



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER THE WEIGHT OF ATTACKS

CONTINUING EROSION OF CIVIC SPACE IN SLOVAKIA

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# CONTENTS

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. SLOVAKIA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. EXPERIENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS</b>	<b>11</b>
5.1 ONLINE AND OFFLINE HARASSMENT	11
5.2 CHALLENGES SECURING FUNDING	14
5.3 DIFFICULTIES IN MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC DECISIONS	15
5.4 INCREASED REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ON CIVIL SOCIETY	17
5.5 SOLIDARITY	18
<b>6. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS REINFORCE CHALLENGES</b>	<b>19</b>
6.1 RECENT LEGISLATIVE MEASURES	19
6.2 HARMFUL RHETORIC	22
6.3 LIMITATIONS ON FUNDING	25
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>26</b>

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human rights defenders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are crucial for the promotion and protection of human rights in Slovakia. While Slovak authorities have a responsibility to respect and protect these brave individuals and collectives, Amnesty International has monitored the opposite – incidents of harassment, pressure, online and offline insults and stigmatization from the general public, and the lack of adequate financial support.

In the context of ongoing pressure from the state authorities since 2024, this briefing examines the challenges human rights defenders, including NGOs, face in Slovakia today. This briefing is based on responses from 126 NGOs to a survey Amnesty International disseminated, 13 qualitative interviews with representatives of NGOs that participated in the survey, as well as desk research. Amnesty International also sought the views of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, Simona Zacharová, providing her with a right of reply prior to publication. Amnesty International received the Plenipotentiary's reply on 21 April 2026, including on activities that her Office conducts with the aim to support civil society in Slovakia. Amnesty International further sent her office an additional letter, sharing briefing's summary and recommendations on 5 May 2026.



Human rights defenders told Amnesty International about the various challenges they faced functioning in Slovakia. They explained how they encounter threats in online and offline spaces and ongoing stigmatization. They also noted experiencing limitations in financial support – including from the state, sometimes on discriminatory grounds – which has seriously impacted the capacity of non-governmental organizations focusing on human rights, sometimes resulting in reduction of activities, staff or even closure of organizations. Organizations further noted that they were increasingly supervised by the government, through legal and administrative requirements, which they felt created enhanced administrative burdens on them. This is paired with ongoing stigmatizing narratives coming from political representatives, where they accuse NGOs of being “non-transparent”, “threatening to the state” or acting as “agents of foreign countries”.

Lack of meaningful participation and exclusion of independent public voices, including in creation of policies and legislation that directly impact the functioning of civic space is another way by which state authorities have worked against human rights defenders in the past two years. In the past two years, Slovak authorities also adopted at least four legislative amendments and resolutions directly impacting work of human rights defenders, including infringing on the human right to freedom of association, with the declared aim to control, monitor and punish non-governmental organizations in Slovakia.

These examples of continuing attacks against the civic space in Slovakia have serious repercussions for the functioning and existence of a diverse, vital and strong civil society environment, where human rights defenders can monitor, promote and protect human rights for all.



# 2. METHODOLOGY

This briefing describes the key challenges that civil society groups in Slovakia face, in the period 2024-2025. This period was chosen because Amnesty International has monitored strengthening of negative trends against civic space, including in relation to the drafting, adoption and discourse around the amendment to Act on non-governmental organizations.

This briefing relies on observations and information from the following sources:

- **Responses to the questionnaire:** In April 2025, Amnesty International disseminated a questionnaire to over 300 NGOs, chosen from its network of contacts that could be described as human rights defenders organizations active in Slovakia. The semi-structured questionnaire included 43 questions, focusing on whether the organizations had faced threats and harassment in online and offline spaces, any restrictions on access to financial resources, their experience of legal and administrative controls by state institutions and what they felt about opportunities to participate in public policy-making.<sup>1</sup> Responses were received from 126 organizations<sup>2</sup> - including NGOs working in the fields of human rights, environmental protection, social services, and anti-corruption, based in all regions of Slovakia – and these have been reflected in this briefing.
- **Qualitative interviews:** Amnesty International conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with human rights defenders between September and October 2025, to allow for a fuller discussion of the main challenges identified through the questionnaire described above. Amnesty International reached out to human rights defenders working in the NGOs that responded to the questionnaire above and agreed to participate in further conversations. Amnesty International made an effort to seek out the experiences of human rights defenders from marginalised groups, including people defending the rights of Roma persons, LGBTI+ people and people with disabilities. Information regarding the names of the individuals interviewed and their organizations, and the organizations that replied to the survey, has been kept confidential to maintain their privacy and ensure their safety due to potential reprisals.
- **Desk-based research:** Amnesty International conducted a thorough review of relevant legislation, policies, judicial rulings, governmental data, as well as Slovakia's international human rights obligations.
- **Inputs from the government representatives:** Amnesty International sent a letter with questions, informing about the planned publishing of the briefing to the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society and received a reply on 21 April 2026. Amnesty International further sent an additional letter, sharing the briefing's summary and recommendations on 5 May 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International Slovakia, "Démonizácia, očierňovanie a vyhrožovanie – čomu čelia MVO na Slovensku v dôsledku autoritárskych praktík [Demonization, smear campaigns, and threats – what NGOs in Slovakia face as a result of authoritarian practices]", 7 July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/demonizacia-ociernovanie-a-vyhrazanie-comu-celia-mvo-na-slovensku-v-dosledku-autoritarskych-praktik/> (in Slovak).

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International acknowledges that the sample may not represent the entire civil society; however, respondents included organizations of varying size, thematic focus, and geographic location, which strengthens the credibility of the findings.



## TERMINOLOGY

In this briefing

- “Human rights defenders” are individuals or groups who act to defend and promote human rights at the local, national, regional or international levels, in a peaceful manner and without resorting to or advocating hatred, discrimination or violence. Amongst other activities, human rights defenders have the right to form and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups; to participate in the conduct of public affairs; to meet or assemble peacefully; to develop and hold opinions about the protection of human rights and to critique any aspect of the work of governmental bodies that may hinder or impede the promotion, protection and realization of human rights; to draw these matters to public attention and to advocate for human rights.<sup>3</sup>
- “Civic space” is the political, legal and social environment that allows individuals and groups to freely express their views, organize, advocate, and participate in decisions affecting their lives and communities. It is the space for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly (including peaceful protest), association, and participation in public life, both on and offline.<sup>4</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Amnesty International would like to express its sincere gratitude to non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders working in them for participation in the research for this briefing.

<sup>3</sup> Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12.

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, *Civic space and environmental human rights defenders: Essential for achieving climate justice* (Index: POL 32/0173/2025), 23 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol32/0173/2025/en/>.

# 3. INTRODUCTION

**“For us, the environment has never been favourable, and we’ve been the target of such attacks practically nonstop—from questions about our funding to various media attacks, and so on, including physical ones in the end. So, for us, this isn’t really a new situation at all, and I see it more as having expanded—that now the attack is directed, in some ways, at the entire sector, and in others, at a much broader range of organizations...”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 10 October 2025

State authorities in Slovakia have been taking steps against civil society and the civic space for a long time, including by engaging in stigmatization, sharing hostile narratives, encroaching on financing, stifling possibilities for meaningful engagement and participation in public consultations or matters of public interest or that directly impact them and enacting laws that directly threaten a healthy functioning of NGOs.<sup>5</sup> However, non-governmental organizations that took part in our research have underlined how authorities have intensified their attacks against civic space in the last two years, engaging in attacks and stigmatization of human rights defenders.

Amnesty International’s focus on civic space, including human rights defenders, is part of the organization’s long-term commitment to protecting human rights for all, including those that promote and protect them. Amnesty International Slovakia has been monitoring and documenting threats to human rights, including the constant pressure on non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders, especially those working on the rights of minorities and marginalized groups in Slovakia. Amnesty International has observed an increase in this pressure, starting from 2024, and in this context, sought to understand the challenges human rights defenders face while functioning in Slovakia today. This briefing highlights the experiences of human rights defenders, including NGOs, in Slovakia over a two-year period, between 2024 and 2025.

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International Slovakia, “Experti OSN upozorňujú na eróziu základých slobôd. Slovenská vláda sa obhajuje ‘politickými’ mimovládami a ‘kultúrnym imperializmom’ [UN experts warn of the erosion of fundamental freedoms. The Slovak government defends itself by citing ‘political’ NGOs and ‘cultural imperialism’]”, 15 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/experti-osn-upozornuju-na-eroziu-zakladych-slobod-slovenska-vlada-sa-obhajuje-politickymi-mimovladkami-a-kulturnym-imperializmom/> (in Slovak); Amnesty International Slovakia, “Vláda obmedzuje prístup MNO k verejným zdrojom, sektor stráca milióny eur [The government is restricting NGOs’ access to public funds, and the sector is losing millions of euros]”, 2 March 2026, <https://www.amnesty.sk/vlada-obmedzenie-mno-verejne-zdroje/> (in Slovak); Amnesty International Slovakia, “Štát neprestáva s očierňovaním občianskej spoločnosti [The government continues to smear civil society]”, 11 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/stat-neprestava-s-ociernovanim-obcianskej-spolocnosti/> (in Slovak).

