



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Tunisia

September 2026

Context

Reporting period: November 2025 to September 2026

In Tunisia, 25 July 2021 marked a [political turning point](#) in the country's democratic trajectory and in civic engagement, breaking with an environment that had been conducive to [the exercise](#) of rights and freedoms since the 2011 revolution. The gradual [concentration](#) of power around the executive is profoundly altering the operating conditions for democratic institutions and civil society actors, stigmatising them and seeking to delegitimise their work, against a backdrop of increasing [repression](#) of civil liberties. Although the [2022 Constitution](#) establishes a new institutional framework and retains the majority of constitutional guarantees relating to the exercise of rights and freedoms, it comes at a time when checks and balances are being eroded and the rule of law is being [undermined](#).

Civil society work is carried out under severe constraints. Upstream, debates surrounding the [reform](#) of the legal framework governing associations, [allegations](#) of foreign funding, and the launch [of](#) administrative and financial [investigations](#) into several [organisations](#) – specifically those working in the fields of human rights, migration, the fight against discrimination, governance and election monitoring – are of particular concern. Some NGOs have been forced to cease their activities in Tunisia, such as [Terre d'Asile Tunisie](#).

Furthermore, the imprisonment of [journalists](#) and [activists](#) reflects a drastic change in the relationship between the authorities and civil society actors. [Forty-seven people](#) linked to NGOs have been prosecuted, including members, employees and former employees, at least [14 of whom](#) have been sentenced to prison terms. The climate of prosecutions and detentions has led several civil society figures and activists to continue their work from abroad, '[forced into exile](#)' for fear of prosecution, such as the journalist [Khaoula Boukrim](#), the columnist [Haythem Mekki](#) and the former coordinator of the Mnementy association, [Ghofrane Binous](#). In 2026, Tunisia remains classified as '[partly free](#)' by Freedom House, with a score of 42 out of 100, and as 'repressed' by the CIVICUS Monitor, with a score of 34 out of 100.

Despite these setbacks, Tunisian civil society is showing resilience. Many civil society actors are reorienting their strategies, adapting to new political realities and strengthening their solidarity networks. Efforts to comply with changing regulations, diversify resources and continue advocacy work demonstrate an ongoing commitment to democratic values. This overview provides a glimpse of a sector that is weathering adversity with determination, seeking to preserve its role in Tunisia's contested transition.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

In Tunisia, safeguards for fundamental freedoms – in particular freedom of expression, association and assembly – have deteriorated significantly, gradually undermining civil society's ability to act independently.

Freedom of expression remains under threat despite a temporary wave, during the first quarter of 2026, of releases of civil society activists and prisoners of conscience, such as the human rights defender, lawyer and former judge [Ahmed Souab](#) and the activist [Saloua Ghrissa](#).

Several [journalists](#) have been in prison for over two years, such as [Mourad Zeghidi and Borhen Bessais](#), whilst there has been a renewed intensification of arrests and prosecutions of journalists such as [Mohamed Yousfi](#) and [Zied El Heni](#), prolonging the pressure on freedom of expression and freedom of the press. [Independent media outlets](#) are facing smear campaigns, suspension orders and administrative and judicial pressure, such as [Inkyfada](#), [Nawaat](#) and [Al Qatiba](#). Lawyers such as [Sonia Dahmani](#) and [Ghazi Mrabet](#), and [judges](#) such as [Anas Hmedi](#), are being prosecuted and convicted in cases linked to their opinions.

