

## National Human Rights Index

<https://index.belhelcom.org>

2023

### The right to health:

Expert Commentary

<b>The score:</b>	<b>4,3</b>	<b>-0,1</b>
<i>Including scores by component:</i>		
• General principles	3,7	-0,1
• Maternal, child and reproductive health	4,7	-0,1
• Healthy natural and workplace environments	4,3	-0,1
• Disease prevention	4,6	-0,1
• Medical and nursing care in case of illness	4,1	-0,1

In assessing the state with the right to health in 2023, the Index experts gave lower scores than in 2022. **Among the main reasons:**

- in general, experts note the divergency of the situation: in some areas, the state has managed to maintain a sufficient level of provision of health care goods and services to the population, while in other areas the situation has worsened;
- persistence and aggravation of the problem with the availability of medicines (especially antiepileptic drugs, vaccines); long waiting times for prosthetics, medical trials;
- approval of the list of paid medical services provided in public health care institutions, which includes ineffective, fraudulent and unscientific methods;
- aggravation of the problem of shortage of qualified personnel; the resolution of the Ministry of Health actually abolishes the need for retraining in a number of medical specialties;
- continued repression of medical professionals (detentions, politically motivated dismissals, difficulties in subsequent employment);
- normative establishment of gender discrimination in medical education (advantage for men in surgical sub-residency);
- lack of access to quality medical care for political prisoners, which led to the deaths of two political prisoners (N. Klimovich and A. Pushkin) in 2023.



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- **General principles**

In 2023, the level of availability of sufficient functioning facilities, goods and services in the field of health care and medical care continued to decline - also due to the ongoing political crisis and the repressive policy of the state.

Among the positive facts noted by experts in 2023: the opening of several polyclinics<sup>1</sup>, a new radiology building in the Mogilev Regional Oncological Dispensary<sup>2</sup>; the resumption of activities of some private medical centers, which had been suspended in 2022; amendments to the Law on Health Care in 2023 included in the right of citizens to affordable health care the provision of free medical care in university clinics<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, the level of availability of a sufficient number of functioning facilities remained low. The practice of depriving private medical centers of their licenses continued<sup>4</sup>. Massive closure of village hospitals is reported<sup>5</sup>. The overall situation is also worsened by the massive shortage of specialists due to repressions and harsh working conditions (in some settlements there was a lack of specialized doctors for several years)<sup>6</sup>.

Problems with the availability of medicines persist: there are reports of interruptions in the supply of drugs used to treat breast cancer<sup>7</sup>, reagents for mandatory screening of pregnant women<sup>8</sup>, standard drugs for chemotherapy<sup>9</sup> and prevention of HIV infection of a child during childbirth from an HIV-positive mother<sup>10</sup>, and so on<sup>11</sup>. It is known about the prosecution of officials of five private companies that supplied Belarus with medicines and medical equipment<sup>12</sup>. Experts also note the deterioration of the situation due to the withdrawal of a number of manufacturers, who provided unique medicines and medical consumables, from the Belarusian market<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/v-minske-otkrylas-14-ya-gorodskaya-detskaya-klinicheskaya-poliklinika/>, <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/v-grodno-torzhestvenno-otkryli-novuyu-polikliniku-8-/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/segodnya-sostoyalos-otkrytie-novogo-radiologicheskogo-korpusa-3-mogilevskogo-oblastnogo-onkologiches/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12300308>

<sup>4</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8530](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8530), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8536](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8536), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8707](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8707),

<sup>5</sup> In particular, it concerns 188 beds in Vitebsk region [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8240](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8240)

<sup>6</sup> See the example of Kalinkavichy region: the central regional hospital did not have an oncologist for several years, and medical care for patients with relevant requests was provided by doctors of other profiles (<https://www.belta.by/regions/view/otsutstvie-vracha-onkologa-probely-v-skrininge-prokuratura-obnaruzhila-narusheniya-v-kalinkovichskoj-577496-2023/>), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8745](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8745), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8288](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8288)