# 4. SLOVAKIA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Slovakia has ratified multiple instruments that protect the right to freedom of association, including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In addition to international and regional human rights instruments, the right to freedom of association is also protected under Article 29(1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (the Constitution).<sup>6</sup>

The right to freedom of association is critical for non-governmental organizations, as it recognizes the right of individuals to freely form or join formal or informal groups to take collective actions. It is protected under numerous international and regional instruments,<sup>7</sup> which require states to ensure an enabling environment for the creation and effective functioning of associations and to refrain from imposing any undue restrictions on the exercise of the right, including in relation to requirements of registration and restriction on access to funding. The right to freedom of association therefore protects the right of individuals to create associations for the defence of human rights, as well as the right of such human rights organizations to act freely in order to achieve their objectives.

The right to freedom of association protects the right to seek, secure and use resources, including financial resources, from domestic, foreign, and international sources, as inherent to the right to freedom of association and essential to the existence and effective operation of organizations. The UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) has repeatedly clarified in its Concluding Observations that funding restrictions – such as, bans, restrictions on access to foreign funding, taxation specifically impacting donations to NGOs whose activities are considered as “political”, or “unreasonable, burdensome and restrictive conditions” imposed on organizations receiving foreign

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<sup>6</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 460/1992 Zb. Ústava Slovenskej republiky [Act No. 460/1992 Coll. Constitution of the Slovak Republic], 1992, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/> (in Slovak).

<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 17; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 22; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Article 5(d)(ix); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 15; European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), Article 11; The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Article 10; The Arab Charter on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 28; American Convention on Human Rights, Article 16; Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on human rights defenders), Article 5 and Article 13 in Amnesty International, *Human rights defenders under threat – A shrinking space for civil society* (Index: ACT 30/6011/2017), 16 May 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6011/2017/en/>, p. 25.

funding, among other examples, constitute an interference with Article 22 of the ICCPR (right to freedom of association).<sup>8</sup>

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Gina Romero, “[n]egative and hostile narratives increasingly used to vilify and criminalize civil society and activists deepen the stigmatization of those exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and association. Stigmatization, whether intentional or not, especially when propagated by authorities, effectively denies these fundamental rights. It misrepresents legitimate exercises of freedom as illegal and those involved as criminals or threats to national security, public order or morals. This fuels harmful stereotypes, fosters hostility, justifies punitive measures and triggers undue restrictions on these rights.”<sup>9</sup>

Any restriction on the right to freedom of association must be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the interference is prescribed by law and pursues one or several of the legitimate aims expressly established in the applicable human rights instruments: the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals, or the rights of others. It must also be assessed on a case-by-case basis whether any such interference is necessary and proportionate to achieve the legitimate aim. Moreover, restrictions must not be discriminatory or impair the essence of the right. New legislation creating obligations or imposing any other restrictions on associations must be the result of genuine consultation with civil society. Legislation should also be preceded by an adequate assessment of the risks that it is purported to address and of the impact that the precise measures would have on associations.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

International human rights law and standards recognise the right to defend human rights as an autonomous and independent right.<sup>10</sup> Article 12 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders declares that states should ensure that human rights defenders can work in a safe and enabling environment and to protect them against undue restrictions, violence, threats, discrimination or any form of retaliation due to their human rights activism. It calls on states to ensure that human rights defenders are protected effectively in national law.<sup>11</sup> When states retaliate against human rights defenders or fail to protect them from retaliation in the form of stigmatization, criminalization or otherwise, it creates a “chilling effect” on those who may want to voice their human rights concerns or express their solidarity with the victims of violations.



<sup>8</sup> European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), *Relevant Sources of Law on Article 22 ICCPR: Right to Freedom of Association*, July 2023, <https://ecnl.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECNL-ICNL-Relevant-Sources-of-Law-on-Article-22-ICCPR-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, *Protecting the Rights to Freedom of Association*, 31 July 2024, UN Doc. A/79/263, para. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (previously cited).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 2.

# 5. EXPERIENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

This section summarizes the challenges that human rights defenders, including NGOs, said they faced while functioning in Slovakia, based on their responses to Amnesty International’s questionnaire, as well as subsequent interviews with Amnesty International researchers.

## 5.1 ONLINE AND OFFLINE HARASSMENT

**“[There is] an atmosphere created by government officials—namely, those repeated verbal attacks from the highest levels that systematically undermine civil society and its role in society, and that indiscriminately target certain leaders of these civil society organizations. [...] There is simply an indiscriminate campaign against certain organizations here, which is hitting hard, hitting hard on those organizations and doing harm to the entire sector.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 30 September 2025.

In the questionnaire Amnesty International disseminated to civil society groups in Slovakia, we asked whether the NGOs, or any of its members or employees, faced any threats or harassment in online space over the last 16 months (January 2024-April 2025). Amnesty International also discussed the same questions in its subsequent qualitative interviews with 13 human rights defenders. 35% of organizations who responded to the survey said that either the organization had experienced harassment or threats in the online space (social networks, websites, emails) or some of their members and employees had. They reported incidents of cyberbullying, stigmatizing comments on social networks, harassing emails, hacking attempts, doxxing (revealing personal or identifying information online about someone without their consent),<sup>12</sup> smear campaigns and videos, publication of

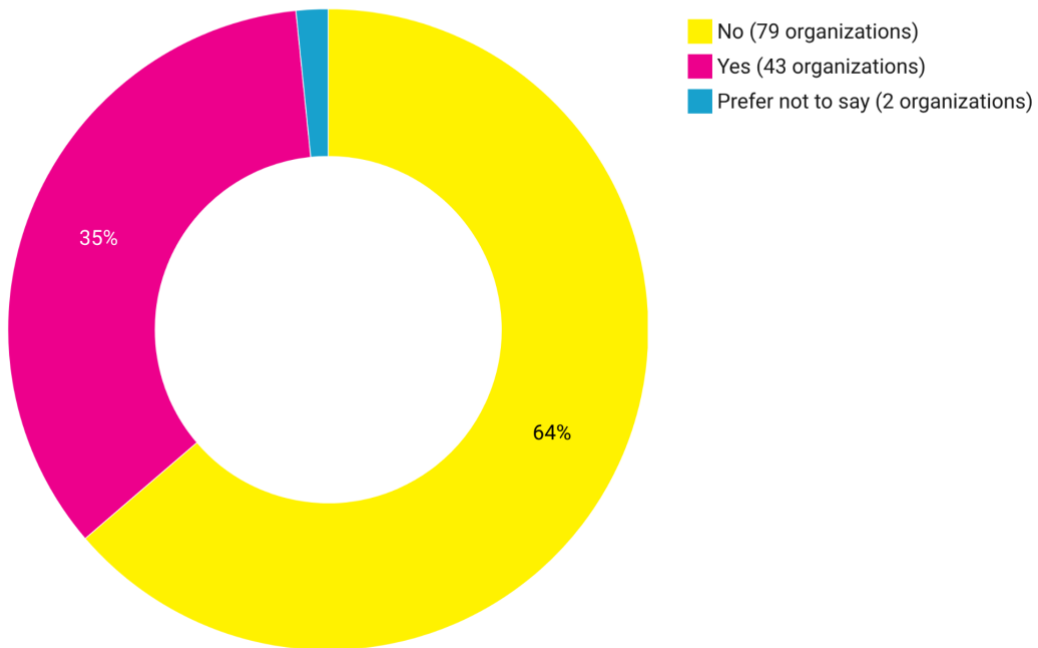
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<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, “What is online violence and abuse against women?”, 20 November 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/what-is-online-violence-and-abuse-against-women/>

threatening lists of “political” NGOs or human rights defenders, or threats of violence in the online environment. Some organizations said they encountered such attacks on a daily basis.

In most cases, organizations shared that the perpetrators of harassment and threats were the general public. In some cases, organizations told Amnesty International that they believed there was a link between harassment from the public and critical statements made by politicians about them, or that they encountered harassment from people who were close to the government. Survey and interview participants also shared that, in some cases, harassment and threats in the online and offline space were also committed directly by politicians or social media influencers.

## Has your organization or anyone individually from its membership/staff faced threats and harassment in the online space in the past 16 months?



As a result, civil society groups explained how they employed a number of strategies to protect themselves from attacks, including deleting of their personal or their organizations’ social media, deleting names and phone numbers from their websites, while also reporting on lack of time, capacity, or financial resources to focus on mitigating strategies, such as cyber security.

One interviewee reported a reduction of harassment against them, compared to ten years ago. They believed this might be because of a lack of interest in their activities. On the other hand, organizations that worked on issues that were perceived to be “controversial”, including environmental rights, LGBTI+ rights, and Roma rights, faced greater challenges. These human rights defenders believed that their experience of offline and online harassment was likely linked to the state’s harmful narratives on these issues.

