



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Tajikistan

May 2026

IPHR International
Partnership
for Human Rights

Context

Period covered by this report: January to May 2026

Over recent years, the space for CSOs, independent media, journalists, bloggers, and HRDs in Tajikistan has continued to narrow due to a combination of legal ambiguity, administrative pressure, financial limitations, restrictive public discourses and increasing digital control.

While the State maintains official frameworks for registration, consultation, and engagement with civil society, these mechanisms are often characterised by limited transparency and flawed implementation. At the same time, broader socio-political narratives emphasising stability, national security, and protection from external influence shape public perceptions of civil society actors and influence the overall enabling environment in which they operate.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Fundamental freedoms in Tajikistan, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and access to information, continue to be significantly restricted in law and practice. Although the [Constitution](#) guarantees these rights, their implementation is undermined by restrictive legislation, broad discretionary powers granted to state authorities, limited independent judicial oversight, and the lack of effective safeguards against arbitrary interference in the activities of CSOs, independent media and government critics.

Freedom of expression and access to information remain severely constrained. Past reprisals against journalists and media outlets have led to widespread self-censorship, particularly on issues which the authorities consider politically sensitive. For example, following the May 2022 events in GBAO, authorities reportedly [instructed media outlets](#) not to report on developments in the region, and the independent news outlet Asia-Plus subsequently announced that it was obligated to cease covering the situation in response to this request.

Administrative measures restrict media operations, including for foreign and international outlets. Journalists affiliated with the Tajik service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty have [repeatedly faced difficulties](#) in obtaining accreditation, and several independent media outlets reportedly encountered [similar obstacles](#) during the March 2025 parliamentary elections. The restrictions observed during the parliamentary elections raise concerns about the conditions under which the 2027 presidential election will be conducted, particularly with respect to independent media access, transparency and public scrutiny of the electoral process.

Restrictions on freedom of association continue to affect CSOs in Tajikistan. The CSO registration process is widely perceived as unpredictable, inconsistent, and subject to political influence, with applications frequently delayed, blocked, or rejected on arbitrary and untransparent grounds. As [previously reported](#), registration fees for public associations were doubled in October 2025, creating additional barriers to registration, particularly for smaller and regional organisations. Concerns also remain regarding legislative initiatives that might further affect the regulation of non-commercial organisations.

These restrictions severely hinder the work of CSOs and independent media outlets, and foster widespread self-censorship due to fear of repercussions. Reflecting the deteriorating media environment, Tajikistan [ranked 155th](#) in the 2026 World Press Freedom Index, dropping two places compared to the previous year. The country is among the states with the most restrictive conditions for journalists and independent media in the region.

As [pressure on the media grows](#), many journalists have fled the country, while others face intimidation, legal pressure, and restrictions linked to their professional activities. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) 2026 report, Tajikistan now figures in the [world's top ten countries](#) with the highest number of imprisoned journalists. **Daler Imomali, Abdullo Gurbati, Zavkibek Saidamini, Abdusattor Pirmukhamadzoda, and Rukhshona Khakimova**, whose arrests reflect the authorities' intention to silence independent voices, remain behind bars after being found guilty on politically-motivated charges.

While government support enables state-controlled media outlets to [expand and modernise](#), independent media and civic actors face increasing political, legal, and administrative pressures. Fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and access to information, are increasingly restricted. [Recent public statements](#) by representatives of the Ministry of Culture referred to past closures of media outlets occurring after they overstepped the "boundaries of democracy" and suggested that media outlets could be brought to account for moving beyond "journalistic norms, exceeding the limits of freedom of expression". However, the government has failed to set out clear legal definitions or transparent standards to justify these closures.

Regarding the right to freedom of assembly, there has been no accountability for past human rights violations committed by authorities during the violent suppression of peaceful protests in Khorog, the capital of GBAO in 2021 and 2022. The [four year anniversary](#) of the events occurred on 16 May 2026, but there has been no progress on organising a thorough, independent investigation into the [serious human rights violations](#) committed when authorities suppressed mass protests leading to the reported killing of at least 40 civilians. In the wake of the events in Khorog, many civil society activists, journalists and others who publicly criticised the use of unnecessary force by law enforcement officials were caught up in the ensuing clampdown, including [members of a joint committee](#) composed of government and civil society representatives established to investigate the events.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

The legal and administrative environment for CSOs and independent media in Tajikistan is highly restrictive. While official procedures for the registration and operation of CSOs and media outlets exist, engagement with civil society remains limited and tokenistic in practice. CSO representatives and media actors report a lack of transparency regarding registration requirements, timelines, and responsible institutions, undermining meaningful cooperation, legal certainty and the ability of organisations to operate effectively.

