

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

Hungary

by Ökotárs



ökotárs
alapítvány



Monitoring Action
for Civic Space



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

Ökotárs-Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation is an independent foundation committed to strengthening and supporting civil society and community initiatives in Hungary. It provides grants, training, and technical assistance with the aim of contributing to the development of a democratic, sustainable and equitable society and an institutional system based on citizen participation.



ökotárs
alapítvány

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.






Monitoring Action
for Civic Space

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- About the author 3**
- Key Trends 5**
- Summary 5**
- Key Developments 6**
 - Election campaign heats up 6
 - The (so-called) Transparency Act 6
 - Banned Pride becomes a great success 6
- Dimensions 7**
 - Freedom of Association 7
 - Access to Funding 8
 - Freedom of Peaceful Assembly 10
 - Freedom of Expression 11
 - Right to Participation in Decision-Making 12
 - Safe Space 13
- Recommendations 14**

Key Trends

-  Draft law on the transparency of public life attempts to target funding sources of critical CSOs
-  Pride marches banned, LGBTQI organiser criminally charged
-  Scrutiny of foreign funding to civil society, including EU funding to CSOs

Summary

Civic space in Hungary is rated as “Obstructed” by the CIVICUS Monitor.¹ The European Commission’s 2025 Rule of Law report recommended that the government take steps to “ensure that there are no obstacles hindering the work of civil society organisations, including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, and foster a safe and enabling civic space.” The government took no steps to address this recommendation.

In 2025, it continued its attacks on civil society, and in particular escalated its attacks on LGBTQI+ rights. The pattern of proposing restrictive legislation continued with the draft law on the transparency of public life, which would have cut off the funding resources of CSOs, media, think tanks and other actors critical of the government. The law would give a broader mandate to the relatively new Sovereignty Protection Office, which

so far has served as a propaganda tool. In mid-March, the Assembly Act was hastily amended to create a legal basis for the ban of the LGBTQI+ Pride march. Following this, the police banned the march, but this decision was overturned by the court. Later, the police issued further bans on the march (which had been notified to the authorities under several different titles), some of which were overturned, but others not. Nevertheless, the Budapest march saw an unprecedented number of people attending — between 200,000 and 300,000. In Pecs, authorities banned the local march, which also went ahead regardless. Additionally, the Criminal Code has been used to threaten certain activists involved in highly political cases, usually with the purpose of intimidation rather than actual punishment, launching investigations that are not closed. CSOs’ participation in decision-making remains weak, while foreign funded CSOs continue to face smear campaigns.

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

Key Developments

Election campaign heats up

The state of civic space in Hungary has continuously deteriorated over the past decade, and it further worsened in 2025 against the backdrop of parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in April 2026. Although the official campaign period only starts 60 days prior to an election, the campaign was already in full swing throughout 2025. With a new contender, the centre-right TISZA Party led by Péter Magyar, leading in the polls against the governing right-wing populist FIDESZ, a new political reality of one-on-one competition emerged. FIDESZ responded by further

raising the stakes, and in this tense political climate, scandals broke out on a weekly basis.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán started the year with several high-profile speeches (such as the annual State of Hungary address) during which he repeatedly spoke about the need to “clean out” dissenters,² including academics, journalists, and civil society organisations (CSOs). This rhetoric translated into two major legislative initiatives that defined 2025.

The (so-called) Transparency Act

The prime minister promised this “clean out” by Easter, without specifying any details, thereby creating a sense of uncertainty that worried many and lasted throughout the spring. The threat took form in mid-May when an unexpected draft law on the transparency of public life was published on the parliament’s website, causing immediate alarm. Human rights CSOs dubbed the law “Operation Starve and Strangle”, as it would have targeted CSOs, media, think tanks, and other actors critical of the government and cut them off from their financial resources (see more under Access to Funding). The law would give a broader mandate to the relatively new Sovereignty Protection Office, which so far had served as a propaganda tool, issuing accusatory reports to discredit independent media and CSOs without any authority, and which at the time of writing awaits a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

Opposition to the draft act took many forms: approximately 300 CSOs and 60 media outlets signed a joint statement.³ Judges, lawyers, and trade unions condemned it publicly, while banner-hanging actions took place in several cities and within the parliament itself. Two large demonstrations were organised in Budapest and international organisations issued solidarity statements. Despite the outcry, parliament continued to debate the law. On 4 June, the leader of the FIDESZ parliamentary group unexpectedly announced that debate over the law would be postponed till after the summer but it was not withdrawn. In the months that followed, governing party figures sent contradictory messages, and while there were no new developments at the time of publication, the uncertainty and threat remained.

