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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights,
civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Civil society space**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights****Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 59/10, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a thematic report in follow-up to the report containing practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society, based on good practices and lessons learned, to review progress against the recommendations contained therein, to identify new and emerging trends concerning civil society space, including through an analysis of the specific contribution and risks faced by underrepresented parts of civil society, and to provide an updated set of recommendations in the light of those trends.

The report identifies key challenges and new and emerging trends affecting civic space, online and offline, including key gaps and practices, and puts forward recommendations for States and the human rights ecosystem.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.

I. Introduction

1. People of all ages and backgrounds seek to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures and those of their loved ones. Democracy and open civic space enable them to advocate for their rights and to exercise agency, including by demanding accessible and quality education, healthcare, housing and public transport; contributing to public debate on energy subsidies, taxation and the allocation of public resources; denouncing corruption; protesting against policy choices they disagree with; and holding decision makers accountable. The present report explores the measures and laws that enable people and civil society to exercise influence, and key trends affecting civic space in recent years.

2. In its resolution 59/10, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a thematic report in follow-up to the 2016 report on practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society, based on good practices and lessons learned,¹ to review progress against the recommendations contained therein, to identify new and emerging trends concerning civil society space, including through an analysis of the specific contribution and risks faced by underrepresented parts of civil society, and to provide an updated set of recommendations in the light of those trends.

3. The present report draws on the views of States, civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders, including special procedure mandate holders. It is based on responses to an online survey conducted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in February and March 2026,² desk research and targeted consultations with civil society, which sought to identify good practices and trends as compared to the recommendations contained in the previous report. All contributions are acknowledged with gratitude.

II. Civic space as an enabler of human development

4. An open and vibrant civic space is both a human right in itself and an enabler of all human rights, essential for people to sustainably enjoy adequate standards of living, housing, health, water and sanitation, quality education, social protection, work and a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The discussions of the Human Rights Council on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have emphasized that adequate space for civil society and a “whole-of-society” multi-stakeholder approach are key to aligning human rights obligations with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, underscoring civic participation as integral to development outcomes.³ Open civic space and participatory institutions are linked to better health, service delivery and accountability and to poverty reduction; while restrictions on civic space are linked to weaker service provision, higher levels of corruption, missed economic opportunities and higher risk of conflict.⁴

5. Evidence indicates that institutions and mechanisms that keep civic space open – such as free and genuine elections, independent media and a vibrant civil society – create measurable accountability effects that translate into better economic and human development outcomes. For example, empirical research by the V-Dem Institute indicates that countries that democratize experience, on average, a 20 percentage point increase in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita over 25 years; and democracies with strong accountability provide 23 per cent greater access to safe water, 35 per cent higher childhood immunization rates, around 94 per cent lower infant mortality and up to 300 per cent higher Internet connectivity.⁵

¹ [A/HRC/32/20](#).

² Responses were received from 17 Member States, 15 national human rights institutions and more than 240 civil society and regional organizations.

³ See [A/HRC/43/33](#).

⁴ See, for example, [A/73/279](#) and [A/HRC/53/25](#), as well as <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2024-12/SDG%2016%20Data%20Initiative%20Report%202024.pdf>.

⁵ See https://www.v-dem.net/documents/34/C4DReport_230421.pdf.

6. Recent evidence shows that an open civic space and participation are integral to effective, accountable and inclusive governance. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that 69 per cent of those who feel able to influence government decisions report high or moderately high trust in institutions.⁶ Furthermore, constrained participation and weak institutions are associated with reduced investor confidence, lower levels of citizen engagement and diminished economic performance,⁷ whereas higher transparency and trust correlate with stronger economic activity and measurable gains in income levels.⁸

7. Similarly, studies indicate that States that respect freedom of association consistently show higher government effectiveness, stronger judicial independence, reduced corruption and higher tax revenue, lower maternal mortality, better access to education, water and sanitation and clean energy, and stronger environmental stewardship. Opposite patterns are seen where civic space is restricted, based on the correlation between enjoyment of freedom of association and the 267 Sustainable Development Goals indicators.⁹ The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is hampered by burdensome regulations and funding restrictions imposed on civil society organizations, as well as distrust of civil society data,¹⁰ and development projects lose effectiveness in restrictive contexts.¹¹

8. Clear links exist between open civic space and peace and security. Inclusive decision-making and broad participation, particularly by youth, women and civil society, is essential to create “incentives for actors to choose actions that resolve conflict without violence”. Repression and human rights abuses increase conflict risk by reinforcing perceptions that there is “no viable alternative” for expressing grievances. Historical data for the period 1990–2015 show that countries with fewer violations of physical integrity rights witnessed, on average, 37 per cent fewer violent protests, 79 per cent fewer terrorist attacks and 86 per cent fewer civil war deaths.¹² Conversely, failure to protect civic space limits peaceful alternatives for groups to express their grievances and, in turn, can contribute to the outbreak of violence.¹³

9. A recent study found a nearly sixfold increase in the likelihood of protecting societies from democratic backsliding, from 7.5 per cent to 51.7 per cent, when strong social movements and civil resistance campaigns were involved. The study further urged investments in proven strategies that could safeguard democracy, highlighting, for example, the positive role of philanthropy in fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders.¹⁴

III. Key civic space trends

10. The complexity of documenting civic space trends was extensively covered in the 2024 report of the High Commissioner on civil society space.¹⁵ Regardless of the methodological approach, most attempts to aggregate statistical information, including those measuring the impact of digital, new and emerging technologies, confirm an overall

⁶ See https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/06/government-at-a-glance-2025_70e14c6c/0efd0bcd-en.pdf.

⁷ See <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099808303042442715>; and <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/30720e31-4b95-440e-b83c-c03879baf50b>.

⁸ See <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/947471607543857349>.

⁹ See <https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Arrested-development-Asia-civil-civil-society-report-final.pdf>.

