

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: BELARUS FACTSHEET

OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

VERY HIGH RISK

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for Belarus includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN BELARUS:

The International Committee for
Investigation of Torture in Belarus

Human Rights Center
"Viasna"

AT A GLANCE

Torture in Belarus is widespread, systematic and deeply embedded in state structures, particularly within law enforcement and detention facilities. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as facing a **very high risk** of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024.

Victims, especially political prisoners, women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and migrants, routinely face physical and psychological abuse, including beatings, electric shocks, threats of rape and degrading treatment during initial hours of detention. **These abuses, some of which amount to crimes against humanity** according to the UN Group of Independent Experts, are intended to suppress dissent and reinforce President Lukashenko's rule, prompting mass exile and undermining fair trial guarantees.

The broader context reveals a **highly repressive political and institutional environment**, especially following the 2020 presidential elections. Since then, **Belarus has withdrawn from key international treaties, including the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and severely limited cooperation with UN mechanisms**. Civil society organisations have been dismantled, and **human rights defenders face criminal prosecution and harassment**. The legal framework is weaponised to suppress dissent, using anti-terrorism and anti-extremism laws to criminalise activism and independent reporting. To this day, at least 1,208 political prisoners remain in detention.

"Repentance" videos aimed at humiliation are common, constituting a form of digital torture. Conditions in detention facilities are harsh, with overcrowding, incommunicado detention and excessive use of restraints. The use of vague "extremism" laws, denial of medical and psychological care, and prolonged solitary confinement further compound the gravity of the situation. The persistent lack of independent oversight enables these practices to continue unchecked.

Authorities have adopted mass surveillance and expanded prosecutorial powers, which has led to arbitrary detentions and politically motivated prosecutions without due process.

While exact numbers remain difficult to confirm due to the lack of transparency, **at least 228 civil society organisations were dissolved in 2024**. Since 2020, **hundreds of thousands have fled the country, including journalists, activists and lawyers**. Numerous political prisoners are held incommunicado, including **Maria Kalesnikava, Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Viktor Babaryka**. **At least 31 special procedure criminal cases have been launched since 2022**, allowing in-absentia trials for opposition figures. Reports indicate that women in correctional colonies face life-threatening conditions and systemic abuse.

Victims face significant barriers to seeking justice. There is no National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), **no victim-centred legal definition or a guaranteed right to reparation**, and legal aid is scarce and often denied to political prisoners. Investigations into torture lack independence, and forensic processes fail to meet international standards. Impunity is entrenched through institutional bias, legal loopholes, and retaliation against victims, families and legal representatives.

GENERAL INFORMATION



Type of government:
Presidential Republic



United Nations Convention Against Torture:
Ratified



OPCAT ratification:
Not ratified



Population:
9.1 million



People deprived of liberty:
32,566



Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):
345



Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):
16.6%



Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:
64



Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:
3



Prison Occupancy level:
83.4%



Homicide rate (per 100.000 people):
2

THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Belarus demonstrates a clear lack of political commitment to preventing and addressing torture and ill-treatment. The country has not accepted the competence of the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) to consider individual complaints under Article 22 of the Convention, nor has it ratified key international instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) or the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The level of engagement, which has never been satisfactory, has significantly deteriorated over the years following the human rights crisis unfolding in the context of the 2020 presidential elections.

Since 2021, Belarus has exited multiple treaties and has become increasingly selective in its engagement with United Nations bodies and mechanisms, frequently expressing objections to what it views as double standards and politicised approaches.

The authorities are misusing counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation to further suppress freedom of expression and eradicate political opposition.

Torture is not criminalised in the national legislation. There is no National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in place, nor is there any public policy or dedicated budget for the prevention of torture or support for victims. Despite the recommendations issued by CAT, Belarus has failed to implement them, further reinforcing a culture of impunity. Civil society organisations (CSOs) that cooperate with UN mechanisms face intimidation and reprisals, effectively silencing independent monitoring and advocacy. Combined, these factors indicate an institutionalised resistance to accountability and a systemic disregard for international human rights obligations.



