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## Belarus

### Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

#### I. Background

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, taking into consideration the outcome of the previous review.<sup>1</sup> It is a compilation of information contained in relevant United Nations documents, presented in a summarized manner owing to word-limit constraints.

#### II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with human rights mechanisms

2. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended the re-ratification by Belarus of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, following its withdrawal in 2023.<sup>2</sup> The Committee also recommended that Belarus ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Belarus ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

4. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations country team recommended that Belarus ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.<sup>5</sup> The country team recommended that Belarus accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in accordance with a 2019 pledge.<sup>6</sup>

5. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus urged the Government of Belarus to re-engage in a meaningful and non-selective manner with United Nations human rights mechanisms.<sup>7</sup>

6. The International Labour Organization (ILO) noted that Belarus had not ratified the ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), or Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).<sup>8</sup>



### **III. National human rights framework**

#### **1. Constitutional and legislative framework**

7. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stated that it remained concerned that Belarus had not institutionalized a systematic gender analysis of its legal framework to ensure full compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was concerned that the legislative review conducted between 2017 and 2019 had not been explicitly aimed at identifying and amending or repealing discriminatory laws, such as legal provisions criminalizing HIV transmission. The Committee recommended that Belarus institutionalize a mandatory gender analysis to ensure that draft legislation was systematically reviewed with regard to its impact on women's rights and gender equality before adoption. It also recommended that Belarus adopt a comprehensive gender equality law that provided a cross-sectoral framework for promoting gender equality; and that it repeal discriminatory provisions, such as those criminalizing HIV transmission.<sup>9</sup>

8. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that it was concerned about the lack of effective legal provisions and practical measures to protect women with disabilities from multiple forms of discrimination and violence. It recommended that Belarus amend the current national legislation, in particular the Civil Code, the Criminal Code and the Marriage and Family Code, and harmonize them with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the relevant human rights treaties for the protection of women with disabilities from violence, forced abortion and "forced abandonment" of their children, and ensure equality for women with disabilities in all spheres of life.<sup>10</sup>

#### **2. Institutional infrastructure and policy measures**

9. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed regret that Belarus had decided not to establish an independent national human rights institution. It recommended that Belarus reconsider establishing an independent national human rights institution, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).<sup>11</sup> The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Belarus establish a national mechanism to monitor and investigate all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities and adopt effective and equitable remedies.<sup>12</sup>

### **IV. Promotion and protection of human rights**

#### **A. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law**

##### **1. Equality and non-discrimination**

10. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stated that it was concerned about the absence in the legislation of Belarus of a definition of discrimination against women, covering both direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination. It recommended that Belarus adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that specifically prohibited all forms of discrimination against women and girls, including direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

11. The same Committee stated that it remained deeply concerned about the persistent societal discrimination, stigmatization and gender-based violence faced by lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. It recommended that Belarus conduct public awareness campaigns to combat stereotypes, stigma and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, and provide targeted training for law enforcement officials and other State actors on the human rights of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Right to life, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture

12. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that, since 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented five deaths that had allegedly resulted from unnecessary or disproportionate force used during the protests in 2020 or from a failure to protect life in detention. OHCHR had collected further testimonies, information and evidence relating to three deaths allegedly resulting from unnecessary or disproportionate use of force during the protests in 2020 or in custody. OHCHR had reasonable grounds to believe that one death had not been due to suicide, as alleged by Belarusian authorities, and that two other deaths had resulted from medical negligence in detention. OHCHR had found reasonable grounds to believe that the three deaths might amount to a violation of the right to life.<sup>15</sup>

13. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus noted that, in November 2023, Belarusian non-governmental organizations had reported being aware of 13 deaths of people in places of detention, most likely caused by inadequate or untimely medical care, as well as three deaths that had occurred upon release from detention due to coronavirus disease infections contracted in detention, since 2020. Since then, reports of two more deaths in custody had appeared. Of those 18 persons, five had reportedly been convicted on politically motivated charges and at least two were likely to have died due to medical negligence. None of the deceased had undergone an autopsy.<sup>16</sup>

