

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2025

Prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

Expert commentary¹

The score:	2.8	
<i>Including scores by component:</i>		
● Physical and mental integrity of the individual	2.4	
● Prevention of torture, investigation and protection mechanisms	1.4	
● Treatment of persons subjected to any form of detention or imprisonment	3.0	
● Domestic violence	4.3	-0.1

A description of the baseline situation regarding the realisation of the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment can be found in the [2019 review](#).

Although the overall score of the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in 2025 remained identical to the 2024 score, when evaluating the state of implementation of this right, Index experts assigned lower scores to the ‘Domestic Violence’ component, reducing it by 0.1, as well as to a number of individual indicators. Among the main reasons:

- political prisoners released under pardons were subjected to forcible transfer to the borders of neighbouring states, carried out inhumanely – in handcuffs and with bags over their heads – in breach of procedural guarantees, and effectively denied access to legal protection, compensation and rehabilitation;
- the practice of deporting political prisoners effectively deprives them of the opportunity to seek compensation and rehabilitation; even where mechanisms are formally available, their implementation in practice becomes virtually impossible;

¹ ‘Expert’ and other masculine nouns are used in a gender-neutral sense and refer to all genders.

- the state has not adopted comprehensive domestic violence legislation, has not criminalised marital rape, and has not established an effective response system, leaving victim protection fragmented;
 - the absence of an accessible shelter network, the closure of relevant NGOs and a formalistic approach by law-enforcement agencies effectively deprive victims of meaningful protection; similarly, in cases of violence against children, the state frequently fails to take even basic measures.
- **Physical and mental integrity of the individual**

In 2025, serious constraints on access to reliable information about instances of torture and ill-treatment persisted. Pressure on human rights organisations, lawyers, journalists and victims themselves continues to obstruct the documentation of violations.

A standalone legislative provision establishing criminal responsibility for all acts of torture in accordance with international standards remains absent. Responsibility is dispersed across various articles of the Criminal Code, which does not ensure comprehensive or effective prosecution of perpetrators.

All previously established inhumane practices continued to be employed – among them the recording and publication of so-called 'repentance videos' featuring detainees, the use of physical and psychological pressure to extract confessions or applications for pardons, and the creation of intolerable conditions of detention (see below).²

The practice of pardons, which began in 2024, was in 2025 accompanied by the forcible transfer of released political prisoners to the borders of neighbouring states. Such actions were carried out in breach of procedural guarantees, in handcuffs and with bags over their heads, and effectively denied individuals access to legal protection. Of particular concern is the transfer of individuals to Ukraine, which created heightened risks to physical safety and intensified psychological pressure on vulnerable persons.³

There is no evidence of a qualitative change in the situation regarding the protection of children from violence in any form, nor of effective mechanisms for identifying, investigating and preventing such cases.

- **Prevention of torture, investigation and protection mechanisms**

² [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)

³ [Statement by the human rights coalition regarding the forced deportation from the Republic of Belarus of people released as a result of a pardon](#)



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In 2025, there were no significant changes in the indicators relating to the prevention of torture and investigation mechanisms. Torture and other forms of prohibited treatment continue to be used as a tool for intimidation and to extract information, which is subsequently used for prosecution.

Preventive training for law enforcement officers is either non-existent or merely formal. Unlawful actions by law enforcement officers still do not receive proper legal scrutiny, and effective investigations are not initiated.

Standards of conduct for law enforcement officers, including safeguards during arrest, interrogation and detention, are not observed in practice. There are no guarantees of a fair trial by an independent and impartial court, which precludes the possibility of a genuine investigation into acts of torture. An atmosphere of fear and mistrust of the justice system continues to prevent victims from seeking protection.

Experts also emphasise that the practice of forcible transfer of former political prisoners effectively deprives them of access to effective legal remedies: they are unable to participate in court proceedings in person, file claims, or seek compensation and rehabilitation; and even where such mechanisms are formally available, their implementation in practice remains extremely difficult.

The practice of detaining and subsequently expelling foreign nationals persists. In 2025, UN experts expressed concern over the separation of a migrant mother and her child without due process – including without access to legal assistance or linguistic support that would have allowed her to challenge either the expulsion or the separation. UN experts further noted that, according to information received, prior to her expulsion the mother had been held in inhuman conditions at a centre for offenders, owing to the absence in Belarus of dedicated detention facilities for female migrants.⁴

Experts highlight that in 2025 the practice of cruel and inhuman treatment of migrants at the border by Belarusian officials has continued. Cases of physical violence have been documented – including blows to the hands and knees with metal objects – as well as the coercion of migrants into repeated attempts to cross the border into Poland.

Furthermore, the practice of deportation to countries of citizenship, in particular to Russia, continued. In 2025, Russian stand-up comedian Artiom Astanin, against whom criminal proceedings had been opened in Russia for "negative and offensive comments directed at a participant in the special military operation", was detained in Minsk and expelled to Russia with a meat grinder hung around his neck.⁵

- **Treatment of persons subjected to any form of detention or imprisonment**

⁴ [Belarus: UN experts alarmed by forced separation of migrant mother and baby | OHCHR; Belarus: UN experts alarmed by the separation of a migrant mother and her child - Human Constants](#)

⁵ [Russian stand-up comedian detained in Belarus](#)



In 2025, previously documented practices of cruel and degrading treatment in temporary detention facilities, remand centres and correctional institutions persisted.