II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Police brutality in Belarus is firmly embedded in the practices of law enforcement agencies. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment are routinely used to intimidate detainees, extract confessions or obtain information for prosecution. Victims, including women and LGBTQI+ individuals, face physical and psychological abuse, particularly during the initial hours of detention, often without access to fundamental safeguards such as medical care. The practice of “digital torture” through the recording of “repentance” videos, or interviews aimed at humiliation remains widespread. These recordings often involve degrading treatment and visible injuries, as seen in the case of Vladimir Pavlovets. Law enforcement agencies operate with near-total impunity, with no independent monitoring of police misconduct, no accountability mechanisms or zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence in state custody.

Legal safeguards are almost non-existent; complaints of torture almost never lead to investigations, and the criminal procedure code does not require courts to examine such allegations. Evidence obtained through torture is used in proceedings. Enforced disappearances remain decriminalised and practiced, with individuals held incommunicado for extended periods. Detention facilities are overcrowded and lack surveillance and basic protections. The use of kinetic weapons and chemical agents during assemblies is frequent, indiscriminate and unregulated. The violent crackdown on the 2020 protests continues through ongoing arrests, torture and retaliatory prosecutions. According to a 2024 UN report, these violations are part of a widespread, systematic pattern of abuse, with no indication of meaningful reform or accountability.



III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

In Belarus, the risk of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention remains high due to a combination of poor regulation, lack of oversight, and punitive practices. There are no legal restrictions on the use of dangerous restraint devices such as stun batons, stun belts, spiked batons, neck cuffs, or restraint chairs. Prisoners are frequently subjected to intrusive body searches and denied family contact and solitary confinement as a form of punishment. Medical examinations following use of force by prison staff are rarely conducted, and psychiatric care is largely unavailable. Political prisoners are particularly vulnerable, facing arbitrary disciplinary actions for minor or fabricated infractions such as **unshaven faces, unbuttoned collars, dirty clothes or shoes, improper greeting of a representative of the administration**. Solitary confinement, excessive use of restraints, and isolation from the outside world are common, along with a lack of educational or recreational activities and culturally appropriate accommodation. There are persistent allegations of ill-treatment of women held in correctional facilities, especially those convicted in connection with the protests following the 2020 presidential election. Independent human rights experts have expressed concerns about the life-threatening conditions of Viktoria Kulsha, Alena Hnauk, Volha Mayorava, and Iryna Takarchuk.

Certain prisoners have been held **incommunicado** for several months. As of the end of 2023, there is no direct communication (including information about their state of health) with **Maria Kalesnikava (since February 15, 2023), Mikalai Statkevich (since February 10, 2023), Siarhei Tsikhanouski (since March 9, 2023), Ihar Losik (since February 20, 2023), Viktor Babaryka** and other political prisoners.

Independent civil society organisations are denied access to monitor detention facilities, and there is a severe lack of transparency regarding conditions, deaths and suicides in custody. Information comes mostly from independent media or families. Migrants also face rights violations and are often held in unsuitable short-term facilities without access to legal aid, especially if they do not speak the local language. The absence of rehabilitation and reintegration policies further compounds systemic abuse and neglect in detention settings.



IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Impunity for torture and ill-treatment in Belarus remains a critical and deeply rooted problem. Public officials are not legally required to report suspicions of torture, and investigations against them often require prior authorisation, further hindering accountability. Torture cases are frequently downplayed by prosecutors and reclassified as minor offenses. The judiciary and law enforcement apparatus remain ideologised and biased. As a result, **there is no independent, impartial mechanism to conduct relevant investigations**.

Allegations must often be filed in the very facilities where the torture occurred, exposing victims to retraumatisation and retaliation. **Victims and their families are rarely informed of their right to seek redress**, and free legal aid is largely inaccessible or inadequate, particularly for marginalised groups.

