



General Assembly

Distr. General
19 May 2026

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Sixty-second session

15 June–10 July 2026

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Situation of human rights in Belarus

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks*

Summary

The present report provides an overview of human rights developments in Belarus between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. Belarus continues to systematically and grossly violate its international human rights obligations through ongoing politically motivated repression and a complete crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly and association. The Special Rapporteur examines continued severe ill-treatment in detention facilities, the continuing trend of transnational repression through trials in absentia and denial of documents, harassment of families, indefinite extensions of the deprivation of liberty for individuals convicted on politically motivated charges, the misuse of counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation and the violation of rights of persons who have been released from detention. While the release of persons – more than 150 in 2025 and 250 in March 2026 – recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners is welcome, the forcible expulsion from Belarus of many of those released indicates the lack of an overall improvement in the state of civil and political rights. The Special Rapporteur separately analyses violations of cultural rights through targeted repression and coercive restructuring of cultural space, education, language use and historical narratives, where manifestations of cultural and national identity and linguistic affiliation are increasingly treated as markers of political opposition.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present document after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction

A. Summary

1. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus was established by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 20/13. Since its establishment in 2012, the mandate has been renewed on a yearly basis, most recently for the thirteenth time, in 2025. The current mandate holder, Nils Muižnieks, took up the position on 1 November 2024. The present report is submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to Council resolution 58/19, and covers the period between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026.

2. The report provides an overview of human rights concerns in Belarus, including deaths in custody, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, denial of medical care, violations of fundamental freedoms, misuse of counter-terrorism and anti-extremist legislation, limitations on access to information, forcible expulsion of political prisoners and transnational repression.

3. In addition, the Special Rapporteur provides an analysis of the implementation by Belarus, since August 2020, of its human rights obligations related to cultural rights. He examines developments concerning the systematic political persecution of cultural figures, including journalists and publishers, and the designation of cultural organizations and initiatives as “extremist formations”, which results in criminal liability for participation in or cooperation with them. The Special Rapporteur analyses discrimination against speakers of Belarusian, repression of historical memory and national symbols, and violations affecting ethnic and religious minorities.

4. The Special Rapporteur notes that repression in Belarus has evolved beyond targeting political activists to encompass a systematic restructuring of cultural space, education, language use and historical narratives. Belarusian cultural and national identity and linguistic affiliation are increasingly treated as markers of political opposition.

5. The Special Rapporteur concludes that these patterns engage obligations under, inter alia, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which Belarus remains a State Party. The patterns described in the report engage obligations under articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; articles 2, 12, 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and articles 2 and 5 of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

6. The Special Rapporteur concludes that despite recent releases and pardons of persons recognized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as political prisoners, repression of persons with dissenting views continues.¹

B. Methodology

7. The findings of the present report are based on confidential submissions received from NGOs and academic institutions, allegation letters and urgent appeals transmitted by special procedures, documents issued by United Nations mechanisms, publicly available information, NGO reports and media reports.

8. The Special Rapporteur held consultations throughout the reporting period with international and Belarusian civil society actors, Belarusian mass media workers in exile, State actors, international and regional human rights mechanisms and other stakeholders. A public call for inputs for the report was issued in December 2025.²

¹ See, among others, A/HRC/47/49, A/HRC/52/68 and A/HRC/59/59.

² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2026/call-input-2026-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-belarus-human>.

II. Examination of Belarus by international bodies and mechanisms

9. Over the period under review, together with thematic special procedures, the Special Rapporteur addressed 12 joint communications, including allegation letters and urgent appeals, to Belarusian authorities,³ voicing concerns about alleged ill-treatment of persons in detention, deaths in custody, the denial of adequate medical care and psychiatric and psychological treatment in detention,⁴ including for women, older persons and persons with disabilities, the refusal to authorize travel for a detainee – under house arrest and subject to a travel ban – to undergo life-saving surgery, the denial of contact with family for women prisoners,⁵ the enforced disappearance of a released political prisoner who refused to be expelled to Lithuania in September 2025,⁶ the arbitrary use of article 411 of the Criminal Code as a punitive tool against politically persecuted detainees,⁷ the persecution of members of NGOs and defence lawyers,⁸ the deportation of a foreign student, separating her from her newborn child,⁹ the expulsion of 37 released political prisoners¹⁰ and a proposal to add a new, discriminatory, article (19.16) to the Code of Administrative Offences penalizing with a fine or arrest all forms of “propaganda of homosexuality, sex change, childlessness and paedophilia”.¹¹

10. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the Government’s seven replies, provided in Russian, to these communications. Furthermore, he positively notes the reports about the release of several detainees whose cases had been brought to the Government’s attention by special procedures. However, he deplores the fact that most of the alleged violations remain unaddressed.

11. During the reporting period, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted three opinions concerning Belarus: opinions No. 4/2025 and No. 33/2025, in April 2025, and opinion No. 50/2025, in August 2025.

12. Under the universal periodic review mechanism (fourth cycle), Belarus was reviewed on 3 November 2025.¹² In that connection, on 18 March 2026,¹³ the Human Rights Council adopted the outcome report on Belarus.¹⁴ A total of 101 States made 332 recommendations; 166 recommendations were supported by Belarus and 166 were noted.¹⁵ The review confirmed a continued pattern of serious issues regarding civil and political rights.

13. Belarus has reported that it supports many of the recommendations it has received, particularly recommendations on social policy, cooperation with international mechanisms, and selected institutional and legal reforms, and has stated that several recommendations on torture, fair trial and fundamental freedoms have already been implemented in domestic law. However, it did not support numerous recommendations relating to political repression, engagement with special procedures and reforms concerning freedom of expression, assembly and association, describing them as politicized or not reflective of national specificities.

14. On 10 September 2025, at the sixtieth session of the Human Rights Council, the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human rights in Belarus released a conference

³ All allegation letters, urgent appeals and State replies are available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

⁴ BLR 1/2026.

⁵ BLR 3/2025, BLR 4/2025, BLR 5/2025, BLR 7/2025, BLR 10/2025 and BLR 1/2026.

⁶ BLR 8/2025.

⁷ BLR 12/2025; see also BLR 5/2025.

⁸ BLR 9/2025.

⁹ BLR 6/2025.

¹⁰ BLR 11/2025.

¹¹ BLR 13/2025.

¹² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/by-index>.

¹³ Human Rights Council decision 61/101.

¹⁴ A/HRC/61/4.

¹⁵ See A/HRC/61/4/Add.1 and <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DnQ8zb8oy/?mibextid=wwXlfr>.

room paper,¹⁶ in which it concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the President, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, had participated in the crimes against humanity of political persecution and imprisonment.

15. On 27 February 2026, the Group presented a report¹⁷ to the Human Rights Council at its sixty-first session, in which it welcomed the release of political prisoners in Belarus during the previous year, but warned that their subsequent forced expulsion and arbitrary deportation, and the arbitrary seizure of identity documents, constituted a clear violation of international human rights standards.

16. In 2025, the Government of Belarus and the United Nations country team signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Belarus for 2026–2030, establishing the central framework for United Nations engagement in the country. The agreement covers issues such as advancing legislative alignment with international standards, reinforcing rule-of-law institutions, improving migration and asylum governance through gender- and age-sensitive approaches, promoting gender equality and prevention of domestic violence, and addressing demographic sustainability.

17. In May 2025, Lithuania submitted a referral to the International Court of Justice, alleging that Belarus had violated the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime by orchestrating a migrants' crisis.

18. On 12 March 2026, following another referral by Lithuania, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court concluded its preliminary examination and opened a formal investigation, finding reasonable grounds to believe that Belarusian authorities had been committing crimes against humanity, including deportation or forcible transfer, political persecution and other inhumane acts, since May 2020,¹⁸ reportedly affecting up to 600,000 people.

