

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

Italy

by ARCI





ABOUT THIS REPORT

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Arci is a cultural and social promotion association with hundreds of thousands of members and working through a network of community clubs, houses, and mutual aid societies across Italy. Arci promotes culture, fundamental rights, solidarity, participation and democracy for all. The association operates in local, national and international contexts, contributing to strengthening the European democratic public space.



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Key Trends

-  New Security Decree used to crackdown on peaceful assembly and expression, including Palestine solidarity and environmental activists.
-  Existing restrictive legislation continues to restrict the work of humanitarian and climate groups.
-  Activists, journalists, and CSOs targeted by Italian authorities using Israeli spyware.

Summary

Italy's civic space rating was downgraded from "Narrowed" to "Obstructed" by the CIVICUS Monitor in December 2025,¹ due to a crackdown on protest rights and the state's deployment of surveillance against civic actors.² The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law Report noted concerns raised by civil society over the new security law, but made no recommendations to repeal or amend the law.³

The Italian landscape continues to be marked by an increased shrinking of civic space, in particular against activists, human rights defenders (HRDs), and civil society organisations (CSOs) committed to human rights, environmental and climate justice, LGBTQI+ rights, Palestine solidarity, and the right to housing. These actors have been subject to criminalisation, preventive measures, and legal proceedings within

an increasingly repressive political climate. A central driver of the deterioration was the adoption of the new security law. Originally introduced as an ordinary bill and later converted into an emergency decree, bypassing parliamentary scrutiny, the law introduced new criminal offences and expanded the tools available to authorities to restrict protests and suppress dissent.

Existing restrictive legislation, such as the NGO decree (2023) and the flows decree (2024) continue to hamper CSOs working on migrant rights and carrying out sea rescue missions. Additionally, the 2024 "eco-vandalism" law has had a chilling effect on non-violent climate justice movements. Meanwhile, there are serious concerns around the right to privacy sparked by the Paragon spyware scandal which revealed unlawful surveillance of activists and journalists.

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

2. https://monitor.civicus.org/press_release/2025/italy/

3. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/a717b80d-1631-4fa1-8aeb-7e423c207948_en?filename=2025%20Rule%20of%20Law%20Report_country-abstract%20and%20recommendations.pdf

Freedom of Association

The overall situation for CSOs and HRDs in Italy has steadily worsened in recent years. While the government has made no direct or indirect attempts to formally dissolve CSOs, this is largely due to Italy's robust constitutional framework. Article 18 of the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of association and limits dissolution to organisations with terrorist or subversive aims, which can only be applied following judicial review. However, in 2025, legal and administrative measures have been systematically used to restrict the operations of CSOs. Although these measures remain formally within the limits of the law, they are intended to curtail organisations' operational space and to undermine their social and political legitimacy.

One of the most targeted areas are organisations working with migrant rights, particularly those engaged in sea rescue operations. NGOs such as *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, *Sea-Watch*, *Emergency*, and *Open Arms* have been targeted by restrictive legislation, delegitimisation campaigns and face unfounded accusations of collusion with traffickers,⁴ aimed at curbing their activities.

In 2025, legislative measures adopted in previous years continued to restrict civic space. The 2023 NGO decree⁵ remains in force, requiring the disembarkation of sea rescue mission boats in distant ports and enabling their administrative detentions.⁶ The decree increases costs and limits to the operational capacity of CSOs working on migrant rights and carrying out sea rescue missions. The 2024 flows decree⁷ introduced measures to limit operations at sea by extending sanctions to the shipowner and making it easier to confiscate equipment in the case of a repeat offence. The same decree also transfers the jurisdiction for

the validation of migrant detentions in centres in Albania from specialised immigration judges to the Court of Appeal. This decision appears to be an explicit attempt to circumvent unfavourable judicial decisions in line with international law and European Court of Justice rulings and strengthen political control over the judiciary.⁸

Similarly, environmental and climate justice groups are disproportionately targeted by legislative and administrative restrictions and state repression. The so-called "eco-vandalism" law from 2024, which imposes prison sentences of up to five years and fines of up to €60,000 for acts of civil disobedience, continues to have a chilling effect on nonviolent climate justice movements such as *Ultima Generazione* and *Extinction Rebellion*. The groups have been subject to legal proceedings, arbitrary searches, and preventive administrative measures, such as *fogli di via* (expulsion orders) and *DASPO urbani* (bans from specific urban public areas).⁹ These measures have been accompanied by intense stigmatisation and smear campaigns by the media, aimed at undermining the legitimacy of environmental dissent.

Many proceedings and cases have ended in acquittals or dismissals as the laws were found to violate both the Italian constitution and international law, with the courts recognising them as inapplicable. However, these laws resulted in significant financial burdens, legal uncertainty, psychological pressure, and reputational damage. This has subsequently had a chilling effect and undermines the operational space, sustainability, and legitimacy of civil society. However, lawmakers nonetheless enacted them, using them as tools of deterrence.

