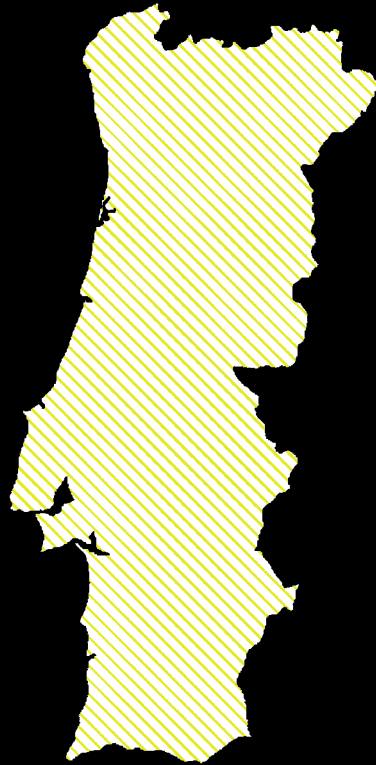
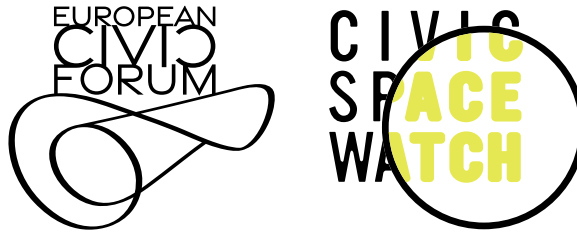


CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025

Portugal

By Academia Cidadã





ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was published by the European Civic Forum (ECF) in June 2025, with chapters written by its secretariat, member organisations, and partner organisations, including as part of the Net4Defenders project. Much of the content originally appeared as part of ECF's submission to the European Commission's Rule of Law consultation. Each chapter reflects the views and analysis of its respective author. For more information about the European Civic Forum, please visit www.civic-forum.eu.

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Academia Cidadã is a non-profit dynamic organisation in Portugal dedicated to fostering active citizenship and strengthening democracy. Through a variety of educational programs, workshops, and community initiatives, Academia Cidadã empowers individuals to engage in civic life, advocate for their rights, and participate in democratic processes.






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Key civic space trends

-  Right to protest under threat, especially for climate activists, the Palestine solidarity movement, and anti-racism groups.
-  Concerns over rising hate speech online, in public rhetoric, and from institutions against marginalised groups and CSO defending their rights.
-  The amendment to the Foreigners' Law could have negative effects on the freedom of association and migrants' rights organisations

Summary

Civic space is rated as open in Portugal by the CIVICUS Monitor.¹ However, 2024 was marked by a significant increase in reports related to threats to civic space in Portugal. The right to protest faced significant barriers, with climate activists, people expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, anti-racist and anti-fascist movements,² and migrants' rights groups targeted.³ Restrictions on protests included disproportionate, intimidating, and sometimes degrading police tactics.

There has been no significant progress in addressing the key issues highlighted in the European Commission's Rule of Law 2024 report and there were no recommendations on civic space. Excluded groups face worrying challenges in terms of access to an enabling

environment. For example, in February 2025, the LGBTQI+ cultural space *Planeta Monas* in Lisbon was the target of a police raid for the fourth time in five months. Civil society organisations (CSOs) were also not meaningfully consulted on the National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination.

The continued use of repressive measures against activists, the rise of hate speech, and the lack of enforcement of anti-racism policies demonstrate a failure to uphold the rule of law and protect fundamental rights. However, despite the direct attacks on democratic freedoms in Portugal, civil society has generated organised responses through protests and collective networked movements.

Institutional, political, and socio-economic landscape

Portugal's political landscape has faced significant instability since António Costa's resignation in December 2023,⁴ triggered by an alleged transcription error by the public prosecutor's office during a corruption investigation.⁵ President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa dissolved the parliament and called for early elections⁶ in March 2024, resulting in the election of Luís Montenegro's coalition, comprising of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the CDS – People's Party

(CDS-PP). This instability benefited the far-right CHEGA party,⁷ which capitalised on anti-establishment and anti-immigration rhetoric and secured 50 seats in the parliament. The rising influence of the far-right shifted the public debate towards security and immigration, prompting stricter residence authorisation procedures for immigrants.⁸ Simultaneously, Portugal has faced a significant rise in poverty and social inequalities. The economic crisis, exacerbated by inflation and

1. <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/portugal/>

2. <https://observador.pt/2024/06/11/sos-racismo-critica-policia-na-gestao-das-manifestacoes-antirracista-e-nacionalista/>

3. <https://www.sabado.pt/portugal/detalhe/psp-abre-inquerito-apos-violencia-policial-contra-manifestantes-antirracistas>

4. <https://www.dn.pt/arquivo/diario-de-noticias/costa-demite-se-nao-me-pesa-na-consciencia-a-pratica-de-qualquer-ato-ilicito-ou-sequer-de-qualquer-ato-censuravel-17297955.html>