Banned Pride becomes a great success

During the first months of the year, the prime minister attacked the LGBTQI+ community, declaring that the annual Pride demonstration would not take place this year. In mid-March, the Assembly Act was hastily amended to create a legal basis for the ban, referring to the 2021 amendment of the Child Protection Act that banned homosexual propaganda to minors, and which at the time of writing was also pending judgement at the CJEU. Despite the bans, Pride organisers were determined to hold the event. In the following two

months, a chaotic and uncertain legal situation ensued: police were notified of several demonstrations and some of these were banned, with several bans then overturned by the Supreme Court of Hungary. In the meantime, Pride generated significant support and solidarity both in Hungary and abroad: the Budapest mayor endorsed it as an official event of the municipality, and embassies and at least 70 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) registered their participation.

2. <https://kormany.hu/hirek/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-20240217?isSpecial=true> ;

<https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1848-49-es-forradalom-es-szabadsaghaoutcriesrc-177-evfordulojan/>

3. <https://civilizacio.net/en/news-blog/no-country-was-built-on-blacklists>

The legal uncertainty remained, however, until the start of the march, which, despite the risk of being fined up to €500 for participating in a banned protest, drew an unprecedented number of people — between 200,000 and 300,000, according to estimates. The event took place peacefully, without disruption; police protected the marchers by separating them from a smaller, far-right counter-protest.

In September, this story was repeated, on a smaller scale, in Pécs (southern Hungary), the only other city where Pride is regularly organised. The police banned the event, and the Supreme Court upheld the decision. Nevertheless, the march on 4 October became the largest ever held in the city, with several thousand people participating. Counter-protesters attempted to disrupt the event but were stopped by the police.

Dimensions

Freedom of Association

In line with relevant international law, Article VIII, paragraph (2) of the Constitution of Hungary provides for the right to freedom of association for everyone. This right is further described in Article I of the Nonprofit Act (CLXV of 2011 on the freedom of association, public benefit status, and the operation and financing of civil society organisations). Detailed rules of the main forms of legally registered civil society organisations (CSOs) — associations and foundations — are included in Chapters VII and XXII of the Civil Code (Act V of 2013). Besides these, the Nonprofit Act also acknowledges a simple, non-registered form of association, known as a civil group.

In theory, the registration of a CSO is fairly straightforward, free of charge, and can be done entirely online using forms and templates provided on the court's website.⁴ In 2025, there were no reports of denied registration or forced dissolution, and the number of registered civil society organisations remained stable, according to official statistics.⁵ The registry of civil society organisations is publicly available on the general court's website.⁶

In practice, however, individuals not familiar with legal procedures, can easily make formal errors in the registration forms, which could lead to a lengthy process of

However, the police later charged the main Pride organiser (a gay Roma teacher) with holding an illegal assembly.

Despite some victories, restrictive legislation passed in the previous year remained in place (or pending in parliament), smear campaigns and the intimidation of CSOs critical of the government, especially those representing minorities such as LGBTQI+ people, migrants, drug users, homeless people, persisted. In rural areas, it was exacerbated by threats of losing employment in the public sector for speaking out or criticising the authorities. In general, an uncertain and threatening atmosphere prevailed and was expected to worsen, at least until the elections, which themselves risked negatively affecting civic action and open debate.

correction. According to the law, the court has 30 days to register an organisation, but in practice, it is rarely done within that timeframe, and the same applies to making any changes in the organisation's registered data or statutes. Minimal official support and guidance are available. Only some civil society resource centres, such as NIOK Foundation⁷ or Pilnet⁸ offer such support with the procedures. Given these circumstances, many groups decide to remain informal in order to avoid the administrative burdens of registering and operating an organisation. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the intimidating political environment sometimes deters people from taking on official roles in CSOs.

In June, the parliament adopted a law reforming the registration of all legal bodies (Act LIX of 2025), including CSOs, by transferring both the process and the registry from the courts to an as yet undetermined administrative office to be established in the future (likely under the justice ministry) to decrease the courts' burden. While on the surface it seems to be a purely administrative change, some fear potential political influence, as an agency under direct governmental control would have less independence than the courts under the new system. The law will enter into force only at the beginning of 2027; thus, its impact remains to be seen.

