

BELARUS

IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



2025

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WHO WE ARE

The Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) is one of the oldest and most prominent human rights organizations in Belarus, established in 1995. As an independent, non-political, and non-profit civic association, BHC is committed to the promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Since July 2022, BHC has held consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

BHC's work is strongly aligned with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). It was the first human rights organization in Belarus to promote the SDGs nationally among civil society and human rights actors from the outset of the 2030 Agenda.

The organisation's core areas include: human rights analytics, focusing on monitoring and assessing public policy and its impact on human rights; international advocacy and the use of international human rights mechanisms; legal assistance to victims of human rights violations; education and capacity-building for youth, legal professionals, civil society organisations, and the broader public.

BHC has implemented over 45 projects in the fields of legal aid, advocacy, education, and monitoring - both at the national and international levels - in cooperation with institutions such as the OSCE, Council of Europe, and the United Nations. Additionally, BHC actively supports other NGOs in utilising UN mechanisms through training, guidance, and the development of digital tools.

Through its comprehensive approach, the BHC contributes to creating a civic environment where citizens, businesses, and government actors work together toward a society grounded in dignity, justice, and sustainable development.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

1. Cease political repression and ensure the immediate release of all political prisoners.
2. Stop the use of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment against detainees and prisoners, including political prisoners. Publicly and unequivocally condemn the use of torture and all forms of inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as unnecessary and disproportionate use of force by law enforcement and other state actors. Cease the use of forced “repentance” videos and other coercive practices targeting detainees, including minors. Stop the practice of *incommunicado* detention and ensure that detention conditions meet international human rights standards.
3. Introduce a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its complete abolition. Until then, ensure full transparency in all death penalty cases, especially those involving foreign nationals or ongoing international review processes.
4. Withdraw from militarisation policies that increase public insecurity, including hosting foreign military weapons.
5. Adopt comprehensive gender-based violence legislation, including a dedicated domestic violence law aligned with the Istanbul Convention. Shift domestic violence cases from private to private-public prosecution to prevent case closures due to reconciliation. Make publicly available official statistics on domestic violence. Provide gender-sensitive training for professionals. Ensure that the “socially dangerous situation” framework is not misused to penalise victims of domestic violence, and reform child protection practices to focus on holding abusers accountable rather than blaming or coercing women who seek help.

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere, 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

6. Stop ideological pressure and propaganda in schools. End the militarisation of education and eliminate compulsory participation in military-patriotic programmes. Promote peace, tolerance, and human rights in education.

Cease the involvement in forcible transfer and re-education of Ukrainian children on Belarusian territory.

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

7. Repeal or amend overly broad and vague counter-terrorism and anti-extremism laws and stop their misuse against peaceful dissent, civil society, and independent media.
8. Conduct a comprehensive review and repeal of all legal acts adopted in the past years that codify or enable violations of human rights, bringing them into full compliance with international human rights standards.
9. Ensure the independence of the judiciary and legal profession by safeguarding fair trial guarantees, protecting lawyers from persecution, and enabling effective legal defence in politically motivated cases.
10. Ensure prompt, independent, and thorough investigations into all deaths in custody and deaths from excessive force, as well as all allegations of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment and other human rights violations.

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

11. Dismantle the excessive concentration of power in the presidency and restore a system of checks and balances through meaningful separation of powers and institutional reform.
12. Revise electoral legislation and procedures to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections in line with international standards, including the restoration of political rights, as well as independent media, and civil society participation. End the abuse of administrative resources and coercive practices in electoral campaigns, ensure the independence of election commissions.
13. Guarantee genuine political pluralism and equal access to public office.

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

14. Repeal Decree No. 278 and reverse amendments to the Law on Citizenship that enable arbitrary deprivation of citizenship and restrict access to consular services for Belarusians abroad. Ensure that all Belarusian citizens, including those residing abroad, have access to civil documentation and consular assistance without discrimination. Take measures to prevent statelessness, protect the rights of children born outside the country to acquire nationality, and uphold the right to legal identity in accordance with international human rights obligations.

16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

15. Stop repressions against civil society activists, including human rights defenders and trade unionists, by halting administrative and criminal prosecution, arbitrary charges, and pressure on their families.
16. Lift the criminal liability under Article 193-1 and restore the rights of those prosecuted. End forced liquidation of CSOs, restoring dissolved CSOs, and ensuring favourable conditions for their work, including funding access. Halt interference in the activities of CSOs, including prosecutions, searches, freezing of assets, and discrediting in media, and prosecute those responsible under the law. Repeal the Law “On the Fundamentals of Civil Society” and guarantee the full and equal participation of all CSOs in public life, in line with international human rights standards.
17. End the repression of independent media, journalists, and individuals exercising freedom of expression, including the misuse of anti-extremist laws, website and social media channels blocking, and internet shutdowns. Revise the Law “On Mass Media” to align with international standards, ensuring media freedom and a safe environment free from harassment and intimidation.
18. Ensure full and unhindered access to information by repealing restrictive legislation, including provisions that criminalise engagement with independent media and classify them as “extremist.”
19. End censorship and manipulation of official data.
20. Restore meaningful dialogue and inclusive participation of a diverse civil society in public affairs as a prerequisite for democratic governance.