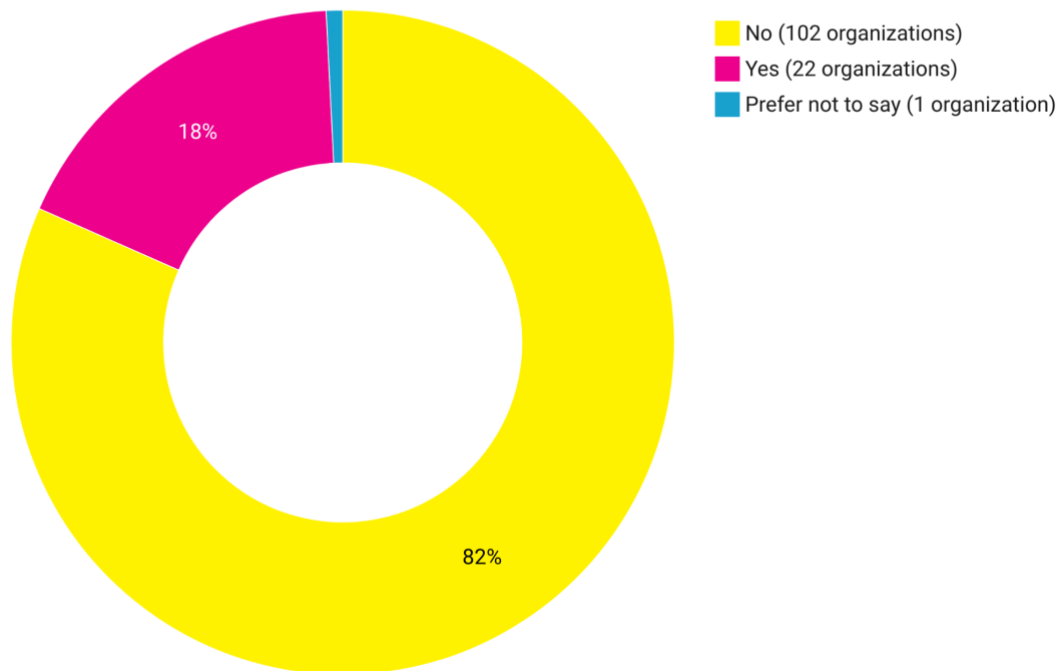
Some organizations mentioned that the harassment extended to their supporters and donors as well. For instance, donors that support activities deemed controversial by the public then face harassment from the public or in the media as well. *“They have already been exposed to all of these, let’s call them negative reactions and so on, and yet they still support us. So basically, these supporters take this into account, and in the past, there was a situation where someone supported us once, had such a negative reaction, and then didn’t want to support us the following year. But those donors who have been with us for a long time, for the last few years, are not really affected (...).”*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 10 October 2025.

In its survey, Amnesty International also asked about whether the NGOs, or any of its members or employees, faced any threats or harassment in person over the last 16 months (January 2024-April 2025). We asked the same questions to 13 human rights defenders in the follow-up interviews.

18% of organizations shared that they and their employees had also experienced harassment in the "offline space," i.e., in person, on the street, in offices, or on public transport, specifically in the form of vulgar language, threats, personal attacks, physical assault, being filmed without their consent, stalking, or damage to property. As with

## Has your organization or anyone individually from its membership/staff faced threats and harassment in the offline space in the past 16 months?



online harassment, they believed the perpetrators were a combination of private individuals, as well as state actors, politicians, or persons associated with them.

Amnesty International also asked the NGOs in the survey, whether the organization had taken any additional measures in response to these threats or harassment (both online and offline). 29 % of the NGOs responded positively, with examples from the survey or interviews, including online moderation of their social media accounts, increasing the physical security of their premises, deleting of their names and place of organizations from the internet, installing security systems or conducting security and resilience trainings.

Only one organization mentioned they had filed a complaint with the police about the harassment they faced, but their experience was not positive:

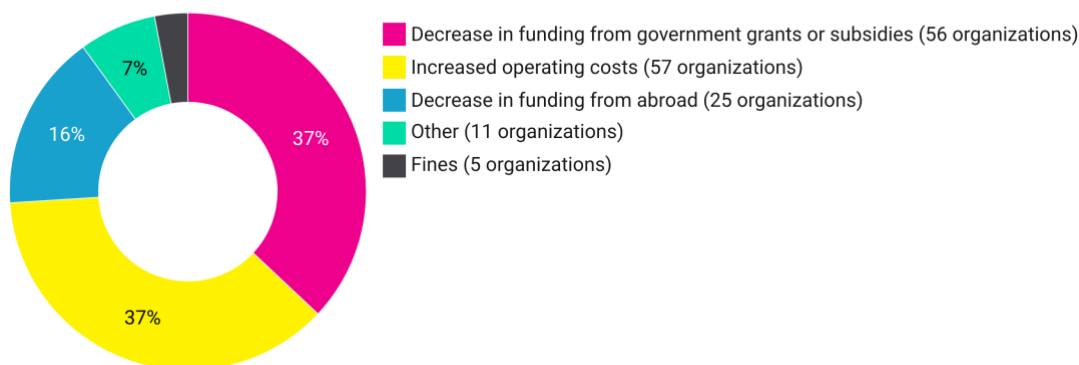
**"... we tried to explain to our colleagues that we had filed criminal complaints, as we knew we had to, we fought for what we believed in, I don't know, we consulted with lawyers, but unfortunately, none of our efforts worked out, just like now. I saw some positives in that some people had to apologize, we just tried, but they always passed it from one court to another and maybe nothing happened with it and at some point, I feel like we were overwhelmed with more work, so we didn't deal with it again (...)."**

Interview with a human rights defender, 13 October 2025

## 5.2 CHALLENGES SECURING FUNDING

Amnesty International asked organizations whether they faced any financial challenges in the past 16 months (January 2024-April 2025); the survey gave a list of possible options (see below) they could choose from. Amnesty International also asked them whether the suspension or cancellation of grants funded by the U.S. government (USAID or U.S. Embassy grants) or private U.S. donors have had an impact on their organization in 2025 as abrupt and arbitrary termination of United States' foreign assistance had put human rights at risk globally.<sup>14</sup>

### Were your organization's finances affected by any of the following financial challenges in the past 16 months? (Select all that apply)



Some NGOs also reported on reductions in financial support from Slovak businesses, as “(f)or some corporate donors, it may become problematic to support certain specific organizations or causes because these organizations are labelled as controversial, problematic, etc. in public discourse. It can also work the other way around, in that they gain new donors and individual donors because they bring with them a certain ethos that they need help, but it can also work the other way around, in that the donor decides to invest in a less controversial cause.”<sup>15</sup>

Some organizations also reported that they believed that other organizations and people were reluctant to openly support them for fear of losing state financial support: “And it happened to us over the last year and a half that we were running a campaign, we had an advocacy activity, and we simply asked other public figures to sign a public appeal, but they didn't want to sign it, they didn't want to get involved, and they unofficially told us that they wouldn't get involved because they have some projects that are actually funded by the state, and if they spoke out, they could lose that support.”<sup>16</sup>

State rhetoric against human rights defenders and civil society also impacts organizations' ability to fund themselves. Some NGOs feared they may lose some of their ongoing income or might be excluded from applying for state funding due to the work they did: “We have limited ourselves [to apply for state financial resources] because we know that we are on some kind of informal blacklist, so there are institutions that we no longer approach because we know that sending projects there would be completely pointless.”<sup>17</sup>

According to the NGOs, these difficulties accessing financing have had a direct impact on them, including limiting of activities, job loss or in some cases, dissolution of NGOs. More NGOs therefore have to compete for limited resources, domestically or internationally:

**“We are constantly looking for ways to reach donors, attract new leads, and so on [...]. So yes, this is constantly happening, and it is happening not only because of the government we have, but also because of what is happening around us geopolitically and internationally. So yes, we are adjusting**

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, USA: *Lives at risk: Chaotic and abrupt cuts to foreign aid put millions of lives at risk* (Index: AMR 51/9408/2025), 29 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9408/2025/en/>

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 16 September 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 28 October 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 30 September 2025.

**this, we are constantly debating how to actually generate income for our activities, and one of the reasons we are doing this is because of this government, which has actually made the whole environment more chaotic.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 7 October 2025

## **5.3 DIFFICULTIES IN MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC DECISIONS**

**“(…) civil society organizations are perceived as enemies of the country, our position is weakened, and we cannot enter into any partnerships with the state. We are not invited to various events; that is, we are still invited, but we are taken less and less seriously, and this has an impact on our specific work. It greatly weakens us and worsens our situation, not only because of the administrative burden, which is very significant, but also because of the political and public discourse on this topic. (…) Since we cooperate with public institutions, including local governments, we need them in order to do our work. And I am a little concerned that the situation in the future will not be favourable enough for us to do our work well.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 9 September 2025

Organizations who responded to Amnesty International’s survey said they had worked directly with local, regional and / or national authorities in the course of their work. While some of the cooperation and participatory processes between NGOs and local, regional or national bodies successfully continue, human rights defenders reported on an overall lack of inclusive and meaningful participatory processes in all matters regarding policy and legislative drafting, even in the policies and laws that directly affect their work in the two year period covered by the survey:

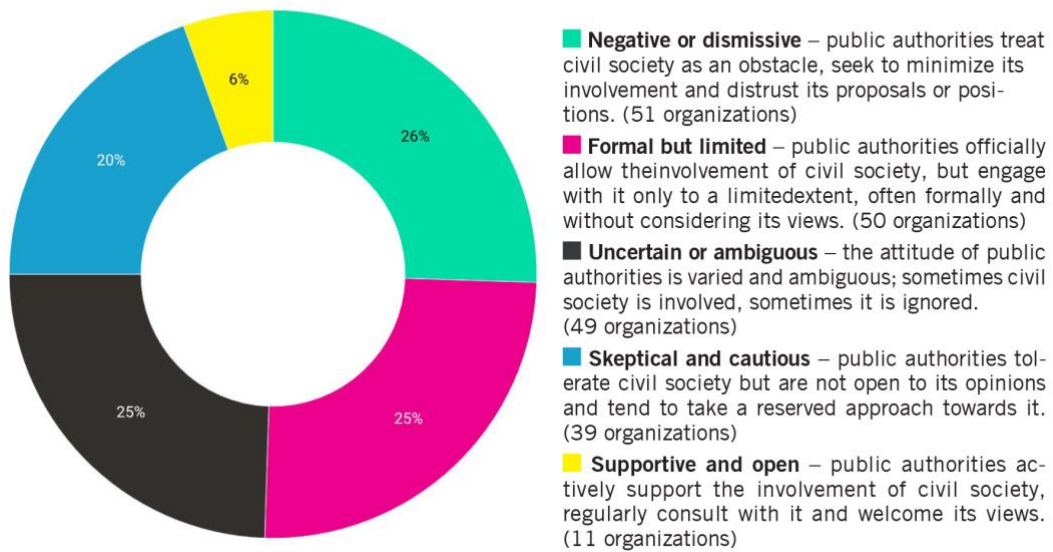
**“(…) in the past, non-governmental organizations were part of the decision-making process; they were simply invited to various advisory bodies, and the opinions of non-governmental organizations that had established themselves over the years as experts on given topics were accepted in the creation of public policies as those of experts who understood the issues. That is**

