



2025

**BELARUSIAN
CIVIL SOCIETY
REPORT ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS
IMPLEMENTATION**

2025 Belarusian Civil Society Report on Sustainable Development Goals Implementation was prepared by a group of experts and representatives of civil society. The authors have analysed the current situation for the SDGs in Belarus and prepared recommendations for the Belarusian state and International partners on their achievement.

The review will be presented in July 2025 at the High-Level Political Forum in the UN.

Editorial team:

Research Coordinator, Editor — Iryna Ponedelnik, SDG Expert, Science Communicator, MSc.

Team of Belarusian CSOs in exile, independent authors and experts. Some authors have chosen to remain anonymous for security reasons.

2025 Belarusian Civil Society Report on Sustainable Development Goals Implementation — Berlin: 2025 — 83 pages.

CONTENT

SUMMARY: SDG PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN BELARUS	4
Introduction	8
SDG 2: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems in Belarus: Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change by 2030	10
SDG 3: Imitation of The Struggle Against Covid-19: Refusal of International Cooperation in the Field of Healthcare	13
SDG 3: The Right to Health and Access to Health Care For Prisoners Convicted on Politically Motivated Charges in the Penitentiary System of Belarus	15
SDG 4: The Systemic Crisis of Teaching Staff Caused by Authoritarian Policy in the Field of Education	19
SDG 5: Access to Protection and Assistance for Women Victims of Domestic Violence	23
SDG 6: Water and Sanitation Management In Belarus: Institutional Efforts, Data Deficits, and Limited Civil Society Engagement	27
SDG 7: Status and Trends of Access to Clean and Renewable Energy in Belarus	31
SDG 8: The Systematic and Gross Violations of the Freedom of Association in Labour Relations	34
SDG 10: Systemic Inequality and Discrimination In Belarus	38
SDG 11: The Issue of Civil Society Participation in Urban Planning	43
SDG 12: Low Efficiency of The Separate Collection of Municipal Waste in Belarus	46
SDG 13: Challenges of Belarusian Climate Policy	49
SDG 14: Impact of Transboundary Waterways and Challenges on Marine Ecosystems in Belarus	53
SDG 15: Forest Conservation, Forest Management, and Forest Exploitation	56
SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	60
SDG 16: Participation in Cultural Life as an Offence	68
SDG 16: Belarusian Youth under Repression and Isolation	71
SDG 16: Implementation of SDG 16 in the Context of Ensuring the Right to a Favorable Environment	74
SDG 17: Problems with Statistical Data to Monitor SDGs Implementation in Belarus	79

SUMMARY: SDG PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN BELARUS

Belarus submitted its 2025 VNR to the UN but excluded independent civil society from all stages of its preparation. No mechanisms exist for genuine civil society participation, peer review, or data validation. The official VNR focuses on positive narratives and external challenges (primarily sanctions), avoiding systemic issues such as repression, human rights violations, and governance failures.

Currently, no domestic mechanisms exist for civil society's SDG reports to influence government policy. The Belarusian regime views independent data and advocacy as threats rather than partners in development.

Meanwhile, Belarusian civil society in exile has prepared alternative reporting to highlight the real situation across the SDGs. At the same time, we see various UN platforms as valuable opportunities to foster open dialogue between the state and civil society, which could serve as an essential first step toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus.

OFFICIAL REPORTING VS. CIVIL SOCIETY REALITY

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being

For more information you can see chapters on SDG 3: [Belarus and the Illusion of Pandemic Response](#) and [The right to health and access to health care for prisoners](#).

Official VNR: Belarus highlights national vaccine development (Belkovidvak), declining maternal mortality, and investment in health infrastructure.

Civil Society Reality: The health sector is intertwined with political repression. Beyond the mismanagement of COVID-19, significant violations occur in the prison system, directly undermining SDG 3.

As of July 10, 2025, at least 1,150 people remain imprisoned for political reasons. Among them, at least 29 individuals have severe health conditions. Despite clear diagnoses, political prisoners continue to receive prison sentences rather than alternatives permitted under national law. Medical care is severely restricted.

Since April 2023, pre-trial detention centers (SIZO) have banned the transfer of most medications from families, limiting prisoners' access to essential drugs and specialist care. No separate clinical protocols exist for prisoners in punishment cells, leading to severe health deterioration. Human rights groups report at least 13 deaths in detention since August 2020, including seven political prisoners who died due to denied medical care.

Positive steps have included a wave of pardons starting July 2024, releasing around 300 political prisoners. However, these remain selective and politically motivated. Broader laws on amnesty and humanitarian release explicitly exclude political prisoners.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality

For more information you can see chapter [SDG 5: Access to protection and assistance for women victims of domestic violence](#).

Official VNR: Mentions national gender equality plans but offers no substantive reporting on gender-based violence.

Civil Society Reality: Belarus lacks a comprehensive law on domestic violence. Over 90% of victims are women, yet authorities often pressure victims into reconciliation rather than protection. Mothers leaving abusive partners face barriers in securing housing, especially in families with three or more children who risk losing state subsidies.

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

For more information you can see chapter on [SDG 8: The systematic and gross violations of the freedom of association in labour relations](#).

Official VNR: Praises low unemployment rates and economic resilience.

Civil Society Reality: Belarus is under ILO Article 33 measures for grave violations of workers' rights. All independent trade unions were forcibly dissolved in 2022. Over 70 union leaders have been persecuted, some imprisoned as political prisoners. Workers have no freedom of association, rendering SDG 8 unattainable under current conditions.

SDG 14 – Life Below Water

For more information you can see chapter on [SDG 14: Impact of Transboundary Waterways and Challenges on Marine Ecosystems in Belarus](#).

Official VNR: Offers superficial references to transboundary cooperation.

Civil Society Reality: Belarus, though landlocked, significantly affects marine ecosystems via riverine pollution. Civil society reports note:

- Belarus contributed 62% of nutrient pollution entering the Baltic Sea in 2024.
- Microplastics in Belarusian rivers rose 15% from 2023 to 2024.
- Belarus withdrew from several environmental conventions and ceased cooperation with HELCOM, obscuring critical data.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

For more information you can see chapters on SDG 16: [Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#), [Participation in cultural life as an offence](#), [Belarusian youth under repression and isolation](#), [Ensuring the right to a favorable environment in the Republic of Belarus](#).

Official VNR: Focuses on technical legal reforms, omitting political repression.

Civil Society Reality: No progress on SDG 16 is possible under systemic repression. Belarus’s legal system functions as a tool of repression:

- Over 1,150 political prisoners remain in detention.
- Trials lack due process; trials in absentia have become widespread.
- Nearly 2,000 NGOs have been liquidated since 2020.
- New laws criminalize nearly any independent cultural, media, or civic activity under “extremism.”

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

For more information you can see chapters on [SDG 17: Problems with statistical data to monitor SDGs implementation in Belarus](#)

Official VNR: Blames sanctions for financial constraints. Emphasizes collaboration with UN agencies and regional organizations and reports progress in developing national statistical systems and SDG data platforms.

Civil Society Reality: While sanctions affect external finance, Belarus’s own repressive governance repels foreign investment and aid. State budgets prioritize security apparatuses over health, environment, and social services. Official statistics lack transparency, and cannot be independently verified. Disaggregated data on vulnerable groups is absent. This lack of reliable data severely undermines SDG monitoring and evidence-based policymaking.

Recommendations for International Community:

1. Prioritize the release of political prisoners and highlight the prison health crisis in diplomatic engagements.
2. Expand technical and financial support from international organisations to projects and initiatives, including those inside Belarus, that promote democratic values, and projects in exile; initiatives aimed at ensuring access of political prisoners to quality and timely medical care in places of deprivation of liberty.
3. Supporting the creation and publication of alternative reports on the state of education and other SDGs related topics in Belarus.
4. Ensure that Belarus is not ranked in the international or regional indexes unless independent civil society is given the opportunity to conduct a peer review of the data.

SDGs in Belarus are inseparable from democratic reforms and human rights protection. Without ending repression and restoring civic space, progress on the SDGs remains illusory. International support should center on empowering Belarusian civil society—inside and outside the country—to produce reliable data and advocate for policies that genuinely advance human rights and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the government of Alexander Lukashenko presented its [third Voluntary National Review](#) (VNR). Typically representatives of civil society are invited to this process in other countries. However, representatives of Belarusian civil society in exile did not participate in the VNR process, as evidenced by previous VNR publications.

Today, Belarus faces a unique set of challenges in implementing the SDGs: reduced access to foreign financial aid due to sanctions, and the decrease in the country's expert potential due to a migration, significantly affecting progress in achieving the SDGs. It is impossible to implement the SDGs without comprehensive partnerships between different stakeholders based on fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda in order to meet the interests of the citizens of Belarus.

This report has been prepared by Belarusian NGOs in exile, academia, research institutes, civic activists in all the areas of SDGs. Unfortunately, due to continuing repressions against individuals and organisations whose opinions differ from those of public authorities and officials of the government of Lukashenko, not all the experts can openly publish their positions, so some of the chapters below are signed by 'independent experts'.

The methodology of this year's Alternative Report included analysis of only one or several specific issues of each SDGs. Even in exile we, as civil society, see as the main implementor of SDGs in Belarus—government of Lukashenko, so recommendations provided by authors addressed both the government of Lukashenko and, in some cases, international partners and other stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

The initiative group comprised more than 20 experts who worked on creating this review. Preparation of this year's review also included a peer-review process where experts could comment on chapters.

The chapters were compiled between February and July 2025, which means there may be discrepancies in certain data, such as the number of political prisoners or dissolved organizations. Each chapter includes references and sources where updated figures can be found.

When preparing each section, the experts covered the following issues:

- Situation overview that briefly describes the current problem, citing data from sources or providing a real-life example.
- Key changes after 2022 that highlight changes or trends since the previous [Belarusian Civil Society Report on SDGs Implementation](#).
- Description of the consequences include the risks of continuing the current situation with SDGs implementation.

2 ZERO
HUNGER



SDG 2: SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS IN BELARUS: BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE BY 2030

This section was prepared by Independent Expert

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The Republic of Belarus is actively developing legal norms in the field of organic production. In 2018, Law No. 144-3 [«On the production and circulation of organic products»](#) was adopted, which entered into force on November 18, 2019. The objectives of the Law are to increase the production of organic products to provide for the population, sell them for export, as well as preserve and rationally use natural resources. The interstate standard 33980-2016 «Organic products. Rules for production, processing, labeling and sale» was introduced as a state standard. The technical code of established practice 635-2019 (33170) «General rules for the production of organic products» was approved and put into effect.

The main problem of the Belarusian legislation is the certification system, which differs from the world practice, and includes checking not only the production process, but also the product itself. The Republic of Belarus is the only country that has taken this legislative path, which significantly complicates the certification processes and acts as the main barrier for producers. Certification of not only the production process, but also the product implies that it is necessary to take samples at certain periods, for example, harvesting, and do expensive analyses. Along with the additional financial burden on producers, such a system can limit the principle of crop rotation. For example, in the current season, an agricultural producer receives a certificate for a certain crop, but does not plan to grow it in the next one, which means that it is necessary to go through the stage of product certification again for a new crop.

Since 2020, the number of organic agricultural producers and lands [has been constantly decreasing](#): from 6838 hectares in 2020 to 5387 hectares in 2023 (-21.2%). The number of producers, their interest and motivation are also decreasing. For example, in 2020, there were 21 agricultural producers in Belarus, and in 2023, there were only 14.

The major reasons include:

- the lack of state support for organic producers;
- the departure from Belarus of most certification companies accredited by the European Commission to certify the production process under Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labeling of organic products;
- the outflow of buyers of organic products to other countries and a decrease in overall demand;

- the liquidation of non-profit organizations that were engaged in the promotion of organic agriculture and supported farmers.

Currently, the only measure of state support is the reimbursement of costs for certification of organic products and their production processes in accordance with the State Program «Agricultural Business» for 2021-2025. Despite this, the number of agricultural producers certified under the national system has not increased in recent years. There are [11 valid certificates](#) of conformity issued to 6 producers. This is due to the complicated certification process and insufficient measures to promote the direction in the country. Monitoring shows that since 2022, there have been practically no activities on organic production, and the direction has disappeared from the state agenda.

One of the challenges in applying sustainable practices in agriculture and switching to organic practices is limited educational opportunities and activities. Lack of education and information leads to errors and financial losses and, subsequently, a motivation to implement sustainable production practices. Since 2022, higher education institutions have begun to add materials on organic production to their programs. For example, in 2023, the Belarusian State of the Orders of the October Revolution and the Order of the Labour Red Banner Agricultural Academy made changes and additions to the curricula for advanced training in organic production, published a textbook «Information and analytical support for the production of organic products» and disciplines related to the production and circulation of organic products were included in the educational program documentation of some specialties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Amend the current legislation, eliminating the need for product certification, leaving only the certification of the process following world practice.
2. Create mechanisms to stimulate organic agricultural producers, for example, compensation of costs for biological products, purchase of suitable machinery and equipment, reimbursement of costs for training, marketing research, participation in exhibitions, certification procedures, etc.
3. Conduct a campaign to inform agricultural producers about the possibilities of certification of organic products and their production processes, and the mechanism for compensating certification costs.
4. Develop and conduct a long-term regional information campaign aimed at stimulating demand for organic products in the country.
5. Develop and implement at the national level a comprehensive system of education and training in the field of organic agriculture, including: advanced training courses, creation of specialized educational programs and areas in agricultural universities, expansion of internships, including international ones, conducting scientific research based on existing organic farms, as well as integrating the basics of organic production into school education in rural areas.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3: IMITATION OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COVID-19: REFUSAL OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF HEALTHCARE

This section was prepared by Medical Solidarity Foundation

In Belarus, the state program «Health of the People and Demographic Security» for 2021-2025 is being implemented, but in 2022-2024, the Belarusian healthcare system continues to face an intensifying personnel crisis, a worsening demographic situation, and political pressure on health workers. Political repression is also growing: the Belarusian Medical Solidarity Fund database [contains more than 300 cases](#) of detention of health workers for political reasons for 2020-2024. Funding remains low: in 2023, [healthcare spending amounted to about 4.4% of GDP](#), which was slightly higher than before, yet lower than the recommended 5-6% according to WHO standards, as well as the healthcare structure remains suboptimal (there is a shortage of personnel for both doctors and mid-level medical workers).

