

Eswatini

Country Focus Report

October 2025



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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES

- 1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms**
- 2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework**
- 3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources**
- 4. Open and Responsive State**
- 5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society**
- 6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment**

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the 6 principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Eswatini is governed under an absolute monarchy, where the King holds executive, legislative, and judicial authority. The country operates a hybrid governance system that blends traditional institutions with liberal democratic principles. Constitutionally, the Monarch serves a dual role as both the King and the *Ingwenyama*, symbolising the fusion of modern statecraft and customary leadership. Despite formal provisions for civic participation within both governance systems, public engagement has limited influence on decision-making. Power remains highly centralised, and the absence of institutionalised feedback and accountability mechanisms has contributed to widespread civic apathy.

Political pluralism is severely restricted. Political parties remain banned under the [1973 King's Proclamation](#), a decree that continues to override the provisions of the [2005 Constitution](#). Elections serve primarily to establish government authority, but the composition of elected bodies is tightly controlled, limiting their ability to resolve political tensions or represent diverse interests. Dissent is systematically suppressed through repressive legislation, the [Suppression of Terrorism Act](#), [Public Order Act](#), and the [Sedition and Subversive Act](#). These laws have been used [to target](#) political opponents, human rights defenders, and civil society activists. As a result, Eswatini is classified as a “closed” civic space by the [2024 CIVICUS Monitor](#).

In this restrictive environment, civil society organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in advocating for human rights, transparency, and social justice. However, they operate under significant legal and regulatory constraints. The Companies Act, which currently governs CSOs, is not tailored to their unique operational needs. The proposed Non-Profit Organizations (NPO) Bill of 2024 is a potentially transformative piece of legislation aimed at addressing these gaps. Nonetheless, stakeholders have raised [substantive concerns](#) regarding its provisions, underscoring the need for inclusive consultations to ensure the law is just, enabling, and fit for purpose.

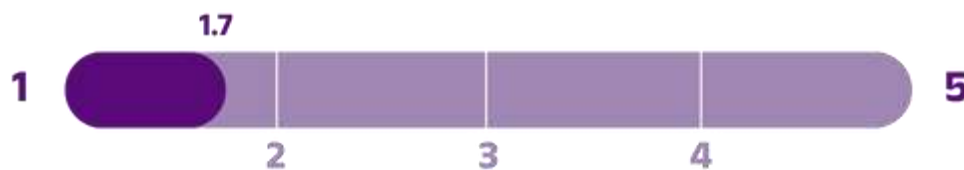
Further compounding the challenges faced by civil society are the absence of access to information laws and whistle-blower protection frameworks. These gaps hinder transparency, weaken accountability efforts, and expose journalists, activists, and human rights defenders to heightened risks.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: 1.7/5 ¹



The civic space in Eswatini remains deeply constrained, with the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression facing systemic repression. Despite constitutional and international guarantees, civil society actors—particularly those engaged in advocacy or political organising—face systemic legal, political, and physical barriers that limit their ability to organise, mobilise, and speak out. The legal ban on political parties and judicial reinforcement of executive control reflect a broader resistance to pluralism. Peaceful assembly is routinely obstructed through prohibitions, dispersals, and violence, especially when protests challenge state policies or demand accountability. Freedom of expression is similarly undermined by media monopolisation, surveillance, and intimidation of journalists and activists. These restrictions are not isolated but part of a deliberate strategy to suppress dissent and limit civic participation. As a result, civil society operates in a climate of fear and unpredictability, where fundamental freedoms are nominally protected but practically denied. The following sections examine how these constraints shape the civic space and threaten democratic engagement in Eswatini.

1.1 | Freedom of Association

In Eswatini, the right to freedom of association remains significantly constrained, particularly for civil society actors engaged in political or advocacy work. Although the [2005 Constitution](#)

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2024.

explicitly guarantees this right in Section 25 (1) and Eswatini is a signatory to international instruments such as Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 10 of the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), the practical reality diverges sharply from these legal commitments. The continued [legal and practical ban](#) on political parties exemplifies the state's entrenched resistance to pluralism and undermines the foundational principle of free association. Judicial interpretation, notably in the 2009 appeal case of [National Constituent Assembly v. Prime Minister and Others](#), further entrenched these limitations, revealing a judiciary that reinforces executive control rather than safeguarding constitutional rights. Civil society organisations that focus on non-political or service delivery issues are generally allowed to operate, but those that challenge the status quo face systemic repression. The case of the Swaziland National Union of Students (SNUS), which has been [repeatedly denied recognition](#) and publicly delegitimised by government officials such as the [Labour Minister in 2011](#) and [the National Commissioner in 2017](#), illustrates the State's intolerance toward youth-led activism. Similarly, [the harassment](#) of members of the Royal Eswatini Police Staff Association (REPOSA) happening on the 5th April 2025, for participating in lawful meetings and marches highlights the punitive measures directed even at professional associations.

These patterns of obstruction and intimidation suggest that while a narrow operational space exists for apolitical entities, any form of organised civic engagement with a political or rights-based agenda is met with denial or sanction. The cumulative effect of these practices confirms that freedom of association in Eswatini is only partially enabled, reflecting a civic space that is not only restricted but actively suppressed, with serious restrictive implications for democratic participation, accountability, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In Eswatini, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly remains severely constrained, with the [Public Order Act](#) functioning as a key instrument of state control over civic expression. Although Section 25 (1) of the Constitution nominally guarantees this right, its practical realisation is undermined by a pattern of state actions that target assemblies deemed politically sensitive or critical of government performance. The consistent use of administrative and security apparatuses to block or violently disperse peaceful gatherings reveals a deliberate strategy to suppress dissent and limit public mobilisation. For instance, in December 2024, the Regional Administrator Princess Tsandzile [prohibited](#) a protest organised by the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA) against proposed electricity and water tariff hikes—an action that exemplifies how state actors pre-emptively curtail collective action on socio-economic grievances. Similarly, the [violent assault](#) on Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) leaders, including Secretary General Lot Vilakati, by rogue police officers in February 2025 while they sought enforcement of a court order, underscores the extent to which state violence is deployed to intimidate and punish those exercising their assembly rights. These incidents are not isolated but reflect a broader climate of hostility toward organised civic engagement, particularly when it challenges state authority or demands accountability.

