



# Belarus: Political Opposition and Dissent

# **Belarus: Political Opposition and Dissent**

**Country of Origin Information Report**

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Cover photo: Lukashenko Shows No Sign Of Backing Down After Weeks Of Protest, Misha Friedman, © Getty Images, 2020, [Riot police get ready to disperse an anti-government rally on August... News Photo - Getty Images](#)

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## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). It is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited timeframe. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 1 April 2026. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#)





## Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
<b>ABPA</b>	All-Belarusian People's Assembly
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>KGB</b>	State Security Committee of Belarus
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>ODIHR</b>	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights



# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of applications for international protection, including refugee status and subsidiary protection.

The report covers the period between 1 January 2025 to 1 April 2026.

## Methodology

This report was drafted by EUAA and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)<sup>1</sup> and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).<sup>2</sup>

### Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by the EUAA based on input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI Specialist Network on Russia, Ukraine, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The ToR of this report can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#).

### Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources, as well as interviews with expert oral sources, until 1 April 2026. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 28 April 2026.

### Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 28 April 2026. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but it does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EUAA.

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)





## Sources

In accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology, the content of this report relies on a range of different open-source material, as well as interviews and email communication with oral sources. Information was mainly gathered from public reports by international organisations; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; civil society, advocacy groups, and NGOs; COI reports of national asylum administrations; media, specialised academic publications, and think tanks.

In addition to publicly available sources, interviews with experts were conducted to supplement information gaps and/or to further corroborate specific findings. Some experts interviewed by the EUAA preferred to remain anonymous for security reasons. Experts were selected and assessed according to their expertise, reputability, and current knowledge of the situation on the ground. All the public and oral sources referenced in this report are cited and described in [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).

## Structure and use of the report

The report consists of four main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the political system and governance in Belarus, detailing recent political developments, the protests of 2020, and state control over information and culture.

The second chapter outlines state practices affecting civic space, focusing on human rights context and the use of legislation against critics of the government. It examines the application of anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws and various lists maintained by the authorities and describes politically motivated prosecution, including in relation to donations to organisations designated as extremist and expressing support for Ukraine.

The third chapter addresses the law enforcement and justice system. First, it covers the security apparatus and its methods, including surveillance practices and border control measures applied by the authorities to individuals returning to Belarus. Second, it focuses on the administration of justice and describes court procedures, fair trial guarantees, trials *in absentia*, and detention conditions of political prisoners.

The fourth chapter examines the treatment of various political groups by the authorities. It covers political opponents, protesters, journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers, former political prisoners, relatives of political prisoners, and LGBTIQ+ persons and activists.

## Terminology

The report does not use quotation marks for terms such as extremism, terrorism, or presidential elections. These terms are used as legal categories used by the Belarusian authorities and their scope and application are clarified in the text.



# Maps



Map No. 3776 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS  
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

Map 1. Belarus<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>UN Geospatial, Map No. 3776 Rev.3, 1 January 2004, [url](http://www.un.org/Depts/da/geospatial/)





# 1. Country overview

## 1.1. System of governance

### 1.1.1. Executive branch and the presidency

The political system of Belarus is characterised by a highly centralised system of governance, which is based on ‘a strong presidency’ that exerts full control over both the legislative and judicial branches of government.<sup>4</sup> The President serves as the head of state and is elected for a five-year term. The Prime Minister is the head of the government but is subordinate to the presidency, as the appointment of the Prime Minister is made by the President.<sup>5</sup> According to the Constitution, the President holds extensive powers, including determining the structure of the government and appointing and dismissing key officials, such as deputy prime ministers, ministers, the Prosecutor General, judges of courts of general jurisdiction, and other officials.<sup>6</sup>

In 1994, Aliaksandr Lukashenka became the first president of Belarus in elections described as the country’s only democratic vote.<sup>7</sup> Since then, and over three decades, Lukashenka has been repeatedly re-elected.<sup>8</sup> Following the presidential elections of 26 January 2025,<sup>9</sup> in which he claimed to have secured nearly 87 % of the vote according to official results, Aliaksandr Lukashenka entered his seventh consecutive presidency term.<sup>10</sup>

The 2025 presidential election took place ‘in a highly restricted political environment,’<sup>11</sup> characterised by severe repression<sup>12</sup> against political opposition and dissent.<sup>13</sup> Following protests related to the 2020 presidential elections, opposition figures were either imprisoned or forced into exile.<sup>14</sup> Other potential opposition candidates were arbitrarily disqualified from participating in the electoral process. As a result, there were only four candidates, all of whom supported Lukashenka.<sup>15</sup>

The constitutional amendments adopted after a referendum of February 2022 increased the minimum age of presidential candidates from 35 to 40 years and extended the required period of continuous residency in Belarus from 10 to 20 years.<sup>16</sup> In addition, both the

<sup>4</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 26 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 7, 10

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Belarus, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> Belarus, Constitution (With Amendments Adopted by Referendum of 27 February 2022), European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 5 October 2022, [url](#), Art. 84

<sup>7</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), paras. 3, 48

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> SCEEUS, The Farce of the 2025 Belarusian Elections: Power, Repression, and the Struggle for Legitimacy, 27 January 2025, [url](#); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>14</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>15</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>16</sup> USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Belarus, 22 April 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 53



constitutional changes and the amendments to the Electoral Code in February 2023 barred individuals who hold or previously held foreign citizenship, a residence permit, ‘or other document of a foreign state entitling them to privileges or advantages’ from standing for presidential office.<sup>17</sup> Together with the constitutional provision that persons serving a prison sentence are ineligible to vote or be elected,<sup>18</sup> the new Constitution effectively excluded political opponents in detention or exile from standing for election.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the authorities abolished polling stations abroad,<sup>20</sup> citing alleged security concerns, the reduction in diplomatic personnel,<sup>21</sup> and low voter turnout.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the absence of genuine competition,<sup>23</sup> the presidential election process was described as a ‘sham’ or ‘no-choice election’.<sup>24</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks stated that the election violated Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as the authorities severely restricted the right to vote and to stand for election.<sup>25</sup> The authorities did not invite independent observers from the participating states of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), to monitor the election, violating the country’s commitments with OSCE.<sup>26</sup> The ODIHR/OSCE was last invited to observe elections in Belarus during the parliamentary elections in 2019.<sup>27</sup>

The official results of the 2025 presidential elections have not been recognised by the European Union and its Member States ‘due to substantial doubt about their fairness,’ while independent platforms established by Belarusian civil society organisations reported that the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya secured an absolute majority of votes, based on exit polls and analysis of over 200 polling station protocols.<sup>28</sup>

The 2022 constitutional amendments further strengthened presidential powers<sup>29</sup> by granting former presidents immunity for actions taken while in office.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, although the amendments reinstated a two-term limit on the presidency, this restriction takes effect only

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<sup>17</sup> Belarus, Constitution (With Amendments Adopted by Referendum of 27 February 2022), European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 5 October 2022, [url](#), Art. 80

<sup>18</sup> Belarus, Constitution (With Amendments Adopted by Referendum of 27 February 2022), European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 5 October 2022, [url](#), Art. 64

<sup>19</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>20</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 53

<sup>21</sup> Belta, ЦИК: Беларусь не создает участки для голосования за рубежом [Central Election Commission: Belarus is not establishing overseas polling stations], 10 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 58

<sup>24</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 58

<sup>26</sup> OSCE, No election observation mission in Belarus due to lack of invitation, in breach of OSCE commitments, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> OSCE, Elections in Belarus. n.d., [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> EP, European Parliament recommendation of 21 October 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus, 21 October 2020, [url](#), paras. J, L

<sup>29</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>30</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 27





after the 2025 presidential election,<sup>31</sup> effectively allowing Lukashenka to potentially serve two further terms, up to 2035.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.1.2. Legislative branch and local governance

The National Assembly of Belarus is a bicameral parliament, consisting of the Council of the Republic (upper chamber) and the House of Representatives (lower chamber).<sup>33</sup> Members of the Council of the Republic are elected for a four-year term through an indirect election process where deputies are elected by regional councils,<sup>34</sup> combined with presidential appointments of a small number of deputies.<sup>35</sup> The most recent elections for the Council of the Republic took place on 4 April 2024.<sup>36</sup> The members of the House of Representatives are elected for a four-year term by popular vote.<sup>37</sup> The most recent elections to the House of Representatives were conducted on 25 February 2024, concurrently with elections for local councils of deputies.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly to the 2025 presidential elections,<sup>39</sup> the parliamentary and local elections were conducted in a highly restricted political atmosphere,<sup>40</sup> amidst numerous violations of international standards for free and fair elections,<sup>41</sup> a low level of public engagement, and manipulation and falsification of voter turnout and results.<sup>42</sup> Opposition candidates were not allowed to register for the ballot, and the elections lacked independent local or international election monitors<sup>43</sup> or OSCE observers.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, reports indicated ‘a heavy presence’ of security services at polling stations,<sup>45</sup> which effectively prevented any possible manifestation of a public protest.<sup>46</sup>

As noted by independent foundation Bertelsmann Stiftung, both the National Assembly and the Council of Republic lack real authority and are dependent on the presidency. Likewise, locally elected councils at regional, district, city, and village levels are fully dependent on ‘local executive bodies and higher councils,’ despite being formally elected through direct vote.<sup>47</sup> Executive bodies at local level are organised in a three-tier structure: the primary level (village, town, and city authorities), the basic level (districts and cities within administrative regions),

<sup>31</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> AP, Belarus calls referendum that could strengthen Lukashenko, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>34</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, Elections, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Belarus, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 48

<sup>37</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Belarus, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Kłysiński, K. and Żochowski, P., Voting with no alternative. Parliamentary and local ‘elections’ in Belarus, OSW, 27 February 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>40</sup> EP, Joint statement by the Chair of [...] on the parliamentary and local “elections” held in Belarus on 25 February 2024, 26 February 2024, [url](#), p. 1; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>43</sup> EP, Joint statement by the Chair of [...] on the parliamentary and local “elections” held in Belarus on 25 February 2024, 26 February 2024, [url](#), p. 1; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 48

<sup>45</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Kłysiński, K. and Żochowski, P., Voting with no alternative. Parliamentary and local ‘elections’ in Belarus, OSW, 27 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 15



and the oblast level (the regional authorities and Minsk city). There are also over 1 300 local councils of deputies operating at these levels.<sup>48</sup>

The 2022 constitutional amendment established the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly (ABPA), designed to serve as the highest representative body.<sup>49</sup> Inaugurated in April 2024,<sup>50</sup> the ABPA is composed of around 1 200 delegates appointed by government officials, members of the parliament and local councils, and pro-government civil society organisations. The ABPA has been granted broad powers, including setting the main directions of domestic and foreign policy, initiating legislation, overseeing elections, deciding on the appointment and dismissal of key judicial and electoral officials.<sup>51</sup> It also has the authority to remove the president in cases of criminal conduct or violation of the Constitution.<sup>52</sup> However, despite its broad powers, the assembly’s independence is severely limited in practice, as the President Lukashenka serves both as its president and chairman.<sup>53</sup>

### 1.1.3. Political parties

According to the UN Human Rights Council, the political landscape in Belarus is characterised by ‘deliberate eradication’ of oppositional political parties.<sup>54</sup> Following amendments to the ‘Law on Political Parties’ in February 2023, all political parties in Belarus were required to re-register<sup>55</sup> with the Ministry of Justice,<sup>56</sup> which resulted in the dissolution of 12 parties.<sup>57</sup> These included the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) – the oldest political party in Belarus,<sup>58</sup> the longstanding opposition party United Civil Party, whose leaders were sentenced to prison due to their participation in 2020 protests, the Green Party, the Republican Party, the Social Democratic Party of People’s Accord, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party.<sup>59</sup>

The re-registration process resulted in the approval of only four parties deemed loyal to the government<sup>60</sup> and operating in line with ‘the national security concept’: the Belarusian Party Belaya Rus, the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB), the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (LDPB), and the Republican Party of Labour and Justice (RPTS).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Barometer of Local Institutional Reforms in Europe, The Republic of Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>50</sup> Slunkin, P., Lukashenka’s long shadow: Understanding Belarus’s new political architecture, ECFR, 26 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> Kłysiński, K., The propagandist congress of Lukashenka’s supporters: putting the formal finishing touches to the new system, 26 April 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>52</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), pp. 10, 12

<sup>53</sup> COE, European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission), Updated Compilation of Venice Commission Opinions and Reports Relating to Qualified Majorities and Ant-deadlock Mechanisms, 19 December 2025, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>54</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 48

<sup>55</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 – Belarus, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> SCO meter, Belarus launches campaign of forced liquidation of political parties, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 – Belarus, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> RFE/RL, Belarus Shuts Down Opposition United Civil Party as Civil Society Crackdown Continues, 15 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 – Belarus, 26 February 2025, [url](#); HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, Political Parties, 2026, [url](#)





## 1.2. The 2020 protests

In its history, Belarus has experienced many episodes of large-scale protests, often linked to allegations of electoral fraud. Demonstrations following Lukashenka's re-election for the third and fourth presidential terms in 2006 and 2010 were met with force by the authorities, resulting in arrests of hundreds of protesters.<sup>62</sup> By 2020, due to the established system of governance, state institutions and law enforcement started perceiving protests primarily as a threat rather than an exercise of people's rights.<sup>63</sup>

In May 2020, protests broke out after President Lukashenka announced his intention to seek a sixth term in the office.<sup>64</sup> After the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced Lukashenka's victory in the presidential election held on 9 August 2020,<sup>65</sup> hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Minsk<sup>66</sup> to protest widespread allegations of electoral fraud.<sup>67</sup> The protests spread across the country, being driven – next to the claims of electoral fraud – by a deteriorating economic situation, dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a decline in public trust in state institutions.<sup>68</sup>

The protests were unprecedented in scale and duration, continuing for several months and joined by people from diverse segments of society. Particularly, women, many of whom were previously politically inactive, were reportedly 'at the forefront' of the protests.<sup>69</sup> The authorities responded with a violent crackdown, employing excessive force and carrying out large-scale arbitrary arrests and detentions to suppress the protests.<sup>70</sup> During the protests, tens of thousands of individuals were reportedly detained for participating in the protests, taking photos, carrying white-red-white flags, or wearing clothes in these colours.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>62</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), paras. 18, 19

<sup>63</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>64</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>65</sup> EP, European Parliament recommendation of 21 October 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus (2020/2081(INI)), 21 October 2020, [url](#), para. K; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>66</sup> HRW, "I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully." Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus' Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>68</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 24; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>69</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>70</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus' Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 24  
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 5



By June 2021,<sup>72</sup> over 35 000 people had been arbitrarily detained in relation to the protests.<sup>73</sup> Protesters had been subjected to summary trials in both administrative and criminal cases.<sup>74</sup> As reported by human rights organisation Viasna, as of August 2025, over 3 670 people had been convicted for participation in the 2020 protests, noting that human rights defenders assess the actual figure to be higher due to incomplete data.<sup>75</sup>