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Before the pandemic, the healthcare system in Belarus functioned without emergency workloads, but in the period from 2020 to 2024, the weakness of the state strategy to combat COVID-19 became apparent. [Official mortality statistics were understated](#): according to a data leak, excess mortality in the country from March 2020 to March 2021 amounted to about 32,000 people, which is 14 times higher than the official figures. This information has become the reason for a serious crisis of confidence in government data and institutions. In the context of the peak of morbidity and mortality, in July 2021, only 37% of respondents stated they were ready to get vaccinated, which indicates a deep mistrust of society in official information and measures taken by the authorities.

In 2021, the Belarusian authorities announced the creation of their own vaccine against COVID-19 — «Belkovidvak». More than \$30 million was spent on development, but [production never began](#). At the end of 2023, the Ministry of Health announced the successful completion of three stages of clinical trials and the readiness to use the domestic vaccine for [mass vaccination](#). The data on the results of clinical trials were classified and became available only due to a leak of information from the Ministry of Health. Because of the leak, it became known that the [study design was described with a violation of GMP](#).

Clinical trials passed only two stages, and by 180 days after the vaccine administration, the concentration of antigen-specific [IgG decreased to the initial level](#). The main goal of the project was to demonstrate independence from the Western countries, and not to fight the pandemic. Belarus refused to purchase vaccines from the EU and the USA, opting for its own development and supplies from Russia and China. This limited the population's access to vaccines with proven effectiveness and increased public mistrust of vaccination.

CONSEQUENCES

The revelations around Belkovidvak have increased public skepticism about vaccines in general. In 2023-2024, the level of COVID-19 vaccination in Belarus dropped to its lowest since the beginning of the pandemic, which increases the risk of outbreaks of new strains. Skepticism extends to other vaccinations, including childhood vaccines (measles, polio).

Vaccination coverage indicators are enshrined in the KPI system for health workers, failure to meet which entails financial sanctions. However, the lack of effective tools and resource provision for achieving target values creates conditions for [falsification of statistical reporting](#).

Politicization of science and healthcare: The Belkovidvak project was a political move aimed at demonstrating «scientific independence». Instead of strengthening the country's biomedical sector, it undermined trust in medical institutions. Repressions against doctors and scientists who criticized the quality of Belkovidvak also led to the Belarusian healthcare system becoming even more closed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Put pressure on Belarus to ensure transparency of clinical trials of new medical developments. Including Belarusian research centers in international projects could help bring the country out of isolation.
2. Propose mechanisms for the supply of effective vaccines (e.g., through the COVAX programs) without political ties, which could improve access to quality vaccination for the population.
3. Continue independent monitoring of vaccination rates and the quality of health services, despite the repression. Disseminating reliable information about vaccines can help reduce misinformation and increase trust in science.

SDG 3: THE RIGHT TO HEALTH AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR PRISONERS CONVICTED ON POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CHARGES IN THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM OF BELARUS

This section was prepared by the May 21 Support Fund, the FreeBelarusPrisoners Association of Relatives and Former Political Prisoners, Politzek.me, Euro-Atlantic Affairs Agency, and TaskForce Belarus association

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Today, there are at least 1,150 people in prison in Belarus ([as of July 10, 2025](#)) convicted on politically motivated charges.

Political prisoners with chronic diseases and serious health conditions [do not receive proper and timely treatment](#) in correctional institutions and are subject to discrimination.

Among them are representatives of vulnerable social groups—people with serious diseases, including at least 29 people with extremely grave health conditions, the elderly, mothers and fathers of many children; people with disabilities established by law; people with mental health problems; minors; families where both parents are in prison; mothers raising children alone; people who have been ordered by the court to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment; people in other vulnerable situations.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

Despite established diagnoses, the presence of chronic diseases and even disabilities, political prisoners continue to be sentenced to imprisonment, ignoring alternative measures established by national legislation that are not related to imprisonment. The list of diseases that prevent serving a sentence, according to the current national legislation, does not apply to political prisoners.

In pre-trial detention centers (SIZO)—since April 29, 2023, [the Department of Corrections of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus has banned](#) the transfer of medical drugs, with the exception of vitamins, mineral complexes and imported insulin. Political prisoners face the impossibility of receiving timely medical care from relatives, consultations with narrow-profile specialists, timely diagnosis and effective treatment.

The specifics of penitentiary institutions do not provide for separate health care standards (in particular, clinical protocols for diagnosis and treatment). For example, there are no protocols for examining persons placed in punishment cells (SHIZO) and punishment cells, which leads to a rapid deterioration in health.

In the situation of ongoing repressive practices in Belarus, a new process of pardoning political prisoners began in July 2024. This positive step by the Belarusian authorities was noted and welcomed by both human rights activists and the international community. At least

300 political prisoners were released on humanitarian grounds, some of them people with serious illnesses, disabilities, elderly people, parents with many children, and other vulnerable groups. Unfortunately, the effect of the Laws of the Republic of Belarus on Amnesty in 2022-2025 did not extend to political prisoners, although they also contained humanitarian criteria for health and age for release from punishment.

CONSEQUENCES

In conditions where access to specialized medical care and vital drugs is limited by the state, the health condition of prisoners is deteriorating and putting their lives at risk. Since August 2020 and to date, human rights activists are aware of at least 13 cases of deaths in places of detention or immediately after release from them of people detained for political reasons, including at least 7 cases of deaths of recognized political prisoners in places of confinement due to untimely provision of medical care and the inability to provide the necessary [treatment in custody](#).

It is also worth noting that the lack of early diagnosis does not allow for the timely detection of serious diseases, and limited access to medical care can lead to chronic health problems, deterioration in the quality of life and a reduction in its duration. To date, at least 196 people from among political prisoners are at particular risk due to health, age and other life circumstances.

We are convinced that an open dialogue between the state and civil society can become a key tool for achieving sustainable development goals in Belarus—and we are open to this dialogue. Such an approach will strengthen trust, increase the sustainability of social institutions and demonstrate Belarus's commitment to fulfilling its international obligations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the government of Lukashenko:

1. Accelerate and expand the process of releasing political prisoners on humanitarian grounds, who, due to their health, age, family circumstances, in accordance with the legislation of Belarus, should not be held in places of deprivation of liberty.
2. Eliminate discrimination against persons convicted under extremist and protest articles in the national legislation on criminal liability and relief from punishment (amnesty, pardon). When sentencing, take into account age, health, family circumstances and other humanitarian grounds.
3. Ensure proper application of national legislation and WHO recommendations to improve prisoners' access to medical care: including consultations with narrow-profile specialists, free access to prescribed medications, including those purchased at their own expense, timely diagnostics and screening programs, individual rehabilitation equipment and the necessary medical equipment.

4. Ensure effective interdepartmental cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health of Belarus, assigning the latter the primary responsibility for the organization, provision and examination of medical care in places of deprivation of liberty, with the aim of providing prisoners with medical services identical to the level of care provided in the community, including obtaining additional medical services at the expense of the prisoner and his close relatives.
5. Ensure the integration of the prison medical service into the public health system with subordination to the Ministry of Health of Belarus to achieve continuity of medical care for individuals both released from prison and detained and/or convicted.
6. Encourage the resumption of activities and the creation of conditions for the functioning of civil society organizations in Belarus that can facilitate the provision of prisoners with access to medical care.
7. These recommendations do not dismiss the unacceptability of persecuting citizens for exercising their civil and political rights as well as the recommendation to immediately release and review the criminal cases of all political prisoners in Belarus.

For the International Community:

1. Make the release of political prisoners a priority, engage with the Belarusian authorities on humanitarian issues related to their release, and actively use all possible diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to achieve this goal.
2. Provide diplomatic and expert assistance, as well as technical and financial support to initiatives aimed at ensuring access of political prisoners to quality and timely medical care in places of deprivation of liberty.
3. Facilitate independent international monitoring of conditions of detention, including compliance with WHO standards in penitentiary institutions of Belarus.
4. Facilitate the launch of humanitarian projects of international technical assistance for the Republic of Belarus aimed at ensuring effective interagency interaction and coordination between responsible agencies and civil society organizations to improve prisoners' access to timely and quality medical care in penitentiary institutions.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4: THE SYSTEMIC CRISIS OF TEACHING STAFF CAUSED BY AUTHORITARIAN POLICY IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

This section was prepared by Independent Experts

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The ideologization of education, the militarization of upbringing, and the cultural colonization of the educational process in Belarus after 2020 [hinder the achievement of SDG 4](#). The emphasis has shifted from environmental, civic, and cultural education to the propaganda of state ideology, the suppression of critical thinking, and the ignoring of human rights, civil liberties, and cultural diversity.

[This has a negative impact on teachers](#): their professional and personal attitudes are deformed, and their pedagogical autonomy is completely lost — teachers are used as an instrument of indoctrination. Pressure from the administration and security [forces leads to denunciations, dismissals, and persecution, increasing fear and self-censorship](#).

In addition, the systemic pressure on informal and private educational initiatives that began in 2021 led to their closure or significant restrictions on their activities, which significantly narrowed the range of educational offerings for residents of Belarus and [left a large number of informal education trainers and youth workers without a livelihood](#).

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

The shortage of personnel, especially in the regions and rural areas, [continues to grow](#). From 2022 to 2025, [the number of schoolteachers decreased by almost 4.5 thousand](#), while the number of students increased, which leads to an increased workload for teachers.

[Low wages remain a problem](#): the average monthly salary of a teacher is only 66-68% of the national average[7]. Many teachers work one and a half to two jobs, combining teaching with educational work, which leads to burnout, a decrease in the quality of education, and a loss of motivation for professional development.

Due to the lack of high-quality professional development programs, teachers create informal online communities to exchange pedagogical practices and ideas, but [the authorities declare even such activities extremist](#)[8], which leads to a loss of professional solidarity, disunity among teachers within Belarus and an increase in the emigration of experienced teachers.

The reduction of Belarusian-language teaching in pedagogical specialties, the decrease in the number of Belarusian-language schools, and the predominance of the Russian language in documentation contribute to the displacement of national culture and a decrease in the number of teachers and parents willing to choose education in the [Belarusian language](#).

Belarusian civil society in exile, with the support of Poland, Germany, and the EU, provides support to teachers within the country and abroad (Beehive, SALT, etc. programs). However,

receiving assistance is associated with risks to the safety of those who receive it. Work is underway to advocate for the interests of Belarusian teachers and international cooperation, but its scale remains insufficient.

CONSEQUENCES

Ideological control in education is increasing: military-patriotic elements dominate, and the topics of education for sustainable development: human rights, climate change, the rule of law, and democracy (SDG 4.7) are marginalized or replaced by disinformation narratives. Schools and universities are turning into propaganda tools, suppressing pedagogical and academic freedoms.

Due to political repression, teachers emigrate or leave the profession. The shortage of qualified teachers is particularly acute for vulnerable groups, increasing the gap in access to quality education. The lack of pedagogical autonomy creates passivity and conformism among students and limits the discussion of local and global challenges.

The quality of education is declining rapidly. The deformation of professional attitudes of teachers, the lack of funding, and personnel worsening teaching, which leads to a decrease in the level of student knowledge and contributes to the growth of mistrust on the part of parents. The personnel crisis leads to teacher overload and professional burnout.

Educational inequality is growing: the shortage of qualified teachers is particularly acute for vulnerable groups, increasing the gap in access to quality education.

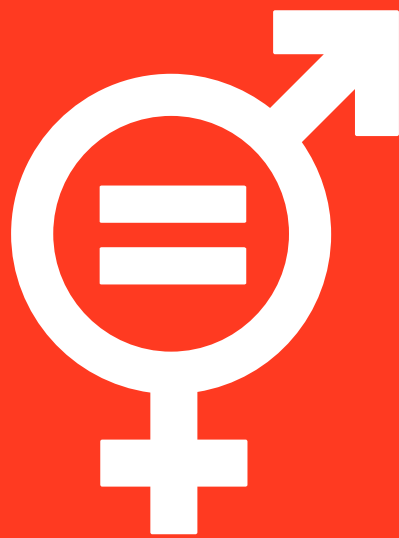
Despite the appearance of a coherent education system, these factors hinder the creation of an inclusive educational environment that encourages students to think critically and take responsibility for their actions, and weaken society's resilience to political and economic challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support for teachers in Belarus and in exile by providing scholarships, grants, internships, retraining programs, and mentoring programs for dismissed teachers, creating conditions for their inclusion in informal networking with European educational structures.
2. Advocate for the rights of teachers:
 - a. Increasing pressure on the Belarusian authorities through international and European structures, supporting independent media and human rights defenders;
 - b. Supporting the creation and publication of alternative reports on the state of education and Education for sustainable development (ESD) in Belarus.
3. Support development of online courses and platforms for Belarusian students and teachers, supporting independent educational initiatives, including:

- a. developing teaching materials and resources on ESD topics (human rights, democracy, gender equality and cultural diversity, and active citizenship);
 - b. preserving Belarusian-language education: promoting educational institutions and initiatives that teach in the Belarusian language, developing digital materials on the history and culture of Belarus.
4. Provide financial support for integration into the European educational space: long-term funding for Belarusian educational projects in emigration, facilitating the employment of teachers in European educational institutions.

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



SDG 5: ACCESS TO PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This section was prepared by Belarusian Coalition, organizations, initiatives and activists against national and domestic violence (in exile)

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Women in Belarus continue to face the problem of gender-based domestic violence against the backdrop of the ongoing political crisis and repression of civil society organizations. The country still lacks a specialized comprehensive law on the prevention of domestic violence. Most criminal cases on domestic violence are privately produced and can be terminated upon reconciliation of the parties. The duration of protective orders is limited to 30 days, which is not enough to resolve a situation of domestic violence. None of the 130 state «crisis rooms» provides specialized assistance to victims of domestic violence. The Ministry of Internal Affairs considers domestic violence statistics to be «restricted information» and does not provide public access to them. A unified model for implementing correctional programs for aggressors has not been officially adopted. State intelligence services have unjustified access to the personal information of victims and aggressors collected in the Register of Facts on Domestic Violence. Public service specialists, especially law enforcement officers, do not undergo specialized training in working with victims and are subject to numerous gender stereotypes. Criticism of the authorities' actions to prevent domestic violence is prohibited.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

In 2022, amendments and additions to the Law of the Republic of Belarus «On the Fundamentals of Activities to Prevent Offenses» came into force, which have the potential to intensify the implementation of state policy in the field of preventing domestic violence. Despite the positive dynamics, the Law cannot replace comprehensive specialized legislation. The document does not define the problem of domestic violence as a gender issue, although the state recognizes [that 90% of victims of domestic violence are women](#). Ignoring this relationship indicates that the state does not understand how gender inequality, as a root cause, and gender, as a factor in women's vulnerability, are related to domestic violence.

