



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# **Enabling Environment**

## **Baseline Snapshot**

**Cameroon**

**June 2026**

## Background

**Period covered by this report:** June 2025 – June 2026

In the aftermath of the October 2018 presidential election, Cameroon was marked by numerous socio-political tensions. These were fuelled in particular by the demands of activists and supporters of the opposition political party, the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC), who contested the official election results and claimed victory for their candidate, Professor Maurice Kamto. These tensions have persisted in Cameroon's socio-political landscape, particularly with regard to the issue of activists from this opposition party who were arrested, and [convicted](#) by military courts. Some of these activists are still languishing in prison.

Against this tense backdrop, civil society organisations have also faced increased repression, notably through the [suspension](#) of the activities of several NGOs and associations, such as REDHAC, Reach Out Cameroon (ROC), the Cameroon Socio-Cultural Charitable Association (ACSCC) and the L.M Nanje Foundation INC.

Compounding these political tensions and the restriction of civic space are the security crises affecting certain regions of the country, which have been a major issue in public debate for several years. In the far north region, the population continues to face violence linked to the activities of Boko Haram, whilst the North-West and South-West regions have been plagued by a persistent security crisis since 2017.

In such a context, human rights organisations find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. Their work is also the subject of rhetoric aimed at delegitimising it, notably through accusations of a supposed 'importation of Western values'. This rhetoric is particularly prevalent when it comes to civil and political rights, as well as the defence of the rights of sexual minorities.

In the same vein, authorities imposed restrictions on pro-democracy activists and some journalists before, during and after the electoral process of 12 October 2025. This is particularly evident in the media censorship by the National Communications Council (CNC), which formally [ordered](#) the suspension of all political debate programmes in the broadcast media with effect from 27 September 2025, marking the official start of the campaign, or [the ban](#) on meetings and rallies organised by certain opposition political parties by the administrative authorities, such as the ban on the '*undeclared*' political congress of the Front for Change in Cameroon (FCC) by the Prefect of Wouri in June 2025.

Economically, between June 2025 and June 2026, Cameroon maintained a resilient growth trajectory, fluctuating between 3.3 per cent and 3.5 per cent, underpinned by agricultural production (notably strong performance in the cocoa sector), electricity generation and robust public and private investment. The key economic trends during this period centred on the following areas: the slowdown in inflation, the investment boom and the driving role of the agri-industry. According to recent data from the African

Development Bank Group, Cameroon's macroeconomic performance in 2025 saw high [growth](#) of 3.7 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent in 2024.

On the social front, the strike by secondary school teachers through the OTS movement ('We have endured/suffered too much') [continued](#) to shape the educational landscape in Cameroon through several major actions. This social movement, launched in April 2025, led to a major nationwide 'school strike' organised by the Collective of Education Organisations in Cameroon, which took over from the original OTS movement, launched in 2022. The main demands are dignified working conditions for teachers and the payment of outstanding debts.

In the 2025 global Democracy Index rankings, Cameroon is ranked 136th worldwide and 48th on the African continent. The country is classified as an authoritarian regime, notably due to significant shortcomings regarding political pluralism and citizen participation, as well as restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

In the preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996, as amended and supplemented by Act No. 2008/001 of 14 April 2008 and [Act No. 2026/002 of 14 April 2026](#), Cameroon '*affirms its commitment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all relevant international conventions duly ratified*', but also guarantees civil liberties. The same preamble contains statements such as: '*All people are equal in rights and duties. The State shall ensure that all citizens have the necessary conditions for their development; freedom of religion and the free exercise of religious practice are guaranteed; freedom of communication, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of trade union organisation and the right to strike are guaranteed under the conditions laid down by law...*'. On reading these provisions, it is clear that, in theory, the Cameroonian Constitution lays the foundations for a civic space open to the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and pluralism.

However, in practice, the exercise of these rights remains very limited. This is evident, for example, from the 2025 [CIVICUS Monitor](#) ranking, in which Cameroon scored a low 23 out of 100, illustrating flagrant restrictions on the three fundamental pillars: freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to peaceful assembly. This ranking therefore describes Cameroon's civic space as '*repressed*'.

