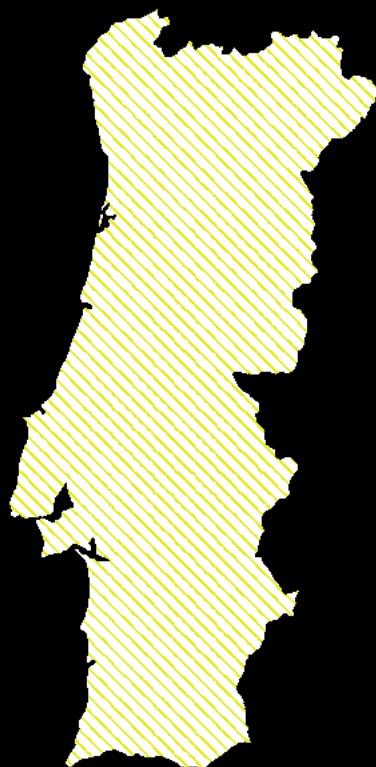


CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

# Portugal

by Jonni Lopes, Academia Cidadã





## 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](http://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

---

**Academia Cidadã** is a non-profit dynamic organisation in Portugal dedicated to fostering active citizenship and strengthening democracy. Through a variety of educational programs, workshops, and community initiatives, Academia Cidadã empowers individuals to engage in civic life, advocate for their rights, and participate in democratic processes.



ACADEMIA  
**CIDADÃ**

---




**CITIZENSHIP**  
ACADEMY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

- Key Trends** ..... 5
- Summary** ..... 5
- Freedom of Association** ..... 6
- Access to funding** ..... 7
- Freedom of Peaceful Assembly** ..... 8
- Freedom of Expression** .....10
- Participation in Decision-Making** ..... 11
  - Formal Mechanisms and Practical Barriers ..... 11
  - Right to Information and Institutional Censorship ..... 11
  - New Lobbying law ..... 12
- Safe Space** .....12
  - Escalation of Hate Crimes and Neo-Nazi Actions ..... 12
- Normalisation of Political Extremism** .....13
  - Anti-Immigration Xenophobia: Misinformation and Escalating Violence ..... 14
- Recommendations** .....16
- About the author** .....16

# Key Trends

-  Data privacy breaches and escalating repression of peaceful protest through selective enforcement and police violence, with climate activists, Palestine solidarity movements, and trade union strikes targeted.
-  Volatile public funding landscape and urban gentrification force community and cultural spaces to close, weakening grassroots CSOs' ability to operate.
-  The rise of the far-right and normalisation of xenophobic and anti-rights narratives contribute to increased hate crimes and a hostile environment for human rights advocacy.

## Summary

Civic space is rated as “Open” by the CIVICUS Monitor.<sup>1</sup> Despite this rating, there has been a substantial deterioration in civic freedoms in the country, warranting the need for early intervention. The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law report recommended that the Portuguese government improve the transparency of law-making, particularly on the implementation of impact assessment tools, and to adopt rules on the regulation of lobbying. In 2026, Portugal adopted a legal framework for the representation of interests (Law No. 5-A/2026),<sup>2</sup> thereby responding largely to European recommendations on transparency of private influence over public decision-making. However, its effectiveness will depend on its implementation. Despite a legally robust framework protecting civic freedoms, in practice, civic space in Portugal continued to shrink throughout 2025. Freedom of association is increasingly constrained by restrictive migration

and nationality reforms, administrative dysfunction, systemic funding insecurity and pressures from gentrification and real-estate speculation that are forcing cultural and community organisations to close. These structural barriers disproportionately affect migrants, racialised communities, grassroots groups, and organisations working closely with vulnerable people.

Selective enforcement of laws on peaceful assembly, disproportionate fines, excessive police force, and repeated data-protection violations against protesters have restricted protest rights and created a chilling effect on civic mobilisation, especially for climate, anti-racist and Palestine solidarity movements. This occurs within a context of rising far-right influence, disinformation campaigns, and increased hate crimes, weakening civic action, collective organisation, state accountability, and public participation.

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

2. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/5-a-2026-1028061007>

# Freedom of Association

Article 46 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic guarantees the right to freely form associations without prior authorisation, provided that their aims are not contrary to criminal law.<sup>3</sup> Decree-Law No. 594/74 frames this right as a “basic guarantee of personal fulfilment” that the state can only restrict in the name of the general interest,<sup>4</sup> and the national legal framework remains aligned with international and European human rights standards. However, in practice, restrictive reforms on migration policy, combined with serious flaws in migration administration, constitute significant barriers to the effective exercise of freedom of association and other democratic rights like the right to vote, especially for vulnerable communities and their organisations.

Law No. 61/2025, significantly tightened access to nationality and residence, and has knock-on effects for freedom of association.<sup>5</sup> It extends naturalisation periods to seven years for nationals of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) and ten years for other nationalities. This effectively doubles previous requirements, while introducing mandatory Portuguese language and culture tests and eliminating the pathway for regularisation through “expression of interest”, making it almost impossible to request a visa after coming to the country as a tourist, for example. The only way to apply is through Portuguese consulates and embassies in the countries of origin. This represents the most restrictive change to Portugal’s immigration framework in the post-1976 period. In practice, this means that migrants who are already living in the country that would otherwise qualify for residence have to remain under precarious legal conditions, which restricts their ability to plan, participate in and lead collective initiatives, including protests, joining associations, trade unions, and community organisations.

