

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS

the main trends  
of public policy

*2024 analysis*



## Trends

All Trends reviews are  
available at  
[www.trends.belhelcom.org](http://www.trends.belhelcom.org)



## Subscribe

Trends updates,  
no more than one or two  
emails per quarter



# About Trends

## DYNAMICS

focused on developments that drive **significant, qualitative change** and **elevate state policies/measures to a new level** – whether violating human rights or creating conditions for such violations

## KEY AREAS

- general measures
- law enforcement
- key decisions and reactions of international institutions

## THREE TIMES A YEAR

in 2025, the review will be released three times, each covering four-month periods

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2024  
TRENDS.BELHEL.COM.ORG

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: THE MAIN TRENDS OF PUBLIC POLICY

GENERAL MEASURES | LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE | KEY REACTIONS  
OF INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES



*In 2024, AI is not only getting «smarter» but also becoming more accessible to a growing number of people. To capture our audience's attention, we create cover images for reviews using AI, reflecting the reality in Belarus.*

*In the third trimester, it was clear that the state had entered a second phase of legalizing repression, introducing even harsher amendments to laws that had already been modified in a repressive manner.*

***The image for the cover of the third (september-december) report in 2024, generated by Shutterstock.AI, a tired little wild boar is unable to step off the revved-up carousel. It is critical that we not only get off the carousel but also bring it to a complete halt.***

# 2024 DRAWS A LINE UNDER A FIVE-YEAR PERIOD FOLLOWING THE EVENTS OF 2020

- 2020 – shock;
- 2021 – adjustment;
- 2022 – the first signs: amendments to acquired citizenship norms;
- 2023 – the main wave of repressive legalization and the start of legislating inequality – formalizing discrimination;
- 2024 – second-cycle amendments, further tightening previously introduced repressive measures.

# GENERAL TRENDS OF THE KEY REPRESSIVE YEARS: 2023–2024

**Three strategic systemic documents were adopted or revised:**

## Legal Policy Concept

*“Historical-ideological foundations and ideological imperatives of legal policy”* as an ideological framework for lawlessness.

- The state's interests precede individual rights (patriotism redefined).
- Universal standards are to be adjusted to fit Belarus' 'unique path'.

## National Security Concept

The approach to defining threats to national security has shifted: it has become subject-based

## Military Doctrine

- the number of military risks and threats has tripled (from 22 to 60);
- resorting to military force in peacetime
- initiating “anti-Belarusian” topics with international partners is considered a military risk;
- certain forms of dissent are classified as military risks and challenges;
- mass draft evasion is now labeled a military threat.

# GENERAL TRENDS OF THE KEY REPRESSIVE YEARS: 2023–2024

- The state has made its biggest leap in legalizing repression in 2023. 2024 did not bring another wave of large-scale legislative repressive measures. Instead, the state “digested” the legislative changes introduced in 2023, focusing on adjustments to lower-level regulations and expanding the scope of unlawful practices.
- By the end of 2024, it became especially clear that the state was going through a second cycle of legalizing repression – introducing even harsher amendments **to the same legal norms** and areas that had already been previously modified in a repressive manner. This process further solidifies the pyramid of repressive legislation.

# GENERAL TRENDS OF THE KEY REPRESSIVE YEARS: 2023–2024

**2024: an attempt to remedy the consequences of repressive lawmaking (the «Passport decree») for the system itself**

*We remind: besides the inability to obtain/renew passports, the Passport decree reduced a significant notarial functions of consulates, functions on issuing certificates for civil status acts (including certificate of no other marriage, which is needed to register marriage abroad), duplicate certificates. As a result, the state is unable to obtain vital information about its citizens.*

- Mandatory reporting: citizens must inform Belarusian civil registry offices about registering a civil status act abroad, including birth, marriage, adoption, establishment of maternity or paternity, name changes, death, and divorce.

It is not a human rights violation in itself, but given the state's own unscrupulous behaviour and deliberate obstructions to the regular process of updating civil status for citizens abroad, this innovation appears not only cynical but also chaotic, highlighting the dysfunction in state administration and lawmaking.

- The phrase “previously documented by a passport of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, who has refused to use it” has been introduced in the context of identity verification for pension eligibility.



