

Human Rights Center Viasna

Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2025

Analytical review



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Summary:

- The human rights situation in Belarus remains grave. Repression against dissidents, protest participants, journalists, and human rights defenders continues.
- Authoritative international organizations have established gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity committed by the Belarusian authorities.
- Despite the Belarusian authorities' efforts to [conceal](#) the extent of criminal and administrative repression, Viasna continues to receive information about detentions and prosecutions on political grounds. Since 2020, the Viasna Human Rights Center has documented more than 8,000 convictions in politically motivated criminal cases, including 39 individuals sent for compulsory psychiatric treatment; at least 1,963 of the convicts are women.
- At least 1,254 people were [convicted](#) in the past year, 355 of whom were women.
- The number of political prisoners remains critically high. As of December 31, 2025, there were 1,131 political prisoners in Belarus, 167 of whom were women. Since May 2020, the total number of individuals recognized as political prisoners has exceeded 4,339. As of this time, 3,208 individuals have been released from custody for various reasons, including the completion of sentences, release from punishment, or a change in restriction level. Among these individuals, 659 are female.
- According to data available to Viasna, in 2025, at least 2,384 individuals experienced various forms of repression related to criminal or administrative prosecution during the previous year, including arrests, interrogations, and searches. Women made up almost 30% of the repressed. It is important to note that this number should not be compared with data from previous years. The conditions for collecting data on repression have changed dramatically since the beginning of 2025. Authorities now withhold data on politically motivated persecution and discourage activities aimed at collecting such data.
- Political prisoners are subjected to particularly harsh conditions, stringent oversight, and restrictions that are not provided for by law. Consequently, many political prisoners are subjected to disciplinary deprivation of privileges, including care packages containing medicines, visits from family members, spouses, and legal counsel. Furthermore, correspondence by political prisoners is subject to arbitrary restrictions. No fewer than three political prisoners are being held incommunicado. Two political prisoners, **Valiantsin Shtermer** and **Andrei Podnebenny**, died in correctional facilities in 2025. A total of nine political prisoners died in correctional facilities and remand centers since 2020.
- Political prisoners are subjected to forced labor at low wages; upon their release after serving their sentences, political prisoners are subjected to strict control beyond the regular supervision of released convicts; the rights of convicts are further restricted by the consequences of being included in the List of Persons Involved in Extremist and Terrorist Activities.

- In politically motivated administrative, criminal, and civil cases, the courts continue to function as an instrument of repression against the accused. The independence of the courts has been eroded.
- Activities of NGOs and civil initiatives are regularly subject to arbitrary criminalization.
- The persecution of peaceful expression continues under the guise of fighting terrorism and extremism.
- Journalists, media employees, and bloggers continued to face repression.
- Torture and other prohibited treatments on political grounds continue to be practiced in Belarus. There have been no investigations or prosecutions at the national level of those responsible for widespread torture and other gross human rights violations in August 2020 and beyond.
- Discrimination across various spheres persists because the state fails to take steps to prevent it. The authorities demonize LGBTQ+ individuals and establish legal grounds for persecuting them based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and reproductive choices.
- In February 2025, through a fraudulent election, the authorities renewed Aliaksandr Lukashenka's mandate as President of the Republic of Belarus for another five years.

Introduction

The Viasna Human Rights Center publishes an annual review assessing the human rights situation in Belarus. The review is based on Viasna's own information from a variety of credible sources, incorporates open-source data, and takes into account information from other international and human rights organizations and initiatives.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka's loss in the 2020 presidential election in Belarus has gone down in history as the starting point of a massive and severe campaign of terror against supporters of democratic values, civil society, and political opponents of the government. Since then, the level of repression has remained high. However, it has changed its vector, tactics, and intensity in response to the current political situation. The authorities continue to persecute protesters, dissidents, supporters of alternative democratic policies, opponents of Russia's aggressive foreign policy, and those who show solidarity with the repressed. Law enforcement officials do not make distinctions based on social status, gender, or age.

In early 2025, representatives of US diplomacy raised hopes for a rapid reduction in repression and the release of political prisoners in exchange for a reduction in sanctions pressure. These hopes have not materialized.

The legal framework has set the stage for politically motivated repression, and the process for labeling various publications, media, and organizations as extremist functions like an automated assembly line. Repression is carried out through a façade of legal mechanisms. Courts, prosecutor's offices, investigative and internal affairs bodies, and special services consistently and coherently implement a policy of internal terror and repression. Repression

is not limited to the criminal and administrative realms; it exists in virtually all areas, including labor relations, education, culture, finance, and entrepreneurship.

There are no registered opposition political parties or organizations in Belarus. No authorized opposition street events were held during the year. All human rights organizations have been expelled from the country. In these circumstances, a fraudulent presidential election was [held](#) in January 2025, and no democratic institution acknowledged its results.

A system has been created in which torture and other prohibited treatments, violations of personal freedom and inviolability, and a lack of accessible, independent sources of information and opportunities to exercise political rights are designed to foster public confidence in the futility of expressing any alternative opinions, much less resisting.

In the realm of foreign policy, Belarus has abandoned its neutrality and nuclear-free status. It remains, above all else, a staunch political, economic, and military ally of the Russian Federation. This aggressor state continues its brutal, bloody war against sovereign Ukraine and terrorizes the democratic world with threats of military invasion. Russia's military presence in Belarus is growing. Belarus has established itself as a rogue state, yet it continues to disregard consistent criticism of its human rights violations.

In its February [report](#), the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus drew attention to the systematic nature of human rights violations and suppression of freedoms in Belarus dating back to the early years of A. Lukashenka's tenure. The group noted that the Belarusian government has been accused of committing "widespread human rights violations against civilians as part of a brutal effort to crush any opposition to the rule of President Aliaksandr Lukashenka." Some of these violations, according to experts, amount to crimes against humanity. The most flagrant violations recorded include arbitrary arrests and detentions on political grounds, which are "an integral part of the Belarusian authorities' tactics."

On April 4, 2024, the Human Rights Council established the Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus pursuant to [Resolution A/HRC/RES/55/27](#). The group was formed "to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances, and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses committed in Belarus since May 1, 2020."

The Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus submitted their [report](#), "Closing the Accountability Gap for Human Rights Violations and Related Crimes in Belarus," in September 2025. According to the experts, "the State of Belarus has committed countless violations of international law, beginning at least on May 1, 2020, and continuing as the situation devolved into a protracted human rights crisis." The Group concluded, inter alia, that "President and other high-level State officials have participated in the crimes against humanity of political persecution and imprisonment and therefore finds that they should be subject to judicial investigations for determining their individual criminal responsibility."

Special Rapporteur Nils Muižnieks's [report](#) on the situation of human rights in Belarus raised concerns about workers' rights.

1. Administrative and criminal prosecution on political grounds

Criminal and administrative prosecutions for dissent and protest, as well as for supporting protest initiatives, remain the most widespread and severe forms of politically motivated repression in Belarus. These prosecutions are comparable in terms of the severity of sanctions. Human rights defenders assess the scope of persecution based on information collected from various sources.

Latent repression

Having purged the media, driven human rights organizations out of the country, and suppressed overt dissent, the Belarusian regime entered a new stage of societal control: “latent” repression. Silencing the facts of persecution has become a state policy. People are still persecuted regularly, but without loud court cases, high-profile verdicts, or show trials.

In late February 2025, the authorities invited the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Belarus. In February, the possibility of an agreement between Belarusian and US authorities was discussed. *“A possible grand bargain under which Mr. Lukashenko would release a slew of political prisoners, including prominent ones In return, the United States would relax sanctions on Belarusian banks and exports of potash, a key ingredient in fertilizer, of which Belarus is a major producer,”* *The New York Times* quoted a US diplomat on February 15. According to the newspaper, he also “said he had asked Mr. Lukashenko whether he was ready to scale back repression and was assured that he was.” Since March 5, the most complete and objective source of information about the scale of administrative and criminal repressions and public information about court hearings has been discontinued. Access to the open bank of court decisions, which was previously free, had been terminated some time before. Officials also stopped reporting data on politically motivated prosecutions, including the initiation, investigation, and sentencing of so-called “antiextremist” cases.

These measures have created the statistical impression that repression has declined, but this is misleading. Viasna now only collects data on detentions, searches, and administrative detention from people who have faced persecution or received this information from relatives, friends, and open sources. Though far from complete, this data paints a depressing picture of the level of repression. In 2025, Viasna received reports of 2,384 cases of repression stemming from criminal and administrative prosecutions.