16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

21. Reaccede to international human rights obligations, including re-accession to the ICCPR Optional Protocol and the Aarhus and Bern Conventions, as well as to key anti-corruption instruments, including the Council of Europe Criminal Law and Civil Law Conventions on Corruption, and resume membership in GRECO.
22. Cooperate fully with UN Special Procedures and treaty bodies, as well as ILO, and implement their recommendations in good faith. Engage constructively with the OSCE, respect the findings of the Moscow Mechanism and exchange information in good faith under Vienna Mechanism. Demonstrate genuine commitment to and engagement with other independent international assessments.
23. Adopt and effectively implement comprehensive national human rights plans and programmes, ensuring meaningful cooperation with independent CSOs at all stages.
24. Establish an independent NHRI in accordance with the Paris Principles.

16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

25. Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that clearly defines all forms of discrimination - including direct, indirect, and intersectional discrimination - and ensures effective legal remedies and enforcement mechanisms.
26. Repeal all laws and administrative practices that formalise inequality, including those that stigmatise or prosecute on the grounds of SOGI and reproductive choices, restrict women's rights, or target individuals based on their real or perceived political beliefs.
27. Restore and protect the rights of minority groups, promote inclusive and human rights-based public discourse, halt hate speech and discriminatory narratives against minorities in state-controlled media, and ensure the full participation of marginalised communities in public life.

CONTEXT

The human rights situation in Belarus has been consistently deteriorating over the past five years, with systemic and large-scale politically motivated repression following the rigged 2020 presidential elections and subsequent peaceful protests. Forms of repression have evolved and now affect not only dissenters, but potentially everyone, as well as all categories of rights, including economic, social and cultural. The UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus has found reasonable grounds to believe that Belarusian authorities have committed [crimes against humanity](#), including persecution and related acts.

As of 12 July, 2025, 1,150 [political prisoners](#) are in custody, and the [total number](#) of political prisoners, including those released, reaches 4,022. [Conditions of detention](#) amount to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and in some cases torture, including long-term *incommunicado* detentions. Allegations of ill-treatment remain [uninvestigated](#).

Over the past 5 years, 600,000 Belarusians have been forced [to flee the country](#) due to the threat of political persecution. In September 2024, Lithuania [referred](#) to the International Criminal Court to investigate alleged crimes against humanity, including deportation, persecution and other inhumane acts committed by Belarus.

The [crackdown](#) on independent civil society organisations and media, as part of a broader systemic policy of repression, forces them to leave Belarus and operate from exile, further weakening development efforts.

The state is actively [legalising repression](#) for systematic politically motivated persecution in various fields: in 2023-2024, more than 50 normative legal acts were adopted or amended to intentionally formalise arbitrary limitations of human rights or create conditions for their violation.

In 2024, the [National Human Rights Index](#) reflects a further decline compared to 2022, with civil and political rights' situation significantly worsening. According to the National Human Rights Index, the human rights situation in the country in 2024 is assessed at 2,4, which is 0,2 lower than in 2022. The level of enjoyment of civil and political rights has also dropped by 0,2 compared to 2022 and now stands at 2,1, while social and economic rights are currently assessed at 3,4 (3,6 in 2022). General human rights measures in 2024 were rated by experts at 1,7, which is 0,1 lower than in 2022.

All of this is taking place against the backdrop of Belarus's [ongoing material, logistical, and ideological support](#) for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, instead of effectively cooperating to bring to an end, through lawful means, such a serious breach of international law as an act of aggression.

Therefore, the problems that were raised in the [previous civil society report](#) within VNR in 2022 have not lost their relevance, and many of them have become even more acute.

STATE-SANCTIONED VIOLENCE: A SYSTEMIC CRISIS

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

Political repressions and atmosphere of insecurity. People in Belarus live in a climate of fear, deprived of basic feelings of safety and control over their lives due to state policies rooted in intimidation, mass surveillance, and the arbitrary application of law. Since 2020, over 65,000 people have been subjected to [arbitrary detention](#) for exercising their fundamental rights. Given the adult population of Belarus (approximately 6,9 million registered voters in 2025), this means at least 1 in every 106 adults has been arbitrarily detained in the past five years - a staggering rate of state repression.

Repression is not limited to the present: individuals continue to be punished for lawful activities committed up to five years ago, including peaceful protest, social media posts, or donations. Law enforcement regularly carries out [non-procedural searches of smartphones](#) at border crossings, in public institutions, and at workplaces, seeking traces of dissent. People are [dismissed](#) from their jobs for political reasons, particularly in the public sector. The absence of an independent judiciary, systematic [denial of fair trial](#) guarantees, and the suppression of any independent initiative contribute to the complete erosion of legal protection. Meanwhile, state-controlled propaganda actively [promotes hate speech and incites hostility](#), fuelling an atmosphere of distrust, division, and collective intimidation. This systemic repression makes it clear: in Belarus, no one is safe from the reach of the state - regardless of how much time has passed or how lawful one's actions once were.