The implications for the enabling environment are profound: civil society actors operate under constant threat, and the space for peaceful assembly is not only restricted but actively policed. This entrenched repression indicates that while some assemblies may occur, they do so under conditions of fear, unpredictability, and systemic obstruction, rendering the right to peaceful assembly effectively hollow for actors seeking meaningful change.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in Eswatini is [severely restricted](#), with constitutional guarantees rendered largely symbolic in the face of pervasive state control and intimidation. Civil society actors—including CSOs, NGOs, activists, and journalists—operate in an environment where expression is either actively censored through punitive legislation or suppressed through self-censorship driven by fear of reprisal. The media landscape is dominated by state-owned outlets such as Eswatini Broadcasting and Information Services (EBIS), Eswatini Television, and the Eswatini Observer, leaving only a narrow margin for independent journalism through privately owned entities like the Times of Eswatini and Channel Swazi. However, the [acquisition](#) of the Times of Eswatini by Michelo Shakantu on April 2025 raises serious concerns about the erosion of editorial independence and the consolidation of media influence under politically connected actors. Community radio stations, which could offer grassroots alternatives, remain unlicensed [despite sustained advocacy](#) by the Swaziland Community Multi-Media Network, reflecting the State's reluctance to democratise access to public discourse.

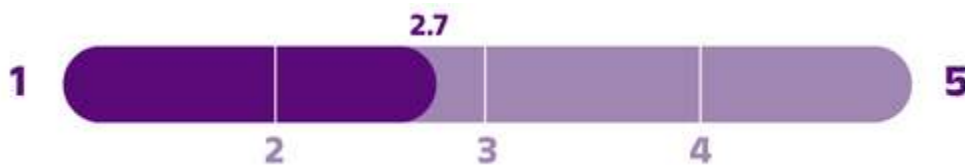
Journalists face routine intimidation, surveillance, and legal harassment, as evidenced by the [January 2025 revelation](#) that Defense Principal Secretary Prince Sicalo had embedded a Channel S journalist within the army to spy on colleagues—an act that starkly undermines journalistic integrity and safety. The [Government's legal pursuit](#) of Swaziland News, demanding prior notice before inquiries, further illustrates its antagonism toward critical reporting, even though the case [was dismissed](#) by a South African court in August 2024.

Beyond the media, activists, union leaders, and ordinary citizens who voice dissent are vulnerable to arbitrary arrests, harassment, and violence, with online spaces increasingly monitored and policed. These patterns of repression reveal a deeply disabling environment for freedom of expression, where the cost of speaking out is high and the space for independent thought and critique is rapidly shrinking. The implications for civil society are grave: without the ability to freely express ideas, challenge power, or disseminate information, the foundational conditions for civic engagement and democratic accountability are systematically dismantled.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score: 2.7/5



The legal and regulatory environment for civil society in Eswatini is characterised by ambiguity, administrative discretion, and political interference. While the Constitution guarantees freedom of association, the absence of a dedicated CSO law and reliance on restrictive provisions within the Companies Act and Suppression of Terrorism Act have created a fragmented and exclusionary registration system. Organisations advocating for rights-based reforms or representing marginalised groups face systemic barriers to legal recognition. Operationally, CSOs contend with outdated policies, complex financial regulations, and proposed reforms—such as the NPO Bill of 2024—that threaten their autonomy and impose burdensome oversight. Access to funding is further complicated by opaque tax and banking procedures. Protection from interference remains weak, with laws enabling deregistration without judicial review and increasing surveillance of pro-democracy actors. Together, these factors contribute to a fragile and shrinking civic space. The following sections examine how legal frameworks and administrative practices shape the viability, independence, and sustainability of civil society in Eswatini.

2.1 | Registration

In Eswatini, the legal framework governing the formation and registration of CSOs is marked by ambiguity, discretion, and systemic exclusion, particularly for politically sensitive and marginalised groups. Although Section 25(1) and (2) of the [Constitution](#) guarantees freedom of association, subsections (4)(a) and (b) permit laws that restrict registration based on prescribed qualifications, effectively legitimising selective denial. The absence of a dedicated CSO regulatory framework—aside from the unenforceable [NGO Policy of 2005](#)—means registration is currently governed by the [Companies Act of 2009](#), which outlines procedures but imposes limitations through Section 17(1)(b), which narrowly defines non-profit organisations. Registration requires submission of a memorandum to the Registrar of Companies, who holds broad discretionary powers under Section 5 to approve or reject

applications. These powers have been used to deny registration to groups such as the [Swaziland National Union of Students](#) (SNUS) and [Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities](#) (ESGM), the latter even after a [Supreme Court ruling](#) in its favour, illustrating the extent of administrative resistance to rights-based organising.

While Section 11 of the Companies Act provides for appeals in cases of registration refusal, this safeguard is undermined by Section 39(6) of the [Suppression of Terrorism Act of 2008](#), which allows deregistration decisions to be final and unreviewable by any court. These legal and procedural inconsistencies create a hostile environment for CSOs, where registration is neither uniformly accessible nor reliably protected by law. Bureaucratic discretion, lack of transparency, and political interference discourage registration, particularly for organisations advocating for accountability, inclusion, or reform.

The cumulative effect of these legal ambiguities, discretionary enforcement, and lack of transparency is a disabling environment for civil society, where registration is not only procedurally burdensome but also politically contingent, stifling the emergence of diverse and independent civic actors.

2.2 | Operational Environment

The operational environment for civil society organisations in Eswatini is shaped by legal uncertainty, administrative discretion, and emerging threats to independence. While the NGO Policy of 2005 remains the only formal guideline currently in force, its lack of enforceability has left CSOs vulnerable to arbitrary interpretation and inconsistent oversight. The proposed [NPO Bill of 2024](#) introduces a more structured regulatory framework, but its provisions raise serious concerns about state overreach. Notably, the Bill [seeks to dissolve](#) the independent NGO Council—Coordinating Assembly of Non-governmental Organizations (CANGO)—and replace it with a government-dominated NGO Assembly, a move that risks undermining the autonomy of CSOs by placing coordination, advocacy, and grant management under state control. If enacted in its current form, [the Bill would impose](#) burdensome registration procedures, intrusive monitoring and inspection powers, and complex reporting requirements that could stifle grassroots organising and advocacy. Although the current legal framework does not explicitly require government approval for internal governance or activities, the proposed changes signal a shift toward tighter control and reduced operational freedom.