Criminal prosecution

According to Viasna, at least 1,254 people were [convicted](#) in political criminal cases in Belarus in 2025. Of those sentenced, 899 (72%) were men and 355 (28%) were women. 45 people of retirement age are among the total number of convicts. This includes 27 women and 18 men. At least 30 people were convicted within special proceedings. Since 2020, Viasna has documented more than 8,000 convictions in politically motivated criminal cases, including 39 individuals sent for compulsory psychiatric treatment. Among these convictions, at least 1,963 are women.

In 2025, there were especially many convictions for participation in protests from five years ago. The year 2025 was the final opportunity to convict individuals under Article 342 of the Criminal Code for the 2020 street demonstrations. The number of known 2025 convicts is at

least 643. Although the statute of limitations for prosecution under this criminal statute has expired, it is still possible to try those who have absconded and are wanted. People are still being tried for defamation offenses related to A. Lukashenka and public officers. Thus, at least 151 people were convicted of insulting Lukashenka under Article 368 of the Criminal Code. At least 71 others were convicted of insulting a public officer under Article 369. A minimum of 133 people were charged with inciting “other social enmity” (Article 130 of the Criminal Code).

At least 274 people were convicted of “assisting extremist activity” (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code). At least 102 people were sentenced for “founding or participating in an extremist formation” (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code). At least 36 people were convicted for “financing extremist activities” (Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code). In 2025, at least 84 Belarusians were convicted for calling for sanctions under Article 361 of the Criminal Code.

Other forms of repression

The authorities persisted in their systematic repression and escalating pressure tactics. These practices broadly affected property rights. The apartments and other properties of individuals convicted in politically motivated cases were auctioned off, including those owned by those convicted in absentia. In October, **Viktar Babaryka**’s art collection was [put up for auction](#).

Artsiom Karatkevich, a former political prisoner, [recounted](#) an attempt to recruit him after his arrest. Law enforcement officials offered him a cash reward and release in exchange for his cooperation and completion of tasks outside the country.

New cases of interrogations and enhanced searches at border crossings were recorded. It was common practice to check phones, photo galleries, messaging apps, social media accounts, and subscriptions for “extremist” content or evidence of political activity.

Belarusian activists who were forced to leave the country have been [subjected](#) to various forms of pressure by Belarusian security services. This pressure has taken the form of phone calls, fake mailings, letters urging them to return, requests to confirm that they will not return to Belarus, and threats of fines for owning an expired passport. Reports of [surveillance](#) of activists and former protesters emerged.

Belarus continued to abuse the Interpol Red Notice system by using it to prosecute individuals on political grounds, often under far-fetched terrorism charges. The [updated](#) Russian wanted database, which is shared with Belarus, includes 1,180 Belarusians. Many of them are being pursued for their political or civic activities and views.

Police officers made preventive visits to the relatives of exiled activists and conducted interviews.

Overall, the recorded facts demonstrate the continuation of the policy of transnational repression directed at those remaining in Belarus, as well as at citizens who have left the country and their relatives.

2. Situation of political prisoners

Statistical data on political prisoners

As of December 31, 2025, the number of people imprisoned on political grounds in Belarus was 1,131, including 167 women. There are at least 20 foreign nationals among the political prisoners. A total of 4,328 people have been recognized as political prisoners since May 2020.

In 2025, human rights activists identified 490 individuals as political prisoners, averaging approximately 40 individuals per month. Additionally, human rights defenders demanded the rehabilitation of the 144 individuals who were recognized as political prisoners following their release.¹

By the end of the year, at least 164 political prisoners were [considered](#) to be at special risk. These prisoners include at least 56 individuals with serious health issues, 7 people with disabilities, 26 elderly people over the age of 60 (many with significant health problems), and 10 people with mental health problems.

Since 2020, nine political prisoners have [died in captivity](#), including two in 2025.

At least 20 [families](#) among political prisoners have faced persecution involving several relatives simultaneously, including spouses, parents, children, and siblings.

Since 2020, more than 1,700 people have fully served their sentences and been released from prison, with at least 300 released in 2025. Since 2020, pardon processes have affected up to 582 political prisoners. Of those, up to 342 were pardoned in 2025 with the help of the US and European democracies. It is impossible to determine the exact number of political prisoners released from detention facilities through these processes. Several pardon decrees also concerned individuals convicted of political crimes and sentenced to non-custodial punishments, such as restrictions of freedom in an open-type correctional facility. Two other decrees pardoned convicts without political motives alongside political prisoners, and the quantitative ratio of these groups is unknown.

189 political prisoners were forcibly removed from Belarus after the pardon. Human rights activists condemned the practice of the Belarusian authorities. Some of those “pardoned” had only a small part of their sentence left to serve. However, it should be noted that, even after serving the original sentence, they could be imprisoned for an extended period of time in Belarus using well-established methods, such as [Article 411 of the Criminal Code](#). Under these circumstances, forcible expulsion served as an alternative to ongoing arbitrary detention, and the actions of Western democracies formed part of a humanitarian effort to save the regime’s de facto hostages.

Deaths of political prisoners

In May 2025, three cases of deaths occurring after release became known — those of **Hanna Kandratsenka**, **Tamara Karavai**, and **Valery Bohdan**.

On May 21, 2025, news of [Valiantsin Shtermer](#)’s death became public. It was [reported](#) that he was admitted to Correctional Facility No. 17 in serious physical condition after a stroke.

¹ These individuals [satisfied the criteria for recognition as political prisoners](#) at the time of their captivity; however, information regarding their deprivation of liberty became known only after their release.

[Andrei Podnebenny](#) [passed away](#) on September 3, 2025, due to asphyxiation in Correctional Facility No. 15. Such deaths can be traced back to the intolerable conditions of confinement. Since 2020, a total of [nine](#) political prisoners have died in captivity, and numerous former political prisoners have died shortly after release. Human rights activists attribute these deaths to several factors, including the detention conditions, inadequate medical care, limited nutrition, forced labor, and delayed release of seriously ill individuals.

Incomunicado convicts

In early 2025, 11 political prisoners have been held in incomunicado detention: [Maksim Znak](#) — from February 8, 2023, [Mikalai Statkevich](#) — from February 10, 2023, [Maryia Kalesnikava](#) — from February 15, 2023, [Ihar Losik](#) — from February 20, 2023, [Siarhei Tsikhanouski](#) — from March 9, 2023, [Viktar Babaryka](#) — from April 26, 2023, [Uladzimir Kniha](#) — from September 5, 2023, [Mikalai Bankou](#) — from December 2023, [Andrei Navitski](#) — from April 2024, [Aliaksandr Aranovich](#) — from June 6, 2024, and [Aliaksandr Frantskevich](#) — from October 2024. Some of them were featured in pro-government media shows. Nevertheless, this did not stop their isolation. Some were released over time, while others re-established contact with the outside world.

By the end of the year, four individuals remained held incomunicado: **Uladzimir Kniha**, **Aliaksandr Aranovich**, **Aliaksandr Frantskevich**, and **Mikalai Statkevich**, whose fate following his re-arrest remains unknown to his relatives (see Section 11).

Several political prisoners are also showing signs of being in incomunicado detention. They no longer have close relatives in Belarus and are prohibited from contacting others.

Political prisoners have been placed in punishment cells, subjected to solitary confinement, and confined to secure housing units as a means of putting pressure on them. Detention in punishment cells, and often in the Secure Housing Unit (SHU), means being held under inhumane and incomunicado conditions.

Repeat convictions

New criminal cases were initiated against political prisoners while they were in prison. For example, in January 2025, [Siarhei Franchuk](#) was sentenced to six months' imprisonment under Article 369 of the Criminal Code; meanwhile, a new criminal case was opened against **Kiryl Vevel**, who had been sentenced to three years in prison, on charges of "participation in an extremist formation."

It is known that 69 political prisoners (43 still in custody and 26 already released) had been sentenced by the court to additional arbitrary prison terms under [Article 411 of the Criminal Code](#) for a series of disciplinary violations committed while in detention. By the end of the year, solely based on convictions under Article 411 and after having served their original sentences, the following individuals remained deprived of liberty: [Mikita Yemialjanau](#), Uladzimir Kniha, [Pavel Aucharou](#), [Yahor Ibrahimau](#), [Aleh Kanavalau](#), [Yelisei Kuzniatsou](#), [Andrei Lubetski](#), and possibly other political prisoners.

Detention conditions

There are ongoing reports of political prisoners in correctional facilities and prisons facing targeted restrictions on their rights that do not apply to other inmates.

Human rights defenders documented reports of inadequate medical care, poor sanitary conditions, as well as ill-treatment and psychological pressure (see Section 10).

