

## Belarus Human Rights Index

<https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

2024

## Right to Liberty and Security of Person

Expert commentary

The score:	2,1	-0,1
Including scores by component:		
• Liberty and security of person	2,7	-0,1
• Protection against arbitrary arrest or detention	1,8	-0,1
• Specific safeguards for custody on criminal charges	1,9	

A baseline description of the situation regarding the realization of this right is available in the 2019 [overview](#). When assessing the state of the right to liberty and security in 2024, Index experts assigned lower scores compared to 2023. **Among the main reasons are** the normalization and routinization of unlawful practices such as:

- Arbitrary detention involving physical and psychological pressure,
- Cruel and degrading treatment of detainees and prisoners – including the increasingly widespread use of prolonged incommunicado detention for political prisoners and unjustified placement in punitive isolation wards.

- **Liberty and security of person**

The reasons behind the downgrade of the first component score include both entrenched and newly emerging forms of repression. In 2024, Belarusian state authorities continued the practice of using physical violence, psychological pressure, and intimidation against citizens, with such actions still going unpunished.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the continuing<sup>2</sup> failure to protect individuals from violations of their personal liberty by private actors, and the lack of effective protection mechanisms for public figures, human rights

<sup>1</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> See the expert commentary on the assessment of this right for 2023: [https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/2\\_right\\_not\\_to\\_be\\_subjected\\_to\\_torture\\_2023.pdf](https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/2_right_not_to_be_subjected_to_torture_2023.pdf).



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defenders, journalists, persons with disabilities<sup>3</sup>, victims of domestic violence<sup>4</sup>, and those facing violence based on sexual orientation<sup>5</sup>, the reporting period saw a further expansion in the categories of those subjected to repression.

Experts draw particular attention to the persecution of individuals expressing solidarity with political prisoners. At the beginning of 2024, authorities conducted a large-scale raid targeting the relatives of political prisoners: over 300 people – primarily women – were subjected to searches, interrogations, and detentions.<sup>6</sup> The grounds for this persecution were legal forms of assistance to the families of political prisoners through the INeedHelpBY initiative. For the first time in this context, the authorities actively used Part 2 of Article 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Violations (“Use of foreign gratuitous assistance to carry out terrorist or other extremist activities, or other actions prohibited by law”)<sup>7</sup>, which had not been previously applied.

Individuals who sent small monetary donations or letters of support to political prisoners were also subjected to persecution.<sup>8</sup> In addition, there were reports of raids targeting relatives of people who had left the country – these individuals were pressured to persuade their loved ones to return to Belarus.<sup>9</sup>

- **Protection against arbitrary arrest or detention**

According to experts, the situation in this component continues to deteriorate – primarily due to the routinization of unlawful practices that can hardly be dismissed as “excesses of individual officials”. Rather, they appear to constitute systemic measures. Human rights defenders continue to report regular arbitrary detentions (often involving violence) and politically motivated prosecution under both criminal and administrative charges in virtually all administrative districts of the country.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the periodic report of Belarus note a number of persistent problems with the protection of this group of persons from violence, including the lack of effective norms and practical measures to protect women with disabilities from discrimination and violence, the continuing risks of infringement on personal liberty and security and the use of prohibited treatment in places of detention, and reports of violence by border guards against asylum seekers, including persons with disabilities: (CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1)

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2FC%2FBLR%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2FC%2FBLR%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> In the period under review, insufficient measures were taken to address domestic violence in Belarus: see Expert Commentary to the assessment of the right not to be subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (2024): <https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Targeted harassment of members of the LGBTQ+ community in 2024: Between August and October, more than 30 queer activists, including at least 10 trans individuals, were detained, many of whom were subjected to physical and psychological violence: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCplfAkmWv/>

<sup>6</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 25

<sup>7</sup> [In Belarus, people started to be tried for "using foreign aid to carry out extremist activities"](#)

<sup>8</sup> [More than 5,800 convicted: results of administrative prosecution in 2024](#)

<sup>9</sup> [How the repressive practices of the Belarusian authorities are changing: we examine the situation together with human rights defenders](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 4.



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According to 2024 data, at least 8,895 individuals were subjected to various forms of repression related to criminal or administrative prosecution, including arrests, interrogations, and searches. Women accounted for approximately one-quarter of the total.<sup>11</sup> Arbitrary detentions also continued to occur during long interrogations and searches at the Belarusian border.<sup>12</sup> As previously noted, the category of persons at risk of arbitrary detention continues to expand.

Mechanisms intended to provide protection from arbitrariness remain ineffective: state authorities ignore both domestic complaints and appeals made through international mechanisms.<sup>13</sup>

The treatment of detainees and individuals held in custody for political reasons remains inhumane and fails to meet the stated purposes of detention. During the reporting period, four individuals died in custody, bringing the total number of political prisoners known to have died while incarcerated to seven.<sup>14</sup> Experts highlight the ongoing punitive use of punitive isolation wards (PIW) and cell-type premises (PKT) against political prisoners – not as a measure for maintaining order, but as an instrument of additional pressure.<sup>15</sup>

Particular concern is raised by the regime of prolonged incommunicado detention, applied to a growing number of individuals. As of December 31, 2024, the following persons remained held in isolation from the outside world: Maksim Znak (693 days), Mikalai Statkevich (691 days) Maria Kalesnikava (686 days), Ihar Losik (681 days), Siarhei Tsikhanouski (664 days), Viktor Babaryka (616 days), Uladzimir Kniha (484 days), Mikalai Bankou (over 360 days), Andrei Navitski (over 240 days), Aliaksandr Aranovich (209 days), Aliaksandr Frantskevich (over 60 days)<sup>16</sup>.

