

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2025

The right to freedom of expression:

Expert commentary¹

The score:	1.2
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Including scores by component:

-
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| ● Freedom of opinion and expression | 1.0 |
| ● Access to information | 1.3 |
-

A description of the baseline situation regarding the realisation of the right to freedom of expression can be found in the 2019 [review](#).

In assessing the state of implementation of this right in 2025, the Index experts maintained the previous score, finding no grounds in the situation to justify an increase. At the same time, it is important to note that the score for the component “*freedom of opinion and expression*” has remained at 1.0 for the fourth consecutive year, indicating a stable, *de facto* impossibility of exercising these aspects of the right.

Nevertheless, alongside previously documented repressive practices, experts note the further development of trends that worsen the situation. In 2025, an expansion of the grounds for state interference with the exercise of this right was recorded in a number of areas. The ecosystem of “anti-extremism” legislation continues to develop and become entrenched, serving as one of the key instruments for restricting the expression of opinions and access to information. The intensive prosecution of journalists persists, including the transnational persecution of media actors in exile. Opportunities for the safe operation of independent media and human rights organisations within the country remain absent.

Access to information of public interest remains significantly restricted: practices of censorship and self-censorship persist, and substantial bodies of information of public relevance remain inaccessible to society.

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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- **Freedom of opinion and expression**

In 2025, criminal and administrative prosecution continued for the expression of opinions and related forms of behaviour.² Despite a radical reduction in the availability of information on repression in 2025,³ experts note the persistence of systematic persecution, as well as the expansion of existing forms and grounds for its application.

In particular, large-scale prosecution associated with the “Hajun case” was observed in 2025. Through the use of overly broad wording of Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“Facilitation of extremist activity”), courts have been convicting en masse individuals who in one way or another interacted with the Telegram bot of the “Belaruski Hajun” project. In a number of cases, “other facilitation of extremist activity” has been interpreted as the expression of disagreement with the Russian Federation’s “special military operation” on the territory of Ukraine.⁴ According to human rights defenders, more than one hundred individuals have been confirmed as defendants in this case; by the end of 2025, mass detentions linked to it were ongoing. Available information suggests that the lists of persons subject to detention may include more than one thousand individuals.⁵

A distinct strand of politically motivated prosecution based on “anti-extremism” legislation has taken shape in the form of the “courtyard chats” case, which has become one of the largest repressive campaigns aimed at suppressing grassroots self-organisation: various forms of local civic interaction – from organised initiatives to spontaneous activity – are classified as “extremist” and entail criminal prosecution. In a number of cases, defendants have been charged, *inter alia*, with having received independent civic education, which, according to the prosecution, could have been used for subsequent participation in the country’s political life.⁶

Overall, persecution continued to be carried out for a wide range of forms of expression and related actions, including criticism of the actions of the authorities and security forces and the dissemination of information about them (see below); donations and other financial support classified as unlawful; informational and analytical activities – including those carried out outside the country; support for Ukraine and statements deemed to be ‘discrediting the state’, etc.⁷

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

³ Ibid., p. 4

⁴ [Review of the application of anti-extremism legislation \(October–December 2025\)](#), p. 30

⁵ Ibid., p. 32

⁶ [“The Case of the Neighbourhood Watch”: How Neighbourhood Watches Turned into a Criminal Case; Review of the Application of Anti-Extremist Legislation \(October–December 2025\)](#)

⁷ [Review of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus for April–June 2025](#); Review of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus for October–December 2025; see also analytical materials from the Belarusian Association of Journalists: <https://baj.media/be/aglyady-manitoringji/>



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Restrictions on the right in question remained unlawful and failed to meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality.

The widespread application of ‘anti-extremist’ legislation continued. The legal framework of the list of ‘extremist’ offences, updated in 2025, allows any offences under the Special Part of the Criminal Code to be classified under this category if they are committed ‘on grounds of racial, national, religious enmity or discord, political or ideological enmity, as well as on grounds of enmity or discord towards any social group’,⁸ which significantly broadens the scope for classifying various forms of expression as ‘extremist’. The practice of bringing criminal charges for the expression of opinions, with the application of sanctions clearly disproportionate to the alleged acts, has persisted.⁹