14. The High Commissioner and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus noted that they had reasonable grounds to believe that some of the human rights violations documented in Belarus amounted to international crimes in that they had been committed intentionally as part of a widespread and systematic attack against a segment of the civilian population of Belarus, and the perpetrators of those violations had had knowledge of the attack and had known that their acts had been a part of it.<sup>17</sup> They also noted that the commission of crimes, in the context of a deprivation of fundamental rights of victims, aggravated by discriminatory intent, led to the conclusion that the crime against humanity of persecution on political grounds had been committed against Belarusians perceived as being critical of, or opposed to, the Government.<sup>18</sup>

15. The Human Rights Committee, on 12 October 2023, found a violation of the right to life and the right to a fair trial in a case concerning Belarus in which the death penalty had been imposed. Belarus had proceeded with the execution despite the interim measures granted by the Committee, in violation of article 1 of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>19</sup>

16. The High Commissioner noted that, based on cumulative evidence collected since 2021, it had reasonable grounds to believe that Belarusian security forces had committed rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexualized torture and forced nudity, on men, boys, women and non-binary individuals in police vehicles, police stations and detention facilities between 1 May 2020 and 31 December 2023. Over 32 per cent of all 657 interviewees had reported that they had been victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. The most common forms of sexual and gender-based violence had been unnecessary strip and cavity searches in the context of arrest, interrogation or detention and rape threats, which had been widespread and made by persons representing the authorities.<sup>20</sup>

17. Independent human rights experts stated that they were deeply concerned about the harsh treatment of women convicted in connection with the protests against the 2020 presidential election. They expressed alarm at the life-threatening condition of the former administrator of the “Drivers 97 per cent” Telegram channel, which had encouraged drivers to block the streets in protest after the 2020 elections, who was being held in Zarechye Correctional Colony No. 24 and had reportedly suffered a serious deterioration in her physical and mental health. However, she had been denied adequate medical and psychological care and continued to be subjected to severe ill-treatment. The experts also raised concerns about three older women prisoners who had been convicted as part of the repression unfolding since 2020. The experts urged the Belarusian authorities to address persistent allegations of the ill-treatment of women held in correctional colonies. The experts also stated that alleged prolonged incommunicado detention of one woman had increased the risk of her enforced disappearance.<sup>21</sup>

18. The Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus urged Belarus to bring the conditions in detention facilities across the country into line with international standards.<sup>22</sup>

### **3. International humanitarian law**

19. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that it was concerned about the lack of specific measures for persons with disabilities in Belarus, and those affected or displaced by the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, in particular with regard to the risks for children with disabilities in the context of the conflict. The Committee recommended that Belarus: (a) review and harmonize the national emergency risk reduction strategy for the period 2019–2030 to promote protection measures, including the evacuation of persons with disabilities; and (b) ensure that the emergency response mechanisms, services and evacuation plans were inclusive, available and accessible for all persons with disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

### **4. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law**

20. The High Commissioner noted that there was no reasonable expectation that justice would be delivered for the human rights violations committed in Belarus. There continued to be an active policy to shield perpetrators and prevent accountability. The High Commissioner was not aware of any positive measures taken by the Belarusian authorities to effectively investigate reported violations or to hold those responsible to account. Allegations of torture or other ill-treatment had been ignored, including by judges, even when presented with credible evidence. Several victims had been pressured not to complain or had reported reprisals from complaining.<sup>24</sup>

21. The High Commissioner also noted that systematic violations of the rights to due process and a fair trial in both administrative and criminal cases had continued, following previously established patterns. Since 1 May 2020, over 5,500 individuals, including at least 55 children, had been criminally convicted on charges assessed by OHCHR to be politically motivated in trials that had lacked fairness.<sup>25</sup>

22. The High Commissioner and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus recommended that Belarus promptly initiate independent, impartial, effective and transparent investigations into all past violations of human rights, in particular those that might amount to crimes under international law, including the gender dimensions thereof, and ensure that investigations addressed the full chain of command relevant to individual criminal responsibility.<sup>26</sup>

23. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus recommended that Belarus launch prompt, effective, impartial and transparent investigations into all deaths in custody.<sup>27</sup>