The overall sense of insecurity is further exacerbated by Belarus's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine and its increasing military cooperation with Russia. In 2023, Russia announced plans to [station tactical nuclear weapons](#) in Belarus and [transferred](#) Iskander missile systems to Belarusian forces. While actual deployment has not been verified, such declarations - especially in the context of ongoing armed conflict - deepen public anxiety and erode the sense of safety. This anxiety is amplified by repeated incidents of drones crossing into Belarusian territory from the war zone - reportedly numbering in the hundreds - with some reaching deep into the country's airspace. The lack of clear communication from authorities about these events further fuels uncertainty and fear among the population.

Police brutality and conditions of detention. Instead of reducing violence, the Belarusian government has institutionalised it as a primary tool of political

control. Unlawful, disproportionate and unnecessary force [has been used routinely](#), particularly during arrests. It has also been a common practice to coerce detainees, including children, into [humiliating “repentance” recordings](#), which are disseminated through state-controlled media.

The detention of individuals, particularly those imprisoned on political grounds, is accompanied by [torture and inhuman or degrading treatment](#), including during administrative and pretrial detention.

While conditions in Belarusian penitentiary institutions generally fall short of international human rights standards, political prisoners are subjected to [additional, systematic abuse and cruel treatment](#), which severely affects their physical and mental health. All political prisoners are marked with a yellow tag, a practice that singles them out for “particularly harsh prison conditions” and increases their vulnerability to targeted abuse by prison authorities. This treatment includes the denial of adequate medical care, obstruction of visits from lawyers and family members, prolonged solitary confinement, and deprivation of written correspondence, news, or any external information. Other forms of pressure include restrictions on financial and food transfers, arbitrary placement in punishment or high-security units (such as SHIZO, PKT), and temporary transfers to harsher prison regimes.

Over the past three years, at least 11 political prisoners have been subjected to [prolonged incommunicado detention](#) - completely deprived of any contact with the outside world - some for more than two years. International human rights mechanisms qualify such treatment as a form of [enforced disappearance](#).

In addition to isolation, political prisoners are subjected to forced, strenuous, and often poorly paid labour. In [Women’s Correctional Colony No. 4](#), wages are below the legal minimum, ranging from \$0,60 to \$42 per month. Women are also subjected to mandatory, unpaid hard physical labour for up to 14 hours a day beyond the established work schedule, for the maintenance of the colony itself. They are forced to perform physically demanding and dirty tasks in inappropriate clothing - such as pink dresses and pencil skirts. Some prisoners [have reported](#) accidents, injuries, and long-term health damage resulting from the lack of professional training, absence of protective clothing or equipment, and general disregard for occupational safety standards.

One particularly stark example of cruel treatment is the practice of [placing prisoners in a metal cage](#) located in the yard of Women’s Correctional Colony No. 4.

At least 203 political prisoners with [serious health conditions](#) - many incompatible with incarceration - remain behind bars. Numerous political prisoners have experienced significant deterioration of their health while in detention.

At least [8 political prisoners died](#) in custody between 2020 and 2025. None of these cases have been [investigated](#).

Death Penalty. During 2022 and 2023, the authorities consistently, contrary to their international obligations, took steps to expand the scope of the death penalty for crimes that do not meet the criterion of “the most serious crime”. Thus, on May 29, 2022, amendments to the Criminal Code came into force, according to which the death penalty can be applied not only for the most serious crimes that caused the death of a person, but also for the following attempted crimes: an act of terrorism against a representative of a foreign State or an international organisation, an act of international terrorism, an act of terrorism, an act of terrorism against a State or public figure. On March 25, 2023, amendments to the Criminal Code entered into force introducing the death penalty for high treason committed by an official in a responsible position, an official holding a public position, or a person to whom the status of a military officer applies.

This not only contradicts Belarus' international obligations in itself, but also raises serious concerns, because authorities continue to carry out executions [without any transparency](#), even when cases are under international review. Alarmingly, in 2024, the authorities have used the death sentence [against a foreigner for political purposes](#). German citizen Rico Krieger, who was arrested in Belarus, faced charges under six articles of the Criminal Code, including mercenarism and terrorism. This marks the first death sentence for actions that did not result in human casualties, and the first death sentence for a foreigner in the last 15 years. Later, Krieger was pardoned in violation of procedural laws and became part of a “large exchange” between the USA and Russia.

Militarization of Education and the Cult of Violence *(16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children)*. The Belarusian government continues to actively promote [militarised patriotism](#) in schools, shifting focus from peace and human dignity to a glorification of strength and war. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this trend has escalated dramatically. Schools impose ideological conformity through coercion, intimidation, and propaganda, fostering hostility toward political dissenters and certain national groups under the guise of state-sponsored narratives.

The Belarusian government has become [directly involved](#) in Russia's policy of forcible transfer, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children by

facilitating the relocation of children from temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to Belarus. On Belarusian soil, these children are reportedly subjected to re-education programmes modelled on the Russian system, which includes elements of militarisation and ideological indoctrination.

By the resolution “Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine”, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [explicitly recognised](#) that such practices violate international law - including the Fourth Geneva Convention, Additional Protocol I, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These actions constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and an element of the crime of genocide.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

In 2020, the Belarusian government adopted the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025), which highlights domestic violence and entrenched gender stereotypes as key challenges. The plan includes measures such as training for law enforcement and judges on gender-based violence, creating crisis rooms, and establishing an inter-agency resource centre for domestic violence prevention. However, there is little publicly available information on the actual implementation of these initiatives.