19. In June 2025, the Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted strong conclusions on Belarus' violations of freedom of association and other freedoms, and the ILO Governing Body appointed a Special Envoy to Belarus; a working group has been established to coordinate efforts by the ILO and other United Nations entities concerning Belarus.¹⁹ The ILO Committee of Experts, in its 2026 report on the application of international labour standards, and the ILO Governing Body, in its conclusions dated November 2025, confirmed the continued and serious deterioration of fundamental labour rights in Belarus.²⁰

III. Key human rights trends and concerns

A. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly

20. Freedom of association and freedom of assembly in Belarus remain nearly non-existent.²¹ Belarusian authorities continue to arbitrarily detain and convict individuals, in violation of due process and the rule of law, under various articles of the Criminal Code, including for insulting President Lukashenka, judges and officials; defamation; desecrating State symbols; disorderly conduct; supporting protest initiatives; vandalism; participation in

¹⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/belarus-truth-justice-and-reparations-needed-belarusian-victims-un-group?sub-site=HRC>.

¹⁷ A/HRC/61/57.

¹⁸ See <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/icc-office-prosecutor-concludes-preliminary-examinations-venezuela-ii-and-lithuania/belarus>.

¹⁹ See <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/GB355-INS-8-%5BNORMES-250918-001%5D-Web-EN.pdf>.

²⁰ See <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2026-%5BNORMES-251223-001%5D-Web-EN.pdf> and <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/GB355-INS-8-%5BNORMES-250918-001%5D-Web-EN.pdf>.

²¹ On the deterioration of enjoyment of freedom of association, see A/HRC/56/65.

so-called “group actions that constitute a severe breach of public order”; and other similar accusations.

21. In January 2026, the human rights NGO Lawtrend reported that at least 1,995 public associations, trade unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions and associations had been closed in Belarus since 2020. At least 1,220 non-profit organizations had been forcibly liquidated, including 78 foundations, 11 political parties, eight public associations, four trade unions and one religious organization. Another 770 entities self-liquidated. As of December 2025, as compared to 2021, the number of public associations had decreased by 45 per cent.²²

B. Freedom of expression and media freedom

22. In the World Press Freedom Index of 2025, Belarus ranked 166th out of 180 countries,²³ a drop of one place compared to 2024. The authorities continued to detain and fine journalists and other media workers, and prevent them from doing their work,²⁴ using vaguely defined legislative provisions on countering extremism or terrorism, often applying the current legislation retroactively. Between April 2025 and March 2026, the authorities designated 11 media outlets as “extremist formations” or “extremist organizations”.²⁵ In 2025 alone, 479 Telegram channels were designated as “extremist materials”.²⁶

23. The prosecution of those who subscribed to, commented on, reposted or “liked” online “extremist materials” continued. In February 2026, human rights defenders reiterated concerns about the continued selective and discriminatory application of article 130 of the Criminal Code (incitement of other social hatred) aimed at protecting officials as a separate protected group,²⁷ which does not meet the threshold test outlined in the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.²⁸

C. Access to information

24. The lack of transparency in judicial proceedings remains a concern. Since March 2025, authorities have removed court schedules from official websites, limiting civil society’s ability to monitor trials, and often published information on convictions only after sentences had been served. Civil society reports also indicate expanded restrictions on access to and dissemination of information, including a sharp increase in designated “extremist” materials. According to the Human Rights Centre Viasna, as at 5 December 2025, 8,172 materials had been listed, including 2,107 added in 2025 alone.²⁹

D. Misuse of legislation related to terrorism and extremism

25. The authorities continue to misuse counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation to persecute opposition figures, human rights defenders, journalists and activists, including cultural and academic actors. Authorities deny responsibility for arbitrary detention and continue targeting individuals after release by placing them on “extremist” or “terrorist” lists, thereby prolonging restrictions on their rights. Repression has become increasingly

²² See <https://www.lawtrend.org/english/monitoring-of-the-situation-with-freedom-of-association-and-the-status-of-civil-society-organizations-in-the-republic-of-belarus-january-2026> and <https://isans.org/analysis/belarus-review/belarus-review-by-isans-january-19-2026.html>.

²³ See <https://rsf.org/en/country/belarus>.

²⁴ See <https://baj.media/en/aglyady-manitoringi/repressions-against-journalists-in-belarus-2025-list-of-colleagues-in-prison/>.

²⁵ See <https://baj.media/be/aglyady-manitoringi/spis-jekstrjemisckih-medya/> (in Belarusian).

²⁶ See <https://humanconstantia.org/en/results-of-the-fight-against-extremism-in-belarus-in-2024/>.

²⁷ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119682>.

²⁸ See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/one-pager-incitement-hatred-rabat-threshold-test>.

²⁹ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119388>.

sophisticated: listed individuals face severe limitations, including barriers to employment and education,³⁰ and, in the case of those designated as “terrorists”, restrictions on SIM cards, banking and basic financial transactions. Removal procedures remain opaque, and effective remedies appear to be lacking.

26. Together with other special procedures, the Special Rapporteur raised allegations of intentional ill-treatment of prisoners designated as “extremists” or “terrorists”.³¹ Concerns persist that such prisoners face severe restrictions on receiving money transfers and packages, leaving them dependent on inadequate provisions from penitentiary institutions.

E. Right to life and physical integrity

27. Belarus remains the only country in Europe that applies the death penalty. Under the guise of countering extremism, the authorities have restricted public access to independent information on the death penalty. On 16 January 2026, the Baranavichy District and City Court declared that media resources relating to a campaign by human rights defenders against the death penalty³² were “extremist” materials and the Ministry of Information included them on the list of “extremist” materials.

28. In June 2025 and in March 2026, special procedure mandate holders addressed communications to the Government raising concerns about several deaths and suicides in various correctional colonies, and about persons being denied adequate physical and mental healthcare.³³ In early 2026, a number of NGOs reported on several cases of attempted suicides among political prisoners in detention.

F. Violation of rights of persons deprived of liberty

29. Severe ill-treatment and arbitrary detention persist, including in the context of repeated extensions of prison terms under article 411 of the Criminal Code (malicious disobedience). The Special Rapporteur, with other special procedures, has repeatedly raised concerns about this practice with the authorities.³⁴

30. The Special Rapporteur received consistent reports of inhuman detention conditions and ill-treatment in prisons and colonies. They included reports of arbitrary disciplinary measures, denial of adequate medical and psychological care, prolonged solitary confinement and incommunicado detention, restrictions on contact with families and lawyers, poor hygiene, insufficient food and clothing, forced labour, violence by inmates that was tolerated or incited by staff, and psychological abuse.

31. The deteriorating health of many prisoners, life-threatening conditions of detention for vulnerable detainees and the lack of mental health support, with punishment for suicide attempts, all evoke serious concern. While ill-treatment is widespread, those detained for actual or perceived opposition are reportedly specifically targeted, with even minors being put in isolation.³⁵

32. Special procedures sent several communications to the Government concerning numerous cases of alleged ill-treatment in detention, naming suspected perpetrators. However, State responses suggest that no investigations have been initiated. Special procedures raised particular concern about widespread ill-treatment in women’s penal colonies No. 4 and 24, including gender-based violence such as strip searches by male staff, denial of hygiene products and medical care, and forced labour during menstruation. It

³⁰ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/bili-tri-raza-v-den-istoria-unogo-politzaklucennogo-iz-belarusi/a-76033384?maca=rus-Red-Telegram-dwbelarus> (in Russian).

³¹ See BLR 3/2025, BLR 4/2025, BLR 5/2025, BLR 7/2025, BLR 10/2025 and BLR 1/2026.

³² See <https://dp.spring96.org/en>.

³³ See BLR 4/2025 and BLR 1/2026.

³⁴ See BLR 5/2024, BLR 6/2024, BLR 2/2025, BLR 3/2025, BLR 5/2025, BLR 7/2025 and BLR 12/2025.

