

**Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the
Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by
the Republic of Belarus**

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women (CEDAW) - 90th session**

Prepared by the coalition of Belarusian NGOs and initiatives: Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, Human Constanta, Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Human Rights Organization “Respect - Protect - Fulfill”, Lawtrend, Legal Initiative, Medical Solidarity Foundation BYMEDSOL, Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rabochy Rukh - under the general coordination of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE COALITION MEMBERS

Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions is an association of Belarusian independent trade unions. The main areas of activities include: representing Belarusian workers in the International Labour Organization and other international organizations, monitoring violations of workers' rights, providing international legal protection for the rights of Belarusian workers, and humanitarian support of persecuted trade unions members.

Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) is an independent, non-political, non-profit civic association. BHC works with international human rights mechanisms, provides legal assistance to the victims, monitors and analyzes public policy in the field of human rights, arranges human rights education for the youth, civil society activists and legal professionals, and organizes events to draw public attention to the most pressing human rights issues in Belarus.

Human Constanta is a Belarusian human rights organization, working to promote public interests and joint actions in response to modern challenges in the field of human rights. The organization works in the spheres of human rights in the context of antiextremist policies as well as digital rights, anti-discrimination and rights of migrants and refugees.

Human Rights Center "Viasna" is the leading human rights organization of Belarus with 27 years of relevant experience. Its priorities include assistance to the victims of human rights violations, information activities, monitoring freedom of peaceful assembly and fair trial standards, etc. Viasna has over a dozen local offices across Belarus with nearly 80 activists based in Belarus and abroad, together with over 100 volunteers.

Human rights organization Respect-Protect-Fulfill is a Belarusian independent non-governmental non-profit human rights litigation organization, currently based in Lithuania. The mission is promotion of human rights in Belarus and beyond its borders, utilizing international mechanisms for strategic litigation and prioritizing issues that have never been raised before.

Lawtrend is the Belarusian human rights organization. Since 1996, Lawtrend has been the leading Belarusian expert organization in the field of freedom of association and legal regulation of CSOs. Areas of expertise: freedom of associations; access to information; freedom of movement and rights of migrants; international mechanisms.

Legal Initiative is a non-profit non-governmental human rights organization, protecting human rights in Belarus since 1996. The organization primarily works in four main areas of expertise: human rights education, legal help to victims of human rights violations, improvement of legislation and change in law enforcement practice, international advocacy.

Medical Solidarity Foundation (BYMEDSOL) is an organization established in 2020 to support and raise awareness for healthcare workers and patients in Belarus. The main areas of

the foundation's activities include: advocacy for healthcare workers' rights, monitoring the state of the healthcare system, running media dedicated to Belarusian healthcare.

Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a Belarusian human rights organization, liquidated in Belarus and operating from abroad. The focus of the activity is the whole range of rights of people with disabilities within the framework of a comprehensive and universal understanding of human rights, non-discrimination.

Rabochy Ruch is an independent organization formed in the wake of the 2020 strikes by employees of major Belarusian state-owned enterprises. Its main activities include assisting workers in resisting regime-backed management at workplaces, exposing corruption and sanctions evasion, and advocating for democratic reforms.

CONTEXT

The post-election political crisis related to the rigged 2020 presidential elections and the peaceful protests that followed caused systemic and large-scale politically motivated repression of dissenters. Over the past 4 years, the human rights situation has been constantly deteriorating, 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.

As of 6 January 2025, 1,260 [political prisoners](#) are in custody, and the total number of political prisoners, including those [released](#), reaches 3,747. Among them at least 168 [women political prisoners](#), while 514 women are [former political prisoners](#). At least 401 women received a [sentence of restricted freedom](#) without being sent to an open-type institution as a result of politically motivated trials.

Since the beginning of the political crisis in 2020, women have been persecuted for political reasons in at least 19,800 cases, including 2,989 criminal prosecutions.

[Conditions of detention](#) of political prisoners constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or, in some cases, torture.

According to various estimates, 300,000-500,000 Belarusians were [forced to leave](#) the country due to fear of political persecution.

OHCHR, having assessed the evidence of human rights violations collected over 3 years, concluded that it has reasonable grounds to believe that the Belarusian authorities committed a [crime against humanity](#) in the form of persecution along with other related acts.

NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Belarus lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that would include clear definitions of direct and indirect discrimination. 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.

Since 2023, Belarus has been initiating and adopting legislative acts aimed at restricting women's rights and discriminating against them.

In June 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) [introduced an initiative](#) to establish administrative responsibility for the “promotion of non-traditional sexual relations, gender transition, pedophilia, and the childfree lifestyle.” This initiative has been endorsed by A. Lukashenka, who, in March 2023, [declared](#) that “any promotion of childlessness in the cultural or informational space should be outlawed”. By May 2023, the PGO had successfully petitioned the courts to [recognize](#) several childfree social media channels as “extremist”. The PGO’s initiative represents an unjustified interference in personal life, particularly targeting women's reproductive choices.

On March 19, 2024, the Ministry of Culture [adopted](#) Decision № 24, equating LGBTQ+ with “non-traditional sexual relations,” alongside necrophilia and pedophilia, and classifying its demonstration as “pornography.” This is the country's first discriminatory legislation directly targeting LGBTQ+ women in particular.

In June 2023, the Ministry of Health of Belarus issued Order № 879, according to which in Belarusian State Medical University in the subinternship program for Anesthesiology and Resuscitation were allocated 60 spots, with 40 reserved for men and 20 for women. In the Surgery subinternship program, 70 spots were allocated and distributed as follows: 39 for men and 31 for women. Students at several universities who have raised concerns about this order [have faced pressure](#) from authorities.

In 2020, the government adopted the National Action Plan for Ensuring Gender Equality for 2021-2025, which emphasizes the integration of gender issues in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The plan acknowledges domestic violence and traditional gender stereotypes as ongoing problems. However, challenges persist in integrating gender perspectives into socio-economic policies and enhancing women’s political participation. The absence of collaboration with independent civil society organizations further [undermines](#) the plan’s effective implementation.

The National Council on Gender Policy under the Council of Ministers falls significantly short as an effective mechanism for advancing gender equality and safeguarding women’s rights. This Council includes only one pro-government public association, the Belarusian Republican Women’s Union, while three independent civil society organizations were removed from its composition in 2021.

No substantive steps, including public dialogues, have been taken toward creating a national human rights institution. Existing state institutions lack independence and cannot substitute for a national human rights body.

The state has taken no temporary special measures to promote gender equality. Additionally, there is no indication that authorities have considered this issue or conducted public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of such measures in accelerating substantive gender equality across all sectors. Though the authorities do not admit the existence of parliamentary gender quotas, the results of the 2024 parliamentary elections (which [did not meet](#) international standards for democratic and free elections) - 33% of women-deputies in the House of Representatives.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Despite the existence of declarative norms in the legislation, the right to a fair, independent, and impartial trial [is not being implemented](#) in Belarus. In Belarus, courts depend on the president, who appoints judges, determines their term of office, and can dismiss them. After the elections in 2020, the situation has only worsened. National courts are now part of a

repressive mechanism, systematically passing politically motivated sentences against dissenters in violation of numerous fair trial guarantees.

Additionally, the Bar in Belarus is not independent, being entirely under the control of the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry is responsible for administering the Bar exam, appointing persons to all senior positions in the Bar, initiating disciplinary proceedings against lawyers, and terminating licenses.

Since 2020, 141 lawyers [have been deprived of their licenses](#) by the Belarusian authorities for providing legal assistance in politically motivated cases (among them - at least 52 women). Many of these lawyers [have also faced](#) administrative arrests, including torture and ill-treatment by the State Security Committee, and criminal charges. Women lawyers have also been victims of such persecution. Thus, lawyer [LK](#) was detained in an administrative case and fined, lawyer [TL](#) served 15 days of administrative arrest, and [IO](#) was fined in an administrative case. Lawyers [YY](#) and [AL](#) were sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment each. In 2024, lawyer [GP](#) was detained in a criminal case, but was able to leave Belarus.

With the absence of an independent judiciary, mass persecution of lawyers and human rights defenders, and the liquidation of civil society organizations (including those working on women's rights) and their designation as extremist (see below), access to justice for women and girls has become even more difficult.

