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Civic Freedom Monitor: Morocco

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Recent Developments

In June 2025, Moroccan CSOs raised alarm over proposed legal amendments that would weaken their role in fighting corruption and defending public funding. The CSO coalition plans to escalate the issue to the United Nations. Specifically, the CSOs denounce Article 3 and Article 7 of a draft reform to the Code of Criminal Procedure. The amendments, which were already approved by the House of Representatives, would restrict CSOs from filing legal complaints in financial crime cases and would set new conditions for launching public legal actions in cases involving public funds. The associations warn that these measures amount to a serious threat to democratic transparency and public accountability. Please see the Pending Regulatory Initiatives and News sections below in this report for more details.

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Morocco play an essential role in promoting democratic development and addressing social, cultural, and environmental issues. Since King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne in 1999, Morocco has undergone a series of major reforms that have shaped the operating environment for civil society. These include the 2002 amendments to the Decree on the Right to Establish Associations and the adoption of a new Constitution in 2011 following popular protests. Together, these reforms expanded the legal space for civil society, granting associations stronger protections and a greater role in governance and policymaking. As a result, Morocco's civil society sector has experienced substantial growth and diversification over the past two decades.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Associations that work on sensitive issues—such as Western Sahara, the monarchy, or religion—continue to face administrative obstacles and other restrictions, both within and beyond the boundaries of the law. Freedoms of expression and assembly, while guaranteed by the Constitution, are also subject to limitations in practice, including vague legal provisions and discretionary enforcement that can hinder civic engagement.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Associations
Registration Body	Headquarters of the Local Administrative Authority, NGOs Directorate
Approximate Number	220,000, according to an April 2020 government estimate

Barriers to Formation	While Moroccan law provides for the registration of associations through a notification process, the process often functions as a de facto prior approval system and can present a significant hurdle for associations. Administrative officials sometimes refuse to issue registration receipts.
Barriers to Operations	Organizations which pursue activities that are “illegal, contrary to good morals, [or which aim] to undermine the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, or the monarchical regime, or call for discrimination” are prohibited.
Barriers to Resources	Legal registration is required to receive funds – including foreign funds – and carry out financial transactions. An additional license is required to collect donations; while the NGOs Directorate generally approves these fundraising licenses, the requirement adds an administrative burden.
Barriers to Expression	The freedom of expression is limited by laws criminalizing criticism of the monarchy, Islam, and the government’s position on territorial integrity and Western Sahara. Journalists and activists face harassment, surveillance, and legal prosecution, leading to widespread self-censorship.
Barriers to Assembly	The law contains broadly worded provisions that grant authorities significant discretion. Assembly organizers are required to “prevent any statement that contradicts with the public order and manners, or that involves incitement for a misdemeanor or a crime.” Government authorities may ban an assembly if they deem it a threat to public security.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Morocco’s legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1979
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1979
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1970
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1993
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	No

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1993
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	1993
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2009

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
Arab Charter on Human Rights	2004**

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

** Signed but not ratified

Note: Morocco withdrew from the African Union in protest at the admission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara).

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The first Moroccan Constitution was adopted in 1962 after the country regained independence from France. The Constitution has undergone a number of revisions, most recently in July 2011 following popular protests and other events of the “Arab Spring.” Following the 2011 amendments, the Constitution provides more expansive rights for civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, and guarantees their freedom to operate in accordance with the Constitution and laws of Morocco. The relevant articles include the following:

Article 12

The associations of civil society and the non-governmental organizations are constituted and exercise their activities in all freedom, within respect for the Constitution and for the law.

They may not be dissolved or suspended by the public powers except by virtue of a judicial decision.

The associations interested in public matters and the non-governmental organizations, contribute, within the framework of participative democracy, to the enactment, the implementation and the evaluation of the decisions and the initiatives of the elected institutions and of the public powers. These institutions and powers must organize this contribution in accordance with the conditions and modalities established by the law.

The organization and functioning of the associations and the non-governmental organizations must conform to democratic principles.

Article 13

The public powers work to the creation of instances of dialogue, with a view to associate the different social actors with the enactment, the implementation, the execution and the evaluation of the public policies.

Article 29

The freedoms of reunion, of assembly, of peaceful demonstration, of association and of syndical and

political membership, are guaranteed.

The right to strike is guaranteed. An organic law establishes the conditions and the modalities of its exercise.