**no longer the case. Now, the system is simply trying to push these people out of this space, and that could essentially lead to us having bad public policies.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 28 October 2025

The survey asked the following question - How would you describe the general attitude of government authorities toward civil society’s involvement in policymaking? 26% of NGOs described the attitude as “negative or dismissive – authorities view civil society as an obstacle, seek to minimize its involvement, and distrust its proposals or positions” and 20 % as “skeptical and cautious – the authorities tolerate civil society, but are not open to its views and tend to take a reserved approach towards it.”

**How would you describe the general attitude of public authorities towards the involvement of civil society in policymaking? (Select all descriptions that you consider concise.)**



This trend is also evident in certain legislative amendments over the past two years, which are described in more detail in later sections of this briefing.

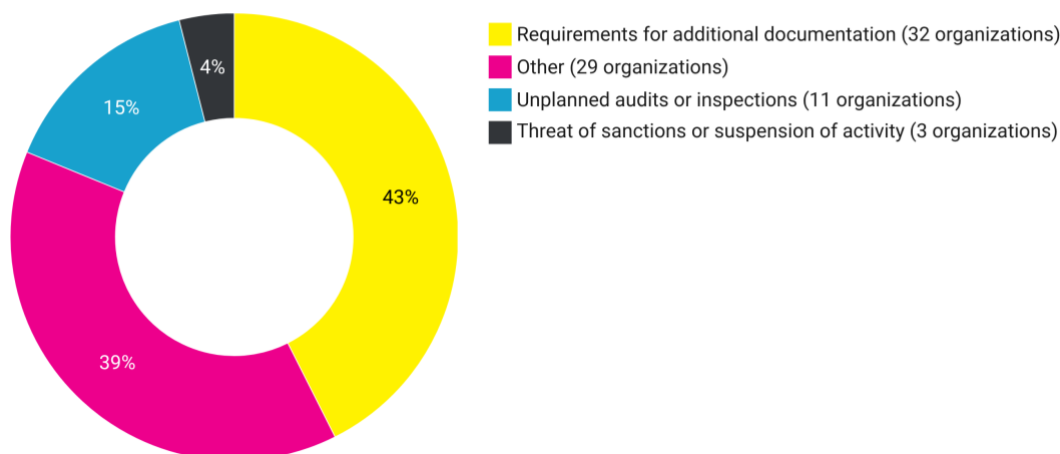
## 5.4 INCREASED REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ON CIVIL SOCIETY

“And it cost us some time and energy over the last year and a half that the state ordered several audits, especially on the grant scheme for [disadvantaged group], which was already over and the project had already been closed, it was evaluated as correct and I don't know what else. And yet a series of audits were still carried out because the task was to conduct some audits, so yes, it affects us in some way. And it affects us that we have to operate in a society where politicians very clearly declare, not all of them, but the coalition politicians very clearly declare that the non-governmental sector is someone who is a foreign influence, a freeloader, and I don't know what else, so it's not easy to work in that environment.”

Interview with a human rights defender, 16 September 2025

Excessive controls or the threat thereof, including through new legislative measures (see section 6) can also have a chilling effect on activities of NGOs or require them to redirect their capacities to burdensome administrative controls instead of carrying out their activities. In the survey conducted by Amnesty International, 54% of organizations claimed that such controls are stronger now, than in the previous five-year period.<sup>18</sup>

### Were some of the following requirements placed on your organization in the past period? (Select all that apply)



Slovak state authorities have argued that the amendment to the Act on NGOs (discussed in more detail in section 6) had to be adopted to “increase transparency of financing the NGO sector,”<sup>19</sup> and has added more reporting obligations through this legislation. However, civil society organizations told Amnesty International that NGOs already had regular independent audits and disclose their financial resources transparently on their websites or in annual reports on a long-term basis. Human rights defenders therefore felt that laws such as this one were stigmatizing and unwarranted: “(...) we went through such enormous audits, yes, directly by the most well-known external audit agencies, that it's just ridiculous, yes, that something is needed. Simply everything they wanted within the framework of the law on non-governmental organizations, we've been doing for a long time.”<sup>20</sup>

While organizations agreed that oversight and monitoring of NGOs was needed, they explained to Amnesty International that the current controls were “excessive and harassing”. In its reasoning on the unconstitutionality of the amendment to the legislation on NGOs, the Constitutional Court mentioned that “(t)he fact that some NGOs

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International Slovakia, “Démonizácia, očierňovanie a vyhrážanie – čomu čelia MVO na Slovensku v dôsledku autoritárskych praktík [Demonization, smear campaigns, and threats – what NGOs in Slovakia face as a result of authoritarian practices]” (previously cited).

<sup>19</sup> Slovakia, Dôvodová správa k zákonu č. 109/2025 Z.z., ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 213/1997 Z. z. o neziskových organizáciách poskytujúcich všeobecne prospešné služby v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa menia a dopĺňajú niektoré zákony [Explanatory memorandum to Act No. 109/2025 Coll. amending Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services and amending certain acts, as amended], 2025, <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=544281> (in Slovak).

<sup>20</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 29 September 2025.

carry out activities that resonate in the public sphere and that they are part of public discourse or the oversight of public authorities does not automatically transform them into public authorities or other public-law entities to which the requirement of transparency and public accountability should apply by analogy, as is the case with political parties.”<sup>21</sup>

As a response on the decision of the unconstitutionality of the Act on NGOs by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, in February 2026, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic announced a further goal of enhanced monitoring of NGOs by means of controls by relevant state bodies. Through a proposal “aimed at ensuring greater transparency in the financing of non-governmental non-profit organizations and their activities”,<sup>22</sup> it imposed an obligation on the relevant state authorities to conduct inspections of non-governmental organizations.<sup>23</sup>

In its explanatory memorandum, the Government explains the need to implement stricter controls of NGOs as follows: “Since the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic has, through this ruling, effectively blocked the possibility of increasing the transparency of funding and the continued operation of non-governmental non-profit organizations, and since a government audit of selected non-governmental non-profit organizations has revealed shortcomings in the use of public funds, it is proposed that the relevant state authorities utilize all existing statutory control mechanisms and conduct audits of non-governmental non-profit organizations, focusing on compliance with the legal conditions governing their activities, financing, and financial management, with particular emphasis on the use and management of public funds, as well as on compliance with labor law regulations, regulations on occupational safety and health, and legal provisions on public procurement and personal data protection.”<sup>24</sup>

## 5.5 SOLIDARITY

Despite the existence of increased uncertainty, and relentless attacks from the state or the public, many organizations have expressed their determination to continue their important work, support other non-governmental organizations, and continue to defend human rights in Slovakia. While human rights defenders expressed the impacts of these attacks on their work and lives, including fear and exhaustion, they also communicated methods of resistance and solidarity:

**“(...) on the one hand, I see a great surge in the civil sector, which is very active, very supportive of each other, i.e., I feel that, contrary to what I would have expected before, that these organizations would start to fragment and begin to act against each other, so far I see great solidarity and great mutual support, even from different segments of civil society, i.e. if NGOs that support the rule of law or human rights are attacked, they are defended by NGOs that, for example, provide social services or those who care for people, people with disabilities [...]. So, these are aspects where, on the one hand, I would say that the civil sector is holding on and functioning and trying to consolidate and maintain its position, not to give up, to defend itself, but at the same time it is becoming increasingly difficult.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 9 September 2025

In addition, human rights defenders value solidarity and advocacy provided by their supporters from the general public: “(...) sometimes our community of supporters puts itself in the role of advocates, explaining why social justice is important and why it is important to have organizations like ours. These are very nice things.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, PL ÚS. 11/2025, 17 December 2025, para 54.

<sup>22</sup> Slovakia, Návrh na zvýšenie účinnosti kontrolnej činnosti voči mimovládny neziskovým organizáciám v kontexte nálezu Ústavného súdu Slovenskej republiky PL. ÚS 11/2025-116, s ohľadom na zvýšenie transparentnosti financovania mimovládnych neziskových organizácií a ich činnosti [Proposal to increase the effectiveness of control activities vis-à-vis non-governmental non-profit organizations in the context of the ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic PL. ÚS 11/2025-116, with regard to increasing the transparency of the financing of non-governmental non-profit organizations and their activities], 2026, <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/31575/1> (in Slovak).

