



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Senegal

March 2026

Context

Period covered by report: October 2025 – March 2026

Despite relative political and institutional stability, with democratic changes of government in 2000, 2012 and 2024, problems persist related to the deepening of democracy, the imbalance between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, reforms and the modernisation of the justice system, as well as the need to meet social demands.

The ‘Senegal 2050’ Transformation Agenda, which has served as the framework for public policy since April 2024, and the National Development Strategy 2025–2029, embody the ambition of the administration of President Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye, in power since April 2024, and set the course for development based on a rethinking of the economic model, inclusive social transformation, renewed governance, and balanced regional planning.

Two years after the numerous promises made during the election campaign – particularly regarding a break with past governance practices and the strengthening of national sovereignty – the country is experiencing division at the highest level of government, characterised by disagreements between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who holds a parliamentary majority, as well as by persistent tensions between the government and opposition parties. Furthermore, certain civil society organisations, notably the ‘Sursaut Citoyen’ movement, have voiced their frustrations, arguing that reforms are taking too long to be implemented given the commitments made by the President of the Republic to break with the status quo and strengthen national sovereignty.

On the economic front, the situation remains difficult despite the new authorities’ commitment to transparency, which has involved the publication of the results of the public finance audit. These revealed that Senegal’s public debt and budget deficits were higher than those published by the previous government for the period 2019–2023.

It is against a backdrop of a steadily shrinking civic space and social tensions that there has been a continuation of arrests and imprisonment of journalists and columnists for offences relating to the expression of opinion or the dissemination of fake news. Despite this, CSOs in all their diversity continue to fulfil their role in defending freedoms, promoting political and civic awareness, and fostering civic engagement. These CSOs contribute to the governance of public policies and the improvement of public service delivery and living conditions, particularly for poor or vulnerable populations.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

In Title II dealing with ‘fundamental rights and freedoms and the duties of citizens’, the [Constitution of Senegal](#) guarantees the right to freedom of association to all citizens in Articles 8 and 12. Groups or associations whose purpose or activities contravene criminal law, such as the promotion of LGBTQIA+ groups or violent extremism, are prohibited. This provision has been strengthened since March 2026 by the [reform of Article 319 of the Criminal Code](#), which has tightened the crackdown on homosexuality, its advocacy and any other act deemed unnatural.

The Constitution forms the basis of the laws and regulations that guarantee freedom of expression, assembly and the press. With regard to freedom of association, the current registration system allows CSOs to operate and to organise public meetings and demonstrations without requiring written authorisation.

Although the central role of the press in public life is recognised, changes in the media landscape – linked in particular to the growth of social media – are posing new challenges. Disinformation has increased, and [criminal charges](#) relating to the dissemination of false information, defamation, insulting the Head of State, and invasion of privacy have been used to prosecute critical journalists, thereby undermining freedom of expression and citizens' right to information. In this context, media outlets, journalists and political figures [have been arrested or detained](#), served with formal notices by the Criminal Investigations Division and brought before the courts.

Although the adoption in August 2025 of laws on [access to information](#) and [the protection of whistleblowers](#) represented a step forward in the protection of investigative journalists, there has been a resurgence in summonses, police custody and prosecutions targeting journalists, columnists and activists. As a result, the country has [regressed](#) in terms of press freedom and now ranks 78th in the world, according to Reporters Without Borders. A [report](#) indicates that the press is operating in a climate of tension that has been repeatedly condemned by the Council of Broadcasters and Press Publishers of Senegal (CDEPS). Against this backdrop, where the new regime has failed to put an end to the upsurge in threats against journalists, this is creating conditions conducive to an erosion of citizens' right to information.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

The regulatory framework for the establishment, operation and activities of CSOs is governed by a set of general and specific legal provisions, primarily under Laws 66-70 and 68-08 of the Civil and Commercial Code. This legislation also governs the possible dissolution of CSOs, which the administration may order at its discretion when a registered CSO breaches the provisions of the law. These organisations include associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), collectives or networks, citizens' movements, faith-based organisations, trade unions, research institutions, media organisations, charitable organisations and social movements.

The legal framework is considered restrictive in terms of registration and reporting, with waiting times of up to six months, thus exceeding the statutory two-month deadline. The [establishment](#) of a one-stop shop via the e-senegal.sn platform, operational since March 2026, could streamline registration procedures and ensure transparent tracking of applications, initially covering the Ministries of Justice and the Civil Service, before the integration of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security.

