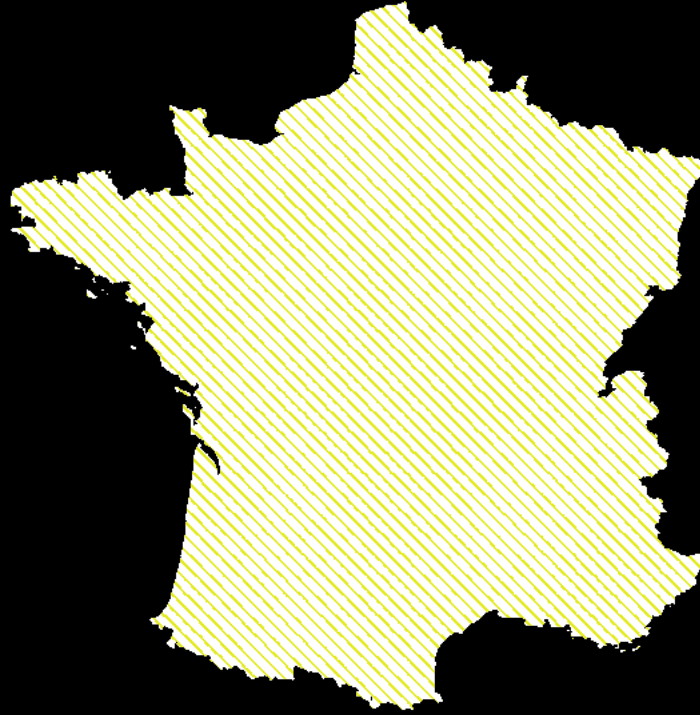


CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

# France

by European Civic Forum and Ligue des droits de l'Homme (LDH), based on the  
MACS report by Le Mouvement Associatif



Monitoring Action  
for Civic Space



## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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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](http://www.civic-forum.eu).

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**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.



**Ligue des droits de l'Homme** is an association founded in 1898. It is a highly recognised civic actor, acting in total independence of political parties, and public authorities. It claims to be a political actor in the sense of dealing with all issues of public interest for the effective access to all rights for all. It is therefore an actor of the public debates. It acts against injustice, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism and discrimination of all kinds. It acts for the development of an active citizenship which relies on a strong and vibrant democracy and extended solidarity. It defends a secularism of the State that favours inclusion for all faith and belief. It fights against any xenophobic instrumentalisation, freedoms, equal rights and fraternity as the basis of a fraternal society and, therefore, of solidarity.



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# Key Trends

-  Repeated partial or total bans on “sensitive” protests on public order grounds.
-  *Contract d'engagement Republicain* (CER) used to threaten funding of critical associations.
-  Increasing pressure against those working on solidarity, migration, and climate justice.

## Summary

Civil society has documented a continued and systemic deterioration of the rule of law and civic space in recent years in France, which led to its civic space rating being downgraded from “Narrowed” to “Obstructed” by the CIVICUS Monitor in 2025.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, civil society remains strong and resolute in defending fundamental rights and freedoms, including through successful litigation.

While the European Commission’s 2025 Rule of Law report noted some concerns raised by civil society, it failed to make recommendations on civic space. Specific actors, such as those working on anti-discrimination, migration, the environment, and international solidarity, are facing targeted and worrying attacks, affecting both individual and collective freedoms and the respect for the rule of law. Civil society documented alarming trends, such as the refusal or withdrawal

of funding, the dissolution of associations and the repression of peaceful protests. Once rare practices are increasingly common, such as elected or administrative authorities openly signalling their intention to disregard court rulings. These practices influence public perception of freedoms and can undermine citizens’ trust in institutions, constituting a major political challenge in France and across the EU.

These developments contribute to the weakening of democratic checks and balances and a gradual shift in the standards for protecting public freedoms. In the medium term, this is creating a political environment in which proposals that breach the rule of law and fundamental rights standards — particularly those promoted by illiberal or far-right political forces — are becoming more easily normalised in public debate.

<sup>1</sup>. An “Obstructed” rating places France in the third tier of civic space, where freedoms are heavily contested and governments impose legal and practical constraints that undermine the full enjoyment of fundamental rights. See: [https://monitor.civicus.org/press\\_release/2025/france/](https://monitor.civicus.org/press_release/2025/france/)

# Key developments

## Associations under pressure: financial and political constraints

Several surveys conducted by the associative sector show a significant erosion of its economic model. The structural decline in public subsidies at national and local levels, the rise of calls for projects and public contracts, combined with inflation and budgetary instability, are threatening the sustainability of many organisations. Data shows increased fragility in associations' cash flow, with thousands of jobs threatened and a "record" year for judicial liquidations of associations.

Beyond budgetary constraints, funding is increasingly used as a tool of political regulation. Subsidies are refused or withdrawn when associations adopt critical positions or take legal action against public authorities. In addition, there have been legislative attempts to restrict the tax benefits of specific so-called "activist" associations (gag amendments), as well as new forms of financial pressure (asset freezes and closures of bank accounts), or digital restrictions on fundraising (new rules on Meta platforms).

## Uneven protection: Selective restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly

Demonstrations considered sensitive (such as those in solidarity with Palestine, feminist marches, and Pride) have faced partial or total bans on public order grounds, some of which were later suspended by judges, reflecting the prevalence of security imperatives over democratic pluralism. This may also reflect a political desire to limit the exercise of minority rights by restricting their ability to mobilise collectively,

make their demands visible in the public sphere, and influence democratic debate. Added to this are controversial police practices, the disproportionate use of force, and restrictions on access to public spaces, which limit the visibility of these causes and contribute to a climate of deterrence or even self-censorship, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the right to protest.

## A weakened democratic debate and participation

Cases of self-censorship are increasing among associations, undermining the plurality of debate and the democratic role these structures play. Citizen participation remains formal and their influence on public policy remains very limited (citizen conventions have little or

no legislative impact, and petitions have no binding effect). The rise of hate speech, the persistence of gagging orders, and increased pressure on defenders of migrants' rights and environmental activists also point to a shrinking civic space.

# Dimensions

## Freedom of Association

With nearly 1.4 million active associations out of the 3.8 million registered in the European Union, France displays a unique dynamic in regards to the right to association.<sup>2</sup> Between July 2024 and 2025, 74,000 associations were created, facilitated by a legal framework that has historically been favourable to freedom of association.<sup>3</sup> This right is enshrined in Article 1 of the Law of 1 July 1901, liberal in its conception and based on contractual freedom and

the common will of at least two natural persons to associate for the purpose of a non-profit project of general interest.<sup>4</sup> The creation of an association is not subject to any prior authorisation.

As a fundamental principle recognised by the laws of the Republic of France, freedom of association is one of the rights and freedoms protected by the French Constitutional Council.<sup>5</sup> However, it is not absolute:

2. [https://lemouvementassociatif.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/LMA\\_dossier\\_pointpresse\\_30012025\\_web.pdf](https://lemouvementassociatif.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/LMA_dossier_pointpresse_30012025_web.pdf);  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/ip\\_23\\_4242](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/ip_23_4242)

3. <https://recherches-solidarites.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/La-France-associative-16-10-2025.pdf>

4. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000006294210](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000006294210)

5. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1971/7144DC.htm>

an association may be subject to dissolution by a decree by the Council of Ministers as outlined in the Internal Security Code.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, freedom of association has been subject to new regulations, following the adoption of the Law of 24 August 2021, which introduced the Contrat d'engagement républicain (Republican Commitment Contract) or CER.<sup>7</sup> The CER imposes seven commitments on associations seeking to benefit from public funds or material subsidies. The commitments relate to respect for the law, freedom of conscience, equality, the prevention of violence and respect for dignity.

The stated objective of these commitments is to ensure that the activities of associations comply with "republican principles". However, the vagueness of certain provisions and the risk of a unilateral decision to withdraw subsidies give the state more power to restrict the activities of associations.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the same law broadens the scope for dissolving associations based on the actions of some of their members.<sup>9</sup> This could also have detrimental consequences for freedom of association should public authorities misuse this provision to target certain associations.

Despite a strong legal framework, 2025 saw a deterioration in relations between public authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs).