While not completely isolated, many political prisoners were severely restricted in their communication with the outside world. They were denied meetings with their families, phone calls, and correspondence. They were also denied access to the internet and independent media. For instance, **Dzianis Ivashyn** was unable to contact his family or wife from prison for over six months.

Post-release harassment

Following their release, former political prisoners continued to face harassment and pressure. Thus, a criminal case was initiated against former political prisoner [Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk](#), who departed Belarus, for absconding from preventive supervision (Article 422 of the Criminal Code) and encouraging sanctions (Article 361 of the Criminal Code).

Many pardoned political prisoners found themselves [forced into exile](#) and were denied the opportunity to return home.

3. Access to justice, the right to defense, and the right to a fair trial

The Group of Independent Experts on the situation of human rights in Belarus [noted](#) in its report that “the laws and practices applying to the Belarusian judiciary do not respect the basic requirements of judicial independence under the ICCPR, and as reflected in the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary (Basic Principles), endorsed by General Assembly resolutions 40/32 and 40/146.”

Erosion of judicial independence

In its Concluding Observations on the Ninth Periodic Report of Belarus in February 2025, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed [concern](#) about “the systemic barriers to fair trials and the lack of judicial independence, including the harassment, prosecution and arbitrary detention of lawyers working on human rights cases, as well as the revocation of their licences, the subordination of the professional bar association to the Ministry of Justice and the absence of gender-sensitive legal training, which result in gender-biased rulings and severely limit women’s access to independent legal representation, in particular for women human rights defenders and political activists.” The Committee also made several recommendations to strengthen the judiciary’s independence.

Belarusian judges persistently find themselves included on the EU sanctions lists due to their issuance of politically motivated verdicts, thereby contributing to the repression of civil society. In March 2025, sanctions were [imposed](#) on **Dzina Kuchuk**, a judge of the Supreme Court of Belarus; **Anastasiya Papko** and **Zhanna Brysina**, judges of the Minsk City Court; **Halina Bondal**, a judge of the Viciebsk Regional Court; **Andrei Vasiliuk**, a judge of the Brest Regional Court; as well as district court judges **Aleh Kaliada**, **Alena Bushava**, **Siarhei Budrevich**, and **Ala Skuratovich**.

Lawyers and the Bar

The Bar in Belarus is not autonomous; it is subject to the oversight of the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry is responsible for administering the qualification exam, appointing senior positions at lawyers' self-governing bodies, initiating disciplinary proceedings against lawyers, and terminating licenses. As UN experts [noted](#), "large-scale violations of civil and political rights in Belarus since 2020 have been accompanied by systematic persecution of lawyers in retaliation for defending civil society actors, protestors or political figures." According to information received by Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, the number of lawyers in the country decreased by 597 over the past five years, dropping from 2,199 to 1,603. Additionally, 14 lawyers were criminally prosecuted.

Margaret Satterthwaite, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, and Nils Muižnieks, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, expressed alarm over the government of Belarus's unprecedented stranglehold on legal professionals: "The government in Belarus is using terror to intimidate, control and quash dissent. This has a chilling effect, with lawyers afraid to represent clients in politically sensitive cases. In fact, many people are afraid to work as lawyers at all. Newly-qualified lawyers are not replacing those who are imprisoned, disbarred or in exile, leading to a crisis of access to justice."

The Group of Independent Experts spoke in the same spirit: "The Group concludes that the punitive persecution of lawyers is part of an overall pattern of targeted repression and State control that is silencing the legal profession throughout Belarus. This persistent harassment serves as a chilling warning to all lawyers considering taking on politically sensitive cases. As a result, the number of competent lawyers able and willing to assist victims is decreasing year by year, especially those representing clients who are, or are perceived to be, challenging Government policies. This continued persecution severely affects the rights of prisoners to have legal counsel of their own choice and a genuine defense."

Violation of fair trial standards

The authorities' efforts to prevent independent monitoring of court hearings have resulted in information about politically motivated trials originating solely from individuals persecuted and forced to flee Belarus. For example, human rights defender [Vital Chopik](#) was accused of monitoring politically motivated court cases and sharing information about them with Viasna human rights defenders. He is currently serving a seven-year sentence for "facilitating extremist activity."

Courts continue to consider criminal cases in the absence of defendants who reside outside Belarus. Such cases are considered to clearly and openly violate the right to defense. The accused and convicted are not provided with procedural documents, including the verdict. They are denied communication with their assigned defense lawyers, and their explanations and objections regarding the charges are not accepted. Twenty-one additional names were added to the list of those to be tried under special proceedings and summoned by the authorities for criminal prosecution. Three of them are accused of economic crimes and left Belarus because of the events of 2020. One is charged with property crimes, and the rest with so-called extremist crimes.

Compared to 2024, when 109 special proceedings were started, the intensity of special proceedings decreased significantly in 2025.

Since 2024, Belarus has considered five criminal cases involving deceased collaborators among Soviet citizens who fled to the “countries of the collective West” after World War II, charging them with “genocide of the Belarusian people.” Those convicted have been sentenced under Article 127 of the Criminal Code (Genocide). The politicized nature of the trials, sentencing, and state propaganda coverage is noted. Thus, by the end of 2025, a verdict had been passed against **Osip Vinnitsky**. Both the prosecutor’s speech and the verdict emphasized his nationality and his membership in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. While defending another collaborator, **A. Yarmolchyk**, attorney **A. Hambaleuski** proposed that his German father’s genetic makeup determined his cruelty. Soviet-made documentaries and the distorted conclusions of the Nuremberg trials were used as evidence of guilt. The cartoonish nature of court proceedings, the sketchy and superficial verdicts, and the poor quality of evidence collected decades ago in other settings undermine confidence in the trial’s outcome.

The Republic of Belarus introduced criminal liability for genocide with the adoption of the 1999 Criminal Code. Under the Criminal Code, an act is considered criminal and punishable according to the law in effect at the time it was committed. A law that criminalizes an act, increases the penalty, or otherwise worsens the position of the person who committed it shall not apply retroactively.

4. Key mechanisms of political repression through anti-extremism policy

4.1. Maintaining the List of Extremist Publications and Content as a method of controlling freedom of expression and censorship

The most prevalent and long-standing form of antiextremist prosecution in Belarus is the labeling of publications as “extremist.” It was the mechanism for recognizing content as extremist that led the authorities to start testing the Law on Countering Extremism, a practice that caused significant concern back in 2019.²

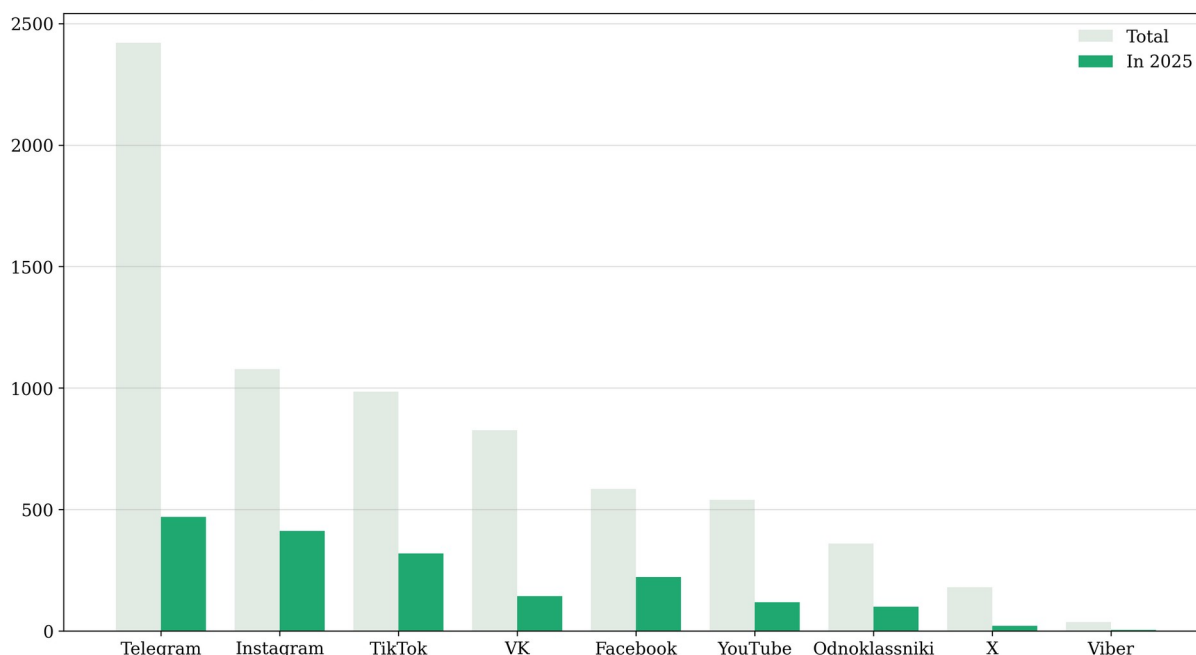
Initially, the term “extremist content” was used arbitrarily, primarily in reference to anarchist and human rights publications, as these were considered the most “inconvenient” by the authorities. This practice has been actively developing since 2020, and the next evolutionary phase was in 2025. Now, almost everything is indiscriminately recognized as extremist. After 2025, any independent and popular information resources that are not controlled by the state are actually considered extremist. See below for more details.