In detention, ill-treatment and torture were reportedly widespread,<sup>76</sup> including instances of sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, while several leading political opposition figures ‘were arbitrarily detained and convicted in unfair trials,’ many others were forced into exile, convicted *in absentia*, and face arrest should they return to Belarus.<sup>78</sup> The number of Belarusians who left the country after the 2020 protests has been estimated at between 200 000 and 500 000.<sup>79</sup> According to some estimates, as of 2024, the number of people who have left Belarus may be up to one million.<sup>80</sup>

Despite widespread violence against protesters<sup>81</sup> and human rights violations,<sup>82</sup> those responsible were not held accountable.<sup>83</sup> Instead, ‘many were awarded or promoted’ for carrying out or aligning with Lukashenka’s direct orders,<sup>84</sup> contributing to a ‘culture of impunity’ within the security apparatus.<sup>85</sup>

### 1.3. State control over information and culture

The information and media landscape in Belarus is characterised by extensive state dominance, with state-owned media outlets and television channels serving as the primary source of information.<sup>86</sup> Numerous independent newspapers, radio stations, and television

<sup>72</sup> UN OHCHR, 35,000 People Have Been Arbitrarily Detained in Belarus, Special Rapporteur on Belarus Tells Human Rights Council, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> UN OHCHR, 35,000 People Have Been Arbitrarily Detained in Belarus, Special Rapporteur on Belarus Tells Human Rights Council, 5 July 2021, [url](#); AP, Belarus targets opposition activists with raids and property seizures, 16 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> Viasna, 3,670 convicted: The relentless crackdown on Belarus’s 2020 protesters, 12 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> HRW, No Choice for Voters in Belarus’ Sham Elections, 24 January 2025, [url](#); HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 54

<sup>79</sup> PACE, Belarusians in exile: an overlooked issue addressed by the Parliamentary Assembly, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> BCFA, An Overview of Human Rights Violations in Belarus: The Catastrophic Impact of Lukashenka’s Regime, 16 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>82</sup> EP, JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the situation in Belarus, five years after the fraudulent presidential elections, 17 October 2025, [url](#), para. N

<sup>83</sup> EP, JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the situation in Belarus, five years after the fraudulent presidential elections, 17 October 2025, [url](#), para. N; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>84</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>85</sup> EP, JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the situation in Belarus, five years after the fraudulent presidential elections, 17 October 2025, [url](#), para. N

<sup>86</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 15





channels had their licences removed or were forced to close.<sup>87</sup> In November 2024, the Ministry of Information ordered distributors of print materials to remove publications deemed to be ‘harming the national interest of Belarus’, including those deemed to ‘distort the historical truth and justice’, ‘promote non-traditional sexual relations’ and ‘popularise subcultures that are not traditional for Belarusian society’.<sup>88</sup> The same month, the ministry issued a list of 35 printed publications – including ‘LGBTIQ+ literature, erotic fiction, and unofficial studies on the history of Belarus’, which were declared banned from distribution in the country.<sup>89</sup>

According to the human rights organisation PEN Belarus,<sup>90</sup> 336 books were ‘banned for political or ideological reasons’ as of mid-April 2026.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, between 2020 and November 2025, five independent publishing houses were shut down.<sup>92</sup> In February 2026, the authorities conducted raids against publishing houses and book distributors in Minsk,<sup>93</sup> resulting in the arrest and detention of several individuals associated with a suspended publishing house. In addition, the State Security Committee (KGB) designated a publishing house operating in exile as an extremist formation.<sup>94</sup>

As of February 2026, a blacklist maintained by the Ministry of Culture contained names of ‘hundreds’ of persons, reflecting widespread cultural, political, and ideological censorship. The official cultural policy is based on public support for President Lukashenka, the state’s control over the interpretation of historical memory, and growing cooperation with Russian cultural institutions.<sup>95</sup> The authorities have intensified a ‘campaign of historical revisionism,’ including through restrictions on ‘alternative narrative of Belarusian identity’ and the promotion of ‘pro-Russian disinformation.’ As a result, the country faces political polarisation and highlighted divisions between supporters and opponents of the authorities.<sup>96</sup>

Educational institutions have been increasingly militarised through expansion of military-patriotic clubs and classes.<sup>97</sup> Patriotic clubs are led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and parents who do not enrol their children may face suspicion of disloyalty to the state. There were cases where the General Prosecutor’s Office investigated schools for insufficient

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<sup>87</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>88</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 61

<sup>89</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 63

<sup>90</sup> PEN Belarus is a human rights organisation, which monitors violations affecting cultural rights, PEN Belarus, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> PEN Belarus, Belarus. Banned Books, n.d., [url](#); PEN Belarus, PEN Belarus’s analytical products, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> PEN Belarus, Briefing, November 27! Banned people: How writers and journalists work in Belarus, where independent work is branded “extremism”, 21 November 2025, [url](#); IPA, Bans, Prison, and Exile: Belarusian Authors Seeking Freedom to Write, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> Nasha Niva, У Мінску адбыліся масавыя затрыманні выдаўцоў і кнігараспаўсюднікаў [Mass detentions of publishers and book distributors took place in Minsk], 21 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>95</sup> PEN Belarus, Monitoring of violations of cultural rights an human rights of cultural figures, Belarus, 2025, 13 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>97</sup> Belsat, Ban on Belarusian language and symbols, Lukashenka cult, and Russification: how authorities are erasing Belarusian identity, 22 October 2025, [url](#)



involvement in patriotic activities, treating low participation as a national security issue that could lead to further scrutiny or prosecution.<sup>98</sup>

While the country has two official languages – Belarusian and Russian,<sup>99</sup> sources noted on the dominance of Russian language in state media, government institutions, and education.<sup>100</sup> Many public services, including courts and law enforcement agencies, provide information only in Russian.<sup>101</sup> Following the 2020 protests, the authorities closed and declared numerous Belarusian-language media outlets and publishing houses as extremist.<sup>102</sup> Speaking Belarusian in everyday life became perceived as a marker of opposition to authorities,<sup>103</sup> and, as reported by Belarusian independent media outlet Belsat, individuals had been detained ‘for simply reading books by Belarusian authors in public.’<sup>104</sup>

The authorities continuously expand restrictions on dissemination of and access to information,<sup>105</sup> systematically increasing control over the internet.<sup>106</sup> Independent media outlets have been blocked and their content criminalised through anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation.<sup>107</sup> In February 2025, the Minister of Information stated that the authorities had blocked over 15 000 webpages, including websites designated as extremist.<sup>108</sup> As noted by Freedom House, the list of blocked online materials includes websites of independent media outlets and human rights organisations.<sup>109</sup> In February 2026, several resources of the human rights organisation Viasna – including its TikTok account and two specific campaign websites, #FreeViasna and Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty – were classified as extremist materials.<sup>110</sup> For more information, see chapter [2.2.2. Anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws](#), [a\) List of extremist materials](#).

In September 2025, the authorities introduced new procedures for restricting internet access, allegedly to eliminate conditions that facilitate online crime. Under the new rules, request for internet access restrictions can be issued by ‘the Prosecutor General, the head of the

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<sup>98</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>99</sup> Belarus, Constitution (With Amendments Adopted by Referendum of 27 February 2022), European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 5 October 2022, [url](#), Art. 17

<sup>100</sup> Euronews, Belarus endures Russification as native language fades away in schools, 14 September 2024, [url](#); Chernin, V., National Democratic Movement of Belarus, BESA, 19 March 2025, [url](#); Belsat, Language incommunicado: Why the state fears the Belarusian word, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> Chernin, V., National Democratic Movement of Belarus, BESA, 19 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> Belsat, Ban on Belarusian language and symbols, Lukashenka cult, and Russification: how authorities are erasing Belarusian identity, 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> Euronews, Belarus endures Russification as native language fades away in schools, 14 September 2024, [url](#); Chernin, V., National Democratic Movement of Belarus, BESA, 19 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> Belsat, Ban on Belarusian language and symbols, Lukashenka cult, and Russification: how authorities are erasing Belarusian identity, 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2025 – Belarus, 31 May 2025, [url](#); Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>108</sup> BHRC, Belarus: Almost 7 thousand information sources are considered "extremist", 6 June 2025, [url](#); SCO meter, Belarus to block access to internet and phone services for selected individuals, 4 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2025 – Belarus, 31 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)





Investigative Committee, the chairman of the KGB, the Minister of Internal Affairs or their authorised officials.”<sup>111</sup>

## 1.4. International sanctions and accountability

In February 2022, Belarus allowed Russia to use its territory as a staging ground for attacks into northern Ukraine<sup>112</sup> and has continued to provide the territorial access in the following years.<sup>113</sup> Alongside military cooperation, Belarus maintains close political and economic ties with Russia.<sup>114</sup> The Belarusian authorities rely on ‘rhetoric about external threats’ coming from neighbouring EU countries and Ukraine and, in 2024, portrayed its military forces activities (such as military drills near the Ukrainian border in February 2024<sup>115</sup>) as preparation for a potential military confrontation.<sup>116</sup> On 1 April 2026, President Lukashenka stated that, in a wartime scenario, the country could potentially mobilise up to half a million people.<sup>117</sup>

Since 2020, Belarus has been subject to sanctions by the EU, UK, United States, and Canada in response to political repression by the Belarusian authorities. Further sanctions were imposed in 2022 due to Belarus’ role in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.<sup>118</sup> In December 2025, the European Council expanded the sanctions against Belarus<sup>119</sup> to address hybrid activities affecting EU member states, including airspace violations over Lithuania.<sup>120</sup> This followed a sharp increase in such violations since 2024, including incursions by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and balloons incursions, as well as ‘cyberattacks, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns’ and the instrumentalisation of migration<sup>121</sup> (notably in 2021<sup>122</sup>). In February 2026, the EU extended sanctions linked to internal repression in Belarus and its support for Russia’s war against Ukraine for one year, until 28 February 2027.<sup>123</sup>

In September 2024, Lithuania submitted a request to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open an investigation into ‘alleged crimes against humanity’ committed since May 2020 by ‘senior Belarusian political, law enforcement, and military leaders’ against the Belarusian ‘civilian population’ in Belarus and Lithuania.<sup>124</sup> In March 2026, the ICC opened such an investigation stating that there was ‘a reasonable basis to believe’ that the Belarusian authorities had committed crimes against humanity – specifically ‘deportation and persecution

<sup>111</sup> SCO meter, Belarus to block access to internet and phone services for selected individuals, 4 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> DW, Belarus conducts military drills near Ukraine, EU, 4 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> Belsat, “We are preparing for war.” Can Lukashenka really mobilize half a million Belarusians?, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>119</sup> European Council, Belarus: Council broadens scope of sanctions regime to cover hybrid activities against EU member states, 15 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> European Council, EU sanctions against Belarus, 2026., [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> EP, Parliament denounces continuous Belarusian hybrid attacks against Lithuania, 18 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> European Council, EU sanctions against Belarus, 2026., [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> European Council, Timeline - EU sanctions against Belarus. 2026, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> ICC, Preliminary examination, Republic of Lithuania/Republic of Belarus, ICC 01/24, [url](#)



through deportation’ – as part of a systematic state policy against actual or perceived political opponents.<sup>125</sup>

In February 2025, the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus noted that, in their efforts to suppress dissent, Belarusian authorities had ‘committed widespread human rights violations against the country’s civilian population’, with some ‘amounting to crimes against humanity.’<sup>126</sup> In February 2026, the UN Group of Independent Experts reaffirmed these findings, citing ‘crimes against humanity of persecution and imprisonment.’<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> ICC, ICC Office of the Prosecutor concludes preliminary examinations into Venezuela II and Lithuania/Belarus, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> UN OHCHR, Belarus: Human rights violations remain rampant, some amounting to crimes against humanity, UN Group of Experts says, 14 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 111





## 2. State practices affecting civic space

### 2.1. Human rights context

Following the 2020 presidential elections, the authorities unrolled broad and systematic efforts aimed at suppressing any form of dissent,<sup>128</sup> resulting in an environment marked by ‘fear, censorship and self-censorship’.<sup>129</sup> The campaign to penalise public criticism continued through 2024<sup>130</sup> and 2025,<sup>131</sup> with politically motivated charges used against political opponents, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens expressing dissent.<sup>132</sup> In the first months of 2026, the human rights situation has remained ‘severe’ as the repression continued.<sup>133</sup>

Through the security apparatus, the Belarusian authorities systematically restrict freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.<sup>134</sup> State practices aimed at suppression and punishment of any dissent rely on a range of measures, such as various restrictions, surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, ill-treatment, and forced exile.<sup>135</sup> Unlike the period before 2020, when waves of arrests and detentions gradually subsided, arrests and detentions following the 2020 protests have persisted. At the same time, the focus of politically motivated prosecutions has shifted from punishing protesters to targeting those who express criticism of the authorities,<sup>136</sup> with a growing number of prosecutions being ‘related to the war in Ukraine.’<sup>137</sup>

The UN Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights of Belarus noted that arbitrary arrest and detention of those who oppose the authorities or are perceived as doing so, became ‘a permanent fixture of the repressive tactics’ of the Belarusian authorities<sup>138</sup> in violation of Article 9 of the ICCPR, ratified by Belarus in 1973.<sup>139</sup> Arrests and prosecution have particularly affected people exercising their fundamental rights in connection with the 2020

<sup>128</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), paras. 3-4

<sup>129</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>130</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 59; Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#); AI, Belarus: No end in sight for the human rights crisis, 25 January 2026, [url](#); HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>135</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 30

<sup>136</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 32

<sup>137</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>138</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 32

<sup>139</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 17



presidential election, the broader political situation in Belarus, and the war in Ukraine.<sup>140</sup> In February 2023, the Government of Belarus withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.<sup>141</sup>

### 2.1.1. Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression in Belarus is ‘severely curtailed’.<sup>142</sup> The Ministry of Information is the main body that regulates media in the country.<sup>143</sup> The authorities suppress free speech and independent press and deny opposition figures access to state media.<sup>144</sup> Governmental control over digital platforms was expanded through a presidential decree of October 2022, which requires email providers and messaging apps to store user data and grant law enforcement and security agencies direct remote access, strengthening the state’s capacity to track and restrict online activity.<sup>145</sup>

The authorities have developed ‘a consistent practice of punishing online activity’ by relying on broad and vague anti-extremism provisions, including those concerning activities deemed to threaten national security, participation in an extremist formation, and the financing of extremist activity.<sup>146</sup> As a result, the legal system ‘functions as a mechanism of digital intimidation’ and punishes ‘likes’ and reposts with administrative fines.<sup>147</sup>