<sup>7</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8295](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8295), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8297](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8297)

<sup>8</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8531](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8531)

<sup>9</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8767](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8767)

<sup>10</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8156](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8156)

<sup>11</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8181](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8181)

<sup>12</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8319](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8319)

<sup>13</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8643](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8643), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8433](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8433)



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Experts note a worsening situation in terms of physical and economic accessibility of health care facilities, goods and services due to:

- decrease in the number of medical institutions, pharmacies and specialists, especially - in rural areas<sup>14</sup>,
- adoption by the Ministry of Health of a decree effectively abolishing the need for retraining in a number of medical specialties, which, according to experts, may complicate the provision of adequate medical care by appropriately qualified specialists - and further reduce confidence in official data on the availability of specialists with certain qualifications<sup>15</sup>,
- continuing repressions against private medical centers - in the absence of the possibility to provide the necessary services in public institutions<sup>16</sup> (also noted is the relatively high cost of services in private centers, reducing their accessibility for certain groups of the population),

In general, experts note the heterogeneity of the situation: in some areas<sup>17</sup> the state managed to maintain a sufficient level of provision of goods and services of health care to the population, while in other areas the situation deteriorated<sup>18</sup>.

In 2023, there were still problems with the availability of prosthetics, including long waiting lists for surgery<sup>19</sup> - including due to the persecution of orthopedic traumatologists in 2022, the general policy of the state to control the availability of this procedure<sup>20</sup>, which entails an acute shortage of competent specialists and imported medical devices<sup>21</sup>. Successful trials of a Belarusian-made endoprosthesis have been announced, and it is additionally reported that the Minsk material and technical base has been improved to fill the need for free endoprosthetics, including an increase in the number of intensive care beds and the opening of a new traumatology department<sup>22</sup>. However, experts question the safety and efficacy of the prosthesis, given the short trial period, the lack of long-term follow-up of patients and the likely change in materials<sup>23</sup>. The experts also note the worsening situation due to the government's approval of a list of paid medical services provided to the public in public health institutions, which includes both proven ineffective methods and methods recognized as fraudulent in a number of countries<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, the Minister of Health openly promotes unscientific methods of

<sup>14</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8120](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8120), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8508](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8508)

<sup>15</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=W22339710>

<sup>16</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8796](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8796), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8708](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8708), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8508](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8508)

<sup>17</sup> In particular, there were no significant disruptions in the ability to provide necessary therapy to HIV-positive people

<sup>18</sup> In particular, there are disruptions in the supply of medicines for people with disabilities, people with cancer:  
[https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8574](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8574)

<sup>19</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8473](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8473)

<sup>20</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8643](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8643)

<sup>21</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/41079.html?c>

<sup>22</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/v-belarusi-nachali-izgotavlivat-endoprotezy-kolennykh-sustavov/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://telegra.ph/Situaciya-s-ehndoprotezami-v-Belarusi-12-05>

<sup>24</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22300237>

<https://e-petitions.by/articles/1762>



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treatment (traditional Chinese medicine), the development of which is given great attention in the country and whose registration is simplified<sup>25</sup>.

In May 2023, the chairman of the State Control Committee also noted the long waiting times for medical trials, the lack of guarantee of access to compulsory trials (including for women and pre-school children), the high cost of services and the insufficient production of domestic medicines<sup>26</sup>. Experts note the aggravation of the situation due to the adoption of a decree normalizing long waiting times for trials (90 working days from the date of appointment; not more than 45 - in case of suspected cancer)<sup>27</sup>.

In the review period, the problem of shortage of qualified personnel continued to worsen with each passing month<sup>28</sup>: in particular, even according to rough estimates, taking into account open data (with the continuing trend of closed official statistics<sup>29</sup>), there were vacancies for about 10% of the required number of "specialized doctors"<sup>30</sup>. At the same time, there is no information about improvements in the harsh working conditions that doctors continue to face - including low wages<sup>31</sup>, compulsory overtime<sup>32</sup>, forced non-core physical labor during working and/or non-working hours<sup>33</sup>.

