



# NATIONAL REPORT

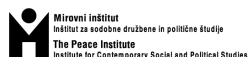
## ON THE STATE OF CIVIC SPACE IN SLOVENIA





# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	5
Methodological framework . . . . .	6
Regulatory environment . . . . .	7
Finance and funding . . . . .	13
Right to participation in decision-making . . . . .	19
Safe space. . . . .	23
Capacity and resilience of organisations . . . . .	27
Conclusion . . . . .	32
Acknowledgements. . . . .	34



*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.*





# Introduction

The *National report on the state of civic space in Slovenia* provides a comprehensive assessment of the state of civic space in Slovenia, drawing on a structured expert-evaluation methodology and an review of legal, institutional, and practical conditions shaping the environment for civic space. Its purpose is to examine the enabling and constraining factors that influence the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and individuals to exercise fundamental freedoms, participate in public life, and operate safely and effectively. The analysis is organised across five core dimensions: regulatory environment, finance and funding, right to participation in decision-making, safe space, and capacity and resilience of organisations. Each dimension is assessed through a set of sub-indicators that capture both formal guarantees and their implementation in practice.

Although the current centre-left government does not take a hostile stance toward civil society actors and maintains a declarative commitment to cooperation, engagement often remains procedural rather than substantive, with formal meetings rarely translating into concrete policy outcomes. At the same time, civil society actors operate in an increasingly polarised political environment. Throughout the entire mandate, the right-wing political opposition and aligned media have systematically targeted civil society with disinformation campaigns aimed at delegitimising CSOs, especially those working in the fields of human rights, migration, and LGBTQ+ rights. Public debates on social and political issues routinely become polarised, and CSOs are often used as convenient scapegoats for political mobilisation and agitation by right-wing political actors. As Slovenia approaches the March 2026 parliamentary elections, the risk of a return to the restrictive and toxic environment seen under the 2020–2022 government of Janez Janša remains a significant concern for the sector. In this context, the report seeks to provide an evidence-based foundation for safeguarding an open, resilient, and participatory civic space environment in Slovenia.

# Methodological framework

The methodology comprised several interconnected stages designed to produce an evidence-based assessment of the state of civic space in Slovenia. As an initial step, the project consortium developed a comprehensive expert panel questionnaire, a process coordinated and led by Glopolis as the project coordinator. The same questionnaire was administered across all four participating countries to ensure methodological coherence and enable meaningful cross-country comparability. In Slovenia, five experts with recognised professional experience in the field of civil society were invited to participate in the assessment:

- Goran Forbici ([Centre for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs – CNVOS](#)),
- Katarina Bervar Sternad ([Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment – PIC](#)),
- Katarina Rotar ([Slovene Philanthropy](#)),
- Tina Cigler ([Slovene Association for Voluntary Work Development – DRPD Novo mesto](#)),
- Borut Jerman ([Cultural and Educational Association PiNA](#)).

In the first phase, experts received the questionnaire and were asked to provide numerical scores for each sub-indicator, accompanied by narrative justifications for their assessments, as well as reflections on key positive developments, negative trends, and recommendations. The scores presented in this report represent average values of all expert assessments at the levels of sub-indicators and the overall dimension. The scoring scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the most favourable assessment and 5 the least favourable.

Following completion of the questionnaires, the experts participated in an expert panel session conducted in the format of a focus group discussion. The aim of the session was to review the initial scoring, explore divergences and convergences among assessments, and clarify methodological or substantive dilemmas. This process facilitated an in-depth exchange of perspectives and ensured that the evaluation was grounded in collective deliberation. After the discussion, experts were given the opportunity to revise their scores. Some adjustments were made, although these remained relatively limited.

The preparation of the report drew on the experts' written inputs, insights generated during the panel discussion, and additional desk research, which served to incorporate further relevant examples, contextual developments, and publicly available evidence.

The monitoring period covered in this assessment spans October 2024 to October 2025, representing a one-year observation window.

# REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

## SUB-INDICATORS:

Everyone is free to establish, join or participate in the activities of a civil society organisation.	1,6
The state shall treat all civil society organisations equally with regard to their establishment, registration and activities.	1,6
Everyone (individuals and groups) may freely enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by organising and participating in such assemblies, including online.	1,8
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the state shall enable and protect freedom of opinion and expression.	2,6
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>1,9</b>

## Regulatory aspects

Slovenian legislation allows for the free establishment and dissolution of CSOs, with the founding procedures set out transparently and relatively clearly in sectoral laws (e.g., the Societies Act – ZDru-1<sup>1</sup>, the Institutes Act – ZZ<sup>2</sup>, the Foundations Act – ZU<sup>3</sup>) as well as in the overarching Non-Governmental Organisations Act – ZNOrg<sup>4</sup>).

At the formal level, the legislative framework is well developed and introduces only reasonable restrictions aimed at preventing activities that are unlawful or threaten the constitutional order, thereby allowing organisations to determine their own objectives and activities. The registration process for societies or private institutes is generally quick, clear, and straightforward, but complications may arise due to varying interpretations of requirements among administrative units or even among officials within the same unit. In cooperation with regional hubs, CNVOS (Centre for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs) has prepared a systematic review of these differences, which reveals inconsistencies in administrative practice, including frequent requests for amendments without a clear legal basis and varying interpretations of statutory requirements<sup>5</sup>. Despite these inconsistencies, there are no significant practical obstacles to establishing CSOs, including those whose objectives do not align with public policies. Refusal is possible only if the objectives conflict with the law or the Constitution. In practice, however, operating conditions are not always entirely uniform, as they are informally influenced by the type of organisation, its connections with local and national decision-makers, and the level of mutual goodwill. Oversight of CSOs in Slovenia is properly regulated by law and, under current circumstances, is generally not subject to abuse.

At the expert panel, representatives primarily from regional or local CSOs reported that, although formal oversight generally functions impartially, differences in treatment among legal forms remain evident: at the local level, societies and non-profit private institutes are still treated differently, with institutes often lacking equal access to public funds.

