

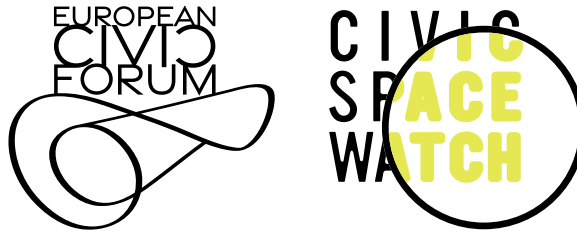
CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025

Denmark

By Nyt Europa



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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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Nyt Europa is a Danish organisation founded in 1998 with the overall objective to promote civic engagement on a Danish and European level. We work for a more sustainable and inclusive Europe, across themes such as green transition, economic transformation, democracy & fundamental rights, and youth empowerment. Our works spans across the national and the European level seeking to build networks and alliances across borders on these issues.



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Key civic space trends

-  Funding cuts for watchdog civil society organisations (CSOs), especially those working on minority rights.
-  Harsh police practices and disproportionate detentions of activists, especially in climate protests, resulted in a chilling effect.
-  Online smear campaigns targeting specific groups, particularly those advocating for gender and LGBTQI+ rights, have intensified.

Summary

Civic space in Denmark continues to be rated as “Open”, according to the CIVICUS Monitor.¹ There were no recommendations related to civic space made in the European Commission’s 2024 Rule of Law report. However, it noted that “certain segments of civil society experience difficulties in securing stable financing.” A key concern in 2024 was the defunding of civil society organisations (CSOs) that work to protect fundamental rights, particularly for minority groups. For example, ActionAid Denmark faced political attempts of defunding due to their work on Gaza and migration issues and the oldest Danish LGBTQI+ organisation was also targeted. There are growing concerns over harsh police practices and disproportionate detentions of activists, especially in climate related protests, with lawsuits and reports highlighting the chilling effect on their civic participation.

Organisations promoting LGBTQI+ and minority rights continue to experience increased harassment and threats. In a seriously concerning case, 2025 began with a seemingly politically motivated arson attack on the offices of Global Aktion.² The organisation also reports that it has experienced threats based on its work related to Western Sahara, and that multiple employees are being followed or shadowed in Denmark. These events have been reported to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. Global Aktion also reported that they have experienced harassment and threats related to their activism on Palestine, and that activists related to the organisation have been subjected to house searches, seizure of phones and illegal arrests.³

In addition, CSOs have raised concerns about several new amendments which conflate legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism and is likely to have a chilling effect on the Palestine solidarity movement.

Institutional, political, and socio-economic landscape

The government is currently a majority government, which is rare in Danish political history. It is also a government consisting of the two parties that usually compete for the role of government (centre-right Liberal Party and centre-left Social Democratic Party), as well as a newer centrist party, Moderaterne, led by former PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen. As a result, the opposition is split in two: a left-wing and right-wing opposition.

In general, civil society in Denmark operates within a relatively safe and beneficial landscape, compared to some other European countries. However, there are increasingly worrying developments and a need for improvements in many areas, which are essential to highlight and address.

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

2. <https://globalaktion.dk/global-aktion/brandattentat-paa-global-aktion/>

3. Information directly received by NYT Europa

At the political level, there have been increasingly loud voices questioning the legitimacy and relevance of international conventions and institutions. For instance, the then political speaker of the Social Democratic Party and current minister of taxation, argued against the democratic legitimacy of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), stating that in the future, Denmark should not abide by the Court's rulings — particularly on questions on immigration and integration.⁴ While the government has not implemented this practice, there has been no rejection from the government of the minister's arguments. These arguments were reiterated by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen in a speech in which she stated that while she does not intend to withdraw Denmark from the conventions, that does not mean that they are set in stone.⁵ Such a practice would entail a serious risk of fundamental rights breaches and weaken the international rules-based order.⁶ Later, in November of 2024, the ECtHR ruled that Denmark had breached the right to privacy in the deportation of an Iraqi citizen, underscoring the importance of adhering to court rulings to ensure the fundamental rights of citizens and residents.⁷

There are also concerns regarding unequal access to fundamental rights in Denmark, with certain groups facing more barriers in enforcing their rights. This includes discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities,⁸ indigenous⁹ and LGBTQI+ people,¹⁰

and people with disabilities,¹¹ all of which have been documented in recent years as having serious restrictions on their access to fundamental rights.