5. <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/ministerio-publico-de-portugal-erra-em-caso-que-levou-premie-a-renuncia/>

6. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/01/15/politica/noticia/oficial-parlamento-dissolvido-funciona-servicos-minimos-2076853>

7. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c1v1r44lekdo>

8. <https://www.esquerda.net/artigo/manifestacoes-de-interesse-milhares-de-pessoas-nao-conseguirao-regularizar-se/91709>

increasing prices of essential goods, has disproportionately impacted low-income families.⁹ Property speculation and the lack of effective public policies for affordable housing have made buying or renting a home unaffordable for many, especially in major cities like Lisbon and Porto.¹⁰ Additionally, job precariousness¹¹ and income inequalities have worsened the situation, with an increasing number of workers living in poverty.¹² These regional and social disparities underscore the urgent need for political measures to mitigate the effects of the crises and promote a more equitable distribution of resources.

A report by OberCom – Observatório da Comunicação (Communication Observatory)¹³ revealed that there were signs of external interference in Portugal's elections for the first time in the 2024 legislative elections, including a campaign of online advertisements accusing the socialist party of corruption and recalling the PSD's cuts during the "troika".¹⁴ The MediaLab at the University Institute of Lisbon identified anonymous paid advertising on Facebook, which reached over two million people in a few days.¹⁵ The 2024 elections were considered the most polarised in Portugal's democratic history, facilitating the spread of disinformation. Additionally, in just three days up to €12,000 may have been spent on prohibited online advertising against the PSD, more than the annual spending of parties on digital ads.¹⁶

A survey conducted by the Institute of Public and Social Policies (IPPS) at the University Institute of Lisbon revealed that 74% of respondents believe that the Portuguese justice system functions poorly or very poorly, the worst performance among all evaluated public institutions. Portuguese citizens criticise the slowness and errors of the judicial system, which primarily penalises the poorest and ethnic minorities. The lack of speed and efficiency in the judicial system is a recurring issue. The same IPPS survey indicated that 66% of respondents believe that judges and prosecutors are vulnerable and yield to pressures from economic

and social groups, the government, and the media, suggesting that the justice system may be influenced by external factors, compromising its impartiality.¹⁷

According to the survey, 74% of respondents believe that the justice system treats poor people worse, and 55% believe this to be the case for people belonging to ethnic minorities. This significant inequality highlights the systemic bias against vulnerable populations, particularly in the context of racism and discrimination. Furthermore, 74% of respondents perceive that the justice system functions poorly or very poorly in terms of protecting fundamental rights. This widespread belief suggests that the justice system is failing to fulfil its role in safeguarding the rights of those who face discrimination. The extent of this inefficiency is further underscored by data from the public prosecutor's office (MP) in Portugal, which shows that between 2020 and 2023, 792 investigations of hate crimes were initiated, yet charges were filed in only 14 cases.¹⁸ This stark disparity reveals serious concerns about the effectiveness and impartiality of the judicial system in addressing and prosecuting hate crimes, ultimately undermining public trust and confidence in its ability to deliver justice fairly.

The Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum (AIMA) is facing a critical situation, with over 400,000 residence permit applications pending.¹⁹ This backlog overloads the judicial system and increases the response time of the administrative courts and the number of judicial notifications. For instance, the Lisbon Administrative Circle Court takes about three months to complete tasks, such as delivering notifications to interested parties, which should be done within 48 hours.

Moreover, the Supreme Administrative Court is experiencing a shortage of human resources. Only 33 of the 45 judicial officer positions. This lack of personnel contributes to the backlog of over 428,000 nationality

9. <https://executivedigest.sapo.pt/noticias/portugal-e-dos-paises-com-mais-alto-custo-de-vida-da-europa-do-supermercado-as-rendas-apanas-os-paises-de-leste-estao-pior/>

10. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/01/10/economia/noticia/so-01-mercado-privado-rendas-acessiveis-2076227>

11. <https://capmagellan.com/portugal-3-o-pais-da-ue-com-mais-trabalhadores-precarios/>

12. <https://www.esquerda.net/artigo/900-mil-trabalhadores-vivem-na-pobreza-absoluta-em-portugal/93719>

13. https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Legislativas_2024_FINAL.pdf

14. The "troika" refers to the period between 2011 and 2014 when Portugal was under a bailout programme led by the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund (collectively known as the troika). This period was marked by significant austerity measures and economic reforms implemented by the PSD-led government under Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho.