Access to Funding

In 2025, there were no regulatory measures explicitly aimed at the direct defunding of CSOs. However,

concerning fiscal and regulatory developments could negatively affect the sustainability of associative

4. https://image.b.economist.com/lib/fe8d13727c6104777c/m/1/609fbc8d-4724-440d-b827-2c7b7300353d.pdf?utm_campaign=MA00001514&utm_medium=email-owned&utm_source=eiu-marketing-cloud&RefID=&utm_term=20250603&utm_id=2078580&sfmc_id=00QWT00000QBQEn2AP&utm_content=cta-button-1&id_mc=285566693

5. <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/provvedimento/d-l-1-2023-disposizioni-urgenti-per-la-gestione-dei-flussi-migratori.html>

6. <https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/tribunale-agrigento-sospende-fermo-nave-dakini/> ;

<https://x.com/RescueMed/status/1975869157666120040> ;

<https://sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-rescue-ship-aurora-detained/> ;

<https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/tribunale-di-agrigento-non-si-possono-sanzionare-le-ong-perche-non-comunicano-con-i-libici/>

7. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2024/10/11/24G00171/sq>

8. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/migranti-si-camera-fiducia-decreto-flussi-lavoratori-extra-ue-paesi-sicuri-fino-blitz-competenze-giudici-AG5ZG8OB>

9. <https://www.lindipendente.online/2025/11/04/la-repressione-contro-extinction-rebellion-tutti-assolti-ma-roma-conferma-i-fogli-di-via/> ;

<https://www.rainews.it/tgr/piemonte/articoli/2025/01/attivisti-per-il-clima-archivate-decine-di-denunce-bcd93a11-5253-4f88-bd29-890e2bd9d6d8>.

html#:~:text=Ambiente%20per%20appendere%20uno%20striscione%20con%20critto,motivazioni%20che%20mettono%20in%20evidenza%20inconsistenza%20dellehttps://ilmanifesto.it/attivisti-climatici-assolti-con-questa-sono-57

activities. In particular, concerns remain around a legislative measure that provides for the revocation of the VAT exemption for non-profit associations, thereby subjecting them to the same tax regime as for-profit enterprises. The law, originally scheduled to take effect on 1 January 2025, has been postponed by one year following strong pressure from civil society.¹⁰

Although this postponement provides partial relief, the structural risks remain. If passed, the law would represent a significant bureaucratic burden for thousands of grassroots associations, whose operations rely predominantly on the voluntary work of their members. In addition to compromising the economic sustainability of non-profit activities, the measure risks an indirect restriction of the freedom

of association, hindering access to and participation in civic life for many local movements and organisations engaged in the protection of rights and social cohesion.¹¹

To date, there is no systematic evidence that CSOs have altered their work activities on or how they communicate to secure public funding, nor have significant new bureaucratic restrictions been reported. However, in a context of increasing political pressure and stigmatisation of dissent, there remains a concern that mechanisms of self-censorship or depoliticisation could gradually emerge, especially among the most fragile CSOs or those heavily dependent on institutional funding.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In 2025, the right to peaceful assembly underwent a further worrying erosion, continuing the pattern of recent years. At the legislative and administrative level, increasingly restrictive measures were introduced, particularly through public security decrees, which expanded precautionary measures and heightened penalties for activists and protesters. These interventions took place within a highly stigmatising political and media context, fuelling narratives that systematically criminalises dissent.¹²

One of the most frequently applied measures is the *foglio di via* (expulsion order), a preventive administrative measure which requires individuals to stay away from a specific municipality for public order reasons. This measure has been increasingly used against climate activists, especially those belonging to Ultima Generazione and Extinction Rebellion, even though they did not engage in violent acts.¹³

The establishment of the so-called “Red Zones” by the interior ministry follows the same trajectory. These are designated areas in a city where movement is restricted for individuals considered “troublesome and aggressive, prone to criminal activity, and not in compliance with immigration laws.” This measure severely curtails constitutionally protected freedom

of movement and could, by extension, restrict the right to peaceful assembly if sites for public demonstrations are designated as red zones.¹⁴

The *Caivano Bis* Decree (Law 159/2023)¹⁵ provides for the extension of preventive measures based on a broad presumption of “social dangerousness”, extending their application to minors as well (from the age of 14). It includes *Daspo Urbani* (expulsion orders), oral warnings, and precautionary measures. These provisions heighten the criminalisation of dissent and shrink civic space, undermining the freedoms of expression and assembly, and democratic participation.¹⁶

Moreover, several bills proposed by the governing majority seek to limit the application of the crime of torture for police forces,¹⁷ effectively increasing the risk of impunity for potential human rights abuses. Despite calls from CSOs, Italian law still does not require police officers to wear identification codes or to use body cameras during public demonstrations, hindering the identification of the individual responsible in cases of violations. A concerning development in this context is the appointment of Filippo Ferri as the police chief of Monza, despite his conviction related to police brutality at Diaz school.¹⁸ The issue is especially significant given

10. <https://www.cantiereterezosettore.it/nel-dl-milleproroghe-il-rinvio-del-nuovo-regime-iva-al-1-gennaio-2026/>

11. <https://www.vita.it/iva-al-terzo-settore-la-proposta-per-uscire-dallimpasse-ce-il-governo-che-fa/>