Women political prisoners are highly vulnerable, lacking access to legal aid and, consequently, to justice. As the State indicated in its report, a lawyer is only allowed to see a prisoner if she requests one. However, the lawyer may be denied access to their client, as the administration can falsely claim that no request for a visit was made. All correspondence of women prisoners is controlled by the colony administration. Mass disbarment of lawyers, as well as their administrative and criminal persecution, makes a politically persecuted person an “undesirable client”, which negatively affects access to legal aid for such persons.

This creates a system whereby women prisoners [cannot complain about violations](#) of their rights in detention, which is also a barrier to complaining to CEDAW as a failure to exhaust domestic remedies.

No efforts have been made to promote the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or improve gender sensitivity among judges. Court databases lack any reference to the Convention, and violations of women’s rights are routinely ignored. Judicial training focuses narrowly on criminal cases involving sexual offenses, neglecting other rights and freedoms of women and girls. There is virtually no gender disaggregation of judicial statistics.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In Belarus, the right to freedom of association is severely restricted, with excessive interference in the creation and operation of organizations. Forced membership in

pro-government organizations like the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, the Belarusian Republican Women's Union and the Federation of Trade Unions is widespread, and public associations are often forced to exclude specific members.

Various forms of repression have been used by the authorities against civil society organizations: raids, inspections, suspension of activities, written warnings, blocking of websites.

Since early 2021, Belarusian authorities [have forcibly liquidated or coerced the self-liquidation](#) of at least 1,892 non-profit organizations (NPOs), including civic associations, professional unions, political parties, and foundations. Among them, at least 31 focused on supporting women, protecting their rights, and promoting gender equality. These actions have left women with fewer resources to defend their rights, making them more vulnerable.

Since 2021, the number of NPOs registered annually has been ten times fewer than those liquidated with no women's initiatives registered during this period. 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.

The 2023 [amendments to the Law “On Public Associations”](#) introduced some positive changes, such as online submission of documents and allowing local associations to operate nationwide. However, the overall registration and operational procedures remain unchanged, while new restrictive measures were added, including mandatory legal addresses in non-residential premises for republican associations and the risk of liquidation for activities deemed inconsistent with domestic or foreign policy.

On January 4, 2022, Belarus [reinstated](#) criminal responsibility for organizing and participating in an unregistered organization (Article 193-1), with [the first sentence](#) under this law issued on August 2, 2024, against VV, former head of the forcibly liquidated Public Charitable Organization “Hrodna Children’s Hospice”.

The authorities arbitrarily use anti-extremist legislation to suppress civic activity, explaining it by national security considerations. Telegram channels, chats, websites of civil society organizations, including women's organizations, [are recognized](#) as “extremist materials”. 255 structures, including the Belarus Women's Foundation and the “Leadership School” (“Leadership skills for women” initiative), [have been recognized](#) as “extremist organizations/formations”. Any interaction with extremist materials or formations entails administrative or criminal liability.

The state creates favorable conditions for a few pro-government civil society organizations, including women's organizations. The Law of February 14, 2023, № 250-3 “On the Foundations of Civil Society”, established a hierarchy of NGOs based on their interaction

with the state, with the Ministry of Justice recognizing only five associations, including the Belarusian Republican Women's Union, as entitled to engage with the public.

WOMEN CIVIC ACTIVISTS

Due to the fact that women are in the majority in the Belarusian civil society, they have been affected by repressions on a large scale. Women faced administrative and criminal prosecution, summonses for “conversations” with security forces, and pressure on their beloved.

Many women civic activists are imprisoned, including member of the Council and co-founder of the School of Young Public Administration Managers (SYMPA), expert of the research project BIPART [TK](#), founder and editor of the expert community website “Our Opinion”, head of the expert monitoring group “Belarus in Focus” [VK](#), both sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment; 2 human rights defenders - [MR](#), sentenced to 14 years and 9 months of imprisonment and a fine of 700 basic units (\$8800) and [AL](#), sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment for her alleged participation in writing a report on the persecution of the anarchist community in Belarus in 2018.