# 50+

This is the number of legal acts amended in  
Belarus in 2023–2024 to legalize repressions

# AREAS OF LEGALIZED REPRESSION

## 2023

- Legal status (citizenship revocation, foreign residency permits);
- Possibility to exit/enter the state;
- Expanded grounds for criminal liability;
- Law enforcement powers;
- Employment;
- Access to a profession for various groups;
- Minority rights;
- Belarusians abroad;
- Functioning of the institutions: CSOs, religious organizations, political parties;
- Legal status of foreigners;
- Education (especially targeting medical professionals);
- Social guarantees;
- Culture;
- Social protection measures for children.

## 2024

- Gender identity, sexual orientation, reproductive choices;
- Personal data;
- Expanded grounds for criminal liability;
- Law enforcement powers;
- Employment;
- Access to a profession for various groups;
- Social protection measures for children;
- Pensions;
- Education;
- Culture;
- Belarusians abroad;
- Freedom of association for children.

# REPRESSION LEGALIZATION'

## 24

→ **Access to professions in exchange for loyalty** + a profession ban for politically motivated convicts : *tour guides and interpreters, notaries, educators.*



→ **Legal grounds for persecution based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and trans status** formalized

- The definition of “pornography” expanded to include “*deliberate display of non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behavior*”.
- The list of “information that may harm children's health and development” now includes “*propaganda of homosexual relationships, gender transition, pedophilia, and childlessness*”.

→ Expanded **access for state authorities to personal data**, including without consent: passenger transportation, investigative committee powers, and banking transactions.

# REPRESSION LEGALIZATION'

## 24

→ Expanded **grounds for criminal liability:**

- Unauthorized departure of individuals with access to state secrets –intended to intimidate civil servants and military personnel.
- Reporting the presence or movement of Russian military equipment in Belarus – a new criminal offense.
- Violence against the (former) president and his family – a new criminal offense;
- Expansion of extraterritorial criminal liability: The number of offenses for which a person can be prosecuted under Belarusian law for acts committed abroad increased from 3 to 17 – formal grounds for transnational repression +.



→ Loyalty to the regime now formalized as a condition for receiving social benefits for astronauts. *In 2023, the same applied to special merit pensions.*

→ Legal grounds for arbitrarily restricting children's right to freedom of association are formalised.

# DEPARTURE FROM FORMAL EQUALITY'

## 24

*In 2023, holding a foreign residence permit emerged as a distinct ground for discrimination.*

*As a result, a formally discriminated group now includes individuals with a foreign residence permit or, in some cases, relatives who hold one.*

→ Formally discriminated group: individuals convicted under political charges, **regardless of whether their conviction has been expunged, pardoned, or dismissed** due to amnesty or statute of limitations.


- professional bans: tour guides, interpreter-guides, educators.
- exclusion from the application of mitigated criminal law norms.

# EXPANSION OF EXTRA-LEGAL, EXTRA-JUDICIAL PROCEDURES' 24

*In 2023, a Return Commission was established to handle individuals who “committed administrative offenses or crimes of a protest nature”.*

*This mechanism is repressive and arbitrary, constituting an extra-judicial intervention in the procedural matters.*

- The Commission's activities are now permanent.
- Not only Belarusians abroad, but also those inside the country can currently apply to the Commission “following a presidential directive”.
- The Commission’s scope of decisions has expanded, now including the possibility of adopting “other decisions resulting from the implementation of presidential orders”.



Expansion – both geographically and substantively – of the powers of a non-judicial collective body with opaque authority, which operates through an extra-legal, arbitrary process, making decisions that should fall under the jurisdiction of courts or other competent institutions, without due process, oversight, or procedural guarantees.

# STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCING APPARATUS' 24

*In 2023, the KGB's powers were expanded regarding the use of firearms, military service and mobilization, as well as oversight of diplomats.*

- Expanded powers for the arbitrary use of force by the military against civilians.
- Broadened scope of professions related to national security.
- New preferential conditions for tuition reimbursement and allocation for law enforcement personnel and their families.
- Strengthened labor guarantees for individuals undergoing military service or alternative service assignments.
- .