In 2023, an additional BYN 10.5 million was allocated from the state budget to pay medical specialists (about BYN 34 per employee<sup>34</sup>)<sup>35</sup>.

During the review period, repressions continued<sup>36</sup>, including arbitrary mass detentions<sup>37</sup> (in 2023, there were also reports about the practice of "kidnapping" of specialists from their workplaces by the GUBOPiK officers<sup>38</sup>), making it difficult to find subsequent employment, an important condition for

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.belta.by/society/view/pinevich-rasskazal-kak-v-belarusi-budut-sozdavat-tsentr-traditsionnoj-kitajskoj-meditliny-585172-2023/>, <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/belarus-uprostita-poryadok-gosudarstvennoy-registracii-preparatov-tradicionnoy-kitayskoy-mediciny>

<sup>26</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/39783.html?tg>

<sup>27</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=W22340418>

<sup>28</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8309](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8309), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8566](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8566)

<sup>29</sup> On statistical anomalies in relation to the number of doctors in Belarus in 2022-2023: [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8260](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8260); [https://news.zerkalo.io/life/60869.html?\\_gl=1\\*1dsw3c8\\*\\_ga\\*MTAwNzOwNzk5Ny4xNjc5OTI0MDQy\\*\\_ga\\_B8LJ3JOEWY\\*MTcwNzgxODkzMi4zNC4xLjE3MDc4MTkwMDEuNjAuMC4w](https://news.zerkalo.io/life/60869.html?_gl=1*1dsw3c8*_ga*MTAwNzOwNzk5Ny4xNjc5OTI0MDQy*_ga_B8LJ3JOEWY*MTcwNzgxODkzMi4zNC4xLjE3MDc4MTkwMDEuNjAuMC4w)

<sup>30</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8213](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8213)

<sup>31</sup> [https://mediazona.by/translate/2023/01/12/doctor\\_chaos](https://mediazona.by/translate/2023/01/12/doctor_chaos)

<sup>32</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8500](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8500), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8600](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8600)

<sup>33</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8396](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8396)

<sup>34</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/54146.html?tg=7>

<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the planned expenditures on security forces and courts are twice as high as the expenditures on health care: [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8670](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8670)

<sup>36</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8827](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8827)

<sup>37</sup> On mass detentions of psychotherapists and psychiatrists: [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8262](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8262),

<sup>38</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8199](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8199), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8189](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8189), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8527](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8527)



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which is the absence of disloyalty to the authorities<sup>39</sup>, politically motivated dismissals, which often result in the inability to work in their specialty within the country<sup>40</sup>. Repressions are carried out against the background of publication of information about the low retention rate of young specialists<sup>41</sup>.

In 2023, anesthesiologists are particularly in demand, with at least 31 anesthesiologists known to have been detained since August 2020<sup>42</sup>. A total of 16 physicians were among the political prisoners at the end of 2023.<sup>43</sup> In addition to administrative and criminal prosecutions of physicians, inspections that disrupt health care facilities<sup>44</sup>, including checking employee loyalty<sup>45</sup>, continued in 2023. The state sees the solution to the problem in the legislative fixing of temporary norms for the provision of medical services (it is noted that such norms do not meet the standards of service provision, are unrealistic<sup>46</sup> and are not implemented - including during the season of peak respiratory infections<sup>47</sup>), control of the professional path of applicants to medical schools<sup>48</sup>, increasing the share of students studying under the conditions of targeted training<sup>49</sup>, increasing the duration of residency and the introduction of mandatory work for at least 5 years after it<sup>50</sup>, stigmatization of those who have left the country<sup>51</sup>, increased ideological pressure in health care institutions (up to the prohibition to wear a combination of red and white colors in any form)<sup>52</sup>. During the review period, it also became known about the prosecution of doctors for illegal destruction of vaccines and overreporting of the number of vaccinations - experts note, however, that such behavior of doctors is caused by deliberately unrealistic requirements of the state to doctors, which provoke such violations<sup>53</sup>.