Existing legislation hinders the establishment and work of media outlets, especially those critical of the authorities. According to the Law on 'State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs' both traditional and online media are required to undergo compulsory state registration. Before registering, print and online media outlets require approval from the Ministry of Culture¹ and security clearance from the State Committee for National Security (SCNS).² Several independent media outlets have closed due to difficulties obtaining registration or orders by courts for them to liquidate. At least seven media organisations ceased operations after failing to complete re-registration procedures with the Ministry of Culture, with media owners reporting that officials imposed additional documentation and certification [requirements](#) that were difficult or impossible to fulfil in practice.

¹ Article 11 of the Law on State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs.

² Procedure for State Registration of Publishing Activities, Printing Enterprises and the Maintenance of the Unified State Register approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan of 25 February 2017, No. 97.

The Civil Code of Tajikistan recognises different organisational forms of non-commercial organisations. The establishment of a public association requires registration with the Ministry of Justice in a more complex procedure, while other forms of non-commercial organisations (public foundations and associations of legal entities) are registered with the local [tax authorities](#). The legislative framework for civil society in Tajikistan is restrictive, in particular when it comes to the registration of new groups, reporting requirements and funding. Amendments introduced on 10 October 2018 to the Law on Public Associations obligates CSOs to register foreign grants and provide project implementation plans to the Ministry of Justice, which has the right to conduct unscheduled [inspections of CSO activities](#).

According to information from the Ministry of Justice, approximately 1,700 CSOs currently remain active in the country. During 2025, 85 CSOs [ceased operations](#). Of these, seven CSOs, including the Centre for Investigative Journalism, were [liquidated by court decision](#). The Ministry of Justice stated that the closures were linked to activities allegedly conducted outside the organisations' statutory mandates, including the provision of educational or medical services without the required licences. The remaining 78 organisations reportedly ceased operations for various reasons, including government pressure, regulatory restrictions, and financial difficulties.

While authorities have justified the dissolution of CSOs by citing alleged violations of registration, reporting, licensing, and other compliance requirements, affected CSOs have reportedly raised concerns regarding the absence of prior warnings, opportunities to address alleged shortcomings, and adequate procedural safeguards, including the right to appeal. Under international standards, dissolution is one of the most severe restrictions on freedom of association and should be applied only as a measure of last resort in cases of serious and repeated violations. The reported reliance on "minor shortcomings" or technical issues raises proportionality concerns.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Following the withdrawal of major donors from Central Asia, including the [closure of USAID-funded programmes](#) in early 2025, following earlier reductions in international funding programmes, civil society and independent media organisations in Tajikistan have faced significant financial challenges. The reduction in available funding led to staff cuts, loss of office space, and in some cases the closure of organisations, further limiting the already narrow operational space for civil society.

Limited opportunities for obtaining funding from government grants, private philanthropy, corporations, etc. hindered access to diversified income sources, and dependence on external donors contributed to the financial instability of CSOs, their inability to cover core costs such as rent and utilities, to retain staff and carry out their work effectively. Organisations facing repeated inspections, administrative scrutiny from different state bodies, including the prosecutor's office, additional tax inspections, fire safety services and other regulatory agencies as well as legal uncertainty, often struggle to secure funding or maintain donor confidence. The withdrawal of USAID funding led to the closure of several independent media outlets in Tajikistan and severely weakened others, including the local service of [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), which remains among the few reliable independent sources of information in the region.

[Recent research](#) on HIV-related non-governmental organisations in Tajikistan further demonstrates the consequences of these challenges. CSOs working in HIV prevention and support services operate under increasing structural constraints shaped by both donor requirements and national regulatory frameworks. The requirement for public associations to maintain a registered legal address places a disproportionate burden on small and regional CSOs. In practice, compliance often requires maintaining rented office premises, which entails

costs that many organisations can no longer afford due to declining donor support and increasing operational constraints. As a result, organisations risk facing legal and administrative consequences despite continuing to operate lawfully. This negatively affects organisational stability and reduces their ability to protect the most vulnerable. Consequently, organisations are often forced to prioritise administrative compliance and financial survival over programmatic development, advocacy, or service expansion, limiting both the sustainability and effectiveness of their work.