Cases of violence during arrest and transfer were recorded, including beatings and degrading treatment.⁶ The practice of degrading body searches, including full strip searches, persisted.⁷

There were reports of overcrowded cells, sleep deprivation, unsanitary conditions, poor temperature control, and limited access to food, water and medical care in temporary detention centres.⁸

Political prisoners were systematically subjected to discriminatory treatment compared with other convicted persons. Practices included restrictions on parcels and purchases, prohibition of telephone calls, limitations on correspondence, denial of visits, and prohibition of access to media and information.⁹ Political prisoners released in 2025 reported being forcibly placed on "low status" with the aim of intensifying psychological pressure by making conditions of detention yet more unbearable.¹⁰

Women faced additional discrimination, including restricted access to hygiene products and medical care, as well as instances of sexualised violence and humiliating body searches.¹¹

Since 2020, nine political prisoners have died in custody, two of them in 2025. In addition, three cases of death of former political prisoners shortly after release became known in 2025. These and other deaths are attributed by human rights defenders in part to conditions in correctional colonies, deficiencies in medical care, restrictions on nutrition, the imposition of heavy labour, and delays in the release of gravely ill individuals.¹²

⁶ ["They fainted in a prison van" : How prisoners are transported in Belarus; Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)

⁷ ["The phrase 'strip naked' has become the language of the authorities": women speak out about "strip searches" in detention; "All transfers take place in handcuffs". Conditions of detention for political prisoners in the Vitebsk temporary detention centre](#)

⁸ ["They could be doused with a bucket of water and then tasered." Stories of former political prisoners](#)

⁹ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)

¹⁰ ["In fact, the lowest status is that of the GUBAZIK." Vadzim Yermashuk on humanity at the very bottom and why Lukashenko will die in chains; Cut off the skin. A conversation with a young man who was forced to remove his Pahonia tattoo in prison; "Low status" is killing your morale because you are considered an outcast": ex-political prisoner Dmitry Kuchuk; Political prisoner and blogger Pavel Vinogradov: I spent nearly four years gathering evidence; "For the sake of my children, so I can return to them." Dashkevich recounted how he ended up in "low status" and how he was required to submit a request for amnesty](#)

¹¹ [Viasna – They have decided to wipe us off the face of the earth](#)

¹² [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)



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Arbitrary placement in punitive isolation cells was likewise accompanied by confinement in cold conditions and restrictions on food.¹³

The practice of prolonged isolation (including in the form of *de facto incommunicado* detention) continued. Article 411 of the Criminal Code was used as a means of pressure.¹⁴

Belarus still lacks an independent national preventive mechanism in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. The persecution of lawyers significantly restricts prisoners' right to choose a defence counsel and to effective legal assistance.

No mechanism for independent medical examinations exists. The documentation of bodily injuries is not guaranteed. A substantially revised instruction on the procedure for providing medical care in correctional institutions – revised in 2024 and entering into force in 2025 – despite containing certain positive provisions, is drafted in complex terms, contains numerous cross-references and does not establish direct norms; this hampers its application in practice and, in the assessment of experts, diminishes the quality of medical care.¹⁵

No systemic changes aimed at improving conditions of detention or preventing ill-treatment were noted in 2025.

- **Domestic violence**

The state has still not adopted a standalone criminal law on domestic violence, nor does it recognise marital rape as a separate offence. Efforts to combat domestic violence are formally channelled through the Law "On the Fundamentals of Crime Prevention Activity", which in practice renders the state response fragmented and ineffective.

According to official figures, tens of thousands of cases of domestic violence are recorded annually in the country, including over 12,000 referrals by victims to social services, among whom mothers with children constitute a significant proportion.¹⁶ These figures attest to the widespread nature of the problem, while official statistics remain incomplete, non-transparent and not disaggregated by age, disability or the nature of the relationship between victim and perpetrator.

¹³ [Cold and hunger are the main causes of illness. The conditions in which released political prisoners were held; Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)

¹⁴ [A political prisoner's sentence in the penal colony is being extended for the fourth time; Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#)

¹⁵ [On the procedure for providing medical care and carrying out sanitary and anti-epidemic measures in correctional institutions](#)

¹⁶ [Domestic violence in Belarus: how children are used as a means of pressure](#)

Experts note that in cases of violence against children the state frequently fails to take even minimal measures: it does not provide psychological support, does not arrange mandatory consultations with psychologists, and does not hold perpetrators accountable even under existing legislation – demonstrating a complete absence of any systemic approach.

Experts point out that it is virtually impossible for a victim of domestic violence to find assistance: there is no developed shelter network, and where shelters do exist they are extremely difficult to locate. Social accommodation facilities are used simultaneously for victims seeking support and for individuals removed from their homes following complaints, which further reduces access to assistance.

Specialised NGOs that provided support to victims of domestic and gender-based violence have been almost entirely closed down or restricted in their activities, while state support mechanisms remain inadequate. The response of law-enforcement agencies is frequently limited to the formal recording of incidents, without effective measures to prevent recurrence or ensure the protection of victims.¹⁷ The situation is compounded by a climate of fear and distrust of the law-enforcement system, low public awareness of available services, and continued pressure on the legal profession.

In its concluding observations adopted in 2025, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted¹⁸ :

- the absence of comprehensive legislation addressing all forms of gender-based violence, the absence of criminal liability for marital rape, the exclusion of domestic violence as an aggravating circumstance in sentencing, and the frequent disregard of instances of violence by courts in divorce and custody proceedings;
- the insufficient duration of protection orders (30 days) and the lack of effective protection for victims against retaliation;
- obstacles faced by victims in accessing justice, including the absence of *ex officio* prosecution and gender bias among law-enforcement officers;
- limited support for victims, including the inadequate number, funding and capacity of shelters and "crisis" rooms, and the closure of women's NGOs, which reduces access to independent support services;
- the absence of reliable data on gender-based violence, including disaggregation by age, disability and the nature of the relationship with the perpetrator.

¹⁷ [Domestic violence in Belarus: how children are used as a means of pressure](#)

¹⁸ [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#)