In 2023, the Ministry of Health issued an order according to which the number of places for distribution in sub-residency in several specialties "is determined separately for male and female students", with a

<sup>39</sup>[https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8813](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8813), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8409](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8409), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8075](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8075), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8489](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8489)

<sup>40</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8559](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8559)

<sup>41</sup> In particular, in the Mogilev region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcXyk9GP-cA>

<sup>42</sup> <https://civicmonitoring.health/post/repressions-report/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://spring96.org/ru/news/113810>

<sup>44</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8303](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8303), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8489](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8489)

<sup>45</sup> Individual professionals were subsequently required to be recertified: [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8532](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8532)

<sup>46</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8565](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8565)

<sup>47</sup> <https://e-petitions.by/articles/2605>, <https://civicmonitoring.health/post/worker-exploitation/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/41333.html#c>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.bsmu.by/abiturientu/kontrolnye-cifry-i-bally/>

<sup>50</sup> See the updated Law on Health Care: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12300308>, <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/53065.html?tg=9>, [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8728](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8728), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8731](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8731)

<sup>51</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8443](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8443)

<sup>52</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/voprosy-ideologicheskoy-raboty-v-respublikanskikh-uchrezhdeniyakh-sistemy-zdravookhraneniya-obsudili/>, [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8180](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8180), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8521](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8521), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8583](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8583), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8672](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8672), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8743](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8743), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8766](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8766)

<sup>53</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8789](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8789)



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significantly lower number of places for women<sup>54</sup>. Students at several universities have come under pressure for attempting to express their views on the discriminatory order<sup>55</sup>. In the case of medical education, experts noted positively the introduction of university clinics to ensure practice-oriented medical education and additional points of care for the population.

In 2023, problems with ensuring medical ethics persisted: at the beginning of the year, a new version of the Law on Psychological Assistance came into force, expanding the grounds for the disclosure of information about clients containing professional secrets, including to law enforcers<sup>56</sup>. During the review period, the practices of stigmatization<sup>57</sup>, discrimination<sup>58</sup> and inhuman treatment<sup>59</sup> in health care institutions, and lack of access to quality medical care for political prisoners<sup>60</sup> persisted. The latter led to the deaths of two political prisoners - Nikolai Klimovich and Ales Pushkin<sup>61</sup>.

The state's promotion of traditional Chinese medicine, according to experts, negatively affects the situation in the aspect of quality requirements for medical services. The quality of services is also negatively affected by the above-mentioned possibility of rapid change of qualification of medical specialists, the general situation with difficult working conditions of medical professionals and repressive background. During the review period it also became known about a case of independent work of an intern doctor in the absence of appropriate training in the clinics of the Republic of Belarus<sup>62</sup>.

#### • Maternal, child and reproductive health

Experts note a general problem with insufficient information, in particular about child mortality, which does not allow a realistic assessment of the situation.

No changes in the implementation of the national strategy for the promotion of women's right to health throughout their life have been recorded.

With regard to the aspect of children's health protection, experts note a worsening of the situation due to the Ministry of Health ignoring the requests of citizens to authorize the supply of medicines for

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<sup>54</sup> <https://nashaniva.com/320585>, <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/42770.html?tg>, <https://telegra.ph/EHto-vse-potomu-chno-ty--zhenshchina-Koordinator-ByMedSol-o-diskriminacii-v-zdravoohranenii-09-28>

<sup>55</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8617](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8617)

<sup>56</sup> <https://telegra.ph/EHto-stagnaciya-na-dolgie-gody-Psihiatr-pro-bazu-klientov-dlya-silovikov-sostoyanie-lyudej-i-budushchee-Belarusi-04-20>, <https://pravo.by/document/?quid=12551&p0=H12200184>

