



Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus

January 2025

In January 2025, the situation regarding freedom of association reflected the overall human rights situation in the country – repression intensified against the backdrop of the so-called electoral process. The number of detentions of Belarusians at border crossings while returning to the country increased, along with preventive detentions and summons for questioning, primarily in the regions. More than a hundred representatives of civil society organizations remain in places of detention. Courts continue to issue sentences with lengthy liberty deprivation terms for facilitating extremist activities, creating, leading, and participating in extremist formations, and financing extremism through donations to solidarity funds and other initiatives. Trials also continue against former political prisoners and relatives of political prisoners under Article 24.15, Part 2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (violating the law on foreign gratuitous aid). The practice of intimidation and pressure on activists abroad persists, including through the initiation and consideration of criminal cases in the format of special (in absentia) proceedings. The Investigative Committee announced the identification of 365 participants in overseas protests on January 26 and the initiation of criminal cases.

For the first time since 2021, the campaign to liquidate non-profit organizations (NPOs) has slowed down. In January 2025, only one lawsuit was recorded for the forced liquidation of a public association. At least two NPOs decided to self-liquidate. At the same time, a campaign for the re-registration of religious organizations is underway. During this campaign, which began on July 6, 2024, and will last for a year, several religious communities have already failed to pass re-registration or have submitted documents for liquidation.

Overall, by the end of January 2025, the number of forcibly liquidated NPOs reached at least 1,187, while the number of organizations that opted for self-liquidation reached at least 709. In total, since the post-election period of 2020, the public sector in Belarus has suffered the loss of at least 1,896 institutionalized forms of NPOs (public associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions, and associations).

Access to funding for NPOs in the country is increasingly restricted. The authorities are primarily interested in supporting state projects or allocating funds to ideologically vetted initiatives. A decision was made to suspend U.S. foreign aid programs worldwide, which directly affected the interests of Belarusian civil society organizations.

Forced liquidation of non-profit organizations.

The forced liquidation of NPOs, such as public associations, foundations, and non-governmental institutions, which has been actively ongoing since 2021, including in the last months of the previous year, has significantly slowed down. In January 2025, only one lawsuit for the forced liquidation of a public association was recorded. The significant decrease in the intensity of the liquidation process is due to a substantial (approximately 50%) reduction in the number of organizations subject to liquidation. In the near future, isolated cases of liquidation can be expected – either for organizations that engage in activities undesirable to the authorities or for the few remaining public associations that have not amended their charters in accordance with the new legal requirements and have not submitted reports to the registering authority confirming the continuation of their activities or have provided them with material breaches.

At the same time, on July 6, 2024, Belarus launched [a campaign for the re-registration of all religious organizations](#), which will continue until July 5, 2025. Unlike other organizational-legal forms of NPOs, information about registered religious organizations is not included in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR), making it almost impossible to track the process of their liquidation. According to [the Katolik.life portal](#), the number of Roman Catholic parishes and Orthodox communities in the country decreased over the past year.

According to Christian Vision, the Commissioner for Religious and National Affairs – the controlling authority in the field of religious organizations – requires leaders of religious organizations submitting their charters for re-registration to include provisions prohibiting individuals listed as involved in extremist or terrorist activities from serving as leaders or founders of religious communities. This restriction is already contained in the new repressive law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (Article 12). However, authorities are demanding that this provision be additionally explicitly included in charters to increase pressure on religious organizations and create new grounds for liquidating religious communities due to violations of their own charters.

In total, as of January 31, 2025, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#)¹, there have been 1.187 NPOs in the process of forced liquidation, including lawsuits filed by registering authorities for liquidation or being forcibly excluded from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR).

Non-profit organizations deciding on self-liquidation.