15. <https://medialab.iscte-iul.pt/identificada-publicidade-anonima-e-paga-no-facebook-que-liga-o-lider-do-psd-aos-cortes-durante-a-troika-e-que-ja-alcançou-mais-de-dois-milhoes-de-pessoas/>

16. <https://observador.pt/2024/03/08/publicidade-no-facebook-contra-psd-custou-mais-do-que-gastos-dos-partidos-num-ano/>

17. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2024-07-16-justica-e-a-instituicao-publica-mais-mal-avaliada-pelos-portugueses-4fb9ebdf>

18. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/07/sociedade/noticia/quatro-anos-mp-abriu-792-inqueritos-crimes-odio-deduziu-acusacao-apanas-14-2089467>

19. <https://www.publico.pt/2025/02/08/sociedade/noticia/tribunal-fecha-2024-46824-processos-aima-pendentes-contraria-tendencia-reducao-2121802>

applications awaiting resolution, reflecting a judicial system under pressure and unable to meet the growing demand.²⁰

These challenges highlight the urgent need for reforms in the migration and justice systems to ensure efficiency and fairness in processing applications both for immigrants and Portuguese citizens.

Extremist rhetoric has increased, particularly towards immigrants, who now represent a significant portion of Portugal's population. Immigrants are used as scapegoats for the difficulties Portuguese people face. This narrative overlooks the complexity of economic and social challenges, leading many to believe that immigrants are "taking" jobs without recognising that the structural issues go much deeper.

Strong trends of discrimination were observed on various levels, from speeches in the Portuguese parliament²¹ to in schools, with increasing reports of bullying and discrimination against children of different nationalities.²² Studies reveal that black and Roma people face a higher risk of death during police interventions,²³ alongside the rise of online disinformation campaigns and the growth of organised supremacist groups. A study by Casa do Brasil has revealed a significant increase in online and public service hate speech against Brazilians in Portugal. The research also indicated that hate speech against immigrants has become more violent, with many believing that anti-immigration political rhetoric leads to discriminatory practices.²⁴

The lack of political will to effectively implement and enforce the National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination exacerbates the difficulty in acknowledging the existence of racism and its consequences for racialised and Roma communities.²⁵ The absence

of effective government responses has resulted in deeper anti-immigration rhetoric and hate speech, the marginalisation of social groups, limited access to fundamental rights, and, consequently, the erosion of the rule of law in the country.

The president of the Portuguese parliament, José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, defended the freedom of expression of members of parliament, allowing racist and xenophobic comments, which was contested by left-wing parties and applauded by the far-right party CHEGA.²⁶ The tolerance for hate speech within democratic institutions undermines the principles of equality and human rights, risking the normalisation of discrimination and weakening social cohesion. For a healthy political environment, all discourse must respect the dignity of everyone. This requires representatives and authorities to combat such practices.

In the 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the United Nations,²⁷ Portugal was assessed for its compliance with human rights. The UN highlighted several critical areas where Portugal needs improvement, including:

- ▶ Detention conditions, overcrowding, and a lack of resources in prison facilities, which result in violations of the minimum required conditions, such as adequate ventilation and heating;
 - ▶ Systemic racism, police violence, and the lack of an effective response from authorities, particularly against communities of African origin and the Roma; and
 - ▶ Women's rights violations, including restrictions in accessing justice, especially for victims of domestic violence.
- ▶ The UN recommended the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families to enhance the protection of these vulnerable populations.

²⁰. <https://www.publico.pt/2025/01/19/publico-brasil/noticia/justica-atrasa-notificacoes-processos-cidadania-portuguesa-nao-avancam-2119321>

²¹. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/17/politica/noticia/sos-racismo-aguiarbranco-nao-condicoes-manter-presidencia-ar-2090927>

²². <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/14/sociedade/noticia/associacao-nepaleses-denuncia-aumento-bullying-filhos-imigrantes-2090388> ; <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2024/02/22/professor-arrastou-aluna-pelos-cabelos-o-choque-de-brasileiros-em-portugal.htm> ; <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/25/sociedade/noticia/volta-terra-escolas-respondem-racismo-2091706>

²³. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/03/18/sociedade/noticia/ciganos-43-vezes-probabilidade-mortos-policia-negros-21-vezes-2083740>

²⁴. https://casadobrasilidelisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/MM_relatorio2024_digital_v7.pdf

²⁵. <https://gerador.eu/atrasos-e-silencios-preocupam-apos-dois-anos-do-plano-nacional-de-combate-ao-racismo-e-a-discriminacao/>

²⁶. <https://oglobo.globo.com/blogs/portugal-giro/post/2024/05/em-portugal-presidente-do-parlamento-libera-insultos-xenofobos-e-racistas.ghtml>

²⁷. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/47/PRT/1>

The regulatory environment for civic freedoms

Freedom of association

The primary legal provisions regulating the freedom of association are outlined in Decree-Law No. 594/74,²⁸ which states that “citizens have the right to form associations freely without prior authorization, provided that their purposes are not contrary to law or public morality.” This right is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic in Article 46,²⁹ which establishes:

“1. Citizens have the right to freely form associations, provided that their purposes are not contrary to criminal law or constitutional norms.”