Access to funding, while not directly restricted by a specific law, is subject to a web of [financial regulations](#) that can complicate CSO operations. Tax laws such as the [Tax Order of 1975](#) and the [Value Added Tax Act 2011](#) provide for exemptions of NPOs. The Value Added Tax Act 2011 makes provision for non-exempt activities and allows CSOs to apply for annual tax exemption from the Eswatini Revenue Services; and if the Commissioner General is satisfied that the body or organisation making the application is legitimately charity organisation, they are granted exemption. However, this requirement for annual applications and discretionary approval by the Commissioner General, create uncertainty for organisations reliant on charitable status. Additionally, laws governing financial transactions—including [the Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Act 2011](#), the [Exchange Control Order 1974](#), and various banking regulations (the [Swaziland Financial Institutions Act 6 of 2005](#); the [National Clearing and Settlement Systems \(NCSS\) Act of 2011](#); and the [Swaziland Interbank Payment and Settlement Systems \(SWIPSS\)](#))—introduce bureaucratic hurdles that may delay or obstruct international funding flows. Although there is no documented evidence of these laws being used to deliberately frustrate CSO operations, their complexity and opacity contribute to a climate of administrative burden and potential vulnerability.

Taken together, these developments suggest that while CSOs in Eswatini currently retain some operational autonomy, the enabling environment is increasingly fragile. The proposed

legal reforms, coupled with existing financial and bureaucratic constraints, point to a trajectory of growing state control and reduced civic space. The implications are clear: without safeguards for independence and transparency, the operational environment risks becoming disabling, particularly for organisations engaged in rights-based work or critical advocacy.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

The legal environment for civil society organisations in Eswatini remains precarious, shaped by a legal framework that is both fragmented and susceptible to state overreach. While the [Companies Act](#) of 2009 serves as the primary legislation governing CSOs—due to the absence of a dedicated civil society law—it offers limited and indirect protections. It does not explicitly protect CSOs from undue influence or harassment by non-state actors. The Act outlines procedures for voluntary and compulsory liquidation, primarily on grounds such as insolvency or inability to pay debts. These provisions, codified under Chapter 14, apply equally to CSOs registered as companies, and there is no recorded precedent of arbitrary dissolution under this framework.

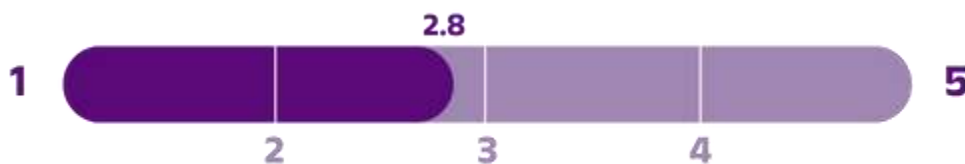
However, the Suppression of Terrorism Act (STA) of 2008 introduces a significant threat to the operational autonomy of CSOs. Section 39(6) of the STA permits deregistration of organisations suspected of supporting terrorism, without clear procedural safeguards or avenues for appeal. This provision lacks transparency and accountability mechanisms, thereby creating a legal pathway for politically motivated dissolution of CSOs. The absence of judicial review or independent oversight in such cases [undermines](#) the rule of law and exposes CSOs to arbitrary state action.

The post-2021 civil unrest in Eswatini further illuminated the vulnerabilities of CSOs to state interference. Reports [indicate increased surveillance](#) and monitoring of NGOs, particularly those perceived to be aligned with pro-democracy movements or accused of “funding regime change.” These developments reflect a broader trend of securitisation of civil society, where legitimate advocacy and dissent are conflated with threats to national security.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score: 2.8/5



The resource environment for civil society organisations in Eswatini is restricted by a complex interplay of donor behaviour, national policy frameworks, and institutional capacity. While international funding remains the primary lifeline for most CSOs, access to resources is uneven and often constrained by political sensitivities and regulatory uncertainty. The effectiveness of these resources is further influenced by donor conditions, which may or may not align with CSOs' strategic goals, and by the flexibility of funding structures to adapt to evolving operational contexts. At the same time, sustainability remains a persistent challenge, with many organisations relying on short-term, project-based funding that undermines long-term planning and institutional resilience. These dynamics raise critical questions about the autonomy of CSOs, their ability to respond to emerging needs, and the extent to which they can build self-reliance. Understanding how resources are accessed, managed, and sustained is essential to evaluating the health and future of Eswatini's civil society sector. The following sections explore these dimensions in greater depth, offering insights into the structural and strategic implications for CSOs operating in this environment.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Accessibility of funding for civil society in Eswatini is partially enabled. While international donors remain the primary source of funding for CSOs, particularly those working on sensitive issues such as human rights, governance, and marginalised communities, domestic support is virtually non-existent. Government funding is typically reserved for organisations aligned with state priorities, leaving independent CSOs vulnerable and [reliant on external streams](#).

This dependency is further complicated by the proposed NPO Bill of 2024, which introduces stringent anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism measures. Although framed as aligning with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations, [the Bill deviates](#) from the FATF's risk-based approach and could indiscriminately restrict access to funding for CSOs. The lack

of proportionality in these provisions risks undermining operational freedom and deterring donors from engaging with Eswatini-based organisations.

Despite these challenges, mechanisms for disseminating funding opportunities do exist. Platforms such as the CANGO play a pivotal role in sharing calls for proposals and facilitating access to donor networks. International partners—including the EU, U.S. Embassy, Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, and UNDP—regularly publish funding opportunities targeting local CSOs, often with thematic priorities that include human rights, civic engagement, and environmental sustainability. However, the ability of CSOs to respond effectively to these opportunities varies significantly. Smaller and nascent organisations often lack the technical capacity to develop competitive proposals or align with complex donor requirements. Initiatives like the [EU sub-granting mechanism](#) have helped bridge this gap by enabling intermediary organisations to support grassroots actors through capacity-building and simplified access to funds.

On the fiscal front, Eswatini's tax regime is relatively supportive of CSO funding. The Income Tax Order 1975, amended in 2023, provides for tax exemptions on charitable activities and refunds for double taxation, which can incentivise philanthropy and reduce operational costs for CSOs. Nevertheless, [a survey](#) revealed widespread lack of awareness among CSOs regarding these tax incentives, indicating a need for targeted education and outreach to maximise the benefits of existing policies.

Challenges with financial service providers also persist. While Eswatini has made strides in financial inclusion—[reaching 87% formal sector access by 2023](#)—CSOs report difficulties in opening bank accounts, accessing credit, and navigating compliance requirements. There are concerns that banking data may be used for surveillance, particularly for organisations working on politically sensitive issues. The proposed NPO Bill could exacerbate these risks by mandating intrusive financial reporting under the guise of counter-terrorism oversight.

