CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

Spain

by NOVACT

CIVIC SPACE WATCH

EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM

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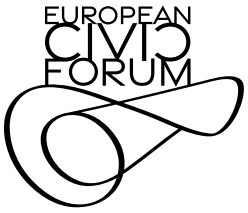

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NOVACT defends life and freedoms in the Euro-Mediterranean region to promote a fair and lasting peace. The organisation reinforces an ecosystem of social change that confronts authoritarianism by accompanying movements and human rights defenders through nonviolence. NOVACT aims to strengthen them from a holistic perspective, based on social environmentalism and gender justice, which fosters coordination and community power-building at the service of fundamental civil and political rights. Furthermore, it strengthens and accompanies the role of civil society as a central actor in conflict prevention, at the service of reducing violence and building peace. NOVACT is committed to a prevention strategy based on nonviolence and human security that focuses on preventing authoritarianism, extremist violence, and negative polarisation, building social cohesion, and contributing to nonviolent conflict transformation.

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Key Trends

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- Structural funding barriers and attempts to defund undermine the financial sustainability of rights-based and racialised CSOs.
- Escalating repression of Palestine solidarity, housing rights, and climate justice movements, including misuse of sectoral sanctioning regimes and judicial harassment.

Summary

Civic space in Spain in 2025 is rated as "Narrowed" by the CIVICUS Monitor.[1] The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law report did not include any recommendations on civic space. It noted that a draft law to reform the Citizen Security Law ("Gag Law") was put forward to address civil society concerns. However, no reform took place in 2025.

Instead, civic space has continued to deteriorate, driven by the persistent securitisation of activism, disproportionate policing, and the ongoing application of the Gag Law. Grassroots, youth-led and rights-based movements, particularly those engaged in Palestinian solidarity, housing rights, climate justice, have been disproportionately affected by police raids, judicial harassment, surveillance, and public stigmatisation. The normalisation of repression on protests, through police infiltrations and detentions, has generated a profound chilling effect on participation in social movements, and collective organising.

Structural barriers continue to undermine the financial sustainability of civil society. Public funding remains short-term, project-based, burdensome, and inaccessible to small, grassroots organisations, reinforcing inequalities within the sector. Political contestation around the legitimacy of human rights, international solidarity, and advocacy work by civil society has further contributed to funding insecurity, defunding risks and self-censorship. Although Spain has numerous participatory decision-making mechanisms on national and local levels, these remain formal rather than substantive, with marginal impact of civil society on decision-making processes.

1. https://monitor.civicus.org/country/spain/

Freedom of Association

The freedom of association in Spain is primarily regulated by Article 22 of the Spanish constitution[2] and Organic Law 1/2002 on the Right of Association.[3] This framework recognises the right to associate without prior authorisation and limits the suspension or dissolution of associations to judicial decisions, in line with international and European human rights standards. However, despite the absence of new legislation directly restricting this right, the continued application of security legislation — particularly Organic Law 4/2015 on the Protection of Citizen Security, known commonly as the Gag law — has entrenched an environment in which freedom of association is indirectly but persistently constrained.[4]

In 2025, there was a clear pattern of indirect interference with the right to freedom of association, characterised by administrative hurdles, political stigmatisation, and security-based policing of civic action. These included the denial of permits for community events, festivals, and public activities, administrative challenges affecting access to public space, and public stigmatisation of organisations through narratives linking them to extremism, public disorder, or terrorism. Public authorities and political actors increasingly relied on such narratives, often invoking provisions of the Gag law, to justify administrative obstacles, intensified policing, and judicial action against civil society actors.

This securitisation approach extended to the judicial sphere. Activists linked to Futuro Vegetal, a non-violent climate justice movement, faced criminal investigations under terrorism-related charges,[5] despite the absence of evidence of violent intent. The charges related to their nonviolent direct actions, specifically spraying washable paint on the facades of public buildings such as the agriculture ministry and the Congress of Deputies. The use of such charges against environmental activists represents a severe escalation in the criminalisation of associative life and poses a serious threat to freedom of association.

Additionally, CSOs have raised concerns about the investigation of the housing rights movement under frameworks related to violent extremism.[6] Reports indicate that specialised police units focused on "violent extremism" have conducted monitoring and intelligence-gathering activities targeting housing collectives and solidarity networks. Such actions blur the line between legitimate social protest and security threats and risk criminalising collective action aimed at defending social rights. This further erodes trust between civil society and public institutions.

These dynamics have disproportionately affected organisations and movements engaged in Palestine solidarity, housing rights, and climate justice, as well as anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQI+, and anti-fascist activism. Restrictions are often preceded by pressure or public campaigns initiated by far-right political actors. For instance, political actors publicly accused representatives of Casa Palestina of links to terrorism and sought to declare them *persona non grata*, illustrating how delegitimisation and political pressure are used to undermine associative activity without formal legal action.[7]

In parallel, numerous CSOs and informal collectives, particularly within youth and grassroots associations, were subjected to excessive and disproportionate administrative controls and policing practices, going far beyond legitimate oversight. Documented patterns include police infiltrations into social movements, intrusive "routine" inspections of social centres and youth spaces, repeated identity checks during assemblies and cultural activities, raids on premises, confiscation of materials, and the imposition of heavy fines for minor administrative infringements. A clear example of such sanctions is the €3,000 fine imposed on La Cosa Nostra social centre in Castelló in November 2025. The sanction was imposed after a fascist attack during a concert at the centre, on the basis of alleged non-compliance with public space regulations. Notably, there were no repercussions for the attack itself. Media reports framed this as a