<sup>23</sup> Slovakia, Dôvodová správa k Návrhu na zvýšenie účinnosti kontrolnej činnosti voči mimovládny neziskovým organizáciám v kontexte nálezu Ústavného súdu Slovenskej republiky PL. ÚS 11/2025-116, s ohľadom na zvýšenie transparentnosti financovania mimovládnych neziskových organizácií a ich činnosti [Explanatory Memorandum to Proposal to increase the effectiveness of control activities vis-à-vis non-governmental non-profit organizations in the context of the ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic PL. ÚS 11/2025-116, with regard to increasing the transparency of the financing of non-governmental non-profit organizations and their activities], 2026, <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/31575/1> (in Slovak).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 25 September 2025.

# 6. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS REINFORCE CHALLENGES

In this context, where NGOs and human rights defenders feel additionally burdened in their functioning, this section describes how the Slovak state has responded: instead of easing restrictions and functioning, in line with human rights standards, steps taken by the government have added to the challenges faced by NGOs and human rights defenders.

## 6.1 RECENT LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

In addition to international and regional human rights instruments, in Slovakia, the right to freedom of association is also protected under Article 29(1) of the Constitution, where the right to freedom of association is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to associate with others in associations, societies, or other groups.<sup>26</sup> The Constitution further stipulates that the exercise of this right may be restricted only in cases provided for by law, if it is necessary in a democratic society for the security of the state, the protection of public order, the prevention of criminal offences, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>27</sup>

The main legal framework for the establishment and functioning of NGOs is the Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on non-profit organizations (Act on NGOs).<sup>28</sup> While the most recent amendment to the Act on NGOs of April 2025 was a primary concern for Amnesty International (these concerns were shared by respondents to our survey and interviews), there were several other legislative measures adopted that encroach on the right to freedom of association and the functioning of NGOs in Slovakia.

### AMENDMENT TO THE ACT ON THE NGOS

In April 2025, the National Council adopted an amendment to Act No. 109/2025 Coll. on non-profit organizations,<sup>29</sup> which significantly tightened the obligations of NGOs and introduced new administrative obligations, sanctions, and control mechanisms. One of its stated goals as explained in its explanatory memorandum<sup>30</sup> was to "increase

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<sup>26</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 460/1992 Zb. Ústava Slovenskej republiky [Act No. 460/1992 Coll. Constitution of the Slovak Republic] (previously cited), Article 29 (1).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Article 29 (3).

<sup>28</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 213/1997 Z.z. o neziskových organizáciách poskytujúcich všeobecne prospešné služby [Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on Nonprofit Organizations Providing Services of General Interest], 1997, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1997/213/> (in Slovak).

<sup>29</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 109/2025 Z.z. Zákon, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 213/1997 Z. z. o neziskových organizáciách poskytujúcich všeobecne prospešné služby v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa menia a dopĺňajú niektoré zákony [Act No. 109/2025 Coll. amending Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services and amending certain acts, as amended], 2025, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2025/109/> (in Slovak).

<sup>30</sup> Slovakia, Dôvodová správa k Zákonu č. 109/2025 Zákon, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 213/1997 Z. z. o neziskových organizáciách poskytujúcich všeobecne prospešné služby v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa menia a dopĺňajú niektoré zákony [Explanatory Memorandum to Act No. 109/2025 Coll. amending Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services and amending certain acts, as amended], 2025, [nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=544281](https://nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=544281) (in Slovak), p. 1.

credibility and transparency of the NGOs," but in practice, the legislation created an unreasonable regime that may have had a chilling effect on association, freedom of expression, and the activities of NGOs as public watchdogs. The legislation was deemed as an unjustified interference with the right to freedom of association, including by OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR),<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>32</sup> and the Venice Commission,<sup>33</sup> Slovak Public Defender of Rights<sup>34</sup> and civil society organizations, including Amnesty International.<sup>35</sup>

The Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic found the law to be incompatible with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic in December 2025.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, the Court found that the “disclosure of information about contributors and the amount of their contributions disproportionately interferes with their right to privacy” and “has the potential to interfere with the name and personal honour of natural persons and the good reputation of legal persons.”<sup>37</sup> Regarding the obligation to keep and publish reports, the Court noted that such an obligation is not in itself an unreasonable administrative burden, but “has a deterrent effect on contributors and their willingness to contribute to the functioning of civil associations (...)”, which “may jeopardize their functioning.”<sup>38</sup> With regards to classification of NGOs as obligatory entities under the Freedom of Information Act,<sup>39</sup> the Court ruled that the amendment transferred obligations typical for public bodies to NGOs without sufficient reasoning and created an “unreasonable administrative burden, which can also lead to harassment by other entities and, consequently, to serious interference with the very essence of the activities for which the NGOs were established.”<sup>40</sup>

While some of the negative direct impact of the law are therefore no longer a challenge, the discourse around its adoption, including by state authorities and Parliamentarians describing the need to enact such legislation by labelling NGOs and human rights defenders as a threat<sup>41</sup> may have long-term harmful consequences (this is discussed in more detail in the section below).

## AMENDMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACT

In addition to the amendment to the NGO law, the 2024 amendments to the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (EIA Act) illustrate how the government is making legislative changes that limit the ability of all people, including human rights defenders and civil society groups, to participate in decisions that impact them and people’s human rights more broadly.

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<sup>31</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR): *Slovak Republic: Urgent Opinion on the Law Amending Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on Non-Profit Organizations Providing Public Benefit Services and Amending Other Acts*, 16 April 2025, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/593495>

<sup>32</sup> Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Slovak Parliament should not adopt legislation that threatens civil society”, 09 April 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/the-slovak-parliament-should-not-adopt-legislation-that-threatens-civil-society>.

<sup>33</sup> Venice Commission of the Council of Europe: *Slovak Republic – Opinion on the amendments to the Law “On non-profit organizations providing services of general interest”*, 13 October 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1256>

<sup>34</sup> Public Defender of Rights, “Obrátil som sa na Ústavný súd vo veci zákona o mimovládnych organizáciách. Niektoré jeho časti podkopávajú princíp slobody, znemožňujú participáciu občianskej spoločnosti na verejnom živote a zavádzajú neprimerané štátne zásahy umožňujúce „špicľovanie [I appealed to the Constitutional Court regarding the law on non-governmental organizations. Some parts of it undermine the principle of freedom, prevent civil society from participating in public life, and introduce disproportionate state intervention allowing for “spying.”]”, 15 August 2025, <https://vop.gov.sk/obratil-som-sa-na-ustavny-sud-vo-veci-zakona-o-mimovladnych-organizaciach-niektore-jeho-casti-podkopavaju-princip-slobody-znemoznuju-participaciu-obcianskej-spolocnosti-na-verejnom-zivote-a/> (in Slovak).

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International Slovakia, “Lex MVO: Občianska spoločnosť v ohrození [Lex NGO: Civil society in danger]”, 25 November 2024, <https://www.amnesty.sk/lex-mvo-obcianska-spolocnost-v-ohrozeni/> (in Slovak); Amnesty International, “Slovakia: Anti-NGO law a full-frontal assault on civil society”, 30 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/slovakia-anti-ngo-law-a-full-frontal-assault-on-civil-society/>; Human Rights Coalition, “We reject the law against non-governmental organizations”, 9 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/we-reject-the-law-against-non-governmental-organizations/>; Amnesty International Slovakia, “Analýza k návrhu zákona proti MVO z pohľadu porušenia ústavnoprávneho zákazu diskriminácie [Analysis of the Proposed Anti-NGO Bill from the Perspective of Violations of the Constitutional Prohibition on Discrimination]”, 14 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/analiza-k-navrhu-zakona-proti-mvo-z-pohladu-porusenia-ustavnopravneho-zakazu-diskriminacie/> (in Slovak); Amnesty International Slovakia, “Novela zákona o neziskových organizáciách ohrozuje občiansku spoločnosť [The amendment to the Nonprofit Organizations Act threatens civil society]”, 26 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.sk/novela-zakona-o-neziskovych-organizaciach-ohrozuje-obciansku-spolocnost/> (in Slovak).

<sup>36</sup> Slovakia, Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, “Zákon, ktorý novelizuje právnu úpravu mimovládnych organizácií, je v rozpore s ústavou [The law amending the legal regulation of non-governmental organizations is contrary to the Constitution]”, 18 December 2025, [https://www.ustavnyud.sk/aktualne-informacie/aktuality/-/asset\\_publisher/B99toBHzi1uA/content/z%C3%A1kon-ktor%C3%BD-novelizuje-pr%C3%A1vnu-%C3%BApravu-mimovl%C3%A1dnych-organiz%C3%A1ci%C3%AD-je-v-rozpore-s-%C3%BAstavou](https://www.ustavnyud.sk/aktualne-informacie/aktuality/-/asset_publisher/B99toBHzi1uA/content/z%C3%A1kon-ktor%C3%BD-novelizuje-pr%C3%A1vnu-%C3%BApravu-mimovl%C3%A1dnych-organiz%C3%A1ci%C3%AD-je-v-rozpore-s-%C3%BAstavou) (in Slovak).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 211/2000 Z. z. o slobodnom prístupe k informáciám a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov (zákon o slobode informácií) [Act No. 211/2000 Coll. on Free Access to Information and on Amendments to Certain Acts (Freedom of Information Act)], 2000, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2000/211/> (in Slovak).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> SITA, “Moc mimovládok je na Slovensku extrémna. Hlas by si mal obhájiť prípadné zmeny v novom zákone, tvrdí Gedra [The power of NGOs in Slovakia is extreme. Hlas should advocate for potential changes in the new law, says Gedra]”, 14 April 2025, <https://sita.sk/moc-mimovladok-je-na-slovensku-extremna-hlas-by-si-mal-obhajit-pripadne-zmeny-v-novom-zakone-tvrdi-gedra/> (in Slovak); Aktuality, “Robert Fico ide po krku mimovládkam. V minulosti im štedro rozdal 30 miliónov eur [Robert Fico is out to get NGOs. In the past, he generously handed out 30 million euros to them]”, 7 April 2025, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/H4eEU52/robert-fico-ide-po-krku-mimovladkam-v-minulosti-im-stedro-rozdal-30-milionov-eur/> (in Slovak).