At the same time, the new Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) became a symbol of administrative dysfunction due to long waiting times for visa applications, appointment requests, document renewals, and naturalisation applications. During the first four months of 2025, statistics on the Complaints

Portal (*Portal da Queixa*), a popular online platform for filing complaints against public services, showed a 37% increase in complaints directed to AIMA compared to the same period in 2024. The response rate to these complaints was only 13.3%, the resolution rate was 14.9%, and the level of satisfaction was extremely low, at 17.8/100.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to administrative constraints, incidents of intimidation, discrimination, and police violence illustrate direct interference with freedom of association. For example, between October 2024 and April 2025 there were four police raids at Planeta Manas, a LGBTQI+ cultural centre in Loures. The raids were conducted without judicial warrants and resulted in physical assaults, homophobic verbal abuse, and ultimately the closure and expulsion of the community.<sup>7</sup> Following public outcry, the Inspectorate-General of Internal Administration (IGAI) initiated a preliminary inquiry into police conduct in June 2025, though no disciplinary measures had been announced as of January 2026.

Due to the gentrification of Portugal’s urban centres, several associations are under constant threat of closure as a result of increases in rental prices or evictions, driven by the exploitation of local accommodation for tourism and property speculation.<sup>8</sup> The impact of real estate pressure on associative freedoms is increasingly evident, as was seen in the case of the Academia de Amadores de Música de Lisboa (Lisbon Amateur Music Academy), which has been in existence for over 141 years. The academy saw a 588% increase in rent from €542 to €3,728 per month, threatening the continuation of its activities after the landlord requested a revaluation of the rent.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Casa Independente, a cultural space, announced that it will close by the end of 2026, due to similar pressures from real estate speculation.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in Lisbon, the Zona Franca dos Anjos association was evicted in 2025, as its lease agreement was not renewed by the landlord.<sup>11</sup> Cooperatives such as Largo Residências in Lisbon have already been forced to relocate three times,<sup>12</sup> while the Sirigaita and self-managed activist

3. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-49436275>

4. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/594-1974-471532>

5. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/61-2025-941547426>

6. <https://www.publico.pt/2025/05/14/publico-brasil/noticia/reclamacoes-aima-aumentam-37-quatro-meses-ano-2133049>

7. <https://acabine.pt/2025/02/novamente-sem-mandado-psp-faz-rusga-ao-planeta-manas/>

8. <https://www.publico.pt/2025/10/09/local/noticia/colectividades-lisboa-pedem-moratoria-despejos-uso-edificios-municipais-2150226>

9. <https://www.sabado.pt/portugal/detalhe/80-anos-depois-academia-de-amadores-de-musica-tera-que-deixar-instalacoes>

10. <https://expresso.pt/cultura/2025-09-29-casa-independente-em-lisboa-encerra-no-final-de-2026-e-nao-ha-possibilidade-de-continuidade-do-projeto-1fa1a9fa>

11. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DP546LiEW7/>

12. <https://largoresidencias.com/sobre/>

space, has been under threat of eviction since 2023, fighting a tough court battle alongside intense public protest from the community, which has yet to reach a conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

There have been no consistent measures or proposals from the government to prevent associations and community-run spaces from being priced out or evicted. In one positive example, Porto city council classified the STOP Cultural Centre, as a “municipal monument” putting to an end the threats of eviction it had faced since 2013.

## Access to funding

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Portugal face a structural crisis of financial sustainability that directly compromises their ability to fulfil their social missions and defend fundamental rights. The most recent assessment of Portuguese NGOs, carried out by the Catholic University of Portugal for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and published in 2024, reveals a sector in a state of profound vulnerability. The report notes that more than 50% of NGOs’ income comes from public funding, while only 7% comes from voluntary contributions, including donations, inheritances, legacies, in-kind contributions from individuals, and private philanthropy.<sup>16</sup> This almost exclusive dependence on volatile funding sources worsened dramatically in the post-pandemic period. For example, while in 2020 and 2021, extraordinary support from Next Generation EU allowed organisations to continue their activities, from 2022 onwards, the end of this support, combined with escalating inflation, had a devastating effect.

In the Private Social Solidarity Institutions (IPSS) sector, the percentage of entities recording negative net results (annual budget deficits) jumped from 33.8% in 2022 to 40.9% in 2023, a deterioration that the National Confederation of Solidarity Institutions (CNIS) classified as “very serious”.<sup>17</sup> The state secretary acknowledged that the “lack of predictability is very serious”, but the situation remains unchanged.

Associations have also faced Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). In one case, the association Unidos Em Defesa das Covas do Barroso, which campaigns against the creation of lithium mines in a rural area Barroso-northeast of the country, has faced at least two criminal complaints from the mining company Savannah Resources, widely denounced by civil society organisations as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).<sup>14</sup> The lawsuits form part of a broader pattern of smear campaigns and pressure on the local community, which has been contesting the expansion of the mining concession and the lack of meaningful consultation with affected residents.<sup>15</sup>

This financial fragility intersects with urban gentrification and real estate pressure, producing a bottleneck effect that disproportionately affects community organisation spaces. Access to European funds is hampered by bureaucratic barriers. Portugal’s Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR) makes €22.2 billion available to civil society, while the EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) adds a further €641.7 million.<sup>18</sup> However, processing times of 1-2 years, co-financing rates of 75-85% and complex eligibility rules act as a discriminatory barrier that favours large organisations, while excluding community-based entities that are closer to people and grassroots communities. The discontinuation of funding has a direct effect on workers whose jobs depend on project funding. These trends suggest that, even as civil society organisations are called upon to support a growing number of people, the structure of available funding increasingly works in the opposite direction, weakening precisely those communitybased actors that are closest to the people.

