

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

Denmark

by Nyt Europa





ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was published by the European Civic Forum (ECF) in May 2026, with chapters written by its secretariat, member organisations, and partner organisations. Much of the content originally appeared as part of ECF's submission to the European Commission's Rule of Law consultation, while some country reports were first published under the Monitoring Action for Civic Space (MACS) project. Each chapter reflects the views and analysis of its respective author. For more information about the European Civic Forum, please visit www.civic-forum.eu.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Aarti Narsee	Lead author
Kerttu Willamo	Co-author
Benjamin Goodwin	Editor
Giada Negri	Editor
Natacha Kazatchkine	Editor
Domiziana Palumbo	Research assistant
Adrien Labbe	Graphic design and report layout



Co-funded by
the European Union

The European Civic Forum is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the granting authority. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nyt Europa is a Danish organisation founded in 1998 with the overall objective to promote civic engagement on a Danish and European level. We work for a more sustainable and inclusive Europe, across themes such as green transition, economic transformation, democracy & fundamental rights, and youth empowerment. Our works spans across the national and the European level seeking to build networks and alliances across borders on these issues.






This chapter was originally published in February 2026 as part of the **EU-funded Monitoring Action for Civic Space** (MACS) project. It has undergone minor edits to align with the wider Civic Space Report.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- About the author** 3
- Key Trends** 5
- Summary** 5
- Key developments** 5
 - Pressure is mostly rhetoric and practice-driven..... 5
 - Conditional funding undermines autonomy and voice 6
 - A worsening of safe space across segments..... 6
- Dimensions** 6
 - Freedom of Association 6
 - Access to Funding 7
 - Freedom of Peaceful Assembly 8
 - Freedom of Expression..... 9
 - Right to Participation in Decision-Making 10
 - Safe Space 11
- Recommendations**13

Key Trends

-  Civil society funding unstable, with organisations that take a critical stance on politically sensitive issues threatened with defunding.
-  CSOs working on minority rights face public vilification from some politicians.
-  “Politically sensitive” protests face disproportionate police responses.

Summary

Civic space in Denmark is rated as “Open” by the CIVICUS Monitor.¹ There were no recommendations on civic space in the European Commission’s 2025 Rule of Law report. In 2025, pressure on civic space that was driven by political discourse and administrative practices rather than formal legal restrictions.

Certain civil society organisations (CSOs), especially those working on minority rights, climate activism, and Palestine solidarity, were portrayed as illegitimate or “anti-democratic”. Policing of demonstrations which are deemed “politically sensitive” also raised concerns, with several incidents of excessive force or large-scale detentions.

Civil society funding is unstable, and some organisations who have taken critical stances against the government faced threats of being defunded. For example, a coalition of right-wing political parties called for the public funding of ActionAid Denmark to be revoked for its work on Gaza. Online harassment and smear campaigns targeted activists working on climate, gender, and Palestine-related issues, thereby contributing to a more hostile public climate.

Despite strong formal structures and several positive examples, civil society participation in decision-making has also been subjected to formal restrictions, untransparent systems, and discursive marginalisation.

Key developments

Denmark has historically been considered a robust democracy with a strong civil society. Collaboration between the state and civil society organisations (CSOs) has been a cornerstone for the development and implementation of policies, and CSOs have generally enjoyed a vibrant civic space. However, Denmark has not been immune to the increasing autocratic trends

spreading globally and in Europe in the last 15 years. While it is important to stress that Danish democracy is relatively healthy, compared to other countries in Europe, worrying developments have placed civic space under pressure. A survey amongst Danish CSOs from 2025 found that 22% of respondents expressed that civic space is in a poor state.²

Pressure is mostly rhetoric and practice-driven

Although Denmark maintains a strong legal framework for the rights to association, expression, and assembly, 2025 was marked by pressure on civic space that was driven by political discourse and administrative practices rather than formal legal restrictions. Political rhetoric portrayed certain CSOs, especially those working on minority rights, climate activism, and Palestine solidarity, as illegitimate or “anti-democratic”. This

resulted in narrowing the space of what is considered acceptable dissent. Policing of demonstrations deemed “politically sensitive” also raised concerns, with several incidents of excessive force or large-scale detentions. Together, these trends contributed to a climate of caution and self-censorship, even though civil and political rights remained intact.