Simplifying the procedure for issuing a protective order by the internal affairs agency is an important, yet insufficient step to protect victims and bring offenders to justice. It is still issued with the written consent of the victim. This is ineffective because victims are often dependent on their abusers and are afraid to give such consent. The extension of a protective order after thirty days is not provided for by law.

The Register of Facts of Domestic Violence records excessive personal and confidential information about victims, aggressors, and witnesses of domestic violence, which is accessible to a wide range of government agencies, including state media. This reduces public trust in government institutions.

Both victims and aggressors are invited to meetings of interdepartmental councils to provide assistance to victims of domestic violence, where officials try to reconcile them. Responsibility for family well-being is placed on the woman as the «keeper of the hearth». This practice contributes to additional victimization of female victims, as well as violates the principle of confidentiality, since «random» people gain access to sensitive information, as the composition of the participants in the interdepartmental councils is not personal.

Women who have three or more children and suffer from domestic violence are especially vulnerable if they want to divide property acquired during marriage. By law, large families have the right to receive financial assistance from the state for the construction/purchase of an apartment. However, in the event of divorce due to domestic violence, the local administration (executive committees) does not issue permission to sell or exchange residential premises built with the use of a preferential loan or subsidies. Therefore, many women are forced to remain in violent relationships until the loan is repaid, and often they are forced to pay the real estate loan alone without financial assistance from the aggressor spouse.

State social services do not provide specialized services for victims. In 2022 and 2023, of [all those who received the services of the «crisis room», only about half were victims of domestic violence](#). This can further traumatize women, as well as contribute to the violation of the principle of confidentiality, especially in small communities. There are cases when perpetrators of domestic violence move into «crisis room».

CONSEQUENCES

The state's de-prioritization of the problem of domestic violence and refusal to cooperate with civil society organizations leads to a decrease in citizens' awareness of the problem and their desire to seek help and protect their rights. In 2024, [awareness of services assisting women who have experienced domestic violence was 19%](#), compared to 55% of those who knew about services helping animals. According to a 2023 survey, 14.1% of residents of the Minsk region know nothing about domestic violence. 78.3% of respondents believe that the key cause of domestic violence against women is the use of alcohol, drugs, and other psychoactive substances. In 2023, [50.8% of female victims did not tell anyone about what happened](#). Women with disabilities, elderly women, women raising minor children, and women living in rural areas are highly vulnerable to domestic violence. However, state statistics on domestic violence are hidden, and the available data are not disaggregated by gender, age, region of residence, presence of children in the family, disability, and other important characteristics, which makes it difficult to assess the needs of vulnerable citizens and understand the real scale of the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt a specialized Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, taking into account the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, which should recognize the gendered nature of the problem of domestic violence.

2. Transfer the category of criminal cases on domestic violence from private prosecution to cases of private-public or public prosecution, which will ensure the participation of the prosecutor and avoid closing cases due to the reconciliation of the parties.
3. Make public, accessible, and regularly updated state statistics on domestic violence, taking into account the criteria of gender, age, region of residence, presence of children, disability of victims and perpetrators.
4. Create specialized services, in particular «crisis room», for victims of domestic violence based on a gender approach in each regional center, additionally considering the situation in small towns and rural areas.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



SDG 6: WATER AND SANITATION MANAGEMENT IN BELARUS: INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS, DATA DEFICITS, AND LIMITED CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

This section was prepared by Yavor Levachou, PhD student of Vilnius University

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

SDG6 is one of the most embedded SDGs in Belarus's political programs, with targets highly aligned with the national strategy. In 2021, Belarus provided the entire population with water supply services organized in compliance with safety requirements, and 98.3% of the population used sanitation services. The share of discharged treated domestic and industrial wastewater in the country increased from 99.4% in 2016 to 99.9% in 2023. Water use efficiency in Belarus fluctuated in 2015–2023, peaking in 2020 (BYN 64.1/m³) amid the pandemic and declining water consumption. A sharp drop was observed in 2021–2022, likely due to sanctions and the economic downturn. In 2023, [the efficiency began to recover, amounting to BYN 59.6/m³](#).

From 2016 to the present, Belarus has been implementing state programs aimed, among other things, at achieving SDG6. The state program «Comfortable Housing and Favorable Environment» includes the subprogram «Clean Water», which aims to provide consumers with centralized water supply systems and drinking water, [improve the quality of wastewater treatment and the reliability of sewage systems](#). The [state program «Environmental Protection and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources»](#) is focused, in terms of water resources management, on finding new sources of groundwater and improving monitoring of the state of water bodies.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND SEWERAGE

According to official data, all residents of Belarus use water supply services organized in compliance with safety requirements. However, the current level of data disaggregation does not allow for a clear indication of where exactly action is needed to ensure safe drinking water. Drinking water is available to the population, but not every water supply source (especially a well or borehole on a plot) is covered by quality monitoring. In terms of sanitation, the biggest problem is the lack of disaggregated data. The decrease in the share of the urban population using sanitation services calls into question their quality. Certainly, Belarus has put an end to open defecation, but the lack of data on the number of households using unsealed cesspools creates a barrier to assessing the implementation of the task.

WASTEWATER POLLUTION

A major problem is the discharge of untreated wastewater. Its share is to be reduced by at least half by 2030, while the reduction in the share of water courses with a «good» ecological status is worrying. Unfortunately, in the Republic of Belarus, there is no clear understanding of the exact location and condition of cattle burial grounds, and many agricultural enterprises cannot afford high-quality systems for collecting and treating domestic wastewater, manure storage and removal systems. Increased water use efficiency depends on the modernization of the water consumption system. Today, agriculture with the lowest efficiency is a kind of «anchor» for Belarus. In the conditions of the economic crisis, the likelihood of such modernization, especially in the primary sector of the economy and water management, is decreasing, including due to the departure of potential creditors of infrastructure projects. At the same time, the intensity of consumption in modern economic realities will most likely continue to decrease due to shrinking economic demand and a decrease in the population.

WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Due to the political crisis in Belarus, transboundary cooperation has significantly decreased. The degree of implementation of integrated water resources management in Belarus will remain at a moderately high level, that is, the possibilities for implementing management elements are generally adequate, and implementation is generally within the framework of long-term programs.

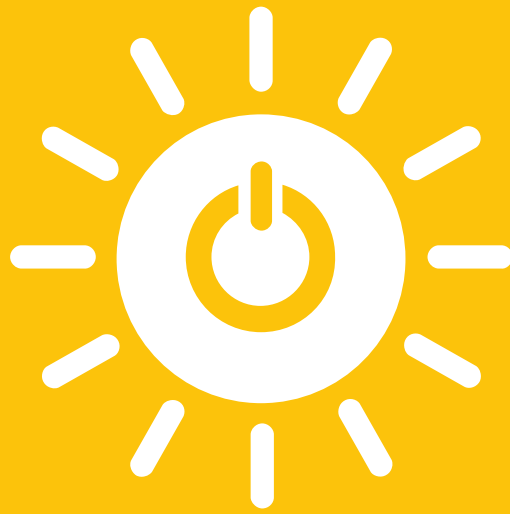
The trend towards wetland decline is a reason for concern. It is worth noting that this is the only target not reflected in the state programs of the Government of the Republic of Belarus. Programs related to wetlands were often financed by the European Union, and after the liquidation of environmental organizations and the loss of funding, the situation may become more complicated. From 2023, data on the area of water-related ecosystems will be generated using a newly developed methodology; however, [this methodology does not cover all water bodies but generates a proxy indicator](#).

In general, the deterioration of the political and economic situation leads to a decrease in international assistance and funding for government programs aimed at achieving SDG6. In Belarus, [according to the Water Code](#), there are basin councils in which representatives of government agencies, water users, as well as public associations and scientific organizations participate. Environmental public organizations are excluded from this list, many of which have been liquidated. Thus, the level of expertise in decisions made and public involvement in this process is reduced, which does not support or strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water management and sanitation. The population does not realize the value of water resources, which leads to their irresponsible use. Moreover, the exclusion of civil society from the process of achieving SDG6 undermines confidence in the results of the implementation of a particular target.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Gradually develop systems for monitoring the quality of drinking water, including in cooperation with civil society; include water quality control for the degree of pollution in the toolkit of household surveys.
2. Pay more attention to data disaggregation through cooperation with public utilities and authorities. Include questions on cesspool and septic tank disposal in household survey tools.
3. Stimulate the creation of a civil control system for the condition of water bodies, modernize wastewater treatment assessment systems and improve state monitoring of water bodies: expand the network of observation points and the list of measured pollutants (microplastics, heavy metals), ensure the availability of information on the results of state monitoring of water bodies.
4. Introduce manure processing technologies, and do not allow their storage in open areas without waterproofing. Conduct inventory and assessment of the condition of cattle burial grounds, including anthrax.
5. Include the issues of wetland area reduction in state programs, do not allow upland bogs to be drained, and work on their conservation and restoration. Improve the system for assessing the area of wetlands and their protection.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



SDG 7: STATUS AND TRENDS OF ACCESS TO CLEAN AND RENEWABLE ENERGY IN BELARUS

This section was prepared by Yaugen Makarchuk, iSANS expert

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In Belarus, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 is characterized by stagnation or even regression in several key indicators. According to official data, the share of the population with access to electricity (indicator 7.1.1) has been stable at 100% for many years. However, for indicator 7.1.2 — the share of the population using mainly clean fuels and technologies — there is no updated data: the latest known estimates relate to 2019 and are not published annually. In 2023, the energy intensity of the economy remained virtually unchanged compared to previous years, indicating stagnation. Indicator 7.2.1, reflecting the share of energy production from renewable sources, decreased and returned to the 2019 level, and almost no new renewable energy capacity was introduced. The increase in installed capacity in 2022 was due to the launch of the Rechytsa solar power plant, which was subsequently arrested and does not actually produce electricity.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

[After 2022, negative changes were noted in the process of achieving SDG 7 in Belarus.](#) Despite official statements about commitment to sustainable development, actual indicators show a lack of progress.

The energy intensity of the economy in 2023 remained at the level of previous years, without demonstrating the expected decline that usually accompanies GDP growth. In 2023, GDP grew by 3.9%, but the main driver of growth was industry, a more energy-intensive sector of the economy, which explains the maintenance or even growth of energy intensity.

SDG indicator 7.2.1 «The ratio of primary energy production (extraction) from renewable sources to the gross consumption of fuel and energy resources» decreased in 2023 and returned to the 2019 level. This is due to the fact that the authorities stopped launching new renewable energy projects and focused only on the operation of existing equipment.

According to the SDG indicator 7.b.1 — installed capacity of renewable energy production (W/person) — there have been virtually no changes since 2020. The slight increase is explained by a decrease in the population, and not by the introduction of new capacities. The launch of the Rechytsa solar power plant in 2022 almost completely ensured the growth of installed capacity in that period. Still, the plant was subsequently seized, nationalized, and in 2023 did not produce electricity, which leaves the indicator unchanged since 2020.

CONSEQUENCES

The continued stagnation in the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency in Belarus entails significant socio-economic consequences. The high energy intensity of the economy reduces its competitiveness and leads to increased costs of fuel and energy resources. The country remains dependent on energy imports, despite the growth of electricity production at the nuclear power plant.

The lack of growth in the renewable energy sector is holding back the transition to a low-carbon economy and limiting the country's ability to adapt to modern climate and technological requirements. Political risks and the nationalization of facilities, as happened with the Rechytsa solar power plant, are hindering investment and the introduction of modern technologies in the energy sector. If the situation does not change, Belarus risks further technological lag and increased economic isolation.

Belarus demonstrates formal compliance with SDG 7 only in terms of universal access to electricity (100%). Stagnation or regression was recorded for other indicators, and key renewable energy indicators returned to the 2019 level. There are practically no new renewable energy projects being implemented, and the energy intensity of the economy remains high.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Resume publishing data on indicator 7.1.2 to assess the share of the population using clean fuels.
2. Ensure the commissioning of new renewable energy capacities and protect investments from political risks.
3. Reduce the energy intensity of the economy, especially in industry, by modernizing equipment and increasing energy efficiency.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8: THE SYSTEMATIC AND GROSS VIOLATIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN LABOUR RELATIONS

This section was prepared by Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP)

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In July 2022, all Belarusian independent trade unions (Free Trade Union of Metalworkers (SPM), Free Belarusian Trade Union (SPB), Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP), Belarusian Trade Union of Radio-Electronic Industry Workers (REP)) and their association - Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), [have been forcibly liquidated by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus](#). In June 2023, [together with more than 20 years of non-compliance with the Recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry](#), this became the basis for the [application of Article 33 of the ILO Constitution to Belarus](#) (the second country in the world after Myanmar). Belarus does not recognize the ILO mandate under Article 33 and deliberately does not cooperate with the ILO under the Article 33 regime.

In March-August 2023, supervisory complaints of SPM, BNP, and SPB were rejected by the Supreme Court. *Inter alia*, SPM and SPB - due to the lack of authority to file a complaint. According to [Belarusian law](#), the liquidation of a legal entity terminates the power of attorney. The forced liquidation of the trade union excludes the possibility to appeal.

To operate legally, trade unions must be registered. Independent trade unions cannot legally function in Belarus. Those involved face criminal charges and up to 10 years' imprisonment for pursuing union goals or related human rights work. As a result of the forced dissolution in the country, BKDP now operates from exile.

Therefore, in Belarus, freedom of association in labour relations is essentially absent:

- workers are prohibited from free choice to join or establish a trade union;
- workers are not properly represented in collective bargaining agreements at the local and State levels;
- workers are not properly represented in social partnership (workers - employers - state), including in terms of participation in the legislative process;
- there is no representation of workers by trade unions for the protection of their interests.

At the same time, there is mass discriminatory repression against trade unionists by the State.