¹⁰ See https://sdgglobalforum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/VNR_Lab_Global_Forum_2025_report_v2.1.pdf.

¹¹ See https://bankwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025_02_Counteracting-shrinking-space.pdf.

¹² World Bank Group, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, p. xxi.

¹³ See https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/IPI-E-RPT-Protection-and-Promotion-of-Civic-Space_FR2.pdf.

¹⁴ See <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/how-philanthropy-can-show-up-in-solidarity-with-movements-defending-democracy/>.

¹⁵ A/HRC/57/31.

weakening of political support for freedoms, diversity and democratic governance, including in contexts previously regarded as stable democracies.

11. Most civil society metrics reflect this trend. For example, the CIVICUS 2025 global update assessed civic space as shrinking across all regions, and reported that only 7 per cent of the global population lived in countries with free or relatively open civic space.¹⁶ Similarly, the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law reported that, as of 2024, 7 out of 10 people lived in countries with restricted civic space.¹⁷ In its latest report, Freedom House noted the continued decline in global freedom for the twentieth consecutive year in 2025 due to rising armed conflicts, the gradual erosion of democratic institutions and escalating repression by authoritarian governments – especially in relation to media freedom, freedom of expression and due process.¹⁸ The V-Dem Institute reported that democracy had declined back to 1978 levels for the average global citizen, while democracy in Western Europe and North America was at its lowest level in over 50 years, and almost all aspects of democracy had registered far-reaching declines during the previous decade.¹⁹

12. According to data compiled by OHCHR, between 2015 and 2025 at least 5,995 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were killed or subjected to enforced disappearance globally, of whom 813 were women (13 per cent).²⁰ Geographically, approximately 55 per cent of the cases (3,304) were recorded in Latin America and the Caribbean, 16 per cent in North Africa and West Asia (935 cases), 10 per cent in East and South-East Asia (626 cases), 9 per cent in Central and South Asia (532 cases), 7 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (430 cases), 3 per cent in Europe and North America (166 cases) and less than 0.1 per cent in Oceania (2 cases). For the period 2023–2025, disaggregated data indicate that of those killed or subjected to enforced disappearance, about 25 per cent (588) were environmental or land defenders, 22 per cent (514) were Indigenous or minority human rights defenders, 14 per cent (321) were women human rights defenders and 12 per cent (275) were youth human rights defenders. United Nations experts also highlighted attacks against national human rights institutions and called upon States to ensure protection, adequate resources and a safe enabling environment.²¹

13. More than 80 per cent of civil society respondents to the online survey conducted by OHCHR reported an overall contraction of civic space, with systemic, multi-channel pressures – combining legal and regulatory tools, administrative non-disclosure of information of public interest, funding constraints, stigmatization and criminalization as “foreign agents” and expansion of digital repression – producing a cumulative chilling effect on participation, expression and association. While some pockets of progress were noted, these were often outweighed by resource scarcity and implementation gaps, which pushed many civil society actors into “survival mode”, entailing downsizing, self-censorship, relocation or reliance on international advocacy channels.

1. Digital tools continue to transform the information ecosystem

14. Although structural inequalities in connectivity, affordability and digital literacy persist, search engines, content-sharing platforms and, more recently, artificial intelligence agents have enabled people – particularly youth and people living in rural areas²² – to access vast amounts of information about government action at all levels, from local to national to international. While information, communications and technology skills remain uneven across the globe,²³ people in all regions are now able to learn more about public decisions in

¹⁶ See https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2025/.

¹⁷ See <https://www.icnl.org/post/report/development-impacts-of-civic-space-restrictions>.

¹⁸ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2026/growing-shadow-autocracy>.

¹⁹ See https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf.

²⁰ OHCHR compiles and reports data on indicator 16.10.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, as the custodian, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization.

²¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/un-experts-raise-concern-about-increasing-attacks-national-human-rights>.

²² See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2025/10/15/ff25-youth-internet-use/> and <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2025/10/15/ff25-internet-use-in-urban-and-rural-areas/>.

²³ See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2025/10/15/ff25-ict-skills/>.

a wide range of policy areas, to express their views and to give feedback about impacts. The creation of additional avenues for expression and assembly also enables more rapid organizing and vibrant exchanges – with the potential to strengthen accountability.

15. However, in parallel, States and other actors have sought to control these spaces and new forms of exercising rights and power. A small number of technology companies also play an outsized role in shaping the information environment. A recent study found that social media and digital platforms had become the dominant global gateways to news consumption, with more people now accessing news outside of traditional media channels. It also reported that audience trust in traditional news had declined worldwide.²⁴

16. Those who lack access to the Internet face even greater challenges. The connectivity gap already constrains participation, and these obstacles are compounded by deliberate State actions that restrict digital access and information flows. Internet shutdowns and bandwidth throttling are increasingly common tactics used to disrupt communications and access to information and to prevent or weaken peaceful protests or other moments of political contestation.²⁵ Beyond full shutdowns, Governments and other actors rely on a wide range of censorship measures to shape the online information environment. In 2024, Freedom House's indicators assessing "limits on content" – including website blocking, disproportionate content removal, censorship laws, self-censorship practices, content manipulation and constraints on information diversity – hit their lowest average score in over a decade.²⁶

17. Digital tools have also enabled much more comprehensive tracking and monitoring of civil society work, through spyware, but also through artificial intelligence-enabled data extraction and processing, lowering the costs of both mass and targeted surveillance. Often, the most exposed critical voices are the primary victims of spyware surveillance and digital attacks, including participants in assemblies protesting local grievances, who now can easily be tracked and identified through facial recognition.²⁷ Increasingly, human rights defenders also face threats and attacks across borders, expanding the impacts on their safety and their actions.

