

Costa Rica

Country Focus Report

September 2025



Credit: Cesar Badilla Miranda



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

B. Assessment of the Enabling Environment

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 on Discourses on Civil Society
6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

C. Recommendations

D. Research Process



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

Civil society actors in Costa Rica operate in an increasingly complex environment, marked by institutional tensions, shifting public [perceptions](#), and a decisive electoral moment ahead of the February 2026 [elections](#). The upcoming national elections - where the Presidency, Vice-Presidencies, and the Legislative Assembly will be chosen - have amplified [political polarization dynamics](#), compounded by public insecurity, pressures on the media, and socioeconomic challenges. For civil society organisations (CSOs), this results in scarce dialogue with government authorities and a limited margin of influence.

This situation is further aggravated by the sustained decline [in public approval of President Rodrigo Chaves' government](#), whose rating has dropped significantly. At the same time, concern about insecurity and crime continues to rise and has become the country's main public worry, deepening an atmosphere of distrust and social tension.

On the economic front, Costa Rica has been [reclassified as a high-income country](#), which has led to reduction of international development funding. This threatens the financial sustainability of many grassroots organisations working on human rights, the environment, gender equality, or rural territories. Despite the high-income status, [deep inequalities](#) still persist, particularly affecting Indigenous communities, Afro-descendant populations, and rural women, making equal access to opportunities more difficult. In the 2024 [Bertelsmann Stiftung \(BTI\)](#) report, Costa Rica shows a worrying decline in key indicators related to equality and inclusion. The report highlights a deterioration in the country's performance on socioeconomic barriers over recent years, as well as persistent gaps reflected in its gender inequality score. These findings underscore that, despite the country's democratic strengths, significant structural obstacles remain for achieving equitable participation and equal access to opportunities for all population groups.

Despite these challenges, Costa Rican civil society continues to demonstrate resilience. Organisations remain central actors in defending fundamental freedoms, promoting transparency, influencing public policy, and protecting spaces for civic participation. In an electoral cycle as critical as 2026, strengthening their organisational capacity, ensuring sustainable financing, and consolidating their public legitimacy are key elements to guarantee that they can operate effectively and safeguard democratic participation.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score:¹



1.1 Freedom of association

In Costa Rica, the right to freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed under Article 25 of the [Political Constitution](#), which recognises the right of individuals to associate freely for lawful purposes. This provision underpins the work of thousands of civil society organisations (CSOs), community associations, cooperatives, and unions that operate within the country's democratic framework.

According to Article 5 of [the Associations Law](#) (Law No. 218 of August 8, 1939, and its amendments) of Costa Rica, the main law governing civil society, associations must register with the Registry of Associations, which is overseen by the Ministry of Justice. Article 33 prescribes fines for operating a secret or unregistered association, even if its goals are legal. However in practice, many informal groups tend to be [able to operate](#) without registering. In addition, article 27 clearly stipulates that associations cannot be dissolved through administrative action, but only by a judicial ruling.

Despite the legal framework, Costa Rica's [civic space](#) in 2025 reflects ongoing challenges to association, particularly in relation to the protection of individuals and groups engaged in public interest advocacy. Targeting of civil society actors has threatened their ability to organise,

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2024. The country is rated as Narrowed in the Monitor, with a score of 71 out of 100, which has been converted to fit our 1–5 scale

collaborate, and participate freely in civic life, undermining the fundamental right to freedom of association. Recent incidents illustrate the range of risks faced by human rights defenders and community advocates. For instance, in June 2025, the [killing](#) of Nicaraguan refugee and opposition figure Roberto Samcam Ruiz, which CSOs alleged was [politically motivated](#), raised [concerns among human rights](#) organisations about the adequacy of existing protection mechanisms for people at risk, including refugees and human rights defenders. In July 2025, an environmental advocate [reported](#) that a preventive court order freezing his bank accounts—issued following a civil complaint by a private tourism company—had affected his ability to sustain his work. While the judicial process remains ongoing, civil society actors noted that such measures may have a discouraging effect on environmental and community-based participation. These events illustrate the need to strengthen existing institutional coordination and protection frameworks so that individuals involved in civic action can carry out their activities safely and without undue constraints.

1.2 Freedom of assembly

Freedom of peaceful assembly is enshrined in Article 26 of the Constitution. Historically, Costa Rica has maintained a tolerant environment for demonstrations and public mobilisation. However, this right has been significantly restricted since the approval of [Law No. 9808 of 21 January 2020](#) the Law to Provide Legal Certainty Regarding Strikes and Their Procedures, commonly known as the [“Anti-Strike Law.”](#) This law declares political strikes illegal, limits strikes to a maximum duration of 48 hours when they affect workers’ economic or social interests, and prohibits work stoppages in essential sectors such as health, education, security, and transportation. The law additionally establishes **graduated sanctions**, including: wage suspension for every day of participation in an unlawful strike; **disciplinary procedures and possible dismissal without employer liability** for workers who participate in banned strikes; **personal civil liability** for union leaders or organisers when an illegal strike causes economic damage; and the **immediate suspension or dissolution of the strike** by judicial order. Civil society organisations and trade unions have [criticized the law](#) for undermining the principle of proportionality and for creating a chilling effect on legitimate social mobilisation.

In 2025, several developments also shaped the landscape for freedom of peaceful assembly. Peaceful demonstrations throughout the year, including the [February 2025 march](#) on social and equality issues and the [8 March 2025 International Women’s Day mobilization](#), proceeded without major restrictions, although some interactions with authorities and public statements by officials generated debate about the quality of public dialogue. In March 2025, a protest convened by President Rodrigo Chaves outside the Public Prosecutor’s Office prompted discussion regarding the importance of safeguarding judicial independence during politically sensitive moments.

Several cases have highlighted the recent threats to freedom of assembly in the country. For example, in February 2025, several dozen students, environmental and human rights defenders joined a peaceful protest in front of the Presidential House. After the event, [activists reported being pursued by police](#) forces that allegedly entered the main campus of the University of Costa Rica without authorisation.

In May 2025, student members of the *Alianza Estudiantil* protesting about the Federation of Students of Costa Rica (FEUCR) leadership and alleged administrative irregularities were reportedly being [threatened](#) by a [university security officer carrying a firearm](#). Later that month, the administrative director of the School of General Studies [reportedly drove his vehicle](#) toward peaceful demonstrators, an allegation he rejected. On **3 June 2025**, a disciplinary complaint

filed against several students triggered [strong reactions](#) from student bodies, academic centres, and the university workers' union, who expressed concern about the implications for freedom of expression and student activism on campus.