Expressing any criticism of the authorities, including online, can result in administrative or criminal charges, as noted by a representative of human rights group Human Constanta in the interview with EUAA.<sup>148</sup> According to the same source, individuals may be prosecuted for sharing an opinion online or being linked to political or human rights activities, which are defined very broadly. Consequently, even minor criticism, such as complaints about local road conditions and criticising of the work of local governance, can be punished. Enforcement in these cases is often selective and depends on whether such content is noticed by law enforcement, which may then investigate the person who wrote it, review their online activity, call the person for questioning, and then decide whether to initiate prosecution.<sup>149</sup>

Between 2020 and December 2025, the authorities initiated nearly 3 500 criminal cases in relations to online activities, whereas almost 2 900 individuals were found guilty. Additionally, nearly 8 700 administrative cases were initiated for the online distribution of extremist materials (Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences).<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 16, 18

<sup>141</sup> UN Treaty Collection, Chapter IV, Human Rights, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> EPRS, Media environment in Belarus, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>144</sup> BBC News, Belarus country profile, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> ICNL, Belarus, 4 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>147</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>148</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>149</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>150</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 4





## 2.1.2. Freedom of peaceful assembly and association

Freedom of assembly and association in Belarus are nearly non-existent.<sup>151</sup> Legislation such as the Law on Mass Events imposes strict requirements on public gatherings, including their prior authorisation and eligibility criteria for organisers, which significantly suppress public assemblies.<sup>152</sup>

The legal environment for civil society organisations is characterised by highly restrictive regulations that grant authorities broad discretion to deny their registration, restrict foreign funding, and dissolve or suspend entities for minor infractions.<sup>153</sup> After the 2020 protests, the authorities initiated a systematic purge on organisations,<sup>154</sup> such as trade unions, associations, and NGOs.<sup>155</sup>

In June 2021,<sup>156</sup> the authorities started a large-scale campaign to revoke official registrations of civil society organisations,<sup>157</sup> a process that accelerated in the following years<sup>158</sup> and resulted in widespread liquidation of various organisations and associations,<sup>159</sup> including human rights groups,<sup>160</sup> NGOs, trade unions and religious communities.<sup>161</sup> This state-led crackdown led to a sharp decrease in the number of registered public organisations, declining – according to the data of the Ministry of Justice – from 3 025 in 2020 to 1 973 in January 2024 (comprising 177 international, 572 national, and 1 224 local entities).<sup>162</sup> As of December 2025, according to the monitoring group Lawtrend, 1 220 non-profit organisations had been forcibly liquidated<sup>163</sup> and another 769 had self-dissolved,<sup>164</sup> while the number of registered NGOs stood at 1 943.<sup>165</sup>

Repression against civil society actors also involves arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment of activists, peaceful protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, and lawyers.<sup>166</sup> Civil society organisations and cultural associations, as well as their members, have been

<sup>151</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 67

<sup>152</sup> ICNL, Belarus, 4 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> ICNL, Belarus, 4 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>155</sup> Belsat, Belarus moves to confiscate property of liquidated parties and NGOs, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> CSO meter, Belarus: New wave of liquidation of CSOs that fail to amend their charters, 5 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>158</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>159</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#); CIVICUS, Belarus: Ongoing Crackdown on civil society demands stronger international response, 19 March 2025, [url](#); Belsat, Belarus moves to confiscate property of liquidated parties and NGOs, 14 November 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>160</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), paras. 26, 59

<sup>161</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>162</sup> CSO meter, Belarus: New wave of liquidation of CSOs that fail to amend their charters, 5 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> Lawtrend, Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus December 2025, 12 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> Lawtrend, Январь-декабрь 2025 [January-December 2025], December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> Lawtrend, Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus December 2025, 12 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> CIVICUS, Belarus: Ongoing Crackdown on civil society demands stronger international response, 19 March 2025, [url](#)



added to the list of extremist organisations, which enables their prosecution.<sup>167</sup> For example, in 2024, after an organisation providing online training on women rights was designated as extremist formation, the KGB and the district police departments' members arrested and interrogated some of its participants, many of whom were subsequently charged with petty hooliganism and detained for up to 30 days.<sup>168</sup>

## 2.2. Use of the legal system against government critics

### 2.2.1. Scope of politically motivated prosecutions

The authorities use the justice system as a tool to suppress dissent,<sup>169</sup> employing politically motivated charges and court trials against critics of the government, often leading to their imprisonment or forced exile.<sup>170</sup> Following the 2020 protests, legislation was amended to introduce new criminal and administrative offences.<sup>171</sup> Since then, national security and extremism-related legislation have been used to silence opposition figures, journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, members of civil society organisations and trade unions, and citizens expressing opinions perceived by the authorities as hostile.<sup>172</sup>

Between May 2020 to 31 March 2026, according to the data of the human rights centre Viasna, at least 9 594 individuals have faced politically motivated criminal prosecution, with at least 8 304 individuals convicted, including convictions *in absentia*.<sup>173</sup> In 2025, at least 2 384 individuals faced criminal or administrative prosecution, including arrests, searches, and interrogations.<sup>174</sup> As of 28 February 2026, 1 141 political prisoners were held in detention.<sup>175</sup> Minors also have faced convictions, with 43 minors convicted on politically motivated charges in 2024<sup>176</sup> and 40 in 2025.<sup>177</sup> In both years, the highest number of convictions was related to the participation in protests (29 in 2024 and 16 in 2025).<sup>178</sup>

<sup>167</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 79

<sup>168</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 41

<sup>169</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>173</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2026, 7 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> DW, В Беларусі за измену государству судят даже детей [In Belarus, even children are tried for treason], 6 March 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>177</sup> Viasna, Некалькі дзясяткаў непаўнагадовых беларусаў былі асуджаныя ў мінулым годзе па палітычных артыкулах [Several dozen minor Belarusians were convicted last year on political articles], 12 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>178</sup> DW, В Беларусі за измену государству судят даже детей [In Belarus, even children are tried for treason], 6 March 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>178</sup> DW, В Беларусі за измену государству судят даже детей [In Belarus, even children are tried for treason], 6 March 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 38; Viasna, Некалькі дзясяткаў непаўнагадовых беларусаў былі асуджаныя ў мінулым годзе па палітычных артыкулах [Several dozen minor Belarusians were convicted last year on political articles], 12 February 2026, [url](#)





To prosecute individuals for activities perceived as dissent, the authorities have relied on several articles of the Criminal Code, including but not limited to:

- Article 130 ‘Incitement of social hatred’<sup>179</sup>
- Article 342 ‘Organisation and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them’<sup>180</sup>
- Article 367 ‘Defamation of the President of the Republic of Belarus’
- Article 369 ‘Insulting a government official’
- Article 391 ‘Insulting a judge or a people’s assessor’<sup>181</sup>
- Article 361-1 ‘Creation of an extremist formation or participation in it’
- Article 361-2 ‘Financing extremist activity’
- Article 361-4 ‘Facilitating, promoting, or aiding and abetting extremist activity’.<sup>182</sup>

The authorities perceive criticism as an action undermining the authority of the government, therefore individuals expressing criticism are punished under articles related to ‘defamation’ and ‘insult’.<sup>183</sup> Criticism directed at the President is ‘punished especially harshly’, with prison sentences ‘imposed almost automatically.’ In contrast, criticism of other officials, including judges, results more often in sentences of ‘restricted freedom with or without placement in an open-type facility.’ The severity of the sentence also depends ‘on the number of episodes and the nature of the comments’, which means that investigating and court officials have in practice freedom to ‘determine the level of punishment based on political expediency rather than legal reasoning.’<sup>184</sup>

As noted by a representative of Viasna Human Rights Center in an interview with EUAA, sentences under extremism-related articles vary depending on the specific charges but often involve the maximum penalties allowed by law. Individuals can receive sentences of up to 10-15 years in prison for activities that are not violent. Some people receive shorter sentences such as three years in prison or one year of home arrest.<sup>185</sup>

After mass protests subsided in late 2020, the authorities shifted repression to the digital space.<sup>186</sup> Already by 2021, a large number of criminal cases had been initiated to punish critical opinions expressed on social media.<sup>187</sup> After 2023, the authorities started using Articles 361-1, 361-2, and 361-4 of the Criminal Code to punish a wide range of digital interactions, such as administering or subscribing to social media channels, turning the internet ‘into a space

<sup>179</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>181</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>182</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>183</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>184</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 7-8

<sup>185</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>186</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>187</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 8



where any word, photo, or reaction can become grounds of prosecution.’ As of December 2025, around 2 800 individuals faced criminal prosecution for social media posts, comments, and messages.<sup>188</sup>

## 2.2.2. Anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws

The scope of anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws was amended in 2021.<sup>189</sup> These laws have been described as overbroad<sup>190</sup> and vague,<sup>191</sup> and are reported to be used to suppress dissent<sup>192</sup> and punish actual or perceived political opponents<sup>193</sup> as well as journalists, human rights defenders,<sup>194</sup> and civil society members.<sup>195</sup> The authorities have used anti-extremism laws against civil society representatives, including by the designation of public initiatives, their information resources, and social media accounts as extremist materials.<sup>196</sup> The use of anti-extremism laws to punish persons expressing dissent<sup>197</sup> has resulted in the situation where even reading media sources declared extremist by the authorities can lead to short-term arrest.<sup>198</sup>

The authorities maintain multiple lists that designate organisations, information resources, and individuals as extremist or terrorist.<sup>199</sup> These lists are regularly expanded, laying the grounds for continued repression.<sup>200</sup>

### a) List of extremist materials

The National List of Extremist Publications and Content is maintained by the Ministry of Information.<sup>201</sup> Sources on the list are blocked. In April 2024, the presidency-controlled

<sup>188</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>189</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 71; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>190</sup> International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Definitional Overreach: Belarus’s Expansive Definitions of “Terrorism” and “Extremism” as a Basis for Systemic Human Rights Abuses, 1 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>192</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 71; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>193</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), paras. 3, 71

<sup>194</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3; HRW, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#); Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>195</sup> HRW, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>196</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>197</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28; UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 71

<sup>198</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>199</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2026, 7 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> UN OHCHR, Belarus misuses counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation to stifle dissent: UN expert, 23 October 2023, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)





Operation and Analysis Center issued a directive allowing it to remove websites classified as extremist from the national domain system, effectively closing them.<sup>202</sup>

As of 31 March 2026, the list consisted of around 9 100 items,<sup>203</sup> comprising publications, webpages, and social media channels,<sup>204</sup> including by independent media and webpages of human rights groups.<sup>205</sup> This figure indicates a continued upward trend: as by 5 December 2025, Belarusian courts classified 8 172 materials as extremist,<sup>206</sup> including 1 444 in 2024<sup>207</sup> and 2 107 in 2025.<sup>208</sup> In 2024, such designation was applied for the first time to an LGBTIQ+ website as well as websites providing guidance to conscripts for military service.<sup>209</sup> In May and June 2024, the authorities dismantled independent legal services which assisted conscripts, treating their work as a threat to national security after the Prosecutor General labelled these resources – particularly due to their advice on military service exemptions – as extremist and contrary to the national interest.<sup>210</sup> In January 2025, the civil platform ‘Convenient City/Petitions.by’, which enabled citizens to submit petitions to the authorities on local issues, was also classified as extremist.<sup>211</sup> In March 2026, a local court designated the Instagram account of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) as extremist content.<sup>212</sup>

Following, sharing, or reacting to publications and online sources designated as extremist can lead to prosecution,<sup>213</sup> resulting in administrative detention, heavy fines, and confiscation of personal devices.<sup>214</sup>

## **b) The lists of extremist and terrorist formations**

This list of extremist formations is maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs since October 2021 and is regularly updated on its website.<sup>215</sup> The decision to designate an organisation as extremist is made by the KGB or the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>216</sup> The list includes civic groups

<sup>202</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>203</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2026, 7 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>204</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>207</sup> Viasna, 40.5% of all the "extremist" rulings were issued in 2024. What was recognized as "extremist" last year, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>209</sup> Human Constanta, Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024, 13 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>211</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 62

<sup>212</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2026, 7 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>215</sup> News.by, Ministry of Internal Affairs posts list of extremist formations on its websites, 18 October 2021, [url](#). To access the list, see Belarus, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, О мерах противодействия экстремизму и реабилитации нацизма [On measures to counter extremism and the glorification of Nazism], 6 February 2026, [url](#).

<sup>216</sup> Viasna, In 2024, 89 "extremist formations" were recognized, including media, a theater troupe, and public organizations, 10 January 2025, [url](#)



and human rights groups, media outlets, and humanitarian projects,<sup>217</sup> serving as a mechanism for criminalisation of a wide range of activism.<sup>218</sup>

There is no clear or typical profile of entities designated as extremist. In addition to major political actors, small civil society groups and even Telegram channels with low numbers of subscribers have been designated as extremist formations.<sup>219</sup> As of 16 April 2026, the list comprised 353 entities,<sup>220</sup> most of them civil society organisations and initiatives.<sup>221</sup> In March 2026, the KGB designated the Belarussian Helsinki Committee (BHC) – a human rights organisation which has been working in Belarus since 1995 – as an extremist formation, listing webpages, social media accounts and email addresses related to BHC as extremist materials.<sup>222</sup>

As explained by human rights specialist interviewed by EUAA, designation as an extremist formation particularly affects organisations, which are based abroad and work for democratisation of Belarus, including journalist associations and human rights groups. In practice, this legal framework is used to sever contacts between persons inside Belarus and those abroad, especially those who are engaged in human rights advocacy work abroad. Once designated, such entities are effectively unable to operate in Belarus, as their registration in Belarus may be revoked, bank accounts frozen, and individuals inside Belarus may face criminal prosecution for any cooperation or communication with such entities.<sup>223</sup>

Interactions with entities or individuals designated as extremist or terrorist constitute a criminal offense.<sup>224</sup> The authorities carry out widespread prosecution of individuals who create, lead, or participate in activities of such organisations.<sup>225</sup> Criminal prosecution can also follow for any financial support to these entities, regardless of its amount.<sup>226</sup>

### **c) List of persons associated with extremist activities**

The List of Belarussian Citizens, Foreign Nationals, and Stateless Persons Associated with Extremist Activities is maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and consists of individuals who were convicted under extremism-related articles.<sup>227</sup> However, in practice, persons who have already served their sentences, those subjected to compulsory psychiatric measures, or those who cannot be held criminally liable due to the expiry of the five-year statute of limitations of Article 342 of the Criminal Code can also be included on the list. In such cases,

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<sup>217</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>218</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>220</sup> Belarus, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, О мерах противодействия экстремизму и реабилитации нацизма [On measures to counter extremism and the glorification of Nazism], 6 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> Belarussian Helsinki Committee, About us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>223</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>224</sup> HRW, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>227</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#). To access the list, see Belarus, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, О мерах противодействия экстремизму и реабилитации нацизма [On measures to counter extremism and the glorification of Nazism], 6 February 2026, [url](#).