12. <https://www.amnesty.it/tre-anni-di-governo-meloni-diritti-in-caduta-libera/>

13. <https://rivistacriticadeldiritto.it/?p=1992>

14. <https://www.magistraturademocratica.it/articolo/zone-rosse-i-soggetti-segnalati-e-le-liberta-costituzionali-di-tutti/>

15. <https://www.sistemapenale.it/it/scheda/bernardi-converto-in-legge-il-dl-caivano-in-tema-di-contrasto-al-disagio-e-alla-criminalita-minorili-una-panoramica-dei-numerosi-profilii-dinteresse-per-il-penalista?out=print>

16. <https://www.sistemapenale.it/it/notizie/decreto-caivano-le-novita-introdotte-con-decreto-legge-dal-consiglio-dei-ministri-comunicato-stampa>

17. <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/reato-tortura-italia-cosa-prevede-articoli-legge-modifiche-abolizione-cestaro-cedu-codici-identificativi-ra6vp2hm>

18. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/un-poliziotto-condannato-la-diaz-diventa-questore-e-polemica-AHFCHjx>

that the crime of torture was introduced after the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) highlighted the inadequacy of Italian laws in relation to the violence that took place at the Diaz school during the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa.¹⁹

At the same time, Italy does not provide data on deaths resulting from interventions by law enforcement authorities, as recommended by the United Nations and the ECtHR.²⁰ Moreover, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has raised the issue of Italian police forces engaging in forms of racial profiling.²¹ This raises serious concerns around police impunity, given the

recent death of five civilians due to police intervention through the use of tasers.²²

Italian law requires prior notification, rather than formal authorisation, for public demonstrations. However, authorities can prohibit events due to public safety. A notable example of the restrictive approach was at a Palestine solidarity demonstration in Rome in October 2025, where the police carried out controls, identity checks and banned protesters from entering the city for protesters taking part in the demonstration in solidarity with Palestine in Rome in October 2025, accompanied by preventive measures such as *foglio di via* orders from Rome and the prohibition of return for a certain period.²³

Security Decree: an authoritarian turn in the management of public order

Despite intense criticism, during 2024 and 2025, the Italian government advanced a highly repressive legislative framework, culminating in the enactment of the so-called "Security Decree" (DDL 166).²⁴ In June 2025, an ordinary bill was converted into a decree law — an instrument constitutionally reserved for "extraordinary cases of necessity and urgency" — effectively bypassing parliamentary debate and limiting the possibility of amendments and democratic debate.²⁵ Resorting to a decree law without any contingent justification constituted a serious violation of the separation of powers, parliamentary procedure and fundamental rights.²⁶

Among the most concerning provisions of the measure, which introduces 14 new crimes, are:

- ▶ The criminalisation of roadblocks, with penalties of up to two years in prison.
- ▶ The introduction of aggravating circumstances for those protesting against public works, targeting environmental movements.
- ▶ Harsher penalties for demonstrations in CPRs (temporary detention centres) and prisons, with sanctions reaching up to 20 years.
- ▶ The extension of personal preventive measures even in the absence of convictions,

paving the way for an authoritarian-style preventive management of dissent.

The measures aim to discourage and punish all forms of social protest, including peaceful and non-violent actions, through the expansion of criminal offences and the use of disproportionate sanctions.²⁷ Concerns have not been limited to civil society. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) human rights office publicly criticised the measure, stating that it "contains several gaps that could hinder the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms," including the freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression, and movement, and the rights to personal security, privacy, and a fair trial.²⁸

The decree triggered a widespread protest movement between December 2024 and May 2025, with demonstrations, public campaigns, and local mobilisations organised by trade unions, associations, committees, student organisations, and legal professionals.²⁹ Italian and European-level civil society criticised not only the content of the decree but also the method by which it was imposed.³⁰ The security decree emerges as one of the most alarming legislative measures in recent years, reflecting an authoritarian model for managing

19. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/06/22/news/reato_tortura_strasburgo_diaz-168799815/

20. <https://www.lindipendente.online/2024/11/06/ue-in-due-anni-almeno-487-persone-sono-morte-in-custodia-o-durante-operazioni-di-polizia/>

21. <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-italy-translation-in-italian-/1680b205f7>

22. <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/taser-cinque-morti-in-quattro-mesi-dibattito-bt7pn2af>

23. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/10/04/manifestazione-palestina-blocchi-pullman-roma-oggi/8149197/>

24. <https://www.senato.it/leg/19/BGT/Schede/FascicoloSchedeDDL/ebook/59571.pdf>

25. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2025/06/04/news/decreto_sicurezza_voto_finale_fiducia_senato_proteste_opposizioni-424647209/ ;

<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/in-edicola/articoli/2025/04/06/dl-sicurezza-il-penalista-gatta-inutile-e-lurgenza-umilia-le-camere/7941934/>

26. <https://www.amnesty.it/dl-sicurezza-ulteriori-preoccupazioni-per-il-patto-sui-diritti-umani/>

27. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/sicurezza-decreto-e-legge-le-proteste-14-nuovi-reati-e-nove-aggravanti-ecco-tutte-novita-AHOJF44?refresh_ce=1

28. https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/2024-05-27%20-%20Opinion_Italy_Draft%20Law%20on%20Public%20Security%20-%20final.pdf

29. <https://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/corteo-no-dl-sicurezza-roma-14-dicembre-2024.html> ;

<https://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/corte-no-dl-sicurezza-roma-31-maggio-2025-sicurezza-informazioni.html>

30. <https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Civil-Society-Letter-to-Commissioner-McGrath-concerning-the-Italian-Security-Decree.pdf>

dissent and social conflict.³¹ Rather than addressing genuine security needs, it seeks to restrict the right to protest and reinforce a repressive framework that endangers democratic participation and the rule of

law. In 2025, it was applied, for example, against metal workers who organised a protest in June in Bologna to demand the renewal of their work contract that had expired.³²

Excessive use of force, police infiltration and intimidation

Several incidents document an escalation in the use of force and repressive measures in 2025:

- ▶ On 17 April, Sara Maffioletti, an Ultima Generazione activist, was indicted in Milan for violating a *foglio di via* order she had received in March 2025 following a demonstration for clean air.³³
- ▶ On 28 April, Extinction Rebellion activists were identified by police following a peaceful protest in front of the Air Force ministry in Rome.³⁴
- ▶ On 3 June, in Pescara, a young man died of cardiac arrest after being struck by a police taser during an arrest. Investigations into the cause of death are ongoing. The episode reignited debate over the use of potentially lethal equipment and the need to ensure greater transparency and accountability in police operations.³⁵
- ▶ On 13 June, students of Potere al Popolo from the University of Federico II in Naples reported police infiltration in Palestine solidarity and housing rights assemblies.³⁶
- ▶ On 14 October, the national “Show Israel the Red Card” demonstration took place in Udine during an Italy–Israel football match, protesting against the normalisation of the genocide in the Gaza Strip and against the participation of the Israeli national football team in the qualifiers for the next World Cup. Observers from Amnesty International Italy published a report denouncing the extensive use of tear gas and water cannon directed at body height, as well as the unjustified use of batons, including against people with their hands raised. After the demonstration ended, 13 people were stopped and held for around five hours without being

informed of the reasons for their detention and with no access to make a phone call. Ten of them were later served with expulsion orders banning them from the city of Udine.³⁷

- ▶ On 31 October, 5,000 people gathered in an abandoned warehouse to take part in a free party in Campogalliano, in the province of Modena. Law enforcement authorities sealed off the exits to prevent participants from leaving and to identify them, following police charges and the use of tear gas. Those detained were not allowed to request legal assistance. Participants reported the incident as unlawful detention.³⁸

These events demonstrate an increasing use of repressive measures to contain and suppress peaceful assembly, in violation of international standards. The selective and disproportionate use of force against protesters, combined with the broad powers to use deadly weapons and a lack of transparency and accountability within the police forces, poses a tangible threat to civic participation and democracy.

However, throughout 2025, civil society also demonstrated strong capacity for public mobilisation, particularly in response to the adoption of the new security decree. In May, dozens of demonstrations took place in various Italian cities to protest measures perceived as punitive and discriminatory toward migrants, NGOs, and activists.³⁹ Streets were filled with trade unions, student associations, human rights organisations, and solidarity networks, demonstrating that, even in a repressive climate, a civic fabric can resist authoritarian tendencies and defend constitutional principles of equality and social justice.

31. <https://www.amnesty.it/italia-la-nuova-legge-che-criminalizza-la-protesta-pacifica/>

32. https://corrieredibologna.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/26_gennaio_31/bologna-tre-richieste-di-condanna-per-il-corteo-delle-tute-blu-l-accusa-agli-organizzatori-e-di-blocco-stradale-1bada4dc-d09f-41b1-9a41-211184311xk.shtml?refresh_ce

33. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/04/17/lattivista-per-il-clima-a-processo-a-milano-politica-repressiva-troveremo-nuovi-modi-per-protestare/7956504/>

34. <https://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/unicorno-giorgia-meloni-palazzo-aeronautica.html>

35. <https://www.amnesty.it/luso-del-taser-a-pescara-e-la-morte-di-un-uomo-disarmato/> ;

<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/06/10/pescara-il-ginocchio-dellagente-sulla-schiena-il-video-dellarresto-e-tutti-i-dubbi-sulla-morte-di-riccardo-zappone/8021988/>

36. <https://www.napolitoday.it/cronaca/proteste-federico-ii-agente-infiltrato.html>

37. <https://www.amnesty.it/a-udine-il-14-ottobre-commesse-violazioni-dei-diritti-umani/>

38. <https://www.amnesty.it/a-udine-il-14-ottobre-commesse-violazioni-dei-diritti-umani/>

39. <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2025/05/a-roma-sfila-la-manifestazione-contro-il-decreto-sicurezza-3f4084ce-cfa5-420e-800c-30c6e70d9904.html>