During the [11 November 2025](#) farmers' march, participants from agricultural regions reported police pressure and obstacles that hindered their ability to mobilise, illustrating the additional risks and barriers faced by those organising outside urban centres. These developments indicate a progressive erosion of the right to assemble, including for young, vulnerable and rural populations.

1.3 Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression and of the press are constitutionally protected under Articles 28 and 29. They provide that everyone has the right to freely express and communicate their opinions without prior censorship, as long as they do not violate the law, and will be held responsible for any abuse committed in exercising this right. Nonetheless, Costa Rica has experienced a marked deterioration in press freedom and in the broader environment for expression during the administration of President Rodrigo Chaves (2022–2026).

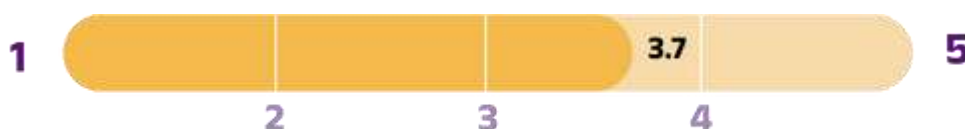
According to the 2025 [World Press Freedom Index](#), Costa Rica's [ranking dropped sharply](#) from 8th place in 2022 to 36th place in 2025, its lowest position in two decades. This decline reflects a combination of factors, including increasing verbal hostility toward journalists, indirect censorship by state institutions, and growing obstacles to accessing public information. In May 2025, the [Institute for Press and Freedom of Expression \(IPLEX\)](#) reported a sustained rise in violations against the press, documenting 32 incidents and 40 victims in 2024—an increase of 14% from the previous year—most of them linked to actions by the Executive Branch. Additionally, on 24 May 2025, [media outlets reported a letter](#) from the Presidency to the director of Teletica, which journalists interpreted as an attempt to pressure editorial independence. Earlier concerns had already emerged when the state-owned Costa Rican Electricity Institute withdrew advertising from a satirical television program—a measure later found to constitute indirect censorship by [the Constitutional Chamber](#). Together, these developments demonstrate a deteriorating environment for media freedom and explain the country's significant drop in global press freedom rankings in 2025.

Throughout this period, the president has also maintained a confrontational and stigmatising attitude toward journalists and media outlets, frequently resorting to [verbal attacks](#) during press conferences and social media broadcasts. Such behaviour has contributed to a climate of hostility and self-censorship among media professionals. [During 2024](#), senior officials and the president himself interrupted journalists, silenced them, and ordered their microphones to be disconnected during press conferences, while the Ministry of the Presidency failed to respond to information requests regarding the 4×3 work schedules. In June, 2025, the [Constitutional Chamber declared](#) both actions unconstitutional, ordered compensation for those affected, and reaffirmed the State's obligation to guarantee access to public information, noting a concerning governmental trend toward restricting transparency and democratic debate. In January 2023, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court had also already [ruled against](#) the Municipality of San Ramón for blocking a citizen's Facebook account after he publicly criticised the mayor. The Court determined that the blocking constituted an unjustified violation of the right to free expression and reaffirmed that social media platforms used by public institutions are part of the public sphere, where citizens' participation and criticism must be protected.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



2.1 Registration

The legal and regulatory framework in Costa Rica allows all civil society actors to form, register, and operate without undue legal or administrative restrictions. This framework is based on Article 25 of the [Political Constitution](#), which recognises and guarantees the right of association by establishing that “the inhabitants of the Republic have the right to associate for lawful purposes,” and on the Associations [Law No. 218](#) of August 8 1939, which regulates non-profit associations. It should be added that some CSOs use the legal structure of a Foundation ([Law No. 5338](#) of August 28, 1973).

The Associations Law allows the creation and registration of CSOs in a generalised and non-discriminatory manner. It establishes that associations must be constituted through clear statutes and registered before the Registry of Legal Entities to obtain a legal identification number and operate formally. The registration process is geographically accessible, as the National Registry has regional offices outside the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) and many procedures can be completed digitally. Although the Law of Associations does not specify dedicated appeal mechanisms when registration is denied, CSOs may rely on the general administrative remedies established in the General Law of Public Administration. For instance, the constitutional writ of amparo is a general, rights-based mechanism before the Constitutional Chamber that can be used when denials are arbitrary or disproportionate. The Office of the Ombudsman also offers a complementary channel for complaints related to potential human rights violations, issuing recommendations to public institutions and facilitating dialogue and mediation processes that support CSOs in protecting their rights and strengthening their advocacy.

However, challenges persist that affect full accessibility. For example, although government registration fees are low, the administrative process is complex. This complexity stems from strict formal requirements, repeated back and forth with the Registry, the need for notarised documents, and digital platforms that are not user-friendly. While registration does not require a lawyer to complete, the vast majority of organisations choose to seek funding to pay for legal services to navigate these complexities. These requirements, along with the cost of notarial services to facilitate the process, result in poor adaptation to emerging organisational models that normally have scarce resources. They also limit the ability of marginalised groups and volunteers to register their organisations.

Administrative procedures are often slow and bureaucratic, which forces CSOs to submit their applications multiple times in order to register. The use of digital platforms also deepens operational capacity gaps because organisations with limited digital skills, inadequate equipment, or unstable internet connections are unable to fully leverage these tools, creating disadvantages in comparison with better-resourced CSOs. As government procedures, donor applications, reporting requirements, and public participation spaces increasingly move online, organisations lacking digital competencies must invest more time and effort to complete the same tasks. This widens disparities in efficiency, access to information, and ability to participate in decision-making processes. Furthermore, public entities' digital systems are not user-friendly, and the existence of the digital divide also affects the registration of organisations. These factors represent an obstacle for CSOs with fewer resources or technical knowledge, limiting their ability to register and carry out other periodic registry procedures without specialised support.

2.2 Operational Environment

The Associations Law allows CSOs to define their internal governance, objectives, and activities without interference or restrictions, provided these are lawful. No special government approval is required for CSOs to carry out their operational activities, and no undue administrative supervision has been reported. CSOs are not required to submit reports unless they participate in and manage public funds, in which case they must comply with the reporting obligations established in the [Standards for the Control of Public Funds and Activities that Are Safeguarded or Managed by Private Entities](#). However, experts note that these reporting requirements vary from one public institution to another and are neither clear nor simple. As a result, they generate administrative burdens, uncertainty, and compliance challenges for CSOs, especially smaller organisations with limited technical capacity, thus affecting their ability to operate efficiently and engage in public programmes.