Organisations critical of authorities occasionally face public pressure or negative statements from decision-makers. However, advocacy groups involved even in legal proceedings against the state do not report any adverse effects regarding their legal status or regulatory oversight.

1 Societies Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4242>

2 Institutes Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO10>

3 Foundations Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO428>

4 Non-Governmental Organisations Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7129>

5 Source: Internal document sent by CNVOS.

## Freedom of assembly and association

Freedom of assembly and association is guaranteed by Article 42 of the Slovenian Constitution<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, during the right-wing government of Janez Janša (2020-2022), which coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, this right was repeatedly undermined by restrictive and intimidating measures, such as limits on the number of participants, that the Constitutional Court later ruled unconstitutional<sup>7</sup>. Although the current government has not interfered in this way, proposals to penalise “unnotified protests” continue to surface, especially under right-leaning administrations, underscoring the need for stronger safeguards.

During the reporting period, public assemblies included pro-Palestinian rallies, demonstrations opposing Israel’s genocide in Gaza, protests targeting the current government policies, and the annual Pride Parades in Ljubljana and Maribor. These events proceeded without significant incidents or observable police interference with the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly. Nevertheless, police video-recording of participants, which is authorised under Article 114 of the Police Tasks and Powers Act (ZNPPol)<sup>8</sup> in circumstances where large-scale disturbances are anticipated, was documented at demonstrations opposing Israel’s actions, particularly those convened in proximity to diplomatic missions. Although legally permissible, such surveillance was experienced by participants as intimidating.

An incident took place at the demonstration in Celje in connection with a hearing in the “Trenta case”, in which Janez Janša and two former company executives are accused of having engaged in an allegedly irregular real-estate transaction. As Janša arrived at the Celje District Court, supporters gathered outside and framed the event as a political protest against the judiciary, with Janša himself declaring it “the beginning of the uprising against krivosodje<sup>9</sup>”. During this protest, two RTV Slovenija (public broadcaster) employees, who arrived in a marked official vehicle, became targets of verbal abuse, spitting, and physical aggression. Protesters struck and kicked the vehicle, used flagpoles to hit it, and attempted to force their way inside. The situation escalated to the point that police intervention was required. The journalistic community strongly condemned the incident, emphasising that the society must not tolerate circumstances in which verbal and physical harassment become an occupational hazard for journalists<sup>10</sup>.

6 Slovenian Constitution: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=USTA1>

7 Source: <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/ustavno-sodisce-odloki-o-prepovedi-in-omejevanju-stevila-udelezencev-shodov-neustavni/588111>

8 Police Tasks and Powers Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6314>

9 The term “krivosodje” is a politically charged expression used by some actors to claim that the judiciary is unfair, biased, or corrupt.

10 Sources: <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/jansa-pred-celjskim-sodiscem-to-je-zacetek-upora-proti-krivosodju/728666>; <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/rtv-obsoja-napad-na-svoje-zaposlene-gre-za-povsem-nesprejemljivo-ravnanje/728771>

## Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and formally protected for everyone, limited only by the rights of others. In practice, however, this protection is uneven, particularly for marginalized groups, who often lack accessible information about their rights in languages or formats they can understand.

The concept of free speech is also frequently misused, especially by political right, to justify hate speech and personal attacks. A major challenge is the blurred line, which is sometimes deliberately presented as unclear, between the freedom of expression and hate speech. Hate speech is not defined in a single comprehensive law but addressed in different statutes, including the Criminal Code - KZ-1<sup>11</sup>, the Protection Against Discrimination Act - ZVarD<sup>12</sup>, the Protection of Public Order Act - ZJRM-1<sup>13</sup>, and the Mass Media Act - Zmed<sup>14</sup>. This fragmented framework creates recurring questions of jurisdiction and contributes to under-enforcement. Although the current government established a Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech<sup>15</sup>, which issued recommendations<sup>16</sup> for relevant ministries, their implementation is not yet evident.

Whistleblowers are now protected under the Whistleblower Protection Act - ZZPri<sup>17</sup>, adopted in early 2023. Nevertheless, access to public information is at times obstructed, as evidenced by procedures related to the planned JEK 2 nuclear plant, where CSOs were compelled to initiate administrative litigation to obtain relevant documentation. Earlier drafts of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Act (ZPPDFT-2B)<sup>18</sup> raised significant concerns among journalists and civil society regarding limited access to the register of beneficial ownership. However, the final adopted version of the law incorporated key revisions advocated by these actors, thereby facilitating continued access to data on beneficial ownership and preserving an important mechanism for public oversight of corporate structures and financial links between business and government.

In October 2025, the government approved the draft Act on Protection Against SLAPP Lawsuits, developed on the basis of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive<sup>19</sup>. While primarily relevant for journalists, who are frequent targets of SLAPPs in Slovenia, the draft law also extends protections to civil society activists, thereby strengthening the broader enabling environment for public debate and accountability.

11 Criminal Code: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5050>

12 Protection Against Discrimination Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7273>

13 Protection of Public Order Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3891>

14 Mass Media Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1608>

15 Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/delovna-telesa/strateski-svet-za-preprecevanje-sovraznega-govora/>

16 Recommendations for the prevention of hate speech: [https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/SRI/NASILJE/brosura\\_priporocila-za-preprecevanje-sovraznega-govora-1.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/SRI/NASILJE/brosura_priporocila-za-preprecevanje-sovraznega-govora-1.pdf)

17 Whistleblowers Protection Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8518>

18 Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO9136>

19 Source: <https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/vlada-potrdila-predlog-zakona-za-zascito-pred-slapp-tozbami/>

While hate speech is nominally addressed in the Criminal Code in Article 297, prosecutorial and judicial practice has not developed sufficiently to ensure effective enforcement, and some legal reforms are still needed. CSOs often face hate speech from right-wing political actors but have few effective legal avenues for timely redress. In effect, hate speech remains rarely prosecuted and is often shielded by the very right to freedom of expression it seeks to abuse.