In late 2024, following the suspension and closure of several NGOs and associations, around 50 civil society organisations and figures from the academic community issued a statement [denouncing](#) the restriction of civic space in Cameroon, particularly in the run-up to the presidential election on 12 October 2025.

2025 was a pivotal year due to the political calendar, and primarily the presidential election held in October 2025, in which the incumbent president sought an eighth term.

On the eve of the announcement of the presidential election results, hundreds of opposition supporters [defied](#) bans on demonstrations; in Douala, four people were killed during clashes between security forces and supporters of the opposition leader. Parliamentary and local elections were postponed by President Paul Biya, following an initial extension decided upon to avoid a clash with the 2025 presidential election. Against this backdrop, a number of infringements on civic space were recorded. Here are a few examples:

- Freedom of association: REDHAC's premises remained [closed](#) from 9 December 2024 to 17 September 2025, in breach of the three-month time limit set out in the decree issued by the Minister for Territorial Administration, accompanied by prolonged judicial harassment and an arbitrary trial against the Co-Chair of its Board of Directors, Ms Alice Nkom, and its Executive Director, Ms Maximilienne Ngo Mbe;
- Freedom of assembly: On 8 June 2025, the administrative authorities in Douala [banned](#) a meeting and rally organised by Maurice Kamto and activists from the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon at the party's regional headquarters in Deido Grand Moulin, leading to a police cordon and the postponement of the event. On 4 August 2025, 52 people who had come to attend the public hearings on pre-election disputes before the Constitutional Council were [arrested](#).

[Law No. 2014/028 of 23 December 2014](#) on the suppression of acts of terrorism severely punishes the glorification of terrorism. This law is frequently used against activists, journalists and human rights defenders. The law grants military courts jurisdiction to try terrorism cases, with the possibility of imposing the death penalty, and has regularly been used to prosecute civil society actors and democracy activists for mere political opinions or peaceful protest actions. By way of illustration, on 21 January 2025, following a complaint by the NGO Observatoire du développement sociétal (ODS), the lawyer and human rights defender Ms Alice Nkom was [summoned](#) to the Central Judicial Investigations Service of the National Gendarmerie on charges of '*financing terrorism and undermining state security*' under this law. Following the death of Xavier Koulou Engoulou, the NGO's general coordinator, in October 2025, no further action was taken in response to this summons. Similarly, certain administrative restrictions are being imposed under the pretext of '*preserving public order*', even though these restrictions are not provided for in the 2014 Act.

Other types of restrictions have been observed. In 2025, the Minister for Territorial Administration [informed](#) representatives of the United Nations system and various diplomatic missions that a [register](#) of 104 associations and NGOs – all legally recognised and in compliance with Cameroonian regulations – was available, and asked them to prioritise their partnerships and funding in accordance with this list. The publication of this list was accompanied by an ultimatum from the Minister for Territorial Administration stating that NGOs must not receive direct funding from abroad without the government's prior consent. This approach was not based on any

relevant legislation, argument or objective criterion. This measure restricted certain civil society organisations' access to external funding.

The fight against gender-based violence is now a national priority and a fundamental issue for building a fairer, more equitable society that respects human rights. [66 women were killed](#) between January and November 2025. According to data provided by the government, Cameroon recorded [1,599 cases](#) of gender-based violence between January and April 2026. Whilst the authorities and civil society are certainly stepping up efforts to prevent and combat this phenomenon, it unfortunately persists. In the face of the rising prevalence of femicide within society, civil society's advocacy is focused on tightening the legal framework for prosecution, specifically the criminal law, which must recognise femicide as a crime and punish it as such.

LGBTQ+ people face severe legal and social repression. [Article 347-1 of the Cameroonian Penal Code](#) criminalises homosexual relations, imposing sentences of between six months' and five years' imprisonment and a fine of between 20,000 and 200,000 CFA francs on anyone who has sexual relations with a person of the same sex.

Press freedom in Cameroon in 2026 has deteriorated further. The country ranks 133rd out of 180 in the [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) World Press Freedom Index](#), having dropped two places since 2025. Journalists there face a highly hostile working environment, characterised by censorship, financial insecurity and legal proceedings.