2. https://www.senado.es/web/conocersenado/normas/constitucion/detalleconstitucioncompleta/index.html#t1c2s1
3. https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2002-5852
4. The term "Gag law" (*Ley Mordaza*) is commonly used in English to refer to Spain's Organic Law 4/2015 on the Protection of Citizen Security (*Ley Orgánica de Protección de la Seguridad Ciudadana*). In a broader sense, the term is often used to describe a legislative package adopted in 2015 that significantly expanded punitive and administrative powers affecting civic freedoms. This package also includes Organic Law 1/2015, reforming the Criminal Code and increasing penalties for certain offences, and Organic Law 2/2015, introducing terrorism-related offences and exceptional measures into the Criminal Code. Together, these reforms have been widely criticised for strengthening sanctioning regimes and restricting fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, assembly and association.
5. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/madrid/activistas-futuro-vegetal-imputadas-organizacion-criminal-lanzan-pintura-al-juzgado-antes-declarar
6. https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/alerta-solidaria-mossos-moviment-habitatge/
7. https://www.aragondigital.es/articulo/politica/vox-pide-declarar-persona-non-grata-presidente-casa-palestina-eleva-pulso-pp/20251006124624945738.html

part of a broader trend where municipal authorities are using regulatory frameworks to suppress dissent, rather than address actual violations.[8] In addition, law enforcement interventions in associative spaces have included detentions, the use of physical force, searches of premises and the deployment of surveillance technologies such as drones, even in non-violent, community-based contexts. For instance, during the April 2025 eviction of the *Etxarri Rekalde* occupation in Bilbao, police deployed riot units, helicopters, and drones to assist with the eviction.[9] These practices blur the line between public order policing and interference in lawful associative activity particularly when the intervention targets peaceful spaces without direct threats to public safety. The use of these tactics in non-violent settings disproportionately affects informal collectives and non-institutionalised organisations with limited legal and financial capacity to respond.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal a systemic pattern of administrative harassment, securitisation, and over-policing affecting civil society in Spain. While the impact is particularly acute on youth-led and grassroots organisations, it also disproportionately affects racialised communities, migrants, feminist and LGTBQI+ collectives, housing rights groups, and organisations engaged in international solidarity, reflecting intersecting forms of discrimination in the restriction of civic space.

The cumulative impact has been a strong chilling effect on the freedom of association. Activists and community organisers report reducing their level of engagement due to fear of sanctions, surveillance, or criminalisation.[10] Additionally, organisations face increased financial and organisational strain as resources are diverted to legal defence, compliance, and risk management. These pressures weaken organisational sustainability, lead to self-censorship, and ultimately undermine democratic participation, raising serious concerns regarding proportionality, legal certainty, and non-discrimination in the protection of freedom of association.

Access to funding

In 2025, CSOs continued to face structural barriers to accessing sustainable and adequate funding, particularly organisations engaged in advocacy on human rights, anti-racism, migration, international solidarity. While public funding schemes exist at all levels of government, they remain largely short-term, project-based, and highly bureaucratic, limiting their capacity to support long-term organisational planning and core activities.

Across the sector, CSOs report increasing difficulties in accessing funding due to complex application procedures, restrictive eligibility criteria, and burdensome reporting and auditing requirements. These obstacles disproportionately affect small and medium-sized organisations, as well as informal collectives and grassroots initiatives with limited administrative capacity. This reinforces inequalities within civil society and undermines pluralism.

These barriers also contribute to the "NGO-isation" of social movements, forcing grassroots actors to adopt formalised and bureaucratic organisational models that often exceed their capacities, restrict mobilisation, and contribute to the depoliticising their position.[11]

The structural weaknesses of current funding schemes are particularly evident in the cultural and community sectors led by racialised groups. In December 2025, Periferia Cimarronas, the first Black theatre in Spain, announced its closure after five years of activity, citing the impossibility of achieving financial sustainability under existing funding frameworks. Despite its recognised cultural and social value, the project faced repeated denials and withdrawals of public subsidies that have a highly restrictive eligibility criteria — including language requirements and minimum performance thresholds. This resulted in a strong dependence on short-term public grants and philanthropic funding. The absence of stable, multiannual operational support, combined with intense competition for scarce resources among racialised and feminist projects, resulted in accumulated debt, staff burnout, and ultimately the closure of the space.[12] This case illustrates how current funding

8. https://directa.cat/lajuntament-de-castello-imposa-una-multa-de-3-000-euros-al-centre-social-antifeixista-la-cosa-nostra/?fbclid=PAdGRleAOeiYxleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZA8xMjQwMjQ1NzQyODc0MTQAAafC3b3WtwCrFoLk05uQDC_hXfL5di6i7Q1wlV7AyHC9Jweal6tLfRCWu_TRJw_aem_bK2H6PBtWoDOl0CZiFwT_g
9. https://elpais.com/espana/2025-04-04/cinco-detenidos-y-15-ertzainas-heridos-en-las-protestas-por-el-desalojo-de-un-centro-social-okupado-en-bilbao.html
10. This observation has been noted through NOVACT's work with grassroots groups and civil society organisations, who have shared their concerns about the increasing risks associated with organising public actions.
11. Information received by NOVACT.
12. https://periferiacimarronas.es/cerramos

models disproportionately disadvantage grassroots initiatives operating outside dominant institutional and linguistic, norms.

Beyond structural shortcomings, access to funding is increasingly shaped by political contestation around the legitimacy of certain areas of civil society work, particularly international cooperation, solidarity-based action, and human rights advocacy. Public debate has increasingly framed cooperation and global justice policies as expendable or ideologically driven. Far-right actors have explicitly opposed public investment in these areas and questioned the legitimacy of organisations working on migration, anti-racism, and international solidarity.[13]

At the international level, Spain has repeatedly reaffirmed its long-term commitment to allocate 0.7% of its gross national income to official development assistance. However, actual funding levels remain significantly below this target. This persistent shortfall reflects broader budgetary choices that also impact domestic funding environments for CSOs. Despite formal commitments to international solidarity, the lack of proportional progress underscores structural constraints on public budgets for civic, advocacy and rights-based work. This limits resources available to civil society actors both domestically and internationally and reinforces competition over increasingly scarce public funds.

This political climate has translated into budgetary pressure and defunding risks for CSOs engaged in critical advocacy. Public discourse has increasingly portrayed cooperation and solidarity funding as misallocation of public resources. This contributes to growing hostility towards organisations perceived as politically critical or working on human rights. While this has not yet been formalised through legislative measures, these narratives create a hostile environment that undermines funding stability and discourages public authorities from prioritising long-term support for such organisations.

Concrete examples of funding cuts illustrate this trend. In July 2025, the Federation of Youth Centres of Catalonia (Casals de Joves de Catalunya) publicly denounced a reduction of nearly €100,000 in its public funding,[14] significantly affecting its capacity to sustain youth-led associative activities. In parallel, several CSOs engaged in human rights monitoring and legal defence reported reductions or losses of public funding. Organisations working on police accountability and repression monitoring, such as Irídia - Centre for the Defence of Human Rights, have highlighted how increased repression has coincided with growing financial strain and funding instability.[15]

Although such funding decisions are not always explicitly justified on political grounds, they are widely perceived within the sector as linked to the critical nature of the organisations' work and public positioning. This has contributed to a climate of financial insecurity and self-censorship, weakening the watchdog role of civil society and limiting its ability to engage in sustained, independent rights-based advocacy.