## Positive and negative trends

Key achievements include the adoption of the Whistleblower Protection Act in 2023 and the continued constitutional protection of freedom of association and assembly. While freedom of expression is not absolute, growing practices and official recommendations for sanctioning hate speech indicate progress. CSOs benefit from relatively straightforward procedures for establishment and participation, supported by an expanding network of enabling environments. CSOs can now obtain public-interest status in an increasing range of fields, enhancing their access to support and recognition. In the cultural sector, new legislation has clarified the operation of CSOs and content-based networks, after the previous vague criteria that, under previous right-wing government, enabled the granting of such status to and NGO involved in promoting racism and white supremacy. While the anti-SLAPP act is primarily relevant for journalists, who are frequent targets of such lawsuits in Slovenia, the draft law also extends important protections to civil society activists. In addition, the draft NGOs Development Strategy to 2030<sup>20</sup> sets a long-term framework for strengthening the sector.

At the same time, significant challenges persist. Responsibility for prosecuting hate speech is often avoided by competent ministries and inspectorates, and existing legislation is not suited to the surge of online hatred and incitement, especially on social media. There remain broad opportunities to misuse constitutionally guaranteed rights, as demonstrated during 2020–2022 when unregistered protests and selected individuals were penalised. The relevant laws remain unchanged, leaving open the possibility of renewed proceedings against those previously prosecuted unconstitutionally, particularly if a future government chooses to use these instruments in a politically motivated manner. Additional issue includes unclear criteria for police videorecording of public assemblies.

20 Source: <https://cnvos.si/novice/3670/v-javni-razpravi-osnutka-strategij-razvoja-nevladnih-organizacij-in-prostovoljstva-do-leta-2030/>

## Recommendations

- 1. Relevant legislation safeguarding freedom of expression, assembly, and association should be consistently implemented across all levels of government, without discriminatory or selective restrictions.**
- 2. Decision-makers, public officials, and the general public should be provided with regular training and awareness-raising on the applicable legal framework governing CSO operations and fundamental rights.**
- 3. Registration practices should be harmonised through systematic measures, including targeted training for administrative units and more frequent binding guidance issued by the Ministry of Public Administration.**
- 4. The legal framework on hate speech should be strengthened, including a more precise definition and more effective sanctioning mechanisms, particularly in relation to online incitement.**

# FINANCE AND FUNDING

## SUB-INDICATORS:

Civil society organisations are free to obtain and use financial and material resources from domestic and foreign, public and private sources.	2,2
Civil society organisations are not restricted in any way in the use of foreign resources or have tax disadvantages compared to domestic sources.	1,4
The state offers various legally established and effectively used mechanisms for supporting private financing.	2,75*
Civil society organisations have access to public financing based on clear and transparent criteria. The distribution of funds is transparent and competitive, with procedures and results publicly available.	2,6
The state allocates funds from the state budget for grants and subsidies for the activities of organisations, with the possibility of medium-term financing.	2,8

## OVERALL SCORE

2,35

*\* Methodological note: one of the experts on expert panel did not score this indicator due to lack of knowledge in this field*

## Access to resources

Slovenian legislation governing the financing of CSOs is broadly liberal and imposes no special restrictions on the types of resources organisations may collect, whether financial, material, or human, from domestic, foreign, or international sources. Regarding economic activities, sectoral legislation allows societies, institutes, and foundations to engage in market activities only when these are connected to or supportive of their primary non-profit purpose, which is a reasonable and justified limitation that preserves a conceptual distinction between CSOs and commercial enterprises.

While Slovenia provides several funding avenues for CSOs, including the NGO Development Fund<sup>21</sup>, individual income-tax allocations, and sectoral calls, important structural weaknesses persist. Funding mechanism for professionalisation of NGOs often require at least one employed staff member, effectively excluding small, volunteer-based or newly established organisations and forcing them into unequal partnerships with larger CSOs. Content areas that are underfunded, such as environment protection advocacy, are particularly disadvantaged. Grant procedures typically demand prior financial outlay without pre-financing, deterring less professionalised groups from applying beyond the local level. Application and reporting requirements are highly bureaucratic and burdensome, especially for volunteer organisations, and donors sometimes impose additional rules that add paperwork without improving accountability or quality. Although income-tax donations appear transparent, they favour causes that are easier to “market,” putting human-rights and advocacy groups at a disadvantage compared with more popular sectors like sports.

In addition, some ministries also operate mechanisms for securing the national co-financing required for EU-funded and international development projects. The Ministry of Public Administration periodically issues calls for co-financing projects selected under EU or EFTA programmes, thereby enabling NGOs to cover the mandatory national contribution<sup>22</sup>. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs likewise runs regular calls for the co-financing of NGO projects funded through EU instruments in the fields of development cooperation and humanitarian aid<sup>23</sup>.

## Foreign financing

The source of funding does not limit CSOs’ access to decision-makers or parliament. Financing from foreign or other non-domestic sources can enhance independence and provide greater operational freedom. However, calls to restrict foreign funding and to stigmatise organisations receiving it periodically re-emerge and are often voiced by right-wing parties and their affiliated media. Should such parties return to power, tighter restrictions on foreign support, bans on specific funding sources, and

21 NGO Development Fund: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/projekti-in-programi/programskladnvo/>

22 Source: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/javne-objave/javni-poziv-za-letno-2024-za-sofinanciranje-projektov-nvo/>

23 Source: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2025-03-07-javni-poziv-sofinanciranje-projektov-nvo-s-prodobja-mrshp-financiranih-iz-instrumentov-eu-za-2024/>

reductions in domestic funding are plausible risks. At the local level, organisations that secure significant EU or other international funding sometimes face reduced municipal support on the assumption that they are sufficiently resourced, even when official explanations differ.

