

## Belarus Human Rights Index

<http://index.belhelcom.org>

2024

## Right of Persons Deprived of Their Liberty to be Treated with Humanity

Expert Commentary

The score:	2	-0,2
Including scores by component:		
• General principles	2,4	-0,1
• Detention conditions	2,1	-0,1
• Protection of persons deprived of their liberty	1,6	-0,2

Assessing the situation regarding the right of persons deprived of their liberty to humane treatment in 2024, the Index experts again lowered the overall score compared to 2023 by 0.2 point, reflecting the continuing systemic deterioration of the situation. **Among the main reasons:**

- in 2024, the use of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment continued, including the practice of prolonged solitary confinement and *incommunicado* detention, which, according to experts, poses serious risks to the physical and mental health of prisoners, including fatal consequences - in 2024, at least four deaths were recorded which, according to human rights defenders, were caused by inadequate conditions and lack of medical care;
- prisoners systematically face restrictions or complete denial of access to lawyers, families, medical care, as well as arbitrary placement in solitary confinement, cell-type premises, and prison regime.
- the practice of complete isolation (*incommunicado* detention) continues and is getting worse. In 2024, at least 10 political prisoners were held in these conditions for a whole year. Plus, the legal defense system is basically destroyed: with lawyers under pressure and getting detained, prisoners are increasingly unable to get a lawyer.
- information about the state and conditions of detention remains closed: there is no up-to-date official data on the number of prisoners, capacity limits, and other basic parameters, and access for public and international monitoring is completely blocked, which, according to experts, makes it impossible to assess the situation objectively and contributes to impunity.

**• General principles**

As of December 31, 2024, according to human rights organizations, there were 1,265 political prisoners in Belarus, including 168 women, 220 of whom were included in the humanitarian list.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Political prisoners in Belarus](#)



#human rights

#business and human rights

#discrimination

#human rights based approach

#international human rights enforcement mechanisms

[office@belhelcom.org](mailto:office@belhelcom.org)[www.belhelcom.org](http://www.belhelcom.org)

According to experts, the treatment of prisoners in Belarus is increasingly selective and discriminatory, particularly against those convicted on political grounds. The authorities continue to consistently implement and consolidate repressive policies against this category, thereby violating the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of political beliefs.

Experts also note that an informal division has begun to form within the group of political prisoners themselves: those perceived as more radical opponents of the authorities are subjected to particularly harsh treatment, while those considered “less dangerous” are treated more leniently.

According to testimony from released political prisoners, prisoners belonging to the LGBT+ community are subjected to additional degrading treatment. They are deliberately placed in worse conditions of detention.

The practice of blocking correspondence, meetings with lawyers and relatives, and access to adequate medical care continued.<sup>2</sup> In 2024, four deaths of political prisoners in places of deprivation of liberty were reported, bringing the total number of political prisoners who died in places of deprivation of liberty to seven persons.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the year, at least 10 persons were held in *incommunicado* detention, seven of them for more than a year, which is considered by international mechanisms to be a form of enforced disappearance.<sup>4</sup> Experts point out that the state ignores appeals from the UN Human Rights Committee and other special procedures, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, to end this practice. The responses provided by the Belarusian authorities either do not contain specific information or refer to outdated data. According to experts, isolated demonstrations of prisoners (such as Viktor Babaryka or Maria Kalesnikava) in photos or videos cannot be considered an end to *incommunicado* detention, as legitimate channels of communication (correspondence, lawyers, visits) have not been restored.

Also in 2024, political prisoners included in the lists of “extremists” or “terrorists” were completely deprived of the possibility of receiving money transfers. Experts emphasize that this practice was previously applied selectively, but now it applies to virtually everyone in the specified category. This is exacerbated by the fact that only one parcel per year, weighing no more than 2 kg, is allowed, and it often does not reach the prisoner or is returned without explanation.