No meaningful measures were introduced to improve access to funding for CSOs, particularly regarding long-term, predictable, and transparent funding schemes. Public funding continues to prioritise short-term projects over operational or core support, and limited progress has been made in creating an enabling environment for philanthropy or in complementing EU funding with flexible domestic support mechanisms.

On the contrary, several CSOs reported increased legal uncertainty and administrative burden, linked to complex funding rules, overlapping reporting requirements and delayed payments. In 2025 a broad coalition of social economy, solidarity, cultural, and rights-based organisations publicly denounced the current public funding and administrative system as excessively bureaucratic and incompatible with the effective guarantee of rights.[16] The coalition highlighted how disproportionate administrative requirements, rigid procedures, and lack of legal certainty systematically exclude smaller organisations, generate financial vulnerability through delayed payments or forced reimbursements, and divert resources away from substantive social work towards compliance and paperwork. This collective mobilisation underscores that bureaucratic overload is a structural barrier to equitable access to public funding and to the sustainability of civil society actors.

13. https://www.elcritic.cat/opinio/roger-pala/per-que-cal-invertir-molt-mes-en-cooperacio-i-per-que-extrema-dreta-hi-esta-en-contra-254968
14. https://www.instagram.com/p/DMpklkRsG3m/?img_index=2&igsh=MWFxOGFlejNmb2J4Yg%3D%3D
15. https://iridia.cat/mes-repressio-mes-iridia/
16. https://xes.cat/infoxes/2025/05/13/front-comu-de-diferents-organitzacions-socials-per-una-burocracia-mes-justa-i-amb-mes-garantia-de-drets

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The freedom of peaceful assembly in Spain is regulated by Article 21 of the Spanish constitution[17], Organic Law 9/1983 on the Right of Assembly,[18] Organic Law 4/2015 on the Protection of Citizen Security (also known as the Gag law),[19] and the Penal Code (Organic Law 10/1995).[20] Although this framework formally recognises the right to peaceful assembly, key provisions of the Gag law have been widely criticised for not being in line with international human rights standards.

Several critical statements have been made against the Gag law by civil society organisations and international human rights bodies. According to Amnesty International, the law has "led to widespread violations of human rights" over the last decade, highlighting how it "has significantly restricted the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and information". Despite promises of reform, Amnesty notes that "these promises have largely been unfulfilled, and the law continues to be a tool of repression against activists and the broader public". The organisation has consistently called for the "repeal or substantial amendment" of the law to align it with Spain's international human rights obligations. This includes eliminating provisions that criminalise peaceful protest and restrict the documentation of police abuses.[21]

The United Nations Human Rights Committee, has urged Spain to review the law to ensure full conformity with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)).[22] In addition, organisations such as No Somos Delito have actively campaigned against the Gag law, claiming that it "disproportionately targets marginalised groups and inhibits their ability to protest or hold the government accountable".[23] This ongoing criticism underscores the law's persistent role in restricting civil liberties and weakening the functioning of civil society in Spain. Despite this long-standing criticism from civil society and international human rights bodies and attempts at reforms the law in previous years, no substantive reform of this law was adopted in 2025. As a result, the law continues to perpetuate legal uncertainty and facilitates disproportionate restrictions on assemblies.

In practice, the Gag law operates as a mechanism of economic repression with a particularly severe impact on social movements and small collectives. According to official data published by the interior ministry in October 2025, more than 327,000 administrative sanctions were imposed in 2024, generating fines exceeding €203.7 million, almost €29 million more than the previous year. While the number of sanctions directly linked to peaceful assemblies and demonstrations were fewer in number, their total economic impact increased compared to 2023.[24]

For small social movements and grassroots groups, these fines represent a disproportionate economic burden. Resources that could otherwise be devoted to organising, campaigning, or community work are instead redirected towards paying fines, pursuing appeals, and managing administrative debt. The accumulation of sanctions undermines organisational sustainability and translates the exercise of a fundamental right — peaceful protest — into an economic risk, producing a strong chilling effect on mobilisation.

Beyond the application of the Criminal Code and the Gag Law, sector-specific sanctions regimes originally designed to address violent extremism in sports contexts have increasingly been misapplied to penalise peaceful protest activity. In 2025, the State Commission Against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance in sport issued fines ranging from €3,000 to €4,000 against at least 17 individuals for their participation in protests during stages of the Vuelta a España cycling race.[25] The individuals were sanctioned under Law 19/2007 on the prevention of violence, racism, xenophobia and intolerance in sport. This legal framework establishes significantly harsher sanctions than public order legislation, including higher fines and additional measures such as bans from attending sporting events.

Although the law was created to prevent violent, racist, or extremist conduct linked to sporting events, it has been applied to social protests, particularly

17. https://app.congreso.es/consti/constitucion/indice/titulos/articulos.jsp?ini=21&tipo=2
18. https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/1983/07/15/9/con
19. https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2015/03/30/4/con
20. https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/1995/11/23/10/con
21. https://www.es.amnesty.org/en-que-estamos/noticias/noticia/articulo/ley-mordaza-diez-anos-de-vulneraciones-de-derechos-humanos-y-promesas-incumplidas/
22. https: www.fibgar.es/observaciones-finales-del-comite-de-derechos-humanos-sobre-espana/
23. https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/media-releases/open-letters/5593-citizens-security-law-under-reform-the-right-to-freedom-of-peaceful-assembly-and-expression-rule-of-law-in-spain-at-stake
24. https://www.publico.es/politica/15-sanciones-29-millones-recaudacion-balance-ley-mordaza-2024.html
25. https://elpais.com/deportes/2025-09-17/antiviolencia-propone-sanciones-de-entre-3000-y-4000-euros-para-17-personas-implicadas-en-las-protestas-pro-palestina-en-la-vuelta-a-espana.html

protests related to Palestinian solidarity and criticism of the participation of Israeli-linked teams. Such use of sports-related sanctions regimes illustrates how exceptional legal frameworks aimed at combating violent extremism are being repurposed to deter lawful protest in high-visible public settings, producing a chilling effect on the freedom of peaceful assembly.