Freedom of Expression

Italy has experienced an increased erosion of the freedom of expression, particularly for journalists and civic actors. This deterioration is confirmed by the annual Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, where Italy's rating declined from 41st in 2023 to 49th in 2025.⁴⁰

The so-called “gag law” contributed to eroding the freedom of expression by limiting the right to journalistic reporting. The law prevents journalists from publishing preventive detention orders (public documents) until the preliminary investigation is completed.⁴¹ A new provision is currently being discussed which could extend the restrictions by introducing economic sanctions to editors.⁴²

Attacks against journalists and artists also demonstrate the deterioration of the freedom of expression. In April 2025, comedian Daniele Fabbri was indicted following a lawsuit filed by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni over satirical remarks made during the *Contiene Parolacce* podcast in 2021. The legal action, initiated by then-lawyer Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove (now undersecretary of justice), seeks €20,000 in compensation for moral damages. The case has raised concerns about the use of lawsuits as a repressive tool against political satire, representing a striking example of a Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP).⁴³

In October 2025, the Italian Data Protection Authority (Garante della Privacy) fined RAI, the state-owned broadcaster, €150,000 for broadcasting an investigation by the TV programme Report.⁴⁴ Employees of the authority questioned the integrity of the institution and requested a meeting with the governing board. During the meeting, the director of information systems, Cosimo Comella, publicly disclosed the content of an email he had received on 4 November 2025, in which his secretary general, Angelo Fanizza, asked him to collect an extensive amount of internal data from the authority. This included all employees' emails, VPN access logs, shared folders, network storage

spaces, document management systems, and even security systems, without leaving any trace of the data acquisition activities. The operation aimed to identify employees who shared internal information with journalists, including Report, in order to dismiss them.⁴⁵ The board of the authority stated that Fanizza had acted alone, despite several sources revealing the involvement of the wider governing board in carrying out the operation. Fanizza subsequently resigned.⁴⁶ Employees unanimously called for the resignation of the board, but four members of the authority rejected the request.⁴⁷

On 16 October, a bomb exploded in the car of Sigfrido Ranucci, a prominent Italian investigative journalist who hosts Report.⁴⁸ An investigation has been opened by the anti-Mafia prosecution section.⁴⁹ Since 2000, Ranucci has investigated political corruption, organised crime, mafia, and international conflicts and has been targeted several times, including receiving death threats.⁵⁰ In the summer of 2024, two bullets were found outside of Ranucci's home in Pomezia. In November 2024, following his investigation of the war in Gaza, Report's board were threatened with a terrorist attack similar to the one carried out against the Charlie Hebdo editorial office in Paris in 2015. The bomb attack in October 2025 is the latest escalation in this ongoing harassment and intimidation.

In November 2025, the journalists from the newspaper *Domani* were charged with aiding and abetting unlawful access to computer data after publishing an investigation into an alleged conflict of interest involving Italy's Defence Minister Guido Crosetto. The investigation was based on data obtained by Pasquale Striano, an officer of the Guardia di Finanza's anti-mafia unit, who allegedly carried out unauthorised accesses to thousands of confidential databases, including financial records and sensitive information concerning politicians, business figures, and public personalities.⁵¹ While the unauthorised access to sensitive data may raise concerns regarding the right to privacy, the criminal prosecution of journalists for requesting and publishing

40. <https://rsf.org/en/index?year=2024>

41. https://www.brocardi.it/codice-di-procedura-penale/libro-secondo/titolo-i/art114.html#google_vignette

42. <https://www.fnsl.it/legge-bavaglio-costante-manganellate-a-giornalisti-ed-editori-con-le-sanzioni-economiche>

43. <https://www.articolo21.org/2025/04/meloni-non-sopporta-la-satira-il-30-aprile-udienza-sul-caso-di-daniele-fabbri-querelato-dalla-premier/>

44. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/11/20/spionaggio-garante-privacy-documento-dimissioni-news/8202607/>

45. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2025/11/30/news/inchiesta_report_anticipazioni_garante_privacy-425011698/

46. <https://www.ilpost.it/2025/11/20/garante-privacy-dimesso-segretario-angelo-fanizza/>

47. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/garante-privacy-segretario-generale-rassegna-dimissioni-AHALF4rD>

48. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/12/01/attentato-ranucci-scorta-aumento-esercito-notizie/8212859/>

49. <https://cpj.org/2025/10/italian-investigative-journalist-sigfrido-ranucci-targeted-in-car-bombing/>

50. <https://www.fanpage.it/attualita/perche-sigfrido-ranucci-e-sotto-scorta-dal-2009-le-inchieste-e-le-minacce-rivolte-alla-sua-famiglia/>

51. <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/caso-striano-chiusa-linchiesta-su-domani-nessun-mandante-ma-rischio-processo-crosetto-tizian-trocchia-vergine-rww4qh31>

information of public interest is equally concerning and in violation of the freedom of expression and the right to information. The journalists had reported, in particular, on payments received by Minister Crosetto from the defence company Leonardo S.p.A. The criminal proceedings against *Domani* journalists, who face up to nine years in prison, have been condemned by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) as an infringement of media freedom.⁵²