## 2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

In addition to the constitutional guarantees mentioned above, freedom of association in Cameroon is governed by two main laws, namely: [Act No. 90/053](#) of 19 December 1990 on freedom of association, and [Act No. 99/014](#) of 22 December 1999, which governs associations with humanitarian or development objectives and which, in reality, constitutes the legal framework for NGOs. In the Act of 19 December 1990, the legislature drew a clear distinction between national associations and foreign or religious associations, each of which is subject to a specific regime from the moment of their establishment.

Indeed, 'national' associations are freely established by means of a declaration to the competent prefectural authority, as set out in Article 6, which states: *'Subject to the cases of nullity provided for in Article 4 above, associations may be freely established. However, they acquire legal personality only if they have been the subject of a declaration accompanied by two copies of their articles of association'*. Article 7, for its part, refers to the declaration procedure applicable to these associations upon their formation with the prefectural authority, which immediately issues a receipt upon receipt of the formation dossier, provided that the dossier is complete and free from any grounds for nullity.

The second category of associations comprises religious and foreign associations. These are subject to an authorisation procedure by the Minister for Territorial Administration or the Presidency of the Republic.

‘Foreign’ associations are defined as those which, regardless of their legal form, have their registered office abroad, or which, whilst having their registered office in Cameroon, are in fact managed by foreign nationals and more than half of whose members are foreign nationals (Article 15 of Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990). Before commencing operations, these associations are subject to an authorisation procedure by the Minister for Territorial Administration, following approval from his counterpart at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The application for authorisation to operate, which is submitted to the Ministry of External Relations by the founders or authorised representatives of a foreign association, must specify the activities to be carried out, the locations within Cameroon, and the names, professions and addresses of those responsible for managing these activities.

Finally, religious associations and congregational institutions are also subject to an authorisation regime, but with the difference that their authorisation falls within the exclusive competence of the President of the Republic, following a reasoned opinion from the Minister for Territorial Administration (Article 24 of Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990). It should be noted that the authorisation of a religious association is not governed by a single implementing decree, but by individual presidential decrees. Under the 1990 Act, each religious group must receive express authorisation granted by a decree of the President of the Republic following the advice of the Ministry of Territorial Administration.

As for Act No. 99/014 of 22 December 1999, it governs the status, establishment and operation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Cameroon; in particular, by regulating their participation in the execution of tasks in the public interest on behalf of the State. Under this Act, an NGO is a registered association or a duly authorised foreign association which obtains administrative approval to carry out activities in the public interest in areas such as human rights, health, education, the environment, humanitarian aid, etc.

Article 10 of this Act specifies that the authorisation granted to an NGO is valid for a renewable period of five years. It should be noted that this renewal of an NGO’s authorisation is a kind of sword of Damocles hanging over certain organisations, which may be refused renewal by the competent authorities if their activities do not meet with the authorities’ approval; one example is the NGO Un Monde Avenir, which has been awaiting renewal of its authorisation since 2021.

In practice, the exercise of freedom of association – particularly for organisations working on civil and political rights – is often curtailed due to restrictions, or even repression, by the administrative authorities supposed to be responsible for regulation. In other words, civil and political organisations very often find their activities banned by sub-prefects on the pretext of preserving public order, even when there is no threat

of a breach of public order. Local and sports associations are not spared from such suspensions: several sports or socio-cultural associations have had their activities suspended by prefectural authorities (as in Mfoundi in late 2025) on grounds of internal dissension or involvement in undeclared activities. It is possible to challenge a suspension in court, but first one must lodge a Preliminary Administrative Appeal (RGP) with the authority that issued the suspension order; failure to do so will result in the judge declaring the application null and void.

### 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

The financing and sourcing of accessible and sustainable resources by associations and NGOs are also governed by the two aforementioned laws. In other words, these organisations are required to account for all their financial transactions and to submit an annual report to the authorities to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The main rules relating to the financial management of associations and NGOs include:

- The source of funds (donations, bequests, grants) may come from national or international organisations, subject to transparency;
- Scrutiny and authorisation: for donations and bequests of property, prior authorisation from the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) is mandatory;
- Administrative transparency: associations are legally obliged to submit an annual administrative and financial report to the Minister for Territorial Administration.