## CER at the centre of controversies and concerns

Although there is little data on the misuse of the CER, an evaluation report by the National Assembly's law commission emphasised that the first disputes related to compliance with the CER did not concern associations linked to religious movements.<sup>10</sup> This observation illustrates a contradiction with the spirit of the law (which was to combat religious separatism) and confirms the fears expressed by civil society at the time of its adoption that it would create a means to coerce or sanction associations that might have political disagreements with their public funders. For example, theatre company Arlette Moreau had its grant application rejected by the regional prefecture on the

grounds that their activities did not comply with the CER.<sup>11</sup> On 14 October 2025 the Bordeaux administrative court did not rule on the legality of this refusal but accepted alternative grounds for rejecting the theatre company's application.<sup>12</sup> The prefecture reasoned that the rejection was due to the administration of public funds, transforming the refusal of the subsidy into a simple matter of budgetary constraints, given that the requested subsidy was large.<sup>13</sup> A second ruling on the misuse of the CER relates to the case of Alternatiba Rhône, where the association's subsidies were withdrawn by the Rhône prefecture on allegations of violating the CER through acts of civil disobedience.<sup>14</sup> Several associations filed a voluntary intervention brief on 3 November 2025. They hope to obtain protective case law which would rule out the possibility of disqualifying an association from eligibility for public funds on the grounds that it had engaged in or promoted civil disobedience in the past.<sup>15</sup>

## Increased use of administrative dissolutions

Apart from the CER, 2025 was marked by new administrative dissolutions made in connection with combating radical Islam and far-right movements, such as the dissolution of Lyon Populaire<sup>16</sup> — a far-right organisation promoting hate speech and discrimination against religious and sexual minorities. In a report by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), and French Human Rights League (LDH), the watchdog groups noted a significant increase in the number of dissolutions targeting associations.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, 27 dissolution decrees have been published since 2017, a record number compared to its more limited use between 1936 and 2017, during which only around 100 such decrees were issued. The increased use of this power, described as "intrusive" by LDH and Amnesty International during a focus group interview conducted for the purposes of this report, illustrates a shift in the use of dissolution as a method of administrative repression against associations, particularly those that intervene in the public sphere and mobilise citizens through demonstrations.<sup>18</sup> Such was the case for the Palestine solidarity group Urgence Palestine,

6. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000043982161](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000043982161)

7. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043964778>

8. <https://lemouvementassociatif.org/contrat-dengagement-republicain/>

9. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043964778>

10. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/documents/cion\\_lois/l17n870210094\\_document.pdf](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/documents/cion_lois/l17n870210094_document.pdf)

11. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrave/a-poitiers-la-prefecture-de-region-mobilise-le-contrat-dengagement-republicain-contre-la-compagnie-de-theatre-arlette-moreau/>

12. [https://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/jur\\_ta-bordeaux\\_2025-10-14.pdf](https://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/jur_ta-bordeaux_2025-10-14.pdf)

13. [https://www.itineraires-avocats.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/jur\\_ta-bordeaux\\_2025-10-14.pdf](https://www.itineraires-avocats.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/jur_ta-bordeaux_2025-10-14.pdf)

14. <https://lemouvementassociatif-aura.org/2024/01/10/refus-subvention-alternatiba-rhone-controverses-recours-tribunal-administratif/>

15. <https://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article7610>

16. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000051724936>

17. [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/20250916\\_fidh\\_rapport-obs-france\\_fr\\_v7.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/20250916_fidh_rapport-obs-france_fr_v7.pdf) (p.24).

18. Joint videoconference interview with the Human Rights League and Amnesty International, 20 October 2025

whose dissolution procedure was reportedly because of its stance in relation to the movement of solidarity with Gaza, but whose dissolution decree has not yet been published.<sup>19</sup>

## The question of political neutrality applied to associations

In 2025, tensions arose over the desire to extend the principle of political neutrality in public services to associations. Family allowance funds — Caisses des Allocations familiales (CAF)— withdrew or considered withdrawing funding from associations that had taken a stand against far-right ideas during the early parliamentary elections of 2024.<sup>20</sup> The Calvados family planning association, for example, received no subsidies in 2025 on the grounds that it had failed to respect the principle of neutrality, which according to the law is only applicable to civil servants.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Léo-Lagrange Club in Vienne had its municipal subsidy frozen on the basis of having breached the CER when calling for people not to vote in favour of far-right ideas.<sup>22</sup> The subsidy was finally awarded after the Club committed to ceasing such actions. This is at odds with established case law, as recalled in a ruling by Lyons administrative court of appeal on 13 February 2025, which stated that an association cannot be considered a user of a public service solely on the grounds that it receives a subsidy. As a result, an association cannot be subject to the general requirement of political neutrality.<sup>23</sup> The pressure of neutrality by associations may undermine the freedom of association, as it prevents associations from engaging in a political role, and it could favour associations that align their political action with the position of the current public authorities.

## Proposed legislative changes cause concern

In 2025 there were concerns that several legislative may have a potential impact on the right to association. This includes the proposed bill of 10 June 2025, aimed at prohibiting and punishing so-called anti-republican

content and discourse. It was drafted following the interior ministry's report on the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam in France. The law could pave the way for the criminalisation of any criticism perceived as "anti-secular" or "communitarian", thereby targeting religious or civic associations in particular.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Article 4 of the proposed bill could lead to dissolution procedures for such associations. Similarly, the Law of 13 June 2025 aimed at "freeing France from the trap of drug trafficking" authorises the temporary closure of premises suspected of being linked to illegal activities, which could include associations' premises, via a decision by the local police prefecture.<sup>25</sup> The Constitutional Council issued an interpretative reservation on this provision, recalling the obligation to ensure that measures are "strictly necessary, appropriate and proportionate".<sup>26</sup>

Another legislative proposal aims to transfer the responsibility for providing legal assistance to foreigners held in administrative detention centres, currently provided by associations, to the French Office for Immigration and Integration.<sup>27</sup> Under the pretext of political neutrality, budgetary constraints, and the effectiveness of removal policy (deportation), this proposal has potential negative consequences. It could sideline independent actors, such as associations, which safeguard legal protection for people deprived of their liberty.

While freedom of association remains protected under French law, 2025 has seen a gradual erosion of its effectiveness. The widespread use of administrative dissolutions, the controversial application of the CER, debates on political neutrality, and the evolution of specific laws point to an increasingly restrictive environment. These developments call into question the legal framework's ability to balance the protection of public order and democratic pluralism with the vitality of community life as expressed through civic associations.

19. <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués-de-presse/dissolution-de-trois-groupements-de-faits/> ; <https://www.amnesty.fr/liberte-d-expression/actualites/dissolution-urgence-palestine-une-menace-contre-les-defenseurs-des-droits-palestiniens>

20. <https://france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/normandie/calvados/caen/la-caf-supprime-ses-subsidions-au-planning-familial-du-calvados-on-a-l-impression-qu-il-y-a-une-certaine-hostilite-3249349.html>

21. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000044427911](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000044427911)

22. <https://www.ledauphine.com/politique/2025/06/23/apres-la-polemique-le-club-leo-lagrange-retrouve-finalement-sa-subsidion-municipale>

23. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000051212348>.

24. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/l17b1535\\_proposition-loi#:~:text=Proposition%20de%20loi%20visant%20%C3%A0,le%20mardi%2010%20juin%202025](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/l17b1535_proposition-loi#:~:text=Proposition%20de%20loi%20visant%20%C3%A0,le%20mardi%2010%20juin%202025)

25. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000051734851>

26. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2025/2025885DC.htm>

27. <https://www.senat.fr/leg/exposes-des-motifs/pp124-472-expose.html>

## Access to Funding

In France, the funding of CSOs is enshrined in legal and regulatory rules that aim to guarantee the transparency, accountability, and independence of associations. The Law of 1 July 1901 (on the formation of associations) does not require associations to have their own resources or specific funding but allows them to receive public subsidies, private donations, and legacies, as well as to develop secondary profit-making activities.<sup>28</sup>

The allocation of subsidies to associations by public authorities is discretionary,<sup>29</sup> and the refusal to award a subsidy does not require a justification.<sup>30</sup> However, the authorities must respect the principle of equal treatment, particularly when deciding to modify or withdraw a subsidy.<sup>31</sup>

Funding is a key issue and a major vulnerability for many French CSOs. According to the opinion of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, adopted unanimously on 28 May 2024, the percentage of public subsidies in the overall budgets of associations fell by 41% between 2005 and 2020. This decline reflects a gradual disengagement by the state in favour of competition through calls for projects or provision of services, which reinforces the commodification of services and introduces a more authoritative relationship between public authorities and associations.<sup>32</sup>

### The sector weakened by reduced funding and budgetary instability

In 2025, the financial situation for associations continued to deteriorate in the face of mounting budgetary constraints, with lower public funding and rising inflation. The draft finance bill for 2026 foresees another year of budgetary austerity for associations, marked by a general reduction of 26% in the funds allocated to community life and nearly €1 billion in proposed sectoral cuts for the civil society sector.<sup>33</sup> This trend is also reflected regionally. For example, for the 2025 budget allocated to associations, the president of the Pays de la Loire region announced a reduction of €100 million, representing a 64% cut

in subsidies dedicated to culture, sport, and associations.<sup>34</sup> These cuts weaken the region's civil society which is essential to local community life.

Furthermore, a recent survey conducted by the Hauts-de-France Regional Observatory for Associative Life (ORVA) on the financial health of associations highlights the overall fragility of the association economic model.<sup>35</sup> According to the ORVA study, 70% of associations that employ staff report that their capital funds remain fragile or non-existent; 30% report having less than three months' cash flow; and 5% do not even have one month's operating costs in reserve. In short, 90,000 association-related jobs are directly threatened due to insufficient cash flow. These difficulties are the result of absent or unreliable funding, a decline in direct public subsidies, and increased competition and administrative burdens, exacerbated by the proliferation of public procurement contracts.

### Funding as a lever for regulation and pressure: A growing political issue

Beyond budgetary constraints, funding has become a major political issue. The "guillotine" effect of the CER allows public authorities to withdraw or refuse subsidies based on criteria that are vague or subjective, which could lead to using funding as a tool to constrain or repress associations. The example of the association France Nature Environnement Jura illustrates the growing importance of the political positioning of associations.<sup>36</sup> The association had its grant application rejected by the regional president who reasoned that the association "takes legal action against projects supported by the department and therefore cannot receive public subsidies."<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, as is the case every year, the examination of the draft finance bill led to the tabling of amendments aimed at limiting certain types of funding for associations. Several proposals directly target environmental protection associations and migrant aid associations.<sup>38</sup> These amendments aim to exclude these associations from tax exemptions for donations they receive,

28. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGISCTA000006084157>

29. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000029318586](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000029318586)

30. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000007900859>

31. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000008256955/>

32. [https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2024/2024\\_09\\_Financement\\_associations.pdf](https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2024/2024_09_Financement_associations.pdf)

33. <https://lemouvementassociatif.org/plf-2026-1-milliard-de-en-moins-pour-les-assos-65-millions-de-francais-es-impactes/>

34. <https://lemouvementassociatif.org/casse-associative-coup-porte-aux-territoires/>

35. <https://lemouvementassociatif.org/la-sante-financiere-des-associations-un-constat-alarmant/>

36. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrave/france-nature-environnement-jura-se-voit-refuser-11-000-euros-de-subsidation-par-le-departement-qui-laccuse-dutiliser-cet-argent-contre-lui/>

37. <https://www.fne-jura.fr/vie-associative/2025/07/23/lettre-ouverte-departement-jura/>

38. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/amendements/1906A/AN/581> <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/amendements/1906A/AN/280>

thereby hindering their ability to receive donations in a cost-effective manner.

### **New forms of pressure: freezing of assets, account closures, and digital restrictions**

According to LDH and Amnesty International, several forms of financial pressure affect CSOs.<sup>39</sup> The freezing of assets, decided arbitrarily by decree, temporarily deprives associations of their ability to make payments. Challenging this measure in court is complex, as the administration can unilaterally decide to partially release the funds, which excludes the possibility of initiating emergency proceedings, as the condition of urgency is no longer fulfilled. The other instrument raised by these organisations, amounting to “banking repression”, consists of banks simply closing the accounts of CSOs, thus complicating their day-to-day management.

## **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

Under Article 11 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the Constitutional Council's decisions of 18 January 1995 and 4 April 2019, “the right to collective expression of ideas and opinions” and freedom of peaceful assembly are guaranteed as constitutional rights and freedoms.<sup>42</sup> Also recognised by the Council of State as a fundamental freedom,<sup>43</sup> freedom of assembly may be subject to emergency legal proceedings on the basis of Article L.521-2 of the Code of Administrative Justice when there is a serious and manifestly illegal infringement on this freedom and to obtain protection from the judge.

For CSOs, these fundamental freedoms are particularly important because they are an essential extension of the right to freedom of association. However, this freedom is not absolute and is governed by Articles L211-1 to L211-4 of the Internal Security Code, which stipulates that all demonstrations and related details must be conveyed in advance to the prefecture from three to 15 days before the event. This procedure allows the authorities to assess the potential risks to public order and, in the event of a serious risk, to ban the demonstration. The power to do so is strictly regulated and must comply with the principle of proportionality.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the European Union regulation of 13 March 2024 on transparency and targeting of political advertising has had detrimental effects on associations using social media to promote their fundraising campaigns.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the regulation, Meta has banned all social and political advertising on its channels. These restrictions limit the visibility of CSOs' publications, awareness-raising campaigns, and fundraising efforts.<sup>41</sup>

In 2025, access to funding remained a major concern for CSOs, whose economic model is becoming increasingly unsustainable due to the decline in public subsidies, inflation, and increased competition. Cash-flow difficulties, precarious funds, and jobs under threat are of serious concern to the sector. At the same time, the increasing use of funding as a means of control, whether in the form of the CER, pressure from banks or other restrictions, is undermining the ability of associations to operate unhindered.

Recent legislative developments in France have contributed to stricter control over the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly in order to maintain public order, ensure public safety, and curtail urban violence. The Law of 10 April 2019, known as the “anti-rioter” law, introduced additional restrictions, including administrative police measures that allow police officers, acting under the supervision of a magistrate, to check the personal belongings of passers-by and vehicles travelling or parked at the entrance to a defined zone in the six hours before the start of a demonstration and until it disperses.<sup>45</sup> This systematic control of access to a demonstration may have a deterring effect or even lead to a restriction on the right to demonstrate.

A recent bill aims to rectify the shortcomings associated with the excessive use of identity checks, which are more frequent during demonstrations, often ineffective, and harmful to civil liberties.<sup>46</sup> By imposing stricter legal safeguards and increasing transparency, it aims to restore a balance between law enforcement practices and the protection of fundamental rights. It also comes at a time when discriminatory identity checks have been highlighted by the group Défenseur des droits, an independent administrative authority.<sup>47</sup>

39. Joint interview with the French Human Rights League (LDH) and Amnesty International, 20 October 2025.

40. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202400900](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202400900)

41. <https://www.coordinationsud.org/actualite/meta-impose-de-nouvelles-restrictions-les-impacts-pour-les-associations/>

42. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1995/94352DC.htm>/<https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2019/2019780DC.htm> : freedom of assembly is also covered by a specific law, unlike freedom of demonstration: Law of 30 June 1881 on freedom of assembly.

43. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000018259403>

44. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section\\_lc/LEGITEXT000025503132/LEGISCTA000025505131/](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000025503132/LEGISCTA000025505131/)

45. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000038358582>

46. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/l17b1841\\_proposition-loi](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/l17b1841_proposition-loi)

47. <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/enquete-sur-lacces-aux-droits-sur-les-relations-entre-police-et-population-que-retenir-896>

## Unequal treatment of politically sensitive demonstrations

While freedom of peaceful assembly remains a fundamental and protected right, there have been gradual restrictions in favour of a preventive and security-based approach.

A report published in September 2025 by FIDH, LDH, and OMCT highlights a trend of restricting demonstrations perceived as politically sensitive or critical of the public authorities.<sup>48</sup> This raises questions about the equal treatment of demonstrations and the guarantees regarding the political expression of minority groups.