4. <https://birosag.hu/ugyfeleknek/urlapok-nyomtatvanyok/eljarasok-nyomtatvanyai/civil-eljarasok-urlapjai>

5. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/gsz/hu/gsz0013.html

6. <https://birosag.hu/ugyfeleknek/civil-szervezetek/civil-szervezetek-nevjegyzeke>

7. <https://www.nonprofit.hu/tudastar>

8. <https://www.pilnet.org/our-work/europe-eurasia/hungarian/>

The everyday operation of CSOs is largely free of undue state interference, as they can determine their activities and elect their statutory bodies independently. In 2025, there were no reports of excessive inspections by authorities, with one notable exception. Since 2015, the government targeted the Oltalom (Shelter) Charitable Association, which is linked to the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood, stripping the association of funding. In 2024, the Budapest regional government office shuttered the association's schools, where they taught homeless and otherwise disadvantaged children. The decision was revoked by the court in March 2025.⁹ However, in September 2025, the same office initiated a procedure to withdraw the licence of the homeless shelters run by the association in the 8th district of Budapest.¹⁰ The court decision claimed that there were inadequate conditions at the shelters,

despite many earlier inspections. Furthermore, in November, the public prosecutor charged Pastor Gábor Iványi,¹¹ the leader of the association (and several other persons), with violence against public officials in relation to a tax inspection that took place at the association's premises in 2022.

CSOs, especially those with public benefit status (approximately 20% of all organisations), have to meet extensive documentation and reporting obligations, and they may be subject to controls by various governmental agencies, including the State Audit Body. All organisations must submit their annual financial reports, using the relevant forms for publication in the registry, and must publish them on their own websites, thus guaranteeing a level of transparency.

Access to Funding

Under current legislation, CSOs are free to seek and receive funding both domestically and from abroad, as well as from any sources and through any means, including online. The rules for collecting individual donations are in Government Decree 350/2011 (XII.30 on certain questions of the management of CSOs, fundraising, and public benefit status) and require CSOs to report separately on the money they collect. In practice, CSOs use a broad variety of fundraising tools, ranging from online crowdsourcing and merchandising through corporate support to philanthropic and public grants. However, foreign funding (of any type) has been treated by the government as suspect, and organisations receiving grants from abroad are among the primary targets of smear campaigns (see more in Safe Space). In spring 2024, a separate state agency, the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO), was created (based on legislation passed in December of the previous year, Act LXXXVIII. of 2023) with the sole purpose of collecting information and producing reports and other papers on organisations and programmes that allegedly work in the interest of foreign entities. After publishing reports on several CSOs, including Transparency International-Hungary¹² and Ökotárs Foundation,¹³ in 2025, the SPO's publications focused

on EU funding programmes such as Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV),¹⁴ Horizon Europe,¹⁵ and the Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF),¹⁶ as well as listing some of their Hungarian beneficiaries in an arbitrary manner. The European Commission, which earlier initiated an infringement procedure on the Sovereignty Protection Act, referred the case to the European Court of Justice¹⁷ in October 2024, with the result pending at the time of writing.¹⁸

In a related move, Csaba Dömötör, a Hungarian member of the Patriots for Europe group in the European Parliament, requested in (P-001007/2025¹⁹) that the European Commission disclose the data of all funded organisations. The Patriots group created its own directory on the website ngotransparency.eu, which could be used for targeted smear campaigns against Hungarian CSOs.

This situation escalated when, on 13 May, a draft law, the Transparency of Public Life Act (T/11923²⁰), was submitted to parliament by an individual MP (later joined by the majority of the FIDESZ governing party) without any prior consultation. The bill was to be adopted by mid-June, but in an unexpected

9. <https://oltalom.hu/2025/03/13/itelet-szuletett-jogszerutlen-volt-met-budapesti-iskolainak-bezarasa/>

10. <https://oltalom.hu/2025/09/23/a-kormanyhivatal-eljarast-inditott-a-danko-utcai-hajlektalanellato-intezmenyek-mukodesi-engedelyenek-visszavonasara/>

11. <https://ugyeszseg.hu/vademeles-ivanyi-gabor-es-tarsai-ellen/>

12. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/The-impact-of-Transparency-International-Hungarys-activities-on-Hungarian-sovereignty.pdf>

13. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/The-impact-of-the-activities-of-%C3%96kot%C3%A1rs-on-Hungarian-sovereignty.pdf>

14. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/Az-Europai-Bizottsag-CERV-programja-Igy-nyitotta-meg-Brusszel-a-penzcsapot-a-Soros-halozat-finanszirozasara.pdf>

15. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/hirek/politikai-projekteteket-is-finansziroznak-az-europai-unio-kutatasi-es-innovacios-programjabol>

16. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/hirek/migraciobarat-befolyasolas-kozvetlen-brusszeli-forrasokbol>

17. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/da/ip_24_4865

18. <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=296476&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=381843>

19. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-10-2025-001007_EN.html

20. <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11923/11923.pdf>

development, halfway through the parliamentary debate, the government announced it would suspend adoption until autumn 2025. By the end of the year, however, the bill was still listed as pending on the parliament's website, with no action planned.