### **5. Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life**

24. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus noted with concern that Act No. 334-Z amending the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act made all religious organizations subject to a mandatory process of re-registration within a year of its entry into force.<sup>28</sup> On 20 February 2024 the Special Rapporteur on Belarus, together with two thematic mandate holders, denounced the “climate of intimidation for religious leaders, communities or activities deemed to be unwelcome by the State” created by Act No. 334-Z. In August 2023, before the adoption of the law, the same experts had written to the Belarusian authorities about the text, pointing to its contradiction with the obligations of Belarus under article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>29</sup>

25. The Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus noted that, ahead of the 2025 presidential election, the Belarusian authorities had continued to purge the civic and democratic space of all potential sources of dissent and opposition. In 2024, another 228 civil society organizations had been liquidated. In addition, 87 entities and 1,168 persons had been added to the “extremist” lists, with the effect of rendering any form of interaction with them subject to criminal prosecution. Alongside those measures, the authorities had introduced legislative measures drastically curtailing forms of LGBTIQ+

expression. To further uproot dissent and discredit the opposition in exile, they had also expanded the surveillance capabilities of law enforcement bodies.<sup>30</sup>

26. The same Group urged the Government of Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release all those unlawfully or arbitrarily detained for the peaceful exercise of their freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, or their legitimate functions, including human rights defenders, trade unionists, journalists and lawyers, and cease and reverse any administrative or criminal proceedings against individuals for the mere exercise of their human rights. The Group also urged the Government of Belarus to cease using counter-terrorism and counter-extremism laws, as well as other laws, to silence dissent and take effective measures to facilitate the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and religion.<sup>31</sup>

27. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus noted that private funding for NGOs had been restricted by Presidential Decree No. 300 of 1 July 2005, on the provision and use of gratuitous (sponsor) aid, and Presidential Decree No. 3 of 25 May 2020, on foreign gratuitous aid, which listed the purposes for which organizations could receive donations, and that human rights defence activities were not included among the listed purposes. All foreign donations must be registered at the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Presidential Executive Office. Sanctions for violation of the legislation on foreign gratuitous aid included liquidation of the organization and criminal prosecution of its leaders.<sup>32</sup>

## **6. Right to privacy**

28. The Human Rights Committee, on 20 October 2023, found that Belarus had violated the right to privacy under article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by putting the human rights defender Leonid Sudalenko under unlawful surveillance.<sup>33</sup>

29. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus stated that Presidential Decree No. 269 of 29 August 2023 had ordered the National Bank of Belarus to organize information-sharing between law enforcement authorities and payment service providers on unauthorized payment transactions. Presidential Decree No. 32 of 25 January 2024 had introduced an obligation for all “road carriers carrying out non-scheduled transportation of passengers”, such as taxis and minibuses, to provide exhaustive information to the Transport Inspectorate about their vehicles, drivers and dispatchers, to record all executed and non-executed transportation orders, to install video cameras inside their vehicles and to share information with the authorities. Mobile operators were obliged to share phone numbers of persons liable for military service with military enlistment offices and the State Security Committee.<sup>34</sup>

## **7. Prohibition of all forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons**

30. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stated that it remained concerned that trafficking continued to disproportionately affect ethnic minority, refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls. It was concerned that challenges in effective enforcement of anti-trafficking and sexual exploitation laws, in particular at the Belarusian-Polish border, left women and girls vulnerable to gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation. The Committee recommended that Belarus strengthen the enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation to ensure effective and early identification, prevention and protection services and referral of victims to appropriate services, as well as the investigation, prosecution and adequate sentencing of perpetrators of trafficking.<sup>35</sup>

31. The United Nations country team noted that cases of labour exploitation, whether occurring domestically or internationally, were not recognized as trafficking. Instead, they were often classified as illegal or fraudulent employment. As a result, individuals who fell victim to that form of exploitation did not qualify for State assistance or reintegration support. Hence, initiatives to prevent, investigate and prosecute trafficking for labour exploitation should be strengthened.<sup>36</sup>

