

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2025

Right to freedom of association:

Expert commentary¹

| | |
|-------------------|------------|
| The score: | 1.6 |
|-------------------|------------|

Including scores by component:

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|-----|
| ● Freedom of association: general principles | 1.6 |
| ● Activity of associations | 1.6 |

A description of the baseline situation regarding the realisation of the right to freedom of association can be found in the 2019 review.

Despite the overall assessment of the right to freedom of association – including its component elements – remaining identical in 2025 to that of 2024, Index experts assigned lower scores to a number of individual indicators concerning non-interference by the state in the activities of associations; the equal and non-discriminatory right of all persons to form associations; and the free access of associations to financial and other resources, including foreign and international sources. The principal reasons are as follows:

- the conduct of a non-transparent re-registration campaign targeting religious organisations, which in practice constitutes interference in their activities;
- requirements to incorporate into the charters of religious organisations prohibitions on the participation of persons included on lists of "extremists" and "terrorists", creating grounds for the liquidation of organisations on the basis of "charter violations";
- the application in 2025 of Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which prohibits the activities of unregistered organisations;

¹ 'Expert' and other nouns of the masculine grammatical gender are used in a gender-neutral sense and refer to all genders.



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- the restriction of access to resources through the redistribution of funding for civil society initiatives in favour of state and quasi-state structures, which reduces the capacity of independent initiatives and distorts mechanisms of civic participation.

- **Freedom of association: general principles**

Legislation on freedom of association has not changed significantly. However, attention should be drawn to amendments to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On the Rights of the Child" concerning children's right to association.² Under the revised provision, children may form children's and youth public associations provided such associations do not pursue terrorist, extremist or other prohibited activities, nor engage in acts that "allow for the possibility" of such activities. Given the vague formulations and the unpredictability with which the authorities apply anti-extremism legislation, these amendments will create barriers both at the stage of establishing associations and in the course of their operation.³

By the end of 2025, the total number of organisations liquidated – whether forcibly dissolved or compelled to self-liquidate – since 2021 had reached at least 1,990. Of these, 1,220 NGOs were forcibly liquidated (including 913 public associations, 205 institutions and 78 foundations), while 770 organisations resolved to "voluntarily" self-liquidate.⁴

As of 1 January 2026, there were 1,337 public associations registered in the country, compared to 1,337 as of 1 January 2025.⁵ According to Lawtrend's estimates, the number of public associations has fallen by 55% compared to 2021.⁶

In 2025, the number of non-profit organisations registered during the year was lower than in 2024. Thus, in 2025, 2 foundations, 17 non-governmental institutions and 19 public associations were registered. New non-profit organisations are predominantly oriented towards the priorities of state programmes in terms of their areas of activity.⁷

Experts note that in practice registration refusals are documented – including following repeated attempts to submit applications: applicants may be sent back on multiple occasions to remedy minor

² [Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 86-Z of 12 July 2025 "On Amendments to Laws Concerning the Protection of Children's Rights"](#)

³ [Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)

⁴ [Monitoring of NGOs in Belarus undergoing compulsory liquidation and having decided to self-liquidate | Lawtrend – Research Education Action](#)

⁵ [Political parties, public associations and other non-profit organisations – Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus](#)

⁶ [Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)

⁷ [Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)



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formal requirements, which they duly address, only for a refusal to be issued regardless. Such situations arise even in relation to institutions operating in socially neutral fields, including support for persons with disabilities, educational and other social projects.

The central event of 2025 was the re-registration campaign for religious organisations, which ran from 6 July 2024 to 5 July 2025. The process was conducted without transparency: the authorities did not publish lists of communities that had passed through the filter, though a reduction in their number is already known.⁸ According to data from the national report submitted under the Universal Periodic Review, as of August 2025 the number of religious organisations had fallen from 3,592 (at the start of 2024) to 3,426, and the number of religious communities from 3,419 to 3,257.⁹

The authorities also required communities to incorporate into their charters a prohibition on leadership and founding roles for persons included on lists of "extremists" and "terrorists" – notwithstanding that such a prohibition is already contained in the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations". In this way, the authorities intensify pressure on religious organisations and lay the groundwork for their liquidation on the basis of charter violations.¹⁰