Associations with the specific status of NGOs are 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 their activities. Supplementary decrees on combating money laundering and preventing the financing of terrorism provide for stricter controls over sources of funding and movements in NGOs' bank accounts. Furthermore, the mandatory accounting system SYCEBNL, in force since 2024, has improved the transparency and accountability of CSOs.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

CSOs operate in an increasingly competitive environment, characterised by a scarcity of financial resources. They operate within a legal framework that is not particularly conducive to accessing funding, particularly public resources under programme implementation

agreements with the government. The majority of the funds received by CSOs come from international partners, and few of them are able to raise funds in their capacity as service providers (consultants, operators) under programmes run by the government, local authorities, or technical and financial partners.

The relationship between CSOs, the state and donors is characterised by imbalances in access to information and resources, against a backdrop in which CSOs are increasingly asserting themselves as agents of change. CSOs, particularly NGOs implementing government programmes, have faced a loss of resources due to the suspension of certain programmes since 2024, such as the [family security grants](#). This situation compounds an already difficult context following the suspension of US official development assistance (ODA) in 2025, which profoundly altered the architecture of international solidarity and contributed to weakening the funding framework for CSOs.

The fact that CSOs' funding comes mainly from external sources limits their autonomy and the sustainability of their activities, particularly as there is strong pressure to align their priorities with those of the government and private donors. Moreover, this external funding is only accessible to CSOs with the institutional and managerial capacity required to meet donors' requirements and selection criteria. Against this backdrop, CSOs are experimenting with new forms and methods of self-funding their activities in a quest for sovereignty and autonomy to ensure more sustainable initiatives. Finally, the recruitment and retention of qualified staff poses a major challenge for local CSOs as financial constraints are driving qualified professionals to join organisations offering better working conditions and remuneration.

4. Open and responsive state

Senegal continues to build on recent progress made in terms of transparency and responsiveness in governance. Since August 2025, laws on access to information, the protection of whistleblowers, the fight against fraud and corruption, and the declaration of assets by magistrates and judges have been adopted and, in November 2025, an implementation decree for the Law on Access to Information was signed. These laws provide a foundation for CSOs' work in relation to engagement with public services and transparency.

Furthermore, progress on the legal framework and the ongoing digital transformation are improving the government's openness and responsiveness. For example, the [launch](#) in March 2026 of the e-senegal.sn portal as a one-stop digital shop offers users centralised access and transparent tracking of online procedures and processes for accessing certain services provided by the public administration. This brings the administration closer to citizens and improves the performance of public institutions.

In line with [Vision 2050 and Axis 4 of the systemic transformation strategy](#), interactions between the government and civil society are governed by mechanisms for consultation and dialogue on public policies. Certain civil society organisations are indeed regularly involved in consultative bodies and participate in the development and monitoring of public policies, such as within the [National Audiovisual Regulatory Council](#) and the [National Human Rights Commission](#). CSOs are members of several steering or coordination bodies for public programmes at national, regional and local levels.

In terms of governance, Senegal is among the world leaders in transparency and accountability in the extractive sector, with an overall score of 89 out of 100 in the [2023 EITI Standard assessment](#).

As part of the structured dialogue between the State and civil society, efforts are needed to institutionalise the various mechanisms for consultation and dialogue on public policies, as was the case during the [process of drafting the national equity strategy](#), which has been

under way since March 2026. Whilst their views are sought within the bodies responsible for policy design and formulation, the consultation mechanisms show weaknesses in terms of the difficulty in developing common positions and representatives not always appointed based on their expertise, which limits the possibility for high-quality civil society contributions.

It also happens that the government unilaterally selects civil society organisations for consultations or dialogue on public policies that are ‘favourable’ to it. This often results in parallel processes that can create potential conflicts with state bodies and civil society organisations. In such cases, civil society organisations independently lead processes for policy development or evaluation, producing input documents and citizen-led or alternative reports that are not always taken into account by the government.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Since the new government was inaugurated following the presidential election on 24 March 2024, there has been a certain degree of misunderstanding between some members of the government and certain media outlets on the one hand, and CSOs on the other, which has affected the positive image they had of civil society. Political leaders are accustomed to shifts in their perception of CSOs and their roles, depending on whether they are in opposition or in government. This is evidenced by certain perceptions that have taken hold in public opinion, due in particular to [statements](#) made by the Prime Minister and leader of the ruling party, who, in July 2025, described a section of civil society – notably those active in political governance – as ‘rubbish’, and who, in October 2025, announced [his intention to introduce](#) legislation aimed at prohibiting CSOs from receiving funds from abroad. Although no such bill has been tabled in parliament, similar rhetoric continues to shape the public debate on civil society.