## Private funding

State incentives for private donations remain extremely limited. Corporate donations are deductible only up to 0,3 % of taxable income (with an additional 0,2 % for cultural and disaster-protection purposes), a comparatively low threshold by regional standards<sup>24</sup>. Individuals receive no tax relief for donations, and the previous system of tax incentives was replaced in 2007 by income-tax allocations, which are currently set at 1 %. Private funding for CSOs, primarily through donations and sponsorships, remains limited and inadequately incentivised. Donations from companies are partially tax-deductible, whereas sponsorships are fully deductible but treated as income from gainful activity, subject to corporate tax or VAT. Individual donations, whether one-time or through income-tax allocation, are obtained directly by CSOs and exempt from corporate tax. Recent legislative changes have slightly broadened the scope of eligible recipients for tax benefits, but uptake remains low: only a small percentage of donors support general CSOs, while most contributions continue to flow to humanitarian causes. Overall, despite minor improvements, effective mechanisms to encourage private funding have changed little over decades, leaving many organisations, particularly smaller and volunteer-based ones, under-resourced.

## Transparency of public funding procedures

Public funding provides essential support for Slovenian CSOs, but access is often hindered by unclear, arbitrary, or politically influenced criteria. For example, the Ministry of Public Administration (MJU), which is responsible for administering the NGO Development Fund, in the 2023 call for projects to strengthen active citizenship awarded extra points for letters of support from the minister, giving preference to organisations operating in areas favoured by the minister or with personal connections. Some letters were reportedly signed without review, rendering the criterion largely meaningless while adding administrative work for applicants. In 2025, the MJU call for projects to strengthen professionalisation of NGOs introduced a controversial criterion prioritising sectors that receive the most income-tax donations, effectively excluding organisations working in less-funded areas<sup>25</sup>. Additional challenges include short deadlines for complex applications, such as the one-month submission period for the Ministry of Health's multi-year mental health program during summer holidays, and long delays in announcing results, as observed in both national and local calls.

24 Source: Proposal for Amendments and Supplements to Tax Legislation to Promote the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations document sent by CNVOS.

25 CSOs called the Ministry to exclude this criteria: <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/nevladne-organizacije-pozivajo-vlado-k-umiku-merila-ki-daje-prednost-tistim-ki-dobijo-vec-donacij/749634>

Despite these challenges, state funding for CSOs is established and relatively stable, with total public financing (national and local) steadily increasing in recent years. CSOs may obtain public-interest status through clear and affordable procedures, which grants eligibility for income-tax donations. Public procurement procedures are open to CSOs, and the allocation of public funds is governed by transparent and legally prescribed rules across multiple statutes.

## State funding

State funding for CSOs has increased from 416 million € in 2020 to 617 million € in 2023, with the share of GDP rising from 0,73 % (2017) to 0,97 % (2023)<sup>26</sup>. However, this growth is driven almost entirely by the expansion of personal assistance services carried out by CSOs, while key fields such as anti-corruption, rule-of-law advocacy, and democracy promotion remain structurally underfunded. Grant-based funding does not allow for medium-term planning, as programmatic calls are often delayed or irregular. For instance, the 2025 professionalisation call for NGOs was published three months later than scheduled, the active citizenship call was still pending, and funding for multi-generational centres was suspended for over two years. Funding remains unpredictable, with delays of over a year in some cases, and typical two- to three-year cycles are insufficient for continuous engagement. Local authorities allocate resources based on budget capacity rather than strategic analysis. Factors such as unequal distribution, irregular timing, and lack of strategic planning undermine the sustainability and effectiveness of CSOs across sectors.

## Positive and negative trends

Public funding for CSOs in Slovenia has increased and there are emerging efforts to align funding with societal needs, even if implementation remains uneven. Legislative improvements, such as the expansion of eligible areas for donations from legal entities and self-employed individuals, also contribute to a more supportive environment. The draft NGO Development Strategy to 2030 includes several potentially beneficial measures: ensuring the operation of support structures under relevant ministries (Article 23 of the NGO Act), providing assistance for applications to European funding programs, establishing a two-year expenditure framework for the NGO Development Fund, and standardising criteria for obtaining public-interest status. In addition, overall public spending on CSOs has been rising continuously, and Slovenia maintains a dedicated budgetary fund for NGO development, which finances sectoral infrastructure and long-term investment in organisational capacities.

Despite these advances, significant challenges persist. Funding remains largely project-based, with programmatic support insufficient and irregularly timed, creating uncertainty for planning and implementation. Political pressures also contribute to

26 Source: [https://s3.fr-par.scw.cloud/djnd/cnvos/filer\\_public/c6/3d/c63d637a-7c66-48f2-8d57-4f83062be110/analiza\\_obsega\\_javnega\\_financiranja\\_nevladnih\\_organizacij\\_v\\_2023.pdf](https://s3.fr-par.scw.cloud/djnd/cnvos/filer_public/c6/3d/c63d637a-7c66-48f2-8d57-4f83062be110/analiza_obsega_javnega_financiranja_nevladnih_organizacij_v_2023.pdf)

instability. Right-wing actors frequently frame CSOs as “parasitic” and call for cuts or elimination of the NGO Development Fund, influencing public perception and threatening sector independence. Funding gaps at the sectoral level are pronounced, with social programs receiving disproportionately more resources than environmental or advocacy-focused initiatives, and both national and local authorities often fail to adopt strategic, needs-based approaches to budget allocation. Private philanthropic support, both corporate and individual, remains under-incentivised, limiting the diversification of funding sources. Long-standing underfunding of essential public-interest fields, such as democracy promotion, rule-of-law advocacy, anti-corruption efforts, and the fight against populism, continues to constrain sectoral development. Public calls are routinely delayed, further undermining predictability and operational continuity.