In general, there is increased polarisation around multiple political issues, including climate activism¹², gender issues,¹³ and the wars in the Middle East.¹⁴ Regarding gender rights, high-level decisionmakers have made anti-gender statements and argued for the restriction of rights, particularly for transgender people. Most notably, this came from the then minister of gender equality, who in a statement on the occasion of the annual Copenhagen Pride, spoke out against “woke-ism”.¹⁵

Another theme which has been significant in the last year is the war in Gaza and the continued humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian population. This crisis has engaged both CSOs and individual activists in high numbers in demonstrations and campaigns. Tension on this issue has risen throughout 2024, and by the end of the year, the newspaper *Politiken* uncovered how the prime minister and the justice minister had put pressure on both the public prosecutor and police to apply criminal law to prosecute “approval of terrorism”. *Politiken* uncovered specific cases in which police departments were ready to drop a case but were asked by the public prosecutor to continue the investigation. In this specific case, the woman in question was found not guilty.¹⁶

The regulatory environment for civic freedoms

Freedom of association

Freedom of association is protected by Article 78 in the Danish Constitution, which states that it is limited only by the lawfulness of activities. Associations are not regulated by a specific law, but certain formal requirements are enforced to receive grants and employ staff. The requirements include that organisations must have

more than two members, be formally established in a documented founding meeting, and must have official statutes, although there are no requirements as to the contents of the statutes. It is also a requirement that there is a form of management committee functioning

4. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/rasmus-stoklund-den-europaeiske-menneskerettighedsdomstol-er-blevet-et-stort>

5. <https://www.dansketaler.dk/tale/mette-frederiksens-tale-ved-socialdemokratiets-kongres#source>

6. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/stoklund-foreslaar-en-erodering-af-den-internationale-retsorden-og-sender-danmark-paa-slingrekurs>

7. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#/%22itemid%22:%22001-237958%22%7D>

8. <https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Oplevet%20etnisk%20diskrimination%20i%20Danmark.pdf>

9. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/fn-med-opsang-til-danmark-groenlaendere-har-ikke-de-rettigheder-de-har-krav-paa>

10. <https://www.vive.dk/media/pure/18049/8565518>

11. <https://menneskeret.dk/nyheder/handicapkomite-kritiserer-danmark-tilbagegang-rettighedsindsats>

12. <https://pet.dk/-/media/mediefiler/pet/dokumenter/analyser-og-vurderinger/vurdering-af-terrortruslen-mod-danmark/vurdering-af-terror-truslen-mod-danmark-2024.pdf>

13. <https://kforum.dk/nyheder/debat/article16443856.ece>

14. <https://pov.international/erklaring-danmark-officielle-politik-gaza/>

15. <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/kronik/ECE17337761/ibipippi-har-faaet-mine-ojne-op-for-hvor-problematisk-juridisk-koensskifte-er/>

16. <https://politiken.dk/danmark/art10154625/Fyns-Politi-blev-presset-til-at-rejse-sag-om-terrorbilligelse>

as an authorising entity, and for the association to have its own defined finances, including budget and accounts.

