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HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: THE MAIN TRENDS OF PUBLIC POLICY

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





The Belarusian authorities have designated the BHC and a number of other human rights organisations as so-called «extremist formations».

Storing or disseminating the organisation's materials carries risks for individuals in Belarus or planning to travel there. Please bear this in mind when handling this material.

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| CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
SUMMARY	6
I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY	10
Expansion of the legal framework for systemic repression	10
• Strengthening of controls over security service personnel and diplomats	10
• Strengthening of controls over citizens' freedom of movement through restrictions on access to information	12
• Strengthening of controls over civil society	13
Pressure in the sphere of education	15
• Intensification of ideological control over individual educational activity (non-formal education)	15
• Expansion of the powers to search minors in educational institutions	16
Expansion of the state's powers of arbitrary access to personal data / interference with private life	17
• Expansion of the data that clients are required to provide to banks: geolocation now mandatory	18
• A law on mandatory DNA registration has been announced	19
Social and economic rights: restrictions in the sphere of pension provision as part of repressive policy	21
II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS	22
Mass prosecution for connections with the EHU	22
«Hidden repression»	23
New persecution practices	23

| 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.

- *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 review has been published since 2023. In 2023, two issues were released (covering each half of the year). In 2024 and 2025, the review has been issued on a trimester basis (covering each four-month period). Previous issues and consolidated annual overviews are available [here](#).

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| SUMMARY

- The overarching and most striking trend of May – August 2026 at the level of state policy is **the intensification of control, including through the formalisation of an ever-growing number of extrajudicial instruments of repression**. Notwithstanding the already severe measures of ideological and other control, substantially formalised over the past five years, during the reporting period the state adopted (or announced its intention to adopt) a whole range of new controlling measures:
 - ideological control over security service personnel and diplomats, civil society organisations, and the sphere of non-formal education (private tutors);
 - control over citizens' freedom of movement;
 - administrative controls in secondary education institutions/securitisation of the educational environment (control over minors);
 - identification and biometric controls;
 - digital controls.
- A new Presidential Decree No. 230 «On Matters of Military Service and Service in Paramilitary Organisations» has been adopted. First, it enshrines an arbitrary, extrajudicial mechanism of post-service monitoring and the potential exclusion of individuals from a defined segment of professional life – in other words, it formalises a violation of the right to work and introduces yet another set of discriminatory provisions. Second, it confers on paramilitary organisations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs new and atypical supervisory powers – oversight of the execution of sentences.

The employment of six categories of officials dismissed «under discrediting circumstances» will be monitored for five years, so as to prevent such individuals from accessing managerial positions not only in state organisations but in private ones as well. This applies to military personnel, officers of the State Control Committee's financial investigations bodies, the Investigative Committee, the internal affairs bodies, the emergency services, and diplomats. Neither the broad and vague list of «discrediting circumstances», nor the five-year monitoring period, nor the extension of the provision to the private sector, has any reasonable legal justification; the measure constitutes an additional repressive extrajudicial instrument.

- The lawful forms and space for civil society activities and self-organisation are falling almost entirely under state control. Each new legal act in this sphere further narrows the possibility of legal existence for civil society organisations that are not wholly loyal to the state. New rules on the registration of private institutions and associations have been adopted – the owners of institutions and members of associations are now required to be vetted by the KGB; a dedicated regulatory framework (a standalone law) is being prepared in relation to volunteering; and amendments to the regulation of trade unions are in preparation.
- Two measures adopted in the sphere of education – the creation of a registry of private tutors and independent teachers, and the expansion of powers to search minors in educational institutions without the presence of parents – continue the state's consistent movement towards the monopolisation of the education sector and the intensification of control over children. Formally shielded by the rhetoric of child protection, the two measures taken together reveal not so much a concern for the safety and wellbeing of children as the construction of instruments of disciplinary and ideological control – over both the adults who work with children and the children themselves.
- The state continues to adopt new measures restricting access to digital services – contrary to its declared commitment to digitalisation. The procedure for obtaining information from the database of citizens subject to a temporary travel ban has been amended. Whereas previously such information could be accessed through a personal account in the Ministry of Internal Affairs system, it is now provided only in person to the citizen concerned or their legal representative. This is, first, another instance of the closure of access to information that is directly relevant in the context of repression – as was the removal in 2025 of online access to court hearing schedules. Second, the measure reduces both the ease and speed with which citizens can establish whether they are subject to a travel ban; in a repressive context, this creates additional risk and may deter individuals from seeking to check their travel restrictions and plan safe courses of action. Third, it also constitutes a form of transnational repression: individuals who have been compelled to leave the country or have been forcibly transferred out of it are unable to obtain information about their own status – as [illustrated](#) by the case of human rights defender Uladzimir Labkovich, who was forcibly transferred out of the country in December 2025.
- The legalisation of the use of various systems for identifying and tracking individuals is expanding – from biometric and genetic identifiers to digital