In June 2025, the energy company Fox Petroli sued two activists for defamation, seeking €2 million in damages after they denounced the “degraded” conditions of an oil storage site linked to a planned methane liquefaction plant in the Torraccia district of Pesaro. The activists, supported by the ARCI-coordinated civil society protection hub and the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE), reported the case to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁵³ According to CASE’s report, Italy recorded the highest number of SLAPPs in Europe in 2025.⁵⁴ In response, The Good Lobby launched the *Libera voce in libero Stato* (free voice in a free state) campaign.⁵⁵

In May 2025, the committee promoting the citizenship referendum on the citizenship law filed a complaint against the RAI Supervisory Commission over the lack of coverage and impartiality in reporting on the referendum questions, calling for a revision of the regulations on informational pluralism. The referendum aims to repeal the law requiring 10 years of legal residence to obtain citizenship in Italy, reducing it to five years.⁵⁶

Regarding censorship against movements expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, in May 2025, police officers demanded the removal of a Palestinian flag displayed on the balcony of a private residence in Putignano (BA), representing a clear infringement on individual freedom of expression.⁵⁷ During the Giro d’Italia cycle race in the province of Vicenza, authorities identified several individuals for painting a Palestinian flag on the wall of a home, while others were stopped

merely for displaying the flag along the race route.⁵⁸ In November 2025, Lombardy regional councillor Luca Paladini was identified by police and fined €200 for displaying a Palestinian flag before a basketball match between Olimpia Milano and Hapoel Tel Aviv.⁵⁹

In May 2025, a *La Scala* theatre employee in Milan was dismissed after shouting “Free Palestine” during an event attended by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.⁶⁰ On 24 November 2025, Mohamed Shahin, imam of the Omar Mosque in Turin, was arrested and detained in a detention centre pending expulsion on national security grounds, after remarks made during a Gaza solidarity protest. The expulsion order, signed by Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, remains classified.⁶¹ In November, a journalist working for *Agenzia Nova* was dismissed after asking the European Commission whether Israel should contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza, as the EU requires Russia to do for Ukraine.⁶² Tensions over freedom of expression related to the genocide in Gaza were further reflected in the vandalism of the newspaper *La Stampa*’s headquarters by Palestine solidarity protesters on 28 November, in relation to its coverage of the imam’s arrest.⁶³

In late 2025, the Italian parliament proposed a controversial law on combatting antisemitism. Civil society and scholars raised alarm over the draft legislation, which seeks to incorporate the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into law. They warn that, despite the stated aim of strengthening the fight against antisemitism, the move risks restricting the freedom of expression and silencing civil society’s voices. Based on the examples of antisemitism provided in the IHRA definition, statements condemning Israel’s human rights and international law violations against the Palestinian people could be considered as manifestations of contemporary antisemitism. This could lead to the criminalisation of legitimate criticism of Israel and create legal uncertainty for people and groups engaging in boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) initiatives against the state of Israel or Israeli companies.⁶⁴

52. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/italy-mfrr-partners-strongly-condemn-investigation-into-domani-journalists/>

53. <https://www.articolo21.org/2025/10/due-attivisti-citati-in-giudizio-da-una-potente-compagnia-energetica-la-causa-riconosciuta-comeslapp/>

54. <https://www.thegoodlobby.it/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2025-report-SLAPPs-in-Europe.pdf>

55. <https://www.thegoodlobby.it/campagne/liberta-espressione/>

56. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/05/25/referendum-8-e-9-giugno-magi-diffida-la-commissione-di-vigilanza-rai-modifici-il-regolamento-che-disciplina-linformazione-sui-quesiti/8002209/>

57. <https://www.baritoday.it/cronaca/putignano-rimossa-bandiera-palestina-denuncia-social.html>

58. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/05/28/basta-armi-e-bandiera-della-palestina-al-giro-ditalia-identificati-qualcuno-ha-chiesto-ai-volontari-del-servizio-gara-di-togliarli-loro-si-sono-rifutati/8006136/>

59. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/12/01/bandiera-palestinese-multa-consigliere-regionale-notizie/8212891/>

60. <https://www.milanotoday.it/cronaca/licenziamento-maschera-scala-illegittimo-2025.html>

61. https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2025/12/06/news/espulsione_imam_shahin_viminale_secreta_gli_atti-425025567/

62. <https://www.ilpost.it/2025/11/05/gabriele-nunziati-agenzia-nova-licenziato-israele-domanda-unione-europea/>

63. <https://www.ilpost.it/2025/11/28/redazione-la-stampa-vandalizzata/>

64. <https://www.amnesty.it/no-alladozione-della-definizione-di-antisemitismo-dellihra/>

Finally, in the context of the 25 April Liberation Day celebration, in Ascoli Piceno, a baker was subjected to police identity checks for displaying an anti-fascist banner reading, “25 April, as good as bread, as beautiful as anti-fascism,” which was considered provocative by the authorities.⁶⁵ Similarly, the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI) was fined in Orbetello for organising a Liberation Day celebration, after

the municipality revoked the authorisation of the event. ANPI decided to hold the event anyway and the municipality fined the association’s president €500.⁶⁶ Taken together, these events paint a worrying picture for freedom of expression and privacy in Italy. Restrictive measures, combined with political pressure and violations of the right to privacy, pose a concrete threat to democracy and civic participation.