As of 23 April 2025, the State has persecuted more than 70 trade unionists. Among these, some were imprisoned, some were subject to the restriction of freedom, while others had been released but not exonerated. 28 trade unionists are imprisoned, e.g., Aliaksandr Yarashuk, BKDP chair, ILO Governing Body member. 49 trade unionists are recognised in an administrative manner as «extremists», 9—as «terrorists».

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

There are 2 categories of trade unions in Belarus:

- 1) State-backed trade unions acting under the umbrella of their association—the Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions (FPB) that carry out the official policy of the State and do not comply with the requirements of the independence of trade unions; focus on management of real estate (sanatoriums, children’s holiday camps, business centers, etc.); organize excursions and other “cultural” events for workers, and, most importantly, actively participate in the repression against workers at State-owned enterprises, failing to protect them from mass discriminatory layoffs, and remaining silent on regressive changes to labour legislation since 2020, as well as organises Presidential elections, [operate in Belarus](#). Its chair is included in the Presidential Personnel Registry;
- 2) independent trade unions (SPM, SPB, BNP, REP) and their association—BKDP.

All independent trade unions in Belarus have been forcibly liquidated by the State in July 2022, and only State-backed trade unions, which in reality perform functions under the Government’s instructions, operate in Belarus. Therefore, the representation of workers in Belarus as the implementation of freedom of association is not proper—the State itself chose the side of social dialogue in the [person of the entity under its control](#)—the FPB, and liquidated all independent trade unions as «unfavorable» to the regime.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRESTS

Many workers are subjected to administrative arrests ([up to 30 days per charge](#)) for trade union activities and affiliation (e.g., Kyril Barstok—25 days, Andrei Shkirenka—15 days, Aliaksandr Liashkou—15 days. It was his fourth consecutive administrative isolation, which amounts to 59 days).

UNFAIR DISMISSALS

Belarusian authorities are systematically persecuting trade unionists and participants of the 2020 National Strike, including unfair dismissals and the non-renewal of labour contracts (e.g., Minsk Electrotechnical Plant Named After Vi Kozlov, Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant, Belarusian Railways, Peleng, Belaruskali, Naftan, Grodno-Azot).

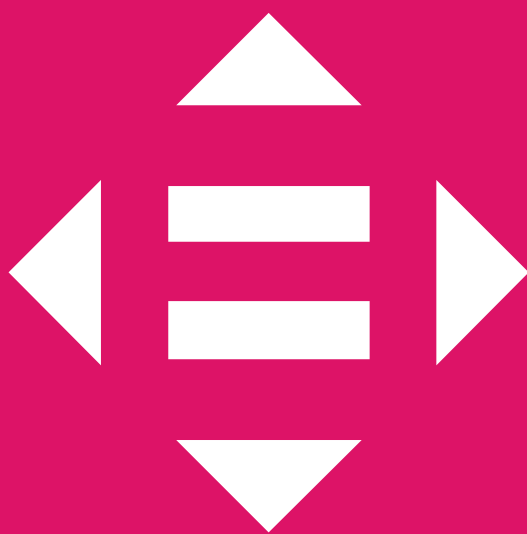
INTERROGATIONS, DETENTIONS AT WORKPLACES

At State-owned enterprises, coordinated actions by KGB, GUBOPiK, management, and State-backed trade unions involve workplace interrogations, detentions, and unlawful dismissals of employees for participation in peaceful protests, opposition to the regime, cooperation with banned NGOs or independent trade unions, or anti-war views (e.g., Rinaplastik, Lakokraska, Vitebskenergo, Naftan, Mozyr Oil Refinery, Grodno Azot, Belaruskali).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. End repression against workers, civil society activists, NGOs, and independent trade unionists; reinstate unfairly dismissed workers with compensation.
2. Restore all independent trade unions (SPM, SPB, BNP, REP, and their association—BKDP).
3. Engage with the ILO in *good faith*, intending to fully implement all outstanding recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry, supervisory bodies, and Article 33 of the ILO Constitution legal mechanism.
4. Repeal Art. 42 (7) of the Labour Code of the Republic of Belarus on dismissals for strikes.
5. Repeal the Law «On countering extremism» № 203-Z of 4 January 2007 and other related laws.
6. Amends the Law «On mass events» № 114-Z of 30 December 1997, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On foreign gratuitous aid” № 3 of 25 May 2020, and other related legislation. The amendments should be directed at: end sanctions for single trade union violations; ensure lawful restrictions on mass events align with freedom of association; bring the scope of activities for which foreign gratitude aid can be used into accordance with freedom of association.
7. Cooperate in *good faith* with the ILO for follow-up measures for implementation of the International Labour Conference Resolution concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Belarus (June 2023).
8. Acknowledging the lack of independence of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and its participation in the repressive policies of the State, including the falsification of the results of the Presidential election, suspend its participation in the International Labour Conference.
9. Acknowledging the lack of independence of the trade unions that are members of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, exclude them from membership in international trade union organizations.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG 10: SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN BELARUS

This section was prepared by Independent Expert

Supported by Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Prismatic - intersectional queer feminist organization

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Since 2016, [Belarus has lacked a dedicated SDG 10 action plan](#), relying instead on fragmented policies—on disability, gender equality, and child protection—that lack measurable indicators and transparent reporting. The UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Belarus [confirm that systemic inequality has deepened, with marginalized groups](#)—including political prisoners, civil society activists, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic and religious minorities, and migrants—subjected to escalating discrimination and repression[] While the principle of equality is enshrined in the Constitution and laws, it remains too vague to be effectively applied in discrimination cases. The anti-discrimination provisions in the Labor Code and the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have a very limited scope. [The absence of specialized legal procedures limits victims' ability to seek justice.](#)

In 2024, the level of tolerance in Belarusian society received a score of -1.80 in the [Belarus Resilience Index](#) indicating a state of «crisis». By comparison, in 2023, tolerance was rated even lower, at -2.00, which also corresponded to a crisis situation.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Information about the situation of persons with disabilities in Belarus has become increasingly scarce as the regime intensifies its efforts to enforce an information blockade. According to the latest statistics, [over 575,000 people in Belarus, or about 6.12% of the population, are officially registered as persons with disabilities.](#) However, the government's repressive policies have forced many, including disability rights activists, to flee the country, leaving those whose human rights are most severely impacted without adequate representation.

The national legislation addresses disability in a perfunctory paternalistic manner, falling short of the Convention's principles of respect for inherent dignity and equality. The Law «On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Their Social Integration» (2022) incorporates some concepts from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities but retains an outdated medical approach. While retaining the basic definitions deriving from the Convention, the law does not contain any mechanisms for implementation, monitoring or sanctions, making the implementation of the principle of non-discrimination unrealisable in practice. The official terminology used in Belarus, including in the 2022 Law, is not aligned

with the social model of disability. [The pejorative term «invalid» persists despite opposition from representative organisations of persons with disabilities, who prefer the term «persons with disabilities».](#)

The country maintains a rigid, vertically controlled system of social protection in which nearly all services are provided by the public sector. Despite extensive lists of state support measures for people with disabilities, these services often remain inaccessible in practice, and authorities routinely ignore feedback from affected individuals. Belarus lacks, and explicitly denies the necessity of, a deinstitutionalization strategy, [leaving people with severe disabilities facing an impossible choice between entering institutional care homes or remaining at home without adequate assistance, sometimes at the risk of losing their lives.](#)

The government's repressive policies have transformed many disability organizations into government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), which serve the interests of the regime both domestically and on the international stage.

CHILDREN

Belarus adopted national action plans on children's rights (2022–2026), while these initiatives signal the government's recognition of relevant issues, [challenges in child protection persist and are often further exacerbated by state actions.](#)

Amendments to the Citizenship Law and the Decree No. 278 have severely limited Belarusian citizens' access to documents and legal procedures abroad, leaving children—[especially those born overseas to parents unable to return](#)—at heightened risk of statelessness and denied essential rights and services.

Children with disabilities face discrimination based on age, disability, and gender, leading to stigmatisation and challenges for their families to feel fully included in society. Issues relating to children with disabilities are distributed across various ministries without robust coordination, resulting in a piecemeal approach to advancing their rights. [The transition from childhood to adulthood is particularly problematic, lacking a coordinated approach.](#)

ROMA

The law on national minorities prohibits restriction of the rights and freedoms of individuals based on their belonging to a national minority and bans forced assimilation. Governmental and societal discrimination against Roma minority groups persisted. According to leaders of the Roma communities, security and law enforcement agencies continued arbitrarily to detain, investigate, profile, and harass Roma, including by forcing fingerprinting, mistreating them in detention, and subjecting them to ethnic insults.

The Roma community continued to experience marginalization, various forms of discrimination, high unemployment, low levels of education, and lack of access to social services. Roma generally held citizenship, but many lacked official identity documents and refused to obtain them.

In 2022 the Ašmiany Roma Community, the Belarusian Roma Association «Roma»—of the oldest organisations supporting national minorities in Belarus—[were liquidated](#).

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Article 32 of the Constitution of Belarus contains a special clarification that marriage is a union of a man and a woman introduced in 2022, despite the fact that same-sex civil unions had never been legal in the country. The inclusion of such a provision in the Constitution aligns with the consistent course towards [increasing State oppression of the LGBTQ+ community](#).

Following the adoption of Resolution No. 24 of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus in 2024, the concept of «pornography» was expanded to include the demonstration of «non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behavior» In turn, the list of «non-traditional sexual relations» includes, «sexual relations between people of the same sex». This allows the use of Article 343 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus against LGBTQ+ community members and activists. According to reports from human rights organizations, [at least 15 detentions were recorded in 2024 under this article, with two people facing charges](#).

[On 8 July 2025](#), the Belarusian government submitted to the House of Representatives a draft law «On Amendments to the Codes on Administrative Liability», introducing a new Article 19.16 effectively legalizing administrative repression against LGBTQ+ individuals, transgender persons, and anyone advocating for the right to freely choose one’s identity or parenthood. Under the bill, fines for disseminating information that «creates an impression of attractiveness» will be issued. Alarmingly, the law equates LGBTQ+ relationships and childlessness with pedophilia, promoting an extremely aggressive and discriminatory message that threatens the safety and dignity of thousands of people. [This approach not only violates fundamental human rights but also fuels hatred within society](#).

In July 2025 Belarus has passed amendments to the Law on the Rights of the Child that ban any information deemed to “discredit the institution of family and marriage” or to promote homosexuality, gender transition, pedophilia, or childlessness, requiring [all content mentioning LGBTQ+ topics](#)—to carry an 18+ label and allowing authorities to block related websites and social media groups. The bill fails to clarify what qualifies as propaganda, raising legitimate fears that any information about LGBTQ+ people might lead to prosecution. [The amendments also threaten the parental rights of those raising children to accept diverse SOGI](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Outline any plans to align the Russian definition of «person with a disability» with the social model of disability.
2. Describe measures to support the development and functioning of representative organisations of persons with disabilities, including financial instruments to ensure their sustainable functioning.

3. Adopt a national plan to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities in the society, targeting public and private sectors, media and the general public. In continuous partnership with the organisations of persons with disabilities, undertake educational activities to eliminate stigma and prejudice about disability and provide support, including funding, for such activities.
4. Repeal the provisions of Resolution No. 18 of the Ministry of Culture and cease active attempts to ban the dissemination of information concerning LGBTQ+ people, repeal the amendments to the Article 37 of the Law on the Rights of the Child and Article 343 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus to and cease equating information about homosexual, bisexual relationships and transgender identities with pornography.
5. Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including protection on the basis of SOGI, in line with international standards and focusing on all spheres including healthcare, education and social protection coupled with awareness raising actions for relevant staff.
6. Create an independent mechanism for considering complaints of discrimination on the basis of SOGI, including with the participation of human rights organizations working with LGBTQ+ people.
7. Develop and implement non-ideological, evidence-based and SOGI-inclusive educational programs on sex education for teenagers, grounded in internationally recognized scientific research and a human rights-based approach.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



SDG 11: THE ISSUE OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

This section was prepared by Independent Expert

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Despite the declared commitment to sustainable urban development, Belarus has virtually no real mechanism for citizen participation in urban planning. After 2020, there was a sharp narrowing of democratic procedures: public participation was reduced to a formal collection of opinions through online questionnaires that are not subject to public disclosure. [As emphasized in the 2023 Alternative Report on SDG 11](#), «not a single one of the country's 53 cities has seen stable and effective public participation in urban governance».

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

Since the publication of the previous Alternative Report and the launch of the project «Supporting the Efforts of the Republic of Belarus in Nationalizing and Localizing the SDGs» in 2022, the situation with civil society participation in urban development has not improved, but rather worsened.

Firstly, the period for posting information on urban development projects before public discussions has been reduced from 10 to 5 days, which makes full participation impossible. Secondly, the Scheme of Integrated Territorial Organization of the Territory (GSKTO), a key strategic document determining the development of entire regions, has been excluded from the list of documents to be discussed.

According to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 425 of June 30, 2022, only individual architectural concepts or detailed planning projects are subject to discussion. Even these discussions are not transparent—the necessary sections on the websites of executive committees are difficult to find or inaccessible, as, for example, in Minsk and Brest.

Instead of full-fledged discussions, online questionnaires are increasingly being conducted, which do not imply publicity and responsibility. Although such questionnaires were conducted in 22 cities, the results were not published but are used exclusively by design companies. This approach does not allow citizens to see the opinions of other participants and has no legal force. Finally, on the largest city project—the adjustment of the general plan of Minsk—the public discussions planned for 2024 never took place, and the document itself remains inaccessible.

CONSEQUENCES

Such formal participation of civil society leads to a loss of trust in the authorities, an increase in urban development conflicts, and a decrease in the quality of decisions made. People are

deprived of the right to influence processes that directly affect their lives—transportation, landscaping, real estate development, waste management.

Without feedback from the population, the unevenness of regional development worsens, as can be seen in the example of the Minsk region and the depopulation of the Mahilyow region. The closed nature of processes increases the feeling of alienation and reduces the motivation to participate in the development of their city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. When implementing international projects in Belarus, strive to include participation mechanisms and transparency as mandatory conditions. Support programs that strengthen local initiatives.
2. Develop an alternative framework for citizen participation in urban development based on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency, and environmental sustainability.
3. Restore full-fledged public discussions on key urban development documents, publish the results of questionnaires, and ensure informal dialogue with communities.

