

Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus

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Recent Developments

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Introduction

Civil society in Belarus operates in an extremely restrictive environment, reflecting the country's broader human rights crisis. Since the 2020 presidential election, conditions have deteriorated sharply, with widespread and systematic violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. In practice, the right to freedom of association has been effectively nullified, as state authorities engage in persistent and unpunished interference with its exercise.

Following the 2020 electoral campaign, a significant number of civil society organizations (CSOs) were forced into exile. Inside the country, organizations and their members face sustained pressure, including inspections, searches, interrogations, seizure of property, website blocking, and administrative and criminal prosecution. Authorities have also targeted the relatives of activists who have fled abroad. Since 2021, more than 2,000 non-profit organizations (NPOs) have been forcibly liquidated or have dissolved under pressure, and over 100 civil society representatives remain in detention. One common tool of repression is the designation of CSOs as "extremist formations" and the labeling of their materials as "extremist," which exposes individuals to criminal liability for participation, organization, or financial support.

The legal framework governing NPOs is highly restrictive and inconsistently applied. Registration procedures for public associations and foundations are permit-based, costly, and excessively bureaucratic, requiring extensive documentation under unclear and non-uniform standards. In practice, authorities retain broad discretion to deny registration to organizations deemed undesirable. Criminal liability for involvement in unregistered organizations has been reinstated and is actively enforced. Access to both domestic and foreign funding is also subject to significant constraints, further limiting the viability of independent organizations.

Freedom of peaceful assembly is similarly constrained by law and practice. Legislation does not establish a presumption in favor of assemblies and instead imposes extensive requirements, including prior authorization and the obligation for organizers to cover related costs. Authorities routinely apply these rules in a manner that disregards the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination. In practice, seeking authorization for an assembly carries significant personal risk, including the possibility of political persecution. Spontaneous and simultaneous assemblies, as well as counterdemonstrations, are prohibited, and there are no meaningful remedies to challenge restrictions.

Access to information is also severely limited. There is no comprehensive public access to court schedules or decisions, and information on the registration and liquidation of non-profit organizations is not systematically published. In addition, many government websites, including those of key law enforcement

bodies, are inaccessible from abroad, further restricting transparency.

CSOs operating in exile face a distinct set of challenges. These include navigating complex legal and institutional frameworks in host countries, limited access to specialized legal and accounting services, financial and banking barriers, and ongoing legal risks connected with continuing activities related to Belarus. Together, these factors further constrain the ability of Belarusian civil society to operate effectively, both inside and outside the country.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Public associations (PAs); national state-public associations; associations (unions); foundations; consumer cooperatives; religious organizations; state and private establishments
Registration Body	Ministry of Justice, oblast-level executive committees, and local councils and executive committees, as well as the National Department for Religious Affairs
Approximate Number	According to the Ministry of Justice, as of January 1, 2026, the following NPOs are registered in Belarus: four political parties and 844 of their organizational structures; 19 trade unions (15 republican, one territorial, and three at the organizational level) and 27,466 of their organizational structures; 1,337 public associations (121 international, 290 republican, and 926 local) and 47,812 of their organizational structures; 43 associations (unions) of public associations; and seven republican state-public associations. Official statistics on the number of registered non-state establishments, foundations, and associations (unions) (except for associations of public associations) are not available. According to the human rights organization Lawtrend, as of February 2026, the total institutional losses of the civil society sector following the 2020 elections amount to at least 2,012 non-profit organizations (PAs, trade unions, political parties, foundations, non-state establishments, and associations (unions)). Of this number, at least 1,235 NPOs were forcibly liquidated, while at least 777 NPOs were voluntarily liquidated.
Barriers to Formation	Prohibition against unregistered associations; high minimum membership requirements; high registration fees; limits on eligible founders, including the prohibition on foreign citizens establishing PAs; burdensome documentation requirements; interference of registration authorities in the objectives, activities, and governance structure of an association at the registration stage; limited opportunities appeal registration decisions.
Barriers to Operations	Interference in the internal affairs of NPOs, including regular inspections, searches, and other forms of pressure; restrictions on certain types of activities, such as human rights, sociological, or educational work; broad grounds for suspension and liquidation; designation of associations as “extremist formations” and of information resources as “extremist materials.”

Barriers to Resources	Mandatory prior registration of all foreign aid, including aid from Belarusian citizens residing abroad, regardless of the amount; a narrow list of permitted purposes for its use; the possibility of refusal to register foreign aid on broad or discretionary grounds, including determinations that its receipt or use is inadvisable; the requirement to obtain a government agency's opinion on the compliance of the aid's objectives with state interests; limited permissible purposes for receiving domestic aid by foundations, institutions, and associations (unions); provision of state support to a limited circle of NPOs; and the risk of administrative and criminal liability for violations of funding regulations.
Barriers to Expression	Criminal and administrative prosecution for expression of opinion and related forms of conduct is widespread, including under the guise of combating terrorism and extremism. Prosecution is carried out for various acts of expression, including criticism of the actions of authorities and security forces and the dissemination of related information; donations and other financial support deemed unlawful; expression of opinions contrary to the official line; informational activities, including those conducted abroad; support for Ukraine and statements considered as "discrediting the state"; and participation in analytical and research activities.
Barriers to Assembly	Non-citizens of Belarus, citizens not permanently resident in the country, and minors are restricted from organizing certain assemblies; notification to the authorities is required at least 15 days in advance of all public actions or mass events; wide-ranging legal restrictions on where assemblies may be held, with events often forcibly relocated to city outskirts or banned without explanation; organizers are responsible for maintaining public order and for the actions of participants, which must be declared in a special written form filed with state authorities; use of excessive force during dispersals, including lethal weapons; and widespread impunity for abuses by law enforcement authorities.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Belarus' legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1973
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No**
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1973
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1969
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1981

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	2002
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	1987
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture	No
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1990
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2016

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms	No

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

** In August 2022, Belarus' government withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OP-ICCPR), which was ratified on September 30, 1992. In the last 30 years, the ICCPR Committee has reviewed hundreds of complaints against the Belarusian state on issues ranging from freedom of expression to the right to peaceful assembly, to fair trials in death penalty cases. The procedures have contributed to the development of jurisprudence on important issues for Belarus and other states parties.

The ICCPR Committee noted that Belarus adopted its decision without providing an explanation and without consulting with civil society. With this step, Belarus became just the fourth country to withdraw from the OP-ICCPR, which has been ratified by 117 countries.

The renunciation took effect on February 8, 2023. All complaints currently being considered by the ICCPR Committee are still processed, reviewed, and adjudicated. Cases found to be in violation of rights will also continue to be followed up on in accordance with the relevant provisions of the ICCPR Committee's Rules of Procedure.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (with changes and additions adopted at the nationwide referenda on November 24, 1996, October 17, 2004, and February 27, 2022) contains the following provisions relating to civil society:

Article 36. Everyone shall be entitled to freedom of association. Citizens have the right to create political parties and other public associations, participate in their activities for the implementation and satisfaction of political, social, economic, cultural and other interests. Political parties and other public associations are created and operate in accordance with the law. Judges, employees of the Procurator's Office, the staff of bodies of internal affairs, the State Supervisory Committee and security bodies, as well as servicemen may not be members of political parties or other public associations that pursue political goals.

Article 4. Democracy in the Republic of Belarus shall be exercised on the basis of diversity of political institutions, ideologies and views. The ideology of political parties, religious or other public associations or social groups may not be made mandatory for citizens.