In 2024, a worrying issue of defunding CSOs, particularly the ones working with the protection of minorities and/or fundamental rights, surfaced. Two cases in particular have been raised. First, the case of ActionAid Denmark and political attempts to defund them due to their work. ActionAid Denmark is a partially publicly funded organisation with an annual public contribution of 129 million DKK. In September 2024, multiple media figures, including editorials, published pieces criticised the public funding of the organisation, stating that “taxpayers’ money” is spent on left-wing propaganda.¹⁷ This referred particularly to ActionAid Denmark’s campaigns on the war in Gaza but also pointed to their efforts to make Danish citizenship more accessible, stopping deportations of Syrians¹⁸ and ending the so-called Ghetto law.¹⁹ Following these editorials, multiple politicians got involved in the public discussion. For instance, Mikkel Bjørn, a member of parliament from the far-right Danish Peoples Party (DPP) stated that the DPP would not support this year’s Finance Bill unless the funding to ActionAid Denmark was removed from it. Subsequently, DPP also stated that other organisations should have their funding removed, including Oxfam Denmark.²⁰ The calls for removing funding were also applauded by several other members of the Danish parliament.

Responding to these statements, a broad coalition of CSOs wrote an op-ed highlighting that public funding must never become a muzzle for civil society, and raising concerns over the danger that this poses to an independent civil society.²¹ The organisations in question and civil society in general, comply with all the rules, guidelines, auditing requirements. At the same time as self-owned and independent organisations, they

are entitled to their own visions, missions, and agendas, regardless of the public funding they may receive. This is a core principle of the arm’s length distance between governments and civil society. They further stated that political activism is conducted and financed from the organisation’s other sources of funding, such as private foundations and private donors. For now, this case was somewhat closed, when the minister of foreign affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, rejected the idea of defunding.²²

Another case was the proposed cut in funding of the oldest Danish LGBTQI+ organisation, LGBT+ Danmark. When the government presented their proposal for the 2025 Finance Bill, the organisation saw their operating grant reduced by 62%. This happened shortly after the organisation responded²³ to a statement from the minister of gender equality, Marie Bjerre, in which she spoke out against “woke-ism”, particularly regarding transgender rights.²⁴ While it is impossible to say or document that there was an link between these two events, this can easily be perceived as such and causes members and leaders of civil society to consider whether they should speak as freely as they would like, in fear of losing their financing.²⁵ Subsequently, members of parliament from the Conservative Party stated that the support to LGBT+ Danmark should be stopped, due to their concerns over the organisations’ advisory function and practice of transgender minors seeking healthcare abroad.²⁶

In summary, these cases show that many Danish top-level politicians increasingly see the withdrawal of funding for CSOs as a political tool. This not only puts the targeted organisations in a precarious situation, but risks causing a chilling effect throughout the entire sector and raises concern about self-censorship in civil society.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Article 79 of the Danish Constitution regulates the freedom of peaceful assembly, securing this right for Danish citizens and residents. There is no legislation limiting peaceful assembly, hence the legislation on the issue is in line with international standards.

In recent years there have been multiple large demonstrations in Denmark, particularly on issues of climate change and the war in Gaza.²⁷ Activists have also used other forms of protests, such as civil disobedience, particularly on climate and environmental issues.

17. <https://www.berlingske.dk/ledere/berlingske-mener-sagen-om-mellemfolkeligt-samvirke-peget-paa-et-generelt>

18. <https://www.ms.dk/stopudvisningerne>; <https://www.ms.dk/sites/default/files/publikationer/2022/Positionspapir%20v.2.pdf>

19. <https://www.ms.dk/ghetto>

20. <https://radio4.dk/nyheder/df-i-flaesket-paa-ngoer-oxfam-danmark-burde-ogsaa-miste-stoette-OseXWqoQQnCDQy1adKLLK>

21. <https://www.berlingske.dk/synspunkter/35-ngoer-svarer-paa-kritik-i-berlingske-statslige-tilskud-boer-aldrig>

22. <https://radio4.dk/nyheder/lars-loekke-afviser-blankt-at-traekke-ngo-i-stoette-q2RJI0SCuqLcabTfNojN>

23. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/lgbt-danmark-chef-til-marie-bjerre-det-var-noget-af-en-mavepuster-jeg-fik-faktisk-kvalme>

24. <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/kronik/ECE17337761/ibippi-har-faaet-mine-oejne-op-for-hvor-problematisk-juridisk-koensskifte-er/>

25. <https://dm.dk/akademikerbladet/aktuelt/hvordan-hjaelper-vi-dem-der-hjaelper-andre/forening-kaemper-med-oekonomien-efter-voldsom-koensdebat/>

26. <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE17507729/det-er-paa-tide-at-smide-fløjlshandskerne-over-for-lgbt/>

27. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/demonstration-markerer-etaarsdag-israels-krig-i-gaza-uskyldige-bliver-draebt-og>

Concerning these protests, there have been cases of accusations of unduly or disproportionate detention of activists, which have now reached the courts. During a 2022 protest on climate action, a large number of activists were confined by police in Copenhagen. In 2024, 121 activists filed a lawsuit against the Copenhagen Police Department for illegal confinement, to lengthy confinement or otherwise exceeding the legal limits for confinement of activists.²⁸ The lawsuit was heard

by the court in October and November 2024, and in 19 of the 121 cases the court ruled in favour of the activists.²⁹ Activists from the climate movement report that police practices are increasingly rough, which has a chilling effect on participation in activism. This was also uncovered in a report published by Denmark's oldest environmental organisation, NOAH, which found that activists experienced increasingly harsh treatment from police, with minorities being particularly targeted.³⁰

Freedom of expression and the right to privacy

Freedom of expression is protected in Article 77 of the Danish constitution and is widely recognised as a key part of Danish society and democracy. While this was a major theme in 2023, there have been fewer developments related to this right in 2024. However, one development is relevant: in June 2024, the government and eight opposition parties presented a new political agreement to strengthen efforts against antisemitism.³¹ While the effort to fight antisemitism was welcomed broadly, ActionAid Denmark noted its concerns over the definition of "the new antisemitism", as "generated from a contempt for the State of Israel." The new definition restricts legitimate criticism of a state and government and conflates it with discrimination against Jewish people. Hence, ActionAid Denmark called for the use of the definition of antisemitism from the Jerusalem Declaration to ensure that there should not be a limit on the right to criticise the state of Israel.³²

Following this political agreement, the government presented a proposal for several amendments to legislation³³ to increase criminal penalties by 50%, if the committed crime was based on the person's identity, such as ethnic origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or similar. The new

amendment would enable police to enforce a general increased penalty period across the entire country, if there are increased crimes related to beliefs or identity. Finally, it enables police to order any platform provider, and its users, website and news media, to remove so-called "terror-related" content from their platform without a court order.

While these initiatives include all hate crimes, they are aimed at targeting antisemitism. The ministry of justice only provided one example of a test case linked to the period after Hamas' attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023, after which police monitored potential developments of hate crimes with an antisemitic motive. Since the police have the broad power to enforce an increased penalty period, and given the new broader definition of antisemitism, this puts the Palestine solidarity movement at risk of being particularly targeted by the proposed changes to the legislation. Similarly, the bypassing of the courts in cases of removing online content raises concerns about freedom of expression. This has also been pointed out as a concern by the trade organisation Danish Media. The bill was approved by parliament on 20 February 2025.³⁴

Safe space

In general, Danish civil society benefits from a safe environment, especially compared to other European countries. Judicial harassment, SLAPPs, police

infiltration, surveillance or spying on civic actors, activists, journalists or opposition figures are not common.