³⁵ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-belarusi-za-izmenu-gosudarstvu-sudat-daze-detej/a-71842299> (in Russian).

especially affects those convicted in connection with the protests held in 2020.³⁶ Special procedure mandate holders also raised concerns about restrictions on communication between detained mothers and their young children.³⁷

33. Special procedures have received reports of violations of confidentiality perpetrated by psychologists working in penal colonies and of a prohibition on reading certain types of books, including history books. The Special Rapporteur received reports of reprisals against inmates who submit complaints to prosecutorial monitors or international mechanisms who conduct visits, and reports of failure to transmit the complaints to the monitors, undermining access to remedies.³⁸ Allegations also suggest the possible complicity of penitentiary administrations, the department responsible for correctional services, and the prosecutorial offices in concealing ill-treatment.

G. Coercive psychiatric treatment

34. In April 2025, special procedures raised concerns about at least 33 individuals subjected by courts to coercive psychiatric treatment following prosecutions for exercising their rights, including by participating in protests and for alleged insulting officials.³⁹ The authorities tried these individuals behind closed doors because they are considered persons “who have committed a socially dangerous act” under article 6 (13) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Moreover, the authorities held many of them incommunicado. While 8 of those individuals have been released, the fate of at least 25 of the individuals remain unknown, raising concerns about possible enforced disappearance.

35. There are strong indications that such treatment is used as an alternative to imprisonment. Those affected are held indefinitely – incommunicado – inside hospitals, without access to correspondence, amnesty, presidential pardons or parole, and with contact with families strictly controlled by hospitals’ head physicians, and little clarity as to any genuine medical basis for their confinement. Due to stigma around mental illnesses, family members of human rights defenders in such situations do not contact them.

H. Political prisoners

36. Between January 2025 and March 2026, President Lukashenko released more than 400 persons who were recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners, with many of the releases authorized following negotiations with representatives of the Government of the United States of America. However, the Special Rapporteur continues to receive regular reports about new politically motivated arrests, detentions and prosecutions, and many of those still detained are in a particularly vulnerable situation.

37. As at 31 March 2026, compiled reports from human rights organizations and initiatives indicated that 954 detainees were political prisoners, including 122 women, and that 23 persons had been subjected to forced psychiatric treatment.⁴⁰ These numbers constantly fluctuate,⁴¹ as dozens of individuals are released monthly after serving sentences, and others are transferred to open facilities or home confinement or pardoned,⁴² and with new arrests happening at the same time.

38. The latest wave of repression has particularly targeted persons supporting Ukraine. Since February 2022, the authorities have convicted at least 403 individuals and over 200 were still in prison as of February 2026. Following law enforcement access in February 2025 to the “Belaruski Hajun” chatbot, by February 2026 authorities had reportedly brought at

³⁶ See [BLR 3/2025](#) and [BLR 5/2025](#).

³⁷ See [BLR 7/2025](#).

³⁸ See [BLR 1/2026](#).

³⁹ See [BLR 3/2025](#).

⁴⁰ See <https://dissidentby.com/en>.

⁴¹ On 3 December 2025, the reports reflected a total of 1,197 detainees recognized as political prisoners.

⁴² In October and November 2025, at least 44 political prisoners were released – 38 had completed their prison terms and at least 6 were pardoned.

least 183 people into custody for sharing information on Russian troop movements.⁴³ Since early 2026, trials have reportedly led to 155 convictions for “facilitating extremism”, with those individuals added by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the official “extremist” list.

39. The “Black Nightingales” case involves six individuals, including five minors, detained for anti-war graffiti, who were allegedly ill-treated and prosecuted on reportedly fabricated terrorism charges. According to one NGO submission for the present report, four of those individuals remain in detention, including Aliaksandra Pulinovich, who was arrested at age 16.

40. The list of individuals detained as political prisoners includes 147 older persons. Reportedly, if an older detainee has a State pension, penitentiary institutions retain half of the pension, creating financial incentives, while detainees without labour pensions receive no social pension and are rarely granted disability status.⁴⁴ Despite age and health conditions, they continue to face disciplinary measures. In 2025, 430 minors were put on trial and 102 were sentenced to prison. Forty teenagers were convicted under political statutes.⁴⁵

41. Reports persist of released political prisoners being coerced to leave Belarus within 48 hours or face criminal charges.⁴⁶ The authorities forcibly deported most of the political prisoners released in 2025. In an allegation letter dated 22 October 2025, special procedures expressed concern over the forcible expulsion of 37 individuals, in some cases without valid identification documents, on 11 September 2025, citing procedural violations and secretive transfers and denial of the option to remain in Belarus.⁴⁷ In addition, reports noted the confiscation of personal belongings and manuscripts.⁴⁸

42. On 19 March 2026, the authorities released around 250 political prisoners, deporting 15 high-profile individuals without documents or the choice to remain. The 235 others remained in Belarus but are likely to face ongoing restrictions and surveillance.⁴⁹

43. All those expelled remain in a legal limbo without clarity as to whether they can safely return to Belarus, whether they have criminal records and whether their releases were duly registered in national databases. Some report being on a list of fugitives, others report the initiation of new in absentia proceedings against them. In late March 2026, at least 16 former prisoners reported that their Belarusian passports had been cancelled, creating obstacles for their legalization abroad.⁵⁰

44. The Special Rapporteur notes that release of persons recognized by civil society as political prisoners occurred without rehabilitation or redress.⁵¹ President Lukashenko denies the existence of political prisoners and politically motivated trials, describing released individuals as “traitors and spies”,⁵² pardoned to avoid deaths in custody and the resulting blame by foreign actors.

45. The Special Rapporteur continued to receive numerous reports of pressure placed on, and harassment of, relatives of persons in exile and political prisoners,⁵³ and similar treatment of the lawyers of exiles and political prisoners. The authorities deem lawyers in politically motivated cases to be “disloyal”; such lawyers often face disbarment and persecution. During the period under review, at least three lawyers have faced disbarment; between 2020 and October 2025, over 140 lawyers lost their licences; as of early 2025, at least six were

⁴³ See https://t.me/dw_belarus/18619 (in Russian).

⁴⁴ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/kak-pensionery-v-belarusi-vyzivaut-v-turme/a-76123668?maca=rus-Red-Telegram-dwbelarus> (in Russian).

⁴⁵ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/bili-tri-raza-v-den-istoria-unogo-politzaklucennogo-iz-belarusi/a-76033384?maca=rus-Red-Telegram-dwbelarus> (in Russian).

⁴⁶ See https://t.me/dw_belarus/18529 (in Russian).

⁴⁷ See BLR 11/2025.

⁴⁸ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2026/03/03/zayava-ab-sistematychnym-kanfiskavanni-i-zniknenni-autarskih-rukapisau.html>.

⁴⁹ See <https://youtu.be/-Pk6VM29wH8?si=MyS4geHQLxH8FzB> (minute 1:27)

⁵⁰ See <https://www.svaboda.org/a/33720776.html> (in Belarusian).

⁵¹ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119541>.

⁵² See <https://youtu.be/qKA3zkckHco?si=t5vzSA8V8JiuNwUh>, (minute 1:20).

⁵³ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119358>.

imprisoned on politically motivated charges. Even in exile, risks persist, and the authorities designated the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers an “extremist formation” in August 2025.⁵⁴

I. Transnational repression

46. During the reporting period, authorities conducted in absentia trials against exiled activists, using them as a routine tool alongside public “demonstrations” of property seizures and forced entry.

47. Reports indicate that authorities sought information on exiled individuals by hacking private correspondence and creating fraudulent chatbots imitating monitoring or solidarity initiatives to gather data to be used for intimidation, the discrediting of initiatives, or subsequent in absentia prosecution.

48. On 9 October 2025, NGOs reported that more than 10 Viasna members had been added to a joint wanted persons database of Belarus and the Russian Federation.

49. Submissions indicate that pressure on relatives remains a key tool of repression,⁵⁵ accompanied by public threats, while exiled individuals are unable to renew passports abroad.

50. The authorities have extended the designation of entities as “extremist formations”, and social media as “extremist materials”, to humanitarian organizations (including those providing assistance to refugees),⁵⁶ cultural organizations abroad that preserve Belarusian heritage and community linkages, and NGOs that help Belarusians engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Such designations expose individuals in Belarus interacting with and accessing the sites of such organizations to legal liability.

