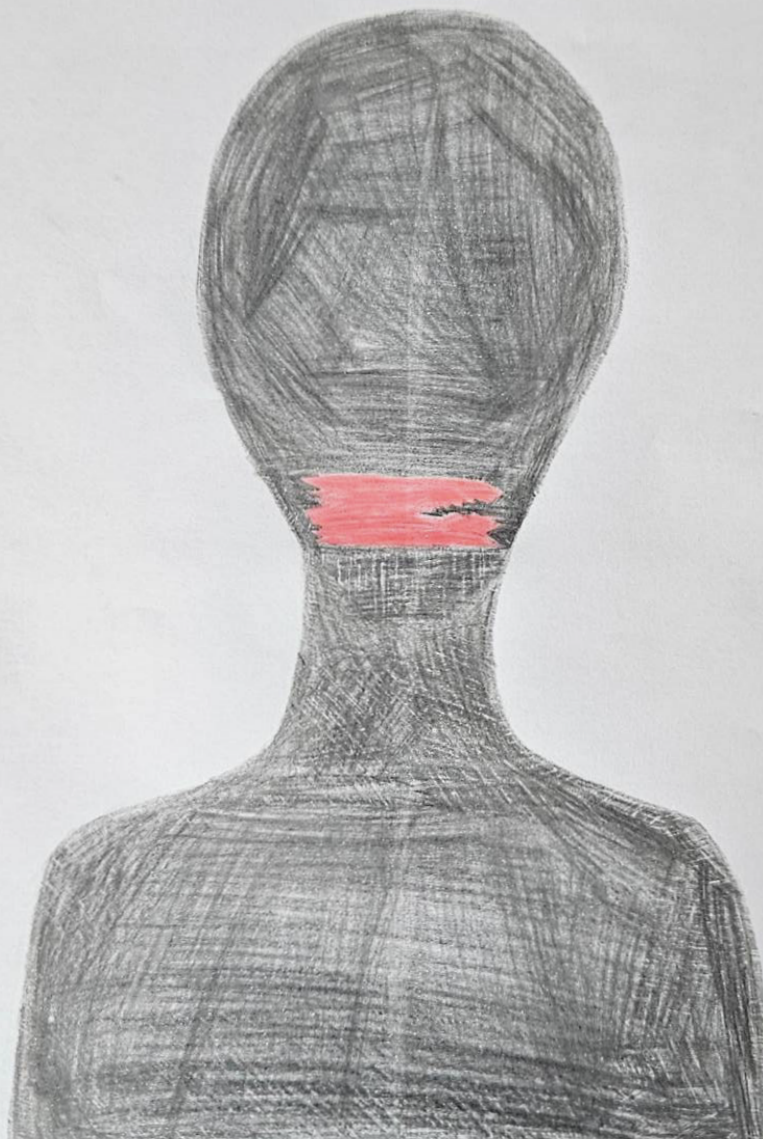


HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: THE MAIN TRENDS OF PUBLIC POLICY

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



At the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, we strive to maintain a healthy work-life balance — but under our circumstances, that is often unrealistic. Inevitably, work follows us home, and our families become closely acquainted with the human rights situation in Belarus.

Since everyone is already immersed in this context, we invited our children to draw their associations with the words freedom and prohibition. In 2025, we used these drawings as covers for our trend reviews.

This cover features a drawing by N, age 16.



© Belarusian Helsinki Committee, 2025

| CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
SUMMARY	7
I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY	11
Expansion of the legalisation of systemic repression	11
Formalisation of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and reproductive choice	17
Addressing financial resource shortages and human capital outflow through the violation of economic and social rights	18
Increased pressure in the field of education: restricting educational rights and militarisation	20
II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RIGHTS	23
New forms of pressure on the «economically inactive individuals» («parasites»)	23
Increased initiation of court proceedings ahead of statutes of limitation expiring	24
Intensification of control and ideologisation in education	24
New forms of transnational persecution and pressure on relatives of those forced to leave the country	25
New forms of pressure in the workplace	25

III. KEY CHANGES IN THE REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

27

Lithuania's referral to the icj against Belarus regarding the migration crisis

27

Establishment of a tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine with the possibility of holding belarusian officials accountable

28

| INTRODUCTION

The human rights situation in Belarus remains the subject of monitoring and analysis by both Belarusian and international NGOs and international organisations. Since 2012, the mandate of the [Special Rapporteur](#) on the situation of human rights in Belarus has been in place. Civil society's alternative reports to treaty bodies overseeing the implementation of the core UN human rights conventions, as well as in the [reports](#) of these bodies themselves, also provide reviews. In response to the unjustified use of force, torture against peaceful protesters contesting the 2020 rigged elections, and the subsequent repressions, a special [Mandate on the human rights situation in Belarus](#) was established under the auspices of the OHCHR in March 2021. In 2024, it was [changed](#) to a group of independent experts, which means more autonomy and independence for this mechanism.

Since 2019, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been calculating [the Belarus Human Rights Index](#), within which more than 40 Belarusian experts assess changes in each specific human right. Belarusian NGOs regularly conduct targeted human rights situation monitoring based on their areas of expertise.¹

The events of 2020, followed by the war in Ukraine and Belarus' complicity in Russia's aggression, have significantly altered the situation in the country, including its policies and practices in the realm of human rights. The situation is continually deteriorating, with daily updates on legislative changes, government initiatives,² specific violations, etc. Amidst this influx of information, **maintaining focus** and distinguishing between essential and minor aspects **becomes challenging**.