The 2024 EIA amendments limit the possibility for participation in two ways. First, the Amendment to the EIA Act (Act No. 350/2024 Coll. amending and supplementing Act No. 24/2006 Coll. on Environmental Impact Assessment and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts, as amended, and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Other Acts),<sup>42</sup> concentrates the initial stages of the process primarily among state authorities and the municipality where the activity is directly located, thereby delaying the effective entry of the broader public and neighboring municipalities into the process.

Under the new rules, while the legal definition of an “affected municipality” still includes those whose territory may be impacted, their procedural standing in the early scoping phase is restricted. This amendment significantly limits the early-stage participation of environmental human rights defenders and civil society by setting specific procedural hurdles (such as the requirement to submit reasoned comments only at later stages) to gain the status of a party to the proceedings.<sup>43</sup>

## **ACT ON CERTAIN MEASURES TO IMPROVE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (“LEX ASSASSINATION”)**

The ability of the human rights defenders and the public to expose injustice and abuse and demand accountability has also been restricted in 2024 through the so-called “Lex Assassination” Act, which severely restricted the right to freedom of assembly, including through introduction of blanket bans. The Act was submitted as a government bill and was delivered to the National Council in June 2024.<sup>44</sup> The proposal was discussed under an accelerated legislative procedure and approved by the National Council on June 27, 2024. It was subsequently published in the Collection of Laws in July 2024, as Act No. 166/2024 Coll. on Certain Measures to Improve the Security Situation in the Slovak Republic (Act on Security Measures – “Lex Assassination”). The Government stated that the reason for introducing this bill was to respond to the security situation in the Slovak Republic following the assassination attempt on the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, on 15 May 2024, in Handlová.

The manner in which the Act on Security Measures (Lex Assassination) was adopted –through an accelerated legislative procedure without public involvement and spanning just 8 days from the proposal of the draft to its adoption in the first reading,<sup>45</sup> as well as several of its provisions, drew strong criticism from the civil society organizations,<sup>46</sup> Public Defender of Rights<sup>47</sup> and OSCE/ODIHR.<sup>48</sup> Critics particularly objected to the use of the expedited legislative procedure and warned that certain provisions posed risks to human rights and the rule of law.

With regards to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the Act severely restricts peaceful assemblies, including provisions that limit protests near government buildings and private residences.<sup>49</sup> The law introduced extensive new restrictions, such as blanket bans to conduct assemblies in the perimeter of 50 metres from the seats of the President of the Slovak Republic, the Government, the National Council or the Constitutional Court, which are presumptively disproportionate and can interfere with the organizers’ freedom to choose the time place and manner of the assembly.<sup>50</sup> The amendment also extended discretionary powers by municipalities to ban peaceful

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<sup>42</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 350/2024 Z.z. ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 24/2006 Z. z. o posudzovaní vplyvov na životné prostredie a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov v znení neskorších predpisov a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov [Act No. 350/2024 Coll. amending and supplementing Act No. 24/2006 Coll. on Environmental Impact Assessment and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts], 2024, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2024/350/> (in Slovak).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 166/2024 Z.z. o niektorých opatreniach na zlepšenie bezpečnostnej situácie v Slovenskej republike [Act No. 166/2024 Coll. on Certain Measures to Improve the Security Situation in the Slovak Republic], 2024, [https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2024/166/vyhlasene\\_znenie.html](https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2024/166/vyhlasene_znenie.html) (in Slovak).

<sup>45</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, *Urgent interim opinion on Article I of the Draft act on “some measures to improve the security situation in the Slovak Republic”*, 25 June 2024, [https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/2024-06-25%20FINAL%20ODIHR%20Urgent%20Interim%20Opinion%20on%20Freedom%20of%20Peaceful%20Assembly\\_Slovak%20Republic\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/2024-06-25%20FINAL%20ODIHR%20Urgent%20Interim%20Opinion%20on%20Freedom%20of%20Peaceful%20Assembly_Slovak%20Republic_ENGLISH.pdf), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International, “Slovakia: Draconian bill restricting right to protest must be redrawn”, 18 June 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/06/slovakia-draconian-bill-restricting-right-to-protest-must-be-redrawn/> and VIA IURIS, “Verbal attacks on judges continue (Zeitgeist 5.)”, 10 July 2024, <https://viaiuris.sk/aktuality/verbal-attacks-on-judges-continue-zeitgeist-5/>

<sup>47</sup> Office of the Public Defender of Rights, “Public Defender of Rights on the so-called lex assassination: I recommend that the government and parliament adopt stronger guarantees to protect the constitutional right of citizens to assemble. I do not recommend making non-payment of fines a criminal offence [Verejný ochranca práv k tzv. lex atentát: Vláde a parlamentu odporúčam prijať vyššie záruky na ochranu ústavného práva na zhromažďovanie občanov. Z neplatenia pokút spravím trestný čin neodporúčam]”, 18 June 2024, <https://vop.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Tlacova-sprava-VOP-18.-06.-2024.pdf> (in Slovak).

<sup>48</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Urgent interim opinion on Article I of the Draft act on “some measures to improve the security situation in the Slovak Republic”* (previously cited).

<sup>49</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 166/2024 Z.z. o niektorých opatreniach na zlepšenie bezpečnostnej situácie v Slovenskej republike [Act No. 166/2024 Coll. on certain measures to improve the security situation in the Slovak Republic] (previously cited); OHCHR, “Experts alarmed by deterioration of fundamental freedoms and civic space in Slovak Republic”, 10 March 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/experts-alarmed-deterioration-fundamental-freedoms-and-civic-space-slovak>

<sup>50</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 21, 24, 38 and 55.

assemblies. State authorities also expanded reasons for banning peaceful assemblies, including by broadly defined existence of a “reasonable concern” of a clash amongst participants of several assemblies or if the peaceful assembly would disturb the privacy and peace of several people's homes.<sup>51</sup>

International human rights standards require that restrictions imposed on peaceful assemblies always comply with a three-part test (legality, legitimate aim, necessity and proportionality) and where the imposition of restrictions by the state is deemed necessary, the authorities should seek to apply the least intrusive measures, with a prohibition of assembly remaining always a measure of last resort.<sup>52</sup> The Act is currently being admitted for further proceedings by the Constitutional Court following an initiation of proceedings by a group of Parliamentarians. Specifically, the Constitutional Court will examine whether certain provisions of the Act, among them also those related to restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly are compatible with the principles of the rule of law, freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly under the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>53</sup>

## RESOLUTION ON THE SUBMISSION OF INFORMATION ON THE PROVISION OF FUNDS TO NON-GOVERNMENTAL NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

In March 2025 the Government adopted *Resolution No. 119/2025 on the submission of information on the provision of funds to non-governmental non-profit organisations*.<sup>54</sup> In it, the Government imposed an obligation for state authorities to submit for governmental discussion information on the intention to conclude contracts on the provision of funds to NGOs by state authorities before the contracts are signed.

State officials promoted the adopted resolution as a means to control “political non-governmental organizations” and as needed to curtail activities that “polarize society” or “promote an ideology with which [citizens] disagree”<sup>55</sup>, thus creating a potential chilling effect for NGOs that would be applying for funding distributed by the state.

## 6.2 HARMFUL RHETORIC

In March 2025, UN Special Procedures mandate holders issued a warning about the deterioration of human rights and civic space in Slovakia. Amongst other issues, the experts called upon the Government to immediately end stigmatization and persecution of NGOs and journalists while noting that “*human rights defenders, journalists, and protesters have increasingly become a target, including Government smear campaigns against several critical journalists and restrictions on press access to official events curtailing the rights of independent media.*”<sup>56</sup>

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association has previously noted how hostile and stigmatizing narratives that directly or indirectly target associations and assemblies violate or facilitate violations of human rights that are protected under international human rights law, such as rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, freedom of expression, non-discrimination, participation in public affairs, equality before the law and equal protection of the law or prohibition of arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence.<sup>57</sup>

Slovak authorities have engaged in negative discourse, stigmatization and negative labelling of human rights defenders and civil society groups for several years now.<sup>58</sup> However, non-governmental organizations that

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<sup>51</sup> Slovakia, Zákon č. 166/2024 Z.z. o niektorých opatreniach na zlepšenie bezpečnostnej situácie v Slovenskej republike [Act No. 166/2024 Coll. on certain measures to improve the security situation in the Slovak Republic] (previously cited), para 6.

<sup>52</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21) (previously cited), paras. 4 and 37.

<sup>53</sup> Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, PL ÚS 11/2025.

<sup>54</sup> Slovakia, Uznesenie Vlády Slovenskej Republiky č. 119 z 5. Marca 2025 k predkladaniu informácií o poskytovaní finančných prostriedkov mimovládny neziskovým organizáciám [Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 119 of March 5, 2025 on the submission of information on the provision of funds to non-governmental non-profit organizations], <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/30501/1> (in Slovak).