Article 5. Political parties and other public associations acting within the framework of the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Belarus shall contribute towards ascertaining and expressing the political will of the citizens and participate in elections. Political parties and other public associations shall have the right to use state mass media under the procedure determined by legislation.

The creation and activities of political parties and other public associations that aim to change the constitutional system by force, or conduct propaganda of war, social, ethnic, religious and racial hatred shall be prohibited.

Article 22. All shall be equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of their rights and legitimate interests.

Article 23. Restriction of personal rights and liberties shall be permitted only in the instances specified in law, in the interest of national security, public order, the protection of the morals and health of the population as well as the rights and liberties of other persons. No one may enjoy advantages and privileges that are contrary to the law.

Article 33. Everyone is guaranteed freedom of thought and beliefs and their free expression. No one shall be forced to express one's beliefs or to deny them. No monopolization of the mass media by the State, public associations or individual citizens and no censorship shall be permitted.

Article 34. Citizens of the Republic of Belarus shall be guaranteed the right to receive, store and disseminate complete, reliable and timely information of the activities of state bodies and public associations, on political, economic, cultural and international life, and on the state of the environment. State bodies, public associations and officials shall afford citizens of the Republic of Belarus an opportunity to familiarize themselves with material that affects their rights and legitimate interests. The use of information may be restricted by legislation with the purpose to safeguard the honor, dignity, personal and family life of the citizens and the full implementation of their rights.

Article 35. The freedom to hold assemblies, rallies, street marches, demonstrations and pickets that do not disturb law and order or violate the rights of other citizens of the Republic of Belarus, shall be guaranteed by the State. The procedure for conducting the above events shall be determined by the law.

Article 37. Citizens of the Republic of Belarus have the right to participate in the conduct of state affairs both directly and through freely elected representatives. Direct participation of citizens in the management of public and state affairs is ensured through the holding of referenda, discussion of draft laws, other normative legal acts, and issues of republican and local significance, as well as by other methods prescribed by law. In accordance with the procedures established by legislation, citizens of the Republic of Belarus participate in discussions on matters of state and public life at republican and local assemblies.

NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

The basic legislation affecting the establishment of civil society organizations (CSOs) and their activities in Belarus includes:

- Resolution #2 of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus on the List of General Administrative Expenses of August 12, 2006
- The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (with the changes and additions adopted at the nationwide referendums of November 24, 1996, October 17, 2004, and February 27, 2022
- Education Code of the Republic of Belarus of January 13, 2011, #243-Z

- The Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus of December 7, 1998, #218-Z
- The Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Belarus of January 6, 2021, #91-Z
- The Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus of July 9, 1999, #275-Z
- The Labor Code of the Republic of Belarus of July 26, 1999, #296-Z
- The Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus of December 19, 2002, #166-Z. General Part
- The Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus of December 29, 2009, #71-Z. Special Part
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Public Associations of October 4, 1994, #3254-XII
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Trade Unions of April 22, 1992, #1605-XII
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Political Parties of October 5, 1994, #3266-XII
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of December 17, 1992, #2054-XII
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Republican State-Public Associations of July 19, 2006, #150-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on the Essentials of Civil Society of February 14, 2023, #250-Z
- Resolution #3 of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Establishing the Forms of Documents of August 12, 2006
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus of December 30, 1997, #114-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Local Administration and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus of January 04, 2010, #108-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Mass Media of July 17, 2008, #427-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Countering Extremism of January 4, 2007, #203-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Accounting and Reporting of July 12, 2013 #57-Z
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on State Support of Youth and Children's Public Associations in the Republic of Belarus of November 9, 1999, #305-Z
- Decree #302 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Certain Measures to Regularize the Activities of Foundations of July 1, 2005
- Decree #1 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on State Registration and Liquidation (Termination of the Activity) of Business Entities of January 16, 2009
- Decree #425 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Using the Words 'National' and 'Belarusian' in the Names of Legal Entities and Mass Media of September 8, 2005
- Decree #300 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on the Provision and Use of Gratuitous (Sponsor) Aid of July 1, 2005

- Decree #3 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Foreign Gratuitous Assistance of May 25, 2020
- Decree #460 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on International Technical Assistance Provided to the Republic of Belarus of October 22, 2003
- Decree #337 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Providing Support to Sports Organizations of September 17, 2025
- Decree #22 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Supporting the Public Association “BRSM” of January 19, 2026
- Decree #138 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Lease and Gratuitous Use of Property of May 16, 2023
- Resolution of the Council of Ministers of The Republic of Belarus on the Procedure for Opening and Terminating Activities of Representative Offices of Foreign Organizations and Branches of Foreign Legal Entities in the Territory of the Republic of Belarus, and on Maintaining the Register of Representative Offices of Foreign Organizations and Branches of Foreign Legal Entities #408 of May 30, 2018
- Resolution #154 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the Adoption of the Provision on the Procedure of Approving the Names of Commercial and Non-Commercial Organizations of February 5, 2009
- Resolution #1445 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the Publishing by Printed Mass Media of Information About the State Registration, Change of Name, and Dissolution of Non-Commercial Organizations of November 5, 2009
- Resolution #141 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the Procedure for Accounting and Termination of Activities of Organizational Structures of Political Parties and Public Associations of February 18, 2014
- Resolution #502/4 of the Council of Ministers and the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Measures for the Implementation of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 3 of 25 May 2020 “On Foreign Gratuitous Assistance” of August 27, 2020
- Resolution #742 of the Council of Ministers and the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus on the Agreement for the Provision of Gratuitous (Sponsorship) Assistance of October 9, 2024
- Resolution #1522 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of November 21, 2003 on Certain Measures to Implement Decree #460 of the President of the Republic of Belarus of October 22, 2003
- Resolution #327 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on Public Associations and Their Organizational Structures, Foundations, Associations of Legal Entities and/or Individual Entrepreneurs (Associations and Unions) to Which a Reducing Coefficient of 0.1 is Applied to Base Rental Rates for the Lease of Immovable Property of April 30, 2013
- Resolution #2 of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Belarus on Establishing the Forms of Documents within the Framework of International Technical Assistance of January 22, 2026
- Resolution #42 of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus on the Forms of Documents

- Resolution #48 of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus on Issues of State Registration of Political Parties, Trade Unions, Other Public Associations, Their Unions (Associations), and Their Activities of August 30, 2005
- Resolution #20 of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus on the Approval of the Names of Legal Entities of March 5, 2009

PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

Law on Foreign Gratuitous Aid

The 2026 legislative plan includes a draft Law on Foreign Gratuitous Aid, which is expected to replace the current decree-based regulation and establish a comprehensive legal framework for receiving and using foreign funding by CSOs. This law is particularly significant for the non-profit sector, as it will directly affect access to external resources and the exercise of freedom of association. The draft is being prepared by the Office of the President of the Republic of Belarus and the National Center for Legislation and Legal Information (NCLLI). It is expected to be finalized in November 2026 and submitted to the House of Representatives in February 2027.

Law on Trade Unions

The legislative plan also includes amendments to the Law on Trade Unions, which may affect the regulatory environment for labor organizations and their activities. Responsibility for drafting these amendments lies with the Council of Ministers, the NCLLI, and the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus. The draft law is expected to be prepared in May 2026 and submitted to the House of Representatives in July 2026. These changes may have broader implications for freedom of association in the labor sector.