To ensure that significant events are not overlooked and to gain a better understanding of the situation in Belarus regarding the rule of law and human rights, we track **the most significant and qualitative changes in the main trends of state policy in the field of human rights**.

For this purpose, since July 2023, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been issuing a periodic review. Its aim is to present our expert assessments of **the most significant and qualitative changes in the trends of Belarusian state policy** in the field of human rights and the international community's reactions to it over the reporting period in three areas:

- *general measures*: systemic issues – legislation, strategies, and policies that generally shape the conditions and prerequisites for the fulfilment of human rights in the country;

¹ See, in particular, *Analytical reviews of the situation with human rights prepared by Human Rights Center «Viasna»*: <https://spring96.org/ru/publications>;
Monitoring the situation of freedom of association and civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus by Lawtrend: <https://www.lawtrend.org/english>;
Electronic bulletins of mass media in Belarus by the Belarusian Association of Journalists: https://baj.media/en/aglyady_category/baj-monitors/ and others.

² We consider the current authorities in Belarus as the *de facto* authorities.

- *law enforcement practices*: trends in violations of civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights;
- *key decisions and reactions of international institutions* related to the human rights situation in Belarus.

Our analytics will contribute to a better understanding of human rights trends in Belarus, aid international partners in navigating the Belarusian agenda, facilitate monitoring of systemic and qualitative changes in the situation, expand the human rights focus of analytics in related areas (political, economic, social, etc.), and serve as a useful resource for developing strategies and positions.

The analysis for 2023 was published in two issues (for each half of the year). These issues, along with a consolidated annual overview, can be found [here](#).

The review was published three times in 2024 (each covering a four-month period). All issues, the 2024 annual overview, and the first trimester 2025 analysis are available [here](#).

You can subscribe to our review [here](#).



SUBSCRIBE TO THE NEXT
ISSUE OF TRENDS
[TRENDS.BELHELCOM.ORG](https://trends.belhelcom.org)

| SUMMARY

- A clear overall trend points to yet another turn toward totalitarianism:
 - the authorities are moving towards establishing liability for certain aspects of private life: administrative penalties are being introduced for the «propaganda of homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness, and paedophilia»;
 - opportunities for self-expression in sports, culture, and education have been placed under further state control, with near-monopolisation of representation at international competitions;
 - the sphere of secondary education has been further monopolised through a ban on online education in foreign schools for children residing in Belarus. See details on each trend below.
- The list of professions subject to political loyalty requirements has also expanded. Over the past two years, the authorities have steadily changed the rules of attestation, ethical standards, and recruitment criteria for a range of professions: tour guides and interpreter-guides ([second half of 2023](#) and [the second trimester of 2024](#)); notaries ([second trimester of 2024](#)); and teaching staff ([final trimester of 2024](#)). Between May and August 2025, further changes were introduced. New professions added to the category of those under political control include real estate agents, auditors, insolvency administrators, along with additional changes again affecting tour guides and interpreter-guides.
- [The draft law](#) On Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Liability (July 2025) formalises, through administrative sanctions, a number of discriminatory and repressive measures previously introduced by sectoral legislation:

Firstly, amendments to the Law on the Rights of the Child (adopted in December 2024 and in force as of July 2025), inter alia, expanded the list of «information harmful to the health and development of children». A new provision, Article 19.6, establishes liability for the **«propaganda of homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness, and paedophilia.»** Penalties include fines of up to 20 base units for individuals, and between 100 and 150 base units for legal entities. If such actions result in minors being exposed to this information, sanctions are more severe. Thus, the practice – borrowed from Russia – of formalising discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and reproductive choice has progressed from rhetoric (2023) to codified administrative liability (2025).

Secondly, Presidential Decree No. 459 On the Representation of the Republic of Belarus at International Events (December 2024) is being implemented. A new provision is introduced: **Article 24.62 Unlawful Representation of the Republic of Belarus at International Events**. Any violation of the procedure for selection and participation in such events (which may take place only with state authorisation), which the decree defines as a «violation of the lawful interests of the Republic of Belarus», is punishable by fines ranging from 10 to 200 base units for individuals, and from 20 to 1,000 base units for legal entities. Thus, ideological control over the cultural, sporting, and educational spheres is being tightened (amounting, in effect, to near-total state monopolisation), further narrowing the autonomy of civil society institutions.

- Once again, opportunities for violating the right to privacy have been expanded. In early 2024, legislative amendments in the areas of passenger transportation and banking operations granted law enforcement agencies broad powers to monitor virtually all aspects of an individual's life, while also extending the Investigative Committee's authority to access personal data without the person's consent. Now, another measure has been added: operative-investigative bodies have been given legally enshrined, round-the-clock access to the automated system for recording and storing data on the movement of registered postal items.
- New legislative amendments in the sphere of external labour migration – presented by the state as measures to improve regulatory efficiency – in practice put both migrant workers and their employers in a more vulnerable and discriminatory position. **Presidential Decree No. 202** of May 2025, «On Strengthening the Role of Employers in the Field of External Labour Migration», both assigns employers supervisory functions not inherent to their role, thereby shifting responsibility away from the state, and simultaneously restricts migrant workers' right to freely choose their employment.
- Further changes have also been introduced to pension provision, which may negatively affect the rights of pensioners in detention. Responsibility for administering their pensions has been transferred from the Social Protection Fund to the Ministry of Internal Affairs system. The entire amount of a labour pension will now be transferred to the correctional institution, which will carry out all deductions before crediting the remaining balance to the individual's account. It is also worth recalling another restriction highlighted in the **May-August 2024 issue**: the grounds for pension deductions have been broadened. Pensioners in detention can now be required to contribute not only towards food and utilities, but also towards personal hygiene products, clothing, and footwear.

