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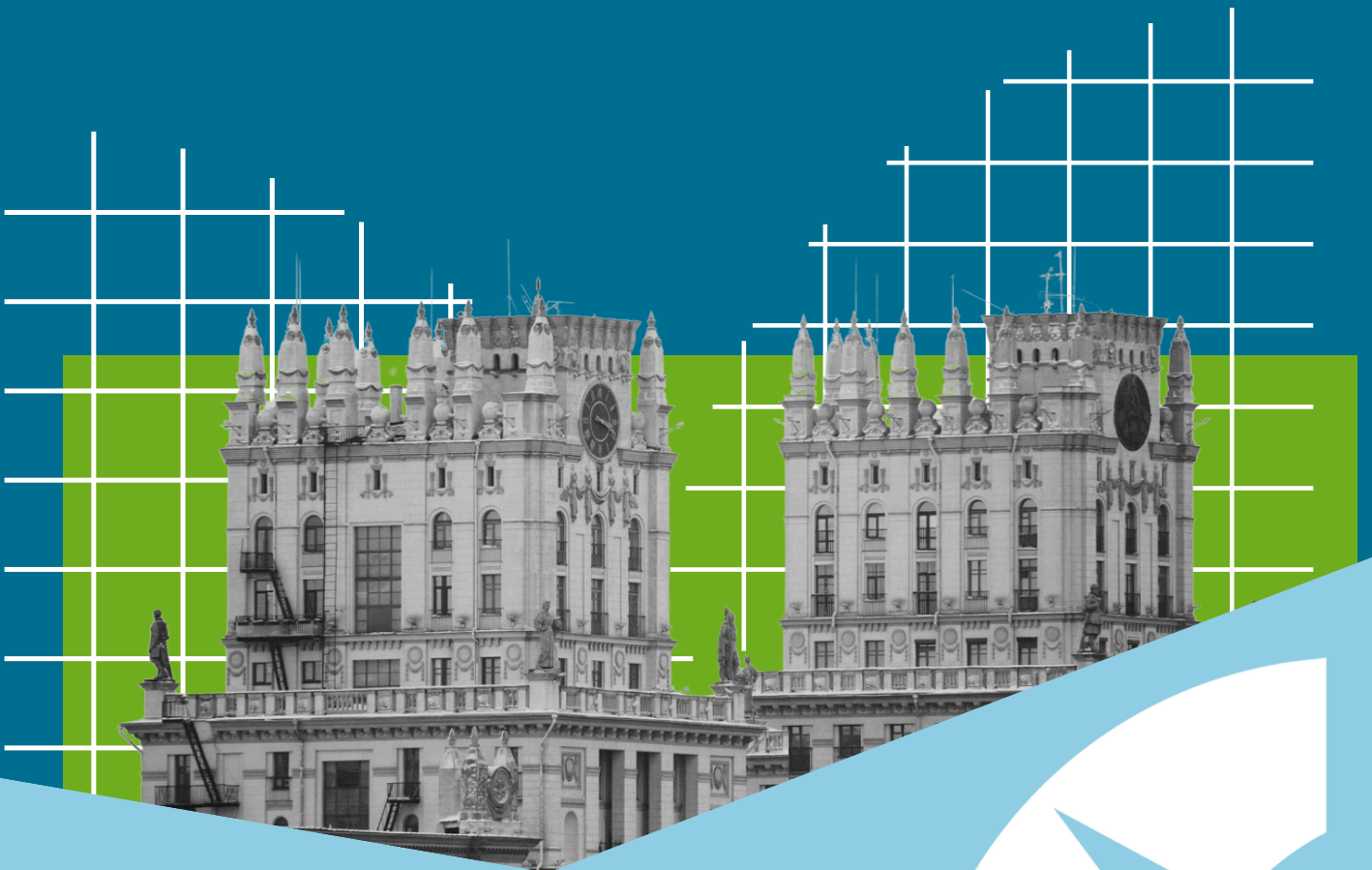
# CSO METER

## Empowered for Action

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### BELARUS 2025

### Country Report





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European Center for  
Not-for-Profit Law

# CSO Meter 2025: Belarus Country Report

Reporting period: January–December 2025

European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting (ECNL) is a leading European resource and research centre in the field of policies and laws affecting civil society. ECNL creates knowledge, empowers partners and helps set standards that create, protect and expand civic freedoms.

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# ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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AI	Artificial intelligence
AML/CTF	Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing
BRYU	Belarusian Republican Youth Union ( <i>Bielaruski respublikanski sajuz moladzi</i> )
BYN	Belarusian Ruble
CSO	Civil society organisation
CoE	Council of Europe
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ECNL	European Center for Not-for-Profit Law
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679)
GONGO	Government-organised non-governmental organisation
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HRC	UN Human Rights Committee
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	Information and communications technology
KDB	State Security Committee ( <i>Kamitet dzjaržaŭnaj biaspieki</i> )
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, etc.
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus
MoJ	Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus
NCO	Non-commercial organisation
OAC	Operational and Analytical Center under the President of Belarus
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar

# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Country context and key trends affecting the civil society environment

In 2025, the Belarusian government's public policy towards civil society remained unchanged as it maintained existing legislative and practical restrictions on the establishment and operation of CSOs, and use of repressive sanctions against activists of foreign CSOs. While there were minor positive changes in the legal environment and improvements in some technical conditions for CSOs, these were largely side-effects of state policy or related to policies aimed at creating favorable conditions for state controlled CSOs, or CSOs actively supporting the existing political regime.

The presidential election of 26 January 2025 bore little resemblance to a genuinely competitive political process, functioning instead as a tool of self-legitimization for Belarus' existing political system. Pro-democratic CSOs, both inside Belarus and abroad, along with GONGOs and pro-government CSOs, did not perceive participation in the election as a significant event. Even the state-mandated participation of loyal CSO representatives in nominating election commission members and observers was not active and was largely perfunctory – carried out not out of genuine engagement, but as an informally imposed state duty performed in exchange for state support or guarantees of relatively free grassroots public activity. However, more repressive arms of the government continued to view the election as a potential escalation point, which led to intensification of repressive activities, including pressure on recipients of foreign aid or former participants in previous election campaigns, as well as the introduction of new restrictions on freedom of online communication.

Beyond the government's own course of action, the international political landscape remains a factor that shapes the overall environment for civil society in Belarus - both through its effect on government policies and impact on public sentiment. Central to this is the ongoing war in Ukraine, which remains the basis for unilateral sanctions against Belarus and, in general, keeps many aspects of Belarus' interaction with Europe and the world frozen. The country's isolation in many aspects of international cooperation continues (for example, in culture and sports, charity and social activities), which has in practice facilitated the progression of some segments of Belarusian civil society closer to the influence of the so-called "Russian world". Some sociological studies indicate a weakening of pro-European geopolitical orientations within the

society in favor of a pro-Russian orientation<sup>1</sup>, however it is difficult to definitively assess the sustainability of this trend, as well as the reliability of such studies themselves.

The peacemaking efforts of the new U.S. administration, which took office in early 2025, and its outreach to Minsk have resulted in the early release of new groups of political prisoners. Many civil society figures were among the 189 persons early released in 2025 (including Nobel laureate Ales Bialiatski), all of which who were forcibly and extralegally expelled from Belarus. Their release were not the result of any institutional mechanism for human rights protection or accountability; but a transaction framed as a humanitarian response and manifestation of the Belarusian authorities' goodwill in response to the removal of certain U.S. sanctions towards Belarus.

Overall, the early release of political prisoners is proceeding at the pace set in 2024, with only a slight acceleration (from 227 early released by pardon persons in 2024 to 342 pardoned persons in 2025)<sup>2</sup>. Even when combined with near 300 political prisoners released due to the end of their sentences, this only slightly reduces the total number of political prisoners - from 1,299 at the beginning of 2025 to 1,131 at the end of the year. This is due to the continuation of arrests, both administrative in nature (for example for possession and distribution of extremist materials, including "likes" or "shares" on social media) and criminal (particularly for participation in extremist formations and facilitating extremist activity). At least 1,254 people have been convicted on political criminal charges in Belarus in 2025<sup>3</sup>, which marks a decrease compared to the 1,721 convictions in 2024 (with imprisonment or other methods of punishments). The most severe cases of repression with imprisonment decreased from 500 cases of imprisonment court sentences in 2024 to 306 convictions for imprisonment in 2025<sup>4</sup>. At least 30 people have been convicted in absentia under special proceedings. Over the course of 2025, human rights defenders recognised 490 people as political prisoners (however, some of these cases are related to sentences from previous years). The total number of people recognised as political prisoners since May 2020 is 4,328.

The high level of repression and restrictions together, which have lasted for over five years, negatively impacts the capability to assess the parameters envisaged in the methodology. Most monitoring groups and instruments operate from abroad and their

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<sup>1</sup> Euroradio, Chatham House: pro-Russian sentiment in Belarus at its highest in five years, 2 December 2025.

<sup>2</sup> All the numbers of political prisoners and released peoples based on the calculations from the Human Rights Center "Viasna".

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Center "Viasna", At least 1,254 people convicted in 2025: the results of criminal prosecution, 29 December 2025.

<sup>4</sup> According to the same source cited above, however, one should take into account the increased invisibility of these practices and the difficulties in monitoring court trials.

data is incomplete, difficult to verify, or subject to delays. Experts from outside Belarus have difficulty assessing the interests and practical needs of Belarusian civil society, being more familiar with the situation with refugees, diasporas and political emigration. Experts inside the country are wary of engaging with international assessors, both due to the risk of repression and concerns about the proper security of personal data collected by foreign researchers, as well as reasonable doubts about the overall effectiveness and feasibility of international monitoring mechanisms.

When describing the situation in Belarus, special UN mechanisms established for Belarus, politicians, and experts often start with the thesis that there is '*no civil society at all or any real CSOs in Belarus*' without any serious verification and justification<sup>5</sup>.

Methodological challenges in assessing indicators in the "*Practice*" dimension become particularly significant, where the volume of empirical data collected using traditional methods and available for analysis has dramatically decreased, amounting to approximately 20% of what was available in 2019 when the first measurement was conducted. The practical dimension is now primarily measured based on government statistics and official reports (which are incomplete), as well as media reports (which are often biased and unrepresentative). The data extracted from consulting and advocacy practices, as well as sociological surveys, has significantly reduced and now provides only a fragmented picture.

The "*Law*" dimension is more accessible for direct analysis due to the general public disclosure of legislative acts. However, obstacles arise even in this area due to blocked access to many important legal resources for foreign users. Thus, the official MoJ website<sup>6</sup> cannot be accessed from abroad without additional tools, and there are interruptions in access to various registries, databases and other official resources, especially during political events that are important for official Minsk (for example, the January 2025 election or the session of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in December 2025). In general, online tools are rarely used in Belarus to enhance opportunities for CSOs, and they serve more as mechanisms for state monitoring and control, thereby reducing the figures in relevant indicators.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, from the participants of the OCSE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference plenary, 16 October 2025, voiced assessment concludes that all independent organisations in Belarus have been liquidated <https://odhr.osce.org/chairmanship/2025whdc>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://minjust.gov.by/>

## Key developments and priorities in the civil society environment

As for many other countries, the most important factor influencing the structure of the funding base for CSOs in Belarus in 2025 was the cessation of funding from the American USAID programs and the closure of the agency itself (including the Belarusian office which opened in 2024 in neighbouring Lithuania<sup>7</sup>). The long-term effects of this new U.S. policy have yet to be assessed, in particular due to the fact that the USAID funds often financed programs and projects in Belarus indirectly, through intermediaries, including those associated with CSO infrastructure or UN agencies. However, many CSOs have already announced program reductions due to the disappearance of significant funding sources<sup>8</sup>. Difficulties were reported to a greater extent by media outlets rather than by CSOs, and not by those located outside Belarus but by those located inside the country. Nevertheless, by the end of 2025, the majority of the affected CSOs had managed to restructure their programs, attract additional funding from other sources or reduce expenses and areas of activity; with only a few CSOs considering full closure.

The release of new groups of political prisoners has increased the role of organisations somehow involved in this area. This includes both human rights centres that record political prisoners, and humanitarian CSOs that provide them with material aid and other assistance abroad in their countries of exile. However, the very method of releasing political prisoners as a result of transactional diplomacy in exchange for lifting of sanctions has weakened the civil society groups that have advocated for increased sanction pressure on Belarus and sharply criticised any negotiations with official Minsk (these are primarily the CSO structures grouped around political opposition abroad). The development of a negotiating track based on transactional diplomacy will in the long term diminish the significance of the efforts of those foreign CSOs that in 2021-2025 focused on developing institutional mechanisms to hold official Minsk accountable and exert influence upon the authorities through international law, including human rights.

At the same time, sanctions pressure on Belarus negatively impacted the CSO sector. CSOs inside Belarus were restricted in their ability to use foreign funding due to the cut off from EU funding. However, in February 2025, the Council of the European Union introduced exceptions to the sanction regime established in 2022 for civil society and

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<sup>7</sup> Pozirk, USAID opens Belarus office in Vilnius, 20 September 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Results of the survey on continuation of activities and needs of Belarusian CSOs, February 2025.

media: Council Decision 2025/391<sup>9</sup>. Related EU regulations introduced specific exemptions in early 2025 for Belarusian CSOs and media, primarily allowing the use of certain EU banknotes for essential work promoting democracy, human rights, or the rule of law, despite broader sanctions on financial transactions with Belarus, while also addressing humanitarian aid and other crucial sectors like food and medical supplies. These exemptions aimed to facilitate the work of independent actors facing severe repression, by allowing essential funding and services for non-prohibited activities, was recommended by the EaP Civil Society Forum resolution and highlighted in the CSO Meter Belarus Country report in 2024<sup>10</sup>.

Banks restrict access to basic banking services for Belarusians and Belarusian CSOs abroad, including from opening accounts and making money transfers under standard consumer agreements. Debanking of Belarusians and Belarusian CSOs is intensifying for discriminatory reasons under the pretext of complying with the alleged AML/CTF regulations, due diligence and and know-your-customer approaches. However, in reality, it is the EU directives regarding the EU sanction regime against Belarus which is push banks to this activity.

There is a growing divergence of interests in these and other areas between Belarusian CSOs in Belarus and the civic structures established in 2020-2025 abroad (primarily in Lithuania and Poland, but also in Georgia, Ukraine, the United States, Germany and elsewhere). Foreign segments of civil society remain strongly integrated with the political opposition (many even claim that *civil society and opposition are one and the same*<sup>11</sup> and that independent CSOs do not exist in Belarus), although the overall politicisation of diaspora activists is declining and their focus of activity is shifting toward humanitarian, cultural, artistic and social activities, as well as addressing the problems of new émigré communities. Depoliticisation is even more characteristic of CSOs inside the country, where it becomes a condition for survival and risk mitigation.

Belarusian CSOs abroad continue to conduct advocacy activities through international mechanisms (the UN, EU, Council of Europe, OSCE and SDGs), but some have again begun to address their appeals to the Belarusian authorities. CSOs inside Belarus increasingly advocate at the level of local authorities and technical specialists at state

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<sup>9</sup> 'In order to facilitate the work of civil society and media, it is appropriate to introduce an exemption from the prohibition regarding the use in Belarus of banknotes denominated in any official currency of a Member State, where it is necessary for civil society and media activities that directly promote democracy, human rights or the rule of law in Belarus, under certain conditions.' - Council Decision 2025/391, point 18 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2025/391/oj>

<sup>10</sup> CSO Meter, 'Belarus Country Report 2024', 2024, [https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2025-05/2024%20CSO%20Meter%20Belarus%20Country%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2025-05/2024%20CSO%20Meter%20Belarus%20Country%20Report_0.pdf) Page 7.

<sup>11</sup> For example, this was stated by some CSOs at a meeting of Belarusian network and umbrellas organizations "Civil society of Belarus on the obstacle course: black swans and rainbow unicorns" on December 15, 2023, in Vilnius, following the first round of the strategic dialogue with the United States, where Belarus was represented by a non-governmental delegation of broad democratic forces.

agencies, but are cautious about raising issues at the national level, out of fear for politicisation.

In addition, there are different approaches to the visibility and openness of CSO activities to the public. Abroad, defence of civil society interests, impact on stakeholders and public campaigns are inseparable from advertising and media coverage; success in working with international stakeholders is diligently promoted for media coverage. However, inside the country, work with media coverage is either much more discreet or absent at all, rarely materializing in social media posts or publications on CSO websites. It is often disguised as the activity of unorganized citizens or even as work within the government machinery, presenting CSO advocacy as a discussion within the various approaches of individual state agencies.

In 2025, the crackdown campaign on public sector through the liquidation of undesirable organisations was reduced. The re-registration of religious organisations completed in 2025, did not entail the loss of legal status for any denomination (although the total number of churches and communities decreased due to their inability to meet stricter re-registration requirements). Forced termination of CSOs remains a tool in the government's arsenal, but it is used selectively and does not take the form of a nationwide campaign to sift the entire sector through a sieve of total control and inspections. It was reported that about 36 CSOs were terminated by force in 2025, whereas this figure exceeded 200 in 2023 and 2024, and 400 and 300 in 2022 and 2021. Taking into account the termination of at least 60 civil society organisations by decision of their founders in 2025, a total of 100 organisations launched the termination process in 2025 (excluding religious organisations). The total number of CSOs in Belarus continued to gradually decline in 2025, as newly registered organisations are extremely few and their numbers are unable to compensate for the loss caused by forcibly terminated organisations and those that voluntarily ceased their activity. While according to official data, there were 1,397 public associations in Belarus as of 1 January 2025, there are only 1,337 which remain as of 1 January 2026.

There is no consensus among experts on the trajectory of the developments for political repressions for civil society. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the government is making full use of the repressive mechanisms developed in 2021-2024 in almost all their forms and methods. At the same time, there has been a quantitative decline in many of these methods in 2025. This includes the number of CSOs forced to close during the year, the total number of political prisoners and, in particular, journalists in prison, decrease of the number of political prisoners subjected to incommunicado imprisonment from 11 to 4, and the number of court decisions recognising information products as extremist materials. Among political sentences, a greater proportion of milder types of punishment were handed down (rather than imprisonment,

restrictions on liberty while remaining in the place of permanent residence). Given that the released political prisoners included leading politicians and a number of prominent civil society figures, at least some analysts have noted a decline in repressive activity<sup>12</sup>. However, such assessments face objections that the decline in many of the indicators are due to the difficulties in recording practices, including the lack of opportunity to observe court proceedings and the desire of many victims of repression to refuse contact with human rights defenders and international mechanisms for fear of additional punishment<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the decrease in the proportion of prison sentences in the total number of repressive convictions is counterbalanced by an increase in the number of more lenient punishments (fines, restrictions on freedom).

This model continues to have a chilling effect on civil society, although it is connected with less physical suffering for the individuals who have fallen victim of repression. In this regard, it is worth noting the extremely long period of repression that has been going on since 2020 (much longer than the previous repressive phases of 2021-2023, 2006-2008, and 2010-2011). In this recent period, for example, the authorities no longer need to crack down on protest gatherings to achieve the same deterrent effect, as almost no one attempts to organise public protests anymore.

No real and full-scale response to the recommendations previously addressed to Belarus was detected in 2025. To a certain extent of conventionality, the inclusion in November 2025 of provisions on developing a concept for the law "On Volunteer Activity" and a draft law "On Foreign Gratuitous Aid" in the 2026 legislative activity plan can be considered a step toward implementing the recommendations. This step can also be perceived as a declaration of intent to continue improving legislation on the resource base for CSOs, which started in 2023 with the introduction of legislative norms on financial support for civic initiatives and continued in 2024 with a new version of the edict of the president on domestic sponsorship aid, regulating internal corporative donations for CSOs.

## Key developments and priorities in the civil society environment

The overall score for the CSO environment in Belarus **remained unchanged in 2025** as compared to 2024 (2.2 out of 7).

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<sup>12</sup> For example, **Radio Liberty Belarus Service**, "Perhaps the severity of the repression has somewhat eased, said political analyst Rudkovsky", 10 January 2026

<sup>13</sup> Especially the authoritative In particular, the authoritative Human Rights Centre 'Viasna' notes this methodological complexity in its final review for 2025 and warns against mechanically comparing the statistical indicators of repression collected in the reports - pages 1 and 4.

The slight change in the general practice score of 0.1 points (an improvement from 1.6 to 1.7) is not material and did not affect the country's overall score. It is caused mainly due to a decrease in the formal number of the cases of forced termination of CSOs in 2025 (dozens) compared to 2021-2024 (hundreds) in the "practice" dimension for *Freedom of Association* (scored as an improvement from 1.7 to 1.8). However, this change is merely quantitative in nature, since the practice of forcibly closing down registered public organizations continues and the relevant legislation continues to apply to dissolve such organisations. Another practice improvement recorded in the *Right to Participation in Decision-Making*, where slight improvement from 2.1 to 2.2 increased the general score for this area.

On the scoring in the Area 2 *Equal Treatment* the situation continued to deteriorate in practice (from 2.2 to 2.1) and in general (from 2.7 to 2.6) due to the growing gap between a small circle of state-supported CSOs and all those who do not have access to privileges, which are often based on the direct granting of preferences to selected entities.

On the legislation dimension on the Area 3 *Access to Funding* the deterioration from 2.6 to 2.5 was driven by a rollback of some previous improvements in access to domestic funding (for example, the effective devaluation at the level of local by-laws, of the recently introduced mechanism for state support of civic initiatives).

None of the recommendations from the previous CSO Meter reports on Belarus have been implemented, apart from a reduction in the number of cases of forced termination of CSOs (although this practice itself continues on a smaller scale). The promising areas for improving the situation and implementing recommendations regarding access to foreign funding and legal support for volunteering were the inclusion of work on new framework laws in these areas into the official legislative plan for 2026. This will be the subject of close analysis in the coming years for the next CSO Meter reports in coming years.

## Key developments

- The January 2025 presidential election was not a significant event for the CSO sector or society at large. It largely represented pretext for new unfounded repression campaigns, which unfolded even despite the opposition's passivity and non-participation of CSOs in the election.
- The release of political prisoners has gained new momentum in 2025 due to U.S. negotiating policy. However, the early release of several groups of political prisoners and their deportation abroad, as well as the expiration of a range of other prisoners' sentences, only insignificantly reduces the total number of political prisoners behind bars due to new criminal cases and convictions.