Overall, while Eswatini's civil society benefits from international donor engagement and some enabling fiscal policies, the overall accessibility of resources is constrained by political suspicion, regulatory overreach, and uneven institutional capacity. For a truly enabling environment, reforms must ensure proportional regulation, enhance transparency in financial oversight, and invest in capacity-building for grassroots organisations—especially those serving marginalised communities and advocating for democratic governance.

3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

The effectiveness of resources accessed by CSOs in Eswatini is compounded by a complex mix of donor conditions, geopolitical developments, and national classification. The impact of the [United States Executive Order](#) halting funding to Eswatini has been particularly severe, leading to [the closure](#) of some organisations and destabilising the operational landscape. This is compounded by Eswatini's classification as a lower-middle-income country, which [limits](#) its eligibility for certain international funding streams and reduces the overall pool of accessible resources.

Donor practices vary widely in their responsiveness and flexibility. While some donors maintain rigid reporting and compliance requirements that strain CSO capacities, others—such as the European Union—actively invest in capacity-building through grantee training and technical support. This divergence in donor behaviour has significant implications for CSO autonomy. Organisations often find themselves aligning their programming with donor priorities or national development plans, such as [Eswatini's Multi-Year Indicative Plan](#) 2021-

2027, in order to secure predictable funding. While this alignment can foster strategic partnerships, it also risks sidelining grassroots priorities and limiting the scope of independent advocacy.

Government influence over resource use remains limited but not absent. The [Aid Coordination and Management Section](#) (ACMS), under the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, plays a role in tracking and aligning external aid with national priorities. Although ACMS does not directly interfere with CSO operations, its strategic positioning means that CSOs must actively engage and lobby to ensure their goals are [reflected](#) in national development frameworks. This dynamic places the burden of advocacy on CSOs, requiring them to navigate both donor expectations and government planning processes.

Flexibility in funding modalities is possible, particularly when donors maintain direct relationships with CSOs. The [Eswatini Grant Assistance for 2025/2026](#) exemplifies this, allowing for adjustments in funding structures provided there is timely and transparent communication. Moreover, CSOs that incorporate risk analysis and mitigation strategies into their project designs are better positioned to negotiate program changes and safeguard their personnel. Mechanisms such as the [Human Rights Defenders Network](#) further support CSOs in managing security risks associated with their work.

Despite these adaptive strategies, the broader resource environment remains challenging. Funding is predominantly project-based, with limited access to core support that would enable long-term planning, staff retention, and institutional growth. This restricts CSOs' ability to respond to emerging needs, innovate, or sustain impact beyond the lifespan of individual projects. The effectiveness of resources, therefore, is not solely a matter of availability but of alignment, flexibility, and strategic engagement. Without reforms that promote donor responsiveness, reduce bureaucratic burdens, and expand access to core funding, the sustainability of civil society in Eswatini will remain fragile and contingent.

3.3 | Sustainability of Resources

Civil society organisations in Eswatini are undermined by a narrow and unreliable funding landscape, leading to a collapse and [closure](#). While philanthropic and donor support remains the primary source of financing, few organisations have successfully diversified their income streams. The growing Royal patronage of humanitarian work has opened a window for domestic revenue through national events such as the annual Eswatini Biggest Braai which funds the Philani Maswati Charity Organisation patroned by the Queen Mother. There are various companies with Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programs in the country, and these are Standard Bank Eswatini, Eswatini Electricity Company, Eswatini National Petroleum Company, Nedbank Swaziland, and Eswatini Post and Telecommunications to name a few. These domestic fundraising efforts are limited in scope and accessibility whereas existing Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programs lack clear engagement frameworks, leaving CSOs uncertain about how to access these resources. Government subventions are similarly opaque and restricted to a select few organisations, often those aligned with state interests.

Overdependence on external, project-based funding has created severe structural vulnerabilities. Funding cycles are often short-term and unpredictable, leading to operational disruptions, staff turnover, and program discontinuity. Without core funding to support administrative and strategic functions, CSOs struggle to retain skilled personnel or invest in institutional development. The result is a sector that is reactive, donor-driven, and unable to pursue long-term goals or engage in meaningful strategic planning.

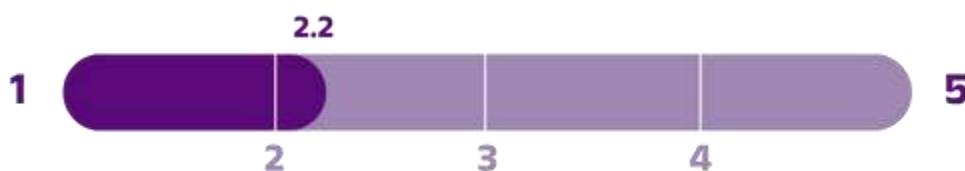
Efforts to build self-reliance have been sporadic and largely unsuccessful. While a few CSOs have experimented with income-generating activities such as property acquisition and user fees, these remain isolated cases. Volunteerism, though present, cannot substitute for paid staff in a context of high unemployment and limited social safety nets. Initiatives like the proposed NGO cooperative by CANGO aimed to foster collective sustainability but failed to gain traction due to limited capacity and institutional support.

In this constrained resource environment, CSOs face significant challenges in achieving financial stability and programmatic continuity. Without deliberate efforts to diversify funding, expand access to core support, and strengthen mechanisms for domestic resource mobilisation, the sector risks remaining fragile and donor-dependent—unable to fulfil its potential in advancing democratic governance, social justice, and inclusive development.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score: 2.2/5



The openness and responsiveness of the Eswatini government to civil society actors remains limited and inconsistent, posing significant challenges to the sector's sustainability. Despite occasional invitations to participate in legislative and policy processes, CSOs often face restricted access to timely information, limited influence over decision-making, and a lack of meaningful feedback mechanisms. Transparency is undermined by outdated secrecy laws and the absence of a legal framework guaranteeing access to public information. Participation is frequently symbolic, with CSOs consulted late in the process or excluded based on perceived political alignment. Accountability structures are virtually non-existent, with no formal avenues for CSOs to track how their input is used or to hold government institutions to account. These constraints reflect a broader governance culture resistant to scrutiny and inclusive engagement. As a result, civil society's role in shaping policy and promoting democratic governance is severely curtailed. Addressing these gaps is essential to building a more enabling environment for civil society in Eswatini.