Firstly, the treatment of solidarity with Palestine demonstrations reflects, in some cases, a form of political targeting that illustrates the tension between public safety and protection of the right to peaceful assembly. Reconciling these two considerations can hinder freedom of demonstration, at least in part, as was the case in Strasbourg during August 2025, where a local gathering was restricted on the grounds of risks to public order.<sup>49</sup> This also occurred on 11 November 2025, when there was a partial ban on the Dijon Pride parade passing through the city centre in order to “preserve public order” and “prevent” possible “disturbances”.<sup>50</sup> This restriction was upheld by the administrative judge who rejected the emergency fundamental freedom protection petition which sought permission for the Pride march to pass through the city centre.

## Excessive use of preventive public order restrictions with judicial safeguards remains

This so-called balance between security and freedom led to prioritising public security over ensuring the full effectiveness of the right to demonstrate. For example, a feminist night march was banned in Paris by the prefecture in March 2025 due to the risk of public disorder, particularly because of calls to join the march from groups involved in Palestine solidarity demonstrations.<sup>51</sup> However, this ban was suspended by the administrative court, which deemed it disproportionate,

as the march had been organised regularly without violence or messages inciting hatred or discrimination since 2020.

While certain control or prevention measures may be justified in the context of a threat, several human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and LDH, have raised concerns about the excessive use of force during demonstrations.<sup>52</sup> The persistent use of so-called “less-lethal” weapons (grenades, multi-shot launchers) fosters a climate of fear and self-censorship, undermining the effectiveness of the right to demonstrate.<sup>53</sup> In addition, other organisations such as Reporters Without Borders have denounced an increase in police violence against demonstrators and journalists.<sup>54</sup> In its statement of 17 June 2025 the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights expressed serious concerns about cases of excessive use of force and arrests followed by preventive detention.<sup>55</sup>

## Restrictions on access to public spaces: A new obstacle for freedom of assembly and association

New forms of infringement on the right to peaceful assembly have emerged, particularly affecting associations. These include cases of prohibiting access to municipal premises and, above all, in 2025, their exclusion from public events and limiting of visibility in public spaces. In Chalon-sur-Saône, for example, the mayor excluded the local branch of LDH from the associations’ forum, citing the absence of a registered office in the municipality and the political nature of its activities.<sup>56</sup> This decision came after several legal actions by the LDH against municipal decrees. Despite a court decision to allow LDH to participate, the mayor publicly condemned LDH as “politicisation” of the forum.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the mayor excluded the local branch of the association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS) from the forum on the grounds that it was “political or activist”.<sup>58</sup> In summary proceedings, the Dijon administrative court once again overrode the mayor and suspended this decision on 5 September

48. [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/20250916\\_fidh\\_rapport-obs-france\\_fr\\_v7.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/20250916_fidh_rapport-obs-france_fr_v7.pdf)

49. <https://france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/grand-est/bas-rhin/strasbourg-0/la-prefecture-interdit-un-perimetre-de-la-ville-a-la-manifestation-pour-la-palestine-prevue-samedi-2-aout-a-strasbourg-3196515.html>

50. [https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/lgbt/la-prefecture-interdit-la-pride-2025-dans-le-centre-ville-de-dijon\\_7307532.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/lgbt/la-prefecture-interdit-la-pride-2025-dans-le-centre-ville-de-dijon_7307532.html)

51. [https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/a-paris-une-marche-nocturne-feministe-radical-interdite-par-la-prefecture-de-police-20250306\\_X635GMD55FH5H6665MZQ53XYQ/](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/a-paris-une-marche-nocturne-feministe-radical-interdite-par-la-prefecture-de-police-20250306_X635GMD55FH5H6665MZQ53XYQ/)

52. Joint interview with the Human Rights League and Amnesty International, 20 October 2025.

53. Joint interview with the Human Rights League and Amnesty International, 20 October 2025.

54. <https://rsf.org/fr/france-la-libert%C3%A9-de-la-presse-entrav%C3%A9e-par-des-violences-polici%C3%A8res-au-cours-des-manifestations#:~:text=C>

55. [https://www.cndh.fr/sites/default/files/2025-06/A%20-%202025%20-%207%20-%20CNCNDH%20-%20Avis%20R%C3%A9duction%20de%20l%27espace%20civique\\_0.pdf](https://www.cndh.fr/sites/default/files/2025-06/A%20-%202025%20-%207%20-%20CNCNDH%20-%20Avis%20R%C3%A9duction%20de%20l%27espace%20civique_0.pdf)

56. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrave/154-le-maire-de-chalon-sur-saone-exclut-la-section-locale-de-la-ligue-des-droits-de-lhomme-du-forum-des-associations/>

57. <https://justice.pappers.fr/decision/dcd85f67ebc53a0bc3924437d0ff010450d07128>

58. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrave/156-la-section-chalonnaise-de-lassociation-france-palestine-solidarite-exclu-du-forum-des-associations-par-le-maire/>

2025.<sup>59</sup> The local branch of AFPS in Salon-de-Provence was also banned from the associations' forum, as the municipality considered it to be engaged in political activities contrary to the principle of neutrality.<sup>60</sup> The ban on AFPS was not suspended by the administrative court.

The emergence of these new infringements on the freedom of peaceful assembly of civil society organisations should be highlighted, as they further reduce their capacity for action and political advocacy. Similarly, the right to protest in France, although fundamental and protected by the constitution, has seen its guarantees considerably weakened. Trends in 2025 show that the growing tension between public security requirements and the exercise of collective freedoms is systematically invoked to restrict freedom of demonstration and peaceful assembly.

### Expansion of restrictive Olympic laws

The 2023 Olympic and Paralympic Games Act introduced several measures that infringed upon rights and freedoms including algorithmic video surveillance (VSA), body scanners, the screening of thousands of employees and volunteers, and the creation of new offences targeting protesters. The law which was meant to be applicable for a limited time period was in effect from May 2023 to the end of March 2025. The extensive security measures implemented for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which fail to meet the principles of necessity, appropriateness, and proportionality, have been denounced by several United Nations Special Rapporteurs.<sup>61</sup>

The bill relating to the 2030 Olympic and Paralympic Games, currently being debated in parliament,<sup>62</sup> includes the extension of the VSA until 31 December 2027 under the same terms as the 2023 Olympic and Paralympic Games Act. The matter was referred to the Constitutional Council on 19 February 2026.

The use of VSA illustrates how, in the wake of a "one-off" event, the administration has considerably expanded the scope of behaviours qualified as potentially

"terrorist", thereby instrumentalising anti-terrorist administrative law.<sup>63</sup>

On 14 October 2025, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) published an opinion, raising concerns about the normalisation of administrative anti-terrorism measures. It gave particular attention to the "security" measures proposed in the draft law for the 2030 Olympic and Paralympic Games.<sup>64</sup>

### Deliberate refusal to protect independent observers

Independent observers who document law enforcement operations carried out by police forces have faced unlawful obstruction and violence. In 2023, the Council of State found that the minister of the interior and overseas territories had disregarded the principle of *res judicata*<sup>65</sup> by restricting the right to remain on site only to journalists during the dispersal of gatherings, excluding independent observers.<sup>66</sup> The court had already ruled on this matter in 2021, stating that, like journalists, independent observers cannot be prevented from carrying out their duties during dispersal of protests. However, the government has failed to take any corrective measures to protect independent observers.

Observers regularly face confiscation of their protective and observation equipment, abusive identity checks, intimidation, and direct physical violence. Events in 2025 during demonstrations in Poitiers, Toulouse, and Montpellier illustrate the lack of protection for independent observers and the obstacles to their mission.