The absence of legal registration has broader financial implications for CSOs. Unregistered groups are unable to open bank accounts, which limits their ability to receive grants and other forms of financial support. As many donors require applicants to possess legal registration and an organisational bank account, informal civic initiatives and grassroots groups often face significant barriers in accessing resources necessary for their activities.

Access to funding is further constrained for newly established organisations. Following the [closure of numerous CSOs](#) in recent years, some activists have sought to continue their work through newly registered entities. However, many institutional donors, including major international donors, require applicants to demonstrate a proven organisational track record and previous project management experience. As a result, newly established organisations often face difficulties competing for funding despite possessing relevant expertise and experience through their founders and staff. These factors collectively contribute to a shrinking civic space by limiting the ability of independent civil society actors to sustain their activities and access financial resources.

Broader regional [analysis on civil society support](#) in Central Asia highlights that donor funding models are often short-term and project-based, limiting opportunities for long-term institutional development and sustainability. As funding is frequently linked to specific donor priorities and technical requirements, CSOs may face pressure to adapt their activities to externally defined agendas rather than locally identified needs. In restrictive environments, these dynamics can weaken organisational resilience and reduce the ability of smaller civil society actors to engage in long-term planning and advocacy.

4. Open and responsive state

Limited transparency and arbitrary practices by public institutions in Tajikistan restrict access to information and weaken public trust. As described above, restrictive state policies, burdensome registration and licensing requirements, accreditation procedures, and the arbitrary implementation of media regulations significantly limit the ability of journalists and civil society actors to operate freely and engage with state institutions. These practices reduce the openness and accountability of public bodies, constrain meaningful public participation, and contribute to growing self-censorship among independent media and civil society actors.

In practice, state authorities often [react negatively](#) to the presence of independent journalists and media representatives. For example, following the November 2025 appointments of new university rectors by President Rahmon, a journalist from Asia-Plus [was reportedly removed](#) from a university building for wearing jeans and sneakers while attempting to interview one of the new rectors. According to university staff, the decision was taken on the rector's instructions, despite the absence of any legal provision establishing such a dress code requirement.

At the same time, the authorities continue to engage with international human rights mechanisms, including the [United Nations Human Rights Council](#) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Within the framework of the [National Strategy for Human Rights \(NSHR\)](#) until 2038 and its [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) for 2023-2025, the government committed to developing a National Strategy on the Development of the Media. In addition, under the NAP for the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Human Rights

Council in accordance with the third cycle of the UPR process for 2023-2026, the authorities also committed to developing a State Programme for Media Support.³

Certain platforms for state-civil society dialogue still exist. For example, meetings involving representatives of the Ministry of Justice and civil society actors focused on the collection, consolidation, and submission of recommendations for consideration in the development of the new NAP for 2026-2028. Discussions addressed approaches to CSO participation in the preparation of the new NAP, including the consideration of findings from the monitoring of the current NAP for 2023-2025, and the recommendations developed by CSOs across different human rights areas.

International human rights review processes, including Tajikistan's reviews by UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), provide important opportunities to strengthen engagement between CSOs and state authorities. The [recent review](#) of Tajikistan by the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) demonstrated the positive potential of such processes. In the lead-up to the review, CSO representatives were invited to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in the NGO/shadow report with state representatives, including the Ministry of Justice. Such engagement demonstrates that international human rights mechanisms can serve as constructive platforms for dialogue, confidence-building and identifying practical steps towards improving the enabling environment for civil society and addressing broader human rights concerns in Tajikistan.

However, despite these stated commitments and international initiatives, concerns remain regarding the practical implementation of reforms and the overall openness of state institutions.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Public discourse surrounding civil society in Tajikistan is still shaped by state narratives emphasising stability, national security, traditional values and protection from alleged external influence. Official rhetoric portrays information, public discourse, and civic engagement through the lens of ideological stability and "information warfare", framing independent media and civil society actors as [potential threats](#) rather than legitimate contributors to constructive public dialogue and development. Such narratives contribute to growing public distrust towards independent civic actors and have a detrimental effect on the overall environment for civic participation and public engagement.