1. <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/denmark/>

2. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

Conditional funding undermines autonomy and voice

Funding remained a central challenge, with many CSOs reporting unstable or politicised conditions for the receipt of funds. For example, 69% of CSOs noted limited or absent core funding, and one in four had experienced conditions tied to politically prioritised themes. Threats from politicians and political actors of defunding reinforced concerns that critical voices

risk losing financial support. In particular, organisations engaged in litigation or “undesirable political activities” experienced increased concern over losing state funding. Private foundations continue to play a major role in funding, but with limited transparency and concentrated decision-making power.

A worsening of safe space across segments

Despite Denmark’s comparatively safe environment for civil society, 2025 marked a clear decline in the sense of security and inclusion experienced by several segments of the sector. Online harassment and smear campaigns targeted activists working on climate, gender, and Palestine-related issues, thereby contributing to a more hostile public climate. Minority groups continued to face disproportionate barriers to exercising their rights. At the same time, administrative decisions

also contributed to this uncertainty and instability. Instances such as municipalities denying Palestinian solidarity groups’ access to public venues curtailed civic space. Combined with political debates questioning Denmark’s commitment to international human-rights standards, these developments signalled a weakening of the safe, inclusive, and enabling environment required for equal participation in democratic life.

Dimensions

Freedom of Association

Freedom of association is guaranteed under the Article 78 of the Danish constitution and is only limited if activities are unlawful.³ The courts are cautious when limiting this freedom, with rare cases of dissolution, notably of the gang-based groups Loyal to Familia in 2021 and more recently, Bandidos in October 2025, due to threats to public safety.⁴ Associations are not regulated by a specific law, but certain formal requirements are enforced, including that civil society organisations (CSOs) must have more than two members, be formally established in a documented founding meeting, and have statutes that are approved by a general assembly of its members.⁵ It also requires a form of management functioning as an authorising entity, and that the organisation has specified finances and a bank account. This means that the threshold for forming an association is low, which also corresponds to a survey conducted amongst CSOs in 2025, wherein 67% of respondents found that the conditions are generally favourable.⁶

At the same time, however, CSOs have also experienced bureaucratic hurdles that make it difficult to exercise this right in full. One issue is with opening a bank account, which the aforementioned survey found was a challenge for 15% of respondents. It seems that issues with opening a bank account are most prevalent among CSOs and activists belonging to minority groups or who have partners in countries such as Afghanistan and Palestine.⁷ In some cases, these problems seem to be related to the arbitrary enforcement of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CFT) rules, and in other instances, it seems to be related to issues of discrimination against minority groups.⁸ This limits the freedoms of specific groups to form an association.

On a positive note, in early 2025, the Danish government presented a policy proposal to reduce administrative burdens for volunteer associations and to strengthen civil society.⁹ The proposal introduces 30 initiatives focused on simplifying financial procedures,

3. § 78 / Folketin <https://www.ft.dk/da/dokumenter/bestil-publikationer/publikationer/mingrundlov/min-grundlov/kapitel-8/paragraf-78get>

4. These groups are known as street gangs or biker gangs. They have been convicted for criminal and violent activities that pose a threat to the public. <https://www.tv2kosmopol.dk/metropolen/nu-er-dommen-faldet-bandidos-forbydes-i-danmark-063cb>

5. <https://frivillighed.dk/guides/saadan-starter-i-nemt-en-ny-forening>

6. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

7. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

8. Information based on various interviews that Nyt Europa held with CSOs and activists in Spring 2025.

9. <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20241/almedel/KUU/bilag/237/3056632.pdf>

easing documentation requirements, and improving cooperation between associations, banks, and municipalities. Overall, the proposal aims to free up time and resources for the CSOs and alleviate bureaucratic

burdens. This has been welcomed by both key stakeholders and local councils. The proposal is still in the implementation phase, but it is a step in the right direction for associations.

Access to Funding

Funding for civil society is provided through both public and private funds, many through open tenders. Historically, there has been a political consensus that support for civil society is important and a priority for both public and private donors. This largely remains true, but it is, however, challenged by recent developments. While some CSOs receive relatively stable funding, it can be scarce and unreliable for other organisations. In a survey of CSOs, 69% indicated that core funding is limited or not available, and this is true of both domestic and European funding sources. For smaller civic actors, in particular, this can lead to a constant struggle for survival rather than being able to focus on affecting change and implementing activities for their constituencies.¹⁰ Another problem that has persisted in 2025 is that funds are increasingly linked to extensive administrative requirements and an expectation to adapt to politically prioritised topics or issues. In the same survey, more than one in four CSOs experienced problems with complex and often opaque administrative requirements.