[HA](#), member of the “Rabochy Ruch” initiative, employee of the “Belarusian Railway”, was sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment. Activist of independent trade union (BNP) and former worker of OJSC “Naftan” [VB](#) was sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment. [PS-P](#), activist of independent trade union (REP) was sentenced to 5 years and 1 day of imprisonment. PS-P is the first woman political prisoner in Belarus convicted under the article 411 of the Criminal Code (“Malicious disobedience to demands of penal institution administration”), used to prolong the arbitrary detention of political prisoners. At least another 12 female labor union and striking committees activists [faced political persecution](#).

Two political activists [VK](#) and VT were sentenced to 12 years in prison *in absentia* for their political activities.

Independent female journalists have also faced criminal persecution solely for carrying out their professional duties. Thus, Belsat journalist [KB](#) was sentenced to 8 years and 3 months of imprisonment in addition to her previous punishment – 2 years in prison. A former journalist of Belteleradiocompany and member of the Coordination Council of the opposition [KL](#) was sentenced to 8 years in prison (released by pardon). Two employees of the BelaPAN news agency - sociologist and activist [IZ](#) and editor-in-chief and director [IL](#) (released) - were sentenced to 9 years and 4 years of imprisonment respectively. Former editor-in-chief [MZ](#) and ex-general director [LC](#) of “TUT.BY” news agency were sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment. Earlier, other employees of the newspaper [VL](#), [AT](#) and [KT](#) had their measure of restraint changed and were able to evacuate abroad.

Due to unprecedented repressions, a large number of representatives of civil society organizations [were forced to leave the country](#), being separated from their families. Even

abroad they continue to face persecution by the Belarusian authorities, including arbitrary criminal charges and [trials in absentia](#) (so-called ‘[special proceedings](#)’), house searches and seizure of property, individual threats and intimidation of family members remaining in Belarus. AM, an activist of the Human Rights Center Viasna in exile, has faced charges of promoting extremism and on October 15, 2024 [was sentenced](#) in absentia to 3 years of imprisonment.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Since 2020, real and perceived dissenters have been actively persecuted in Belarus.

Belarusian authorities equate any form of independent political participation and civic activism, as well as expression of any opinion alternative to the state one, with “extremist activity”. Since August 2020, at least [1,140 women](#) have been convicted of “extremist crimes,” and [5,019](#) for “extremist administrative offences.” Such convictions result in legal and economic restrictions, including job loss, exclusion from public life, and bans on holding public office or engaging in publishing for up to five years after expungement.

Women are also persecuted for expressing their opinion in the following formats: [participating in peaceful assemblies](#), [online comments](#) addressed to government officials, [charitable donations](#), [cooperation with pro-democratic organizations and media](#), [participating in and administering independent chats](#).

Repression in Belarus is often accompanied by public coverage of cases of arrests and persecution of active women. Additionally, women face threats of losing custody of their children or having their family marked by the social services as being in a “socially dangerous position” if they express a “wrong” opinion in one form or another.

All this serves as a frightening example for others: women who decide to participate in political and civic life, expressing their opinion in various forms, are directly or indirectly made to understand that they will be subject to sanctions if they continue their activities, which demotivates, and discourages political and civic activism where women may already be underrepresented.

Although many women left Belarus to escape political persecution, they continue to be subjected to repressions by the Belarusian authorities. In September 2023, the Decree № 278 [abolished](#) an opportunity of exchanging a passport of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus outside the Republic of Belarus, which, in turn, created serious legalization problems. Additionally, the Decree prevents the issuance of Belarusian passports to children born abroad, disproportionately affecting women giving birth and caring for children.

GENDER STEREOTYPES

Belarusian authorities have long reinforced gender stereotypes and societal stigmatization of women, through both legislation and recurring public statements.

This practice continued and intensified in the lead-up to the 2020 elections. A. Lukashenka [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 ST with gendered insults.

Government officials frequently [emphasize](#) 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.

Gender stereotypes are also widespread in relation to female healthcare workers, in the media they can be called [“beautiful saviors of human health”](#), [“true squires of doctors”](#), [“mothers to the subordinates”](#).

Gender-specific practices in Belarusian schools [reinforce](#) stereotypes, with girls taught domestic skills and boys learning technical trades. Textbooks further [entrench](#) traditional norms, portraying men in public roles like politics and business, while confining women to household and family duties.