This type of repression is primarily carried out through administrative prosecution, for which the requirements are significantly lower than those for criminal prosecution. Consequently, the level of procedural control and caution in its application is much lower. This has led to its arbitrary and instrumental use by law enforcement agencies.

² [Countering Extremism and Human Rights: A Joint Analytical Report by Human Rights Organizations in Belarus](#), Minsk, 2019

By the close of 2025, the List of Extremist Publications and Content in Belarus had amassed to nearly 2,000 pages. By the end of 2025, over 8,000 publications had been designated as extremist, with almost a quarter of them added during 2025.

Designation of Internet Resources as “Extremist” in Belarus



By the end of 2025, the labeling of independent information, primarily online, had effectively fulfilled two key functions of the repressive regime: censoring the information landscape and establishing a formal, universally applicable basis for prosecution, often as a substitute for criminal prosecution.

Censorship

In 2025, censorship increasingly extended beyond political and activist projects to a much broader range of [publications](#), including cultural content such as music groups and art books, with a notable precedent being the designation of the official website of the Council of Europe as extremist. Moreover, the authorities’ reach extends beyond Belarusian resources, as foreign publications, notably Ukrainian ones, are also identified as extremist.

Due to their popularity and role in disseminating various types of information, Telegram channels and chat rooms account for the largest share of extremist content. However, in 2025, the authorities clearly shifted toward designating Instagram pages as extremist. Thus, a new trend in 2025 was the designation of personal — often not even public — Instagram pages as extremist, usually those belonging to political prisoners or former political prisoners.

Designation of Internet Resources as “Extremist” in Belarus
(Total Number and 2025 Share)

Platform	Total Number	Designated in 2025	Share of Total (%), 2025
Instagram	1077	411	38.2
Facebook	585	222	37.9
TikTok	985	319	32.4
Odnoklassniki	360	99	27.5
YouTube	540	118	21.9
Telegram	2421	469	19.4
VK	826	143	17.3
X	180	21	11.7
Viber	36	4	11.1

The list of printed publications containing information, messages, and materials whose dissemination may harm Belarus’s national interests is another censorship tool. It extrajudicially classifies publications as prohibited and may result in the deprivation of state registration for distributors of printed publications. The List now includes 225 publications.

The procedure for designating publications as extremist and the symbolic role of the courts

[The procedure for designating publications as extremist](#) in Belarus consists of four nominal stages and is clearly vertically organized and initiated by power structures. It begins with an initiative by entities tasked with countering extremism — typically law enforcement bodies — which submit a request to special commissions responsible for assessing information materials. These commissions evaluate materials for signs of extremism using vague criteria and without any guarantees of objectivity, transparency, or expertise. After that, the publications are submitted to the court. In the final stage, the Ministry of Information [adds](#) publications to the List of Extremist Publications and Content. The content is not subject to public disclosure. There are no effective mechanisms for appealing or removing items from the List, which makes the entire process closed, unilaterally controlled, and virtually unlimited in time.

In this mechanism, the courts’ role is purely symbolic. In fact, they only approve decisions made by law enforcement agencies engaged in activities to “combat extremism.” There is no record of a court ever refusing to recognize content as extremist on the merits of a case. Furthermore, the commission’s conclusions are accepted without any critical evaluation, even though it is not a full-fledged expert body.

“Judicial” proceedings take place behind closed doors. There are no effective opportunities for stakeholders and the wider community to participate, nor is there any possibility of appealing the decision or obtaining a reasoned explanation.

Despite the closed nature of the procedure and the lack of effective remedies, it became known at the end of 2025 that an open [trial](#) on the case of recognizing content as extremist had been held. During this time, the Prosecutor’s Office publicly explained why it had

recognized *Zerkalo*, one of the most popular independent media outlets, as an extremist publication, essentially acting as a court of law. Thus, the authorities use publicity surrounding “extremist content” solely for propaganda and to intimidate society. The process itself directly interferes with freedom of expression and dissemination of opinion, as well as the right to an effective legal defense.

It is distinctive that the function of recognizing materials as extremist is concentrated in separate courts. For example, the Centralny District Court in Minsk adopted 513 relevant decisions. In contrast, the Kastryčnicki District Court in Minsk adopted only one.

Courts lack clear criteria and consistency in their decisions: the object of designation may change within a single month, and the status of “extremist content” is applied selectively and situationally, ranging from independent media to the websites of international organizations. The situation with the Council of Europe’s online resources was also illustrative: on December 5, 2025, the Partyzanski District Court of Minsk declared the website of the Conference of International NGOs (CINGO), pointing to the official Council of Europe site, as an “extremist resource”; by December 10, this decision was overturned, yet on December 19, individual pages of the same site were added to the extremist list.

Administrative persecution based on the arbitrary designation of information as “extremist”

Individuals have also been prosecuted for interacting with “extremist” content, such as subscribing to, liking, reposting, or forwarding it. As with censorship, the responsibility for punishment lies with the power structures, while the courts merely formally approve such decisions, lending them symbolic legitimacy.

Thus, the second purpose of the List of Extremist Publications is to provide a foundation for detaining and punishing individuals when there is no evidence of an actual crime or administrative violation. This mechanism serves two purposes: to punish dissent and to provide a buffer before more serious criminal prosecutions that require formal evidence. In 2025, the repressive environment persisted, and the regime created situations in which the courts recognize “confessions” obtained under torture as sufficient grounds for imposing lengthy prison sentences.³

The recognition of content as extremist carries legal implications for the owners of webpages and any individuals who interact with them. The main consequence is administrative liability. According to Part 2 of Article 19.11 of the Administrative Violations Code, both page owners and their users are liable for interactions such as subscriptions, comments, likes, reposts, and forwarding.

In practice, detention clearly prevails over a fine as a punishment, and it is usually for a maximum of 15 days. Additionally, law enforcement authorities consider a seized phone or device that shows engagement with an “extremist” page to be evidence that the device was used to commit an offence. Appeals never reverse such decisions — there are no effective remedies.

³ For example, political prisoner [Mikita Hrusheuski](#) was sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention under Article 19.11 of the Administrative Violations Code. But after serving his time, he was not released. He was charged with four felony counts.

Thus, updating the List of Extremist Content actually supports statistics in the “fight against extremism” and censors the information space. It also provides a broad basis for prosecuting people under Article 19.11 of the Administrative Violations Code for expressing their views through subscriptions and likes, as well as for disseminating undesirable information. In practice, this policy results in micro-censorship and total control over not only mass information, but also micro-communities, private publications, and fiction.

4.2. Maintaining the List of Extremist Formations as a violation of freedom of association and expression

The procedure for designating civil society actors as “extremist formations”

The Council of Ministers formulated the legislation and procedures for recognising organisations and online communities as extremist formations in 2021, and these remain fundamentally unchanged in 2025. In practice, however, this mechanism took hold during the reporting year as an administrative procedure of repression that is used to systematically control any form of collective activity in society. An exceptional measure designed to counter violent extremism has, in practice, become a universal tool for stigmatizing and criminalizing groups of people.