Experts note that re-registration in this context effectively functioned as a form of interference in the activities of religious associations and as a continuation of a broader line of state policy towards the non-profit sector – one that previously manifested in relation to public associations, then political parties, then trade unions, and finally religious communities – **rendering these processes components of a single sustained campaign.**

2025 consolidated the practice of trials *in absentia* against those who have left the country. The leaders of the BY SOL and BY_Help foundations each received sentences of 18 years' imprisonment *in absentia*, and their property in Belarus was subjected to confiscation.¹¹

The Investigative Committee began systematically identifying participants in diaspora events abroad and opening cases against them for "facilitating extremist activity". Specifically, the Investigative

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[The re-registration of religious organisations was discussed at a meeting of the regional executive committee – Administration of the Leninsky District of Grodno;](#)

[Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus April 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action;](#)

[Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus July 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action;](#)

⁹ [National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, A/HRC/WG.6/50/BLR/1](#)

¹⁰ [Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus January 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action](#)

¹¹ [Employees of the BY SOL and BY_Help foundations have been convicted](#)



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Committee opened cases against 365 participants in diaspora events on 26 January 2025 and identified a further 207 participants in Freedom Day events across various countries.¹²

The mass designation of initiatives as "extremist formations" continued – their number exceeding 320 by the end of the year – along with the inclusion of their resources on lists of "extremist materials". Representatives of civil society organisations based abroad began to be actively added to lists of "extremists" and "terrorists".¹³ Experts note that simultaneously there was an intensification of criminal and administrative prosecution for membership of or participation in such structures: numerous cases were documented of detention, administrative liability proceedings and subsequently the opening of criminal cases following the designation of organisations as "extremist formations".

Within the country, the application of Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code – which criminalises any activity conducted on behalf of unregistered organisations – resumed: in 2025 the religious movement IVDIVO³ was targeted under this provision.¹⁴

The practice of effective coercion into association membership continued. Experts highlight a trend towards the expansion of trade union membership, including in private-sector organisations, with the aim of strengthening state control over their activities.

Although this trend is not new, in 2025 criminal cases were recorded in connection with the carrying out of specific types of activity – whether monitoring court proceedings or conducting social research on health-related matters.¹⁵ The criminalisation of activities unwelcome to the state thus continues.

The broad and inconsistent approach to defining "extremist formations" allows organisations with widely differing areas of activity to be included on the relevant lists.

¹² [Investigative Committee: 365 participants in protests abroad identified; a further 207 participants in street protests abroad identified. Searches and seizures of property have begun | News | Official website of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus](#)

¹³ [Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus August 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action](#);
[Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus September 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action](#)

¹⁴ [Investigators in the capital, in conjunction with the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, have shut down the activities of an illegal religious organisation. Leaders detained | News from the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus for the City of Minsk | Official website of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus](#); [Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus March 2025 | Lawtrend – Research, Education, Action](#)

¹⁵ [Three residents of the capital have been charged with treason. Details of the investigation | News from the Investigative Committee of Minsk](#)



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It should further be noted that official statistics on the fields of activity of registered organisations are currently not published in full, which hampers analysis of the sector's composition. Nevertheless, according to Lawtrend's assessments, the most frequently registered types are sports organisations, charitable and social organisations, professional associations, search-and-rescue, patriotic and paramilitary organisations, consumer rights associations and educational institutions.¹⁶

In 2025, a proposal was put forward to introduce Article 19.16 into the Code of Administrative Offences, establishing fines for the dissemination of information about homosexual relations, gender transition, voluntary childlessness and paedophilia – placing these on a single list. Under the proposed Article 19.16, "dissemination in any form of information with the aim of forming in citizens the impression that homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness or the recognition of paedophilia as permissible are attractive" would carry a fine of up to 20 base units (840 roubles) for individuals, up to 100 base units (4,200 roubles) for sole traders, and between 100 and 150 base units (4,200-6,300 roubles) for legal entities. The draft law also envisages the introduction of a further new provision – Article 24.62: "Unlawful representation of Belarus at international events".¹⁷