At the same time, the number of direct beneficiaries of NGOs increased by 275% between 2014 and 2024, but the average number of members of associations decreased by 63.4% in the same period.<sup>19</sup> The combination of administrative barriers in the right to civic participation of migrants, real estate pressure on community spaces, police intimidation of vulnerable communities, and a structural funding crisis is creating an environment of shrinking civic space. Although it

13. <https://sirigaita.org/index.php/nao-se-despeja-um-desejo/>

14. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=961253502813041&set=a.595636326041429>

15. <https://www.jornalmapa.pt/2024/09/26/novos-contos-das-montanhas-barrosas-usurpacoes-intimidacoes-e-resistencia/>

16. [https://ciencia.ucp.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/111266925/109197469\\_2.pdf](https://ciencia.ucp.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/111266925/109197469_2.pdf)

17. <https://agencia.eclesia.pt/portal/portugal-presidente-da-cnis-preocupado-com-sustentabilidade-das-ipss-apos-estudo-revelar-aumento-de-resultados-liquidos-negativos/>

18. <https://econews.pt/2025/08/08/portugal-has-already-received-e1-34-billion-from-the-sixth-rrp-payment/>

19. [https://ciencia.ucp.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/111266925/109197469\\_2.pdf](https://ciencia.ucp.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/111266925/109197469_2.pdf)

does not take the form of severe overt repression, it produces similar effects of silencing, fragmentation, and weakening of the capacity for collective organisation. This makes freedom of association a privilege afforded to those who have resources and stability and excludes many of those who most need collective organisation to claim their rights.

The operating model of European funds in some government programmes can also hinder access to funding. *Portugal Inovação Social*, the public initiative that aims to promote social innovation and mobilise EU funds, requires a letter of commitment from social investors for 20% of the total project cost for applications to be eligible.<sup>20</sup> This means that organisations applying for this funding need to find organisations and local authorities that agree to commit to investing in the projects even before the application is submitted. Investors may subsequently benefit from tax relief of up to 130% of the amount invested.<sup>21</sup> However, tax waiver data is not disclosed in a disaggregated manner,

making it impossible to analyse how much tax revenue the state waives as part of these programmes.<sup>22</sup> This opacity prevents the assessment of the real costs and benefits of these mechanisms and limits parliamentary and public scrutiny of those who benefits from them.

At the same time, the dominance of short-term project funding (typically one to two years) keeps organisations and professionals in a permanent cycle of uncertainty including dependence on project funding, successive fixed-term employment contracts, unstable teams, and the impossibility of planning medium- to long-term structures. In a sector already weakened by scarce resources and strong pressure to demonstrate rapid impact, this funding model acts as an indirect mechanism for restricting freedom of association, because it conditions organisational survival on adherence to the agenda of public and private funders, rather than ensuring a stable basis for the autonomous exercise of civil rights.

## Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The right to peaceful assembly is enshrined in Article 45 of the Portuguese Republic's Constitution, which guarantees all people the right to assemble peacefully in public places without prior authorisation.<sup>23</sup> However, ordinary legislation creates a contradiction: Law No. 406/74 requires prior notification to authorities at least two working days in advance, with non-compliance classified as "aggravated disobedience" — a criminal charge.<sup>24</sup> This gap between constitutional guarantees and ordinary law creates scope for police and prosecutors to question the legitimacy of peaceful demonstrations on procedural grounds rather than on substance.

In 2025, this legal framework became a tool for selective enforcement, particularly targeting climate movements, Palestine solidarity groups, and anti-racist organisations. Between July 2025 and January 2026, members of climate movements reported 87 ongoing administrative and judicial proceedings initiated against them. A total of €28,140 in fines were issued, with the remaining 72 pending cases facing up to €250,000 in total penalties.<sup>25</sup> These fines were disproportionately

high — about ten times higher than the average annual income of a Portuguese worker, which was about €24,800 in 2024.<sup>26</sup> This effectively makes engaging in climate activism unaffordable and beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.

Palestine solidarity groups also experienced attempts at repression in 2025. During the Tour of Portugal cycling race in August 2025, protesters displaying Palestinian flags in Nazaré and Caldas da Rainha were subjected to systematic abuses of authority by uniformed and plainclothes Public Security Police (PSP) officers. Police carried out identity checks (without the required legal justification), used physical force (including pushing and restraint), threatened protestors with arrest, and carried out arrests based on the grounds of participating in an "illegal demonstration" — a classification that does not exist in Portuguese law for peaceful gatherings. Of the six protesters that were arrested, four had their charges dropped when prosecutors found no legal basis for detention.<sup>27</sup> The IGAI initiated an inquiry into the police's actions in September 2025. This operation highlighted the selective and

20. <https://pis.portugal2030.pt/parcerias-para-a-inovacao-social/>

21. <https://inovacaosocial.portugal2020.pt/en/financing/social-impact-bonds/>

22. [https://info.portaldasfinancas.gov.pt/pt/apoio\\_contribuinte/Folhetos\\_informativos/Documents/Folheto\\_Investimento\\_em\\_Portugal.pdf](https://info.portaldasfinancas.gov.pt/pt/apoio_contribuinte/Folhetos_informativos/Documents/Folheto_Investimento_em_Portugal.pdf)

23. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-45552675>

24. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/406-1974-424767>

25. <https://www.climaximo.pt/com-mais-de-40-casos-a-frente-e-ate-250-mil-euros-em-multas-no-futuro-a-resistencia-climatica-continua-a-ser-a-unica-saida-do-colapso-climatico/>

26. [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/economia/salario-medio-anual-em-portugal-foi-de-24800-euros-em-2024-abaixo-da-media-da-ue\\_n1697653](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/economia/salario-medio-anual-em-portugal-foi-de-24800-euros-em-2024-abaixo-da-media-da-ue_n1697653)

27. <https://guilhotina.info/2025/08/21/repressao-palestina-volta-portugal/>

disproportionate use of police power, in violation of Articles 45 (assembly and demonstration) 15 and 37 (freedom of expression) of the constitution.<sup>28</sup>

In one unusual case, a homeless man was fined over €11,000 after being convicted of causing damage to Lisbon City Hall in a Palestine solidarity action. The court reached the verdict based on the testimony of a single police officer, despite the defendant's absence and the lack of his testimony during the proceedings. The decision has faced scrutiny due to discrepancies between the timing of the arrest and the emergence of video evidence from the demonstration.<sup>29</sup>