As of January 31, 2025, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 709 NPOs (associations, public associations, foundations, institutions, and political parties) in which the authorized body or founders have decided to liquidate. At the same time, the number

¹ The monitoring includes only cases of forced liquidation and self-liquidation of non-governmental non-profit organizations; state institutions and republican state-public organizations are not counted in the quantitative indicators. Likewise, consumer cooperatives and other organizational-legal forms of non-profit organizations (apart from public associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, private institutions, and associations), are not included in these statistics.

of decisions by NPOs on liquidation has also significantly decreased compared to the previous monitoring period. The reduction in the number of NPOs opting for self-liquidation is also linked to the overall substantial decline in the number of registered organizations in the country.

Both of the two public associations that decided to self-liquidate were active organizations that had submitted reports to the registering authority for the previous year.

At the same time, an increase in the number of voluntary liquidation decisions by religious organizations is to be expected due to their mandatory re-registration process. Several religious communities [have already submitted liquidation documents](#) due to their inability to comply with the legal requirement of having at least 20 founders.

The decision of NPOs to self-liquidate in Belarus is primarily driven by unprecedented repression in the country, an unfavourable legal environment, and pressure on the entire independent civil sector, as well as on specific organizations, their leadership, members, and employees.

Administrative and criminal prosecution of the leadership and members of civil society organizations, as well as other forms of pressure on civil society organizations.

In connection with the performance of their professional activities, participation in civil society organizations, and the manifestation of civic activism, at least 6 representatives of human rights organisations, dozens of representatives of civil society organizations and religious organizations, and 34 representatives of trade unions and the labour movement² continue to serve prison sentences. Pressure on representatives of religious organizations continues.

On January 15, 73-year-old human rights defender from Mazyr (a city in Homiel Region, Belarus), Uladzimir Cieliapun, was detained and subsequently sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest for distributing "extremist" materials (Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses). This is not the first time the human rights defender has been detained. It became known about the initiation of a criminal case under Part 2 of Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (promotion of extremist activity) against the founder of initiatives to popularize the Belarusian language, Ihar Sluchak, in May 2024.

Trials continue against former political prisoners and relatives of political prisoners under Article 24.15, Part 2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses for allegedly violating legislation on foreign gratuitous aid – receiving aid in monetary and material form.

The authorities continue to exert pressure on Belarusians who have been forced to leave the country, as well as on their relatives who remain in Belarus. On January 26, the Investigative Committee issued a statement warning Belarusians against participating in protests abroad against the regime, including the planned festival "Беларусы годныя лепшага" ("Belarusians Deserve

² Examples of representatives of civil society organizations being held in places of detention with liberty deprivation sentences, as well as information on individuals listed in extremist and/or terrorist registries can be found in Lawtrend's monthly reviews of the situation with Freedom of association and the situation of civil society organizations, for example, [for May 2024](#). Information about detained trade union members and trade union activists is published based on [Solidarity data](#).

Better"). Later, [the Investigative Committee announced it had identified 365 participants](#) in these protests abroad that day. Criminal cases have been initiated against the participants, including under Parts 2 and 3 of Article 361-1 (creation of an extremist formation, joining its ranks to commit extremist crimes) of the Criminal Code. Authorities are also investigating whether such individuals own property in Belarus, including property registered under other persons' names.

Earlier, on January 15, while speaking at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, [Prosecutor General Andrei Shved stated](#) that all those involved in extremist and terrorist activities had either already been convicted or had criminal cases initiated against them, which would be reviewed by the courts.

Criminal legislation on special (in absentia) proceedings is widely used to prosecute Belarusians abroad. On January 22, a group of independent UN human rights [stated the widespread use of trials in absentia in Belarus](#), without fundamental guarantees of fair trial rights.

[According to the Brest City Prosecutor's Office](#), compliance with legislation by organizations supporting small and medium-sized businesses was reviewed. As a result, violations were found in the activities of one public organization that had declared itself a centre for entrepreneurship support. Prosecutors established that since 2022, this centre had not provided legally defined support to small and medium-sized enterprises. Instead, its only activity was educational services, specifically foreign language training. Consequently, the organization's registration as an entrepreneurship support centre was revoked. As of January 23, 2025, according to [the Ministry of Economy's database](#), 87 entrepreneurship support centres and 18 small entrepreneurship incubators operate in Belarus. Among them, 10 are non-profit organizations, including 1 public association, 3 foundations, 1 union, and 5 non-governmental institutions – 3 of which are educational institutions.