18. OHCHR and United Nations experts have warned about chilling effects of spyware and targeted digital surveillance, the privatization of freedom of expression on digital platforms driven by political and corporate interests, and increasingly targeted and harder-to-detect Internet shutdowns. Digital technologies can be used for profiling and repression, including through the misuse of facial recognition and biometric systems, to amplify stigmatization and disinformation and to carry out coordinated online attacks or smear campaigns against human rights defenders and civil society leaders.²⁸ Survey respondents also highlighted surveillance of peaceful protests through real-time facial recognition,²⁹ disinformation threats, including artificial intelligence-generated content, and "media capture and digital controls" as major constraints on civic space.³⁰

2. Social movements and protests

19. Movements and protests are a vital form of public expression and participation, essential to the promotion of a vibrant civic space, often with significant youth participation. Movements take different forms, ranging from traditional demonstrations to social media

²⁴ See https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/DNR%202026%20FINAL_2.pdf.

²⁵ See <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/KeepItOn-2024-Internet-Shutdowns-Annual-Report.pdf>.

²⁶ See https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/FREEDOM-ON-THE-NET-2024-DIGITAL-BOOKLET_v2.pdf.

²⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20260427-safeguard-hr-freed-syst-digi-inter-serv-chill-civic-space-sr-freedom-peaceful-en.pdf>.

²⁸ See [A/77/196](#), [A/79/263](#), [A/80/219](#), [A/80/341](#), [A/HRC/41/35](#), [A/HRC/47/24/Add.2](#), [A/HRC/50/55](#), [A/HRC/51/17](#), [A/HRC/56/50](#), [A/HRC/62/45](#) and [A/HRC/63/52](#). See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2022/09/interactive-dialogue-high-commissioner-report-identifying-recent>.

²⁹ Survey response by International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law.

³⁰ Survey response by Human Rights Measurement Initiative.

campaigns and advocacy to more creative forms of mobilization and direct action, and reportedly, with cross-border links between movements.

20. In recent years, many social movements, including youth-led movements, have been driven by people unaffiliated with trade unions, political parties, NGOs or other traditional civil society structures; they have advanced views that they felt were underrepresented in more established civil society and political spaces. For example, between 2024 and 2026, youth-led movements, often associated with “Generation Z”, were driven by grievances related to inequality, corruption and nepotism, unaffordability and lack of employment opportunities for young people, as well as increasingly by environmental concerns. What often began with concerns related to economic, social and cultural rights subsequently expanded into wider political demands, including in relation to limited participation options and patterns of exclusion.³¹

21. Between January 2023 and July 2026, public authorities reportedly intervened in at least 30,900 demonstrations in more than 210 countries and territories, and those interventions in many cases resulted in killings, detention, injuries and other types of interference.³² United Nations and civil society experts consistently raised alarm over States’ use of a range of measures to suppress peaceful protests, including emergency laws, militarized policing, arbitrary arrests and detention, excessive or lethal force, criminalization, digital surveillance and stigmatization of protestors.³³ Evidence also shows a growing crackdown on protests led by environmental and land rights defenders through criminalization, including judicial harassment and strategic lawsuits against public participation,³⁴ indicating a shift towards legal, administrative and other coercive measures, rather than solely physical violence.

3. Criminalization and securitization, including normalization of emergency powers

22. In many instances, securitization, initially justified by temporary emergency powers acquired in the context of a national security crisis, has been consolidated into ordinary law. This trend raises concerns about the normalization of emergency powers,³⁵ including through the perpetual renewal of states of emergency, effectively rendering them the norm, and about the exercise of exceptional powers without formally declaring an emergency.³⁶ It also reflects a broader tendency to frame human rights and public security as competing rather than complementary objectives.

23. Research also shows that measures purportedly adopted to combat terrorism and money-laundering sometimes translate into undue restrictions on civic space. In practice, they have included intrusive supervision of civil society organizations, often with burdensome registration procedures and restrictions on organizations’ access to funding and bank accounts. As a result, legitimate civil society organizations may be unfairly restricted.³⁷

24. Criminalization based on vague or overly broad legislation – including laws on cybercrime, counter-terrorism, disinformation, hate speech, or “foreign agents” or “foreign influence”³⁸ – continued to be reported across all regions, with human rights defenders,

³¹ See, for example, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2025-gen-z-protest-worldwide/>.

³² Figures are based on the OHCHR artificial intelligence-coded dataset, based on media reports, and give an overall sense of trends rather than verified numbers.

³³ See A/78/246, A/79/263, A/80/219, A/HRC/50/42, A/HRC/53/38, A/HRC/56/50 and A/HRC/59/44.

³⁴ See <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/navigating-a-global-crossroads-human-rights-defenders-and-business-in-2025/>; and <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/how-states-use-criminalisation-to-target-land-and-environmental-defenders/>.

³⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/fact-sheet-no-32-rev-1-rights-terrorism-counter-terrorism-web.pdf>.

³⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/COVIDstatementEN.pdf>.

³⁷ See <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Unintended-Consequences.pdf>; and https://media.odi.org/documents/HPG_financial_access_4_final.pdf.

³⁸ See also the joint declaration on protecting the right to freedom of association in the light of “foreign agents” or “foreign influence” laws, of 13 September 2024, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/association/statements/2024-09-13-statement-sr-foaa.pdf>.

journalists, political opponents and civil society organizations targeted through imprecise legal concepts that enable arbitrary interpretation and enforcement.³⁹ Furthermore, United Nations independent human rights mechanisms have publicly raised concerns about the adoption of such laws and the use of existing laws or restrictive measures in countries and territories across the globe.⁴⁰

25. The United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, adopted by the General Assembly in December 2024, establishes criminalization measures, investigative powers and mechanisms for international cooperation. In the light of documented patterns of abuse of cybercrime legislation at the national level, the implementation of the Convention requires strong human rights safeguards.⁴¹ Without them, measures such as cross-border data-sharing or content restrictions risk being misused to target civil society actors, journalists and dissenting voices and to normalize digital surveillance, censorship and the criminalization of legitimate civic activity.