Additionally, Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk was held incommunicado from January to August 2024; Uladzimir Hundar from May to August; and Yauhen Afnabel from June to August 2024.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> [Risks of return: criminal cases and detentions at the Belarusian border](#)

<sup>13</sup> In particular, experts from a number of international human rights mechanisms have called on the authorities to provide information on the health and whereabouts of prisoners held in incommunicado detention, to investigate alleged ill-treatment in places of detention, and to pardon vulnerable prisoners or commute their sentences (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/belarus-experts-alarmed-reports-coercive-psychiatric-treatment-punishment>) – which, however, still does not trigger a corresponding response from the state.

The early release of political prisoners is more likely to take place not in accordance with the law, but by political will - through pardons or exchanges (as in the case of Ukrainian citizens or German citizen Rico Krieger, sentenced to death on terrorism charges).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 10; <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/dzmitryi-szlethauer>, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/aljaksandr-mikalaye-vich-kulinicz>, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/ihar-lednik>, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/vadzim-khrasko>

<sup>15</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 12

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 12

Experts also note the continued active use of Article 411 of the Criminal Code (“Malicious disobedience to the demands of the administration of the correctional institution executing the sentence of deprivation of liberty”) as a tool for the arbitrary extension of prison sentences.<sup>18</sup>

The normalization of arbitrary placement in compulsory rehabilitation centers – including of individuals convicted for political expression<sup>19</sup> – as well as the ongoing possibility of involuntary hospitalization and treatment of persons with disabilities<sup>20</sup>, led to a downgrade in the corresponding indicator.

As of January 2024, new provisions of the Law “On the Procedure and Conditions for Referring Citizens to Compulsory Rehabilitation Centers and Conditions of Stay Therein” entered into force.<sup>21</sup> Although official statistics on the occupancy of compulsory rehabilitation centers are not published, there has been a noticeable increase in court decisions ordering such placement (as well as decisions to extend or shorten the duration of stay): from 6,295 decisions in 2021 to 5,366 in just the first half of 2024.<sup>22</sup>

In 2024, amendments to criminal legislation were proposed, partially aimed at humanizing and mitigating punishments.<sup>23</sup> However, these measures explicitly exclude individuals accused of “extremist-related” offenses, applying in a discriminatory manner. Such individuals are excluded from eligibility for release from pre-trial detention – even if they suffer from serious illnesses and have not committed crimes involving harm to life or health<sup>24</sup>.

There is still no de facto possibility of compensation for persons subjected to arbitrary detention.

- **Specific safeguards for custody on criminal charges**

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<sup>18</sup> As of December 31, 2024, at least 53 political prisoners and eight former political prisoners, including four women, were sentenced under Article 411 of the Criminal Code to additional terms of imprisonment: *ibid*, p. 13

<sup>19</sup> ["It's easier to be in prison." At least 33 people were subjected to compulsory medical treatment for political reasons](#)

<sup>20</sup> See CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1

([https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2FC%2FBLR%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2FC%2FBLR%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en), para. 27)

<sup>21</sup> The new version of the Law simplified the procedure for entering LTPs, while at the same time narrowing the range of persons who can be admitted to preventive treatment centers. There is a stricter procedure for isolation of people with drug addiction: citizens who applied or were admitted to health care organizations for treatment of poisoning caused by narcotic substances receive an official warning about the possibility of being sent to LTP. The second such referral within a year will be grounds for a decision on referral to LTP: see *The Right to Liberty and Security of the Person* (2023):

[https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/3\\_right\\_to\\_liberty\\_and\\_security\\_2023.pdf](https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/3_right_to_liberty_and_security_2023.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> The sanctions for 97 offenses are expected to be revised. The sanctions of 65 offenses are proposed to be supplemented with alternative, more lenient types of punishment. And the sanctions of 32 offenses are to be adjusted in terms of the amount of punishment or the introduction of additional punishments on an alternative basis (fine, deprivation of the right): <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/78552.html>

<sup>24</sup> [Human rights in Belarus: the main trends of public policy \(September–December 2024\)](#), pp. 12-13



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The overall score for this component remains unchanged; however, experts continue to observe persistent abusive practices. Arbitrary detention frequently still occurs before sufficient grounds are established to press administrative or criminal charges. Moreover, the practice remains in place whereby individuals declared wanted at the national or international level learn of their prosecution only through media reports – often based on information posted, for instance, in the Russian wanted persons database.<sup>25</sup>

Experts also draw attention to the deepening crisis of the legal profession in Belarus, which is becoming increasingly subservient to the state. The absence of conditions for free and safe legal practice<sup>26</sup> continues to erode access to quality legal assistance – especially in politically motivated cases.

Pre-trial detention remains the norm. No improvements have been recorded in the realization of the right to a timely trial or release from custody.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://spring96.org/ru/news/114363>; <https://spring96.org/ru/news/116776>

<sup>26</sup> [Deterioration of legal profession in Belarus: facts, reasons, assessments](#)



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