51. Authorities apply post-release pressure, including summonses and demands to leave Belarus, alongside prosecutions in absentia, asset seizures and the intimidation of relatives, creating a climate of fear beyond the country’s borders. Authorities also increasingly subject returnees from abroad to politically motivated checks and detention.

52. On 1 February 2026, a Presidential decree introduced a mandatory certificate of “attitude towards military duty” for men aged 18–27, linking access to basic services, such as passports and driving licences, to military compliance,⁵⁷ and potentially compelling those abroad to return, increasing risks of persecution.

J. LGBTIQ+ discrimination

53. During the reporting period, Belarusian authorities adopted discriminatory legislation targeting LGBTIQ+ persons. In 2025, amendments to the Children’s Rights Act identified so-called “propaganda of homosexual relations” as harmful, restricting freedom of expression and access to information. In April 2025, the Ministry of Culture amended its decree on “erotic materials” to classify “homosexuality, lesbian love” and the “desire to live and be seen by others as a person of an opposite sex” as “non-traditional sexual relationship or behaviour”.⁵⁸

54. On 13 March 2026, the House of Representatives approved,⁵⁹ upon second reading, a bill introducing a new article to the Code of Administrative Offences on “propaganda of homosexuality, sex change, childlessness and paedophilia”, which prohibits “distribution, in any form, of information aimed at shaping citizens’ perceptions about the attractiveness of homosexual relations, sex change [and] childlessness or about the recognition of paedophilia

⁵⁴ See [BLR 9/2025](#).

⁵⁵ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119358>.

⁵⁶ See <https://ndbelarus.com/2026/01/15/humanitarian-aid-to-belarusian-russian-and-ukrainian-refugees-under-attack-by-belarusian-security-services/>.

⁵⁷ See https://t.me/dw_belarus/18503 (in Russian).

⁵⁸ See <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/belarus>.

⁵⁹ See https://www.instagram.com/p/DWB2VtVIHzM/?igsh=Yjc0NzZqcZltczA%3D&img_index=6.

as permissible”, and punishes such acts by fines or administrative arrest.⁶⁰ This legislation falsely conflates advocacy for women’s bodily autonomy and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights with unlawful punishable conduct, which will reinforce harmful stigma.

55. The Special Rapporteur notes that the situation for LGBTIQ+ individuals in Belarus is worsening, marked by legislative discrimination and increased harassment by law enforcement, including raids, arbitrary detention and coercive practices, such as entrapment and pressure on relatives. Transgender persons face additional barriers, particularly in accessing healthcare and legal gender recognition.⁶¹

IV. Cultural rights

A. Political persecution of cultural figures as part of the broader wave of repression since 2020

56. Repression has targeted not only political and civic activists, but a wide range of cultural figures, such as actors, artists, musicians, writers, publishers, scholars and activists, engaged in preserving the cultural, historical, linguistic and religious heritage of Belarus, including that of its minority communities. The significance of the repression of cultural rights goes beyond its immediate human rights impact. Cultural figures maintain and develop what is distinctive about Belarus today, which can be subsequently transmitted intergenerationally.

57. The increasing political and economic dependence of Belarus on the Russian Federation has been accompanied by the growing cultural and linguistic influence of the Russian Federation on Belarus. This dependence has been reinforced by the isolation of Belarus from the West and the Belarusian authorities’ active persecution of individuals and communities with ties to the West. State policy in the cultural sphere is characterized by pronounced anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian narratives, alongside a strong pro-Russian orientation.

58. Due to the continuing repression inside the country, much of Belarusian cultural life has been displaced abroad. The Special Rapporteur received information that the authorities portray links to Western institutions, educational opportunities abroad and diaspora initiatives as grounds for suspicion and repression. Submissions for the present report noted the treatment of certain exile-linked educational and cultural institutions as allegedly destabilizing; the designation of the online resources of those institutions as “extremist”; and the use, in that context, of rhetoric framing European or Western values as hostile to State interests.

59. The effective exercise of cultural rights requires the ability to participate, associate, assemble, impart and receive information and express oneself. Thus, disproportionate restrictions on freedom of association, assembly and expression – a well-documented problem in Belarus – impinge on cultural rights as well. The fulfilment of cultural rights also implies the existence of pluralism, while the Belarusian authorities have in recent years imposed a stultifying homogeneity in many areas of life.

B. Persecution of individuals involved in cultural initiatives and organizations and of activists

60. The Special Rapporteur received reports about continued repression in the cultural sphere, including detentions and prosecutions of cultural figures, censorship and the

⁶⁰ See [BLR 13/2025](#).

⁶¹ See <https://wp.tbeltarus.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/the-monitoring-of-repression-and-discrimination-against-belarusian-lgbtq-community-in-2025-en.pdf>.

designation of artistic works and actors as “extremist”.⁶² As at 15 March 2026, at least 148 cultural figures, including 32 writers, were imprisoned or under restriction, and 330 books had been banned.⁶³

61. Writers in Belarus are prosecuted under broadly defined “extremism” and related charges, often without due process, in violation of international obligations. Repression extends beyond imprisonment to censorship, the blocking of Internet sites, book bans and the closure of independent publishers, while detained writers face ill-treatment and isolation. Authorities marginalize “undesirable” figures, removing works from curricula and public access – including those of Svetlana Alexievich, a winner of the Nobel Prize in literature – and expanding blacklists that restrict publishing, performances and artistic activity.

62. Individuals behind independent and informal cultural initiatives in Belarus face repression and criminalization. The unregistered art space Sklad Butelek in Barysaw, which operated as an informal platform for artistic expression, was designated as an “extremist formation”.⁶⁴ Sergey Salash, associated with that initiative, has remained in detention since November 2025, facing extremism charges. The Special Rapporteur notes that censorship and surveillance restrict cultural expression, with blacklisting and prosecutions driving self-censorship and exile.⁶⁵

C. Arrests and prosecution of journalists and media workers

63. Journalists and media workers remained highly targeted in 2025, subjected to arrest and searches, and more than 100 prosecutions in absentia were conducted. As of December 2025, 28 journalists and media workers remained imprisoned, at least 42 media projects had been designated as “extremist”, exposing journalists to criminal liability,⁶⁶ and at least 30 outlets had relocated abroad.

64. The repression of media workers appeared to intensify amid the release of other individuals convicted for exercising their rights, who were often subsequently expelled from the country. In November 2025, the authorities sentenced four journalists to house arrest on charges of promoting “extremist” activity and designated them as “extremists”. During one week in February 2026, the authorities sentenced six journalists to prison, including two on charges of “high treason”.⁶⁷

D. Arrests and persecution of publishers and distributors of books

65. A new category of individuals has emerged as subjects of systemic persecution – independent publishers and distributors of books. On 17 and 18 February 2026, several publishers and book distributors were arrested in Minsk.⁶⁸ Repression targets not only individuals,⁶⁹ but also legal entities, such as independent publishing houses and organizations

⁶² See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2025/02/20/manitoryng-parushennyau-kulturnyh-pravou-i-pravou-chalaveka-u-dachynenni-da-dzeyachau-kulturny-belarus-2024-god.html>.

⁶³ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2026/03/16/hronika-parushennyau-pravou-chalaveka-u-sfery-kulturny-1-15-sakavika-2026-goda.html>. See also <http://mininform.gov.by/news/actual/spisok-iz-35-naimenovaniy-pechatnykh-izdaniy-zapreshchennykh-k-rasprostraneniya-na-territorii-respub/> (in Russian).

⁶⁴ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/119385>, <https://nashaniva.com/ru/382897> and <https://www.mvd.gov.by/ru/news/8642> (in Russian).

⁶⁵ See <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628f9ae10b12c8255bd8814d/t/68947be6bf78280a1c0da0d3/1754561510275/PEN+-+UPR+submission+-+Belarus+-+2025.pdf>.

⁶⁶ See <https://baj.media/en/aglyady-manitoringi/figures-of-the-year-2025/>.

⁶⁷ See https://interbaj.substack.com/p/six-journalists-sentenced-in-one?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=6366905&post_id=190377028&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=3hkx1x&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email.