4.1. | Transparency

Government transparency in Eswatini remains severely constrained, with significant implications for the sustainability and effectiveness of civil society organisations. The legal framework does not explicitly guarantee the right to access information, nor does it provide mechanisms for proactive disclosure. The absence of a dedicated Freedom of Information law has entrenched a culture of secrecy across public institutions, where information is tightly controlled and rarely made available in accessible formats or digital platforms. The [Official Secrets Act](#) of 1968 criminalises the unauthorised disclosure of government information, reinforcing institutional opacity and deterring whistleblowers and journalists from exposing misconduct. This legal environment not only restricts public access to decision-making processes but also undermines CSOs' ability to engage meaningfully in policy advocacy and accountability efforts.

Public institutions are not legally obligated to publish comprehensive decision-making documents such as draft laws, budgets, or audit reports in a timely or accessible manner. While [some parliamentary documents](#), including draft legislation and voting results, are published online, access remains inconsistent and fragmented across ministries. Citizens and CSOs often rely on purchasing government gazettes from private printers, a costly and unreliable method that further limits participation in legislative processes. The lack of centralised, open-access platforms for public information severely hampers CSOs' ability to monitor government actions, respond to policy developments, and advocate for community needs.

Procedures for filing access to information requests are either [non-existent or unclear](#). There are no standardised processes, fee waivers for vulnerable groups, or guarantees that requests will be processed within legal timeframes. Moreover, there are no legal protections against unjustified denial of access, nor are there appeal mechanisms or sanctions for non-compliance. This absence of accountability mechanisms allows public officials to arbitrarily withhold information, reinforcing a power imbalance between the state and civil society. The [2022 Data Protection Act](#), while aligning Eswatini with global privacy standards, does little to advance transparency. Its focus on regulating personal data and protecting privacy is important, but it does not address the broader need for public access to government-held information. In fact, the Act's emphasis on confidentiality may inadvertently reinforce existing barriers to information access, especially in the absence of balancing legislation that promotes openness.

In this context, CSOs operate in an information vacuum, relying heavily on informal networks, digital media, and international partners to access credible data. The lack of transparency not only impedes their ability to plan and implement effective programs but also erodes public trust and limits civic engagement. For civil society to thrive, Eswatini must adopt comprehensive access-to-information legislation, establish independent oversight mechanisms, and institutionalise proactive disclosure practices. Without these reforms, the sustainability and impact of CSOs will remain compromised by systemic opacity and exclusion.

4.2 | Participation

Civil society participation in decision-making processes in Eswatini is marked by limited access, constrained influence, and systemic exclusion. While CSOs are occasionally invited to contribute to legislative processes—typically through parliamentary portfolio committees or via coordination with umbrella bodies like CANGO—these invitations often come with minimal notice and insufficient time for meaningful input. The short turnaround undermines the quality of submissions and reduces participation to a procedural formality rather than a substantive engagement. Historical examples, such as the passage of [election laws in 2013](#), illustrate how CSO inputs are frequently disregarded, even when formally solicited. Moreover, the use of certificates of urgency to fast-track controversial legislation further erodes opportunities for public scrutiny and civil society involvement, bypassing normal committee stages and limiting transparency.

Discrimination in participation is also evident in how government categorises CSOs. Organisations perceived as aligned with state interests are more likely to be engaged, while those advocating for democratic reform or human rights are marginalised or excluded. This selective engagement undermines the principle of inclusive governance and weakens the legitimacy of consultation processes. Although participation is offered both online and in person, in-person formats are preferred for their clarity and immediacy. However, accessibility remains uneven, especially for grassroots organisations with limited resources.

The dual governance structure in Eswatini—combining parliamentary and traditional systems—further complicates civil society engagement. The Sibaya platform, often presented as a conduit for direct democracy, [lacks the institutional safeguards](#) necessary for genuine participation. It is convened at the discretion of the monarch (Ingwenyama), lacks representativeness, and offers no mechanisms for follow-up or accountability. Submissions to the Sibaya platform are made individually, with speakers required to identify themselves by name, chiefdom, and local leadership, reinforcing a culture of surveillance and discouraging dissent. Organised group submissions are not permitted, and politically critical voices are actively suppressed, as evidenced by incidents of [activists being silenced](#) during public consultations.

These structural and procedural limitations significantly constrain civil society's ability to influence policy, advocate for community interests, and contribute to democratic governance. Without reforms that institutionalise inclusive, timely, and transparent participation mechanisms, CSOs in Eswatini will remain peripheral actors in national decision-making—undermining their sustainability and their role as agents of accountability and social change.

4.3 | Accountability

Where transparency is lacking and participation is treated as a formality, accountability becomes virtually unattainable. Civil society organisations are routinely invited to consultations, yet there is no formal feedback mechanism to indicate how their input is considered or integrated into decision-making. Government institutions do not publish minutes or reports detailing the outcomes of consultations, nor do they provide explanations when CSO recommendations are disregarded. This lack of responsiveness erodes trust and reinforces the perception that CSO engagement is symbolic rather than substantive.

There are no institutionalised spaces for CSOs to follow up on their contributions or to hold government accountable for the use—or omission—of their input. The absence of post-consultation reporting and justification mechanisms means that CSOs are left without recourse when their feedback is ignored. An assessment of [democratic legislative practices](#) in Eswatini identified critical gaps in both pre-legislative and post-legislative scrutiny. These gaps limit opportunities for parliament to engage with expert input early in the legislative process and prevent civil society from evaluating whether laws achieve their intended outcomes. Without such scrutiny, accountability remains elusive, and the policymaking process lacks transparency and public legitimacy.

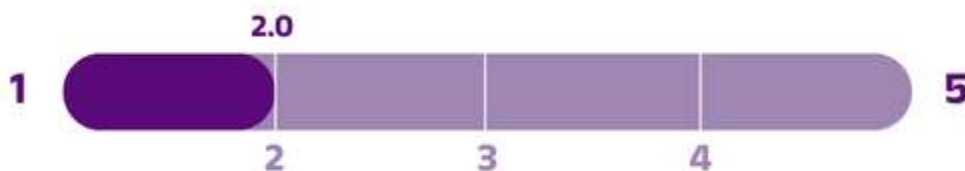
In the current environment, the only viable avenues for CSOs to monitor government commitments and advocate for accountability are through international human rights mechanisms, such as those under the United Nations and the African Union. While these platforms offer some leverage, they are external to the domestic governance system and often slow to produce tangible change. The lack of domestic accountability structures not only weakens civil society's role in governance but also discourages sustained engagement, as organisations see little return on their efforts to influence policy.