In 2024, Portugal did not pass any new laws that directly restrict or improve the freedom of association. However, there have been significant changes in other areas that may indirectly impact the freedom of association, especially in the context of immigration policies. A notable example is the amendment to the Foreigners’ Law, which ended the “Expression of Interest” regime for immigrants. This change has been criticised by various migrant rights associations, who argue that the measure is a setback of at least 17 years in immigration policies.³⁰ They argue that the measure makes it more difficult for immigrants to access the regularisation process and may negatively affect associations that work to support these individuals.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Article 45 of the Portuguese Constitution³¹ guarantees the right to peaceful assembly without prior authorisation. However, Decree-Law No. 406/74³² requires advance written notification, which must be signed by three organisers, to the municipal authorities for public gatherings. Failure to comply may result in criminal sanctions, hindering spontaneous protests. Restrictions on demonstration times further limit their effectiveness and visibility, especially impacting the ability to draw attention to causes.

With the end of the *Manifestação de Interesse* regime, the process of regularising immigrants in Portugal has become more bureaucratic and complex, increasing demand for services provided by associations, such as legal assistance, document preparation, and guidance on rights. Many of these organisations already operate with limited resources, and the rising demand may overwhelm their capacity, hindering effective service delivery. Although freedom of association is guaranteed by the constitution, changes to the Foreigners’ Law create an unfavourable environment for these associations. By complicating regularisation, the measure not only strains their resources but also weakens immigrant representation and efforts towards inclusive policies.

Additionally, undocumented immigrants face specific barriers to exercising their freedom of association. The lack of documents, such as proof of residence or a tax identification number (NIF), prevents formal participation in associations, while fear of deportation or reprisals discourages even informal involvement. Language barriers, social exclusion, and limited access to information about associations further restrict their engagement. Discrimination and mistrust towards undocumented immigrants exacerbate these challenges, making integration into civil society even more difficult.

In 2024, activists were charged for participating in peaceful protests.³³ Climate activists in Portugal have faced legal consequences for their peaceful protests across various locations. The *Av. 5 de Outubro* action in Lisbon resulted in total fines of €1,980.³⁴ The *Praça José Fontana* protest led to fines totalling €2,700 along with a one-year and 10-month prison sentence, which was converted to 480 hours of community service.³⁵

28. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/594-1974-471532#:~:text=A%20todos%20os%20cidad%C3%A3os%20maiores,necessidade%20de%20qualquer%20autoriza%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20pr%C3%A9via>

29. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-34520775-43894075>

30. https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/retrocesso-associacoes-de-imigrantes-criticam-novas-regras_n1579920

31. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-aprovacao-constituicao/1976-502635>

32. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/406-1974-424767>

33. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/07/08/azul/noticia/oito-ativistas-movimento-climaximo-condenados-pena-suspensa-ano-meio-2096749>; <https://observador.pt/2024/09/04/15-meses-de-prisao-com-pena-suspensa-para-ativistas-da-climaximo-que-invadiram-aerodromo-de-tires/>; <https://cnrportugal.iol.pt/climaximo/condenados/ativistas-do-climaximo-condenados-a-pena-suspensa-de-ano-e-meio/20240708/668bb7a2d34e04989222e000>

34. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-10-10-Democracia-e-isto-mesmo-Climaximo-corta-estrada-no-centro-de-Lisboa-2bece098>

35. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-10-12-Climaximo-trava--novamente--transito-em-praca-de-Lisboa-f0fe1176>

Similarly, the *Av. 24 de Julho* action incurred fines of €2,780 and a one-year and 4-month prison sentence, also converted to 480 hours of community service.³⁶

The Cascais Aerodrome protest resulted in fines of €4,657.50 converted to community service, a €5,000 compensation order, and a one-year and three-month suspended prison sentence.³⁷ Lastly, the *Av. Duarte Pacheco* action resulted in a one-year and six-month suspended prison sentence.³⁸ These legal actions demonstrate the range of penalties imposed on climate activists in Portugal, including fines, community service, and suspended prison sentences. This measure appears to be an attempt to intimidate protesters and criminalise climate activism in the eyes of the public. Many of these cases are part of smear campaigns and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs),

tactics that are becoming increasingly frequent in Portugal and are often employed to silence dissenting voices and discredit social movements. These practices undermine the freedom of peaceful assembly and pose a significant threat to participatory democracy and freedom of expression.

Amnesty International Portugal reports that 37% of the Portuguese people believe the authorities handle demonstrations with bias, depending on organisers and locations.³⁹ Additionally, a study by anthropologist Ana Rita Alves reveals Roma people are 43 times, and Black people 21 times, more likely to be killed by police, highlighting severe threats to the civic space of excluded groups.⁴⁰ This undermines the fundamental rights of Roma, black, and migrant communities.

Freedom of expression and the right to privacy

In Portugal, freedom of expression is primarily protected under Article 37 of the Portuguese Constitution,⁴¹ which states that everyone has the right to freely express and disseminate their thoughts, without hindrance or discrimination. This article also guarantees the right to inform, to be informed, and to seek information. It ensures that individuals can express their opinions without interference from the government.