For example, from 4-6 July 2025, members of the Toulouse Observatory of Police Practices and the Tarn Observatory of Police Practices were prevented from observing protests against the A69 motorway project near Toulouse, after their equipment was confiscated by law enforcement.<sup>67</sup> Later, in October 2025, observers in Toulouse sustained injuries after they were beaten by law enforcement officers even though they were

59. [https://justice.pappers.fr/decision/5d21c2d2b92960eec3240d1cec0cafc76a67b0f6?q=Palestine&date\\_decision\\_min=2025-09-05&date\\_decision\\_max=2025-09-05&jurisdiction%5B%5D=tribunaux+administratifs](https://justice.pappers.fr/decision/5d21c2d2b92960eec3240d1cec0cafc76a67b0f6?q=Palestine&date_decision_min=2025-09-05&date_decision_max=2025-09-05&jurisdiction%5B%5D=tribunaux+administratifs)

60. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrevue/155-la-mairie-de-salon-de-provence-refuse-la-participation-au-forum-des-associations-de-la-section-locale-de-lassociation-france-palestine-solidarite/>

61. <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/press-releases/2025/03/human-rights-violations-paris-2024-olympics-must-teach-us-lesson-un-experts>

62. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/dossiers/DLR5L17N52100>

63. The LDH (Human Rights League) has published an analysis of violations of rights and freedoms during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games: <https://www.ldh-france.org/les-atteintes-aux-droits-et-libertes-pendant-la-periodes-des-jeux-olympiques-de-paris-2024/>

64. CNCDH Opinion "Freedoms put to the test by major events – the experience of the Olympic and Paralympic Games", dated October 14, 2025: [https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2025-10/A%20-%202025%20-%209%20-%20CNCDH%20-%20Avis%20Libert%C3%A9s%20Grands%20C3%A9v%C3%A9nements%2C%20oct%202025\\_0.pdf](https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2025-10/A%20-%202025%20-%209%20-%20CNCDH%20-%20Avis%20Libert%C3%A9s%20Grands%20C3%A9v%C3%A9nements%2C%20oct%202025_0.pdf)

65. A legal doctrine which prevents the same parties from re-litigating a claim or issue already decided by a final judgment on the merits.

66. Council of State, No. 461513, December 29, 2023.

67. <https://www.ldh-france.org/des-observatrices-et-observateurs-et-des-manifestantes-et-manifestants-victimes-de-violences-a-montpellier/>

clearly identifiable.<sup>68</sup> These examples are not isolated incidents but appear to be part of a coherent strategy

to discourage independent observation and restrict citizens' right to monitor and document state actions.

## Freedom of Expression

In France, the freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and has had constitutional status since 11 October 1984, per a decision by the Constitutional Council.<sup>69</sup> The legal framework is based mainly on the Law of 29 July 1881 regarding freedom of the press<sup>70</sup> and supplemented by several provisions of the Criminal Code that define limitations, namely by prohibiting the glorification of terrorism,<sup>71</sup> defamation and insults,<sup>72</sup> and discrimination.<sup>73</sup>

### Growing self-censorship within CSOs

With regard to the freedom of association, the 2025 survey conducted by the Observatoire des libertés associatives (Observatory of Associative Freedoms) on the state of relations between associations and public authorities revealed that 27% of the associations self-censor their activities or positions on certain policies for fear of reprisals, and 41% of citizen groups involved in political mobilisation, advocacy, or civil disobedience report the same.<sup>74</sup> This self-censorship is particularly marked in the humanitarian, environmental, and human rights sectors, as well as in certain regions such as Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur, where tensions between public authorities and civil society are higher.

### Right to criticise political action restricted

Recent cases demonstrate the increasing difficulties associations face in exercising their right to criticise public policy. For example, in the summer of 2025, the association Vélo Cité developed a barometer rating the political will to promote cycling in each municipality of the Bordeaux metropolitan area. Subsequently, its operating subsidy was deferred, though it was later restored in a revote.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the risk to freedom of expression is reflected in the withdrawal of administrative approvals or subsidies from student and activist associations, such as the collective Le Poing Levé Brest, due to its political stance, specifically on Palestine.<sup>76</sup>

### A tougher stance on acts of civil disobedience

Similarly, acts of civil disobedience, though an aspect of freedom of expression, have also faced repressions. For example, an environmental activist who threw paint at the Hôtel Matignon was sentenced to six months in prison by the Paris criminal court.<sup>77</sup> This decision goes against case law recognising freedom of expression as a justification for such acts of civil disobedience, and it contravenes the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of 3 November 2025, which only allows for minimal punitive measures in cases of permanent damage to property.<sup>78</sup>

### SLAPPs remain insufficiently regulated

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) have remained a major issue in terms of the right to free expression. Although the European Anti-SLAPP directive was adopted in 2024, it has not been fully integrated into French law. As a result, journalists, whistle-blowers, and NGOs continue to face lawsuits from companies or politicians with the aim of deflecting public criticism. In an opinion dated

68. <https://www.ldh-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Communiquei-OPP-du-3-octobre-v1.pdf>

69. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1984/84181DC.htm>

70. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000006070722>

71. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000029755573#:~:text=Modifi%C3%A9%20par%20D%C3%A9cision%20n%C2%B0,init.&text=Le%20fait%20de%20provoquer%20directement,75%20000%20%E2%82%AC%20d'amende](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000029755573#:~:text=Modifi%C3%A9%20par%20D%C3%A9cision%20n%C2%B0,init.&text=Le%20fait%20de%20provoquer%20directement,75%20000%20%E2%82%AC%20d'amende)

72. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section\\_lc/LEGITEXT000006070719/LEGISCTA000006165410/](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000006070719/LEGISCTA000006165410/)

73. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section\\_lc/LEGITEXT000006070719/LEGISCTA000006165298/](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000006070719/LEGISCTA000006165298/)

74. <https://libertesassociatives.org/ressource/presentation-des-resultats-de-la-premiere-enquete-nationale-sur-les-relations-entre-associations-et-pouvoirs-publics/>

75. <https://www.sudouest.fr/gironde/bordeaux/bordeaux-metropole-subvention-ajournee-pour-velo-cite-qui-va-devoir-s-expliquer-25201507.php>

76. <https://www.ouest-france.fr/education/etudiant/universites/le-poing-leve-sanctionne-par-lubo-entrevue-a-la-liberte-d-expression-selon-huit-organisations-3929e13a-a076-11f0-a698-dbf3ac8f3cb6>

77. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrevue/157-apres-une-action-symbolique-de-jet-de-peinture-devant-matignon-une-militante-de-derniere-renovation-est-condamnee-a-6-mois-de-prison-ferme/>

78. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-243886%22%5D%7D> / [https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/index.php?lvl=notice\\_display&id=55550](https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=55550)

13 February 2025 on the occasion of the transposition of directive, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights made several recommendations for countering SLAPPs. It noted that they impose a significant financial, psychological, and reputational cost, which is further aggravated by the length of such legal proceedings.<sup>79</sup> The commission called for national legislation to mitigate these costs which undermine free speech.

In 2025, Utopia 56 remained the subject of three criminal investigations initiated in late December 2024, concerning the alleged dissemination of false information and defamation against law enforcement in connection with its humanitarian work with migrants in northern France. Two of the proceedings stemmed from reports filed by the maritime prefecture after the organisation relayed alerts from people in distress on boats in the English Channel to the rescue services. The Pas-de-Calais prefecture also accused the organisation of defamation following the publication of a video on social media of a burning boat, accompanied by testimonies implicating law enforcement who fired tear gas and grenades at those on board.<sup>80</sup>

## Right to Participation in Decision-Making

The legal framework for citizen participation in France is based on constitutional and legislative mechanisms that guarantee the involvement of citizens in the development of public policy. The 1958 constitution provides for several forms of direct consultation: nationwide through legislative referendums, constitutional referendums, and shared initiative referendums.<sup>83</sup> Referendums are guaranteed for all levels of local government and are enshrined in Article 72-1 of the constitution.<sup>84</sup> These legal instruments are complemented by consultative mechanisms that provide for the possibility of organising local consultations,<sup>85</sup> neighbourhood councils — which are mandatory for cities with more than 80,000 inhabitants<sup>86</sup> — and citizens' councils in priority neighbourhoods of the city.<sup>87</sup> These

## Stifling academic freedom

On 9 November 2025, a conference entitled “Palestine and Europe: The Weight of the Past and Contemporary Dynamics,” initially scheduled to take place on 3 and 14 November 2025 at the Collège de France was cancelled. The university explained that its decision was due to “the controversy surrounding the event,” following concerns by the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA), adding that it abides by “strict neutrality (...) with regard to matters of a political or ideological nature”.<sup>81</sup> This incident highlights the growing tensions facing academic freedom in French higher education institutions and reveals structural weaknesses in institutions whose research focuses on topics considered sensitive in the contemporary context. The case is part of a broader erosion of academic freedom, which has been well-documented by several studies published in 2025.<sup>82</sup>

While France retains a solid legal framework for the protection of freedom of expression, 2025 was marked by an erosion of its guarantees in practice, due to administrative pressure, harmful litigation, and new forms of digital control under regulations on Meta platforms and bans.

mechanisms provide a pluralistic framework for French participatory democracy.

