

STRENGTHENING CIVIC SPACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN WEST AFRICA

Location: Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal

Timeframe: 2025–2027

Funding Request: EUR 3 million

SUMMARY

UN Human Rights is uniquely positioned—through its mandate, field presence, and trusted relationships—to monitor, report, and advocate for human rights across West Africa’s diverse national contexts. Civic space across West Africa is facing unprecedented pressure. Governments are increasingly resorting to restrictive laws, arbitrary arrests, digital surveillance, and the silencing of civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders. This erosion of fundamental freedoms not only undermines democratic governance and accountability but also fuels instability across the region. As civic space continues to shrink and human rights crises intensify, with a growing risk of regional spillover, the Office plays a vital role in reinforcing civil society resilience, promoting international accountability, and strengthening national protection systems.

By investing in UN Human Rights, donors help **prevent escalation, strengthen civic resilience, and promote democratic governance rooted in human rights**. The Office’s work enables early warning, supports legal and institutional reforms, and safeguards fundamental freedoms, which are anchored in judicial independence and civic participation. UN Human Rights brings trusted access to national institutions and civil society networks, deep expertise in legal frameworks and international human rights mechanisms, early warning and prevention capacity, support for national protection systems and judicial independence, and field-based monitoring and reporting that informs global advocacy and action.

In **Senegal** and **Benin**, recent political transitions have opened new opportunities for dialogue and reform. Yet, legal restrictions, harassment of the press, and misuse of counter-terrorism laws continue to constrain civic participation. In **Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger**, military authorities have suspended political parties, dissolved associations, and closed independent media, leaving civil society actors vulnerable and without institutional protection. **Regional fragmentation**, including the withdrawal of these countries from ECOWAS, has further weakened accountability mechanisms. In **Burkina Faso**, civic space is restricted in the name of security imperatives, reflecting a lack of political will and an institutional culture of impunity. It cannot, therefore, be addressed in isolation, and programmatic responses must focus on accountability and improving the legal framework, through, among other measures, structured dialogue and enhancing technical skills. UN Human Rights’ engagement is grounded in the Government’s acceptance of 11 UPR recommendations related to civic space, including the imperative to safeguard freedom of the press and expression from undue interference. The initiative aims to operationalise the national consultation framework on civic space, while upholding a ‘do no harm’ principle to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants.

To respond, UN Human Rights proposes the project “**Strengthening Civic Space and Human Rights Protection in West Africa**” (2025–2027). With a dual strategy, the initiative will:

- Enhance the engagement of relevant national human rights institutions and civic actors with human rights mechanisms regarding freedom of expression and opinion, as well as freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Increase alternative reporting to these mechanisms and follow up on the implementation of their outcomes by state actors.
- Strengthen legal, regulatory, institutional, and policy frameworks related to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly to better protect civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and media professionals.

Through targeted advocacy, capacity-building, and strategic partnerships, the project aims to create an enabling environment that promotes the safe and practical contributions of civic actors to democratic governance and accountability.

The initiative will be coordinated by the UN Human Rights Regional Office for West Africa (WARO) and, in the case of Burkina Faso and Niger, led by the OHCHR presences there, in close collaboration with national institutions, civil society, and UN partners, ensuring a results-based and evidence-driven approach.

By investing in this initiative, donors will help safeguard civic space, strengthen accountability, and support resilient, rights-respecting societies across West Africa at a critical juncture for the region's democratic future.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGE

"We are seeing worrying signs of undue restrictions on civil society and independent journalism, creating a climate of increasing fear and self-censorship. There should be zero tolerance for harassment and intimidation of independent lawyers, journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders."
– Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights¹

As **Benin** approaches its 2026 general elections, civic space remains fragile and increasingly constrained. Despite constitutional guarantees, restrictions on freedom of expression, media independence, and peaceful assembly persist as significant challenges. Journalists and media outlets face censorship, financial pressure, and threats of suspension, contributing to widespread self-censorship. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders operate under repressive legal frameworks, including provisions in the Criminal and Digital Codes, which have been used to silence dissent. Restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly persist, with specific laws, such as the 2018 Criminal Code, the 2018 Digital Code (as amended in 2020), and the Law

regarding the exercise of the right to strike (as amended in 2022), limiting these fundamental freedoms. Following a visit to Benin in 2024, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism expressed concern about the misuse of counter-terrorism laws against civil society and highlighted how these provisions "may interfere with the rights of human rights defenders, political activists and journalists and the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and access to information." The Government appears to be deliberately using the security situation in the northern regions as a pretext to suppress dissent and silence critical voices. Since 2019, "hundreds of arrests, many seemingly arbitrary or without adequate notice of reasons for arrest, have been made in connection with terrorism-related crimes". Many individuals remain in pretrial detention for years awaiting resolution of their cases before the Court for the Repression of Economic Crimes and Terrorism (CRIET). An analysis of the legal and institutional framework in Benin, with targeted advocacy, aims to reduce the risk of deepening public mistrust and marginalising voices critical to democratic governance.