The media follow and report on the activities of CSOs and regularly publish interviews with civil society representatives. This takes place within a media landscape that is becoming increasingly polarised and politicised, which affects public discourse, the exercise of the right to information and citizens’ perceptions of civil society. However, communities generally hold a positive view 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 greater visibility within civil society, and their demands have been widely championed by organisations such as CONGAD and the NGO Sight Savers, through the promotion and dissemination of the ‘Leave No One Behind’ strategy. Although Senegal has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and adopted several pieces of legislation in this regard, the implementation of these provisions remains inadequate. Whilst [Law No. 2010-11 of 28 May 2010, establishing absolute gender parity](#), has strengthened the presence of women in parliament, their representation has fallen from 44.2 per cent of seats to 41 per cent following the most recent parliamentary elections in November 2024. A large number of women’s organisations and associations [have spoken out](#) to condemn the failure to respect gender parity in the National Assembly’s leadership and [the low representation of women](#) in the Government (4 out of 25 ministers).

Women also remain [under-represented](#) at local council level, with only 18 female mayors out of 558 and only 3 female department council chairpersons out of 43. With regard to the inclusion of people with disabilities, the country is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which has helped to change perceptions of disability within society and in development policies. However, much remains to be done before all policies and initiatives are truly inclusive of people with disabilities. Despite some progress,

gender-based violence, as well as 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 sphere, Senegal's digital ecosystem is growing rapidly. However, it is evident that, outside urban areas, there are rural areas that lack internet coverage. The [arrival](#) in February 2026 of the new operator Starlink – which has raised issues of transparency and fairness in digital governance, particularly regarding satellite connectivity – will enable effective and continuous access to fixed broadband internet in areas that have hitherto been underserved or not covered by terrestrial networks. This strengthens connectivity and is a key factor in digital inclusion and environmental improvement.

The implementation, since February 2025, of [the New Technological Deal programme](#) has helped to strengthen the foundations of a robust and sovereign public digital infrastructure, with internet bandwidth for public administrations increasing from 600 megabits to 20 gigabits and the interconnection of more than fifty administrative buildings.

Access to online information is not effective and 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 run on obsolete software versions with little or no protection. These CSOs have not sufficiently developed the skills and capacity to protect their information systems and data.

Despite regulations [governing the protection of personal data](#), [cybersecurity and cybercrime](#), the rise of social media has exacerbated disinformation, harassment, defamation and invasions of privacy. Social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and X) are being used by the security services as [tools to threaten and persecute](#) journalists and civil society organisations, who are subjected to harassment and legal proceedings. These civil society organisations are subject to surveillance of their digital communication systems. They campaign for the improvement of the digital civic space through appropriate regulation that takes into account the concerns and specific circumstances of civil society organisations and poor or vulnerable communities.

Challenges and opportunities

Over the next four months, civil society will continue to face multifaceted challenges given the erosion of public debate linked to tensions between the government and the opposition, as well as the duality at the top of the state between the President of the Republic and his coalition, which controls the executive through the government and the Prime Minister, whose party, 'PASTEF les Patriotes', holds a comfortable parliamentary majority. Furthermore, social tensions are mounting, with repeated announcements and threats of strikes by trade unions, particularly in the education, health and transport sectors.

Civil society must therefore work towards a better understanding of the legal and legislative framework governing CSO action in order to contribute to the quality of public debate, and to the adoption of the principles of sovereignty, particularly in the digital and financial fields. To bridge the gap often observed between legal texts and their practical application, civil society organisations involved in drafting new laws on access to information, the fight against corruption, and the status and protection of whistleblowers must play a role in making these laws accessible to the public, promoting their implementing regulations and monitoring their implementation. To this end, they must rise to the challenge of recruiting and retaining high-calibre staff.

In light of the requirements of digital sovereignty, the government and all stakeholders must ensure compliance with current regulatory obligations, particularly in the areas of telecommunications, cybersecurity and the protection of personal data. In this context, civil society must advocate to the government for the strengthening of the regulatory and institutional framework governing the management and operation of satellite networks and the protection of users' data.

The environment in which CSOs operate continues to give rise to serious concerns. Faced with the diversity of civil society – which is often misunderstood by the government – the government is attempting to restrict the expression of critical voices and increase its control over civil society. This lack of understanding necessitates the development of dialogue with the new authorities and the involvement of CSOs in the drafting of institutional and legal reforms in order to promote greater accountability and transparency within the framework of more open governance.

Another challenge for CSOs is to play a greater role in the design and implementation of public social protection and inclusion programmes, such as family support grants, training and mentoring for young people, etc. This requires strengthening their staff, whom they find it difficult to retain for long periods.

Among the ways in which the enabling environment could be improved are the promotion of the right to information, enshrined in the Law on Access to Information passed last August, and the digitisation of certain procedures for registering for and accessing public services.

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