In another case, a Lisbon court convicted a young climate activist of causing damages to Prime Minister Luís Montenegro's suit by throwing green paint at him, a verdict upheld by the Court of Appeal in January 2026. Although the prime minister initially claimed approximately €1,750 for his damaged suit, the judge issued a substantially lower fine of €958, finding the claimed costs were inaccurate. Alongside this compensation, the activist was ordered to pay a fine of €1,600 and an additional €527 to a photographer whose clothes were also damaged.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond direct police intervention, the mishandling of protesters' personal data has created additional barriers to the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly. In July 2025, Faro City Council shared the complete personal data of three organisers of a protest in solidarity for Palestine, including their names, tax identification numbers, phone numbers, and addresses, with over 30 public and private entities without consent or redaction.<sup>31</sup> The organisers filed a GDPR complaint with the National Data Protection Commission (CNPd). As of January 2026, no disciplinary action had been announced. This incident replicates a pattern documented in Lisbon (2018-2021), where the municipality shared protesters' data with foreign embassies in 52 cases, resulting in a €1 million CNPD fine.<sup>32</sup> The repeated data breaches can lead to a chilling effect on civic participation and self-censorship on politically sensitive topics.

Similar dynamics are visible in the police response to labour struggles. The general strike on 11 December 2025, called jointly by the two main trade union federations CGTP-IN (Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses – Intersindical) and UGT (União Geral dos Trabalhadores) in opposition to the government's labour market package, represented the largest coordinated action by Portugal's two major union confederations since 2011. The officially called strike and march to parliament proceeded peacefully with an estimated 50,000 participants. After the official end, approximately 200 protesters remained near a police barrier in front of the parliament. Isolated incidents of vandalism occurred, with some individuals burning bins and throwing objects, involving less than 50 people. However, police responded disproportionately, using kinetic energy ammunition (rubber bullets) to indiscriminately disperse people in the area, including protesters that had not participated in any violent acts. The ammunition struck an estimated 10 to 15 people, mostly in the upper body and head, causing facial and cranial contusions, deep haematomas, and head wounds requiring sutures. The use of force was not preceded by any effective audible warning.<sup>33</sup>

Decree-Law No. 457/99 classifies kinetic energy ammunition (rubber bullets) as "firearms" under law and explicitly establishes that: (1) their use is a measure of last resort; (2) use is only admissible in situations of imminent threat to life; and crucially, (3) their use is explicitly prohibited for "dispersing crowds" or "crowd control." The law also mandates audible warnings before deployment.<sup>34</sup> The police response appeared to violate each of these requirements. Ammunition was used to disperse a crowd that posed no imminent threat to life; less harmful means were not exhausted; no effective audible warnings were issued; and shots were fired indiscriminately.<sup>35</sup> In addition, this practice conflicts with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which require proportionality, necessity, and enhanced caution when potentially lethal weapons are involved.<sup>36</sup> To date, accountability has been limited to internal inquiries, with no guarantee of an independent and transparent investigation by the Inspectorate-General of Internal Administration.

<sup>28</sup>. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-49411175>

<sup>29</sup>. <https://pt.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/04/12/sem-abrigo-condenado-a-pagar-11-mil-euros-a-camara-de-lisboa>

<sup>30</sup>. <https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/relao-confirma-condenao-de-ativista-que-atirou-tinta-verde-a-lus-montenegro>

<sup>31</sup>. <https://civicspacewatch.eu/privacy-breach-organisers-of-palestinian-solidarity-in-portugal-targeted/>

<sup>32</sup>. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lisbon-fined-sharing-protesters-data-with-targetted-embassies-2022-01-14/>

<sup>33</sup>. [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/greve-geral-manifestantes-denunciam-violencia-policial\\_v1706573](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/greve-geral-manifestantes-denunciam-violencia-policial_v1706573)

<sup>34</sup>. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/457-1999-693806>

<sup>35</sup>. This assessment is based on multiple converging sources, including media reports, video footage and firsthand testimonies documented by Academia Cidadã. See: [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Q\\_5gbzRXjc](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Q_5gbzRXjc);

<https://tvplayer.iol.pt/programa/tvi-jornal/63ef5eb50cf2665294d5f87a/video/695fae3e0cf24e58d783c34f>

<sup>36</sup>. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/useofforceandfirearms.pdf>

The use of rubber bullets by Portuguese authorities has been documented on other occasions in the past.<sup>37</sup> These incidents have been mostly documented in racialised communities which are heavily policed or around football matches, generally framed by the authorities as “public order” interventions. It is concerning that similar tactics have now been used to curtail the right to protest, as seen in the case of the general strike.

The disproportionate use of force serves as a means of discouraging peaceful assembly and expression

and demonstrating and can lead to fear and collective withdrawal from civic participation.

Taken together, these episodes represent a substantial erosion of the right to peaceful assembly in Portugal. In practice, the exercise of this right has become conditioned by a growing risk of police violence, judicial persecution, and political stigmatisation, especially for rights groups that challenge state policies or denounce institutional racism.

## Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression and information is guaranteed in Article 37 of the constitution, which explicitly prohibits any form of censorship and ensures freedom of the press and editorial autonomy of the media. Despite this formally robust framework, journalism in Portugal faces a combination of news deserts, media concentration, job insecurity, and growing threats that, in practice, constrain the media’s ability to inform the public and scrutinise the authorities.