Law enforcement and prosecutors commonly discourage victims from filing accusations, using threats, intimidation and even bribes. The extended incommunicado detention of some prisoners enables authorities to torture political prisoners with impunity due to the lack of transparency about their conditions.

In 2023, victims, their families and legal representatives were subjected to harassment, and some were even prosecuted under 'extremism' laws. Human rights groups that document and report cases of torture have been arbitrarily labelled as extremist, while lawyers representing victims have faced administrative and criminal penalties.

Forensic investigations into torture and deaths in custody lack independence and credibility. There are too few qualified medico-legal experts and neither the Istanbul nor Minnesota Protocols are used in practice. The judiciary's independence and effectiveness in handling torture cases remain seriously compromised, perpetuating a climate of fear and impunity.



V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Victims of torture and ill-treatment in Belarus face significant legal and practical barriers to justice and recovery. National legislation does not define who qualifies as a victim of torture, nor does it guarantee the right to reparation, rehabilitation or compensation. The existing compensation mechanism under the Criminal Procedure Code is generic and not tailored to the specific needs of torture victims. In 2023, **no cases of compensation for torture victims were recorded, and human rights organisations did not initiate any related processes due to legal and political constraints.**

The experts also highlight [ongoing issues related to legal aid access](#) routine exclusion of lawyers representing political prisoners has become common practice, further hindering the ability to exercise the right to file complaints.

There are no dedicated rehabilitation centres or government-funded programmes to provide medical, psychological or social support for survivors. Due to the inability to initiate investigations and the prevailing repressive environment, torture victims remain unable to exercise their right to redress and to obtain fair and adequate compensation.

Civil society organisations attempting to support victims face severe reprisals, restrictions and are often labelled as extremist. The absence of a victim-centred approach and lack of state accountability leave survivors without redress, intensifying their suffering and contributing to the continuation of patterns of abuse and impunity.



VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

In Belarus, vulnerable groups, including women, children and individuals accused under vague national security laws, face severe and systemic protection gaps. The state rarely implements meaningful measures to combat intimate partner violence, femicide or domestic violence against children. Criminal liability for domestic violence and marital rape is still not established as the State [does not see it as 'an acute' problem](#). While some forms of corporal punishment in private settings are prohibited, broader protections for children remain absent. The repressive environment, limited access to effective support, lack of trust in institutions and insufficient shelter options contribute to [victims of domestic violence feeling unsafe or unwilling to seek help](#).

The humanitarian crisis at the Belarus-EU border continues, with a rise in reports of cruel and degrading treatment of migrants, including abuses committed by Belarusian border guards.

Migrants have suffered serious abuses and violations, including deaths caused by Belarusian border guards and security agents. Belarusian authorities have restricted their movement within border zones, effectively trapping them and compelling repeated attempts to cross into the EU.

The legal framework on terrorism and extremism is vague, **allowing for arbitrary application and serious human rights violations.** These laws lack safeguards against torture, ill-treatment and refoulement, creating a dangerous legal void where abuse is likely to occur and go unchallenged. Over the past three years, politically motivated prosecutions under the guise of combating 'terrorism' and 'extremism' have increased sharply. Lawyers are frequently denied access to their clients and pressured to remain passive, while suspects are initially held on administrative charges before facing criminal prosecution.



VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

In Belarus, the right to defend human rights is under severe and sustained attack. National laws fail to recognise, promote or protect Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and operating an unregistered organisation is criminalised under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code. Legal personality for associations depends entirely on state approval, and non-registered groups are banned. Registration processes are deliberately cumbersome, with arbitrary rejections based **on vague grounds like 'national security' or 'foreign interference'**, while foreign funding, although not explicitly illegal, often results in persecution.

The reprisals against [Viasna and its members are part of a broader crackdown on civil society](#) after mass protests erupted over the rigged 2020 presidential elections. The authorities responded by shutting down all human rights and independent organisations and media, effectively eliminating every legally operating human rights NGO in the country. Currently, 64 human rights defenders, including journalists, human rights lawyers and trade unionists, are in detention. Among them are six team members of human rights organisations: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, Marfa Rabkova, Anastasia Loika, Valiantsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich and Andrey Chapuk.