- The pressure and ideological control in the field of education continue to take new forms.

First, as of 1 September 2025, amendments to the Education Code entered into force. A significant new restriction was introduced: a ban on distance learning in foreign secondary schools for children residing in Belarus. This measure can hardly be described as an attempt to prevent the outflow of children abroad – it does not affect those who have moved abroad temporarily and attend local schools there. Rather, it represents the monopolisation of state-run secondary education in Belarus and a restriction on the access of Belarusian pupils to foreign educational institutions. It is also yet another misguided attempt by the authorities to resolve administrative inconveniences through measures curtailing human rights, while simultaneously reinforcing ideological control. In the [May-August 2024 issue](#), we already partially analysed other changes in the same legislative package at the drafting stage, including amendments to the mandatory work placement rules (easing requirements for law enforcement officers and tightening them for others).

Second, mandatory field training for all 10th grade students will be introduced, starting in 2026. Previously, the ten-day training was compulsory only for cadets and Suvorov school students. The new training will run from 26 May to 5 June – immediately after the end of the academic year.

Beyond the ideological harms of militarising general secondary education (which violates the right to education in terms of its aims), this measure raises further concerns about the infringement of other children's rights, particularly, freedom of conscience.

- New unlawful practices identified between May and August 2025:
 - new forms of pressure on «economically inactive individuals» («social parasites»): the authorities have involved law enforcement bodies, which now send individuals notifications requiring mandatory appearance (in effect, summonses) and escort them to employment commission meetings;
 - intensified court hearings under Article 342 of the Criminal Code («organization of or participation in actions grossly violating public order») ahead of statutes of limitations expiring;
 - new practices of ideologisation in education: «military-patriotic» groups, modelled after those in schools, have begun to be created in kindergartens;

- new forms of transnational persecution and pressure on relatives of those who fled: there are reported cases of collecting genetic material (saliva) from relatives; letters demanding accountability for expired passports have begun to arrive at the place of registration of those who left;
- new practices of workplace pressure: in private companies in Minsk, executive committees are sending letters requiring the former to report on the presence of a designated staff member responsible for ideological work (implementation of Directive No. 12 «On the Implementation of the Fundamentals of the State Ideology of Belarus»).

○ Among important reactions of the international community:

First, Lithuania initiated proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Lithuania accuses Belarus of facilitating and enabling the smuggling of migrants, as well as of failing to take the necessary border measures to prevent and detect such smuggling, and of breaching a number of other obligations under the Protocol;

Second, in May a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine was established. While this is not a direct measure or reaction to the human rights situation in Belarus, it is nonetheless an important development in the context of bringing Belarusian officials to account for complicity in Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The Tribunal's jurisdiction allows for such a possibility where evidence exists of a substantial contribution by Belarusian officials to the crime of aggression.

I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES, POLICIES, THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY

KEY POINTS:

- Plans to introduce liability for certain expressions related to private life (administrative liability being established for «propaganda of homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness, and paedophilia»);
- Opportunities for self-expression in sports, culture, and education placed under additional state control (representation at international competitions is effectively monopolised);
- Monopolisation of secondary school education (ban introduced on online schooling abroad for children residing in Belarus);
- The list of professions with access determined by loyalty to the state has been expanded to include real estate agents, auditors, and crisis managers.

EXPANSION OF THE LEGALISATION OF SYSTEMIC REPRESSION

1. Expansion of bans and restrictions on access to professions

Through the formalisation of loyalty requirements, the authorities are continuously tightening the conditions of access to specific professions for various professional groups. Over the past two years, the authorities have gradually amended rules on certification, ethical standards, and recruitment procedures for a range of professions: tour guides and interpreter-guides ([second half of 2023](#) and [second trimester of 2024](#)); notaries ([second trimester of 2024](#)); and teaching staff ([last trimester of](#)

2024). In the period from May to August 2025, further developments occurred in this area. The list of regulated professions has been expanded to include:

○ Real estate agents

In May 2025, the Law «On Real Estate Activity» was adopted, establishing a single framework for regulating the profession. To strengthen state control over the sector, a new «self-regulatory» body – the Chamber of Realtors – has been created. Only those real estate agents who are members of the Chamber and hold a certification will be authorised to provide services.

To implement the law, the Ministry of Justice issued Regulation No. 45 «On the Certification Examination and Issuance of Certificates for Real Estate Agents». As with tour guides and interpreters, the procedure establishes filters directly or indirectly based on loyalty to the state. For instance, a realtor's certificate is subject to revocation if its holder (para. 33):

- participates in unauthorised mass events, or publicly calls for their organisation or conduct in violation of the established order;
- engages in any activity deemed to «discredit» the Republic of Belarus or its state bodies and agencies – including personal involvement, mediation or cooperation through service provision, registration in «extremist formations», subscription to information resources labelled «extremist», or dissemination of content published on such resources.