If adopted, this legislation could potentially target CSOs, media outlets and other entities by:

- ▶ allowing the government to draw up a list of entities (of any kind) based on a recommendation from the Sovereignty Protection Office and vaguely defined criteria (for example, “influencing public life”).
- ▶ requiring these listed entities to seek permission from the tax authority in order to receive any foreign support.
- ▶ obliging banks to report to the tax authority on any transfers from abroad to the accounts of the listed entities.
- ▶ penalising any unapproved receipt of foreign donations with a fine 25 times the value of the support.
- ▶ requiring domestic private donors to declare in writing, with full evidentiary power that their donation is not coming from foreign sources; and
- ▶ excluding the listed entities from among the beneficiaries of the 1% income tax assignment system (see below).

The law provides no legal remedies for entities to challenge their inclusion in the list or a ban on receiving specific grants or donations from abroad. A more detailed briefing of the law's impact was developed by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, together with other human rights organisations.²¹ Naturally, the draft generated protest both in Hungary and internationally, including in the banking sector, and even created divisions within the ruling party, but also much fear, especially among CSOs listed in the SPO's publications (see more in the Safe Space section). If adopted, the law could be in breach of EU law on several counts, for example, in terms of freedom of association and expression, and the right to an effective remedy and a fair trial.

Furthermore, a recently passed Government Decree (297/2025. (IX.26) on emergency rules for action against certain persons and organisations in the fight against terrorism may cause concern in the future. The regulation creates a national terrorism list of people

and organisations that can be sanctioned, primarily through financial means, such as freezing assets and limiting transactions. Thus far, the only listed organisation is “Antifa” without specifying which organisation precisely it refers to (in a similar vein to a decision by the US president). It is possible that the decree could be used against organisations under any pretext.

In terms of state funding, there are several instruments (the National Cooperation Fund and the City and Village Civil Funds) that support CSOs with significant amounts: the former dispersed 16 billion HUF (€40 million), and the latter 4.8 billion HUF (€12 million) this year. The working procedures of these state funding mechanisms are not transparent; for example, the lists of supported projects are hard to find on the website nor easily searchable. Investigative journalists have repeatedly shown²² by analysing the results²³ of the grant calls that the majority of this funding goes to organisations established and/or led by local leaders and figures of the governing party. While human rights organisations and other critical CSOs are not excluded *per se*, they have simply not received grants from these sources. EU Structural Fund support (such as is available) is mainly distributed through pre-defined projects, and not via open, competitive calls, thereby strongly favouring state institutions and churches over CSOs. Meagre municipal grants cannot make up for the lack of funding, and local institutional philanthropy remains weak. Therefore, independent CSOs depend on foreign institutional and private donors as well as on micro-donations, which they collect with increasing efficiency. Though not specific to Hungary, the negative impact of the sudden termination of US government-funded programmes in January 2025 was also felt by several organisations in Hungary: some had to re-think their work plans and do additional fundraising to make up for the lost resources.

All CSOs can register to benefit from the 1% of personal income tax, as based on citizens' allocation (Act CXVII of 1996). In 2025, more than 30,000 CSOs were included in this scheme. While organisations caring for children and stray animals have traditionally been the main beneficiaries, human rights CSOs also receive significant amounts. Most recently, the foundations of independent media outlets have become popular, too, with Telex news portal and the Partizán YouTube channel topping this year's list.²⁴

21. <https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/05/Operation-Starve-and-Strangle-2025.pdf>

22. <https://444.hu/2025/05/21/ujra-kinyilt-a-kormanyzati-penzcsap-ami-kozpenzt-ont-az-allamparhoz-kozel-allo-civil-szervezetekre>

23. https://bgazrt.hu/wp-content/uploads/palyazati_kirasok/varosi_civil_alap/2025/VCA-KP-1-2025_dontesi_lista.pdf

24. https://nav.gov.hu/ado/szja1_1/kimutatasok_elszamolások/civil-szervezetek/egyszaz_kiut_2025/kozlemeny-a-2025.-evben-szja-1-os-felajnlásban-reszesult-civil-kedvezményezettekrol