The practices of the public authorities with regard to freedom of association have become progressively more restrictive. At least [25 organisations](#) have been subject to suspension measures, including the [LTDH, ASF, FTDES, ATFD and OMCT](#). [Several](#) have had their appeals rejected and now face the risk of dissolution, such as Al Khatt and Mnementy, whose chairperson, [Saadia Mosbah](#), has been sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Freedom of assembly is also subject to increasing restrictions. Firstly, rallies linked to the [Soumoud Flotilla](#) in solidarity with the Palestinian cause were banned in March 2026. Several of its coordinating [members](#) were subsequently arrested and detained as part of legal proceedings, including [Wael Naouar](#), who remains on hunger strike and is in a critical condition. On another front, [Seifeddine Arfaoui](#), a young activist with the Nafas association, blogger and human rights defender, was arrested following his participation in a peaceful demonstration challenging certain public policies, thus illustrating the growing restrictions faced by participants in peaceful protest movements.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

The work of civil society actors takes place within a framework of legal uncertainty. The authorities resort to manoeuvres to enforce [Decree-Law No. 88 of 2011](#) on associations in order to carry out mass [suspensions](#) of associations [operating](#) in Tunisia. These tactics involve [the extensive use](#) of Article 3 of this decree, the general wording of which requires associations to respect the principles of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. The vague nature of these requirements leaves considerable scope for interpretation by the authorities, particularly through formal notices issued in general terms that do not specify the alleged breaches. The same applies to Article 45, the provisions of which the authorities appear to [be invoking](#) beyond their original purpose in order to justify the [suspension](#) of associations. This 'tinkering' with the legal framework allows a system designed to regulate the activities of associations to be transformed into an instrument of disproportionate coercion and control.

The authorities have also [invoked](#) criminal provisions relating to the provision of assistance to foreign nationals in an irregular situation, as well as those of the 2015-26 Anti-Terrorism Act and anti-money laundering legislation, to bring [proceedings](#) against members of CSOs. [Dozens of organisations](#) have been subject to financial or criminal investigations, focusing in particular on their foreign funding, with charges relating to money laundering under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Several of these proceedings remain open, with no final decision to bring the prosecutions or investigations to a close. Meanwhile, the Investigation and Tax Evasion Unit has stepped up its investigations into at least [18 NGOs](#), including IWatch, Moukariboun, FTDES and Legal Agenda.

Added to this is the [overlapping](#) legal application of Decree-Law No. 2022-54. This constitutes a further element of legal uncertainty and a tool for restricting civic space. Article 24 of the decree-law is being used to criminalise publications or public statements. Its extensive use, beyond its original objective of combating cybercrime, contributes to creating a [climate of self-](#)

[censorship](#) around public expression and civic work, without genuine judicial safeguards, whilst [the justice system is being exploited](#) by the executive branch.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Access to sustainable resources for civil society in Tunisia continues to deteriorate. Public funding is [limited](#), poorly structured and often reserved for organisations aligned with the government's interests.

NGOs and associations – particularly those working on human rights, governance or minority issues – are heavily reliant on foreign funding. Financial restrictions are the main means of exerting pressure on them. Relations between CSOs and banks have [deteriorated](#) significantly, with an increase in requests for documentation, checks and procedures that vary from one institution to another, as well as difficulties in accessing certain standard banking services. In particular, they [face obstacles](#) in opening or maintaining their accounts, accessing accounts in foreign currencies or convertible dinars, and carrying out international transfers.

International [funding](#) has been blocked for several weeks, in some cases returned to the senders or subject to requests for further information, compromising the organisations' ability to access their resources within a timeframe compatible with their activities. In this context, at least [20 organisations](#) have had financial transfers blocked or returned to their donors. In some cases, processing times have reached ten weeks, directly jeopardising the implementation of ongoing projects. Other organisations have faced requests to close their bank accounts, without any clearly established justification.

The funding [available](#) to CSOs remains largely project-based and tied to limited funding cycles, leading organisations to adapt their activities to donors' priorities rather than to their own needs and strategies. The project-cycle funding model forces CSOs to tailor their remit to calls for proposals and to stretch their human and financial resources.

Access to [information](#) on public funding opportunities remains hampered by the absence of an institutional portal centralising funding opportunities, combined with the complexity of calls for proposals and the technical requirements of foreign donors. There has also been a decline in the proactive publication of public information by state bodies, despite the obligation for 'spontaneous and regular publication' provided for under the Tunisian legal framework.