26. Civil society reported that prohibitionist, and in some contexts, militarized approaches to drug control policy had negatively impacted the space for civil society working on related issues. For example, civil society noted that “anti-drug propaganda” provisions – laws restricting information perceived as promoting drug use, including harm reduction content – narrowed freedom of expression and access to information, including for health and human rights actors.⁴² Similarly, they denounced the fact that the securitization of drug policy had driven health and human rights organizations to the sidelines and had redirected funding towards punitive law enforcement approaches, rather than evidence-based, rights-centred interventions such as harm reduction.⁴³

27. Finally, since October 2023, there has been both an alarming rise in antisemitism, and increased instances of allegations of antisemitism being invoked to discredit or restrict legitimate expression, including criticism of government policies and human rights violations.⁴⁴ Attempts to criminalize or unduly restrict journalists, protesters, demonstrations or NGOs on the basis of vague and inconsistent definitions of antisemitism or bans of pro-Palestinian activism have also been documented in several countries.⁴⁵

³⁹ See, for example, OHCHR press statements from the past 24 months:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/turk-warns-deepening-clampdown-freedom-expression-across-middle-east>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/07/uganda-crackdown-fundamental-freedoms>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/cameroon-restrictions-civic-space-risk-undermining-presidential-election>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/comment-un-human-rights-chief-volker-turk-russian-designation-memorial>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/uk-palestine-action-ban-disturbing-misuse-uk-counter-terrorism-legislation>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/05/turk-calls-tunisia-end-repressive-measures-against-civil-society-and-media>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/burkina-faso-turk-calls-authorities-halt-rapid-closure-civic-space>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-human-rights-chief-calls-repeal-new-media-law-maldives>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/nicaragua-un-report-highlights-continued-human-rights-violations-and-erosion>.

⁴⁰ See public press statements by United Nations independent human rights mechanisms at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/latest>.

⁴¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/civicspace/resources/civic-space-cybercrime-convention-brief.pdf>.

⁴² Survey response by Eurasian Harm Reduction Association.

⁴³ Survey response by International Drug Policy Consortium.

⁴⁴ See <https://europe.ohchr.org/resources/speeches/op-ed-antisemitism-mr-volker-turk-un-high-commissioner>.

⁴⁵ For example, see statements since September 2024:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/freedom-expression-global-crisis-says-un-expert> (based on <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a79319-global-threats-freedom-expression-arising-conflict-gaza-report>); <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/05/united-kingdom-un-expert-alarmed-systemic-erosion-right-protest>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/france-draft-antisemitism-law-could-seriously-undermine-free-expression-and>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/sweden-un-expert-warns-gradual-erosion-rights-human-rights-defenders>; <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20260206-com-stm->

4. Stigmatizing narratives that undermine civic space and civil society

28. OHCHR and United Nations experts have warned repeatedly over the years that harmful, dehumanizing and stigmatizing narratives – often amplified by social media, algorithms and AI-generated content – are eroding democratic discourse, inflaming polarization and increasing risks of discrimination, hatred and violence, including in the context of elections.⁴⁶ They have stressed that States, political leaders and public officials have a heightened duty not to propagate or legitimize such narratives, and that advocacy of hatred and incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence – even when framed as “political speech” – falls outside the protection of international law and must be addressed with human rights-based safeguards. Human rights mechanisms have also noted that smear campaigns and efforts to discredit journalists, civil society organizations and human rights defenders – including by describing these actors as “foreign agents” or accusing them of engaging in terrorist activities – have chilling effects and have been used to justify further restrictive laws and policies.⁴⁷ Survey respondents highlighted the need to counter narratives that oversimplified complex issues, relied on scapegoating and idealized the past and, rather, to develop alternative, compelling narratives capable of inspiring public support for human rights and human rights defenders.

5. Administrative throttling and legal restrictions

29. The majority of survey respondents pointed to administrative and legal regulations that imposed restrictive requirements, heightened governmental oversight, complex and at times onerous reporting and financial compliance requirements and procedural and bureaucratic constraints, which limited the independent functioning and sustainability of civil society actors,⁴⁸ including through tax audits and financial inspections,⁴⁹ alongside new burdens created by donors and financial institutions.⁵⁰

30. The Secretary-General,⁵¹ OHCHR⁵² and United Nations experts have also warned that some States impose burdensome registration regimes, intrusive oversight and complex reporting and financial compliance requirements that “divert” civil society resources, constrain operations and enable selective enforcement. It is well documented that States adopt regulatory schemes – often justified on the basis of enhanced transparency, anti-terrorism or security grounds – that combine funding restrictions and administrative controls. These include so-called foreign agent frameworks, justified by some States on the grounds of protecting national security and/or sovereignty from foreign interference, but which in practice subject organizations to onerous audits and overburdening reporting

[europe-central-asia-region-sr-protection-right-en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-urge-germany-halt-criminalisation-and-police-violence-against-students); <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-urge-germany-halt-criminalisation-and-police-violence-against-students>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/switzerland-un-experts-alarmed-criminal-sanctions-against-students>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/deporting-international-students-involved-pro-palestinian-protests-will>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/10/universities-must-respect-peaceful-activism-and-revise-repressive>.

⁴⁶ For example, see A/HRC/63/50. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2026/06/high-commissioner-turk-it-falls-every-generation-renew-democracy>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/01/hc-turk-message-improving-protection-human-rights-defenders>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/09/hc-turk-updates-human-rights-council-we-need-safeguard-eighty-years>; and <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/defending-human-rights-europe-high-stakes-conversation-un-high-commissioner-volker-turk-eesc>.

⁴⁷ For example, see A/HRC/59/33, A/HRC/59/50, A/HRC/60/68 and A/HRC/60/71.

⁴⁸ See also, for example, <https://publications.civicus.org/publications/2025-state-of-civil-society-report/>; and <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/03/americas-estados-intensifican-ofensiva-contra-la-sociedad-civil-mediante-leyes-anti-ong/>.

⁴⁹ See <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/a-new-wave-of-repression-on-civic-space/>.