‘courts may still issue a conviction-like ruling without imposing criminal liability or formally establishing guilt,’ in violation of formal legal requirements.<sup>228</sup>

The scope of activities considered extremist has expanded to include any form of interaction with civil society organisations designated as extremist.<sup>229</sup> As of February 2026, the list contained the names of 6 353 individuals,<sup>230</sup> including 1 188 added in 2024.<sup>231</sup> In January and February 2026, as reported by Viasna, 155 individuals were added,<sup>232</sup> most of whom were convicted under Article 361-4, probably in connection with the Belarusian Hajun project (*Belaruski Hajun*).<sup>233</sup> For information on the case, refer to chapter [2.2.3 Criminal and administrative prosecution, d\) Prosecutions related to Belaruski Hajun case](#).

Inclusion on the extremist list entails wide-ranging restrictions, such as ‘the freezing of bank accounts and transfers’ and a ban on employment in public administration, education, military, healthcare, and social services. These measures remain in place for up to 5 years after a criminal record is expunged and, in practice, might be extended to 13 years after a sentence has been served.<sup>234</sup>

#### **d) List of persons associated with terrorist activities**

The list of individuals associated with terrorist activities is maintained by the KGB<sup>235</sup> and is published on its Telegram channel.<sup>236</sup> As of February 2026, it contained 1 417 individuals, including 700 Belarusian citizens. In February 2026, the list was updated twice, with one of those added being the former head of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), who faces charges for ‘incitement of hatred.’<sup>237</sup>

As noted by a human rights specialist in an interview with EUAA, the distinction between ‘the extremist’ and ‘terrorist’ lists, is primarily procedural and relates to investigative responsibility under the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>238</sup> While the lists are regularly expanded<sup>239</sup> and formally public, updates are not always published immediately. Consequently, ‘announcements of new designations may circulate before consolidated and updated lists are fully accessible, which creates uncertainty for those trying to determine what has been designated extremist.’<sup>240</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026 and Email correspondence with EUAA, 17 April 2026

<sup>229</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>230</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>231</sup> Human Constanta, Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024, 13 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>232</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>234</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>236</sup> BYSQL, «Пробиваем» себя по базам. Как узнать, ищут ли вас в Беларуси [Checking Yourself in Databases: How to Find Out if You're Wanted in Belarus], n.d., [url](#). To access the list, see Belarus, The KGB of the Republic of Belarus, Telegram, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>238</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>239</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>240</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026



Compared to those on the ‘extremist list’, individuals included on the ‘terrorist list’ face more severe financial, social, and property restrictions and are also subjected to freedom of movement restrictions. In detention, the individuals included on the ‘terrorist list’ are prohibited from receiving bank transfers.<sup>241</sup>

### 2.2.3. Criminal and administrative prosecution

#### a) Prosecution for dissemination of extremist content

In 2024, there was a significant increase in administrative charges for the ‘dissemination of extremist materials,’ with thousands of people fined or sentenced to up to 15 days in detention for subscribing to, liking, or sharing content classified as extremist, including content promoting the Belarusian language or ‘sharing a post about broken traffic lights.’<sup>242</sup> In May 2024, the first criminal case was opened under article 361-4 for sharing information in messaging apps, an act previously subject only to administrative prosecution.<sup>243</sup>

In many cases, reposting or sharing of online content was made prior to the designation of the website or social media channel as extremist.<sup>244</sup>

#### b) Prosecution of financial contributions and donations

Using the legal system, the authorities have criminalised acts of solidarity with human rights initiatives, using financial support and civic engagement as political disloyalty and evidence of involvement in extremist activity.<sup>245</sup> Authorities have prosecuted individuals for financing terrorism<sup>246</sup> and extremism for donations to civil resistance funds and organisations providing aid to political prisoners – as well as to civic initiatives, humanitarian projects, and media outlets<sup>247</sup> – after organisations were classified as extremist.<sup>248</sup>

Prosecution often involves the retroactive application of the law, where transfers made before an organisation was classified as extremist result in criminal charges. Punishments are often disproportional. For instance, an attempted donation of approximately 16 US dollars to Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment, a Belarusian volunteer formation within the Ukrainian armed forces, resulted in three-year prison sentence for ‘attempting to facilitate extremist activity.’<sup>249</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>242</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>243</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 61

<sup>244</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>245</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>246</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>248</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>249</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 15





According to a human rights specialist interviewed by EUAA, the authorities can easily trace donations made through domestic banking channels. For this reason, people generally avoid using these channels, relying instead on external payment systems or cryptocurrencies, where traceability is much more limited.<sup>250</sup>

Law enforcement officers force individuals to pay bribes to avoid prosecution.<sup>251</sup> Individuals identified as having made financial transfers to an extremist entity are reportedly summoned by the KGB and are pressured to admit guilt and ‘compensate the damage’ to avoid prosecution. This payment is typically set at ten times the original donation. However, those who pay this compensation can still be subsequently detained and convicted for the same donation.<sup>252</sup>

### c) Prosecution of individuals supporting Ukraine

Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Belarusian authorities have used anti-extremist legislation to prosecute individuals for anti-war speech activism and speech.<sup>253</sup> The suppression of anti-war opinions has become ‘one of the most widespread directions of criminal prosecution.’<sup>254</sup> Concurrently, Belarusian courts adopted Russian state propaganda narratives, integrating phrases such as ‘special military operation,’ ‘denazification,’ and ‘protection of civilian population’ into court judgements.<sup>255</sup>

The authorities perceive anti-war statements as ‘discrediting the state’ or ‘inciting hostility’<sup>256</sup> and punish both expression of support for Ukraine<sup>257</sup> and donations to organisations supporting Ukraine, which are classified as financing of extremism,<sup>258</sup> including donations to the Kastus Kalinoŭski Regiment.<sup>259</sup>

According to Viasna, as of February 2026, at least 403 individuals, including Belarussian and foreign citizens, have been convicted for expressing support to Ukraine. This includes 213 individuals convicted for ‘facilitating extremist activities’, including through sharing of photos and videos about Russian military equipment movement, 41 for treason, and 34 for an ‘act of terrorism’ (Article 289 of the Criminal Code), including cases of sabotage, such as on the railway and the Mačulišчы airfield.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>251</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>252</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>253</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>254</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>255</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>256</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>257</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#); Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>258</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> Viasna, The fourth year of the war and the fourth year of repression: Belarusians persecuted for supporting Ukraine, 24 February 2026, [url](#)



In addition, as of February 2026, over 200 political prisoners were held in detention for expressing solidarity with Ukraine, comprising those who had fought or intended to fight on the side of Ukraine, persons who carried out sabotage on the railway to prevent military equipment movement, persons who made donations or spoke publicly against the war, and persons who shared information about military equipment movement.<sup>261</sup>

Since summer 2025, the authorities have increasingly used so-called ‘charitable contributions’,<sup>262</sup> offering individuals who have made donations in support of Ukraine the opportunity to avoid criminal prosecution by making payments to state-designated organisations. The practice is formalised through the Prosecutor’s decision to decline initiating criminal proceedings ‘upon voluntary disclosure of the offense and compensation of damages.’<sup>263</sup> Payments are requested before trial or during detention, ‘in exchange for a lighter sentence or dropped charges’ and release.<sup>264</sup> While the payments and an expression of repentance are considered mitigating circumstances at trial, they reportedly not always result in lighter sentences, such as home confinement. In some cases, there have been reports of individuals making such payments and, nevertheless, being convicted.<sup>265</sup>

#### d) Prosecutions related to *Belaruski Hajun* case

The *Belaruski Hajun* project, a Telegram-based initiative, was established to collect open-source data<sup>266</sup> regarding the movement of Russian troops<sup>267</sup> and military equipment,<sup>268</sup> including railway transportation and aircraft flights.<sup>269</sup> The project had reportedly around 345 000 subscribers and the collected information was accessible to the public, journalists, and analysts.<sup>270</sup> In early February 2025, security forces gained access to the project’s chat and part of its users’ personal data,<sup>271</sup> leading to detentions of individuals who had shared photos and videos under charges of ‘aiding extremism’<sup>272</sup> and forcing the project to terminate its activities.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>261</sup> Viasna, Eight stories of Belarusians convicted for solidarity with Ukraine, 23 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> Viasna, "Refuse, and you'll go to detention": Belarus forces political detainees to pay "charity" for freedom, 2 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>263</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>264</sup> Viasna, "Refuse, and you'll go to detention": Belarus forces political detainees to pay "charity" for freedom, 2 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> Viasna, "Refuse, and you'll go to detention": Belarus forces political detainees to pay "charity" for freedom, 2 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>267</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>268</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>269</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>270</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>271</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16; Viasna, The fourth year of the war and the fourth year of repression: Belarusians persecuted for supporting Ukraine, 24 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 16





Detentions related to the *Belaruski Hajun* case continued throughout 2025 and into 2026, serving as a primary tool for the punishment of anti-war positions and support for Ukraine.<sup>274</sup> According to a human rights specialist, individuals who sent information to the project became targets of searches and prosecution: in such cases, even a single message sent via the channel is reportedly sufficient to attract the attention of the authorities.<sup>275</sup> As noted by Viasna, these cases indicate the growing pattern of ‘digital repression’, with criminal proceedings grounded on digital evidence, such as messages and data retrieved from Telegram.<sup>276</sup>

As of February 2026, at least 183 individuals were reportedly detained or convicted in connection with the *Belaruski Hajun* case. Detentions and trials remained ongoing as of February 2026 and were held almost weekly,<sup>277</sup> with defendants prosecuted for ‘assistance to extremist activities’ (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code), carrying a maximum penalty of up to five years’ imprisonment.<sup>278</sup> Also in these cases, the authorities reportedly offered detainees to make ‘voluntary donations’ to public institutions in exchange for the termination of criminal proceedings.<sup>279</sup>

## 2.3. Access to identity documentation

The 2023 amendment to the Belarusian citizenship law permits the revocation of citizenship of Belarusians living abroad if they have been charged with extremism.<sup>280</sup> Moreover, passport renewal procedures are not available at Belarusian embassies or consulates abroad, requiring individuals to return to Belarus to renew their identity documents.<sup>281</sup>

For those who left Belarus for political reasons, the expiration of their passports effectively results in the denial of renewal of identity documents, restrictions on international travel, and significant obstacles in legalising their status in their countries of residence,<sup>282</sup> which in the long-term may lead to ‘the loss of evidence of citizenship’ and ‘potentially to statelessness.’<sup>283</sup> According to a human rights specialist, individuals who stayed abroad for a long time reportedly fear returning to Belarus to renew their passports,<sup>284</sup> as doing so may expose them to border checks, device searches, and possible prosecution.<sup>285</sup>

<sup>274</sup> Viasna, The fourth year of the war and the fourth year of repression: Belarusians persecuted for supporting Ukraine, 24 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>275</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>276</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>277</sup> Viasna, The fourth year of the war and the fourth year of repression: Belarusians persecuted for supporting Ukraine, 24 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>278</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 16-17

<sup>279</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>281</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>282</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), pp. 7-8

<sup>283</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 86

<sup>284</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>285</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026



The authorities have invalidated the passports of individuals who were detained on political grounds and ‘forcibly expelled’ from Belarus after being pardoned and released from prison in 2025 and 2026. As a result, ‘these individuals face significant legal and practical consequences’, as they cannot return to Belarus and are separated from their families and face barriers ‘to accessing legal status, employment, healthcare, and essential services’ in the countries of their stay, as well as increased risks of statelessness and long-term legal uncertainty.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> UN OHCHR, Belarus: UN experts condemn Government move to invalidate passports of exiled opponents, 20 April 2026, [url](#)





## 3. Law enforcement and justice system

### 3.1. Security apparatus

The law enforcement in Belarus is characterised by a high degree of centralisation, with its main bodies controlled by the presidency.<sup>287</sup> It consists of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which manages the national police and the ministry's internal troops to ensure public security,<sup>288</sup> the KGB, tasked with the implementation of national state security policy and coordination of state security agencies,<sup>289</sup> the Investigative Committee, composed of state law enforcement agencies responsible for preliminary investigations and pretrial proceedings,<sup>290</sup> and the Prosecutor General's Office, which also conducts preliminary investigation.<sup>291</sup> Both the KGB and the Special Purpose Police Units (OMON) monitor political opposition groups, as well as the business community, and foreigners.<sup>292</sup>

Law enforcement in Belarus is instrumental in intimidation of members of political opposition and government critics,<sup>293</sup> conducting raids, mass arrests, and detentions.<sup>294</sup> Since 2020, security forces – including the KGB and the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption (HUBAZiK/GUBOPiK) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – have used threats, intimidation, and violence during arrests, even when encountering no resistance. Furthermore, arrests were frequently conducted by men in plainclothes using unmarked vehicles, who often neither identified themselves nor presented warrants.<sup>295</sup> There is no accountability<sup>296</sup> or state oversight mechanisms to address human rights violations.<sup>297</sup>

#### 3.1.1. Operational methods and surveillance

Human rights organisations noted that security officers employ 'proactive methods' and digital tools, to identify critics of the government.<sup>298</sup> This include the use of anonymous video chats (chat-roulette), where conversations are deliberately steered toward politically sensitive topics, such as government actions or the war in Ukraine, in order to provoke critical statements. These conversations are recorded, and participants are identified through Open-Source

<sup>287</sup> Belarus 24, The President set tasks for the new heads of law enforcement agencies, 24 December 2025, [url](#) Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>288</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>289</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, State Security Committee, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>290</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>291</sup> Belarus, President of the Republic of Belarus, Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Belarus, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>292</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Belarus, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>293</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>294</sup> Euronews, Belarus targets government critics with continued raids and detention, activists say, 6 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>295</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>296</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>297</sup> OMCT, Global Torture Index 2025: Belarus Factsheet, n.d., [url](#); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>298</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 6



Intelligence (OSINT), which can lead to criminal proceedings. At least 12 such cases were documented as of December 2025.<sup>299</sup>

The authorities carry out extensive monitoring of online activity. Individuals trying to remain anonymous online can be identified through phone numbers linked to their accounts, IP addresses, and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and telecommunications providers.<sup>300</sup> Security services also monitor foreign online communities actively used by Belarusians, such as social media accounts run by Ukrainian bloggers.<sup>301</sup>

During home searches, law enforcement officers demand access to personal electronic devices, sometimes using violence or threats to force people to unlock them. It was also reported that they were able to extract previously erased information, such as photos of conversations.<sup>302</sup> In addition, security agencies reportedly accessed detainees' phones to generate grounds for prosecution, including by initiating interactions with civil initiative chatbots or by subscribing users to Telegram channels linked to alleged extremist activities. Another tactic noted by human rights organisations involves the creation of fake chatbots that replicate legitimate channels in order to collect user data for the purpose of subsequent detentions.<sup>303</sup>