More alarmingly, the system that distributes public funds is not very transparent, and in some cases even dependent on personal relationships and individual MPs arguing for or against funding a particular CSO — either in debates or publicly in the media. Public financial support is provided through various funding schemes at both national and local levels. This takes place primarily through the finance bill that is proposed by the government to the parliament annually, listing CSOs that have been selected for public funding and the amount awarded.¹¹

2024 saw high-profile cases of threats to defund CSOs working on the protection of minorities and/or fundamental rights, including ActionAid Denmark, LGBTQI+ Denmark, Oxfam Denmark and Sabaah.¹² This

continued in 2025, with a recent example from Helle Bonnesen — an MP from the Conservative People's Party — who stated that Danish CSOs who sue the state should not be able to get financial support from the state.¹³ This statement followed a lawsuit filed by three Danish CSOs and one Palestinian organisation against the Danish government over its weapons exports to Israel. The statement drew criticism from the public and especially from other CSOs.¹⁴ Though Helle Bonnesen later withdrew parts of her statement, her reasoning can still be found in the political programme that four right-wing parties (Liberal Alliance, Denmark Democrats, Conservative People's Party and Danish People's Party) launched ahead of the national election in March 2026.¹⁵ Liberal Alliance's political spokesperson, Sólbjørg Jakobsen, has stated that, among other things, CSOs that engage in (unfavourable) political activities should not receive public funding.¹⁶

A more widespread concern in 2025 has been that CSOs often experience difficulties when raising funds for political work that differs from the political agenda of the government.¹⁷ This has become especially relevant in the light of the war in Gaza, where CSOs that expressed their position on this issue have faced negative repercussions. One example is ActionAid Denmark, which has been singled out by a coalition of right-wing political parties as an organisation that should have its public funding revoked.¹⁸ Another example is the restrictions put in place by the Municipality of Copenhagen targeting public events in solidarity with Palestine.¹⁹ These restrictions have since been found to be in breach of the constitution and therefore reversed.²⁰ It is important to note, however, that these issues predate the current war in Gaza, and that organisations working on environmental or other more controversial topics also face challenges. CSOs report having conditions tied to funding; for example, organisations

10. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

11. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_36cb3688616e4655b734b50b1310bde0.pdf

12. <https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Civic-Space-Report-2025-ECF.pdf>

13. <https://www.altinget.dk/civilsamfund/artikel/k-vil-tage-offentlig-stoette-fra-ngoer-der-sagsoeger-staten>

14. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/konservative-vil-tage-stoetten-fra-danske-ngoer-der-sagsoeger-staten>

15. <https://www.altinget.dk/uddannelse/artikel/laekket-dokument-her-er-den-blaa-oppositions-50-forslag-til-en-borgerlig-regering>

16. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/konservative-vil-tage-stoetten-fra-danske-ngoer-der-sagsoeger-staten>

17. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_0d3b1bd599384246a682298bd60437c5.pdf

18. <https://www.altinget.dk/udvikling/artikel/trods-politiske-trusler-ngo-saelger-billet-til-palaestina-aktivisme>

19. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/k%C3%B8benhavns-kommune-vil-bestemme-hvad-borgerne-share-7290342901513883650-k4Tw/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAEz3PWQBjLgy1txzIffeYdZAKgv9QhDyP7M

20. <https://dfs.dk/nyheder/nyheder/dfs-vinder-vigtig-sag-kommune-er-vendt-paa-tallerken/>

have not been allowed to use funding for advocacy or campaigns that are political in nature.²¹ Specifically, 25% of respondents in the aforementioned survey declared that they have experienced such issues of conditional funding.²²

There are many positive aspects about the large presence of private donors in Denmark. Many such donors are increasingly mission-oriented and seek to build long-term projects, which, for some CSOs, has contributed to greater sustainability. At the same time, private donors can operate with limited transparency and oversight, which critics have warned can lead to “black-boxing” and unchecked control over civil society and unequal power dynamics.²³ This is reinforced by the fact that the 20 biggest private donors are responsible for distributing 75% of the funds, meaning that civil society is dependent on a small group of powerful donors.²⁴ The discretionary nature of private funding, combined with concerns that critical perspectives are not always encouraged, has

raised concerns that CSOs may refrain from criticism in order to safeguard access to funding.²⁵

In a positive development, a new core funding plan for welfare-oriented CSOs, to make funding more long-term, transparent, and independent from the government, has been adopted in a political agreement.²⁶ This plan follows years of advocacy, notably from The Sector-organisation for Civil Society. This new core funding mechanism is mostly for welfare-oriented CSOs that address social issues and provide support and services to vulnerable groups. This means that political, environmental, or other CSOs cannot benefit from this funding plan. For many welfare CSOs this core funding plan is long-awaited, and the debate has been ongoing for many years. There are still unanswered questions about this plan, but concerns have been raised that the allocated funds will not be allowed for advocacy efforts. The final procedures for this mechanism had not yet been finalised at time of writing.²⁷