⁵⁰ See A/HRC/53/38/Add.4.

⁵¹ A/76/273, paras. 22–26; A/78/269, paras. 19–22; and A/80/380, paras. 24–30.

⁵² See A/HRC/57/29.

requirements, and typically carry heavy fines or entail closure or criminal liability for non-compliance, effectively undermining independence and sustainability.⁵³

31. At a systemic level, a global survey across 140 States found that legal and administrative frameworks – including those governing freedom of association and the funding and operations of civil society organizations – are a defining feature of an enabling (or disabling) environment for human rights defenders.⁵⁴ Administrative restrictions adopted in the context of countering terrorism have included burdensome registration requirements, reporting and funding restrictions, travel bans, movement controls and revocation or deprivation of citizenship, often imposed without safeguards. For example, 57.6 per cent of the cases examined by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the subject of undue regulation and registration of women’s organizations during the period 2010–2022 pertained to restrictions on the basis of counter-terrorism.⁵⁵

6. Funding restrictions and cuts

32. Over 70 per cent of survey respondents reported that funding for civil society had either decreased significantly or been stopped. The significant cuts in international aid budgets since early 2025, notably by the United States of America and other major donors, has had a profound impact on civil society across the globe. For example, the NGO Article 19 reported that cuts by the United States in the first half of 2025 had led to approximately 10,000 organizations being defunded – reducing media protection and leaving up to 2 billion people at increased risk of censorship and repression worldwide.⁵⁶ Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported that abrupt, large-scale cuts in United States foreign assistance had had major effects on the ability of civil society to operate and ensure accountability. In the European Union, almost 44 per cent of the civil society organizations that took part in a consultation conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights had experienced unexpected funding cuts, freezes or reductions in 2025, with 39 per cent stating that the cuts threatened part of their work.⁵⁷

33. Global aid cuts have also negatively affected women’s rights organizations, undermining protections against gender-based violence and risking the reversal of gender equality gains. Nearly 90 per cent of 428 women’s rights organizations that took part in a study by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) reported reduced access to services for women and girls, and only 5 per cent anticipated being able to sustain their operations beyond two years.⁵⁸

34. Studies show that “foreign agent” laws also reduce civil society access to funding by deterring organizations from accepting foreign support, and in some cases forcing them to cease operations altogether. The stigmatizing labelling associated with such laws, combined with onerous administrative and reporting requirements, restricts the ability of organizations to operate effectively and safely.⁵⁹

7. Participation deficits

35. Meaningful and inclusive participation, including in policymaking at all levels, has become easier, as digital tools facilitate accessing information and giving feedback. However, close to 40 per cent of survey respondents reported that State authorities had taken

⁵³ See A/HRC/56/50, A/HRC/59/44, A/79/263, A/80/219 and A/80/341. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/peru-impact-international-cooperation-law-ngos>.

⁵⁴ A/73/215, para. 42; and A/HRC/53/38/Add.4 (on access to funding).

⁵⁵ Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, *Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism on Civil Society and Civic Space*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ See <https://www.article19.org/resources/targeted/>.

⁵⁷ See <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2026/civic-space-update>.

⁵⁸ See <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/at-risk-and-underfunded-how-funding-cuts-are-threatening-efforts-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf>, p. 15.

⁵⁹ See, for example, https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/foreign-influence-report_Jan_2025_update.pdf; and <https://eusee.hivos.org/foreign-agents-laws-stigmatising-civil-society-and-choking-funding-flows/>.

no measures to enable civil society contributions, and that participation practices were often tokenistic, ad hoc or controlled by Governments. Patterns and hurdles that have been identified are set out in the paragraphs below.

36. **Consultation without influence.** Interlocutors noted practices whereby authorities claimed public backing through participatory processes; however, the outcomes of such processes were either ignored or excluded relevant critical civil society voices.⁶⁰ While inclusive participation improves the quality of solutions and governance effectiveness, performative processes that exclude critical voices weaken policy design and legitimacy and ultimately increase distrust in public processes.⁶¹

37. **Co-optation by State and non-State actors.** Interlocutors described a trend whereby parts of civil society were co-opted by political leadership or other actors and take advantage of participatory processes to advance and defend the political interests of Governments or groups they are aligned with.⁶² This includes the role of so-called government-organized NGOs, which have been found to crowd out independent civil society groups, including in intergovernmental processes. Selective inclusion in national dialogues or policymaking has become more common, with Governments seeking to exclude dissenting voices or to favour aligned actors, resulting in participation that is invited, filtered and not safe for critics.⁶³ Certain economic sectors, such as the fossil fuel sector, may also be overrepresented in national and international forums as a result of sponsoring civil society organizations defending their interests.⁶⁴

38. **Challenges to equality.** Actors seeking to reopen discussions on rights universally agreed and enunciated in the International Bill of Human Rights, such as equality and non-discrimination, have selectively adopted human rights language and occupied human rights spaces.

39. **Strategic lawsuits against public participation.** OHCHR and United Nations human rights mechanisms have documented the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation as a tactic to stifle public participation,⁶⁵ including by misusing defamation and other laws to intimidate activists, journalists and human rights defenders.⁶⁶ They have called for measures to counter strategic lawsuits against public participation and have reminded businesses⁶⁷ of their responsibility not to use them. By exploiting power asymmetries and imposing financial, psychological and legal burdens, these lawsuits undermine freedom of expression, restrict public debate and erode the enabling environment for civic engagement and democratic accountability.⁶⁸ Although it is difficult to compile global data regarding cases of

⁶⁰ See <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/unmasking-citizenwashing-dos-and-donts-participation/conclusions-and-recommendations>.

⁶¹ See <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/open-government-foundations-mainstreaming-participation/>.

⁶² See <https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Sebastien-Peyrouse-Unmasking-GONGOS-as-Agents-of-Illiberalism-2024-2.pdf>.