In this regard, the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic (hereinafter CGR) has been updating regulations and audit studies on the minimum controls applicable to private entities such as CSOs linked to public entities, in three scenarios. These are: (i) when public bodies grant them resources free of charge and without consideration, in accordance with [Article 5 of the Organic Law of the CGR](#); (ii) when resources are delivered for their custody and administration in the form of budgetary transfers of funds so that they may contribute to the purposes of the State, pursuant to Article 4 of the Organic Law of the CGR; or (iii) when it is determined that private entities—whether associations or foundations—have a public utility and, consequently, may receive tax-deductible donations from private parties (see CGR reports [No. DFOE-GOB-IAD-0008-2024 of October 11, 2024](#), and [No. DFOE-BIS-SGP-0001-2025 of January 30, 2025](#)).

Financial regulations are clear and predictable, especially regarding the sources of funds. Since 2024, provisions have been in place on [beneficial ownership](#), responding to national obligations related to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulations.

CSOs must comply with obligations such as registration in the [Registry of Transparency and Ultimate Beneficial Owners](#) (RTBF), which requires disclosing the identity of their beneficiaries or directors.

While this regulation serves a legitimate purpose, small organisations are particularly constrained, as it increases administrative burdens by requiring the legal representative to obtain a digital signature. Obtaining it involves not only a financial cost, but also the need to schedule an appointment and appear in person at an authorised bank branch to complete the procedure.

There are no legal barriers to accessing either national or international financing. There is no special tax on funds received by CSOs from abroad, but they must pay 13% for value-added tax. This poses a challenge to smaller CSOs as these taxes represent resources that they cannot allocate to their projects, which limits their operational capacity.

The transfer of public funds to CSOs is subject to fragmented procedures and varying regulations across state institutions, which creates significant operational obstacles. Financial institutions apply strict controls derived from [the Law on Narcotics, Psychotropic Substances, Unauthorized Drugs, Related Activities, Money Laundering, and Terrorism Financing \(Law No. 8204\)](#). Articles [15 and 15 bis of this law](#) classify several activities as vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist financing risks, such as receiving substantial or regular donations, managing foreign funds, handling cross-border transfers, or administering assets on behalf of third parties. Whenever a CSO engages in any of these activities or receives systematic or significant remittances, it falls under the scope of these provisions.

Consequently, CSOs meeting these criteria must register with SUGEF as “obliged parties” and comply with enhanced due-diligence obligations. These include identifying and verifying donors and beneficiaries, documenting the origin and intended use of funds, conducting internal risk assessments, maintaining updated governance and accounting records, responding to information requests, and—in some cases—undergoing monitoring visits. While these measures aim to reduce illicit financial risks, they impose a disproportionately high administrative and compliance burden on CSOs.

The operational capacity of CSOs becomes complicated when they must make inquiries or complete administrative procedures due to delays and lack of timely responses, requiring resubmissions or writs of amparo. The use of digital platforms also creates a gap in the operational capacity of organisations.

2.3 Protection from Interference

The Costa Rican legal framework, composed of the Political Constitution, the Associations Law (No. 218), the [Foundations Law \(No. 5338\)](#), and various international instruments—such as the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (art. 22) and the [American Convention on Human Rights](#) (ACHR, art. 16)- explicitly guarantee the right of association. The international treaties, which [-according to Article 7 of the Constitution-](#) have a higher rank than domestic law according to constitutional jurisprudence, establish strict restrictions against state interference and protect CSOs from arbitrary dissolution or undue interference.

[The Associations Law](#) sets out in Articles 4, 27, and 34 the conditions for the operation, public utility, termination, and dissolution of associations. Under this law, the dissolution of an association cannot be arbitrary: any state intervention - whether inspectorial or resolute - must be duly reasoned, proportional, compliant with due process, and grounded in the legal

causes established by law. In this sense, the Executive may intervene through decrees (or administrative inspections) when the law provides for it, but the final decision to dissolve or declare the termination of an associative legal entity lies with the Judiciary when it involves declaring forced termination or liquidation. These checks and balances prevent abuse of executive powers to targets CSOs and provide them with judicial mechanisms to defend themselves against undue interference.

However, there still remains some challenges. For instance, there is no general law for the protection of human rights defenders as exists in countries such as [Mexico](#) or [Colombia](#), or for the promotion of CSOs as exists in [Honduras](#) or the [Dominican Republic](#). Added to this is the [lack of an anti-SLAPP law](#) to protect activists and CSOs against abusive lawsuits designed to silence their work. These gaps leave CSOs increasingly vulnerable to intimidation, arbitrary interference, and legal harassment.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



3.1 Accessibility of Resources

Access to international financial resources for CSOs in Costa Rica is constrained by several structural factors. As a high-income country, Costa Rica is no longer a priority for most international cooperation programs, which has significantly [reduced the availability of external funding](#). For example, major donors such as Bloomberg Philanthropies exclude high-income countries altogether, automatically limiting access for Costa Rican organisations. Although some international funding sources remain, accessibility is hindered by lack of transparency in information about available opportunities. This opacity stems from the fact that calls for proposals, eligibility criteria, and funding announcements are often not disseminated widely or systematically within the country. Consequently, only organisations with established networks or direct contacts receive information in time, while rural, community-based, or smaller CSOs frequently remain unaware of available opportunities.

Additionally, many funding calls are available only in English and not in Spanish, creating an extra barrier for organisations outside urban centres or without English-speaking staff. Combined with the absence of centralised platforms and limited outreach efforts, these gaps reinforce an unequal funding landscape and restrict meaningful access to financial resources.

At the national level, there are state funding mechanisms and certain tax exemptions available for CSOs. However, their application is often complex, unequal, and conditioned by strict bureaucratic requirements. Access to public funds is limited not only by the diversity of eligibility criteria but also by the need for multiple [declarations of suitability](#) (*declaratorias de idoneidad*), registry updates, and compliance with detailed administrative rules that many organisations—especially small, rural, or grassroots CSOs—struggle to meet.

Examples include mechanisms such as the [Fondo de Becas y Proyectos del IMAS](#), the [Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal](#), municipal subsidies, or funds allocated through public

competitions managed by ministries (culture, environment, social development). These programs typically require extensive project formulations, audited financial statements, legal certifications, and ongoing reporting. This creates barriers that tend to favour larger or more professionalised organisations over community-based groups.

Costa Rica also offers fiscal incentives, such as exemptions from the *Impuesto de Ventas/IVA* for donations, reduced or exempt import duties for humanitarian materials, and municipal tax exemptions for organisations declared of public interest. However, obtaining these benefits requires navigating complex administrative procedures, including obtaining a declaratoria de utilidad pública, demonstrating financial solvency, and complying with annual reporting obligations. As a result, many small or community-based CSOs particularly those outside the Greater Metropolitan Area cannot fully access or benefit from these incentives, reinforcing existing asymmetries in the national support system for civil society.