Since August 2020, no duly authorised peaceful assembly has been held. Assemblies seen as critical by the authorities are routinely restricted, despite legal guarantees.

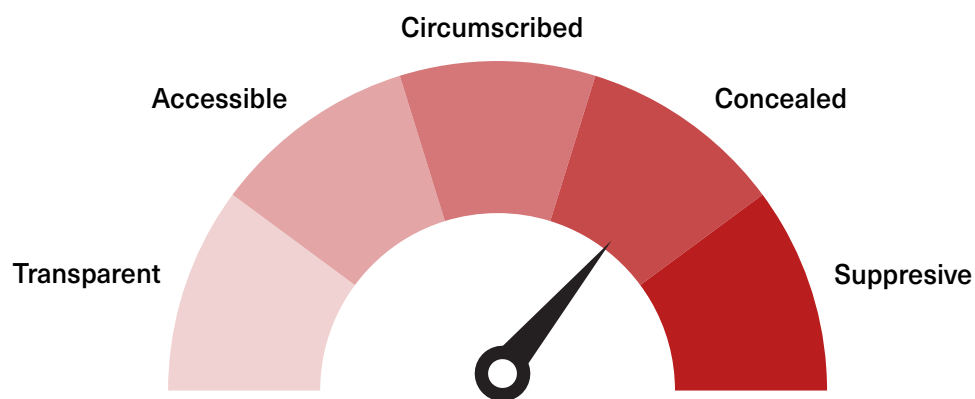
Belarusian authorities also use defamation and incitement laws to target HRDs and journalists. [Human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers are arbitrarily detained](#), often subjected to violence and held in isolation under conditions amounting to torture. Since September 2022, at least 50 'special procedure' criminal cases have been decided by the courts against opposition figures and activists, and dozens more have been initiated, allowing trials in absentia under 43 Criminal Code articles. The human rights defender [Anastasia Loika](#) was convicted of inciting hatred following her critical reporting on police abuses. Journalists [Andrzej Poczobut](#) and [Gennadiy Mozheika](#) were similarly convicted under politicised charges for their reporting.

Several members of pro-democratic forces have also been subjected to enforced disappearance or held incommunicado for extended periods of time, including [Siarhei Tsikhanouski](#), [Viktar Babaryka](#), [Mikalai Statkevich](#), [Maryia Kalesnikava](#) and [Maksim Znak](#).

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

The score for Belarus is **concealed** based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN BELARUS: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Index includes 5 recommendations for Belarus, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Enhance cooperation with international human rights bodies, including recognising the authority of the UN Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture to receive and review individual complaints. In addition, Belarus should accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and enact comprehensive anti-torture laws, including rigorous training programmes for law enforcement and judicial personnel.
2. Create laws and policies that protect human rights defenders, enabling them to work freely and safely, with the right to express opinions and criticise government policies without fear of retaliation. Simplify NGO registration and remove unnecessary administrative barriers to support the formation and effective functioning of civil society organisations.
3. Establish an independent body to investigate cases of torture and abuse, ensuring it remains free from influence by those under investigation, including the crimes committed as part of crimes against humanity since 2020.
4. Establish robust national laws and frameworks to protect, support, and guarantee justice for victims of torture and cruel treatment. Clearly define victims, provide access to legal remedies and compensation, and create a dedicated state institution for victim rehabilitation, alongside increased funding. Involve NGOs and civil society and set up an independent oversight mechanism to prevent threats or retaliation. Offer regular training to police, judicial officials and healthcare providers on the rights and needs of victims.
5. Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse by law enforcement and military officials, establishing strict protocols and an independent monitoring and accountability mechanism to monitor and investigate police activities, provide recommendations and refer cases to judicial authorities.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

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