⁶³ See, for example, the survey responses by Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, Good Governance Africa, Human Rights Measurement Initiative, Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, MY World Mexico. See also <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Civic-space-v1-1%281%29.pdf>.

⁶⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20251110-eom-stm-geneva-sr-protection-context-en.pdf>.

⁶⁵ See, for example, A/HRC/50/29; and <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/briefer-the-impact-slapps-hr-how-resond.pdf>.

⁶⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/05/thailand-un-experts-condemn-use-defamation-laws-silence-human-rights>.

⁶⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/un-experts-concerned-systematic-use-slapp-cases-against-human-rights>.

⁶⁸ See, for example, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/strategic-lawsuits-against-freedom-expression-how-justice-can-respond>, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33161/html> and https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/2021_SLAPPs_Briefing_EN_v657.pdf.

strategic lawsuits against public participation, due to underreporting, at least 1,303 such cases were documented in Europe between 2010 and 2024.⁶⁹

8. Transnational repression

40. While transnational repression is not a new phenomenon, it has become increasingly routine and systematic, and marked by an expanding toolkit that blends physical, legal and digital coercion, as the High Commissioner has repeatedly stated.⁷⁰ The Human Rights Council has expressed grave concern about repressive activities conducted by States to harm, silence and intimidate civil society actors abroad through digital, physical and other means, including through the misuse of spyware and other intrusive surveillance software.⁷¹ United Nations experts have warned that exile “too often” fails to provide safety, citing cases of assassination, abduction, prosecution in absentia and retaliation against relatives, and a surge in online violence, hacking and targeted digital surveillance, with women journalists facing heightened risks,⁷² a pattern that has been also recognized by some States.⁷³ United Nations experts have documented cases of transnational repression globally and in specific countries⁷⁴ and treaty bodies have explicitly called upon States to halt cross-border human rights abuses. Furthermore, civil society has documented incidents of transnational repression and has reported widely on the issue for over a decade.⁷⁵

IV. Practices for safeguarding civic space

41. Across regions, a range of practices can be identified that, when grounded in genuine political commitment, adequate resources, access to information and transparency, enforcement mechanisms and consistent implementation, can enable people to participate in decision-making more meaningfully. States’ responses, as well as those of national human rights institutions and other organizations, to the online survey launched by OHCHR, offer a menu of approaches that can inform practical reforms, deepen accountability and reinforce the enabling environment in which the public, civil society, journalists and human rights defenders can participate safely and effectively.

42. The practices reported by States illustrate a spectrum of efforts: opening decision-making to public input and information access; strengthening protection and remedies against intimidation and abuse; and supporting civil society through funding, facilitation and structured engagement. The overarching lesson is that legal and institutional design matters, but that impact ultimately depends on implementation, resourcing and political willingness to protect and expand civic space in practice.

A. Innovative practices to hear people’s voices and to foster participation and access to information

43. Some States highlighted avenues for participation in public decision-making that sought to move beyond ad hoc consultations and towards structured and predictable engagement. The parliament of Chile promoted participation by citizens in legislative

⁶⁹ See <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/publications/case-2025-report-on-slapps-in-europe/>.

⁷⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/transnational-repression-1-en.pdf>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/01/hc-turk-message-improving-protection-human-rights-defenders>; and <https://europe.ohchr.org/resources/speeches/transnational-repression-mapping-trends-and-improving>.

⁷¹ Human Rights Council resolutions 58/18, 58/23, 59/1, 59/10, 59/15, 60/21 and 60/23.

⁷² See, for example, A/HRC/56/53.

⁷³ See <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2025/06/17/g7-leaders-statement-transnational-repression>.

⁷⁴ See, for example, A/HRC/56/53 and A/HRC/56/24.

⁷⁵ See, for example, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2026/collaboration-and-resistance-tracking-transnational-repression-2025>; and <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/22/we-will-find-you/global-look-how-governments-repress-nationals-abroad>.

processes through public hearings and citizen forums, and the executive branch carried out in-person and virtual citizen consultations, preceded by training for community leaders and NGO representatives on channels for participation. In Ireland, citizens' assemblies involved the wider public in considering constitutional, legal and policy issues, through structured deliberations in groups that were representative of the population, with submissions, recommendations and government responses published online. The resulting inputs were subsequently debated in the country's parliament. Maldives set up the Civil Society Parliamentary Network, led by the People's Majlis, which was designed to provide a structured bridge through which civil society organizations could contribute to lawmaking; moreover, in February 2026, it had launched the Electronic Petition System, which enabled citizens to submit petitions and to track their progress online – an approach that could lower barriers to participation and improve transparency with regard to how civic inputs were processed.

44. Several States emphasized participatory governance mechanisms anchored in executive-level coordination. Armenia reported having established the Participatory and Open Governance Department within the Prime Minister's Office, tasked with coordinating engagement with civil society and strengthening participatory mechanisms, including public councils under the Prime Minister and selected government bodies, with rules promoting inclusivity through regional representation and mandatory rotation. Armenia also reported the use of digital platforms to facilitate consultations and submissions, reflecting an effort to institutionalize accessible channels for public input. Italy had adopted an Open Government Partnership participation model, which featured mandatory public debates on public works, and had developed an open-source platform to enable online participatory processes across central and local administrations.

45. Numerous States referred to access to information, transparency and review mechanisms as being core enabling conditions for meaningful participation. Armenia had inaugurated a digital monitoring system linked to its national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up framework, intended to systematize recommendations from United Nations and Council of Europe mechanisms and to strengthen transparency by making information publicly accessible, encouraging civil society engagement through searchable interfaces and coordinated focal points. Maldives reported that its Right to Information Act required proactive publication of information by public bodies and that the Information Commissioner's Office independently reviewed refusals, with an additional avenue of appeal available through the courts. In Romania, Act No. 544/2001 provided both proactive disclosure and disclosure upon request, including specific deadlines, and a remedy path from administrative complaint to court action under an expedited procedure. Switzerland had created the Interdepartmental Working Group on Influence Activities and Disinformation in 2025, and had carried out consultations on a draft law on communication platforms and search engines, aimed at strengthening digital civic space.