Thus, the ability to practise the profession is made directly dependent on the abandonment of fundamental rights (including freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to information), creating constant additional pressure on individuals.

Furthermore, individuals dismissed from courts, law enforcement or other state bodies, or other organisations on grounds recognised by law as «discrediting circumstances», will not be allowed to sit for the certification exam for three years from the date of dismissal (para. 4). While this may appear formally legitimate, in practice it can be used as a tool of arbitrary persecution and additional pressure against those dismissed from public service on political grounds since 2020.

It is worth noting that in April, the KGB carried out a series of raids and inspections of real estate agencies.

○ Auditors

In May 2025, **amendments** were introduced to the Law «On Audit Activities». A new requirement was added, upgrading the previous obligation of «having a business reputation» to that of maintaining an «impeccable business (professional) reputation». An auditor is now barred from practising if they «do not meet the requirement of having an impeccable business reputation».

This requirement includes, inter alia, the absence of any unexpunged or unpardoned convictions for a number of offences frequently used by the authorities for politically motivated prosecutions. These include, in particular, Criminal Code Articles 342, 341-1, 361, 369-1, 369-2, and 369-3.

○ Insolvency administrators

In May 2025, the Ministry of Economy submitted for public discussion (held from 13 to 25 May) a **draft amendment** to the Regulation on the Procedure for Certification and Recertification of Individuals for Compliance with the Professional and Qualification Requirements Applicable to Temporary (Insolvency) Administrators.

The explanatory note to the draft stated that its purpose included «ensuring access to the insolvency administration market only for qualified specialists with a positive attitude toward state and public institutions and the constitutional order».

The proposed amendments introduce new grounds for terminating an administrator's certificate (para. 5 of the Regulation), similar to the professional fields mentioned above – namely, provisions that directly or indirectly impose a political filter. These include: the existence of an unexpunged or outstanding criminal conviction; the fact of having been held administratively liable for offences, including those under articles frequently used for politically motivated prosecution (Articles 19.10, 19.11, and 24.23 of the Administrative Code). Moreover, individuals previously prosecuted under these same articles are barred from certification altogether. Another ground is the receipt by security agencies of information about an act allegedly committed by the certified person that poses a threat to national security.

This clearly demonstrates the consistent and expanding practice of using administrative liability and convictions under politically motivated provisions as grounds for barring access to the profession. The authorities are deliberately creating a situation of constant risk of job loss to suppress any attempt at dissent. In other words, the state not only seeks to punish disloyal citizens through arbitrary administrative and/or criminal prosecution but also aims to make their lives after serving such (already unjust) punishment socially difficult – depriving them even of the right to freely choose their work, let alone their civil and political rights.

An important indicator of the systemic nature of restrictions on labour rights within the framework of political repression is the most recent [report](#) of the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus (published in July 2025), which is devoted specifically to violations of labour rights.

○ **Tour guides and interpreter-guides**

Tour guides and interpreter-guides are professions the state has shown remarkable persistence in regulating since the second half of 2023, when the Ministry of Sport and Tourism first [approved](#) professional and ethical requirements. These contained a number of ideologically-driven provisions – extending even to rules on the colour of clothing – that effectively forced guides to censor both themselves and the tourists they work with. In 2024, [amendments](#) were introduced to the Regulation on the Procedure and Conditions for Professional Certification of Tour Guides and Interpreter-Guides. These tightened access to the profession on the basis of individuals' history of political persecution and breaches of the newly imposed ethical rules.

On 30 April 2025, further amendments were made to the professional and ethical requirements originally adopted in 2023. Among other things, two new requirements were added, both derived from the state's new comprehensive «code of ideological rules» – Presidential Directive No. 12 ([analysed](#) in our January–April 2025 issue): to know the basics of the state ideology of Belarus as set out in Directive No. 12, and to implement ideological work in their professional activities (para. 5-1); to promote the strengthening of the country's positive international image and the recognition of the «uniqueness» of the Belarusian model of social development (para. 5-2).

The state's particular attention to guides is readily explained by the fact that they work with foreigners. For the authorities, it is crucial (for varying reasons with different groups of foreign visitors) to ensure the ideological framing of memory politics – including the narrative of «historical falsification». The special significance of this sphere is further underlined by the [attention](#) it has received from notorious propagandists, who have openly proposed creating a database of «normal guides», claiming that «this is important for the preservation of the state».

2. State monopolisation of international representation in cultural, sporting, and educational spheres as a form of repressing civil society

In July 2025, a [draft law](#) «On Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Liability» was introduced in the House of Representatives. It proposes a new offence – **Article 24.62: «Unlawful Representation of the Republic of Belarus at International Events»**. This article enforces [Presidential Decree No. 459](#) of December 2024 «On the Representation of the Republic of Belarus at International Events». The decree was adopted to «streamline the selection of individuals and the

representation of the Republic of Belarus at international events held abroad». In other words, it effectively monopolises representation abroad in order to strengthen ideological control over those travelling to participate in cultural, educational, or sporting events (the spheres explicitly mentioned in the decree).

The Decree specifically stipulates that the terms «Republic of Belarus», «Belarus», «national», and «Belarusian» may only be used in events selecting participants to represent the country abroad if the organiser is a state body (or an entity authorised by it). Representation of Belarus at international competitions – **where a country may be represented by only one individual or one team** – is now permitted only with prior state authorisation (not merely notification). Notification of participation must be submitted in writing to the relevant state body before applying to the international event. If participation is deemed «unacceptable», the state body informs the applicant accordingly. In practice, this means that central executive bodies will decide whether it is «appropriate» or «possible» for Belarusian representatives to take part **in most major international** cultural, educational, and sporting competitions. Any violation of this procedure is considered a **«breach of the lawful interests of the Republic of Belarus»**.