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Article 79 of the Danish constitution guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly for all citizens and residents. Of surveyed CSOs in 2025, 77% state that they can freely assemble.²⁸ During the year, large demonstrations took place on international and domestic issues. Notably, Palestine solidarity demonstrations grew in size and frequency. One large-scale demonstration for Palestine on 4 October drew substantial crowds in Copenhagen. Various CSOs, including Amnesty International and grassroots movements such as Alle På Gaden For Et Frit Palæstina, collaborated to promote the public gatherings. This can be viewed as a positive sign for civil society in its fulfilment of the right to peaceful assembly and expression. Annual events, such as Copenhagen Pride Week, also proceeded unhindered, with thousands participating in parades and gatherings celebrating LGBTQI+ communities.²⁹ This can likewise be highlighted as an example of peaceful assembly and “safe space” for expression.

Alongside these encouraging examples, several developments in 2025 also raised concerns over how this right is upheld in practice, particularly during demonstrations considered as politically sensitive. In February, police arrested around 20 activists during a protest at the Maersk headquarters in Copenhagen, where demonstrators attempted to block the entrance in opposition to the company’s alleged involvement in transporting arms to Israel. Reports indicated police use of batons and tear gas, raising concerns about whether the intervention was proportionate, especially as the protest was mostly non-violent.³⁰ At a Palestine solidarity protest, during the European leaders’ summit in October 2025, police detained 13 protesters, with several arrests made on charges related to violations of public order.³¹ While the police described these actions as proportionate responses to disturbances, civil society observers and legal experts have raised concerns that the level of force and the pattern of detentions risk narrowing the space for peaceful

21. Focus group held by Nyt Europa with Danish CSOs 16 December 2025.

22. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_0d3b1bd599384246a682298bd60437c5.pdf

23. <https://www.altinget.dk/fonde/artikel/forsker-advare-fondenes-nye-missionsfokus-er-ikke-noedvendigvis-mere-demokratisk> ; <https://politiken.dk/debat/debatindlaeg/art10443597/Nu-m%C3%A5-vi-begr%C3%A6nse-kernetopperne-i-den-danske-magtelite>

24. <https://dm.dk/forskerforum/magasinet/2025/forskerforum-nr-2-2025/fonde-skaber-ulighed-milliardkloeft-i-fondsmidler-deler-universiteterne/>

25. <https://fundats.dk/branche/fondsmagt/fonde-vi-er-klar-over-at-bevillingsmodtagerne-er-bange-for-at-kritisere-os/>

26. <https://frivillighed.dk/nyheder/grundfinansiering-af-civilsamfundet-hvad-ved-vi-og-hvad-ved-vi-ikke-endnu#:~:text=Den%20nye%20model%20for%20grundfinansiering%20af%20civilsamfundet%20er,%20m%C3%A5den%20at%20staten%20st%C3%B8tter%20frivilligt%20socialt%20arbejde%20p%C3%A5>

27. Grundfinansiering af civilsamfundet: Hvad ved vi – og hvad ved vi ikke? <https://frivillighed.dk/nyheder/grundfinansiering-af-civilsamfundet-hvad-ved-vi-og-hvad-ved-vi-ikke-endnu#:~:text=Den%20nye%20model%20for%20grundfinansiering%20af%20civilsamfundet%20er,%20m%C3%A5den%20at%20staten%20st%C3%B8tter%20frivilligt%20socialt%20arbejde%20p%C3%A5>

28. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

29. <https://www.copenhagenpride.dk/copenhagen-pride-afslutter-en-fantastisk-pride-uge-med-stor-opbakning-og-mange-deltagere/>

30. https://www.dawn.com/news/1894160?utm_3d7754_22fd8cbcc8dd4ffda465a80329476038.pdf

31. <https://ekstrabladet.dk/krimi/masseanholdelse-13-demonstranter-blokerede-h.c.-andersens-boulevard/10357816>

assembly and may have a chilling effect on participation in protests.³² NOAH, the Danish chapter of Friends of the Earth, has reported similar concerns for climate-related demonstrations, asserting that: “Many activists seem to experience a discrepancy between the law and what the police enforces through their handling of protests and protesters.”³³