There are also tax burdens that can limit CSO operations. Among them is the tax on foreign remittances, which applies when they contract services from providers not domiciled in Costa Rica, with a [withholding tax](#) that in most cases is 15%. Likewise, although the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic has indicated that foundations without commercial activity are not subject to municipal licensing, they could be if they carry out lucrative activities such as selling services to the State. For its part, the tax on legal entities created by Law 9428 does not apply to associations and foundations, since it is directed exclusively at commercial companies.

Finally, beyond taxes, CSOs must comply with a series of formal obligations that condition their ability to receive tax-deductible donations and avoid penalties. Among these are being up to date with the Costa Rican Social Security Fund when they have permanent staff under labour regime, with tax obligations, and with the annual declaration to the Registry of Transparency and Ultimate Beneficial Owners, which must be filed every April. Failure to meet these requirements may result, in such case, in the loss of authorization to receive deductible donations.

In summary, the Costa Rican tax system offers mechanisms that encourage fundraising through deductible donations and some exemptions but also establishes burdens that, if not managed carefully, can restrict the functioning of CSOs. For this reason, it is key that these organisations maintain strict compliance and make use of the available tools to maximize tax benefits and reduce the risks that affect their sustainability.

3.2 Effectiveness of Resources

The financing conditions of CSOs allow for the implementation of relevant projects, but present limitations that affect their long-term sustainability and independence. International donors are usually more flexible and respectful of CSO autonomy, while at the national level inflexible dynamics persist, with bureaucracy, excessive paperwork, and at times perceptions of institutional competition.

While relations with donors are generally collaborative, accountability requirements and short implementation deadlines tend to overburden organisations, especially the smaller or volunteer-based ones that lack the technical and administrative capacity to meet all the demands. Experts also point out that there are no real spaces for dialogue on these issues. Donors usually focus solely on having the project delivered as agreed, rather than engaging in meaningful conversations with CSOs. They also do not make significant efforts to reach out to grassroots or marginalised organisations; instead, they simply publish the funding opportunities, and only those who manage to apply end up being selected.

In addition, the predominance of external agendas and the lack of long-term institutional financing favour “programmatic fragmentation” through short-term projects more aligned with external agendas than with the CSOs’ mission, limiting the ability of CSOs to consolidate sustainable and autonomous strategies. In this context, although there are positive experiences with certain donors who offer support and trust, overall effectiveness is constrained by structural conditions that make it difficult to fully achieve the sector’s objectives.

3.3 Sustainability of Resources

The financial sustainability of CSOs in Costa Rica is severely limited by their dependence on short-term and project-specific funds, which hinders strategic planning and program continuity. While some large and well-established organisations have been able to diversify their income sources by hiring specialised staff for fundraising and project development, the vast majority rely on one or very few funding streams. These organisations often operate primarily through volunteer work, and many of their members must hold other jobs to support their families, which limits the time they can dedicate to the organisation. This makes them even more vulnerable to abrupt disruptions should a funding source be lost.

International cooperation has declined due to Costa Rica’s status as a high-income country, while national public resources are insufficient and subject to budgetary restrictions. In addition, unrestricted or institutional development funds are almost non-existent, and the few available resources are often burdened with additional taxes that reduce their impact. The few resources obtained are affected by taxes (13% VAT on contracts). There is no technical support, understood as the lack of practical accompaniment through meetings, personalized guidance, or training sessions in which government staff can coach organisations on how to carry out administrative procedures, prepare project proposals, or comply with regulatory requirements.

Likewise, there is no accessible minimum infrastructure for CSOs, as many lack a stable physical space to hold meetings, coordinate activities, or bring their teams together. In numerous cases, organisations must rent such spaces, requiring financial resources that many—particularly small, community-based, or grassroots CSOs—do not have. This combination of financial, fiscal, technical, and logistical constraints severely limits the operational capacity of civil society organisations in the country.

The lack of financing means that the majority of organisations cannot even hire sufficient staff to work full-time on their projects. They rely on volunteer work and contributions from their members, compromising the resilience and sustainability of CSOs, particularly for smaller or community-based ones.

Consequently, although there are fundraising and volunteer efforts that provide some resilience, the current environment does not guarantee long-term financial stability or predictability.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



4.1 Transparency

The right of access to public information in Costa Rica is guaranteed by Article 30 of the Constitution and reinforced by the [Law to Promote Transparency in the Provision of Information from the Public Sector](#) (Law No. 10,240). A major development occurred in November 2024 with the approval of the [Law on Access to Public Information](#) (Law No. 10554). It is the first comprehensive national framework– though its implementation in 2025 continues to be limited due to the absence of full regulation, which has slowed institutional adaptation and created discrepancies between the legal standards and actual practices.

The law defines clear obligations for all public institutions, sets common procedures for citizens, and standardizes timelines, exceptions, and appeal mechanisms on accessing public information.

It introduces several substantial improvements, including a unified procedure for requesting information without the need to justify the purpose, the obligation for institutions to proactively disclose information in open and reusable formats, and a maximum response period of ten business days, extendable once for an additional ten days when properly justified. This timeline aligns with Article 31 of the General [Law of Public Administration](#) (Law 6227), which has historically governed administrative response periods. The law also establishes administrative responsibility and sanctions for unjustified refusals or delays, reinforcing accountability mechanisms and limiting discretionary interpretation.

Under this framework, denials of access must be based strictly on grounds defined by law, such as national security, the protection of personal data, the safeguarding of ongoing judicial or disciplinary investigations, and the protection of industrial or commercial confidentiality. Any restriction must be written, reasoned, proportional, and explicitly grounded in legal provisions,

following the standards established by the Constitutional Chamber. When information is partially restricted, institutions are required to release the non-confidential sections. If information is denied or deadlines are exceeded, individuals have the right to request reconsideration within the same institution, submit an appeal before the hierarchical superior, or file an *amparo* action before the Constitutional Chamber, which has historically been an accessible and effective mechanism. In June 2025, [the Constitutional Chamber upheld an amparo](#) filed by journalists and ordered compensation after a public institution failed to provide requested information within the legal timeframe, violating both freedom of the press and the constitutional right of access to public information. This ruling became one of the first decisions to explicitly recognise damages arising from unjustified opacity under the new access to information framework.