Ultimately, the absence of feedback loops, follow-up mechanisms, and public justification for decisions reflects a broader governance culture resistant to scrutiny and inclusive policymaking. For civil society to thrive and contribute meaningfully to national development, Eswatini must institutionalise transparent and accountable processes that recognise CSOs as legitimate stakeholders. Without such reforms, civil society will remain marginalised, and its sustainability will continue to be compromised by systemic exclusion and unresponsiveness.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score: 2/5



Since the 2021 unrest, public discourse has grown more polarised, with CSOs often portrayed as adversaries rather than partners in development. Constructive dialogue between government and civil society remains rare, conditional, and sector-specific, limiting CSOs' influence on governance and policy. Public perception of civil society is further weakened by limited civic education and constrained participation, leaving many citizens disengaged and unaware of their rights. Media narratives and cultural expressions reinforce scepticism, while government control over civic learning restricts diverse voices. Despite constitutional guarantees, civic inclusion remains uneven, with women, youth, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals facing systemic barriers. These dynamics undermine civil society's legitimacy, reach, and sustainability. Addressing them requires a shift toward inclusive dialogue, empowered civic engagement, and equitable participation. The following sections explore these dimensions in depth, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for strengthening civil society in Eswatini.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

The relationship between civil society organisations and the Eswatini government has become increasingly strained, particularly following the civic unrest of 2021. While some CSOs have long operated under suspicion, recent developments have intensified mistrust, with political leaders publicly framing certain organisations as threats to national stability. Accusations of [funding regime change](#) and politically motivated rhetoric—such as the Ministry of Home Affairs' [threat to deregister](#) organisations deemed to be “pushing a political agenda”—have contributed to a hostile environment that undermines public confidence in civil society. This antagonism is further reflected in cultural expressions, such as traditional songs performed

during national events like Umhlanga, which [satirically target](#) those perceived as “anti-monarch,” a label often extended to human rights defenders.

Media coverage of CSOs in Eswatini is inconsistent and largely shaped by political alignment. State-owned media outlets tend to highlight CSO activities only when they align with government priorities, while independent or critical voices are marginalised. Journalists frequently cite resource constraints as reasons for not covering CSO events, forcing organisations to rely on social media and self-publication to disseminate their work. This selective visibility distorts public perception, limiting recognition of CSOs’ contributions and reinforcing narratives of distrust.

Constructive dialogue between CSOs and government is rare and conditional. Evidence-based solutions proposed by CSOs are acknowledged primarily in sectors where government buy-in exists, such as health and education. In areas like HIV/AIDS response or support for vulnerable children, CSOs are seen as partners. However, in governance and human rights advocacy, their input is often dismissed or politicised. The broader culture of public discourse—across government, media, and social platforms—lacks inclusivity, respect, and openness to diverse perspectives. This environment stifles civil society’s ability to contribute meaningfully to national debates and policy development.

The implications for sustainability are profound. When CSOs are framed as adversaries rather than stakeholders, and when their voices are excluded from public dialogue, their legitimacy, operational space, and long-term viability are threatened. A shift toward respectful, inclusive, and evidence-driven discourse is essential to fostering a more enabling environment for civil society in Eswatini.

5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perception of civil society in Eswatini remains shaped by limited civic education, [constrained](#) political participation, and a broader sense of disempowerment among citizens. While civil society organisations play a critical role in service delivery and advocacy, many citizens do not view them as central actors in shaping national development or influencing political decisions. This disconnect is reflected in low levels of political engagement beyond voting, with only modest participation in community initiatives—47% of citizens [reported](#) attending a community meeting in the past year, and 43% joined others to raise an issue. These figures suggest a fair level of civic engagement, but one that lacks depth and sustained involvement.

Civic education is a major barrier to deeper engagement. It is neither widely accessible nor comprehensive, particularly in its treatment of human rights and democratic governance. Government restrictions have narrowed the space for CSO-led civic education, requiring organisations to submit training materials for approval and seek permission from the Ministry of Tinkhundla. Community entry protocols further complicate outreach, as CSOs must negotiate with traditional leaders, some of whom are resistant to civic education initiatives. The state has reserved voter education for the Elections and Boundaries Commission and human rights education for the Human Rights and Public Integrity Commission, limiting the diversity of voices and approaches in civic learning.

This controlled and fragmented civic education landscape contributes to a population that is largely unaware of its political rights and sceptical of its ability to influence governance. The result is a weakened civil society ecosystem, where public support is fragile and citizen participation is sporadic. For civil society to thrive and contribute meaningfully to democratic

development, Eswatini must invest in inclusive, community-based civic education and foster a culture that values citizen agency and collective action. Without these reforms, CSOs will continue to operate in an environment of limited public trust and constrained civic engagement, undermining their long-term sustainability and impact.

5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion

While Section 20 of Eswatini's Constitution affirms the principle of equality and non-discrimination across political, economic, and social spheres, the lived reality for many marginalised groups reveals persistent structural and cultural exclusions. Legal protections exist for persons with disabilities and women, with notable legislative milestones such as the domestication of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Election of Women Act of 2018 and the [2024-2028 National Disability Plan of Action](#). Women enjoy the right to exit any culture as enshrined in Section 28 (3) of the Constitution. However, these frameworks have not translated into full civic inclusion. Persons with disabilities face infrastructural and procedural barriers to participating in decision-making, and women continue to be constrained by customary practices, such as mourning rituals and exclusion from traditional governance structures. Mourning rituals compel women to remain in seclusion for extended periods, avoiding social gathering including workplaces and civic processes. Law and Custom bars them from accessing national structures such as parliament. The constitution makes provision for affirmative action, article 86 which is given expression in the [Election of Women Act of 2018](#) and provides processed based guidelines for the election of women into parliament. Despite constitutional guarantees, Eswatini [has yet to meet](#) its own 30% quota for women's representation in parliament, and youth inclusion remains aspirational, hindered by limited implementation of the Youth Policy and economic capacity gaps.