Law on Volunteer Activity

The legislative plan includes the development of a concept for a new Law on Volunteer Activity, aimed at addressing gaps in the current, only partially regulated framework. Volunteer initiatives remain an important component of civil society, particularly under restrictive operating conditions, but the lack of clear regulation creates legal uncertainty for both organizations and volunteers. At the same time, there are concerns that excessive regulation could further constrain civic space, underscoring the need for a balanced approach. The concept is expected to be prepared in April and submitted to the President in October 2026.

The above list is not exhaustive. If you are aware of other pending legislative initiatives not included here, please contact asia@icnl.org.

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Belarus' legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

The development of Belarusian legislation in the sphere of freedom of association has been significantly influenced by European continental law. The Civil Code lists a number of organizational and legal forms for NPOs, as listed below. They can be divided into two categories: “membership-based associations” and “property-based associations.” The most common legal forms include the following:

- Public associations are voluntary associations of citizens uniting for the joint exercise and satisfaction of social, economic, cultural, and other interests and for the achievement of the objectives specified in its charter. [Belarusian law provides for the establishment of the following types of public association in a broad sense: political parties, trade unions, and public associations.
- Religious organizations are voluntary associations of citizens (religious communities) or associations of religious communities (religious associations) uniting on the basis of their common interests for the purpose of satisfying religious needs and disseminating information about their religious doctrine.
- National state-public associations are membership-based NPOs, their purpose being to implement tasks of state significance.
- Associations (unions) are non-profit organizations established by commercial, non-profit organizations and/or citizens engaged in individual entrepreneurial activity for the purpose of coordinating their activities and representing and protecting their common interests.
- Foundations are property-based organizations without membership, founded by one or more citizens and/or legal entities (or one legal entity) on the basis of voluntary property contributions. They pursue social, charitable, cultural, educational and scientific goals, the development of physical culture and sports, or other socially useful goals specified in their charters.
- Establishments are organizations set up by a proprietor in order to exercise managerial, socio-cultural or other non-commercial functions, funded by the proprietor in part or in full.
- Consumer cooperatives are voluntary, membership-based or property-based associations of citizens or citizens and legal entities for the purpose of fulfilling material (property) and other needs of their members.
- Gardening associations are NPOs that operate based on citizen membership and the use of land plots provided for collective gardening to cultivate various crops, create conditions for recreation and leisure, and satisfy other needs of members. Homeowners' associations are NPOs formed by owners of residential or non-residential property. In certain cases, envisioned by law, they may also include individuals who hold rights of economic or operational management over such property, as well as those who financed its construction and are expected to obtain ownership or management rights.

The Civil Code's list of organizational and legal forms of NPOs is not exhaustive. For example, the Law on Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus of January 4, 2010, No. 108-Z recognizes collegial bodies of territorial public self-government as NPOs. Similarly, under the Law of the Republic of Belarus of December 30, 2011, No. 334-Z "On the Bar and Advocacy in the Republic of Belarus," both territorial bar associations and the Belarusian Republican Bar Association are classified as NPOs.

To obtain registration, an NPO must correspond to one of the organizational forms envisioned by the Civil Code or other applicable laws. NPOs are not permitted to operate without registration.

Responsibility for registering NPOs is divided among several state bodies, depending on the type of organization:

- **Ministry of Justice and its regional directorates:** The Ministry of Justice, along with the chief directorates of justice at oblast executive committees and the Minsk Executive Committee, registers public associations, political parties, trade unions, foundations, their unions (coalitions), national state-public associations, and arbitration courts. These justice directorates also register

structural units of political parties; oblast and inter-oblast structural units of public associations; and inter-oblast, oblast, and Minsk city structural units of trade unions, provided that the governing body of the structural unit falls within their jurisdiction.

- **Local executive and administrative bodies:** Oblast executive committees and the Minsk Executive Committee may delegate part of their registration authority to local executive and administrative bodies. These bodies may register establishments, consumer cooperatives, gardening associations, unions (associations) of non-profit and/or for-profit organizations, individual entrepreneurs, and religious communities. They are also authorized to review applications from structural units of associations when registration does not fall within the competence of regional justice directorates.
- **National Department for Religious Affairs:** This body is responsible for registering religious associations, monasteries and monastic communities, religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods, religious missions, and seminaries.

Approximate Numbers

As of January 1, 2026, the following NPOs are registered in Belarus: four political parties with 844 organizational structures; 19 trade unions (including 15 republican, one territorial, and three at the organizational level) with 27,466 organizational structures; 1,337 public associations (including 121 international, 290 republican, and 926 local) with 47,812 organizational structures; 43 associations (unions) of public associations; and seven republican state-public associations.

Official statistics on the number of registered non-state establishments, foundations, and associations (unions) (except for associations of public associations) are not available.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Belarusian law does not recognize concepts such as “socially oriented,” “charitable” or “public benefit” organizations. Tax and other benefits are granted to specific organizations according to established lists. For example, the Tax Code identifies 18 NPOs, and Belarusian businesses receive profit tax benefits when providing assistance to these entities. Benefits may also extend to organizations in particular fields of activity. For instance, Decree #337 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Providing Support to Sports Organizations of September 17, 2025 establishes additional benefits for sports organizations.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following national laws affect public participation in Belarus:

- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Regulatory Legal Acts of July 17, 2018, #130-Z;
- Resolution #54 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on Predicting the Consequences of Adopting (executing) Normative Legal Acts of 25 January 25, 2019;
- Resolution #56 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the Public Discussion of Draft Normative Legal Acts of January 28, 2019
- Resolution #247 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of March 20, 2012 on Organizing Public Discussion of Draft Normative Legal Acts on Entrepreneurship, Issues of Conducting Entrepreneurial Activities, and on Amendments to Resolution No. 2070 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 31 December 2008
- Resolution #687 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the State Urban Planning Cadastre and Public Discussions in the Field of Architectural, Urban Planning, and Construction

Other relevant laws affecting access to information include:

- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Information, Informatization and Protection of Information of November 10, 2008, #455-Z;
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Mass Media of July 17, 2008, #427-Z;
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus on Appeals by Citizens and Legal Entities of July 18, 2011, #300-Z;
- Decree #498 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on Additional Measures for Handling Appeals by Citizens and Legal Entities of October 15, 2007;
- Resolution #667 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on Some Issues of Working with Appeals by Citizens and Legal Entities of July 23, 2012;
- Resolution #645 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on the Procedure of Operation of Internet- sites of State Bodies and Organizations of April 29, 2010.

In Belarus, there are no legislatively approved frameworks governing cooperation between state authorities and NPOs, nor are there formal programs for state-nonprofit partnership. There is also no dedicated legal act regulating access to information held by state bodies and local self-government authorities, and no unified legal guarantees ensuring the effective realization of the right to information. Provisions relating to interaction between CSOs and state authorities are scattered across various unsystematized legal acts. The most common—and to some extent legally defined—forms of interaction include public councils, public discussions, and participation in law-making processes. However, the prevailing climate of repression and fear has fostered self-censorship among CSOs, leading them to minimize engagement with authorities, particularly in decision-making processes and advocacy on behalf of their interests and target groups.

In practice, most participation mechanisms function only formally, are often ineffective, and have little to no real influence on decision-making. Key decisions are typically made without consultation. Legal provisions allowing CSO involvement in policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation exist only in limited areas—such as environmental protection and business regulation—and are absent in many others. Public discussion of draft laws in electronic form remains one of the few available mechanisms for submitting proposals, including those aimed at addressing gaps in legal regulation. However, such discussions are not mandatory, and many significant legal acts are adopted without any public consultation. Even when consultations occur, their outcomes are often summarized in a formalistic manner, without a clear or comprehensive assessment of the proposals received. Similar limitations apply to consultative bodies, which are widespread but effective only in certain sectors. Further, the liquidation of CSOs and related factors have significantly reduced the composition of many public councils. Many legal provisions governing public participation are quasi-obligatory in nature, relying on vague formulations such as “normally” or “as a general rule,” which further weakens their enforceability.