The concept of “extremism”, which is increasingly permeating various areas of legal regulation¹⁰ and is more frequently used as a social regulator, continues to be interpreted in an overly broad and inconsistent manner. During the reporting period, statements by law enforcement officials indicated that even *inadvertent interaction* with “extremist materials” – for example, viewing such materials, which due to the technical features of certain messaging applications may result in their automatic saving on a user’s device – is treated as constituting an administrative offence (Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences, which prohibits the “storage” of “extremist materials”).¹¹ It was also once again confirmed that subscribing to “extremist” resources may entail liability, as it increases the popularity of “destructive” content (while “likes” are taken as evidence that a person holds “destructive” views).¹²

During 2025, the list of printed publications banned from circulation in Belarus was expanded by almost 200 titles. A significant proportion of these were books on LGBTQ+ issues, sex education, adolescent psychology, and educational literature for children.¹³

⁸ See the new version of Council of Ministers Resolution No. 575, supplemented by Annex 3, which contains a list of extremist offences; [Overview of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for April–June 2025](#)

⁹ [Overview of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for April–June 2025](#), [Overview of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for January–March 2025](#)

¹⁰ See the expansion of ‘filters’ restricting access to certain professions through the use of ‘anti-extremist’ legislation: [Human Rights in Belarus: Key Trends in Public Policy. September – December’25](#)

¹¹ [Overview of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for October–December 2025](#), p. 38

¹² *Ibid.*, [“A ‘Like’ Could Cost You Your Freedom”: Gomel Prosecutor on How to Protect Young People from Online Manipulation](#)

¹³ See Human Constanta’s analysis: ‘During the period under review, the list was dominated by books on crime and violence, on drugs and psychoactive substances, as well as publications related to the upbringing of children and adolescents. In books about crime, violence is neither normalised nor encouraged; it is generally portrayed as a traumatic experience, a source of fear and destruction. In books about illicit substances, there is no romanticisation of use: on the contrary, addiction is portrayed as a difficult, often hopeless experience, and non-fiction publications are based on research and facts. The presence on the list of publications on parenting, family relationships, growing up, gender stereotypes, as well as educational literature for children, including a



During the reporting period, a draft law “On Amendments to Codes on Issues of Administrative Liability” was adopted in its first reading, providing for the introduction of liability for the “propaganda” of homosexual relationships, gender transition, childlessness and paedophilia, defined as “the dissemination, in any form, of information aimed at shaping in citizens perceptions of the attractiveness of homosexual relationships, gender transition, childlessness, or the acceptability of paedophilia.” 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,¹⁴ the draft law provides, among other sanctions, for the possibility of administrative detention where minors are exposed to such information.¹⁵

Furthermore, experts draw attention to the introduction of a new Article 366-1 into the Criminal Code (‘Violence or threats against the President of the Republic of Belarus, including one who has ceased to exercise his powers’), which establishes liability for violence or threats of violence, destruction or damage to property against the current or former head of state, as well as members of his family. The penalty under this article provides for restriction of liberty for a term of three to five years or imprisonment for a term of three to eight years.¹⁶ At the same time, amendments have been made to Articles 367 and 368 of the Criminal Code (‘Defamation of the President’ and ‘Insulting the President’), extending their scope not only to the incumbent president but also to a person who has ceased to hold office.

Taken together, these changes indicate a further expansion of the instruments enabling a wide range of statements and forms of expression to be classified as administrative offences or criminal acts.

Experts also note the persistence of repressive trends targeting journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders.

During the reporting period, repression against journalists continued – both those remaining in the country and those who had been forced to emigrate.¹⁷ According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), by the end of 2025, 28 media representatives remained in detention. Throughout the year, there were continued searches and inspections of premises (38 cases), detentions (at least 12 cases), and the designation of media outlets as ‘extremist organisations’ (42 new designations during the reporting period).¹⁸ There were instances of persecution of the few remaining regional media

book on wild animals, seems particularly difficult to explain, as these texts fall within the scope of standard educational and developmental literature. The list also includes a large number of books that mention LGBTQ+, although in some cases this topic is not central.”: [Review of the application of anti-extremism legislation \(October–December 2025\)](#)

¹⁴ [Human Rights in Belarus: The Main Trends of Public Policy \(May–August 2025\)](#)

¹⁵ <https://pravo.by/document/?quid=3941&p0=2025035001>

¹⁶ [Review of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus for January–March 2025](#)

¹⁷ [Electronic bulletin “Media in Belarus” No. 1 \(79\) 2025](#)