The use of legislation to combat extremism as a form of pressure on civil society organizations.

Legislation on combating extremism continues to be actively used against representatives of civil society organizations: prosecution for money transfers to solidarity funds, and also for the assistance to political prisoners and their families, including criminal prosecution, recognition of public initiatives as extremist formations, and information resources, social networks, etc. as extremist materials.

During the monitoring period, [several items were added to the Republican list of extremist materials](#), including pages of the "Незалежны прафсаюз РЭП" ("Independent Trade Union REP") on Facebook, Instagram, VKontakte, and the Telegram channel "Профсоюз РЭП" ("Trade Union REP"). Other resources added include the VKontakte page named "Спартыўны клуб "Патрыёт" ("Sports Club 'Patriot')", the Facebook page "Беларуская сацыял-дэмакратычная партыя: Брэсцкая вобласць" ("Belarusian Social Democratic Party: Brest Region"), and information materials from the public page "Сацыяльна-хрысціянскі рух" ("Social-Christian Movement"). Several resources of Belarusian organizations abroad were also added to the list, such as the Facebook page "Згуртаваньне Беларусаў у Вялікай Брытаніі" ("Association of Belarusians in the Great Britain").

Additionally, [the Republican list of extremist materials](#) now includes information materials posted on the crowdfunding platform "Gronka," launched in July 2024, including its main website <https://gronka.org>, as well as its social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, and the platform's Telegram channel.

In Belarus, at the initiative of the Mahiliou Regional Prosecutor's Office, access to the website of the initiative "Честные люди" ("Honest People") has been restricted. [The prosecution explains the blocking](#) by claiming that the site contained "deliberately false information about the political and social situation in the Republic of Belarus" and content with signs of "extremism."

The Operational and Analytical Centre (OAC) annulled the domain **petitions.by** (previously, the website and social media pages of the initiative had been recognized as extremist materials). On January 17, amendments were made to the Instruction on the Registration of Domain Names in Belarus's national domain zone by OAC Order No. 6, which now provides for the annulment of domains deemed harmful to national interests.

Funding.

The public association "Belaya Rus" has announced its support for 10 humanitarian projects from its regional branches in 2025. This marks the third year of support within the framework of the program "Опыт лучших «Белой Руси» – достояние общества" ("The Best Practices of 'Belaya Rus' is the Nation's Asset"), a grant competition for projects aimed at engaging citizens in socially significant and civic-patriotic activities, increasing civic engagement, fostering entrepreneurial initiative, and unlocking creative potential. However, there is no publicly available information regarding the sources and amounts of funding for "Belaya Rus" itself. Unlike several other pro-government organizations, there are no legal provisions securing funding for this organization in the state or local budgets, nor is there a publicly accessible regulatory act specifically governing its financing.

The Department for Humanitarian Activities continues to conduct regional seminars on attracting foreign gratuitous aid, primarily for state institutions. For instance, on January 15, 2025, department representatives participated in [a seminar held by the Shklou District Executive Committee](#), discussing current trends in humanitarian activities within the country and Mahiliou region, as well as challenges in implementing project initiatives in Shklou District.

On January 24, the U.S. State Department issued an order to "halt operations" concerning all existing foreign aid and suspended new allocations (except military funding for Israel and Egypt). The decision followed an executive order by U.S. President Donald Trump, requiring a 90-day review to assess whether foreign aid aligns with his foreign policy agenda. The U.S. remains the world's largest donor. In the 2023 fiscal year, it allocated \$72 billion to other countries.

[According to data from the Department for Humanitarian Activities](#), in 2023, the amount of registered foreign gratuitous aid from the U.S. to Belarus reached \$20.62 million (117.5% compared to 2022). By the end of 2023, the U.S. ranked second among donor countries, slightly behind Russia. The U.S. share of total humanitarian aid to Belarus in 2023 was 27.48% (compared to 19.86% in 2022).