Despite these legal advances, persistent structural and cultural barriers continue to limit full transparency. Response times frequently reach the maximum legal limit, and many institutions exceed the mandated timeframe without providing written justification. The majority of public information is still available only upon request and not through proactive publication, contrary to the standards set by the [Open Data Decree \(Executive Decree No. 40199-MP-MICIT\)](#), which requires public bodies to release information in accessible, machine-readable formats. Implementation is particularly uneven at the municipal and rural levels, where delays, partial responses, and unavailable datasets are more common. Accessibility remains an unresolved issue: many institutional websites do not comply with basic accessibility standards, lack compatibility with screen readers, provide documents in formats that cannot be read by assistive technologies. In addition, they do not offer adjustable font sizes or alternatives for users with disabilities, thereby excluding a segment of the population from effectively exercising their right of access.

At the same time, the government has launched initiatives that seek to improve institutional compliance. [The National Council for Open Data \(CNDA\)](#), within the broader framework of the State Open initiative, promotes uniform standards for open government information, supports public institutions in adopting transparency practices, and encourages public participation in monitoring the availability and quality of information. Complementing this high-level body, the [National Open Data Commission](#) serves as the technical arm responsible for implementing these standards, coordinating institutional focal points, and ensuring the practical execution and follow-up of open data commitments across public institutions. However, [OECD assessments \(2024\)](#) and findings from the [Ombudsman's Office](#) indicate that longstanding challenges persist, such as the absence of lobbying regulation, limited publication of ministerial agendas, and the Executive's reluctance to release the minutes and records of the Council of Government. These issues remained present throughout 2025, suggesting that while the legal framework has been strengthened, institutional practices have not yet aligned with the standards envisioned by the new law.

In conclusion, the adoption of Law 10554, together with open-data policies, has strengthened the legal foundations for access to information. However, implementation gaps - particularly unjustified delays, low levels of proactive disclosure, accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities, and uneven compliance across institutions - continue to limit civil society's ability to exercise effective oversight and fully participate in democratic processes.

4.2 Participation

Participation of civil society in decision-making is legally recognised as a democratic principle in Costa Rica. Article 9 of the Constitution defines the political system as “popular, representative and participatory,” placing citizen involvement at the centre of institutional life.

This principle is reflected in several formal consultation mechanisms, including the procedures established in the [Rules of the Legislative Assembly](#) -particularly Article 157, which obliges legislative commissions to request opinions, hold hearings and receive contributions during the discussion of bills. Participation is also embedded in the national Open State framework, where the co-creation cycles of [the National Open State Plan](#) bring together civil society, government and academia to define, monitor and evaluate commitments on transparency, integrity and digital governance. Despite these formal mechanisms, the degree of actual influence remains uneven and tends to depend on the political context, the thematic area, institutional openness and the relationship between civil society organisations and the State.

Mechanisms such as the [Economic and Social Council](#) and the various sectoral and local consultative bodies legally created to facilitate public participation are intended to provide structured and continuous dialogue between public institutions, civil society, the private sector and academia. In practice, however, they have not been fully utilised or systematically convened. The **Economic and Social Council**, whose mandate is to advise the Executive on economic, labour and social policy through tripartite and multisector dialogue, has operated intermittently and has often remained inactive during key policy debates, limiting its potential as a permanent platform for structured consultation. Similarly, many **sectoral councils, advisory commissions and local participation bodies** -such as those in health, education, social development, youth, municipal planning or territorial management - formally require citizen or stakeholder participation. However, they are convened irregularly, focus on procedural matters rather than co-decision, or operate with minimal outreach to civil society organisations. In several cases, these bodies exist only on paper, or function with limited diversity of representation, which restricts their ability to influence policy or monitor implementation.

Experience shared by experts is that many organisations perceive public consultation spaces as symbolic, since there are no spaces for co-creation or co-evaluation of initiatives or policies. Their contributions are not always incorporated into the final results and are often requested merely to fulfil a legal requirement rather than to achieve real influence. In other words, participation tends to be limited, consultative, and non-binding. Moreover, there is little feedback provided on the consultation processes in which CSOs have participated.

Participation is also marked by persistent inequalities: while business chambers have direct access and influence in decision-making processes, many CSOs face exclusion or are relegated to merely symbolic roles. Experts emphasized that this imbalance is structural and particularly evident in sectors such as public health and environmental protection. Business chambers participate in boards of state institutions, advisory councils, and policy-shaping spaces, often holding seats or advisory roles within ministries and other strategic bodies. Although these spaces are formally open, in practice they tend to prioritize the agendas of economic actors over those of civil society. As highlighted by representatives of “Costa Rica Saludable,” authorities frequently give precedence to the interests of major food and beverage industries or [tobacco companies](#), sidelining evidence-based proposals aimed at protecting public health. A similar pattern emerges in environmental governance, where regulatory decisions often favour large tourism or real-estate developments while minimizing the concerns of environmental organisations. As a result, civil society participation remains sporadic and uneven, with greater involvement among urban and institutionalised actors and limited inclusion of rural, Indigenous, and community-based groups. This disproportionate influence, combined with the State’s lack of proactive measures to safeguard CSO participation, creates structural tensions that undermine democratic balance and perpetuate unequal access to decision-making spaces.

Currently, the government views organisations that work on [sensitive issues](#) such as environmental rights, indigenous peoples' rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and feminist organisations, as a [threat](#), given they tend to be highly critical of its actions. Consequently, they are also not properly consulted in decision-making on the issues that concern them.

Despite these challenges, some recent legislative and regulatory advances have expanded or formalised opportunities for civil society participation. Additional sector-specific regulations adopted in 2022–2024—such as those strengthening youth participation bodies or expanding consultative mechanisms within the [municipal framework](#)—have also opened new entry points for engagement. Nonetheless, these advances have not yet translated into consistent or meaningful influence, and their effectiveness continues to depend heavily on political will, institutional capacity and the thematic alignment between civil society actors and the authorities.

4.3 Accountability

Given the limitations to transparency and participation, accountability is also affected. Although the Constitution recognizes this principle (Arts. 9 and 11) and there is [Law No. 9398, “Law to Improve Accountability.”](#) its lack of regulation and generalized application weakens its effectiveness. Accountability remains limited, fragmented, and mostly formalistic. Public institutions' accountability mechanisms are reduced to annual reports and tend to prioritise the display of hierarchical achievements rather than the fulfilment of commitments. Likewise, at the local level, accountability is limited to annual reports before municipal councils or usually very formal presentations by mayors before residents. There are no transparent ways for civil society to question government decisions.

While mechanisms such as [the Transparency Network \(Ombudsman's Office\)](#) aim to seek greater openness, they do not guarantee accountability by officials on civil society contributions in influencing public decisions. The absence of standardised feedback mechanisms, the lack of explanations as to why contributions are accepted or rejected, and the prevalence of accountability in a media-based rather than institutional form, generate mistrust and perceptions of formalism.