The current fragility of the press in Portugal directly reflects the democratic instability of the country. The press, which plays a crucial role in scrutinising and holding political powers accountable, faces serious

financial challenges. Amnesty International Portugal has expressed great concern over the recent lack of transparency⁴² and financial instability within the Global Media Group, highlighting issues such as unpaid salaries. There are fears that this vulnerability could lead to the instrumentalisation of the press by interests that counter its mission, compromising freedom of expression and the integrity of journalism. Newsrooms are also facing problems related to media ownership and interference with editorial independence, threatening the essential role of the press in sustaining democracy.⁴³

Safe space

On 8 February 2024, journalists João Biscaia from *Setenta e Quatro* newspaper and Bernardo Afonso from the investigative media outlet *Fumaca* were attacked by unidentified Public Security Police (PSP) Intervention Corps officers while covering an anti-fascist and anti-racist protest in Lisbon. Despite identifying themselves multiple times as press, they were subjected to violence, with Afonso receiving multiple baton strikes and Biscaia being punched and kicked. The PSP falsely claimed no journalists were harmed. The journalists

documented further assaults on protesters, revealing indiscriminate police brutality. They intend to file a joint complaint, although identifying the attackers is unlikely, and the case will likely be dismissed. In 2024, many attacks on journalists took place, underscoring ongoing threats to press freedom and public safety. Both editorial teams expressed solidarity with affected journalists and condemned the police brutality and assaults on press freedom.⁴⁴

³⁶. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-10-14-Ativistas-do-movimento-Climaximo-cortam-Avenida-24-de-Julho-b83cbf4c>

³⁷. <https://www.climaximo.pt/jatos-privados-sao-armas-de-destruicao-macica-nao-tem-lugar-numa-sociedade-em-chamas-climaximo-pinta-e-bloqueia-jato-privado-em-ca/>

³⁸. <https://www.climaximo.pt/o-unico-plano-para-travar-a-guerra-e-parar-a-normalidade-climaximo-bloqueia-o-tunel-do-marques/>

³⁹. <https://www.amnistia.pt/a-liberdade-como-bandeira/#gref>

⁴⁰. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/03/18/sociedade/noticia/ciganos-43-vezes-probabilidade-mortos-policia-negros-21-vezes-2083740>

⁴¹. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/geral/en/levant-legislation/constitution-of-the-portuguese-republic>

⁴². <https://www.amnistia.pt/fragilidade-da-imprensa-e-um-ataque-a-democracia-em-portugal/#gref>

⁴³. <https://rsf.org/en/country/portugal>

⁴⁴. <https://fumaca.pt/psp-agrede-jornalistas-do-fumaca-e-setenta-e-quatro/>

Additionally, the children's book author Mariana Jones has also faced threats and persecution. Since October 2024, she has been targeted by Djalme dos Santos, a member of the far-right association Habeas Corpus, due to her book *O Pedro gosta do Afonso*. The situation escalated on 1 June when Jones was directly confronted by Santos at the Lisbon Book Fair. She has since received multiple hate messages, including threats involving her family. Jones filed a formal complaint with the PSP, highlighting the fear and drastic changes to her life caused by these threats.⁴⁵

On 8 February 2025, the LGBTQI+ cultural space Planeta Monas in Lisbon, was the target of a police raid for the fourth time in five months. The police forces entered the venue without identifying themselves or showing a warrant, and members of the cultural association hosting the space were threatened and physically assaulted with truncheons. While the incident occurred in 2025, it is just the latest in an increased and continuous pattern of violent and disproportionate attacks against independent cultural spaces and organisations working for the rights of marginalised communities.⁴⁶

On 8 March 2024, police officers of the Public Security Police (PSP) confronted participants at an International Women's Day march in downtown Faro. A mother with her baby was approached by an officer who wanted to confirm the route of the march and questioned her about joining the march with her child.⁴⁷ After confirming her intention to participate with the child, she reportedly faced warnings about potential risks, including from objects being thrown and adverse weather conditions.⁴⁸ The officer also expressed concerns about a counter-demonstration, suggesting the authorities could not ensure participants' safety.

Palestine solidarity protests

On 7 May, a student encampment was set up at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Lisbon to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.⁵² However, on 9 May, the PSP entered the university grounds after they were instructed to do so by the university faculty, and detained eight students.⁵³ Earlier, during a meeting

Despite the officer's warnings, the mother remained determined to participate in the march. The officer then stated in an intimidating tone that if she went ahead with the march, he would note record of her personal details. He also threatened to report the situation to the Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (CPCJ). A commissioner from the security force arrived at the scene and supported the officer's stance.

The march proceeded with the participation of the targeted mother, who did not formally have her details recorded. Following the conclusion of the demonstration, the officer reportedly followed the woman to her car, indicating his intention to use a photo of her license plate to report the situation and identify her, according to the association Rede 8 de Março.