At the same time, the wording of para. 1.2 of the Decree – defining the scope of competitions covered as those «for which the governing documents provide for state representation only by one individual, one group of individuals (including a delegation, team, or collective)» – raises a number of questions. For instance, does it extend to competitions with different age categories, where each may have a specific national team? Will the decree indeed apply only to such strictly defined competitions, or in practice to all events (as there are many competitions where multiple individuals or teams from one country can participate)? Will it cover international animal exhibitions and similar events? These questions will only be clarified in the course of its application.

The new administrative offence provides for a fine of ten to two hundred base units, and for legal entities – from twenty to one thousand base units.

Thus, the authorities place under their control the entire cultural, sporting, and educational spheres in order to prevent «undesirable» participants from entering international platforms. This violates the principle of equal access to opportunities for self-realisation and the exercise of one's abilities. It remains unclear on what grounds and by what criteria decisions on participation will be made; moreover, the very requirement to seek such authorisation already infringes on a number of rights and freedoms – primarily freedom of association.

This measure will affect a wide range of competitions, including at a minimum: sporting events (including e-sports); cultural competitions and festivals (cinema, theatre, etc.); international academic olympiads; and numerous professional

competitions, such as moot courts in the legal field – adding yet another element of ideological pressure and discrimination in education.

3. Expansion of State Powers for Arbitrary Access to Personal Data / Interference with Private Life

Mechanisms of interference with the right to privacy are continually taking on new dimensions, creating further opportunities for politically motivated persecution.

At the beginning of 2024, we [reported](#) on legislative amendments in the areas of passenger transport and banking operations that granted law enforcement agencies wide powers to monitor individuals and control virtually all aspects of their daily lives. At the same time, the Investigative Committee was given expanded powers to obtain, without the consent of individuals, data from information systems containing personal data, including through remote access.

In May 2025, [amendments](#) were adopted to the Law on Postal Services. A new automated system has now been introduced for the registration and storage of data on the movement of registered postal items, with round-the-clock access granted to law enforcement and investigative bodies, without adequate procedural (judicial) safeguards.

Beyond the risk of arbitrary interference with private life per se, this also creates additional threats for communication between Belarusians forced to live abroad due to political persecution and their relatives remaining in Belarus. This may contribute to self-censorship. While the [previous version](#) of the law already obliged postal operators to provide access to such bodies, the new amendments remove even those minimal procedural guarantees and give the authorities virtually unchecked power to interfere with privacy in this domain.

4. Expansion of Cross-Border Persecution and Pressure

The state continues to broaden its toolkit for transnational persecution of Belarusians forced to leave the country for political reasons, including by seeking to create maximum obstacles in managing their own property from abroad. In 2023, the so-called «[Passport Decree](#)» was adopted – a repressive instrument with far-reaching cross-border implications.

In June 2025, the [draft Law](#) on State Registration and Liquidation (Termination of Activities) of Business Entities passed its first reading. The law would change the rules governing the withdrawal of participants from limited liability or additional liability companies. According to [expert commentary](#), under the new provisions, an application to withdraw will no longer be submitted to one's own company, as was previously the case (with the form of submission unregulated), but instead to a

notary. In practice, this means the application must now be notarised, requiring the personal appearance of the participant or their representative before a notary.

As a result, the situation becomes significantly more complicated for those abroad who cannot return to Belarus.

FORMALISATION OF DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, AND REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

The discriminatory practice of direct persecution of the LGBTQ+ community – borrowed from Russia – is receiving further legislative entrenchment. We have been tracking this trend: in 2023, the authorities began speaking about it; in 2024, certain provisions appeared in sectoral legislation, such as the revised definition of pornography in the Instruction of the Ministry of Culture (see BHC's legal analysis [here](#)) and amendments to child protection legislation (a brief analysis was presented in the [September–December 2024 review](#)); and in 2025, administrative liability is now being introduced.

The [draft Law](#) on Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Liability, submitted to the House of Representatives in July 2025, proposes a new provision – Article 19.6 «Propaganda of homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness, or paedophilia». This would include «dissemination in any form of information with the aim of creating in citizens a perception of the attractiveness of homosexual relations, gender transition, or childlessness, or of recognising paedophilia as permissible». The sanctions envisioned are fines of up to twenty base units for individuals and from one hundred to one hundred and fifty base units for legal entities. Where such actions «resulted in minors becoming acquainted with such information», penalties are even harsher, including the possibility of arrest or community service for individuals.

If adopted, this will not simply be another set of discriminatory legislative provisions contradicting both the Constitution of Belarus and its international obligations, but a stark manifestation of the country's movement toward totalitarianism. The qualitative «breakdown» in the retreat from formal equality is illustrated by the fact that:

- **First**, such amendments effectively introduce liability for certain manifestations of personal life and identity, thereby stigmatising them;

- **Second**, the changes extend far beyond the LGBTQ+ community: alongside any expressions of LGBTQ+ identity or positions, the ban could encompass many feminist perspectives, human rights positions relating to equality, privacy, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights, as well as informational materials in the areas of sexual education and family planning, works of art, and much more.