The policing of assemblies has repeatedly involved the disproportionate use of force, including baton charges, the indiscriminate deployment of pepper spray, and other crowd-control measures. These interventions have been documented in contexts where protests were largely peaceful and did not pose an imminent or concrete threat to public order. Rather than isolated incidents, CSOs report that when force is deployed, it is frequently contributing to an atmosphere of intimidation and deterrence around the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly.[26]

Both the Spanish National Police and the Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan police) have internal protocols governing the use of batons. This includes the National Police protocol adopted in 2020, which expressly prohibits strikes to the head, neck, and spinal column and requires that baton use be directed from the lower part of the body upwards in order to minimise the risk of serious injury.[27] Despite these formal safeguards, numerous documented interventions indicate a systematic failure to comply with these standards in practice, revealing a persistent gap between regulatory frameworks and operational conduct.

This gap is further aggravated by the frequent absence of proper police identification, including the lack of visible or traceable officer identification numbers (NOP), particularly during public order operations. The inability to identify individual officers undermines effective accountability, restricts access to remedies for victims of excessive force and reinforces perceptions of impunity. Taken together, the recurrent breach of use-of-force protocols and deficient identification practices raise serious concerns regarding necessity, proportionality, and democratic oversight in the policing of assemblies.

In 2025, the use of pepper spray by the Mossos d'Esquadra increased significantly: OC spray, which had only been used three times since 2019, was deployed seven times in a single year, six of which took place in October at Palestine solidarity demonstrations. In several of these operations, including a sit-in at Barcelona's Sants station, the spray was used against seated protesters and in situations where the "aggressive attitude" required by internal instruction 16/2023 for its use was not present. This signals a worrying normalisation of this weapon and an expansion of the circumstances under which it is employed.[28] Multiple people were injured, some experiencing lasting health effects for several days or weeks, including respiratory distress and visual impairment. Journalists were also among those affected. The indiscriminate and harmful nature of this weapon raises serious concerns regarding necessity and proportionality, and CSOs launched a public campaign to denounce its use and effects.[29]

In addition to fines, preventive detentions and mass identity checks are frequently imposed for broadly defined public order offences, often without individual assessment. This punitive approach shifts the focus from facilitating assemblies to deterring participation, imposing significant financial and legal burdens on civil society actors.

There are credible indications that protests on certain themes or organised by specific groups are treated more restrictively by authorities. Mobilisations related to housing rights, labour struggles, Palestinian solidarity, anti-fascist activism, and youth movements are more likely to face heightened policing, sanctions, and restrictions. A double standard has been detected in police responses to demonstrations where far-right groups converge with anti-fascist mobilisation. In several cases, law enforcement has subjected anti-fascist protests to stricter controls, identity checks, and heavily policed cordons, while allowing far-right gatherings in the same area to proceed with comparatively lenient oversight. This differential treatment was documented, for example, during the protest on 22 October in Granada against far-right agitator Vito Quiles, where an authorised anti-fascist gathering faced intense police filtering, selective identifications — particularly of racialised people — and tighter containment. In contrast a large, unnotified far-right gathering was permitted to assemble in the originally requested square, with visible displays of extremist symbols and chants and with a more tolerant police approach. Such practices reinforce perceptions of selective enforcement of public order and raise serious

26. https://elpais.com/espana/catalunya/2025-10-18/la-normalizacion-del-uso-de-gas-pimienta-por-parte-de-los-mossos-abre-una-brecha-entre-socios-del-govern.html
27. https://elpais.com/espana/2020-07-13/prohibido-golpear-en-cabeza-cuello-y-columna.html
28. https://en.ara.cat/politics/pepper-spray-in-numbers-the-mossos-d-esquadra-make-record-use-in-2025_1_5556772.html
29. https://stopgaspebre.cat/

concerns regarding equality, non-discrimination, and the protection of the right to peaceful assembly.[30]

Racialised people and migrants have also been disproportionately subjected to identity checks and police interventions in protest contexts, pointing to patterns of discriminatory profiling.[31] For instance, during a Palestine solidarity demonstration in Barcelona on 15 October, 15 people were arrested during the protest, including 11 minors.[32] CSOs reported identity checks on minors based on racial profiling, as well as controls targeting cultural and political symbols such as the use of the Palestinian keffiyeh scarf.[33]

Another repeated phenomenon was the restriction of protest formats. Authorities frequently encouraged or required organisers to replace a march or demonstration with a static assembly, often citing insufficient police resources or vague security considerations. They modified routes or locations at short notice, invoking bureaucratic technicalities in ways that undermine the impact and objectives of certain protests. In October 2025, local associations in Vicálvaro, Madrid were ordered with less than 24 hours' notice to relocate an officially declared anti-fascist assembly from a central square to a peripheral area, citing generic "security reasons".[34] The late and unilateral change severely limited participation and visibility, illustrating how administrative decisions are used to restrict the form and impact of peaceful assemblies.

Judicial proceedings affecting collective action have also had a strong deterrent effect on peaceful assembly. A prominent example is the case of the "Six of La Suiza" — trade union activists who were sentenced to prison in July 2025 in relation to a labour dispute, despite the non-violent nature of their collective actions.[35] Although subsequent penitentiary measures partially mitigated the sentence, CSOs stress that imprisonment and prolonged judicial proceedings already produced a chilling effect on trade union activity, collective mobilisation, and the exercise of peaceful protest, regardless of the final outcome.

Taken together, these practices of economic sanctioning, disproportionate use of force, preventive detentions, discriminatory policing, and arbitrary restrictions on protest formats, have generated a substantial chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly. Beyond responding to specific incidents, these mechanisms increasingly operate as tools to regulate who is able to protest, in what forms, and at what personal, legal, and economic cost. Civil society actors report modifying, scaling down, or altogether refraining from organising or participating in protests due to fear of sanctions, physical harm, surveillance, or legal consequences. This cumulative impact discourages collective mobilisation, erodes trust in public institutions, and weakens the organisational capacity of social movements, effectively narrowing civic space.

Freedom of Expression

The freedom of expression in Spain is primarily regulated by Article 20 of the Spanish Constitution, the Gag law, and the Penal Code.[36] While the constitutional framework formally guarantees freedom of expression and information, its implementation in practice continues to raise serious concerns regarding proportionality, legal certainty, and selective enforcement, particularly in relation to protest-related speech, political criticism, journalistic work, and artistic expression.