Surveillance and violations of fundamental rights: the Paragon Case

On 31 January 2025, an official notice from Meta (the company that owns WhatsApp) revealed that numerous Italian activists and journalists had been targeted by a cyberattack using advanced spyware called Graphite, produced by the Israeli company Paragon Solutions. Among those affected were prominent figures in Italian civil society, including Luca Casarini (co-founder of the NGO *Mediterranea Saving Humans*), Don Mattia Ferrari (chaplain of the same NGO), Francesco Cancellato (director of the news outlet *Fanpage*), journalist *Ciro Pellegrino*, and *David Yambio* (activist and founder of *Refugees in Libya*).⁶⁷

The alert issued by WhatsApp was later confirmed by independent analyses conducted by the Canadian laboratory *Citizen Lab*, which identified that Paragon was responsible for enabling highly invasive surveillance, designed to access private conversations, sensitive documents, and personal data without authorisation.⁶⁸

The institutional response in Italy was initially opaque. Following the intervention of the Parliamentary Committee for the Security of the Republic (COPASIR), the government acknowledged the use of the spyware by Italian intelligence services, justifying it as part of operations against irregular migration. However, the committee denied that surveillance activities had targeted journalists — an assertion contradicted by the forensic analyses conducted by *Citizen Lab*.⁶⁹

The case raised serious concern at both European and international levels. The European Commission⁷⁰ and the European Parliament⁷¹ expressed deep concern over the use of surveillance tools against activists and journalists, warning that such technologies risk

undermining fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and the right to participate in democratic life.

Paragon Solutions claimed that its products are sold exclusively to democratic states and under strict ethical guidelines that explicitly prohibit the use of spyware against journalists or activists. According to the Israeli company, Italy breached these agreements, prompting its unilateral decision to terminate the contract. However, the Italian authorities stated that the decision to end the collaboration was mutual.⁷²

The Paragon case represents one of the most serious violations of the rights to privacy and information recorded in Italy in recent years. It forms part of a broader context marked by shrinking civic space, with a clear tendency toward increased surveillance and the criminalisation of dissent. The use of highly intrusive technological tools against members of civil society raises urgent questions about compliance with constitutional safeguards, the transparency of security services’ activities, and the adequacy of democratic oversight mechanisms.

The absence of a clear and decisive institutional response to fully clarify the incident is striking. Despite the alarm raised over unlawful surveillance and repeated public calls for transparency, thus far no authority has taken responsibility and launched an independent and transparent investigation to determine the circumstances, purposes, and ensure accountability for the use of the spyware.

Another significant case involves a complaint filed by the political party *Potere al Popolo (PaP)*, concerning

65. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/04/25/striscione-antifascista-davanti-alla-panetteria-fornaia-identificata-dalla-polizia-ad-ascoli-piceno/7965383/>

66. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/04/25/25-aprile-a-orbetello-multa-da-566-euro-allanpi-per-occupazione-di-suolo-pubblico/7965375/>

67. <https://it.euronews.com/2025/02/06/italiani-spiati-su-whatsapp-roma-tra-clienti-di-paragon-chiesta-informativa-al-governo> ;

<https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/spyware-paragon-caso-politico-spionaggio-attivisti-e-giornalisti-AGJ5vkkC> ;

<https://www.ilpost.it/2025/02/01/whatsapp-dice-che-oltre-novanta-giornalisti-e-attivisti-sono-stati-spiati-sulla-sua-app/>

68. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/jun/12/european-journalists-targeted-with-paragon-solutions-spyware-say-researchers>

69. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/perche-il-secondo-rapporto-di-citizen-lab-sul-caso-paragon-cambia-tutto/> ;

<https://www.editorialedomani.it/inchieste/caso-paragon-citizen-lab-giornalista-attaccato-spyware-graphite-ciro-pellegrino-francesco-cancellato-clg0csbo>

70. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/06/12/caso-paragon-la-commissione-ue-inaccettabile-accedere-illegalmente-a-dati-dei-cittadini/8024057/>

71. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/caso-paragon-arriva-alla-plenaria-del-parlamento-ue-la-commissione-inaccettabile-spiare-giornalisti/>

72. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/paragon-smentisce-il-copasir-l'opposizione-attacca-il-governo-renzi-meloni-vuole-insabbiare-scandalo/>

alleged espionage and infiltration activities that lasted ten months. The operation was reportedly carried out by a 21-year-old who had graduated from the police academy in 2023 and posed as a student living away from home to infiltrate PaP activists in Naples. The party

is now demanding an explanation from the interior minister. The Democratic Party (PD) has initiated a parliamentary inquiry into the matter. Meanwhile, the police have denied the allegations.⁷³

Participation in decision-making

During 2025, no substantial developments were recorded regarding institutionalised dialogue between public authorities and civil society. On the contrary, the overall context continues to be characterised by a climate of hostility and resistance from the government, particularly concerning mechanisms of stakeholder consultation.