## **8. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work**

32. ILO noted that, since 2003, allegations concerning the non-observance of the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), by Belarus had

been investigated in accordance with ILO special procedures. The findings included restrictions on and forced dissolutions of independent unions; and the targeting of union leaders and members with intimidation, arrests, detentions and imprisonment, often under charges such as “extremism” or “terrorism”. That had led to a significant erosion of workers’ rights and civil liberties, including the suppression of freedom of expression, assembly and association. The Government of Belarus had consistently failed to abide by key findings and recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry, instead escalating the repression once again in 2022.<sup>37</sup>

33. ILO noted that, in March 2025, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office had requested that Belarus with the utmost urgency accept (a) an international humanitarian mission to ensure that independent doctors could visit all imprisoned trade unionists; and (b) an ILO tripartite mission to assess the situation in the country. The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association urged Belarus to amend the Public Events Act and the accompanying regulations, as well as Presidential Decree No. 3 of 25 May 2020 on foreign gratuitous aid, with the aim of abolishing the sanctions imposed on trade unions or trade unionists for a single violation of the respective legislation. It requested Belarus to adopt specific legislative provisions affording adequate protection against non-renewals of contracts for anti-union reasons and urged Belarus to amend its legislation to ensure that workers were protected against any acts of discrimination for simply having peacefully exercised their right to strike to defend their occupational and economic interests.

## **9. Rights to social security and to an adequate standard of living**

34. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted with concern the gender neutrality of many economic and social benefit schemes, which failed to address the specific needs of women. It was concerned that women in unpaid care work and informal work were excluded from pension entitlements and that family assistance benefits were inadequate. It recommended that Belarus: (a) ensure that unpaid care work and informal work were recognized in social protection schemes, including pension entitlements, and account for women’s caregiving roles and contributions in the informal economy; and strengthen pension reforms to protect older women; and (b) review family assistance benefits to adequately reflect caregivers’ and dependants’ real cost of living and ensure that those benefits covered an adequate standard of living, including food, housing and healthcare.<sup>38</sup>

## **10. Right to health**

35. The same Committee recommended that Belarus: (a) ensure affordable and autonomous access to a range of modern contraceptive methods, including hormonal and oral contraceptives, for all women and girls, including those with disabilities, and provide adequate sexual and reproductive health information free from discrimination and stigmatization; (b) ensure that women and girls could make free, informed decisions about their bodily autonomy and could exercise their legal right to abortion without interference from their partners and public, private or religious actors, and without the requirement of parental consent, and provide voluntary, non-coercive pre-abortion counselling; (c) ensure equal access to quality sexual and reproductive health services through reasonable accommodations in the healthcare system for women with HIV/AIDS and women with disabilities, including protection from non-consensual sterilization and forced abortion, through improved healthcare policies and oversight; and (d) improve efforts to raise awareness about early cancer detection, increase access to cervical cancer screening, mammography screening and human papillomavirus vaccinations, in particular for rural women and girls, and ensure the availability of skilled healthcare personnel in obstetric and maternal health.<sup>39</sup>

## **11. Right to education**

36. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) noted that the Constitution and the Education Code of Belarus guaranteed the right to education for all and the principle of non-discrimination. Pre-primary education was free but not compulsory.<sup>40</sup> UNESCO recommended that Belarus: (a) introduce legislation to make pre-primary education compulsory for at least one year; (b) ensure that the minimum age of

employment was aligned with the end of compulsory education by raising it to 18 years; (c) legally proscribe corporal punishment in education settings; (d) continue efforts to ensure gender equality in education, especially in technical and vocational education and training; and (e) continue efforts to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education.<sup>41</sup>

## **12. Cultural rights**

37. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus noted that, between 2020 and the end of 2023, at least 228 cultural organizations had been liquidated and at least 52 cultural workers had been sentenced to imprisonment for between one and three years. In 2023, criminal proceedings had been initiated against at least 79 cultural workers residing inside and outside Belarus. The Special Rapporteur had received allegations about pressure exerted on artistic unions by the Ministry of Culture, which had led to the exclusion from the Union of Artists of at least 20 members perceived as having expressed dissent. In December 2023, the “Pahonia” artistic union, which was over 30 years old, had been liquidated.<sup>42</sup>