Article 139

The participative mechanisms of dialog and of acting in concert are implemented by the Councils of the regions and the Councils of the other territorial collectivities so as to favor the participation of the citizens and of the associations in the enactment and the application of the programs of development.

The citizens and the associations can exercise the right of petition with a view of demanding the inclusion in the agenda of the Council, a question relevant to its competence.

NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Relevant national legislation includes the following:

- *Decree on the Right to Establish Associations* (Decree 1-58-376 of 1958 as amended by Decree 1-733-283 of 1973 and Decree 1-02-206 of 2002)
- *Decree to Implement the Decree on the Right to Establish Associations* (Prime Ministerial Decree 2-04-969 of 2005) [[English](#)] [[عربي](#)]
- *Circular on the Conditions of Recognizing Public Benefit for Associations* (Circular 1 of 2005) [[English](#)] [[عربي](#)]

PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

In June 2025, Moroccan CSOs raised the alarm over proposed amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, which would weaken their role in fighting corruption. The amendments, which have been approved by the House of Representatives, would restrict CSOs from filing legal complaints in financial crime cases and would set new conditions for launching public legal actions in cases involving public funds. CSOs [warn](#) that these measures amount to a serious threat to democratic transparency and public accountability and “aim to neutralize the essential role civil society plays in fighting impunity and protecting public resources.”

We are unaware of any other pending legislative/regulatory initiatives affecting NGOs. Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Morocco’s legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

The primary legal form for CSOs in Morocco is the association. The right to establish associations is governed by the *Decree on the Right to Establish Associations* (Decree 1-58-376 of 1958, as amended by Decree 1-733-283 of 1973 and Decree 1-02-206 of 2002). The Decree defines an association as “an agreement to achieve constant cooperation between two or more persons using their information or activities for a non-profit purpose.”

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

The *Decree on the Right to Establish Associations*, the *Decree on Public Benefit Status for Associations*, and the *Ministerial Circular on the Requirements and Process of Awarding Public Benefit Status* all establish a procedure through which associations may apply for public benefit status. However, Moroccan law does not define clear criteria for which activities qualify as being of public benefit. Associations that obtain public benefit status are entitled to tax benefits and may apply for government financial support.

The number of associations with this status remains limited. According to a list published by the General Secretariat of the Government in March 2022, only 236 associations (five of which are foreign) have public benefit status, and only three were newly granted that status in 2021.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Constitution provides robust protection for the rights to public participation and access to information (Preamble and Articles 1, 6, 8, 12-15, 19, 27, 33, 136, and 139). Several laws reinforce these rights:

- Organic Law 111.14 on Regions (Articles 116-118) establishes participatory mechanisms in regional councils.
- Organic Law 112.14 on Provinces (Articles 110-112) establishes participatory mechanisms in provincial councils.
- Organic Law 113.14 on Communities (Articles 119-121) establishes participatory mechanisms in the communal councils.
- Organic Laws on Legislative Motions and Petitions allow citizens to submit motions and petitions to government bodies, while the internal bylaws of the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors set out the procedures for submitting legislative motions.

In practice, however, meaningful participation is limited. Participation is further undermined by limited public understanding of legal requirements; lack of capacity-building efforts aimed at familiarizing associations or citizens with participation opportunities; limited public debate on ways to leverage these opportunities; and the absence of best practices on community participation.

The legal framework and state practices also impose restrictions. Article 12 of the Constitution requires public authorities to establish consultative bodies to engage social actors on the enactment, implementation, execution, and evaluation of public policies, but no law defines “public consultation” or outlines how consultation mechanisms should operate. Morocco also lacks a law on associations that is aligned with the 2011 Constitution, preventing CSOs from fully contributing their expertise in human rights and democratic development to policymaking.

Additional procedural barriers hinder participation. To submit a legislative motion, citizens must collect 25,000 signatures; a petition requires 5,000 signatures. Since 2018, the [National Portal for Citizen Participation](#) has provided an online mechanism for submitting motions and petitions to parliament, public authorities, and local councils.

While the Constitution and organic laws mandate participation opportunities for marginalized groups, implementation is inconsistent. Authorities retain discretion over how to design participatory mechanisms, resulting in uneven practices. Some councils, for example, reserve seats in consultative bodies for women or persons with disabilities, while others do not.