In **Senegal**, following a period of political unrest and civic repression, the election of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye in March 2024 marked a turning point for Senegal's democratic trajectory. While his administration has raised hopes for a more open and accountable government, the civic space remains fragile. Civil society continues to operate in a context shaped by years of restrictive laws, arbitrary arrests, and digital censorship. Cybersecurity and anti-terrorism laws are sometimes used to limit civic space, suppress dissent, and control access to information. Journalists, influencers, and human rights activists face threats such as censorship, surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and, in some cases, physical violence. Access to information is hindered by media shutdowns, the expulsion of correspondents, and targeted internet blackouts. Although President Faye has pledged to restore press freedom and protect fundamental rights, early signs—including the persistence of media harassment and the controversial amnesty law shielding past abuses—highlight the urgent need for sustained reform.

Regional cooperation in the Sahel is increasingly fragmented, with the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States/Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) by **Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, and their withdrawal from ECOWAS, effective February 2025, further weakening** the regional human rights accountability mechanisms. While each of the three countries has its specificities, there are overarching regional dynamics that impact the enjoyment of human

rights, namely increasing attacks by armed groups, serious human rights violations during counter-terrorism operations committed with widespread impunity, extensions of transitional periods without elections, and weak governance and State presence. Civic space is facing unprecedented repression. Since the wave of coups, transitional authorities have systematically cracked down on civil society, independent media, and political opposition, shrinking the space for democratic participation and silencing dissenting voices as part of highly militarised responses to armed extremism. Cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances and judicial harassment of human rights defenders, civil society and political actors, and media professionals have become widespread tools of control. In this context, civil society actors are increasingly vulnerable, operating under threat and without the institutional protection they need. NGOs have been suspended, political parties banned, and draconian new laws have been introduced to curtail media freedom and freedom of association. This shrinking civic space undermines democratic governance, weakens accountability, and threatens regional stability.

"Civic space is a human rights issue, it is a peace issue, it is a development issue. It is key for sustainable and resilient societies, yet it is under increasing pressure from undue restrictions and repressive laws."
– Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights¹

In **Burkina Faso**, since the 2022 coup d'état, all activities of political and civil society organisations have remained suspended, while civic, political, and humanitarian spaces continue to shrink dramatically. Authorities continue to carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, and targeted conscription into the security and defence forces—including their voluntary auxiliaries (*Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie - VDPs*) of representatives of the civil society, the media, and political parties. In mid-2025, a new law on freedom of association was introduced, along with an extensive monitoring

mechanism that requires administrative authorities to report on the activities and finances of associations. This Law also extends authorities' powers to suspend or dissolve organisations on vague grounds, such as "public order" and "morality," without providing access to legal recourse. The Law also imposes stricter requirements on foreign associations, including the mandatory appointment of Burkinabè nationals as both representative and financial officer. Authorities also suspended at least seven international humanitarian NGOs on grounds that were not clearly defined, such as unauthorised data collection or "public order and security". Authorities also continue to suspend international and national media outlets in response to perceived criticism. On 30 July 2025, the Council of Ministers adopted a draft law on the Press and Audiovisual Communication, which would reintroduce custodial sentences for press offences. If adopted, this would represent a significant setback for press freedom in Burkina Faso, which had decriminalised press offences in 2015. In addition, a draft law amending the Penal Code would reintroduce the death penalty for offences relating to "terrorism" and attacks on State security, which could be used to orchestrate reprisals against real or perceived critics of the authorities. The combined effect of these measures increased distrust of security institutions, discouraged community reporting of violations, isolated communities and undermined early warning.

