

## ESTONIA

### *Key trends in 2023*

- Same-sex marriage legalised but harassment, discrimination and hate speech against LGBTIQ+ remains a worrying trend, as draft hate speech legislation is debated in the parliament
- Many CSOs continue to operate on limited funding relying on voluntary work, participation fees and unsustainable small local government grants.
- Structured civil dialogue with civil society throughout the policy making process remains a challenge

### *Targeted recommendation:*

- Ensure that there is a structured dialogue with civil society's throughout the policy process in an ongoing, comprehensive and transparent manner

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### Summary

Civic space is rated as open in Estonia. In 2023, Estonia continued to prioritise fundamental freedoms, including the right to association, assembly, and expression, they were mostly respected, and the legislation is in line with international standards. In its 2023 Rule of Law report, the European Commission recommended that the government of Estonia advance in ensuring “consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information taking into account European standards on access to official documents”. The government has taken some steps to implement this recommendation by collecting information between ministries and putting forward proposals which would alleviate the administrative burden for officials and improve data collection. The report also noted that there are concerns about the absence of clear criteria for the allocation of funding to civil society organisations (CSOs) through Parliament. While parliamentary parties no longer distribute money directly to CSOs, funding is dispersed by ministries based on their criteria.

Although freedom of expression is guaranteed at the legal and political level, journalists face the risk of self-censorship due to anti-defamation legislation and cyber-bullying, and access to information remains insufficient in Estonia. The approval of the marriage equality legislation was an important step for the improvement of LGBTQI+ rights in Estonia. However, many LGBTQI+ people continue to face harassment, discrimination, and hate speech. A notable worrying development involved a ban on one pro-Palestinian demonstration.

Most CSOs operate with limited funding, relying on voluntary work, participation fees and unsustainable small local government grants. Larger, national-level organisations get more state funding which is becoming longer term and partnership-based. As a result, their financial security is improving. Some political institutions are implementing the strategic partnership model, aimed at increasing civil dialogue and stakeholder participation in decision-making processes. However in reality, civil society participation is not guaranteed and is often inadequate or completely lacking.