<sup>55</sup> SMER – Sociálna Demokracia, “Stačilo - Vláda SR bude dohliadať na to, ktorým mimovládkam a na čo idú naše spoločné peniaze [Enough – The Slovak government will monitor which NGOs receive our tax dollars and how they are spent]”, 10 March 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwtdPhxz7BM>; Amnesty International Slovakia, “Štát neprestáva s očierňovaním občianskej spoločnosti [The government continues to smear civil society]” (previously cited); SITA, “Ficova vláda bude kontrolovať financovanie mimo vládok, niektoré však budú mať výnimku [Fico's government will monitor funding for NGOs, but some will be exempt]”, 05 March 2025, <https://sita.sk/ficova-vlada-bude-kontrolovat-financovanie-mimovladok-niektore-vsak-budu-mat-vynimku/>.

<sup>56</sup> OHCHR, “Experts alarmed by deterioration of fundamental freedoms and civic space in Slovak Republic” (previously cited).

<sup>57</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, *Protecting the Rights to Freedom of Association* (previously cited), para. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Amnesty International Slovakia, “Reakcia na ďalšiu stigmatizáciu občianskej spoločnosti [A Response to Further Stigmatization of Civil Society]”, 20 March 2018, <https://www.amnesty.sk/reakcia-na-dalsiu-stigmatizaciu-obcianskej-spolocnosti/> (in Slovak).

participated in our research and the UN human rights bodies<sup>59</sup> have highlighted how authorities have intensified their attacks in recent years, engaging in smear campaigns and stigmatization of human rights defenders, especially those working on human rights of disadvantaged groups.

Already in its foundational policy statement of October 2023, the current Government announced its intention to target what it deemed as “political” NGOs: *“The government is particularly committed to standardizing the democratic political system and fostering healthy competition among political parties. The government also recognizes the role of non-governmental organizations. However, it cannot accept that politically motivated entities, often funded from abroad, influence democratic political competition in a non-transparent manner. The government is prepared to provide financial support to non-governmental organizations engaged in public-benefit activities, such as in the social, humanitarian, environmental, educational, and sports sectors, among others.”*<sup>60</sup>

In addition, state authorities have directly engaged in this harmful stereotyping. For instance, Prime Minister Robert Fico and Minister of Interior Matúš Šutaj Eštok accused Slovak civil society of planning a “state coup”<sup>61</sup> and engaged in describing NGOs as “foreign agents”.<sup>62</sup> Minister of Tourism and Sport Rudolf Huliak (while being a nominee for the post of Minister of the Environment) engaged in targeting environmental NGOs, claiming they are “draining the state budget”.<sup>63</sup> Minister of Culture, Martina Šimkovičová publicly engaged in disparaging narratives against LGBTI+ human rights defenders, including claiming they provide a “sexualized show to youth” and alleging to LGBTI+ human rights defenders and NGOs to being morally corrupt, including calling LGBTI+ people a “malignant ideology”.<sup>64</sup>

One human rights defender described the negative impact of the discourse around enacting the amendment to the law on non-governmental organizations as follows:

**“I think that the environment has deteriorated significantly overall, very significantly for some segments of non-governmental organizations, but it has also deteriorated in terms of the overall atmosphere for all non-governmental organizations. [...] A large part of government politicians are pushing the narrative in public discourse that non-governmental organizations are something bad, something threatening, something non-transparent [...] That narrative is supposedly pushing [that there are] bad NGOs, political NGOs, and that there are also good NGOs, but I think this is beyond people's ability to distinguish, and I think that overall, the environment for these organizations is very bad in terms of the overall perception of what they do, why they do it, and what their mission is.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 16 September 2025

This rhetoric was particularly common during the drafting of the amendment to the Act on NGOs (the law is described in more detail above). Since the beginning of the drafting process in 2024, state authorities spoke in negative terms about NGOs, especially those that were to them deemed as “political”. First legislative drafting

<sup>59</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), Concluding Observations: Slovakia, 8 April 2026, UN Doc. CCPR/C/SVK/CO/5, paras. 41-42; OHCHR, “Experts alarmed by deterioration of fundamental freedoms and civic space in Slovak Republic” (previously cited).

<sup>60</sup> Government of the Slovak Republic, *Programové vyhlásenie Vlády Slovenskej Republiky 2023 - 2027 „Lepšie, pokojnejšie a bezpečnejšie žiť“* [Policy Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2023–2027: “A Better, More Peaceful, and Safer Life”], 2023, [programove\\_vyhlasenie\\_vlady\\_sr.pdf](#) (in Slovak), p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Pravda, “Pri vyšetřovaní podozrenia na prevrat preverujú policajti viaceré verzie, vyhostili už niekoľko osôb [Police are investigating several versions of events in connection with suspected coup, and have already deported several individuals]”, 17 June 2025, [https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/756047-pri-vysetrovani-podozrenia-na-prevrat-preveruju-policajti-viacere-verzie-vyhostili-uz-niekolko-osob/](#) (in Slovak); SITA, “Občianske iniciatívy chcú odstúpenie Šutaja Eštoka a šéfa SIS, žiadajú aj ospravedlnenie pre údajný prevrat [Citizen groups are calling for the resignation of Šutaj Eštok and the head of the SIS, and are also demanding an apology for the alleged coup]”, 11 August 2025, [https://sita.sk/obcianske-iniciativy-chcu-odstupenie-sutaja-estoka-a-sefa-sis-ziadaju-aj-ospravedlnenie-pre-udajny-prevrat/](#) (in Slovak).

<sup>62</sup> Aktuality, “Fico pohrozil neziskovkám zákonom USA. V skutočnosti vyzdvihuje ruský vzor [Fico threatened non-profit organizations with US law. In reality, he is highlighting the Russian model]”, 18 October 2023, [https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/D0gZCxD/fico-pohrozil-neziskovkam-zakonom-usa-v-skutocnosti-vyzdvihuje-rusky-vzor/](#) (in Slovak).

<sup>63</sup> Aktuality, “Nie sme „nacucnuti“ na štátny rozpočet, väčšinu peňazí získavame z Bruselu, reagujú ochranári z BROZ [We aren't dependent on the state budget; we get most of our funding from Brussels,] say conservationists from BROZ”, 19 October 2023, [https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/uCkaHTp/nie-sme-nacucnuti-na-statny-rozpocet-vacsinu-penazi-ziskavame-z-bruselu-reaguju-ochranari-z-broz/](#) (in Slovak).

<sup>64</sup> SITA, “Šimkovičová avizuje, že už nebudú poskytovať dotácie na školenia mládeže na sexualizovanú šou LGBTI” [Šimkovičová announces that subsidies will no longer be provided for ‘youth training on sexualized LGBTI performances’], 13 January 2024, [https://sita.sk/simkovicova-avizuje-ze-uz-nebudu-poskytovat-dotacie-na-skolenia-mladeze-na-sexualizovanu-sou-lgbti/](#) (in Slovak); TA3, “Šimkovičová nazvala LGBTI ľudí ‘zhubnou’ ideológiou. Evanjelická cirkev sa ich zastala, odmieta šírenie nenávisťi [Šimkovičová called LGBTI people a ‘pernicious’ ideology. The Evangelical Church has come to their defense and rejects the spread of hatred]”, 17 February 2025, [https://www.ta3.com/clanok/980937/simkovicova-nazvala-lgbti-ludi-zhubnou-ideologiou-evanjelicka-cirkev-sa-ich-zastala-odmieta-sirenienavenavisti](#) (in Slovak).

started in March 2024, around the time other governments in Europe enacted so called “foreign agent laws” - that is, laws that “specifically target NGOs and not-for-profits that receive foreign funds and require them to register as foreign agents, organisations serving the interests of a foreign power, or agents of foreign influence.”<sup>65</sup>

In October 2023, Prime Minister Robert Fico declared: “... the era when non-governmental organizations ruled this country is over”<sup>66</sup> and announced that he would enact legislation requiring non-governmental organizations with income from abroad to be labelled as “foreign agents”.<sup>67</sup> On March 2024, Parliamentarians submitted a draft law introducing the labelling of NGOs that receive foreign funding as “organizations with foreign support”.<sup>68</sup> This was discussed in the Parliament on 30 April 2024. By this time, the Court of Justice of the European Union had already ruled that a similar designation of NGOs in Hungary was contrary to EU law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU<sup>69</sup> or ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Ecodefence and others v. Russia*.<sup>70</sup>

Despite these rulings, similar “foreign agents” legislations continue to be introduced by governments of other countries, including Georgia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>71</sup>

**“I perceived it as part of the Fico government's broader pressure against the non-governmental non-profit sector, against civil society, which was to be expected, since it had been clear since the election campaign that Robert Fico had targeted civil society as one of the entities he had decided to attack and restrict. So it was not a surprise, but rather an expected move.”**

Interview with a human rights defender, 30 September 2025

While the final amendment to the legislation removed the designation “organisations with foreign support”, negative discourse continued. During the process of submitting and adopting the legislation in question, state representatives commented on the alleged “political” activities of NGOs.<sup>72</sup> According to the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Gina Romero, such “foreign agents” and similar legislation and discourse to undermine human rights defenders: “Often authorities and public figures have used deliberately stigmatizing rhetoric against civil society and activists to discredit and exclude them from public discourse and restrict their ability to influence politics and decision-making.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>65</sup> International Service for Human Rights, “Spread of ‘foreign agent’ laws in Central, Eastern Europe a growing threat to civil society”, 26 February 2025, <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/spread-of-foreign-agent-laws-in-eastern-europe-posing-increasing-threats-to-civil-society/>; see also OSCE/ODIHR, *Georgia: Note of the Legislative Initiatives on Transparency and Regulation of Associations Funded from Abroad of So-called “Foreign Agents Laws” and Similar Legislation and Their Compliance with International Human Rights Standards*, 20 October 2023, <https://odhr.osce.org/odhr/556074>