In conclusion, although there have been advances in transparency and participation such as via the National Open State Plan and the National Open Data Commission, the impact of these advances remains very limited and unsustainable, as their implementation depends heavily on political will and lacks stable institutional support, dedicated budgeting, and continuous technical capacity. As a result, while the country has adopted the principles and language of international transparency and accountability standards, the practical effects on policy influence, institutional responsiveness, and long-term openness are still weak. This affects accountability in Costa Rica, preventing it from ensuring periodic publicity and transparency, as well as effective feedback that would strengthen civil society's participation in decision-making.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



5.1 Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

While organisations have spaces to participate in public debates and some have achieved visibility in the media and multisectoral forums, recent government rhetoric has tended toward confrontation, especially against women's groups, sexual diversity groups, environmentalists, and unions.

The president has frequently attacked some union leaders in his press conferences, including publicly referring to them as "corrupt unions," a statement that [prompted legal action](#) by CSOs for alleged crimes against honour. Also, there has been use of offensive terms against journalists such as ["political hitmen"](#), ["damned"](#) and ["scumbag press"](#) by the president and senior officials, which the [Constitutional Court confirmed](#) as disrespectful and offensive.

In May 2024, [the Green Bloc highlighted the absence of environmental issues in presidential speeches](#), and in June 2025, [the president criticized those who advocate for environmental protection without translating their words into action](#), creating a confrontational climate with environmental organisations. These CSOs have been accused of responding to foreign agendas regarding human rights, diversity, or equality, as occurred with the [Sustainable Development Goals, which were reduced to respond to "national values."](#)

Political dialogue on the part of the Executive Branch is often combative and polarising, with few spaces for active listening or constructive engagement. This dynamic has been visible in a series of [confrontations with prominent civil society](#) and public-interest organisations. Throughout 2023 and early 2024, the [President repeatedly questioned](#) the legitimacy and transparency of the Costa Rican Coalition of Development Initiatives (CINDE), casting doubt on its management practices and suggesting political motivations in its work. CINDE rejected these claims as unfounded, noting that the President had misrepresented its proposals. The controversy intensified when the [Ministry of Foreign Trade \(COMEX\)](#) hinted that the

government's rupture with CINDE was driven by political rather than technical reasons, creating uncertainty around the organisation's role and its relationship with public institutions.. A similar pattern unfolded with the Fundación Omar Dengo (FOD) in 2023, when the government abruptly terminated the 30-year cooperation agreement under which the FOD administered the national educational technology programme. The decision was taken without prior consultation, accompanied by public comments questioning the [foundation's efficiency](#) and stewardship of educational resources, and later followed by disputes over the custody and management of unused computer equipment.

These incidents exemplify a broader environment in which [divergent opinions are met with public disqualification](#), with the Executive frequently using press conferences to criticise or personally attack individuals and organisations that express disagreement with the President. When CSOs adopt a critical stance, they are often portrayed as obstacles, politicised actors, or defenders of special interests. This pattern of polarization, amplified through social networks and official communication channels, undermines the credibility of CSOs and reduces their capacity to influence policy or participate meaningfully in public decision-making.

The vast majority of media coverage is neutral, but only a few media private outlets [recognise the contributions](#) of CSOs. Likewise, other media aligned with the government sometimes replicate official discourses that delegitimise civil society actors. There is space for positioning on social networks, but the opinion of CSOs is ignored by authorities and decision-makers. On the part of civil society organisations, the internal fragmentation of the sector, their limited communication capacity, and the lack of generational renewal weaken their influence and a positive discourse.

5.2 Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Citizen perception of civil society and civic participation is at an intermediate level. Citizens value democracy and rights, but collective action occurs more at the local level and with low structural influence. There is a general recognition of the value of social organisations, especially in times of crisis (e.g., the pandemic, environmental emergencies). This is consistent with the findings of the [World Bank's 2024](#) Country Opinion Survey, in which respondents expressed high levels of trust in civil society organisations and the United Nations, placing them among the most trusted institutions in the country. However, this trust weakens in polarised contexts, when social organisations are associated with specific political or ideological agendas. According to experts, the confrontational discourse of the President towards certain groups has also contributed to an [escalation of online hostility](#), including increased hate speech and verbal aggression against journalists, activists and human rights organisations, further undermining the environment for constructive civic participation.

Civic participation is channelled mainly through voting, while in community or consultative spaces it is more limited and unequal. There is a high level of citizen apathy and disinterest, reflected in abstentionism, particularly in municipal elections. Although [civic education is mandatory](#) in the educational system, it is often theoretical and lacks practical strategies that motivate active and sustained participation. Moreover, it is often seen as an unimportant filler subject. Given that civic education is weak, citizens do not clearly perceive the importance of civil society's contributions leading to citizen apathy, disinterest, and ignorance toward civic participation are evident.

Factors such as confrontational government discourse, the spread of [hate speech on social networks](#) (which affects social cohesion and trust in CSOs), as well as the lack of solid co-creation mechanisms in decision-making, have eroded the perception of civil society as an influential actor in governance. Nevertheless, in the collective imagination, civil society

continues to be [recognised as an important pillar](#) for the defence of rights and social change, although with clear challenges in legitimacy, influence, and active citizen participation.

5.3 Civic Equality and Inclusion

The legal framework recognizes ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity, and policies have been implemented to promote equality and combat discrimination. **Article 1 of the [Political Constitution of Costa Rica](#)**, defines the country as a democratic, free, independent, multiethnic and multicultural republic. **Article 33** establishes the principle of equality before the law and the prohibition of discrimination, while **Article 76** protects the languages and cultural expressions of Indigenous peoples. **Article 89** mandates the State to preserve and stimulate national culture and the cultural heritage of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. This constitutional framework is complemented by specific legislation, such as [Law No. 7142 on the Promotion of the Social Equality of Women](#), [Law No. 7711 to Prevent and Sanction Discrimination, Racism and Intolerance](#), and [Law No. 6172 on Indigenous Peoples](#), as well as [public policies](#) that seek to promote equality and combat structural discrimination.

However, in practice, structural, economic, and social barriers persist that limit the civic inclusion of marginalized groups such as indigenous communities, people of African descent, migrants, youth, women, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ population. Poverty continues to be a cross-cutting barrier, as it hinders access to [digital media for participation](#) or access to the area where most decisions are made, which is the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM). Although anyone can formally associate and local inclusion programs exist, the real and sustained participation of historically marginalised groups remains limited, conditioned by discrimination, territorial inequality, and attitudinal barriers.

