

HUNGARY

Summary

The space for civil society continues to decline and civic space is rated as 'Obstructed' in Hungary.¹ The Hungarian government made no steps to implement the European Commission's 2022 recommendation "to foster a safe and enabling civic space and remove obstacles affecting civil society organisations (CSOs), including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, in particular the immigration tax.". Rather, smear campaigns and vilification of CSOs and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) remained a routine practice. The government continued to sustain and extend the state of danger which has contributed to the creation of an insecure legal and political environment for civil society since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Restrictive legislation, including the anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law, remained in effect and new laws were adopted, in particular the Sovereignty Defence Act. The act will give the authorities broad powers to investigate any organisation or individual suspected of serving foreign interests or threatening national sovereignty and therefore can be used to arbitrarily target CSOs, journalists, opposition politicians and HRDs. The government-created narrative of labelling civic actors as foreign agents remained strong and led to increased polarisation, as well as de-politicisation and self-censorship of civil society.

The right to peaceful assembly was occasionally violated as police used excessive force and imposed indiscriminate bans on protests. Some protests were specifically targeted, including Palestinian solidarity protests and the teachers', students' and parents' movement calling for better public education. The blocking of and lack of coherent and accessible state funding remained an issue and led to an increased dependency on unsustainable crowdsourcing and foreign funding for independent civil society.

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Key trends in 2023

- 🔍 New foreign influence legislation poses a major threat to civic space
- 🔍 Civil society engaged in advocacy or critical of certain government policies subjected to smear campaigns and continuously vilified
- 🔍 Limited opportunity for CSOs to engage in civic participation with public institutions and in decision-making

Targeted recommendation:

- 🔍 Urgently Repeal the Defence of Sovereignty Act