In 2025, the media landscape became even more fragile, with cascading effects on democratic accountability. Nationwide studies conducted by Labcom (University of Beira Interior) identified 14.6% of Portugal’s municipalities (45 municipalities) as complete “news deserts” with no regular local coverage; 12.3% (38 municipalities) as “semi-deserts”, with only occasional local information; and 28.3% (87 municipalities), under acute threat of desertification with only one active media outlet. Cumulatively, this means 55% of Portugal’s municipalities lack either adequate or sustainable local news coverage, creating information vacuums exploited by disinformation networks.<sup>38</sup>

Precarious working conditions are a central driver of this crisis. The national survey on the living and working conditions of journalists in Portugal, conducted by the Portuguese Journalists’ Union (SJ), in partnership with Portuguese Press Association (API) and Casa da Imprensa, reveals that almost half of Portuguese journalists report high levels of professional exhaustion, overtime, difficulties in balancing work and family life, and pervasive job insecurity. In parallel, around half

of respondents report having experienced censorship or self-censorship, and more than a half say they have been blocked from accessing sources — including official information, documents, and key interlocutors. These conditions create structural vulnerability to political and economic pressure.<sup>39</sup>

The absence of national anti-SLAPP legislation exacerbates the situation, leaving journalists and activists exposed to abusive litigation designed to exhaust resources and silence criticism.<sup>40</sup>

This lack of effective protection stands in stark contrast with the authorities’ low tolerance for political satire. In January 2026, the government filed a criminal complaint against a social media user for a post on X (formerly Twitter) that simulated a fictional private message allegedly from Prime Minister Luís Montenegro, supposedly leaked by Donald Trump that was clearly satirical — even bearing a “satire” watermark for the avoidance of doubt. The prosecution’s characterisation of this post as “intentional disinformation with high public dissemination” drew immediate criticism from legal experts and freedom of expression organisations, who warned of dangerous conflation between protected political satire and criminal disinformation, particularly in an electoral context.<sup>41</sup>

Between July and December 2025, Portugal witnessed a coordinated immigration disinformation campaign, according to European Digital Media Observatory analysis. The scale was unprecedented: false anti-immigration narratives accumulated 3.8 million views;

37. <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/police-fire-rubber-bullets-into-air-at-protestors-on-lisbon-avenue/48123> ;

<https://www.defendtherighttoprotest.org/portugal-police-batons-for-protesters-and-rubber-bullets-for-the-kids-of-bela-vista/>

38. <https://apimprensa.pt/estudo-revela-condicoes-precarias-e-esgotamento-profissional-entre-jornalistas-portugueses/>

39. <https://jornalistas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Inquerito-Nacional-as-Condicoes-de-Vida-e-de-Trabalho-dos-Jornalistas-em-Portugal-03-11-2023-c.pdf>

40. <https://ipi.media/portugals-media-struggles/> ;

<https://observador.pt/2024/04/23/personalidades-pedem-rapida-transposicao-de-diretiva-que- protege-liberdade-de-expressao/>

41. <https://pt.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/01/22/luis-montenegro-apresenta-queixa-por-desinformacao-apos-publicacao-que-simula-mensagem-par>

the hashtag #PortugalInvadido (Portugal Invaded) accumulated 21 million impressions — five times more than hashtags discussing government corruption — and these false narratives dominated social media discourse during Portugal's 2025 Parliament election campaigns. Network analysis identified that 58% of accounts amplifying these narratives on the public pages of far-right politicians are automated or fabricated (inauthentic). Geolocation of IP addresses and account metadata indicates coordination originating in third countries, suggesting transnational influence on operations designed to destabilise Portuguese democracy.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, freedom of expression in Portugal remains formally protected, but its exercise is being eroded by three interrelated dynamics: an economically fragile and concentrated media ecosystem;<sup>43</sup> working conditions that produce self-censorship and vulnerability; and an environment of threats, misinformation, and impunity that penalises those who report abuses and challenge extremist narratives.

## Participation in Decision-Making

### Formal Mechanisms and Practical Barriers

Portugal has a constitutional framework (Articles 48 and 52 of the constitution) protecting citizen participation in public life and decision-making,<sup>44</sup> either directly or through elected representatives. In 2025, there were no structural legislative changes, apart from the Action Plan of the National Digital Strategy, which provides for strengthening digital participation, including through the expansion and use of the participava.gov.pt platform.<sup>45</sup> Designed to host participatory processes such as participatory budgets and other citizen-driven initiatives, through this online portal, citizens can submit proposals, and vote on projects.

Despite these formal mechanisms, several barriers remain. International assessments of Portugal's open government framework note that co-creation and consultation processes are often compressed into short

time frames, which makes it difficult for organisations with limited resources to prepare substantive contributions. For example, for the 2023-2027 Open Government Action Plan, wider public input was gathered through three workshops and a 10-day online survey that elicited 112 responses, followed by a one-week public consultation on the draft commitments, which received no comments.<sup>46</sup> Information for consultations can be fragmented or presented in ways that are hard to navigate, and smaller CSOs face structural capacity constraints in terms of staff time, expertise, and funding to analyse complex consultation dossiers. In addition, independent reviews and European bodies have recommended that Portugal improve the documentation and publication of how public inputs are used, indicating that substantive feedback on how contributions are considered is often limited or opaque.