During the 2020 protests, authorities collected photographic evidence and used mobile phone location data to track individuals. Such data is used as evidence in criminal proceedings.<sup>304</sup> Since 2020, the authorities have employed software to analyse video footage, including through facial and license plate recognition, which they used to identify persons involved in the 2020 protests.<sup>305</sup> As of March 2025, according to the Ministry of Interior, there were 60 000 cameras equipped with facial recognition and vehicle number plate recognition functions nationwide.<sup>306</sup>

In 2024, digital surveillance capabilities of law enforcement expanded through a presidential decree requiring transport carriers, such as taxis and minibuses, to remotely share passenger data with the authorities and install in-vehicle cameras. The same year, the Investigative Committee was granted authority to access remotely information systems with personal data.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 6, 13-14

<sup>300</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>301</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>302</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>303</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>304</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>305</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#); Guryeva, M., AI in Authoritarian States: Why Belarus's AI Push Is a Human Rights Problem – and What International Actors Must Do, 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>306</sup> Belsat, Lukashenka's digital eyes, 27 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>307</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 63





The authorities have significantly intensified pressure on Belarussians living in exile, perceiving the diaspora as a primary source of dissent. In 2025, President Lukashenka explicitly threatened Belarusians abroad by stating that security services hold 'complete files' on activists and warning that their relatives in Belarus could face retaliatory measures.<sup>308</sup>

The security services reportedly monitor Belarusian citizens abroad,<sup>309</sup> including by hacking their email and social media accounts and threatening them online.<sup>310</sup> At demonstrations abroad, presence of individuals suspected of monitoring participants, photographing attendees, or gathering information is often reported.<sup>311</sup> According to a human rights specialist interviewed by EUAA, Belarusian special services attempt to infiltrate civil society groups in neighbouring countries, including by joining online meetings and collecting information and photographs from events abroad, although the full extent of such surveillance is difficult to determine.<sup>312</sup> In addition, human rights organisations have noted an increase in security services' attempts to recruit Belarussians abroad.<sup>313</sup>

### 3.1.2. Border control upon return

Security agencies conduct systematic and routine checks of mobile phones at border crossings<sup>314</sup> and check and detain individuals returning from abroad.<sup>315</sup> Upon crossing the border from Lithuania or Poland, individuals are reportedly subjected to brief interrogations.<sup>316</sup> The checks on border crossings target links to organisations designated as extremists – including through donations to funds classified as extremist<sup>317</sup> – as well as signs of support for anti-government activities,<sup>318</sup> including following independent media outlets,<sup>319</sup> participation in demonstrations abroad, and expressing support of Ukraine.<sup>320</sup>

Border guards routinely check individuals who have been abroad for more than six months, as well as those holding foreign residence permits or having travelled to Ukraine<sup>321</sup> and Ukrainian nationals entering Belarus.<sup>322</sup> The checks can take place at any border point, including

<sup>308</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 67-68, 70

<sup>309</sup> Hlotau, D., Authoritarianism without borders: Belarus and Transnational Repression in Central and Eastern Europe, 24 September 2025, [url](#); Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>310</sup> Hlotau, D., Authoritarianism without borders: Belarus and Transnational Repression in Central and Eastern Europe, 24 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>311</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>312</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>313</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Reformation, Zazulinskaya: Pardons With Forced Deportation Are A New Form Of Repression, 6 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>314</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>315</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>316</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>317</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>319</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>320</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>321</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>322</sup> Current Time, "Благодарю Бога, что меня не арестовали за лайки". Украинцы рассказывают о жесткой "фильтрации" при въезде в Беларусь ["I thank God I wasn't arrested for likes." Ukrainians report strict "filtration"



airports. However, in practice, most returns occur through land borders due to the lack of direct air connections with most of the European countries.<sup>323</sup> In January 2026, Viasna reported on the increase in checks at the border.<sup>324</sup>

At border crossings, authorities reportedly employ specialised software to extract and analyse data from travellers' devices as well as 'interconnected Telegram bots' to extract detailed personal information. Furthermore, individuals documented in the *Besporiadki* database, which logs individuals convicted in criminal or administrative proceedings related to protest activity, are subjected to mandatory, intensified screenings, such as 'deep-level searches' and 'exhaustive interrogations' every time they cross the border.<sup>325</sup>

According to a human rights specialist, individuals linked to anti-government activities of opposition face a 'real risk of arrest and imprisonment'. The source described the assessment by the authorities as largely arbitrary.<sup>326</sup> Where content considered as extremist is identified, individuals may be detained immediately after interrogation<sup>327</sup> and placed in temporary detention facilities in border towns and subjected to fines or administrative arrest, with criminal proceedings initiated in some cases.<sup>328</sup> Individuals might be also obliged to appear at a police station at a place of their registration in the country, where they may be detained and placed on the list of persons who are prohibited from leaving Belarus. This list is not public, but a person can check this information about themselves<sup>329</sup> in the database of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>330</sup>

As reported by Viasna, at least 55 individuals were detained upon return to Belarus in the period between January and September 2024: while some of them faced administrative penalties, 17 of those detained were charged with criminal offenses.<sup>331</sup> In one case described by the Human Rights Watch in May 2025, a businessman with past links to an opposition candidate in the 2020 elections, who left Belarus due to threats from the authorities, was repeatedly questioned, had his phone scanned, and was threatened with arrest by border guards and KGB officers during his short visits to the country.<sup>332</sup> In December 2025, independent outlet BG. Media reported on large-scale checks, mobile phone inspections, and interrogations at the Polish-Belarusian border which affected students, individuals holding foreign residence permits, and people who had not visited Belarus for an extended period of time.<sup>333</sup>

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upon entering Belarus], 30 March 2025, [url](#); BG. Media, «3 человека давно не были в РБ — допросы». Как проходят «беседы» на границе Беларуси с Евросоюзом в декабре ["Three people haven't been in Belarus for a long time – interrogations." How "conversations" are going on at the Belarus-EU border in December], [url](#)

<sup>323</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>324</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus, January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>325</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>326</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>327</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>328</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>329</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>330</sup> Spex Advisers, When Travel Abroad can be Prohibited, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. September 2024, 8 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>332</sup> Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>333</sup> BG. Media, «Студентов, всех с видом на жительство, всех, кто давно не был». На границе массово допрашивают белорусов из-за ВНС? ["Students, everyone with a residence permit, everyone who hasn't been





Some travellers choose to travel to Russia first and to cross Belarus from Russia, since border checks on Russia-Belarus border were previously less strict. However, by early 2026, this route has become less safe, as Belarusian border guards started conducting checks on this border as well, subjecting persons to interrogations, including about their voting history, participation in past protests, and attitude toward the war in Ukraine.<sup>334</sup> Consequently, arrests have also been reported at the Belarusian-Russian border.<sup>335</sup>

## 3.2. Administration of justice

### 3.2.1. Court system and prosecution practices

The court system in Belarus comprises the Constitutional Court and universal jurisdiction courts, which consist of the Supreme Court, *oblast* courts, Minsk city court, town courts, economic courts for Minsk and *oblasts*.<sup>336</sup> While the Constitution formally grants judges independence,<sup>337</sup> in practice, the judiciary is controlled by the executive branch and the presidency.<sup>338</sup> Judges of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court are appointed and dismissed by the ABPA on the recommendation of the President, while all other judges are appointed and dismissed directly by the President.<sup>339</sup>

As a result, the judiciary – along with law enforcement agencies and prosecutors<sup>340</sup> – has become a tool of political repression, used to suppress political opponents and persons expressing dissent through criminal and administrative prosecutions<sup>341</sup> and to contribute to ‘human rights violations and crimes against humanity.’<sup>342</sup> Judges frequently align with the penalties sought by prosecutors.<sup>343</sup> As noted by a human rights specialist, operative officers within law enforcement bodies, such as the Minister of the Interior and the KGB, play a decisive role in determining who will be prosecuted, while courts tend to largely endorse decisions made at earlier stages.<sup>344</sup>

Most of politically motivated trials are held behind closed doors, which makes it difficult for human rights organisations to access how proceedings are conducted in practice. The penalty is usually a prison sentence, and often includes financial compensation, effectively leading to property seizure.<sup>345</sup> At the same time, acquittals ‘are almost non-existent’; therefore, the main

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here in a while." Are Belarusians being questioned *en masse* at the border because of the All-Union People's Congress?], 18 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>334</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>335</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>336</sup> Belarus, Belarus.by, The Court system in Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>337</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>338</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 21

<sup>339</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>340</sup> EP, European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2025 on the situation in Belarus, five years after the fraudulent presidential elections, 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>341</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>342</sup> EP, European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2025 on the situation in Belarus, five years after the fraudulent presidential elections, 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>343</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>344</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>345</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026



area of judicial discretion is often limited to determining the exact length of the prison sentence.<sup>346</sup>

Since 2020, a pattern of repeated prosecutions for the same offense has been reported, with individuals tried multiple times for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. In some cases, they were convicted ‘three or even four times’, first on administrative charges, followed by criminal charges.<sup>347</sup>

### 3.2.2. Fair trial guarantees and access to legal counsel

The absence of judicial independence has led to a systematic violation of fair trial guarantees in politically motivated cases.<sup>348</sup> Court proceedings often involve linguistic ‘expert examinations’, which are conducted by employees of state universities, rather than by independent specialists. As a result, courts classify any content that contradicts the official discourse as extremist or ‘insulting’ the authorities.<sup>349</sup>

At the same time, the transparency of court proceedings has significantly declined<sup>350</sup> since March 2025, when the Supreme Court of Belarus removed the ‘Schedule of hearings’ section from its website,<sup>351</sup> preventing access to information on politically motivated court trials.<sup>352</sup> As of March 2026, the ‘Schedule of Hearings’ webpage remains inactive, which limits the ability of human rights defenders to monitor cases of prosecution.<sup>353</sup>

The right to legal defence in cases involving politically motivated prosecution is also severely affected by the systematic harassment of lawyers.<sup>354</sup> Since 2020, lawyers defending individuals subjected to politically motivated prosecution faced removal from bar associations and license revocations,<sup>355</sup> and in many cases have been compelled to leave the country.<sup>356</sup> By late 2023, the number of independent lawyers has declined significantly,<sup>357</sup> making it difficult for people facing criminal prosecution to hire a lawyer privately.<sup>358</sup> In such situations,

<sup>346</sup> Human rights specialist, Interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>347</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>348</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 16, 23; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>349</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>350</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>351</sup> RFE/RL, «Спроба прыхаваць рэпрэсіі», — праваабаронца Судаленка пра зьмены на сайце Вярхоўнага суду ["An attempt to hide repressions," — human rights activist Sudalenska on changes to the Supreme Court website], 1 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>352</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>353</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>354</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>355</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 29; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>356</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>357</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>358</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 22; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026





defence counsel may be assigned by the state.<sup>359</sup> As noted by Viasna, state-appointed lawyers often encourage defendants to plead guilty, regardless of the evidence.<sup>360</sup>

Since 2020, individuals under politically motivated prosecution have reportedly been denied legal representation at the time of arrest, during preliminary investigations, and at trial,<sup>361</sup> and have been very often prevented from contacting family members.<sup>362</sup> At the same time, many were compelled to provide self-incriminating statements, sometimes on camera and, in some cases, in the presence of state-appointed counsel.<sup>363</sup>

According to Human Constanta, Belarus has approximately 1 600 licenced and registered lawyers in Belarus, which is not enough to serve the country's population of 9 million. The source also noted that in some areas, there may be only one lawyer per relatively large town, who is theoretically responsible for representing all criminal cases. The shortage of lawyers affects not only politically motivated cases but also a broader range of criminal proceedings.<sup>364</sup>

### 3.2.3. Trials *in absentia*

In 2022, the law was amended to allow for special proceedings enabling criminal investigations and court trials to be conducted *in absentia* against Belarusian citizens living abroad.<sup>365</sup> In February 2025, further legislative amendments expanded the scope of special proceedings to include charges frequently used for political prosecutions such as 'discrediting the Republic of Belarus' and 'insulting an official'.<sup>366</sup> The primary legal grounds for prosecution *in absentia* is residing outside the country and allegedly evading appearance before Belarusian investigative or judicial authorities.<sup>367</sup> In March 2026, Human Constanta noted that the official 'List of persons against whom special proceedings have been initiated' includes the names of 169 individuals.<sup>368</sup>

The use of trials *in absentia* grew sharply from 18 trials in 2023 to 110 trials in 2024.<sup>369</sup> In 2025, courts convicted *in absentia* at least 30 individuals.<sup>370</sup> Trials *in absentia* are frequently used to prosecute opposition politicians and activists, human rights defenders, and journalists in exile.<sup>371</sup> While trials *in absentia* are most actively used against high-profile opposition figures

<sup>359</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>360</sup> Viasna Human Rights Centre, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>361</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>362</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>363</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>364</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>365</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 42

<sup>366</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>367</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>368</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026. For information on individuals subject to on investigations and trials in absentia, see Belarus, Специальное производство. Официально [Special proceedings. Officially], Telegram, [url](#)

<sup>369</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>370</sup> Viasna, At least 1,254 people convicted in 2025: the results of criminal prosecution, 29 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>371</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 43; AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final 'dirty trick' by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)



and activists – including Belarusian volunteers in Ukraine and representatives of solidarity funds – their application against non-public persons, who either participated in protests or posted critical comments online, has increased.<sup>372</sup> The main charges for trials *in absentia* are usually related to extremism.<sup>373</sup>

According to Viasna, the authorities appear to strategically select certain cases for trials *in absentia* to create a deterrent effect, with factors such as property confiscation and financial penalties potentially influencing case selection.<sup>374</sup> As further noted by the human rights specialist, the public mainly becomes aware of high-profile cases, as the authorities themselves publicise such cases, which does not exclude the possibility that less visible proceedings may also take place without wider public knowledge.<sup>375</sup>

Individuals tried *in absentia* are often not informed about the trial<sup>376</sup> or proceedings and learn of charges only through human rights organisations or public sources,<sup>377</sup> including public press releases from the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Moreover, they are also not informed about the investigation of their cases and have no access to the case file.<sup>378</sup> Law enforcement authorities may send case materials to a person's registered address in Belarus or question their family residing at this address. Notification may also be delivered via a Belarusian phone number, via personal social media accounts, such as Instagram,<sup>379</sup> or messaging applications such as Viber. However, such communication is 'irregular and informal.'<sup>380</sup> In addition, the Investigative Committee uses its official Telegram channels to announce such trials, which have become a primary source of this type of information since 2025.<sup>381</sup>

For court trials *in absentia*, defence lawyers are appointed by the state; however, in practice, such lawyers are prevented from contacting their clients. As a result, persons tried *in absentia* are unable to participate in a meaningful way in the proceedings against them.<sup>382</sup> Trials *in absentia* generally take place behind closed doors.<sup>383</sup> Convictions in criminal court cases tried *in absentia* are conducted in violation of basic fair trial guarantees<sup>384</sup> and often result in heavy prison sentences and include seizure of property.<sup>385</sup> Furthermore, these proceedings can