In 2024, the authorities continued to use Article 411 of the Criminal Code as a mechanism to extend the arbitrary detention of political prisoners. By the end of 2024, 53 political prisoners and 8 former prisoners, including women, had been convicted under Article 411.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Viasna, Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024; Belarus: Experts mark second anniversary of enforced disappearance of Siarhei Tsikhanouski, demand action | OHCHR](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Viasna, Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

Since the summer of 2024, there have been eight waves of pardons, resulting in the release of 227 persons. However, experts note that this practice was accompanied by pressure on prisoners to sign pardon requests, which included admitting guilt and renouncing their political views.<sup>6</sup>

Former political prisoners continue to face strict surveillance and administrative checks.<sup>7</sup>

Experts believe that for political prisoners, the prison system functions exclusively as a mechanism of political pressure and ideological coercion, rather than as a system aimed at rehabilitation. In 2024, the practice of ideological pressure on prisoners continued through regular coercion to consume propaganda materials and participate in staged videos with “confessions of guilt.” According to experts, in conditions where a significant number of persons are held in isolation in prison, without access to basic social interaction, the very idea of rehabilitation becomes impossible. Detention in *incommunicado* conditions for more than one year (as in the case of a number of political prisoners) is considered a complete deprivation of the possibility of social functioning, which, in essence, contradicts the objectives of rehabilitation.

#### ● Conditions of detention

In 2024, conditions of detention continued to fall short of international human rights standards.

There were at least four known deaths in custody in 2024. In January 2024, Vadzim Khrasko, who was 50 years old, died in Penal Colony No. 3. He had a serious illness and had contracted pneumonia in prison.<sup>8</sup> In February 2024, Ihhar Lednik, who had a second-degree disability due to cardiovascular disease, died in Penal Colony No. 2. The cause of death was cardiac arrest.<sup>9</sup> In April 2024, Aliaksandr Kulinich died in the Brest SIZO. The death certificate states that Aliaksandr Kulinich died of ischemic heart disease.<sup>10</sup> In October 2024, Dzmitry Shlethauer, a citizen of the Russian Federation, died, allegedly as a result of suicide. The relatives of the political prisoner do not agree with the suicide version.<sup>11</sup> According to experts, all these cases point to systemic problems with the provision of medical care in the prison system.

There are at least 190 political prisoners in custody with serious health problems, often incompatible with detention in prison.<sup>12</sup> Many political prisoners have experienced a significant deterioration in their

---

<sup>6</sup> [Legal Initiative, How and why does the regime “extract” petitions for clemency from political prisoners?](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Viasna, “They come for checks two or three times a night.” We talk about the surveillance of former political prisoners after their release](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Vadzim Khrasko - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Ihhar Lednik - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Aliaksandr Kulinich — Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Dzmitry Shlethauer — Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

health while in captivity.<sup>13</sup> Experts emphasize that access to medication is sporadic, and chronic illnesses are exacerbated by the cumulative effect of inadequate conditions.

According to experts, limited or no access to food and medicine from outside sources threatens the physical survival of prisoners. Due to lack of money and the inability to regularly receive parcels, many live in conditions of virtual starvation. The possibility of sending parcels or money is technically simple and does not require significant resources from the system, but it is restricted by the authorities in relation to political prisoners. The permitted volume of parcels is only 2 kg per year, but even these parcels often do not arrive and are returned without explanation. There are known cases where prisoners were sent bags of rotten vegetables<sup>14</sup>, which experts regard as abuse disguised as formal compliance with the rules.

2024 was the first full year in which a number of political prisoners were held in *incommunicado* detention for more than 12 months. According to Vesna, the following individuals were held incommunicado, a form of torture, during the year: Maxim Znak – since February 8, 2023 (693 days)<sup>15</sup>, Mikalai Statkevich – since February 10, 2023 (691 days)<sup>16</sup>, Maria Kalesnikava – since February 15, 2023 (686 days)<sup>17</sup>, Ihar Losik – since February 20, 2023 (681 days)<sup>18</sup>, Siarhei Tsikhanouski – since March 9, 2023 (664 days)<sup>19</sup>, Viktor Babaryka – from April 26, 2023 (616 days)<sup>20</sup>, Uladzimir Kniha – from September 5, 2023 (484 days)<sup>21</sup>, Mikalai Bankov – from December 2023 (more than 360 days)<sup>22</sup>, Andrei Navitski – since April 2024 (more than 240 days)<sup>23</sup>, Aliaksandr Aranovich – since June 6, 2024 (209 days)<sup>24</sup>, Aliaksandr Frantskevich – since October 2024 (more than 60 days)<sup>25</sup>. Also in 2024, the following individuals were held *incommunicado* for a certain period of time: Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk – from January to August 2024<sup>26</sup>, Uladzimir Hundar – from May to August 2024<sup>27</sup>, Yauhen Afnabel – from June