data on devices and geolocation. Although these mechanisms have different stated purposes and operate under different legal regimes, what unites them is an increase in the volume of information enabling the state to identify individuals. The progressive narrowing of the space for anonymity under an authoritarian regime, first, renders particularly vulnerable those at risk of political persecution – both within the country and beyond its borders; and, second, creates a durable infrastructure of control that may be deployed arbitrarily, regardless of the purposes originally declared.

- Pressure on individuals compelled to live abroad through social and economic rights is being formalised to an ever greater degree. A new ground has been added to the existing bases for the deprivation of special merit pensions: residence abroad. This standalone ground eliminates even the appearance of a connection between the deprivation of a pension and any specific «act». What becomes punishable is now the mere fact of being outside the country – which transforms this measure into an instrument of transnational repression and pressure targeting those who have left and retain significant influence and public standing.
- The prosecutions arising from the designation of the EHU as an «extremist organisation» – which began in June 2026 – illustrate in practice the general trend of 'collateral repression' identified in our previous review: in a drive to make life yet more difficult for the 'politically unreliable', the measures adopted directly affect, strip of their rights, or expose to the risk of repression a wide range of persons – including those with no political record whatsoever. According to Viasna, as of 17 August at least 175 individuals are known to have been affected by such prosecution (110 students and their relatives), and at least 60 searches have been carried out. People are being targeted on account of their studies at the EHU as well as on account of having paid tuition fees.
- Against the backdrop of the state's near-total concealment of the information from which conclusions about the scale and intensity of political persecution might be drawn, the crisis of traditional monitoring methods is particularly apparent. This in turn affects the volume of information reaching the international community and the basis on which its understanding of events in Belarus is constructed. In June 2026, Viasna published a report entitled «Hidden Repression», analysing how the nature of direct forms of persecution and the availability of information about them have changed between 2020 and 2026.

- Among new practices of persecution the following may be highlighted: the stripping of individuals at border crossings; the first recorded cases of the application of Article 19.4 of the Code of Administrative Offences on «LGBTQ+ propaganda» (the BHC produced a [detailed analysis](#) of this provision at the time of its introduction); pressure by the KGB on students studying in Poland or processing documents to travel abroad for study; and increased attempts by KGB officers to make direct contact with Belarusians living abroad through their relatives residing in Belarus.

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

KEY POINTS:

- New rules on the registration of two forms of civil society organisations – private institutions and associations – under which the owners of institutions and members of associations are now required to be vetted by the KGB;
- New instruments of disciplinary and ideological control over both the adults who work with children and the children themselves;
- New extrajudicial instruments of repression: control over security service personnel and diplomats;
- Another instance of restricted access to digital services and to information relevant to the tracking of repression.

EXPANSION OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR SYSTEMIC REPRESSION

1. Strengthening of controls over security service personnel and diplomats

On 9 July 2026, [Presidential Decree No. 230](#) «On Matters of Military Service and Service in Paramilitary Organisations» was adopted. It establishes additional control measures in relation to six categories of officials dismissed «under discrediting circumstances»: military personnel, officers of the State Control Committee's financial investigations bodies, the Investigative Committee, the internal affairs bodies, the emergency services, and diplomats. It is notable that the diplomatic service is likewise classified as service «in military or paramilitary organisations».

Under the new provision, organisations in which such service is possible are required, at least once every six months over a period of five years, to monitor information on the employment of such individuals. The information needed for this monitoring is provided to those organisations by the Social Protection Fund. Where they identify that such individuals have taken up managerial positions in state or private (!) organisations, they are required to notify the local executive authorities «for the adoption of response measures in accordance with legislative acts».