²⁸. <https://www.tv2kosmopol.dk/koebenhavn/klimaaktivister-anlaegger-sag-mod-politiet-for-ulovlig-frihedsberoevelse>

²⁹. <https://ekstrabladet.dk/krimi/historisk-retssag-i-koebenhavn-kun-en-dukkede-op/10411271>; <https://www.berlingske.dk/indland/demonstranter-blev-ulovligt-noegenvisiteret-af-politiet>

³⁰. <https://noah.dk/materialer/under-pressure-repression-environmental-activism-denmark-2019-2024>

³¹. <https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Aftaletekst.pdf>

³². <https://www.altinget.dk/etik/artikel/tim-whyte-ny-aftale-om-bekaempelse-af-antisemitisme-skaber-censur>

³³. The amendment(s) are to the following pieces of legislation: *straffeloven* (criminal code), *lov om politiets virksomhed* (legislation on police practice) og *lov om supplerende bestemmelser til forordning om håndtering af udbredelsen af terrorrelateret indhold online* (law with supplementary provisions to regulation on the handling of the spread of terror-related content online). <https://arbejderen.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Udkast-til-forslag-til-lov-om-aendring-af-straffeloven-mv.-Gennemfoerelse-af-dele-af-aftale-om-en-styrket-indsats-mod-antisemitisme.pdf>

³⁴. <https://arbejderen.dk/indland/skaerper-straffe-og-indfoerer-censur-uden-dommerkendelse-mod-gaza-solidaritet/> ; https://www.ft.dk/samling/20241/lovforslag/L110/som_vedtaget.htm

However, specific groups are increasingly targeted, particularly through online smear campaigns, which remain a worrying trend. In particular, those working on gender and LGBTQI+ rights face online harassment. The amount of registered hate crime cases towards LGBTQI+ people more than doubled between 2016 and 2022,³⁵ and the Danish Institute for Human Rights argues that the actual numbers might be higher due to underreporting.³⁶ In line with this trend, organisations working to promote LGBTQI+ rights experience increased harassment and threats. Similar trends have also been observed for other minority groups. The criticism of media figures and members of the parliament (MPs) by multiple CSOs and subsequent calls for defunding mentioned above also constitute

a concern. There are no new initiatives from the government to promote civic space or human rights defenders (HRDs) in Denmark.

While physical attacks on organisations and activists remain rare, 2025 began with a highly concerning, seemingly politically motivated arson attack on the offices of Global Aktion.³⁷ The attack appears to be in response to the organisation's engagement in the conflict in Western Sahara. The offices were shared by multiple other CSOs. While the investigation is still ongoing, it is deeply concerning that organisations working in politically polarised fields have to worry about physical attacks and property damage, in addition to online or verbal harassment.

Financial viability and sustainability of civil society

The representative organisation for civil society in Denmark (Civilsamfundets Brancheøring) has raised concerns about the general way in which public funding is allocated to civil society, calling for a new model. The government has announced that it will propose a new model, but no details have yet emerged.³⁸

Access to public funding is perceived differently across Danish civil society. While some organisations receive relatively stable public funding, others find it scarce and unreliable. The system which distributes public funding lacks transparency, and in some cases, it is even dependent on personal relationships and individual MPs advocating for or against funding specific organisations — either through negotiations or publicly in the media. As a result, it is a widespread perception amongst organisations that public funding can be difficult to rely on. Some organisations also report concerns that receiving public funding makes it more difficult to be critical of the government. This perception has particularly intensified following the calls to defund organisations such as ActionAid Denmark and LGBT+ Danmark but has been a concern for years. This highlights a general challenge for civil society, which is the lack of access to core funding. Without this, organisations are forced to rely on project-based funding. This limits their ability to engage in long-term strategic planning and puts staff in more precarious employment

situations.³⁹ Ultimately, this causes the sector to lose qualified employees and limits the ability to compete with the private sector in terms of political engagement.

Smaller organisations are forced to be extremely strategic as seeking and securing funding is a very resource intensive process. As a result, organisations need to prioritise which avenues of funding to pursue, as each source comes with its own process, related to both application and reporting. The different systems create a high barrier for organisations applying for funding, especially smaller ones. With the increasing insecurity of public funding, organisations are forced to shift their focus towards private foundations, international sources of funding or other avenues of fundraising, which take resources away from their core tasks such as providing services, advocacy, and aid coordination. Another challenge is that fundraising — whether from institutional, private, public, or other donor-types — typically requires a well-organised setup, leaving more loosely organised groups, such as activist networks, with limited options.