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<sup>372</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>373</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>374</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>375</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>376</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 75

<sup>377</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>378</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>379</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>380</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>381</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>382</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>383</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>384</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 42

<sup>385</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3; AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final 'dirty trick' by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)





facilitate the revocation of citizenship of persons in exile.<sup>386</sup> At the same time, courts reject ‘attempts to contest those moves.’<sup>387</sup>

### 3.2.4. The death penalty

Belarus remains the only country in Europe that applies the death penalty.<sup>388</sup> In April 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee raised concerns on violations regarding the ‘right to a fair trial and right to life’ of two persons executed in 2018<sup>389</sup> for six murders ‘linked to a real estate scam’.<sup>390</sup> In October 2024, the Minsk Regional Court sentenced to death a person convicted of murder.<sup>391</sup>

In June 2024, the Minsk Regional Court sentenced to capital punishment a German citizen<sup>392</sup> after finding him guilty under six articles of the Criminal Code, including ‘terrorism’, ‘extremism’, ‘rendering transport or communication routes unusable’,<sup>393</sup> ‘participation in mercenary activities’, and ‘undercover activities’.<sup>394</sup> At the end of July 2024, he was pardoned by president Lukashenka and released as a part of a prisoner exchange between the Russian Federation and the US and Germany.<sup>395</sup>

## 3.3. Treatment of political prisoners in detention

Sources noted on inhumane conditions of detention,<sup>396</sup> ill-treatment,<sup>397</sup> torture, and inhumane or degrading treatment in detention.<sup>398</sup> The UN Group of Independent Experts concluded that Belarus continues to systematically violate the country’s international obligations – Article 10 of ICCPR and UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment Prisoners – in relation to detainees held in various types of detention facilities across the country, such as prisons, penal colonies, pretrial detention facilities and temporary detention centres.<sup>399</sup> General

<sup>386</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>387</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>388</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 16; HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>390</sup> COE, CM/Inf(2017)23 - Abolition of the death penalty - Information document by the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law on the death penalty in Belarus, 13 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>391</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>392</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>393</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>395</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 19; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>397</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>398</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 26



reported conditions included lack of proper hygiene and healthcare,<sup>400</sup> overcrowding,<sup>401</sup> inadequate provision of food and clothing, and forced labour regardless of detainees' health condition.<sup>402</sup>

In the aftermath of the 2020 protests, law enforcement and security force officers reportedly used excessive physical force against protesters and ill-treatment and torture against individuals detained during the protests. Allegations of sexual violence have also been reported. According to the UN Group of Independent Experts, injuries sustained by the protesters 'were usually not recorded by law enforcement officials, judicial authorities or medical personnel within detention facilities.'<sup>403</sup>

Individuals arrested on politically motivated charges have reportedly faced ill-treatment and torture at all stages of detention, including at the time of their arrest and during transportation, interrogation, and detention<sup>404</sup> as well as at the stage of the investigation of politically motivated criminal cases.<sup>405</sup> Individuals included in the lists of persons involved in extremist or terrorist activities face intentional ill-treatment<sup>406</sup> and 'particularly tough prison conditions.'<sup>407</sup>

Sources noted that persons imprisoned on politically motivated charges have been subjected to harsher conditions of detention compared to other prisoners<sup>408</sup> and various restrictions, including on access to religious services, exercise facilities, and prison library.<sup>409</sup> They are reportedly also identifiable in prisons by yellow badges on their prison uniforms.<sup>410</sup> Political prisoners face prolonged isolation,<sup>411</sup> including *incommunicado* detention<sup>412</sup> and detention in solitary punishment cells.<sup>413</sup>

<sup>400</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 19; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>401</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>402</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>403</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>404</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 42

<sup>405</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>406</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 73

<sup>407</sup> AP, A political prisoner dies in Belarusian prison, human rights activists say, 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 42; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>410</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>412</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 19; HRW, Belarus Releases Opposition Politician, 13 Other Political Prisoners, 23 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>413</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#); HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)





Many political prisoners have faced ‘disciplinary deprivation of privileges, including care packages containing medicines,<sup>414</sup> contact with family members and legal counsel,<sup>415</sup> and money transfers.<sup>416</sup> Furthermore, correspondence by political prisoners is subject to arbitrary restrictions<sup>417</sup> and ‘their ability to receive parcels and correspondence was limited to close relatives only’.<sup>418</sup>

The authorities use ‘harsh disciplinary measures’ to punish political prisoners ‘for minor or fabricated transgressions.’<sup>419</sup> Particularly, Article 411 of the Criminal Code, which establishes criminal liability for ‘malicious disobedience’ to the penitentiary administration<sup>420</sup> has been used to impose additional prison sentences, enabling repeated conviction and extension of detention.<sup>421</sup> In addition, political prisoners are ‘systematically denied eligibility for early release on parole.’<sup>422</sup>

Political prisoners are continuously prevented from receiving timely and adequate medical care.<sup>423</sup> As of January 2026, more than 170 political prisoners were reportedly ‘in a particularly vulnerable situation.’<sup>424</sup> Since 2020, nine political prisoners reportedly died in detention,<sup>425</sup> including four in 2024<sup>426</sup> and two in 2025.<sup>427</sup> At least eight of nine reported deaths in custody ‘resulted from a failure to protect life in detention’. All eight were serving prison sentences in relation with the 2020 protests and some of them ‘had serious pre-existing mental and physical health conditions that were known to the authorities.’<sup>428</sup>

The UN Group of Independent Experts recorded ‘several cases in which penitentiary officers, members of the Special Purpose Police Detachment or representatives of the Office of the Prosecutor General pressured detainees on politically motivated grounds’ to request

<sup>414</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>415</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 26; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>416</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>418</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>419</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>420</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 32

<sup>421</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 33; Human rights specialist, Interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>422</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>423</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>424</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>426</sup> Viasna, Как беларусы умирают из-за политического преследования [How Belarusians are dying due to political persecution], 9 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>427</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 38



pardons.<sup>429</sup> In several instances, those who refused to sign such request ‘were subjected to severe psychological violence’, including being ‘transferred to punitive isolation cells.’<sup>430</sup>

### 3.3.1. Forced psychiatric treatment

Belarusian courts reportedly use coercive psychiatric treatment against individuals expressing dissent.<sup>431</sup> Between 2020 and 31 December 2025, at least 39 individuals were subjected to this practice related to politically motivated cases,<sup>432</sup> such as for participation in protests, insulting the president or government officials, terrorism, and promoting extremist activities.<sup>433</sup> Court decisions to transfer individuals to psychiatric hospitals were reportedly made in closed doors proceedings,<sup>434</sup> as courts classified them under Article 6 (13) of the Criminal Procedure Code as having ‘committed socially dangerous acts’.<sup>435</sup>

Individuals subjected to coercive treatment are reportedly held *incommunicado* in mental health facilities. Unlike prisoners in penitentiary system, they may be detained for indefinite periods and are not eligible for parole, amnesty, or pardon.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 63

<sup>430</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 64

<sup>431</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>432</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>433</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 37; UN OHCHR, Belarus: Experts alarmed at reports of coercive psychiatric treatment as punishment for political dissent, 24 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 37; UN OHCHR, Belarus: Experts alarmed at reports of coercive psychiatric treatment as punishment for political dissent, 24 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>435</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>436</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 37; UN OHCHR, Belarus: Experts alarmed at reports of coercive psychiatric treatment as punishment for political dissent, 24 April 2025, [url](#)





## 4. Treatment of selected profiles and groups of the population

### 4.1. Political opponents, including perceived political opponents

Authorities initiate legal proceedings against political opponents, including those perceived as challenging ‘the conduct of the elections.’<sup>437</sup> Prosecution heavily relies on criminal provisions on extremism and participation in or cooperation with organisations deemed extremist, with the situation remaining ‘essentially unchanged’ since 2020.<sup>438</sup>

In May 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated criminal proceedings against participants in the elections to the Coordination Council, a ‘proto-parliament’ established in 2020 and by the Belarusian opposition in exile supporting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as the leader of Belarusian democratic forces.<sup>439</sup> All 257 participants in the elections were labelled as ‘representatives of 12 extremist formations’ and faced criminal charges, for ‘conspiracy to seize State power’, creation of an extremist formation, and aiding extremist activities.<sup>440</sup> In January 2025, four activists associated with the election observation initiative Honest People<sup>441</sup> were sentenced *in absentia* to prison sentences ranging from eight to ten years<sup>442</sup> for the creation of an extremist formation, insulting the President, inciting hatred, slander, discrediting Belarus, and calling for sanctions against the authorities.<sup>443</sup>

The authorities punish active and public support of structured opposition and solidarity groups, including any financial support.<sup>444</sup> Since 2021, the authorities prosecute individuals involved in the Peramoha Plan (‘Victory Plan’), a Telegram chatbot<sup>445</sup> created to mobilise protesters by providing them with a set of actions.<sup>446</sup> The project was designated as extremist formation in November 2021, which entails criminal liability for both its creators, who are based in exile, and participants.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>437</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 56

<sup>438</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>439</sup> EP, Belarus: Sergey Tihanovski and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to address MEPs, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>440</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 56

<sup>441</sup> Initiative Hones People was created in June 2020 and was engaged in monitoring of violations during the 2020 presidential election, Honest People, What We Do, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> Viasna, До десяти лет колонии с большими штрафами: вынесен заочный приговор по делу "Честных людей" [Up to ten years in prison with large fines: a verdict in absentia handed down in the "Honest People" case], 22 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>445</sup> Article 19 and Human Constanta, Quashing online dissent, August 2025, [url](#), p. 8; Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>446</sup> Human Constanta, Overview of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in October-December 2021, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>447</sup> Human Constanta, Overview of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in October-December 2021, 18 January 2022, [url](#); Article 19 and Human Constanta, Quashing online dissent, August 2025, [url](#), p. 8



In an interview with the EUAA, a human rights specialist noted that individuals perceived as not supporting the policies of Lukashenka ‘face a serious risk of persecution.’ According to the source, the determining factor is not whether a person is objectively a political opponent, but whether they are perceived as such by the authorities. This ‘perception-based approach’ results in ‘a broad range of persons’ who may be affected by the prosecution.<sup>448</sup> A representative from Human Constanta further noted that the authorities consider anyone who does not openly support the regime as a critic of the government: a public alignment with state policies and activities is expected, and deviation from this may trigger suspicion of being against the authorities. This includes the expected support of the war in Ukraine.<sup>449</sup>

Individuals who are neither public figures nor activists may come to the attention of authorities through relatively minor expressions of views perceived as critical. Consequently, any public statement, including comments on social media, may be sufficient to attract scrutiny.<sup>450</sup> In November 2025, a photographer from Minsk was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting the president,<sup>451</sup> reportedly based on a single comment on social media.<sup>452</sup> In December 2025, the brother of the abovementioned person,<sup>453</sup> an activist from Rechytsa (Rečyca) was sentenced to 10 years in prison after the court found him guilty of treason and participation in extremist activities.<sup>454</sup>

## 4.2. Protesters

The authorities continue to systematically punish participation in street protests.<sup>455</sup> Penalties for the participation in the 2020 mass protests have been widely applied over the following years,<sup>456</sup> with prosecutions continuing in 2024<sup>457</sup> and 2025.<sup>458</sup> On 27-28 February 2022, unauthorised protests were reported in connection with the constitutional referendum and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The authorities detained over 1 000 people, amid reported cases of police violence and ill-treatment of detainees. Most of those detained were charged with administrative offences for participation in unauthorised mass events, generally resulting in fines and/or short-term detention of up to 30 days.<sup>459</sup>

To punish participants in the 2020 and 2022 protests, the authorities use Article 342 of the Criminal Code ‘Participation in actions that constitute a severe breach of public order’,<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>449</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>450</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>451</sup> Viasna, Vadzim Zdaravennau, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>452</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2025, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>453</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2025, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>454</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>455</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>456</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026,

<sup>457</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>458</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>459</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Belarus, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2025, 8 December 2025, [url](#)





which carries a maximum penalty of up to three years' imprisonment,<sup>461</sup> including for activities previously treated as an administrative offense.<sup>462</sup> In some instances, individuals have been sentenced twice for the same act or received multiple sentences based on the same evidence.<sup>463</sup> Between July and September 2025, participation in the 2020 protests remained one of the most common grounds for criminal prosecution,<sup>464</sup> with at least 643 individuals convicted under Article 342 in 2025.<sup>465</sup>

By late 2025, there was a notable shift in the application of Article 342 of the Criminal Code. As this Article has a five-year statute of limitations for criminal liability, an increasing number of cases were discontinued<sup>466</sup> between October and December 2025.<sup>467</sup> Nevertheless, as reported by Viasna, in the first months of 2026, prosecutions for participation in the 2020 protests were still taking place in cases where the statute of limitations had not expired and had not been interrupted by a subsequent offence.<sup>468</sup> Furthermore, even where cases were dismissed on procedural grounds due to the lapse of the statute of limitations, defendants were still added to the official list of extremists, showing that such designations are made even in the absence of criminal conviction.<sup>469</sup> In the last three months of 2025, 33 individuals were reportedly added to the list of extremists with a note that they were released from liability due to the expiration of the statute of limitations.<sup>470</sup>

According to Human Constanta, some cases against individuals suspected of participating in the 2020 protests have been closed. However, the source noted that such outcomes depend on various factors, such as, for example, whether the authorities find additional incriminating material on the person's phone. While criminal cases are unlikely to be opened solely for participation in the 2020 protests, such involvement remains known to the authorities, who may initiate prosecution if additional grounds emerge. In 2025, the organisation observed that many people were called for interrogation by the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in connection with the 2020 protests.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Amnesty International, Belarus: Authorities unleash mass criminal proceedings against hundreds of peaceful protesters, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>462</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>463</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>464</sup> Human Constanta, Обзор борьбы с «экстремизмом» в Беларуси за июль-сентябрь 2025 [Review of the fight against extremism in Belarus for July–September 2025], 5 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> Viasna, At least 1,254 people convicted in 2025: the results of criminal prosecution, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>466</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>467</sup> Human Constanta, Судебный конвейер за информацию о военной технике и «экстремистские» треш-блогеры [A judicial conveyor belt for information about military equipment and "extremist" trash bloggers], 30 January 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>468</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>469</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>470</sup> Human Constanta, Судебный конвейер за информацию о военной технике и «экстремистские» треш-блогеры [A judicial conveyor belt for information about military equipment and "extremist" trash bloggers], 30 January 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>471</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026