Domestic violence, including marital rape, is [not criminalised](#). Although the 2014 Law on Crime Prevention was amended to define domestic violence as including physical, psychological, and sexual violence, it still excludes economic abuse and harassment - both common in Belarus.

Most domestic violence cases [remain private prosecutions](#), meaning they are initiated only at the request of the victim, where they are given full responsibility for collecting evidence about incidents of violence. Private prosecution cases may also be terminated upon reconciliation of the parties.

Victims often face a [lack of confidentiality and support](#), with services failing to address the specific needs of women with children, older women, women with disabilities, and rural residents. When violence occurs in families with children, child protection authorities focus on living conditions rather than addressing the violence itself, often blaming the mother. They [manipulate and threaten](#) women to remove children from the family due to “socially dangerous situation” if women seek help from police.

[The case of Anastasiya Taratuta](#) highlights systemic inaction on domestic violence. Despite reporting her partner's - Aliaksandr Taratuta - abuse to the police and seeking help from social services, no effective measures were taken. Later, she and her partner killed their child. Aliaksandr was sentenced to death, and Anastasiya to life imprisonment. The case illustrates how authorities ignore clear signs of danger, failing to protect victims and children.

Meanwhile, a broader crackdown on civil society has led to the [closure of NPOs providing essential support to victims](#), including shelters and legal aid.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs treats domestic violence statistics as [restricted information](#) and does not regularly inform the public.

EROSION OF THE RULE OF LAW AND DENIAL OF JUSTICE

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

The Belarusian government systematically manipulates the legal framework to suppress dissent.

The [arbitrary interpretation and application of counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation](#) in Belarus remains a tool for repression and intimidation. The overly broad and vague definitions of “terrorism” and “extremism” in national law grant authorities sweeping discretion to label a wide range of actions as extremist or terrorist using both, judicial and extrajudicial instruments. These definitions can be applied not only to expressions of political dissent, peaceful assembly, or freedom of association, but also to all civil society activities. As a result, any form of civic engagement, independent expression, or opposition are arbitrarily prosecuted under the pretext of combating extremism.

[The Republican List of Extremist Materials](#) includes more than 8,000 entries - ranging from independent media and civil society websites to satire channels - while 293 groups of citizens are [listed as “extremist formations,”](#) including media outlets, NGOs, and trade unions. Thousands of people [were convicted](#) for distributing or possessing such content, with hundreds prosecuted under criminal articles for participating in or supporting “extremist” activity. These charges often stem from online expression, criticism of authorities, or independent reporting on political or historical issues. Harsh penalties have also been imposed for insulting or slandering the president, state officials, or symbols, with thousands convicted.

The existing legal framework [enables](#) systematic violations of civil, political, and cultural rights, and [facilitates](#) unlawful state interference in public and private life.

Additionally, over the past two years, more than 50 legal acts have been amended or introduced to codify [norms that arbitrarily interfere with human rights](#) or create conditions for their violation across various spheres. These measures now extend beyond civil and political rights to economic, social, and cultural rights, affecting not only activists but the broader population.

The provisions introduced not only expand the grounds for politically motivated criminal prosecution and law enforcement powers, but also affect the issues of legal status of Belarusians in and outside the country; legal status of foreigners; possibility to exit/enter the state; functioning of the institutions: CSOs, religious organizations, political parties; freedom of association for children; minority

rights; gender identity, sexual orientation, reproductive choices; education (especially targeting medical professionals); employment access to a profession for various groups; social guarantees; social protection measures for children; culture.

The positive legislative changes that mitigate criminal penalties contain exceptions that [discriminate against persons convicted on charges of “extremism”](#), that is, in fact, persons who are subject to political persecution.

National courts do not uphold the rule of law, instead [acting as part of a repressive mechanism](#), issuing politically motivated sentences and judgments against dissenters in violation of numerous fair trial guarantees. Since 2020, Belarusian courts have prosecuted tens of thousands of individuals in politically motivated administrative and criminal cases, handing down disproportionate sentences for participation in peaceful protests or for expressing real or perceived dissenting views.

As of today, 1,150 [political prisoners](#) remain behind bars in Belarus, with [a total](#) of 4,022 individuals having been imprisoned on purely political grounds since 2020. In addition, more than 38,000 people have faced [administrative persecution](#) for exercising their fundamental rights.

Recent legislative changes further allow [trials in absentia](#), which are conducted by biased courts with no opportunity for an effective defence, resulting in lengthy prison sentences, deprivation of property and housing, and possibly even the death penalty.

At the same time, appeals against actions of law enforcement, state bodies, and election commissions are [systematically rejected](#). None of the approximately 5,000 complaints regarding torture and unlawful actions by law enforcement officers during and after the 2020 presidential election in Belarus have been properly investigated. The authorities have not condemned the use of torture - instead, they have repeatedly and publicly endorsed the actions of the security forces, effectively encouraging such abuse and fostering a sense of impunity. Cases of deaths during peaceful protests, as well as deaths in custody, [have also not been investigated](#).

The Bar in Belarus [lacks institutional independence](#), with lawyers operating under the control of the Ministry of Justice. Since the 2020 elections, authorities have deliberately obstructed the work of lawyers, particularly in politically sensitive cases. These measures include [denying access to clients](#), [intercepting confidential communications](#), [imposing broad non-disclosure obligations](#), and arbitrarily

closing trials. Such practices severely undermine the ability of lawyers to provide effective legal defence.