Finally, it is important to note there are subtle deterrents that can inhibit the right to peaceful assembly for certain groups. In May 2025, the Danish Institute for Human Rights published an analysis revealing that 47% of sexual minorities in Denmark had self-censored or withdrawn from public debate in the past year out of fear, including refraining from attending demonstrations, compared to 30% of cis-gendered heterosexual

individuals. This suggests that fear of harassment or violence is disproportionately silencing LGBTQI+ persons and other minorities, effectively limiting their participation in assemblies and public events.³⁴

In summary, freedom of peaceful assembly in Denmark remained generally respected in 2025, with numerous high-profile demonstrations taking place and even contentious protests largely permitted. However, the year’s events also indicate that challenges persist in ensuring proportional and rights-based policing. Taken together, they suggest a need for closer oversight, transparent reporting on police conduct, and safeguards to prevent practices that could deter participation in public assemblies.

Freedom of Expression

The freedom of expression remains formally protected under Article 77 of the Danish constitution, and the principle continues to be widely regarded as a defining feature of Danish democracy.³⁵ A majority of CSOs can express themselves freely and many report that they retain broad freedom to voice their positions without direct legal restrictions. This safe space for free expression demonstrates that Denmark continues to uphold a strong institutional foundation for open democratic debate. Several developments in 2025, nonetheless, also point to a widening gap between the strong legal framework and the lived experiences of an increasing number of CSOs. While no legislative prohibitions on speech have been introduced, CSOs report growing indirect pressures that influence their ability to speak freely and participate in public debate.

A key finding from the survey of CSOs was that a concerning number of respondents reported having self-censored, due to fears of political or financial repercussions. There are reports of increased political pressure and hostile rhetoric that portray some CSOs as partisan or illegitimate. This has created a shift in tone, where political actors publicly challenge the role and credibility of organisations that advocate for minority rights, humanitarian issues or criticise the current systems.³⁶ As mentioned earlier, this has been combined with threats by politicians to review or cut funding for organisations expressing critical

views. CSOs note that this rhetoric has contributed to an atmosphere of caution and strategic silence, particularly for smaller organisations with limited financial resilience. This effect was particularly pronounced among actors working on minority rights, climate activism, and international solidarity.³⁷ Some CSO employees report having been instructed to refrain from certain statements in their work to avoid threats of defunding and public criticism.³⁸

Direct criticism from Danish politicians is viewed as a way for the government to interfere in CSOs’ right to express their positions and platforms. Due to fear that their funding will be removed or limited, CSOs may self-censor, which is a troubling tendency.

A major policy development shaping debate in early 2025 concerned the legislative package derived from the 2024 political agreement to strengthen efforts against antisemitism.³⁹ The package was scheduled for fast-track adoption on 1 February 2025. While the initiative was widely welcomed for its aim of countering rising antisemitism, it raised significant concerns among civil society and media actors. ActionAid Denmark and others warned that the agreement’s broad definition of “the new antisemitism,” which characterises “contempt for the State of Israel” as a form of antisemitism, risks conflating legitimate criticism of a state with discrimination. Further concerns were raised regarding the

32. <https://cphpost.dk/2025-10-03/news/round-up/13-detained-after-pro-palestinian-protest-in-copenhagen/>

33. <https://noah.dk/sites/default/files/2024-11/Under%20pressure%20rapport.pdf>

34. <https://menneskeret.dk/nyheder/sekseuelle-minoriteter-laegger-baand-paa-offentlige-debat>

35. https://mpm.cmpf.eu.eu/public/upload/%2077%20_%20Folketinget.pdf

36. Views voiced by several CSOs as a Roundtable Meeting with EU Commissioner Micheal McGrath, 4 December 2025. The meeting was organised by Nyt Europa.

37. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

38. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

39. <https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/pressemeddelelse/alle-folketingets-partier-indsatsen-mod-antisemitisme-styrkes/>

proposal's expanded powers for police to order the removal of online content deemed "terror-related" without a court order under the Terrorist Content Online regulation. Media organisations argued that bypassing judicial oversight poses risks to press freedom and could contribute to overly cautious and excessive content moderation.⁴⁰

At the same time, positive developments emerged in regard to this legislative process. The wide cross-party support for addressing what in Denmark has been termed antisemitism reflects politicians' commitment to countering hate speech and protecting vulnerable communities. Several political actors also engaged directly with CSOs to discuss potential risks and the need for safeguards. This dialogue, though not always consistent, demonstrates an openness to receiving feedback from civil society.