On 23 March 2024, the same mother took part in another protest in the capital with her baby. The latter, accompanied by family members, held a sign that read, "No one forbids me to demonstrate with my mother," emphasising her right to engage in peaceful protests alongside her child.⁴⁹ Academia Cidadã criticised the action as a violation of the democratic right to freedom of expression, condemning the use of misogynistic tactics to suppress the fight for equality both nationally and in Europe.

The feminist association Rede 8 Marco Algarve strongly condemned the PSP's actions towards the targeted mother participating in a peaceful demonstration with her baby.⁵⁰ They question the basis for the PSP's attempt to record the identity of and potentially criminalise the mother, highlighting inconsistencies in the PSP's treatment of different groups. Following the incident, Rede 8 de Março has made a formal complaint.⁵¹

between the students and the faculty management, the university had agreed not to evict students as long as the teaching activities were continued normally. The students questioned why this agreement was not respected.

45. <https://expresso.pt/cultura/2024-06-07-vitima-de-ameacas-e-perseguido-escritora-mariana-jones-apresenta-queixa-na-psp.-percebi-que-ja-nao-era-com-o-livro-era-comigo-f6962950>

46. https://www.instagram.com/p/DF6C2HCNIYE/?img_index=1&igsh=MWE0N3NmNmV1b3pteQ%3D%3D

47. [https://psp%20denounces%20mother%20to%20cpcj%20for%20taking%20baby%20to%20women's%20march%20\(aeiou.pt\)/](https://psp%20denounces%20mother%20to%20cpcj%20for%20taking%20baby%20to%20women's%20march%20(aeiou.pt)/)

48. https://tvi.iol.pt/noticias/videos/psp-reporta-a-cpcj-mae-que-levou-bebe-a-uma-manifestacao-do-dia-da-mulher/65f5d57a0cf2c4edbc0efc77?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

49. <https://www.jn.pt/3972891591/mae-de-faro-volta-a-participar-num-protesto-em-luta-pelo-direito-a-manifestacao/>

50. https://www.instagram.com/p/C4jBFTFoFPg/?img_index=2

51. <https://www.portugalresident.com/psp-reports-mother-to-child-protection-services-for-marching-womens-day-with-baby/>

52. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2024-05-09-video-oito-estudantes-detidos-em-protesto-pro-palestina-na-universidade-de-lisboa-61559cee>

53. <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2024-05-09-video-oito-estudantes-detidos-em-protesto-pro-palestina-na-universidade-de-lisboa-61559cee>

On 17 May, a protest in solidarity with the Palestinian people was organised by the “End the Fossil” collective, with protesters occupying the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is reported that police removed the activists and students forcibly, confiscating their posters.⁵⁴

On 22 May, during a ceremony to celebrate the “76th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel”, a demonstration was organised by Palestine solidarity activists while there was heavy police presence and tension.⁵⁵

Use of force and detention of climate activists

On 17 March 2024, two photographers supporting the climate movement Climáximo were detained at an EDP marathon in Lisbon after photographing a bridge that had been painted by activists calling for climate action.⁵⁷ Police seized their phones and shoes, detaining them on unclear grounds, according to their supporters.⁵⁸

Academia Cidadã published an open letter signed by numerous organisations and collectives, calling for an end to the police repression against climate activists.

On 6 June, activists organised a protest in solidarity with Palestine during Ursula von der Leyen’s speech at a political rally held by the Democratic Alliance (AD-Aliança Democrática) in Porto.⁵⁶ The protesters reported that the PSP were aggressive towards them, that they used excessive force and at first refused medical treatment to a protester suffering from serious injuries. According to protesters, police arrested two activists and recorded the identity of another. However, the PSP only confirmed one arrest.

The letter, originally prepared in December 2023 but updated in June 2024, highlighted the rise in police violence against climate activists.⁵⁹

In October 2024, the criminal case against activists who organised a protest at Lisbon airport in 2023 was archived.⁶⁰ During the 2023 protest, the activists glued themselves to an airplane that was going to fly from Lisbon to Porto to protest against greenhouse gas emissions from short-haul flights. However, the activists still face administrative consequences, including suspended sentences and fines related to the protest.⁶¹

Funding for civil society

In the state budget for 2025, only an 11% increase in funding for the social sector was announced.⁶² The increase is lower than previous years and highlights the challenges faced by civil society organisations in Portugal. The report “NGO Diagnosis in Portugal 2015-2024”, conducted by the Portuguese Catholic University and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Bissaya Barreto Foundation, provides valuable insights into the financial viability of CSOs. According to the report, 42.5% of organisations in Portugal were heavily dependent on public funding

in 2024, while 47.3% relied on private donations. This heavy reliance on public funds puts civil society at risk, especially when there are cuts in government budgets.⁶³

The small increase in funding for the social sector exacerbates the financial instability of CSOs, hindering their ability to provide essential services and support to the communities they serve. As a result, these organisations may struggle to maintain their operations and pursue their missions effectively. The impact of such financial constraints is particularly severe in areas where civil society plays a critical role in addressing social issues, such as poverty, education, and healthcare.