<sup>57</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8395](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8395)

<sup>58</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8232](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8232)

<sup>59</sup> <https://telegra.ph/Umolyali-podrug-sderzhat-slezy-poka-nam-razdadut-tabletki-Prodolzhenie-rasskazov-pacientov-pro-pyatoe-otdelenie-RNPC-05-04>, [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8325](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8325)

<sup>60</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8114](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8114), [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8312](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8312)

<sup>61</sup> <https://spring96.org/ru/news/112187>

<sup>62</sup> [https://gsmu.by/about\\_the\\_university/news/65207/](https://gsmu.by/about_the_university/news/65207/)



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children with epilepsy to Belarus<sup>63</sup>. At the same time, in 2023, the Ministry of Health reported a number of unique or complex surgeries for children<sup>64</sup>.

In terms of the psychological climate, there is a growing negative trend towards militarization of children, increasing introduction of military training in schools and mass sending of children to paramilitary camps<sup>65</sup>. The practice of threats related to the deprivation of parental rights of politically active parents persists<sup>66</sup>.

During the reporting period, there is no information on measures taken to address the problems related to teenage pregnancy, in particular the stigmatization of teenage mothers<sup>67</sup>. The Council of Ministers approved the Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and the Mechanism for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Sexual Abuse<sup>68</sup>. At the same time, the Prosecutor General's Office proposes to strengthen the responsibility of parents "for improper upbringing of children," to establish administrative liability for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations, sex reassignment, pedophilia and childfree" and to include a mandatory course of sex education in the educational process<sup>69</sup>. Several resources of childfree communities were recognized as "extremist materials" due to "incitement of hostility against children and parents"<sup>70</sup>. Officials at various levels have spoken out about the need to ban the "ideology" of childfree<sup>71</sup>. In 2023, a book on child sex education was recognized as "information negatively affecting the physical and mental development of children", the publishing house that published it is being liquidated<sup>72</sup>. The Belarusian Orthodox Church and pro-life organizations were involved in providing information on sexual and reproductive health<sup>73</sup>. In addition, the experts note with concern the lack of proper response of the competent authorities to

<sup>63</sup> <https://e-petitions.by/articles/1502>, <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2023/5/15/548094/>

<sup>64</sup> Surgeries to correct severe heart defects: <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/unikalnye-operatsii-provedeny-v-rnpts-detskoy-khirurgii-/>, surgery on a child with a spinal deformity: <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/v-belarusi-vypolnili-operatsiyu-rebenku-s-deformatsiey-pozvonochnika/>, treatment of children with spinal muscular atrophy: <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/belarusi-trem-malysham-rodivshemsya-so-spinalnoy-myshechnoy-atrofiyev-vveli-preparat-zolgensma/>, <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/sobytiya/v-belarusi-provedena-gennozamestitelnaya-terapiya/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/14-06-2023-sistema-ishhet-teh-kto-budet-zashhishhat-lukashenko-chto-ne-tak-s-voenno-patrioticheskimi-lageryami-v-belarusi>

<sup>66</sup> <https://t.me/LegalHubHelp/645>

<sup>67</sup> <https://telegra.ph/Maloletnyuyu-mat-v-Belarusi-ne-zashchishchayut-a-ishchut-prichiny-ee-nakazat-Beremennost-nesovershennoletnih-belarusok-06-07>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.sb.by/articles/po-informatsii-generalnoy-prokuratury-respubliki-belarus.html>

<sup>69</sup> Id, <https://www.pro-life.by/obshhestvo/zdorov-e/kurs-po-voprosam-polovogo-vozpitanija-detej-i-molodezhi-razrabatyvajut-v-belarusi/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/39192.html?c>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-zapadnoj-mode-na-chajldfri-takaja-ideologija-dolzha-byt-vne-zakona-558505-2023/>

<sup>72</sup> [https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/56942.html?popular\\_desktop=](https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/56942.html?popular_desktop=)

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.pro-life.by/antisemejnye-tehnologii/seksprosvet/v-gomele-proshli-seminary-po-reproduktivnomu-zdorovju-podrostkov/>



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pseudoscientific publications appearing on the official websites of health-care institutions, including those misrepresenting sexual and reproductive health issues<sup>74</sup>.