In terms of labour relations, workers' organisations have repeatedly reported the absence of prior consultation on strategic measures affecting the labour market and fiscal policies. On several occasions, trade unions have been confronted when decisions have already been made, without any form of consultation or involvement, in violation of the principle of participation enshrined in the constitution.

None of the legislative measures highlighted in previous sections of this report — despite having a significant impact on fundamental freedoms and civic participation — were subjected to any form of structured consultation or dialogue with CSOs. This lack of democratic inclusion appears particularly serious in a political context marked by increasing restrictions on civic space.

As a sole sign of openness, the government has initiated a consultation with the Italian Third Sector Forum on the sensitive issue of the application of the new VAT regime to non-profit associations.⁷⁴ Although the dialogue is still in its preliminary phase, its activation represents an important precedent, which should be closely monitored in terms of effectiveness and transparency.

Safe Space

In recent years, Italy has seen a significant increase in both symbolic and physical attacks against CSOs, associative spaces, and the people who work within them. These incidents reflect a climate of growing hostility and insecurity for those engaged in promoting human rights, social justice, and democratic participation.

The government has maintained an openly hostile narrative towards LGBTQI+ movements, despite the absence of explicit repressive laws. However, Italy still lacks a law against discrimination based on sexual orientation. There were numerous reported attacks against LGBTQI+ people and organisations in 2025.⁷⁵ In March 2025, the ArciGay headquarters in Catania was defaced with pro-fascist slogans and homophobic

graffiti.⁷⁶ A similar attack occurred in January 2025 at the Cassero in Bologna, a centre for LGBTQI+ people.⁷⁷ Threats against the LGBTQI+ community were also directed at the Rete degli Studenti and the Unione degli Universitari, whose offices in Venice were vandalised between March and April 2025.⁷⁸ On 15 May, the front door of the social centre La Strada in the Garbatella neighbourhood in Rome was destroyed.⁷⁹

In the context of an increasingly polarised and violent societal climate, other serious incidents have also targeted party offices and democratic institutions. On 25 April, during Liberation Day celebrations, a group of protesters besieged the Fratelli d'Italia office in Milan, throwing objects and staging a violent protest.⁸⁰ On

⁷³. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/la-denuncia-di-potere-al-popolo-siamo-stati-infiltrati-e-spiati-dalla-polizia-per-10-mesi/>

⁷⁴. <https://www.anpas.org/terzo-settore-tavolo-permanente/>

⁷⁵. <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2025/01/aggressione-omofoba-a-roma-calci-e-pugni-contro-una-coppia-gay-la-notte-di-capodanno-4395a352-ba55-46b0-903d-de08a41bacc0.html> ;

<https://ilmanifesto.it/roma-ragazze-trans-picchiate-e-rapinate>

⁷⁶. <https://www.hashtagsicilia.it/2025/03/26/attacco-alla-sede-arcigay-di-catania-marano-m5s-inaccettabili-rigurgiti-fascisti/>

⁷⁷. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2025/01/17/bologna-attacco-cassero-omofobia-casapound-patrioti/7841483/>

⁷⁸. <https://www.veneziatoday.it/cronaca/furto-scasso-sede-udu-quarta.html> ;

<https://www.veneziatoday.it/cronaca/maniglia-divelta-morte-gay-comunisti-sede-udu.html>

⁷⁹. <https://www.romatoday.it/politica/attacco-centro-sociale-la-strada-distrutta-porta.html>

⁸⁰. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/25-aprile-sede-fdi-assediata-estremisti-sinistra-fuori-i-2470786.html>

26 May, the Lega party office in Modena was defaced with offensive graffiti and anarchist symbols.⁸¹

Hatred, polarisation, and rising tension are fuelling a spiral of violence, indiscriminately targeting civil society, trade unions, associative spaces, and political

parties. Taken together, these events highlight growing insecurity for organisations and individuals engaged in civic activities, within a national context where the freedom of association and expression is increasingly at risk from both institutional and non-institutional actors.

⁸¹. <https://www.modenatoday.it/cronaca/sede-della-lega-modena-imbrattata-nella-notte-scritte-offensive-e-simboli-anarchici.html>

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:

- **Urgently repeal the security decree to ensure full compliance with the Italian Constitution and international human rights standards.**
- Foster a safe and enabling civic space, including by removing obstacles affecting CSOs, particularly the NGO decree, flows decree, “eco-vandalism” law and the use of *fogli di via* and *DASPO urbani*.
- Respect the freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression as per international human rights standards and refrain from targeting the climate justice and Palestine solidarity movement.
- Ensure the accountability and oversight of law enforcement by introducing mandatory identification codes for police officers in protests and establishing an independent complaints mechanism to investigate allegations of excessive use of force.
- Urgently launch an independent investigation into the use of Paragon spyware against activists, CSOs, and journalists, to hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent the use of unlawful surveillance and respect the right to privacy.
- End the misuse of SLAPPs through effective anti-SLAPP protections, in line with the EU Anti-SLAPP directive.

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.

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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.

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