Besides this, however, there are very few tax benefits for civil society: according to the Company Tax Act (Act LXXXI. of 1996), companies supporting CSOs with public benefit status can deduct 20% of the donation from their corporate tax (40% of the support exceeds three years), but individual taxpayers have no such

similar scheme. Corporate tax benefits are also strongly biased towards professional sports. Furthermore, the 25% punitive tax on all incomes of organisations that “support illegal immigration” as introduced in 2018 is, in theory, still remains, though it has never been applied.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Until March 2025, the 2018 Assembly Act (Act LV. of 2018) was generally considered as meeting relevant international standards, though it received some criticism for giving overly broad grounds to the police to ban planned assemblies. At the same time, the law allows spontaneous assemblies to take place without prior notification. The police are usually cooperative and safeguard assemblies appropriately. One notable exception, however, is the blanket ban on Palestine solidarity assemblies, issued by the interior minister following the outbreak of the war in Gaza in 2023, which was still in place at the time of writing.²⁵

On 15 March 2025, in his celebratory speech on the National Day of Hungary, Viktor Orbán stated that Pride organisers “shouldn’t bother” this year, as the march would not be held. Following this, an amendment to the Assembly Act was adopted in an extraordinary process over just two days, which made reference to the Child Protection Act (more specifically to an amendment passed in 2021 banning “homosexual propaganda” to minors, dubbed as the ‘propaganda law’). It formed the grounds for banning an assembly, thus creating a legal basis to ban Pride. The amendment further:

- ▶ threatens the organisers of illegal assemblies with up to one year in prison.
- ▶ makes participation in unauthorised assemblies an offence punishable by fine; and
- ▶ empowers the police to use facial recognition tools to identify participants in assemblies.

Separately, amendments were also made to the Infraction Act and the Facial Recognition Technology Act, which authorise the use of facial recognition technology against protesters and constitute real-time remote biometric identification in public spaces. This is in direct breach of Article 5 of the newly adopted EU AI Act.²⁶

The adoption of the amendment to the assembly act sparked protest from opposition MPs in the parliament, with independent MP Ákos Hadházy, with the support of others, holding demonstrations every Tuesday for several months. During the initial marches, protesters attempted to occupy several bridges on the Danube, but were partially stopped or dispersed by the police, and administrative procedures were carried out against several dozen people.²⁷ Later demonstrations took place without similar such incidents.

In parallel to this, police initially acknowledged a small demonstration held on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia, but later banned assemblies that were to be held on the planned date of Pride, 28 June. Human rights CSOs turned to the Curia (high court), which twice overturned the bans, but upheld them the third time. In the meantime, Mayor of Budapest Gergely Karácsony adopted the march as a municipal event, thus not requiring permission from the police. Additionally, the far-right party Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) “booked” practically all potential routes for the Pride march. This led to a chaotic and unpredictable legal situation,²⁸ with the justice minister warning embassies a few days before to refrain from participating in Pride.

In spite of all this, Pride was held and became one of the largest demonstrations in Hungary ever, with participation between 200,000 and 300,000 people.²⁹ After some initial inaction, the police also worked professionally during the actual event, safeguarding the route and separating the march from the smaller counter-protests. No procedures were launched against participants, with one notable exception: Mayor Karácsony was interviewed by the police³⁰ on 1 August as the organiser and later the police proposed to the prosecutors to press charges.³¹

25. <https://kuria-birosag.hu/hu/gyulhat/kgykvii3912020238-szamu-hatarozat>

26. <https://ecnl.org/news/civil-society-urges-european-commission-uphold-ai-act-hungary>

27. <https://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/kozrendvedelem/osszesites-5>

28. <https://helsinki.hu/valaszok-negy-gyakran-felmerulo-kerdesre-a-pride-kapcsan/>

29. See e.g. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20250628_Budapest-Pride-Buszkeseg-Menet-LMBTQ-Karacsony-Gergely-rendorseg-elo-kozvetites-ebx

30. <https://444.hu/2025/08/01/bevonult-kihallgatasara-karacsony-gergely-fopolgarmester>

31. <https://www.reuters.com/world/hungarian-police-propose-charges-against-budapest-mayor-over-banned-pride-march-2025-12-12/>

Police banned Pride in Pécs, the only one held outside the capital, and planned for 4 October. Curia (high court) also upheld the police decision. Despite this, organisers were intent on holding the event, which was eventually a success with several thousand participants, and it took place without any significant incidents.³² Once again, the police provided adequate protection

by separating the march from counter-protesters. However, in early November, police interviewed the main organiser of the march, Géza Buzás-Hábel, on suspicion of organising an illegal assembly, and subsequently recommended that the public prosecutor press charges.³³

