

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2024

Right to Life

Expert Commentary

The score:	3,2	-0,1
Including scores by component:		
• Arbitrary deprivation of life	3,1	-0,1
• Death penalty	3,9	-0,1
• Enforced disappearances	2,5	-0,1

A description of the basic situation regarding the realization of the right to life can be found in the 2019 review¹. Assessing the situation in the field of the right to life in 2024, the Index experts gave lower scores than in 2023. **Among the main reasons:**

- persons deprived of their liberty (especially political prisoners) continue to be subjected to torture and cruel, degrading treatment that poses a serious threat to their health and, in some cases, to their lives, with the number of such deaths peaking in 2024
- the politicized use of the death penalty against German citizen R. Krieger, who, in violation of procedural norms, ultimately became part of a political deal ("bargain") between Russia, Germany, and the United States
- 2024 was the first full year in which a number of political prisoners were held in *incommunicado* detention, the duration of which can be equated to enforced disappearance.

• Arbitrary deprivation of life

In 2024, there were no significant changes in legislation that would affect the right to life. The main trends in law enforcement practice remain unchanged: in the "non-political" sphere, the state generally fulfills its basic obligations to ensure the right to life. However, in situations of politically motivated persecution, there is still no information about the initiation of criminal cases, investigations, or prosecutions in connection with the deaths of citizens as a result of actions by law enforcement officials that occurred in previous years (including during the "hot period" 2020) and deaths in custody that occurred in 2024, i.e., there is still complete impunity for arbitrary deprivation of life in Belarus².

¹ https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/1_pravo_na_zhizn_2019.docx_.pdf

² [Как беларусы умирают из-за политического преследования](#)



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Deaths in places of detention

In 2024, persons arbitrarily imprisoned on politically motivated charges continued to die in Belarusian prisons and colonies as a direct result of ill-treatment, including denial of adequate medical care. The deaths of political prisoners began to occur with alarming regularity, indicating that conditions of detention were deliberately made life-threatening. A joint statement³ by the Belarusian human rights community noted that the death of Aliaksandr Kulinich in April 2024 was the sixth case in three years of a political prisoner dying in a facility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Department of Internal Affairs.

In 2024, there were at least four deaths in places of detention linked to arbitrary persecution on political grounds:

- Vadzim Khrasko⁴ 50 years old – died on January 9, 2024, in Penal Colony No. 3 “Vitba” (Vitebsk region) from severe pneumonia;
- Ihar Lednik⁵ 63 years old – died on February 20, 2024 (according to reports received on February 21) in a prison hospital in Minsk. He was taken there from Colony No. 2 in Bobruisk in critical condition;
- Aliaksandr Kulinich⁶ 51 years old – died during the night of April 8-9, 2024, in Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 7 in Brest.
- Dzmitry Shlethauer⁷ 22 years old – died (presumed suicide) on October 11, 2024, in Penal Colony No. 15 (Mogilev Region)

In addition, on December 10, 2024, Sviatlana Krutikava committed suicide due to pressure from constant persecution on “extremist” grounds⁸.

The situation with suicide prevention is getting worse, as the suicide rate among minors has gone up by 40%⁹.

In the case of suicides of persons in places of detention, the conditions in which they are held can be interpreted as incitement to suicide. The measures that should have been taken have not been taken, and the situation is therefore deteriorating.

The practice of depriving persons with mental illness of their liberty continues, which is directly linked to their risk of suicide.

³ [Заявление правозащитного сообщества Беларуси по поводу смерти политзаключенного Александра Кулинича | Беларускі Хельсінскі Камітэт](#)

⁴ [Statement by the human rights community of Belarus on the death of political prisoner Vadzim Khrasko](#)

⁵ [Statement of the Belarusian human rights community on the death of political prisoner Ihar Lednik](#)

⁶ [Statement by the Belarusian human rights community on the death of political prisoner Aliaksandr Kulinich | Belarusian Helsinki Committee](#)

⁷ [Dzmitry Shlethauer, a 22-year-old political prisoner, died in Mahilioŭ penal colony No. 15](#)

⁸ [In the Pinsk district, a woman committed suicide after being persecuted under “extremist” articles](#)

⁹ [Why are teenage suicides on the rise in Belarus? | ThinkTanks](#)

In 2024, there were no significant legislative changes concerning **abortion**. At the practical level, access to qualified medical care may be restricted due to a severe shortage of personnel and the closure of private medical centers.