Articles 36.23 and 37.4 of the Gag law have had a particularly restrictive impact on the freedom of expression. Article 36.23 penalises the unauthorised use of images or personal data of police officers when it may allegedly endanger their safety or an operation.[37] In practice, this provision has been repeatedly used to discourage or prevent the recording of police actions, despite such recording being protected under the right to information.[38] Article 37.4, which sanctions "lack of respect" towards members of the security forces, relies on vague and subjective wording that enables

30. Internal report by the Granada Protest Rights Observation Network on the 22 October 2025 protest against Vito Quiles (on file with the authors, not publicly available).
31. https://www.cear.es/noticias/exigen-el-fin-de-las-actuaciones-policiales-racistas/
32. https://en.ara.cat/society/15-people-were-arrested-most-of-them-minors-at-the-pro-palestinian-march-in-barcelona-marked-by-riots-and-police-charges_1_5530365.html?
33. https://x.com/CGTCatalunya/status/1978438512329314814?t=_KPk5bHBt5l8NXjUVufH4A&s=35
34. https://x.com/ResistiremosVKL/status/1979624953969565765?t=tHvGF40hPJ4LM8-2XY-GfA&s=35
35. https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250710/juzgado-decreta-entrada-prision-seis-suiza-sindicalistas-cnt/16658394.shtml
36. https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1995-25444 ; https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2015-3439
37. https://nosomosdelito.net/sites/default/files/public_files/documentos/conoce_tus_derechos_no_a_la_ley_mordaza.pdf
38. https://www.publico.es/sociedad/tenemos-derecho-grabar-policia-actuacion-violenta.html

sanctions based on verbal expressions or slogans directed at police officers.[39]

The Penal Code continues to include offences that are frequently used against activists, artists, journalists, and political actors, including the glorification of terrorism (Art. 578), insults against the Crown or public authorities (Art. 490.3), and offences against religious feelings (Art. 525). Although the Penal Code has been partially reformed in recent years, these provisions remain unchanged and continue to be applied inconsistently.[40] This has resulted in criminal investigations and prosecutions for satire, artistic expression, and political criticism that fall within the scope of protected public debate.

A significant example related to this is the reopening of criminal proceedings against the satirical magazine Mongolia following a complaint by ultra-conservative actors over the content of a satirical cover.[41] Although the case concerns artistic and political satire, it was pursued through criminal channels, reinforcing concerns about the use of punitive legal frameworks to constrain expression that is critical of power structures. SLAPPs against satirical media outlets and comedians have been quite common in Spain in recent decades. Ultra-Catholic and far-right private associations such as Abogados Cristianos or Hazte Oir have led several campaigns of judicial harassment against activists. Similar dynamics have affected musicians, performers, and cultural actors subjected to judicial proceedings for lyrics, performances, or public statements critical of local authorities or institutions, even when such cases ultimately resulted in acquittals.[42]

Beyond judicial action, censorship and self-censorship were recurrent in 2025. Civic actors reported the removal of banners, murals, and political symbols from public spaces ; the prohibition or cancellation of talks, exhibitions and cultural events ; and restrictions on political expression in educational, cultural and sporting contexts. In several cases, these measures were adopted without transparent justification or effective avenues for appeal. Public authorities have also imposed restrictions on the display of Palestinian symbols in institutional and educational settings. In September 2025, several public schools in the Community of Madrid prohibited the display of Palestinian flags and symbols, following instructions from regional educational authorities, on the grounds of maintaining political neutrality in schools.[43] According to public broadcasters, these measures were applied selectively and without equivalent restrictions on other political symbols, raising concerns about the arbitrariness and unequal treatment of political expression, particularly in relation to solidarity with Palestine.

The freedom of expression has also been affected in the digital sphere. Human rights organisations and activists have faced account suspensions, content removals, and restrictive content moderation on social media platforms, particularly in relation to politically sensitive issues such as Palestine, anti-racism, police accountability and LGBTQI+ rights. These measures are frequently applied without clear justification, prior notice, or effective appeal mechanisms. During the monitoring period, this included the closure or restriction of accounts belonging to well-known LGBTQI+ rights defenders,[44] alongside the circulation of fake news and coordinated online attacks. Taken together, these practices undermine digital civic space, amplify the chilling effect on online expression, and limit the ability of civil society actors to communicate, mobilise, and operate safely and effectively.

Press freedom remains particularly vulnerable in protest contexts. Journalists and media workers are frequently subjected to identity checks, sanctioned, or fined under the Gag law while covering demonstrations, sometimes receiving the same penalties as protesters. In addition to administrative repression, reporters have been exposed to direct police violence, including baton strikes, impacts from foam projectiles and the use of pepper spray, despite being clearly identified as press. In June 2025, a journalist investigating police infiltrations into social movements was detained and investigated for alleged document falsification, despite the clear public interest of the investigation, raising concerns about the use of criminal procedures as a deterrent against investigative journalism into security forces and state practices.[45]

Journalists have also been targeted by non-state actors. In August 2025, a journalist investigating far-right groups was physically assaulted at the entrance of his

39. For example: https://elpais.com/politica/2017/06/01/actualidad/1496342552_279869.html
40. https://novact.org/es/publicacio/guia-de-defensa-contra-la-criminalizacion-indebida-de-activistas-mediante-los-delitos-de-expresion/
41. https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/03/27/la-justicia-reabre-una-investigacion-contra-los-coeditores-de-la-revista-mongolia-por-su-portada-de-un-belen-satirico-cadena-ser/
42. https://www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/navarra/tierra-estella/2025/09/30/absuelven-cinco-miembros-raimundo-el-canastero-cancion-alcaldesa-estella-662063-1006.html
43. https://elpais.com/espana/madrid/2025-09-17/el-gobierno-de-ayuso-pide-a-varios-colegios-madrilenos-que-retiren-los-simbolos-de-apoyo-a-gaza.html
44. https://orgull.barcelona/noticies/exclusiva-facebook-tanca-el-compte-de-jordi-petit-activista-historic-lgtbi/
45. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/madrid/detenido-madrid-investigar-casos-infiltracion-policial-movimientos-sociales

home by ultra-right individuals, highlighting serious failures to guarantee the safety of media workers and to ensure effective investigation and accountability for such attacks.[46]

Political pressure and intimidation against public figures and media professionals have also increased. In September, a member of the far-right Vox party publicly threatened television presenter Marc Giró with dismissal from public broadcasting if the party were to gain institutional control, illustrating how political power is explicitly invoked to intimidate critical voices and undermine editorial independence.[47]

Overall, while freedom of expression remains formally protected in Spain, its practical enjoyment is increasingly constrained by a combination of administrative sanctions, criminal provisions, censorship practices, digital restrictions, and both state and non-state intimidation. These dynamics disproportionately affect activists, artists, journalists and CSOs engaged in rights-based and politically sensitive work, undermining pluralism, democratic debate, and the vitality of civic space.