<sup>66</sup> *Hospodárske noviny*, “Ak nespĺnia nové pravidlá, skončia. Národníci posielajú do parlamentu kontroverzný návrh o mimovládach [If they don't comply with the new rules, they'll be finished. Nationalists send controversial proposal on NGOs to parliament]”, 12 April 2024, <https://hnonline.sk/slovensko/96143949-ak-nesplnia-nove-pravidla-skoncia-narodnici-posielaju-do-parlamentu-kontroverzny-navrh-o-mimovladkach> (in Slovak).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Denník N*, “Nie zahraniční agenti, ale ‘organizácie so zahraničnou podporou’. SNS predložila zákon proti mimovládkam [Not foreign agents, but ‘organizations with foreign support’. The SNS has introduced a bill targeting NGOs]”, 2 April 2024, <https://dennikn.sk/3916401/nie-zahranicni-agenti-ale-organizacie-so-zahranicnou-podporou-sns-predlozila-zakon-proti-mimovladkam/> (in Slovak).

<sup>69</sup> Amnesty International, “Hungary: Landmark judgment rejects stigmatization of NGOs”, 18 June 2020, <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/hungary-landmark-judgment-rejects-discriminatory-and-unjustified-restrictions-on-ngos/>

<sup>70</sup> European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), *Ecodefence and others v. Russia*, Applications 9988/13 and 60 others, Judgment, 10 October 2022.

<sup>71</sup> International Service for Human Rights, “Spread of ‘foreign agent’ laws in Central, Eastern Europe a growing threat to civil society” (previously cited).

<sup>72</sup> SITA, “Moc mimovládok je na Slovensku extrémna. Hlas by si mal obhájiť prípadné zmeny v novom zákone, tvrdí Gedra [The power of NGOs in Slovakia is extreme. Hlas should advocate for potential changes in the new law, says Gedra]” (previously cited).

<sup>73</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, *Protecting the Rights to Freedom of Association*, 31 July 2024 (previously cited), para. 23.

Stigmatization often has a severe chilling effect on civil society actors' exercise of human rights such as the right to freedom of expression or association, especially on human rights defenders that already experience inequality, discrimination and violence in their daily life.<sup>74</sup> According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association: *"Stigmatization of civil society, civic mobilization and activism often have a severe and lasting 'chilling effect', not only on directly affected individuals and groups, but also a detrimental impact on civic space broadly. Its impact is especially deeper for individuals and groups that already experience heightened barriers to exercise their freedoms and are subjected to inequality, marginalization, racism, discrimination and violence because of, among other grounds, their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age and/or migration status."*<sup>75</sup>

Some human rights defenders reflected on the chilling effect the stigmatization towards civil society by state authorities may have on their work: *"We are certainly much more careful now in the sense that we do not want to completely abandon the possibility of criticizing the state or local government when we think that it is failing or not doing enough, we do not want to give that up. But we are certainly much more cautious in our statements than we were in the past, and we carefully consider how to communicate difficult topics so as to avoid being harmed."*<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, some human rights defenders also reported the opposite effect: *"... we do not engage in self-censorship, not at all. On the contrary, I don't feel any inner fear, neither do my colleagues, and we've never had a discussion about not saying something because it could hurt us. We are careful about this, and I think we have been quite successful so far."*<sup>77</sup>

## 6.3 LIMITATIONS ON FUNDING

Slovak authorities have been curtailing the right to freedom of association by limiting or cancelling access to funding for the protection of human rights, including on discriminatory basis, such as in the case of LGBTI+ human rights defenders. For instance, the Minister of Culture, Martina Šimkovičová, announced in November 2024, that projects focused on the rights of LGBTI+ persons will not receive "a single cent" from the resources of the Ministry of Culture.<sup>78</sup>

Other reports have also noted this trend in reduced funding for NGOs in Slovakia. Report by Platform for Democracy in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation from 2026 (covering the years of 2024-2025) on defunding of Slovak NGOs estimated that based on analyses covering areas of human rights, culture, the environment, and development aid, *"the total scale of cuts to public funding for nongovernmental organizations in 2024 and 2025 can be estimated at 15–16 million Eur."*<sup>79</sup> Ways in which funding for NGOs has been reduced includes administrative cuts to budgets allocated for calls for proposals and programs; cancellation of planned and anticipated calls for proposals; selective decision-making; changes in the composition of decision-making bodies; changes in rules, and restrictions on co-financing.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. para. 14.

<sup>75</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Protecting the Rights to Freedom of Association, 31 July 2024

<sup>76</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 25 September 2025.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with a human rights defender, 9 September 2025.

<sup>78</sup> Denník N, "LGBTI+ projekty nedostali z dotácií u ministerky Šimkovičovej „ani cent“. Je to absurdné, reagujú kvír organizácie [LGBTI+ projects did not receive "a single cent" from Minister Šimkovičová's subsidies. This is absurd, say queer organizations.]", 6 November 2024, <https://dennikn.sk/4290521/lgbti-projekty-nedostali-z-dotacii-u-ministerky-simkovicovej-ani-cent-je-to-absurdne-reaguju-kvir-organizacie/> (in Slovak).

<sup>79</sup> Platforma pre demokraciu, *Defunding mimovládnych neziskových organizácií 2024 – 2025 [Defunding of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations 2024–2025]*, February 2026, <https://www.amnesty.sk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Defunding-zhrnutie-20-s.pdf> (in Slovak), p.8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 10-11.

# 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with international human rights law and standards, the Slovak Republic has an obligation to create a safe and enabling environment for non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders to carry out their actions safely and without fear of reprisals. This requires State authorities to refrain from intimidating and persecuting civil society—on the contrary, they must respect and support its activities and adopt laws and policies that create the most favourable environment for its work.

However, human rights defenders in Slovakia have been observing the opposite trends for a long time, including regarding open or covert hostile and stigmatizing discourse by state representatives, and the adoption of laws that are not in line with international human rights standards.

In order to protect and promote the human rights for all, including marginalized groups, state authorities have to reverse their course and ensure that human rights defenders and civil society actors in Slovakia can carry out their activities in a favourable and safe environment without fear of persecution, repression, or any form of intimidation, in accordance with international human rights law and standards.

Amnesty International therefore makes the following recommendations to the Government of the Slovak Republic:

## **LAW AND POLICY REFORM**

- Adopt and implement legislation which recognizes and protects human rights defenders, and that incorporates a gender, anti-racist and intersectional approach;
- Repeal or amend legislation that may place obstacles to promote and defend human rights, including with regard to the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- When formulating, amending and implementing laws and policies, especially those that directly affect the activities of human rights defenders, including non-governmental organizations, ensure their effective and meaningful participation and take their recommendations and proposals into account.

## **FUNDING**

- Safeguard civil society's ability to realize their right to seek, receive and utilize resources by, among other measures, ensuring that domestic laws and regulations do not unfairly target or restrict access to funding, discriminate against particular types of associations or have a general effect of shrinking the space for civil society.
- Adopt sustainable and long-term institutional support, including financial mechanisms for civil society organizations and human rights defenders on a non-discriminatory basis, including for members of disadvantaged groups.

## **PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION**

- Ensure that human rights defenders and civil society actors in Slovakia can carry out their activities in a safe and enabling environment without fear of persecution, repression, or any form of intimidation.
- Publicly condemn the attacks, threats and intimidation against human rights defenders, including disadvantaged groups.
- Refrain from using language that stigmatizes, abuses, disparages or discriminates against human rights defenders including by characterizing them as criminals, “foreign agents”, or of being morally corrupt, a threat to security, development or traditional values.
- Effectively address threats, attacks, harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders, including, where applicable, by thoroughly, promptly and independently investigating human rights abuses against them and bringing the suspected perpetrators to justice and providing effective remedies and adequate reparations to the victims.
- Establish, in consultation with human rights defenders and civil society organizations, national protection mechanisms for defenders at risk which incorporate preventative, collective and gender-sensitive approaches. Ensure that women human rights defenders receive specific protection they need against gender specific threats and violence they may face due to their work.

## **PARTICIPATION**

- Enable participatory approaches to ensure that human rights defenders have access to decision makers at the national, regional and international levels in a secure manner.
- Establish participatory processes within civil society that include human rights defenders working in rural areas or in community-based settings, when adopting laws and mechanisms for their protection.

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# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER THE WEIGHT OF ATTACKS

## CONTINUING EROSION OF CIVIC SPACE IN SLOVAKIA

Briefing by Amnesty International reveals the continuing attacks against human rights defenders in Slovakia, including incidents of harassment, pressure, online and offline insults and stigmatization and the lack of adequate financial support and meaningful participation. Based on survey responses of over 120 NGOs and additional interviews with 13 human rights defenders, this briefing calls for state authorities to reverse their course and ensure that human rights defenders and civil society actors in Slovakia can carry out their activities in a favourable and safe environment without fear of persecution, repression, or any form of intimidation, in accordance with international human rights law and standards.