- In 2025, it was announced that one new criminal case under Article 193-1 had been opened against several individuals involved in the activities of an unregistered association.
- Cross-border repression and persecution of a foreign part of civil society remains a tool in the authorities' arsenal as a means to intimidate and influence undesirable CSOs<sup>14</sup>. This is notable in the prosecution of individual activists for calling for sanctions, establishing and participating in extremist formations and otherwise facilitating extremist activity, as well as in declaring individual foreign organizations as extremist formations.
- The campaign on mass liquidation of CSOs has ended, although targeted single forced terminations continue, along with CSOs' decisions about termination on their own accord. Cases of new CSO registrations are few, partly due to the lack of groups for whom an attempt to register a legal entity and going beyond the level of informal grassroots initiatives is considered a necessary step in organisational development.
- The approved by the edict legislative activity plan for 2026 includes the development of the concept of the law "On Volunteer Activity" and the draft law "On Foreign Gratuitous Aid" to replace the presidential decree currently in force in this area.

## Key priorities

1. Release all individuals recognised as political prisoners and stop all politically-motivated criminal cases and investigations;
2. Abolish the Law on the Countering of Extremism and all by-laws adopted under it, especially the Index of Extremist Formations and the Index of Extremist Materials;
3. Cancel criminal responsibility for organising and participating in the activities of an unregistered organisation (Article 193<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code) and abolish the ban on the activities of public associations without registration;
4. Stop the practice of forced termination of CSOs and restore real opportunities to operate for CSOs previously forcibly terminated in 2020–2025 (including public associations, foundations and private institutions, trade unions and their independent associations, religious organisations and opposition political parties);
5. Cease all forms of repression and discrimination against protesters, representatives of the opposition and CSOs, including mass administrative and criminal prosecution of activists inside the country and abroad in absentia, abuse of investigative powers, searches, seizures of data and communication devices, fines, arrests, the freezing of

<sup>14</sup> iSANS Transnational Repression in Belarus: A Brutal Tool of the Persecution of Dissent, 24 September 2025.

assets, and forced public disclosure in the media (including social media) of personal data during investigations or arrests;

6. Eliminate legislative possibilities for and the practice of internet disruption and the blocking of websites without court decisions; and
7. Cease the misuse of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) legislation and investigative powers in hate speech crimes to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of thought, as well as to restrict access to funding from abroad for charities, human rights and humanitarian CSOs.

# II. BELARUS – IN NUMBERS

## Basic data

**Population:** 9,056,080 (2026)<sup>15</sup> | **GDP per capita:** 8,317.6 USD (2024)<sup>16</sup> | **Number of CSOs:** 19 trade unions; 1,337 public associations as of 1 January 2026; 227 foundations as of 1 January 2022<sup>17</sup> (estimated 113 of these foundations retained their legal status at the end of 2025) and around 473 private institutions that meet the criteria of a CSO.<sup>18</sup> | **CSOs per 10,000 inhabitants:** around 2.4 (estimated) | **Registration fee for a CSO in 2025:** 21 BYN for private institutions; 210 BYN for local foundations and local public associations; 420 BYN for national and international public associations and for national and international foundations (approximately 6 EUR/61 EUR/122 EUR). | **Registration period for a CSO:** One month for public associations and foundations and one day (or a few days in practice) for institutions. | **Freedom in the World:** 7/100 (Not Free)<sup>19</sup> | **World Press Freedom Index:** 25.73 (166 out of 180 countries).<sup>20</sup>



**Country score: 2.2**  
**Legislation: 2.7**  
**Practice: 1.7** ↑

The scores range from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies the lowest possible score (extremely unfavourable – authoritarian – environment for civil society) and 7 signifies the highest possible score (extremely favourable – ideal democratic – environment for civil society).

Areas	Overall	Legislation	Practice
Freedom of Association	<b>2,3</b>	2,8	1,8 ↑
Equal Treatment	<b>2,6</b> ↓	3,1	2,1 ↓
Access to Funding	<b>2,2</b>	2,5 ↓	1,8
Freedom of Peaceful Assembly	<b>1,5</b>	1,9	1,1
Right to Participation in Decision-Making	<b>2,7</b> ↑	3,1	2,2 ↑
Freedom of Expression	<b>1,8</b>	2,4	1,2

<sup>15</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, [https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-pdf/oficial\\_statistika/2025/naselenie\\_2025-en.pdf](https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-pdf/oficial_statistika/2025/naselenie_2025-en.pdf) [https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/ssrd-mvf\\_2/natsionalnaya-stranitsa-svodnyh-dannyh/naselenie\\_6/chislennost-naseleniya1\\_yan\\_poobl/](https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/ssrd-mvf_2/natsionalnaya-stranitsa-svodnyh-dannyh/naselenie_6/chislennost-naseleniya1_yan_poobl/)

<sup>16</sup> The World Bank, 'GDP per capita (current US\$) – Belarus'

<sup>17</sup> Data from the MoJ. It is important to note that this number includes public associations and foundations that have already stated their intention to dissolve themselves but have not yet completed the liquidation procedure and therefore remain listed in the official register. Since 2022, the MoJ has not published the total number of registered foundations, nor has it provided data on the annual number of newly registered public associations and foundations.

<sup>18</sup> Lawtrend, 'NGOs in Belarus: Registration Situation and Liquidation', 15 December 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026 – Belarus.

<sup>20</sup> Reporters Without Borders, 'World Press Freedom Index 2025'.

Right to Privacy	<b>2,4</b>	3,3	1,5
State Duty to Protect	<b>1,9</b>	2,5	1,2
State Support	<b>2,4</b>	2,8	1,9
State-CSO Cooperation	<b>2,3</b>	2,7	1,9
Digital Rights	<b>2,1</b>	2,6	1,5

*The arrows indicate improvement or deterioration compared to last year's scores.*

# III. FINDINGS

## 3.1 Freedom of Association

Overall score per area: **2,3 /7**

Legislation: **2,8 /7**

Practice: **1,8 /7**

As of 2025, the implementation of freedom of association in Belarus remains consistently unsatisfactory. Despite some positive changes in legislation, it is not possible to freely establish CSOs in Belarus, members and participants of independent CSOs are persecuted for their membership, more than half of CSOs in Belarus have been liquidated since 2021, CSOs are still recognised as extremist organisations, and their information products are recognised as extremist materials. Since 2021, approximately 2,000 CSOs of diverse legal entity types have been either subjected to forced termination through judicial or extra-judicial procedures or have opted for voluntary termination. In 2025, the campaign of mass termination of CSOs of various organisational and legal forms was suspended, likely due to the fact that there were no more entities eligible for liquidation. However, there have been cases of selective forced dissolution of CSOs that were undesirable to the authorities. From 6 July 2024 to 5 July 2025, a campaign was conducted to re-register religious organisations, resulting in a reduction in their number, although not as dramatic as in the secular sector. This is important because the elimination of religious organisations affects related secular CSOs, including educational and charitable ones. The number of newly registered organisations is around a tenth of the number of CSOs that have ceased to exist across the same period. Many of the CSOs that were forcibly terminated were declared 'extremist formations'. There is persistent pressure on CSO members, including over one hundred CSO representatives who have been imprisoned. Foreigners are restricted in terms of the possibilities to establish associations according to the law. Since 2022, the activities of unregistered CSOs have been re-criminalised. In 2025, a new criminal case was initiated against an unregistered organisation. Excessive state interference in CSOs' activities, including searches, seizure of equipment and documentation, and blocking of bank accounts and websites, is common in Belarus, including under the pretext of AML/CTF legislation and countering extremism. Many Belarusian CSOs have been forced to leave the country under severe pressure and continue their activities from abroad, often also facing specific restrictions in the countries they have relocated to. The overall score in the area of Freedom of Associations, 2.3 in 2025 remained the same as in 2024 despite a slight increase from 1.7 in 2024, to 1.8 in 2025 in the practice score for this area.

### Standard I. Everyone can freely establish, join, or participate in a CSO.

The right to establish, join or participate in the activities of CSOs is significantly limited both at the legislative level and at the level of practical implementation.

Article 36 of the Constitution of Belarus enshrines the right to freedom of association. However, the Constitution also limits the purposes for which associations may be formed, namely political parties and other public associations. The stated objective is

the 'implementation and satisfaction of citizens' political, social, economic, cultural and other interests'.

Foreigners are still forbidden from being founders of public associations.<sup>21</sup>

Criminal liability has been established for organising and participating in the activities of organisations (public associations, including political parties and trade unions, religious organisations and foundations) without state registration (Article 193<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code, which was abolished from July 2019 until 22 January 2022). It has been announced that another, second criminal case has been initiated in 2022 under the aforementioned article, pertaining to "the act of conducting the activities of a public association without the requisite registration under the guise of a commercial organisation." In March 2025, 15 people from leaders and members of the unregistered organisation "IVDIVO" were detained and named suspects in a criminal case initiated under Article 193-1 for the activities of an unregistered public association<sup>22</sup>.

Belarusian citizens are subject to involuntary membership in 'pro-government' public associations known as GONGOs. These include the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRYU), the public association 'Belaya Rus', the Pioneer Organisation and trade unions belonging to the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus. Citizens face pressure due to their membership in CSOs, and CSOs are also targeted because of the individuals associated with them.

The amendments introduced through 'On Amendments to Laws on the Protection of Children's Rights', dated 12 July 2025<sup>23</sup> significantly restrict the realisation of children's rights to association. According to the amendments, "children have the right to form children's and youth public associations, provided that the activities of these associations do not include terrorist or other extremist activities, other acts prohibited by law, or acts that allow for the possibility of carrying out such activities and acts in the course of achieving the legitimate goals of the association's creation." The amendments therefore allow for a very broad interpretation of the restrictions on the exercise of freedom of association, including both at the stage of creation and during the activities of the association.

## **Standard II. The procedure to register a CSO as a legal entity is clear, simple, quick, and inexpensive.**

The procedure to register public associations and foundations is quite complicated, burdensome and expensive. The registration period is one month and this can be extended through suspension of registration. The legislation also provides state bodies with the possibility to de facto arbitrarily refuse registration on insignificant or

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<sup>21</sup> Article 2, Law on Public Associations of 4 October 1994 (with amendments).

<sup>22</sup> <https://sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-gminsk-ru/view/stolichnymi-sledovateljami-presechena-dejatelnost-nezakonnoj-religioznoj-organizatsii-rukovoditeli-zaderzhany-14695>

<sup>23</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12500086>

implausible grounds. The registration stage includes the preparation of more than a dozen documents by the applicant in accordance with numerous mandatory requirements, including using a special unique font and the right size of margins. Registration authorities do not advise on the documents' correctness.<sup>24</sup> As a result, if any faults (however minor) are subsequently found in CSOs' application documents, the authorities will use these as a basis to justify their refusal to register an organisation. Further, after all identified faults are eliminated and the same set of documents is re-submitted, the registration body can still reject the application again on other, different, grounds.

Private residential premises cannot serve as a registered office address for a CSO, including local branches, and this requirement is a serious problem for all forms of CSO.

Belarusian courts are not independent. When considering registration appeals and termination or non-registration claims from CSOs, they show bias and usually side with the justice agencies.

In the context of mass liquidation of CSOs and systemic repression, the relevance of registering independent CSOs has significantly diminished. According to official statistics, which include NCOs in the process of termination, as of 1 January 2026 there were 1,337 registered public associations in Belarus<sup>25</sup> (as of 1 July 2020, this number was 3,025). Following the termination of CSOs, many public activities of a non-commercial nature continue to be carried out through commercial legal entities and individual entrepreneurs established for this purpose.

### **Standard III. CSOs are free to determine their objectives and activities and operate both within and outside the country in which they were established.**

CSOs are not free to choose their goals or determine their activities and they are subject to serious interference and attacks on their activities by state bodies. Unprecedented mass persecution, intimidation, and pressure on members of CSOs, including being subjected to civil and criminal liability, represents a significant and troubling trend in Belarus. The state's repressive apparatus is deployed against the full spectrum of CSOs encompassing a diverse range of activities, including those located throughout the entirety of the Republic of Belarus or those that have relocated abroad.

CSOs have become targets for prosecution under the laws on extremism and terrorism. The practices of declaring groups as 'extremist formations' (for which there is no need to obtain a court decision), activists as heads and participants of extremist formations, and information resources as extremist materials has become widespread.

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<sup>24</sup> Belarus Digest, 'Setting Up an NGO in Belarus: Challenge Yourself', 12 June 2013.

<sup>25</sup> According official information of MoJ.

The public project Nastaunik.info, the organisation Centre for New Ideas, the initiative Partyzanka (which helps Belarusians with legislative issues, primarily in Poland), the association Christian Vision (uniting clergy, theologians and activists from Christian churches in Belarus and abroad) and others were recognised as extremist formations in 2025<sup>26</sup>. On 15 September 2025, the KDB added the BEROE economic research centre to the list of "extremist formations". BEROE economic research centre is an independent analytical centre engaged in economic research, education, and making policy recommendations on Belarus. In February 2025, economist Pavel Daneika, the administrative director of the centre, was sentenced in absentia to 12 years in a penal colony. On 22 July 2025, the Belarusian Academy project was added to the Index of Extremist Foundations. On 7 October 2026, Femgroup Belarus was added to the Index. Femgroup Belarus is a feminist public initiative created by Belarusian activists promoting gender equality, women's rights, and women's participation in public and political life, including within the opposition movement. On 21 August 2025, the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers was designated as "extremist formations". The Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers is an independent association of Belarusian lawyers and legal advisors who work in exile and are engaged in the protection of human rights<sup>27</sup>. On 30 July 2025, the Green Network coalition joined the Index, including the Belarus Beehive, Green Portal, and Ecohome projects. On 18 June 2025, the MIA declared the Petitions.by project an "extremist formation", following January 2025, the OAC cancelled the domain petitions.by. This was a Belarusian online platform for creating and signing public petitions. It allowed citizens to express demands to authorities and organizations, as well as to draw attention to social and political issues.

Joining an organisation listed in the Index, as well as financing or participating in any of its activities (including those carried out long before the organisation was recognised as extremist) is interpreted as a crime under Articles 361<sup>1</sup> and 361<sup>4</sup> of the Criminal Code punishable by long-term imprisonment.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in August 2025, Brest journalist Oleg Suprunyuk was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment under Part 3 of Article 361<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code ("participation in an extremist organisation") for participating in the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which was recognised as an "extremist formation"<sup>29</sup>. A Belarusian citizen was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment and a fine of 500 base units (21,000 roubles) for participating in the activities of the so-called extremist formation 'Aktywnymi byts faine' (ABF) — an informal educational

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<sup>26</sup> See the Index of Extremist Formations <https://mvd.gov.by/ru/news/8642>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/11/un-experts-urge-belarus-stop-interfering-legal-profession>

<sup>28</sup> Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=Hk9900275>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://prokuratura.gov.by/ru/media/novosti/nadzor-za-resheniyami-po-ugolovnym-i-grazhdanskim-delam/podgotovil-bolee-40-030625/>

organisation promoting Swedish study circle methods, which was liquidated in Belarus in 2021 and continued its work abroad<sup>30</sup>.

Openly conducting human rights activities is not possible in Belarus. Numerous human rights defenders continue to serve prison sentences resulting from their professional activities, including vice-chairman of the Viasna Human Rights Center Valiantsin Stefanovic, as well as human rights activist Nasta Loika. In a series of court decisions, information resources produced by human rights organisations, including the associations Inshyja, Volnyja and other CSOs, have been designated as extremist materials.

Furthermore, other CSO representatives are currently being held in custody, including Andrzej Poczobut (a member of the Union of Poles), Tatsiana Kuzina (an expert from the BIPART Research Centre), Pavel Belavus (a cultural activist and the founder of the independent public cultural initiative Art-Siadziba), and Eduard Babaryka (former head of the crowdfunding platforms Ulej and MolaMola). 19 representatives of trade unions and the labour movement are as of December 2025 serving prison sentences (while at the beginning of 2025, there were 27 in prison).<sup>31</sup>

The government has taken action to suppress the activities of civil society representatives who have been forced to leave the country. For these purposes, criminal legislation on special (absentee) proceedings is widely used. Under special proceedings, the investigation of a criminal case may be completed without the participation of the accused who is located outside Belarus, and the case is tried in absentia with substantial violations of the right to a fair trial (including lack of legal assistance or opportunity to read the case file, and even to present arguments in defence)<sup>32</sup>. Special proceedings have been initiated against 30 persons, in 2025<sup>33</sup>.

Public associations are deprived of the right to independently conduct entrepreneurial activities and are required to establish a separate commercial legal entity to do so.

The authorities are *de jure* prohibited from interfering in the internal activities of CSOs. The Law on Public Associations establishes mandatory compliance of the activities of public associations with the principal direction of the government's domestic and foreign policies, as well as the concept of national security, which has been approved by the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. The violation of this condition is grounds for the termination of public associations. In practice, CSO representatives are summoned to

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<sup>30</sup> <https://minsknews.by/za-aktivnoe-uchastie-v-ekstremistskom-formirovanii-yunosha-poluchil-dva-goda-kolonii-i-ogromnyj-shtraf/>

<sup>31</sup> Information about detained trade union members and trade union activists is published based on data from 'Solidarity'.

<sup>32</sup> International Committee for the investigation on torture in Belarus There is no crime, but there is a sentence: Special handling of the case as a form of persecution in Belarus.

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Center "Viasna", At least 1,254 people convicted in 2025: the results of criminal prosecution, 29 December 2025.

meetings with law enforcement agencies and other bodies, including with the objective of inspecting and adjusting the activities of CSOs.

The law stipulates that the objectives for any foreign funding received by a CSO should correspond to government priorities if the CSO wishes to be exempted from taxes on foreign funding.

State bodies have created obstacles to the implementation of activities aimed at assisting victims of human rights violations. Among other methods, this occurs through the authorities prohibiting the collection of funds for these purposes. Criminal cases on charges of 'financing extremism' have been filed against those who have provided targeted financial support from abroad or from inside Belarus to Belarusians who have suffered from law enforcement brutality, including beatings and torture. In August 2025, the heads of the 'BYSOL' and 'BY\_Help' solidarity foundations, Andrei Strizhak and Alexei Leonchik, were sentenced in absentia to 18 years in prison and a fine of 252,000 BYN (73,000 EUR) each under 17 articles of the Criminal Code, including Article 361<sup>1</sup> ("creation of or participation in an extremist organisation"), Part 2 of Article 361<sup>2</sup> ("financing of extremist activities"), and Part 2 of Article 290<sup>1</sup> ("financing terrorist activities")<sup>34</sup>. In total, 9 employees of these foundations were sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment and a fine of 231,000 BYN (67,000 EUR) each.

The Council of Ministers submitted to Parliament a draft law "On Amending the Codes on Administrative Violations"<sup>35</sup>, which, among other things, introduces Article 19.16 ("Propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, pedophilia")<sup>36</sup>. Disseminating information on these topics can be punished with a fine or imprisonment for up to 15 days. The changes were initiated by Prosecutor General Andrei Shved, who stated that the LGBTQ+ community "destroys traditional values and families in the West, where destructive ideas unacceptable for Belarus are being cultivated". Human rights activists opposed the initiative, however, on 3 October 2025, this bill was passed in its first reading (as of the end of 2025, no second reading had been held).

#### **Standard IV. Any sanctions imposed are clear and consistent with the principle of proportionality and are the least intrusive means to achieve the desired objective.**

The relevant legislation provides for a broad range of sanctions in respect of public associations: warnings, termination of their activities for a specified term, and termination by a court decision on referral from the MoJ of the Republic of Belarus.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.prokuratura.gov.by/ru/media/novosti/nadzor-za-resheniyami-po-ugolovnym-i-grazhdanskim-delam/generalnaya-prokurat191225/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://kopyl.by/svezhie-novosti/item/37672-v-belarusi-predlozhili-vvesti-otvetstvennost-za-propagandu-bezdetnosti-i-lgbt-otnoshenij>

<sup>36</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3951&p0=2025035001>

In 2025, the campaign for the mass liquidation of CSOs, which began in 2021, came to a halt, and as of the beginning of 2025, the authorities had liquidated, or self-termination of CSOs, accounted for more than half of the CSOs in the country. Nevertheless, targeted sanctions for forced dissolution continue to be being applied: in 2025, at least 36 CSOs were forcibly terminated, and at least 60 decided to dissolve themselves. The authorities continue to use forced liquidation to address CSOs whose activities they disagree with. From 2021 to 2025, and as of the end of December 2025, 1,220 CSOs were either undergoing forced termination or had already been terminated.<sup>37</sup> Further, at least 770 organisations decided to self-terminate, including as a result of coercion. Self-termination is primarily due to a combination of the pressure on the members and employees of CSOs, an unfavourable legal environment, and the overall socio-political situation in the country. As such, the number of civic sector organisations in Belarus that have been lost since the post-election period of 2020 total at least 1,990 CSOs, including public associations, trade unions, foundations, non-governmental establishments, and associations (unions) of legal entities. The number of newly registered CSOs are estimated only approximately, to be around 255 organisations in various forms for the period from 2021 to 2025.<sup>38</sup> Thus, since 2021, for every new organisation which is formed, eight have closed down.

The government is pursuing a policy of destroying the institutional forms of CSOs. The grounds for forced termination may include formal reasons that have been typical for previous waves of termination of CSOs in Belarus.

Unlike public associations, the vast majority of forcibly terminated institutions are terminated according to a simplified system, without a court decision, simply by order of a law enforcement or tax authority.

The liquidated CSOs are excluded from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs compulsorily without completing the liquidation process, even if the organisation has real estate on its balance sheet. At the same time, many CSOs have been in the process of liquidation for more than 4 years.

#### **Standard V. The state does not interfere in internal affairs and operation of CSOs.**

Article 6 of the Law on Public Associations prohibits the interference of state bodies and officials in the activities of public associations, except for cases stipulated by law. Article 194 of the Criminal Code provides for liability for obstruction of the lawful activities of public associations or interference in their activities. There are no known cases of prosecution under this article in practice.

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<sup>37</sup> Lawtrend. The updated list of non-voluntary liquidated public associations, foundations, institutions and unions of legal entities.

<sup>38</sup> Lawtrend. 'NGOs in Belarus: the situation with registration and liquidation' (in Russian), 15 December 2025.

Interference in the internal affairs of CSOs by state agencies is a common practice and takes a variety of forms. These include wiretapping of phones and offices, searches and seizure of equipment and documents, inspections by financial and law enforcement agencies, requests for information, coercion to coordinate educational programmes, the content of events and to change the leadership of organisations, and intimidation of CSO members and summoning them for interrogations. The authorities are actively using the existing international approaches aimed at implementing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) mechanisms on combating extremism and terrorism to interfere in the activities of CSOs. Following the entry into force of the Edict N<sup>o</sup> 227 of 6 June, 2025, “On Improving the Effectiveness of Inspection (Supervisory) Activities” CSOs are no longer required to maintain a mandatory inspection record book<sup>39</sup>, which is a positive change that reduces bureaucratic paperwork requirements, although it does not reduce the control burden.