⁶⁸ See <https://nashaniva.com/ru/388710> and <https://www.dw.com/ru/u-belarusi-hvala-represij-suprac-knigavydaucou-sto-vadoma/a-76293678?maca=rus-Red-Telegram-dwbelarus> (in Russian).

⁶⁹ See <https://reform.news/lukashenko-zajavil-chto-budet-prodolzhat-repressii-protiv-opponentov-negljadja-ni-na-kakie-zakony> (in Russian).

that have relocated abroad. On 16 February 2026, the State Security Committee designated the publishing house Gutenberg Publisher as an “extremist formation” and its social media as “extremist” materials.⁷⁰ On 27 February 2026, the State Security Committee designated PEN Belarus⁷¹ as an “extremist formation”.⁷²

66. The authorities reportedly confiscate books for “extremism” checks and subsequently ban them as extremist materials; as of March 2026, more than 225 publications, including children’s, fiction and historical works, had been banned, exposing individuals to liability even for possession. The cited grounds for censorship – “risks to national security” and “harm to moral, religious or traditional values” or classification as “extremist materials” – reflect broad, ideologically driven restrictions on access to information. Scrutiny of publications is conducted by the republican commission on the assessment of symbols and information products, which is composed predominantly of State ideologists and law enforcement officials.⁷³ The authorities remove publications from “extremist” publishers from sale, with distributors facing prosecution. Since 2020, authorities have systematically shut down independent publishing outlets or forced independent publishers into exile.

67. On 3 March 2026, the State Security Committee designated the non-existent “Coalition of Publishing Houses” as an “extremist formation”, claiming that it was an association that included Kamunikat.org, an online library,⁷⁴ and the Łohvinaŭ Publishing House and the Andrei Yanushkevich Publishing House, which print texts in the Belarusian language and operate from abroad.⁷⁵ On 9 March 2026, the Ministry of Internal Affairs extended the extremist label to the social media and websites of those organizations.⁷⁶ Under domestic legislation, the designation also affects readers, who can be arrested for possession of banned materials. In addition, the authorities reportedly seek to link publishing houses to foreign funding.

E. Persecution of students, teachers and scholars and targeting of educational institutions

68. The cultural policy implemented by the Government of Belarus is based on the concept for the development of the national cultural space in all spheres of society for 2024–2026. One NGO, in its submission for the present report, noted that education (and its cultural dimension) is not conceived of as a free space for critical thinking, but rather as a tool for reproducing State ideology.

69. The Special Rapporteur expresses concern over the growing repression of students, teachers and scholars, particularly those engaged in critical examination of Belarusian history. The authorities have put academic freedom under pressure for many years and, according to the Academic Freedom Index, such freedom in Belarus is currently “completely restricted”.⁷⁷

70. Pro-Russian ideological narratives are increasingly promoted in Belarusian education, with universities advancing the concept of a shared “Russian world”. Cooperation with Russian institutions and the Orthodox Church reinforces common narratives, traditional values and Union State alignment.

⁷⁰ See <https://reform.news/en/gutenberg-publisher-designated-an-extremist-formation>.

⁷¹ The PEN Belarus centre was dissolved by the Supreme Court on 9 August 2021 and subsequently relocated to Poland. PEN Belarus plays a leading role in defending Belarusian culture, language and identity, including by monitoring violations of human rights of cultural workers. See <https://www.pen-international.org/news/belarus-pen-belarus-labelled-extremist-amid-systematic-crackdown-on-cultural-rights>.

⁷² See <https://www.pen-international.org/news/belarus-pen-belarus-labelled-extremist-amid-systematic-crackdown-on-cultural-rights>.

⁷³ See https://youtu.be/CO8QTLHM30g?si=xaa_LJ5U5GGgoEyd (minute 4:24).

⁷⁴ The website Kamunikat.org is blocked in Belarus and designated as “extremist”. It is subjected regularly to hacker attacks.

⁷⁵ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2026/03/19/zayava-ab-sistemnym-perasledze-u-knizhnaj-sfery-i-pryznanni-litaraturnyh-arganizacyzj-ekstremisczkimi-farmiravannyami-2.html>.

⁷⁶ Submission from International Strategic Action Network for Security.

⁷⁷ See https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update_2025.pdf.

71. Authorities have tightened ideological control over education through appointments, curriculum censorship, limits on independent teaching, and the establishment of “deputy rector for security” posts, often held by State Security Committee members.⁷⁸

72. Belarusian scholars and students face strict controls on international travel, requiring official permission, alongside broader administrative obstacles.⁷⁹ Repression limits the collection of reliable data, but available information indicates widespread dismissals⁸⁰ and prosecutions for dissent.⁸¹

73. On 1 July 2024, Minsk Regional Court sentenced 20 exiled intellectuals in absentia to between 10 and 11.5 years’ imprisonment on extremism-related charges, referring to them as “Tsikhanouskaya’s analysts”.⁸²

74. On 15 September 2025, the Prosecutor General submitted a petition to formally ban the activities and symbols of the European Humanities University. The University relocated to Lithuania after the Government of Belarus revoked its licence, characterizing it as too “pro-Western.” The Prosecutor General labelled the university an “extremist organization”, accusing it of promoting alternative historical interpretations and democratic values in order to destabilize Belarus.⁸³

75. Authorities continue to treat links to Western institutions, study abroad programmes and diaspora initiatives as grounds for suspicion, labelling related entities and resources as “extremist” and portraying Western values as hostile.

F. Discrimination against users of the Belarusian language

76. The Constitution of Belarus recognizes Belarusian and Russian as official State languages (art. 17) and guarantees the right to use one’s native language and choose the language of communication (art. 50), alongside participation in cultural life (art. 51). Together, these provisions establish a legal basis for using one’s native language in the contexts of education, access to information, cultural activities and communication with State authorities, as part of one’s cultural rights. The Belarusian language is classified as potentially vulnerable by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

77. Despite the institutionalization of bilingualism and formal constitutional equal status, in practice the Belarusian language is subjected to systematic marginalization – there is de facto dominance of the Russian language in public administration, education, media⁸⁴ and everyday use. Reportedly, the State has failed to take adequate positive measures to ensure the preservation and development of the Belarusian language.

78. Data from the 2019 census indicate that the proportion of individuals identifying Belarusian as their native language decreased from 86 per cent in 1999 to 61 per cent in 2019 (a reduction of over 2 million persons), while the proportion of those using Belarusian at home fell from 41 per cent to 28 per cent (a decrease of close to 1.1 million persons).⁸⁵

79. These dynamics are reinforced through State media narratives and the activities of pro-Russian actors. In 2025, only one of six State television channels and one of four national radio stations broadcast in Belarusian; most content, including cultural programmes, is in

⁷⁸ See <https://belarusnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Analytical-Article-no.-10.pdf>.

⁷⁹ See <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20250611102011509>.

⁸⁰ See <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1846696/FULLTEXT01.pdf#page=99>.

⁸¹ See, for example, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2024-09-13-belarusian-state-medical-university/>.

⁸² See <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2024-07-01-multiple-institutions/>.

⁸³ See <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2025-09-15-european-humanities-university/>.

⁸⁴ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2026/01/21/aglyad-parushennyau-mounyh-pravou-u-belarusi-z-1-lipenyapa-31-snezhnya-2025-goda.html>. See also <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2025>.

⁸⁵ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2022/09/26/belaruskaya-mova-u-peryyad-gramadska-palitychnaga-kryzisu-pravy-mounaj-dyskryminacyi.html>.

Russian.⁸⁶ This trend is linked to long-standing State policies marginalizing the Belarusian language and promoting the Russian language and cultural integration with the Russian Federation.

80. Human rights monitors report that violations against Belarusian-language users have increased since August 2020, as authorities increasingly treat the use of Belarusian as a sign of political disloyalty and target both public figures and the general public. The authorities use language and culture as tools of ideological control, promoting State-aligned “patriotic” values and restricting independent linguistic and cultural expression to consolidate political power and suppress dissent.

