

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2025

The right to liberty and security of person:

Expert commentary¹

The score:	2.1
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including scores by component:

● Liberty and security of person	2.7
● Protection against arbitrary arrest or detention	1.7 -0.1
● Specific safeguards for custody on criminal charges	1.9

A description of the baseline situation regarding the realisation of the right to liberty and security of person can be found in the 2019 [review](#). In assessing the situation in 2025, the Index experts note a further deterioration in several aspects of the realisation of this right and emphasise that the absence of change in the overall score, which aggregates multiple components, does not indicate an absence of negative developments. The 2025 overall score reflects previously documented systemic practices that persisted throughout the reporting period and continued to determine the extremely low level of realisation of this right.

In addition, during the reporting period, further practices and trends were identified that affected scores under specific components. These include:

- the practice of forcibly expelling released political prisoners from the country, accompanied by the *de facto* continuation of unlawful deprivation of liberty following their formal release;
- new evidence of the institutionalisation of discriminatory practices in the treatment of political prisoners in places of detention, as well as
- the intensification of cross-border pressure and intimidation.

● **Liberty and security of person**

In 2025, the situation regarding the protection of freedom and personal integrity in Belarus remained critical, demonstrating the continuity and further development of repressive practices that had taken shape in previous years.

¹ 'Expert' and other nouns of the masculine grammatical gender are used in a gender-neutral sense and refer to all genders.



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Experts note the persistence of serious shortcomings in protecting individuals from violations of liberty and security of person by third parties. Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and a dedicated law on combating domestic violence remain absent in the country, while vulnerable groups continue to lack sufficient state protection and support mechanisms.

During the reporting period, an intensification of both direct and indirect intimidation practices targeting journalists, human rights defenders and public figures located outside the country was observed, which led to a decrease in the score for the relevant component. Throughout the year, numerous cases were documented of attempts by Belarusian security services to establish contact, including letters, phone calls and messages offering “cooperation”, as well as recruitment attempts accompanied by threats or implicit references to possible consequences for relatives remaining in Belarus.² In addition, threats and hate speech persisted in the rhetoric of senior officials, law enforcement representatives, pro-government journalists and activists.³

- **Protection against arbitrary arrest or detention**

The significant decrease in the score for the component concerning the legal regulation of deprivation of liberty and the prevention of its arbitrary application is attributable to the manner in which the deportation of political prisoners released in 2025 was carried out. In addition to violating other human rights, this practice was accompanied by unlawful restrictions on their security of person; the forced removal effectively became a continuation of deprivation of liberty following formal release: individuals were transported under guard, in handcuffs and with bags over their heads, without any clarification of their legal status and without the possibility of accessing any effective remedies.⁴

The deportations themselves were carried out outside the procedures established by law, creating a situation of uncertainty – including legal uncertainty – both for the individuals concerned and for the state authorities themselves. It is noted that, following the forced removal of released individuals, certain authorities continued to take actions premised on their presumed presence within the country, including attempts to establish their whereabouts and to consider placing them under preventive

² “Polish authorities initiated a criminal investigation into the sending, between 27 and 31 July 2025, of messages to at least ten members of the National Anti-Crisis Management (NAU) offering “cooperation” with the Belarusian security services, which took the form of blackmail, attempted bribery and financial inducements, as well as proposals to ‘start from a clean slate’”: [Poland opens criminal investigation into attempts by Belarusian security services to recruit NAU staff](#); [Belarusian activists abroad begin receiving messages proposing cooperation from the KGB](#); [KGB officers call Belarusian activists in Poland](#); [“They are blackmailing and intimidating.” Tsikhanouskaya’s adviser on pressure on Office staff and relocation from Lithuania following a reduction in security levels](#)