The Reproductive Health Month continues, and an “Abortion-Free Week”¹⁰ is held in state medical institutions, during which, from October 14 to 21, 2024, abortions are allowed only on medical grounds.

In December 2024, discussions at a legal forum on amendments to the legislation on healthcare¹¹ revealed a noticeable trend toward supporters of a restrictive approach to abortion. The outcome of the discussion and the format of state regulation of abortion will become clear in 2025.

● Capital punishment

In 2024, one death sentence was handed down¹². Following legislative changes in 2022-2023 that expanded the scope of the death penalty¹³, on June 24, 2024, for the first time taking into account the newly adopted changes¹⁴, under Part 3 of Article 289, and for the first time a foreign citizen (a German citizen) Rico Krieger¹⁵ was sentenced to death. Rico Krieger, 29, an employee of the German Red Cross and a military medic by training, was arrested in the fall of 2023 and charged with six criminal offenses, including mercenary activity, terrorism, and espionage. However, the acts he is accused of are not “most serious crimes” as required by Article 6.2 ICCPR¹⁶, although formally the elements of the Criminal Code are classified as grievous and extremely grievous crimes), since they were not actually intended to lead to serious consequences, including the death of persons, i.e., the death penalty was not imposed as an exceptional measure.

The trial was partially closed to the public, and the official authorities did not report on R. Krieger's case for a long time. He was convicted for an alleged “act of terrorism” – an explosion on the railway.¹⁷ R. Krieger did not appeal his death sentence (one of the main procedural guarantees in cases of the

¹⁰ <https://www.mintrud.gov.by/uploads/files/Plan-223-363.PDF>, <https://oblstom.by/patsientu/novosti-i-ob-yavleniya/1112-aktsiya-nedelya-bez-abortov-i-rody-bez-boli>

¹¹ [The Ministry of Health has invited Belarusians to comment on the draft of a new code. Now it proposes to ban abortion and IVF](#)

¹² <https://court.gov.by/ru/minskij/oblastnoj/sud/statisticheskie/dannie/d8768bb2bffa4079.html>

¹³ [Смертная казнь. Количество смертных приговоров в Беларуси | Беларускі Хельсінкскі Камітэт](#)

¹⁴ ["An exceptional case." The coordinator of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders against the Death Penalty" spoke about the sentence of Rico Krieger | Capital punishment in Belarus, analytics, Petition against the Death Penalty in Belarus](#)

¹⁵ [The Rico Krieger case: we have collected everything that is known | Capital punishment in Belarus, analytics, Petition against the Death Penalty in Belarus](#)

¹⁶ [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Conventions and agreements – Declarations, conventions, agreements, and other legal materials](#)

¹⁷ [The Rico Krieger case: we have collected everything that is known | Capital punishment in Belarus, analytics, Petition against the Death Penalty in Belarus](#)



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death penalty did not work). However, in July 2024, R. Krieger appealed to A. Lukashenko for clemency; the pardon was announced on July 30,¹⁸ and on August 1, 2024, R. Krieger was transferred to Germany as part of a complex prisoner exchange involving the US and Russia. R. Krieger's pardon was part of an exchange "deal": together with a group of Russian political prisoners, he was exchanged for Russian FSB officer Vadim Krasikov, who was serving a life sentence in Germany¹⁹. Thus, the release of a person sentenced to death was effectively carried out through an unlawful procedure (the procedural law in force at the time of the events did not allow the death penalty to be replaced with anything else during the pardon process; such legislation was only adopted in 2025²⁰).