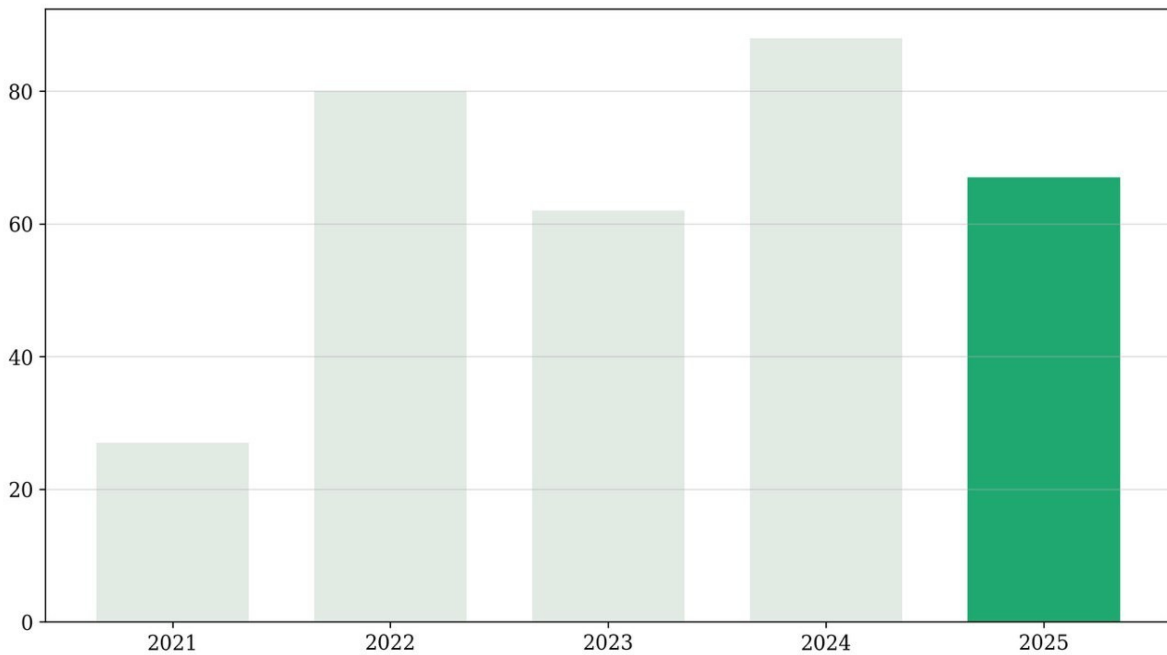
In Belarus, recognition of groups as extremist formations is carried out outside the judicial system and is based on vague, abstract formulations in the Law on Countering Extremism. The Ministry of Internal Affairs or the KGB (very rarely the Supreme Court) makes decisions without effective appeal procedures. The Ministry of Internal Affairs maintains and publishes the List of Extremist Formations, but access to it from abroad is blocked. This violates the right to receive information guaranteed by Article 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

From the perspective of international human rights standards, these practices seriously interfere with the freedom of association guaranteed by Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In compliance with the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality, as well as the possibility of effective judicial appeal, only a court can prohibit the activities of organizations. This is systematically ignored in the Belarusian context.

The evolution of the practice of designating entities as extremist formations

In 2025, 67 civil society organizations were recognized as extremist formations. By the end of the year, that total number amounted to 324.

Dynamics Of Designating Entities As Extremist Formations (2021-2025)

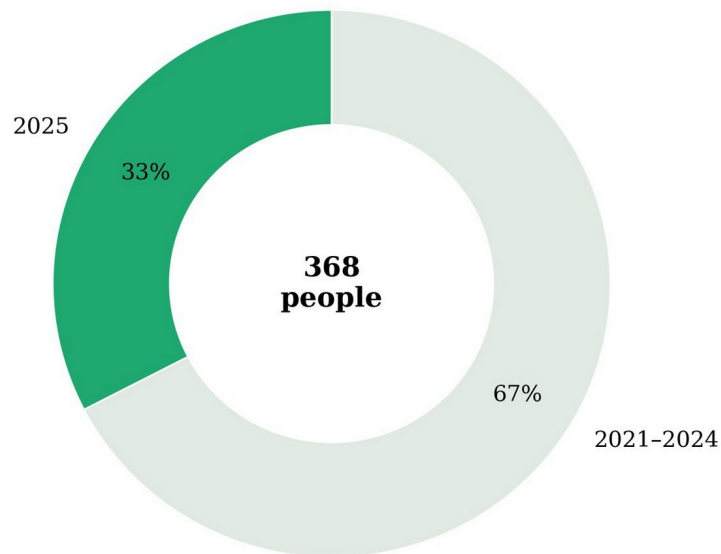


On the one hand, in 2025, entities already considered “standard” targets for inclusion on the List of Extremist Formations continued to be designated as such, including political parties (the Belarusian Socialist Party), popular media outlets (such as *Mediazona Belarus* and *Plan B*), the streaming platform Belarus Tomorrow, as well as research and educational initiatives (the Center for New Ideas, the Office for Education for a New Belarus, and BEROC).

However, [new trends](#) in identifying extremist groups emerged in 2025: religious communities such as “Priest Barok” and “Khrystsianskaya Viziya,” professional organizations like the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, and cultural initiatives including Radio Plato, the music group Dzieciuki, and the jewelry brand BelaruskiCry. Thus, recognizing groups as extremist formations criminalizes almost all forms of interaction between people, from political activism to cultural and professional self-expression.

Separately, the use of the criminal prosecution scheme in 2025 is documented. Beginning in previous years, this scheme involves recognizing an extremist group after the fact to justify the politically motivated prosecution of individuals who have “come to the attention” of the authorities. In several cases in 2025, a characteristic sequence of actions was recorded: administrative detention based on Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Violations; establishing a connection with an initiative; recognizing the initiative as an extremist formation; and initiating criminal proceedings.

Convictions under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code
“Founding or joining an extremist formation”



Since 2021, at least 368 people have been convicted of “founding or participating in an extremist formation” (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code). Of those, 120 were convicted in 2025. This article is often used in conjunction with other criminal articles in prosecutions.

A significant proportion of the extremist formations identified in 2025 were either established abroad or aimed at Belarusians in the diaspora. This suggests a deliberate attempt to restrict cross-border connections, solidarity, and interaction between Belarusians in Belarus and those in the diaspora.

4.3. Lists of persons involved in extremist or terrorist activities

Dynamics of list expansion in 2025

Throughout 2025, the Ministry of Internal Affairs regularly updated the List of Belarusian Citizens, Foreign Nationals, or Stateless Persons Involved in Extremist Activities (the List of Extremists) almost automatically (with weekly updates on Fridays). This resulted in 1,319 listings for the year, bringing the total number of listings since March 23, 2022, to 6,127. After individuals convicted before the List was created were added, an average of about 100 people per month — or about 30 per week — were subsequently included. This resulted in more than 75% of the List comprising people convicted on political grounds. At the same time, the List includes individuals exonerated through amnesty (1), compulsory psychiatric treatment (25), or the expiration of the statute of limitations for prosecution (76). Of the 76 individuals exonerated due to the expiration of the statute of limitations for prosecution, 50 were added in 2025.

The State Security Committee has significantly expanded the List of Organizations and Individuals Involved in Terrorist Activities, also known as the “list of terrorists.” By the end of 2025, 1,399 individuals were on the List, including at least 660 Belarusian citizens. They

were listed arbitrarily, with no connection to actual terrorist activity. Of those individuals, 143 were Belarusians added in the past year.

The repressive nature of the “extremist lists.” List of extremists

A person is included in the List of Belarusian Citizens, Foreign Nationals, or Stateless Persons Involved in Extremist Activities based on an effective court verdict for crimes categorized as extremist. The corresponding list of offenses includes nearly 70 specific criminal offenses and 50 separate articles.

At the same time, this List’s legal construction, updated in 2025, has become more expansive.⁴ In addition to the offenses listed in the Criminal Code, it allows for any other crimes listed in the Code's Special Part to be classified as “extremist” if, according to law enforcement agencies and the court, they are committed on the grounds of political, ideological, racial, national, or social enmity.

Accordingly, what matters most is not the act itself, but the subjective assessment of a motive, which lacks transparent, verifiable standards and usually amounts to exercising rights and freedoms safeguarded by the Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As a result, the List of Extremist Crimes is open, and the inclusion mechanism allows for arbitrary expansion. This contradicts the principles of legal certainty and is used as a politically motivated instrument in addition to the punishment imposed by the court.

List of terrorists

A person is included in the List of Organizations and Individuals Involved in Terrorist Activities based on one of two criteria: an effective court verdict under articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus classified as terrorism, or a ruling to bring the person to trial under the same articles, i.e., before a court ruling. Thus, criminal prosecution alone is sufficient grounds for inclusion on this List, rather than a court-established finding of guilt, which violates the presumption of innocence.

Similar to the List of Extremists, the criteria for being included on the “list of terrorists” were significantly expanded in 2025. The updated List includes a broad range of criminal law provisions, including articles not directly related to acts of violence — for example, Article 369-2 of the Criminal Code (Illegal receipt and use of foreign gratuitous aid) — provided there is an evaluative indication of “the purpose of carrying out terrorist activity.”