In July 2024, [President Rodrigo Chaves dismissed the Minister of Culture, and the Commissioner of Social Inclusion for issuing a declaration of cultural interest for the LGBTQ+ Pride March without his authorization](#). This action was [criticized by LGBTQ+ organisations](#) as an attempt to undermine rights and restrict freedom of expression. His leadership style has been characterized as confrontational, often employing colloquia language and religious references to appeal to conservative sectors.

In January 2025, the Ministry of Public Education [eliminated sexuality programs](#). This was followed up by October 2025 setbacks when [Chaves restricted access to therapeutic abortion](#) by repealing the technical regulation in place since 2019, which permitted the termination of pregnancy when the mother's health was at risk. Additionally, the government [proposed a bill](#) to increase prison sentences for women who undergo an abortion without medical consent. These measures have been widely criticized by human rights and feminist organisations as a regression and an act of stigmatization. Likewise, the [increase in femicides](#) and existing gaps ([such as persistent economic inequalities, barriers to employment, and territorial disparities affecting rural and Indigenous women](#)) reflect that normative advances do not always translate into effective action. At the economic level, poverty and lack of resources hinder equitable participation, while the [reduction of social investment and contradictory policies](#) reinforce inequalities.

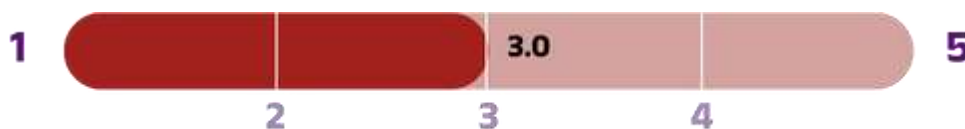
According to experts engaged in this research, acritical case is the exclusion of deaf people, who face communication barriers (lack of sign language interpreters, limited accessibility in public forums) and absence in decision-making spaces. This reflects the structural invisibilities of certain groups.

Also, significant gaps still exist in internet access in rural and indigenous areas, as well as exclusion of people with disabilities, particularly deaf people, due to the lack of communication accessibility (sign language interpreters, subtitling, adapted materials, etc.). They also face serious barriers in terms of digital privacy and online security, since there are no accessible protocols in sign language nor adapted complaint mechanisms, which undermines their fundamental rights. In environmental matters, the Chaves administration has shown resistance to key international commitments, such as the [Escazú Agreement](#). Additionally, environmental groups and analysts have criticized his administration for promoting policies favouring the exploitation of natural-gas and fossil-fuel resources, undermining Costa Rica's environmental reputation and threatening protected-area safeguards.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



6.1 Digital Rights and Freedoms

Access to a safe digital environment is supported by a solid legal framework that protects digital freedom of expression, privacy, and access to the internet. **Article 28 of the Political Constitution** guarantees freedom of expression, and Article **24** protects the right to privacy, communications, and personal data. These guarantees are complemented by [Law 8968 on the Protection of Personal Data \(2011\)](#), which regulates the treatment, storage, and safeguarding of digital information. In addition, the Constitutional Chamber has [upheld](#) the validity of these rights in multiple rulings, and there are no internet shutdowns or systematic blocking of online content by public authorities.

In practice, relevant weaknesses persist, including forms [of indirect censorship and partial surveillance](#). For instance, [in March 2024](#), the Sala Constitucional ordered the Ministry of Health to unblock a citizen from its official Facebook page after confirming that the restriction lacked due justification and violated freedom of expression. Similarly, throughout 2024 and early 2025, media observatories such as IPLEX and [academic experts reported](#) politically motivated withdrawals of state advertising from news programs perceived as critical, as well as growing hostility in official rhetoric toward the press. These practices—together with the documented proliferation of coordinated [disinformation, bots, and anonymous accounts](#)—have contributed to an environment of indirect censorship and increased self-censorship. While there is no formal state-imposed censorship, multiple [reports from digital rights](#) groups in 2024–2025 indicate that economic and political pressures on media outlets continue to affect the plurality of voices and undermine the broader climate for freedom of expression.

Likewise, journalists, activists, and human rights defenders have faced harassment campaigns and online threats, experiencing digital violence and harassment that weaken the full exercise of digital freedom. For instance in August 2025, [precautionary embargo measures](#) were issued against two environmental activists and content creators in Costa Rica: [Juan](#)

[Bautista Alfaro](#) and [Javier Adelfang](#). The action was requested by a company linked to a tourist project in Playa Panamá following social media complaints about environmental damage and questions about permits granted. The seizure included the blocking of bank accounts, withholding of salary, cards, and real estate. [Specialists described](#) it as disproportionate and as a possible strategic lawsuit to silence public participation. Jurists and human rights organisations denounced it as another act of intimidation against freedom of expression and citizen denunciation. As a result, a legislative proposal was filed by the Frente Amplio Party under file [number 25.125](#) to limit preventive seizures when what is denounced is of public interest. It also fuelled the debate on the use of judicial mechanisms as tools of pressure.

In summary, digital rights and freedoms in Costa Rica are legally guaranteed and protected, but not fully effective in practice, due to indirect censorship, inequalities in access, and lack of inclusive accessibility. There is a strong legal environment, but with growing risks and real barriers for vulnerable sectors and critical voices.

6.2 Digital Security and Privacy

The country also has a regulatory framework on privacy and personal data, mainly the [Law on the Protection of the Person in relation to the processing of their personal data](#) (Law 8968 of 2011) and complementary regulations, including its implementing Regulation ([Executive Decree No. 37554-MP-J](#)), binding guidelines issued by the Data Protection Authority (PRODHAB), and related legislation such as [the Computer Crimes Law \(Law 9048 of 2012\)](#). In addition, there are ongoing initiatives [such as Bill 23.771](#) (2024) to regulate artificial intelligence.

However, there are legal and regulatory gaps: Law 8968 is outdated and does not respond to current challenges such as AI, blockchain, or massive flows of personal data. The modernization bill is still under discussion, leaving gaps in protection and redress against violations. Although complementary laws exist, [leaks of personal information persist in public institutions](#) and there are no effective guarantees of redress, which results in incomplete data protection. There are also gaps in protection against state/private surveillance and a lack of robust redress mechanisms. Civil society have denounced digital harassment [campaigns and discursive manipulation](#) (bot farms, digital violence), which affect the security of activists, journalists, and CSOs critical of the government.