Participation in Decision-making

Spain maintains a formal participation framework at national, regional, and local levels, combining constitutional guarantees, sectoral legislation, and a growing eco-system of digital participation tools. At the national level, citizen participation is channelled mainly through the Transparency and Open Government framework, including the *Plataforma de Participación Ciudadana* for public consultations on draft laws, regulations and strategies. In addition, Popular Legislative Initiatives (ILPs) constitute a key formal mechanism for direct citizen participation in the legislative process.

In 2025, a total of 20 ILPs were formally processed by congress. This marks the highest number recorded in the past decade and reflects sustained citizen engagement through this institutional mechanism despite persistent obstacles in advancing proposals to substantive legislative debate. While this figure indicates an active use of formal participatory channels, many ILPs face long procedural delays, limited parliamentary debate, or stagnation at committee level, limiting their effective impact on policymaking.

Regarding public consultations at state level, the government continued to launch prior public consultations and public hearings through the central participation portal managed by the Ministry for Digital Transformation and Public Function. However, no consolidated or disaggregated public data is available on the total number of state-level consultations carried out in 2025, the average number of contributions received, or participation rates across sectors.[48] The absence of such aggregated statistics constitutes a significant transparency gap and makes it difficult to assess the real scope, inclusiveness and effectiveness of participatory processes.

Moreover, there is no systematic, mandatory mechanism to provide public feedback explaining how citizens' or civil society contributions are assessed or incorporated into final decisions. This lack of traceability between participation and outcomes reinforces perceptions that consultations function primarily as formal or procedural requirements, rather than as meaningful deliberative tools. The government itself has implicitly acknowledged these shortcomings in the preparatory documents of the fifth Open Government Plan (2025–2029), which identifies the need to improve follow-up and accountability in participatory processes.[49]

At regional and municipal levels, participation frameworks remain more developed and accessible. Platforms such as *Decide Madrid*, *Irekia* (Basque Country), *Participa Gencat* (Catalonia) and the open-source platform *Decidim*[50] are widely used, and participatory budgeting processes continue to operate in several major cities. Nevertheless, participation rates remain uneven, and digital participation tools can exclude certain groups due to barriers related to digital literacy, accessibility, language, and time constraints.

Overall, while Spain displays a dense architecture of participatory mechanisms, the gap between participation in form and participation in substance persists. The lack of consolidated data, limited feedback, late-stage

46. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/extrema-derecha/un-grupo-ultraderechistas-agrede-al-periodista-roman-cuesta-puerta-casa
47. https://elpais.com/television/2025-09-25/un-diputado-de-vox-amenaza-con-despedir-fulminantemente-a-marc-giro-cuando-su-partido-llegue-a-rtve.html
48. https://www.mpt.gob.es/portal/ministerio/participacion_proyectos.html
49. https://transparencia.gob.es
50. https://decidim.org/es/usedby/

consultations, and weak integration of contributions into final policy outcomes undermine trust in participatory processes and reduce their democratic value. Strengthening participation would require greater transparency, earlier and more inclusive engagement, institutionalised structured dialogue with civil society, and enforceable obligations to report on the impact of public input on decision-making.

Safe space

In 2025, civil society actors in Spain operated in an increasingly unsafe environment, marked by physical attacks, intimidation, surveillance, harassment, and judicial pressure. These dynamics interact with and amplify the restrictions documented in the chapters on freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression and transform legal and administrative pressures into lived conditions of fear, insecurity, and self-censorship.

Physical attacks and vandalism against civic spaces and actors were recurrent. Far-right and neo-Nazi groups targeted community centres, social spaces, and cultural venues associated with grassroots organising and left-wing or anti-racist activism. Incidents included attacks on neighbourhood social centres, neo-Nazi graffiti, and racist threats against the Lakaxita social centre in the city of Irun;[51] assaults, vandalism. and fascist graffiti on the Ateneu Popular d'Esplugues[52] and the Casal Independentista L'1 d'Octubre,[53] as well as a violent neo-Nazi attack in a community space in Valencia.[54] Cultural spaces and independent bookshops linked to Palestinian solidarity and left-wing movements were also subjected to vandalism and intimidation.[55] These attacks directly undermine the perception of safety necessary for sustained civic engagement, disproportionately affecting small, community-based initiatives with limited resources to ensure security or pursue accountability.

Beyond targeted attacks, the excessive use of force in protest and eviction contexts further eroded safe space for civic engagement. As documented earlier, CSOs reported police charges, beatings, hospitalisations, and the use of crowd-control weapons, resulting in serious injuries, including permanent harm caused by foam projectiles. The indiscriminate use of pepper spray and tear gas during protests and evictions increased risks not only for protesters, but also for journalists and bystanders, reinforcing the perception that public space itself has become unsafe for civic participation.

Of particular concern were three newly uncovered cases of police infiltration and covert surveillance in 2025,[56] adding to at least nine similar cases documented since 2022 in our report. In these cases, undercover officers embedded themselves for prolonged periods within social movements and associative spaces under false identities, systematically collecting information on internal dynamics, personal relationships, and political activities. Such practices constitute a grave interference with the autonomy of CSOs and raise serious concerns regarding their legal basis, proportionality, and the absence of effective democratic oversight.

In the recent cases, police infiltration using false identities were uncovered, affecting environmental movements in Madrid,[57] Palestinian solidarity and independence-related movements in Barcelona,[58] and pro-independence activism in Lleida.[59] These cases add to a broader pattern of documented infiltrations in neighbourhood movements and social centres.

These infiltration practices have had severe and lasting consequences for those affected, particularly in cases involving deception and intimate relationships. In 2025 Spanish courts again denied access to justice to a woman who was the victim of a police infiltration operation involving a prolonged deceptive sentimental relationship, despite acknowledging the existence of the undercover operation. The court refused to recognise her as a victim or to investigate potential violations of her fundamental rights, effectively closing the door to accountability and reparations.

51. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/racismo/navidades-agresiones-fascistas-euskal-herria
52. https://esplugues.digital/5e-atac-feixista-2025-ateneu-popular-esplugues/
53. https://x.com/Octubre_P9/status/1953410991644877056?t=czsMbaWJMQjaBixvMlYLiA&s=35
54. https://www.instagram.com/p/DGsgB2vN6L-/?igsh=X3A1bXYzSEVO&img_index=4
55. https://www.elnacional.cat/es/sociedad/libreria-finestres-denuncia-ataque-vandalico-contra-treintena-libros-sobre-palestina_1432825_102.html
56. Uncovered cases of police infiltration in social movements in 2025: 05/03/2025 | Belén Hammad Gomez, a Spanish police officer infiltrated in the Palestinian Solidarity Movement & the Catalan independentist movement in Barcelona: https://www.elsaltodiario.com/represion/directa-destapa-una-policia-infiltrada-movimiento-palestina-izquierda-independentista | 01/04/2025 | Joan Llobet Garcia, a Spanish police officer infiltrated in the Catalan and leftist independentist movement in Lleida: https://directa.cat/un-policia-espanyol-sinfiltra-dos-anys-en-lactivisme-de-lleida/ ; 23/04/2025 | Nieves López Medina, a police officer infiltrated in the environmental & ecologist movement in Madrid: https://www.elsaltodiario.com/madrid/nieves-otra-policia-infiltrada-movimiento-ecologista-madrid
57. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/madrid/nieves-otra-policia-infiltrada-movimiento-ecologista-madrid
58. https://directa.cat/una-policia-espanyola-sinfiltra-durant-dos-anys-al-moviment-per-palestina-i-a-lesquerra-independentista/
59. https://directa.cat/un-policia-espanyol-sinfiltra-dos-anys-en-lactivisme-de-lleida/

On various occasions, the court believed that activists gave "consent" to the infiltrated police officers to access their spaces and documents, as well as in their sexual and romantic relationships. These cases illustrate how infiltration practices not only undermine the collective autonomy of social movements, but also cause profound personal harm, including psychological trauma, violation of privacy and erosion of trust, while leaving victims without effective legal remedies. CSOs warn that the absence of accountability mechanisms and victim recognition further deepens the climate of fear and insecurity surrounding civic engagement.[60]

International bodies have reiterated these concerns. In its latest concluding observations on Spain's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Human Rights Committee warned that surveillance practices targeting human rights defenders and civil society can restrict freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. The committee expressed concern about the use of spyware such as Pegasus and the infiltration of agents into social movements, and urged Spain to ensure that all allegations of unlawful surveillance are investigated thoroughly and impartially, and that victims have access to effective remedies.[61]

These dynamics also affect journalists and media workers, particularly those investigating police practices, far-right violence, or state accountability. Detentions, criminal investigations, and other coercive measures have been used against journalists in ways that go beyond legitimate law enforcement needs. This includes police violence against journalists and cases where journalists investigating police infiltration into social movements were subjected to criminal procedures, reinforcing perceptions of retaliation and institutional hostility towards critical scrutiny.[62]

Safe space has also been undermined in the digital sphere. Activists involved in housing rights, anti-fascist mobilisation, and neighbourhood struggles reported coordinated online harassment, threats and smear campaigns aimed at delegitimising their work and exposing them to personal risk. In several cases, online harassment was combined with offline intimidation, including threats during public events.[63] In addition to offline intimidation and legal harassment, civil society actors report growing insecurity in the digital sphere, where account suspensions, content removals and coordinated online attacks contribute to self-censorship and undermine their ability to operate safely.

A particularly concerning development is the consolidation of the so-called "desokupa" phenomenon. Private eviction companies, closely linked to far-right political and media environments, have increasingly intervened in housing conflicts through intimidation, pressure tactics, and public smear campaigns against housing rights activists, tenant unions and community spaces. This contributes to a climate of fear and discouraging collective mobilisation. In Granada, a court convicted AMA Desokupa for coercion after the company attempted to evict a social centre without a judicial order, confirming that the action was carried out through intimidation and without legal authorisation.[64] This case exemplifies how extrajudicial practices by non-state actors, when tolerated or insufficiently sanctioned, further erode safe space and legal guarantees for civic action.

Judicial harassment has taken the form of criminal investigations and prosecutions linked to protest, expression, and advocacy, including cases promoted or supported by ultra-conservative actors. CSOs identify SLAPP-like characteristics in several proceedings where litigation appears aimed at intimidating, exhausting or silencing critics rather than addressing genuine harm.[65] This is the case with the Observatorio de Bienestar Animal (OBA), which has been accused of "misinformation" by the Lidl supermarket chain after pointing out in several campaigns that the chain's poultry products "showed evidence of animal abuse."[66]

Crucially, many judicial proceedings against activists ultimately end in acquittal, dismissal, or amnesty. However, civil society actors stress that the criminal process itself functions as punishment. An illustrative case is that of housing rights activists who were prosecuted for alleged robbery in the context of protest-related actions but ultimately acquitted due to lack of evidence.[67] Despite the outcome, those involved faced years of legal uncertainty, reputational damage, and significant economic and emotional

60. https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/justicia-vuelve-cerrar-puerta-victima-policia-infiltrado-pese-engano-relacion-sentimental_1_12303982.html
61. https://centrosira.org/el-comite-de-derechos-humanos-de-naciones-unidas-suspende-a-espana/
62. https://www.elperiodico.com/es/sociedad/20251217/consejo-europa-investigara-impacto-proyectil-mossos-fotoperiodista-manifestacion-palestina-barcelona-124885979
63. https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/extrema-dreta-amenaces-vei-vallcarca-desnonament/
64. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/granada/ama-desokupa-intenta-desalojar-un-nuevo-centro-social-granada-orden-judicial?&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=web&utm_source=directo
65. https://blogs.es.amnesty.org/castilla-la-mancha/2025/02/24/la-sentencia-a-los-8-de-caixabank-restringe-desproporcionadamente-el-derecho-a-la-protesta/#:~:text=Por%20sentencia%20de%20fecha%2013,el%20art%C3%ADculo%20556%20del%20C%C3%B3digo
66. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/maltrato-animal/lidl-denuncia-animalistas-pollo-maltrato
67. https://www.publico.es/sociedad/represion-movimiento-vivienda-catalunya-quieren-desmovilizar-pero-pararemos.html?

costs. Similar dynamics are observed in emblematic cases analysed elsewhere in this report, such as the conviction of the "Six of La Suiza", where prolonged judicial proceedings and custodial sentences linked to non-violent collective action produced a chilling effect extending well beyond the individuals concerned.