## Recommendations

- 1. Ministries administering public funds should publish a multi-year indicative timetable for project and programme calls, accompanied by detailed annual schedules, and adhere to these timelines without deviation.**
- 2. Tax incentives for private philanthropy should be introduced to stimulate both corporate and individual giving and diversify the sector’s funding base.**
- 3. Long-term support mechanisms should be established to ensure sustained advocacy activities in fields of public interest.**
- 4. The state should prioritise substantial, long-term investments in strengthening democracy, independent journalism, and efforts to counter disinformation.**



# RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

## SUB-INDICATORS:

Everyone has the right to participate in decision-making. Public authorities use various mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of the public and civil society organisations.

3,2

There is regular, open and meaningful participation of civil society organisations in the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies. Any civil society organisation can take part in consultations without discrimination and has access to the information necessary for participation, regardless of its type or its position towards the government.

3,0

State policies facilitate cooperation with civil society organisations and support their development. The state has a strategy for cooperation with civil society organisations and establishes consultative bodies whose creation and operation are transparent and enable participation in decision-making.

2,4

**OVERALL SCORE**

**2,87**

## Mechanisms for ensuring public participation

Despite a solid legal framework for public participation, Slovenia's legislative process remains marked by weak implementation and limited transparency. The Resolution on Legislative Regulation – ReNDej<sup>27</sup> and Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly - PoDZ-1<sup>28</sup> mandate a 30 to 60 day public consultation on draft laws, but this requirement is breached in over 70 % of cases<sup>29</sup>, with shortened periods or no consultation when “urgent” procedures are invoked without justification, often during holidays or summer recess. Formal participation mechanisms such as ministerial strategic councils, expert forums, and public hearings frequently have little influence on final decisions, and feedback on submitted comments is rare. The national e-participation system offers only minimal functionality, while a high proportion of legislation is adopted through extraordinary parliamentary sessions that curtail debate even among MPs. Government sessions remain closed to the public, with minutes and supporting materials often delayed or missing, hindering oversight by CSOs and journalists. Consultative referendums are non-binding and can only be initiated by parliament, enabling political actors to control the agenda and at times use the process for partisan purposes. Access to information is inconsistent, with notable gaps in disclosures on major infrastructure projects such as the planned JEK 2 nuclear plant. Although the government introduced the MOPED application to track legislative preparation, it does not meaningfully expand opportunities for public involvement, and the 2024 pledge to establish a comprehensive “legislative footprint” has stalled. Overall, Slovenia's law-making practices often reduce civic participation to a formality and limit the democratic accountability envisioned in national legislation.

## Civil society participation in consultations

Formal mechanisms exist for civil society participation, but in practice their influence is often limited. Government consultative bodies are only lightly regulated, and membership is generally determined by ministerial discretion, though the CNVOS nomination process ensures transparent selection where used. Some laws require CSO representatives, but these are exceptions. Early involvement is uncommon: ministries seldom seek input during initial drafting, deadlines are often shortened, and consultation materials are frequently minimal. Access-to-information rules are clear in law, but refusals occur in practice; oversight by the Information Commissioner remains effective. Recommendations frequently fail to affect legislative outcomes, and access is unequal, favouring larger or politically aligned CSOs. While CSOs and individuals can participate in public consultations under equal deadlines, proposals are rarely treated uniformly. Access to information is limited due to institutional delays or incomplete disclosure, leaving CSOs with partial data. Engagement requires significant time and effort, often without reimbursement, and key policy measures developed during consultations,

27 Resolution on Legislative Regulation: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5516>

28 Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=POSL34>

29 See CNVOS »breaches counter« here: <https://www.cnvos.si/stevec-krsitev/>

such as for the Climate Act – PoZ<sup>30</sup>, are rarely adopted. Lobbying rules allow CSO advocacy but limit unregistered lobbying to employees and legal representatives, which restricts voluntary representatives. Authorities rarely publish CSO proposals or provide feedback, and Slovenian legislation does not regulate policy monitoring, making ex-post evaluations largely absent.

## Institutional cooperation with civil society

Slovenia's Non-Governmental Organisations Act – ZNOrg establishes a formal framework for planning CSO development, requiring the government to adopt a five-year NGO Development Strategy that includes a needs analysis, strategic objectives, key policy areas, funding projections, and a detailed programme of measures. A new strategy is currently in interministerial coordination and expected to be adopted by the end of 2025, again following an inclusive and early-stage consultative process coordinated largely by the NGO sector. Since 2022 all ministries have designated contact points for cooperation with CSOs, a positive development that has improved accessibility, though responsiveness varies across institutions. Cooperation is further facilitated by the Government Council for the Promotion of Volunteering, Volunteer Organisations and NGOs<sup>31</sup>, a consultative body established in 2011, whose membership is selected through transparent and autonomous procedures. The Council has played an active role in the preparation of both the NGO Development Strategy and the Volunteering Strategy to 2030, demonstrating good practice in early engagement, although the translation of recommendations into policy decisions remains inconsistent. At the local level, cooperation mechanisms are not formalised, with municipalities consulting CSOs on an ad hoc basis and the uptake of civil-society proposals remaining uneven.

## Positive and negative trends

Slovenia has strengthened civil society participation through contact points for NGOs across all ministries and the Prime Minister's Office, greater transparency in some public consultations, and broad NGO involvement in sectoral strategies, including the upcoming NGO Development Strategy to 2030. The consultative framework is comparatively strong: public consultations are mandatory with narrowly defined exceptions, early involvement is formally envisaged, and NGOs are generally autonomous in selecting their representatives for government consultative and working bodies through transparent and open procedures. Digital tools are being developed to systematise legislative preparation, and independent oversight institutions, such as the Information Commissioner, remain reliable supports for civil society. The informal civil society coalition [Voice of the People \(Glas ljudstva\)](#) continues to monitor 122 pre-election commitments of the government parties. The Prime Minister's Office and sectoral

30 Climate Act: <https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO8899>

31 Government Council for the Promotion of Volunteering, Volunteer Organisations and NGOs: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/delovna-telesa/svet-vlade-republike-slovenije-za-spodbujanje-razvoja-prostovoljstva-prostovoljskih-in-nevladnih-organizacij/>

ministries participate by providing self-assessments of progress, which demonstrates a degree of openness to civil-society oversight, despite the limited transformative impact of these processes.

