

Belarus Human Rights Index

<http://index.belhelcom.org>

2025

Right to Life

Expert Commentary

The score:	3,1	-0,1
<i>Including scores by component:</i>		
• Arbitrary deprivation of life	3,1	
• Death penalty	3,9	
• Enforced disappearances	2,4	-0,1

Assessing the situation with the right to life in 2025, Index experts slightly lowered the overall rating compared to 2024¹. This decline is primarily due to the worsening situation regarding enforced disappearances. Key trends of the year include:

- the continued deaths of political prisoners in places of detention amid complete impunity;
- the persistence throughout 2025 of the practice of *incommunicado*, a number of cases of which qualify as enforced disappearances under international standards;
- the first recorded instance of a person being re-detained immediately after formal release via a “pardon”, with the state denying the very fact of the detention (the Statkevich case);
- legislative changes posing risks to the right to life: amendments authorizing the use of the military in internal armed conflicts;
- escalating rhetoric and regulatory measures restricting reproductive rights.

• Arbitrary deprivation of life

In 2025, at least two deaths of political prisoners were recorded in places of detention. In early 2025, political prisoner V.Shtermer², who was serving his sentence at Penal Colony No. 17 (Shklov), died; the exact date and circumstances of his death are not available in open sources. On September 3, 2025, A.Podnebenny³ died at Penitentiary Institution No. 15 (Mogilev)—according to his mother, he took his

¹ https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/1_right_to_life_2024.pdf

² [Valiantsin Shtermer – Political prisoners and repressed in Belarus](#)

³ [Andrei Padniabenny – Political prisoners and repressed in Belarus](#)



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own life in solitary confinement. As in previous years, no criminal cases are being opened regarding the deaths of prisoners; impunity for the arbitrary deprivation of life in places of detention persists.

According to available data, 2025 was not the worst year in recent years in terms of political prisoner mortality (2 deaths in 2025 compared to 4 in 2024); however, each case indicates the systematic creation of conditions of detention that are knowingly life-threatening.

Throughout 2025, deaths of migrants continued to be recorded at the border between Belarus and European Union member states. According to official information from the State Border Committee, 15 people died at the border from January to October 2025; a total of 78 people have died since 2021⁴. There are doubts regarding the consistency of data from official sources (in July 2025, Belarus reported 80 cases to the UN)⁵. In May 2024, the State Border Committee reported 52 deaths⁶; in November 2024, 40⁷, indicating a trend toward an increase in the number of victims. On May 19, 2025, Lithuania initiated proceedings in ICJ⁸ against Belarus in connection with the migration crisis.

At the end of 2025, legislative changes⁹ were adopted, opening the possibility of deploying the Armed Forces to prevent and resolve internal armed conflicts. This change is potentially dangerous from the perspective of the right to life: the standards governing the permissible use of force in military operations differ fundamentally from those conducted by the police¹⁰—primarily in terms of proportionality, necessity, and prior warning.

Likely as part of a response to the failure¹¹ of all government agencies to address a domestic violence situation which resulted in the death of a child and the death sentence handed down to the child's father, A. Taratuta, new changes were adopted through Law No. 86-Z "On Amending Laws Concerning the Protection of Children's Rights,"¹² which in particular, clarifies provisions regarding the protection of children from violence and abuse, as well as the obligation to inform government agencies of facts that pose a threat to a child's life and health.

In the context of the **right to life in the healthcare sector**, no significant changes have been observed: the anticipated legislative amendments to abortion procedures in the 2025 Health Code were not

⁴ [Избили и выбросили в реку: на границе с Латвией обнаружен труп беженца](#)

⁵ [В Беларуси заведено более 130 уголовных дел за организацию незаконной миграции – МИД | Pozirk](#)

⁶ <https://gpk.gov.by/news/gpk/160602/>

⁷ [Ад рукотворный создали для беженцев на границе с Беларусью страны Европейского союза](#)

⁸ [Alleged Smuggling of Migrants \(Lithuania v. Belarus\)](#)

⁹ [Закон Республики Беларусь от 09.12.2025 г. № 111-З «Об изменении законов по вопросам обеспечения военной безопасности и обороны» – Pravo.by](#)

¹⁰ See the analysis at: <https://trends.belhelcom.org/storage/reviews/January2026/aLhKTZx4Pnk9NqjtRTRy.pdf>, P. 16.

¹¹ [Суд над должностными лицами по делу семьи Таратута начался в Минске](#)

¹² [Закон Республики Беларусь от 12.07.2025 г. № 86-З «Об изменении законов по вопросам обеспечения прав детей» – Pravo.by](#)



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adopted. A bill¹³ was introduced in the House of Representatives introducing administrative liability for propaganda, including that promoting “childfree” ideology; it was finally adopted in 2026. The extent to which the introduction of an official pro-natalist policy will affect the realization of a wide range of personal rights¹⁴, including access to abortion, will become clear later.