## **B. Rights of specific persons or groups**

### **1. Women**

38. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stated that it was concerned about: (a) the absence of comprehensive legislation addressing all forms of gender-based violence, the failure to criminalize marital rape, the omission of domestic violence as an aggravating factor in sentencing and the frequent failure of courts and relevant authorities to take incidents of domestic violence into consideration in legal proceedings concerning divorce and child custody; (b) the insufficient 30-day duration of protection orders and the lack of protection of victims/survivors from reprisals; (c) the barriers faced by victims/survivors in gaining access to justice, including the absence of ex officio prosecution and gender bias on the part of law enforcement officials, who reportedly often discouraged reporting through threats of child removal or by labelling households as “socially dangerous”; and (d) the inadequate support for victims/survivors of gender-based violence against women and girls; the limited number, funding and capacity of shelters and crisis rooms; and the closure of women’s non-governmental organizations, which further undermined access by victims/survivors to independent support services.<sup>43</sup>

39. The same Committee recommended that Belarus: (a) adopt comprehensive legislation addressing all forms of gender-based violence; and specifically criminalize marital rape; recognize domestic violence as an aggravating factor when sentencing perpetrators of crimes of physical and sexual violence; (b) extend the duration of protection orders to allow sufficient time for the investigation and resolution of cases, and remove barriers to their issuance, such as the requirement for written consent; (c) build the capacity of judicial and law enforcement authorities to address gender bias and stereotypes and ensure that child protection measures were not used to deter victims/survivors of domestic violence from reporting abuse; and (d) increase the availability and capacity of State-run and independent shelters and crisis rooms, ensuring that they were adequately staffed, funded and equipped to meet the needs of women and girls who were victims/survivors of gender-based violence, including psychosocial counselling, medical treatment, free legal assistance and access to education and professional skills training.<sup>44</sup>

40. The same Committee stated that it was concerned about the persistence of gender stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, which constituted a root cause of gender-based violence, limited the opportunities available to women and girls and reinforced gender segregation in education and in the labour market. It was particularly concerned about the role of authorities in actively promoting, reinforcing and tolerating such stereotypes, leading to a culture of impunity. It also noted with concern the increasingly hostile attitude towards individuals who chose not to have children, undermining women’s bodily autonomy and equal rights in marriage and family life. It recommended that Belarus adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate stereotypes in education, employment, the media and advertising; and amend the Advertising Act to explicitly prohibit discriminatory and sexist stereotypes. The Committee also recommended

ensuring that women had the autonomy to decide whether or not to have children and that any practices that penalized individuals for their reproductive choices be eliminated.<sup>45</sup>

41. The same Committee stated that it was concerned about significant barriers to the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making in political and public life, including at higher levels of the judiciary, in diplomatic roles, such as ambassadors, and in regional governments, as well as the lack of targeted measures to increase their representation in leadership roles in the public and private sectors. It recommended that Belarus: (a) adopt and implement temporary special measures such as parity quotas, preferential recruitment of women and targeted support for women candidates in order to accelerate gender parity in political and public life; (b) conduct awareness-raising campaigns to address gender stereotypes in political discourse, and prevent and adequately punish harassment and gender-based violence against women in politics; and (c) increase the number of women in key decision-making roles, including at higher levels of the judiciary, in diplomatic positions, such as ambassadors, and in regional governments (oblasts).<sup>46</sup>

## **2. Children**

42. The United Nations country team noted that violence against children in all settings remained a critical issue, with a significant increase in identified cases of sexual violence and a lack of prevention, identification and response measures in place. Gaps in the social care system, with late identification of vulnerable families with children, inadequate quality of response services, lack of parenting skills in non-violent discipline, tolerance of violent discipline measures, suboptimal competencies of frontline workers, such as teachers and healthcare providers, and lack of family-centred approaches to prevention services, all affected the degree of protection of children from all types of violence.<sup>47</sup>