Stringent requirements have been introduced for organisations conducting surveys on the socio-political situation: a minimum of three years' standing, at least two staff members holding relevant qualifications in sociology or political science, and the absence of any member of leadership from lists of "extremists".¹⁸

For 2026, the development is planned of a Law "On Foreign Gratuitous Assistance" – which would replace the existing decree-based regulation – as well as a new conceptual framework for a Law "On Voluntary Activity". Experts fear that this will result in the final subordination to the state of even such grassroots forms of civic engagement as volunteering. Amendments to the Law "On Trade Unions" are also planned.¹⁹

- **Activity of associations**

The state is actively implementing Directive No. 12, which in practice obliges organisations of all forms of ownership to conduct ideological work and to "ensure conditions for the participation of employees in the activities of public associations and trade unions" – meaning pro-state structures.²⁰

¹⁶ [Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)

¹⁷ [Liberalisation and prevention. How will the codes on administrative liability change?](#)

¹⁸ [Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 672 of 25 November 2025 "On the accreditation of legal entities to conduct public opinion polls"](#)

¹⁹ [Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 400 of 18 November 2025 "On the plan for the preparation of draft legislative acts for 2026"](#)

²⁰ [Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus July 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Actions](#)



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Pro-government structures are effectively replacing liquidated independent civil society organisations, receiving budgetary funding and preferential treatment. The 2026 budget allocates 16.4 million roubles for the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) and over 774,000 roubles for the Union of Writers of Belarus.²¹ The “Belaya Rus” party has been granted preferential terms on the rent of 118 state-owned premises.²²

The suspension of US aid programmes in early 2025 deprived the sector of significant support, as the US was the country’s second-largest donor after the Russian Federation (accounting for 27.5% of all humanitarian aid in 2023).²³

Prosecution for the financing of “extremist” structures remains an entrenched practice. According to a statement by the Chair of the State Control Committee, in 2024 more than 2,700 cryptocurrency transactions linked to “extremism financing” were identified, and the identities of 1,445 citizens who had transferred funds via Facebook were established.²⁴

Furthermore, last year, violations of the procedure for receiving foreign aid were classified as “extremist” offences.²⁵ Any such violations now effectively fall within the purview of the GUBOPiK, further intensifying the repressive character of the regulatory framework.

Earlier amendments to Decree No. 300 are, in the assessment of experts, formulated in extremely vague terms, making it difficult to understand the permissible purposes for receiving gratuitous sponsorship assistance. In practice, organisations avoid seeking clarifications from state bodies for fear of potential consequences.

At the same time, experts note a high frequency of inspections by financial authorities.

In the sphere of the state social procurement mechanism – in particular in the areas of HIV and tuberculosis – technical changes to documentary requirements were introduced, formally aimed at simplifying procedures, but without materially altering conditions of access. This mechanism in these areas remains available to a limited number of organisations and offers terms that are not particularly favourable for the provision of services. Experts note, moreover, that the volume of funding has decreased.

²¹ [Monitoring the situation regarding freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus November 2025 | Lawtrend – Research Education Action](#)

²² [Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 294 of 29 May 2025](#)

²³ [Humanitarian aid from the USA - Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the United States of America; Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)

²⁴ [The Criminal Investigation Department has initiated 44 criminal cases for the financing of extremist and terrorist activities](#)

²⁵ [Belarus: Violations relating to the receipt of foreign aid to be classified as extremist activities | CSOMETER; Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 319 of 10 June 2025](#)



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The financing of civil initiatives is increasingly channelled through local budget mechanisms, though their implementation is inconsistent. As experts emphasise, in practice the "civil initiatives" that receive support are frequently projects aligned with the priorities of local authorities – such as landscaping or the restoration of facilities – rather than horizontal civic initiatives. In Minsk, amendments were introduced whereby the recipient of funds becomes the entity that owns the objects being created – typically municipal enterprises. This results in the redistribution of resources within the state sector rather than direct support for citizens' initiatives. As a consequence, what is formally declared to be civic participation is in part transformed into a system in which a significant share of resources and control is concentrated in state and quasi-state actors, in the absence of any unified and consistent policy in this area.²⁶

²⁶ [Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organizations. Review for 2025. Belarus](#)



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