Generally speaking, civil society organisations struggle to access funding for reasons such as cumbersome international procedures, limited organisational capacity, strict legal constraints and a lack of domestic financial support. In practice, the authorities sometimes [use](#) security or counter-terrorism grounds to prevent associations from accessing resources or to bring legal proceedings against human rights defenders, such as the summons issued against Ms Alice Nkom.

The aforementioned list of 104 NGOs authorised to receive funding, issued by the Ministry of Territorial Administration in June 2025, was not discussed with civil society organisations and is not based on any objective criteria. From a legal perspective, no legal proceedings have been brought before the courts.

In Cameroon, there are funding schemes and institutional or sectoral support within ministries such as the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) or the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MINAC), but direct state grants for civil society organisations (CSOs) remain minimal, uncertain, extremely selective and difficult to access. The majority of funding comes from international partners.

### 4. Open and responsive state

The prevailing climate between public authorities and civil society organisations is ambivalent, as the nature of the relationship depends on the sectoral department concerned and the affiliated civil society organisations. For example, for organisations working on civil and political issues, dialogue between these two entities remains extremely limited. The authorities very rarely engage in consultations with independent organisations and systematically refuse to recognise unregistered associations as valid interlocutors, even when they are consistently active and recognised in their field. The ban imposed by the Minister for Territorial Administration on organisations that had not been accredited and trained by official institutions for observing the presidential election on 12 October 2025 is a perfect illustration of the climate that exists between the State and civil society organisations. This hardening of tone by the Minister for Territorial Administration led, on election day, to [the arrest](#) of certain observers at the Dang university campus and the Malan state school in N’Gaoundéré; they were later taken to the central intelligence police station and placed in police custody. However, in other sectors, such as health and education, the public authorities and CSOs regularly work together in a spirit of collaboration to promote the country’s development.

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CDHC), as a National Human Rights Institution intended to act as a mediator between civil society and the State, is sometimes regarded by certain stakeholders as an institution that lacks independence and credibility. This is mainly due to the fact that all its members are [appointed](#) by the executive. According to the [Paris Principles of 19 December 1993](#), which set out the powers and guarantees of independence for National Human Rights Institutions, such institutions should be entirely autonomous from the executive branch in their operations and in the positions they adopt. Furthermore, [having been appointed on 19 February 2021 by Presidential Decree No. 2021/110](#) for a five-year term renewable once, the current team’s term officially expired on 19 February 2026.

It is therefore more important than ever to consider establishing a formal framework for exchange, inclusive dialogue and consultation between the State and civil society, which would enable effective and efficient solutions to be found for crucial issues.

There is no specific, comprehensive and stand-alone law in Cameroon enshrining the right of access to information or freedom of information for citizens and journalists, although certain sector-specific provisions (such as legislation on digital matters or data protection) address these issues in a piecemeal manner, according to [Reporters Without Borders](#).

Engagement with and consultation of journalists’ unions, such as the [National Union of Journalists of Cameroon \(SNJC\)](#), remain limited and often informal, with professional organisations regularly calling for inclusive consultations on the drafting and passing of a specific law on freedom of information. The lack of systematic institutional involvement leads media stakeholders to step up their advocacy efforts at public forums or on international days dedicated to press freedom.

## 5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

In Cameroon, the official and media discourse regarding civil society tends to discredit it in the eyes of public opinion. Far from being perceived as partners in development or as key actors in the promotion and protection of human rights, civil society organisations are often portrayed as organisations that are being exploited by foreign powers or driven by intentions hostile to the state, and are therefore sometimes regarded as a countervailing power. This reductive, even stigmatising, narrative about civil society undermines, in one way or another, any form of criticism or engagement, particularly when an organisation addresses sensitive issues such as human rights, governance, the fight against corruption, individual freedoms, social justice, the environment, and so on. It is very often in such an environment that certain organisations are wrongly suspected of undermining social cohesion, the unity of the country, national sovereignty or even state security; hence their marginalisation, repression and, at times, the administrative and financial restrictions to which they are frequently subjected, as was the case with the publication in March 2025 of the list of 104 organisations deemed to be in good standing with the Ministry of Territorial Administration.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

Legislation on a secure digital environment is primarily governed by two pieces of legislation, namely: [Act No. 2010/012 of 21 December 2010 on cyber security](#) and cybercrime in Cameroon, and [Act No. 2010/021 of 21 December 2010](#) governing e-commerce in Cameroon. This body of law also governs the protection of personal data.