¹⁸ [Figures of the Year. 2025](#)



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outlets in connection with their lawful – including under Belarusian law – interaction with foreign diplomatic missions, including the German Embassy in Belarus.¹⁹

Intensive transnational persecution of journalists in exile also continued,²⁰ including the initiation of criminal proceedings in absentia followed by their placement on inter-State wanted lists,²¹ the seizure of property, searches conducted in the homes of journalists or their relatives in Belarus, as well as attempts at recruitment using various forms of pressure, including pressure on family members.²²

The release of some political prisoners through pardon and their forced removal from the country affected 12 representatives of the media sector. Most of them were deported without documents ensuring the possibility of exercising basic human rights abroad.²³

No information was recorded indicating the initiation of effective and impartial investigations into incidents of persecution in 2025. Experts draw attention, inter alia, to the absence of accessible and effective mechanisms that could realistically be used to initiate such investigations.

During the reporting period, the development of regulatory mechanisms expanding the state's capacity for censorship in the media sphere continued.

In particular, the administrator of the national domain zone was granted the authority²⁴ to revoke the domain names of internet resources 'capable of harming the national interests of the Republic of Belarus', in the absence of a clear regulatory definition of the content of this criterion.²⁵

Experts also note the further institutionalisation of ideological regulation of the media sphere. In particular, the Directive 'On the Implementation of the Foundations of the Ideology of the Belarusian State', adopted in April 2025, assigns media outlets the role of 'agents for the implementation of the ideology of the Belarusian State'.²⁶ The relevant provisions provide for the media's participation in 'counter-propaganda work',²⁷ 'the dissemination and explanation of socially significant information in

¹⁹ [E-newsletter: MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS No.2 \(80\) 2025](#)

²⁰ [New report on press freedom: Belarus among the leaders in transnational persecution of journalists](#)

²¹ <https://euroradio.fm/ru/esche-odnogo-zampredsedatelya-bazh-obyavili-v-mezhgosudarstvennyy-rozysk>

²² [More than 40 Belarusian media outlets have been designated as “extremist organisations”, with 40 journalists currently in detention; Transnational Repression in Belarus: A Brutal Tool of the Persecution of Dissent by the Lukashenka Regime](#); see also BAI's operational monitoring reports: https://bai.media/en/aqlyady_category/baj-monitors/

²³ [E-newsletter: MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS No.3 \(81\) 2025](#)

²⁴ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=T62505912>

²⁵ <https://bai.media/be/aqlyady-manitoringj/smi-belarusi-1-2025/>

²⁶ Paragraph 3 of the Directive:

https://president.gov.by/fp/v1/630/document-thumb_64630_original/64630.1744203438.7b044f240f.pdf

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 3.1

accordance with the main tasks of ideological work,²⁸ as well as the coordination of positions among the heads and editors-in-chief of state, republican and regional media outlets.²⁹ The Ministry of Information is involved in “providing informational support for ideological work”.³⁰

In the version of the Council of Ministers’ resolution “On the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus” updated in September 2025, the ministry’s tasks were also expanded to include “providing informational support for ideological work”.³¹ However, the directive does not reflect the need to protect the independence and diversity of the media.

It is noted that the legal and law enforcement environment remains such that it is impossible to ensure genuine pluralism and independence of the media. In 2025, the lists of ‘extremist groups’ and ‘extremist materials’ continued to be expanded, with independent media resources and platforms still being included *en masse*. At the same time, disproportionate institutional and financial support for state media projects was observed.³² In effect, there are no longer any media outlets in the country capable of engaging in socio-political activity involving critical coverage of State policy. The reduction in access to information of public interest described below, according to experts, also affects the nature of published content: many media outlets are compelled to shift their focus towards neutral or entertainment content, avoiding socio-political topics.

- **Access to information**

Formally, the legal regulation of the right of access to information remains unchanged. At the same time, in practice, this right remains effectively inaccessible in a number of areas. Experts note the persistence of a trend towards restricting access to information of public interest, including through the narrowing of the volume of published data and limitations on access to State information resources.