³ [“And we will bomb you, bomb you.” Lukashenko declared that there would be no more “foreign agents” or “extremists” in Belarusian politics](#); [Security forces are threatening “criminal cases, searches and seizure of property” against participants in the protests in Warsaw on 9–10 August](#), [“They’re threatening us with prison and persecution.” Strizhak spoke about the security forces’ new tactics to track down those who have fled — who is at risk](#)

⁴ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), p. 28; <https://spring96.org/ru/news/118240>



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supervision. This indicates the absence of legal mechanisms for implementing such arbitrary decisions and, at the same time, creates a risk of additional sanctions for deported individuals in the event of their return to Belarus.⁵

The detention and subsequent enforced disappearance of Mikalai Statkevich, who refused forced removal from the country,⁶ likewise constitute a serious unlawful restriction of liberty and security of person.

During the reporting period, Law No. 61-3 “On Amendments to the Codes on Criminal Liability” came into force,⁷ providing for a review of penalties for a number of offences and the introduction of more lenient forms of punishment.⁸ In particular, the circumstances in which a custodial sentence is not imposed have been expanded to include certain categories of parents, persons with Group I disabilities, and minors who have committed minor or less serious offences for the first time.

At the same time, these provisions do not apply to persons accused of “extremist offences”, which significantly limits the practical effect of the proclaimed humanisation of legislation. Concurrently, the amendments expand the extraterritorial application of criminal law, including the possibility of holding individuals liable for acts committed outside the country that are not recognised as offences in the state where they were committed – including acts related to statements and other forms of non-violent expression.

The grounds for arbitrary detention continue to expand. In particular, the draft law “Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Offences”, adopted by parliament at first reading, provides for the introduction of liability for the promotion of homosexual relationships, gender transition, childlessness and paedophilia. Such “propaganda” is defined as ‘the dissemination, in any form, of information with the aim of forming citizens’ perceptions of the attractiveness of homosexual relationships, gender transition, childlessness, or the acceptance of paedophilia as permissible’. In addition to further stigmatising homosexuality, transgender identity, childlessness, and related views and opinions, as well as potentially increasing hostility towards the relevant social groups,⁹ the bill provides, amongst other sanctions, for the possibility of administrative detention in the event that a minor is exposed to such information.¹⁰

⁵ “At the same time, such summonses create a basis for the possible swift and ostensibly lawful imposition of new sanctions against those who decide to return to Belarus. For example, this may involve abuse of the sanctions under Article 25.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences for violation of the rules of preventive supervision”: [Security forces are searching for former political prisoners expelled from the country](#)

⁶ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/mikalaj-statkievich>

⁷ <https://pravo.by/document/?quid=12551&p0=H12500061>

⁸ As part of the amendments, sanctions for 97 offences were revised, amongst other things. In 65 cases, more lenient penalties were introduced, including 24 offences for which, prior to the amendments, imprisonment was the only possible penalty: [Review of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for January–March 2025](#)

⁹ [Human Rights in Belarus: Key Trends in State Policy \(May–August 2025\)](#), pp. 18–19

¹⁰ <https://pravo.by/document/?quid=3941&p0=2025035001>

The ability to monitor administrative and criminal repression has deteriorated significantly: in March 2025, public information about court hearings ceased.¹¹ At the same time, there are no grounds to conclude that the intensity of politically motivated administrative and criminal prosecution has decreased.¹² Arbitrary detentions, interrogations and searches at border crossings continued,¹³ as did arbitrary restrictions on freedom and personal integrity within the country, affecting, in particular, human rights defenders, journalists and representatives of other groups. The practice of cross-border persecution of Belarusian citizens who had been forced to leave the country also persisted.¹⁴

The treatment of persons held in places of deprivation of liberty on political grounds remained inhuman and inconsistent with the formal purposes of detention. During the reporting period, two political prisoners died in places of detention.¹⁵ New details of established practices of inhumane treatment are emerging from the testimonies of political prisoners being released. In particular, experts draw attention to the institutionalisation of informal discriminatory prison practices – the arbitrary, even by prison standards, assignment of a ‘low social status’ to political prisoners, which significantly worsens the already dire situation of such individuals¹⁶ and is carried out on the initiative of or with the knowledge of the prison administration.¹⁷