In **Mali**, civic and democratic space have continued to shrink as illustrated by the continued arbitrary arrests and detentions, threats, harassment, intimidation, and enforced disappearances of journalists, bloggers, and civil society activists, the dissolution of civil society organisations and associations, the politically-motivated prosecution of civil society and political actors, media professionals and researchers on trumped-up charges, and the suspension of media outlets, which have forced several actors to practise self-censorship or withdraw from public debate. The specialised cybercrime Court ("*Pôle national de lutte contre la cybercriminalité*") and the media regulator ("*Haute Autorité de la Communication*") (HAC) have played a significant role in restricting civic space, including by a broad implementation of the Malian anti-cybercrime legislation against dissenters through vague offences such as "undermining the credibility of the state" (*atteinte au crédit de l'Etat*), which have landed many dissenting voices in prison. On 8 July 2025, Mali's Transitional President promulgated a law amending the transitional charter granting him a five-year presidential term, renewable "as many times as necessary, until peace is restored in the country, without requiring an election. This followed other draconian legislation, including the presidential decree of 7 May 2025 suspending the activities of political parties; a presidential decree of 13 May 2025 dissolving all political parties and "organisations of a political nature"; the Law of 13 May 2025 repealing the 2005 Charter of Political Parties and the 2015 Law on the Status of the Political Opposition.

In **Niger**, following the July 2023 coup, the transitional authorities banned public demonstrations and suspended the activities of political parties. On 26 March 2025, the authorities officially dissolved all political parties. Additionally, a series of legal and judicial measures have been implemented that significantly erode guarantees of press freedom. These include the suspension of the *Maison de la Presse*, a key institutional platform for media professionals, in January 2024, the suspension of three major international media outlets in the country and the adoption of Ordinance No. 2024-28 on the repression of cybercrime in June 2024. This ordinance criminalises defamation and insult committed via electronic means. Since the coup of July 2023, UN Human Rights has been documenting the arrest and detention of political activists, human rights defenders, members of civil society organisations, and journalists, frequently stigmatised as foreign agents collaborating with external powers. This situation has resulted in a climate of fear among journalists and human rights activists, with the majority of whom having resorted to self-censorship to avoid any tensions with the new authorities.

"We are not asking for privilege—we are asking for protection. Our work is legal, peaceful, and essential to our communities. When civic space shrinks, our voices disappear."

— Human rights defender, UN Human Rights-led global civic space consultation

APPROACH AND EXPECTED RESULTS

GOAL: ENHANCING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION AS WELL AS FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION AND PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS.

To achieve that goal in West Africa, UN Human Rights will pursue a dual strategy focused on strengthening both institutional engagement with human rights mechanisms and the legal and policy environment that governs civic space. This involves building the capacities of civil society actors, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), human rights defenders (HRDs), and media professionals to engage effectively with these mechanisms, utilise their outcomes strategically for advocacy, and participate in multi-stakeholder platforms that foster dialogue and coordination. Complementing this, UN Human Rights will conduct legal and policy analysis, produce early warning reports, and advocate for the alignment of national frameworks with international standards. By supporting relevant actors and promoting inclusive, evidence-based advocacy and accountability, UN Human Rights aims to create an enabling environment where civic space is protected and fundamental freedoms are upheld.

OUTCOME 1: IN WEST AFRICA, RELEVANT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIC ACTORS ENHANCE THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS REGARDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION AS WELL AS FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION, AND FOLLOW UP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR OUTCOMES BY STATE ACTORS.

If UN Human Rights strengthens the capacities of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with human rights mechanisms—particularly through the submission of alternative reports, follow-up on recommendations, and strategic advocacy—and if it facilitates the creation and reinforcement of multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue and coordination on civic space, and supports coordinated advocacy efforts using human rights recommendations; **then** in West Africa, NHRIs and civic actors will enhance their engagement with human rights mechanisms regarding freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly, and association; increase the production of alternative reports; and exert greater pressure on State actors to implement the outcomes of these mechanisms, with meaningful participation from civil society and regional institutions.

- 1.1. Capacities of the NHRIs and CSOs to document human rights violations and submit reports to regional and international human rights mechanisms are strengthened.
- 1.2. Capacities of civil society actors and NHRIs to follow up on the HRM outcomes are strengthened.
- 1.3. Multi-stakeholder platforms are established or strengthened to promote dialogue and coordination on civic space and human rights reporting.
- 1.4. Civil society and NHRIs are supported to undertake coordinated advocacy using human rights recommendations to promote civic space and accountability.