Lengthy investigations, pre-trial measures, repeated court appearances, and prolonged legal uncertainty impose severe psychological, financial and organisational burdens, regardless of the final outcome. Civil society actors warn that this dynamic normalises the use of criminal law as punishment through process rather than outcome, eroding trust in judicial institutions and discouraging collective action.

Additional surveillance practices include the use of drones during mobilisations and evictions, systematic recording of protests, the presence of unidentified police officers at assemblies, and repeated identity checks and detentions. These practices contribute to a climate of fear and undermine the perception of safety for activists, journalists, and participants in peaceful civic action.

Certain groups experienced disproportionate targeting due to the nature of their activism. Palestinian solidarity mobilisations faced fines,[68] detentions,[69] and the removal of symbols and restrictions on expression.[70] Housing rights movements were subjected to heavy policing during evictions.[71] Racialised communities and anti-racist collectives reported racial profiling and mass identity checks.[72] LGBTQI+ activists experienced vandalism, online harassment and police interventions,[73] while feminist collectives reported the vandalisation of murals[74] and detentions during protests.[75] These patterns reflect intersecting forms of discrimination that further narrow safe space for those defending the rights of marginalised groups.

Impunity for past and present human rights violations continues to undermine safe space for civil society in Spain. Despite the adoption of the Law on Democratic Memory (20/2022),[76] that recognises the victims of the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship (1936-1978) and promotes the search for missing persons, truth, and memory, victims continue to face systemic obstacles to justice. Investigations into torture and other grave abuses remain largely stalled, and accountability mechanisms have proven slow and ineffective, reinforcing perceptions of institutional unwillingness to address past crimes. CSOs stress that this unresolved legacy of impunity has direct consequences for the present: it weakens trust in judicial institutions, normalises the absence of accountability for state violence, and undermines guarantees that these crimes will not be repeated.[77] These concerns are compounded by recent developments affecting civic actors, including revelations of police infiltration in social movements and allegations of unlawful surveillance. In this context, the failure to ensure effective investigations and remedies — both for historical abuses and contemporary violations — contributes to an unsafe environment for activists, journalists. and human rights defenders and reinforces a climate in which accountability deficits persist across generations. The cumulative effect of these dynamics has been a significant deterioration of safe space for civil society in Spain. Organisations and activists report reduced participation in protests, increased self-censorship, changes in visibility and formats of action, and the suspension of activities. Financial burdens linked to fines and legal defence, combined with psychological stress, fear, and exhaustion — particularly in cases involving violence or infiltration — have weakened organisational sustainability and individual wellbeing.

Taken together, these conditions severely restrict the ability of civil society actors to operate safely, freely, and effectively, undermining democratic participation and the protection of fundamental rights.

68. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/cordoba/cuatro-activistas-multados-2400-euros-cordoba-manifestarse-genocidio-palestina
69. https://www.ara.cat/societat/15-detinguts-majoria-menors-marxa-propalestina-barcelona-marcada-pels-aldarulls-carregues-policials_1_5530261.html
70. https://www.totbarcelona.cat/societat/la-guardia-urbana-retira-pancartes-de-suport-a-palestina-a-les-festes-de-gracia-646684/
71. https://capgros.elnacional.cat/ca/successos/critiquen-violencia-policial-mataro-arran-onada-vandalisme-barri-cerdanyola_815322_102.html
72. https://www.cear.es/noticias/exigen-el-fin-de-las-actuaciones-policiales-racistas/
73. https://www.publico.es/sociedad/exclusiva-redadas-humillaciones-riesgo-carcel-asi-actua-policia-colectivo-lgtbiq-excusa-drogas-chemsex.html
74. https://elpais.com/espana/catalunya/2025-05-22/vandalizado-un-mural-feminista-de-barcelona-con-pintadas-de-velos-islamicos.html
75. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/comunidad-madrid/femen-protestan-terapias-conversion-un-acto-familia-psiquiatras-rojas-escape
76. https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-17099
77. https://centrosira.org/2026/01/30/dos-anos-de-ley-de-memoria-democratica-lentitud-e-ineficacia-en-su-puesta-en-marcha-y-ausencia-de-justicia-para-las-victimas/

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION

- **Urgently reform the Law on Citizen Security (Gag law) by the end of 2026 to safeguard the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression, including by removing vague and discretionary offences, guaranteeing the right to spontaneous assemblies, and ending the use of administrative sanctions as a deterrent to protest.**

- **End the misuse of criminal law against civil society, trade unions, and social movements,** including the use of terrorism, organised crime, the instrumentalisation of sports-related legislation, hate crime, aggravated offences against non-violent and peaceful protests, labour action, and political expression, in line with international human rights standards.

- **Halt unlawful police infiltration and surveillance of social movements, investigate past cases, and provide reparations to victims,** prohibit racial and political profiling, and establish a clear legal framework recognising profiling as discrimination, including mandatory documentation of stop-and-search practices.

- **Prevent "punishment through process" and judicial harassment of activists,** ensuring the early dismissal of cases lacking evidence, recognising SLAPP-like dynamics, and adopting safeguards to prevent prolonged criminal proceedings that generate chilling effects, in line with EU Anti-SLAPP directive.

- **Ensure full compliance with international human rights standards in the policing of assemblies and evictions,** guaranteeing legality, necessity, proportionality, and accountability in all use-of-force operations.

- **Guarantee fair, stable, and accessible public funding frameworks for civil society, neighbourhood and grassroots organisations,** including by eliminating excessive bureaucratic barriers and discretionary requirements, and guaranteeing multiannual funding mechanisms.

- **Prohibit or strictly regulate private coercive entities operating outside judicial oversight, including companies engaged in forced evictions or intimidation practices, such as so-called "Desokupa" groups,** and unequivocally end any form of cooperation, coordination, or tolerance between law enforcement bodies and such entities, ensuring accountability for both private actors and public officials involved.

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025

About European Civic Forum

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

civic-forum.eu

About Civic Space Watch

Civic Space 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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