### Right to Information and Institutional Censorship

The right to access to information is regulated by Law No. 26/2016, with the possibility of appeal to the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CADA).<sup>47</sup> Of particular concern was the removal of the chapter "Extremism and Hybrid Threats" from the Annual Internal Security Report (RASI) published in April 2025.<sup>48</sup> The preliminary version contained

specific information on "the existence of representation of an international extremist organisation in Portugal, classified in several countries as a terrorist organisation," promoting "meetings through musical events" as a method of recruitment and financing propaganda.<sup>49</sup> However, the final version sent to parliament completely removed this chapter, claiming

42. <https://edmo.eu/publications/portuguese-general-elections-2025-information-and-disinformation-on-social-media/>

43. [https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portalfiles/99090007/Portugal\\_EN\\_mpm\\_2024\\_cmpf.pdf](https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portalfiles/99090007/Portugal_EN_mpm_2024_cmpf.pdf)

44. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-45923275> ; <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-50458475>

45. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/noticia?%3Dnova-plataforma-participagov-vai-dar-suporte-a-processos-participativos-e-de-cidadania&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1776699977362784&usg=AOvWaw0Vmj7iM3xu3u0Zzgc2h17o>

46. [https://ogp.digital.gov.pt/documents/48760/0/Portugal\\_Action-Plan-Review\\_2023-2027\\_EN.pdf/9ab6aad4-ce67-7820-b27a-9e6bfa886ac1](https://ogp.digital.gov.pt/documents/48760/0/Portugal_Action-Plan-Review_2023-2027_EN.pdf/9ab6aad4-ce67-7820-b27a-9e6bfa886ac1)

47. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/lei/2016-106603618-106597570>

48. <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/rasi/rasi-2024/capitulo-sobre-movimentos-extremistas-e-ameacas-hibridas-a-portugal-eliminado-da-versao-final-do-rasi-20250402/67ed41edd34ef72ee4443a63>

49. <https://observador.pt/2025/04/02/segurancacapitulo-sobre-extremismos-e-ameacas-hibridas-desapareceu-entre-versao-preliminar-e-oficial-do-relatorio-be-questiona-governo/>

it was a “working version” subject to discussion. This institutional censorship constitutes a violation of the right to information and compromises democratic

oversight that allows civil society to monitor threats to civic space.

## New Lobbying law

In January 2026, Portugal adopted a legal framework for the representation of interests (Law No. 5-A/2026),<sup>50</sup> thereby responding to European recommendations on transparency of private influence over public decision-making. The new regime establishes a Transparency Register, a code of conduct and a system of sanctions, including “cooling-off” periods for former political office-holders. However, its effectiveness will depend on the actual establishment of the register, the capacity for oversight, and the extent to which it covers, in practice, different forms of influence, including informal contacts and civil society actors. Legal analysts have stressed that the main challenge of the new framework will not be its adoption but its practical implementation and the ability of public authorities and private actors to adapt to the new system. They warn that the regime must be aligned with pre-existing and well-established practices to be effective.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, international experience shows that poorly designed or poorly implemented lobbying frameworks can contribute to shrinking civic space by creating disproportionate administrative burdens,

broad discretionary powers and instruments that may be applied selectively against critical organisations and activists.<sup>52</sup> Commentators also note that the Portuguese law fills a long-standing legal vacuum by clarifying the boundary between legitimate interest representation and criminal conduct (namely corruption and influence peddling), which, if applied in an expansive or selective manner, could further increase the risk of undue pressure on dissenting civil society actors.

The law does not make provision for an independent authority dedicated exclusively to safeguarding the integrity of lobbying activities. Rather, it distributes responsibilities between the future body managing the register and existing parliamentary structures, which raises additional questions about protection against the political weaponisation of sanctions and safeguarding civic participation. In this context, the review, foreseen to take place one or two years after implementation could prove decisive as it will assess the robustness of the institutional framework, and determine whether the regulation strengthens democratic transparency or, on the contrary, introduces new risks for civic space.

## Safe Space

### Escalation of Hate Crimes and Neo-Nazi Actions

Between 2021-2024, Portugal’s two main police forces (PSP and GNR) combined received 987 formal complaints alleging discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and incitement to hatred, with annual complaint numbers for both forces rising steadily over this period. The judicial police opened 228 formal investigations in 2024 alone (a 38% increase from 2023), but only five of these investigations led to indictments: just 2.19%. The sentencing rates are even lower with only 13 convictions for racial discrimination in the whole country between 2017 and 2024.<sup>53</sup> This represents a conviction rate of less than 1% of complaints made — a rate suggesting either systematic evidentiary

weakness or institutional unwillingness to prosecute hate crimes.

At the same time, the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination (CICDR) has been virtually paralysed for over a year due to the lack of regulatory framework<sup>54</sup> or consolidated access to complaint data, which prevents the systematic identification of patterns. Thus, while official statistics document an increase in crimes of discrimination and incitement to hatred, effective accountability remains residual,<sup>55</sup> functioning, in effect, as a mechanism of impunity that encourages the repetition of attacks.

50. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/5-a-2026-1028061007>

51. [https://www.vda.pt/xms/files/06\\_Media/2026/JEA\\_060226\\_202.pdf](https://www.vda.pt/xms/files/06_Media/2026/JEA_060226_202.pdf)

52. <https://www.dsc.org.uk/content/keep-calm-and-carry-on-campaigning-but-government-must-reform-the-lobbying-act/> ; <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/csos-lithuania-concerned-new-amendments-law-lobbying-may-unnecessary-overburden-ngos/>

53. <https://observador.pt/2025/03/21/psp-e-gnr-receberam-quase-1000-queixas-por-discriminacao-e-racismo-em-4-anos/>

54. <https://observador.pt/2025/03/21/queixas-por-racismo-a-pj-aumentaram-38-em-2024-comissao-contra-a-discriminacao-racial-parada-ha-ano-e-meio/>

55. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2024-05-07-video-crimes-de-odio-aumentam-mas-so-uma-minoria-resulta-em-acusacao-01edd391>

In 2025, there was a worrying increase in verbal, physical, and online attacks targeting civic actors, activists, and human rights groups in Portugal.<sup>56</sup> Climate movements were included in the RASI under headings linked to “extremism,”<sup>57</sup> while none of the violent far-right events and groups identified by the investigative police was mentioned. Although the self-contained chapter on “extremism and hybrid threats” was later removed from the final, official version of the same report, it was widely spread in media and social media. This contributed to the growing criminalisation of climate movements and portrays non-violent climate-justice activism as a security threat. Overall, this contributes to a hostile environment and reinforces stigmatisation, while minimising the violent activities of the far-right.