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is protected under Article IX of the Fundamental Law, focusing on the dignity of the individual and that of national, ethnic, and religious communities. There are no general or undue legal restrictions, including in the online space. Extreme opinions can be sanctioned under the clauses on scaremongering, defamation, and incitement (against a member of a community) in the Criminal Code (Act CCXXIII of 2012). A recent amendment, entering into force at the beginning of 2025, added “online aggression” (paragraph 332/A), defined as the publication of online content wishing for or expressing an act causing the death or suffering of someone. This clause has reportedly already been used³⁴ as the basis for police action in several instances.

These criminal clauses have been used to threaten certain people involved in highly political cases, usually with the purpose of intimidation rather than actual punishment, launching investigations that are never closed. These usually do not concern CSOs but have involved activists. Most recently, in September, a defamation procedure was launched³⁵ against a former leader of a child protection institution who publicly spoke out about the poor state of the childcare system in relation to allegations of abuse. In a related case, police searched a house and confiscated electronics from an ex-politician and YouTube activist, Péter Juhász who had revealed similar suspected abuses in another childcare home in one of his videos.³⁶

In another case, an activist in Pécs was warned by the court in the first instance for overwriting billboards carrying the government’s propaganda messages.³⁷ The appeal is still pending. Activists of the group The City is for All! were condemned by the court on the

second instance for damage to property for painting slogans on sidewalks in 2020.³⁸ In a case of infringement on free expression, authorities banned Northern Irish band Kneecap from Hungary before their scheduled concert at the Island Festival, claiming national security concerns.³⁹

State and municipal employees are regularly threatened or face sanctions for speaking out on issues, often on social media posts or in comments. One such case in 2025 concerned the wife of an opposition MEP who was sacked from the ministry where she worked, after she reshared a post critical of the state of protection for monuments.⁴⁰ Péter Pázmány Catholic University launched disciplinary procedures against three researchers in 2025 for publishing papers supporting the LGBTQI+ community. Eventually, all three researchers resigned.⁴¹

The 2021 amendment to the Child Protection Act, banning “homosexual propaganda to minors”, constitutes one further restriction on freedom of expression. In 2025, it was mainly used as a basis to ban Pride marches (see above in Freedom of Assembly). Following the initiative of the European Commission in 2023, the law was pending at the EU Court of Justice (CJEU) at time of writing. In the Opinion issued in June 2025, the Advocate-General of the CJEU⁴² concluded that the law infringes upon the Charter of Fundamental Rights on several counts.

The “propaganda law”, among other consequences, has effectively banned CSOs from cooperating with public education, due to fear of repercussions. This was further exacerbated by Government Decree 39/2024 (XII. 13), which centralised the system of teacher

32. <https://444.hu/2025/10/04/elkezdodott-a-betiltott-pecs-pride>

33. <https://helsinki.hu/a-rendorseg-vademelest-javasol-a-pecs-pride-szervezoje-ellen/>

34. <https://telex.hu/techtud/2025/08/13/internet-kozossegi-media-kommentek-rendorseg-ugyeszseg-mi-a-helyzet>

35. <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2025/09/10/kuslits-gabor-tegyesz-gyermekvedelmi-szakember-interju-feljelentes-szocialis-es-gyermekvedelmi-foigazgatóság-rendorseg/>

36. <https://ugyeszseg.hu/ugyeszseg-nyomozati-cselekmények-a-szolo-utcai-javitointezet-ugyeben-a-kozponti-nyomozó-fogyeszseg-sajtóközleménye/>

37. <https://helsinki.hu/elitelték-a-mar-hulladék-gyuloletplakatot-kjavito-pecsi-aktivistathave/>

38. <https://kreativ.hu/cikk/a-kozvecekert-kampanyoltak-most-eliteltok-oket>

39. <https://kormany.hu/hirek/kitalitottak-a-kneecap-egyutttest-magyarorszagrol>

40. <https://helsinki.hu/tarr-zoltan-felesege-jekely-berta-megtamadta-miniszteriumi-felmenteset/>

41. https://nepszava.hu/3293706_pazmany-peter-katolikus-egyetem-pszichologus-feolomondas

42. <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=300973&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=31053228>

training, making the National University of Public Service and the Education Office the sole accredited training institutions.