OUTCOME 2: LEGAL, REGULATORY, INSTITUTIONAL, AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY ARE STRENGTHENED TO PROTECT BETTER CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS.

If UN Human Rights strengthens its monitoring and produces targeted human rights analysis—whether regional, country-specific, or thematic—for key actors, and if it conducts legal and policy analysis on freedom of expression, press freedom, and peaceful assembly, followed by progressive advocacy to align national frameworks with international standards, and if it deepens partnerships with UN entities and humanitarian organisations to strategically leverage data and analysis for early warning and prevention, and if it builds the capacities of national actors to review and implement laws and practices that protect civic space both online and offline, and if it empowers civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, human rights defenders, and other stakeholders to monitor and address civic space-related risks and violations, and if it engages in strategic advocacy to promote accountability for abuses such as excessive force and arbitrary detention of media professionals and civic actors, **then** national institutions and civil society actors will be better equipped to protect and promote civic space, contribute to legal reforms, respond to human rights violations, and foster democratic resilience through inclusive and rights-based approaches.

- 2.1. Human rights analytical products are produced and shared to inform responses to human rights concerns.
- 2.2. National laws and policies governing freedom of expression, including press freedom and assembly, will be analysed, and advocacy will be conducted to align them with international standards progressively.
- 2.3. Partnerships with UN entities and other partners, including humanitarian organisations, are strengthened to strategically leverage data, information, and analysis, supporting human rights risk analysis for early warning and prevention.
- 2.4. The capacities of national actors to review and implement laws, policies, and practices that protect civic space online and offline, in line with international human rights standards, are strengthened.
- 2.5. Capacities of CSOs, NHRIs, HRDs, and other relevant stakeholders to monitor and address human rights risks and violations related to civic space, both in Law and in practice, are strengthened, both online and offline.
- 2.6. Strategic advocacy initiatives developed and implemented to promote accountability for violations, including excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions of media professionals, CSO representatives, and human rights defenders, helping to rebuild public trust and democratic resilience.

A detailed logframe outlining the expected results, activities, and indicators is provided in **Annexe A**.

GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

The project integrates gender equality and inclusion across all outcomes, outputs and activities, recognising that women, girls, and gender-diverse persons face specific risks when civic space narrows. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs), journalists, and civic leaders are often targeted through gender-based violence, online harassment, and legal intimidation. UN Human Rights will ensure that gender perspectives inform all analysis, monitoring, and advocacy, including through disaggregated data collection and gender-sensitive indicators. Training and capacity-building activities will involve targeted outreach to WHRDs and women-led organisations, aiming to strengthen their participation in decision-making processes and advocacy platforms. Partnerships with women's rights networks and gender focal points within NHRIs will be prioritised to amplify women's voices in national dialogues and to support reforms that address gender-specific barriers to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. This approach is fully aligned with the UN Human Rights Gender Equality Policy. This project will also adopt a range of approaches, including cross-cutting approaches to non-discrimination that meaningfully address the situation of various marginalised groups and communities, including but not only LGBT persons, showcasing how discriminatory laws and practices negatively impact on the enjoyment of human rights of a wide range of individuals, and more broadly, their families, communities, and society as a whole. The Regional Gender Advisor, based in the West Africa Regional Office, will ensure oversight on the project's implementation, and will provide the necessary technical assistance to staff on specific gender-related issues.

SUSTAINABILITY AND EXIT STRATEGY

The project's sustainability is grounded in capacity transfer, national ownership, and institutional integration. By strengthening the technical expertise of national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, and government counterparts, UN Human Rights ensures that the capacities built will endure beyond the project cycle. Activities are designed to embed human rights monitoring and reporting mechanisms—such as National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRFs)—into national systems, promoting self-sustaining processes of accountability and reform. Multi-stakeholder platforms established under the project will continue serving as coordination and dialogue spaces for civic actors and authorities, while strategic partnerships with regional bodies such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and national NHRIs will further anchor sustainability through shared responsibility and policy coherence.

At the same time, a two-year timeframe is necessarily short for the depth of institutional and normative change required. This initiative should therefore be seen not as a stand-alone project but as part of a broader, long-term effort to strengthen civic space and accountability across West Africa. While some interventions will yield tangible results within two years—such as strengthened reporting, improved legal analysis, and operational dialogue frameworks—others will lay the groundwork for processes that are not yet possible under current conditions. By fostering national ownership, peer learning, and institutional collaboration, this initiative will create durable foundations for a sustained, region-wide transformation in the protection of civic space and the promotion of human rights.