In 2024, following a decision by the Supreme Court, the sentence of A. Taratuta came into force, although human rights defenders have doubts about the observance of due legal procedure (the defendants filed a complaint against police officers for using physical violence and pressure against them, which was rejected)²¹. There is no reliable information on the execution of death sentences in 2024. The last publicly known execution remains that of Viktor Skrundik, carried out on July 16, 2022. It is likely that A. Taratuta's sentence had not yet been carried out by the end of 2024. Gathering information on the situation with the death penalty is complicated by the fact that the state continues to conceal the dates and places of executions, maintaining an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

In 2024, the HRC adopted observations on a complaint concerning the death penalty imposed on S. Berezhnuy and I. Gershankov²², in which it reiterated that paragraph 2 of Article 6 of the Covenant allows the imposition of the death penalty in countries that have not abolished capital punishment only for "the most serious crimes." – a term that should be interpreted restrictively and applied only to particularly serious crimes involving intentional killing pointed out the inconsistency; and also that if, during the trial leading to the imposition of the death penalty, there have been violations of the guarantees of a fair trial provided for in Article 14 of the Covenant, such a sentence is arbitrary and constitutes a violation of Article 6 of the Covenant.

● Enforced disappearances

Ill-treatment of political prisoners, including the increased practice of *incommunicado* detention²³, may amount to enforced disappearance. In 2024, a number of political prisoners held in *incommunicado* detention were "presented" to the public²⁴ (but after this demonstration, it is not possible to speak of a

¹⁸ [Решение о помиловании гражданина Германии | Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь](#)

¹⁹ [Russian prisoner swap: Who was released? – DW – 08/01/2024](#)

²⁰ [Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 61-Z of 17.02.2025 "On amendments to the codes on criminal liability" – Pravo.by](#)

²¹ [Supreme Court rejects appeal of Slutsk resident sentenced to death](#)

²² <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=UNgGNRKz7l4LcBuLFPW29AFGO2XZrgeTTD2JLF6xmuCC1SuOxZmBRSbRyVDZbm1bTjiejOkI%2ByHd3UdVOTRheHTx6o%2BUu2FhSmLklUfBNY8%3D>

²³ [Countdown. Incommunicado](#)

²⁴ V. Babariko, M. Kalesnikava, I. Losik.



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full restoration of communication with them), which partially removes the suspicion of enforced disappearance in their cases, but the fate of S. Tsikhanousky, N. Statkevich, M. Znak, and P. Seviarynets remains unknown.

In April 2024, the UN Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus and established an independent group of experts, condemning, among other things, enforced disappearances.²⁵

In October 2024, a group of UN special rapporteurs and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances expressed²⁶ concern about the prolonged regime of *incommunicado* detention, emphasizing that prolonged detention in secret from relatives could amount to enforced disappearance. Concerns were also expressed that some of these prisoners were being held in life-threatening conditions, particularly given the sharp deterioration in their health in detention and the advanced age of a number of them (at least 49 of these prisoners are over 60 years old).

In 2024, the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances considered a communication on the situation of M. Kalesnikava²⁷.

In November 2024, UN experts stated²⁸ that the authorities continue to ignore previous official requests regarding the arbitrary detention and conditions of imprisonment of political opponents.

In 2024, Belarus still had not acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

²⁵ <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/HRC/55/L.24>

²⁶ "According to allegations received, such inmates are subjected to various forms of ill-treatment, including denial of medical care and prolonged incommunicado detentions, which in some cases could amount to enforced disappearances." [Belarus: Inmate ill-treatment and possible enforced disappearances ongoing concerns, say UN experts | OHCHR](#)

²⁷ [The UN will decide on the disappearance of Maria Kalesnikava, who has been missing for 350 days - Respect-Protect-Fulfill](#)

²⁸ The experts observed that during the past three years, the Belarusian authorities have not responded to several communications by Special Procedures related to alleged arbitrary detentions, unfair trials and ill-treatment of inmates: BLR 4/2021, BLR 6/2022, BLR 3/2023, BLR 4/2023, BLR 8/2023, BLR 12/2023, and BLR 13/2023. [Belarus: Inmate ill-treatment and possible enforced disappearances ongoing concerns, say UN experts | OHCHR](#)