Under these circumstances self-censorship is rather widespread, including among CSOs, especially in the countryside, where the loss of public-sector employment comprises an existential threat. There is no tangible data on this phenomenon, but anecdotal evidence shows that local CSOs and activists do not dare to engage on specific issues or with specific organisations and keep a distance from anything “political” due to the risk of repercussions.

Although hate speech is criminally sanctioned, and civil law remedies are also available, government leaders have made distorted, misleading or false claims (see Safe Space), which are further repeated and amplified in the pro-government media conglomerate comprised of about two-thirds of all outlets, including the public

broadcaster, most commercial radio stations, and all regional newspapers. Although there were no reports of major campaigns against any specific CSOs in 2025, smearing, stigmatisation, and vilification of critical organisations has been a recurring, and by now, usual practice, exacerbated by the SPO’s reports and lists of organisations and persons viewed as a “threat to national sovereignty”. The extent of mis- and disinformation is well evidenced in the latest analysis by the investigative portal Átlátszó (Transparent). In 2024, pro-government outlets lost 67 court cases,⁴³ obligating them to publish corrections. In most such cases, independent outlets have won. Átlátszó, the subject of one of the first SPO reports,⁴⁴ sued the SPO for defamation and won on the first instance in December, though the SPO has not accepted the ruling.⁴⁵ CSOs, especially in the regions, face challenges in accessing community spaces. In this environment, it is extremely difficult for CSOs to have their voices heard and to combat disinformation.

Right to Participation in Decision-Making

Public consultations of draft legislation are included in Act CXXXI. of 2010 (on public participation in the preparation of legislation), while access to public information is laid down in Act CXII. of 2011 (on the right to information, self-determination and freedom of information).

According to the 2010 act, draft legislation must be published on the government website, with at least eight days for anyone to submit comments or opinions that the legislator should take into account and provide summary feedback (with a list of contributors) on the same webpage. However, the act includes a broad range of exemptions on the grounds of national security, protection of the environment, and other reasons, and in a 2025 amendment, exemptions on issues related to the state budget and funding. In practice, the minimum deadline is rarely extended, feedback is rarely provided, and more importantly, the whole consultation process is circumvented with major pieces of legislation submitted to parliament by individual MPs (and not the government), as was the case this year with the transparency law (see Access to Funding).

Regarding other avenues for dialogue, various committees and working groups exist, including

the National Environmental Council, Human Rights Roundtable, and the Roma Coordination Council, but in practice they do not convene often or are no longer active. The government usually only consults with “friendly” organisations (or GONGOS⁴⁶), but even this tends to be tokenistic and for appearances.

In contrast, the EU Monitoring Committees of the Cohesion Funds include civil society representatives from various areas and operate regularly.⁴⁷ Civil society committee members have coordinated among themselves to raise problematic issues and advocate for including CSOs as eligible applicants in certain calls for proposals. At the same time, the Committees serve primarily as a source of information, as civil society representatives can rarely influence decisions.

At the local level, since 2023, based on an amendment to the Environment Protection Act (paragraph 91/C (3), Act LIII. of 1995), public hearings on planned investments and environmental impact may be held online. The authorities have used this approach in especially contested cases such as the planned new car battery factory in Debrecen,⁴⁸ thereby avoiding direct, in-person public criticism. At the same time, municipalities with opposition or independent leadership

⁴³. <https://atlatszo.hu/kozadat/2025/03/13/a-magyar-nemzet-az-origo-es-a-ripost-bukta-a-legtobb-sajtopert-2024-ben/>

⁴⁴. <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/the-impact-of-atlatszos-activities-on-hungarian-sovereignty.pdf>

⁴⁵. <https://atlatszo.hu/kozugy/2025/12/04/pert-nyertunk-a-szuverenitasvedelmi-hivatal-ellen-az-első-foku-ítelet-szerint-valotlanságokat-terjesztettek-rolunk/>

⁴⁶. Government-organised non-governmental organisations — organisations that are established or directed by governments to imitate independent groups.

⁴⁷. <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/informacio/monitoring-bizottsag>

⁴⁸. <https://debreciner.hu/cikk/koz-nelkuli-kozmeghallgatast-tartanak-a-catl-kornyezethaszalati-engedelyenek-modositasarol>

have used several citizen participation tools, such as citizen assemblies and participatory budgeting.