Official public discourse reflects limited tolerance of criticism, independent advocacy, and alternative views. Issues related to human rights, accountability, social justice, and minority rights are frequently framed as politically sensitive or incompatible with "traditional values", creating additional pressure on CSOs and independent media actors working on topics which are deemed 'sensitive'.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

The digital environment in Tajikistan [creates a climate of fear](#), particularly affecting CSOs, independent media, journalists, bloggers and HRDS. Digital platforms are increasingly subject to monitoring and restrictions, while online expression on social and political issues, which are considered sensitive, is increasingly risky. Independent journalists and bloggers reporting on human rights issues often face intimidation, pressure, harassment, and threats linked to their

³ The draft of the State Programme for Media Support is not publicly available

online activities and publications. [Reports of detentions](#), interrogations, and penalties related to online expression have led to widespread self-censorship. As a result, social media is increasingly perceived as a high-risk environment where critical views may lead to serious consequences. This significantly restricts digital rights and undermines online freedom of expression in the country.

A record number of journalists and bloggers are [currently behind bars](#) in Tajikistan on charges widely believed to have been brought in retaliation for their reporting and online activities. Among them are journalists **Daler Imomali** and **Abdullo Ghurbati**, who are [serving lengthy prison sentences](#) on anti-state charges issued in 2022. Prior to their arrest, they collaborated on a popular YouTube channel covering issues such as alleged unlawful housing demolitions and mismanagement by local authorities, while openly criticising government policies.

In May 2025, we noted amendments to [remove criminal liability](#) for social media “likes” and reactions, changes to Article 179(3) (Public calls for terrorist activity) and Article 307(1) (Public calls for extremist activity). However, freedom of expression online remains tightly controlled, and the continued [use of fines for “likes”](#) shows that peaceful online expression is not consistently protected in practice.

This was further illustrated by the recent case of a mother of seven who [faced criminal charges](#) for allegedly cooperating with banned organisations and supporting their activities online when she reposted religious videos on TikTok. In another case, the mother of a student killed during the violent suppression of peaceful protests in Khorog in November 2021 was detained in Tajikistan after being forcibly extradited from Russia. A criminal case was subsequently initiated against her in relation to her [online comments](#) criticising the actions of security forces and the authorities in GBAO.

The authorities have recently launched the country’s first [national messenger “ORIZ”](#), presented as a secure platform for calls, chats, and video conferencing, with all servers located inside the country. While the government claims this guarantees strong data protection, the application’s privacy policy raises serious concerns and directly contradicts these assurances. The policy allows the collection of personal data, including user identity details, device information, and the content of messages, and permits their use and potential sharing without clearly defined legal grounds, storage limits, security safeguards, or user rights, raising fears about expanded state monitoring.

Challenges and opportunities

Upcoming challenges for civil society include:

- Continued shrinking of civic space due to increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, media independence, and online activity;
- Ongoing legal and administrative uncertainty, including inconsistent registration, licensing, and compliance procedures affecting CSOs and media;
- Financial instability caused by reduced donor funding, limited domestic resources, and dependence on short-term project-based support;
- Increased digital and physical surveillance, as well as online and broader repressive measures targeting journalists, bloggers, and HRDs, contributing to self-censorship and increased security risks.

Opportunities for improving the EE in Tajikistan:

- Government participation in international human rights mechanisms and incorporation of recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review into an Action Plan signed by the President; its commitment to NSHR and its NAPs and media strategy development;
- Dialogue platforms between civil society and state institutions on policy planning, including NAP processes;
- International events hosted by Tajikistan provide an important platform to encourage positive reforms, demonstrate commitment to international human rights obligations, and strengthen cooperation between the authorities and civil society. Tajikistan's hosting of high-level international events and forums, such as regional and global conferences on water, climate, youth, sustainable development goals, etc., presents an important opportunity to promote a more open and enabling environment for CSOs. As such events entail increased international engagement from EU and UN agencies, and international stakeholders, they provide an opportunity for dialogue on human rights and civic participation. The organisation of such fora should be accompanied by meaningful engagement with independent CSOs, human rights defenders and youth activists - through inclusive consultations, side events and public discussions on civic space issues.

What is needed for CSOs to be able to address challenges and utilise opportunities:

- Clear, transparent, and consistently applied legal and administrative procedures, including fair registration and licensing processes;
- Protection of fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, media freedom, and digital rights;
- More predictable, flexible, and diversified funding mechanisms for CSOs, including support for long-term institutional development;
- Improved safeguards for civil society engagement in policy processes, ensuring meaningful participation rather than formal consultation only;
- A shift in public discourse toward recognising the role of civil society actors in public life.

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