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Key trends in 2023

- Significant improvement for the regulatory environment for CSOs but civil dialogue mechanism and participation processes must be systematised.
- Climate activists - in particular the group Letzte Generation - face legal and political pressure.
- Independent journalism is at risk as more and more media outlets struggle financially.

Targeted recommendation:

- Prioritise establishing and systematising structured civil dialogue to ensure open, inclusive, ongoing and transparent participation of civil society at all stages of the policy and decision-making processes

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Summary

Civic space continues to be rated as 'Open' in Austria. In its 2023 Rule of Law report the European Commission recommended that the government "Advance with the reform on access to official information taking into account the European standards on access to official documents." In early 2024 the Austrian government took a first step and passed the Freedom of Information Act, however, monitoring the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act remains crucial.

In 2023, positive legal developments for the rule of law in Austria were reported. Some important laws to strengthen civil society, which had been negotiated between civil society representatives and the government for years, were finally passed. These include the comprehensive expansion of tax deductibility for donations to all non-profit organisations, a strengthening of voluntary involvement and respective initiatives, and the expansion of government subsidies as a response to rising energy costs. It must be noted that further progress in terms of systematic and structured participation processes for civil society, including civil dialogue between the sector and governing bodies is essential to ensure a resilient future. In addition, some civil society groups have experienced increased political pressure and primarily include informal organisations and activists promoting climate action.