Other developments in the media sphere pointed to emerging risks. The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) issued a warning in 2025 about the proposed creation of a Danish Media Ombudsperson. According to ECPMF, the proposal, with powers to intervene in defamation cases, report matters to police, and act as a third party in civil proceedings, could undermine media independence and concentrate enforcement authority in a state-appointed body, posing risks to editorial freedom and freedom of expression.⁴¹

Overall, developments in 2025 present a mixed picture. Denmark continues to uphold a strong legal and institutional framework for free expression, and many actors remain able to participate openly in democratic debate. However, the combined effect of harmful political rhetoric and funding-related pressures points to a civic environment wherein certain groups face growing vulnerabilities in expressing themselves freely.

Right to Participation in Decision-Making

Throughout 2025, Denmark experienced both encouraging initiatives and concerning developments in the inclusion of CSOs and citizens in governance and decision-making processes. On the upside, multiple efforts were made to engage civil society stakeholders in policy development and implementation. The Green Tripartite Plan, negotiated in 2024 by the government, agricultural organisations, the Danish Nature Agency, and environmental organisations, initiated 23 town hall meetings throughout the affected regions.⁴²

Elsewhere, authorities engaged in partnerships with CSOs to utilise their expertise. A notable example came from the Ministry of Defence, which used the Danish knowledge centre for gender and equality (KVINFO) to develop a report as part of a larger plan to combat harassment and improve the culture in the military, as more women are to be conscripted in 2026.⁴³

Another encouraging example occurred in May, when the communal Health and Care Administration signed a transparency agreement with the Forbundet af Offentligt Ansatte (FOA trade union). This "agreement on openness" committed the city of Århus to include

care-sector employees (through FOA) in decision-making processes about workplace welfare and improvements in the protection of free speech.⁴⁴ Such steps reflect a positive development in democratic participation in public service governance by giving frontline stakeholders a formal voice in shaping policies that affect them.

Despite strong formal structures and several positive examples, civil society participation in decision-making has also been subjected to formal restrictions, untransparent systems, and discursive marginalisation. This is particularly evident in the constant shortcomings of the public hearing system in Denmark, which continues to rely on short and ill-timed deadlines, often during holiday periods, with no visible improvement despite political acknowledgement of the issue.⁴⁵ Several CSOs have reported that consultation periods are scheduled over weekends, making it impossible to submit responses within the deadline. Furthermore, participation in the hearing process appears to be contingent upon submitting a formal consultation response, effectively excluding those unable to do so in time.⁴⁶ Some CSOs also report having their formal

40. https://edri.org/our-work/denmark-will-issue-removalSeksuelle minoriteter lægger bånd på sig selv i den offentlige debat | Institut for Menneskerettigheder-orders-without-court-approval-impacts-on-free-speech-and-pro-palestinian-voices/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

41. https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/News/Denmark-MFRR-partners-oppose-introduction-of-new-state-funded-media-Ombudsperson?utm_source=chatgpt.com

42. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/moeder-om-groen-trepart-er-publikumsmagneter-men-flere-kommuner-toever-med>

43. <https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/nyheder/2025/ny-rapport-satter-fokus-pa-rekruttering-og-tilknytning-af-underrepraesenterede-grupper-i-haren/> Hæren har teamet op med Kvinfor for at komme krænkende kultur til livs | Indland | DR.

44. <https://www.foa.dk/presse/pressemeddelelser/2025/maj/som-de-foerste-i-danmark-indgaar-sundhed-og-omsorg-en-aabenhedsaftale-med-foa> - :-.text=Som%20de%20f%C3%B8rste%20i%20Danmark%20indg%C3%A5r%20Sundhed%20og.at%20udtale%20sig%20om%20kritisable%20forhold%20p%C3%A5%20arbejdspladsen.

45. https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_87c9c78c80314c29b7ec7818601a6f9b.pdf

46. Reported by several CSOs at a dialogue meeting on December 16, 2025. The meeting was organised by Nyt Europa.

consultation response used against them, which further discourages participation.

At the same time, informal access to ministers and MPs remains largely untransparent, as they are not required to disclose with whom they meet.⁴⁷ This can disproportionality benefit larger and more well-resourced organisations and makes meaningful engagement more difficult for smaller CSOs. This could also result in civil dialogue becoming biased and less transparent.

These structural constraints are also seen in the political rhetoric of political figures who take a hardline stance towards civil society actors that contradict the trajectory and direction of the current government. For

example, when certain CSOs opposed the proposed emergency-surveillance bill, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen publicly dismissed their concerns as exaggerated, downplaying the potential threats the bill would have on rights protection.⁴⁸ The law allows the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) to collect and process large datasets from publicly available sources.⁴⁹

In summary, Danish participation in decision-making remains formally robust, but 2025 revealed vulnerabilities. Financial pressures on NGO and CSOs, fused with formal and informal political obstructions towards dissenting civic actors, instil fear and uncertainty, and can diminish confidence in the system of governance.