81. Marginalization of the Belarusian language and discrimination against those who use it are systemic across State institutions, including in the public administration, courts, detention settings, education, media and official communication. Although the majority of people in the country identify Belarusian as their native language, its everyday use remains limited, with official data showing that, particularly in urban areas, it is spoken regularly only by a minority.

82. Restrictions on the Belarusian language reflect a persistent, institutionalized pattern of discrimination that is tolerated or enabled by State bodies. The lack of effective protection creates an environment where the use of Belarusian is discouraged and may lead to negative consequences from government officials, administrative pressure or punitive measures against individuals who insist on exercising their linguistic rights.

83. The marginalization and repression of Belarusian language use undermine not only individual rights but also the collective cultural heritage of the Belarusian people. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that the protection of linguistic rights is integral to the realization of human rights as a whole.

G. Suppression of Belarusian-language initiatives and education

84. Since 2020, the authorities have systematically dismantled independent Belarusian-language initiatives under “extremism” laws, including by closing independent publishing houses. Publications in the Belarusian language reportedly face heightened scrutiny by State control bodies. As a result, the publication of Belarusian-language literature has declined; such literature comprised only 12.5 per cent of publications in 2024, compared to 80.9 per cent in Russian.⁸⁷

85. Before August 2020, Belarusian-language education existed, to a limited extent, mainly at the primary level and was supported by civil society. Structural constraints – limited higher education in Belarusian, scarce materials and weak State support – led to its gradual decline, with only a small proportion, especially outside rural areas, of students educated in Belarusian. Opportunities for university study and research in Belarusian have also narrowed. Education reforms have further reduced Belarusian-language instruction, while increasing ideologization and alignment with Russian curricula; there has been a decline in Belarusian content at all levels.

86. On 5 August 2025, in response to an appeal lodged by an activist, the Ministry of Economy reported that only 3 of its 3,044 legal acts (0.1 per cent) had been issued in Belarusian.⁸⁸ On 5 September 2025, in response to the request of an activist, one national company refused to provide technical documentation in Belarusian, citing the risk that consumers would misunderstand technical terms.⁸⁹

87. The denial of Belarusian-language education, the suppression of cultural initiatives, and limitations on access to one’s own language in the administration of justice constitute unjustified and disproportionate interference with cultural rights.

⁸⁶ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2023/12/26/rusifikacyya-belarusi-sfera-kultury.html>.

⁸⁷ See <https://t.me/bellitinfo/1795> (in Belarusian).

⁸⁸ See <https://t.me/prawanamovu/275> (in Belarusian).

⁸⁹ See <https://t.me/prawanamovu/299> (in Belarusian).

H. Discrimination in the administration of justice and detention

88. Detainees face severe restrictions on expression and cultural rights, including the denial of access to uncensored cultural and religious reading and video materials and to creative activity. Access to Belarusian-language content is particularly limited, with some materials classified as “extremist”, leading to their confiscation.

89. Individuals insisting on using Belarusian in official proceedings, including court hearings, face discrimination, delays or refusals, with reports of harsher penalties imposed, despite constitutional guarantees. In detention, use of Belarusian can lead to ill-treatment, disciplinary sanctions, restricted communication and other discriminatory practices by staff. NGO submissions indicated that there are reports that some penitentiary staff explicitly announce that the facility is a “Russian colony” and thus the use of the Belarusian language is not allowed therein.

I. Repression of historical memory and persecution for the use of national symbols

90. The white-red-white flag and the Pahonia emblem (coat of arms) constitute core elements of Belarusian historical identity, associated with the Belarusian People’s Republic of 1918 and earlier State traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While not recognized as official State symbols under current legislation, members of civil society use them widely as markers of national statehood and identity, historical continuity and cultural expression.

91. Since 2020, however, the Belarusian authorities have increasingly and systematically reclassified the use of such symbols as markers of political dissent and opposition and, in many cases, as indicators of “extremist” activity. Individuals displaying white-red-white symbols or the Pahonia emblem face administrative and criminal sanctions, including arrest, fines, detention and prosecution. Many politically motivated administrative prosecutions in 2022 and 2023 were linked to the use of national symbols, often under article 24.23 of the Code of Administrative Offences, on violations of rules for assembly. There is no legal ban on the white-red-white flag or the Pahonia emblem and neither is listed as extremist. Moreover, the authorities officially recognize the cultural value of the Pahonia emblem. Imposing sanctions on the use of historical symbols restricts cultural rights and interferes with freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

92. In Views adopted on 17 July 2025,⁹⁰ the Human Rights Committee found that Belarus had violated article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by imposing fines for displaying white-red-white symbols without assessing, or demonstrating, the necessity and proportionality of those fines. Pursuant to article 2 (3) (a) of the Covenant, Belarus was under an obligation to provide the authors of the communication with remedies and undertake legal reforms; the Committee requested Belarus to provide, within 180 days, information on the measures taken to give effect to the Views.

93. Since 2022, legislative amendments and new regulations have imposed State control over cultural activity, requiring ideological conformity and restricting alternative historical perspectives. These measures have led to sanctions for displaying national symbols and the closure or designation as “extremist” of organizations promoting Belarusian identity.⁹¹

94. The authorities have restricted or banned cultural events linked to Belarusian identity, detaining participants and subjecting organizers to administrative and criminal liability. These measures systematically suppress symbolic expression of identity and have nearly eliminated independent spaces for historical memory outside State-controlled narratives.

⁹⁰ *Kachurets et al. v. Belarus* (CCPR/C/144/D/J/1).

⁹¹ See <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628f9ae10b12c8255bd8814d/t/68947be6bf78280a1c0da0d3/1754561510275/PEN+-+UPR+submission+-+Belarus+-+2025.pdf>.

J. Control of memorialization practices

95. The Special Rapporteur received information about monuments and sites linked to Belarusian pre-Soviet identity having been neglected, altered or restricted, including memorials to political repression and for national figures. The authorities often ban independent grass-roots commemorations, reflecting broader efforts to control historical memory and suppress alternative narratives.

96. Such control has also a transnational reach. For example, the Investigative Committee of Belarus annually initiates in absentia criminal proceedings against participants of the Belarusian Freedom Day (25 March) celebrations held abroad.⁹² Such events mark the anniversary of the 1918 independence of the Belarusian People's Republic.

K. State-driven reinterpretation of the Soviet past

97. Authorities promote a pro-Soviet historical narrative, emphasizing ties with the Russian Federation. This includes the portrayal of the former Soviet Union as having been a central pillar of Belarusian statehood and identity.

98. Authorities use so-called “genocide trials” – State-initiated proceedings on Second World War atrocities, formally aimed at investigating crimes committed against the population under Nazi occupation – to promote an official narrative of wartime victimhood and Soviet continuity, while downplaying Soviet repression and limiting alternative interpretations. Such State-led investigations and “genocide trials” are accompanied by extensive propaganda efforts and integration into educational materials to reinforce this narrative, marginalizing independent scholarship and alternative interpretations of history and risking the politicization of historical justice.

L. Rewriting historical narratives and transforming the teaching of history

99. Educational reforms and informal practices also increasingly promote interpretations aligned with official State ideology and Russian historical narratives, while marginalizing alternative perspectives. The Special Rapporteur observes that core human rights principles of participation, consultation and pluralism are routinely undercut by top-down State propaganda. State discourse promotes what might be termed the “russo-sovietization” of the past; at the same time, new historical narratives position Belarus in geopolitical confrontation with the West, while propagating greater ties with the Russian Federation. Government propaganda focuses increasingly on patriotism, civic duties and combat readiness.

100. As mentioned by some NGOs in their submissions, the education system has become a key instrument for shaping national identity in line with pro-government and pro-Russian narratives. This includes the promotion of concepts such as a “common historical space” and the increased integration of Belarusian and Russian educational frameworks. The establishment of “historical clubs” and the organization of State-sponsored historical events often emphasize Soviet-era narratives, glorify State continuity with the former Soviet Union and minimize or reinterpret Soviet-era repression.