2025 saw a widening gap between the dense, multi-layered legal framework and the level of effectiveness of participatory mechanisms in practice.

## Significant development of citizens' participation

With regard to citizens' councils, the best-known form of citizens' participation in decision-making, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) organised its third citizens' convention on children's time-use planning, with its report voted on and published on 23 November.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the

79. <https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2025-02/A%20-%202025%20-%202%20-%20CNCNDH%20-%20Avis%20Proc%C3%A9dures-b%C3%A2illons%2C%20f%C3%A9vrier%202025.pdf>

80. <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/reports/observatory-report-france-dropping-out-of-democracy-obstructions-to-freedom-of-association-and-peaceful-assembly>

81. [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2025/11/2/un-mois-apres-l-annulation-du-colloque-sur-la-palestine-l-unite-reste-fragile-au-college-de-france\\_6658473\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2025/11/2/un-mois-apres-l-annulation-du-colloque-sur-la-palestine-l-unite-reste-fragile-au-college-de-france_6658473_3224.html)

82. [https://franceuniversites.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/20251015\\_Report\\_Defending-and-promoting-academic-freedom\\_EN.pdf](https://franceuniversites.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/20251015_Report_Defending-and-promoting-academic-freedom_EN.pdf)

83. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT00000428976>

84. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT00000428976>

85. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000006389072](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000006389072)

86. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000028640661](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000028640661)

87. [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000028640661](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000028640661)

88. <https://conventioncitoyennetempsenfant.lecese.fr/>

deliberations of the CESE second citizens' convention on end-of-life care, which paved the way for active assistance in dying, were voted on by the National Assembly at first reading.<sup>89</sup> At the local level, the city of Paris also organised its first citizens' convention on the future of the river Seine,<sup>90</sup> where fifty citizens formulated nine proposals to preserve rights relating to the river. Other local initiatives and experiments exist throughout France.<sup>91</sup> For example, the citizens' and popular assembly in the city of Poitiers aims to develop proposals in cooperation with elected officials and local government authorities.<sup>92</sup>

### Limited influence on decision-making

While the number of citizen-led initiatives is growing, their influence on the development of public policy remains insufficient. Public consultations are not binding on the authorities. The deliberations of the citizens' convention on end-of-life care resulted in two bills adopted at first reading on 27 May 2025, two years after the CESE submitted its report on the issue. However, this is only the first stage in the parliamentary process: the next step being a review by the Senate. This lengthy legislative process can create mistrust and scepticism in the ability of citizens to influence public policy.

Following the controversial adoption of the Duplomb Law, which overturned a previous ban on the use of certain neonicotinoids in agriculture, a historic citizens' petition gathered more than two million signatures to express opposition to this law.<sup>93</sup> Under the National Assembly's rules of procedure, a petition obtaining more than 100,000 signatures can be examined by a committee.<sup>94</sup> On 17 September 2025, the economic affairs committee voted unanimously to review the petition and to publish a report. However, the procedure lacks a mandatory vote at the end of the

debate, thus diminishing the decision-making power of this tool.

### Attempts to reduce the role of organised civil society in consultative democracy

2025 brought numerous proposals aimed at reducing the role of consultative bodies representing organised civil society in public debate. Several legislative initiatives reflect this decline in consultative democracy. The bill to simplify economic life, tabled in the National Assembly, produced a list of consultative bodies deemed "unnecessary" or too costly<sup>95</sup> and included amendments targeting regional economic, social, and environmental councils (CESER)<sup>96</sup> which represent civil society active in the regions. Although two amendments leading to the abolition of the CESERs were passed in committee, cross-party mobilisation in the National Assembly led to their reinstatement.<sup>97</sup> Several other bills attempted to reduce the influence of these alternative political spaces. One aims to abolish certain committees, structures, councils, and commissions which have not proven useful, and was adopted in the first reading by the Senate without subsequently being scheduled for consideration by the National Assembly.<sup>98</sup> Two other bills, tabled on 18 November 2025, aim to combat the proliferation of state agencies and reduce the number of state advisory bodies.<sup>99</sup>

If passed and implemented, these laws could diminish consultative democracy processes. It would also weaken joint decision-making and control of public policies and reduce the role of intermediary bodies. Thus, although France has a comprehensive and pluralistic participatory framework, in 2025 there were consultative mechanisms that had no concrete effects and a lack of political will from the authorities to engage in citizen-led dialogue.

### Safe Space

Following a decision by the Constitutional Council on 27 December 1973, French law has upheld the concept of equality before the law as a constitutional principle.<sup>100</sup>

This implies two obligations: the prohibition of certain forms of discrimination and the uniform application of the rule of law, namely the prohibition of any distinction

89. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b3755\\_proposition-loi](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/115b3755_proposition-loi)

90. <https://www.paris.fr/pages/convention-citoyenne-seine-30402>

91. Interview on 20 October 2025 with Sylvie Barnézet, General Delegate of the Institut de la Concertation et de la Participation Citoyenne.

92. <https://www.poitiers.fr/assemblee-citoyenne-et-populaire-quest-ce-cest>.

93. <https://petitions.assemblee-nationale.fr/initiatives/i-3014?locale=fr>

94. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/divers/texte\\_reference/02\\_reglement\\_assemblee\\_nationale](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/divers/texte_reference/02_reglement_assemblee_nationale)

95. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/dossiers/DLR5L16N49868>

96. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/amendements/0481/CSVIEECO/1024>

97. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/amendements/1191/AN/1>

98. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b0872\\_proposition-loi](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b0872_proposition-loi)

99. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b2084\\_proposition-loi](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b2084_proposition-loi) ;

[https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b2084\\_proposition-loi](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b2084_proposition-loi)

100. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1973/7351DC.htm>

based on origin, race, religion, beliefs, opinions, or gender. However, this principle is not absolute, and traditional case law allows for different situations to be dealt with differently.<sup>101</sup>

2025 was marked by a contrast between legal standards and discriminatory practices. The general climate in terms of combating discrimination and protecting civic space remained marred by tension between security policies, identity politics, and guarantees of fundamental rights. This tension particularly affects minority rights protection such as the rights of migrants, women, and LGBT

QI+ persons and can lead to an increase in hate speech against minorities, including religious minorities.

### Intensification of debate on religious minority groups and increased risks related to hatred

At the institutional level, France was condemned by the ECtHR in 2025 for identity checks deemed discriminatory.<sup>102</sup> The court found that the systematic practice of checks based on appearance or ethnic origin constituted a violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>103</sup> This decision is in line with the position of Défenseur des droits, which called for a change in practices based on the results of the investigation into access to rights in relations between the police and the population on 24 June 2025.<sup>104</sup> For example, it found that people perceived as non-white are 30% more likely to be subject to identity checks.

At the same time, public and political debates on the issue of Islam and secularism continue to intensify. The interior ministry's report on the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islamism in France, published in April 2025,<sup>105</sup> has contributed to fuelling forms of general suspicion towards Muslim populations (and those perceived as such) in France and towards Muslim and anti-racist associations. The report labels several Muslim CSOs, including organisations like the Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE), the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student

Organisations (FEMYSO), and Etudiants Musulmans de France (EMF), all members of the EU-wide network European Network Against Racism (ENAR), as part of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood group. It outlines potential new measures targeting Muslim communities and organisations.

In early September, leaders of the CCIE, along with members of a French partner organisation, were arrested, questioned, and placed under judicial supervision with restrictions on their activities.<sup>106</sup> French authorities claimed they were attempting to reconstitute the Collective Against Islamophobia in France, which was dissolved in 2020. However, the CCIE is a legally independent Belgian organisation operating across Europe.