Despite these pervasive stereotypes, there is [no evidence](#) that the authorities has taken any steps to address gender biases, nor have they conducted public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of temporary special measures that could accelerate gender equality across all sectors. This lack of action reflects a persistent endorsement of patriarchal norms and stalls progress toward substantive gender equality.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

- *Education*

Women continue to be discriminated against in a sphere of education.

In Belarus, there is still [no opportunity for women to enroll](#) in a number of higher educational institutions, or unequal conditions are created for admission (e.g., the number of places is significantly lower than for men). Such universities include the Military Academy, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the University of Civil Protection of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. At the Institution of Military Medicine [the passing score](#) for women is higher than for men (in 2022: males - 274, females - 313, in 2023: males - 331, females - 363).

The Order of the Ministry of Health No. 879 (see p.5), based on which female students, despite their high scores and abilities, are limited in the free choice of the desired specialisation, does not comply with the Constitution of Belarus and its international obligations, violating the right to education.

- *Health*

Women and children [continue to receive](#) appropriate medical benefits, including during the prenatal period, in connection with childbirth and after the birth of a child, and, if necessary, care during hospitalization. The state provides free medicine, partner childbirth. However, access to medicine, maternity hospital and related benefits for women from Minsk or regional centers [is higher](#) than in rural areas, which affects the efficiency and timeliness of access to medical care. There are still [problems](#) of falsification of statistics and gynecological and obstetric violence.

Paramedic and obstetric stations that worked locally in small towns [continue to close](#). At the same time, against the background of political repression in healthcare, the number of qualified medical personnel [has declined](#), and the quality of medical care has deteriorated, disproportionately affecting women, especially those of age and with chronic illnesses.

- *Employment*

Systemic discrimination against women in Belarus persists in the labor sector, reinforced by both legislative and societal norms.

Despite reducing the list of professions closed to women from 181 to 88 in 2022, significant [barriers to equal employment](#) remain. The elimination of some exclusions mainly affects obsolete professions and does not significantly improve access to modern employment. In addition, some professions traditionally considered “masculine” [remain inaccessible](#) to women in practice.

Gender-based wage inequality in Belarus [remains significant](#), with a 26% overall pay gap and 36% in healthcare (2023). Research [reveals](#) that women are paid less across various sectors due to a compensation system that includes bonuses and allowances, typically more accessible to men. Career advancement opportunities also [remain unequally distributed](#), with women facing a glass ceiling in both public and private sectors. In 2022, women [made up](#) 31.5% of entrepreneurs, with few as employers or founders, further hindered by a disproportionate burden of household and childcare responsibilities.

The narrative surrounding women's reproductive “function” hinders equal opportunities and gender-sensitive workplace policies. Workplace harassment, both physical and psychological, [remains common](#), with ineffective protective mechanisms, particularly for state employees. The ILO [has noted](#) that Article 170 of the Criminal Code is inadequate in addressing sexual harassment, often failing to provide remedies for victims or cover all forms of harassment.

The government’s closure of private childcare centers in 2023 had a [particularly detrimental effect](#) on working mothers, reducing their access to supportive childcare services necessary for workforce participation.

While employment support programs remain, they [mainly target](#) low-paying blue-collar jobs and fail to address female unemployment effectively.

In July 2022, all independent trade unions (Free Trade Union of Metalworkers (SPM), Free Belarusian Trade Union (SPB), Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP), Belarusian Trade Union of Radio-Electronic Industry Workers (REP) and their association - Belarusian Congress of Trade Unions (BKDP)) [were forcibly liquidated](#) in connection with “the implementation of destructive activities, that does not meet the goals stated in the charter, aimed at an unconstitutional change of power in the Republic of Belarus”.

Thus, in Belarus [there are no independent trade unions](#) that could protect women's rights in labour relations, as well as participate in social partnership, including in the development of new legislation. The Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions supports state repressions, organizes A. Lukashenka's presidential campaign, operates real estate, and [fails to independently protect workers' rights](#), including those of women.

DISADVANTAGED GROUPS OF WOMEN

- *Women in detention*

The situation of women prisoners has seriously deteriorated, especially after the 2020 elections, when politically motivated detentions began.