Many lawyers have faced [political persecution](#), including arbitrary detention, interrogation, and threats. Since September 2020, at least 23 lawyers have been arbitrarily detained, with authorities using these arrests as grounds to remove them from politically motivated cases and revoke their licences. At least 141 lawyers [have been disbarred](#), and several have been prosecuted for carrying out their professional duties or expressing dissenting views. As of now, at least 6 lawyers [are serving prison sentences](#) ranging from six to ten years in connection with politically motivated charges. As a result of this systemic repression, by 2024 [the number of practicing lawyers in Belarus has decreased](#) by 27% compared to 2020. In 55 districts across the country, a single lawyer may be responsible for serving several thousand - or even tens of thousands - residents.

All of this, combined with the persecution of human rights defenders and pressure on civil society organisations, significantly hinders access to justice overall and effectively deprives politically persecuted individuals of their right to a fair trial.

THE ABSENCE OF TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Belarusian political institutions are entirely centralised under the president, whose arbitrary decisions dictate state policies and public services. This concentration of power disconnects governance from real socio-political needs, undermines institutional accountability and transparency, and leaves no effective checks and balances within the state structure.

Both [local and parliamentary elections of 2024](#) and [presidential elections of 2025](#) did not meet international standards for democratic and free elections and were accompanied by numerous violations of the electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus.

The appointment of the seventh presidential elections for January 26, 2025, 6 months before the expected date of their holding (and 7 days before the deadline for registration of initiative groups to nominate presidential candidates), indicates the instrumentalisation of electoral procedures and manipulation of legislation. All stages of the electoral process were not just administratively controlled by the authorities, but were organised by them to keep A. Lukashenko in power while imitating his broad support. [This is evidenced by](#) the complete suppression of the right to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and other human rights, without the proper implementation of which it is impossible to talk about free and democratic elections; non-transparent formation of election commissions at all levels; candidates approved by the authorities who based their election programmes not on criticism of A. Lukashenko's policies, but on his full support (with the exception of A. Kanopatskaya); collection of signatures aimed at creating the appearance of support only for A. Lukashenko (more than a third of all voters have been declared to be collecting signatures), using administrative resources and coercion, since the lists are open and refusal to sign could become the basis for political persecution; campaigning, in which all candidates except A. Lukashenko were practically invisible in the information space, and an administrative and propaganda resource was used in support of A. Lukashenko to simulate political activity and broad support, which can practically be called serving the cult of A. Lukashenko; continuation of the practice of forcing voters to participate in early voting; an atmosphere of intimidation with bans on photographing and taking out ballots,

and several police officers on duty at all polling stations; non-transparent vote counting procedure; the reported record turnout figures (85.7%), including in early voting (41.81%), exceeding the 2020 figures (84.38% and 41.70%, respectively), when the level of politicisation and mobilisation of society was significantly higher, as was evident from the queues at polling stations on election day; the complete absence of independent observers (both national and international).

Loyalty to the regime of A. Lukashenko remains the primary criterion for participation in public affairs. Free expression of opinion - particularly criticism of state actions - is not tolerated and is often criminalised under broad anti-extremism legislation. Independent media and the majority of civil society organisations have been forced out of the country, with many of their members imprisoned. As a result, any form of independent - including political - activism has become virtually impossible (see more below).

[Access to public office](#) is also denied not only to individuals who are openly critical of the regime but even to those merely perceived as disloyal, often based on arbitrary or far-fetched grounds. Those within the public sector are subjected to intense ideological control and surveillance, including scrutiny of their private lives, restrictions on movement, and monitoring of whether some of them or their family members hold foreign documents.

Under such conditions, decision-making processes are neither inclusive, transparent, nor accountable. Public trust in state institutions is virtually non-existent - replaced instead by fear and coercion.

DENIAL OF LEGAL IDENTITY FOR BELARUSIANS ABROAD

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

Recent legislative and administrative developments have significantly undermined access to legal identity for Belarusian citizens abroad, including in forced exile. Rather than upholding the right to documentation and recognition before the law, the authorities have adopted measures that strip individuals of citizenship, restrict access to civil registration, and cut off consular services for those residing abroad. These actions not only contradict international human rights obligations, but also lead to statelessness and severe disruption of civil, political, and family life.

The amendments to the Law on Citizenship No. 136-Z, which entered into force on 5 January 2023, allow for the revocation of Belarusian citizenship from individuals residing abroad who have been convicted by a final court verdict of participating in “extremist activities” or “causing serious harm to the interests of the Republic of Belarus.” These vague and broadly defined terms encompass offences under 55 articles of the Criminal Code and are subject to retroactive application, in clear violation of the principles of legal certainty and the rule of law. The decision to strip citizenship is made at the discretion of the President, creating a [powerful tool for political retaliation](#) against dissenters abroad. This legislative development followed the 2022 constitutional referendum, which introduced the legal basis for such deprivation.