During a monitoring session of the National Assembly's law commission on anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia, statistics from the interior ministry's national intelligence department, Direction nationale du renseignement territorial (DNRT), reported 173 anti-Muslim incidents recorded in 2024, a 29% decrease compared with 2023 (242 incidents). However, the report points out that these figures do not fully reflect the prevailing Islamophobia in society, which manifests itself on a daily basis in political discourse and the media.<sup>107</sup>

This observation is shared by the 2024 report on the fight against racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia by the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (CNCDH), a national consultative committee on human rights, which reported an 11% rise in racist crimes and offences.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, antisemitic acts continue to rise at an alarming rate following the Hamas terror attacks of 7 October 2023, with more than 1,570 incidents recorded. This increase led to the relaunch of the Assises de la lutte contre l'antisémitisme, a conference against antisemitism, by the interministerial delegation for the fight against racism, antisemitism, and anti-LGBTI+ hatred, which issued a report on 28 April 2025.<sup>109</sup> The report recommended 15 measures to combat antisemitism and structure public action in response to this threat.

<sup>101</sup>. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1996/96380DC.htm>

<sup>102</sup>. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-243820%22%5D%7D>

<sup>103</sup>. <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/controles-didentite-discriminatoires-la-france-condamnee-par-la-cedh-904>

<sup>104</sup>. <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/enquete-sur-lacces-aux-droits-sur-les-relations-entre-police-et-population-que-retenir-896>

<sup>105</sup>. <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/dossiers-de-presse/publication-du-rapport-freres-musulmans-et-islamisme-politique-en-france/https://www.idh-france.org/halte-a-la-paranoia-contre-lesmusulmans/#:~:text=Communiqu%C3%A9%20LDH&text=Un%20rapport%20officiel%20intitul%C3%A9%20%C2%AB%20Fr%C3%A8res,gouvernement%20le%2021%20mai%202025>

<sup>106</sup>. <https://civicspacewatch.eu/alert/france-political-instability-mass-protests-and-new-restrictive-measures-against-civil-society/>

<sup>107</sup>. [https://www.assembleenationale.fr/dyn/17/documents/cion\\_lois/117n792620793\\_document.pdf#:~:text=Les%20statistiques%20de%20la%20Direction,%C3%A0%202023%20\(242%20faits\)](https://www.assembleenationale.fr/dyn/17/documents/cion_lois/117n792620793_document.pdf#:~:text=Les%20statistiques%20de%20la%20Direction,%C3%A0%202023%20(242%20faits))

<sup>108</sup>. <https://www.cncdh.fr/publications/rapport-2024-sur-la-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-la-xenophobie>

<sup>109</sup>. <https://www.dilcrah.gouv.fr/ressources/rapport-des-groupes-de-travail-issus-des-assises-de-lutte-contre-lantisemitisme>

## Increased pressure on LGBTQI+ rights and gender equality frameworks

2025 was also marked by a deterioration in the political climate regarding LGBTQI+ rights. In June, Valérie Pécresse, president of the Île-de-France region, cancelled two €25,000 subsidies awarded to the Inter-LGBT Association, the organiser of the Paris Pride march. This followed a controversy over the publication of a poster to highlight the fight “against international reactionism” for the Paris Pride march.<sup>110</sup> More precisely, the poster depicts seven figures, including a trans person, an Act Up activist, a woman wearing a headscarf, and another woman with a Palestinian flag pin. This episode illustrated the financial vulnerability of LGBTQI+ organisations that are dependent on public funding and the growing use of budgetary leverage in political conflicts.

A report published in 2025 by the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) also warns of an explosion in “anti-gender” funding, which could threaten women’s, LGBTQI+ people’s, and children’s rights, as well as gender equality.<sup>111</sup> The introduction of education on emotional, relational, and sexual life is also facing difficulties in the face of attacks from identity movements. For example, an address by the association C3S Corse Stratégie Santé Sexuelle (Corsica sexual health strategy), during a day devoted to raising awareness of sexual risks, was cancelled due to the risk of disturbing public order following attacks by the party Mossa Palatina.<sup>112</sup>

There is, however, institutional support from Défenseur des droits and from the interministerial delegation for the fight against racism, antisemitism, and anti-LGBTQI+ hatred.<sup>113</sup> For example, Défenseur des droits advocated for the rights to gender identity of transgender people through a series of recommendations on 16 June 2025.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, there were several attacks against LGBTQI+ people, including the ban on the Dijon Pride parade in the city centre in order to “preserve public order” and “prevent” possible

“disturbances”.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the statistics department of the interior ministry published a report on anti-LGBTQI+ offences recorded in 2024 which reveals a 14% increase in offences targeting LGBTQI+ people since 2016.<sup>116</sup>

With regard to the defence of women’s rights, although a bill has been passed to amend the criminal definition of rape and sexual assault to include the concept of consent,<sup>117</sup> the access to and enforcement of these rights are undermined by budgetary restrictions. A survey conducted by the Women’s Foundation in the summer of 2025 reveals that budget cuts have prevented 6,250 women victims of violence from receiving support.<sup>118</sup>

## Environmental rights defenders face pressure, threats, violence, and disproportionate sanctions

Associations committed to defending rights face criminalising rhetoric. This is particularly evident in the 2026 finance bill, where environmental and migrants’ rights associations are targeted by amendments aimed at removing their tax exemptions for donations if they are found guilty of “illegal intrusion”. This measure has been denounced by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and France Nature Environnement as a financial deterrent.<sup>119</sup>

Environmental rights defenders are increasingly subjected to pressure, threats, violence, and disproportionate legal sanctions. In 2025, the Movement in Support of Environmental Defenders (MSDE) recorded 95 legal proceedings, compared to 55 in 2023. This related to actions including road blockades, paint attacks on institutions or businesses, and other symbolic acts of civil disobedience. In most cases, the courts have rejected arguments based on necessity or ecological emergency.

In November 2025, an environmental activist was sentenced to six months in prison for spraying water-based paint on the façade of the Hôtel Matignon,

<sup>110</sup>. <https://libertesassociatives.org/entrave/149-la-region-ile-de-france-retire-50-000-euros-de-subsidiation-a-linter-lgbt-apres-la-publication-dune-affiche-contre-linternationale-reactionnaire-pour-la-marche/>

<sup>111</sup>. [https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/la-france-championne-des-financements-anti-gendre-dereprouve-la-hongrie-selon-un-rapport-20250626\\_XJAL5JCAHBALPH3JBHZ6ZBR2RQ/?redirected=1](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/la-france-championne-des-financements-anti-gendre-dereprouve-la-hongrie-selon-un-rapport-20250626_XJAL5JCAHBALPH3JBHZ6ZBR2RQ/?redirected=1)

<sup>112</sup>. <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/une-association-ecartee-d-une-action-de-prevention-apres-des-critiques-d-un-parti-identitaire-4020391>

<sup>113</sup>. Interview with SOS Homophobie on 11 November 2025.

<sup>114</sup>. [https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/index.php?lvl=notice\\_display&id=55224#:~:text=En%20mati%C3%A8re%20de%20d%C3%A9ontologie%20des,g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ralement%20sur%20la%20th%C3%A9matique%20LGBTI.](https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=55224#:~:text=En%20mati%C3%A8re%20de%20d%C3%A9ontologie%20des,g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ralement%20sur%20la%20th%C3%A9matique%20LGBTI.)

<sup>115</sup>. [https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/lgbt/la-prefecture-interdit-la-pride-2025-dans-le-centre-ville-de-dijon\\_7307532.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/lgbt/la-prefecture-interdit-la-pride-2025-dans-le-centre-ville-de-dijon_7307532.html).

<sup>116</sup>. <https://www.dilcrah.gouv.fr/ressources/une-hausse-preoccupante-des-infractions-anti-lgbt-enregistrees-en-2023/https://www.la-croix.com/societe/les-atteintes-envers-les-personnes-lgbt-en-hausse-de-5-en-2024-20250515>.

<sup>117</sup>. [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/dossiers/definition\\_penale\\_viol\\_agressions\\_sexuelles\\_17e#PROM](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/dossiers/definition_penale_viol_agressions_sexuelles_17e#PROM)

<sup>118</sup>. <https://fondationdesfemmes.org/dfd-content/uploads/2025/08/FDF-Rapport-Enquete-12pages-WEB3.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup>. <https://www.carenews.com/carenews-info/news/budget-2026-des-associations-denoncent-des-amendements-baillons-menacant-leur>

a non-violent protest against climate inaction.<sup>120</sup> This sentence, the harshest ever handed down for an act of environmental civil disobedience in France, illustrates a systematic intensification of the repression, reinforced by the seizure of equipment, police custody, and exorbitant demands for damages, in this case amounting to €163,000.