As a result, over the past year, the “list of terrorists” has become entrenched as a mechanism that has lost touch with its original purpose of countering terrorism. It is now actively used as a repressive tool. The use of this List enables the state to apply the highly stigmatizing label of “terrorism” in politically motivated cases, amplifying isolation, financial pressure, and social stigmatization of those whose activities or opinions are considered undesirable, alongside and beyond formal judicial penalties.

⁴ See Appendix 3 to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 575 of October 12, 2021 (as amended by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 319 of June 10, 2025), defining the list of crimes of an extremist nature.

It is not uncommon for the same person to be placed on both the “list of extremists” and the “list of terrorists.” However, the latter entails more severe consequences, such as an inability to receive remittances while in prison. This particularly affects political prisoners.

Key trends in the expansion of the list of extremists in 2025

The increase in the number of individuals added to the List of those convicted under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“Facilitating extremist activity”) in the final months of 2025 is linked to the large-scale criminal prosecutions in the “*Belaruski Hajun* case,” which began when law enforcement agencies obtained user data from the relevant Telegram bot at the start of the year. The updated December “list of extremists” reflects the trend of mass prosecutions in the “*Belaruski Hajun* case” that began in 2025.

Another feature of 2025 is the practice of including exonerated individuals on the “list of extremists,” which contradicts the List’s purpose. This development reflects the arbitrary use of the list of extremists as a repressive tool and an apparent deviation from its established rules, under which inclusion should be grounded in a legally binding court sentence — that is, actual criminal liability, not release from it. This mainly concerns Article 342 of the Criminal Code (Organizing, preparing or participating in actions that constitute a severe breach of public order). The statute of limitations for the 2020 protests expired in 2025; therefore, those who were prosecuted were exonerated.

Implications and effects of inclusion in the list of extremists

For those included, this means financial and professional isolation, including account and transfer blocking, and prohibition from employment in education, public administration, the military, health care, and social services. These restrictions remain in force for up to five years after a conviction is expunged, effectively lasting up to 13 years after completing a sentence.

The List includes representatives from various social and professional groups, such as librarians, educators, regional media journalists, economists, psychologists, cultural workers, and former law enforcement officers. It also includes people with young children and elderly citizens.

Thus, the list of extremists is one of the key repressive mechanisms because it records facts about politically motivated criminal prosecutions and creates a norm of isolation and stigmatization. The effects of this practice persist even after the sentence has been served, and the criminal record has been expunged. Although it is formally based on court sentences that have entered into force, it is applied arbitrarily in practice. It includes people who have not been charged with a crime but have caught the attention of “entities fighting extremism.” The regime further penalizes actions that are undesirable to the authorities by maintaining this List. These actions go beyond a judicial decision and affect a spectrum of social, professional, and economic rights.

5. Targeting of human rights defenders and expressions of solidarity

Human rights defenders, as well as those who support political prisoners and express solidarity with Ukraine in its struggle for sovereignty, are frequently subjected to severe pressure and all forms of repression.

Targeting people for human rights work and support of political prisoners

The persecution of human rights defenders, human rights organizations, and their volunteers and beneficiaries persisted.

In the context of the criminalization of their activities and any interaction with them, most human rights organizations continue to exist under the label of “extremist.” Some initiatives have been forced to stop their activities. For example, the human rights project *Palityvazynka*, which focused on advocating for the rights of women political prisoners, [stopped](#) its work after being recognized as an extremist formation.

Human rights defenders remaining in Belarus face administrative and criminal prosecution.

Human rights activist from Mazyr **Uladzimir Tseliapun** served 15 days of administrative detention [ordered](#) by the court on charges of “distribution of extremist materials” (Part 2 of Article 19.11 of the Administrative Violations Code).

The human rights defenders from the Viasna Human Rights Center — **Ales Bialiatski**, **Valiantsin Stefanovic**, **Uladzimir Labkovich**, **Marfa Rabkova**, volunteer **Andrei Chapiuk** — as well as Human Constanta human rights defender **Nasta Loika** and human rights activist **Vital Chopik**, remained in detention.

Andrei Chapiuk served his sentence in full and was released in April. At the end of the year, Ales Bialiatski and Uladzimir Labkovich were released and forcibly removed from Belarus.

Marfa Rabkova’s detention was [recognized](#) as arbitrary and politically motivated by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, following an appeal by Viasna lawyers.

The persecution of human rights defenders continued, forcing them to flee the country.

Several human rights defenders [appear](#) in the Russian wanted database, integrated with the Belarusian database. New criminal charges were [filed](#) against **Leanid Sudalenka**, a former political prisoner and human rights defender at the Viasna Human Rights Center, in special proceedings that allow for a conviction in absentia.

Helping and showing solidarity with political prisoners remained criminalized. By the end of the year, at least 26 political prisoners were still imprisoned for showing solidarity. **Aksana Shaliapina**, for example, was [sentenced](#) to three years in prison for helping several dozen political prisoners.

Targeting solidarity with Ukraine amid Russia’s war against it

By the close of 2025, Viasna HRC had [documented](#) at least 239 individuals facing criminal prosecution for their involvement in Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine. Human rights activists consider the persecution of these individuals to be politically motivated. By year-end 2025, there were 88 political prisoners and 111 former political prisoners facing persecution linked to the war.

The cases in question involve a wide range of alleged crimes, including expressions of solidarity, criticism of the Belarusian authorities, and donations. These are peaceful actions that should be protected by freedom of expression.

Several criminal cases involve combatants, potential combatants, and former combatants who fought on Ukraine’s side as volunteers. Thus, there were reports of detentions for expressing

an [intention](#) to join the Kastus Kalinouski Regiment, as well as detentions of former volunteers. **Maksim Ralko**, for example, was [sentenced](#) by the court to 10 years in prison. Several volunteers and former volunteers were [convicted](#) in absentia. For instance, medic **Anastasiya Mahamet** was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Several cases involve various forms of civil resistance aimed at stopping the movement of Russian military equipment through Belarus. At least 36 detainees have been [arrested](#) for allegedly committing sabotage on the railroad. These acts usually involved taking safe measures to slow or stop trains. **Pavel Vabishchau** and **Andrei Zinenka** were [sentenced](#) to 12 and 23 years in prison, respectively, for their involvement in an attempted sabotage incident. The sentences of **Ivan Barodzich** and **Barys Pukhalski** in the attempted bombing of a train case were [revealed](#): the court sentenced them to 11 and 25 years in prison, respectively.

Targeting people for sharing images and videos of Russian military equipment in Belarus via a Telegram bot

A separate aspect of the persecution linked to the war in Ukraine is the “*Belaruski Hajun*” case.

In early February 2025, news broke of a hacking incident involving the Telegram bot of the *Belaruski Hajun* initiative, which was used to share information about the movement of Russian military equipment in Belarus and to express opinions on Russian aggression in Ukraine. As a result of the hack, law enforcement agencies gained access to the personal data of thousands of users. The *Belaruski Hajun* initiative was recognized as an extremist formation in 2022. However, it was not until 2025, when it gained access to user data, that a large-scale repressive campaign began.

In 2025, the “*Hajun case*” led to widespread arrests throughout the country. The detainees are charged under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“Facilitation of extremist activity”) for actions that were essentially an expression of their civic position and solidarity with Ukraine.

As of the end of December, the Viasna HRC knew of at least 127 confirmed defendants in the “*Belaruski Hajun case*”. The total number of detainees is much higher, and the number of identified individuals probably exceeds 1,500.⁵ The Telegram bot received thousands of messages, and up to 30,000 people who [interacted](#) with it could face prosecution in the case.

This repressive campaign is reflected in the dynamics of extremists being added to the List in the last months of 2025. A large number of the new additions pertain to sentences under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code, which took effect recently. For instance, there were over 40 people in December, 65 in November, and over 50 in October.

The case of political prisoner [Aliaksei Kamovich](#) is an example of the persecution that occurred in the “*Belaruski Hajun case*.” He was sentenced to four years and six months of restricted freedom in an open-type correctional facility. He was also placed on the extremist list.

⁵ According to one of the convicts' testimonies, the criminal case file contains information about approximately 2,500 users of the “*Belaruski Hajun*” bot. At least **1,500 of these individuals have already been identified**. This indicates the scope of the collected data and confirms that the persecution is widespread and indiscriminate.

6. Expulsions and potential loss of nationality

Since 2020, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians have fled Belarus to escape political persecution. *“Belarusian authorities have created a purposefully hostile environment that forced a significant segment of the civilian population of Belarus into exile and prevents their safe return. [...] The State of Belarus has demonstrated that it is unwilling and/or unable to provide adequate protection or safeguards against human rights violations, as it is the perpetrator of such violations,”* the Group of Independent Experts noted in their [report](#).