PAST EXPERIENCES

Over the past years, UN Human Rights has positioned itself as a key actor in promoting and protecting human rights across West Africa. Through sustained engagement at national and regional levels, the Office has supported the harmonisation of national legislation with international human rights standards, particularly in areas affecting vulnerable groups.

UN Human Rights has developed tools to monitor trends in civic space, including restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association, which enable early warning and timely interventions. It supports civil society in documenting violations and submitting information to UN special procedures, while also raising the visibility of human rights defenders through storytelling, public recognition, and media engagement.

In **Burkina Faso**, for instance, UN Human Rights built an extensive network. They established a civil society dialogue and consultation framework to prevent violations of civic space and enhance the authorities' understanding of the positive role of civil society. It aims to bring together different ministries, the national media regulator, the police, the National Human Rights Commission, journalists, bloggers, and civil society organisations. The Country Office also adopted an innovative approach to share prevention and early warning analysis notes with ministries and the NHRI, which is viewed by the authorities as concrete support that is not focused on “naming and shaming” and has led, in some instances, to legislative and regulatory changes. In addition, as a member of the humanitarian country team and the Protection Cluster's strategic advisory group, UN Human Rights bolsters the integration of human rights data, information, and analysis into early warning and analysis systems. UN Human Rights is strengthening national capacities to enhance national ownership and participation of CSOs in the protection cluster.

The effectiveness of UN Human Rights' work in protecting and expanding civic space was demonstrated through the impact of its systematic human rights monitoring. This is also evident in the successful provision of informed and evidence-based technical support to governments, NHRIs, CSOs, and other stakeholders in the development and application of human rights tools and methodologies, as well as in the enhancement of human rights monitoring. Stakeholders also reported a shift in the attitude of duty bearers towards rights holders, along with an enhanced and enabling environment, which was attributed to UN Human Rights' training and capacity-building support, as well as the consistent use of human rights monitoring in their areas. The UN Human Rights' comparative advantage has also proven successful in monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, establishing Transitional Justice, utilising

national and international human rights mechanisms, providing legal assistance to human rights defenders, advocacy, and creating networks of victims, beneficiaries, and other rights holders.

The Treaty Body Capacity Building Programme has further enhanced support to States and regional offices, strengthening capacities for treaty ratification, reporting, and the establishment of National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRFs). This has led to improved compliance with reporting obligations, particularly in **Senegal and Benin**. In **Burkina Faso**, capacity building of national authorities on human rights mechanisms and technical support led the Government to accept 11 UPR recommendations on civic space, including the need to prevent any undue interference in the freedoms of the press and expression.

Despite these advances, challenges persist in translating international commitments into national laws, practices, and traditions. UN Human Rights continues to prioritise partnerships with regional institutions and UN agencies, applying a human rights-based approach to address the needs of increasingly vulnerable groups such as children, women, and migrants. This approach has proven effective in fostering collaboration, influencing policy, and encouraging States to integrate human rights into national programs and budgets.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The project will be implemented under the coordination of the UN Human Rights' Regional Office for West Africa (WARO), which will serve as the central hub for strategic oversight and coordination, and by country presences for country-specific activities. The Head of the Regional Office of UN Human Rights will serve as the Project Lead, overseeing strategic direction and delivery. A dedicated team, including Human Rights Officers, Programme Management Officers (PMOs), and administrative support staff, will be responsible for day-to-day implementation. This team will be supported by finance, logistics, and operations teams at relevant duty stations to ensure smooth coverage of Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. Given the nature of the project, a significant portion of the work involves activities such as coordination, strategic engagement, advocacy, and technical support to national institutions and civil society actors. These efforts require sustained staff time and expertise, including organising multi-stakeholder dialogues, facilitating access to international human rights mechanisms, supporting reporting and follow-up processes, and maintaining trusted relationships with national counterparts. The project also relies heavily on field-based monitoring, legal analysis, and policy engagement—functions that are staff-intensive but essential to achieving impact. This investment ensures that the project is delivered with the necessary depth, continuity, and responsiveness across diverse and complex national contexts, while maximising the value of OHCHR's field presence and mandate.

In 2025, the operational structure comprises WARO, Country Offices (COs) in Burkina Faso and Niger, each led by a Head of Office, and remote coverage of Mali. From 2026 onwards, the configuration will evolve: WARO will transition into a Multi-Country Office (MCO), the CO in Burkina Faso will report to the Regional Office for Central Africa (CARO), the national Human Rights Adviser (HRA) in Niger will report to WARO, and Mali will continue to be covered remotely.