While fundraising is a continuous task for civil society, its resource demands increase when multiple funding sources must be pursued to ensure an organisation's economic viability and sustainability.

³⁵. <https://politi.dk/-/media/mediefiler/landsdaekkende-dokumenter/statistikker/hadforbrydelser/hadforbrydelser-2022.pdf>

³⁶. <https://menneskeret.dk/status/lgbt>

³⁷. <https://globalaktion.dk/global-aktion/brandattentat-paa-global-aktion/>

³⁸. <https://dm.dk/akademikerbladet/aktuelt/hvordan-hjaelper-vi-dem-der-hjaelper-forening-kaemper-med-oekonomien-efter-voldsom-koensdebat/>

³⁹. <https://frivilligraadet.dk/nyheder/debat-frivilligraadet-brancheoering-ny-finansieringsmodel-skal-styrke-civilsamfundet>

Civil dialogue and the right to participation

Denmark has a proud and long tradition of formal and informal dialogue between decisionmakers, authorities, and the civic sector. Formally, civil society is invited to partake in the legislative process through public hearings. Informally, many organisations and activists engage in meetings with ministers, MPs, and their advisors. However, this informal system lacks transparency, as there are not many requirements for MPs or ministers to disclose who they meet with.⁴⁰ As a result, bigger organisations, particularly those with many resources, have better access to decisionmakers.

At the formal level, there are ongoing challenges with the practice of public hearings. For years, these hearings have been criticised for extensive use of short and inconvenient deadlines, often set during the summer holiday, where key staff are away.⁴¹ The latest data on the issue shows no improvements, although both the government and MPs have expressed concerns on this issue.⁴²

Another challenge affecting access to decisionmakers and civil dialogue is the current parliamentary process. A recent report by the think tank Justitia concluded that, in general, a significant number of political negotiations on legislation has been moved from the parliament — where there is public access — to ministry meeting rooms.⁴³ This reduces the public's access and overall access to information on political negotiations, making it harder for CSOs to engage in negotiations effectively both in terms of timing and substance. Secondly, with the current majority government, political proposals are often negotiated internally in the government, further distancing negotiations from the public debate. In other words, legislation is often very far along in the negotiation process before it is made public.⁴⁴

Lastly, access to information and transparency remains an ongoing issue in Denmark. In 2024, the European Commission Rule of Law report recommended that the

Danish government introduce rules on “revolving doors”. However, no steps have been taken, despite continued criticism from CSOs such as Transparency International Denmark.

An amendment to the existing Access to Public Administrative Documents Act was passed.⁴⁵ However, instead of improving access to information for the press or academia, the amendment protects public servants against harassment by giving them greater leeway to reject requests for access on the grounds of harassment concerns. For instance, it allows them to reject access to documents related to personnel cases if there are serious considerations regarding the employees' personal security.

In 2023, the entire opposition consisting of nine parties requested a parliamentary committee to review the act and put forth a proposal for revision.⁴⁶ This was rejected by the minister of justice.⁴⁷ In January 2024, however, the government agreed with three other parties to create a committee to make recommendations for changes to the act.⁴⁸ In February 2024, the committee was named, and included members of the press/media, academia, legal experts, and think tanks and associations, as well as representatives of different ministries, including the ministry of finance and the ministry of justice.⁴⁹ The task of the committee is to suggest changes which will increase access to information.⁵⁰ However, no recommendations have been presented yet.

While a committee has been appointed to make recommendations to legislative changes, there have been no substantial developments in 2024, leaving Denmark with continued challenges in accessing official documents.