The practice of unlawfully extending periods of detention in places of forced isolation persists.¹⁸ Following the release of certain political prisoners as a result of political agreements, the number of individuals held incommunicado has decreased. Nevertheless, as of the end of 2025, four individuals remained in this regime.¹⁹

¹¹ [Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2025](#)

¹² [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), pp. 1–2

¹³ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/119191>, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/118898>,
<https://spring96.org/ru/news/118851>

¹⁴ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), p. 27; for practices of cross-border persecution of journalists, see Freedom of expression, expert commentary on the 2025 assessment: <https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

¹⁵ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), p. 1

¹⁶ [“It hits the brain with terrible force; it’s hard to breathe.” Stories of torture that came to light in 2025](#)

¹⁷ For details on how this mechanism operates, as well as the additional opportunities it provides for exerting pressure on prisoners and creating unbearable conditions of detention in places of confinement, see [“Low social status” in the Belarusian prison system: institutionalised torture and a crime against humanity; “Low status” is killing your morale because you are considered an outcast”: ex-political prisoner Dmitry Kuchuk](#)

¹⁸ On the continued application of Article 411 of the Criminal Code, arbitrary detention in solitary confinement and the disciplinary isolation block, and other mechanisms used for this purpose, see [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), pp. 8, 29

¹⁹ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), p. 8



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During the reporting period, the arbitrary practice of sending individuals to compulsory rehabilitation centers²⁰ continued, as did the practice of compulsory treatment.²¹

With regard to the component assessing the possibility of obtaining fair compensation for unlawful deprivation of liberty, experts note that the expulsion of former political prisoners from the country without documents deprives them even of a hypothetical possibility of seeking judicial protection domestically and, consequently, of the right to such compensation – even in cases where the arbitrariness of the deprivation of liberty is recognised. Forced to leave the country without personal and procedural documents necessary to bring a claim before a court, expelled individuals are, in practice, deprived of the ability to exercise their legal capacity. In addition, in exile they face systemic barriers to access to justice in Belarus, which affect all individuals unable to return to the country safely.²²

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

The overall situation under this component remained largely unchanged. Special guarantees – including the prompt communication of the reasons for arrest, the right to be brought promptly before a court, and the guarantee of a trial within a reasonable time or release – continued not to be ensured. Pre-trial detention remained the general rule.

Given the purge of the legal profession observed in previous years and the continuing pressure on lawyers, it is virtually impossible to exercise the right to effective legal assistance, particularly in cases involving politically motivated persecution. Experts note a revealing statement made by a defence lawyer in one of the tendentious trials concerning defendants accused of crimes committed during the Second World War, who effectively supported the prosecution's position²³ – presumably fearing that the very possibility of a full defence of the 'accused' might be interpreted as casting doubt on the official interpretation of history and as a denial of the genocide.²⁴

²⁰ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025](#), p. 24

²¹ ["It's easier to be in prison." At least 33 people were subjected to compulsory medical treatment for political reasons](#); The statistics published by the Supreme Court remain indicative in this regard: in 2025, the courts upheld 100% of cases concerning the compulsory hospitalisation and treatment of citizens, as well as the extension of the period of compulsory hospitalisation and treatment, which calls into question the effectiveness of judicial review of the application of this measure: [Summary statistical data on the activities of courts of general jurisdiction in the administration of justice for 2025](#)

²² For general restrictions on access to justice faced by Belarusians in exile, see the National Human Rights Index, Right to a Fair Trial (expert commentary on the 2025 assessment): <https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

²³ <https://t.me/lgbelarussegodnya/29151>

²⁴ [Remembering the Second World War: how lawyers' lectures on genocide infringe upon the rights to historical truth and national heritage](#).