Another example of government intervention in the activities of CSOs is the periodic re-registration procedure. Following the mandatory period for bringing the statutes of public associations into compliance, which ended in March 2024, the re-registration of religious organisations commenced in July 2024 and continued until July 2025. Statistics on the number of religious organisations that have not been re-registered and will be subject to liquidations through the courts have not yet been published, but it is known that although none of the denominations represented in Belarus have lost their legal status, many of the country's 3,419 religious communities have failed to prepare the necessary registration documents, creating legal grounds for their dissolution.

Many Belarusian CSOs have been forced to decide on relocation abroad for security reasons in light of the extremely unfavourable environment in Belarus, as well as to continue their activities and mission. However, pressure continues to be exerted on relocated organisations from within Belarus, including via criminal and tax cases.

Restrictions on CSO activities also occur through the constant introduction of new licensing requirements<sup>40</sup>, direct instructions and orders from the authorities regarding changes to CSO internal activities, such as changes in leadership.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=P32500227>

<sup>40</sup> For example, according to a comments from the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (in exile), the rollback of excessive licensing requirements for care homes for elderly peoples did not lead to the recovery in 2025 of this private industry, which had suffered as a result of the introduction of burdensome licensing in 2024 – see more on this legislative change here: <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-rolled-back-some-excessive-licensing-requirements-social-services>

## Specific recommendations under Area 1:

- Abolish the ban on the activities of public associations without registration by removing it from the Law on Public Associations, cancel criminal responsibility for organising and participating in the activities of an unregistered organisation (Article 193<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code) and review the sentences imposed under this article;
- Stop the practice of forced termination of CSOs, and revoke all court and local authorities' decisions on the forced termination of CSOs made between 2020 and 2025;
- Enshrine clear and distinct grounds for decisions on termination of NCOs by judicial means in legislation, such as conduct directly banned by the Constitution or the law;
- Release all persons recognised as political prisoners,<sup>41</sup> review and revoke all sentences imposed on them and pending decisions on their responsibility, pay adequate compensation to all political prisoners, and drop all politically motivated criminal cases;
- Stop the practice of state agencies interfering in the internal affairs of CSOs, both at the stage of their creation and once they are operating;
- Eliminate the practice of misusing the legislation on extremism and terrorism to pressure and persecute CSO representatives and their unjustified inclusion on the lists of persons involved in extremist and terrorist activities;
- Abolish the Law on Countering Extremism and all by-laws adopted under it, including the Index of Extremist Formations;
- Allow foreign nationals to act as founders of public associations;
- Introduce a clear list of essential grounds for denial of registration of a CSO (for instance, objectives under its charter that are directly banned by the law, e.g. war propaganda); and
- Ensure re-registration and the continued legal status of all religious organisations subject to re-registration until 5 July 2025, in accordance with the Law on Amendments to Laws on the Activities of Religious Organisations dated 30 December 2023.

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<sup>41</sup> List of current political prisoners maintained by Viasna Human Rights Center and guidelines on the definition of a political prisoner.

## 3.2 Equal Treatment

Overall score per area: **2.6/7**

Legislation: **3.1 / 7** | Practice: **2.1 / 7**

The overall score in this area remains unchanged, which reflects the established and legally codified policy of creating different regulatory frameworks for different categories of CSOs depending on their ideological loyalty. There is unequal treatment of CSOs compared to commercial entities and inequality within the civil society sector and this is reflected in the scores for this area. The changes in this area reflect the general socio-political situation and the state's policy of discrediting CSOs that are unwanted by the authorities. More favourable legislative conditions for the registration and activities of businesses compared to CSOs are still maintained. At the same time, in cases of expressing disagreement with the existing regime, both CSOs and commercial organisations become victims of the policy of persecution (closures, fines, and criminal prosecution). Special conditions have been created only for specific CSOs, primarily pro-government ones. The most prominent de facto cause of inequality for Belarusian CSOs is the gap between organisations that moved abroad to countries with a more CSO-friendly political and legal regime and those that stayed in Belarus and whose main activity centre is still inside the country (i.e. their decision-making centre, main target group, registered legal entity, property, funding sources). However, this analysis does not take into account the situation of relocated CSOs; it focuses solely on the environment for CSOs operating within the country. The overall score in the area of Equal Treatment decreased from 2.7 in 2024 to 2.6 in 2025, due to a decline from 2.2 in 2024 to 2.1 in 2025 in the practice dimension.

### **Standard I. The state treats all CSOs equitably with business entities.**

The law does not provide equal conditions for CSOs in comparison to commercial organisations. At the legislative level, commercial organisations have better conditions for registration, including more favourable deadlines for registration decisions, clear reasons for denying registration and the amount of the state fee for registration. The legislation sets out the same requirements as for commercial organisations only for CSOs in the very simple form of non-profit establishments (institutions). However, due to the social and political situation in the country, there are very few independent institutions that would file documents for registration. In practice, when seeking registration, such institutions face much greater obstacles than commercial organisations. Obstacles are also created at the stage of obtaining approvals for the names of institutions. According to the law, such names must indicate the nature of the activity undertaken by the organisation or the purpose of its activities. However, the requirements for this are not defined at the legislative level, which makes it possible to refuse to approve any proposed name on the grounds that it does not correspond to the nature of the activity.

Public associations are banned from independently conducting entrepreneurial activities and, for this reason, they do not have access to public procurement.

It is a serious problem for CSOs that the law requires that they must have an accountant on their staff or enter into contracts for outsourced accounting services, even if they do not have serious financial activities (for comparison, small commercial organisations with the status of ‘micro organisations’ enjoy a simplified accounting procedure).

As a result, in addition to the general practice of state repression against CSOs, it is easier to set up and operate as a commercial organisation than as a CSO to carry out certain types of socially beneficial activities, even if the founders do not have profit-making objectives. This is the case even though Belarusian legislation does not provide for the notion of ‘social entrepreneurship’.

When describing benefits for a wide range of legal entities, legislation often uses the terms ‘commercial organisations’ and ‘companies’, which excludes CSOs as recipients of such benefits. Some norms cannot be applied to CSOs due to this approach. For example, the procedure for changing the owner of an institution remains unregulated and is impossible because of this in practice.

Since 2025, CSOs, even those engaged in entrepreneurial activities, are not motivated to invest in real estate or productive assets – the tax deduction for investments now available only for commercial organisations.<sup>42</sup>

### **Standard II. The state treats all CSOs equally with regard to their establishment, registration, and activities.**

The legislation applies a mechanism of targeted provision of benefits. The country has a system for providing financing, tax, and other benefits either to specific organisations or to organisations according to certain lists. For example, there is a list of CSOs which enjoy preferential treatment when renting state-owned premises – this list is approved by the government on the proposal of the ministries. The list in question comprises a total of 22 organisations. In 2025, the political party ‘Belaya Rus’, which was created to support the existing political regime, and its local branches, by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 294 of 29 May 2025, also received property rental benefits since 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2025<sup>43</sup>. The document shows that the party and its structural units rent 118 premises at rates reduced to one-tenth of the normal price.

A select group of state-linked organisations, the list of which is also approved by an act of legislation, may be allocated state-owned premises for use free of charge. The Tax Code directly enumerates 18 CSOs, providing sponsorship aid to which Belarusian

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<sup>42</sup> Pravo.by, ‘Налоги в 2025 году: что меняется в законодательстве’ (in Russian), <https://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2024/december/79963/>.

<sup>43</sup> [https://bii.by/news/arendnye-stavki-dlya-partii-belaya-rus-peresmotreny-s-iyunya-703520?dateFrom=03.06.2025&dateTo=10.06.2025&links\\_anch=0&links\\_doc=60204&page=3](https://bii.by/news/arendnye-stavki-dlya-partii-belaya-rus-peresmotreny-s-iyunya-703520?dateFrom=03.06.2025&dateTo=10.06.2025&links_anch=0&links_doc=60204&page=3)

business entities may enjoy tax deductions (in 2025 this list in the Tax Code has been amended by two CSOs). Aid to any other organisation can be provided by a business entity only from post-tax profit and does not entail any tax deduction.

The state has created favourable conditions for a small number of pro-government CSOs, both at the level of legal regulation and at the level of its practical enforcement, while discriminating against other CSOs. Only pro-government CSOs are involved in decision-making activities. This is exemplified by their participation in advisory councils established under various executive authorities.

The state policy is designed to achieve the following objectives: (i) the termination of active CSOs that do not espouse and disseminate the state ideology in any field of activity, including through the designation of such organisations as extremist; (ii) the discrediting of CSOs that are perceived as undesirable by the authorities in the eyes of the public, including in comparison with other existing structures and organisations; (iii) the accentuation of the role of specific state-linked organisations are positioned as carriers of the values of the Belarusian state and society; and (iv) engaging the remaining CSOs, including those without legal registration, provided that they do not publicly express disloyalty to the current regime, in the implementation of programmes with a social, environmental or cultural component.

The discrediting of CSOs occurs both at the level of statements by the 'higher authorities' and in the state media. In the state media, primarily at the nationwide level, information consistently appears aimed at discrediting specific CSOs, certain members or activists of these CSOs and civil society as a whole. Official statements and the media also highlight the role of specific pro-government organisations as genuine CSOs.

Following the precedent set in previous years, the Law on the Republican Budget for 2025 and for 2026 provides for the distribution of financial resources to two state-linked organisations: the Belarusian Union of Writers and the BRYU (which receives an annual budget allocation of approximately 4.7 millions EUR for 2026<sup>44</sup>). Additionally, the legislation establishes state support for a distinct category of NCOs, namely, republican state-public associations<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, financial resources derived from municipal budgets are also directed towards the upkeep of the regional committees of the BRYU<sup>46</sup>. The distribution of financial resources from the public purse to pro-government organisations is also addressed in the decisions on the local (regional, district, and city) budgets.

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<sup>44</sup> The Law on the Republican Budget for 2026 of 29 December 2025

[https://www.minfin.gov.by/upload/bp/act/zakon\\_291225\\_125z.pdf](https://www.minfin.gov.by/upload/bp/act/zakon_291225_125z.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> In particular, one such republican state-public associations, the "Presidential Sports Club," has been granted special privileges that allow it to be one of the largest operators in certain real estate sector.

<sup>46</sup> Edict No. 22 of 19 January 2026 on Support for the Public Association BRYU,

<https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=P32600022>.

In addition, the Law on the Republican Budget stipulates that public associations can receive funds from the national budget by decision of the President of the Republic of Belarus. Such an approach in legislation and practice is completely incompatible with the principles of equality of organisations in their access to public resources.

An even greater inequality for CSOs according to their loyalty to the state is enshrined in the Law on the Essentials of Civil Society. The Law introduces a hierarchy and inequality between organisations, allowing special forms of interaction with state agencies for some NCOs.<sup>47</sup>

Generally, in Belarus, the scope of real access to citizens' rights implementation (including the ability to exercise freedom of association as measured by the indicators outlined in the CSO Meter) depends on loyalty to the existing regime, the absence of openly articulated oppositional views or a pro-democratic self-identity. Loyalty checks, research on private life and social connections, and investigation of information sources and personal contacts often form the basis for practical decisions on sanctions, reprisals or, on the other hand, on granting preferential treatment or support.

#### Specific recommendations under Area 2:

- Use the broad terms 'legal entities' or 'non-profit organisations' (for special preferences for non-profit organisations due to the specific nature of their non-profit activities) in normative acts when defining benefits and preferences, so that they can be dedicated to all possible forms of non-profit legal entities;
- Extend the notification procedure for registration of commercial organisations to registration of CSOs, including the possibility to submit and update constituent documents online;
- Regulate the procedure for changing the owner of an institution;
- Allow public associations to conduct entrepreneurial activities without creating a separate commercial entity;
- Stop the practice whereby CSOs are provided with targeted benefits and direct funding by naming them in the budget and tax laws; extend rental benefits to all CSOs and introduce a mechanism of state funding based on competition, which all CSOs, including unregistered ones, can participate in; and
- Shut down and erase the MIA's Unified Database of Participants in Unauthorised Demonstrations (also known as the *Besporiadki* database) and its equivalents.

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<sup>47</sup> For detailed information on the law, see CSO Meter, 'Belarus Country Report 2023', 2023, [https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2024-03/CSO%20Meter%20Country%20Report%20Belarus%202023\\_1.pdf](https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2024-03/CSO%20Meter%20Country%20Report%20Belarus%202023_1.pdf).

### 3.3 Access to Funding

Overall score per area: **2.2/7**

Legislation: **2.5 / 7**

Practice: **1.8 / 7**

Access to funding for CSOs in Belarus is characterised by harsh legislation, sanctions for its violation, the mass termination of CSOs, and the forced relocation of many CSOs abroad. CSOs are not free to seek, receive, use, and dispose of funds and property. They are subject to restrictions on both receiving assistance within the country and from abroad. In Belarus, preliminary state approval is required to receive foreign funding and there are restrictions on entrepreneurial activities for CSOs. There are significant restrictions on the receipt of funding from internal sources, including under the pretext of combating extremism and terrorism. There is also no publicly-available competitive system of state funding for CSOs in Belarus. Since 2022, the government of Belarus has enacted a series of legislative measures designed to enhance the accessibility of financial resources for CSOs within the country. These measures include the establishment of support programmes for youth organisations and the allocation of funding for civic initiatives at the local level. Nevertheless, the impact of technical improvements is undermined by an unparalleled level of repression and comprehensive control, encompassing the mass dissolution of aid recipients, pressure on domestic donors, and the misuse of criminal charges for alleged financing of extremism. The overall score in the area of Access to Funding remained the same as in 2024, despite a slight deterioration from 2.6 in 2024 to 2.5 in 2025 in the law score for this area.

#### **Standard I. CSOs are free to seek, receive, and use financial and material resources for the pursuit of their objectives.**

CSOs are significantly restricted in their possibilities to seek, receive and use financial and material resources for the pursuit of their objectives. Restrictions are imposed on both foreign donations and donations from Belarusian corporate donors (both money and in-kind), while private donations from Belarusian-resident individuals are restricted to a lesser extent. The freest procedure for use relates to funds received as membership fees of public associations. Public associations do not have the right to independently conduct entrepreneurial activities. Public associations are banned from having bank accounts and keeping money abroad. There are no stimuli or benefits which encourage donations to CSOs.

State bodies have created obstacles to the implementation of activities aimed at assisting victims of human rights violations, as well as other charitable purposes; for example, aid related to the war in Ukraine. Among other methods, this occurs by prohibiting the collection of funds for these purposes. In 2025, the practice of mass summonses for ‘interviews’ with the KDB in connection with donations to solidarity funds assisting victims of repression and other structures, which had commenced in 2023, was continued with vigour. Donors are encouraged to formally admit guilt for a criminal act and to pay an informal, non-statutory fine, which is often at least ten times

the amount of the original donation, to special accounts designated for state social infrastructure facilities (such as hospitals and orphanages). The legal consequences of making donations to solidarity funds are not consistent. In some cases, criminal proceedings are initiated against the donors and the forced transfer of funds by donors to special accounts designated by law enforcement agencies does not necessarily exempt them from criminal liability.

Mass termination of CSOs, along with the ban on the activities of unregistered organisations in Belarus, has significantly limited such CSOs' access to financial resources inside the country. The system of paying membership fees by members of CSOs has collapsed. Mass termination of CSOs, pressure on business entities, and the general atmosphere of repression in the country have significantly reduced the share of support for CSOs from business entities.

Such a rapid decline in domestic funding has played a negative role in CSOs' ability to differentiate funding sources and has made them even more dependent on foreign funding.

After searches were carried out at the offices of a significant number of CSOs, the bank accounts of many CSOs remain blocked.

The Law on Measures to Prevent the Legalisation of Criminally-Obtained Income, the Financing of Terrorist Activity and the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction obliges banks to monitor whether the financial transactions of CSOs correspond with their statutory objectives. Public associations and foundations are required to publish extensive reports about their activities, income and expenses. These reports represent excessive interference in the activities of CSOs, are mandatory for all public associations and do not take into account a CSO's size or the amount of its income.

CSOs' access to funding is also severely restricted by the wide interpretation of AML/CTF norms. This applies both to CSOs that have stayed in Belarus and those that have relocated abroad. Thus, in the countries that Belarusian CSOs have relocated to, CSOs face significant restrictions on opening bank accounts (primarily in Georgia, but also in Germany, Poland, and Lithuania) and the movement of funds. The ability of CSOs to access funding is significantly influenced by the legislative framework of the host country.

Belarusian civil society's split into 'relocated' and 'domestic' CSOs has seriously affected the financial stability of CSOs. Civil society structures that are able to mobilise funding from abroad or in the form of crowdfunding have largely moved outside of Belarus. Domestic groups have had great difficulty in attracting financial support from donors, both as a result of government obstacles and sanctions, and because it is easier for donors to support CSOs that have relocated their activities abroad.

State support for CSOs in Belarus is underdeveloped and mainly targeted at specific state-linked organisations. At the same time, the authorities are interested in providing funds to pro-government organisations and initiatives that implement projects aimed at supporting state ideology. Competitions are announced to support civic initiatives, including those that are not registered in the regions. For example, the public association 'Belaya Rus', which directly supports president Lukashenko, announced its support for 10 humanitarian projects of its regional branches in 2025. While concurrently, there is no public available information about the sources and amounts of support for the 'Belaya Rus' association itself. A national competition for youth initiatives was held, organised by the Ministry of Education in coordination with the BRYU.

Across all regions of the country, annual calls for funding for civic initiatives are held local authorities, aimed at involving citizens in addressing local issues, improving cities, and developing social infrastructure. In practice, however, their institutional architecture demonstrates a high degree of state control and management. For example, in Minsk, following the 2025 competition for 2026, funding was expanded, with 39 initiatives approved by the Minsk City Council of Deputies slated for implementation. In the capital city of Minsk, where previously there was insufficient information about grants for civic initiatives compared to other regions, a special section has finally been launched on local authorities' website<sup>48</sup> (the drawback is that this website is not accessible for users outside Belarus). However, the legal regulation of this mechanism was significantly amended by Decision №123 of the Minsk City Council, dated 18 February 2025. Under the revised rules, civic initiatives projects recognized as winners are implemented not by the initiating groups themselves but by municipal enterprises designated by district administrations, which act as recipients of budget funds<sup>49</sup>.

## **Standard II. There is no distinction in the treatment of financial and material resources from foreign and international sources compared to domestic ones.**

Foreign funding received by CSOs may be classified as foreign gratuitous aid or international technical aid. Both of these types of funding require preliminary approval by the state for the use of the funds received. In practice, it is often difficult to classify a foreign grant under one or the other regime because the wording in the legislation is not precise. Regardless of the amount, the foreign gratuitous aid received by CSOs is subject to mandatory preliminary registration with the Department for Humanitarian Affairs of the Presidential Administration. The legislation stipulates a complex and

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<sup>48</sup>Гражданские инициативы <https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovnet/grazhdanskije-initsiativy>

<sup>49</sup>Решение Минского городского совета депутатов от 22 декабря 2023 г. № 556 «О порядке реализации гражданских инициатив в городе Минске», с изменениями и дополнениями, внесенными решением Мингорсовета от 18.02.2025 №123 [https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovnet/docs/grazhdansk-inic/20250721-Polozhenie\\_o\\_poryadke\\_realizatsii\\_grazhdanskikh\\_initsiativ\\_v\\_g\\_Minske.docx](https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovnet/docs/grazhdansk-inic/20250721-Polozhenie_o_poryadke_realizatsii_grazhdanskikh_initsiativ_v_g_Minske.docx)

burdensome procedure for the receipt, registration and use of foreign gratuitous aid by CSOs, including detailed plans for the allocation of aid and onerous reporting. The Decree of the President of 25 May 2020<sup>50</sup> defines a list of objectives that foreign gratuitous aid can be used for. However, even if a grant is received for the objectives stipulated by the Decree, the state body may refuse to register the foreign aid. Donations from Belarusian citizens residing abroad are considered to be foreign donations and are subject to restrictions.

The legislation effectively classifies any donation received by a CSO by bank transfer without full details of the sender (or with fictional or doubtful details) as ‘foreign anonymous aid’ which must be registered with the Department for Humanitarian Affairs. Because of the vague wording of the Decree on Foreign Aid, CSOs are effectively placed in the position of supervisory bodies required to verify information about all persons who make voluntary donations to them, although this is often technically impossible in practice.<sup>51</sup>

Receipt of foreign aid by CSOs is included in the criteria for assessing the degree of risk for selecting audited entities for random inspections by the financial investigation bodies of the State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus (the list of criteria is approved by the Committee itself).<sup>52</sup>

Personal income tax exemption has expanded by the 30 December 2025 amendments to the Tax Code on the foreign donations to individuals: Article 208 of the Tax Code was supplemented by point 22<sup>2</sup>, which extends the income tax exemption to gifts received by individuals from abroad in the same amount 6,000 BYN (1,740 EUR) per year (which is the same as for reduced sum for domestic personal gifts non-taxable limit)<sup>53</sup>.

There is a permissive principle of registration of foreign gratuitous aid. In practice, access to foreign aid for CSOs is much more difficult. The body that decides on the registration of foreign gratuitous aid, the Department for Humanitarian Affairs, refuses to register the foreign aid received by most CSOs. In 2025, the practice of bringing charges under Article 24.15(2) of the Code of Administrative Offences for alleged violations of legislation on foreign gratuitous aid continued – this includes for the receipt of aid in monetary and non-monetary forms by former political prisoners, and relatives of political prisoners, including as part of the ‘INeedHelpBY’ initiative, which provided food aid to people in dire financial straits due to political repression. The resulting penalties have included substantial fines and the confiscation of the aid

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<sup>50</sup> The Decree of the President on foreign gratuitous aid No. 3 of 25 May 2020, with amendment from 8 November 2021, <https://www.pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=Pd1500005&p1=1>.

<sup>51</sup> Lawtrend, ‘Freedom of association and legal environment for civil society organisations, Review for 2022: Belarus’, 1 March 2023.

<sup>52</sup> State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus, ‘Критерии отнесения организаций к числу осуществляющих деятельность с высоким уровнем риска’ (in Russian), <https://www.kgk.gov.by/ru/kriterii-ru/>.

<sup>53</sup> <https://ilex.by/news/izmeneniya-po-podohodnomu-nalogu/>

received, including through the recovery of its monetary equivalent (if it has not been possible to confiscate this assistance in kind).