In May, an LGBTQI+ book club meeting organised by ILGA and taking place in a public library,<sup>58</sup> was interrupted by the neo-Nazi group Habeas Corpus, who shouted homophobic slurs.<sup>59</sup> In June, an actor was violently beaten and an actress was harassed by members of Reconquista, another neo-Nazi group, in front of the theatre where they were working due to their LGBTQI+ identity.<sup>60</sup>

On 25 April, the day marking the end of the fascist regime in Portugal, the Ergue-te party and the Habeas Corpus movement, with the support of the far-right group 1143, announced a demonstration featuring a “pig roast” at Martim Moniz (an area in Lisbon with a large Muslim community).<sup>61</sup> The police issued a negative

opinion regarding the event, and Lisbon City Council followed its recommendation and assessment, refusing to authorise the far-right movements’ scheduled initiatives. Nevertheless, members of the movement decided to show up at the demonstration, and far-right supporters clashed with anti-fascist protesters and PSP officers.<sup>62</sup>

In a 2025 study, more than 75% of respondents reported experiences of online hate speech, particularly against foreigners and migrant groups.<sup>63</sup> These patterns unfold in a context of weak institutional accountability, as mechanisms to respond to and sanction discriminatory behaviour remain under-sourced and fragmented.

The presence of neo-Nazi elements within the security forces, revealed by judicial police (PJ) investigations in June 2025, identified 12 individuals in leadership positions within the PSP, GNR, and Navy as members of the paramilitary group Amilar Lusitano.<sup>64</sup> The investigation documented activities included purchasing weapons and explosives from Germany and Italy, and allegedly supplying other extremist organisations. This constitutes a serious threat to the rule of law because it shows that individuals committed to racist violence and the “violent overthrow of the democratic constitutional order” were able to penetrate the ranks of the security forces themselves, raising concerns about abuse of police powers, biased enforcement, and the state’s capacity to protect people targeted by far-right violence.<sup>65</sup>

## Normalisation of Political Extremism

The far-right Chega party grew from just one MP in 2019 to 60 MPs in 2024, becoming the third largest political force in the Portuguese parliament.<sup>66</sup> The electoral rise was accompanied by rhetoric about uncontrolled migration, and xenophobic, racist and homophobic speeches disseminated online and subsequently in the plenary session of the Assembly of the Republic (AR), with parliamentary impunity resulting from the invocation of “freedom of expression” by the president of the AR. In February 2025, an open letter signed by more than 700 people and dozens of organisations

demanded sanctions against hate speech in parliament, denouncing “insults and discrimination, hate attacks” without disciplinary consequences. Examples include ableist, racist, fascist, homophobic, and sexist speeches by Chega MPs with identified links to international supremacist groups.

A particularly serious case is the discovery that a Chega candidate was among the largest financial contributors to the neo-Nazi group 1143. Mário Machado, the historic leader of a far-right criminal group in Portugal,

56. <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-portugal-translation-in-portuguese-/1680b6668f>

57. <https://ssi.gov.pt/publicacoes/relatorio-anual-de-seguranca-interna/RASI%202024.pdf>

58. <https://www.ilga-portugal.pt/comunicado-conjunto-ilga-portugal-e-amplios-sobre-invasao-em-clubes-de-leitura/>

59. <https://www.noticiasaoiminuto.com/pais/2795249/habeas-corpus-interrumpe-mais-um-evento-lgbt-desta-vez-clubes-de-leitura>

60. <https://pt.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/06/11/ator-portugues-violentamente-agredido-por-grupo-de-extrema-direita>

61. [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/mais-de-100-pessoas-juntam-se-no-martim-moniz-contraria-acao-da-extrema-direita\\_n1650306](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/mais-de-100-pessoas-juntam-se-no-martim-moniz-contraria-acao-da-extrema-direita_n1650306)

62. <https://sapo.pt/artigo/o-filme-dos-violentos-confrontos-da-extrema-direita-com-a-policia-e-antifascistas-no-25-de-abril-68681768aca971ab63305b71>

63. [https://casadobrasilidelisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/MM\\_relatorio2024\\_digital\\_v7.pdf](https://casadobrasilidelisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/MM_relatorio2024_digital_v7.pdf)

64. <https://observador.pt/2025/06/18/prisao-preventiva-para-quatro-membros-do-movimento-armilar-lusitano-outros-dois-com-apresentacoes-periodicas/>

65. <https://portugaldecoded.substack.com/p/six-neo-nazis-arrested-including>

66. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/PT/PT-LC01/election/PT-LC01-E20250518/>

received donations intended for the same group, demonstrating systemic porosity between normalised political extremism and organised violence, with the circulation of funds constituting a mechanism for sustaining paramilitary capacity.

Due to its growth, Chega now has the power to shape the media agenda, frame debates, and condition parliamentary negotiations. This means that extremist discourse is no longer marginal but has become an institutional voice with airtime, public resources, and protection, such as immunity. The repeated invocation of “freedom of expression” by the president of the AR to avoid functions, in practice, as an institutional shield for the radicalisation of public discourse.