40. <https://transparency.dk/9159-2/>

41. <https://www.k-news.dk/artikler/korte-hoeringsfrister-truer-retssikkerheden>; <https://www.altinget.dk/embedsvaerk/artikel/morten-jarlbaek-er-du-paa-vej-paa-ferie-saa-tikker-der-nok-en-ny-hoering-ind>

42. <https://cepos.dk/artikler/svm-regeringens-forste-ar-stadig-problemer-med-korte-hoeringsfrister/>

43. https://justitia-int.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Rapport_Udfordringer-i-lovgivningsprocessen_15072024.pdf,

44. https://justitia-int.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Rapport_Udfordringer-i-lovgivningsprocessen_15072024.pdf,

45. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ft/202312L00116>

46. <https://radio4.dk/nyheder/ni-partier-i-brev-til-regeringen-lempe-offentlighedsloven/>

47. <https://politiken.dk/danmark/politik/art9316506/Regeringen-vil-vente-med-udvalg-til-at-lempe-offentlighedsloven>

48. <https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Aftale-om-nedsaettelse-af-et-lovforberedende-udvalg-om-aendring-af-offentlighedsloven.pdf>

49. <https://www.altinget.dk/navnenyt/navnene-er-paa-plads-her-er-udvalget-der-skal-gentaenke-udskaeldt-offentlighedslov>

50. <https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Kommissorium-for-udvalg-om-aendring-af-offentlighedsloven.pdf>

Civil society resilience

Danish civil society is relatively resilient and play an uncompromising role as a watchdog for democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights. This role is increasingly important, as there is a growing disregard for human rights conventions and court rulings on these issues, as described above.

While the overall conditions and resilience of Danish civil society remain beneficial and relatively strong, there are also worrying developments which require attention. Firstly, access to funding is an ongoing problem, which has been escalated this year by the public and political campaigns aimed at defunding specific organisations, as described above. This is particularly worrying, as these organisations are guardians for fundamental rights of minority groups. Therefore, such actions reflect an attack on two fronts; first, an attack on civil society's independence and role as a watchdog, and second, as an attack on the rights of the minorities these organisations defend.

These public political campaigns — filling newspaper columns and editorials and amplified by high-profile politicians — expand and legitimise distrust of CSOs, both individually and as a whole. While the minister for foreign affairs rejected the calls for defunding of ActionAid Denmark, this trend is extremely concerning for the future of civic space in Denmark.⁵¹

Internally, civil society in Denmark continuously engages in network-building and solidarity efforts. This was evident in the joint statement issued by 35 civil society leaders as a response to the call for defunding of ActionAid Denmark.⁵² On a more day-to-day level, there are efforts to ensure continuous network and capacity building of civil society internally, which are both important and impactful. However, the lack of resources to support these efforts remains an ongoing barrier, both for participants and facilitators. Hence, resource scarcity is a significant barrier to effective network building and cooperation within civil society and beyond, between civil society and other sectors.

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:

- **Strongly reject (political) calls for the defunding of civil society, and urgently implement measures to ensure stable and transparent funding for its functions. This must be done by 2025.**
- Reject arguments that undermine the legitimacy and relevance of international conventions and institutions, such as the ECtHR, and ensure alignment between Danish legislation and both international conventions and ECtHR rulings.
- Take urgent steps, such as the implementation of the EC Anti-Racism action plan, to protect excluded groups, in particular the LGBTQIA+ community and minorities from discrimination, hate speech, attacks, harassment and smear campaigns, online and offline.
- Refrain from targeting and criminalising climate and environmental rights and Palestine solidarity movements and respect the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression in line with international human rights standards.

⁵¹. <https://radio4.dk/nyheder/lars-loekke-afviser-blankt-at-traekke-ngo-i-stoette-q2RJIOSCuqLcabTfNoJN>

⁵². <https://www.berlingske.dk/synspunkter/35-ngoer-svarer-paa-kritik-i-berlingske-statslige-tilskud-boer-aldrig>

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025



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.

civic-forum.eu



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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