The Government of Belarus in the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 319 of 10 June 2025 (the main provisions entered into force on 14 June 2025)<sup>54</sup> has expanded the list of crimes categorised as extremist activity in a new resolution. Since coming into effect, criminal convictions for violating procedures related to receiving foreign aid (after a guilty verdict is received under Article 369<sup>2</sup>) will serve as grounds for including persons in the list of those involved in extremist activity. These persons are subject to serious restrictions on their civil legal capacity, in addition to criminal punishment. These restrictions remain in place even after the fulfilment of the sentence. As a consequence, MIA will expand its control over foreign aid which could lead to further deteriorations, as the MIA is a body responsible for combating extremism, severely restricting civic activity<sup>55</sup>. Inclusion on the list brings about significant restrictions on civil rights and professional activities. For example, they are prohibited from any public employment in state organisations, military service, educational or publishing activities for five years after the expungement of their criminal record.

Reporting introduced in accordance with AML/CTF legislation requires that CSOs must indicate not only the amount of foreign donations received, but also give information about each donor of foreign resources and the exact amounts received from them.

Stigmatisation and criticism regarding CSOs that receive foreign funding are still prevalent in Belarus. Public newspapers and television constantly publish and broadcast materials that libel CSOs receiving foreign funding, specific activists, and donors.

### Specific recommendations under Area 3:

- Abolish or essentially broaden the existing restrictive list of objectives for which CSOs can receive foreign gratuitous aid, as well as another list of possible sponsor aid from internal resources, replacing both with a method of listing prohibited purposes for which foreign or internal aid cannot be received;
- Thru development of the draft law “On Foreign Gratuitous Aid” with broad public participation and open discussion between representatives of CSOs, international donors organisations make move from an authorisation-based system for registration of foreign aid to a notification-based system; simplify the conceptual construct and provide precise definitions, as well as set a reasonable threshold for the amount of donations from abroad for which registration or special state permission on tax exemption is not required;

<sup>54</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22500319>

<sup>55</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-violations-receiving-foreign-aid-be-classified-extremist-activities>

- Abolish the Edict of the President No. 300 on the provision and use of gratuitous (sponsor) aid;
- Remove from the Criminal Code articles punishing the financing of extremist activities (Article 361<sup>2</sup>) and violation of the procedure for using foreign aid (Article 369<sup>2</sup>);
- Restore the registration of CSOs that were forced to be terminated during 2020-2025, as well as restore the system of crowdfunding platforms, operated without external interference from banks or law enforcement agencies, and make these open for any purposes for CSOs and informal groups to collect money for civil activities or charity;
- Allow public associations to conduct economic entrepreneurial activities on their own behalf, as well as to have bank accounts abroad;
- Introduce amendments to the Law on State Social Contracting to ensure access to this mechanism for a broad range of CSOs, as well as introduce the tools for CSO funding from the budget on a competitive basis; and
- Stop the practice of criminal and other persecution, demonisation, and stigmatisation of CSOs and individuals for receiving foreign donations, fundraising for legal assistance, and other types of legitimate civic activity or philanthropy.

## 3.4 Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Overall score per area: **1.5/7**

Legislation: **1.9/7**

Practice: **1.1/7**

In 2025, the situation regarding freedom of peaceful assembly in Belarus remained extremely restricted and unchanged from previous years. Public assemblies critical of the authorities did not take place due to the ongoing persecution of organisers and participants. Those attempting to exercise this right during last 5 years continued to face arbitrary arrests, criminal prosecution, torture, and inhuman detention conditions. Legislative restrictions introduced in earlier years remain in force and are actively applied, while new digital surveillance tools further expand state control over participants. There are still no effective mechanisms to hold law enforcement accountable for violence, and the right to peaceful assembly is de facto available only to pro-government groups and initiatives. The scores in the area of Freedom of Assembly remained the same as in 2024.

**Standard I. Everyone can freely enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by organising and participating in assemblies.**

The freedom of peaceful assembly in Belarus remains severely restricted both in law and in practice. The Law “On Mass Events” of 1997, amended 15 times, contradicts international human rights standards. A permit-based approach remains in force; spontaneous and counter-assemblies are prohibited; designated venues for assemblies

are strictly limited and determined by local authorities. Only adult citizens with voting rights may organise 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 organisers that are legal entities.

According to the Human Rights Centre «Viasna» in its final review for 2025, not a single opposition mass rally took place in Belarus during that year<sup>56</sup>. However, penalties for violating regulations governing assemblies apply to actions that do not constitute large gatherings *per se*, including criminal offenses<sup>57</sup>.

In 2025, no amendments were introduced to the main legislative acts regulating freedom of assembly (the Law “On Mass Events,” the Criminal Code, and the Code of Administrative Offences). However, restrictions adopted in previous years, including the 2021 amendments strengthening criminal liability and abolishing the notification procedure, remained in force and were actively applied. The authorities continued to search for, detain, and prosecute individuals who had participated in peaceful assemblies in August and autumn 2020. In 2025, at least 643 such cases were recorded. As the five-year statute of limitations for criminal prosecution neared, human rights defenders reported an increase in detentions, expedited trials, and the reclassification of cases under more serious criminal charges.

In 2025, no public assemblies critical of the authorities were held due to ongoing persecution and the forced emigration of activists. Assemblies were conducted secretly, mainly in the form of photo and video pickets, with participants concealing their faces for fear of arrest.

The conditions of administrative and criminal detention of protesters remain inhumane and often amount to torture.

At the same time, pro-government peaceful assemblies continued to be held in 2025 with the active support of executive authorities. Monitoring indicates that such events took place in various cities, often taking the form of motor rallies or relay events. Participants in these assemblies are not prosecuted, and the gatherings are typically timed to coincide with national holidays such as Independence Day, Victory Day, and the Day of Remembrance of Internationalist Soldiers.

## **Standard II. The state facilitates and protects peaceful assemblies.**

In practice, the state does not facilitate peaceful assemblies, except for those in support of the authorities. Any assembly requires prior authorization through a complex

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<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025, 13 January 2026.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “This does not mean the termination of criminal prosecution”: activist Nina Bahinskaya was put under “preventive supervision”, 2 June 2025.

bureaucratic procedure: an application must be submitted no later than 15 days before the event, and the notification principle is absent. The authorities neither properly administer assemblies nor engage in dialogue with organizers. The grounds for prohibiting assemblies are disproportionate and fall short of international human rights standards; in practice, refusals cannot be effectively appealed in court. Dissemination of information about an upcoming assembly is prohibited until official authorization is granted.

Amendments to the Law on Mass Events adopted in 2021 prohibit live broadcasting of assemblies held without authorization via the media, online platforms, or other information networks.

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. National courts fail to provide effective remedies for violations of the right to peaceful assembly. The situation has further deteriorated following Belarus's denunciation of the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR in 2022, when Belarusians have lost the possibility to submit individual communications to the UN HRC — practically the only international mechanism available to protect the right to peaceful assembly.

The government has updated the rules for forming and maintaining the register of organizers of cultural and entertainment events under a Council of Ministers resolution №454 adopted on 22 August 2025<sup>58</sup>. The register, managed by the Ministry of Culture, lists entities authorized to organize such events and specifies their permitted activities. The new regulation clarifies inclusion criteria, registration procedures, and compliance requirements, and only those listed are allowed to hold events with Belarusian or foreign performers. At the same time, existing organisers are required to bring their activities into line with the updated rules, which may create additional administrative barriers. Observers note that this could further reduce the already limited number of entities able to legally organize concerts in the country. Toward the end of 2025, the organisers of many festivals and regular music events began announcing that they would be cancelling their events in 2026<sup>59</sup>.

### **Standard III. The state does not impose unnecessary burdens on organisers or participants in peaceful assemblies.**

National legislation creates serious obstacles to the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly and provides the authorities with numerous opportunities for abuse. Organisers of assemblies are held responsible for maintaining public order and for the

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<sup>58</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22500454>

<sup>59</sup> Zerkalo, The pro-Russian Solntsestoyanie festival will no longer be held in Pruzhany — the authorities have refused to grant permission, 9 December 2025.

actions of other persons during the event, and they are required to confirm this in a special written form submitted to state bodies.

To identify participants, law enforcement agencies use facial recognition technologies and actively monitor the media and social networks. The database of persons arrested for participation in protests (known as the *Besporiadki* database), which contains tens of thousands of names, continues to be used. 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<sup>60</sup>.

Politically motivated criminal prosecutions affect all social groups and segments of the population, and often extend to entire families. Prosecution also continues against individuals who have returned to Belarus after several years abroad. Preventive measures and criminal proceedings in absentia are applied to those forced to leave the country. 30 in absentia convictions are known, at least 13 of which relate to participation in peaceful assemblies, while in 9 cases participation in an assembly was the sole basis for prosecution under Article 342 of the Criminal Code. In some instances, criminal cases have been initiated even for participants of assemblies abroad, including in countries such as Lithuania and Poland.

During 2025, at least 643 people were prosecuted under Article 342 of the Criminal Code (“actions grossly violating public order”), and 11 people under Article 293 (“mass riots”). Five years have now passed since the 2020 protests, meaning the statute of limitations for prosecution under this criminal article has expired, after which their participants cannot be convicted. Of 4339 political prisoners, 1619 were recognised as such due to being deprived of liberty under Article 342 of the Criminal Code.

Released political prisoners report continuing restrictions, including administrative supervision, travel bans and employment limitations, which demonstrate that repression persists even after formal release.

#### **Standard IV. Law enforcement supports peaceful assemblies and is accountable for the actions of its representatives.**

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.

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<sup>60</sup> **Reformation**, The GUBOpIK accidentally revealed the algorithm used to “screen” unreliable individuals and “sacked” an employee, 18 July 2025.

According to Article 26 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Internal Affairs Bodies”, officers may use physical force, less lethal and lethal weapons, as well as special equipment, at their own discretion in cases stipulated by law. Such provisions do not prevent arbitrary actions in dispersing assemblies, which is consistently confirmed in practice.

There are no effective mechanisms to hold officers accountable for acts of violence. Since the 2020 protests and in subsequent years, thousands of cases of torture and arbitrary detentions of peaceful assembly participants have been documented. According to International Accountability Platform for Belarus, more than 3,245 interviews with victims and witnesses have been collected<sup>61</sup>, while the Prosecutor General’s Office reported over 5,000 complaints of torture and ill-treatment. Nevertheless, no investigations or prosecutions of perpetrators are known. Torture against protesters in Belarus remains unpunished.

#### Specific recommendations under Area 4:

- Bring legislation and practice on peaceful assemblies in line with international human rights standards, ensuring that restrictions do not make the exercise of this right impossible;
- Cooperate with UN bodies (the HRC, Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups) to restore violated rights and prevent violations;
- End the criminalisation of peaceful assemblies and revise Articles 342 and 293 of the Criminal Code accordingly; and
- Ensure transparency and accountability of law enforcement officers, including investigation of violence and torture against protesters.

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<sup>61</sup> The International Accountability Platform for Belarus, Ninth progress report 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025 (Public version), 7 August 2025.

## 3.5 Right to Participation in Decision-Making

Overall score per area: **2.7/7**

Legislation: **3.1/7**

Practice: **2.2/7**

Opportunities to participate in decision-making remained unsatisfactory for both institutionalised CSOs and the wider public. Alternative voices continued to be decreased and silenced in formal decision-making processes. An atmosphere of fear and repression fostered self-censorship among CSOs, causing them to minimise any interaction with authorities — particularly in decision-making. Official public discussion of draft laws in electronic form remains one of the few mechanisms for sending proposals on the legislative agenda, including proposals to eliminate gaps and defects in legal regulation. However, the outcomes of these public discussions are often summarised in a formal manner, without a clear and comprehensive assessment of all proposals. The overall score in the area of Right to Participation in Decision-Making increased from 2.6 in 2024 to 2.7 in 2025 due to a slight improvement in the practice, from 2.1 in 2024 to 2.2 in 2025.

### Standard I. Everyone has the right to participation in decision-making.

Access to participation in decision-making for CSOs remains insufficient. Even though there are mechanisms for participation in decision-making in legislation, many CSOs do not have access to these in practice because of political repression due to formal restrictions.

In an environment of mass arrests and torture, as well as criminal cases against CSO leaders and participants,<sup>62</sup> and other forms of repression, the opportunities for CSOs' participation in decision-making have narrowed.

In practice, CSOs are rarely invited to participate in working groups on draft laws.

In 2025, the Ministry of natural resources established a working group to draft the Environmental Code; however, CSOs were not included. The draft Code was submitted for discussion to the Public council on entrepreneurship Development<sup>63</sup>, which is composed mainly of business representatives and state bodies. At the same time, the draft was not considered by the public council that includes CSOs.<sup>64</sup> In practice, public councils have ceased to function as a platform for interaction state authorities with CSOs.

<sup>62</sup> The practice of criminal prosecution for interaction with CSOs recognised as extremist formations continues. In 2025, for example, a Belarusian citizen was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and a fine for participation in the activities of ABF, a non-formal education organisation.

<sup>63</sup> Public Advisory Expert Council on Entrepreneurship Development, protocols of meetings, website of the Ministry of Natural Resources (in Russian) <https://minpriroda.gov.by/ru/sov1/>

<sup>64</sup> Public Coordination Environmental Council website of the Ministry of Natural Resources (in Russian) [https://minpriroda.gov.by/ru/new\\_url\\_128162718-ru](https://minpriroda.gov.by/ru/new_url_128162718-ru)

Usually, only online participation in discussions of draft laws is available to an indefinite number of entities (as is the submission of written comments and proposals on the special state website ‘Legal Forum’). However, it is not mandatory to submit draft laws for such discussion, and many important acts are adopted without public discussion at any stage.

The Law on the Essentials of Civil Society imposes special forms of interaction with the state for a small circle of public associations operating at the national level. It also determines eligibility criteria for the entities that are entitled to nominate civil society representatives to the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly.<sup>65</sup>

There is no practice of officially introducing draft laws in the two state languages. As a result, language groups in Belarus are restricted in their use of their language for participation in development of legislative proposals and submission of comments on draft laws. With regard to official Codes, the situation is a bit better, as a special state commission publishes official translations of the Codes into Belarusian that correspond to the original. Thus, out of 27 codes, only one was adopted in Belarusian; the rest were adopted in Russian, but for 19 of them, an official translation into Belarusian was published.<sup>66</sup> In 2025, the text of the draft Environmental Code posted on the ‘Legal Forum’ was available only in Russian.<sup>67</sup>

## **Standard II. There is regular, open and effective participation of CSOs in developing, implementing and monitoring public policies.**

The authorities make the most important decisions without any consultation with CSOs.

The majority of participation mechanisms work only formally, are often ineffective, and do not have real influence on decisions. This also applies to consultative bodies that are widespread.

Because of the termination of CSOs and for other reasons, the composition of many public councils has been significantly reduced.

The discussion of draft legislation in public councils under state bodies tends to involve businesses more than CSOs. For example, in 2025 a number of draft laws were brought forward for discussion by the Public Advisory Councils on entrepreneurship

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<sup>65</sup> For a political science analysis of this specific body, see: Jakob Wöllenstein, ‘One nation – two new representative bodies?’, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, June 4, 2024. However, in this analysis – as in many other international reviews – a common misconception appears: the Presidium of this body is mistakenly portrayed as equivalent to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In reality, this comparison does not hold in 2024. The Presidium is not a powerful governing entity but rather a symbolic and decorative institution, providing honorary titles to individuals who are, in fact, not among the most influential figures in the Belarusian administrative system.

<sup>66</sup> National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, ‘Кодексы Республики Беларусь’ (in Belarusian and Russian), <https://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/kodeksy-respubliki-belarus/>.

<sup>67</sup> Draft Environmental Code of the Republic of Belarus, Legal Forum of Belarus (in Russian) <https://forumpravo.by/publicnoe-obsuzhdenie-proektov-npa/forum15/17813>

development under the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, and others.

In 2025, at meetings of the Public Advisory Council on tourism under the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, discussions were held on the implementation of the Tourism Law, the draft Presidential Decree on the Development of Agro-ecotourism, the draft National Strategy for Tourism Development in the Republic of Belarus until 2035, and other issues.<sup>68</sup>

However, the participants of these councils are almost entirely representatives of state bodies and organisations, or businesses, not CSOs.

Many norms related to public participation in decision-making are quasi-obligatory in nature (using such terms as ‘normally’ or ‘as a general rule’ and other recommendatory constructs). Legal norms for CSO involvement in policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation exist in only a few areas (such as environmental issues or business legislation) and do not exist in others or in general.

If a public discussion of a draft law has been announced, then its results should be publicly available, but the scope of such a report has not been established, however.

Participation of people and CSOs in public discussions of draft laws on the official website ‘Legal Forum’<sup>69</sup> remains low, although the average number of comments per act has increased since period of silence in 2021-2022.

Table 1: Public interest in the discussion of draft laws and by-laws.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of legislative acts brought up for public online discussion on the ‘Legal Forum’	1	1	6	12	26	76	165	195	178	133	92	65	70
Number of comments	3	1	34	488	709	1,557	3,021	7,437	1,166	881	2,841	1,952	4,042

<sup>68</sup> Public Advisory Council on Tourism, website of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (in Russian) <https://www.mst.gov.by/ru/turizm/oks.html>

<sup>69</sup> Legal Forum of Belarus, ‘Публичное обсуждение проектов нормативных правовых актов’ (in Russian), <https://forumpravo.by/publicnoe-obsuzhdenie-proektov-npa/forum15/>.

Average number of comments to a draft	3	1	5.6	40.6	27.2	20.4	18.3	38.1	6.5	6.6	30.8	30	57,7
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Even the most important and extensive draft legislation for CSOs or the public is discussed online within a very short timeframe (the law stipulates a minimum of 10 days). For example, despite the requirement under the law the Ministry of Natural Resources did not submit the draft Environmental Code (a 500-page document) for a 30-day public consultation, but instead published it only on the website ‘Legal Forum’ for a 10-day consultation period, and no announcement about the public discussion on the draft Environmental Code was posted on the Ministry of the Environment’s official website.<sup>70</sup>.

Regulatory impact assessments are very rarely submitted to public councils for discussion together with the draft regulatory act.<sup>71</sup>

One positive example is that, in 2025, the draft Resolution of the Council of Ministers on the Waste Management Strategy was submitted for public consultation and, importantly, not only the draft resolution itself but also an Explanatory Note and a Financial and Economic Justification were made available.<sup>72</sup>

### Standard III. CSOs have access to information necessary for their effective participation.

The plan for legislative activity is annually approved by edict of the president, and it includes planned government regulations, but not all presidential edicts. Unlike previous years, the legislative agenda for 2026 was approved not in the last days of the previous year, but on 18 November 2025, which should be seen as a positive change<sup>73</sup>. Several of the bills on the agenda directly relate to the activities of civil society organisations, especially the draft law “On Foreign Gratuitous Aid”. The inclusion of this element in the plan was proposed by civil society experts during the proposal

<sup>70</sup> Ecohome Belarus is set to adopt an Environmental Code: public consultations held – 1 September 2025: The draft Environmental Code contains, inter alia, provisions regulating relations related to environmentally hazardous activities. Thus, the public discussion of the draft Code (or its separate parts) should have been conducted in accordance with the provisions of clause 2.1 of the Regulation, namely over a period of 30 days and with the publication of a notification on the official website of the Ministry of Natural Environment (Regulation on the procedure for organizing and conducting public consultations of environmentally significant decisions, environmental impact assessment reports, and accounting for adopted decisions, approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 458 of June 14, 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Neg.by, ‘Последствия принятия госрешений часто не оцениваются’ (in Russian), <https://neg.by/novosti/otkrytj-posledstviya-prinyatiya-gosresheniy-chasto-ne-otsenivayutsya/>.

<sup>72</sup> Discussion of the draft resolution of the Council of Ministers on the Waste Management Strategy, legal forum (in Russian) <https://forumpravo.by/publicnoe-obsuzhdenie-proektov-npa/forum15/17731>

<sup>73</sup> It was approved on November 18, 2025 by the presidential Edict No 400 [https://president.gov.by/ru/events/utverzden-plan-podgotovki-proektov-zakonodatel-nyh-aktov-na-2026-god?fbclid=IwY2xjawOVI\\_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjJwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe0M0lwNr6T8GTnygErXFqau-Y6G8iegVo5cVrssFk3pM8SIT-HXo6cbmVmVw\\_aem\\_FJ2sZJQFQm5gUwUUKu9SkA](https://president.gov.by/ru/events/utverzden-plan-podgotovki-proektov-zakonodatel-nyh-aktov-na-2026-god?fbclid=IwY2xjawOVI_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjJwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEe0M0lwNr6T8GTnygErXFqau-Y6G8iegVo5cVrssFk3pM8SIT-HXo6cbmVmVw_aem_FJ2sZJQFQm5gUwUUKu9SkA)

collection stage, when the plan was being formulated in the spring of 2025. The legislative agenda also puts forth a plan to develop a concept for a bill “On Volunteer Activities”, changes to the Trade Unions Law, the Environmental Code, and several other laws outlined in the plan are also relevant from a freedom of association perspective<sup>74</sup>.

There is no specific law or provisions on CSOs’ access to information. If bills are published, this is often only in the initial version and, until the official publication of the adopted law, the public does not know what form the legislation will ultimately take.

Access to official statistics in Belarus has become increasingly restricted, which negatively affects opportunities for access to information and influence on decision-making.

For example, there is no information in open sources about the number of newly registered public associations and foundations, or even fundamental demographic indicators such as the number of deaths and births are no longer publicly available.<sup>75</sup> Much economic information has become classified and inaccessible due to the policy of efforts to counter and circumvent economic sanctions imposed on Belarus by the EU, the United States, Switzerland, Canada and other countries.

Since March 2025, access to the electronic schedule of court hearings has been suspended, directly limiting the ability to monitor law enforcement practices.<sup>76</sup>

#### **Standard IV. Participation in decision-making is distinct from political activities and lobbying.**

Restrictions on participation of CSOs in political activities are not clearly defined, except for nominating candidates in elections to the National Assembly and local councils — an option available only to political parties.

It is common practice for state-funded CSOs that support the government to be invited to consultations as the sole representation of public opinion.

In general, GONGOs enjoy freedom in their political activities and do not distinguish these from their usual social activities. Independent CSOs, on the contrary, avoid any connections with political actors, and especially with the political opposition, as this can result in forced dissolution and repression against CSO leaders (including criminal prosecution and lengthy prison terms).

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<sup>74</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-2026-bring-new-bills-volunteering-and-foreign-aid>

<sup>75</sup> The last ‘Demographic Yearbook’ was released by the government in 2019. Since then, the National Statistical Committee has regularly updated data on the population of Belarus as a whole, but neither the precise numbers of births and deaths nor migration data are indicated.