BARRIERS TO FORMATION

Moroccan law provides for the establishment and registration of associations through a notification process. In practice, however, the process often functions as a de facto prior approval system and can present a significant hurdle for associations.

Article 2 of the Decree on the Right to Establish Associations (Decree 1-58-376) states that “associations can be freely established without prior permission, provided that” the notification process is followed.

Under Article 5, associations seeking legal personality must file a notification with the Local Administrative Authority where the organization’s headquarters are located. The notification must include: the association’s name and purpose; the name, nationality, age, profession, residence, and national or foreign ID of its founders; and the address of its headquarters.

Once a complete application has been submitted, the law requires a receipt to be delivered within 60 days. If no response is issued, the association is legally entitled to commence activities.

In practice, however, authorities often refuse to accept notification documents or fail to issue the required receipt. Without a registration receipt, associations are effectively denied legal personality. While unregistered associations may operate informally, legal personality is required to conduct financial transactions, including receiving and managing funds to support their activities.

Article 3 of the Decree prohibits the formation of associations whose objectives are “illegal, contrary to good morals, [or which aim] to undermine the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, or the monarchical regime, or call for discrimination.” Moroccan authorities frequently invoke this vaguely-worded provision to refuse to accept the notification of organizations, particularly those linked to Amazigh (native Berber) and Sahrawi (Western Saharan) communities. Among the groups denied registration on this basis are the Iz’uran Association, the Imal Association, and the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations Committed by the Moroccan State.

BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

The Decree on the Right to Establish Associations (Decree 1-58-376) and the Criminal Code of Morocco prohibit membership in groups deemed seditious, violent, or linked to terrorist activities. Aiding terrorism is punishable by lengthy prison terms and, in some cases, the death penalty. Participation in an association with the “features of special armed groups” or that “may affect the unity of the national territory” is punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment.

These provisions have been applied against civil society actors. In June 2009, for example, the Casablanca Court of First Instance sentenced the Amazigh president of the Rif Human Rights Association to three years in prison for “insulting behavior towards State institutions” and for receiving foreign funds allegedly intended to “undermine and discredit the Moroccan authorities’ efforts in the fight against drug trafficking.”

BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

There are few legal barriers to resource mobilization, whether the funding originates domestically or from abroad. The main obstacle for associations is the need to obtain legal registration, without which they cannot conduct financial transactions, as noted above. In addition, associations must secure a separate license to collect donations. While the NGOs Directorate generally approves these fundraising licenses, the requirement adds an administrative burden.

Foreign funding is not subject to significant restrictions, and in practice many organizations receive support from international sources.

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

Morocco's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but this right is significantly limited in practice by laws criminalizing criticism of the monarchy, Islam, and the government's position on territorial integrity and Western Sahara. Journalists and activists face harassment, surveillance, and legal prosecution, leading to widespread self-censorship. While a 2016 press law abolished prison sentences for press offenses, penalties are still imposed, and sensitive topics remain off-limits for critical reporting.

The High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HACA) is tasked with ensuring respect for media

pluralism. In June 2018, it issued Decision 20-18 on ensuring the pluralistic expression of the currents of thought and opinion in audiovisual communication services.

BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

Article 29 of Morocco's 2011 Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, stating: "The freedoms of reunion, of assembly, of peaceful demonstration... are guaranteed." This right is regulated by Law 76 on Public Assemblies (2002), which supplements Decree No. 1-58-377. Despite these protections, the legal framework is not widely publicized, and many CSOs are unfamiliar with its provisions.

Vague Provisions

Law 76 contains broadly-worded clauses that grant authorities significant discretion. Chapter 6, for instance, requires organizers of assemblies to "prevent any statement that contradicts with the public order and manners, or that involves incitement for a misdemeanor or a crime." Chapter 13 allows local authorities to ban an assembly if they deem it a threat to public security. Terms such as "public order and manners," and "public security" are undefined, enabling restrictive interpretations.

Advance Notification

Chapter 3 requires organizers of public meetings to notify the local administrative authorities at least 24 hours in advance and obtain a stamped receipt. The notification must specify the meeting's date, time, place, and purpose of the meeting, and the names, professions, and addresses of three residents of the province where the meeting will occur. Public meetings may be held 24 hours after the stamped receipt is obtained.

