. In addition to the inclusion of Feliciano Reyna, the Programme for Peace and Democratic Coexistence has brought

[in figures from various non-governmental sectors](#), including businessman Ricardo Cusanno, who served as president of FEDECAMARAS and the International Red Cross; academic Michael Penfold; and representatives of neighbourhood movements such as Lamking González. This composition suggests an initial effort to seek broader dialogue with business, academic, and community sectors, although the actual extent of their participation in decision-making remains to be assessed.

Despite this, the overall picture remains mixed. More moderate rhetoric coexists with inherited patterns of polarisation and mutual distrust.

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

The Venezuelan digital environment continues to face challenges related to freedom of expression, access to information, and technological security. Specialised organisations have documented selective website blockades, connectivity restrictions, and obstacles to independent digital media in recent years—[trends that continue to raise concerns in 2026](#).

Following the events of 3 January, the digital space took on even greater relevance as a battleground for political and informational disputes. The rapid pace at which events unfolded, [the institutional uncertainty generated, and the initial absence](#) of consolidated official information led social media, messaging platforms, and digital media to become central channels for the circulation of news, the positioning of narratives, and coordination among various political and social actors.

In this context, the digital environment came to play a strategic role in building public legitimacy, citizen mobilisation, and the interpretation of national events. At the same time, this increased the risks associated with disinformation, coordinated propaganda campaigns, information impersonation, digital surveillance, and higher levels of self-censorship among journalists, activists, and the public.

Various organisations and communicators [continue to rely on digital security tools](#), the use of VPNs, source verification, and internal communication protection protocols.

Although the public has developed greater technological adaptability, the digital environment cannot yet be considered fully secure, open, or risk-free. In parts of the sector, dynamics of institutional self-restraint persist, where organisations reduce public exposure to preserve operational continuity.

Challenges and Opportunities

The main challenge for 2026 is to transform tentative signs of political détente into sustainable and measurable structural changes for Venezuela's civic space. The release of detainees, the passage of legislation such as the Amnesty Law, and the establishment of institutional spaces for dialogue represent significant opportunities, but they remain insufficient unless they translate into concrete reforms, legal safeguards, and permanent mechanisms for citizen participation.

One of the main opportunities arising from the government's current limited openness lies in the possibility of promoting advocacy processes aimed at revising, reforming, or repealing regulations that have restricted civic space, particularly those related to freedom of association, freedom of expression, public participation, and political

pluralism. The existence of channels for dialogue can facilitate technical discussions on regulatory frameworks more compatible with democratic standards and international human rights commitments.

In this regard, the continuation of dialogue between authorities and social actors could open a window to review provisions contained in the NGO Oversight Law, as well as other regulations or administrative practices that have created legal uncertainty for social organisations, independent media, human rights defenders, and community actors. A more predictable regulatory environment would foster both citizen participation and institutional trust.

The inclusion of recognised figures from civil society, such as Feliciano Reyna, within official consultative bodies or forums for democratic engagement, also represents a strategic opportunity. Their presence helps endow these spaces with greater pluralistic legitimacy and allows historically marginalised agendas promoted by civil society to have a visible voice within institutional processes. Among these are the protection of humanitarian work, equitable access to essential services, and the need for evidence-based public policies.

Likewise, these inclusions can facilitate greater visibility for urgent issues such as the continuity of humanitarian programmes, sustained access to food, medicines, and basic supplies, as well as coordination with multilateral organisations and international assistance programmes. In a context where structural vulnerabilities persist, strengthening cooperation with actors such as United Nations agencies remains essential.

Another significant opportunity lies in the possibility of building a safer and more reliable environment for international financing directed toward social organisations and community projects. Greater institutional guarantees, clear rules, and reduced stigmatisation could incentivise technical and financial cooperation focused on health, education, livelihoods, humanitarian assistance, and democratic strengthening.

Similarly, improved legal certainty for private enterprise could open new avenues for financing and sustainability for social organisations through social responsibility schemes, public-private partnerships, blended funds, social innovation, and local support for community initiatives. This would be particularly relevant given the reduction or volatility of certain traditional sources of international cooperation.

However, these opportunities remain constrained by significant structural challenges: institutional weakness, accumulated mistrust among actors, the persistence of restrictive regulatory frameworks, economic fragility, and the absence of full guarantees for political dissent. Without verifiable progress in these areas, the current opening risks remaining symbolic or limited.

In general terms, 2026 offers a significant window of opportunity to reopen civic spaces, strengthen cooperation, and rebuild institutional trust, provided that the initial signs of openness translate into tangible, inclusive, and sustainable reforms.

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