Safe Space

Overall, civil society in Denmark operates within a relatively safe and enabling environment, relative to other European countries. In general, cases of judicial harassment, SLAPPs, police infiltration, surveillance, or spying on civic actors, activists, journalists or opposition remains limited in scope. In other words, it is possible to mobilise as well as criticise the state to a high degree. However, this safe space is on the decline due to several worrying developments. These are mostly driven by changes in political rhetoric and practices, but there have also been legal initiatives that challenge this safe space. There are spaces in which specific groups are targeted, particularly with online smear campaigns, which is a continuing and worrying trend. Climate, Palestine solidarity, and gender and LGBTIQ+-related topics are issues that can draw online harassment. The tone online and in public is generally becoming harsher, even from leading politicians. For example, at the yearly Democracy Festival in June, Mette Frederiksen and former chairperson of the Conservative People's Party Søren Pape framed climate activists as anti-democratic.⁵⁰ Such rhetoric not only risks creating polarisation but also vilifies parts of civil society.

There are also ongoing concerns over barriers to the fulfilment of fundamental rights in Denmark, with certain groups facing more obstacles. Restrictions have included discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities,⁵¹ indigenous peoples,⁵² LGBTIQ+ people,⁵³ and people living with disabilities.⁵⁴ This also includes the political debate on re-immigration that singles out ethnic and religious minorities. Both Danish Jews and Danish Muslims report alarmingly high levels of discrimination and hate crimes.⁵⁵ This demonstrates how some groups cannot express themselves in a safe way.

Groups and activists working on issues of climate, refugee rights, and Palestine solidarity have likewise experienced serious problems in accessing their rights. One example includes the municipality of Copenhagen not allowing Palestine solidarity events to use public venues, referencing a regulation that prohibits the conduct of foreign policy by local authorities.⁵⁶ In another incident, Jøder for Retfærdig Fred (Jews for a Just Peace, red.) reported that expressions of Palestine solidarity were censored by the organisers of a public sports event.⁵⁷

47. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/professor-lobbyisme-kraever-gennemsigthed-desvaerre-er-transparensen-faldet-mens-diversiteten-er-steget>

48. <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/live/politik/2025-05-21-folketingets-afslutningsdebat/mette-frederiksen-tordner-mod-kritik-af-pet-lov?entry=7coba651-2fbf-4cf9-8166-61a959646ce7>

49. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/hummelgaard-udskyder-pet-lovforslag> ;

<https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/hummelgaard-udskyder-pet-lovforslag>

50. <https://www.altinget.dk/fonde/artikel/vil-mette-frederiksen-redde-demokratiet-skal-hun-stoppe-lobbyisterne-ikke-aktivisterne> ;

<https://www.information.dk/debat/2022/06/demokrati-kun-tilskuersport-overser-kritikerne-klimaaktionen-paa-folkemoedet>

51. <https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Oplevet-etnisk-diskrimination-i-Danmark.pdf>

52. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/fn-med-opsang-til-danmark-groenlaendere-har-ikke-de-rettigheder-de-har-krav-paa>

53. <https://www.vive.dk/media/pure/18049/8565518>

54. <https://menneskeret.dk/nyheder/handicapkomite-kritiserer-danmark-tilbagegang-rettighedsindsats>

55. <https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Jewish-Life-in-Denmark-English-summary.pdf> ;

<https://www.mufr.dk/rapporter/islamofobirapport-2023/>

56. <https://www.tv2kosmopol.dk/koebenhavn/det-er-en-sejr-for-ytringsfriheden>

57. https://www.berlingske.dk/kommentarer/joeder-for-retfaerdig-fred-i-opraab-pro-palaestiniske-ytringer-begraenses-mere-end-andre?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWETSqfKsWzbFUtd0go3RYE7w55-5j7Hrz1_ZKIh37KTzGvPbE1HE3FzA553gIKm9es%3D&gaa_ts=6901f075&gaa_sig=BhhjgczXeCAcwi_FZ4oLWNtbOaiowdFmmGj50PKjXsutoKSBdLHC3oBNYjKPyOq9zknmUR58BQ5AJLuyrD0A%3D%3D