The Law on the Essentials of Civil Society establishes special forms of interaction with the state for a limited group of public associations operating at the national level. It also sets eligibility criteria for entities entitled to nominate civil society representatives to the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly. At the same time, the judicial system routinely fails to uphold fair trial standards. Having lost the core characteristics of an independent, self-governing institution, the legal profession has increasingly become an instrument of repression against its own members. Lawyers operate under constant pressure, threats, and harassment; many of the most active practitioners face criminal or administrative prosecution, and a significant number have been disbarred or otherwise deprived of the right to practice.

BARRIERS TO FORMATION

Prohibition of Unregistered Associations

Since 1999, the activities of associations operating without state registration have been prohibited. Beginning in 2005, individuals involved in the activities of unregistered CSOs could face criminal liability under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code. In July 2019, this provision was decriminalized and replaced by Article 23.88 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which imposed fines as the primary penalty. However, in January 2022, Article 193-1 was reinstated in the Criminal Code, again introducing the possibility of imprisonment for up to two years for participation in the activities of unregistered or liquidated public associations, foundations, political parties, and religious organizations.

During the initial period of its application (2005–2019), at least 18 individuals were convicted under Article 193-1, and the prosecutor's office issued hundreds of official warnings regarding its potential application. As of early 2026, three new criminal cases under this provision have been reported: the conviction in absentia of the former head of the liquidated public charitable organization "Hrodna Children's Hospice"; a case against officials of the commercial entity LLC "Klerigata," accused of carrying out the activities of an unregistered public association; and a case involving members of the unregistered religious organization "IVDIVO," in which 15 individuals were recognized as suspects.

The application of Article 193¹ effectively criminalizes the exercise of freedom of association. It creates a strong chilling effect, deterring citizens from engaging in self-organization outside of state-controlled structures.

Minimum Membership Requirements

Belarusian legislation provides certain preferences for republican public associations but imposes stringent membership and structural requirements. Under the Law "On the Essentials of Civil Society" (February 14, 2023, No. 250-Z), only republican public associations with organizational structures in all regions and the city of Minsk and at least 100,000 adult members qualify for special forms of interaction with state authorities. They may also nominate representatives to election commissions under Article 35 of the Electoral Code and use the word "Belarusian" in their name pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 425 (September 8, 2005).

At the same time, the law requires at least 50 founders from all regions and Minsk and mandates the establishment of regional structures nationwide. These requirements create significant administrative and financial burdens, including the need to secure legal addresses in non-residential premises for each structural unit, often at the organization's expense. As a result, only a limited number of associations can realistically meet these criteria.

By comparison, local public associations require at least 10 founders, while international public associations require 13 founders (including 10 Belarusian citizens and three foreign citizens residing abroad).

Initial Capital Requirements

To set up a foundation, the founders must have capital. Local foundations must have 100 basic amounts (one basic amount equals 45 Belarusian rubles or \$15.26) or \$1,526. International or nationwide foundations must possess 1,000 basic amounts or \$15,260.

The founder (owner) of an establishment must finance it fully or partially; however, the law does not specify a minimum required share of such financing.

Registration Fees

The registration fee for local public associations and foundations is five times higher than for commercial organizations (approximately USD 76). The registration fee for republican and international public associations and foundations is ten times higher than the fee for the registration of commercial

organizations (approximately USD 153).

In general, Belarusian legislation discriminates against public associations and foundations in comparison to commercial entities and other NPO forms, which typically do not encounter significant obstacles in obtaining registration.

Limits on Eligible Founders

Except for children and youth public associations, which can be founded by citizens from age 16, Belarusian citizens under the age of 18 cannot be founders of NPOs. Also, aside from international public associations established in Belarus, foreign citizens cannot serve as founders of public associations. Legal entities cannot serve as founders or members of public associations. In contrast, associations (unions) require members to be economic actors, namely legal entities and/or individual entrepreneurs.

Documentation Requirements

Public associations and foundations are required to submit an extensive set of registration documents, with legislation even stipulating mandatory font size and formatting. Registration authorities have broad discretion to review these documents, including the ability to refer them for expert examination. While the law provides that registration should be completed within one month if all requirements are met, in practice, applications are often rejected for minor or technical deficiencies, including non-compliance with procedural rules. The grounds for refusal are sufficiently broad to allow authorities to deny registration to any organization deemed undesirable.

Non-governmental establishments and associations are formally registered through an application-based procedure. However, they must first undergo mandatory name approval, during which authorities may effectively block registration by refusing approval for organizations considered undesirable.

Limited Rights of Appeal

If an NPO is denied state registration, it may appeal the decision in the courts. In practice, however, judicial challenges to registration refusals are ineffective, as courts overwhelmingly side with the state and rule against the organization's founders.

Foreign Organizations

Foreign non-profit organizations are prohibited from operating in Belarus without either registering a branch as a legal entity with the Ministry of Justice, or a representative office, without the status of a legal entity, with a regional (oblast) executive committee or the Minsk Executive Committee.

BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

Interference in Internal Affairs

Article 6 of the Law on Public Associations prohibits interference by state bodies and officials in the activities of public associations, except in cases provided by the law. The same law authorizes registration officials to participate in any activities conducted by public associations, their structural units or unions for statutory purposes, as well as to request and obtain information related to an organization's statutory activity and review their documents and decisions. A foundation, public association, or their associations (unions) must notify the registering body of an upcoming meeting of its highest-level governing body at least seven days in advance.

In practice, Belarusian authorities routinely engage in excessive interference in the activities of NPOs, including inspections, searches, summons for interrogations by law enforcement and security agencies, the imposition of administrative and criminal liability, and pressure on relatives and close associates. Any undesirable organization can be liquidated, and in the case of private establishments, even without a court decision. Since 2021, more than 2,000 NGOs have ceased operations altogether – either through forced liquidation or via pressure to self-liquidate. More than 100 representatives of NPOs are being held

in detention centers

Many representatives of CSOs have been forced to leave the country due to large-scale repression and continue to do so, often facing challenges related to legal status and residence abroad.

To suppress civic activism, the authorities are putting pressure on activists and representatives of civil society who are forced to live abroad. Criminal cases are being brought against participants in protests abroad, and their property is being seized.

Article 194 of the Criminal Code states that obstructing lawful activities of public associations or interfering in their activities in a manner that results in a significant violation of their rights and legitimate interests is punishable by fine or by deprivation of the right to hold certain positions or to engage in certain activities, or by up to two years of corrective labor. However, there are no known cases of application of this article in practice.

Reporting Requirements

Legislation requires foundations, public associations, and their associations (unions) to submit mandatory annual reports to the registering authorities, including documents confirming their legal address; information about their continuing operation; information on statutory activities in the reporting period; the number of members of the public association and its structural units; and lists of members of elective bodies, with the minutes of elections attached.

In line with anti-terrorism legislation, foundations and public associations are also required to publish reports on their activities, including the receipt and expenditure of funds. Since 2022, public associations and foundations must publicly disclose all events they have held during the reporting period, specifying the purposes and content of these events, as well as their participants, including bloggers, journalists, and social media moderators.

Public reporting applies to all public associations and foundations, regardless of the number of members, the nature of their activities, or the volume of funding received. They are required to publish extensive information that is unrelated to counter-terrorism financing and duplicates other existing reporting to justice and tax authorities.