**12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION**



SDG 12: LOW EFFICIENCY OF THE SEPARATE COLLECTION OF MUNICIPAL WASTE IN BELARUS

This section was prepared by Independent Expert

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In Belarus, the low efficiency of separate collection of municipal waste remains an issue: according to industry experts, in 2024, [the level of use of municipal waste was only 37.9%](#), which is almost half the target (64%) set by the State Program «Comfortable Housing and Favorable Environment» for 2021-2025. At the same time, up to 90% of waste is planned to be involved in recycling by 2035, but the population still has poorly sorted waste, and a significant part of recyclable materials get contaminated and end up in landfills.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

The system of municipal waste management in Belarus has been significantly updated in regulatory terms since 2022. In 2023, amendments were made to the National Strategy for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste and Secondary Material Resources, and in January 2025, a new Technical Code of Practice (TCP) was approved. The amendments introduced several changes, including classifying construction waste as a separate category to factor it into per capita waste generation standards and excluding plant waste from these standards to encourage home composting. They also allow mixed secondary material resources to be collected in a single container where separate collection is impractical and promote the active development of RDF fuel technologies as alternatives to fossil fuels in industry.

However, despite the development of legislation, the practice of waste sorting remains low. There are 9 waste processing plants and 82 sorting lines in Belarus, but only about 25-30% of mixed waste is suitable for recycling. Achieving the 64% target by 2025 will require a significant increase in composting and energy recovery technologies for municipal solid waste.

An important aspect is working with the population. In Belarus, there are over 740,000 waste collection containers and 1,650 recycling collection points, but the population is still poorly informed about the need for sorting. The «Goal 99» campaign only partially fills this gap.

Thus, there is a gap between the state's large-scale plans and the real results on the ground.

CONSEQUENCES

Maintaining a low level of separate waste collection is fraught with overloading existing landfills: despite their reduction from over 3,200 mini-landfills in 2010 to 152 facilities by 2024, burial remains the dominant method of waste management. Municipal waste contaminated with recyclables increases burial costs and reduces the service life of landfills.

Economically, the country is losing resources that could generate profits from recycling — 822.9 thousand tons of secondary resources were collected in 2023 alone, which is significantly lower than the potential. Socially, [citizens continue to develop distrust of housing and communal services reforms and the state's environmental initiatives](#). If the situation does not change, Belarus faces new environmental and economic costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen educational work with the population, relying on the data of the "Goal 99" campaign and explaining the simple scheme for sorting waste into two fractions (clean secondary material resources and everything else) and the benefits of participating in separate collection.
2. Introduce financial incentives, including discounts on tariffs or bonuses for residents and organizations that achieve high sorting rates, and create a transparent accounting and remuneration system.
3. Support private companies and entrepreneurs involved in the collection and processing of secondary material resources through simplified licensing, preferential lending, and priority in government procurement. International organizations should provide assistance through grants to modernize sorting facilities and train staff.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



SDG 13: CHALLENGES OF BELARUSIAN CLIMATE POLICY

This section was prepared by Independent Experts

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

By becoming a party to the Paris Agreement in 2016, Belarus has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and taking measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Effective implementation of the provisions of the Paris Agreement into national policy requires aligning national legislation, policies, and legal frameworks with international climate change commitments. Promises of mitigation and adaptation are more credible when based on goals and measures enshrined in official documents. 9 years have passed since Belarus adopted its commitments under the Paris Agreement: what does Belarusian climate policy look like today, and how does it comply with the Paris Agreement?

The following key aspects of the Paris Agreement can be identified: 1) the pursuit of climate neutrality (mitigation), 2) effective management of natural systems, 3) adaptation, 4) financing, technology and innovation, 5) climate education.

In Belarus, climate change is recognized at the state level, as evidenced by both Belarus' accession to the Paris Agreement and the existence of official documents that highlight climate change as a pressing challenge. However, Belarus' climate policy is rather fragmented: it is reflected in a number of plans, policies, strategies, and programs. Relevant documents can be conditionally divided into three categories: 1) conceptual documents, constitution, 2) strategies and plans, and 3) state programs. The consequences of climate change are cross-sectoral in nature, thus, documents that may not be related to climate change at first glance are considered here. At the same time, Belarusian climate policy does not have a general (overarching) long-term plan or strategy that would unambiguously formulate the course and goals of the country's climate policy. Potentially significant documents, such as the National Strategy for Low-Carbon Development and the National Action Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change, are «under development», despite the fact that almost a decade has passed since the adoption of the Paris Agreement.

CHALLENGES

Those state documents that address climate change mainly focus on the environmental aspect – the rational use of nature and environmental protection. For example, the National Security Concept highlights [adaptation to climate change as a key interest in the environmental sphere](#) (paragraph 17). According to the Eighth National Communication to the UNFCCC, the [narrow list of governmental bodies participating in the development and implementation of Belarus' climate policy](#) does not include the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Health, or even the Ministry for Emergency Situations (even though this body primarily and directly deals with the

consequences of extreme weather events). Climate change is a cross-sectoral issue that disproportionately affects various social groups and sectors of the economy. Thus, a range of government bodies with the necessary influence and expertise should be included in the process of developing climate policy. As stressed above, without the participation of diverse stakeholders, it is challenging to effectively adapt social systems and the economy to new conditions. Civil society, the non-profit non-state sector, business, the academic and expert community, as well as vulnerable social groups, must be included in the processes of developing Belarus' climate policy. Especially considering that the Paris Agreement recognizes both the cross-sectoral impact of climate change and the need for an inclusive approach to addressing it.

Another challenge for Belarusian climate policy is the existence of inconsistencies or contradictions between policy documents or even within the same documents. For example, the National Security Concept recognizes climate change as an external threat, but simultaneously the [Nationally Determined Contribution](#) (NDC) does not seek to significantly reduce emissions (1990 is a chosen base year, ensuring semblance of significant decrease of emissions, when in reality it is attributed to economic effects of the dissolution of the USSR rather than mitigation measures). Additionally, the National Action Plan on Adaptation to Climate Change has not been developed yet, although the deadline for its publication, stated in the NDC, expired in 2022. Returning to the National Security Concept, paragraph 27 states that increased attention to the problem of climate change in the world is being used as an excuse to limit the access of Belarusian products to international markets, along with paragraph 61 identifies the need to reduce the carbon intensity of the economy. [Forestry policy](#) focuses on increasing the volume of logging: the same documents that declare the priority of forest restoration over forest use, plan to increase logging, and even use forests [«in the bioenergy market»](#). The State Program «Environmental Protection and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources» provides for the study of subsoil to increase the mineral and raw material base (and, naturally, allocates significantly more resources on the subprogram «Subsoil of Belarus» than on the subprogram «Hydrometeorological Activities, Protection of Natural Resources in the Conditions of Climate Change»). Meanwhile, the National Strategy for a Circular Economy until 2035 notes that the burning of fossil fuels has a negative impact on climate change.

Another pressing problem for Belarusian climate policy is the lack of clearly defined mechanisms for achieving the set goals, as well as their specification. In rare cases, when climate actions are prescribed, such as in the aforementioned State Program «Environmental Protection and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources», they are reduced to weather monitoring, inventorying water resources, and preparing reports and communication papers on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions for international organizations.

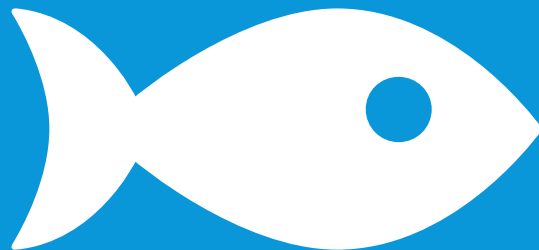
The development of nuclear energy, enshrined in the Constitution, narrows the possibilities for the development of alternative energy sources. This is evidenced by the focus of the State Program «Science-intensive Technologies and Equipment» on nuclear power plants, as well as the existence of a sub-program for training personnel for nuclear energy in the State

Program for Education and Youth Policy (and the absence of mention of climate education and the need to train personnel for the development of a low-carbon economy).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Multifaceted nature of climate change and climate justice by including stakeholders beyond the public sector in the process of development of state climate policy—civil society organizations, academia, business, and vulnerable communities—to ensure its justice and efficiency.
2. Increase Belarusians' climate literacy. Develop and implement education programs in the field of climate change at all levels, including in the course of advanced training for practitioners and managers.
3. Reflect Paris Agreement provisions in state policies and legislation, and harmonize climate policy accordingly, ensuring its consistency.
4. Develop sectoral and local climate adaptation plans based on assessments of current and long-term climate risks, and integrate the proposed measures into local and sectoral development programs.
5. Create an effective system of climate services and forecasting, including the financing of programs in the field of weather forecasting, risk communication, and the development of appropriate climate adaptation measures.
6. Ensure transparency and availability of climate-related data to the public.

14 LIFE BELOW
WATER



SDG 14: IMPACT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERWAYS AND CHALLENGES ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS IN BELARUS

This section was prepared by «Nerush Natura» foundation and Uladzimir Zuyeu, CEO

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Despite being landlocked, Belarus has a significant impact on the health of marine ecosystems through transboundary waterways, including the Baltic and Black Sea basins. The main sources of pollution include nutrient discharges (nitrogen, phosphorus), plastic waste and microplastics, as well as industrial pollution.

According to 2024 data, about 62% of pollutants entering the Baltic Sea originate from the rivers flowing through Belarus – the Western Dzvina and Neman. The concentration of nutrients in surface waters continues to increase, despite existing measures to reduce them. In particular, high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus contribute to the eutrophication of water bodies, which negatively affects biodiversity and water quality. There is also a sharp increase in microplastic levels, especially in the Neman and Dniapro rivers, which has a long-term impact on ecosystems and human health.

Belarus has previously participated in international projects to assess the state of transboundary aquatic ecosystems. However, there are currently no regular observations of the state of small watercourses in the country, including with the involvement of public organizations and initiatives, which complicates a comprehensive assessment of the impact on the environment.

Belarus plays an important role in the conservation of Baltic salmon and European eel, regulating their protection and controlling poaching. However, physical barriers (for example, hydroelectric power stations in Lithuania, Latvia, and Belarus itself) hinder the natural migration of eel between the Baltic Sea and Belarusian water bodies. Belarus participates in international discussions on eel protection, including a dialogue with the EU on the transfer of eel larvae for stocking water bodies. The possibility of a moratorium on industrial eel fishing is being considered. Programs are being implemented to protect spawning rivers and combat poaching.

Belarus imports 135-160 thousand tons of fish and seafood per year. At present, there is no systematic accounting of the share of products from certified environmentally friendly fisheries. It is recommended to introduce an assessment of imports in terms of legality and sustainability of catch.

Belarus is actively involved in scientific research aimed at studying water pollution and developing new treatment technologies. The main areas include monitoring pollutants, modernization of treatment facilities, and participation in international programs.

Belarus is a party to the CITES Convention, which regulates international trade in endangered species. The issue of membership in the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) Committee on Fisheries is being considered. Belarus is an observer in HELCOM (Helsinki Commission for the Protection of the Baltic Sea) but does not yet actively participate in its work.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

Insufficient progress in the modernization of treatment facilities. Within the framework of the Clean Water program (2021-2025), only 40% of the planned facilities have been reconstructed. This is not enough to significantly reduce nutrient pollution, and in 2024, nitrogen and phosphorus levels in transboundary rivers remained virtually unchanged.

According to the results of studies in 2024, the concentration of microplastics in Belarusian rivers has increased by 15% compared to 2023. Studies have shown that more than 80% of water samples from the Neman contain microplastics in concentrations that exceed the EU permissible limits by 2.3 times.

Belarus has not restored full cooperation with international organizations such as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM). Since 2023, the country has stopped providing up-to-date data on pollution in the Baltic region, which complicates the development of joint solutions to reduce pollution.

Continued pollution leads to the degradation of aquatic ecosystems, a decrease in fish populations, and a deterioration in water quality. Eutrophication of the Baltic and Black Seas may intensify, threatening the biodiversity and health of the region's population.

Deteriorating water quality impacts public health, increasing the risks of diseases associated with contaminated water and microplastics, as well as reducing income from fisheries and tourism, and increasing the costs of water treatment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Belarus should resume active participation in HELCOM and start providing comprehensive data on the state of transboundary water bodies.
2. Create a national strategy to reduce microplastic pollution and support public participation in monitoring water quality and protecting water resources.
3. Develop transboundary cooperation on water resources and biodiversity management.
4. Develop new treatment technologies, taking into account the emergence of new pollutants. Introduce stricter standards for treatment facilities.
5. Develop an Action Plan for the implementation of SDG 14, which will outline priorities and specific steps. Include additional indicators in the national reporting system to more accurately track progress. Develop public education programs on the role of Belarus in preserving marine ecosystems.

15 LIFE ON LAND



SDG 15: FOREST CONSERVATION, FOREST MANAGEMENT, AND FOREST EXPLOITATION

This section was prepared by Inessa Bolotsina, Forest biodiversity expert

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The key ecosystems and biodiversity of Belarus are concentrated in the forests. In 2021, the program «Belarusian Forest for 2021-2025» was adopted, in which forest resources play a much greater raw material role rather than an ecological one. In fact, [all the declared indicators for achieving SDG 15](#) and the implementation of the new state program «Belarusian Forest» for 2021-2025 are not directly related to either the effectiveness of preserving forest ecosystems or the goal of stopping the depletion of biological diversity.

Until 2022, practically the only and most effective tool for implementing the principles of sustainable forest management in Belarus and switching to sustainable forest management was forest certification according to the FSC and PEFC systems. All forest enterprises have passed it. However, since 2022, forest certification has ceased to operate in the country and has canceled its certificates. [And some forestry institutions have begun to roll back to the past](#): abandoning the standards for preserving biodiversity, which are prescribed by the FSC standard, in particular, identifying and monitoring red-listed species, preserving biodiversity elements in clear-cut areas, reducing the number of areas left for natural reforestation, as well as refusing to inform citizens by posting annual public reports on economic activities on forestry enterprise websites. Commitment to the principles of sustainable forest management is gradually deteriorating.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

By 2022, the most important environmental NGOs in Belarus that participated in monitoring forest conservation and management ceased their activities; as of 2024, new organizations have not appeared. The termination of the FSC and PEFC forest certification systems in 2022 has further complicated the opportunities for public monitoring, forest conservation, and participation in forest management for the purpose of sustainable forestry development. National indicator 15.2.1. SDGs have not been met since 2022. In 2022, Belarus withdrew from the Aarhus Convention and terminated most international cooperation programs. In 2023, it [withdrew from the Bern Convention as well](#). In Belarus, the public has fewer and fewer levers of influence on decision-making in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, and forest managers have fewer constraints in the balance of interests between the conservation and use of forests.