[Short-term detention](#) (see also [here](#) and [here](#)). Short-term detention facilities in Belarus are poorly equipped, with overcrowded cells, lacking proper ventilation, heating and access to warm water. Female detainees lack basic items like bedding, hygienic products, and drinking water. They are often arbitrarily deprived of showers and daily walks. Sanitary facilities lack privacy and are visible to male guards, who also conduct surveillance and accompany women detainees.

[Pretrial detention](#) (see also [here](#)). Female detainees in pretrial detention facilities are unable to maintain proper hygiene: access to the shower is provided only once a week for 10 minutes and may be restricted by the prison administration, as well as access to other hygiene facilities. Sanitary facilities in cells also do not provide privacy and may be visible to male guards.” Lack of adequate natural lighting and high humidity in the cells are reported.

Detention in penal facilities under a judicial sentence. Conditions of women's detention while serving imprisonment also [fail to ensure](#) that female detainees are able to maintain proper hygiene: showers only once a week for 10 minutes, insufficient number of sanitary facilities for the number of detainees in a unit, strictly limited time for daily hygiene procedures, insufficient provision of hygiene products.

Female prisoners [continue to be subjected](#) to heavy and low-paid labor in poor working conditions and beyond maximum working hours. The wages are [below the minimum](#) and range from \$0.6 to \$42. Women [are also subjected](#) to compulsory unpaid hard physical labour for the maintenance of the colony, exceeding the established time limit (14 hours). They are forced to perform heavy and dirty physical labour only in clothes that are issued to them based on existing gender stereotypes, such as pink dresses and pencil skirts. Some prisoners

[reported](#) accidents, injuries, and negative health consequences due to a lack of training, protective clothing, or equipment, non-observation of other labour protection conditions, etc.

The compulsory labor of incarcerated women violates ILO Conventions C029 and C105, as well as Article 8 of the ICCPR, due to the conditions described above, punitive measures for refusal to work (e.g., isolation, stricter regimes, additional imprisonment under Article 411 of the Criminal Code), the targeting of political prisoners as a mean of additional punishment, and discriminatory practices such as degrading job assignments, designation with a special sign - a yellow tag on their clothes, and lack of incentive measures, reflecting a [systematic state practice of forced labor](#).

In women's correctional colony № 4, one of the punishments is [the placement in the so-called “cage”](#) (small rectangular cage with metal bars), which is located outside, between the residential and industrial areas. Prisoners are placed there for from one to three hours in the cold season to make the punishment worse.

Women convicted on politically motivated charges face [restrictions on family correspondence and parcels, denial of adequate healthcare, provocations, and unlawful punitive measures](#). Almost all inmates charged under a “political article” are automatically [put on a preventive register](#) as “prone to extremism and other destructive actions.” They are banned from going to club, gym, church, and college.

At least 38 women are political prisoners with humanitarian issues: at least 3 women have disabilities, and 3 women have mental disorders; at least 11 women have [severe health issues](#) (e.g. [MK](#), [PS-P](#), [AM](#)); at least 12 female political prisoners have children; at least 3 women have children whose fathers are also political prisoners; at least 2 are single mothers, one of whom has a child with a disability (e.g. [LS](#), [AL](#)); at least 8 female political prisoners are over 60 years old (e.g. [IM](#), [AH](#)); at least 2 women were minors at the moment of arrest (e.g. [AB](#), [MM](#)).

Despite the State's assertions about the existing public control in places of detention, human rights defenders have [no effective access](#) to places of detention, and the competence of the Public Monitoring Commissions established by the authorities [is limited](#) to visits to convicts on judicial sentence, as agreed with the prison administration. These Commissions [are not independent](#) and only create the appearance of public control, but in essence do not fulfill this function. Prisoners [report](#) punitive measures, such as placement in isolation cells, being used to suppress complaints.

Torture, including gender based violence against women. In the period since August 2020, many women dissenters have been victims of extreme violence, documented by [human rights organizations](#), the [Committee against Torture](#), the [OHCHR](#), and the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus](#).

Hundreds of women [have been subjected](#) to torture, ill-treatment, and other forms of physical and psychological pressure, including gender-based violence and the threat of rape, while in

detention. Unlike other detainees, those detained on politically motivated charges [were held](#) in severely overcrowded, poorly ventilated and poorly heated cells; in unsanitary conditions, without mattresses, bedding, essential hygiene products or warm clothing, with limited or complete denial of access to showers, walks, correspondence or transfers. Between 10 and 15 detainees [were held](#) in cramped single-person punishment cells.