46. Some national human rights institutions and regional organizations provided further insights into existing practices. In Denmark, the Borgerforslag (Citizens' Initiative) provides that the Danish Parliament must discuss an issue when an initiative gathers 50,000 signatures.⁷⁶ In Finland, the Municipalities Act and the Act on Wellbeing Services Counties create opportunities for residents and service users to participate in municipal decision-making through open hearings and discussions, and polling of public opinion, and require each municipality to establish youth, older people's and disability councils.⁷⁷ In the Kingdom of the Netherlands, online consultations enable stakeholders to submit views on draft legislation, complemented by consultation and engagement within legislative processes.⁷⁸ Portugal is reported to have binding rules on public consultations covering all legislative initiatives.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Survey response by the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

⁷⁷ Survey response by Human Rights Centre of Finland.

⁷⁸ Survey response by the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights.

⁷⁹ Survey response by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

B. Measures to ensure protection and access to justice

47. States reported a range of measures intended to protect those who participate in public life – particularly journalists, NGOs and human rights defenders – against intimidation, harassment and violence, and to strengthen remedies. Protective mechanisms for human rights defenders and journalists included institutional and procedural mechanisms that could improve safety, reporting and follow-up to threats. Measures to restrict the use of spyware and surveillance technology are covered in a separate report.⁸⁰

48. Ireland established a Media Engagement Group in 2022, in coordination with regulators and government departments, to which media companies can report incidents involving media workers to a Garda media engagement officer. Since 2005, Ireland has operated a temporary relocation scheme for human rights defenders, in partnership with Front Line Defenders (with 1,206 protection grants provided in 2024, of which 45 per cent supported temporary relocation). Switzerland adopted a national action plan for the safety of media professionals in 2024, has actively contributed to mechanisms supporting journalists, including through legal aid, and has supported the Council of Europe platform on the protection of journalists. Mexico had strengthened its protection mechanism for defenders and journalists, providing measures such as personal protection, alerts, relocation and infrastructure protection, with civil society participation, and has taken steps to strengthen the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression to investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists.

49. Regional organizations and national human rights institutions also provided examples. Denmark updated guidelines in 2025 to support electoral candidates in preventing and managing harassment and threats and to strengthen democratic safeguards, including through higher penalties for threats and harassment against them.⁸¹ In Guatemala, the Public Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala 2025–2035 was approved in July 2025, as a concrete State action to comply with a judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and referencing the participation of defenders and civil society in norm drafting.⁸² In July 2023, the Kingdom of the Netherlands criminalized doxxing – making personal data available online with an intent to intimidate or harass.⁸³ In Peru, the Intersectoral Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, established in 2021, included a portal to register risk situations and coordinate protective measures for activists, including Indigenous Peoples.⁸⁴ In Spain, the creation of the Independent Authority for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination, and the operationalization of the Independent Authority for Whistle-blower Protection in 2025, provided additional guarantees.⁸⁵

50. Civil society reported that, in Colombia, formal dialogue spaces – such as the Mesa Nacional de Garantías and regional or local round tables – had facilitated discussions between human rights defenders and authorities on protection policies, including inputs from communities in remote areas.⁸⁶

C. Measures to support civil society, including funding

51. A third cluster of practices concerned providing support to civil society, particularly financial support and engagement structures that could strengthen sustainability, including through direct channels to support grass-roots actors and defenders. Ireland provided substantial financial support to over 400 NGOs across 111 countries in 2024, through Irish Aid, and its Civil Society Partnership for a Better World funding scheme (2023–2027) had an annual budget of €100 million and provided multi-year flexible funding specifically to Irish international NGOs. Such multi-year and flexible modalities were often associated with

⁸⁰ [A/HRC/63/52](#).

⁸¹ Survey response by the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

⁸² Survey response by Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos of Guatemala.

⁸³ Survey response by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

⁸⁴ Survey response by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

⁸⁵ Survey response by the Office of the Ombudsperson of Spain.

⁸⁶ Survey response by Protection International.

improved organizational resilience and the ability to respond to evolving needs and risks. In Switzerland, the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs provided direct grants to human rights defenders and supported advocacy activities on their behalf, including through its embassies, which provided small loans to grass-roots organizations for local civil society projects – flexible instruments that could reach actors beyond major funding hubs.

52. Several practices improved resourcing and the administrative environment for civil society, including through tax incentives. For example, in Albania, foreign-funded projects did not incur value added tax. In Italy, Slovenia and Poland, individuals could allocate 0.5 per cent, 1 per cent and 1.5 per cent of their income, respectively, to support civil society.⁸⁷

V. Conclusions and recommendations

53. People everywhere want to have a say when it comes to their future and the future of their loved ones. Increasingly, in many locations and contexts, they are denied the right to influence decisions that shape their lives. Engaging people increases social cohesion, improves the quality and legitimacy of public decision-making and helps prevent crises, as grievances are expressed freely and those in power have the opportunity to respond.

54. There is ample evidence that open and vibrant civic space correlates to improved respect for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is a crucial enabler for preserving basic freedoms, advancing sustainable development, maintaining peace and security and responding to complex and interrelated global challenges. Conversely, civic space restrictions and attacks against critical voices weaken accountability, harm the economy and exacerbate inequalities and tensions. In an increasingly interconnected and rapidly evolving global context, safeguarding civic space, online and offline, is essential to harness collective knowledge, promote innovation and ensure that responses to pressing challenges are grounded in human rights, dignity and inclusiveness. These efforts ultimately contribute to more just and sustainable societies. This understanding is a foundation of the Global Alliance for Human Rights initiative, launched by the High Commissioner in June 2026.⁸⁸

55. The trends identified in the present report point to several cross-cutting challenges. While social movements across the world demonstrate the enduring power of civic engagement and digital tools enable new forms of networked public engagement, civic space faces a sustained – although not uniform – global contraction due to policies, practices and narratives that stigmatize, criminalize and throttle the ability of civil society and, more generally, of citizens to speak freely, associate and assemble peacefully and participate meaningfully in how they are governed.