The authorities increasingly rely on surveillance technologies, including facial recognition technology.<sup>472</sup> For identification purposes, law enforcement bodies also use publicly available footages, as many protests have been filmed by state and independent media, as well as by videos posted on social media.<sup>473</sup> For example, in July 2025, state-affiliated Telegram channels reportedly posted photos and videos from the 2020 protests held in the cities of Grodno, Bereza, Zhodino, and Baranovichi, asking for help to identify protesters.<sup>474</sup> Mobile billing data has also been used as a proof of presence at protests, even in the absence of photo or video evidence.<sup>475</sup>

As many Belarusians abroad remain politically active, the authorities have also initiated criminal cases to penalise their participation in protests outside of the country.<sup>476</sup> As noted by Human Constanta in email correspondence with EUAA, since 2020, law enforcement has systematically relied on photo and video footage to identify participants at diaspora rallies.<sup>477</sup> Following anti-government rallies held abroad on 26 January 2025, the day of the presidential elections, the Investigative Committee reportedly initiated a criminal case involving approximately 400 individuals as suspects.<sup>478</sup> After public demonstrations held in Poland, Lithuania, U.S., U.K., and Canada on 22 March 2025 to mark Freedom Day – commemorating the anniversary of the country’s 1918 declaration of independence and a symbol of the protest movement<sup>479</sup> – the Investigative Committee identified at least 207 participants,<sup>480</sup> with identifications reportedly made through photo and video materials.<sup>481</sup> As a consequence, the authorities raided the homes of participants’ relatives in Minsk and other parts of the country,<sup>482</sup> subjecting them to searches and interrogations.<sup>483</sup> As of August 2025, the number of protesters identified by security forces reportedly rose to at least 467 people.<sup>484</sup>

<sup>472</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>473</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>474</sup> Zerkalo, Сілавікі пашырылі геаграфію пошуку ўдзельнікаў пратэстаў 2020 года. Іх цікавяць людзі, якія выходзілі на маршы яшчэ ў адным горадзе [Law enforcement has expanded its search for participants in the 2020 protests. They are interested in people who took part in marches in another city], 18 July 2025, [url](#); Mediazona Belarus, Сіловики просят доносить на людей, попавших на кадры с протестов в Березе, Жодино и Барановичах [Security forces are asking people to report those who appear in footage from the protests in Bereza, Zhodino, and Baranovichi], [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>476</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>477</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>478</sup> Lawtrend, Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus – March 2025, 11 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>479</sup> Mezha, Belarusian authorities threaten diaspora activists with criminal charges and asset seizures over Freedom Day rallies, 23 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>480</sup> Mezha, Belarusian authorities threaten diaspora activists with criminal charges and asset seizures over Freedom Day rallies, 23 March 2026, [url](#); AP, Belarus targets dozens of government critics with raids and detention, advocates say, 6 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> Human Constanta, Обзор борьбы с «экстремизмом» в Беларуси за июль-сентябрь 2025 [Overview of the Fight Against “Extremism” in Belarus: July–September 2025], 5 November 2025, [url](#); Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>482</sup> AP, Belarus targets dozens of government critics with raids and detention, advocates say, 6 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> Viasna, Raids, property seizures, interrogations: How Belarus is persecuting participants of solidarity actions abroad, 7 August 2025, [url](#); Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>484</sup> Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026





In some cases, as further noted by Human Constanta, Belarusians abroad reportedly cooperate with the Belarusian authorities by recording protests and sending footage to law enforcement.<sup>485</sup>

As the authorities perceive the organisers of the March 2025 rallies as extremist formations, the persons identified as participants are treated as suspects under charges of ‘aiding extremist activity’ (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code).<sup>486</sup> This offence is punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment and fines ranging from approximately 7 500 to 750 000 US dollars, depending on the offense and the offender’s financial circumstances. Furthermore, in such cases, the authorities frequently seize property to secure payment, what is reportedly a main reason for raids.<sup>487</sup>

Besides Article 361-4, participants in rallies abroad also face charges under Article 361 ‘Calls for restrictive measures (sanctions) or other actions intended to harm the national security’, which carries penalties of up to 12 years of imprisonment. These provisions are often applied together with other articles of the Criminal Code used in politically motivated charges. The authorities treat acts of protests as threats to national security, which is interpreted broadly and enables the use of special (*in absentia*) proceedings to try and sentence individuals abroad.<sup>488</sup>

### 4.3. Journalists and media workers

Journalistic activity in Belarus is under complete state control,<sup>489</sup> with the situation having deteriorated after 2020.<sup>490</sup> Since 2021, virtually all independent Belarusian media have been dismantled,<sup>491</sup> and left the country, with the crackdown affecting also those who had switched their focus to non-political content.<sup>492</sup> Reporters without Borders (RSF) identified Belarus as the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists until the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022.<sup>493</sup>

Suppression of independent media, as well as of civil society organisations (CSOs), continued to intensify throughout 2024<sup>494</sup> and 2025.<sup>495</sup> In the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index, Belarus ranked 166<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries, one place down from 2024, reflecting ‘massive

<sup>485</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>486</sup> Viasna, Raids, property seizures, interrogations: How Belarus is persecuting participants of solidarity actions abroad, 7 August 2025, [url](#); Human Constanta, Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>487</sup> Viasna, Raids, property seizures, interrogations: How Belarus is persecuting participants of solidarity actions abroad, 7 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026 and Email correspondence with EUAA, 13 March 2026

<sup>489</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>490</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>492</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>494</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>495</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)



repression of independent media outlets,' characterised by censorship, coordinated raids on media offices and homes of media workers, mass arrests, and violence.<sup>496</sup>

The authorities use anti-extremism legislation as a primary tool to criminalise independent reporting and restrict access to information,<sup>497</sup> forcing independent journalists to leave the profession or to leave the country.<sup>498</sup> To avoid prosecution, non-state media sources which continue to operate in the county are forced to 'rigorous censorship.'<sup>499</sup>

Most independent media outlets and the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) have been declared extremist and banned.<sup>500</sup> By the end of 2025, according to BAJ, 42 media projects were designated as extremist formations,<sup>501</sup> a designation that criminalises any involvement with such outlets, including for those journalists no longer connected to them at the time of the designation.<sup>502</sup> Participation in such media, including subscribing to or working with them, is punishable by up to seven years in prison for aiding extremist activities.<sup>503</sup>

Sources noted that journalists and media workers face arbitrary arrests,<sup>504</sup> detentions,<sup>505</sup> raids and searches<sup>506</sup> at media outlets and journalists' homes,<sup>507</sup> seizure of devices,<sup>508</sup> and occasional attacks.<sup>509</sup> As reprisal for their work,<sup>510</sup> the authorities punish them through vaguely defined anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws, often applying the relevant legislation retroactively,<sup>511</sup> with courts handing down lengthy sentences<sup>512</sup> in closed door trials.<sup>513</sup> As of the end of December 2025, 28 media workers were in detention,<sup>514</sup> with at least 12 detained on politically motivated charges in 2025.<sup>515</sup>

<sup>496</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 21; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>498</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>499</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>500</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>501</sup> BAJ, 12 затрыманняў і 34 ператрусы: якія яшчэ лічбы прынёс 2025 год у медыя? Лічбы года [12 arrests and 34 searches: what other figures did 2025 bring to the media? Figures of the year], 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>502</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 20-21

<sup>503</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>504</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 82

<sup>505</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 82; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 59;

<sup>507</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 59

<sup>508</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>509</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>510</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 60

<sup>512</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> AP, Belarus journalist is convicted of treason and jailed for 10 years as crackdown on dissent continues, 8 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>514</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#); Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>515</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)





In December 2024, the entire editorial staff of the regional publication Inter-press in the city of Baranavichy was arrested, with seven journalists of the outlet charged with ‘aiding extremist activity.’<sup>516</sup> In August 2025, four journalists from the related regional news portal BAR24 were convicted under the same charges. In February 2026, two heads of the portal were sentenced to 12 and 14 years in prison on the charges of treason (Article 356 of the Criminal Code).<sup>517</sup>

In a case of individual prosecution, in July 2025, a journalist was sentenced to 10 years for treason and revealing state secrets.<sup>518</sup> In September 2025, a prominent independent journalist was convicted to four years in prison on extremism charges for writing articles and commentaries critical to the government.<sup>519</sup> In February 2026, a criminal case on treason charges was sent to court against a journalist who left Belarus in 2021 and returned to the country in January 2026.<sup>520</sup>

According to BAJ, at least 600 journalists have left Belarus,<sup>521</sup> with many continuing to face reprisals even in exile,<sup>522</sup> such as searches of their properties and freezing of their bank accounts in Belarus, investigations<sup>523</sup> and trials *in absentia*, inclusion on international wanted lists, and seizure of their property in Belarus.<sup>524</sup>

Families of independent journalists and media workers, including of those abroad,<sup>525</sup> were reportedly subjected to home searches, intimidation<sup>526</sup> and threats, with some of them asking rights groups not to publicise their cases out of fear of retaliation by the authorities.<sup>527</sup>

<sup>516</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 59

<sup>517</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>518</sup> AP, Belarus journalist is convicted of treason and jailed for 10 years as crackdown on dissent continues, 8 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> AP, Belarus sentences journalist to 4 years in prison, days after release of over 50 political prisoners, 16 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> BAJ, Journalist Pavel Dabravolski’s case sent to court, 3 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#); HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 82

<sup>523</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 83

<sup>524</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>525</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 83

<sup>526</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>527</sup> AP, An incessant crackdown in Belarus hurls dozens of independent journalists into harsh prisons, 20 April 2025, [url](#)



## 4.4. Human rights defenders and lawyers

### 4.4.1. Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders in Belarus face arbitrary detention in retaliation for their professional activities.<sup>528</sup> One human rights defender in detention was convicted to seven years in prison<sup>529</sup> for providing a human rights organisation ‘with information about politically motivated criminal cases in courts.’<sup>530</sup> In December 2025, two human rights defenders were pardoned as part of US negotiations with the Belarusian authorities.<sup>531</sup> On 19 March 2026, three human rights defenders were released following a presidential pardon.<sup>532</sup>

The authorities use anti-extremism legislation against human rights defenders. In August 2025, the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, established in 2023 by Belarusian attorneys in exile, was declared an extremist formation. Consequently, its members face criminal prosecution for involvement in extremist activities in relation to their professional duties, including providing legal counselling on trials conducted *in absentia* and assisting with complaints to international human rights bodies.<sup>533</sup>

### 4.4.2. Lawyers

Bar associations in Belarus lack independence<sup>534</sup> and are fully controlled by the authorities.<sup>535</sup> The legal profession is ‘under severe threat’, as the authorities exert pressure on independent lawyers,<sup>536</sup> bar their access to the profession, and subject them to politically motivated administrative and criminal prosecution<sup>537</sup> and detention, creating a situation in which lawyers become political prisoners themselves.<sup>538</sup>

Between 2020 and May 2024, at least 140 lawyers were disbarred by regional bar associations or had their licenses arbitrarily revoked by the Ministry of Justice. While the Ministry of Justice formally justifies such revocations as based on decisions of its Qualification Commission – citing regulatory violations or insufficient qualifications – the affected lawyers had, on average, more than 13.5 years of professional experience. Many had practiced for

<sup>528</sup> RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>529</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Vital Chopik, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> Reuters, Ales Bialiatski, who won Nobel prize while behind bars, is freed from prison in Belarus, 13 December 2025, [url](#); Viasna Human Rights Center, Uladzimir Labkovich, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> Article 19, Belarus: Release of Nasta Lojka and over 200 other political prisoners, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>533</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 81

<sup>534</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 68

<sup>535</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>536</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>537</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>538</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)





over two decades and some had previously been ‘recognised by bar associations for their excellence.’<sup>539</sup>

Retaliatory practices have particularly affected lawyers defending ‘prominent opposition figures and anti-government activists,’ contributing to a steady decline in the number of legal professionals in Belarus.<sup>540</sup> As representing clients in politically sensitive cases has become increasingly dangerous, lawyers are difficult to find for such cases,<sup>541</sup> which has severely undermined the rights to a fair trial, due process, and legal remedy.<sup>542</sup> Human Constanta further noted that ‘if a lawyer is too active, the Ministry of Justice would conduct checks about them.’<sup>543</sup>

As of January 2025, at least nine lawyers were criminally convicted for their professional or human rights activities.<sup>544</sup> As of end of 2025, six lawyers were serving prison sentences ranging from six to ten years on politically motivated charges,<sup>545</sup> including for ‘providing legal aid to political opposition figures and activists’ and giving interviews to independent media designated as extremist formations.<sup>546</sup> In November 2025, a lawyer, who lost her licence for representing protesters in 2020, was sentenced to house arrest on the charges of ‘inciting hatred.’<sup>547</sup>

In detention, lawyers face retaliatory ill-treatment comparable to that imposed on other political prisoners.<sup>548</sup>

## 4.5. Former political prisoners

As of end of February 2026, the number of former political prisoners stood at 3 356.<sup>549</sup> Between July 2024 and December 2025, 617 political prisoners were released through a series of presidential pardons and diplomatic negotiations to relieve US sanctions against Belarus.<sup>550</sup> After the release of 227 political prisoners between July and December 2024,<sup>551</sup> 14 political prisoners were released and transferred to Lithuania.<sup>552</sup> In September 2025, 52

<sup>539</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>541</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>542</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>543</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>544</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 39

<sup>545</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>548</sup> HRW, “I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.” Politically Motivated Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers in Belarus, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>550</sup> Belsat, 22 political prisoners pardoned in Belarus, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>551</sup> HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>552</sup> Le Monde, Belarus opposition leader Siarhei Tsikhanouski freed from jail, 21 June 2025, [url](#)



political prisoners, including 14 foreign nationals, were released<sup>553</sup> and similarly transferred to Lithuania.<sup>554</sup> In December 2025, following the negotiations with the US administration, 123 political prisoners, including several prominent opposition figures and human rights defenders, were released<sup>555</sup>; 114 of them were sent to Ukraine and 9 to Lithuania.<sup>556</sup> This was followed by the release of 250 political prisoners on 19 March 2026.<sup>557</sup>

Sources noted that the release of political prisoners amounts to forced exile in practice<sup>558</sup> or *de facto* deportation,<sup>559</sup> as many of those released were transferred abroad directly from a prison.<sup>560</sup> Prior to their release, security officers confiscated or destroyed their identification documents,<sup>561</sup> such as passports or other identity papers.<sup>562</sup> For example, 14 former prisoners expelled to Lithuania in September 2025 and 18 prisoners expelled to Ukraine in December 2025 had no identity documents with them.<sup>563</sup> Similarly, political prisoners freed on 19 March 2026, including 15 individuals transferred to Lithuania, were reportedly released without passports or other identity documents.<sup>564</sup>