However, significant challenges remain. In practice, many of the rules and recommendations for meaningful participation are ignored: consultations are frequently reduced to late-stage online comment periods when substantive decisions have already been made, deadlines are often shorter than prescribed, and authorities rarely provide feedback on submitted proposals. Violations of the Resolution on Legislative Regulation persist and urgent legislative procedures further restrict the scope for public participation. Existing systems and legislation are often inadequate, and the legislative trace promised before the last elections has not been implemented. At the local level, many NGOs lack the capacity for effective civic dialogue, and dependence on municipal funding limits their ability to take independent positions or provide critical input.

## Recommendations

- 1. A quality-control mechanism for public participation should be institutionalised, empowering the Government Secretariat to verify whether consultation requirements have been met and preventing draft acts from proceeding to decision-making when procedural standards are not fulfilled.**
- 2. Existing rules on public participation should be consistently implemented, with updated methodologies for engagement, timely publication of consultation opportunities, and clear feedback on submitted proposals.**
- 3. The Resolution on Legislative Regulation should be revised to introduce enforceable consequences, such as blocking further legislative procedure, when consultation obligations are not respected.**
- 4. Referendum legislation should be amended to allow the public and not only parliament to initiate consultative referendums on selected issues, strengthening democratic participation and agenda-setting.**
- 5. Transparent and participatory governance should be strengthened through reforms to government and parliamentary procedures, including greater openness of sessions, improved access to materials, and sustainable support for independent watchdog organisations at national and local levels.**

# SAFE SPACE

## SUB-INDICATORS:

Within the civil society sector, there are early warning mechanisms that express solidarity through public communication in cases of attacks.

2,0

The state protects civil society organisations and individuals associated with them from violence, threats, harassment or any arbitrary actions related to their work, and provides access to remedy if violations occur.

3,0\*

**OVERALL SCORE**

**2,5**

*\* Methodological note: one of the experts on expert panel did not score this indicator due to lack of knowledge in this field*

## Solidarity and early warning mechanisms

Solidarity within the civil society sector remains generally strong, with organisations often coordinating public statements and mutual support in response to policy decisions or public attacks. Although no formalised “early-warning” mechanism or protocol exists, it is widely understood within the sector that organisations facing pressure can turn to umbrella networks such as CNVOS. Legal assistance is likewise accessible through CNVOS and The Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy, whose involvement in high-profile cases is well recognised among CSOs. However, coverage of solidarity actions remains inconsistent, and responses depend on the initiative of individual organisations rather than a structured system. While expressing solidarity is not currently penalised, this may change with future shifts in political context.

## State protection of CSOs

The state does not actively intervene to defend CSOs, and support remains largely declarative, with occasional exceptions, such as the Ministry of Public Administration providing opinions in defence of organisations within its remit. Legal protection is in practice ensured primarily through sectoral solidarity mechanisms, most notably the Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy. CSOs and associated individuals are not afforded any special safeguards in cases of violence, threats, or harassment, and are instead covered only by the general protections available to all individuals and legal entities. While CSOs with public-interest status are formally entitled to free legal aid, this support is subject to significant limitations. Free legal aid does not apply to key areas relevant to reputational attacks, including criminal offences of insult, defamation, slander, or malicious accusation, unless the harmed party can demonstrate probable damage, nor to civil claims involving reputational or emotional harm unless a likely impact on the organisation’s financial or social standing is shown. As a result, free legal aid is inaccessible in many cases most relevant to the protection of CSOs, leaving organisations and individuals largely dependent on their own resources and sector-based support.

## Positive and negative trends

The civil society sector in Slovenia demonstrates strong internal solidarity, supported by long-established traditions of mutual assistance and coordinated responses to public attacks. Under the current government, CSOs generally operate in a relatively safe environment for expressing opinions and beliefs, and in some cases benefit from free or subsidised spaces provided by municipalities or the state. This collective cohesion remains one of the sector’s key strengths, helping organisations withstand external pressures and sustain advocacy efforts even in challenging contexts.

Despite these positive aspects, significant concerns persist. Attacks on civil society (especially online) have increased steadily over the past decade, with human rights and LGBTIQ+ organisations disproportionately targeted. Both the state and CSOs lack

effective mechanisms to respond to such attacks, and no specific legislative or institutional safeguards exist to protect organisations or activists in cases of harassment, intimidation, or smear campaigns. Fragmentation risks remain, sometimes reinforced by competitive funding criteria that prioritise individual over collective outcomes. Access to free legal aid is severely limited in cases involving reputational harm or hate-motivated attacks, leaving many organisations without meaningful protection. Moreover, Slovenia lacks a long-term strategy for infrastructural or spatial support for CSOs, and institutional mechanisms to ensure a genuinely safe and enabling operating environment remain either absent or underutilised.

## Recommendations

- 1. Ensure consistent sanctioning of hate speech and attacks against all individuals and organisations, including civil society actors.**
- 2. Strengthen intra-sectoral solidarity by designing funding mechanisms that promote substantive cooperation rather than competition among NGOs.**
- 3. Access to free legal aid for CSOs should be expanded to cover cases involving hate speech, defamation, and violations of reputation, enabling organisations to seek timely and effective criminal and civil remedies in cases of attacks or SLAPP lawsuits.**



# CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE OF ORGANISATIONS

## SUB-INDICATORS:

Civil society organisations have the capacity to effectively engage in the public sphere and present their views and arguments to defend the interests of specific groups or the public interest. They are also able to counter disinformation and manipulation through their own communication channels and access to the media.	3,0
Engagement in civil society networks and relationships with other sectors, such as government and business, at both national and international levels, strengthen the ability of civil society organisations to access advocacy, protection, funding and support in cases of attack.	2,4
The ability to attract and gain support from the public and the media in cases of attack (e.g. solidarity actions, protests, petitions, crowdfunding, etc.), including media coverage.	2,6
Access of civil society organisations and civic activists to affordable (or free) legal assistance in cases of attack.	3,0*
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>2,75</b>