Measures to **prevent suicide in places of detention continue** to be absent. In 2025, former political prisoners described in interviews¹⁵ the conditions of detention—including the use of disciplinary measures—as factors that incline toward suicidal thoughts rather than deterring them, while psychologists in correctional facilities position themselves more as regime employees than as support specialists.

• **Death Penalty**

In 2025, Belarus maintained legislation in force providing for the death penalty as a form of criminal punishment. There is no confirmed information in open sources for 2025 regarding either the imposition of death sentences or the execution of death sentences. The most recent sentences were handed down in 2024 to German citizen R. Krieger (who was pardoned and transferred to Germany as part of a complex prisoner exchange in August 2024) and A. Taratuta¹⁶.

In 2025, pro-democracy forces adopted a Memorandum on the Abolition of the Death Penalty¹⁷.

In 2025, Law No. 61-Z came into effect, formally regulating the procedure for commuting the death penalty in cases of pardon—a change that was, in effect, necessary to retroactively legalize the exchange of R. Krieger in August 2024.

In mid-December 2025, a former attorney general with zero days of judicial experience became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This appointment is part of a systematic erosion of the judicial system and the legal profession and has direct implications for the right to life: The Supreme Court is the sole instance for appeals and supervisory review of all sentences involving the death penalty. The successive holding of the positions of Attorney General and then Chief Justice by the same individual further erodes the separation of prosecutorial and judicial functions.

• **Enforced Disappearances**

Throughout 2025, the practice of holding detainees *incommunicado* persisted, which in some cases may be regarded as enforced disappearance. As of the end of 2025, there is no information regarding at

¹³ [Законопроекты, поступившие на рассмотрение в Палату представителей | Официальный сайт Палаты Представителей Национального собрания Республики Беларусь](#)

¹⁴ [Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences: What They Mean for LGBTQ+ People and the Childfree | Беларускі Хельсінкскі Камітэт](#)

¹⁵ [Гимн с рукой на сердце. Бывший журналист Радио Свобода Игорь Карней — об издевательствах и пыточных условиях в тюрьмах Беларуси; Самогубствы і спробы суіцыду: крайняя форма пратэсту супраць гвалту і беззаконня](#)

¹⁶ [Верховный суд оставил без удовлетворения жалобу приговорённого к смертной казни случчанина](#)

¹⁷ [Council of Europe Secretary General welcomes the memorandum adopted by Belarusian democratic forces to abolish the death penalty in Belarus - Portal](#)



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least 5 political prisoners¹⁸. In 2025, the fate of some of the political prisoners held *incommunicado* (V. Babariko, M. Znak, M. Kolesnikova, S. Tikhanovsky, I. Losik, P. Severinets) became clear following their “pardon” and expulsion from the country.

In 2025, an incident occurred that clearly fell under the definition of enforced disappearance: M.Statkevich¹⁹ was “pardoned” as part of negotiations with the U.S., forcibly taken to the border, refused to leave the country at the border crossing, and, according to surveillance footage, left the crossing area accompanied by people in uniform. For a long time (about two months), the state did not acknowledge at all that he was in its custody. Subsequently, it was announced that he was “continuing to serve his sentence.” This situation fully meets the definition of enforced disappearance under Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance: the state’s refusal to acknowledge the fact of deprivation of liberty is a constitutive element of this violation. Belarus has never acceded to the Convention.

The very procedures for releasing political and other prisoners through the “pardon” mechanism systematically violate criminal procedure legislation: instead of formally documenting the release at the detention facility and issuing the documents required by law, prisoners (sometimes blindfolded) are transported to an unknown destination. During such transfers, individuals are effectively absent from any legal realm; the legal status of a number of those “released” remains undefined.

In 2025, incidents were documented that may indicate at cross-border extrajudicial persecution of Belarusian citizens. In 2025, A.Melnikova²⁰ and A.Kotov²¹ disappeared in Poland. Direct state involvement in both disappearances had not been proven at the time this commentary was prepared; however, they are viewed as a warning sign against the backdrop of known operations by Belarusian special services abroad. The growing denial of state protection for Belarusians abroad due to the inability to renew documents (a consequence of the “passport decree”) is bringing some of them closer to a state of *de facto* statelessness. In the absence of effective consular assistance from Belarus and without residency in a third country, these people remain virtually defenseless in the event of a disappearance. The cases of Kotov and Melnikova demonstrate that the disappearance of a person in exile can go unnoticed for a long time.

¹⁸ [Счётчик. Инкоммуникадо](#)

¹⁹ [Mikalai Statkevich – Political prisoners and repressed in Belarus](#)

²⁰ [Poland probes disappearance of Belarusian opposition activist | Reuters](#)

²¹ [Belarusian sports solidarity leader Anatol Kotau missing in Istanbul](#)



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