---

<sup>13</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Nasha Niva, Polina Sharenda-Panasiuk again “brought” green apples instead of food](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Maksim Znak – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Mikalai Statkevich - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Maria Kalesnikava - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Ihar Losik - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Siarhei Tsikhanouski - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Viktar Babaryka - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Uladzimir Kniha – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Mikalai Bankov - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Andrei Navitski – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Aliaksandr Aranovich – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Aliaksandr Frantskevich – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Uladzimir Hundar – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

to August 2024.<sup>28</sup> On November 12, 2024, Maria Kalesnikava was able to meet with her father, after which her *incommunicado* detention continued.<sup>29</sup>

According to experts, in 2024, the practice of a total ban on contact with outside persons (except for immediate family members) for political prisoners became entrenched. Throughout the year, even these minimal contacts continued to be arbitrarily restricted. Although opportunities for online contact with the outside world emerged (measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic remained in place), political prisoners were systematically excluded from this practice. Experts also note that 2024 was the year when the presence of lawyers in the cases of political prisoners effectively disappeared.

The detention of lawyers and the deprivation of their status, including through the practice of so-called “Wednesday detentions,” have resulted in many prisoners *incommunicado* having no access to legal assistance in Belarus.<sup>30</sup>

In 2024, the practice of arbitrarily placing political prisoners in solitary confinement continued, where they are held without correspondence, phone calls, meetings with family, or the right to visit a lawyer.<sup>31</sup> Ihar Alinevich was placed in solitary confinement at least four times during the year – in April, May, June, and September.<sup>32</sup> In June, he went on hunger strike and was transferred to a prison hospital with suspected stomach ulcers.<sup>33</sup> Mikalai Bankov, who was held *incommunicado* for a year, spent nine months in a punishment cell.<sup>34</sup> According to former political prisoners, detention in solitary confinement still involves no walks, no work, no meaningful activities, no contact with the outside world, and often involves being kept in constant cold and inadequate sanitary conditions.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, political prisoners were subjected to other forms of pressure and discriminatory treatment, such as placement in cell-type premises or temporary transfer to prison regime. Palina Sharenda-Panasjuk<sup>36</sup> and Andrei Poczobut faced constant placement in cell-type premises.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> [Yauhen Afanahel – Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Radio Liberty, Roman Protasevich reports on Maria Kalesnikava 's meeting with her father](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Right to Defense, Statement by Belarusian human rights organizations on the mass detention of lawyers on February 28, 2024](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Ihar Alinevich - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Viasna, Ihar Alinevich held in solitary confinement in SHIZA](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Viasna, Held incommunicado for a year, nine months in solitary confinement: how Nikolai Bankov is being pressured in IK-1](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Viasna, “It’s impossible to get out healthy.” A former political prisoner who spent about 10 months in solitary confinement and a pre-trial detention center spoke about the conditions there; Viasna, “You know – one article there is worth ten days in solitary confinement here.” Former political prisoner in solitary confinement; Viasna, “IK No. 15 is a concentration camp.” The story of former political prisoner Viktor Panteleev](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Palina Sharenda-Panasjuk - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Andrei Paczobut - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

According to information from Vesna as of December 31, 2024, at least 61 political prisoners were temporarily transferred and held in prison conditions as part of a court-imposed punitive measure for allegedly “malicious violation of the established order of serving their sentences.”<sup>38</sup>

53 political prisoners and 8 former political prisoners, including four women, were sentenced under Article 411 of the Criminal Code to additional terms of imprisonment.<sup>39</sup>

Other political prisoners were repeatedly prosecuted in 2024. Ivan Verbitsky<sup>40</sup>, Vyacheslav Maleychuk<sup>41</sup>, Dmitry Dashkevich<sup>42</sup>, Vladimir Kniga<sup>43</sup>, Andrei Novitsky<sup>44</sup>, Sergei Romanov<sup>45</sup>, and Evgeny Propolsky<sup>46</sup> were twice convicted while in prison with the aim of extending their politically motivated prison terms, and Vladimir Tsyganovich<sup>47</sup> – three times.