Constructive engagement will be maintained with national actors (including customary and religious chiefs) across all target countries, focusing on capacity-building, advocacy, and dissemination of human rights documentation. This includes collaboration with the judiciary, parliaments, ombudspersons, law enforcement agencies, ministerial departments, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), and National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRFs).

Engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs) and other partners will prioritise technical cooperation, capacity-building, and advocacy on agreed-upon human rights themes. Media professionals will continue to receive sensitisation and training on combating hate speech and misinformation, with sessions focused on ethics, professionalism, and deontology, alongside advocacy for freedom of expression and related rights.

UN Human Rights will work in close synergy with other UN agencies to ensure joint implementation of activities, reflecting the "One UN" approach and leveraging collective resources and expertise. The Office will also leverage the

political influence of UNOWAS, engaging the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) strategically as needed. Human Rights and Gender Working Groups will be activated in relevant countries to catalyse joint initiatives and follow up on outcomes.

BUDGET NEEDS

To advance civic space and human rights protection in West Africa, with a focus on Senegal, Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, UN Human Rights is implementing a regional programme that seeks voluntary contributions totalling ≈ **USD 3,525,300** over three years, of which **13% is allocated to Programme Support Costs (PSC)**. The Belgian-supported project forms an integral part of this larger initiative, contributing directly to its strategic objectives and operational delivery. In 2025, the total UN Human Rights regional budget for the programme covered by this proposal amounts to **USD 6,881,526**, to which the Belgian contribution would directly contribute. This integrated approach ensures coherence across country offices and presences, maximises the use of existing field capacity, and reinforces the sustainability and impact of human rights programming in the region.

Financial reporting will be conducted annually, in line with UN standards and structured according to budget categories, ensuring transparency and accountability. A detailed budget is provided in **Annex B**.

MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION

The project will be monitored in line with the UN Human Rights' Results-Based Management principles. Disaggregated data will be collected, and key results will be reported through the Office's Performance Monitoring System. We encourage donors to use our public Annual Report as the primary reporting tool.

As the total budget of the project/programme is EUR 3 million, it is subject to a final evaluation in accordance with the UN Human Rights evaluation policy, in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group's norms and standards. The budget presented in this document includes the evaluation costs.

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ANNEX A: LOGICAL RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Impact/Goal¹:

ENHANCING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION AS WELL AS FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION AND PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Results	Indicator	Baseline (2025)	Targets (2027)	Means of Verification
<p>OUTCOME 1: IN WEST AFRICA, RELEVANT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIC ACTORS ENHANCE THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS REGARDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION AS WELL AS FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION, AND FOLLOW UP THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR OUTCOMES BY STATE ACTORS.</p>	<p>Number of NHRI and CSOs' substantive submissions to treaty bodies, special procedures, and Human Rights Council (UPR) in West Africa that refer to freedom of expression and opinion and/or freedom of peaceful assembly and association.</p>	<p>0 NHRIs/CSOs submissions</p>	<p>5 NHRIs/CSOs submissions</p>	<p>NHRI and CSO reports showing increased engagement with IHRMs.</p>

Output 1.1. Capacities of the NHRIs and CSOs to document human rights violations and submit reports to regional and international human rights mechanisms are strengthened.

¹ Goals refer to the following 'titles of pillar strategies': (1) Advance sustainable development through human rights; (2) Enhance equality and counter discrimination; (3) Enhance participation and protect civic space; (4) Increase implementation of the outcomes of the international human rights mechanisms; (5) Prevent violations and strengthen protection of human rights, including in situations of conflict and insecurity; and (6) Strengthen the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations.