On 22 December, eight environmental activists were tried over two graffiti messages warning about the dumping of toxic waste in Alsace. The public prosecutor requested a three-month suspended sentence,<sup>121</sup> while they had already been held in police custody for 46 hours after tagging a bridge — offences that for a long time were punishable by a simple fine and community service.

In addition, environmental defenders face stigmatising rhetoric, which refers to them as “eco-terrorists” or “khmers verts”, as denounced in an Amnesty International report.<sup>122</sup> There have also been acts of intimidation reported, such as the vandalism at the home of Claire Nouvian, an environmental activist and founder of the NGO Bloom.<sup>123</sup> An investigation was ultimately opened by the Paris prosecutor’s office.

### Discursive attacks against civil society

In recent years, the discourse of the French authorities towards civil society has become increasingly hostile. Associations report an increase in serious attacks by institutions on associative freedoms, either in the form of strong attacks by political leaders aimed particularly at discrediting their actions, or through mechanisms aimed at strengthening the control of their activities.<sup>124</sup>

For example, in April 2025, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau criticised LDH after it took legal action in Rennes against the use of drones in connection with the fight against drug trafficking, which it argued constituted a disproportionate infringement to civil

liberties. On social media, he accused LDH of “playing into the hands of drug traffickers and thugs who profit from this deadly trade” and of opposing, “under the guise of good intentions,” the “right to security.”<sup>125</sup>

Alongside delegitimisation at the governmental level, local elected officials are also increasing attacks against human rights organisations. For example, while running for president of the Les Républicains party, Laurent Wauquiez, president of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, announced in April 2025 his intention to cut subsidies to all “watermelon” associations. The watermelon, which shares its colours with those of the Palestinian flag, has been used by many as a symbol of support for Palestinian rights.

In another case the mayor of Chalon-sur-Saône, Gilles Platret, described the LDH and its partners who are pursuing a legal dispute over Palestinian flags as “small groups in the pay of Islamists”, prompting LDH to file a complaint against the mayor at the Paris Judicial Court.<sup>126</sup>

In November 2025, Rachida Dati, a candidate in the Paris municipal elections and culture minister, accused the Utopia56 association of providing tents to the homeless and thus creating insecurity in Parisian neighbourhoods,<sup>127</sup> a statement relayed on social networks. Meanwhile, in early December, the interior minister, Laurent Nunez, announced that his department was documenting and preparing cases for the dissolution of associations and groups who are “supporters of disorder.” Among those targeted were the Earth Uprisings, whose initial dissolution case was been overturned by the Constitutional Council in 2023.<sup>128</sup> This decision to launch the second dissolution attempt occurred after the Lyon branch of Earth Uprisings claimed responsibility for displaying video messages (via a projector) critical of police actions (“the police injure and kill”) and expressing support for those injured in Sainte Soline in March 2023.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>120</sup>. Six months in prison for throwing paint: a sentence that reveals the hardening of the crackdown against environmental activists: [https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2025/11/01/six-mois-de-prison-ferme-pour-un-jet-de-peinture-une-peine-revelatrice-du-durcissement-de-la-repression-contre-les-militants-ecologistes\\_6650782\\_3244.html?random=1270577723](https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2025/11/01/six-mois-de-prison-ferme-pour-un-jet-de-peinture-une-peine-revelatrice-du-durcissement-de-la-repression-contre-les-militants-ecologistes_6650782_3244.html?random=1270577723)

<sup>121</sup>. <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/ecologie/231225/en-alsace-de-la-prison-avec-sursis-requis-contre-des-militants-ecologistes-pour-deux-tags>

<sup>122</sup>. <https://www.amnesty.fr/actualites/la-strategie-de-la-france-pour-empêcher-l'action-climatique>

<sup>123</sup>. [https://www.liberation.fr/environnement/domicile-vandalise-de-la-militante-ecologiste-claire-nouvian-le-parquet-de-paris-annonce-louverture-d'une-enquete-20250605\\_5R2I37YJENEJ5VFFBHVJL34BM/?redirected=1](https://www.liberation.fr/environnement/domicile-vandalise-de-la-militante-ecologiste-claire-nouvian-le-parquet-de-paris-annonce-louverture-d'une-enquete-20250605_5R2I37YJENEJ5VFFBHVJL34BM/?redirected=1)

<sup>124</sup>. The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH), in its opinion on the restriction of civic space: a major issue for democracy and human rights, dated June 17, 2025: “In its Opinion on Human Rights Defenders of November 23, 2023, the CNCDH (National Consultative Commission on Human Rights) has already denounced the ‘strengthening of campaigns to stigmatize and demonize defenders,’ which weakens civil society and its members. Denigrated for the relevance of their commitment, presented as ‘extremist,’ associated with the term ‘terrorist’ or labelled ‘eco-terrorists,’ and stigmatized as elements whose actions are potentially detrimental to ‘republican order’ and national security, members of civil society see their words, their actions, and the causes they defend discredited in the public sphere. The recurring and aggressive return of certain themes to the political agenda, such as immigration and security, as well as their media amplification, contribute to the delegitimization of the commitment of civil society actors, to the justification of prior control over their actions, and ultimately to various forms of repression.”

<sup>125</sup>. See post on X: <https://x.com/BrunoRetailleau/status/191324936899333673>.

<sup>126</sup>. <https://www.ldh-france.org/gilles-platret-apres-les-atteintes-aux-libertes-fondamentales-les-injures/>

<sup>127</sup>. <https://x.com/CitizenMediaFR/status/1993740278109188605>

<sup>128</sup>. EC, decision no. 476384 of 9 November 2023.

<sup>129</sup>. <https://www.publicsenat.fr/actualites/politique/slogans-anti-police-a-lyon-et-a-marseille-laurent-nunez-annonce-que-les-prefets-ont-depose-des-plaintes>

# Recommendations

## TARGETED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Strengthen legal and policy frameworks to protect civic space by ensuring that associations can operate freely without undue administrative restrictions, discriminatory exclusion from public forums or events, conditional funding mechanisms that undermine autonomy, or arbitrary dissolution.**
- **Revoke the *Contrat d'engagement républicain* (CER) to restore trust between associations and public authorities, lighten the administrative burden for CSOs, and put an end to a mechanism that does not meet the initial objectives of its establishment (combatting separatism).**
- Introduce the right of associations to use municipal premises, while maintaining the right of local authorities to refuse certain requests based on objective criteria clearly defined by law.
- Create an advisory committee for the allocation of public subsidies at municipal and inter-municipal level, including local elected representatives, association officials, and citizens.
- Secure the scope of activities in the public interest by clarifying which activities are eligible for sponsorship, explicitly including those that appear most at risk of exclusion from funding schemes in the event of an unfavourable political change or shift.
- Strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning abuses related to the application of secularism and guarantee the effectiveness of freedom of conscience and the neutrality of public institutions, thereby ensuring equal and protective treatment of all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.
- Transpose the European anti-SLAPP directive to protect civil society organisations, journalists, and human rights defenders from such proceedings.
- Ensure effective accountability mechanisms for law enforcement by strengthening independent oversight bodies, guaranteeing the systematic identification of officers, ensuring prompt, impartial and effective investigations into allegations of police violence, and providing effective access to remedies for victims.
- Strengthen legal protections that guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and civic engagement to address disproportionate policing or administrative measures against peaceful protestors.
- Maintain the exceptional nature of emergency powers, ensure that they remain proportionate, time bound, and subject to full judicial oversight and prevent their permanent integration into ordinary law.
- Prevent the introduction of extraordinary investigative and enforcement power into ordinary law, which could lead to the normalisation of such powers in criminal law (including legislative measures targeting organised crime or narcotrafficking); and ensure that any provisions remain proportionate, time bound, and subject to full judicial oversight.

# 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](https://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](https://civicspacewatch.eu)**



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