The same Decree introduces amendments to six corresponding regulations governing the relevant types of service and defines the grounds for dismissal that will be deemed «discrediting circumstances». For military and security bodies, these grounds are broadly similar. They include: deprivation of rank (for military personnel), criminal prosecution, termination of or refusal of access to state secrets and classified information (including on account of a refusal to consent to a security check), and professional unsuitability.

The situation for diplomats is somewhat different. For them, «discrediting circumstances» of dismissal include: the commission of an act incompatible with holding a diplomatic post; the recall of a diplomatic officer owing to their being declared persona non grata in the receiving state, or to the commission by the diplomatic officer of an act entailing criminal or administrative liability under the legislation of the Republic of Belarus or the receiving state – as well as the commission of such an act by a member of their family; violation of legislation on state secrets or on the handling of restricted official information, where this has led to the disclosure or loss of state secrets or restricted official information, or has created the preconditions for this. The same applies to administrative and technical staff.

The identification of specific grounds for dismissal as a distinct category is not, in itself, contrary to legal logic. However, a prohibition on holding certain posts – with narrow exceptions – is a form of punishment that may be imposed only by a court. Decree No. 230 creates serious risks of violation of the right of equal access to public service, the right to work, and the principle of non-discrimination – notwithstanding that it applies only to managerial positions.

First, the category of «discrediting circumstances» covers an extremely broad range of grounds, a number of which are vague in character. They are not proportionate to one another in terms of gravity or seriousness: criminal prosecution, disciplinary grounds, and circumstances beyond an individual's control – such as being declared persona non grata, which may be a reciprocal measure by the receiving state – are placed on the same footing.

Second, the five-year monitoring period has no reasonable justification, and is applied uniformly regardless of the gravity of the underlying ground.

Third, the functions of monitoring employment – entirely alien to their remit – are imposed on paramilitary organisations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which are thereby made to perform functions belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the oversight of the execution of sentences.

Fourth, the monitoring of employment extends to the private sector, which takes it entirely outside the logic of oversight of public service and constitutes interference both with the right to free choice of employment and with the private sector labour market.

Decree No. 230 thus enshrines an extrajudicial mechanism for restricting employment rights, **placing post-service oversight of civilian life in the hands of paramilitary organisations.**

In a context characterised by the systematic use of dismissals and restrictions on access to professions as an instrument of political filtering, this mechanism has the potential to be used for personnel purges and intimidation. What it creates is not merely the prospect of dismissal and departure from public service, but of **dismissal with no possibility of building a career or freely choosing a place of work in line with one's professional aspirations – at all.**

2. Strengthening of controls over citizens' freedom of movement through restrictions on access to information

The state continues to adopt new measures restricting access to digital services – contrary to its declared commitment to digitalisation – and to information. On 20 July 2026, a **Presidential Decree** «On the Database of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus Whose Right to Leave the Republic of Belarus Has Been Temporarily Restricted» was adopted. It amends the procedure for obtaining information from the database of citizens subject to a temporary travel ban. Whereas previously such information could be accessed online through a personal account in the Ministry of Internal Affairs system, it is now provided only in person – to the citizen concerned or their legal representative (in the latter case, in addition to the representative's own identity document, a document identifying the person about whom the information is sought must also be provided). Accordingly, the online travel ban check function **has disappeared** from the Ministry of Internal Affairs website.

This, **firstly**, is yet another instance of the closure of access to information that is directly relevant in the context of repression – as was the removal in 2025 of online access to court hearing schedules.

Secondly, this measure reduces the accessibility and timeliness with which citizens can obtain information about whether they are subject to a travel ban – information they need in order to effectively protect their right to leave the country. If the state is technically capable of providing this information remotely, a straightforward question arises: why does obtaining information about one's own status now require a citizen's physical presence?

In a repressive context, for a person who fears arbitrary political persecution and wishes to find out in advance whether they are subject to a travel ban – precisely in order to have a full picture of their situation and be in a position to take any necessary steps – the very requirement to appear in person at the Ministry of Internal Affairs may carry additional risk and, accordingly, a chilling effect.

Third, this also constitutes a form of transnational repression: individuals who have been compelled to leave the country or have been forcibly transferred out of it are unable to obtain information about their own status – as illustrated, for example, by [the case](#) of human rights defender Uladzimir Labkovich, who was forcibly transferred out of the country in December 2025.

3. Strengthening of controls over civil society

During May – August 2026, a number of provisions tightening yet another round of strict control over civil society were adopted or put forward as draft legislation.