The presence of such public reporting requirements is disproportionate, which severely restricts NPOs' access to funding while offering them virtually no corresponding benefits or incentives. In the prevailing socio-political crisis, public reporting has become an additional instrument of pressure on NPOs. Violations of reporting requirements, including minor infractions, such as slight delays in submission, have become one of the main formal reasons for decisions to forcibly liquidate public associations. Liquidation on such grounds illustrates the misuse of international AML/CTF standards by the state for restrictive purposes.

Sanctions, Suspension, Liquidation

Registering bodies may impose sanctions on public associations, their associations (unions), and foundations, including written warnings and liquidation. The activity of public associations and their unions can also be suspended for one to six months by a court decision upon application by the competent registering authority. In such cases, the public association or union has an opportunity to eliminate the violations within the established deadline and provide written confirmation, supported by documentation, to the registering authority. When a public association or union is suspended, it is prohibited from carrying out any activities, except for those aimed at eliminating the violations.

Public associations and their associations (unions) may be liquidated by court decision in the following cases:

- engaging in propaganda of war, terrorist or other extremist activities, or other acts prohibited by law, as well as activities causing harm to state and/or public interests;

- violating the law and/or the organization's charter within one year after receiving a written warning;
- committing violations of the law at the time of state registration by the founders that are irremediable;
- the number of members and composition of the association do not meet the requirements provided by law, according to its status and activities;
- the organization is suspended and fails to correct the violations within the deadline established by the court;
- failing to submit mandatory reports to registering authorities and public reports for three consecutive years within the prescribed deadlines;
- conducting activities inconsistent with the main directions of domestic and foreign policy, the national security concept, or resolutions approved by the All-Belarusian People's Assembly.

A public association or union can also be liquidated by a court decision for a single violation of the Law on Mass Events, as well as for violations of the requirements established by applicable law for the use of gratuitous foreign aid. A public association may also be liquidated for unlicensed or prohibited activity or other repeated or gross violations of applicable laws. In practice, public associations and foundations are liquidated both for minor violations of the law, including inaccuracies or delays in submitting reports, breaches of reporting publication procedures, or failure to provide information about their legal address, and for engaging in extremist or other illegal activities.

A distinctive feature of the NPO delegitimization campaign from 2021 to 2024 is that the liquidation of NPOs was accompanied by criminal cases against their leaders and activists, allegedly for engaging in extremist activities, participating in protests, and similar actions.

Non-state establishments and associations of legal entities may be liquidated through a simplified procedure upon decision of state authorities, without a court ruling.

Government-Organized NGOs (GONGOs)

The Belarusian authorities are developing their own model of civil society under state control, including GONGOs and ideologized associations, and making independent initiatives dependent on loyalty and rejection of political themes.

In the context of widespread repression in Belarus, many NGOs are forced to operate in ways resembling GONGOs to maintain their legal status. However, there are clearly pro-government organizations for which legislation and its implementation create favorable conditions.

The Law on the Essentials of Civil Society of February 14, 2023, imposes special forms of interaction with the state based on criteria that only a small number of large, government-supported associations can meet. Despite the official title, the Law does not regulate civil society, but rather governs the interaction of certain civil society actors with the state, particularly the right to nominate delegates from civil society to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. Specifically, the law stipulates that only national-level associations listed by the Ministry of Justice and having membership exceeding 100,000 individuals or representing at least half of the registered trade unions may be recognized as civil society entities with special forms of interaction with the state. As a result, only five organizations meet these criteria: Republican Public Association "Belaya Rus", Belarusian Public Association of Veterans, Public Association "Belarusian Republican Youth Union", Public Association "Belarusian Union of Women", and the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus.

Legislation also creates favorable financial conditions for these organizations. In particular, Decree #22 of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On Supporting the Public Association 'BRSM'" of January 19,

2026, establishes additional state support for that organization. Notably, the purposes for which its expenses are funded are classified as “for official use,” limiting public transparency.

BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

The financial activities of CSOs are subject to increasing state control over funding sources, the redistribution of financial flows in favor of structures loyal to the state, and the criminalization of alternative sources of support for independent initiatives.

Foreign Funding

The law imposes a complex and burdensome procedure for receiving, registering, and using foreign gratuitous aid, including the requirement to submit detailed plans for its distribution. Foreign gratuitous funds may only be received for a very narrow list of purposes explicitly listed in Presidential Decree #3 on Foreign Gratuitous Aid of May 25, 2020. All foreign aid, regardless of the amount, must be registered with a special body – the Department for Humanitarian Activities under the Presidential Administration. Registration can be denied for any reason, including vague grounds such as “inexpediency of registration.” Decisions on exempting such aid from taxes are made on a case-by-case basis, based on the opinion of the state body operating in the area where the aid will be used. The system of foreign funding prioritizes state bodies, creating unhindered conditions for them and introducing additional permissible purposes for receiving such aid. The possible purposes for other recipients (including NPOs) are continuously reduced at both the legislative and practical levels. Any anonymous donation may be considered foreign gratuitous aid. NPOs are forced to verify information about all individuals who have provided them with support, which is technically impossible in practice. Legislation establishes administrative (Articles 24.14 and 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Offenses) and criminal (Article 369-2 of the Criminal Code) liability for violating the rules governing foreign gratuitous aid. Stigmatization and criticism of CSOs receiving foreign funding remain widespread. State media and propaganda sources continuously publish and broadcast materials discrediting CSOs that receive foreign support, as well as donors.

Domestic Funding

The receipt and use of gratuitous aid from domestic corporate donors are regulated by Decree #300 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on the Provision and Use of Gratuitous (Sponsor) Aid of July 1, 2005, which was later amended on March 27, 2024. The new decree significantly expanded the purposes for which NPOs can receive and use financial resources from Belarusian entities. But the continued suppression of civic activity, mass liquidation of CSOs, pressure on businesses, and the overall repressive atmosphere limit the practical impact of these changes on the exercise of freedom of association.

State support for CSOs is underdeveloped and primarily directed toward specific pro-government organizations.

According to budgeting legislation, public associations may receive funds from the government budget by presidential decision. The law provides funding to two pro-government organizations: the Belarusian Writers’ Union and the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM).

Since late 2021, the list of organizations eligible for rental benefits has been significantly reduced, with only 22 Belarusian NPOs currently benefiting from such privileges. At the time of the list’s approval in 2010, around 500 NPOs were eligible for rental benefits, and before the introduction of this list, all public associations had such rights.

Belarusian law forbids public associations and their associations (unions) from engaging in independent entrepreneurial activity. They may do so only by participating in or founding a for-profit entity. Consumer societies and sports societies included in a special list are exceptions to this rule. Legislation does not incentivize domestic business support to CSOs, granting benefits only for financing selected organizations. The Tax Code stipulates that profits transferred to 18 specifically named NPOs and religious organizations are exempt from profit tax (up to 10% of gross profit). There is a widespread

practice of initiating criminal liability for financing civil society organizations and providing support to their target groups, including political prisoners and their family members.

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

Freedom of expression in Belarus is systematically restricted by the state. The restrictions are inconsistent with international law and do not meet international standards of necessity and proportionality. In practice, legislation and law enforcement practices are aimed at suppressing criticism of authorities, independent journalism, and civic activity. Opportunities for the safe operation of independent media and human rights organizations within the country are virtually non-existent.