These technicalities are particularly disadvantageous to local organisations and bodies with limited administrative and financial capacity. This leads to unequal access to funding and information on calls for proposals, favouring organisations that have long had the resources, technical expertise and networks enabling them to identify and mobilise available opportunities more easily.

4. Open and responsive state

Since 2021, the State has been characterised by an increasingly limited openness and responsiveness towards civil society in Tunisia, thereby undermining the conditions conducive to civic engagement. Whilst principles such as transparency, participation and collaboration are officially enshrined in the legal framework, their practical implementation is gradually breaking down. [Organic Law No. 2016-22 of 24 March 2016](#) on the right of access to information remains in force, but its implementation continues to be hampered, particularly

following the government's [dissolution](#) of the National Authority for Access to Information (INAI). Moreover, the Open Government Partnership, in its 2023–2025 [progress report](#) published in 2026, states that Tunisia's commitment to access to information has been profoundly affected by the dissolution of the National Authority for Access to Information.

This development is reflected, in particular, in the weakening of the institutional channels enabling civil society to participate in decision-making and to exercise oversight over public action. The mechanisms for participation and checks and balances that previously existed have been gradually scaled back. The online platform used to publish legislative texts and gather feedback from civil society has been suspended, whilst [Organic Law](#) No. 4 of 2025 on local councils, regional councils and district councils completely [excludes](#) civil society from local affairs.

This reversal has also been accompanied by increased pressure on former heads of independent bodies established during the democratic transition. The prosecutions and convictions of [Sihem Ben Sedrine](#), former chair of the Truth and Dignity Commission, who was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment, and [Chawki Tabib](#), former chair of the INLUCC, form part of this context of the weakening of institutional mechanisms for oversight and accountability. They illustrate the pressure being exerted on figures who held key roles within the systems of transitional justice, anti-corruption and institutional oversight.

Access to information remains limited. Although Law [No. 2016-22](#) officially guarantees the right of access to information for all citizens, with the aim of promoting transparency, combating corruption and strengthening good governance, its implementation is hampered. Civil society organisations frequently [face](#) delays, vague refusals and cumbersome procedures when submitting requests, with limited mechanisms for appeal or feedback. A report by [the Media Ownership Monitor](#) highlights limited access to media organisations' financial data, thereby reducing transparency regarding their sources of funding and ownership. This [prevents](#) the public from knowing who funds the media, who may influence its editorial line and who bears the losses during a downturn in the advertising market. The arrest on 27 August 2026 of journalists [Mahmoud El Majdoub and Ahmed El Ayari](#), correspondents for Al Jazeera's Tunisian bureau, whilst they were covering the bottled water distribution crisis in the Rades district, demonstrates the state's determination to keep information opaque and centralised within public channels. The two journalists were subsequently released, but were forced to delete their recordings.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Civil society continues to be the target of persistent [stigmatising rhetoric](#) from the highest public authorities, which is then echoed by certain political and media figures. Decree-Law No. 2011-88 has also been the subject of a [sustained critical campaign](#) fuelled by rhetoric [denouncing foreign funding](#), the [political exploitation](#) of certain associations, and their involvement in [migration issues](#). This contributes to the portrayal of the voluntary sector as a [potential vehicle](#) for foreign interference and external agendas, particularly in the context of a fragile civic space. Organisations and media outlets that receive foreign funding are consistently accused of being 'mercenaries' or 'foreign agents'. These accusations have once again been used in smear campaigns targeting organisations that have expressed support for human rights or criticised current public policies in Tunisia.

This has recently been the case with the media outlet Al Qatiba. Following the detention of its editor-in-chief, [Mohamed Yousfi](#), his colleague [Yosra El Belali](#) has been subjected to intense personal attacks on social media. These attacks target her professional credibility and integrity, and go so far as to question her nationality and her sense of belonging to Tunisia.

