

Montenegro

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Montenegro's legislative and institutional framework for upholding human rights continued to be largely in place. However, more effort is needed to fully implement this framework and to ensure access to justice and enforcement of rights in administrative and judicial proceedings, particularly with respect to persons in vulnerable situations. In December 2025, the Parliament adopted a new law on anti-discrimination in line with the EU acquis and European standards. The most vulnerable groups in society (including Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons) continued to be subjected to discrimination, hate speech and hate crime.

Montenegro must effectively address all recommendations from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The functioning of democratic institutions was generally stable. However, it suffered from recurrent challenges due to the polarised political situation and consequently, institutions remained vulnerable to political crises and blockages. The government majority, made up of a diverse coalition of parties, was relatively stable despite occasional political tensions. In July, the Parliament adopted amendments to the electoral legislative framework, partially addressing long-standing recommendations from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), including oversight of campaign finance and media, improving the integrity of election administration, increasing the gender quota on electoral lists and introducing a single election day for local elections. No national elections took place. Local elections have taken place nearly every three months. Neither the elections in Kotor nor in Šavnik have been completed.

Montenegro maintained its focus on the EU integration agenda, although the legislative EU alignment process on certain negotiation chapters slowed in early 2025 due to domestic political challenges. The Parliament operated regularly, largely with consensus on key EU-related reforms. However, following a controversial decision by the Parliament to unilaterally declare the retirement of a Constitutional Court judge in December 2024, an institutional and political crisis emerged, with the opposition blocking parliamentary proceedings for a few months and raising concerns about respect for the independence of the Constitutional Court and the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution. This decision was not in line with the procedure foreseen in the Constitution, as also stated by the Venice Commission in its June opinion. Civil society organisations overall operate in an enabling environment. The involvement of civil society in policymaking is formalised, but at times remains formal and does not take place consistently. Further efforts remained necessary to ensure genuine and meaningful cooperation between the government and CSOs. For more information, refer to the European Commission's Montenegro 2025 Report.

Montenegro ranked 37th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, 55th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, 65th on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, and received a score of 77/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the CIVICUS tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: Following the achievement of the interim benchmarks, the EU's action in Montenegro continued to focus on the key areas described in the closing benchmarks on fundamental rights, as part of Chapter 23 of the accession negotiations. They related to alignment with the EU acquis and international standards on strengthening the effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the protection of minorities and cultural rights, protection against discrimination, including racism and xenophobia, and gender equality. EU bilateral political

engagement: The EU continued to closely monitor the situation of human rights in Montenegro within the framework of the EU accession negotiations under Chapter 23, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. There was regular policy dialogue at political level, EU-funded projects, as well as engagement with international organisations and civil society. Montenegro was participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process and continued to broadly implement its obligations under this agreement.

EU financial engagement: Montenegro benefits from EU support under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, of which EUR 20.9 million have already been disbursed as a loan to the State budget. An EU-funded action (IPA III) of UNDP on confidence building in the Western Balkans supported Montenegrin authorities in drafting the War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024-2027 and its Action Plan. Under the IPA III Civil Society and Media Facility, the EU provided support to a community-led rural development and growth initiative with EUR 0.5 million, and around EUR 1 million was allocated to strengthening youth networks and empowering young people in Montenegro. Support to independent media and civic actors in Montenegro also received EUR 1 million for their activities until the end of 2027. Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, the EU continued supporting electoral reform, the prevention of and fight against impunity and gender-based violence, as well as the protection of journalists against violence, including online, and capacity building in investigative journalism (EUR 1.07 million). In addition, a direct award of EUR 0.5 million for the prevention of and fight against gender-based violence was contracted in 2025, aiming to support women's organisations in Montenegro through sub-granting.

Under the NDICI Thematic Instrument on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU also provided support for an independent and professional judiciary (EUR 0.15 million). Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III, with EUR 5 million for Montenegro, focusing on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime, and promoting human rights, including diversity, equality, freedom of expression and social inclusion. The programme enabled the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code in line with the Council of Europe recommendations on anti-discrimination and countering hate speech.

In the area of fighting corruption and economic crime, three sectoral risk assessments were completed, respectively on money laundering risks associated with high-level corruption; money laundering risks associated with the use of cash and the informal economy; and terrorist financing risks involving non-profit organisations and payment institutions. Amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid were adopted, significantly improving access to justice for the most vulnerable categories of victims of criminal acts.

A significant step has been taken towards establishing a comprehensive system for the protection of victims' rights through the drafting of the first National Strategy on Victims' Rights in Montenegro, which was adopted on 25 December 2025. In the context of victim protection, Sentencing Guidelines in cases of sexual and gender-based violence were also developed. With this support, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights finalised the new draft Law on Anti-Discrimination, which the Parliament adopted in December. In addition, the action supported the Working Group that prepared the draft Law on Legal Gender Recognition.

Multilateral context: Montenegro continued to meet its international obligations on human rights and cooperated closely with the EU in multilateral human rights fora. The country continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, including United Nations bodies and the Council of Europe. Montenegro continued to fully align itself with EU statements on human rights in multilateral fora, including EU

restrictive measures following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Montenegro continued to ensure good cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights. The country has ratified most key international human rights instruments. Montenegro has yet to ratify the 2014 Protocol to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 1930 Forced Labour Convention. Montenegro needs to improve its mechanisms for reporting to the UN human rights mechanisms and following up on their recommendations.