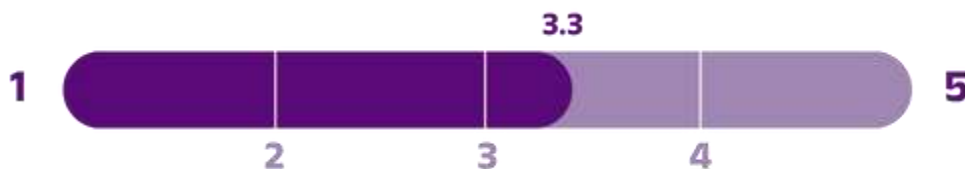
Sexual and gender minorities remain particularly vulnerable, as same-sex relations are [criminalised](#) and no legal protections exist for LGBTQ+ individuals. This legal exclusion is compounded by widespread social intolerance, which isolates these communities from civic processes and public discourse. While Eswatini society is generally [tolerant](#) across language, religion, and ethnicity, political dynamics have become a key driver of exclusion. Advocacy for human rights is often conflated with anti-monarch sentiment, leading to stigmatisation and marginalisation of CSOs working in these areas.

These structural inequalities and cultural barriers significantly weaken civil society's ability to represent diverse constituencies and advocate for inclusive governance. When civic participation is not equitably accessible, CSOs are limited in their reach, legitimacy, and sustainability. Addressing these gaps requires not only legal reform but also a shift in societal attitudes and institutional practices to ensure that all individuals—regardless of identity or status—can engage meaningfully in civic life and contribute to national development. Without such transformation, civil society in Eswatini will remain constrained by exclusion and unable to fulfil its democratic potential.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score: 3.3/5



Access to a secure and inclusive digital environment is vital for civil society actors in Eswatini, shaping their ability to organise, advocate, and engage with communities. However, the digital landscape remains uneven, marked by infrastructural limitations, affordability challenges, and emerging threats to online freedoms. Civil society's digital engagement is influenced by three interrelated dimensions: digital rights and freedoms, digital security and privacy, and digital accessibility. Restrictions on internet use, surveillance practices, and ambiguous cybercrime laws raise concerns about shrinking civic space online. At the same time, limited ICT skills and high data costs hinder meaningful participation, especially among grassroots organisations. The rise of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies presents both opportunities and risks, with trust and capacity gaps affecting adoption. This section explores how these dimensions collectively shape the enabling environment for civil society in Eswatini, highlighting areas of progress, concern, and potential reform.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

Internet and social media shutdowns in Eswatini have been infrequent but strategically timed, with the most notable instance being a four-hour blackout during the [2021 civil protests](#). Beyond shutdowns, Eswatini's [low internet resilience](#) (rated at 31%) characterised by frequent blackouts a structural challenge, limiting CSOs' operational continuity and access to digital platforms even in the absence of overt state interference.

The legislative landscape has evolved with the enactment of the Computer Crime and Cyber Crime Act of 2022, which [criminalises offenses](#) involving computer systems and electronic communications. Passed shortly after the 2021 unrest, the law has raised concerns among civil society actors regarding its potential misuse to suppress online dissent and restrict freedom of expression. Although enforcement data is scarce, the absence of transparency in implementation raises questions about selective application, particularly against critics of the

monarchy or organisers of protests. This ambiguity contributes to a shrinking online civic space and fosters a climate of self-censorship among activists and CSOs.

Government practices around censorship and surveillance appear to be targeted and politically motivated. Reports indicate that authorities [monitor and occasionally restrict](#) access to websites and social media platforms, especially those critical of the monarchy. Allegations of intimidation and prosecution of social media users for posting dissenting views further underscore the risks faced by individuals engaging in online activism. The scope of surveillance is not fully documented, but its selective nature—focusing on political content and CSO-related activities—suggests a strategic effort to control narratives and suppress opposition.

Private platforms, particularly [Meta \(Facebook\)](#), play a complex role in content filtering. Recent shifts in [Meta's content moderation policies](#) have been perceived as aligning with government biases, raising concerns about the platform's complicity in political censorship. The lack of clear accountability mechanisms and transparency in these collaborations undermines trust and exacerbates the vulnerability of civil society actors operating online.

Finally, while specific cases of detention or persecution for online activities are not publicly detailed, anecdotal evidence points to a pattern of intimidation and legal threats against journalists, activists, and CSO members. The involvement of both state actors and private entities in these practices—whether through surveillance, content moderation, or legal enforcement—reflects a broader trend of [digital repression](#) that constrains civic engagement and undermines democratic discourse.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics—sporadic shutdowns, ambiguous legislation, targeted censorship, and opaque platform governance—creates a precarious digital environment for civil society in Eswatini. The lack of safeguards for internet freedom and the increasing convergence between state interests and private platform policies pose significant barriers to civic participation, advocacy, and accountability.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

The digital security landscape in Eswatini presents a mixed picture. While legal frameworks exist to safeguard privacy and combat cybercrime, their effectiveness in protecting civil society actors is limited by opaque enforcement and politically motivated surveillance. The absence of overt cyberattacks does not negate the chilling effect of digital harassment and information manipulation. Together, these dynamics contribute to an enabling environment that is increasingly constrained, where CSOs must navigate both legal uncertainty and digital threats to sustain their advocacy and civic engagement.

[Country human rights report](#) show that civil society actors, particularly those operating in exile or engaging in dissent, are subject to politically motivated digital threats and surveillance. Organisations such as the Southern Defenders and the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, along with independent journalists and labour activists, have reported harassment and coercion linked to government actors. These incidents include [arbitrary surveillance](#) and intimidation of family members residing within Eswatini, indicating a transnational reach of digital repression. While direct cyberattacks using spyware or malware are not publicly documented, the pattern of harassment and surveillance points to a hostile digital environment that undermines the safety and operational security of CSOs.

Eswatini has taken legislative steps to address digital privacy and cybersecurity through the Data Protection Act (2022) and the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Act (2022). The Data Protection Act, effective since March 2022, outlines comprehensive provisions for the collection, processing, and protection of personal data. It mandates registration with the [Eswatini Data Protection Authority](#) (EDPA), enforces data subject rights, and requires breach notifications within 72 hours. Enforcement is overseen by the [Eswatini Communications Commission](#), which has reportedly processed [cases of data breaches](#). However, the extent to which these laws provide effective redress for CSOs facing surveillance or hacking remains unclear, particularly given the lack of transparency around enforcement and the potential for selective application.