[The Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights \(LTDH\)](#), a symbol of civic engagement in Tunisia and the only local organisation authorised to carry out visits to prisons, has thus seen its access gradually restricted. Its activities were [suspended](#) for a month, after which several of its delegations were [prevented](#) from carrying out visits to various prisons, notably in Gafsa, Mahdia, Belli, Nadhour and Borj Erroumi. The LTDH has also [condemned](#) the Ministry of Justice's introduction of a requirement for prior authorisation for these visits, whereas the memorandum of understanding concluded in 2015 merely stipulated an obligation to provide prior notification. This hegemonic policy towards civic engagement contributes to creating a climate of fear and intimidation, stigmatising the work of civil society actors and silencing dissenting voices in the civic sphere.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Internet access is widespread in Tunisia, with 10.4 million users, representing 84.3 per cent of the population according to data from [DataReportal's 'Digital 2026: Tunisia'](#). This high level of connectivity, however, contrasts with a digital environment characterised by increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and insufficient protection for users against legal action relating to their online activities.

Decree-Law No. 2022-54 on cybercrime continues to be used by the judicial authorities against journalists, lawyers, activists and others who have expressed critical views online or in the media. One such example is the lawyer and columnist [Sonia Dahmani](#), who has been prosecuted in several cases on the basis of this legislation, including Article 24. In particular, she was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for criticising prison conditions in Tunisia.

At the same time, the judicial authorities have continued to invoke [Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code](#), which provides for a sentence of up to two years' imprisonment for knowingly causing harm to another person or disturbing their peace via public telecommunications networks. In May 2026, the journalist [Zied El Heni](#) was sentenced to one year's imprisonment under this article for comments criticising the judicial handling of a case. Human rights defender [Mohamed Khalouli](#) was also sentenced in February 2026 to one month's imprisonment on the same grounds, following publications criticising public officials and denouncing violence by the security forces. These practices restrict the scope for exercising freedom of expression in the digital sphere and may act as a deterrent to journalists, activists and citizens.

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next three months, the consolidation of a conducive environment for civil society in Tunisia will depend, above all, on legal certainty and the predictability of operating conditions. A key challenge will be to continue to advocate for the release of, and to drop charges against, leaders and members of civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as independent voices among journalists, lawyers, judges and citizens, who are being prosecuted or detained

because of their activities or the views they have expressed. This will be achieved by applying existing rules in accordance with their purpose and scope, and by avoiding extensive or disproportionate recourse to criminal or administrative provisions that could undermine the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

The concerns expressed in 2026 by the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council regarding restrictions targeting civil society organisations, the criminalisation of the exercise of the right of assembly, and the prosecutions brought against defenders, journalists, lawyers and other critical actors underscore the importance of a predictable legal framework that complies with Tunisia's international obligations. This legal certainty also requires safeguarding the independence of the judiciary and the guarantees of effective judicial review. The ability of CSOs to continue their activities depends, in fact, on their ability to challenge administrative, financial or judicial decisions that may affect their operations before independent and impartial courts.

The [financial sustainability](#) of organisations is another fundamental challenge. Strengthening the oversight of [foreign funding](#) must be carried out within a clear, proportionate and transparent legal framework, without resulting in administrative or banking obstacles that could jeopardise the continuity of CSOs' activities. The aim should be to guarantee both the integrity and traceability of funding and the organisations' ability to access the resources necessary for their operation, in accordance with the guarantees of freedom of association.

In this regard, the scope for action presents a genuine opportunity. In particular, CSOs can make greater use of international human rights protection mechanisms to document the restrictions they face, submit information to the Special Procedures, and contribute to the dialogue with the authorities within the framework of these mechanisms.

In this sense, CSOs have the opportunity to structure their dialogue with the authorities more effectively around the international standards to which Tunisia is bound, by producing documented evidence, formulating specific proposals and following up on the recommendations of United Nations mechanisms. This approach may help to revitalise dialogue with the authorities and guide the state's response towards the legal obligations, procedural safeguards and international human rights protection mechanisms from which CSOs benefit.

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