43. The United Nations country team recommended that Belarus: (a) adopt a comprehensive intersectoral strategy on childcare reform to ensure children's right to live in a family environment, with high-level leadership and coordination as an integral part of the State programmes on the prevention of institutionalization, with allocated financial, human and technical resources, and with particular attention paid to socially vulnerable children with disabilities and children under 3; (b) scale up the national programme for parents in rural areas that provided support and counselling on early childhood development; (c) improve the quality of home visit services existing within the primary healthcare system by introducing child development monitoring; and (d) develop a comprehensive strategy for the prevention and identification of and response to all forms of violence against children, with a particular focus on sexual violence.<sup>48</sup>

## **3. Persons with disabilities**

44. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that it was concerned about: (a) widespread stigmatization of persons with disabilities, in particular persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities; and (b) the limited information and awareness regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular the availability in Easy Read format of the Convention and other human rights-related publicity materials. It recommended that Belarus: (a) develop a national action plan to eliminate the stigma and the stereotypes about persons with disabilities and promote positive values with a view to fostering understanding of diversity in the community, through active collaboration with the media and educational institutions through their curricula and other activities; and (b) undertake measures to ensure the availability of and access to full information regarding the Convention and other human rights instruments, in particular the rights of persons with disabilities, in accessible formats, including in Braille, sign language, audio and Easy Read.<sup>49</sup>

## **4. Minorities**

45. The Special Rapporteur on Belarus noted that Act No. 300-Z of 17 July 2023 amended the law on the languages of Belarus, abolishing the right to education in their mother tongue for linguistic minorities. In November 2023, the Ministry of Justice had initiated the liquidation of Club Gervechiai, a 30-year-old Lithuanian minority association in Astravets District, Hrodna Oblast, where some 750 ethnic Lithuanians resided. In 2022, a Lithuanian



school located there had been forced to shift to providing education in the Russian language, a requirement imposed on some Polish minority schools too. The Special Rapporteur recalled that linguistic minorities had the right to use their own language, under article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Belarus on 1 October 1990, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, of 1992.<sup>50</sup>

## **5. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons**

46. The Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus noted that, in 2024, the Government had further restricted the already constrained space for the expression of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to declaring “the safeguarding and promotion of the traditional family” as a matter of national security, the authorities had amended the definition of pornography in the regulation concerning the distribution and sale of erotic content and sexual education material. The new definition placed homosexuality and transsexualism in the same category as paedophilia, bestiality and necrophilia, all classified as “non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behaviour” subject to censorship.<sup>51</sup>

47. The same Group noted that, in February 2024, the Office of the Prosecutor General announced a draft law punishing the promotion of “non-traditional relationships” and the “voluntary refusal of childbirth”. Those initiatives had been accompanied by increased surveillance, intimidation and arbitrary arrest and detention of LGBTIQ+ individuals, thus forcing many into exile. The Group observed that homophobia and transphobia had been used by the authorities to discredit and stigmatize those who opposed or were perceived as opposing the Government.<sup>52</sup>

## **6. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers**

48. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants stated that he was particularly concerned about allegations of use of violence by the border guards of Belarus and another country pushing migrants back and forth. Allegations included the use of water cannons, the destruction of migrants’ phones and other electrical devices, using dogs to attack, pushing, threatening with weapons, and intimidation. Although denied by both States, the Special Rapporteur had gathered testimonies and evidence inside and outside the countries and had witnessed the results of such violence being perpetrated against migrants, which included physical injuries, and mental health consequences such as stress and trauma. Fear of being subjected to further acts of violence, or to other repercussions such as pushbacks or detention, had prevented migrants affected from seeking medical and non-medical assistance to address their needs, on both sides of the border. Migrants of African descent seemed to be among the most affected, as well as those who were perceived to be Muslim.<sup>53</sup>

49. The Special Rapporteur on migrants recommended that Belarus grant civil society and independent monitoring mechanisms full access to the border area. The Special Rapporteur also recommended that Belarus grant unhindered access to relevant United Nations agencies, to strengthen cooperation, rebuild partnerships and regain trust and interest from donors. More specifically, Belarus should work closely with international organizations, including the United Nations, to enhance the protection of the human rights of migrants and asylum-seekers.<sup>54</sup>