Persecution targets a wide range of expressions of opinion and related actions, including criticism of government bodies and law enforcement agencies, dissemination of information on human rights violations, financial support for civic initiatives, analytical and research activities, support for Ukraine, and statements that the authorities may interpret as “discrediting the state.”

In January 2025, the Operational and Analytical Center issued Order No. 6 amending regulations on the registration of domain names in the national domain zone of Belarus. The order granted the domain administrator the right to cancel domain registration if it is deemed to harm national interests. Following cancellation, domains are added to a special list and become unavailable for re-registration.

Key Repressive Practices

One of the main repressive practices is equating any dissent with “extremism” or “terrorism.” After 2020, the application of anti-extremism legislation has expanded to an unprecedented scale. As a result, political persecution in Belarus effectively operates as a “conveyor belt,” supported by a comprehensive system of legal and institutional mechanisms.

This system includes specialized laws on combating “extremism” and “terrorism,” numerous criminal and administrative offenses, lists of “extremist” organizations/formations and materials, as well as legislative amendments allowing for the revocation of citizenship for “extremist crimes” or the imposition of the death penalty for “acts of terrorism” and “treason.” The politicized nature of this legislation has repeatedly been criticized by international organizations.

Politically Motivated Cases

According to the governmental investigative committee, since 2020, around 22,500 “extremist-motivated crimes” have been registered in Belarus, reflecting the scale of application of these norms.

A prominent example of anti-extremism legislation in action is the large-scale campaign in 2025 related to the so-called “Belaruski Hayun Case.” After the Telegram bot of the “Belaruski Hayun” initiative, used by individuals to report movements of Russian military equipment in Belarus and to share opinions on Russia’s war against Ukraine, was hacked, the personal data of thousands of users fell into the hands of law enforcement. Mass arrests followed nationwide. People were charged under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“Assistance to Extremist Activities”) for actions that were, in essence, expressions of civic position or solidarity with Ukraine, including sending photos and videos of military equipment. According to the Human Rights Center “Viasna,” by the end of 2025, at least 127 confirmed individuals were identified in this case, while the total number of detainees is significantly higher, and lists of persons subject to arrest may include up to 1,500 people.

Another example of politically motivated persecution is the “Yard Chats Case.” Various forms of local communication and citizen self-organization, from organized initiatives to spontaneous discussions, are classified as “extremist activity.” In some cases, participants are also accused of engaging in independent civic education programs, which prosecutors allege could facilitate their participation in political life.

State Control of Media

Nearly all TV channels are owned by the state, which also owns major public and political newspapers and

subsidizes them directly from the state budget. The media market in production and distribution is de facto monopolized by the state. All media must be registered with the Ministry of Information, and the work of foreign media and journalists is subject to accreditation.

State Persecution of Journalists

As of early March 2026, according to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), 28 media workers remain in detention. Journalists and bloggers abroad are regularly convicted through so-called special in absentia proceedings and face other forms of pressure, including being placed on international wanted lists, having their homes searched, and threats to relatives remaining in Belarus. Additionally, they are targeted by state propaganda media through insults and defamation.

Anti-extremism legislation is actively used to restrict access to independent sources of information. Independent media are designated as “extremist formations” or as distributing “extremist materials,” and citizens can be held accountable even for subscribing to, reposting, or otherwise interacting with such resources. Directive #12 of the President of the Republic of Belarus on the Implementation of the Fundamentals of the Belarusian State Ideology, adopted on April 9, 2025, formalizes the role of media outlets as actors in implementing state ideology. The provisions assign media responsibilities in “counter-propaganda work,” “dissemination and explanation of socially significant information in accordance with the main tasks of ideological work,” as well as the coordination of appointments of state republican and regional media by heads and chief editors. The Ministry of Information is involved in providing “information support for ideological work.”

BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

The Constitution of Belarus guarantees freedom of assembly as follows:

Article 35. The freedom to hold assemblies, meetings, street marches, demonstrations and pickets, which do not disturb law and order or violate the rights of other citizens of the Republic of Belarus, shall be guaranteed by the State. The procedure of holding the above-mentioned events shall be determined by law.

The specific law governing assemblies is the Law on Mass Events of December 30, 1997, amended multiple times. The law defines several types of “mass events,” such as: (a) assembly, (b) meeting, (c) street rally, (d) demonstration, (e) picketing, and (f) other forms of mass events.

Freedom of peaceful assembly in Belarus is significantly restricted both in law and in practice. The Law on Mass Events is inconsistent with international human rights standards. Any assembly requires prior authorization through a complex bureaucratic procedure: an application must be submitted no later than 15 days before the event, and the notification principle is absent. The grounds for prohibiting assemblies are disproportionate and fall short of international human rights standards; in practice, refusals cannot be effectively appealed in court. Spontaneous and counter-assemblies are prohibited, and designated venues for assemblies are strictly limited and determined by local authorities. Only adult citizens with voting rights may organize assemblies, while individuals previously held liable for violating assembly procedures are prohibited from doing so. Single-person pickets and other forms of individual expression are often treated by law enforcement as unauthorized mass events. The law also provides for additional sanctions for organizers that are legal entities. Organizers of assemblies are held responsible for maintaining public order and for the actions of other persons during the event, and they are required to confirm this in a special written form submitted to state bodies.

Dissemination of information about an upcoming assembly is prohibited until official authorization is granted. The Law prohibits live broadcasting of assemblies held without authorization via the media, online platforms, or other information networks.

Public assemblies critical of the authorities are effectively absent due to ongoing repression. Assemblies are held secretly, mainly in the form of photo and video pickets, with participants concealing their faces for fear of detention. At the same time, pro-government peaceful assemblies continue to be held, with the

active support of executive authorities.

Persecution of participants in peaceful assemblies is systemic and includes detentions, fines, administrative arrests, criminal prosecution, dismissals from employment, and expulsions from educational institutions, including for participation in the 2020 protests. Politically motivated criminal prosecutions affect all social groups and segments of the population, and often extend to entire families. To identify participants, law enforcement agencies use facial recognition technologies and actively monitor the media and social networks. Authorities maintain databases of individuals detained for participating in protests (including the so-called “Besporiadki” database), containing tens of thousands of names. In 2025, information became available about the development and use of a new database called “Activist,” aimed at tracking civic activity and the involvement of citizens in initiatives critical of the authorities.

The rules governing the use of force by law enforcement officers during assemblies are not publicly accessible: only general laws on the use of force and weapons are available, while by-laws specifically regulating mass events remain undisclosed. In practice, the dispersal of peaceful assemblies, arrests during non-violent gatherings, and the use of riot control measures clearly demonstrate that these rules are not based on a human rights approach. Since the 2020 protests and in subsequent years, thousands of cases of torture and arbitrary detentions of peaceful assembly participants have been documented. There are no effective mechanisms to hold officers accountable for violence. No known investigations or prosecutions of those responsible have been carried out.

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	66 (2023)	1 - 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	105 (2025)	1 - 142
Transparency International	124 (2025)	1 - 182
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index	85 (2025)	179 - 1
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Not Free Political Rights: 1 Civil Liberties: 6 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0

REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Belarus UPR page
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UN Human Rights Reports	• Belarus OHCHR page • UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus • Treaty Bodies Reports • Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus
U.S. State Department	Country report on human rights practices
Fragile States Index Reports	Fund for Peace Fragile States Index
Other	• The International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) progress report • Human Rights Watch World Report: Belarus (2025) • Amnesty International Belarus reports • Reports by Human Rights Center “Viasna” • Reports by Lawtrend • Belarus: CSO Meter • European Parliament resolutions
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	Belarus

NEWS

[ICC opens probe into alleged crimes against humanity by Belarus](#) (March 2026).