First, on 1 June 2026 a new [Law](#) «On the State Registration and Liquidation (Cessation of Activity) of Legal Entities» was adopted. It enters into force on 1 July 2027. The new law introduces for the first time a specific formalised vetting requirement for:

- the state registration of a private institution or association (union);
- amendments to the charter of a private institution relating to a change of ownership of the institution's property.

The registration authority is now required to send a request to «the state body authorised to implement measures for the prevention and detection of threats to national security», asking whether the activity of the owner of a private institution's property, or of a member of an association, who has submitted registration documents, poses a threat to national security. A positive response from that body constitutes grounds for refusal of registration (Articles 25–26). The law does not name the body explicitly; however, the primary body responsible for ensuring national security in Belarus is the KGB.

In plain terms: individuals who, in the KGB's assessment, «pose a security threat» will no longer be able to register a legal entity in the form of a private institution or association (union) – in the latter case, all members are subject to the check. By way of comparison, the previous act regulating these matters [provided for](#) a primarily formal check for institutions and associations, including confirmation that the owner of an institution's property or its director is not on the preventive register under crime prevention legislation.

Lawtrend [notes](#) that an additional assessment criterion is being introduced – one relating not to whether documents comply with established requirements, but to the evaluation of circumstances deemed to constitute threats to national security. The law does not, however, define the relevant circumstances, the criteria for their assessment, the procedure for verifying such information, or the procedural guarantees for challenging it.

It is important to note that precisely these two forms of civil society organisation – the private institution and the association – have traditionally been the forms with the lightest registration requirements, close to a notification-based procedure, in comparison with other forms: public associations, trade unions, foundations and political parties.

The new provision thus formalises the KGB's already effectively unlimited ability to control civil society organisations – an ability that existed in practice. This formalisation systematises repression by eliminating any remaining formal possibility of avoiding such control (the KGB is now legally required to do what was previously a possible practice). The state is, in effect, plugging the gaps in the repressive system and removing any even formally available possibility of placing a civil society organisation within a legal framework in Belarus if it is not unimpeachably loyal to the state.

Lawtrend's [detailed analysis](#) of the new law describes further new restrictions.

Second, a draft Law «On Amendments to Laws on the Activities of Trade Unions» has been prepared. The Ministry of Justice's website [notes](#) that the draft law comprehensively regulates matters relating to trade union rights across various fields, the principles of their activity, their interaction with state bodies, and enshrines provisions on the establishment and operation of trade unions, their representativeness, and their powers to protect the rights of working citizens.

Third, a conceptual framework for a law on voluntary activity is being prepared. [According to officials](#), the law will draw a distinction between a «volonter» – a regular volunteer affiliated with an organisation – and a «dobrovolets» – a person who offers one-off, informal assistance. Officials also state that the new law will

move away from the requirement to maintain a unified database of volunteers, so as not to burden themselves with administrative upkeep and box-ticking, and give assurances that the work of volunteers will not be burdened with excessive regulation.

In both of the latter cases, the draft texts are not yet available, making it impossible to comment on specific provisions. However, in light of the recent practice of amending legislation on public associations, political parties and religious organisations – changes that led to the need for their re-registration – we note the general trend of formalising the transfer of all forms of civil society to direct state management and control. Assuming that the two new laws are likewise directed to that end, we will nonetheless carry out a detailed analysis once the texts are published.

PRESSURE IN THE SPHERE OF EDUCATION

1. Intensification of ideological control over individual educational activity (non-formal education)

In May 2026, a [draft Regulation](#) of the Council of Ministers «On the Registry of Individuals Engaged in Independent Professional Activity in Teaching Children» was submitted for public consultation. The proposal is to create a state registry of individuals engaged in independent professional activity in teaching children (applicable only to the provision of services to minors). This means that only a person included in this registry – in effect, approved by the state – will be able to engage lawfully in private tutoring and independent teaching.

An individual applying for inclusion in the registry must not be subject to restrictions on working with children under Article 27-1 of the Law on the Rights of the Child. In July 2025, amendments were made to that Law which added to the standard list of convictions precluding a person from holding a teaching post a new category: «crimes of an extremist nature». This covers a very broad range of offences – ones that the authorities actively use for the arbitrary prosecution of individuals on political grounds. The Department for Education Quality Control of the Ministry of Education, which will maintain the registry, will be required to request information on each applicant from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

It is notable that under the draft, a single member of staff of the Department responsible for maintaining the registry will take decisions unilaterally – on inclusion in the registry or refusal – on the basis of the information received.