⁵⁴. <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2024-05-17-estudantes-retirados-pela-policia-apos-protesto-no-ministerio-dos-negocios-estrangeiros-43bf7bfb>

⁵⁵. <https://rr.sapo.pt/noticia/pais/2024/05/22/tensao-entre-policia-e-ativistas-pro-palestina-na-celebracao-em-lisboa-da-fundacao-de-israel/379486/>

⁵⁶. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/06/07/sociedade/noticia/ativistas-acusam-psp-abuso-forca-protesto-propalestina-comicio-ad-2093247>

⁵⁷. <https://www.dn.pt/1890287562/climaximo-diz-que-duas-apoiantes-foram-detidas-por-tirar-fotos-a-ponte-do-maat/>

⁵⁸. <https://www.climaximo.pt/atentado-a-liberdade-2-pessoas-detidas-por-tirar-fotos-policia-apreendeu-lhes-os-sapatos/>

⁵⁹. <https://academiacidada.org/en/carta-aberta-pelo-fim-da-repressao-policial-contra-ativistas-climaticos/>

⁶⁰. <https://www.dn.pt/1818824129/arquivado-inquerito-do-caso-de-ativistas-que-se-colaram-a-aviao-em-lisboa/>

⁶¹. <https://comarca-lisboa.ministeriopublico.pt/destaque/ativistas-pelo-clima-processos-criminais-atualizacao>

⁶². <https://monitor.civus.org/explore/protests-against-racism-and-police-violence-restrictions-on-climate-and-palestine-solidarity-protests/>

⁶³. https://gulbenkian.pt/cidadaos-ativos/wp-content/uploads/sites/42/2024/11/PCA_Catolica_EN_Web-1.pdf

Civil dialogue and the right to participation

The Digital News Report Portugal 2024,⁶⁴ published by OberCom – Observatório da Comunicação (Communication Observatory), reveals important data about news consumption in the country and the concerns of citizens. According to the report, 72% of Portuguese people are worried about misinformation, especially news generated by artificial intelligence (AI). Trust in news is a critical factor, with only 45% of Portuguese people trusting the news they consume, and transparency of sources is essential to ensure this trust.

Additionally, the report highlights the growing role of online news videos, with 63% of Portuguese regularly watching these videos. The main sources of news are news websites (78%), followed by social media (55%) and

news apps (42%). This data shows an increasing trend of concern about misinformation and the importance of source transparency to gain public trust.

CSOs were not meaningfully consulted or involved in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. The lack of engagement with CSOs has further hindered the development of effective policies to address the challenges facing civic space in Portugal. When consulted, as was the case with the National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination, civil society was subsequently ignored in crucial stages. The lack of transparency in the actions implemented, coupled with the breakdown of dialogue with civil society representatives, led to widely questionable effectiveness.

Civil society resilience

Direct attacks on democratic freedoms in Portugal have generated organised responses through protests and collective networked movements. These events demonstrate that, despite funding difficulties, civil society actors display remarkable resilience and an unwavering fight for democratic practices and respect for human rights. Without this respect, all civic freedoms are threatened. The use of security forces to discourage collective reactions highlights the gravity of the situation. Although Portugal has regressed institutionally in this recent cycle, civil society continues to resist in an organised manner, showing that the determination to uphold fundamental rights remains strong. This can be seen in the following actions:

- An open letter signed by 16 organisations, which calls for an end to police repression against climate activists.⁶⁵
- Protests for the right to housing which took place in 19 cities of Portugal. The Casa Para Viver⁶⁶ movement organised demonstrations demanding more homes and more affordable prices. In Lisbon, over 30,000 people participated.⁶⁷

- Protests under the slogan Sem Justiça, Não Há Paz (No Justice, No Peace) against police brutality. This followed the killing of Odair Moniz by the Portuguese police.⁶⁸ Protesters emphasised the need for a state that protects, rather than attacks, the rights of immigrants and minorities.
- Protests in solidarity with Cláudia Simões,⁶⁹ which condemned the Portuguese justice system, permeated by structural racism at all stages. An open letter, titled *Criminalizar Vidas Negras Para Absolver o Sistema*,⁷⁰ published by Afrolink and a press release of SOS Racismo, one of Portugal's leading organisations fighting against racism, strongly condemned the attempts to silence the anti-racist movement and intimidate activists and academics committed to combating racism and violence. The organisation highlighted the alarming permeability between expressions of racism and judicial practices.
- An open letter to the government, which was signed by over 35 civil society organisations, including Cáritas Portuguesa and Fundação

⁶⁴. https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Legislativas_2024_FINAL.pdf