According to official data, the forest cover of Belarus reached 40.2% in 2024. The structure of the forest fund is extremely confusing and therefore creates room for statistical maneuvers. Perhaps such maneuvers ensured the increase, [which may not reflect reality](#). Thus, the

appearance of well-being in the field of conservation and rational use of forests is created, although the real situation may be worse. Under the guise of the absence of threats to forest loss, the regime increases its exploitation to a dangerous limit.

[The change in the net forest area after 2021 decreased and amounted to 0.13% in 2022 and 0.05% in 2023.](#) A decrease indicates the prevalence of forest management over reforestation, while a significant decrease indicates irrational and unsustainable management.

The state policy in the field of forest management is aimed at a constant increase in forest management volumes and the achievement of planned indicators. The «Belarusian Forest for 2021-2025» program plans to increase the volume of timber harvesting per hectare [from 3.05 m³/ha in 2021 to 3.15 in 2025](#). The utilitarian approach, aimed at forest resources as a source of raw materials, prevails. In turn, Belarus needs a balanced approach based on the interests of protecting forest ecosystems, the importance of their ecosystem services, and social significance, and their relationship with the interests of the forestry department and the timber processing complex.

CONSEQUENCES

In March 2022, the European Union included the commodity group «wood and wood products; charcoal» in the sanctions package against Belarus. After that, the efficiency of the industry collapsed. In 2023, [profitability fell to 8.6%](#), and net profit fell 4 times compared to 2021.

On the contrary, the introduction of sanctions became one of the factors that led to a decrease in logging in Belarus. In 2022, logging began to decline, and in 2024, this figure became the lowest in the last 8 years—20 million m³. The trend of decreasing the total volume of forest felling in Belarus, which emerged in 2021, continued in 2024. The load on forest ecosystems from logging is slightly reduced, which is beneficial for the conservation of biodiversity. Ignoring the implementation of the activities of the Strategy for Adaptation of Forestry in Belarus to Climate Change until 2050 in favor of increasing forest management will contribute to the loss of forest sustainability in the near future. This will be an obstacle to obtaining ecosystem services and will deprive timber processing enterprises of raw materials.

Despite the fact that forestry management has managed to reduce overdue debt on leasing payments and loans, forestry is among the [top 5 economic areas of activity in terms of the number of unprofitable enterprises in Belarus](#). The problem of personnel shortage in the forestry industry cannot be solved. It does not improve compared to the period before 2022. Almost every forestry enterprise has open vacancies, the number of which in some forestry enterprises can be from 20 to 60 people.

Conducting forest felling, including old-growth forests, at an accelerated pace leads to the disappearance of biodiversity species characteristic of such ecosystems. In the new edition of the Red Book of Belarus in 2025, it is planned to include 3 new species from the list of flora characteristic of old-growth forests.

The liquidation of NGOs, the displacement of independent experts worsen the potential of Belarus to work in the field of forest conservation and management. The lack of specialists may hinder the solution of urgent problems in this area in the near future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The public of Belarus should be supported in implementing public monitoring and participation in forest management.
2. Facilitate the promotion and implementation of the activities proposed by scientists in the Strategy for Adaptation of Forestry in Belarus to Climate Change until 2050.
3. Review national indicators for achieving the SDGs in the field of forest conservation and forest management.
4. Amend Technical code of practice 17.07-01-2021 (33140) towards increasing the effectiveness of species protection measures and simplifying the procedure for transferring habitats under protection.
5. Restore the state environmental protection fund, which previously existed under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection
6. Reform the forest management system by separating logging and forest protection.
7. Make information on the financing of environmental protection measures and their effects available to the public.
8. Expand the EIA procedure to any construction on the territory of protected area forests.
9. Optimize the protected area system by increasing their area of forests by 2030 to at least 20%.
10. Make publicly available the Plans for the conservation of populations of forest species of flora and fauna listed in the Red Book.
11. Ensure the possibility for interested representatives of Belarusian civil society and environmental organizations not affiliated with the regime to participate in the procedures (mechanisms) of the Aarhus and Bern Conventions.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

This section was prepared by Belarusian Helsinki Committee

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The human rights situation in Belarus has been consistently deteriorating over the past five years, with systemic and large-scale politically motivated repression following the rigged 2020 presidential elections and subsequent peaceful protests. The problems that were raised in the [previous civil society report](#) on SDG 16 within VNR in 2022 have not lost their relevance, and many of them have become even more acute.

In 2024, the National Human Rights Index reflects a further decline compared to 2022, with civil and political rights' situation significantly worsening. According to the National Human Rights Index, the human rights situation in the country in 2024 is assessed at 2.4, which is 0.2 lower than in 2022. The level of enjoyment of civil and political rights has also dropped by 0.2 compared to 2022 and now stands at 2.1, while social and economic rights are currently assessed at 3.4 (3.6 in 2022). General human rights measures in 2024 were rated by experts at 1.7, [which is 0.1 lower than in 2022](#).

The state is actively legalising repression for systematic politically motivated persecution in various fields: in 2023-2024, [more than 50 normative legal acts were adopted/amended to intentionally formalize human rights violations or create conditions for their violation](#).

As of 11 July 2025, [there are 1150 political prisoners in custody](#), with a total of 4022 individuals having been imprisoned for political reasons since 2020. Conditions of detention amount to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and in some cases torture, including [long-term incommunicado detentions](#).

Between 300,000 and 600,000 Belarusians have been forced to flee the country due to the threat of political persecution.

The UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus has found reasonable grounds to believe that [Belarusian authorities have committed crimes against humanity, including persecution and related acts](#).

Belarus adopted national action plans on gender equality (2021–2025), children's rights (2022–2026), and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017–2025). While these initiatives signal the government's recognition of relevant issues, challenges in gender equality, child protection, and rights of persons with disabilities persist and are often further exacerbated by state actions. Crackdown on the independent civil society organisations leading to almost half of all country's CSOs cease to exist [further weakens development efforts for vulnerable populations they were serving](#). The Inter-agency plan to implement the recommendations accepted by Belarus following the

second cycle of the UPR and the recommendations of the treaty bodies for 2016-2019 did not contain meaningful actions to change the human rights situation.

STATE-SANCTIONED VIOLENCE: A SYSTEMIC CRISIS

Repression and Police Brutality. Instead of reducing violence, the Belarusian government has institutionalized it as a primary tool of political control. Unlawful and disproportionate use of force has become routine, particularly during arrests. It has been a common practice to coerce detainees, including children, into humiliating «repentance» recordings, which are [disseminated through state-controlled media](#). Short-term and pre-trial detention are frequently [accompanied by torture and inhuman treatment](#). Political prisoners also suffer from systemic abuse, including lack of proper medical care, solitary confinement, forced labour and prolonged incommunicado detention. [At least 8 political prisoners died in custody between 2020 and 2025](#).

The Death Penalty. During 2022 and 2023, the authorities consistently, contrary to their international obligations, took steps to expand the scope of the death penalty for crimes that do not meet the criterion of [“the most serious crime”](#). Authorities continue to carry out executions without any transparency, [even when cases are under international review](#). Alarming, in 2024, the authorities have used the death sentence against a foreigner for political purposes. German citizen Rico Krieger, who was arrested in Belarus, faced charges under six articles of the Criminal Code, including mercenarism and terrorism. This marks the first death sentence for actions that did not result in human casualties and the first death sentence for a foreigner [in the last 15 years](#). Later Krieger was pardoned and became part of a [“large exchange” between the USA and Russia](#)

[Gender-Based Violence](#). The official statistics on domestic violence are not available to the public and classified by the Ministry of Internal affairs as «information of restricted distribution». The absence of dedicated domestic violence legislation leaves victims without adequate legal protection. Since 2020, all specialised NGOs offering gender-sensitive support have been shut down, severely limiting assistance for survivors, particularly women, children, the elderly, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities. Awareness campaigns have declined, and professionals receive no regular gender-sensitive training.

[Militarization of Education and the Cult of Violence](#). The Belarusian government [actively promotes militarized patriotism in schools](#), shifting focus from peace and human dignity to a glorification of strength and war. [Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022](#), this trend has escalated dramatically. Schools impose ideological conformity through coercion, intimidation, and propaganda, fostering hostility toward political dissenters and certain national groups under the guise of state-sponsored narratives.

EROSION OF THE RULE OF LAW AND DENIAL OF JUSTICE

The Belarusian government systematically manipulates the legal framework to suppress dissent.

The arbitrary interpretation and application of [counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation in Belarus remains a tool for repression and intimidation](#).

Additionally, over the past two years, more than 50 legal acts have been amended or introduced to codify norms that directly violate human rights or create conditions for their violation across various spheres. These measures now extend beyond civil and political rights to economic, social, and cultural rights, affecting [not only activists but the broader population](#). Several positive legislative changes contain exemptions discriminating against those convicted on “extremist” charges, that is, in essence, [persons facing political persecution](#).

National courts do not uphold the rule of law, instead acting as part of a repressive mechanism, issuing politically motivated sentences and judgments against dissenters in violation of fair trial guarantees. Since 2020, Belarusian courts have prosecuted tens of thousands of individuals in politically motivated administrative and criminal cases, handing down disproportionate sentences for participation in peaceful protests or for expressing real or perceived dissenting views. Recent legislative changes further allow trials in absentia, which are conducted by biased courts with no opportunity for an effective defence, resulting in lengthy prison sentences, deprivation of property and housing, and possibly even the death penalty.

At the same time, appeals against actions of law enforcement, state bodies, and election commissions [are systematically rejected](#). None of the approximately 5,000 complaints regarding torture and unlawful actions by law enforcement officers during and after the 2020 presidential election in Belarus have been properly investigated. The authorities have not condemned the use of torture - instead, they have repeatedly and publicly endorsed the actions of the security forces, effectively encouraging such abuse and fostering a sense of impunity. [Cases of deaths during peaceful protests, as well as deaths in custody, have also not been investigated](#).

[The legal profession is tightly controlled by the state](#), with the Ministry of Justice managing bar admissions, appointing leadership, and arbitrarily revoking licences. Since 2020, [141 lawyers have been disbarred for defending individuals in politically motivated cases](#), with [many facing arrest, torture, and criminal prosecution](#). Currently, [6 lawyers remain imprisoned for fulfilling their professional duties](#).

With an entirely subjugated judiciary, the persecution of legal professionals, and the liquidation of independent civil society organisations, access to justice in Belarus has been effectively dismantled.

THE ABSENCE OF TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Belarusian political institutions are entirely centralized under the president, whose arbitrary decisions dictate state policies and public services. This concentration of power disconnects

governance from real socio-political needs, undermining institutional accountability and transparency, and leaves no effective checks and balances within the state structure..

Both local and parliamentary elections of 2024 and presidential elections of 2025 did not meet international standards for democratic and free elections and were accompanied by numerous violations of the electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus. [All stages of the electoral process](#) were not just administratively controlled by the authorities, but were organised by them to retain power and simulate popular support and consensus in society.

Loyalty to the regime remains the primary criterion for participation in public affairs. Free expression of opinion - particularly criticism of state actions - is not tolerated and is often criminalized under broad anti-extremism legislation. Since 2021, [authorities have forcibly dissolved or pressured into self-liquidation at least 1944 non-profit organisations](#), including civic associations, trade unions, political parties, and foundations. [Activities of unregistered associations remain prohibited](#), and since 2022, criminal penalties for such activities have been reintroduced, including [imprisonment of up to two years under article 193-1 of the Criminal Code](#). [Anti-extremist legislation](#) is also routinely misused to suppress civil society under the pretext of national security. The Law of February 14, 2023, № 250-Z «On the Foundations of Civil Society», [established a hierarchy of NGOs based on their interaction with the state](#), with the Ministry of Justice recognising only five associations as entitled to engage with the public. Repression against civil society in Belarus targets not only organizations but also individual activists. As of July 2025, five human rights defenders remain imprisoned, with three others recently released after serving their sentences. Over 70 trade unionists have faced state persecution; 26 are currently serving prison terms of up to nine years.

As a result, independent civil society has been entirely excluded from all decision-making processes, including those related to human rights and governance, further entrenching authoritarian control.

Under such conditions, decision-making processes are neither inclusive, transparent, nor accountable. Public trust in state institutions is virtually nonexistent - replaced instead by fear and coercion.

DENIAL OF LEGAL IDENTITY FOR BELARUSIANS ABROAD

On September 4, 2023, the Republic of Belarus adopted Decree No. 278, titled «On the Procedure for Issuing Documents and Performing Actions». The Decree significantly cut the functions of the Belarusians consulates and embassies, mandating that several administrative procedures, including property transactions and obtaining or renewing passports, must be conducted exclusively within Belarus. Even Belarusian citizens permanently residing abroad are required to return to complete these processes. Cutting access to these public services for those who can not return to the country due to security reasons, lead to their de facto statelessness.

The Decree has led to widespread violations of human rights of Belarusians in forced exile: the right to equal treatment (non-discrimination); the right to freedom of movement; the right to respect for private and family life; the right to marry and found a family; the right of every child to be registered and acquire a nationality; the right to property. The most affected groups include human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and opposition members, particularly those without international protection. Children are among the most vulnerable, especially those born outside Belarus to parents [unable to return](#).

The Decree is one of the most illustrative instruments of transboundary character of the politically motivated persecution by Belarusian authorities.

SUPPRESSION OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Belarusian authorities have waged an unprecedented campaign of repression against independent media and journalists, employing legislative, administrative, and judicial tools to systematically dismantle the media landscape that operates outside state control. Between 2021 and 2025, Belarusian authorities carried out [235 arbitrary detentions and 320 searches targeting journalists](#). At [least 38 media professionals](#) are currently imprisoned on politically motivated charges related to their professional activities, while journalists and bloggers in exile face prosecution in absentia under so-called special proceedings.

[At least 38 independent media outlets](#) have been designated as «extremist formations or organisations», making any cooperation with them—including interviews, comments, or content sharing—a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment. Legislative amendments introduced since 2021 have [further restricted freedom of information](#) and significantly increased state interference in journalistic activities.