<sup>76</sup> **Belarusian Helsinki Committee**, Human Rights in Belarus: Key Trends in Public Policy: January– April’25 , 3 June 2025.

### Specific recommendations under Area 5:

- Extend the approaches, regulations and practices applied to CSO participation in decision-making in the development of draft normative acts to the level of local authorities;
- Ensure equal treatment of all organisational and legal forms of CSOs in their participation in decision-making, by using the term ‘non-commercial organisations’ instead of ‘public associations’ in the respective legislation;
- Establish a practice of inviting all interested CSOs to consultations on draft legislative acts, rather than allowing state bodies to selectively invite certain CSOs;
- Extend the list of normative legal acts subject to public consultation, making it mandatory to submit drafts affecting civil rights and freedoms for public discussion;
- Publish draft laws online in a continuously updated format in line with the current stages of the legislative process;
- Provide sufficient time for public consultation on bills;
- Establish in law a mechanism for the consideration and reconciliation of stakeholder input submitted during public discussions of draft regulatory and legal acts; and
- Enshrine in law the obligation to present draft laws to Parliament, and to adopt laws, government orders and edicts of the president in both state languages – Russian and Belarusian.

## 3.6 Freedom of Expression

Overall score per area: **1.8/7**

Legislation: **2.4/7**

Practice: **1.2/7**

Freedom of expression has remained almost unavailable to both citizens and CSOs inside Belarus, especially online, including social networks. Many of CSOs inside the country have stuck to the tactics of anonymising their own activities, fearing negative attention from repressive bodies. The space for independence has further shrunk due to the arrests and criminal prosecution of editors and journalists, and the classification of media outlets, their editorial staff, and subscribers to their Telegram channels as ‘extremist formations’, which entails criminal liability not only for journalists, but also for audiences. Freedom of expression is being destroyed not only in the media, but also in communication between individuals (prosecution for talks in private correspondence, at work, on public transport, subscriptions to banned media, tattoos, banned books or songs, etc). Dozens of independent media outlets were forced to relocate and continue their activities from abroad (often being prosecuted in absentia), others simply stopped publishing. Many websites and electronic media are blocked, and private reposting of their content is punishable by severe arrests and fines. The dominant state-run media support only the interests of the ruling political group and stigmatise the opposition and civil society in exile. The scores in the area of Freedom of Expression remained the same as in 2024.

## Standard I. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Freedom of opinion and expression is stipulated by legislation and the Constitution. But in practice, in 2025, individuals and CSOs have generally not been able to engage in public discussions expressing alternative opinions. The space for free political discussion is strictly limited both in law and in practice and any alternative civil expression is under pressure both online and offline, for citizens, CSOs, political parties, media and social networks, including direct criminal prosecution of free voices. Cases are frequently reported in which information viewed as critical towards the governing authorities has been prevented from being spread, or has become subject to criminal prosecution.

Hate speech against specific groups, such as the political opposition, LGBTQ+ persons, human rights activists, CSOs or protesters is widespread among the state media and state-supported bloggers, particularly speech justifying new arrests, torture and other repression against these groups<sup>77</sup>. The authorities misuse the legislation against radicalism, extremism and hate speech to restrict freedom of expression, including bans on publications and imprisonment for distributing content from media included in the Index of Extremist Materials.

The conducting of opinion polls on social and political topics (even if they are not related to elections) requires special accreditation from the agency under the Academy of Sciences, at the time of the presidential elections in January 2025, there were only 12 agencies on the list, same as for parliamentary elections in 2024.<sup>78</sup> There is a ban on publishing results of such opinion polls conducted without accreditation, a violation of which is punishable by a fine. In August 2025, head of pollsters company Satio Evgeny Krasnyansky was sentenced to 7.5 years' imprisonment in a maximum security colony under Part I of Article 356 ("treason")<sup>79</sup> and Part I of Article 243<sup>3</sup> ("evasion of insurance contributions, resulting in particularly large-scale damage") and a fine of 25,000 roubles for preparing an opinion poll<sup>80</sup>.

Production of printed materials is subject to licensing and the distribution of books is allowed only after accreditation from the Ministry of Information. Resolution N<sup>o</sup> 672 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, dated 25 November, 2025, revoked the previous 2002-2005 regulations on conducting public opinion polls and revised the procedure for accrediting legal entities to conduct opinion polls on

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<sup>77</sup> TG House, Discrimination Against Belarusian LGBTQ+ Community in 2025

<sup>78</sup> Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus on Elections and Holding Republican Referenda, 'Список социологических структур, аккредитованных в настоящее время комиссией по опросам общественного мнения при Национальной академии наук Беларуси' (in Russian), <https://rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Calendar/socopros.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that the harsh Article 356 of the Criminal Code, "Treason," is frequently applied broadly in 2025 against media workers indeed, resulting in lengthy prison sentences (9–12 years) for journalists and editors of banned media outlets

<sup>80</sup> RFI (Radio France Internationale) In Belarus, a public opinion poll has been equated with treason, 9 August 2025.

elections, referendums, and the socio-political situation<sup>81</sup>. Accreditation is carried out by a commission under the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, which requires the presence of at least two sociologists or political scientists with at least three years of experience.

During 2025 the Ministry of Information continues to add books into a list of printed editions containing information messages and (or) materials, the dissemination of which may harm national interests — it was 190 new books in this list, and with 35 books forbidden in 2024, in total this list has 225 books published in Belarus and Russia and not listed as extremist.<sup>82</sup> If these books are distributed, the Ministry of Information threatens to revoke the distribution permit of the guilty booksellers.<sup>83</sup>

## **Standard II. The state facilitates and protects freedom of opinion and expression.**

Almost all TV channels are owned by the state, which also owns major public and political newspapers and subsidises them directly from the state budget. The media market in production and distribution is de facto monopolised 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.

According to the Ministry of Information, as of 1 January 2026, there are 1,091 registered mass media in Belarus<sup>84</sup>, which represents a decline from the December 1, 2024 level, where they stood at 1,143<sup>85</sup>. The number of newspaper titles has decreased by 23.1% over the past five years (from 471 in 2019 to 362 in 2024). The number of periodicals titles decreased by 31.8% during this period, falling from 806 to 550. The annual circulation of magazines and other periodicals decreased by 2.1 times (from 33.157 million to 15.755 million)<sup>86</sup>.

Political repression in Belarus, coupled with diminishing space for independent journalism and CSOs, has forced dozens of media outlets into exile. Fleeing repression, many of these outlets relocated to EU countries. In exile, these media outlets continued serving their audiences, remaining a key voice of objective, high-quality journalism. CSOs that support independent media in these host countries have played a vital role in helping exiled Belarusian media adapt to their new environments. Some challenges

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<sup>81</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22500672>

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, 'Список печатных изданий, содержащих информационные сообщения и (или) материалы, распространение которых способно нанести вред национальным интересам Республики Беларусь' (in Russian),

<http://mininform.gov.by/upload/iblock/bd4/zafmcv44wdl08rw7c3qfgpz68huh68en.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus on Publishing Activities, Article 33, point 2, paragraph 13, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H11200008&p1=1&p5=0>.

<sup>84</sup> <https://president.gov.by/ru/belarus/society/mass-media>

<sup>85</sup> Detector Media, 'Такіх часоў яшчэ ніколі не было. Але незалежныя медыя не здаюцца' (in Belarusian), 13 December 2024.

<sup>86</sup> Radio Liberty Belarus Service, In five years, newspaper circulation in Belarus has decreased by almost 40%, 21 April 2025.

arise from growing pressure from the Belarusian government, while others stem from the increasing costs of maintaining a functioning and relevant media entity in exile, which was worsened in 2025 by a significant reduction in support for independent media due to the closure of the American agency USAID (but the quick response of other donors, including the EU, helped to partially mitigate the negative effect of this step).

Media publications on behalf of unregistered CSOs are prohibited according to Article 38 of the Law on Mass Media.

The legislation provides for a wide range of forms and grounds for restrictions on the expression of opinions through criminal prosecution, restrictions on the media, control over the internet (in respect of both Belarusian and foreign websites), as well as restrictions on imparting of materials and ‘propagandising extremist activity’. Together with the ample powers of the Ministry of Information (on blocking of internet resources in circumvention of courts and initiating newspaper bans through the courts), the powers accorded to intelligence agencies, border guards and law enforcement agencies have created conditions in which the state has extremely broad and disproportionate powers to block the dissemination of information deemed undesirable by the government.

Table 2: Court decisions recognising information materials as ‘extremist’ (according to the Ministry of Information's official Index of Extremist Materials).

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of court decisions declaring materials ‘extremist’ *	2	1	0	1	0	1	2	13	38	37	39	22	19	426	637	<b>889</b>	<b>1,462</b>	<b>1,385</b>

\* One court decision may declare anywhere from one to several dozen information objects as ‘extremist materials’. These can include physical items and digital files—such as flags, patches, badges, the contents of private postal items, books, social media pages, YouTube videos or channels, newspaper issues, images, symbols, or even songs.

The official Index of Extremist Materials compiled in accordance with court decisions is available online. In 2025, for the first time in years, the number of court decisions recognising materials as extremist decreased but the total number of materials mentioned in these decisions has increased. During the year, the courts declared 2,107 information materials to be “extremist” — from Telegram channels and TikTok accounts to books, websites of CSOs, and webpages with a list of political prisoners. As

of end of 2025, the list comprised 1,929 pages, 787 of which (or 40 per cent of the total volume of the Index) were decisions made in 2025.<sup>87</sup> In total, the Index turned out to be longer by 2107 lines and in 2025 it was supplemented by 411 Instagram pages and 222 Facebook pages and communities, 319 TikTok accounts, 143 pages and communities on VK and 99 on Odnoklassniki, 118 pages on YouTube, 21 pages in X and 4 in Viber.

In 2025, the website of the CoE has been designated as “extremist materials” in Belarus. A ruling by the Partizanski District Court of Minsk on 5 December identifies the website of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations, CINGO) as “extremist”, but the Information Ministry’s extremist list specifies the address of the Council of Europe’s website itself — [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).<sup>88</sup> On 10 December, the same court overturned the decision, so the Council of Europe website again became non-“extremist” in Belarus. However, 9 days later, the Partyzanski Court considered “extremist” several pages from the CoE’s website – those related to the activities of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations. According to a statement released on 6 June 2025, the Ministry of Information, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, has already restricted the activities of 18,000 websites (including 3,600 in January-May 2025<sup>89</sup>), nearly 7,000 of which have been designated as extremist materials<sup>90</sup>. For example, the website of the regional publication Evening Bobruisk has been blocked in Belarus by order of the Ministry of Information since late May 2025, following a search of its editorial office (as well as other media outlets) in connection with the security services’ investigation concerning advertising contracts with the German Embassy<sup>91</sup>.

According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, In 2025, there were 12 arrests of journalists (in 2024 there were 27), 34 searches of journalists’ premises (in 2024 there were 66), and 28 journalists and media workers were in prison at the end of 2025 (at the end of 2024 there were 45).<sup>92</sup> In 2025, 42 media outlets are listed in the Index of Extremist Organisations, and the process of adding new media outlets to this list by decision of the MIA or the KDB is continuing steadily: 2025 – 13 media included into the list, 2024 – 10 media, 2023-13 media, 2022- 10 media, 2021 – 4 media.

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<sup>87</sup> Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, ‘Республиканский список экстремистских материалов’ (in Russian), <http://mininform.gov.by/documents/respublikanskiy-spisok-ekstremistskikh-materialov/>

<sup>88</sup> *Mezha*, Minsk Court Declares Council of Europe Website Extremist Amid Sanctions, 9 December 2025.

<sup>89</sup> <https://belta.by/society/view/za-pjat-mesjatsev-2025-goda-mininform-ogranichil-dostup-k-36-tys-internet-resursam-724697-2025/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://belta.by/society/view/ogranichena-dejatelnost-18-tys-informatsionnyh-resursov-mininform-o-prodolzhenii-gibridnoj-voiny-719455-2025/>

<sup>91</sup> *Reformation*, The ‘Evening Bobruisk’ website has stopped loading, 30 May 2025.

<sup>92</sup> Belarusian Association of Journalists, Figures of the Year, 2025, 26 December 2025.

At the same time, the authorities refrain from blocking the social media platforms themselves, like Facebook, Instagram or YouTube.<sup>93</sup>

On this list of banned and declared extremist materials are the sites of reputable CSOs. The storage or distribution of hyperlinks to these materials (for example, by liking or sharing them in social networks) is considered an administrative offence punishable by a fine or arrest for up to 15 days.

It is important to emphasise that an interview or other contribution to a media outlet included in the Index of Extremist Formations is interpreted as ‘promotion of extremist activity’ and can be punished under Article 361<sup>4</sup> of the Criminal Code with up to six years of imprisonment (and this provision is applied in practice). On 16 September 2025, the Minsk City Court concluded the trial of journalist and writer Ihar Iljaš, which had begun on 21 February. He was sentenced to four years in a penal colony and fined for “discrediting the Republic of Belarus” (Article 369<sup>1</sup>) and “facilitating extremist activity” (Article 361<sup>4</sup>). The charges were based on his interviews and commentary for independent media outlets.<sup>94</sup> In February 2025, the elderly mothers of several political prisoners were sentenced to prison for expressing solidarity or for giving interviews in 2022 to independent media outlets. UN reports have emerged about the prosecution of people who: subscribed to, commented on, reposted or “liked” online “extremist materials”, including publications of independent mass media; gave interviews to independent media; and left online comments critical of the Government or of its support for the Russian Federation in the war with Ukraine<sup>95</sup>.

According to national human rights CSOs, due to the overly-broad interpretation of the concepts of ‘extremism’ and the arbitrary expansion of the concept of ‘terrorism’, the arbitrary application of anti-extremist legislation, in 2025 Belarus continued to widely apply repressive practices of suppressing expression of opinions and persecuting opponents of the authorities. Much of this arbitrary repression was made possible by the absence of an independent judiciary. Whistle-blowers are not protected by law and are prosecuted in practice.

As of 15 December 2025, PEN Belarus reported that as of 31 December 2025, at least 140 cultural figures, including 31 writers, were not free – either imprisoned or in home confinement).<sup>96</sup> The ongoing persecution of artists, musicians, writers, cultural managers, theatre groups and other cultural figures in Belarus is most often linked to

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<sup>93</sup> Justice for Journalists Foundation, ‘Attacks on media workers in Belarus in 2023–2024’, 5 February 2025.

<sup>94</sup> PEN-Belarus, Monitoring of violations of cultural rights and human rights of cultural figures. Belarus, January – September 2025, 3 November 2025.

<sup>95</sup> From the Report of human rights in Belarus of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/59>

<sup>96</sup> PEN Belarus, Chronicle of human rights violations in the sphere of culture (15-31 December 2025), 5 January 2026

their civic stance and personal views; in some cases, it stems directly from their artistic expression or professional work<sup>97</sup>.

The non-judiciary blocking of websites, bans on websites, social media pages, and Telegram channels labelled as extremist, putting obstacles in the way of the publishing and distribution of newspapers, criminal prosecution (including imprisonment) of journalists and bloggers, beatings of journalists by law enforcement, as well as threats to media editorial staff with demands to shut down their media outlets, are all used as restrictions on freedom of speech.

The draft law adopted (on 3 October) in the first reading aims to treat information not accepted by the government as “propaganda” and expands the grounds for restricting freedom of expression and the right to privacy. The Council of Ministers submitted to Parliament a draft law “On Amending the Codes on Administrative Violations”, which, among other things, introduces Article 19.16 “Propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, pedophilia”<sup>98</sup>. Disseminating information on these topics can be punished with a fine or imprisonment for up to 15 days. Currently, there are several definitions of “propaganda” in Belarusian legislation (prohibitions of propaganda of pornography, propaganda of violence and cruelty, propaganda of terrorism). “Dissemination of information” (defined in the Law on Information) implies communication towards an indefinite number of persons, regardless of the format. Therefore, there is the threat that any publications about legitimate activities of CSOs (e.g., the work of counselling centres informing about gender transition regulations) may fall under the newly introduced restrictions and be punishable in practice. The risk for the general public and content creators is that any public mention or image related to homosexuality, gender transition or childlessness may be considered as “propaganda”. Photos and posts on social networks can fall under the article, and not only the authors of the content are at risk, but also the users who share or like such links. As of the end of 2025, no second reading had been held of this bill.

The justification of this draft law contains a reference to similar legislation in the Russian Federation<sup>99</sup>. In general, is in line with the government's policy of stigmatizing and denigrating sexual minorities. However, researchers note that so far, this growing smear policy and even the hate speeches in the state media has not achieved its goal and has not led to an increase in homophobic moods, at least among young people<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> PEN Belarus, Belarus: Persecution for Artistic Expression, 1 December 2025

<sup>98</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3951&p0=2025035001>

<sup>99</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-set-punish-information-lgbtqi-childlessness-and-gender-transition>

<sup>100</sup> See “Regular Monitoring of the Hate Speech against LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian Media in 2022–2024 (Three Waves)” in Digest of studies made by Civil Society Organizations of Belarus, Volume III 2021 – 2024 <https://csosfusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/digest-of-studies-made-by-belarusian-csos.pdf> and comments from the participants of the OCSE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference side event “Adapting Under Pressure: LGBTQ+ Strategies for Resilience in Belarus”, 14 October 2025, focusing on concerning trends such as forced outing cases and discriminatory legal measures, as well as current legal practices.

## Specific recommendations under Area 6:

- The release of all individuals recognised as political prisoners, including journalists, bloggers and people sentenced to prison according to defamatory articles of the Criminal Code, the review and lifting of all sentences imposed on them, the payment of adequate compensation to all political prisoners, and an end to all politically motivated criminal cases;
- Make laws and the practice of state regulation of freedom of speech congruent with human rights standards, including the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34 on Article 19 of the ICCPR (2011), so that restrictions do not render the exercise of the right to freedom of expression impossible for citizens (including foreign nationals and minors) and CSOs;
- Abolish the Law on the Countering of Extremism and all by-laws adopted under it, especially the Index of Extremist Formations and the Index of Extremist Materials;
- Pursue the de-monopolisation of electronic media and the privatisation of print media;
- State budget funding for media should be allocated through transparent competition and open calls;
- State TV channels should become public service television, in respect of which a special law should be adopted;
- Exclude liability for defamation (Article 188), defamation of the president (Article 367), insult of the president (Article 368), insult of a state official (Article 369), discrediting the Republic of Belarus (Article 369<sup>1</sup>), public calls to organise or hold illegal assemblies, rallies, street marches, demonstrations or picketing, or involving persons in participating in such mass events (Article 369<sup>3</sup>), insult against a judge (Article 391) and calls for restrictive measures (i.e., sanctions) and other actions aimed at harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus (Article 361) from the Criminal Code, and stop the practice of abusing Article 130 of the Criminal Code ('Incitement of racial, national, religious or other social hatred or discord') against authors of anti-war statements or critics of the authorities;
- Eliminate legislative provisions and the practice of internet disruption and website blocking without court decisions, the system of website blocking and termination of newspaper publishing should be reformed and placed under the sole jurisdiction of the courts; and
- Abolish mandatory accreditation of pollsters conducting opinion polls.
- Don't introduce into the Code on Administrative Offences Article 19.16 "Propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, pedophilia".

## 3.7 Right to Privacy

Overall score per area: **2.4/7**

Legislation: **3.3/7** | Practice: **1.5/7**

Implementation of the national legislation on personal data protection has been taking place in Belarus since 2020, which is generally in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) (GDPR) and in line with the regulations on information privacy in the EU. The National Center for Personal Data Protection is developing methodological recommendations in this area, including guidance tailored to the specific needs of CSOs. However, the protection of personal data does not account for interference by government agencies, which are endowed with significant rights to collect information and control private life and extensively practice collection, processing and use of private information, including the misuse of criminal investigations for political persecution. Involuntary outings of LGBTQ+ individuals occur. Refusal to grant access to private correspondence or smartphones is interpreted as disobedience to law enforcement and, in practice, is often punished by arrest. The main threats to the privacy of CSOs in Belarus are currently related to violations of privacy in the electronic sphere, particularly in relation to donations. The scores in the area of Right to Privacy remained the same as in 2024.

### Standard I. Everyone enjoys the right to privacy and data protection.

The Constitution guarantees the right to privacy, secrecy of correspondence and other messages, and legislation provides for the protection of personal data. The right to privacy is in practice not protected from interference or unlawful restrictions by state authorities.

Seizure of all data storage and communication devices is broadly used both during home searches and arrests.

In the context of the investigation of politically-motivated criminal cases, the authorities hunt out oppositional, media and human rights coordinators, forcibly de-anonymising CSOs and media representatives. In some cases, such persons have been arrested upon their return to the country — for example, for social media posts or participation in protests in 2020–2022. Belarusian journalist Pavel Dabravolski, who had worked for independent outlets and left Belarus in 2021, returned to the country and was detained in January 2025; he has been held in pre-trial detention on politically motivated charges linked to his journalistic work and dissent, with human rights defenders regarding his arrest as part of the broader crackdown on independent media<sup>101</sup>. Cultural figure and founder of a music school, Uładzimir Patapienka was reported detained in early November 2025 a few days after returning from Warsaw,

<sup>101</sup> Belarusian Association of Journalists. Belarusian media workers behind bars. Portraits.

with authorities linking his case to an independent monitoring project that tracked military movements in Belarus, showing how people returning from abroad can be targeted under broad “extremist” or security-related pretexts<sup>102</sup>. The preliminary disclosure of details of criminal cases, including personal data of arrested persons, in an accusatory and biased manner is widely practiced by the state media.

The MIA has created and maintain in 2025 a unified database of participants in unauthorised demonstrations on the basis of resolutions aimed at bringing participants to administrative and criminal justice (known as the *Besporiadki* database). Another and broader the “Activist” database is reportedly an internal registry maintained by state authorities to monitor people involved in political or civic activism. It is used for operational tracking of individuals participating in protests, social movements, or other public initiatives, often without their knowledge. Being listed does not mean a criminal conviction but can result in surveillance, warnings, or administrative pressure. The database is not officially acknowledged, and its criteria and scope remain largely opaque<sup>103</sup>.the authorities compile blacklists of people in certain professions who have been identified as disloyal to the regime: lists of professional athletes and former MIA employees have been leaked.<sup>104</sup>

The Law on Personal Data Protection has been implemented with due diligence and is not intended to restrict CSOs, the state regulator publishes explanations on its application, including those addressed to CSOs. The Centre's website [cpd.by](http://cpd.by) is not accessible from abroad. In practice, however, legal protection is effective only against interference by private, non-state or commercial entities, but not against interference by the state. Forced outings of LGBTQ+ individuals in custody keep be a shameful practice of the MIA.

