

ROMANIA

Key trends in 2023

- 🔍 Smear campaigns and SLAPPs against journalists and civil society organisations.
- 🔍 Media independence under pressure and political influence
- 🔍 Civil society challenged due to bureaucratic practices, lack of adequate funding and inconsistent legislation.

Targeted recommendation:

- 🔍 Refrain from abusing laws, legislative proposals, norms and practices to diminish the capacity of civil society and journalists carrying out their public interest missions.

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Summary

Civic space in Romania is rated as narrowed in 2023. In its 2023 Rule of Law report the European Commission recommended that the government of Romania step up to ensure effective public consultations before the adoption of legislation. While the government has taken some steps in this regard, civil society states that there has been no improvement or concrete progress in implementing this recommendation systematically.

In 2023 civil society organisations (CSOs) continued to call for coherent and appropriate legislation to protect the freedom of association. The current legislative framework is unclear and inconsistent, and results in significant administrative burdens for CSOs. While the Ministry of Justice proposed a draft law that would simplify and digitise existing legal procedures and bureaucratic requirements for CSOs, a new law which limits CSOs right to appeal to a court and environmental organisations' ability to challenge development projects, was also adopted.

Policy-making remains unpredictable and untransparent, as the Romanian legal framework continued to change very fast, in particular a fiscal package proposed made it very difficult for civil society to observe and follow the legislative process. The government continued to legislate through emergency ordinances, offering very little opportunity for stakeholders to be comprehensively consulted.

Journalists continued to face SLAPPs and smear campaigns, while civil society organisations remained targeted by SLAPPs brought by real estate developers in an attempt to force the organisations to cease their activities. There were significant challenges to media independence with major media outlets succumbing to political influence and pressure from private actors. This is expected to have a negative impact during 2024 when Romania will hold four rounds of elections.