These repressive measures severely limit access to independent information in Belarus. Journalists are effectively barred from obtaining government data and must resort to disguising themselves as ordinary citizens to communicate with officials, reducing both the quality of reporting and government accountability. The «anti-extremist» legislation makes it dangerous to communicate with independent media and their journalists, which creates a significant barrier to access to primary sources of information. Government agencies continue to manipulate data, conceal official statistics, and [refuse individual requests for information on grounds of national security](#).

MANIPULATIVE AND SELECTIVE COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

Belarus does not seek to expand the scope of its international obligations. On the contrary, during the reporting period Belarus denounced the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), cutting off access to the Human Rights Committee, and withdrew from two international treaties related to human rights and environmental protection: the Aarhus and Bern Conventions.

While the government submits reports to treaty bodies, it ignores recommendations and presents a misleading picture of the human rights situation. It dismisses Human Rights Committee views as advisory and rejects interim measures, particularly in death penalty cases. Belarus refuses to recognise UN mandates investigating post-2020 rights violations, including the OHCHR examination and the Group of Independent Experts. The government also [rejects cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus](#) and no longer participates in relevant UN interactive dialogues.

For over 20 years, Belarus has failed to comply with ILO recommendations, leading to the rare application of Article 33 of the ILO Constitution in 2023. [It refuses to implement follow-up measures in good faith](#). Belarus has also dismissed OSCE Moscow Mechanism reports in 2020 and 2023 and Vienna Mechanism 2024 as politically biased, further isolating itself from international oversight.

The issue of the establishment of a national human rights institution has not been considered by the authorities. There have been no public discussions on this topic since the development of the Inter-agency plan to implement the recommendations accepted by Belarus following the second cycle of the UPR and the recommendations of the treaty bodies for 2016-2019. Existing state institutions are not independent and cannot serve as a substitute for an NHRI.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES IN COMBATING DISCRIMINATION

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, Belarus still lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that clearly defines direct and indirect discrimination or offers effective enforcement mechanisms. Existing provisions in the Labour Code and the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are narrow and insufficient, leaving most victims without access to justice. Article 130 of the Criminal Code, which addresses hate crimes, has never served as an effective tool against discrimination. Since 2020, it has been increasingly weaponized by the state to suppress dissent rather than protect vulnerable groups.

Since 2020, there has been a movement towards formalising inequality. Throughout 2023-2024, [numerous discriminatory legal acts were adopted](#), targeting individuals based on their actual or perceived political beliefs, as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, and reproductive choice.

De facto discrimination also persists. [Women continue to face systemic barriers](#) in politics, education, and employment, with gender stereotypes deeply embedded in state policies and public discourse. Similarly, national minorities -including Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Roma - experience rising levels of state-sponsored discrimination. Persecution includes [ethnic profiling, the closure of cultural institutions](#), suppression of minority languages, and targeted harassment under so-called «anti-extremist» laws. In 2023-2024 the intensification of the [repressive campaign against the LGBTQ+ community](#) at the legislative level was accompanied by direct persecution (increased detentions and arrests). Considering both legislative measures and law enforcement practice, the possession of a foreign residence permit is [gradually crystallizing into a separate discrimination ground](#).

The forced liquidation of NGOs supporting vulnerable groups further exacerbates these challenges, leaving marginalized communities increasingly isolated and unprotected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cease political repression and ensure the immediate release of all political prisoners.
2. Stop the use of torture, inhumane and degrading treatment against detainees and prisoners, including political prisoners. Publicly and unequivocally condemn the use of torture and all forms of inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as unnecessary and disproportionate use of force by law enforcement and other state actors. Cease the use of forced «repentance» videos and other coercive practices targeting detainees, including minors. Stop the practice of incommunicado detention and ensure that detention conditions meet international human rights standards.
3. Introduce a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its complete abolition. Until then ensure full transparency in all death penalty cases, especially those involving foreign nationals or ongoing international review processes.
4. Adopt comprehensive gender-based violence legislation, including a dedicated domestic violence law aligned with the Istanbul Convention. Make publicly available official statistics on domestic violence. Provide gender-sensitive training for professionals. Reopen and support independent NGOs providing gender-sensitive assistance, including shelters, hotlines, and legal and psychological support. Provide gender-sensitive training for professionals.
5. Stop ideological pressure and propaganda in schools. End the militarization of education and eliminate compulsory participation in military-patriotic programmes. Promote peace, tolerance, and human rights in education.
6. Repeal or amend overly broad and vague counter-terrorism and anti-extremism laws and stop their misuse against peaceful dissent, civil society, and independent media.
7. Conduct a comprehensive review and repeal of all legal acts adopted in the past years that codify or enable violations of human rights, bringing them into full compliance with international human rights standards.
8. Ensure the independence of the judiciary and legal profession by safeguarding fair trial guarantees, protecting lawyers from persecution, and enabling effective legal defense in politically motivated cases.
9. Ensure prompt, independent, and thorough investigations into all deaths in custody and deaths from excessive force, as well as all allegations of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment and other human rights violations.
10. Dismantle the excessive concentration of power in the presidency and restore a system of checks and balances through meaningful separation of powers and institutional reform.

11. Revise electoral legislation and procedures to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections in line with international standards, including the restoration of political rights, as well as independent media, and civil society participation.
12. Stop repressions against civil society activists, including human rights defenders and trade unionists.
13. Reinstate forcibly dissolved NGOs, trade unions, and political parties, and end the crackdown on independent civil society. Lift the criminal liability under Article 193-1 and restore the rights of those prosecuted. Cease the practice of designation of NGOs as “extremist”.
14. Restore meaningful dialogue and inclusive participation of a diverse civil society in public affairs as a prerequisite for democratic governance.
15. Repeal Decree No. 278 and reverse amendments to the Law on Citizenship that enable arbitrary deprivation of citizenship and restrict access to consular services for Belarusians abroad. Ensure that all Belarusian citizens, including those residing abroad, have access to civil documentation and consular assistance without discrimination.
16. End the repression of independent media, journalists, and individuals exercising freedom of expression, including the misuse of anti-extremist laws, website and social media channels blocking, and internet shutdowns. Ensure full and unhindered access to information.
17. Reaccede to international human rights obligations, including re-accession to the ICCPR Optional Protocol and the Aarhus and Bern Conventions. Cooperate fully with UN Special Procedures and treaty bodies, as well as ILO, and implement their recommendations in *good faith*. Engage constructively with the OSCE, respect the findings of the Moscow Mechanism and exchange information in *good faith* under Vienna Mechanism.
18. Adopt and effectively implement comprehensive national human rights plans and programmes, ensuring meaningful cooperation with independent CSOs at all stages. Establish an independent NHRI in accordance with the Paris Principles.
19. Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that clearly defines all forms of discrimination—including direct, indirect, and intersectional discrimination—and ensures effective legal remedies and enforcement mechanisms. Repeal all laws and administrative practices that formalize inequality, including those that stigmatize or prosecute on the grounds of SOGI and reproductive choices, restrict women’s rights, or target individuals based on their real or perceived political beliefs. Reopen and support NGOs that provide vital services to vulnerable groups.

SDG 16: PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL LIFE AS AN OFFENCE

This section was prepared by PEN Belarus

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The right to participate in cultural life is specified in Article 51 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. However, since 2020, Belarus has institutionalised a systematic campaign of cultural repression that directly undermines freedom of expression and broader human rights protections for cultural actors. The right to participate in the cultural life index in Belarus dropped [from 4.6 in 2019 to 1.4 out of 10 in 2023](#).

A striking example of the deterioration of this right is the story of the actors of the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre in Minsk—in 2020 the Theatre was supposed to celebrate its 100th anniversary. On August 16, 2020, the [theatre's collective signed an open letter to the Belarusian people](#). «We, the Kupala Theater actors, look with pain at what is happening in our country right now: every night we live as if on a battlefield. We are against terror and violence. We are against death and blood in our country». In it, they demanded criminal proceedings against those who had issued unlawful orders and others involved in the associated crimes. The next day, on August 17, the theatre's director, Pavel Latushko, was dismissed. This triggered mass protests within the cultural community. In solidarity with their director and in protest against the authorities' actions following the 2020 elections, [over 60 actors and theater workers resigned from the Yanka Kupala Theatre](#).

The Ministry of Culture of Belarus not only failed to resolve the conflict but also actively contributed to the reprisals against dissenting actors. These artists formed the independent theatre group Volnyja Kupalaŭcy, which mainly stages video performances, as it is impossible to obtain official permission for public performances. Authorities have also pressured venue administrators [who were willing to cooperate with such troupes](#). Since 2021 Volnyja Kupalaŭcy, a unique independent theatre group, has been operating in exile in Poland. Despite numerous challenges, the theatre group continues to promote Belarusian culture by staging performances that explore themes of freedom, identity, and human rights.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

Since 2022, the Belarusian authorities have been increasingly using anti-extremist legislation to silence peaceful dissent and target critics. The government has weaponized the criminal justice system to persecute dissenting voices. In practice, any activity that deviates from state ideology and shows elements of dissent may be labelled as «extremism». [The UN OHCHR has found](#) that Belarus's counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation is overly broad and used to suppress dissent and restrict access to information.

On 13 February 2024, a court ruled to designate the social media pages of Volnyja Kupalaŭcy as «extremist». As a result, the group's Facebook, Instagram, SoundCloud pages, YouTube channel, logo, and even email address [were labelled «extremist materials»](#). According to

Belarusian law, simply forwarding, storing, subscribing to, or liking such content (e.g., watching a recorded performance online) can be punished by a fine of up to €360 or up to 15 days of arrest (Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences of Belarus). For 2022–2024, the Belarusian authorities labelled as «extremist» not less than 527 materials, including books, cultural resources and social media of cultural workers: 289 in 2024, 182 in 2023, 56 in 2022.

On 13 December 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus designated Volnyja Kupalaŭcy an «extremist formation». All of the troupe’s activities are now banned on internet platforms within Belarus. The Ministry warned that individuals participating in or sharing information with members of the troupe would be treated as participants in an extremist formation and prosecuted under Articles 361-1 and 361-4 of the Criminal Code of Belarus — facing up to 7 years in prison. This includes actors (as members of the “extremist formation”), viewers (as financiers), and subscribers (as facilitators). In effect, anyone associated with the troupe in any way risks serious imprisonment.

In contrast, on 17 March 2025, the Polish Minister of Culture awarded Volnyja Kupalaŭcy an honorary prize from the Polish Culture Promotion Fund. [This recognition underscores the baselessness of the Belarusian authorities' actions toward the ensemble.](#)

The authorities’ policy not only hinders the realisation of Belarusians' right to participate in cultural life, but also criminalises the work of cultural actors and citizens. The case of Volnyja Kupalaŭcy is illustrative, but it is far from the only example of cultural rights violations in Belarus. It reflects a broader, deeply troubling trend: since 2020, increasing repression against dissent reveals a grim shift in state policy — from censorship to systematic persecution of ideologically «undesirable» citizens and cultural figures. The Belarusian authorities included at least 266 cultural figures in the «List of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons involved in extremist activities» and 38 in the «List of organisations and individuals involved in terrorist» at the time of writing.

CONSEQUENCES

As a result, the cultural sphere suffers dramatically—both in quality and in scale. Fearing harsh punishment, citizens refrain from engaging in cultural life, are forced to emigrate, or resort to [self-censorship](#). Cultural rights cannot be exercised under state persecution. There are also clear trends of forced [Russification](#), [violations of language rights](#), and [widespread censorship](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

For government of Lukashenko:

1. Cease harassment and persecution of cultural figures for the legitimate exercise of their human rights, including freedom of expression and artistic freedom.

2. Ensure independent, impartial, transparent, and prompt investigations into all allegations of human rights violations. Perpetrators must be brought to justice through fair trial proceedings.
3. Take legislative, administrative, and judicial measures to ensure safe conditions for creative activities and cultural projects, and to preserve and develop Belarusian culture within the country.

For the International Community:

1. Expand opportunities from international organisations to support cultural projects and initiatives, including those inside Belarus that promote democratic values, and projects in exile. Culture in emigration serves as a unifying force for the Belarusian diaspora. With many active citizens forced to leave the country, there is strong demand for participation in cultural life and access to cultural products.
2. Take measures to ensure favourable conditions for Belarusian cultural organisations in exile, including institutional support in new jurisdictions.
3. Continue to put pressure on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end the persecution of cultural figures.

SDG 16: BELARUSIAN YOUTH UNDER REPRESSION AND ISOLATION

This section was prepared by The Belarusian National Youth Council RADA

Belarusian youth continue to be the target of systemic repression. According to data as of April 23, 2025, more than [1,800 young people under the age of 35 have been subject to criminal prosecution](#), of which 296 remain behind bars for political reasons. The reasons for the prosecution are participation in peaceful protests, activity on social networks, and participation in cultural and public initiatives.

IDEOLOGIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Since 2022, educational institutions have actually turned into an [instrument of political control](#). University administrations include special services officers responsible for monitoring students and teachers, identifying «disloyal» ones, and forcing them to self-censor. Students are reprimanded and expelled for their political stance, and peaceful demonstrations are effectively banned inside universities. [Students are forced to join pro-government student and youth organizations](#), which are used by the authorities to demonstrate a picture of mass support from the student community and for propaganda purposes.

The practice of show trials in educational institutions has become [a clear tool of state intimidation and control](#). Holding court hearings within the walls of universities is aimed not so much at restoring justice as at demonstrating the consequences for dissent and civic activism. Such trials are accompanied by violations of the right to a fair trial and are used as a means of public humiliation to influence young people.

Students on state-sponsored scholarships are required to work for 2–5 years. In 2023, the [conditions became even stricter](#): remote and part-time employment are prohibited. In addition, the distribution mechanism is used as a tool to suppress dissent.

DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Gender discrimination in higher education is perpetuated through disproportionate quotas that favor men in admission to educational institutions of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and in the [allocation of medical internships](#). Although the list of professions prohibited for women has been reduced, [88 professions remain inaccessible](#), which limits career opportunities. The employment rate for men is 72%, while for women it is 63%. The gender wage gap remains significant, with women earning 20–26% less than men on average.