See a detailed [analysis](#) of the proposed changes and their potential consequences for individuals and organisations prepared by the BHC and the queer initiative Prismatic.

ADDRESSING FINANCIAL RESOURCE SHORTAGES AND HUMAN CAPITAL OUTFLOW THROUGH THE VIOLATION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

1. Regulation of external labour migration: additional restrictions on employers and violations of migrants' rights.

In May 2025, Presidential [Decree](#) No. 202 «On Strengthening the Role of Employers in the Sphere of External Labour Migration» was adopted. It imposes additional duties and restrictions on employers (including private businesses) that «recruit immigrant workers for employment in the Republic of Belarus». It is worth noting that the text of the Decree consistently refers to such workers as «immigrants» rather than migrants, which in itself reflects the authorities' vague understanding of the distinction between those who temporarily come to the country to work and those who resettle permanently – as well as their broader lack of awareness regarding the international labour market.

The functions assigned to employers resemble a mixture of those of a supervisory body and a schoolteacher or mentor. Specifically, employers are now required to: appoint, by internal legal act, «persons responsible for monitoring the work activities and living conditions of immigrant workers»; ensure visits to workers' residences to check actual place of residence and compliance of living conditions with sanitary standards; organise testing of workers' knowledge of one of the state languages (for professions to be defined by the government); monitor the validity periods of their documents (visa, driving licence, etc.).

It is particularly important to note that temporary transfer of migrant workers to another employer is prohibited. This restriction violates the right to freely choose

one's employment, guaranteed both by the Belarusian Constitution (Article 41) and by the country's international legal obligations. It also amounts to direct discrimination on the grounds of citizenship, since this prohibition applies exclusively to migrant workers. In practice, such employment conditions may be qualified as akin to forced labour.

The rhetoric used by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in commenting on the Decree is telling: it [states](#) that «*the transfer of workers to another employer is prohibited*». In other words, the MIA instrumentalises migrant workers as mere objects of control.

The MIA further noted that the relevance of the Decree stems from the significant increase in the number of foreign nationals and stateless persons arriving for employment. On the one hand, it may appear logical that the state would react to this trend with additional regulation. On the other hand, the chosen form of regulation does not resolve existing challenges but instead creates numerous new problems – not for the state itself, but for employers.

Uncharacteristic supervisory functions – this is yet another attempt by the state, as seen in other areas, to shift both responsibility and practical tasks onto others. In effect, it transfers functions that should belong to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other agencies responsible for the integration of migrants into society onto individual legal entities.

At the same time, it remains unclear what safeguards employers have in cases of bad-faith behaviour by migrant workers, or how and where procedural guarantees for either side are established. All of this turns the hiring of such workers into a burden for employers while placing migrants themselves in an even more vulnerable position.

2. Restrictions on Pension Provision for Incarcerated Persons

In July 2025, [amendments](#) to the Law on Pension Provision were signed (entering into force on 1 October 2025). Under these changes, pensions of incarcerated persons will no longer be administered by the Social Protection Fund but by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The entire amount of a labour pension will now be transferred directly to the correctional facility, which will itself carry out deductions and credit the remaining balance to the individual's account. Previously, these operations were performed by the Social Protection Fund.

In our [May-August 2024 review](#), we already analysed earlier draft amendments in this area that reduced social guarantees for pensioners in detention. In particular, the grounds for deductions from pensions were expanded. Pensioners in detention

can now have deductions made to cover the cost of food, utilities, personal hygiene products, clothing, and footwear.

The Ministry of Social Protection [explained](#) that transferring the administration of pensions to correctional facilities is intended to «simplify the process». While this may indeed be administratively easier for the state, from the individual's perspective it creates a number of potential problems. As human rights defenders [note](#), it is unclear what will happen to pensions that, under power of attorney, were previously collected by relatives outside prison – the only way for incarcerated pensioners to transfer money to family members, for instance to pay utility bills. If pension payments by proxy are now prohibited, there is a risk that utility and other payments owed by inmates will be subject to compulsory recovery procedures, with additional penalties for arrears and enforcement fees.

This provision is also discriminatory, as pensioners in detention are placed in a different position and are very likely to lose the ability to freely dispose of their funds. At the very least, the exercise of this right will become substantially more complicated.

INCREASED PRESSURE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION: RESTRICTING EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND MILITARISATION

1. Restrictions on educational rights: a ban on online schooling in foreign secondary education institutions for children residing in Belarus – establishing a state monopoly over secondary education

In December 2024, a package of amendments was adopted in the field of education – the Law «On Amending the Codes on Education» – which entered into force in September 2025. In our [May-August 2024 issue](#), at the draft stage, we had already analysed some of the proposed amendments concerning mandatory job placements (relaxed for security services, but tightened for everyone else).

As of 1 September 2025, another important restriction has come into effect. The obligation of legal representatives of minors to ensure conditions for their education and development has been expanded. Now, legal representatives are required to «ensure conditions for the education and development of their minor children, including obtaining general secondary education by their minor children residing in the Republic of Belarus in educational institutions of the Republic of Belarus» (para. 15, art. 2 of the Law). In the previous version, the wording was limited

to «ensure conditions for the education and development of students». In other words, a ban has been introduced on distance learning in foreign secondary schools for children residing in Belarus (previously, it was possible to study online at Russian and some Western schools). Given the near-total elimination of private schools in Belarus, this effectively amounts to a state monopoly on secondary education.