In March 2026, prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced the opening of an investigation into alleged crimes committed by the Belarusian authorities related to the deportation of political opponents. Although Belarus is not a party to the Rome Statute, the case was initiated by Lithuania, an ICC member state. Prosecutors concluded that part of the alleged crimes had been committed on the territory of Lithuania, thereby establishing the Court’s jurisdiction.

[Belarus leader pardons 18 prisoners in an effort to improve ties with the US](#) (March 2026)

Belarus’ authoritarian president has pardoned 18 more prisoners as part of efforts to improve relations with the United States. In a decree, Lukashenko pardoned 18 prisoners, including 15 people convicted on extremism charges, which are widely used in Belarus in politically motivated prosecutions. Of those pardoned, 11 are women. Since the two leaders spoke on the phone in August, Lukashenko has released 123 prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and prominent opposition figures Maria Kolesnikova and Viktor Babaryka.

[Belarus journalist convicted of treason and sentenced to 9 years in prison](#)(March 2026)

Belarusian journalist Pavel Dabravolski was convicted Monday of treason and sentenced to nine years in a maximum-security prison, activists said, the fifth media worker to be jailed in two weeks in a relentless government crackdown on freedom of the press. Dabravolski, who has reported for international and domestic news outlets and won numerous prizes for his work, was found guilty during a closed-door trial at Minsk City Court.

[Belarus frees opposition politician after stroke in prison, exiled leader says](#) (February 2026)

Belarusian opposition politician Mikola Statkevich was released from custody after suffering a stroke while in prison, according to exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Statkevich had previously been among 52 prisoners freed in September 2025 following an appeal by U.S. President Donald Trump, but he refused deportation to Lithuania and was subsequently re-detained.

[Hearings in U.S Congress on Political Prisoners and Repression in Belarus](#) (January 2026)

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on February 3, 2026, on the human rights situation in Belarus, focusing on political prisoners and repression of civil society. The discussion

highlighted the crackdown that intensified after the 2020 presidential election, when authorities declared Alexander Lukashenko the winner despite widespread support for opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and mass protests.

Australia, Canada, UK urge Belarus to end 'campaign of repression' (August 2025)

Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom called on Belarus to end its campaign of repression against civil society, the media, and the opposition, pointing to mass detentions, torture, and the forced exile of activists.

Lukashenko pardons 30 convicted in Belarus antigovernment protests (September 2024)

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has pardoned 30 people convicted for antigovernment protests, four years after huge demonstrations that prompted a massive crackdown on dissent and spurred a new wave of emigration. Lukashenko's office said in a statement that the move was a "humane gesture" that affected seven women and 23 men. Nearly 1,400 people remain in prison in Belarus for voicing dissent against Lukashenko, who has run the country for 30 years, according to rights group Viasna. Thousands of others have left the country.

Belarus protest leader Maria Kalesnikava starving in prison (September 2024)

When Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko used the full force of his security apparatus to smash mass demonstrations in 2020, Maria Kalesnikava became a symbol of the protesters' defiance. Snatched off the street by masked officers, the opposition campaigner was bundled into a van, driven to the border with Ukraine and threatened with expulsion "alive or in bits". She tore her passport into small pieces to thwart the attempt to deport her. She was sentenced to 11 years on charges including conspiracy to seize power. Four years on from her arrest, Kalesnikava, 42, is being held incommunicado in a tiny, stinking prison cell. The Belarus interior ministry did not respond to a request for comment on Kalesnikava's prison conditions.

Council of Europe Confirms EU's Unwavering Support for Democracy and Human Rights (February 2024)

The Council [of Europe] today approved conclusions reaffirming its unwavering support for the Belarusian people's quest for a free, democratic, sovereign and independent Belarus as part of a peaceful and prosperous Europe.... It strongly condemns the continuing persecution and intimidation campaigns against all segments of Belarusian society, the unprecedented level of repression, and restrictions on political participation.

Lukashenka Tightens Screw Ahead of Belarus Elections (January 2024)

President Aliaksandr Lukashenka is doubling down on repression as Belarus prepares for parliamentary elections in February. Since the 2020 presidential election, Lukashenka has accelerated his authoritarian crackdown and thousands of Belarusians who spoke out against the government have been physically beaten and wrongfully imprisoned. Opposition leaders and other members of the intelligentsia have been given lengthy prison sentences and some threatened with execution. Little will change as a result of the sham elections in February.

Belarus Misuses Counter-terrorism and Anti-extremism Legislation to Stifle Dissent (October 2023)

The Belarusian authorities are misusing counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation to further purge civic space, suppress freedom of expression and eradicate political opposition, a UN expert said. "Many opposition figures, civil society activists, human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists have been abusively labelled as "extremists", detained and prosecuted since 2020. Harassment, repression and fear compelled those who are not behind bars to seek refuge abroad," said Anaïs Marin, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus.

Loss of Citizenship for Opposition Activists (January 2023)

An amendment to the Law on the Citizenship of the Republic of Belarus, signed by Alyaksandr Lukashenka, was published on January 10. Its provisions include the possibility of revoking the citizenship of a person living abroad who has been convicted by a final judgment for 'extremist' activities or other

acts threatening state security. As explained by the initiator of the amendments, deputy Lilia Ananich, the intention was to legally stigmatize those engaged in 'anti-state activities' outside the country.

[Nobel Prize Laureate Ales Bialiatski on Trial Again](#) (January 2023)

On January 5, 2023, the trial in the politically motivated case of the Viasna human rights organization began. Three human rights defenders, each facing 7 to 12 years of imprisonment, are in the dock: Viasna chairman and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, his deputy Valiantsin Stefanovic, and Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections campaign coordinator Uladzimir Labkov.

ARCHIVED NEWS

[Mikalai Autukhovich to be Tried Under the Criminal Code](#) (April 2022)

[Repression against NGOs protecting women's rights and gender equality in Belarus](#) (March 2022)

[UN Human Rights Committee condemns execution of Victor Pavlov](#) (March 2022)

[230 people detained after anti-war and anti-referendum protests](#) (February 2022)

[Authorities to re-impose criminal charges for unregistered organizations](#) (December 2021)

[Opposition leader Tikhanovsky jailed for 18 years](#) (December 2021)

[Maryia Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak sentenced to jail over historic protests](#) (September 2021)

[Supreme Court liquidates Belarusian Association of Journalists](#) (August 2021)

[OSCE human rights head voices serious concerns over continued rights violations](#) (April 2021)

[Over 200 detained on Freedom Day](#) (March 2021)

[Belarus Human Rights Situation Deteriorating](#) (February 2021)

[Belarus Strips Russian Journalists of Accreditation](#) (May 2020)

[120 People Affected by New Crackdown on Protesters](#) (May 2020)

[Belarus Must Stop Repression of Peaceful Protestors](#) (February 2020)

[Viasna Alerts UN Special Rapporteurs to Repression of Peaceful Protesters](#) (December 2019)

[Protesters Arrested and Fined for Rallying Against Integration With Russia](#) (January 2020)

[Ukraine Detains Five For Killing Belarusian Journalist in 2016](#) (December 2019)

[Belarus Among Worst Countries For Internet Freedom](#) (November 2019)

[Over One Million Foreign Visitors on Belarus' Travel Blacklist](#) (October 2019)

[Belarus' independent journalists face mounting fines](#) (September 2019)

[Unflagging Protest: Belarus's Opposition Inspired By A Pensioner](#) (August 2019)