On September 4, 2023, the Republic of Belarus adopted Decree No. 278, titled “On the Procedure for Issuing Documents and Performing Actions.” The Decree significantly cut the functions of the Belarusians consulates and embassies, mandating that several administrative procedures, including property transactions and obtaining or renewing passports, must be conducted exclusively within Belarus. Even Belarusian citizens permanently residing abroad are required to return to complete these processes. Cutting access to these public services for those who can not return to the country due to security reasons, lead to their [de facto statelessness](#).

The Decree has led to [widespread violations of human rights](#) of Belarusians in forced exile: the right to equal treatment (non-discrimination); the right to freedom of movement; the right to respect for private and family life; the right to marry and found a family; the right of every child to be registered and acquire a nationality; the right to property. The most affected groups include human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and opposition members, particularly those

without international protection. Of particular concern is the situation of children born abroad to parents who cannot come to Belarus to obtain documents confirming their children's citizenship. In the long run, this can lead to the loss of documents confirming citizenship, and possibly to statelessness.

The Decree is one of the most illustrative instruments of transboundary politically motivated persecution by Belarusian authorities.

SILENCING DISSENT: SUPPRESSION OF INDEPENDENT VOICES AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

Today, the State not only fails to protect freedom of opinion, assembly and association, but also constantly seeks to strengthen the unlawful restriction of these freedoms.

Mass liquidation and shrinking space for civil society organizations. [Various forms of repression](#) have been used by the authorities against civil society organisations: raids, inspections, suspension of activities, written warnings, blocking of websites.

Since 2021, [authorities have forcibly dissolved or pressured into self-liquidation](#) at least 1,944 non-profit organisations (NPOs), including human rights organisations, trade unions, political parties, and foundations. This has resulted in many groups losing their representation even in the limited existing mechanisms for participation.

At the moment, the number of NPOs registered annually is ten times fewer than those liquidated. [Registering public associations](#) is complex, costly, and requires extensive documentation, including a legal address in non-residential premises, allowing authorities to arbitrarily deny undesirable associations.

Activities of [unregistered associations remain prohibited](#), and since 2022, criminal penalties for such activities have been reintroduced, including imprisonment of up to two years under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code. It is known about three criminal cases initiated under this article.

[Anti-extremist legislation is routinely misused](#) to suppress civil society under the pretext of national security.

The Law “On the Fundamentals of Civil Society,” enacted on February 14, 2023, [sharply narrowed the definition of civil society subjects](#), excluding most non-profit organisations - such as those working on human rights, gender equality, youth, or environmental issues - from formal engagement with the State. Moreover, the law establishes specific forms of state interaction for certain associations that meet highly stringent membership requirements. As of spring 2023, just four public associations and one trade union were granted this status. This significantly limits the diversity of voices in state decision-making and excludes the majority of civil society from meaningful participation in public affairs.

Persecution of human rights defenders and trade union activists. Repression against civil society in Belarus extends beyond the liquidation of organisations - it also targets individual members of these groups. As of July 2025, 5 representatives of human rights organisations, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges, serving sentences ranging from 7 to 14,9 years. Three others have completed their sentences and been released.

In parallel, more than 70 trade unionists have been subjected to state persecution - some imprisoned, others restricted in their freedom, and many released but not exonerated. Twenty-six trade unionists are currently serving lengthy prison terms of up to nine years.

Hundreds of human rights defenders, trade unionists, and other civil society activists have been forced to flee Belarus due to the threat of political persecution. Even in exile they [continue to face persecution](#) by the Belarusian authorities, including arbitrary criminal charges and trials *in absentia*, house searches and seizure of property, individual threats and intimidation of family members remaining in Belarus.

Pressure on independent media and restrictions on access to information. The Belarusian authorities have waged an unprecedented campaign of repression against independent media and journalists, employing legislative, administrative, and judicial tools to systematically dismantle the media landscape that operates outside state control. This repressive policy, aimed at the complete destruction of independent journalism in Belarus, has led to criminal and administrative persecution of media workers, the [widespread application of “anti-extremist” legislation](#), and the closure or forced exile of numerous editorial offices.

As of July 2025, at least 38 independent media outlets [have been designated as “extremist formations or organisations,”](#) making any cooperation with them - including interviews, comments, or content sharing - a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment. Journalists associated with these media are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention, criminal prosecution, and searches of their homes and offices. Between 2021 and 2025, Belarusian authorities carried out 235 [arbitrary detentions](#) and 320 [searches](#) targeting journalists. At least 38 media professionals are currently [imprisoned on politically motivated charges](#) related to their professional activities, while journalists and bloggers in exile face [prosecution in absentia](#) under so-called “special proceedings”.

[Legislative amendments](#) introduced since 2021 have further restricted freedom of information and significantly increased state interference in journalistic activities.

[Foreign media](#) are also targeted: if a Belarusian outlet is banned abroad, the Ministry of Information can impose a reciprocal ban on that foreign outlet within Belarus, prohibiting all dissemination of its content and revoking accreditation of its journalists.

The state maintains [full control over state-owned media](#), which operate without editorial independence and serve as vehicles for official propaganda, disinformation, and, increasingly, hate speech.

These repressive measures [severely limit access to independent information](#) in Belarus. Journalists are effectively barred from obtaining government data and must resort to disguising themselves as ordinary citizens to communicate with officials, reducing both the quality of reporting and government accountability. The “anti-extremist” legislation makes it dangerous to communicate with independent media and their journalists, which creates a significant barrier to access to primary sources of information. Government agencies continue to manipulate data, conceal official statistics, and refuse individual requests for information on grounds of national security.