In addition to isolation, political prisoners are subjected to forced, hard, and often poorly paid labor. In women's correctional colony No. 4, wages are below the minimum wage and range from \$0.6 to \$42.<sup>48</sup> Women are also forced to perform compulsory unpaid hard physical labor for the maintenance of the colony beyond the established time limit (14 hours).<sup>49</sup> They are forced to perform heavy and dirty physical work in clothing not intended for this purpose—in pink dresses and pencil skirts.<sup>50</sup> Some prisoners reported accidents, injuries, and negative health effects due to lack of professional training, protective clothing or equipment, failure to comply with other health and safety requirements, etc.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> [Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Political prisoners in Belarus; Polina Sharendo-Panasuk - Political prisoners in Belarus; Viktoria Kulsh - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Ivan Verbitsky - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Vyacheslav Maleychuk - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Dmitry Dashkevich - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Vladimir Kniga - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>44</sup> [Andrei Novitsky - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>45</sup> [Sergei Romanov - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Evgeny Propolsky - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>47</sup> [Vladimir Tsyganovich - Political prisoners in Belarus](#)

<sup>48</sup> [International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4](#)

<sup>49</sup> [International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4](#)

<sup>50</sup> [International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4](#)

<sup>51</sup> [A/HRC/56/65, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus](#)



One striking example of ill-treatment is the practice of placing prisoners in a metal cage in the courtyard of Women's Penal Colony No. 4.<sup>52</sup>

A new form of pressure has been the forced participation of political prisoners in propaganda videos: seven political prisoners appeared in state television reports.<sup>53</sup>

After their release, political prisoners remain under strict control by law enforcement agencies and face persecution, including *in absentia*.<sup>54</sup>

There continue to be reports of discriminatory treatment and inhumane conditions in temporary detention facilities.<sup>55</sup> Detainees face inhumane treatment regardless of whether they are being persecuted for political reasons. There are reports of poor facilities and unsanitary conditions, as well as a lack of hygiene products, access to hot water and adequate food, and proper medical care.<sup>56</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable: the IVS is staffed mainly by men, the cells are under video surveillance, and the sanitary areas are not isolated and do not provide privacy.<sup>57</sup>

Information about the actual conditions of detention is completely closed. The latest official data dates back to 2019. Experts emphasize that the public does not have up-to-date information on the number of prisoners, the capacity limits of institutions, and other key parameters, which makes it impossible to independently assess the situation.

#### ● Protection of persons deprived of liberty

Belarus still lacks an effective mechanism for independent monitoring of detention conditions. State inspections and courts are not independent, nor are the public monitoring commissions set up by the authorities, which create only the appearance of public oversight but do not actually perform this function.

Instead of creating functioning legal mechanisms, the authorities resort to demonstrative, non-legal measures, such as allowing certain loyal individuals (such as Roman Protasevich) to visit political prisoners outside of any established procedure. Such cases not only violate national law, but also underscore the arbitrary and manipulative nature of current practices. Real legal mechanisms for access to places of detention and oversight of conditions of detention are effectively non-existent.

---

<sup>52</sup> [International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>54</sup> [International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Viasna, Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024](#)

<sup>57</sup> [Viasna, Neighbourhood with parasites in places of deprivation of liberty – a gross violation of international standards of detention](#)



The authorities continue to ignore numerous recommendations from international organizations to improve conditions of detention, including access to medical care, the abolition of the *incommunicado* regime, and the provision of opportunities for regular visits by relatives and independent lawyers.

The right of prisoners to lodge complaints remains formal. Practice shows that even complaints that are lodged, for example, against placement in solitary confinement, are not examined on their merits. For example, in their response to the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, the Belarusian authorities reported that Sergei Tikhanovsky had filed two complaints with the court regarding his placement in solitary confinement, but the complaints were returned for correction of “shortcomings” and were not examined on their merits. The court demanded payment of a state fee, without taking into account his inability to exercise this right due to a lack of funds in his account. Thus, the very mechanism for filing complaints has been effectively blocked. Prisoners report that punitive measures, such as solitary confinement, are used to suppress complaints.<sup>58</sup>

In the context of ongoing mass repression against lawyers for providing assistance in politically motivated cases and against human rights defenders, access to legal assistance is hampered. The status of “political prisoner” makes such persons “undesirable” clients for lawyers remaining in the country.

There is no mechanism for independent and impartial medical examination and documentation of bodily injuries, nor is there an effective mechanism for appealing torture and ill-treatment. There is still no information about impartial and effective investigations into every case of death in penitentiary institutions. Despite widespread public reaction, no public action, including investigation, has been taken by the state.

---

<sup>58</sup> International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Torture and ill-treatment in Gomel Women's Colony No. 4