A person included in the registry is required to notify the Department of the emergence of any restrictions on their work with children within no more than three working days of such restrictions arising. The registry is intended to be public. No appeal procedure is provided for against refusal of inclusion in or removal from the registry.

The [explanatory note](#) to the draft states that its aims are the protection of minors and the systematisation of information about individuals providing such services. It is further stated that the registry will make it possible to shield children from services provided by persons convicted under the list of articles set out in Article 27-1 of the Law on the Rights of the Child, including «crimes of an extremist nature».

The state is thus moving steadily towards the total monopolisation of education. Over the past five years, private formal education has been entirely eliminated – almost all private schools and nurseries have been closed – and online study at foreign schools has been prohibited for children residing in Belarus (see our [May–August 2025 analysis](#)). The state is now moving to establish full control over individual educational activity. In March 2025 (see our [January–April 2025 analysis](#)), a further draft Regulation of the Council of Ministers was submitted for consultation, significantly and without justification restricting the rights of self-employed individuals working in the education sector (tutoring, clubs, studios). The proposed registry further discriminates against and extrajudicially restricts the freedom to choose one's occupation of a person who may have been convicted on political grounds.

2. Expansion of the powers to search minors in educational institutions

In June 2026, [Regulation of the Council of Ministers No. 307](#) «On the Conduct of Security Activities» was published. It enters into force on 1 September. Among other things, it amends the rules on the searching (personal searches, searches of belongings and documents) of minors. Previously, minors could be searched only in the presence of a parent or legal representative. An exception is now introduced: a search may be carried out in an educational institution in the presence of a member of the teaching staff.

The head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Security Department [states](#) that the adoption of this provision was prompted by the study of international experience. He emphasises that the updated procedure does not mean that all children will be searched before entering school: «We know perfectly well which pupils require

particular attention – we receive this information from teachers and officers of the inspectorate for juvenile affairs.»

The possibility of searches by school security personnel may, in certain circumstances, be an appropriate safety measure; it cannot, however, be treated as a norm as a matter of course. Such changes in relation to children create conditions for arbitrary interference with their right to personal integrity and private life, for the degradation of their dignity, and for discriminatory treatment.

First, a teacher is not the child's legal representative. Their presence ensures that another adult is present, but does not necessarily provide independent protection of the child's interests – particularly given the current ideological control exercised over teachers, and the monitoring role teachers play in relation to children. In this light, the Ministry of Internal Affairs representative's explanation that they receive information from teachers about which children merit attention is deeply ambiguous. The state is thus placing children in an inherently vulnerable position – one that is plainly at odds with the best interests of the child, the central principle of child rights protection standards.

The question arises of the procedural guarantees available to a child when the state intervenes in this way. Why must the guarantee of a parent's presence be removed in order to achieve security objectives?

Second, the situation is compounded by the notably vague grounds for conducting a search. The issue is not simply the need to find standard prohibited items – things that may not be brought into or taken out of school. It extends to «items that are instruments or direct objects of unlawful acts, as well as corresponding documents». Given the breadth of «extremism legislation», a range of personal belongings may fall within this category.

A search thus ceases to be a safety measure and becomes yet another instrument of disciplinary and ideological control over children.

EXPANSION OF THE STATE'S POWERS OF ARBITRARY ACCESS TO PERSONAL DATA / INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVATE LIFE

Over the past few years, legislation creating mechanisms for state interference with the right to private life has been continuously expanding, opening up additional

avenues for politically motivated persecution. This manifests in two ways: first, the direct conferral on security bodies of unrestricted access to a range of sources of personal information; and second, measures not directly linked to granting security bodies such access but which nonetheless fail to meet human rights standards and thereby create potential for digital surveillance. These measures are formally justified by reference to legitimate aims – security and crime prevention – but in substance the norms and restrictions adopted are disproportionate and are not accompanied by the necessary procedural safeguards.

In our analyses covering [January–April 2024](#) and [May–August 2025](#), we examined legislative changes in the areas of passenger transport, banking operations, postal items and information resources containing personal data more broadly – changes that enable the state (including security bodies) to have uncontrolled, and in some cases remote, access to individuals' personal data and to interfere with their private life without adequate procedural (judicial) safeguards.