MANIPULATIVE AND SELECTIVE COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

Belarus does not seek to expand its international obligations; rather, it has actively withdrawn from key human rights and anti-corruption frameworks. It denounced the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), thereby depriving Belarusians of access to the Human Rights Committee (HRC). Additionally, Belarus withdrew from treaties related to human rights and environmental protection, including the Aarhus and Bern Conventions. In the area of anti-corruption, following its denunciation of the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (ETS 172), the Additional Protocol (ETS 191), and the Civil Law Convention on Corruption (ETS 174), Belarus ceased to be a member of GRECO as of 1 May, 2024.

Belarus' cooperation with international human rights mechanisms [has sharply declined](#) since 2020. Belarus submits reports to treaty bodies but does not engage meaningfully, creating a misleading image of the improving human rights situation and largely ignoring their recommendations. It dismisses HRC's views as advisory and rejects interim measures, particularly in death penalty cases.

On 21 June, 2021, Belarus suspended the work of the OHCHR Senior Human Rights Adviser, based in Minsk from July 2018. Belarus does not recognize Human Rights Council mandates investigating post-2020 rights violations, including the OHCHR examination and the Group of Independent Experts. The State also consistently refuses to recognise and cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, does not contribute to its reports, and no longer participates in related interactive dialogues in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

Belarus manipulates thematic procedures for political gain, selectively engaging with them. It partially responds to inquiries, withholding key information under the pretext of political bias. Authorities claim the right to withhold substantive replies to inquiries they deem politically motivated. Government officials and state media frequently employ discrediting rhetoric against UN mechanisms, accusing them of lacking independence and impartiality.

For over 20 years, Belarus has failed to comply with [ILO recommendations](#), leading to the rare application of Article 33 of the ILO Constitution in 2023. It refuses to implement follow-up measures in good faith.

Additionally, Belarus has failed to cooperate with the OSCE Moscow Mechanisms 2020 and 2023 and Vienna Mechanisms 2021 and 2024, dismissing it as politically biased.

The issue of the establishment of a national human rights institution has not been considered by the authorities. There have been no public discussions on this topic since the development of the Inter-agency plan to implement the recommendations accepted by Belarus following the second cycle of the UPR and the recommendations of the treaty bodies for 2016-2019. Existing state institutions are not independent and cannot serve as a substitute for an NHRI.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES IN COMBATING DISCRIMINATION

16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Belarus lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that clearly defines direct and indirect discrimination, as well as other forms of its manifestation, or provides effective enforcement mechanisms. While the principle of equality is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and other legislative acts, it remains too vague to be effectively applied in cases of discrimination complaints. The Labour Code and the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, containing the concept of discrimination, provide protection in a very limited number of cases. The absence of specialised regulations and legal procedures prevents victims from accessing adequate protection, limiting their ability to seek justice. Although Article 130 of the Criminal Code formally addresses hate crimes, it has never been an effective tool for combating discrimination. Since 2020, authorities have increasingly used this provision as a means of repression rather than for its intended purpose.

Since 2020, there has been a growing trend toward the [formalisation of inequality](#) in Belarus. Throughout 2023-2024, numerous discriminatory legal acts were adopted, targeting individuals based on their actual or perceived political beliefs. These measures have seriously undermined the principle of equality before the law and have led to violations of equality in employment, access to public services, freedom of association, recognition of legal identity, etc.

Additionally, in June 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office [introduced an initiative](#) to establish administrative responsibility for the “promotion of non-traditional sexual relations, gender transition, paedophilia, and the childfree lifestyle.” The [draft law](#) “On Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Liability” has already been submitted by the Council of Ministers to the House of Representatives. According to the draft, the Code is to be supplemented with Article 19.16: “Promotion of homosexual relations, gender transition, childfree lifestyle, and paedophilia.” Liability for spreading, in any form, information aimed at forming among citizens the perception of the attractiveness of homosexual relations, gender transition, childfree lifestyle, or the acceptability of paedophilia entails a fine of: up to twenty base units (\$256) for individuals, up to one hundred base units (\$1,288) for individual entrepreneurs, from one hundred to one hundred and fifty base units (\$1,288–\$1,932) for legal entities. If a minor is exposed to such information, administrative arrest may be imposed.

In 2024, the Ministry of Culture [classified](#) LGBTQ+ identities alongside necrophilia and paedophilia, restricting their public expression as “pornography.” Amendments of 2025 to the Law on the Rights of Children [further ban](#) LGBTQ+ “propaganda” and restrict access to LGBTQ+ content for minors, erasing LGBTQ+ visibility.