In 2025, the state deported its citizens and foreign residents, including released political prisoners, in several steps. This was a flagrant violation of national and international law.

Forcibly expelling a citizen violates their right to nationality and freedom of movement. The right to freedom of movement includes the right to leave and return to one’s country voluntarily. Only in prescribed cases, and in accordance with an appropriate procedure, may foreign nationals and stateless persons be deported; their expulsion may not be arbitrary.

The authorities penalize those who refuse to be expelled.

On September 11, 2025, 52 individuals released through the mediation of US diplomats were forcibly transferred from Belarusian prisons to Lithuania. **Mikalai Statkevich** refused to be deported by force and was subsequently punished by being sent back to the correctional facility, despite the authorities’ statement that he had been pardoned.

On December 13, 2025, [123 people](#), nearly all of whom were political prisoners, were released through US diplomatic mediation. Human rights activists have no information about one of the individuals released. Most of those pardoned were forcibly taken to Ukraine. 114 people were deported there, including 104 Belarusians and five Ukrainian citizens.

Thus, at least 189 former political prisoners were forcibly expelled during the year. This indicates that deportations were carried out for political reasons.

In some cases, Belarusian authorities confiscated the passports of political prisoners before their deportation. It is impossible to obtain a new passport abroad.

It is worth noting that in 2023, Decree No. 278 on the Procedure for Issuing Documents and Performing Actions took effect, depriving diplomatic and consular offices of the ability to issue or renew passports for Belarusians abroad. Those who have left Belarus are deprived of the opportunity to receive other consular services and the right to conduct property transactions and administrative procedures through powers of attorney executed outside of Belarus.

Thus, the legal situation of many Belarusians who were forced to leave their country contains clear signs of statelessness. “De facto stateless persons are persons outside the country of their nationality who are unable or, for valid reasons, are unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country. Protection in this sense refers to the right of diplomatic protection exercised by a State of nationality to remedy an internationally wrongful act against one of its nationals, as well as diplomatic and consular protection and assistance generally, including in relation to return to the State of nationality.”⁶

⁶ [UNHCR, Expert Meeting — The Concept of Stateless Persons under International Law \(“Prato Conclusions”\), May 2010.](#)

7. Forced labor

Belarus continues to employ forced labor in a variety of settings, including community cleanups, agricultural sectors, and detention facilities, including occupational therapy detox centers. Both international organizations and human rights activists have repeatedly noted that Belarus has violated its international obligations concerning the prohibition of forced labor.

In his October 2025 report to the UN General Assembly, Nils Muižnieks, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, noted widespread discrimination and politically motivated persecution in both the public and private sectors. He also reported on the unjustified and politically motivated restrictions on access to professions, as well as the practice of punishing unjustly imprisoned individuals with hard and dangerous forced labor for little or no pay. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about the total eradication of trade union rights and the numerous violations of workers' rights. The report is the result of the mandate's two-year collaboration with the International Labor Organization, which subjected Belarus to enhanced supervision under Article 33 of its constitution due to violations of trade union rights.

Occupational therapy detox centers

The Occupational Therapy Detox Center system, which has been criticized for its potential violations of human rights and its imposition of penalties such as imprisonment for up to two years and six months for individuals addicted to alcohol and other psychoactive substances who have not committed additional unlawful acts or have already been punished for such acts, remains in effect. OTDC inmates are generally required to perform hard, low-paid labor under threat of isolation and/or extended sentences. There are currently nine OTDCs in Belarus, six for men and three for women. Notably, the Correctional Facility in Ivacevičy, which was previously designed to hold approximately 2,000 prisoners, has now been transformed into an OTDC. Following the decline in OTDC referrals in 2020, when 4,494 individuals were referred, population statistics for OTDCs are no longer published. Additionally, court statistics are not reliable as they combine data on new referrals with information on reductions and extensions of OTDC terms, making the data confusing.

Nevertheless, we can observe an increase in the number of such referrals, rising from 6,295 in 2021 to 9,541 in 2023 and reaching 10,852 in 2024.

Labor of prisoners and convicted persons

Convicts in correctional facilities are subjected to ruthless exploitation with signs of slave labor. They are engaged in compulsory labor without an employment contract, under threat of disciplinary or criminal punishment. Often, they work for negligible remuneration in harsh conditions and without regard to qualifications. Individuals convicted of crimes and sentenced to restricted freedom in open-type correctional facilities are obligated to engage in labor as part of their sentence. These individuals are compelled to enter into labor contracts with entities designated by the facility administration, often under less favorable conditions and without full consideration of their qualifications. Non-compliance can lead to deprivation of freedom.

Individuals designated as “obliged persons” who serve administrative detention are often compelled to engage in unskilled, low-wage labor.

In 2024, human rights defenders documented numerous instances of forced assignment to agricultural work and [street cleaning](#) for previously convicted or imprisoned citizens.

Agricultural work and community cleanups

Public sector employees are traditionally used for harvesting in agricultural enterprises. Anatol Isachenka, the chairman of the Mahilioŭ Region executive committee, [commented](#) on the work of the so-called “interservice team”: “In Belarus, it is customary to work together, whether it’s building a house or working in the field. Therefore, police officers, firefighters, and cultural workers also participated in the harvest. This has been agreed with ministers.”

In the Mahilioŭ Region, no fewer than 186 children, including school and college students, were engaged in harvesting carrots: “Several student squads [worked](#) in the fields of the Kadzina farm. In the morning, it is the schoolchildren, and in the afternoon, they are replaced by students from the Mahilioŭ Economic College. Thanks to their work, the farmers receive an additional 15 tons of vegetables every day.”

Mandatory nationwide and local community cleanups have proven to be a reliable way to replenish national and local budgets. Employees are required to contribute their labor voluntarily for a few days each year or transfer their personal funds instead of working. The ultimate beneficiary of these funds is the state budget. On October 25, 2025, the national community cleanup event brought in approximately \$6.7 million. Deputy Prime Minister Natalia Piatkevich [told](#) state media reporters: “*About 2.3 million people participated in the community cleanup nationwide, earning approximately 19.4-19.5 million Belarusian rubles. That’s 3 million rubles more than the April cleanup. For the first time this year, we are organizing a cleanup day twice a year. ... A resolution of the Council of Ministers defines how the money will be spent. Fifty percent of the funds raised during this cleanup day will be allocated to planned regional projects. The other fifty percent will go toward the construction of the National Historical Museum of Belarus.*”

On October 24, the day before National Cleanup Day, Hrodna held its own citywide cleanup. In addition to the two national cleanup days, a district community cleanup was held in Hlybokaje on November 22. At the Hlybokaje Meat Processing Plant, a community cleanup was also held on November 1 at the “affiliated” farm. This was “*a direct consequence of the president’s instruction voiced at a recent meeting of the Viciebsk Regional Executive Committee. The 100 employees of the Hlybokaje Meat Processing Plant [participated](#) in fieldwork at the Halubichy agricultural enterprise. Employees of the Hlybokaje Meat Processing Plant were actively involved in the process, which included washing windows, repairing fences, painting gates, whitewashing the barn, removing organic matter, tidying up machine yards, mowing the grounds, and repairing and watering the drinking system at the cattle feeding complex.*”

Refusal to participate in a cleanup day is technically possible, but may result in harassment of the employee.

8. Discrimination. Violation of LGBTQ+ people's rights

In 2025, Belarus faced significant challenges to equality and inclusion in various spheres due to the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and effective legal protection mechanisms. Gender inequality in Belarus remained a considerable problem, manifesting in multiple spheres of social life, including the level of earnings, political participation, the issue of domestic violence, stereotypes, and discrimination in society. A remaining concern was the intensification of negative trends among specific social groups.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considered Belarus's Ninth Periodic Report (CEDAW/C/BLR/9) at its 2124th and 2125th meetings (see CEDAW/C/SR.2124 and CEDAW/C/SR.2125), held on February 6, 2025. The Committee expressed concern about the absence of a definition of discrimination against women in Belarusian legislation, which covers direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres, as well as cross-discrimination. Regarding this issue, the Committee recommended that Belarus adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation explicitly prohibiting all forms of discrimination against women and girls. This legislation should cover direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres, as well as cross-discrimination.