Despite some expert [opinions](#) suggesting that the measure is aimed at preventing the outflow of young people abroad, its primary purpose seems rather to lie in ensuring ideological control through bureaucratic monopolisation. The authorities themselves [explained](#) that the measure bans distance learning in foreign schools for children living in Belarus who are receiving secondary education here. However, it does not apply to those who move abroad for temporary residence and attend local schools there.

At the same time, the authorities' [explanations](#) clearly reveal the ideological component of this decision: «The Belarusian school is not only about knowledge, but also about upbringing». There are, however, more practical [explanations](#) that make it clear this is yet another attempt by the state to address its own administrative problems through bans that restrict individuals' ability to exercise their rights. Officials from the Ministry of Education noted that the Belarusian system of general secondary education does not recognise «online learning» or «distance education» as such, which creates numerous problems in certifying students who studied online elsewhere in accordance with the requirements of Belarusian law.

This measure infringes on the right of children to education and on the rights of their legal representatives, including the freedom to choose forms of education. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to encourage the development of different forms of secondary education. [General Comment No. 1](#) to Article 29 of the Convention further emphasises the need for schools to take into account the child's interests in the fullest sense of the term, as well as to provide opportunities for children to develop in line with their evolving capacities. The Belarusian state, however, as in many other cases, has chosen the simplest path – monopolisation – instead of a diversified approach.

2. Mandatory field training for all 10th-grade students

The process of militarising education continues to expand – a process launched after the events of 2020 and further intensified following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The return in 2021 of the position of voenruk (head of military-patriotic education), a Soviet-era institution within schools, has over four years developed into a much more serious measure: the introduction of mandatory field training

for all 10th-grade students. Authorities **explain** that previously, ten-day mandatory training camps were required only for cadets and Suvorov school students. Starting in 2026, they will become compulsory for all 10th-graders. The training will take place from 26 May to 5 June – immediately after the end of the school year.

Beyond the obvious ideological harms of militarising general secondary education (which undermines the right to education, particularly regarding its aims), this development also raises concerns about violations of other rights of the child, especially freedom of conscience.

II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

KEY POINTS:

- New forms of pressure on «economically inactive individuals» («social parasites»): the authorities have involved law enforcement bodies, which are now actively engaged, sending notifications with mandatory appearance requirements (in effect, summonses) and escorting individuals to employment commission meetings;
- New practices of ideological indoctrination in education: «military-patriotic» groups, previously introduced in schools, are now also being created in kindergartens;
- New forms of transnational persecution and pressure on relatives of those forced to leave: reported cases include the collection of relatives' genetic material (saliva samples), as well as letters being sent to the registered addresses of those abroad concerning liability for expired passports.

NEW FORMS OF PRESSURE ON «ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE INDIVIDUALS» («SOCIAL PARASITES»)

In May 2025, it **became known** that individuals classified as «economically inactive» began receiving notifications from the police requiring them to appear before employment commissions – effectively resembling summonses. Previously, such a practice had not been recorded: before, individuals only received letters inviting them to confirm their status or to apply for employment assistance. Following A. Lukashenka's January 2025 call to pay more attention to working with «parasites», police forces in some districts **became involved**, including through home raids.

The new notifications state that this work is carried out by the police «to ensure compliance with the constitutional obligation of citizens to contribute to the financing of state expenditures through the payment of taxes». In some districts, the police **have threatened administrative liability** for failure to appear after receiving such a notification. There have also been reported **cases** of individuals being forcibly brought to employment commission meetings.

It is evident that this new turn in unlawful intimidation practices – enforcing equally unlawful legislation that coerces people into work – is not centrally regulated. There is only a general directive to «intensify efforts», which is interpreted differently across regions. This creates even greater unpredictability and opacity, leaving people practically defenseless against state bodies that have targeted them.

INCREASED INITIATION OF COURT PROCEEDINGS AHEAD OF STATUTES OF LIMITATION EXPIRING

Human rights defenders from Viasna **note** that in recent months trials under Article 342 of the Criminal Code («organisation of or participation in actions that grossly violate public order») have become increasingly frequent. This is linked to the fact that in 2025 the statute of limitations for this article – five years – expires. In July 2025, human rights defenders reported that proceedings under this article had «in recent weeks been put virtually on a conveyor belt».

INTENSIFICATION OF CONTROL AND IDEOLOGISATION IN EDUCATION

Practices of strengthening control and ideological indoctrination in education continue to expand against the backdrop of ideology being formalised at all levels. This time, «military-patriotic» groups, previously introduced in schools, **have begun to be established** in kindergartens.

Against the background of an overall legislative and enforcement tightening of the ideological control, the extent of the lack of any restraints is becoming evident. The particular vulnerability and psychological immaturity of preschool-age children make such practices not only a violation of the rights of children and their parents (as applies to children of any age) but also profoundly immoral.

NEW FORMS OF TRANSNATIONAL PERSECUTION AND PRESSURE ON RELATIVES OF THOSE FORCED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

First, in August 2025, **it became known** that in the Mogilev region law enforcement officers had been collecting genetic material (saliva samples) from relatives of people who had left Belarus. According to human rights defenders who provided this information to journalists, local police officers explained that a DNA database was being compiled «so that people abroad could be identified if necessary». Human rights defenders believe this practice is taking place in various cities across Belarus.