101. One NGO highlighted that new history textbooks for secondary education present a revised narrative that highlights integration with the former Russian Empire and the former Soviet Union while marginalizing key elements of Belarusian national history, including the Belarusian People's Republic. A new textbook, introduced for the 2025/26 school year, presents the 2020 protests as a “coup”, downplays Soviet repression, minimizes Western contributions in the Second World War and frames the “real” independence of Belarus as beginning with Aliaksandr Lukashenka in 1994. With regard to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation,

⁹² See <https://belta.by/society/view/sk-spisok-podozrevaemyh-po-delu-ekstremistov-zarubezhjja-popolnilsja-na-104-familii-634593-2024/> (in Russian).

Belarus has endorsed the area's annexation by the Russian Federation; it has also endorsed the 2022 aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The new textbooks portray national movements as foreign-influenced or marginal and omit core symbols, such as the white-red-white flag and the Pahonia emblem, or depict them negatively.

102. The above-mentioned practices raise serious concerns with regard to the right to education free from ideological indoctrination and the right to access accurate and pluralistic historical information.

103. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, States should ensure that education systems recognize cultural diversity as a fundamental characteristic of contemporary societies and promote critical thinking and pluralism by reflecting diverse perspectives, histories, cultural touchstones and contributions of different community groups in curricula and school textbooks, while preventing the exclusion of alternative perspectives and discriminatory or hateful narratives.⁹³

M. Militarization of education

104. According to several NGO submissions, between 2021 and 2025, the education system in Belarus shifted toward a comprehensive model of ideological and military-patriotic training across all levels. This includes the introduction of heads of military-patriotic education in schools, rapid expansion of State-controlled military-patriotic clubs (around 550 by October 2025), and closer cooperation with security forces. Militarization is reinforced through new cadet and law-enforcement institutions, expanded curricula with intensified pre-conscription training, longer and more practical field drills and growing military components in higher education, combining technical skills with ideological messaging.

105. According to NGO reports, schools increasingly host militarized events and simulations, and students have reportedly assisted law enforcement during elections. Military-patriotic classes and activities have expanded, even to preschool levels, alongside widespread campaigns promoting security-sector careers. Overall, education is increasingly used to instil State ideology and prepare youth for roles within the security apparatus.

N. Situation of national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities

106. The Special Rapporteur notes a continued deterioration in the situation of minorities in Belarus since the 2020 elections, with restrictions forming part of broader efforts to enforce ideological control and limit pluralism and thereby align cultural, linguistic and religious space with State-approved narratives. Minorities, including Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and Ukrainians, officially constitute around 15 per cent of the population, although this figure likely understates the reality due to assimilation pressures.

107. Since 2020, and with a notable increase since 2024, authorities have politicized minority issues, portraying Polish and Lithuanian communities as potential foreign influences amid tensions with neighbouring European Union States. This has led to increased surveillance, stigmatization and targeting, especially of those with cross-border ties.

108. Linguistic rights remain a key concern, with minority languages increasingly politicized. Speakers of Polish and Lithuanian face limited access to education, reduced public presence, and administrative barriers, which contribute to a decline in linguistic diversity and cultural space.

109. Minority activists, educators, journalists and community leaders face arrest, detention and prosecution under broad "extremism" charges, often accused of serving foreign interests, and also face indirect pressure, such as job loss, surveillance and harassment of relatives.

⁹³ A/HRC/47/32, paras. 27 and 76–79.

110. According to reports, out of 1,150 NGOs liquidated between 2021 and mid-2025, at least 30 had worked on issues faced by national minorities. Forced liquidation affected associations of, among others, Armenians, Georgians, Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Jews and Tatars living in Belarus. Additionally, at least 20 national minority associations decided to dissolve themselves.⁹⁴

O. Situation of the Polish and Lithuanian minorities

111. The Polish minority has been heavily targeted, with associations dissolved, cultural activities restricted or brought under State control, and the Union of Poles in Belarus website labelled “extremist.” Its leaders have faced prosecution, including Andrzej Poczubut, a journalist and activist – and winner of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought – who was imprisoned on politically motivated charges until his release on 28 April 2026.⁹⁵ Reportedly, detained Polish minority activists face restricted communication with family and legal counsel, raising serious concerns.

112. Authorities have restricted the use and teaching of Polish, with independent education initiatives largely eliminated.⁹⁶ Holders of a Pole’s Card (a document issued by Poland confirming that a foreign national belongs to the Polish nation) face growing pressure, as the authorities increasingly treat having the card as a sign of disloyalty.

113. The Lithuanian minority has also faced restrictive measures amid tensions between Belarus and the European Union, including scrutiny of cross-border contacts, cultural exchanges and educational cooperation involving Lithuanian institutions, and face an increased risk of being labelled “extremist”.

114. In the context of the post-2020 crackdown, the Belarusian authorities dissolved the Belarusian Community of Lithuanians and several regional organizations. Belarus also closed Lithuanian schools and, in 2022, abrogated a bilateral agreement with Lithuania on cooperation in education. Increased data collection and monitoring at border crossings have further contributed to the creation of a climate of suspicion and discrimination.

P. Religious minorities: repression, reregistration and control

115. The Special Rapporteur notes growing repression of religious communities, especially those not aligned with State ideology. Registration requirements function as a key control mechanism, affecting access to premises, education, cultural activities and minority-language use. When the State denies or revokes the legal status of religious communities, it undermines cultural rights and disrupts the transmission of religious and cultural traditions.

116. The introduction, through the updated law on religion that entered into force in July 2024, of compulsory reregistration requirements for religious organizations has created significant legal uncertainty and exposed many organizations to the risk of dissolution.⁹⁷ Special procedure mandate holders have criticized the new law.⁹⁸

117. For existing religious organizations (a total of 3,592 as of January 2024), the deadline for compulsory reregistration was 5 July 2025.⁹⁹ Official statistics on reregistration are not publicly available but, reportedly, organizations that did not complete the reregistration process face liquidation and their activities are treated as illegal.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ See <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628f9ae10b12c8255bd8814d/t/68947be6bf78280a1c0da0d3/1754561510275/PEN+-+UPR+submission+-+Belarus+-+2025.pdf>.

⁹⁵ See <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/andrei-paczobut>.

⁹⁶ See <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-06-10/abolition-polish-education-belarus>.

⁹⁷ See https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2884.

⁹⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/belarus-un-experts-concerned-about-new-law-freedom-conscience-and-religious> and BLR 7/2023.

⁹⁹ See <https://narovlya.by/novosti/obschestvo/religioznye-organizatsii-dolzny-predstavit-dokumenty-dlya-pereregistratsii-ne-pozdnee-5-iyulya-2025-goda/> (in Russian).

¹⁰⁰ See https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2945.

118. As reregistration is cumbersome and requires applicants to have an extensive geographic presence in the country and a long historical presence, smaller and newer communities have faced heightened exclusion.¹⁰¹ Catholic parishes reportedly have declined in number under the restrictive law and smaller parishes have encountered reregistration difficulties.¹⁰² Jehovah's Witnesses reported that their organization regained official recognition on 5 July 2025, illustrating that reregistration can function as a discretionary re-authorization of previously legal communities.¹⁰³

119. Minority religious groups, particularly Catholic, Protestant and independent communities, face increased administrative barriers, restrictions on clergy and activities, and limits on foreign contacts and funding. Religious activists have also faced administrative and criminal sanctions for peaceful practice.