Only legally established groups—including associations, political parties, unions, or professional bodies—may organize demonstrations on public roads. Organizers must notify authorities at least three days in advance (Chapter 12). The statement must include: the organizers' names, nationalities, residences, and identification numbers; the demonstration's venue, date, time, route, and purpose; and the signatures of three individuals who live in the province where the demonstration is planned.

For both public meetings and demonstrations on public roads, if the organizers are unable to obtain a stamped receipt, they may send the authorities a registered letter containing the same information. However, the law does not require the authorities to provide either the stamped receipt or acknowledgement of receipt of the registered letter. In practice, this enables authorities to block assemblies, often on political or cultural grounds.

Local administrative authorities may also ban demonstrations they consider a threat to public security (Chapter 13). The ban must be served in writing to the organizers at their places of residence. Although organizers may challenge such decisions in administrative court, proceedings are slow and rarely effective.

Spontaneous Demonstrations

The law does not provide for spontaneous assemblies. Without prior notification, spontaneous public meetings and demonstrations risk being treated as "mobs" and prohibited. An exception exists for assemblies linked to local customs, with Chapter 11 of Law 76 providing that "assemblies on public roads that are according to local customs shall be exempted from permit requirement." Examples of such assemblies are weddings, circumcision celebrations, and funerals.

Time, Place, Manner Restrictions

Assemblies are prohibited after midnight or beyond the timeframe specified in the notification permit. The local administrative authority may alter a demonstration's route or timing for reasons such as traffic interference or security. The authority may also prohibit the display of emblems, flags, or other symbols in public places, via a written decision.

Fines and Criminal Penalties

Violations of Law 76 carry criminal penalties. Chapter 9 sets fines of MAD 2,000 to 5,000 (USD \$220 to 550 as of September 2025). More serious sanctions apply for infractions such as submitting misleading declarations or attempting to engage participants in undeclared or prohibited demonstrations: fines of MAD 2,000–10,000 (USD 220–1,100) and prison terms of one to six months. Repeat offenses may be punished by one to two months' imprisonment and a fine of MAD 2,000 to 10,000 (USD 220–1,100).

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	120 (2023)	1 - 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	92 (2024)	1 - 142
Transparency International	99 (2024)	1 - 180
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index	84 (2024)	179 - 1
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Partly Free Political Rights: 13 Civil Liberties: 24 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0

REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Morocco UPR page
UN Human Rights Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morocco OHCHR page• Morocco special procedures visits
U.S. State Department	2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Morocco
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index Reports	Morocco
IMF Country Reports	Morocco and the IMF
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	Morocco

NEWS

[Moroccan NGOs Sound Alarm over Legal Reforms](#) (June 2025)

A coalition of Moroccan CSOs has raised alarm over proposed legal amendments that they say would

weaken their role in fighting corruption and defending public funds. In response, the coalition has announced plans to escalate the issue to the United Nations. At a press conference held at the headquarters of Transparency Maroc, the group denounced two articles — Article 3 and Article 7 — of a draft reform to the Code of Criminal Procedure. The changes, already approved by the first chamber of Parliament- House of Representatives-would restrict NGOs from filing legal complaints in financial crime cases and set new conditions for launching public legal actions in cases involving public funds.

[Morocco restricts civil society's role in anti-corruption cases](#) (November 2024)

The Moroccan government has stirred controversy with its recent decision to bar NGOs from initiating legal action in cases involving the misuse of public funds and property unless requested by the public prosecutor. The move, approved in late August by the Government Council as part of Bill 03.23 amending the criminal procedure law, has drawn criticism from NGOs, which argue it undermines their crucial role in fighting corruption. According to a commentary published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on October 31, the draft amendment pending parliamentary approval “has ignited significant political controversy.” The author notes that before Bill 03.23, anti-corruption NGOs in Morocco “held the authority to initiate legal action against civil servants and elected officials suspected of embezzlement or corruption.”

[In Morocco, civil society bears burden of aid after the earthquake](#) (September 2023)

On the second day after the largest earthquake registered in the North African country, it is civil society that seems to be largely taking care of the victims. There are endless caravans of private vehicles transporting humanitarian aid for the victims of the earthquake that struck southern Morocco, killing over 2,100 people, injuring another 2,400 and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

ARCHIVED NEWS

[The draft law regulating collecting donations from the public is restrictive](#) (July 2022) (Arabic)

[The law regulating contractual voluntary work in Morocco is in force](#) (August 2021) (Arabic)

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<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/morocco>