A newer development is “*sindeligskontrol*” (the political control of opinions), where the granting of Danish citizenship has become closely tied to the applicants’ views and opinions and whether they align with Danish values. The Citizen Committee⁵⁸ investigated three applications in 2024, which otherwise fulfilled all requirements, to determine their disposition regarding Danish values.⁵⁹ Some members of the committee have, for instance, stated that citizenship should be denied if the applicant has expressed positive views about Hamas or is against homosexuality.⁶⁰ This has and could continue to lead to self-censorship and withdrawal from civic activity.⁶¹

The state’s efforts to promote and protect safe space, including complying with international human rights, has in recent years worsened due to increasingly loud voices questioning the legitimacy and relevance of international conventions and institutions.⁶² Most recently in December 2025, MP Mikkel Bjørn of the Danish People’s Party stated that Denmark should

“ignore” the European Court of Justice’s ruling on Denmark’s so-called “ghetto law”, which likely violates the EU’s Race Equality Directive.⁶³ Following the previous year’s political debate, the government appointed an Ambassador for Conventions and launched an investigation into obligations and opportunities in connection with the European Convention on Human Rights. Critics are concerned that these initiatives will be used as a lever to challenge or even undermine the conventions.⁶⁴ This could result in a serious risk of rights breaches.⁶⁵

Instead of ensuring a safe space, various initiatives and rhetoric have in 2025 directly or indirectly limited the space, with certain groups more at risk. This highlights the need for stronger measures to create a safe space and a need to ensure that everybody can participate safely in the Danish democracy. Without such safeguards, the democratic space risks becoming increasingly unequal and intimidating.

⁵⁸. The Citizenship Committee, consisting of appointed members of parliament, is responsible for reviewing the bill on who should be granted Danish citizenship. The bill is called the Citizenship Act and is presented to the Danish parliament by the Minister for Immigration and Integration twice a year.

⁵⁹. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/kort-foer-kontroversielle-sindeligssamtaler-traekker-naestformand-sig-i-protest>

⁶⁰. <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/leder/ECE17686680/sindeligskontrol-er-et-afgoerende-anslag-mod-demokratiets-kernevaerdier/>

⁶¹. Reported by several CSOs at a dialogue meeting with Commissioner Michael McGrath on 4 December 2025. The meeting was organised by Nyt Europa.

⁶². https://www.nyteuropa.dk/_files/ugd/3d7754_22fd8cbcc8dd4ffda465a80329476038.pdf

⁶³. The CJEU found that the LAW could potentially lead to direct discrimination based on ethnicity and it is therefore likely that the law violates the EU’s Race Equality Directive. <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/newsroom/european-court-reaffirms-principles-of-eu-law-making-it-likely-that-denmark-s-ghetto-package-is-racially-discriminatory>

⁶⁴. <https://www.zetland.dk/historie/s8PlrhRq-ac0gnmiD-0c003>

⁶⁵. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/stoklund-foreslaar-en-erodering-af-den-internationale-retsorden-og-sender-danmark-paa-slingerekurs>

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:

- **Urgently adopt a national civil society strategy, in line with the EU Civil Society Strategy and developed in close collaboration with a broad and diverse range of CSOs, to clearly articulate how fundamental freedoms and the wider civic space will be protected and strengthened.**
- Establish more predictable and transparent funding models by expanding access to core funding, clarifying allocation criteria, and ensure that access to public funding is not influenced by political alignment, litigation, or critical advocacy.
- Reform the public consultation system to allow for longer deadlines, more reliable notification procedures, and clearer guidance, enabling under-resourced CSOs to participate meaningfully in policymaking.
- Take concrete measures to ensure a safe and inclusive civic space, including the protection of CSOs, activists, journalists, and minorities from harassment, discrimination, and unequal treatment, both online and offline, and guaranteeing equal access to public spaces and democratic participation.
- Refrain from political interference in civil society, especially in terms of defunding threats and disproportionate limitations on rights for groups mobilising on international solidarity issues.
- Expand civic and democratic spaces to ensure these are universally accessible, by strengthening inclusive participation and guaranteeing that minority groups can fully and safely engage in democratic processes.

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025



About European Civic Forum

The European Civic Forum (ECF) is a pan-European network of more than 100 associations and NGOs across 30 European countries. Founded in 2005 by our member organisations, we have spent nearly two decades working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity, and democracy in Europe.

civic-forum.eu



About Civic Space Watch

CivicSpace Watch is an online platform that gathers data and reports on developments in civic space at the national and EU levels, and analyses trends. Powered by the European Civic Forum, it collects findings through regular contact and interviews with a strong network of members and partners on the ground and alerts European and international institutions when rights are at risk.

civicspacewatch.eu



**Co-funded by
the European Union**