De facto discrimination also persists. Women continue to face [systemic barriers](#) in politics, education, and employment, with gender stereotypes deeply embedded in state policies and public discourse. Despite reducing the list of professions closed to women from 181 to 88 in 2022, significant [barriers to equal employment](#) remain. Gender-based wage inequality in Belarus [remains significant](#), with a 26% overall pay gap and 36% in healthcare (2023). Career advancement opportunities also [remain unequally distributed](#), with women facing a glass ceiling in both public and private sectors. While employment support programs remain, they [mainly target](#) low-paying blue-collar jobs and fail to address female unemployment effectively. In 2020 A. Lukashenko [remarked publicly](#) that “our constitution is not for a woman” and [argued](#) that society was “not ready to elect a woman as president,” confidently concluding that the head of state “will be a man.” In 2024, ahead of a new presidential election, he [repeated](#) this narrative. State propaganda during the 2020 presidential elections and beyond [has targeted](#) (see also [here](#) and [here](#)) opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya with gendered insults. Government officials frequently [emphasise](#) women’s reproductive role as their primary function. They [highlight](#) women’s duty to bear children, and ensure the nation’s future, given the demographic challenges.

Similarly, national minorities - including Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Roma - experience rising levels of [state-sponsored discrimination](#). Persecution includes ethnic profiling, the closure of cultural institutions, suppression of minority languages, and targeted harassment under so-called “anti-extremist” laws.

In 2023-2024 the [intensification of the repressive campaign](#) against the LGBTQ+ community at the legislative level was accompanied by direct persecution - increased detentions and arrests.

Considering both legislative measures and law enforcement practice, the possession of a foreign residence permit is gradually crystallising into a [separate discrimination ground](#).

All of this is reinforced by hate speech and discriminatory narratives promoted through state propaganda, which are ignored by the authorities and left unaddressed.

The forced liquidation of NPOs supporting vulnerable groups further exacerbates these challenges, leaving marginalised communities increasingly isolated and unprotected.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGs

Despite its formal commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Belarusian government continues to manipulate the SDG framework while systematically disregarding its intrinsic connection to human rights.

The 2030 Agenda is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, with a transformative vision to “realise the human rights of all.” At its heart are the principles of equality and non-discrimination, with a pledge to “leave no one behind” and to “reach the furthest behind first.”

Belarus’s claim to progress - such as its 32nd place in the global SDG Index - is being used as a tool to whitewash systemic repression and crimes against humanity occurring within the country. Instead of reflecting genuine social progress for all Belarusians, this rating serves as a cover to hide the exclusionary and discriminatory nature of the state’s governance. It is deeply misleading to cite such achievements while the state actively engages in silencing dissent, dismantling civil society, and denying individuals their fundamental freedoms.

It is impossible to be a true champion of the SDGs while simultaneously eroding the very foundations on which they stand. No goal exists in a vacuum; the integrity of the whole agenda depends on the indivisibility and interdependence of all its goals and principles. Severe and ongoing repression in Belarus - particularly in the context of SDG16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions - has crosscutting effects that undermine the entire SDG framework.

Political repression has not spared the health and education sectors. The targeting of doctors and teachers through politically motivated dismissals, ideological control, and persecution has led to a significant outflow of qualified professionals. These actions gravely undermine SDG3 and SDG4, eroding the capacity of public institutions to deliver essential services.

The ideological indoctrination and militarisation of the education system not only suppress academic freedom and critical thinking but also contradict SDG4’s aim to foster inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes peace, non-violence, and human rights.

Further undermining progress, Belarus has withdrawn from key international agreements, including those related to human rights and environmental protection - moves that starkly contradict SDG13 and SDG15, and weaken global efforts to ensure accountability and transparency.

Despite boasting low maternal mortality and high female employment, the state obscures the reality faced by women, especially political prisoners, who suffer from a lack of basic hygiene products and adequate medical care in detention. State policy increasingly promotes a narrative of compulsory motherhood, even at the legislative level, infringing upon reproductive autonomy. Gender-specific practices in Belarusian schools further entrench harmful stereotypes: girls are taught domestic skills while boys receive technical training, and textbooks reinforce these roles by depicting men in public life and women as confined to the home. These policies and practices contradict both SDG3, SDG4 and SDG5.

Widespread discrimination - including against national minorities, political opponents, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others - undermines not only SDG10 but the credibility of the entire development framework. Discriminatory laws based on political beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender identity do not merely violate SDG16 - they compromise the broader principle of “leaving no one behind.” Pervasive distrust in state institutions and fear of retaliation for any form of dissent or complaint discourages citizen engagement and undermines the implementation of numerous other goals.

Finally, the mass liquidation of civil society organisations, including those focused on gender equality, environmental sustainability, urban development, and support for marginalised groups, has devastated progress across the 2030 Agenda - from SDG5 and SDG10, to SDG11, SDG13, and SDG15. The elimination of independent actors capable of holding the state accountable, advocating for vulnerable populations, or promoting sustainable and inclusive practices leaves a dangerous vacuum.

A key issue also lies in the state’s deliberate concealment and manipulation of data. Authorities routinely distort official statistics, restrict access to objective information, and criminalise independent reporting and analysis. In such a context, any claim of “high achievement” is inherently untrustworthy. Without transparency, freedom of expression, and an independent media, it is impossible to assess progress on the SDGs in good faith. Data without accountability becomes a tool of propaganda, not development.

In this context, Belarus’s approach to the SDGs becomes “performative” rather than transformative. Sustainable development cannot be achieved through coercion, exclusion, and propaganda. It requires a democratic and rights-based environment in which civil society is empowered, individuals can speak freely, and institutions are accountable. Until these conditions are restored, the implementation of the SDGs in Belarus will remain fundamentally flawed.