During the reporting period, further legislative developments emerged, alongside intentions announced by officials with regard to such measures.

1. Expansion of the data that clients are required to provide to banks: geolocation now mandatory

The National Bank [indicates](#) that from 1 July 2026 a «Device Digital Fingerprint» standard has been introduced for Belarusian banks. The standard provides for the collection, storage and analysis of a device's digital fingerprint, which includes, among other things, information on the device's location. This means that in order to use remote banking services, **a client is required to grant the bank access to their geolocation data**. Without doing so, it will be impossible to use mobile banking. The National Bank emphasises that device digital fingerprint data are not shared with anyone and are used exclusively in anti-fraud systems to counter unauthorised payments. Combating fraud is, of course, a legitimate aim for restrictions on and interference with private life. However, a number of questions arise.

First, the measure admits of no alternative. If a person does not provide their geolocation, they will be unable to manage their money remotely. In European practice, the provision of geolocation may be one option among several and merely an additional protective factor. Furthermore, the device itself is used as an identifying factor – which raises the question of whether such a measure is proportionate to the security considerations invoked.

Second, when account is taken of the Belarusian repressive context – the practice of uncontrolled access by security bodies to various data holdings, and the use of digital traces for repressive purposes – banking data become an additional source of information about a person's movements and may be used for their persecution.

The assurances given by the National Bank that data will not be shared with third parties are, regrettably, of no validity in the Belarusian context. It is difficult to envisage a situation in which a bank refuses to provide information in response to a request from the security services.

Such a development does not, of course, mean automatic surveillance – but it does create a situation of additional vulnerability and visibility of the individual to the state. Those at particular risk are persons already exposed to politically motivated persecution – both within Belarus and abroad, where they may be using cards issued by Belarusian banks.

2. A law on mandatory DNA registration has been announced

The State Expertise Committee of Belarus **is initiating** a law on the mandatory genomic registration of citizens. According to the Committee's chair, the matter is currently at the development stage. It is clear that, in the absence of a draft text, it is difficult to assess whether the proposed changes would or would not meet human rights standards.

It is important to note, however, that this legislative initiative correlates with certain unlawful practices already observed in this area on the part of security bodies. In August 2025, **it became known** that in the Mogilev region officers of the security services were collecting genetic material (saliva) from relatives of people who had left Belarus. According to human rights defenders who provided this information to journalists, officers of the district internal affairs departments stated that a DNA database was being compiled so that, «if necessary, people abroad could be identified». According to human rights defenders, DNA material is being collected both from relatives of those who have left (including journalists) and from individuals convicted on political charges. This practice **has been taking place** in various cities across Belarus since 2024. It is entirely unclear on what basis, according to what criteria, and for what purpose this genetic material is being collected.

By way of reminder: under human rights standards, including the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, states are entitled to create and use DNA registers for the prevention and investigation of crime. At the same time, the compulsory collection and retention of genetic data constitutes a serious interference with the right to private life and must therefore meet the requirements of lawfulness, necessity and proportionality. In accordance with the ECtHR's approach, the principal concerns are: the blanket or indiscriminate nature of registration; the absence of a link between registration and a specific offence; excessive or unlimited retention periods; the absence of an effective data deletion procedure; and insufficient safeguards against access to and use of the data for other purposes.

In the Belarusian context, these risks are further compounded by the absence of effective independent oversight mechanisms for the activities of law enforcement bodies and by the deliberate use of legislation to formalise politically motivated criminal prosecution. **The entire state campaign of DNA collection and retention must therefore be assessed primarily against the following criteria:** the categories of persons subject to registration, the grounds and procedure for selection, retention periods, the possibilities for deletion, and the limits on access to the database.

In this context, the legislative amendments adopted in February 2026 concerning the collection of biometric information – which we analysed at the draft stage in our [September–December 2025 issue](#) – must also be noted. The range of citizens subject to mandatory fingerprinting has been substantially expanded. It now includes, among others, foreign nationals passing through border control, Belarusians permanently residing abroad, and those who have obtained «a residence permit or other document of a foreign state granting entitlements and other advantages on grounds of political or religious views or ethnic origin» – that is, primarily those who obtained such status as a result of political persecution. We had noted the stated intention to introduce such changes in our [September–December 2024 issue](#). A draft law on genomic registration can accordingly be expected in approximately a year's time.