120. Information received indicates continued targeting of religious figures, including allegations of politically motivated charges and restrictions on due process. In September 2025, a foreign religious representative was detained and charged with espionage, reportedly with limited access to legal counsel and consular assistance. In November 2025, two Catholic clergy members previously convicted on serious criminal charges were released following presidential pardons,¹⁰⁴ reportedly in connection with high-level diplomatic engagement with the Holy See. However, subsequent reports indicate continued arrests of religious personnel, including the detention of evangelical believers and a Catholic priest in March 2026, raising concerns about ongoing pressure on religious communities. The authorities also detained five Ukrainian refugees who received help from evangelical churches.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. General conclusions and recommendations

121. **The Special Rapporteur deplores the repression in Belarus that has continued since August 2020, including the targeting of individuals within the country and of individuals in exile through transnational repression. Authorities have continued to detain, prosecute and ill-treat persons linked to the 2020 protests, including for acts committed years earlier, and to retaliate against their families and supporters.**

122. **While welcoming the negotiated releases of some individuals identified as political prisoners, the Special Rapporteur remains concerned by the ongoing repression of those who have been released, continued transnational targeting of those who have been expelled, and new arrests for the peaceful exercise of human rights. With over 980 individuals still documented by human rights defenders as political prisoners as of the end of March 2026, there are no grounds to conclude that the overall human rights situation has improved.**

123. **The Special Rapporteur reiterates the recommendations contained in Human Rights Council resolutions 58/19 of 3 April 2025 and 61/26 of 30 March 2026, and concurs with the findings and recommendations contained in the report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus.¹⁰⁵ He also supports the recommendations issued to Belarus in the context of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review¹⁰⁶ and by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial**

¹⁰¹ See https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2884.

¹⁰² See <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/reports-show-decline-in-belarusian-parishes-under-religious-law/>.

¹⁰³ See <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/belarus/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Successfully-Reregistered-as-a-Religious-Organization-in-Belarus/>.

¹⁰⁴ See <https://catholic.by/3/news/belarus/18663-pres-sluzhba-kkbb-pavedamlyae-pra-vyzvalenne-znyavolenykh-svyatara> (in Belarusian).

¹⁰⁵ See A/HRC/61/57.

¹⁰⁶ See A/HRC/61/4.

Discrimination,¹⁰⁷ the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,¹⁰⁸ the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women¹⁰⁹ and the ILO Committee of Experts.¹¹⁰

124. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Belarus:

- (a) Ensure full cooperation with special procedures, including through substantive replies and protection from reprisals;
- (b) End persecution for the legitimate exercise of civil and political rights;
- (c) Release and provide redress to all persons detained on politically motivated charges, including those held incommunicado;
- (d) Provide released individuals with proper legal status documentation and valid personal documents;
- (e) Release detained trade unionists, reinstate independent unions and implement ILO recommendations;
- (f) Ensure that detention conditions comply with international standards for women, minors, older persons and persons with disabilities;
- (g) Investigate all cases of ill-treatment and deaths in custody promptly and impartially;
- (h) Guarantee adequate medical and psychological care in detention and stop penalizing suicide attempts;
- (i) End persecution of defence lawyers and ensure that detainees have access to legal counsel;
- (j) Establish independent monitoring of all places of detention and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- (k) Create effective complaint mechanisms for the reporting of ill-treatment, ensure protection from reprisals and investigate allegations of, and impose sanctions for, official complicity;
- (l) Repeal article 411 of the Criminal Code and release and rehabilitate those convicted under it;
- (m) Abolish disproportionate restrictions on movement, privacy and other rights of former prisoners labelled “extremists” or “terrorists”, and ensure equal protection of the rights of detainees with such designations;
- (n) Ensure public access to court schedules as part of the right to a fair trial;
- (o) Repeal provisions on in absentia proceedings, overturn such convictions and provide reparations;
- (p) End the intimidation of relatives of political prisoners and of persons in exile;
- (q) Put an end to transnational repression and the persecution of persons living in exile; repeal Decree No. 278 (the “passport decree”) and the January 2023 amendments to the Law on Citizenship;
- (r) Align counter-terrorism and extremism laws with international human rights standards and cease their misuse against legitimate exercise of rights;

¹⁰⁷ See CERD/C/BLR/CO/24-25.

¹⁰⁸ See CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1.

¹⁰⁹ See CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9.

¹¹⁰ See <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2026-%5BNORMES-251223-001%5D-Web-EN.pdf>.

(s) Abolish the list of extremist materials and the list of publications that may “harm the national interests”, and revoke the designations of media outlets and independent associations as “extremist formation”;

(t) Repeal legislation that discriminates against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and prevents their legitimate exercise of freedom of expression.

B. Conclusions and recommendations specific to the protection of cultural rights

125. The Special Rapporteur expresses profound concern that since 2020, the authorities have pursued systematic repression targeting cultural figures and the designation of independent cultural initiatives as extremist formations.

126. State policy has led to one of the two State languages – Belarusian – becoming marginalized, and to its preservation, use and promotion becoming politicized. Reports indicate that access to Belarusian-language books and media is limited and that Belarusian-language speakers face hostility from officials in judicial proceedings and discrimination in detention facilities and elsewhere. The increasing association of linguistic identity with political loyalty has led to the stigmatization and persecution of individuals exercising their linguistic rights.

127. The Special Rapporteur concludes that the persecution of individuals for the use of historical national symbols, such as the white-red-white flag or the Pahonia emblem, and attempts at reshaping historical memory are part of a broader policy aimed at controlling the expression of cultural and national identity.

128. The Special Rapporteur recalls that memorialization processes play a crucial role in shaping collective identity, whereas the suppression of pluralistic memorialization practices may contribute to the erasure of cultural heritage. He concludes that the practices observed constitute serious interference with the rights to freedom of expression and cultural rights. The Special Rapporteur calls for urgent measures to be taken to restore respect for cultural diversity, historical truth and freedom of expression in Belarus.

129. The targeting of minority communities, particularly Polish and Lithuanian minorities, as well as religious groups and LGBTIQ+ individuals, reflects broader trends aimed at eliminating pluralism and consolidating ideological control.

130. The series of arrests and convictions of media workers and cultural and religious figures in early 2026 happened against a backdrop of intensified transnational repression in which authorities continued to persecute exiled journalists by conducting trials in absentia, seizing their personal assets and unleashing repression against their relatives.

131. The wave of recent convictions contradicts the purported improvement in the human rights situation associated with the negotiated releases of persons recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners.

132. The Special Rapporteur expresses serious concern regarding the increasing pressure on religious communities, exerted through, inter alia, extremism legislation, restrictive registration/reregistration requirements and threats of closure, alongside censorship and the detention of religious figures.

133. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Belarus:

(a) End the labelling of peaceful cultural, artistic and religious activity as “extremist” and stop misusing anti-extremism legislation to restrict freedom of religion or belief and the right to cultural participation and expression;

(b) Guarantee access to books and diverse cultural and historical materials and initiatives, in particular those in the Belarusian language, and ensure that any restrictions are subject to judicial oversight and comply with international law;

(c) Guarantee the cultural and religious rights of detainees and, in that connection, access to books, including religious texts, correspondence, creative activity and protection from retaliation for cultural expression in general, and for cultural expression in the Belarusian language in particular;

(d) Uphold international standards on academic freedom and ensure that scholars and students can teach, engage in research and learn without fear of persecution;

(e) Protect Belarusian-language participation in public affairs and education without discrimination, and publish disaggregated data – including data collected by independent actors – on the use of the Belarusian language in all spheres of life;

(f) Enable safe cultural and scientific exchanges and end practices that restrict mobility and cross-border cultural life;

(g) Cease the arbitrary use of legislation to prosecute individuals for displaying historical national symbols;

(h) Repeal discriminatory amendments to the Code on Culture and repeal government resolutions that restrict the activities of tour guides and guide-interpreters;

(i) Repeal government resolution No. 608, which unduly restricts the holding of cultural and spectator events;

(j) End interference with cultural initiatives and memorialization practices;

(k) Ensure that education is free from ideologization, respect academic freedom and avoid the manipulation of historical narratives;

(l) Remove penalties for peaceful activity by unregistered cultural and religious groups and other associations;

(m) Guarantee the rights of national and ethnic minorities as prescribed by article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(n) Ensure that restrictions on religious organizations meet non-discrimination, necessity and proportionality standards, and remove barriers that exclude minority religions;

(o) End compulsory reregistration of religious associations and ensure simple, non-discriminatory, transparent procedures with independent review;

(p) Publish, with regard to the registration of religious and other associations, transparent data on applications, approvals, refusals, reasons for refusals, processing times and appeals;

(q) Ensure effective remedies against forced liquidation of religious and other civil society organizations, including the implementation of moratoriums pending independent judicial review during appeals.
