

CROATIA

Key trends in 2023

- 🔍 SLAPP cases against journalists and some civic actors remain a concern
- 🔍 Government has failed to deliver National Plan for Creating an Enabling Environment for civil society
- 🔍 Civil dialogue between government and civil society remains eroded due to ineffective Government council

Targeted recommendation:

- 🔍 In an inclusive, genuine, and constructive process, develop and adopt without delay a new National Plan for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development until 2027.

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Summary

Civic space is rated as 'narrowed' in Croatia. In its 2023 Rule of law report on Croatia, the European Commission recommended that the government "Make further efforts to address the issue of strategic lawsuits against public participation targeted at journalists, including by reviewing the legal provisions on defamation and encouraging wider use of procedural rules that allow dismissing groundless lawsuits, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists". In 2023 there was no review of legal provisions related to defamation. Although the Judicial Academy reviewed and improved educational materials for the training of judges on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, currently the number of participating judges and their profiles remain unknown.

Last year's EC report also noted that "the preparation of the new National Plan for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development 2021- 2027 has not progressed. This remains the case to date. Even though the process of drafting a new strategic document was initiated in 2021, and the Working Group for drafting the National Plan was established in January 2022, the document was not presented for the public consultations, and it is unknown when it will be adopted.

Furthermore, dysfunctionality, sidelining and overall marginalisation of the Government's Council for Civil Society Development continued in 2023 with only one session of the Council held. Although the elections for the new civil society members of the next iteration of the Council were concluded in time, it took the Government approximately six months to appoint the new Council only at the beginning of 2024. This additionally eroded the possibility for genuine dialogue between the government and civil society and deprived access and opportunity for civil society organisations to participate in decision-making processes relevant to areas of their work.