\* Methodological note: one of the experts on expert panel did not score this indicator due to lack of knowledge in this field

## Access to the public and media

CSOs in Slovenia face persistent challenges in securing media visibility, particularly outside high-profile or “newsworthy” events, which limits their ability to counter disinformation effectively. Social media algorithms also reduce organic reach, creating pressure to pay for promotion, which is an option unavailable to many due to chronic underfunding. As a result, most organisations lack dedicated communication capacities, and only a small number have the skills, staff, or financial resources for professional and effective advocacy. Limited funding for advocacy work, the absence of systematic supporter-base development, and a generally weak advocacy culture, including reliance on outdated methods and insufficient digital engagement, further constrain their influence. Smaller and service-oriented CSOs often communicate in technical language, maintain weak media relations, and struggle to reach broader audiences. Geographic centralisation of media in Ljubljana and concerns about jeopardising relations with decision-makers or losing local funding also discourage more assertive public engagement. Nevertheless, traditional media remain generally receptive to civil-society perspectives, and CSO initiatives on major policy issues still tend to receive meaningful coverage.

## Partnerships and networks

CSOs operate through both formal and informal networks, connecting horizontally across sectors and thematically within fields of expertise. Examples of informal networks include the Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy and Voice of the People (Glas ljudstva). While competition for funding exists, there is a strong culture of solidarity and mutual support within the sector. Slovenia’s civil-society infrastructure is comparatively well developed, with numerous sectoral networks and a national umbrella network that directly represents more than 1,700 organisations.

Collaboration with the public sector varies by field: long-term partnerships are common in social services and health, where CSOs work closely with public institutions. Engagement with the private sector is more limited and often transactional, taking the form of workshops, training, or volunteering initiatives, with CSOs providing services and businesses acting as clients. Some private actors also support CSOs through donations or sponsorships, though these interactions are typically financial rather than strategic, and the private sector generally does not respond in solidarity when CSOs come under attack, while trade unions have at times reacted collectively in cases of major escalation.

CSOs also maintain strong connections with supranational institutions, such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, UN bodies, and European Commission directorates. This connectivity enables coordinated advocacy, for example joint letters to policymakers, which can be organized and communicated publicly in a short period. Nevertheless, network membership alone does not guarantee effective advocacy. Individual members may feel unheard or inadequately supported, and cross-sector coalitions remain largely absent. Partnerships within the NGO sector provide support primarily within

civil society rather than across sectors. Unlike in some countries, CSOs in Slovenia cannot routinely rely on specialised funds or organisations that provide financial assistance or protective support in cases of public attacks.

## Media and public visibility

CSOs struggle to attract media and public attention for issues directly affecting them. Protests, campaigns, or press conferences concerning CSO operations or attacks against CSOs generally receive limited coverage, whereas solidarity actions in support of individuals or communities tend to attract more interest. These public relations efforts can sometimes even trigger further attacks, and the limited time and financial resources of CSOs constrain their ability to respond effectively. Only a few organisations are capable of mobilising public or media support when they themselves come under attack. However, solidarity within the sector is well established, and in cases of more serious incidents, umbrella networks and prominent national organisations usually speak out, which reliably generates some media response.

Public understanding of civil society work is generally low, leaving citizens susceptible to misleading narratives, particularly from right-leaning media, which frequently attack CSOs over funding and omit or distort facts. This was evident in September 2025 when newly elected leader of New Slovenia – Christian democrats party made false claims about CSO financing<sup>32</sup>, prompting CSOs to publicly respond, including a public letter by CNVOS director<sup>33</sup>, countering the disinformation and defending the sector's integrity. Broader public support, however, cannot be taken for granted: civil society remains poorly understood, misleading attacks from right-wing actors deepen public distrust, and most CSOs lack systematic strategies for building long-term supporter bases among the general public.

## Access to legal support

Activists and CSOs generally do not have access to state-provided legal aid, as public legal assistance is means-tested and not explicitly designed for activists. Legal support is instead primarily provided through civil society mechanisms. While these structures offer crucial assistance in cases of attacks or legal challenges, there is no formal, state-guaranteed system ensuring CSOs' access to legal support. The government approved the draft act transposing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, which represents a significant step toward improving protections. However, the law has not yet been adopted, and practical safeguards are therefore still not in place. \*Note: this issue of legal support has already been addressed under previous indicators and the recommendation is therefore integrated in the chapter on safe space.

32 Source: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/nevladniki-vrtovcu-ocitajo-da-siri-lazi-glede-njihovega-financiranja/757862>

33 Public letter by CNVOS director: <https://www.cnvos.si/novice/3851/o-300-vladnih-milijonih-za-levicarske-nevladne-organizacije/>

## Positive and negative trends

Recent developments indicate a generally more stable environment for CSOs. Attacks from authorities have become less frequent and less intense, and enduring civil society networks continue to operate even without direct funding, strengthening intra-sector solidarity. Authorities, at least declaratively, recognise the role and importance of CSOs. Public funding through the NGO Development Fund supports professionalisation, digitalisation, and advocacy efforts, and regional NGO hubs facilitate engagement during local elections by providing trainings to both candidates and organisations. Overall, more CSOs are developing advocacy capacities, and the sector demonstrates high levels of solidarity and connectedness. The sector also benefits from a well-developed infrastructural environment, including strong sectoral networks, regional hubs, and a national umbrella organisation, as well as traditionally constructive relations with trade unions and generally adequate coverage of CSO initiatives in mainstream media.