In 2025, a significant portion of statistical data continued either not to be published at all or to be made available in a truncated and aggregated form, often without the necessary level of detail. In particular, after a nearly four-year hiatus, data on births and deaths were published – but only for 2024; information for 2020-2023 has still not been disclosed.³³

²⁸ Ibid., para. 3.2

²⁹ Ibid., para. 5.4; [What has changed in Belarusian legislation in 2025? A lawyer’s review](#)

³⁰ Ibid., para. 5.5

³¹ Clause 3.3 of the Regulations approved by this resolution: <https://pravo.by/document/?quid=12551&p0=C22500519>; for an analysis of other changes, see: [What has changed in Belarusian legislation in 2025? A Lawyer’s Review](#); [Mass media in Belarus 2025](#)

³² <https://baj.media/be/aglyady-manitoringi/novyj-gostelekanal-skolko-deneg-na-breindirovanie/>

³³ [For the first time in four years, Belstat has published data on birth and death rates](#)

Against this backdrop, the National Statistical Committee publicly reports a 95 per cent ‘data availability’ rate as part of its monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³⁴ It is important to note, however, that this does not refer to the openness and actual accessibility of data to the public, but to a national statistical indicator calculated by Belstat using its own internal methodology.³⁵ Moreover, of the 16 ‘accessible’³⁶ and state-calculated SDG achievement indicators presented on the national platform, at least seven contain no data after 2019 or contain no data at all; certain indicators raise doubts regarding the methodology of data collection and the reliability of the information provided.³⁷

The practice of restricting access from abroad to the websites of certain State bodies persists. This affects, inter alia, resources of practical importance for citizens residing outside the country and subject to transnational persecution. In particular, the website of the Investigative Committee – which publishes information on proceedings *in absentia* – is inaccessible, as are the websites of the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Ministry of Justice.

Continuing the trend of reduced transparency regarding the activities of the judicial and law enforcement systems, experts note the cessation in March 2025 of public reporting on court hearings, which has significantly impaired the ability to independently monitor administrative and criminal reprisals.³⁸

There is a continuing and intensifying trend towards withholding significant amounts of information of public interest under the pretext of protecting state and other secrets. In practice, vague categories such as ‘harm to national interests’, which lack clear legal definition, continue to be widely used.

In 2025, a case came to light involving the criminal prosecution of three Minsk residents on charges of ‘treason’ for conducting sociological research without accreditation. It is noteworthy that the researchers used open sources in their work.³⁹ Also in 2025, there were reports of individuals being prosecuted for correspondence with human rights organisations, classified as ‘aiding extremist activities’.⁴⁰

³⁴ [New indicators and information systems. What results did Belstat achieve by the end of 2025](#)

³⁵ The indicator in question is not a global UN SDG indicator, it does not allow for comparison with other countries, and does not in itself indicate a higher level of actual access to information for the public compared to other states. It reflects the availability of data sources, calculation methodologies and disaggregation for SDG indicators defined by the state. See [the Roadmap](#) of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus on the development of statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12

³⁷ <https://sdqplatform.belstat.gov.by/datasets/16.10.1>, <https://sdqplatform.belstat.gov.by/datasets/16.9.1>

³⁸ [Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2025](#)

³⁹ <https://humanconstant.org/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-aprel-iyun-2025/>

⁴⁰ <https://humanconstant.org/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-aprel-iyun-2025/>

Experts have drawn attention to the introduction of the new Article 375-3 of the Criminal Code ('Unauthorised dissemination of information regarding the location or movement of military units, weapons, military equipment and ammunition').⁴¹ The article establishes criminal liability for the dissemination of such information during a counter-terrorism operation, a state of emergency or martial law, even in the absence of evidence of offences under the articles on treason, espionage or the disclosure of state secrets. Penalties under this article include a fine, arrest, restriction of liberty or imprisonment for up to three years, and in the presence of aggravating circumstances, up to six years' imprisonment.

During the reporting period, criminal prosecutions became widespread against individuals who passed on information about the movements of military equipment to opposition initiatives in the context of expressing dissent against Russian aggression against Ukraine; in these categories of cases, courts handed down sentences against dozens of people on charges of 'facilitating extremist activity' under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code. During the same period, there was a resurgence in the practice of simultaneously applying Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code alongside Article 356 of the Criminal Code, under which the transmission of military-related information is likely to be classified not only as 'aiding extremist activity' but also as 'treason', leading to a significant increase in the severity of the penalties.⁴²

⁴¹ [Overview of the fight against 'extremism' in Belarus, January–March 2025](#)

⁴² [Overview of the application of anti-extremism legislation \(October–December 2025\)](#)



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