Women detained on politically motivated charges [did not have access](#) to or were deliberately denied medical care appropriate to their needs. A woman arbitrarily detained in SIZO No. 1 in Minsk was denied obstetric care, resulting in the birth of a stillborn boy in her cell. She was denied official confirmation of pregnancy or stillbirth and threatened to keep silent.

Detainees on politically motivated charges [were systematically deprived](#) of essential hygiene items, including sanitary pads, humiliated when they asked for them and often denied access to hygiene items sent to them in parcels.

The OHCHR also [documented](#) 27 cases in which detained women were forced to listen to inappropriate sexual comments and hate speech, and received information on an additional 5 cases documented and analysed by NPOs that are credible.

The practice of physical violence against women detainees, driven by unjust power relations and designed to reinforce the perceived subordinate status of women, [persisted](#) even after the most turbulent period of August 2020. When beating women, staff threatened them with gang rape and boasted that they had complete freedom to do so. Women [reported](#) being forced to witness sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against husbands, partners, other men, and women, which is itself a form of sexual violence and intimidation.

The OHCHR [reported](#) widespread arbitrary strip and cavity searches of detainees during and after 2020, often conducted in degrading conditions, including in the presence of others and by staff of a different gender. Women menstruating during detention found these practices particularly humiliating. Forced nudity [was documented](#) by OHCHR in 40 cases, with 137 additional credible cases identified by NPOs.

The incommunicado regime, faced by women prisoners, may also amount to torture. It is reliably known that MK [has been in incommunicado detention](#) since 2 February 2023 and [was allowed to see her father](#) only in November 2024. After that, MK continues to be in incommunicado detention.

According to the OHCHR, [there are reasonable grounds to believe](#) that, between 1 May 2020 and 31 December 2023, members of the Belarusian security forces committed rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexualised torture and forced nudity, against men, boys, women and non-binary persons in police vehicles, police stations and places of detention.

Belarusian authorities have not condemned torture or warned of criminal responsibility for such acts. Instead, they have publicly endorsed security forces' actions, reinforcing impunity and enabling further abuses.

- *Migrants*

Belarus has only three temporary accommodation centers for foreign nationals seeking international protection, with limited capacity and placement subject to availability. Despite provisions for special residential facilities managed by internal affairs agencies, information on their number or availability remains inaccessible.

In Belarus there are only two centers offering assistance to domestic violence victims and refugees, but information is not available in migrant-accessible languages, and clients report not being offered these services. This highlights limited access to safe housing in the country.

Women detained in pre-trial (SIZO) or temporary (IVS) facilities, where migrants may be held for extended periods due to circumstances beyond their control, face poor conditions as described above. The staff in these facilities often lack the necessary skills to work effectively with foreign nationals, impacting the adequacy of responses to detainees' requests for information about their rights, access to translation services, and appropriate responses to complaints regarding health and other issues.

Belarusian legislation does not recognize gender-based or domestic violence as grounds for international protection and lacks specific legislation to address domestic violence. Foreign women facing domestic violence receive little support, with cases often dismissed as “family disputes,” leaving victims without protection. Thus, Belarus cannot be considered a safe country for such victims.

The issue of undocumented children born on Belarusian territory to migrant women also requires particular attention. The state has not established a clear procedure for how a mother of a newborn is expected to proceed: the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not assist in communicating with the country of the mother's nationality, the consulate of which may be located outside Belarus. Migration authorities, in turn, may threaten migrant women with child removal to pressure them into voluntary departure from Belarus, even if they lack appropriate documents, further heightening their vulnerability to human trafficking.

Migrant women in Belarus face heightened vulnerability to crimes, fearing deportation over justice when reporting rape, and lack adequate support due to the reduction of non-state organizations assisting trafficking victims.

- *Women with disabilities*

There is no concept of multiple or intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities in national legislation and policies. Gender policies do not take disability into account, and disability policies tend to ignore the double burden borne by women with disabilities. Girls with disabilities face discrimination based on age, disability and gender, which leads to stigma and problems for their families.