[UNHRC renews mandate of Special Rapporteur on Belarus](#) (July 2019)

[UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus: "Too many issues ignored for too long"](#) (June 2019)

[Freedom Day Celebrations marked by excessive police interference](#) (March 2019)

[Editor-in-Chief Found Guilty](#) (March 2019)

[Prosecution of a blogger Siarhei Piatrukhin](#) (February 2019)

[Deep concern over execution of Asipovich](#) (January 2019)

[5 facts about new UN special rapporteur on Belarus](#) (September 2018)

[Clearly disproportionate crackdown on independent journalists](#) (August 2018)

[Belarus cracks down on journalists and publishers](#) (August 2018)

[7 journalists held in criminal case against independent websites](#) (August 2018)

[US LGBTQ poet and activist barred from Belarus](#) (August 2018)

[5th round of EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue takes place in Minsk](#) (July 2018)

[Human Rights Council discusses the human rights situation in Belarus](#) (June 2018)

[Belarus human rights record “devastating” as president tightens grip on power](#) (April 2018)

[Belarus human rights record “devastating” as president tightens grip on power](#) (October 2017)

[What Belarus and Brussels Discuss in Human Rights](#) (July 2017)

[Media Problems in Belarus](#) (July 2017)

[UN human rights expert calls unofficial visit to Belarus ‘first step’ towards cooperation](#) (July 2017)

[Comparison of “media battles” in Russia and Belarus](#) (June 2017)

[KGB drops charges against Young Front activists](#) (June 2017)

[A Belarusian Spring](#) (June 2017)

[The Council should renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus](#) (May 2017)

[Human Rights Situation in Belarus](#) (May 2017)

[Belarus Backsliding Badly on Human Rights: U.N. Report](#) (May 2017)

[UN expert decries Government’s return to mass violence against peaceful protestors](#) (March 2017)

[Riot police in Belarus attack protesters calling for end to ‘dictatorship’](#) (March 2017)

[Assembly announces the winners of the Civil Society Champions award-2016](#) (January 2017)

[Situation in Belarus still frozen, human rights defenders say](#) (December 2016)

[Investigative Committee Detains Two Bloggers over Inciting National Hate \(UPD\)](#) (December 2016)

[Cost of Protest: Belarusian Activists’ Fines](#) (November 2016) (*Russian*)

[Role and Place of Civil Society in Donor Support in Belarus](#) (November 2016) (*Russian*)

[Resolution on Situation in Belarus](#) (November 2016)

[Murder of Journalist Underscores Threats to Free Press](#) (July 2016)

[As Sanctions Are Suspended, Belarus’s UN Human Rights Monitor Remains on the Sidelines](#) (June 2016)

[Review of the freedom of association in Belarus in 1st quarter 2016](#) (May 2016)

[Ulad Vialichka: Civil society wants to take part in relaunch of the EU-Belarus relations](#) (March 2016)

[Issued Review Of Freedom Of Associations In Belarus](#) (February 2016)

[Top 10 Belarus Civil Society in 2015](#) (December 2015)

[In Belarus, threat to free speech in broad definitions of “extremist materials”](#) (December 2015)

[Belarus bookshop braves the state to publish Nobel winner’s work](#) (October 2015)

[Belarus president signs UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (September 2015)

[Civil Society in Belarus, 2000-2015](#) (September 2015)

[Pact Releases Report on Belarus’ Civil Society](#) (September 2015)

[Analysis of changes on foreign gratuitous aid](#) (September 2015) (*Russian*)

[Fine for Religious Worship Re-imposed](#) (July 2015)

[Monitoring for 2nd Quarter of 2015 on Freedom of Association Published](#) (July 2015)

[Civil Society: Away from Politics and towards Cooperation with the Authorities](#) (June 2015)

[UN Human Rights Council Discusses Report of Belarus](#) (May 2015)

[First Belarusian Not-for-Profit Law Forum Takes Place in Vilnius](#) (May 2015)

[Elena Tonkacheva to be expelled from Belarus for three years](#) (November 2014)

[UN recognizes that Belarus violated the rights of Ales Bialiatski](#) (November 2014)

[Ales Bialiatski: Two years of silence in Belarus penal colony](#) (July 2014)

[“Ales Bialiatski released, but other political prisoners remain in jail” – UN expert](#) (June 2014)

[Pinsk BCD coordinator gets warned](#) (January 2014)

[Belarus’ senators approve amendments to laws on political parties](#) (October 2013)

[EU policy towards Belarus](#) (September 2013)

[What is not permitted is prohibited: Silencing civil society in Belarus](#) (April 2013)

[Belarusian Human Rights Defenders Need Support](#) (February 2013)

[Socially Oriented Mobile Applications for Belarusian Civil Society](#) (January 2013)

[Belarusian human rights center’s property confiscated](#) (December 2012)

[Belarus human rights center staff facing eviction](#) (November 2012)

[EU renews Belarus sanctions due to human rights concerns](#) (October 2012)

[Belarus refuses cooperation with the UN Human Rights Committee in Bialiatski case](#) (September 2012)

[Amnesty International concerned over new probe of jailed Belarus activist](#) (July 2012)

[In Minsk, Eurovision winner Loreen expresses support for political prisoners](#) (July 2012)

[U.S., OSCE say Belarus bans activist from travelling](#) (July 2012)

[In Belarus, journalist arrested, charged with libel](#) (June 2012)

[The Observatory refers the case of Mr. Ales Bialiatski to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) (April 2012)

[European dialogue on modernization with Belarus launched](#) (March 2012)

Key Events

International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Belarus ratified the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992. In October 2018, it presented its first report on its execution of the ICCPR to the UN Human Right Committee. Belarusian human rights defenders submitted an alternative report highlighting concerns about freedom of speech and assembly, capital punishment, discrimination, torture, and other issues. They also provided a [range of recommendations](#), most of which were supported by the Committee.

Belarus faced multiple claims before the Committee for violating Article 22 of the ICCPR, which addresses freedom of association, but it has not complied with any concluding observations (e.g., Communication No. 1383/2005, [Katsora et al. v. Belarus](#)). In August 2022, Belarus withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR (OP-ICCPR), cutting off individuals' ability to bring complaints to the Human Rights Committee for violations of their rights under the ICCPR.

International Condemnation of Civic Freedoms Violations

The August 2020 presidential election and subsequent crackdown drew widespread condemnation from the UN, the Council of Europe, and numerous governments. On March 24, 2021, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution condemning abuses of fundamental freedoms in Belarus, which Minsk rejected.

UN Monitoring of Human Rights Violations

In March 2022, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a [report documenting widespread human rights abuses, the protection of perpetrators of abuses by the state, and the obstruction of accountability](#) both before and after the August 2020 elections. Between May 2020 and May 2021, at least 37,000 people were detained, including 13,500 during the week of the election alone. By March 2022, more than 1,000 people were being held in prison on politically motivated charges, with some serving sentences of 10 years or more.

In September 2023, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, confirmed that civic space continues to shrink, noting “a campaign of violence and repression” against dissenting voices and ongoing impunity for human rights violations.

Expansion of Surveillance (Decree No. 368)

On October 18, 2022, President Lukashenko issued Decree No 368, greatly expanding state surveillance powers. The decree requires online resources, including email providers, messengers, online retailers, and taxi and car sharing services, to retain user data and provide law enforcement and security agencies with direct remote access. These measures lack judicial safeguards, are not subject to court review, and further entrench the state's ability to monitor and suppress civic activity.

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<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/belarus>