⁶⁵. <https://academiadacidade.org/en/carta-aberta-pelo-fim-da-repressao-policial-contra-ativistas-climaticos/>; <https://observador.pt/2023/12/12/carta-aberta-subscrita-por-16-organizacoes-repudia-repressao-policial-contra-ativistas-climaticos/>

⁶⁶. <https://www.casaparaaviver.pt/>

⁶⁷. <https://observador.pt/2024/09/28/milhares-de-pessoas-manifestam-se-em-lisboa-pelo-direito-a-habitacao-protesto-estende-se-a-todo-o-pais/>

⁶⁸. https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/familia-de-odair-moniz-apresentou-queixa-contra-a-psp_v1617206

⁶⁹. <https://www.esquerda.net/artigo/solidariedade-com-claudia-simoes-volta-rua-no-proximo-sabado/92168>

⁷⁰. <https://www.afrolink.pt/artigos/criminalizar-vidas-negras-para-absolver-o-sistema-carta-aberta>

Fé e Cooperação, and urged it to pursue migration policies that respect human rights. The organisations emphasised the need to focus on the facts and deconstruct myths and pointed out inconsistencies in current policies.⁷¹

- ▶ “*Não nos Encostem à Parede* - Do Not Push Us Against the Wall,”⁷² a protest that brought thousands of people to the streets of Lisbon between October and November 2024 in response to a police approach in “Martim Moniz” that ignited a cultural environment ignoring racism. Protesters denounced police violence and demanded fair and equal treatment for all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or origin.
- ▶ O Grupo de Ação Conjunta (GAC) - The Joint Action Group against Racism and Xenophobia, composed of 81 collectives submitted a request to the Assembly of the Republic with the rationale for the criminalisation of all racist practices⁷³. According to SOS Racismo, the group has drafted a bill proposal that, once validated by the Assembly, will allow the collection of the 20,000 signatures needed for plenary discussion. The document will be formally submitted to a vice-president of the Assembly, coinciding with International Human Rights Day. After validation, the group will

launch a national campaign to collect signatures. The initiative aims to classify all discriminatory practices motivated by racism or xenophobia as crimes, including the aggravation of defamation and insult crimes based on ethnic-racial discrimination and other protected characteristics.

- ▶ In January 2025, thousands of women marched in Lisbon against gender violence, demanding greater protection and justice for victims.⁷⁴ The “Do Not Push Us Against the Wall” protest saw the participation of various feminist organisations and activists. In 2024, the police received over 30,000 domestic violence reports, resulting in 22 deaths and 5,400 arrests in Portugal.⁷⁵
- ▶ A protest, attended by thousands of workers protested in Lisbon and Porto, which demanded better wages and public services.⁷⁶ The demonstration, organised by the largest trade union federation Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP), also called for an increase in the national minimum wage to €1,000 in 2025, as well as more investment in the National Health Service and housing. The CGTP General Secretary, Tiago Oliveira, highlighted the need for a different policy that is not submissive to the interests of large economic groups.

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:

→ **Implement effective policies to prevent and address racist practices. Criminalise racism and apply laws consistently. Establish a permanent committee with civil society representatives and government institutions to oversee anti-racist initiatives.**

- Provide training to police officers and authorities on how to properly and effectively protect the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards. Ensure that officials are held accountable for abuses and applied restrictions on peaceful assembly.
- Increase transparency and public participation in decision-making in public institutions to ensure citizens have access to information about government policies and decisions.
- Protect the fundamental rights of targeted and marginalized groups, including immigrants, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. Ensure equal access to services.

⁷¹. <https://caritas.pt/2025/noticias-noticias/carta-aberta-por-uma-migracao-baseada-nos-direitos-humanos/>

⁷². https://www.instagram.com/accounts/login/?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instagram.com%2Fnao_nos_encostem_a_parede%2F&is_from_rle

⁷³. <https://www.antiracismo.org/criminalizar-racismo>

⁷⁴. <https://observador.pt/2024/11/25/centenas-exigiram-na-rua-fim-da-violencia-de-genero/>

⁷⁵. <https://www.cmjornal.pt/portugal/detalhe/22-mortes-por-violencia-domestica-e-mais-de-30-mil-queixas-na-psp-e-gnr-em-2024>

⁷⁶. <https://www.publico.pt/2024/11/09/economia/noticia/manifestacoes-porto-lisboa-trabalhadores-exigiram-melhores-salarios-servicos-publicos-2111246>

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About European Civic Forum

European Civic Forum (ECF) is a pan-European network of nearly 100 associations and NGOs across 29 European countries. Founded in 2005 by our member organisations, we have spent nearly two decades working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity and democracy in Europe.

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About Civic Space Watch

CivicSpace Watch is an online platform that gathers data and reports on developments in civic space at the national and EU level and analyses national and European trends in civic space. Powered by the European Civic Forum, it collects findings through regular contact and interviews with a strong network of members and partners on the ground, as well as ongoing media and social media monitoring.

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