Former political prisoners who remain in Belarus face strict supervision beyond the standard regime applied to released convicts.<sup>565</sup> This includes regular reporting to police stations,<sup>566</sup> a requirement to remain at home between 22:00 and 6:00 and obtain police permission to leave their district of residence,<sup>567</sup> and frequent police visits to their homes.<sup>568</sup> In some cases, supervision is conducted on a weekly or even daily basis, creating conditions comparable to house arrest.<sup>569</sup>

The supervision period may last several years and, in some cases, up to ten years. Failure to comply with these obligations can result in additional criminal charges, including prosecution under Article 422 of the Criminal Code ‘Evasion of preventive supervision’, which is

<sup>553</sup> Guardian (The), Belarus frees 52 political prisoners, including foreigners, after visit by US delegation, 11 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> CNN, Belarus pardons scores of prisoners ‘at the request’ of Trump, Lukashenko says, 12 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> Guardian (The), Belarus releases 123 prisoners including opposition leaders after US lifts sanctions, 13 December 2025, [url](#); HRW, More than 1,000 Belarusians Remain in Prison for Exercising Their Rights, 15 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>556</sup> Reuters, Lukashenko frees Nobel winner Bialiatki and key Belarus opposition figures in deal with US, 13 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>557</sup> DW, Belarus releases 250 political prisoners as part of US deal, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>558</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>560</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#); Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>561</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Belarus, 14 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>562</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#); Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>563</sup> AP, Prisoners freed by Belarus say their passports are taken away in a final ‘dirty trick’ by officials, 20 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>564</sup> RFI, «Дали только аттестат за 9 класс». Политзаключенных депортировали из Беларуси без документов [They only gave me a certificate for completion of basic secondary education" Political prisoners deported from Belarus without documents], 20 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 36; Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>567</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>568</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>569</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), paras. 4, 36





punishable by up to two years of imprisonment, and immediate arrest.<sup>570</sup> These restrictions, combined with possible new charges,<sup>571</sup> force many to leave the country.<sup>572</sup>

Additional systemic restrictions are applied to those included in the lists of persons involved in extremist and terrorist activities.<sup>573</sup> Particularly those on the list of persons involved in terrorist activities are reportedly prohibited from holding SIM cards or bank accounts, which prevents them from making basic financial transactions such as paying for housing. While there were cases when several persons had been removed from these lists, this procedure remains difficult.<sup>574</sup>

Beyond these formal restrictions, former political prisoners are denied ‘meaningful employment opportunities’, as employers, including in the private sector, may be pressured not to hire former political prisoners by the authorities. Consequently, former political prisoners are effectively marked out and prevented from rebuilding ‘a normal life’, which pushes many to leave the country.<sup>575</sup>

## 4.6. Relatives of activists and (former) political prisoners

Family members of activists living in exile and former political prisoners face persistent pressure,<sup>576</sup> harassment, and intimidation by security forces in Belarus.<sup>577</sup> Law enforcement agencies reportedly conduct visits to relatives of former political prisoners living in exile, including those who were expelled from Belarus;<sup>578</sup> in some cases, they state that the purpose of such visits is to locate the expelled person<sup>579</sup> or to pressure the family to influence the person to return to Belarus.<sup>580</sup> In several cases, the authorities have confiscated or forcibly sold the property of the convicted individuals, effectively extending the punishment to the entire family.<sup>581</sup> Some individuals have also faced dismissal from employment due to family members residing in ‘unfriendly’ countries.<sup>582</sup>

<sup>570</sup> Viasna Human Rights Center, Online interview with EUAA, 12 March 2026

<sup>571</sup> Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#); HRW, Belarus – Events of 2024, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Political Retaliation against Businesses, 9 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>573</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), paras. 36, 75; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>574</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 75

<sup>575</sup> Human rights specialist, Online interview with EUAA, 20 March 2026

<sup>576</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 87

<sup>578</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 65; Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>580</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 65; Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>581</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>582</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)



Repression against family members of political prisoners intensified in January 2024 and October/November 2024.<sup>583</sup> In January 2024, KGB officers conducted raids, interrogations and detentions affecting nearly 300 families of political prisoners and those who had received support from the INeedHelpBY initiative,<sup>584</sup> an NGO which supports political prisoners by providing food, which was designated as an extremist organisation in January 2024.<sup>585</sup> This resulted in hundreds of prosecutions of relatives of political prisoners under administrative charges for the 'use of foreign donations to carry out extremist activities' (Article 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Offences), leading to arrests, fines, and short-term prison sentences, with women being affected the most.<sup>586</sup> In November 2024, KGB officers conducted another wave of raids on homes of political prisoners, including searches for alleged receipt of assistance from INeedHelpBY, as well as arrests and detentions of their relatives.<sup>587</sup>

Pressure against family members of exiled activists and political prisoners continued throughout 2025. For example, in January 2025, police conducted unscheduled home visits and summoned former detainees and their relatives for 'preventive conversations'.<sup>588</sup> In October 2025, law enforcement officials reportedly visited the homes of relatives of exiled activists to conduct searches and interviews.<sup>589</sup> The same month, dozens of relatives of political prisoners and persons supporting them were reportedly detained, with the Belarusian media outlet Nasha Niva comparing these raids to the mass raids carried out in 2024.<sup>590</sup> In February 2026, several relatives of activists in exile were reportedly summoned to the KGB office in the Homiel' Region (Gomel oblast).<sup>591</sup>

In March 2026, the Central District Court of Minsk designated the Telegram channel 'Pretrial Detention Centre No. 1 In Kolyadichi' – reportedly the largest group supporting relatives of detainees, with approximately 1 800 members – as extremist material. The chat has been reportedly used by relatives of detainees to share practical information, including on sending parcels and queuing procedures at the detention facility.<sup>592</sup>

As noted by Human Constanta, publicly active relatives of political prisoners, particularly those giving interviews or speaking about the cases of their relatives, can face prosecution by the

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<sup>583</sup> Viasna, "The persecution of Belarusians has spread beyond the borders of Belarus." How the regime harassed people in exile in 2024, 26 December 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of Human Rights in Belarus, 22 April 2025, [url](#), para. 47

<sup>584</sup> Viasna, "The persecution of Belarusians has spread beyond the borders of Belarus." How the regime harassed people in exile in 2024, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>585</sup> INeedHelpBy, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>587</sup> Viasna, "The persecution of Belarusians has spread beyond the borders of Belarus." How the regime harassed people in exile in 2024, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 57

<sup>589</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2025, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>590</sup> Nasha Niva, Новая аблава: затрымалі дзясяткі сваякоў палітвязняў і тых, хто ім дапамагаў — што вядома [New roundup: dozens of relatives of political prisoners and those who helped them detained - what is known], 15 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>591</sup> Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2026, 3 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>592</sup> Current Times, В Беларусі "экстремістскім фарміраваннем" прызналі крупнейшы чат па падтрымке родстваўнікаў заключенных [In Belarus, the largest chat group supporting relatives of prisoners has been declared an "extremist organization"], 10 April 2026, [url](#)





authorities.<sup>593</sup> Criminal cases against relatives of political prisoners are frequently based on interviews given to media outlets designated as extremist formations and often involve retroactive prosecution.<sup>594</sup> For example, in February 2025, two women were sentenced to three years and three years and three months, respectively, for interviews given to Belsat TV between 2020 and 2022, in which they publicly supported their sons, one of whom is in exile and the other had been sentenced to 18 years in prison.<sup>595</sup> Human Constanta noted that they have documented at least five cases in which people were prosecuted after actively helping their imprisoned relatives or giving interviews. The organisation also noted that even the relatives who are not publicly active may be subjected to home searches by law enforcement, although those who are not critical of the authorities are less likely to face prosecution.<sup>596</sup>

## 4.7. LGBTIQ+ persons and activists

The situation of LGBTIQ+ people in Belarus is characterised by a lack of protection mechanisms for LGBTIQ+ rights<sup>597</sup> and a deteriorating human rights environment.<sup>598</sup> While same-sex relations and gender transition are not criminalised and remain legal,<sup>599</sup> discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people is widespread.<sup>600</sup> The Belarusian authorities have declared ‘the safeguarding and promotion of the traditional family’ a matter of national security<sup>601</sup> and perceive gender identity as an area that requires protection from ‘Western ideology’, with ‘hostile rhetoric toward the LGBTIQ+ community’ expressed by state officials and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Belarus.<sup>602</sup>

Legislation discriminating against LGBTIQ+ people has been expanded.<sup>603</sup> Since April 2024, the legal definition of pornography has been expanded to include depictions of same-sex relationships and transgender people, allowing the authorities to treat such content as pornography, punishable by up to four years’ imprisonment.<sup>604</sup> In July 2025, the Law on the

<sup>593</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>594</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>595</sup> Dissidentby and Human Constanta, From streets to screens: digital repression in Belarus (2020-2025), 12 December 2025, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>596</sup> Human Constanta, Online interview with EUAA, 25 February 2026

<sup>597</sup> Euronews, Belarus passes bill to crack down on LGBTIQ+ rights echoing similar law in Russia, 2 April 2026, [url](#); AP, Belarusian parliament passes a bill to crack down on LGBTQ+ rights, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> TG House, Report: Situation of the LGBTIQ+ Community in Belarus, 2024, [url](#), p. 10; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>599</sup> CSO meter, Belarus set to punish information on LGBTIQ, childlessness, and gender transition, 3 September 2026, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 45

<sup>601</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 62

<sup>602</sup> TG House, The Monitoring of Repression and Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTIQ+ Community in 2025, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>603</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#); TG House, The Monitoring of Repression and Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTIQ+ Community in 2025, 28 January 2026, [url](#); ILGA Europe, Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>604</sup> HRW, Belarus Calls LGBT Lives ‘Pornography’, 12 April 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus, February 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 62



Rights of the Child was amended to classify the ‘propaganda of homosexual relations, gender reassignment, paedophilia, and childlessness’ as harmful to the psychological health of children.<sup>605</sup>

On 2 April 2026, the parliament adopted amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences, introducing, *inter alia*,<sup>606</sup> Article 19.16 ‘Propaganda of homosexuality, sex change, childlessness, and paedophilia’. Under this legislation, the distribution of information that creates a positive perception of ‘same-sex relations, gender transition, voluntary childlessness, or recognising paedophilia as permissible’ is punishable by fines, community labour, or administrative detention of up to 15 days.<sup>607</sup> The term ‘propaganda’ lacks a clear legal definition, allowing for the broad and arbitrary application of the law,<sup>608</sup> including potential punishment for educational materials, social media posts, and the work of civil society and human rights organisations.<sup>609</sup> The law was signed by President Lukashenka on 15 April 2026<sup>610</sup> and will enter into force in mid-June 2026.<sup>611</sup>

Sources noted that LGBTIQ+ people have faced harassment and intimidation,<sup>612</sup> increased surveillance,<sup>613</sup> arbitrary arrest and detention,<sup>614</sup> and mistreatment in detention.<sup>615</sup> Security forces reportedly carry out raids on LGBTIQ+ cultural events,<sup>616</sup> nightclubs and private gatherings.<sup>617</sup> During raids, LGBTIQ+ individuals have reportedly been subjected to selective detention, document checks, and searches of mobile devices, as well as interrogations ‘often conducted without the drafting of formal records.’<sup>618</sup> In addition, KGB officers reportedly used blackmail against LGBTIQ+ individuals to pressure them into cooperation.<sup>619</sup>

Due to ‘the absence of independent media and effective legal protection mechanisms’, many violations of the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals remain undocumented, with many of those

<sup>605</sup> ILGA Europe, Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 1; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>606</sup> Belsat, Lukashenka signs law imposing fines for LGBT rights and related issues, 16 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>607</sup> UN OHCHR, UN experts alarmed by law targeting LGBT, women’s rights advocates and independent voices in Belarus, 15 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>608</sup> TG House, Лукашенко подписал закон о наказании за «пропаганду ЛГБТ» в Беларуси [Lukashenko signed a law criminalizing “LGBT propaganda” in Belarus], 15 April 2026, [url](#); Belsat, Lukashenka signs law imposing fines for LGBT rights and related issues, 16 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>609</sup> CSO meter, Belarus set to punish information on LGBTIQ, childlessness, and gender transition, 3 September 2026, [url](#); TG House, Лукашенко подписал закон о наказании за «пропаганду ЛГБТ» в Беларуси [Lukashenko signed a law criminalizing “LGBT propaganda” in Belarus], 15 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>610</sup> Belsat, Lukashenka signs law imposing fines for LGBT rights and related issues, 16 April 2026, [url](#)

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<sup>613</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 62

<sup>614</sup> AI, Belarus 2024, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 46

<sup>616</sup> TG House, The Monitoring of Repression and Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTIQ+ Community in 2025, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>617</sup> AP, Belarusian parliament passes a bill to crack down on LGBTQ+ rights, 2 April 2026, [url](#); Euronews, Belarus passes bill to crack down on LGBTIQ+ rights echoing similar law in Russia, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> TG House, The Monitoring of Repression and Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTIQ+ Community in 2025, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>619</sup> AP, Belarusian parliament passes a bill to crack down on LGBTQ+ rights, 2 April 2026, [url](#); Euronews, Belarus passes bill to crack down on LGBTIQ+ rights echoing similar law in Russia, 2 April 2026, [url](#)





affected refraining from making public statements ‘due to fear of further repression, threats against relatives, or repeated violence.’<sup>620</sup>

LGBTIQ+ organisations in the country have been closed.<sup>621</sup> In September 2025, a district court of the Minsk Region designated the LGBTIQ+ media outlet DazHip as an extremist formation.<sup>622</sup> In April 2025, a psychologist and LGBTIQ+ activist was detained in Minsk and interrogated by the KGB officers, who threatened her with criminal proceedings for participation in an extremist formation unless she cooperated and provided information about LGBTIQ+ activists and groups supporting LGBTIQ+ people. In September 2025, a ‘queer activist’ was convicted for the creation of an extremist formation and sentenced to three years in prison in a trial held behind closed doors in relation to her participation in the educational project ‘School of Leadership for Women.’<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> TG House, The Monitoring of Repression and Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTIQ+ Community in 2025, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>621</sup> AP, Belarusian parliament passes a bill to crack down on LGBTQ+ rights, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>622</sup> ILGA Europe, Belarus, 2026, [url](#), p. 1

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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

### Country Context

- State structure and governance
- Key political developments, including the 2020 protests

### Legal framework and state practices affecting civic space

- Human rights situation
- Legal context
  - Politically motivated prosecutions
  - Extremism and terrorism charges and relevant official lists

### Law enforcement and system of justice

- Structure and practices of the security apparatus
  - State surveillance, including of persons abroad
  - Treatment of individuals returning to Belarus, including border measures
- Court system and prosecution
  - Fair trial guarantees
  - Trials *in absentia*
  - Detention conditions and treatment of political prisoners

### Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population

- Political opposition and people expressing dissent
- Protesters
- Journalists and media workers
- Human rights defenders and lawyers
- Former political prisoners
- Family members of (perceived) government critics