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	Number of NHRIs/CSO submissions to HRMs	0 NHRIs/CSOs submissions	5 NHRIs/CSOs submissions	Submission of shadow/parallel Reports to UN Mechanisms.
<p>Activity 1.1.1: Strengthen the capacity of four NHRIs in Benin, Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso (Niger NHRI was dissolved in July 2023) to submit parallel reports to the various mechanisms at both regional and international levels.</p> <p>Activity 1.1.2: Provide training to CSOs, NHRIs, HRDs and media professionals to document violations and abuses and submit information to UN and regional HR mechanisms.</p>				
<p>Output 1.2: Capacities of civil society actors and NHRIs to follow-up on the HRM outcomes are strengthened.</p>				
	Number of NHRIs/CSO advocacy products referencing HRMs outcomes	0 products	5 products	NHRIs/CSO advocacy products
<p>Activity 1.2.1: Support CSOs and NHRIs in their engagements with State actors and HRMs.</p> <p>Activity 1.2.2: Share with CSOs and NHRIs relevant practices and tools to follow-up on the outcomes of HRMs and track implementation by State actors.</p>				
<p>Output 1.3: Multi-stakeholder platforms are established or strengthened to promote dialogue and coordination on civic space and human rights reporting.</p>				
	Number of multi-stakeholder platforms relevant to civic space created/strengthened	1 platform	2 platforms	Reports of activities of multi-stakeholder platforms
<p>Activity 1.3.1: Establish/strengthen multi-stakeholders' platforms, providing OHCHR expertise on civic space and fundamental freedoms, and aiming at enhancing the prevention of civic space violations.</p> <p>Activity 1.3.2: Support coordination meetings and consultations among multi-stakeholders' platforms and contribute in delivering key OHCHR expertise on civic space and fundamental freedoms.</p>				
<p>Output 1.4: Civil society and NHRIs are supported to undertake coordinated advocacy using human rights recommendations to promote civic space and accountability</p>				

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	Number of CSO/NHRI initiatives to promote civic space and accountability	0 initiatives	5 initiatives	Progress and final reports
Activity 1.4.1: Provide expertise civic space and accountability to CSOs and NHRIs to inform strategic advocacy.				
Activity 1.4.2: Contribute to the drafting and review of CSO and NHRI led strategic advocacy papers on civic space and accountability.				

Results	Indicator	Baseline (2025)	Targets (2027)	Means of Verification
OUTCOME 2: LEGAL, REGULATORY, INSTITUTIONAL, AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY ARE STRENGTHENED TO BETTER PROTECT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS.	Number of West African countries that initiate or complete legal, policy or regulatory reform processes aimed at aligning frameworks on freedom of expression or peaceful assembly with international human rights standards.	0 countries	3 countries	Government policy documents or reform roadmaps outlining planned or ongoing legal revisions, minutes or reports from stakeholder consultations, draft bills or policy proposals published for public or parliamentary review. Surveys or assessments showing increased inclusion of marginalized groups (e.g. women, youth, HRDs).
Output 2.1: Human rights analytical products are produced and shared to inform responses to human rights concerns .				
	Number of UN Human Rights reports produced	0 UN Human Rights reports	5 UN Human Rights reports	Copies or links to UN Human Rights reports
Activity 2.1.1: Produce regional, country-specific or thematic UN Human Rights early-warning analysis products for the UN and other key actors.				
Activity 2.1.2: Produce any additional analytical ad hoc/flash reports based on the setting up of OHCHR surge capacity to the five countries.				

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Output 2.2: National laws and policies governing freedom of expression, including press freedom and assembly, will be analysed and advocacy will be conducted to align them with international standards progressively

	Number of laws and policies analysed for compliance with international standards	0 analysis	5 analysis (1 per country)	Progress and final reports
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Activity 2.2.1: Analyse national laws and policies governing freedom of expression, including press freedom and assembly.

Activity 2.2.2: Advocate with authorities to progressively align national laws and policies with international standards on freedom of expression, assembly, and press freedom.

Output 2.3: Partnerships with UN entities and other partners, including humanitarian, to strategically leverage data, information and analysis supporting human rights risk analysis for early warning and prevention are strengthened.

	Number of joint initiatives or collaborations between UN Human Rights and other UN entities, humanitarian actors, or partners focused on human rights risk analysis and early warning.	0 joint initiatives or collaborations	5 joint initiatives or collaborations	Notes of meetings
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Activity 2.3.1: Engage with UN entities and other partners, including humanitarian actors, to strategically leverage data, information and analysis for early warning and prevention.

Activity 2.3.2: Through the participation in coordination mechanisms, share information and OHCHR’s early warning analysis with relevant humanitarian actors, and mainstream analysis in related products.

Output 2.4 : Capacities of national actors to review and implement laws, policies and practices that protect civic space online and offline in line with international human rights standards are strengthened.

	Number of national actors with increased skills and knowledge on protection of civic space	0 actors	50 actors	Activity and progress reports
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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS

Activity 2.4.1: Provide training and expertise to national actors on international standards related to the protection of civic space online and offline, improving the authorities' understanding of the positive role of civil society.