Specifically, Act No. 2010/012 of 21 December 2010 establishes the regulatory framework for combating cybercrime by penalising, for example, unauthorised access to computer systems, hacking, the falsification of digital data and online fraud. This also applies to the fight against cyberbullying and online hate speech (Articles 74 and 75); and to the dissemination of fake news. (Article 78-1 of the Act punishes the publication or dissemination of fake news by electronic means).

In addition to these two Acts, there is also [Decree No. 2019/150](#) of 22 March 2019, which sets out the organisation and functioning of the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC) as the body responsible for regulating activities relating to the security of information systems and electronic communications networks. The Telecommunications Regulatory Agency, for its part, [oversees](#) the functioning of the electronic communications market.

Despite the existence of this legislative framework, civil society organisations in Cameroon operate in a digital environment characterised by insecurity, surveillance

and a lack of institutional protection. This same legislation is often used to [prosecute](#) activists on the basis of online posts.

Social media has become a heavily monitored space where any criticism, particularly of the authorities, can lead to criminal prosecution. Several activists, human rights defenders and journalists have been [arrested](#) or prosecuted for either sharing the content of a video or openly criticising certain officials on social media.

Furthermore, not only is internet access still very limited and unreliable, but there is still no public policy aimed at supporting cybersecurity within the voluntary sector or at strengthening the capacity of civil society actors in the areas of data protection or training on digital risks.

Finally, it is worth noting the targeted disruptions observed from time to time, particularly during demonstrations or elections, which considerably limit online freedom of expression and the possibility of collective coordination. For example, during the presidential election process on 12 October 2025, severe [disruptions](#) to internet access were observed in Cameroon from 23 October 2025 onwards – a week and a half after the vote and ahead of the announcement of the results. This incident slowed down communications across the country and throughout the sub-region; consequently, *Paradigm Initiative* condemned these disruptions in an official press [release](#) due to their impact on the poor quality of the internet and, specifically, on social media, which were indispensable tools during this election.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Cameroonian civil society will continue to face severe restrictions, largely due to a repressive legislative framework that at times criminalises the work of its actors, and to the arbitrary application of that framework, challenges exacerbated by shortcomings in internal coordination, which weaken collective advocacy on certain shared issues, such as the recognition of the status of human rights defenders through, for example, the adoption of a law relating to their protection. Act No. 2014/028 of 23 December 2014 on the suppression of acts of terrorism, which grants jurisdiction to military courts with the power to impose the death penalty, severely restricts freedom of association, despite the constitutional guarantees contained in the preamble and the existing national laws on the matter. No reforms have been undertaken to bring this law into line with international standards.

Added to this are administrative [restrictions](#) on funding for associations, such as the publication of a list of 104 associations and NGOs deemed to be in compliance with the Ministry of Administration and recognised as eligible to receive funding from partners.

Furthermore, the absence of a law recognising the status and protection of civil society actors, as is the case in some countries, also serves to undermine the work of civil

society organisations. The advocacy work carried out by REDHAC over several years calling for the legal recognition of human rights defenders presents an opportunity. Consequently, an updated draft bill was tabled and registered with the Senate President's office on 15 April 2025 by a Senator of the Republic; its eventual adoption would represent a significant step forward, although its legislative journey remains uncertain and depends on political will.

Despite this hostile environment, certain opportunities nevertheless remain. International mechanisms such as United Nations bodies and special procedures still offer avenues for redress and advocacy, although their direct binding force in the face of state sovereignty is often limited. The African Commission on Human and People's Rights and its special mechanisms, such as country-specific and thematic Special Rapporteurs, also help to highlight violations through the complaints submitted to them, reports or visits carried out in specific cases. There are also regional channels such as: AfricanDefenders, the NGO Forum, the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (RINADH) and CIVICUS, which also help to relay Cameroon's demands at the international level.

In any event, the coming period will be critical for freedom of association in Cameroon if nothing is done. However, regional solidarity, international instruments and the resilience of those working on the ground still make it possible to take action and to remain hopeful for the future.

*This publication has been 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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