On October 3, the House of Representatives of the National Assembly passed the draft Law on Amendments to the Codes of Administrative Liability in the first reading. The law introduces liability for propaganda of homosexual relations, gender reassignment, childlessness, and pedophilia. Propaganda is defined as “the dissemination of information in any form to shape citizens’ perceptions of the acceptability of homosexual relations, gender reassignment, childlessness, or pedophilia.” The human rights community [condemned](#) the draft law, calling for an end to the practice of adopting legislation that restricts freedom of expression and divides citizens based on group affiliation, and urging the authorities to ensure compliance with international human rights obligations, including non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and reproductive choice. Human rights activists emphasized that including pedophilia alongside homosexuality, transgenderism, and childlessness is an apparent attempt to discredit and demonize entire social groups. This is unacceptable in a state governed by the rule of law.

Human rights defenders from Viasna [prepared](#) the report “They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women’s testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons.” This review is the result of collecting and analyzing evidence of gender-based violations of women’s rights in detention facilities. It covers the period from the post-election protests of 2020 to the ongoing repression in 2024.

9. Targeting of journalists, media workers, and bloggers

As of December 2025, authorities continued to hold [34 journalists, media workers, and bloggers](#) in detention, alongside at least 34 searches and property inspections [affecting](#) this group during the year.

In late May, the editorial offices of the regional media outlets *Vecherniy Bobruisk*, *Bobruisk Info*, and *Volnaje Hlybokaje* were searched. The state television accused the journalists of

collaborating with the German embassy. At least 12 media representatives have been detained.

Former [Intex-press](#) journalists from the Baranavičy independent newspaper, **Natallia Semianovich, Mikita Piatrouski, Ruslan Raviaka, and Liudmila Zeliankova**, were prosecuted under Part 2 Art. 361-4 of the Criminal Code (facilitating extremist activity).

Ten journalists were released from prison and forcibly deported on February 12, September 11, and December 13, 2025.

Belarus continued to persecute its citizens across borders for exercising rights and freedoms that are legally guaranteed by the country's international obligations. The Belarusian Association of Journalists has documented at least [100 cases](#) of journalists being prosecuted in absentia.

According to the [BAJ](#), thirteen media outlets were recognized as extremist formations during the year.

10. Torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment

In 2025, numerous testimonies of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment [continued](#) to emerge, relating both to the events of 2020 and to subsequent years, including 2025. The documented practices covered the stages of arrest and interrogation, as well as conditions of detention in temporary detention facilities for those administratively detained, remand centers, and correctional institutions.

The International Accountability Platform for Belarus ([IAPB](#)), which the Viasna Human Rights Center co-founded, continued to collect, verify, and analyze evidence of these violations. As of September 2025, over 3,200 interviews with victims and witnesses have been conducted. Additionally, over 2 million pieces of open-source data have been securely preserved and systematized to support investigations by national and international accountability mechanisms.

As of the end of September 2025, the platform had provided evidence and analysis to prosecutors in six states in response to eleven requests. Additionally, 717 survivors had already received psychological and psychosocial support through a referral system, comprehensive clinical monitoring, and evaluation.

In January 2025, the platform [submitted](#) materials and a legal analysis to the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court. The submission requested a preliminary assessment of the court's jurisdiction to conduct an investigation.

Physical violence and ill-treatment during detention and interrogation

Reports of widespread violence during detention and interrogation were standard. This violence included [beatings](#), [broken fingers](#), the use of [tasers](#), [tear gas](#), and [handcuffs](#) to [extract](#) confessions. Interrogations also took place under [inappropriate conditions](#).

Inhumane methods of detainee transfers

[Testimonies](#) of former political prisoners regarding mistreatment during transportation between detention facilities have been collected. These issues include overcrowding in prison transport vehicles (railway cars and others), inadequate access to water and toilets, and poor

treatment by escort personnel. One particularly egregious form of torture involves prison staff forming two lines — a so-called “welcome parade” — and beating newly arrived prisoners with batons as they are forced to walk through.

Many political prisoners who were released and transferred from Belarus on December 13, 2025 with the assistance of the United States reported that they were transported with bags over their heads and in handcuffs. This was [stated](#) by **Aliaksei Kaplich** at a press conference, [mentioned](#) by **Ales Bialiatski** in an interview, and [described](#) by Ukrainian citizen **Ludmila Honcharenko**.

Thus, inhumane detention conditions, ill-treatment, and torture in detention facilities remained systemic problems.

Torture and ill-treatment related to detention conditions

The conditions in the temporary detention facilities remained harsh. Detainees [faced](#) overcrowding, sleep deprivation, unsanitary conditions, poor temperature regulation (cold in the winter and hot in the summer), limited access to food and water, restricted access to medical care, and a lack of basic personal hygiene items. At the beginning of the year, it was [reported](#) that a 66-year-old woman with cancer died three days after being detained in a temporary detention center in Brest.

Beatings occurred not only during arrest but also in [correctional facilities](#), including in [punishment cells](#).

According to [multiple testimonies](#), disciplinary punishment in the form of placement in a punishment cell in remand centers and correctional facilities was inextricably linked to confinement in the cold and deprivation of food.

Women’s Correctional Facility No. 4 [continues](#) to practice placing prisoners in the “[cage of shame](#),” a narrow metal cage located in the courtyard where prisoners are confined until 4 p.m.

Isolation as a form of coercive influence

Prolonged isolation in punishment cells, as well as the practice of alternating between a punishment cell and a Secure Housing Unit (SHU), continued to be used as a form of pressure, particularly against political prisoners. For example, **Siarhei Tsikhanouski** [claimed](#) he was isolated for five years. **Mikalai Statkevich** was [reportedly](#) isolated for two years and seven months.

Psychological pressure, humiliation, discriminatory practices, and sexualized violence

Both during arrest and while in detention, threats, insults, and intimidation were widely used. Discriminatory treatment of political prisoners continued, including restrictions on communication and denial of basic legal opportunities such as early release, care packages, commissary purchases, sports, and education.

The administration’s practice of exploiting prison subcultural traditions, or “downgrading prisoner status,” [persisted](#) in penitentiaries. Prisoners were isolated from others and deprived of the opportunity to participate in everyday activities. They were also subjected to constant

humiliation and provocation. People with psychological disorders were the target of [discriminatory attitudes](#).

Political prisoners in remand centers and correctional facilities were often [subjected](#) to humiliating full-body searches, with women frequently searched in the presence of male staff. Reports indicate that personal searches were [conducted](#) in the temporary detention facilities in humiliating poses.

Many female political prisoners have [testified](#) about experiencing bullying, abuse, threats, and sexual harassment. Additionally, women [faced](#) unmet special needs, including limited access to hygiene products, medical care, and essential personal items.

[Extended imprisonment](#) for persistent violations of internal regulations (Article 411 of the Criminal Code) was commonly used as a means of pressure.

Denial of medical care

Systemic violations of the right to medical care continued to occur in detention facilities. Detention facilities often failed to provide necessary and timely medical care, including denying medication, check-ups, and treatment for chronic conditions.

11. Right to life. The death penalty issue

The Viasna Human Rights Center and its campaign, “Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty,” have not received information on the imposition or execution of death sentences by courts in 2025. Human rights activists know of only one death [sentence](#) imposed since 2024: that of **Rico Krieger**, a foreign national who was later pardoned. Additionally, the state media [discussed](#) the possibility of imposing the death penalty on **Yury Dziamjanau** during the year, but there is no information about the court’s verdict.

Meanwhile, violations of the right to life in Belarus continue.

On December 18, 2025, A. Lukashenka [stated](#) that an apparently opposition activist had been detained and “eliminated,” referring to the individual in his remarks as a “scoundrel” and a “freedom fighter.” Such an allegation may indicate the excessive use of force during an arrest or a possible extrajudicial deprivation of life.

The deaths of **Aliaksandr Taraikouski**, **Henadz Shutau**, and **Raman Bandarenka**, who were killed by excessive use of force during the 2020 street protests, remain uninvestigated.

There is also a lack of investigations into deaths in custody related to inhumane detention conditions, ill-treatment, and torture. In 2025, the deaths of two political prisoners in captivity were reported: **Valiantsin Shtermer** and **Andrei Podnebenny**. Since 2020, a total of nine political prisoners have died in captivity, and several former political prisoners have died shortly after release.

The complete lack of information about political prisoners held incommunicado suggests that they are victims of enforced disappearance. At the start of the year, 11 political prisoners were known to be held incommunicado; many were released during the year, leaving four by year’s end (see Section 2).

Mikalai Statkevich was subjected to enforced disappearance. As of December 31, 2025, there has been no information regarding the whereabouts or fate of Mikalai Statkevich for

three months and 21 days. He was [detained](#) after refusing to leave Belarus when he was transported from prison to the Lithuanian border. The Belarusian authorities refused to provide information to his wife. Before this incident, he had been incommunicado since February 10, 2023.