Second, also in August, Viasna **reported** a new practice: letters began to arrive at the registered addresses in Belarus of those who had left for political reasons, notifying them of liability for an expired passport. The letters explain that residing with invalid identity documents entails a fine and invite recipients to contact the Citizenship and Migration Department to replace their passport.

This practice appears particularly cynical given that people are unable to renew expired documents precisely because of the so-called «**passport decree**», adopted in September 2023.

NEW FORMS OF PRESSURE IN THE WORKPLACE

The adoption in April 2025 of Directive No. 12 «On Implementing the Fundamentals of the Ideology of the Belarusian State» (reviewed in our **January-April 2025 issue**) has led to the expected and predictable increase in workplace pressure, which we had anticipated in our earlier analysis. The Directive pays particular attention to the private sector: one of its declared aims is «the need to convey the state agenda to citizens employed in the private sector of the economy».

In August, it became known that executive committees in Minsk had begun sending letters to private companies demanding that they report whether they have a designated staff member responsible for ideological work. Directive No. 12 sets out in detail the positions responsible for «ideological work», including their appointment, dismissal, and contract renewal, all of which require approval at different levels of the state hierarchy.

According to an official, no fines are foreseen for non-compliance (since this is a Directive, not a Presidential Decree), but they will continue to press for it. This is unsurprising, given that the Minsk City Executive Committee itself is required to

deliver compliance – the Directive has established a system of continuous pressure across the entire chain of command.

Ultimately, this pressure will force companies to appoint such staff, who in turn will be compelled to play the prescribed role (since they will have to report on their activities), thereby stigmatising themselves in the current context.

III. KEY CHANGES IN THE REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

KEY POINTS:

- Lithuania initiated proceedings against Belarus before the ICJ in connection with the migration crisis.

LITHUANIA'S REFERRAL TO THE ICJ AGAINST BELARUS REGARDING THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Following the [migration crisis](#) orchestrated by the Belarusian authorities, on 19 May 2025 Lithuania [initiated](#) proceedings against Belarus before the International Court of Justice, alleging that Belarus has violated its obligations under the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

According to Lithuania, Belarus has breached Articles 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16 of the Protocol, in particular by:

- facilitating, supporting, and enabling the smuggling of migrants, and failing to take necessary border measures to prevent and detect such smuggling and to ensure the security and control of documents;
- failing to exchange information to prevent, detect, and investigate the smuggling of migrants, to strengthen cooperation with Lithuania's border control agencies, and to cooperate in the field of public information to prevent potential migrants from falling victim to organised criminal groups;
- failing to protect the rights of migrants and to provide them with appropriate assistance.

Belarus has [declared its intention](#) to contest both the Court's jurisdiction and the admissibility of Lithuania's Application. The ICJ has established deadlines for the exchange of pleadings: Belarus must submit its Memorial by 19 January 2026, and Lithuania its Counter-Memorial by 20 July 2026.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A TRIBUNAL ON THE CRIME OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE

On 24 June, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE) Alain Berset [signed](#) an [Agreement](#) establishing a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

The need for a dedicated body to prosecute those responsible for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – which may be qualified as a crime of aggression under the Rome Statute – [arises](#) from the [jurisdictional limitations](#) of the International Criminal Court. In particular, the ICC's special jurisdictional regime for the crime of aggression [requires](#), inter alia, ratification of the Rome Statute both by Russia (which is not a State Party) and by Ukraine, or referral of the situation by the UN Security Council – an option effectively blocked by Russia's veto.

The jurisdiction of the new Tribunal is based on Ukraine's territorial jurisdiction – its sovereign right to prosecute the crime of aggression committed against it, which it delegates to the international level. The Tribunal is being established within the framework of the Council of Europe, through the mechanism of an Enlarged Partial Agreement, which allows not only CoE member states but also other states and the EU to join.

The Tribunal's jurisdiction *ratione materiae* is strictly limited to investigating and prosecuting the crime of aggression against Ukraine. The circle of individuals who may be held accountable includes senior political and military leaders responsible for planning, instigating, initiating, executing, or attempting to execute aggression. The Statute's wording allows for the potential prosecution of Belarusian officials as well, provided there is evidence of their substantial contribution to the crime of aggression.³

³ See Art. 4(1) of the [Statute](#): «A person in a position effectively to exercise control over or to direct the political or military action of a State who planned, instigated, ordered or committed, or attempted to commit, a crime referred to in Article 2 of this Statute shall be individually responsible for the crime.»

The European Parliament, when calling on EU institutions and member states to establish such a tribunal, **emphasised** that this body «should have jurisdiction not only to investigate the actions of Vladimir Putin and the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation, but also of Alexander Lukashenko and the political and military leadership of Belarus as a state from whose territory, and with whose logistical support, the Russian Federation is waging its war of aggression against Ukraine, which falls under the definition of the crime of aggression in Article 8 bis of the Rome Statute».

It is also important to note that the Tribunal remains bound by the general rules of international law regarding personal immunities of high-ranking officials – sitting heads of state, heads of government, and foreign ministers. Such individuals **can only be brought** before the court once they are no longer in office or if their immunity is lifted. Nevertheless, the very establishment of the Tribunal already enables investigations, evidence collection, and the preparation of indictments. The Tribunal will thus be in a position to prosecute and hold perpetrators accountable as soon as circumstances permit.



WE WILL BE GRATEFUL

FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

EMAIL US OFFICE@BELHELCOM.ORG