Despite these positive developments, CSOs face persistent challenges. Access to different types of media and public attention remains difficult, while other sectors often show disinterest or even hostility toward CSOs. Attempts to fragment or divide the sector through poorly considered or deliberate measures continue. Internally, older leadership, declining active membership, and inertia in organisational functioning limit agility. Activist burnout among key members remains a concern, and cross-sectoral collaboration is weak. Advocacy capacities remain limited overall, hindered by insufficient funding, staff shortages, and gaps in strategic knowledge, and the sector has largely missed the digital transition, which restricts outreach, especially to younger audiences. Disinformation and false narratives about CSOs are increasing, requiring legal resources that organisations often lack, further straining their ability to defend their reputations. Access to free or affordable legal assistance in such cases remains limited and often dependent on personal networks. These dynamics are likely to intensify in the run-up to the 2026 parliamentary elections in March, during which the largest right-wing party may again deploy disinformation about NGOs and threaten to roll back existing supportive measures, as observed in previous campaigns. In the event of such a political shift, the overall environment for civil society could become increasingly toxic and restrictive.

## Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen public funding for civil-society advocacy by establishing targeted grant schemes dedicated to democracy support, rule-of-law protection, anti-disinformation efforts, and anti-corruption work, including measures that support the sector's digital transition and enhance its digital communication capacities.**
- 2. Adopt an effective anti-SLAPP law that provides meaningful protection for CSO activists and other public-interest actors against abusive litigation.**
- 3. Invest in systematic public education and awareness-raising about the role and value of civil society, recognising this as a responsibility of the state and the education system rather than a task that CSOs must shoulder alone.**

# Conclusion

Across all five dimensions examined in this report the findings point to a civic space that is formally protected yet structurally fragile, unevenly supported, and vulnerable to shifts in political dynamics.

Slovenia's legislative framework provides a strong foundation for civic freedoms, and in many areas these protections are operationalised effectively. Freedom of association is widely respected, registration procedures remain accessible, and the legal environment places few constraints on organisational activity or funding sources. Key legislative developments, such as the Whistleblower Protection Act and the draft anti-SLAPP law, further strengthen the enabling framework. Nonetheless, the implementation of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, remains inconsistent. Hate speech continues to be insufficiently enforced, with the fragmented legal framework and weak prosecutorial practice resulting in limited protection for marginalised groups and CSOs frequently targeted by right-wing political actors. While public assemblies generally proceed without interference, surveillance practices and ambiguities in police powers raise concerns regarding the proportionality of state responses. These inconsistencies underscore the gap between formal guarantees and their practical realisation.

Financing conditions for CSOs similarly reflect both progress and persistent structural deficits. Public funding for the sector has grown in absolute terms, but this increase is heavily concentrated in social-service provision, leaving essential public-interest fields, such as advocacy, democracy support, anti-corruption efforts, and rule-of-law protection, underfunded. Project-based financing, irregular timing of calls, bureaucratic burdens, and unpredictable delays undermine organisational stability and long-term planning. Private philanthropy remains weakly incentivised, with tax reliefs among the lowest in the region, resulting in limited diversification of funding sources. While foreign funding remains unrestricted, recurring political attacks on CSOs receiving it contribute to public distrust and raise concerns about future regulatory tightening should political conditions change.

Participation in decision-making remains one of the most problematic dimensions. Although Slovenia has a comparatively strong legal framework for public participation, breaches of the Resolution on Legislative Regulation remain widespread, with shortened or omitted consultations frequently justified through loosely applied "urgent procedures". Consultation processes often occur at late stages, with minimal influence on policy outcomes and limited feedback from authorities. The emerging NGO Development Strategy to 2030, prepared through a more inclusive process, demonstrates the potential of structured cooperation. However, systematic and enforceable mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation remain absent. At the local level, cooperation is informal and uneven, further limiting the impact of CSO's input.

The analysis of safe space reveals both a high degree of intra-sectoral solidarity and a lack of institutional safeguards. While the civil society sector maintains strong traditions of mutual support, the state does not play an active role in protecting CSOs

or activists from harassment, smear campaigns, or hate speech. Legal remedies for reputational harm or hate-motivated attacks remain largely inaccessible, and there are no specialised mechanisms designed to support organisations under pressure. Online harassment has intensified, disproportionately affecting human-rights and LGBTQ+ organisations. The current government expresses a declarative commitment to supporting civil society, but practical protection mechanisms, whether legal, financial, or institutional, remain insufficient.

Finally, the sector's organisational capacities and resilience are undermined by long-standing structural weaknesses. Most organisations lack stable funding, specialised staff, and modern communication capacities necessary to respond to disinformation or engage effectively in public debates. Media visibility remains uneven and geographically centralised, and CSOs often struggle to reach wider audiences beyond their immediate constituencies. While civil society networks are comparatively strong and provide important solidarity mechanisms, cross-sector alliances, particularly with business or local administrations, remain limited. The sector has also been slow to adapt to the digital transition, leaving many organisations without the tools necessary to mobilise supporters or communicate strategically in fragmented information environments.

Taken together, these findings point to a civic space that is formally open but structurally fragile. The political context further heightens this fragility. The combination of political polarisation, structural underfunding, and weak institutional protections creates an environment in which civic space can deteriorate rapidly under adverse political conditions. Safeguarding civic space in Slovenia therefore requires not only the preservation of existing formal guarantees but proactive strengthening of the institutional, financial, and participatory frameworks that support civil society. This includes consistent enforcement of legislation, substantial and stable public funding, meaningful and enforceable public participation mechanisms, and comprehensive protection against hate speech, harassment, and abusive litigation. Strengthening CSO capacities, particularly in digital communication, advocacy, and long-term organisational development, will be essential to ensuring resilience in an increasingly polarised public sphere but also in the context of broader anti-democratic tendencies emerging across both traditionally stable and more fragile democracies.

# Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is extended to **Goran Forbici, Katarina Bervar Sternad, Katarina Rotar, Tina Cigler, and Borut Jerman** for their valuable contributions to the preparation of the *National report on the state of civic space in Slovenia*, particularly through their participation in the structured expert-evaluation methodology, including completing the expert questionnaires and contributing to the expert panel conducted as a focus group. Appreciation is also expressed to **Brankica Petković** for her mentorship and supervision throughout the process.