The Code on Administrative Offences provides for responsibility for violation of the personal data protection legislation (Article 23.7). Article 203<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code (‘unlawful acts in connection with information on private life and personal data’) covers the ‘intentional illegal collection, provision of information about the private life and/or personal data of another person without his consent, which caused substantial harm to the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens.’

Political persecution bodies practice mass summons for the interrogation of individuals who have made donations to CSOs recognised as ‘extremist formations’. This mainly relates to donations made in 2020-2021, but also to those made in subsequent years. Donations to the Belarusian military formation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (the so-

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<sup>102</sup> PEN Belarus, Chronicle of human rights violations in the sphere of culture (1-15 November 2025), 17 November 2025.

<sup>103</sup> Reformation, The GUBOpIK accidentally revealed the algorithm used to “screen” unreliable individuals and “sacked” an employee, 18 July 2025.

<sup>104</sup> Reformation, The authorities are keeping lists of ‘disloyal’ security officials and athletes - ‘Cyberpartisans’ 13 February 2025.

called 'Kalinouski Regiment') constitute a separate ground for prosecution. Donors identified by the security agencies face criminal prosecution, without the possibility of paying a 'ransom' (as is often possible in the cases of 2020-2021 donations to recipients now recognised as extremist groups).

The forced outing of LGBTQ+ individuals is used as a means of harassment, blackmail, inducement to cooperate with intelligence services, as well as a punishment during imprisonment, and is sometimes accompanied by covert surveillance.<sup>105</sup>

Regarding the documents to be submitted for registration of public associations and foundations, the law requires the submission of personal information, including a list of all founders, be provided. In practice, this information is passed on to other state agencies for additional approval or examination, which in some cases leads to pressure being exerted on CSO members. The MoJ has the right to request any information from public associations, including lists of members.

## **Standard II. The state protects the right to privacy of CSOs and associated individuals.**

Despite the fact that the legislation requires the obligatory sanction of a prosecutor for searches, law enforcement officers arbitrarily intrude into CSOs' offices and the residences of their leaders to carry out arrests, searches and the seizure of equipment.

In accordance with the Law on Measures to Prevent the Legalisation of Criminally-Obtained Income, Financing of Terrorist Activity and the Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, public associations and foundations are required to publish extensive reports on their activities, income, and expenses.

In a few times in 2025, the disclosure, collection and dissemination of the personal data of law enforcement officers, judges, and officials often became the main charges in high-profile political criminal cases, including under Article 203<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code ('illegal actions with respect to information about private life and personal data'). Those convicted under this article were excluded by law from the scope of the May 2025 amnesty<sup>106</sup>.

According to the MIA, over the past 4 years the number of video cameras of the Republican system for monitoring public security has increased tenfold and exceeds 60,000 devices<sup>107</sup>. Dev.by has calculated that over the past 6 years, the number of street

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<sup>105</sup> Radio Liberty Belarus Service, 'Gay in prison, or how to survive with "low status". A blogger from Grodno, Vadzimati, gave a loud interview after his release', 8 January 2025.

<sup>106</sup> The Law on The amnesty commemorating the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12500070>

<sup>107</sup> <https://belta.by/society/view/kubrakov-v-belarusi-ustanovleno-okolo-60-tys-umnyh-kamer-videonabljudeniija-699816-2025/>

surveillance cameras has increased 600-fold, since only 100 such cameras at the end of 2019<sup>108</sup>.

The use of hidden cameras (disguised as everyday objects and installed secretly) by private individuals for the purpose of obtaining information without consent is generally prohibited by the legislation of the Republic of Belarus and may result in serious liability, including criminal liability. Exceptions may be made in cases expressly provided for by law for the activities of authorised state bodies<sup>109</sup>. Video recordings in which a specific person (employee, customer) can be identified constitute personal data. An organisation that conducts video surveillance becomes a personal data controller and is required to comply with all requirements of the Personal Data Protection Law.

29 May 2025 amendments to the Law On Postal Services has introduce changes to postal activities. One of the innovations according the new Article 15<sup>1</sup> is the launch of a special database on postal items and providing law enforcers with round-the-clock access to it. According to the presentation, law enforcers will be able to online access in the real time any mail information.<sup>110</sup>

Basically, the best evidence of the value and security of data in Belarus is the fact that Belarusian cyberguerrillas have managed to steal virtually all of the country's key data—from passports and records of travel abroad to secret police informants and internal wiretaps by the special services, assessments says<sup>111</sup>.

Calls for civic projects organised by some local authorities to secure funding for local civic initiatives are conducted in compliance with personal data protection requirements, and a separate document on personal data policy is included among the mandatory documents in the application<sup>112</sup>. However, other regions have not yet adopted this good practice.

### Specific recommendations under Area 7:

- Establish sanctions for unlawful acts related to the collection, processing, provision, and dissemination of personal data that are proportionate and address the real threats posed by the state, and introduce specific liability provisions for officials of state agencies;

<sup>108</sup> Dev.by. The number of smart video cameras monitoring Belarusians has increased 600-fold over the past five years, 19 March 2025

<sup>109</sup> <https://arsenalvideo.by/poleznye-statii/videonablyudenie-v-belarusi-2025/>

<sup>110</sup> <https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=H12500079>

<sup>111</sup> Ideas Bank, An AI-enhanced state: dream or reality? 15 July 2025

<sup>112</sup> For example in Minsk region <https://borisov.gov.by/2025/12/05/v-minskoj-oblasti-obyavlen-konkurs-grazhdanskih-inicziativ/>

- Ensure sufficient guarantees that the legislation on protection of personal data will not be used to restrict the activities of journalists and CSOs, but is aimed at the protection of public interests;
- Cease the publication of data on private life that has come to the knowledge of government agencies as part of programmes to discredit and stigmatise individuals, especially CSO leaders and activists;
- Dismantle and delete the MIA's unified database of participants in unauthorised demonstrations (also known as the *Besporiadki* database), *Activists* database and its equivalents; and
- End indiscriminate electronic surveillance of citizens, including the interception of CSOs' internet communications without court orders.

## 3.8 State Duty to Protect

Overall score per area: **1.9/7**

Legislation: **2.5/7**

Practice: **1.2/7**

The state does not protect CSOs and their activists from involuntary dissolution imposed by state bodies, from repression, from defamatory propaganda and from state intrusion into the internal affairs of CSOs and individuals' private lives. Laws against extremism have become one of the important prosecution mechanisms used against CSO activists and others who disagree with the policies of the authorities. The scores in the area of State Duty to Protect remained the same as in 2024.

### Standard I. The state protects CSOs and individuals associated with CSOs from interference and attacks.

According to the Law on Public Associations, the state guarantees protection of public associations' rights and legitimate interests, and prohibits state interference in the activities of public associations.<sup>113</sup> In practice, however, this protection is not implemented.

Courts do not serve as a means to restore violated rights. Killings, forced politically motivated disappearances and acts of torture remain unpunished, while the use of hate speech and incitement to violence, including the justification of torture, are widely broadcast by state media.

The Law on the Bar and Lawyers' Activities in the Republic of Belarus gives the MoJ control over lawyers and has created preferential conditions for former legal employees of the MIA to obtain the status of lawyer. The number of lawyers in Belarus

<sup>113</sup> Article 6, Law on Public Associations of 4 October 1994 (with subsequent amendments).

is decreasing<sup>114</sup>. Lawyers in Belarus are systematically prevented from accessing their detained clients. Although the Constitution guarantees the right to legal assistance, this access is often restricted by arbitrary practices of the authorities<sup>115</sup>.

Politicians and government officials engage in hate speech towards human rights CSOs, opposition groups, independent trade unions and CSOs receiving foreign funding. There is no mechanism for ensuring execution of decisions of international human rights bodies, in particular, those adopted by UN human rights treaty bodies concerning Belarus, in relation to violations of the right to association through termination of public associations or refusals to register them.

**Standard II. Measures used to fight extremism, terrorism, money laundering or corruption are targeted and proportionate, in line with the risk-based approach, and respect human rights standards on association, assembly, and expression.**

The abuse of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation continues to be a deliberate policy of the current government. This is evident across all the areas covered by this report.

Legislation on extremism is still used both to justify blocking sites on the internet and to bring political opponents of the government to criminal liability. In general, the legislation and practice of ‘countering extremism’ in 2005 is still very similar to the Russian model. In Belarus, however, the concept of ‘extremism’ also extends to ‘illegal’ mass events; spreading ‘knowingly false information’ about the situation in Belarus; insulting representatives of the authorities; and ‘discrediting’ state authorities. The ‘facilitation’ and ‘training’ of extremism and its ‘public justification’ are also criminalised. Groups of citizens are recognised as ‘extremist formations’ without trial.<sup>116</sup> ‘Extremist symbols’ include images of people previously convicted of extremism, as well as various media logos and watermarks<sup>117</sup>.

Belarusian laws on combating extremism contain vague wording, allowing for broad interpretations, which allow for the misuse of extremism charges, especially in relation to charges related to online publications. Extremist organisations include not only those that carry out extremist activities or fund them, but also those providing other

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<sup>114</sup> Lawyers in Belarus face unprecedented repression in a climate of terror

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/ijudiciary/statements/stm-en-belarus-del-2025.docx>

<sup>115</sup> Situation of Lawyers in Belarus Submitted by the International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger (OIAD) - Report for the UN Universal Periodic Review Belarus: 50th session of UPR 4th Cycle.

<sup>116</sup> Human Constanta, Viasna Human Rights Center, Belarusian Association of Journalists and SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, ‘How “extremism” violates human rights in Belarus: main theses from human rights organisations’, 2022.

<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”, 2107 new “extremist materials”: the results of 2025 in Belarus 65 January 2026.

assistance to extremist activities, or recognising the possibility to conduct extremist activities<sup>118</sup>.

In 2021, the law also introduced the term ‘extremist formation’ and this has been applied in 2025 against CSOs. Its most important difference from the term ‘extremist organisation’ is that an extremist formation can be non-registered and may be unregistered and designated extremist without judicial oversight, by the MIA or the KDB. As of the end of 2025, in total 324 ‘extremist formations’ were included in the list (grow from 257 at the beginning of 2025). In 2021, as many as 27 subjects were added to the list in two months, 80 subjects in 2022, 62 in 2023, and in 2024 a record was set on 89. During 2025, 67 new items have been added to this list, including CSOs medieval reenactment club Barysfen, volunteer center Sustrecha, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Green Network coalition, Femgroup Belarus, BERO economic research centre, or non-registered in Belarus and operating mainly abroad, media outlets, Telegram channels, and informal online communities in social networks make up the bulk of ‘extremist formations’. The mechanism for appealing the MIA’ and the KDB’s decisions on inclusion in the list is vaguely defined and organisations have difficulty in appealing such decisions, also due to difficulties in accessing legal assistance.

Since 2021, at least 368 people have been convicted of "creating or participating in an extremist formation" (Article 361<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code), 120 of whom were convicted in 2025 (this article often is used in conjunction with other criminal articles)<sup>119</sup>.

Legislation on extremism is used both to justify blocking sites on the internet and to bring political opponents of the government to criminal liability.

The Belarusian Law on Measures to Prevent Legalisation of Criminally-Obtained Income, the Financing of Terrorist Activity and the Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction obliges banks to verify that CSOs’ financial transactions align with their statutory objectives. In accordance with the Law, public associations and foundations are required to publish extensive reports about their activities over the preceding year and their income and expenses. The reporting requirements for CSOs are excessive and disproportionate, as well as becoming more difficult due to constant changes in forms and reporting requirements.

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<sup>118</sup> Human Constanta, The first sentences for ‘extremism’ without the assignment of punishment and court rulings in the ‘Belarusian Gayun’ case: an overview of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus for April–June 2025, 7 August 2025.

<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Knights, priests, and musicians: Viasna recalls the high-profile "extremist groups" of 2025, 4 January 2025.

The government's long-term AML/CTF action plans are not targeted and disproportional, are not in line with the risk-based approach and are likely to have negative effects and risks for CSOs.

In 2025, the MoJ continued the practice of conducting a live telephone hotline on issues concerning public associations<sup>120</sup> and special public events intended to promote the activities of civil society organizations<sup>121</sup>. Regional justice departments also hold such consultative seminars for CSOs on issues related to the activities of NCOs; these seminars are free of charge, but registration is required to attend<sup>122</sup>. In February 2025 MoJ urged charities to better inform society about the results of their fundraising and charitable activities. It emphasized transparency, including publishing data on assistance provided and completed projects to build public trust, but only with respect medical confidentiality<sup>123</sup>.

The Department for Humanitarian Affairs continues to hold regional seminars on attracting foreign aid, but primarily by government agencies<sup>124</sup> based on the Activity plan for Organizing Work with Foreign Non-Repayable Aid by state bodies for 2024-2025<sup>125</sup>. For the next years, this document was replaced by the Complex of Joint Actions for Organizing Work with Foreign Gratuitous Aid for 2026 and Subsequent Years, approved by Prime Minister and Head of the Presidential Affairs Department, December 18, 2025, No. 31/112-54/281/22-21/3115.<sup>126</sup>

## Specific recommendations under Area 8:

- Introduce the possibility for CSOs to appeal against any action of state bodies in court, which, in their opinion, violates their rights or the rights of their members, including to the Constitutional Court;
- Abolish the Law on the Countering of Extremism and all by-laws adopted under it, especially the Index of Extremist Formations and the Index of Extremist Materials; and
- Introduce the risk-based approach to the legislation on AML/CTF, as well as end the practice of assessing CSOs' financial transactions for compliance with their charters as a basis for designating them as subject to special control.

<sup>120</sup> [https://minjust.gov.by/information/telephone\\_lines/](https://minjust.gov.by/information/telephone_lines/)

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[https://minjust.gov.by/press/news/politicheskie\\_partii\\_obshchestvennye\\_obedineniya\\_i\\_drugie\\_nekommercheskie\\_org\\_anizatsii/v\\_ministerstve\\_yustitsii\\_sostoyalsya\\_kruglyy\\_stol\\_po\\_popularizatsii\\_deyatelnosti\\_obshchestvennykh\\_o/](https://minjust.gov.by/press/news/politicheskie_partii_obshchestvennye_obedineniya_i_drugie_nekommercheskie_org_anizatsii/v_ministerstve_yustitsii_sostoyalsya_kruglyy_stol_po_popularizatsii_deyatelnosti_obshchestvennykh_o/)

<sup>122</sup> For example in Brest region: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DFIK-WRM2Hn/>

<sup>123</sup>

[https://minjust.gov.by/press/news/politicheskie\\_partii\\_obshchestvennye\\_obedineniya\\_i\\_drugie\\_nekommercheskie\\_org\\_anizatsii/ob\\_informirovanii\\_obshchestvennosti\\_o\\_rezultatakh\\_blagotvoritelnoy\\_deyatelnosti\\_obshchestvennykh\\_obe/](https://minjust.gov.by/press/news/politicheskie_partii_obshchestvennye_obedineniya_i_drugie_nekommercheskie_org_anizatsii/ob_informirovanii_obshchestvennosti_o_rezultatakh_blagotvoritelnoy_deyatelnosti_obshchestvennykh_obe/)

<sup>124</sup> <https://dha.gov.by/novosti/%d1%82%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bd%d1%86%d0%b8%d0%b8-%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b7%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d0%b3%d1%83%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%bd%d0%be%d0%b3%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%be/>

<sup>125</sup> <https://www.senno.vitebsk-region.gov.by/uploads/files/21-03-24-7.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> <https://zhodino.gov.by/app/uploads/2026/01/kompleks-sovmestnyh-mer-po-organizacii-raboty-s-ibp.pdf>

## 3.9 State Support

Overall score per area: **2.4/7**

Legislation: **2.8/7**

Practice: **1.9/7**

State support for CSOs remains underdeveloped. It is based on the unequal treatment of CSOs based on their political loyalty and integration into state structures. Many CSOs that are fully state-run (e.g., sports associations) enjoy state support in exchange for complying with state directives. Other GONGOs have direct financial support and enjoy a degree of independence, not as civil society structures serving the interests of their members, but as administrative authorities of the state. There has been some progress in recent years, including the expansion of state funding mechanisms through youth and civic initiatives, competitive financial support schemes, and social contracting. The state's overall approach to CSOs remains one of targeted support to selected organisations chosen on an exclusive basis. The scores in the area of State Support remained the same as in 2024.

### **Standard I. There are a number of different and effective mechanisms for financial and in-kind state support to CSOs**

The mechanisms for state support to CSOs in Belarus are underdeveloped. However, some positive legislative changes appeared in this area, such as the practical introduction of procedures for competitive distribution of budget funds among CSOs and informal initiatives.

In 2025, legislation and practice provide for three main forms of state financial support to CSOs:

- direct funding of certain CSOs from the state or local budgets on a non-competitive basis;
- social contracting contests; and
- financial support for civic and youth initiatives on a competitive basis.

But in general practice, only a narrow and unchanging circle of CSOs receive state support.

In-kind support in the form of reduced rental fees when renting state-owned premises is provided only to CSOs that are included in the special list approved by the government. In 2025, the political party 'Belaya Rus', which was created to support the existing political regime, and its local branches, by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 294 of 29 May 2025, also received property rental benefits since 1<sup>st</sup> of June

2025<sup>127</sup>. The document shows that the party and its structural units rent 118 premises at rates reduced to one-tenth of the normal price.

In Belarus, access to electronic legal databases is provided on a paid principle, but in 2025 for public associations and some other categories of CSOs the state supplier offers a 30 per cent discount on online subscriptions to official legal databases (the level of discount in 2024 was 35 per cent)<sup>128</sup>.

According to experts, the scope and amount of funds distributed to CSOs through government social contracting calls are increasing and are available to some independent social and health care CSOs (but the main implementers remain local Red Cross structures, controlled by the state and supporting ruling regime). Also, the number of recipients of social services under the state social contracts increased. Besides social contracting, contracting of CSOs remains rare, and tender conditions for state procurement are often formulated to disadvantage CSO participation.

The consolidated budget for 2025 provided for the allocation of 2.8 million BYN (821,000 EUR) in equal shares from the local and national budgets to support civic initiatives. In the budget for 2026 (according to the Law on the National Budget for 2026 of Belarus of 29 December 2025) this amount is set to increase to 3.5 million BYN (over 1 million EUR).<sup>129</sup> According to the Law, each civic initiative must add to a received amount at least 10 per cent of the estimated cost of the civic initiative in co-funding or own contributions.

In addition, according to Edict № 425 of 13 September 2013 on Grants of the President of the Republic of Belarus in the spheres of science, education, health care, culture, and youth policy,<sup>130</sup> up to 100 grants are paid per year from the reserve fund of the President. These grants are provided monthly in the amount of 41 basic amounts and is paid within a year from the date of its grant (i.e. about 6,000 EUR per recipient per year). In fact, these budget funds were used in 2025 to provide for 2025 year 58 such grants 'for the implementation of priority social projects for Belarus' to representatives of organisations in the fields of science, education, healthcare, culture and youth policy<sup>131</sup>, but for 2026 year the number of grants reduced for 42 grants<sup>132</sup>. There has been a clear downward trend in this area of grant funding since 2022: while from 2015 through 2021

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<sup>127</sup>[https://bii.by/news/arendnye-stavki-dlya-partii-belaya-rus-peresmotreny-s-iyunya-703520?dateFrom=03.06.2025&dateTo=10.06.2025&links\\_anch=0&links\\_doc=60204&page=3](https://bii.by/news/arendnye-stavki-dlya-partii-belaya-rus-peresmotreny-s-iyunya-703520?dateFrom=03.06.2025&dateTo=10.06.2025&links_anch=0&links_doc=60204&page=3)

<sup>128</sup> <https://etalonline.by/novosti/aktsii/poluchit-skidku7469/>

<sup>129</sup> [https://www.minfin.gov.by/upload/bp/act/zakon\\_291225\\_125z.pdf](https://www.minfin.gov.by/upload/bp/act/zakon_291225_125z.pdf)

<sup>130</sup> Edict No. 425 of 28 October 2013, 'О некоторых вопросах предоставления государственной адресной социальной помощи' (in Russian), <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=P31300425>.

<sup>131</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, Владимир Караник о грантах Президента: Инновационные разработки лягут в основу больших проектов (in Russian) <https://www.government.by/news/vladimir-karanik-o-grantakh-prezidenta-innovacionnye-razrabotki-lyagut-v-osnovu-bolshikh>

<sup>132</sup> О предоставлении грантов Президента Республики Беларусь на 2026 год Распоряжение № 200рп от 30 декабря 2025 г. <https://president.gov.by/ru/documents/rasporazhenie-no-200rp-ot-30-dekabrya-2025-g>

the number of presidential grants awarded annually ranged from 67 to 103 grants (average of 85 grants annually), from 2022 through 2026 the number of grants awarded annually ranged from 35 to 58 grants (average of 47 grants annually).

## **Standard II. State support for CSOs is governed by clear and objective criteria and allocated through a transparent and competitive procedure.**

In 2025, the regulations on holding contests of civic initiatives adopted in 2023 by the regional authorities and the Minsk City Executive Committee have been widely put into practice. Despite the fact that these regulations were developed based on the same model set out in the Law on Local Governance and Self-Governance, their practical implementation was very different. This was especially evident in the issues of publicity: in some regions the media and websites of state bodies widely informed the public about the announced competitions and criteria for distribution of support, published evaluation protocols for submitted projects, including specific deficiencies that prevented support from being granted, progress reports on project implementation and statistics on distributed aid. Nevertheless, the level of publicity for calls held in the capital city has improved, although previously there was excessive secrecy in this regard<sup>133</sup>: the official website of the city authorities now has a section with an algorithm for preparing projects and a description of the initiatives implemented with this funding<sup>134</sup>. Another problematic element in the practical application of these contests is the extremely short timeframe for submitting civic initiative projects: for some of the competitions announced, only a few days were allocated for project preparation and submission. A good example of this is the call for applications in the Minsk region, which gave applicants one month to prepare their applications, provided a detailed description of the procedure, and specified the deadline for making a decision<sup>135</sup>.