Both proactive publication and reactive access to information are guaranteed by law (Act CXXi of 2011 - Freedom of Information Act), although with some constraints, especially in regard to data on public spending. CSOs use this right through tools such as the kimitud.hu portal developed by Átlátszó. However, state institutions and companies routinely

deny information or simply do not reply, thus CSOs and media outlets must file a lawsuit to obtain it. Following a 2022 amendment to the act, these court cases have been expedited, in theory, but in practice, the appeal process can be lengthy. CSOs such as K-Monitor Association⁴⁹ and Transparency International-Hungary⁵⁰ have eventually won these cases, but authorities have sometimes been reluctant to implement court rulings.

Safe Space

Hungarian CSOs that criticise government policies and/or represent vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ people, refugees, homeless people, or drug users (and to a lesser extent, Roma) have not enjoyed a safe, enabling space for more than a decade. They are the targets of regular smear campaigns, vilification, and disinformation orchestrated by the pro-government propaganda machine (see Freedom of Expression).

Physical attacks on activists are rare. However, in 2025, one such case was reported in Debrecen.⁵¹ In March, two young men entered a community café operated by the local Association of Alternative Communities, where they verbally insulted staff and guests, which led to a physical altercation. The perpetrators fled the scene and were promptly apprehended by the police who launched the appropriate legal procedure against them.

Verbal attacks are widespread, partly in social media comments, but more importantly coming from official entities, including state officials and the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO), which names many organisations (and in some cases even individuals) as being part of “networks of (malign) foreign influence”. This is not necessarily limited to the most vocal organisations, even the SPO’s report on the CERV programme (see Access to Funding) listed 33 CSOs, selected in an apparently haphazard manner, including some working on child protection or in social care. This threatening environment has had a detrimental, often psychological, impact on those affected. In addition, smaller CSOs in particular tend to withdraw from advocacy and activities which may be considered controversial. No protections exist beyond solidarity and self-help, as

the Ombudsman usually remains silent. In November, several reports concerning the segregation of Roma children in schools were deleted from the Ombudsman Office webpage.⁵²

Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) cases also occur, though not very often. One such example from 2025 concerned the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), which represented Forbes magazine in a case brought by the owners of Hell Energy company because of their inclusion in the magazine’s “richest 50” list.⁵³ After the original case was won by Forbes in September 2025, the Hell Energy owners sued HCLU for slander, losing in the first instance.⁵⁴

Unlike in previous years, in 2025 there were no further reported cases of surveillance, nor the use of anti-terrorist or money-laundering regulations against CSOs. At the same time, deepfakes and AI are being used in political campaigning. Although not concerning civil society *per se*, in November, a serious data breach occurred, whereby sensitive personal data (including addresses and phone numbers) of almost 200,000 supporters of the main opposition party were leaked and used by pro-government actors. The National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information condemned the leak as a crime.⁵⁵

The extremely restrictive immigration and asylum legislation (a subject of several negative rulings by the European Court of Human Rights) has resulted in very few asylum applications from human rights defenders at risk, attempting to relocate to Hungary.

49. <https://k.blog.hu/tags/per>

50. <https://transparency.hu/kozszektor/informacioszabadsag/informacioszabadsag-perek/>

51. https://debreciner.hu/cikk/magukat-fasisztanak-vallo-fiatalok-tamadtak-meg-a-debreceni-kozossegi-teret-ameynek-fenntartoja-ellen-evek-ota-hergel-a-fidesz?srsid=AfmBOorz7ZWb_bGw_J3eEzqJjanulO5c7aR9p2GcmpHhkyPt48yneh

52. <https://qubit.hu/2025/11/18/valaszolt-az-ajbh-nem-toitik-fel-az-uj-oldalukra-az-eltuntetett-kenyes-ombudsmani-allasfoglalásokat>

53. <https://tasz.hu/en/cikkek/gdpr-weaponized-summary-of-cases-and-strategies-where-data-protection-is-used-to-undermine-freedom-of-press-in-hungary/>

54. <https://tasz.hu/cikkek/hell-vs-tasz-per/>

55. <https://naih.hu/hirek/779-kozlemereny-a-tisza-vilag-applikacio-adatvedelmi-megiteleserol>

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The Hungarian parliament must immediately withdraw the draft Transparency Act and dissolve the Sovereignty Protection Office.**
- The 2025 amendments to the Assembly Act must be immediately revoked, along with the 2021 amendment to the Child Protection Act that introduced the notion of “homosexual propaganda”.
- Public funding mechanisms for CSOs should be reformed to guarantee unbiased, transparent, and participatory decision-making and monitoring.
- Government representatives and media should cease smearing, vilifying, and harassing CSOs for their criticism of public policies.
- The government should create and implement means and mechanisms of open, regular, and structured dialogue with all civil society actors.

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**