In February 2025, the governing parties, PSD and CDS-PP, along with the Liberal Initiative and the Chega, approved the withdrawal of a guide for the prevention of violence and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression from circulation in schools. According to the newspaper Público, this document was also removed from the website of the Directorate-General for Education.<sup>67</sup>

These political developments has had direct consequences on the civic, and educational space, with groups and individuals feeling emboldened to violently interrupt civic and cultural initiatives, through widespread violent and discriminatory discourse in schools<sup>68</sup> and on social media.<sup>69</sup>

## Anti-Immigration Xenophobia: Misinformation and Escalating Violence

In the 2024 legislative elections, a monitoring project identified irregular paid advertisements containing disinformation targeting the Socialist Party (PS) and Social Democratic Party (PSD). The ad spent approximately €12,000 over three days and has an estimated reach of around two million accounts.<sup>70</sup> Reports from the CNE (“Comissão Nacional de Eleições” - National Electoral Commission) and research centres on the 2024 European elections also show the intensive use of the Meta ecosystem (Facebook and Instagram) for political content and campaigns with false information, including sponsored advertisements linked to Chega and fraudulent investment schemes using deepfakes. Studies on the 2024–2025 campaigns highlight that most online political content circulates precisely on these platforms, making them central to the spread of disinformation through paid advertising.<sup>71</sup>

The normalisation of xenophobic rhetoric has led to organised violence through explicit calls for paid violence. Social media monitoring identified multiple cases in late 2025 of Portuguese extremists offering financial incentives for violence against Brazilians,<sup>72</sup> which accumulated thousands of engagements before the content was removed.

Violence has also occurred in public institutions. For example, a 9-year-old Brazilian student at a Cinfães

school suffered systematic violence between October 2024 and April 2025, due to repeated physical assaults, and verbal xenophobic abuse,<sup>73</sup> with no effective institutional response. Incidents like this directly affect civic space, because they erode the trust of migrant children in public institutions role in safeguarding their rights, weakens the conditions under which they can later exercise freedom of expression, participation, and collective organisation on an equal footing with their peers. According to the Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, education systems have a central mission to prepare learners for democratic citizenship.<sup>74</sup>

During its election campaign, the centre-right party PSD, also announced the creation of two new detention centres for undocumented migrants, aligning itself with an incriminating discourse against immigrants propagated by the far right.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, a media report documented a widespread pattern of linguistic xenophobia, with expressions such as “go back to your country,” «I don’t want to hear your language” expressed in public spaces. This was accompanied by physical aggression, with Brazilian accents systematically used as a marker for humiliation and violence.<sup>76</sup>

67. [https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/o-direito-a-ser-nas-escolas/identidade-de-genero/direita-aprova-retirada-do-guia-que-promove-identidade-e-expressao-de-genero-nas-escolas/20250228/67c1d34bd34ef72ee442e36b#goog\\_rewarded](https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/o-direito-a-ser-nas-escolas/identidade-de-genero/direita-aprova-retirada-do-guia-que-promove-identidade-e-expressao-de-genero-nas-escolas/20250228/67c1d34bd34ef72ee442e36b#goog_rewarded)

68. [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/crianca-fica-sem-pontas-dos-dedos-na-escola-be-associacao-de-pais-e-advogados-querem-explicacoes\\_n1698347](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/crianca-fica-sem-pontas-dos-dedos-na-escola-be-associacao-de-pais-e-advogados-querem-explicacoes_n1698347)

69. <https://www.tsf.pt/portugal/artigo/racismo-e-xenofobia-nas-escolas-institucionalizacao-do-odio-e-redes-sociais-exponenciam-a-violencia/18044783>

70. <https://iberifier.eu/2024/11/13/desinformacao-nas-eleicoes-legislativas-anuncios-pagos-com-desinformacao-atingem-ps-e-psd/>

71. [https://labcom.ubi.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025\\_RelatorioERC\\_V5.pdf](https://labcom.ubi.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025_RelatorioERC_V5.pdf)

72. <https://dia1brasil.com.br/portugues-oferece-500-euros-por-cabeca-de-brasileiro-e-gera-onda-de-revolta-em-portugal/> ;

<https://latamjournalismreview.org/news/far-right-activist-in-portugal-arrested-after-death-threats-against-brazilian-journalist/>

73. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2025-11/mae-denuncia-agressao-menino-brasileiro-em-escola-de-portugal>

74. <https://rm.coe.int/rfcdc-por-volume-1/1680a34ab8>

75. <https://www.publico.pt/2025/04/16/publico-brasil/noticia/precampaña-montenegro-anuncia-dois-presidios-estrangeiros-irregulares-2130001#>

76. <https://revistaplaneta.com.br/volta-para-sua-terra-o-cotidiano-de-intolerancia-contra-brasileiros-em-portugal>

The combination of punitive migration policies, persistent racist and xenophobic attitudes documented by UN mechanisms and national research, and everyday language based hostility contributes to a shrinking civic space. It signals that migrant communities cannot expect equal state protection and that their presence and participation are contested, which discourages their

engagement in public life and collective organisation. In this environment, both online platforms and offline institutions become key battlegrounds for whether civic space in Portugal will remain open, safe, and inclusive for migrants and racialised communities, or continue to narrow in ways that undermine democratic equality.

# Recommendations

## **TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:**

- **Establish an independent mechanism to prevent and address institutional racism and unlawful use of force within and by law-enforcement agencies, with strong investigative powers, effective sanctions, and permanent structured participation of civil society and affected communities.**
- Ensure an enabling environment for civil society by creating a stable core-funding scheme, (with dedicated resources for migrant- and racialised people-led organisations), re-designing Portugal Social Innovation, and protecting community and cultural spaces from gentrification.
- Tackle discrimination, hate crime, and institutional racism by strengthening hate-crime responses, giving CICDR the resources and autonomy it needs, and implementing a national strategy against violent extremism and racism in the security forces, in line with the EU Anti-Racism Strategy.
- Safeguard an open and plural public sphere by supporting local and community journalism, enforcing compliance with Law No. 26/2016, and requiring digital platforms to act against incitement to violence.
- Protect the right to protest and digital participation by revising Decree-Law No. 406/74, adopt strong data-protection protocols for protest notifications, in line with international human rights standards.
- Empowering AIMA by ensuring that administrative barriers do not exclude migrants from civic life, and co-create inclusive digital participation tools with civil society.

# CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025



## **About European Civic Forum**

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

**[civic-forum.eu](https://civic-forum.eu)**



## **About Civic Space Watch**

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

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



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**