However, with regard to civic initiatives in Minsk, there has been a change in the provision determining the recipient and administrator of funds allocated within the framework of civic initiatives. Resolution No. 123 of the Minsk City Council dated 18 February 2025 on amending Resolution No. 556 of the Minsk City Council of Deputies dated 22 December 2023 stipulates that all funds allocated from the budget to support civic initiatives will be directed to enterprises that are municipally owned: The project recognised as the winner of the competitive selection will be implemented by an organisation acting as the recipient of budget funds, determined by the administration of the Minsk district where the project is to be implemented, and to which the property

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<sup>133</sup> <https://belta.by/society/view/v-minske-v-2026-godu-planiruetsja-realizovat-39-grazhdanskih-initsiativ-755736-2025/>

<sup>134</sup> [https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovvet/docs/grazhdansk-inic/20250721-Polozhenie\\_o\\_poryadke\\_realizatsii\\_grazhdanskikh\\_initsiativ\\_v\\_g\\_Minske.docx](https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovvet/docs/grazhdansk-inic/20250721-Polozhenie_o_poryadke_realizatsii_grazhdanskikh_initsiativ_v_g_Minske.docx)

<sup>135</sup> <https://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2025/december/91219/>

created as a result of the implementation of the civic initiative will be transferred for operational management or for economic administration<sup>136</sup>. This means that only those civic initiatives that are directly financially implemented under the leadership of local municipal enterprises can now be implemented in Minsk. In other regions of Belarus, no such changes to the procedure for obtaining funds for the implementation of civic initiatives by amending the provisions have been recorded.

The consolidated outcomes of state-funded projects and programmes are not published, and a monitoring and evaluation system has not been established. CSOs that receive funds from the state participate in propaganda and agitation campaigns in support of the government and pro-government policy, including stigmatisation campaigns.

As noted by representatives of youth organisations and initiatives, state financial support to youth projects is subject to political evaluation criteria and is generally under the direct or indirect control of the BRYU.

### **Standard III. CSOs enjoy a favourable tax environment.**

Belarusian CSOs do not assess the tax environment as favourable. The only benefit is the exemption of membership fees and internal donations from income tax.

Starting from 1 January 2024, the new edition of the Tax Code dated 30 December 2026 will come into force<sup>137</sup>. Foreign donations and grants are not automatically tax-exempt. Besides registration of aid, the recipient must undergo a separate procedure for tax exemption and such exemption may be partially or fully refused.

A sum received by an individual as a gift from domestic sources, so long as it does not exceed 11,516 BYN (approximately 3,340 EUR in December 2025) per year, is exempt from personal income tax. But according to the 30 December 2025 amendment of the point 22 in the Article 208 of the Tax Code, this tax exemptions for the personal cash gifts will be reduced in twice and the level for tax exemptions for 2026 will be established as only 6,000 BYN (1,740 EUR) per year<sup>138</sup>. The move marks a departure from the long-standing policy of raising the relevant limits, which had previously been increased annually. At the same time, this tax exemption was extended by the same law to foreign donations to individuals: Article 208 of the Tax Code was supplemented by the point 22<sup>2</sup>, which extends the exemption to gifts received by individuals from abroad in the same amount 6,000 BYN (1,740 EUR) per year<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> <https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovet/mingorsovet/o-rabote-mingorsoveta/8-o-nekotorykh-voprosakh-deyatelnosti-organov-territorialnogo-obshchestvennogo-samoupravleniya?template=accessibility>

<sup>137</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12500127>

<sup>138</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12500127>

<sup>139</sup> <https://ilex.by/news/izmeneniya-po-pododnomu-nalogu/>

CSOs cite the lack of regulation of the tax status for charitable aid to individuals who receive it from CSOs as an unfavourable measure and, in some cases, tax inspectorates have even demanded that citizens pay tax on such aid. The procedure for obtaining a tax exemption status is not stipulated by law or government regulations. In almost all cases, a CSO must try lobbying an individual political decision by an authority (at the level of a law or a government) to obtain a tax deduction through inclusion in the list for tax exemption (meeting eligibility criteria is not sufficient to enjoy the tax deductions). Even when a CSO does not have any financial activity, it must submit nil tax declarations.

Public associations are prohibited from directly conducting entrepreneurial activities; they need to establish a separate enterprise to be able to render services and sell goods. In cases of the conduct of entrepreneurial business activities by foundations and institutions, such income is subject to taxation like the income of any company. The law does not define a public benefit status, or a notion of social entrepreneurship.

The Tax Code stipulates preferences for donations to organisations of a certain kind. For instance, a certain amount of money given by donors to religious organisations, social service institutions, and some sports organisations is exempt from income tax. For 18 organisations on the specific list enumerated in the Tax Code, and religious and sports organisations, there is a ceiling of how much tax can be deducted from corporate donations. The deduction cannot exceed 10 per cent of a donor's profit.

Many technical requirements on tax calculations are designed for commercial organisations and the specifics of CSOs are not taken into consideration. For example, when a CSO has no financial activity, it must submit nil tax declarations every month. There are no official legislative definitions of 'charitable activity,' 'charitable (public benefit) organisation,' or 'charity.' The legislation uses different terms, such as donations, gratuitous (sponsor) aid, foreign gratuitous aid, and international technical aid, and sometimes the differences between these are unclear. In practice, this creates significant difficulties in the execution of donations for correct calculation of taxes and for the implementation of bank transactions.

In 2025, the tax authorities, KDB and the financial police conducted checks on people who donated money to foreign funds to help victims of political repression in Belarus (especially through crowdfunding platforms). In the process, it has been alleged that some donors were told that if they donated ten times the amount of their original donation to state foundations, this would lead to exemption from possible criminal liability (there is no official confirmation of such deals, although there were a fair amount of reports about its use). People who provided material or legal aid to victims of

law enforcement violence after the presidential elections in 2020 faced criminal charges and extortion of compensation under threat of blackmail from KDB<sup>140</sup>.

There are tax exemptions for student labour squads – groups of students organised to perform temporary work, usually during the summer, as part of various production or social projects. Student brigades often work in construction, agriculture, tourism, large events, etc. The income of student squad members received for their work in Belarus (or the wider Commonwealth of Independent States) is exempt from income tax. In addition, 50 per cent of the amount of social insurance contributed by student squad participants is directed to the BRYU for further redistribution for the purpose of development of the student squads' activities according to the approved programme, as well as for reimbursement of expenses of the sending organisations related to the student squads' activities.

#### **Standard IV. Businesses and individuals enjoy tax benefits for their donations to CSOs.**

The tax system in general does not incentivise businesses or individuals to provide charitable aid, and there are no general tax deductions for donors. The legislation uses a mechanism of targeted benefits provision. Tax deductions are not provided based on meeting general criteria, but rather on the direct inclusion of a donor or recipient organisation in a prescribed list.

For example, Article 181 of the Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus directly enumerates 18 CSOs (in the edition of the law of 30 December 2025, this list was expanded to add two more organisation<sup>141</sup>), the provision of sponsorship aid to which Belarusian business entities may enjoy a tax deduction. Aid to any other CSO may only be provided from post-tax profits and does not qualify for any tax deduction.

Moreover, the fact of sponsorship aid to any other CSO, except for those enumerated in the Tax Code, is sometimes treated by regulatory agencies and tax inspectorates as a potential risk and suspicious operation that requires specific control.

According to the general rules, tax deductions are not provided to corporate donors. In addition, donations from corporate donors must not be anonymous and must be formalised through a written contract with the recipient.

In 2025, the tax deductions available to sponsors of sports organizations were significantly reduced: tax exemptions on real estate, land tax, and income tax were eliminated. The new Edict “On Support for Sports Organizations” № 337 of September 17 will take effect on 1 January 2026, replacing the previous edict from 2013<sup>142</sup>.

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<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”, A chronology of the criminalisation of solidarity: how the right to stand in solidarity is disappearing in Belarus, 22 May 2025.

<sup>141</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12500127>

<sup>142</sup> <https://president.gov.by/ru/documents/ukaz-no-337-ot-17-sentabra-2025-g>

## Standard V. Legislation and policies stimulate volunteering

In Belarus, there is no legislation promoting volunteer activity or regulating volunteering. Currently, the term "volunteer" is mentioned in the laws on social services, on physical culture and sports, on the Belarusian Red Cross Society, on the donation of blood and its components, as well as in the recently adopted Law "On Responsible Treatment of Animals". In each of them, the terms "volunteer" and "volunteer activity" apply only to the limited scope of each law. With a lack of general definition, many issues related to volunteering remain unregulated. Some public associations and CSOs have their own experience of internal regulation of volunteering, including on the basis of agreements on volunteer work concluded with volunteers, internal organisational regulations and others. Volunteers of human rights organisations and other banned CSOs labelled as extremist are subject to criminal and administrative prosecution, including for receiving foreign aid or facilitating so-called extremist activities.<sup>143</sup>

But in the Summer 2025 the Standing Committee on Health Care, Physical Education, Family and Youth Policy of the House of Representatives announced its intention to include the development of a law on volunteering in the legislative activity plan for 2026<sup>144</sup>. The legislative agenda for 2026 has been approved 18 November 2025 by the presidential Edict No 400<sup>145</sup> and foresees a concept for a previously frozen bill "On Volunteer Activities"<sup>146</sup>.

The discussion on regulating volunteering in Belarus started in 2019. The draft law developed in 2020 extensively drew on proposals from Belarusian CSOs and experts and took into account international practices. Among other things, the justification for the draft law referenced the report *Volunteering: European practice of regulation*<sup>147</sup>, prepared by ECNL at the request of Belarusian organisations. The report presented a broad overview of possible models and approaches to the legal regulation of volunteer activities.

During the initial drafting of this bill in 2019-2020, there were concerns that it might restrict opportunities for CSOs, by introducing mandatory regulations on volunteering. Now, in the context of significant restrictions on freedom of association, the

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<sup>143</sup> Human rights activists have stated that at least 126 court cases are known of since January 2024 related to administrative prosecution for using foreign aid to prepare aid parcels for political prisoners, at least 30 of which have been converted to criminal charges under legislation on counter extremism. CSO Meter, 'Belarus: Expanding criminal liability for recipients of foreign aid', 8 August 2024, <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-expanding-criminal-liability-recipients-foreign-aid>

<sup>144</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-volunteering-law-back-agenda>

<sup>145</sup> [https://president.gov.by/ru/events/utverzden-plan-podgotovki-proektov-zakonodatel-nyh-aktov-na-2026-god?fbclid=IwY2xjawOVI\\_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeOMOlwNr6T8GTnygErXFqau-Y6G8iegVo5cVrssFk3pM8SIT-HXo6cbmVmVw\\_aem\\_FJ2sZJQFQm5gUwUUKu9SkA](https://president.gov.by/ru/events/utverzden-plan-podgotovki-proektov-zakonodatel-nyh-aktov-na-2026-god?fbclid=IwY2xjawOVI_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeOMOlwNr6T8GTnygErXFqau-Y6G8iegVo5cVrssFk3pM8SIT-HXo6cbmVmVw_aem_FJ2sZJQFQm5gUwUUKu9SkA)

<sup>146</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-2026-bring-new-bills-volunteering-and-foreign-aid>

<sup>147</sup> [https://ecnl.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Voluntary%20Activities%20-%20European%20Practices%20of%20Regulation%20\(Belarus%20volunteering%20paper\).pdf](https://ecnl.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Voluntary%20Activities%20-%20European%20Practices%20of%20Regulation%20(Belarus%20volunteering%20paper).pdf)

expectations are rather positive - it might create a legal field for volunteer initiatives that emerge in place of previously forcibly liquidated CSOs.

### Specific recommendations under Area 9:

- Abolish the ban on the activities of public associations without registration by removing it from the Law on Public Associations, cancel criminal responsibility for organising and participating in the activities of an unregistered organisation (Article 193<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code) and review the sentences imposed under this article;
- Enshrine provisions for a non-discriminatory and transparent system of funding for non-state NCOs from the state budget on a competitive basis in legislation, requiring the publication of data on the volume of state aid allocated to CSOs, as well as the publication of reports by recipient organisations on its use;
- Release all individuals imprisoned for tax violations in connection with civil or CSO activities, and lift all imposed sentences and pending decisions related to such liability;
- Introduce income tax percentage designation to CSOs for individuals;
- Include in the Law on Accounting and Reporting the option for simplified accounting in NCOs to be carried out by the heads of such organisations without the need to employ a professional accountant and simplify tax reporting for CSOs not engaged in entrepreneurial activities, both online and in paper format; and
- When developing a framework legal regulation on volunteering, it is necessary to allow volunteer activities to be conducted either through CSOs or business entities and in the form of volunteer initiatives without the formation of a legal entity being necessary.
- The development of the concept of the law “On Volunteer Activities” should be carried out with broad public participation, opening up space for discussion between representatives of CSOs, international organisations and the private sector, including public discussions with enough time for the submission of proposals, both online and offline.

## 3.10 State-CSO Cooperation

Overall score per area: **2.3/7**

Legislation: **2.7 / 7**

Practice: **1.9/7**

Many CSOs have deliberately withdrawn from advocacy, cooperation, or any form of contact with the authorities due to the atmosphere of repression (although in rare cases, communication still occurs at the non-political level between individual professionals). CSO cooperation with the state has also declined as a result of the authorities fostering an atmosphere of fear across the broader public sphere and through deliberate decisions to exclude CSOs from interaction with the state. In general, terminated organisations are unable to maintain any interaction with the authorities. There are no framework regulations or policy documents on mechanisms for cooperation and consultation between the state and CSOs. Experts note that in 2025, at least some human rights organisations, forced to

leave the country and operate from abroad, refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the ruling government in Belarus, began again to send their messages and documents to the Belarusian government, becoming open to dialogue. The scores in the area of State-CSO cooperation remained the same as in 2024.

### **Standard I. State policies facilitate cooperation with CSOs and promote their development.**

There are no framework policy documents on cooperation between CSOs and the state. Certain state-approved plans and programmes include provisions for interaction between state agencies and CSOs during their implementation. However, CSO participation in developing these plans, and the availability of sufficient financial support, remains unsatisfactory.

### **Standard II. The state has special mechanisms in place for supporting cooperation with CSOs.**

Legislation does not contain framework regulations on mechanisms for cooperation and consultation between the state and CSOs.

The Law on the Essentials of Civil Society formalised different levels of cooperation with CSOs based on set criteria, including membership size, activity objectives, and the requirement to have organisational branches in all regions of the country. In practice, these criteria have entrenched the privileged legal and practical status of five GONGOs, including state-controlled trade unions.

Public councils with the participation of CSOs are widespread. However, they do not have unified standards and regulation principles, their composition is approved by the decision of a state body, and they do not form a hierarchical system.

In contrast to previous UPR cycles, in 2025 the Belarusian government did not involve even pro-governmental organisations and loyal CSOs in submitting reports for the fourth cycle for Belarus. No opportunity was initiated for civil society to participate openly and accessibly in the preparation or inclusive discussion in frame of the national UPR reporting process<sup>148</sup>. However, GONGOs, such as the Women's Union, were attend the presentation of the state prepared national UPR report in Minsk, during the Council on Sustainable Development meeting on 12 June<sup>149</sup>. This was staged by the authorities as civil society participation in the process of preparing the national report, as part of the SDG mechanism. This, along with the speeches delivered by government officials, demonstrates a strengthening of the previously observed trend whereby the state has shifted its focus towards the SDG process. This process is being used as a substitute for

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<sup>148</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/by-index>

<sup>149</sup> <https://sdgs.by/zasedanie/zasedanie-soveta-po-ustojchivomu-razvitiyu-proshlo-v-minske/>

human rights discourse, with human rights being 'incorporated' into the SDGs and dissolved within them<sup>150</sup>.

### Specific recommendations under Area 10:

- Adopt a government order on cooperation between CSOs and the state, with the participation of a wide range of CSOs and state agencies. The order should also contain an action plan for up to three years which would provide for funding for CSOs as co-implementers of its activities on a competitive basis, as well as with a procedure for regular monitoring, execution assessment and assessment of influence on policies; and
- Expand the legal definition of 'civil society entities' to include all forms of non-governmental non-profit organisations, civic initiatives, youth groups, and other citizen associations that are not legal entities, and provide them with broad mechanisms for engaging with national and local authorities.

## 3.11 Digital Rights

Overall score per area: **2.1/7**

Legislation: **2.6/7**

Practice: **1.5/7**

Although some private internet service providers offer benefits and programmes for CSOs, the online exercise of digital freedoms remains heavily restricted due to strict state regulation and law enforcement's policy of total control, aimed at silencing all independent voices. IT sector employees are under close regulatory scrutiny, and many tech giants, start-ups, and thousands of professionals have left Belarus, which is no longer viewed as a favourable environment for internet communications technology. The scores in the area of Digital Rights remained the same as in 2024.

**Standard I. Digital rights are protected, and digital technologies are compliant with human rights standards.**

**The legislation does not guarantee a safe and enabling online environment or the protection and exercise of digital rights.**

<sup>150</sup> The problems that were raised in the previous CSOs report within Voluntary National Review in 2022 have not lost their relevance, and many of them have become even more acute, say group of CSO in the "Belarus implementation of SDG16: peace, justice and strong institutions" alternative report in connection with the participation of Belarus in 2022 in voluntary reporting in 2025.

Legal norms<sup>151</sup> require private digital service providers to enable tracing, monitoring, and intervention in private communications, without the knowledge of the person being monitored. Freedom of speech online is restricted by surveillance and blocking of internet resources, as well as by searches in providers' offices and in the editorial offices of online media. The Telecommunications Law allows the shutting down or limiting the operation of telecommunications networks and services in response to alleged internet-related threats to national security.

Law enforcement, when making arrests, searching or carrying out random checks on the street, can ask for a person's mobile phone to check their chats and the internet resources that they have accessed. If publications from extremist media or other prohibited information (in conversations and chats or subscriptions to social media) are found on the smartphone, arrest and prosecution will follow.

The state allows surveillance technology to operate unconstrained and unregulated and/or uses spyware/malware to carry out surveillance on CSOs and activists (according to state officials' statements). Operatives can inspect a computer not only by being directly present on location, but also through remote access

Experts note that in Belarus, various bases and registers are created for all sorts of occasions: *Besporiadki* with almost 100,000 people who participated in protests or expressed an opposition standpoint online<sup>152</sup>, unofficial list of individuals who signed in support of the nomination of opposition candidates for president in 2020, the registry of Belarusian citizens holding foreign residence permits and database mobile billing etc. In particular, already existing video surveillance systems on the streets are used to detain persons subject to movement restrictions due to political activism or to arrest activists returning from abroad who are accused of disseminating extremist information. For example, employment checks using these database could lead to reprisals due to past participation in protests or independent CSOs.<sup>153</sup>

National security, border control or counter-terrorism laws authorise opaque and unaccountable government requests for data, where users have no knowledge of these requests and no right to challenge them. The MIA runs a unified database of participants in unauthorised demonstrations on the basis of resolutions aimed at bringing participants to administrative and criminal justice (known as the *Besporiadki* database, in use since late 2020). In 2025, there are reports of another, more advanced database called 'Activist' at the MIA disposal. While 'Besporiadki' is primarily a register

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<sup>151</sup> Edict No. 368 of 18 October 2022, 'on the interaction of telecommunication operators, telecommunication service providers, and owners of internet resources with bodies carrying out operational-search activities (in Russian), <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&pO=P32200368>.

<sup>152</sup> Belpol, On the true scale of repressions in Belarus, 31 July 2025.

<sup>153</sup> Deutsche Welle, How former security officials monitor personnel in Belarus, 8 December 2025 and Current Time, 'You'll fail the security check.' In Belarus, former political prisoners are being denied employment on a massive scale, 22 October 2025.

of specific incidents of arrests and political offences, 'Activist' is a comprehensive dossier containing all information about individuals who have been involved in political activity in any way. It includes not only participants in the 2020 protests or those involved in criminal cases. The database also records those who, for example, liked 'extremist' content, reposted, wrote comments, donated to independent initiatives, signed up for alternative candidates, or simply participated in opposition chat rooms. Moreover, as experts suggests, special attention in this system may be paid to Belarusians abroad, but within the country, everyone who continues to fall within the purview of MIA is also monitored. The database is 'cumulative': if new data appears — a new address, phone number, mention in a report — everything is automatically added. Most likely, only border and high level political persecution officers have access to 'Activist,' while *Besporiadki* was more widely available — at the level of the local police station<sup>154</sup>.

Reporters Without Borders 13 December said it had discovered new software used by the security services in Belarus that spies on journalists. The existence of the spy software, dubbed "ResidentBat", was previously unknown and was discovered this year in the mobile phone of a journalist who had to unlock and give it to Belarusian KDB agents during an interrogation. Unlike other surveillance tools that can infect phones remotely, such as Israel's Pegasus software, ResidentBat has to be installed manually on the device. Once installed, it allows access to phone calls, recordings, screengrabs, texts and messages from encrypted apps, as well as locally saved files<sup>155</sup>.

Measures to fight cybercrime, disinformation, hate speech/incitement to violence and terrorism are widely used to limit digital rights. Imprisonment for clicking 'like' or 'share' on specific posts on social media continues to be a common practice in 2025 (for instance, links to extremist materials, banned media logos, calls for mass actions, publications on political topics or hate against law enforcement or the ruling political regime, insult to state officials, judges or the president).

Many criminal cases of conspiracies, attempted coups, planning of mass riots, acts of terrorism, and so on, are based on records of intercepted communications or disclosed from confiscated smartphones, as well as from meetings on Zoom or other platforms.<sup>156</sup>

The ability to create CSOs from abroad is limited by the fact that many websites of government agencies, including the MoJ and the MIA, are inaccessible from outside Belarus.

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<sup>154</sup> Zerkalo, Security forces have unintentionally disclosed the method of checking suspects for 'extremism' and the identity of the officer involved, 18 July 2025.

<sup>155</sup> RESIDENT.NGO ThreatLab & Reporters Without Borders "Operational Report & Advisory on KGB spyware in Belarus in 2025" - Janik Besendorf, Viktor Schlüter, Maximilian Paß, December 2025.

<sup>156</sup> ABC News, 'Wife fears for American snatched from Moscow and taken to Belarus', 6 April 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wife-fears-american-snatched-moscow-belarus/story?id=78807539>.

Internet use, website commenting, and mobile communication require user identification. Internet providers are obliged to provide intelligence agencies with access to information which is exchanged by users online. The authorities can demand provision of data about the online activities of any citizen.

### **Standard II. The state creates conditions for the enjoyment of digital rights.**

The state control over the national segment of the internet was officially approved, but with little regard for the public's opinion: the Concept of ensuring the sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus in the sphere of digital development until 2030 was approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 1074 of 31 December 2024, which came into force on 16 January 2025.<sup>157</sup> On 22 November 2024, the House of Representatives held parliamentary hearings on 'Development of Digital Law in the Republic of Belarus' having discussed with representatives of academia and foreign experts the issues of digital personal data protection, quality of state databases, legal regulation of artificial intelligence, but without any involvement of CSOs and IT industry stakeholder representatives (the results of the hearings are documented by a parliamentary decision in January 2025).<sup>158</sup>

As noted by Freedom House's 'Freedom on the Net' 2025 review,<sup>159</sup> in June 2025, the Russian and Belarusian governments launched a plan to develop AI built on "fundamental and traditional values," reflecting the same justifications that these regimes invoke when restricting access to the global internet.