This trend as a whole points to the expanding use of various systems for identifying and tracking individuals – which, in the context of the repressive apparatus of an authoritarian state, means an expansion of the tools available for pressure and persecution.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS: RESTRICTIONS IN THE SPHERE OF PENSION PROVISION AS PART OF REPRESSIVE POLICY

In June 2026, amendments **were introduced** to the Regulation on Pensions for Special Services to the Republic of Belarus. The grounds for the deprivation of such a pension were supplemented by the following: permanent residence outside the Republic of Belarus. It is instructive to trace the evolution of these grounds since 2020.

In 2021, «crimes and acts harmful to state interests and national security» **were added** as grounds for deprivation. In the current version of the provision, this ground reads as «the establishment of facts of commission of ... (irrespective of whether criminal or administrative liability has been imposed)». The ground is thus not the outcome of a lawful procedure establishing a person's guilt, but merely a subjective assessment of facts. Over the past five years, a number of the acts for which individuals are typically politically prosecuted have been legislatively classified as «acts harmful to state interests and national security». In 2023, the grounds **were further supplemented** by an even more evaluative and politically motivated formulation: «disrespectful attitude towards state and public institutions and the constitutional order of the Republic of Belarus».

The latest amendments concerning persons residing abroad thus clearly extend an unmistakable trend: the formalisation of the exclusion from entitlement to a special pension of those deemed politically disloyal. In addition, the latest changes contribute to the body of legally defective norms stripping forcibly displaced Belarusians of their rights, adding further grounds for transnational repression.

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

KEY POINTS:

- Repression is becoming increasingly latent in character, which correlates with a crisis of monitoring methods;
- Attempts by the KGB to make direct contact with Belarusians living abroad through their relatives residing in Belarus have intensified.

MASS PROSECUTION FOR CONNECTIONS WITH THE EHU

In April 2026, the European Humanities University was designated an «extremist organisation». In our previous issue ([January–April 2026](#)), we noted that this was the first instance of consequences on such a scale: the mere fact of holding an EHU diploma (including all graduates of any programme), as well as any public association with the EHU – including guest public lectures or employer-student meetings at careers fairs – may become grounds for prosecution.

The prosecutions that followed have proven to be genuinely wide in scope, intense, and severe. Searches and interrogations began on 2 June. [According to Viasna](#), as of 17 August at least 175 individuals are known to have been subjected to such pressure (110 students and their relatives), and at least 60 searches have been carried out. People are being targeted on account of their studies at the EHU as well as on account of having paid tuition fees. KGB officers are also visiting EHU graduates. Two criminal charges are in play: «facilitating extremist activity» and «financing extremist activity». Security officers are demanding that parents of current students contact their children and demand that they withdraw from the university; students are being threatened with the detention of their parents.

This picture of persecution illustrates well the general trend of «**collateral repression**» [identified](#) in our previous review: in a drive to make life yet more difficult for the «politically unreliable», the measures adopted directly affect, strip of their

rights, or expose to the risk of repression a wide range of people, including those with no political record whatsoever.

«HIDDEN REPRESSION»

Repression is becoming increasingly latent in character. This correlates with a crisis of monitoring methods brought about by the state's deliberate concealment of large volumes of information about criminal and administrative prosecution. In June 2026, Viasna published a report entitled «[Hidden Repression](#)», analysing how the nature of direct forms of persecution and the availability of information about them have changed between 2020 and 2026. The report identifies a crisis of traditional monitoring methods and examines the effect this has on the volume of information reaching the international community and on the basis on which its understanding of events in Belarus is constructed.

NEW PERSECUTION PRACTICES

First, in July [it became known](#) that since approximately spring 2026 a new form of pressure has emerged at border crossings: in some cases, individuals with a formal record of prosecution on «political grounds» are being required, in addition to having their phones examined, to undress.

Second, human rights defenders – Viasna, citing [Іншыя – report](#) the first recorded cases of the application of Article 19.4 of the Code of Administrative Offences on «LGBTQ+ propaganda». The BHC produced a [detailed analysis](#) of this provision at the time of its introduction.

Third, in July 2026 [it became known](#) that students studying in Poland, or in the process of obtaining documents to travel abroad for study, have been summoned for interviews with the KGB – including following the submission of visa applications.

Fourth, we are aware that during the reporting period there has been a marked intensification of attempts by KGB officers to make direct contact with Belarusians living abroad through their relatives residing in Belarus.



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