# ADDRESSING LABOR AND FINANCIAL SHORTAGES BY VIOLATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS'

## 24

→ Increased pressure on young people leaving the country for education or right after completing their studies: ban on advertising educational opportunities, demands to “stop the exodus”.

→ Stricter rules on allocation and reallocation after studies (general).

→ Tighter regulations on reimbursement for “free” education.

→ Reduced social guarantees for imprisoned pensioners.

*In 2023, this trend was reflected in pressure on Polish language courses, tracking of apostilles and refusal to issue duplicate education documents, coercive conditions for medical professionals and agricultural specialists, and restrictions on the autonomy of homeowners' associations.*



# ADDRESSING LABOR AND FINANCIAL SHORTAGES BY VIOLATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS'

## 24

*Exploiting people to carry out duties that should be performed by the state and to advance political goals*

→ Employers, with trade union approval and employee consent, can now **increase overtime and weekend work limits** if there is a justified production or economic necessity (Decree No. 105 “On Overtime Work and Work on Weekends in Industrial Organizations”).  
[Most likely – to assist Russia.]

→ Directive on “Eliminating the Consequences of Dangerous Meteorological Phenomena”, which **obliges local authorities to mobilize citizens** for cleanup efforts.

# SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES FOR CHILDREN ENABLING REPRESSIVE ACTIONS AND INDOCTRINATION' 24

→ Monastery-run orphanages:

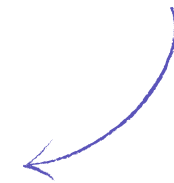
- legally established;
- Russian practice;
- additional vulnerability for children already fully dependent on the state;
- an additional tool for children indoctrination;
- at a minimum, violates freedom of expression and the right to respect for the family.

*In 2023:*

- *Expanded criteria for classifying a child as being in a socially dangerous situation – now up to 14 years old.*
- *changed conditions for placing children in special educational institutions and the length of their stay – without a court decision.*

# STRENGTHENED CONTROL AND IDEOLOGIZATION OF EDUCATION' 24

→ Official pro-government narratives about 2020 are now embedded in school literature curricula. A new textbook, “History of Belarus in the Context of World History”, will be introduced in schools starting in the 2025-2026 academic year. According to this textbook, the events of 2020 are classified as an attempted coup.



Laying the groundwork for societal division and antagonism between different groups of Belarusian society.

*In 2023, textbooks on “The Genocide of the Belarusian People During the Great Patriotic War” were introduced for grades 1-4, 5-9, and 10-11. They draw direct parallels between the actions of Nazis and collaborators and participants in the 2020 peaceful protests.*

A tool for pressuring children and parents to prevent any protest sentiment, stigmatization of protest behavior and individuals who hold views different from the official position, marginalization of 2020 protesters and politically repressed individuals.

# ANYTHING POSITIVE'24?

→ Legislative changes aimed at humanizing criminal law: Sanctions revised for 97 criminal offenses (reduced penalties, introduction of alternative forms of punishment).

**BUT: not for all: individuals convicted of “extremist-related” crimes are explicitly excluded**






- abolition of imprisonment as a sanction
- abolition of pretrial detention as a preventive measure

→ Positive changes in pension policies: working pensioners, women who have given birth to four children, fathers raising children with disabilities without the mother, children with disabilities under 18 who have lost their breadwinner.

**BUT: Reduced social guarantees for imprisoned pensioners.**

# NEW LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES IN 2024

*Notable systemic pardons: From August to December 2024, more than 200 people were pardoned. (Pardons continue in 2025, but on a smaller scale.)*

- Increased pressure on relatives. 
- Prosecution under previously unused legal provisions.
- New practices in extremism-related charges. 
- New methods of persecution for human rights defence.
- New workplace repression practices. 
- Intensification and expansion of trials in absentia.
- New forms of prosecution for donations.
- Use of the death penalty for political purposes.
- Persecution of exiled individuals.
- New border control practices.

## Trends

All Trends reviews are  
available at  
[www.trends.belhelcom.org](http://www.trends.belhelcom.org)



## Subscribe

Trends updates,  
no more than one or two  
emails per quarter



# Thank you for your attention!

[trends.belhelcom.org](https://trends.belhelcom.org)