On 26 January, a presidential election took place in Belarus. The day before and after election were marked by internet censorship and access blocking. The order to isolate national-hosted websites was given by the OAC, reports hosting provider Hoster.by: "*In accordance with the order of the Operations and Analysis Center, from 10:00 on January 25 to 23:59 on January 27, 2025, Belarusian hosting providers will limit access to virtual hosting from outside the Republic of Belarus,*" the statement says<sup>160</sup>.

In fact, this blocking affected all sites of pretty much all Belarusian organisations, regardless of the domain name (that is, not only in the domain zone ".by"), because according to paragraph 2 of the Edict of the President 1 February 2010 № 60 "On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet," all Belarusian legal entities are obliged to host their sites on servers located in the territory of

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<sup>157</sup> Resolution of the Council of Ministers on the Concept of Ensuring Sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus in the Field of Digital Development until 2030 year No. 1074 of 31 December 2024 (in Russian), <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22401074>.

<sup>158</sup> House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H22500141>

<sup>159</sup> Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2025: An Uncertain Future for the Global Internet [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/FOTN%202025\\_final\\_digital\\_120525.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/FOTN%202025_final_digital_120525.pdf)

<sup>160</sup> <https://hoster.by/clients/news/16829/>

Belarus<sup>161</sup>. However, in practice, during this 3-day blocking period, some websites of organisations remained accessible from abroad, including the website of the Central Election Commission itself. According to the reports<sup>162</sup>, the restriction did not affect all sites, but mainly targeted small sites and initiatives that used the "virtual hosting" service, leaving large news platforms, banks, and online stores accessible. Users outside Belarus noticed the unavailability of the Myfin website, the personal account of Belarusian Railways, as well as the applications of Alfa-Bank, Beltelecom, and Eplus. At the same time, these resources continued to work for Belarusian customers. Web-users from Belarus encountered difficulties with the use of VPN services (in particular, Proton VPN, NordVPN, TunnelBear, VPN — Super Unlimited Proxy, X-VPN, Planet VPN) and faced problems with access to certain foreign websites on the morning of 25 January 2025<sup>163</sup>.

In the previous presidential election in 2020, the national segment of the internet was almost completely blocked, but the decision was not officially announced then. Now in the 2025 election, in contrast to the 2020 situation, the authorities have outlined the direction and duration of the restrictions in advance, there were no cases of total internet shutdown.

An official announcement on the blocking was made again by Hoster.by with reference to the order of the OAC on the eve of 25 March 2025, in connection with the anniversary of Belarus's declaration of independence in 1918, which traditionally becomes an occasion for opposition protests.<sup>164</sup>

By Resolution No. 476 of 2 September 2025, the Government approved the procedure for restricting access to Internet<sup>165</sup>. In addition to clarifying the existing procedure for blocking access to websites, this resolution introduces a new mechanism for restricting access to communications in the form of disconnecting specific subscribers from communications (including telephone and Internet) removing their personal phone numbers. without judicial proceedings. The procedure came into force on 5 September 2025. Requests for these measures are sent to telecommunications operators and the National Traffic Exchange Centre (from 15 October 2025). The telecommunications operator suspends the provision of services to the identifiers specified in the request on the day of its receipt for a period of 6 months (unless otherwise specified in the document). Upon expiry of this period and in the absence of a decision to resume the

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<sup>161</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-weekend-unfree-elections-marked-internet-and-vpn-blocking>

<sup>162</sup> <https://news.online.ua/en/belarus-begins-blocking-internet-ahead-of-presidential-election-890178/>

<sup>163</sup> Zerkalo, VPN disruptions have begun in Belarus, 25 January 2025.

<sup>164</sup>

[https://hoster.by/clients/news/18693/?fbclid=IwY2xjawRTGyFleHRuA2FibQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjJwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEepsjm-t2xv2S\\_fQuEXL8zo7eB0-lbyq3gikENpoCdXptlhxhiMStYh6K6sVWs\\_aem\\_Go5vCg9yJCUPydgPSBtRng](https://hoster.by/clients/news/18693/?fbclid=IwY2xjawRTGyFleHRuA2FibQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjJwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEepsjm-t2xv2S_fQuEXL8zo7eB0-lbyq3gikENpoCdXptlhxhiMStYh6K6sVWs_aem_Go5vCg9yJCUPydgPSBtRng)

<sup>165</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-block-access-internet-and-phone-services-selected-individuals>  
<https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22500476>

provision of services, the telecommunications operator shall terminate the provision of services altogether, regardless of the existence of other restrictive measures, by unilaterally terminating the contract. This is part of a broader policy to establish direct government control over all cellular and digital communication channels. However, even before 2020, law enforcement agencies had already disconnected the internet and mobile communications of specific individuals prior to their detention as a preventive measure. Sometimes this occurred in preparation for a search or arrest. Such cases occurred, for example, during the detention of politicians on the eve of mass protests. However, in these cases, such disconnections were limited in time and carried out without justification within the framework of any open legal procedure. The new resolution will be a dangerous tool for eliminating people's access to information and ability to communicate with others<sup>166</sup>.

In 2025, the Belarusian government significantly restricted data speeds for unlimited data streaming. On 22 December, a Resolution of the Ministry of Communications №38<sup>167</sup> set the initial data allowance for mobile network subscribers with unlimited data plans at 30 GB per month, with no speed limits on data transmitted to the subscriber. Once the initial volume is exhausted, the data transfer speed to the subscriber must be reduced to 1 Mbps.

Law enforcers and state ideologists advertise the browser extension 'Stop Extremism' in their Telegram channels. They claim that the browser extension is designed 'to identify and warn users about content on the internet that is on the index of extremist materials. But the extension is a 'trojan' which is essentially a malicious programme that can download and install other programmes or record keystrokes, according to a report by the human rights organisation MayDay CSO.<sup>168</sup> There are claims that tracking malware was installed on journalists' devices during interrogations at the KDB, uses the name of a legitimate app (Adobe Reader) to hide itself to log keystrokes and capture screen content, targets specific messengers (Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp) via screen scraping.<sup>169</sup> Another Signal account takeovers phishing campaign targets exiled Belarusian activists in 2025<sup>170</sup>.

January 2025 amendments to the guidelines "On Registration of Domain Names in the National Zone of Belarus" allowed administrators of the national domain to cancel the

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<sup>166</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-block-access-internet-and-phone-services-selected-individuals>

<sup>167</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=W22644506>

<sup>168</sup> Zerkalo, 'Human rights activists: Security forces propose installing a browser extension called "Stop Extremism," which is actually a malware Trojan', 26 April 2024.

<sup>169</sup> RESIDENT.NGO ThreatLab & Reporters Without Borders "Operational Report & Advisory on KGB spyware in Belarus in 2025" - Janik Besendorf, Viktor Schlüter, Maximilian Paß, December 2025.

<sup>170</sup> RESIDENT.NGO ThreatLab, October 6, 2025 (updated on October 8, 2025) Writeup: Signal Account Takeovers Phishing Campaign Targets Exiled Belarusian Activists 2025

registration of domains that harm the “national interest of Belarus,” and add them into a new ban list<sup>171</sup>.

Some digital inequalities persist, but they are narrowing, according to Freedom House. Belarus maintains high fixed and mobile-broadband penetration rates. There were 14 million internet users in Belarus in end of 2024<sup>172</sup> which is 286,600 more people than a year earlier and which makes Belarus’s internet penetration one of the highest in Central and Eastern Europe. There are 155 Internet subscribers per 100 people in Belarus (+4 subscribers compared to 2023). The volume of data consumed by subscribers and users connected to the Internet via fixed broadband access amounted to 7,096 petabyte, and via wireless broadband access – 1,596 petabyte.

The state does not guarantee open, accessible, or affordable internet. Belarus does not have a law requiring or protecting net neutrality, and practices hinder open and fast internet, favouring some websites over others (including the blocking of CSO sites without court or official decisions).

The state does not ensure the existence of an independent, effective, adequately-resourced and impartial internet oversight mechanism and there are no effective remedies for violations of digital rights. The state misuses state secrets, national security, and criminal justice laws, among others, as obstacles to systematically hinder access to justice for digital rights.

The state policy for overcoming the digital divide is included in the State Programme ‘Digital Development of Belarus’ for 2021–2025, approved by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 66 of 2 February 2021 with a total budget of over 1 billion EUR. The Policy is the main practical tool for implementation of advanced information technologies in the sectors of the national economy.<sup>173</sup>

The Hi-Tech Park in Minsk is a form of government support for the development of the ICT sector, including significant tax benefits, access to information, and cooperation in decision-making. The Hi-Tech Park Administration acts as an intermediary between the IT business sector and the government, which is established by law. However, experts note that mutual understanding between major players in the ICT industry and the government has disappeared, and consultations on internet regulatory decision-making have become less representative and generally lost some of their effectiveness.

The AI4Development Forum was held on 7–8 October 2025 in Minsk, bringing together government institutions, business, academia, international experts, and civil society to

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<sup>171</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=T62505912>

<sup>172</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, [https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-pdf/oficial\\_statistika/2025/infografics\\_telecommunication-2025.pdf](https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-pdf/oficial_statistika/2025/infografics_telecommunication-2025.pdf)

<sup>173</sup> Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus, State Programme ‘Digital Development of Belarus’ for 2021–2025, <https://www.mpt.gov.by/ru/gosudarstvennaya-programma-cifrovoe-razvitie-belarusi-na-2021-2025-gody>.

discuss the development of an artificial intelligence ecosystem in Belarus. The forum was organized by the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of Belarus, and the UNDP, and focused on policy dialogue, practical AI use cases, and strategic recommendations for national digital development. As a key outcome, participants contributed to an analytical assessment and policy-oriented proposals to support responsible and inclusive AI adoption. UNDP, representing the UN, played a facilitating role by providing global expertise, promoting human-centred and sustainable AI approaches, and convening stakeholders, while civil society contributed perspectives on ethics, inclusiveness, and the societal impact of AI. The forum will culminate in an analytical report with policy recommendations for the national AI ecosystem. The insights and solutions generated will help integrate AI-based innovations into national strategies and create opportunities to pilot solutions in key economic sectors<sup>174</sup>.

Belarus ranked as 121 out of 195 nations in the Government AI Readiness Index 2025 edition, ranked with aggregated scores as the lowest in the Eastern European region.<sup>175</sup> Belarus's political landscape, dominated by authoritarian practices, heavily influences its approach to AI governance and the formulation of related rules and regulations. The centralised decision-making process often leads to a lack of transparency and minimal public engagement in developing AI policies. This environment may prioritise the use of AI for surveillance and control, sidelining critical ethical considerations, privacy, and human rights. The government's track record of suppressing dissent suggests a significant risk that AI could be further employed to enhance state surveillance capabilities, thereby infringing on citizens' freedoms and privacy. Experts say that in Belarus there is currently no space for independent CSOs that could freely, and on an equal basis with the state, participate in discussions about responsible AI.

On the international stage, Belarus's isolation, exacerbated by the fallout from the 2020 election protests and later by Belarus' engagement in the war in Ukraine, limits its participation in international AI governance dialogues. Sanctions and diplomatic tensions hinder Belarusian entities from engaging effectively in international forums, restricting the adoption of global AI norms and standards.

The government's tight control over the academic and research sectors, coupled with a broader suppression of dissent and independent initiatives, creates a challenging environment for independent AI researchers to freely collaborate on state-led projects. While there may be some level of engagement, especially in fields deemed strategically

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<sup>174</sup> UNDP "AI4Development: Solutions for Belarus – forum in Minsk" <https://www.undp.org/belarus/press-releases/forum-minsk-brings-together-government-business-and-science-develop-artificial-intelligence-ecosystem-belarus>

<sup>175</sup> 8th edition of the Government AI Readiness Index – December 2025 <https://oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness/government-ai-readiness-index-2025/>

important by the state, such as military, these collaborations are often closely monitored and subject to strict regulations, limiting the scope and openness.

In 2025, the practice of restricting access to state websites from abroad continued and many state websites and online services that are important for CSOs remain blocked for users from abroad (for example, there is no access to the MoJ website and to the Department of Personal Data Protection). The court hearing schedule was blocked for open access since 5 March 2025 (in 2026, public access to the court schedule is planned to be restored, but it will be limited, instead of anyone being able to view the schedule openly on the website, this information will be available only through a user's personal account on the *E-court* electronic litigation platform<sup>176</sup>). Only limited online registration services are available to CSOs, but the Law on Public Associations provide the possibility for public associations to communicate with registration authorities online regarding registration issues, changes to registration documents and for filing mandatory annual activity reports.

On 29 May 2025, the Belarusian government submitted the draft law On State Registration and Liquidation (Termination of Activities) of Economic Entities to the parliament. The draft law introduces the concept of the official email of a legal entity which must be specified during registration. The registration of an organisation without specifying an e-mail address will be impossible. The organisation bears the risk of the consequences for not receiving legally significant messages sent to its registered address or to the email address specified in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities. Legal entities will be required to submit a notification of changes of the official email within 10 business days next to the already existing obligation to report a change in legal address, appointment of a new chief executive, and the start of the reorganisation procedure. The bill establishes the filing and submitting of an application for registration of a legal entity in the online form on the web-portal of a state agency. Even if the founders want to submit the registration package in-person, the printed completed online form with reference number must be attached to package of documents for registration. It will be impossible to submit documents for registration through regular mail on paper. The bill will abolish state registration certificates for legal entities - after registration, founders will receive a charter with a stamp. Instead of a paper record, all information on the legal status of an economic entity, its actual organisational and legal form, and name will be available on the Unified State Register of Legal Entities portal<sup>177</sup>.

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<sup>176</sup> Reformation. The court hearing schedule on the Supreme Court's website will only be accessible via personal accounts, 4 June 2025.

<sup>177</sup> <https://csometer.info/updates/belarus-new-registration-bill-not-game-changer-csos>

On 30 December 2025 the state program “Digital Belarus” for the 2026-2030 was approved by the Resolution of the government №793<sup>178</sup>. In line with this, there are plans to expand the use of digital documents, including the transition to digital passports, residence permits, driving licences, etc. This year, the state programme is to be supplemented with measures to create or modernise information resources and systems for generating such digital documents. The government also intends to enable the use of ID cards via mobile devices, as well as identification and authentication using users' biometric data and unique identifiers. However, experts note that, in addition to convenience and technical progress, mass digitisation carries significant risks. In Belarus, all information about everyone is collected, but it cannot be stored securely, experts note. According to cybersecurity agencies, most often citizens' data becomes publicly available banks and shops<sup>179</sup>, but in some cases, state databases are also attacked. For example, databases of Belarusian passports, employees of the MIA, KDB, their informants and complainants, as well as data on offenders in the register, were stolen in previous years and widely used in the media during 2025. A key part of the programme is about getting digital sovereignty, which means focusing on developing and supporting local IT solutions<sup>180</sup>. They plan to spend 1.08 billion BYN (317 millions EUR) on this programme.

The private ICT sector remains active in promoting media literacy and digital security. On 1 June 2025, the online training course on neural networks for schoolchildren and students, “CyberConIcule,” was launched in Belarus with support from AI. The course continues the nationwide awareness campaign #Think5Seconds, aimed at protecting from fraud, emphasizing the importance of responsible use of technology. The delivery of the online course help build skills for safe behavior in the modern information environment and will contribute to the Belarus's achievement of SDG 1 and 9<sup>181</sup>.

On 21 July 2025 Edict № 285 was signed, amending Edict No. 95 of 2 March 2011, “On Certain Issues Concerning the Collection of Information Not Included in Official Statistical Reports.” The document improves the procedures for collecting official reports and other information. It provides that all reports submitted on a regular basis will be collected online using government web systems. This change will reduce the reporting burden, facilitate the transition to paperless technologies, and cut information processing costs<sup>182</sup>. At the same time, CSOs retain the option to submit certain types of reports on paper (for example, tax reports if the CSO does not engage in business activities).

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<sup>178</sup> <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22500793>

<sup>179</sup> <https://radiosignal.news/news/v-belarusi-mozhet-poyavitsya-tsifrovoy-pasport-grazhdanina/>

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<sup>181</sup> <https://a1.by/be/company/news/a1-obuchit-molodezh-kiberbezopasnosti-i-cifrovym-kompetencyam/p/kiberkaniikuly>

<sup>182</sup> [https://president.gov.by/fp/v1/286/document-thumb\\_67286\\_original/67286.1753109994.29f32073f9.pdf](https://president.gov.by/fp/v1/286/document-thumb_67286_original/67286.1753109994.29f32073f9.pdf)

## Specific recommendations under Area 11:

- Release all individuals imprisoned for tax violations linked to civil activities or CSO activities, including crowdfunding or charges of ‘financing extremism’ or ‘public disorder’; lift all sentences and pending decisions on their liability; and provide adequate compensation to all such political prisoners;
- Abolish the Law on the Countering of Extremism and all related by-laws, especially the Index of Extremist Formations and the Index of Extremist Materials;
- Close and destroy the MIA’s unified database of participants in unauthorised demonstrations (the *Besporiadki* database) and any equivalent systems, including “*Activists*” database;
- Developing regulations in the field of AI should involve stakeholders (AI technology developers, providers and users) and should be open for the broad circle CSOs, with the aim of developing and adopting regulatory legal acts that comply with international HRBA and ethical principles for, including the ban on specific practices involving the use of AI that pose a serious threat to human rights and freedoms; exceptions to this ban must be based on clearly defined criteria enshrined in law;
- Eliminate both the legal basis for and the practice of internet disruption and website blocking without a court decision; and
- Include the development of an effective system for the digital registration of non-profit organisations (public associations and foundations) within the State Programme ‘Digital Development of Belarus’; also provide legal and technical support for digital crowdfunding platforms.

# IV. KEY PRIORITIES

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In light of this, the following seven recommendations – out of a total of 69 recommendations across 11 areas – are identified as key priorities:

1. Release all individuals recognised as political prisoners and stop all politically-motivated criminal cases and investigations;
2. Abolish the Law on the Countering of Extremism and all by-laws adopted under it, especially the Index of Extremist Formations and the Index of Extremist Materials;
3. Cancel criminal responsibility for organising and participating in the activities of an unregistered organisation (Article 193<sup>1</sup> of the Criminal Code) and abolish the ban on the activities of public associations without registration;
4. Stop the practice of forced termination of CSOs and restore real opportunities to operate for CSOs previously forcibly terminated in 2020–2025 (including public associations, foundations and private institutions, trade unions and their independent associations, religious organisations and opposition political parties);
5. Cease all forms of repression and discrimination against protesters, representatives of the opposition and CSOs, including mass administrative and criminal prosecution of activists inside the country and abroad in absentia, abuse of investigative powers, searches, seizures of data and communication devices, fines, arrests, the freezing of assets, and forced public disclosure in the media (including social media) of personal data during investigations or arrests;
6. Eliminate legislative possibilities for and the practice of internet disruption and the blocking of websites without court decisions; and
7. Cease the misuse of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) legislation and investigative powers in hate speech crimes to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of

thought, as well as to restrict access to funding from abroad for charities, human rights and humanitarian CSOs.

Only after these key priority steps are taken will it be possible to report any meaningful implementation of the previous recommendations of the CSO Meter Reports for Belarus, or the additional recommendations laid out in this report.

# V. METHODOLOGY

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The CSO Meter supports regular and consistent qualitative and quantitative monitoring of the environment in which CSOs operate in the EaP countries. It consists of a set of standards and indicators in 11 different areas to measure both law and practice. It is based on international standards and best practices. The CSO Meter was developed by a core group of experts from ECNL and local partners from the six EaP countries.

The country partners, together with other CSOs, part of the CSO Meter Hub, conducted the monitoring process and drafted the narrative country report. They also established Advisory Boards in each country, composed of expert representatives of key local stakeholders. The members of the boards have two main tasks: to review the narrative reports and to assign scores for every standard based on the narrative reports.

This country report covers the period from January to December 2025.

## Monitoring process

This report was prepared through legal research based on the analysis of laws, draft laws, officially announced legislative initiatives and official explanatory statements. For the research of practical implementation, official statistics and databases provided a limited amount of information on the most important indicators, and therefore only played an auxiliary role. The main source for monitoring and analysing legal practice was the consulting experience of experts and CSOs that are part of the CSO Meter Hub for Belarus, as well as their activities in monitoring the state of human rights and advocacy in the domestic and international arena, including through international Human Rights mechanisms, especially within the framework of the UN and the OSCE. An invaluable source of information were media publications from both within the country and from Belarusian media in exile, as well as numerous surveys and research papers on specific areas of CSO activities in Belarus.

It is important to emphasise that CSO Meter analyses the situation in Belarus and does not cover the problems of Belarusian CSOs in exile, relocation or emigration. This exclusive focus is a distinguishing feature of this monitoring, as today the majority of analyses on the Belarusian civil sector focus on the foreign part of Belarusian CSOs, at best, combine relocated and internal Belarusian organisations into one set, and at worst, simply ignore the existence of CSOs inside the country, focusing only on the problems of CSOs in exile.

It has become extremely difficult to find an expert from inside Belarus who will agree to answer the researcher's questions, even on condition of anonymity. These fears are not groundless, since a number of researchers have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms in Belarus, and some research CSOs were not only subjected to forced termination, but were also labelled by the authorities as 'extremist formations'.

In this context, it is necessary to note that Belarus is increasingly becoming a closed country, and it is becoming difficult to verify a considerable number of facts from independent sources.

## Scoring process

The country researchers and the 8 Advisory Board members in Belarus reassessed each standard of the 11 areas of the CSO Meter tool in legislation and practice in areas where changes had occurred. Accordingly, scores have increased in cases where progress is shown, and decreases are justified by certain cases of deterioration. The final score of each standard was calculated using a formula in which the researchers' score counts for 50 per cent, and the Advisory Board members' average score with 50 per cent. The score of each area is then calculated as the average value of the final scores of each standard and calculated and rounded to one decimal place for presentation purposes. Generally, for the scoring procedure, a seven-point scale is used. The extreme values of the scale are conceived as the most extreme or ideal situation or environment. For example, (1) is an extremely unfavourable (authoritarian) environment, while (7) is an extremely favourable (ideal democratic) environment for CSOs. For more information on the CSO Meter tool, the scoring process, and the calculation, visit: <https://csometer.info/>.

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**Note:** *The links to some source cannot be provided, since the Belarusian authorities have arbitrarily recognised all the information posted on these resources as extremist materials.*

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