Activity 2.4.2: Provide expert advice to national actors on relevant legal reform

Output 2.5: Capacities of CSOs, NHRIs, HRDs and other relevant stakeholders to monitor and address human rights risks and violations related to civic space in law and practice, online and offline, are strengthened.

Number of civic space actors with increased skills and knowledge on protection of civic space	0 actors	50 actors	Activity and progress reports
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Activity 2.5.1: Provide training to CSOs, NHRIs, HRDs and other relevant stakeholders on monitoring and reporting human rights risks and violations related to civic space in law and practice, online and offline.

Activity 2.5.2: Support the participation and ownership of CSOs in national coordination fora and protection mechanisms such as the protection cluster.

Output 2.6: Strategic advocacy initiatives developed and implemented to promote accountability for violations, including excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions of media professionals, CSO representatives and human rights defenders, helping to rebuild public trust and democratic resilience

Number of strategic advocacy initiatives conducted	0 strategic advocacies	5 strategic advocacies	Strategic advocacy documents. Journalists/HRDs/dissident voices being freed from arbitrary detention. Media suspension being lifted.
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Activity 2.6.1: Undertake strategic advocacy to promote accountability for violations, including excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and enforced disappearances of journalists, CSO representatives, dissident voices, and whistle blowers helping aimed at rebuilding public trust and democratic resilience.

Activity 2.6.2: Strategic advocacy and awareness raising with customary and religious authorities to promote accountability, and a better understanding of the importance of a vibrant and dynamic civic space.

ANNEX 2: BUDGET

Descriptions	Total Budget (USD)	Year 1 2025 USD	Year 2 2026 USD	Year 3 2027 USD
Staff and other personnel costs	2'835'300	601'020	1'117'140	1'117'140
Contractual Services	0	0	0	0
General Operating and Other Direct Costs	0	50'000	0	0
Supplies, Commodities and Materials	0	0	0	0
Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture	0	0	0	0
Transfers and Grants Issued to Implementing Partner	0	0	0	0
Grants Out	0	0	0	0
Travel	121'000	0	51'000	20'000
Monitoring & Evaluation	80'000	0	0	80'000
Total direct costs	3'036'300	651'020	1'168'140	1'217'140
Programme Support Costs @ 13%	394'719	84'633	151'858	158'228
Grand total	3'431'019	735'653	1'319'998	1'375'368

*BUDGET CATEGORY EXPLANATIONS

1. Staff and Other Personnel Costs (including consultancy services)

This category covers salaries, allowances and benefits for project personnel – both international and national – required for the effective implementation of the action. It includes fixed-term and temporary staff, United Nations Volunteers, and individual or institutional consultants.

2. Supplies, Commodities and Materials

Includes expendable items and consumables required for project activities, such as fuel, stationery, visibility materials and communication supplies. These inputs directly support the delivery of project outputs (e.g. printing of workshop materials, field supplies, office consumables).

3. Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture

Covers durable goods procured specifically for the project office and implementation. Examples include laptops, printers, mobile phones, office furniture and vehicles necessary for field missions. All items are procured at current market prices and are used exclusively for the action.

4. Contractual Services

Covers payments for services rendered under contract, such as translation, interpretation, design, printing, event facilitation and production of public information materials.

5. Travel

Covers official travel of project personnel, experts and meeting participants directly linked to the action. Includes airfare, daily subsistence allowance (DSA) and local transport costs.

6. Transfers to Implementing Partners

Covers grants or contributions (normally above USD 50,000) to implementing partners such as NGOs, academic institutions or other UN entities. Each transfer supports specific components contributing to the action's outcomes.

7. Grants to End Beneficiaries

Covers small-scale grants (below USD 50,000 each) provided directly to civil society organisations, local communities or human rights defenders. These enable local initiatives aligned with the action's objectives, such as community consultations, advocacy or awareness-raising.

8. General Operating and Other Direct Costs

Includes recurring operational expenditures essential for project delivery. This covers office rent, utilities, communications, IT services, insurance, security, and local event organisation costs not covered elsewhere.

Note on Cost Basis

All costs are estimated based on current UN salary scales, vendor quotations or comparable market rates. The budget reflects actual needs to achieve the action's objectives efficiently and in line with UN Financial Regulations and EU eligibility requirements.