In the 2024 [Global Cybersecurity Index](#), Costa Rica scored 75.07 out of 100, placing it in Tier 3 ('Establishing') which corresponds to the middle score-range (55–85) under the Index's scoring scheme. There is also no evidence of state-sponsored cyberattacks or officialised mass surveillance, which supports an environment of relative digital freedom. However, since 2022, the country has been the target of large-scale attacks that paralyzed public institutions. In 2025, [more than 8.7 million attempted cyberattacks were reported in three months](#), with a [184% increase in cybercrimes](#), which demonstrates the weakness of the national cybersecurity infrastructure. This could be attributed to the [lack of digital security training and education](#). These structural vulnerabilities pose significant risks for civil society actors, as breaches in public and private systems can expose sensitive personal information—such as contact details, home addresses, or membership data—leaving organisations and individuals more susceptible to intimidation, targeted harassment, and further digital attacks.

In conclusion, although Costa Rica has a basic legal protection system and generally respects digital rights, weak cybersecurity infrastructure, regulatory gaps, increasing threats, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups place the country at an intermediate level in digital security and privacy: there are solid foundations, but with structural risks that limit the real protection of civil society.

6.3 Digital Accessibility

Costa Rica has made significant progress in digital connectivity, with [85.4% of households having internet access](#) (87.9% in urban areas and 79% in rural areas, according to INEC 2024). Most access occurs via mobile phones, and programs driven by Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE), Ministry of Public Education (MEP), and Telecommunications Superintendence (SUTEL) have expanded coverage in rural territories and educational centres through satellite networks, radio links, and 4G. [The National Telecommunications Plan 2022–2027](#) establishes access to the internet as a fundamental right and seeks to close gaps.

However, internet access does not necessarily translate into effective use, as basic digital skills remain limited and Structural and operational inequalities still persist. For example, rural communities, indigenous populations, people with disabilities, and low-income sectors face limited connectivity, unequal access to equipment, greater economic barriers, and limited access to inclusive and sustained digital literacy and training programs. The resources of National Telecommunications Fund (FONATEL) and digital inclusion programs have not been effectively executed. Added to this, the cost of internet and network saturation affect the quality of access and speed, impacting both citizens and CSOs, which see their capacity for influence, full digital participation, and monitoring reduced.

Likewise, although digital literacy is functional among young and urban sectors, there remains a lack of critical skills such as on source verification, cybersecurity and strategic use of emerging technologies such as AI. In the same vein, many organisations lack resources and technological training to innovate and take advantage of ICTs in their management and advocacy.

In summary, although Costa Rica has high digital coverage and clear policies, the gap in access and skills remains significant. This prevents civil society and citizens from fully and equally participating in the digital space.

C) Recommendations

1. Executive Branch

- Guarantee equitable treatment toward the media and civil society organisations, ensuring that no form of indirect censorship, administrative retaliation, or stigmatizing discourse occurs in response to legitimate criticism. Public authorities should actively recognize the fundamental role of CSOs in defending human rights, ensuring citizen oversight, and promoting sustainable development.
- Support, and encourage the Legislative Assembly to approve, the **Escazú Agreement**, and urgently implement a **National Protocol for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**, including early warning systems and mechanisms for inter-institutional coordination.
- Promptly develop implementing regulations for the **Framework Law on Access to Public Information**, ensure information is available in accessible formats and create a **national Open Data website**.
- Improve **public consultation processes** by establishing clear mechanisms for providing feedback on citizen contributions, guaranteeing that such processes are meaningful and not merely formalities.
- Promote **regional training programs** for civil society that decentralize opportunities and reach communities beyond the Greater Metropolitan Area.
- Simplify and unify registration, suitability, accreditation, and certification procedures for CSOs through a single digital one-stop window that reduces costs, paperwork, and duplications. In addition, apply the principle of proportionality to administrative requirements, distinguishing between large and small organisations. This unified approach should include the creation or modernization of a single accreditation system for accessing public funds, ensuring clear, efficient, and coherent processes across institutions, with explicit improvements to both registration procedures and the mechanisms for obtaining resources. Ensure each institution designates **liaison officers** responsible for engaging with citizens and CSOs on matters of transparency and participation. These officials should promote the publication of **contribution matrices**, explain how inputs are incorporated into decision-making, and facilitate **co-creation processes**.
- The **Legal Entities Registry** should issue clear, accessible guidelines for establishing associations, modifying bylaws, and renewing boards of directors. Meanwhile, the **Ministry of Finance** should standardize and simplify the process for registering CSOs eligible to receive tax-deductible donations.
- Reinforce **active transparency and accountability mechanisms**, moving beyond annual written reports to more participatory and measurable formats.
- Ensure that **participatory processes** are inclusive and culturally relevant, especially for historically excluded populations, and prioritize **digital accessibility** in public institutions and municipalities to close rural gaps.

2. Legislative Branch

- An **anti-SLAPP law** to prevent abusive litigation.
- A **Law on Citizen Oversight** that strengthens social accountability.
- **Lobbying regulations** that ensure transparency regarding the influence of private interests.
- A **Law on the Right to Citizen Participation** that provides legal certainty for participatory practices.
- Updated **data protection legislation** addressing gaps related to artificial intelligence, biometrics, and big data.

3. To Donors and the International Community

- Support programs that strengthen institutional capacities, advocacy skills, and digital security among Costa Rican CSOs.
- Prioritize decentralized funding schemes that reach small, community-based, and rural organisations, rather than concentrating resources in the capital.
- Promote regional cooperation and exchange of best practices on civic participation, data transparency, and the protection of human rights defenders.
- Encourage and finance multi-stakeholder initiatives that connect public institutions, the private sector, academia, and CSOs to advance open government and inclusive development.
- Support the establishment of flexible and sustainable funding mechanisms, allowing CSOs to build reserve funds, strengthen local ownership, and reduce dependency on short-term or foreign assistance.

4. To Civil Society Organisations

- Strengthen advocacy capacities by forming consortia and strategic alliances that enable access to larger-scale funding opportunities and national-level influence.
 - Adopt digital and physical security protocols and voluntarily publish transparency and accountability reports to enhance public legitimacy.
 - Diversify funding sources through community fundraising, social entrepreneurship, and partnerships with the private sector, while creating reserve funds for long-term sustainability.
 - Invest in training on strategic communication, including storytelling and media relations, to improve public visibility and influence.
 - Develop collaborative relationships with academia and local governments to promote evidence-based policy dialogue and co-created initiatives.
 - Work with the business sector to establish responsible engagement policies that avoid undue interference and instead promote co-investment in civic and social projects. Encourage companies to offer technical volunteering in finance, law, and digital technologies to strengthen smaller CSOs.
 - Collaborate with the media to foster balanced narratives, highlight civil society contributions, and promote educational campaigns that encourage citizen participation and respect for democratic debate.
-

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.

*This publication was funded/co-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.*



EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



Funded by
the European Union