Issues related to girls with disabilities are distributed among different ministries without reliable coordination, which leads to a fragmented approach to promoting their rights and makes the transition from childhood to adulthood particularly problematic. Additionally, there are no NPOs dedicated to the promotion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities, leaving a critical gap in advocacy and support.

Early detection and intervention are rudimentary and demand-driven, resulting in many children with disabilities not receiving rehabilitation and educational services. Segregation of girls (as well as boys) with disabilities in education, social development, extracurricular and cultural activities is widespread. Their participation in decision-making is not regulated and depends on the subjective opinion of officials. Moreover, there are no women with disabilities in leadership roles, further limiting their influence on policies that affect their lives.

The problem of unequal access to sexual and reproductive health rights for women with disabilities persists. Psycho-neurological boarding houses, where several thousand women and girls live (the data is intentionally hidden by the state), by all indications are places of deprivation of liberty. With regard to women living there, referral for treatment without voluntary informed consent, including termination of pregnancy, is widely practiced (including due to the lack of legal mechanisms for making such a decision in case of partial or complete deprivation of legal capacity).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including definitions of direct and indirect discrimination. Repeal regulatory acts and abandon the adoption of legislation of a discriminatory character.
2. Establish an effective mechanism for advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights, and adopt temporary special measures to promote gender equality. Take steps to create a national human rights institution.
3. Ensure women, including incarcerated women, have unhindered access to justice. Cease repression against lawyers and guarantee the independence of the Bar.
4. Release all arbitrarily convicted individuals and cease repressions and politically motivated persecutions.
5. Ensure freedom of association, lifting the criminal liability under Article 193-1 and restoring the rights of those prosecuted, as well as ending forced liquidation of NGOs, restoring dissolved women's organizations, and ensuring favorable conditions for their work, including funding access. Halt interference in the activities of civil society organizations, including prosecutions, searches, freezing of assets, and discrediting in media, and prosecute those responsible under the law.

6. Stop repressions against women civil society activists, including halting administrative and criminal prosecution, arbitrary charges, and pressure on their families.
7. Guarantee respect for the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Eliminate the practice of misusing the legislation on extremism and terrorism to pressure and persecute dissenters.
8. Ensure the equal participation of women, including women's organizations, in political and public life, guaranteeing their right to vote, hold public office, participate in policy development, implementation, and monitoring at national and local levels.
9. Stop the dissemination of gender stereotypes at all levels and take measures to overcome discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society, emphasizing the importance of women's equal participation in decision-making processes in both the public and private sectors.
10. Guarantee equal access to education by abolishing discriminatory quotas and higher admission thresholds for women and ensuring equal admission conditions to all educational institutions. Eliminate gender criteria in medical specialization, basing decisions solely on academic performance and student preferences.
11. Improve access to medical services in rural areas and enhance the quality of healthcare by addressing issues such as falsified statistics, introducing mechanisms to prevent gynecological and obstetric violence, and ending political repression of medical personnel.
12. Abolish the list of prohibited professions for women, reduce the gender pay gap, and promote women's career advancement, particularly in high-paying and leadership positions. Implement effective measures against workplace harassment.
13. Ensure detention conditions comply with international human rights standards and implement independent monitoring of places of detention.
14. Ensure that incarcerated women are not subjected to forced labour under any circumstances.
15. End torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, including against women; hold perpetrators accountable and ensure effective remedies and reparations for victims.
16. Increase the number and accessibility of temporary housing for foreign nationals, seeking protection, including providing information in their languages. Include gender-based violence as grounds for international protection and enhance support for victims. Improve detention conditions and staff training to address the specific needs of foreign nationals, including access to translation and legal support.

17. Develop inclusive policies addressing the intersectional discrimination of women and girls with disabilities, ensure service access, promote their leadership, and protect their sexual and reproductive rights.
18. Cooperate with the international human rights mechanisms, in particular, fulfilling in good faith the recommendations and views of CEDAW, the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, and the Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus. Fully implement the recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry and the supervisory bodies of the ILO in respect of freedom of association, as well as follow-up measures for implementation of the International Labour Conference Resolution concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Belarus (June 2023).