56. Despite the importance of civic space to more peaceful and prosperous societies and to enjoyment of the full range of human rights, these trends illustrate that a step change is needed. We need not only to push back on the regression we see, but to build greater understanding and support for the need for progress across the globe to secure civic space. With that in mind, the High Commissioner urges all those concerned to implement a six-part transformative approach to secure concrete results:

(a) **Stand in solidarity.** Strengthen collaboration and solidarity across sectors, in particular with civil society actors under threat, including by building coalitions, supporting social movements and fostering alliances beyond traditional actors, to reinforce collective action in defence of democracy, civic space and human rights and to craft effective, victim-focused responses to transnational repression;

⁸⁷ Survey response by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

⁸⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/global-alliance>.

(b) **Uncover and anticipate.** Enhance capacities to detect patterns of restrictions and expose “hidden” strategies that undermine civic space, including digital threats, the weaponization of criminal and administrative law and the evolving role of non-State actors, and to respond, by creating safe spaces for joined-up strategizing, sharing of lessons learned and shared protection infrastructures;

(c) **Invest.** Identify new funding models, anchored in local contexts, to ensure sustainability, possibly through alternative financing mechanisms such as decentralized funding pools, public-private partnerships and self-sustaining revenue models for non-profits;

(d) **Enhance protection.** Expand shared protection infrastructure – such as coordination spaces, secure digital platforms, legal aid networks and psychosocial support. Strengthen multi-funder initiatives that improve coordination and maximize collective impact, including incubating dedicated spaces among Governments, philanthropic institutions and multilateral organizations to resource a more agile and effective protection ecosystem;

(e) **Inspire.** Shape new narratives, including finding ways to make the value of civic space resonate and bring people together, and connect to concepts that most audiences value (safety, prosperity, effective government and dignity) using unifying language to convey that human rights are for everyone;

(f) **Respond to emerging threats.** Anchor digital governance in human rights, and review continuously – based on monitoring, including of surveillance practice, business-related impacts and transnational repression.

57. Those united to protect civic space should engage with States to advocate for their action to address the concerning trends and adopt the good practices discussed in the present report. In particular, the High Commissioner calls upon States to:

(a) **Respect, protect and fulfil the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and participation in public affairs, online and offline, and review, repeal or amend laws and practices that unduly restrict these rights, including those justified on grounds of national security, counter-terrorism, cybercrimes or “foreign interference”;**

(b) **Ensure that measures related to national security, cybersecurity, public order, emergencies and restrictions on fundamental freedoms comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and use of the least intrusive means, prevent the normalization of exceptional powers that undermine civic participation, fundamental freedoms, access to information and oversight, and, when implementing international treaties on cybercrime and counter-terrorism, pay attention to the risks of transnational repression;**

(c) **Implement meaningful, inclusive and safe public participation, including of civil society, including by establishing innovative and safe participatory mechanisms, enabling privacy-respecting online channels, ensuring transparency and systematic feedback on outcomes and proactively reaching out to underrepresented groups;**

(d) **Ensure that participation modalities allow for experimenting and co-design and enable the tracking of impact and the measuring of progress; in this context, learn from the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which guarantee access to environmental information, as well as early, inclusive and informed public participation in public decision-making about the environment;**

(e) **Enable civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists, academia and other actors to operate safely, prevent attacks and intimidation, including through early warning systems and prompt responses to threats, and provide legal assistance and psychosocial support, paying particular attention to those at heightened risk; support protection networks; and ensure accountability for restrictions and**

attacks, including intimidation, harassment, surveillance, violence and strategic litigation against public participation, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors, including across borders;

(f) Enable peaceful protest and ensure that laws and policies do not criminalize legitimate forms of protest, even when disruptive, in compliance with international law;

(g) Ensure that laws and regulations that govern the digital sphere comply with human rights standards and that platform governance furthers privacy and freedom of expression, overseen by fully independent bodies, subject to independent judicial control;

(h) Ensure that the acquisition, deployment, transfer and export of digital technologies, including those related to digital infrastructure and “smart cities”, in particular surveillance tools, are subject to robust human rights due diligence across their life cycle, including human rights impact assessments and effective oversight, that where risks cannot be adequately mitigated, their use or transfer is suspended or prohibited and that measures are in place to ensure accountability and remedy;

(i) Enact laws and regulations that ensure access to timely and accurate information, including through proactive disclosure of public information and information held by private bodies, essential to protect human rights and ensure effective remedies and independent oversight;

(j) Ensure that civil society actors can seek, receive and use resources, including foreign funding, without undue restrictions, and support sustainable and diversified funding ecosystems, including through tax exemptions and flexible, predictable and coordinated financing approaches;

(k) Counter narratives that portray critical voices as enemies or criminals, particularly when advanced by officials, and refrain from “securitizing” civic space, and recognize, celebrate and craft positive narratives around the vital and transformative role of civil society, including social movements;

(l) Guarantee access to justice and effective remedies in the realm of civic space, including through independent and impartial judicial systems, national human rights institutions that are compliant with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and victim-centred procedures, including for addressing transnational repression and digital harms;

(m) Improve data collection, monitoring and analysis of civic space trends in order to better inform policy responses and prevention, including by increasing transparency and providing access to administrative, judicial and other data, supporting independent data collection by civil society and other actors, developing early warning indicators, addressing structural drivers of restrictions and integrating civic space considerations into policies related to security, digital governance, development and humanitarian action.

58. The United Nations can play a crucial role in advancing the transformative approach outlined above. United Nations entities should recognize civic space as a cross-cutting enabler and precondition for fulfilling the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and should apply a civic space lens when crafting and implementing policies and programmes and in multilateral efforts and development, peace and security and humanitarian contexts.