Experts note that the situation has worsened due to pressure on the Young People+ initiative, which brings together adolescents and young people living with HIV and their relatives, which has led to the curtailment of some of the initiative's programs in Belarus<sup>75</sup>.

#### • Healthy natural and workplace environments

A study published in 2023 on the working conditions of health professionals provides for the first time data on systematic overwork, non-compliance with working time standards, lack of proper rest, regular unpaid work and exploitation of labor, shifts exceeding 24 hours and other violations of labor laws<sup>76</sup>. Taking into account the overall repressive situation (including the absence of independent trade unions), the continuing outflow of specialists, and problems with the supply and renewal of medical equipment (which leads to occupational injuries), the experts lowered their scores in this respect.

In May 2023, it was suggested that medical institutions face problems in meeting the legal requirements for medical waste management, which leads to illegal disposal of medical waste.<sup>77</sup>

In 2023, the tendency to restrict public access to information, including that related to the environment, its components, and the impact on human health of various types of economic activities, intensified in Belarus. This is due to both the termination<sup>78</sup> in July 2022 of Belarus' participation in the Aarhus Convention, which guaranteed the right of access to environmental information and provided an opportunity to protect this right, including at the international level, and repressions against civil society, which resulted in the lack of opportunity to raise and defend such issues. Experts note that information on man-made accidents is mostly concealed, so that the degree of impact of industrial and other economic activities on human health and the environment cannot be assessed objectively.

There are still regular difficulties with water supply and quality in the country<sup>79</sup>.

No qualitative changes in the aspect of taking the maximum possible measures to eliminate the causes of harmful factors of the industrial environment were recorded in the review period. The situation with the provision of adequate housing, safe and healthy working conditions, sufficient food supply and normal nutrition remains stably unfavorable - experts pay special attention to the lack of access to

<sup>74</sup> <https://e-petitions.by/petitions/5750>, <https://e-petitions.by/petitions/5776>, <https://e-petitions.by/petitions/5840>

<sup>75</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/55051.html>

<sup>76</sup> <https://civicmonitoring.health/post/worker-exploitation/>

<sup>77</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8365](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8365)

<sup>78</sup> [https://president.gov.by/ru/events/belarus-prekrashchaet-uchastie-v-orhusskoy-konvencii#:~:text=18%20%D0%B8%D1%8E%D0%BB%D1%8F%202022%20%D0%B3,1998%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%20\(%D0%9E%D1%80%D1%85%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8\).](https://president.gov.by/ru/events/belarus-prekrashchaet-uchastie-v-orhusskoy-konvencii#:~:text=18%20%D0%B8%D1%8E%D0%BB%D1%8F%202022%20%D0%B3,1998%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%20(%D0%9E%D1%80%D1%85%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8).)

<sup>79</sup> <https://citydog.io/post/zaden-kachestvo-vody/>



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adequate food for political prisoners, as well as arbitrary deprivation of food parcels<sup>80</sup>.

- **Disease prevention**

The experts note some improvement in the situation as the state has started to make more active use of the mechanism of state orders to ensure access to basic preventive, curative and rehabilitative health care services. At the same time, access to information resources and initiatives that provided assistance and information to certain vulnerable groups continues to be restricted (due to the general trend of suppressing freedom of expression under the guise of combating "extremism"<sup>81</sup>). The experts also note the termination of the membership of the Belarusian Red Cross Society in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which will entail termination of funding, including for programs aimed at informing the population about various diseases, as well as affecting vulnerable groups assisted by international financial support<sup>82</sup>. The above-mentioned problems with the availability of medical products and health services, and difficulties in obtaining information on health issues also indicate a deterioration of the situation.