In terms of online manipulation and disinformation, there is no concrete evidence of government-linked bots or coordinated campaigns aimed at discrediting CSOs. Nonetheless, the government's strategic engagement with pro-government digital outlets such as Eswatini Positive News to counter narratives from independent platforms like Eswatini News suggests a subtle form of information control. While not overtly deceptive, this practice reflects an attempt to shape public discourse and marginalise critical voices, which may indirectly intimidate CSOs and erode public trust in independent reporting.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Internet accessibility in Eswatini remains uneven and constrained by affordability and infrastructure limitations. While the Central Statistics Office's [2023 survey](#) indicates that 67% of households have internet access, overall [penetration stands at 57.6% of the population](#) in 2025, revealing a significant digital divide. The [cost of data](#)—at approximately 3.47% of Gross National Income (GNI) per capita—exceeds regional affordability benchmarks, disproportionately affecting low-income groups and grassroots civil society organisations. Although the transition from copper to fibre optics signals infrastructural progress, service quality remains poor due to [limited competition](#) among internet service providers, [frequent disruptions](#) from infrastructure vandalism, and the nascent stage of 5G deployment. These factors collectively hinder CSOs' ability to reliably access and share content online, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

The digital skills landscape further compounds accessibility challenges. Basic ICT competencies, including information and data literacy, are [limited](#) among the general population and within the CSO workforce. This deficiency is largely attributed to the absence of a national ICT in Education policy, which has resulted in fragmented and inconsistent digital skills development. Consequently, many CSOs struggle to leverage digital tools effectively for advocacy, communication, and data-driven decision-making, weakening their operational capacity and reach.

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) offer potential to enhance digital inclusivity through tools like automated content creation, assistive navigation, and personalised user interfaces. However, the readiness of CSOs and the broader population to engage with these technologies is constrained by both skill gaps and trust deficits. A [UNDP study](#) reveals widespread scepticism toward AI adoption, with 60% of respondents expressing concerns over privacy and cybersecurity, particularly when technologies are government-led. In contrast, technologies introduced by civil society actors are met with relatively higher trust, suggesting that institutional credibility plays a critical role in shaping public attitudes toward digital innovation.

Overall, the interplay of high data costs, poor service quality, limited digital literacy, and mistrust in emerging technologies creates a restrictive digital environment for civil society in Eswatini. Without targeted interventions to improve infrastructure, affordability, and digital education, CSOs will remain disadvantaged in their ability to engage, mobilise, and advocate effectively in the digital space. Bridging these gaps is essential to fostering a more inclusive and resilient civic ecosystem.



C) Recommendations

Recommendations to Government Authorities

1.1 Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs & Ministry of Home Affairs

The Ministry should prioritise the passage of the NPO Bill 2024, ensuring that the final legislation:

- Explicitly protects the operational autonomy of civil society organisations (CSOs)
- Integrates stakeholder feedback gathered during consultations to enhance legitimacy and foster broad-based support
- Avoids provisions that could be used to arbitrarily restrict or control CSO activities

A modern access to information framework should be adopted to replace the outdated Official Secrets Act. The new law must:

- Guarantee the public's right to access government-held information
- Include clear timelines for disclosure to prevent administrative delays
- Establish independent appeals mechanisms for denied requests
- Minimise exemptions to disclosure, ensuring transparency is the default
- Institutionalise proactive publication of government records, decisions, and budgets

Amend Section 39(6) of the Suppression of Terrorism Act to introduce transparent and fair appeal mechanisms for organisations that are deregistered under the Act. This reform is essential to:

- Uphold due process
- Prevent arbitrary or politically motivated restrictions on civic actors
- Reinforce the rule of law and democratic accountability

1.2 Deputy Prime Minister's Office

The Office should spearhead a coordinated, multi-sectoral effort to eliminate barriers to inclusion. This initiative should:

- Review and repeal discriminatory laws and policies
- Promote inclusive governance frameworks that ensure representation of marginalised groups
- Support public education campaigns aimed at shifting harmful social norms and promoting equality

1.3 Parliament and Parliamentary Portfolio Committees

Parliament should establish mechanisms that facilitate meaningful engagement with citizens and stakeholders. These should include:

- Formal feedback channels for public input on bills and policies
- Reinstatement of oral hearings and extension of consultation periods
- Timely invitations to stakeholders and free public access to legislative gazettes

To strengthen democratic governance, Parliament should adopt and operationalise the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) [benchmarks for democratic legislatures](#) , including:

- Transparency in legislative procedures and decision-making
- Equal access for all stakeholders, including rights-based and critical CSOs
- Mechanisms for public dialogue on laws and policies that affect citizens' lives

1.4 Royal Eswatini Police Service and Security Forces

Security forces must ensure that public order is maintained in a manner that respects fundamental freedoms. This includes:

- Upholding the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression
- Ensuring professional conduct in crowd control and public demonstrations
- Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address violations

Recommendations to Donors and International Community

2.1 Bilateral and Multilateral Donors

Should shift from short-term project funding to multi-year core support, especially for organisations working on human rights, democracy, and inclusion. Funding should cover:

- Operational costs
- Legal defence and compliance
- Digital security infrastructure
- Staff well-being and organisational resilience

Support should be directed toward strengthening CSOs' internal systems, strategic planning, and adaptability to emerging challenges.

2.2 Development Partners and Diplomatic Missions

Should strengthen Diplomatic Engagement on Civic Space Protections to ensure that civic freedoms and CSO treatment should be consistently raised in:

- Bilateral dialogues
- Development cooperation frameworks
- Regional and multilateral forums

Establish Bottom-Up Communication Mechanisms ensuring that donor programming is responsive to local realities through:

- Country-specific calls for proposals
- Community-driven priority setting
- Inclusive monitoring and evaluation processes

2.3 International Philanthropic Foundations

Should reduce administrative burdens on CSOs operating in restrictive environments by:

- Streamlining reporting formats
- Allowing flexibility in deliverables and timelines

Rapid response support should be available for organisations facing threats or disruptions, including:

- Legal aid
- Digital and physical security upgrades
- Advocacy and communications support

Recommendations to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

CSOs should collaborate across sectors to amplify their voice and influence. This includes:

- Developing shared security protocols
- Establishing resource-sharing mechanisms
- Creating joint platforms for advocacy and dialogue

Should build internal capacity through:

- Peer-to-peer learning platforms
- Knowledge hubs for navigating legal and regulatory challenges

Must push for formal participation in:

- The Aid Coordination and Management Section (ACMS)
- Planning stages of National Development Priorities

To ensure sustainability, CSOs should explore:

- Local philanthropy
- Social enterprise models
- Membership-based funding

Support grassroots and marginalised organising models that include:

- Informal networks
- Mutual aid structures
- Community-based initiatives that maintain impact while reducing visibility in restrictive environments

CSOs should systematically record their work to:

- Preserve institutional memory
- Counter disinformation about civil society's role and legitimacy



D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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