

POLAND

Key trends in 2023

- 🔍 CSOs, journalists and activist remain targeted by SLAPPs
- 🔍 Criminalisation of activists assisting refugees and asylum seekers at the Polish/Belarusian border continues.
- 🔍 Violations on the right to protest an increasing concern.

Targeted recommendation:

- 🔍 Urgently create an open and structured framework for civil society dialogue to ensure engagement and participation in decision making processes, as regards to lawmaking, financing of NGOs and choosing persons for the key position in Poland.

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Summary

Civic space is rated as “Obstructed” in Poland. In its 2023 report, the European Commission recommended that the government take steps to “Improve the framework in which civil society operates and continue such efforts regarding the Ombudsperson, taking into account European standards on civil society and Ombuds institutions”. It also made recommendations on the granting of operating licenses to media outlets and independent governance and editorial independence of public service media. No progress has been made in this regard under the Law and Justice (PiS) administration (before the October 15 election).

In 2023 civil society organisations galvanised around the elections, including voter turnout campaigns and election monitoring. The election period saw increasing xenophobia and scapegoating of migrants by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party for election purposes, yet no counter-narrative on migration was offered, even by the majority of the opposition. The situation at the Poland/Belarusian border remains grave, with ongoing pushbacks of refugees and asylum seekers being legitimised by a 2021 regulation. Furthermore, organisations and activists assisting migrants at the border have faced criminalisation and harassment.

CSO, journalists, and environmental and LGBTQI+ defenders remain targeted by Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Police violence during peaceful assemblies remains a concern. Funding remains a challenge for independent civil society, with a lack of transparency and a funding policy reflecting the official party line (under the Law and Justice government).