Quality and effective national policies to prevent alcohol abuse and the use of tobacco, drugs and other harmful substances are still lacking. Experts note the continuing high level of drug and alcohol abuse and consumption and the lack of effective measures to combat this problem on the part of the State. At the same time, experts note in a positive way the preservation of the practice of substitution therapy for people with opioid addiction and the expansion of the list of drugs that can be used in it.

According to experts, the existing strategy to combat infectious diseases is still ineffective, among other things, due to the problematic mechanism of vaccine procurement: according to the findings of a study by the Medical Solidarity Foundation, the state does not use international procurement mechanisms and spends unreasonably large sums on procurement<sup>83</sup>. At the same time, the issue of accessibility of HPV vaccination remains unresolved: in 2023, the head of the WHO country office in Belarus noted the need to include this vaccine in the national vaccination calendar. So far in Belarus, HPV vaccination is available only for a fee (the cost of the vaccine is higher than the minimum subsistence budget)<sup>84</sup>. The above-mentioned problem of unreasonably high requirements to health care institutions and subsequent distortion of information on the number of vaccinations performed does not allow assessing the real situation. According to experts, disruptions in access to medicines have also affected vaccines.

In 2023, the Ministry of Health introduced a new form of medical trials aimed at "determining risk

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<sup>80</sup> <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/usloviyah-soderzhat-belarusi-politzaklyuchennyh/32821399.html>

<sup>81</sup> See National Human Rights Index. The Right to Freedom of Expression, Expert Commentary, 2023: <https://index.belhelcom.org/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-krasniy-krest/32710185.html>

<sup>83</sup> <https://civicmonitoring.health/post/vaccine-budget/>

<sup>84</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8829](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8829)



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factors for diseases<sup>85</sup>. Experts express doubts about the effectiveness of this form of medical examinations<sup>86</sup> and note the reduction of more effective opportunities for prevention due to the lack of equipment and qualified personnel (see above).

The country still lacks a quality and effective national policy on physical and mental health, including for people with disabilities. According to experts, the unfavorable situation in this aspect is aggravated by ongoing repressions and a general atmosphere of fear.

- **Medical and nursing care in case of illness**

The general lack of qualified personnel - including in institutions providing emergency care - makes it impossible to speak of an effective system of emergency medical care in accidents, epidemics and similar incidents.

There is a negative trend towards a significant reduction in the number of feldsher-midwife stations (FMS)<sup>87</sup>, which are often the only place to receive medical care, especially in rural areas. At the same time, there are reports that the State is taking measures to address this problem, including through the organization of mobile FMSs. The experts also note the intensification of work on the provision of high-tech medical care at the district level, as well as on-site training of regional specialists.

The experts note a significant deterioration of the situation with the provision of basic medicines to the population due to the above-mentioned problems with access to medicines<sup>88</sup>, the continuing tendency to prescribe Belarusian medicines, which are often less effective, on patients and clients, criminal prosecution of certain manufacturers, and - as a consequence - the withdrawal from the market of suppliers of medicines for which the state does not provide substitutes. Prolonged HIV therapy is still not available in the country.

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<sup>85</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/novoe-na-sayte/o-novoy-forme-dispanserizatsii-v-belarusi-vse-analizy-za-den-i-zakonny-vykhodnoy/>

<sup>86</sup> <https://minzdrav.gov.by/ru/novoe-na-sayte/o-novoy-forme-dispanserizatsii-v-belarusi-vse-analizy-za-den-i-zakonny-vykhodnoy/>, [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8117](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8117)

<sup>87</sup> See inter alia <https://sozhnews.by/novosti/v-zone-otvetstvennosti-medpomoshch-naseleniyu>, <https://www.sb.by/articles/bolet-veleno-dva-raza-v-nedelyu.html>

<sup>88</sup> [https://t.me/belhalat\\_by/8156](https://t.me/belhalat_by/8156)



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