50. The United Nations country team noted that, in 2024, 2,255 persons had applied for asylum in Belarus, with the largest numbers being citizens of Ukraine (2,099), Afghanistan (24), Yemen (15), Latvia (13) and the Syrian Arab Republic (11). That was the second highest number of asylum-seekers in the history of the Belarusian State refugee status determination procedure.<sup>55</sup> The country team recommended that Belarus consider the introduction of (an) official document(s) within the State refugee status determination procedure to confirm that a person had expressed an intention to seek asylum and was now awaiting a formal asylum application. Such document(s) would be linked to the status of asylum-seeker; once a person had formally applied for asylum, it would be replaced by a regular asylum-seeker certificate. The country team noted that, alternatively, Belarus should consider amendments to the legislation to ensure that a clearly stated and documented intention to apply for asylum would be considered an effective application for asylum leading

to the issuance of the asylum-seeker certificate from the moment of expressing intention to apply.<sup>56</sup>

## 7. Stateless persons

51. The United Nations country team noted that there was currently no dedicated statelessness determination procedure in Belarus despite the ongoing engagement and advocacy of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The country team also noted that two amendments to the Citizenship Act introduced since 2020 raised concerns regarding a potential impact on statelessness.<sup>57</sup> The country team recommended that Belarus: (a) introduce a dedicated statelessness determination procedure to improve the identification and protection of stateless persons, regularize their legal status in Belarus and ensure appropriate documentation; and (b) abolish the clauses of the Citizenship Act that might lead to statelessness.<sup>58</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> [A/HRC/46/5](#), [A/HRC/46/5/Add.1](#) and [A/HRC/46/2](#).
- <sup>2</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 19 and 20.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 44, 61 and 63.
- <sup>4</sup> [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#), para. 6.
- <sup>5</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 56 and 63; and United Nations country team submission for the universal periodic review of Belarus, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> United Nations country team submission, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> [A/HRC/50/58](#), paras. 20 and 21; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 84.
- <sup>8</sup> ILO submission for the universal periodic review of Belarus, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 15 and 16.
- <sup>10</sup> [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#), paras. 11 and 12.
- <sup>11</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 23 and 24.
- <sup>12</sup> [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#), para. 10.
- <sup>13</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 17 and 18.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 57 and 58.
- <sup>15</sup> [A/HRC/55/61](#), para. 36.
- <sup>16</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 31 and 32.
- <sup>17</sup> [A/HRC/55/61](#), paras. 51 and 52; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), paras. 69–71.
- <sup>18</sup> [A/HRC/55/61](#), para. 52; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 81.
- <sup>19</sup> [CCPR/C/139/D/2792/2016](#), para. 8.5.
- <sup>20</sup> [A/HRC/55/61](#), para. 26.
- <sup>21</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/belarus-alarming-ill-treatment-women-prisoners-and-life-threatening>.
- <sup>22</sup> [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 84.
- <sup>23</sup> [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#), paras. 21 and 22.
- <sup>24</sup> [A/HRC/55/61](#), para. 53.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 20.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 56; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 84.
- <sup>27</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), para. 129; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 84.
- <sup>28</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 117–119; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 60.
- <sup>29</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/belarus-un-experts-concerned-about-new-law-freedom-conscience-and-religious>.
- <sup>30</sup> [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 59.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 84.
- <sup>32</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 96 and 97.
- <sup>33</sup> [CCPR/C/139/D/2929/2017](#), para. 8.
- <sup>34</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 67 and 68.
- <sup>35</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 33 and 34.
- <sup>36</sup> United Nations country team submission, p. 3.
- <sup>37</sup> ILO submission, p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), paras. 47 and 48.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 46.
- <sup>40</sup> UNESCO submission for the universal periodic review of Belarus, paras. 2 and 3.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 23.
- <sup>42</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 123 and 124.

- <sup>43</sup> [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), para. 31.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 32.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 29 and 30.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 37 and 38.
- <sup>47</sup> United Nations country team submission, p. 5.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 6.
- <sup>49</sup> [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#), paras. 15 and 16.
- <sup>50</sup> [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 70–73.
- <sup>51</sup> [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 62.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> [A/HRC/53/26/Add.2](#), para. 30.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 45 and 46.
- <sup>55</sup> United Nations country team submission, pp. 7 and 8.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10 and 11.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 12.
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