The problem of gender-based violence in Belarus remains acute. There is no comprehensive legislation prohibiting all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. Official statistics are difficult to obtain, as reporting is inadequate and access to data is limited. According to available data, [more than 70,000 people were victims of domestic](#)

[violence in 2022 alone](#). The closure of NGOs that protected women’s rights and supported victims of violence, as well as the criminalization of cooperation with them, limited access to help for victims of violence and made it difficult to collect information about gender-based violence.

LGBTQ+ young people are at particular risk. In 2024, [more than 30 LGBTQ+ people were detained on trumped-up charges, with torture by law enforcement officers](#). The law allows for criminal prosecution for public displays of LGBTQ+ identities.

Belarusian-speaking youth face cultural discrimination—national symbols and literature are criminalized, and the [Belarusian language is being pushed out of the public sphere](#).

Higher education remains inaccessible to people with disabilities, especially in terms of physical accessibility and communication support. Modern technologies and learning aids are practically unavailable. Admission to higher education institutions for people with disabilities depends on a positive conclusion from the Expert Committee on Medical Rehabilitation, which is often based on theoretical ideas about the possibilities of further employment.

CIVIC ACTIVISM AND PRESSURE ON YOUTH INITIATIVES

Independent youth NGOs have found themselves under unprecedented pressure: mass liquidations, criminal prosecutions and legislative restrictions have made their activities almost impossible. The criminalization of activities on behalf of an unregistered or «extremist» organization has become an additional tool of repression. As of March 2025, more than 200 organizations, including youth organizations, [had been declared «extremist» or «terrorist»](#), and [at least 1,917 NGOs had been liquidated](#). This policy effectively excludes young people from the public sphere and criminalizes civic activism.

Youth NGOs in exile face a gradual loss of connection with their target audience within the country, which reduces the quality of their activities and [limits their ability to respond effectively to the needs of their target audience](#). Constant tension, fear, psychological pressure, and lack of prospects lead to mass burnout among youth leaders. Initiatives lose their human resources, continuity, and structural sustainability.

Forced migration, trauma from state persecution, and difficulties in adapting in exile [significantly worsen the mental health of Belarusians](#), especially children, adolescents, and young adults. Young people face integration difficulties, discrimination, legal and financial instability, as well as mental health problems against a background of stigmatization and a lack of culturally sensitive support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guarantee academic freedom and end political control in educational institutions, ensuring the right of students to express their views freely without risk of persecution.

2. Take measures to eliminate gender discrimination in education and employment, including abolishing lists of «prohibited professions» and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for all.
3. Reform legislation to effectively protect against gender-based violence, including adopting a law on combating domestic violence and ensuring support for victims through independent services.
4. End discrimination and persecution of youth based on LGBTQ+ and Belarusian-speaking identity, guaranteeing equality of all groups before the law.
5. Ensure the right to freedom of association and end the criminalization of youth NGOs, including restoring the right to registration and free operation to organizations.

SDG 16: IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 16 IN THE CONTEXT OF ENSURING THE RIGHT TO A FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT

This section was prepared by Ecohome

Supported by Green Network, Green Belarus Alliance

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Despite the fact that official statements by the Republic of Belarus continue to declare commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, the real situation, both with legislation and in law enforcement practice, in the field of ensuring human rights and, in particular, the right to a favorable environment, demonstrates a steady and consistent deterioration.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

Building peaceful, just, and open societies is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The inability to achieve Target 16.1 has become a notable trend in the progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 16 for Belarus. Belarus's provision of its territory for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is complicity in unleashing a war, which is contrary to the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Trends in achieving Goal 16 in the context of the right to a favorable environment by Belarus in the period 2022-2025 consist of failure to achieve most of the set objectives. It includes Belarus's withdrawal from international agreements regulating the implementation of the right to a favorable environment, increased pressure on civil society, liquidation of environmental NGOs, persecution of activists implementing environmental rights, and reduction of opportunities for public participation.

COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Unlike in the previous period, when positive trends were noted in the implementation of the right to a favorable environment, due to Belarus' participation in legally binding international treaties that provided broader opportunities than national legislation, such trends seem to be impossible under the current conditions.

On July 18, 2022, [Belarus withdrew from the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](#) (Aarhus Convention). After withdrawing from the Convention, all Aarhus centers were liquidated in Belarus. [Belarus amended the legislation](#), which, combined with actual practice, complicated citizens' access to environmental information and limited public participation in environmental issues.

On 18 August 2023, [Belarus denounced the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats \(Bern Convention\)](#).

The public was not involved in these decisions. These steps have a negative impact on ensuring the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and demonstrate the state's lack of desire for international cooperation. Belarus's policy on environmental agreements weakens guarantees for the implementation of environmental rights and increases the country's international isolation.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Target 16.3 remains unresolved and the situation with access to justice in environmental matters has worsened compared to the previous period, since the right to judicial protection is no longer guaranteed by an international treaty, as well as due to the serious deterioration of the judicial system, which undermines confidence in the existence of justice as such.

PERSECUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS, PRESSURE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The practice of liquidating environmental organizations has become systemic. More than 110 environmental organizations of various profiles, from animal protection to education, were liquidated or forced to be liquidated.

In October 2022, the environmental organization Ecodom (Ecohome) was declared an extremist group by the authorities. Internet resources with environmental news, such as the websites of the NGO Ecodom (Ecohome) and the information resource Green Portal (greenbelarus.info), were recognized as extremist materials and blocked in Belarus. Their pages on social media platforms were also recognized as extremist materials.

In 2023, the Supreme Court liquidated the Belarusian Green Party. Its leader, [Dzmitry Kuchuk, received 6 years in prison and was recognized as a political prisoner.](#)

In January 2025, the online platform Petitions.by, created for starting petitions and collecting signatures, was recognized as “extremist materials”, including its social media platforms. This deprived citizens of one of the important tools for highlighting and solving environmental problems.

The ability to safely obtain environmental information has been significantly reduced, and domestic organizations that help citizens realize their environmental rights have virtually ceased to function.

ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING

The effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of institutions, as well as ensuring responsible decision-making by representative bodies (targets 16.6, 16.7) continue to remain unachieved due to the reduction in opportunities for public participation. Almost all active environmental organizations have been liquidated, their representatives have been excluded from public councils, and the changes in legislation do not facilitate the implementation of public rights.

Information on decisions of government bodies related to harmful impacts on the environment or its protection, but not related to the economic activities of legal entities, has been excluded from environmental information. Also, information on the rationale for the need to adopt legislative acts, concepts, strategies, plans, programs, the implementation of which has or may have an impact on the environment, no longer applies to environmental information. In the new version of the Law «On Environmental Protection», the period for providing environmental information was increased to 15 calendar days, which no longer corresponds to the «as soon as possible» terms suggested by the Aarhus Convention and previously enshrined in the Law. These changes significantly limited the public's right to access environmental information.

The period for public discussions in the field of architecture and urban development was reduced from 35 to 20 days, which significantly limits the opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making.

The amendments made to the legislation excluded the concept of public participation in making environmentally significant decisions, replacing it with participation in the discussion of draft decisions.

During the period under review, the right of citizens to participate in making environmentally significant decisions at an early stage, when all opportunities are open for considering various options and when effective public participation can be ensured, was not ensured.

The widespread practice of persecution for any activity has led to the fact that people are afraid to participate even in official public discussions or contact government agencies on environmental issues. There are known cases of detentions and searches, including for collecting signatures as part of such discussions. All this reduces the level of civic activism and undermines trust in government institutions.

Before the mass liquidation of environmental organizations, their representatives actively participated in public advisory councils at various levels. Now, independent organizations are not represented in these councils. Members of the Public Environmental Coordination Council of the Ministry of Natural Resources are mainly structures affiliated with the state, including the Belarusian Orthodox Church and the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Most public advisory councils no longer hold regular meetings. Public councils have lost the function of real dialogue with civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prepare and implement roadmaps that include sets of measures for the re-accession of Belarus to the Aarhus and Bern Conventions.
2. Ensure the full and effective implementation of the Decision of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention.
3. Take practical and individual measures to restore the rights of environmental activists and representatives of environmental organizations violated by government agencies.

4. Introduce changes to the legislation on access to environmental information aimed at ensuring real, unimpeded public access to environmental information, using the provisions of the Aarhus Convention as an example.

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



SDG 17: PROBLEMS WITH STATISTICAL DATA TO MONITOR SDGS IMPLEMENTATION IN BELARUS

This section was prepared by Iryna Ponedelnik, SDGs Expert

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Belarus faces numerous challenges in its national system for forming Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators. Among other issues, this is largely related to legislative changes in 2023: Belstat [may restrict](#) the dissemination and provision of information to users if such dissemination «may cause harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus, public order, morality, rights, and legitimate interests of legal entities and individuals». This decree enables the government of Lukashenko to conceal data necessary for genuine monitoring of SDG progress in the country. Restrictions on information dissemination can facilitate data manipulation to create a more positive picture of SDG achievements. This complicates the independent assessment of the progress made.

Among the main factors undermining data reliability, experts highlight:

- The closed nature of information and limited data access.
- Lack of transparency and unavailability of data from government bodies.
- Methodological issues in data collection, leading to distorted statistics.

This issue is especially important within the high places in international rankings, mostly related to education, environmental issues and SDG Index. Government of Lukashenko has often highlighted Belarus's strong performance in global rankings like the SDG Index—citing, for example, a 24th-place finish in 2021 and 32th in 2025—as proof that «we do everything at the same time». At the same time experts working with SDGs note that they cannot trust Belstat regarding publicly available SDG indicators. State bodies like Belstat frequently withhold or adjust figures—ranging from unemployment and COVID-mortality to trade and industrial output—while independent NGOs and citizens are shut out of SDG assessments. Lukashenko's speeches praise Belarus as «one of the world leaders in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals», but without open, verifiable statistics and civil-society participation, such claims remain unverifiable. In this chapter, you will find various challenges faced by experts working with different SDGs.

KEY CHANGES SINCE 2022

SDG 1: No Poverty

One example of data issues concerns the number of homeless people in Belarus. Official statistics on homelessness are either missing or unpublished. Data is collected at different scales, focusing more on Minsk than on other regions, and there is a risk of duplicate records when people seek assistance from multiple organizations.

The country uses a narrow definition of «a person with experience of homelessness» (limited to the absence of permanent housing). For instance, people who have official registration but are effectively homeless—living in non-residential premises or poor conditions—are excluded from the data, which also affects the relevance of the statistics.

A second example is the statistics on [deaths at the state border](#) and the lack of information about missing migrants.

SDG 4: Quality Education

Belarus does not collect data for SDG target 4.7. In international reports, Belarus states that there are no data because there are no international indicators. However, in this specific target, countries can develop their own indicators, but Belarus does not do this.

Consultations or surveys are often conducted with «convenient» participants (teachers, school representatives), while independent opinions (NGOs, external experts) are excluded or almost absent. Moreover, due to fear, participants in such surveys practice self-censorship, avoiding frank discussion, especially in the context of working with foreign researchers or NGOs.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Among the main issues, experts note the lack of up-to-date information; many SDG 5 indicators have not been updated for a long time. For example, there was a four-year gap in data on the gender pay gap: figures were published in 2021, then again only in 2025.

Official Belstat reports do not specify details, such as which sectors women hold leadership positions in. The difficulty of collecting data on vulnerable groups also affects the real picture of progress on SDG 5. For example, queer individuals fear disclosing personal information.

As a result, this creates the illusion that there are no problems with gender equality. People do not see the scale of discrimination or gender gaps, perceiving their issues as isolated cases.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

In Belarus, data on the area of water bodies is updated only once every five years, and outdated methods are used (e.g., drone surveys conducted once in several years, and restrictions on using Sentinel-2 or Landsat satellite data in favor of «domestic satellites») instead of modern satellite data. Water bodies are dynamic systems (changing after floods, rainfall, etc.), where the timing of measurements is crucial.

Belarusian Research Institutions do not share data to preserve their portion of authority or funding. Experts also note the commercialization of data, where even official data (e.g., hydrometeorological) must be purchased, despite institutions being funded by taxpayers. A significant portion of data in Belarus is officially classified.

Belarus is a watershed country, and pollution or changes in water resources within its borders affect Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. Without high-quality and up-to-date data, this creates risks for neighboring countries.

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Belstat only accounts for data officially reported by enterprises. For example, individual entrepreneurs installing wind or solar systems for their own use do not submit reports, and thus their capacities are not reflected in official statistics.

Often, inaccuracies or manipulative data arise from rounding errors and estimates (in official sources or officials' statements, rounded figures like «about 7,000» appear instead of 6,700). These inaccuracies can lead to errors in analysis. Additionally, analysis is hampered by the low level of data detail; Belstat provides aggregate figures on energy efficiency but does not supply data on trends or details of changes.

After 2020, informal channels for obtaining data through personal contacts with officials were also closed to experts, making it impossible to clarify or verify official figures «from the inside».

Without quality data and an understanding of the real capacity of the energy system in Belarus, it is impossible to build accurate energy balances or decarbonization plans or to conduct investment and financing of projects.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

After 2020, Belstat began closing more sections of statistics, including economic data, reducing opportunities for analysis and independent research. Not all unofficial sources are equally reliable: while data from the IMF, World Bank, and EBRD are generally verified and cross-checked, websites without transparency and journalistic articles require caution and verification.

Regarding SDG 8 indicators, there's also a risk of misinterpretation. For example, Eurostat data on Belarusian migration counts everyone who has received a residence permit in the EU for longer than three months, but this does not necessarily mean all these people have actually moved to the EU.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

Experts point out that even when figures are technically correct (e.g., the number of people with disabilities), trust in them is low because some data are not collected by the state at all; the state conceals or does not publish negative data; and statistics are adjusted to suit the government's needs. Even «simple» figures can be distorted — for instance, the number of people with disabilities seems like an «objective figure», but in practice, it depends on the strictness of the disability recognition system; policies regarding social benefits; the level of barriers in obtaining disability status.

Another problem is the narrow methodology: the state often counts only the presence of ramps as a measure of accessibility, but does not consider: visual and auditory accessibility; availability of information for different groups; quality of infrastructure.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

There is virtually no official public information about cities. In small towns, there is hardly any data at all. In larger cities, only basic indicators (population size, etc.) are available. Data provided by Belstat is fragmented and inconsistent: there is no unified statistical collection for each city, so to compile information about a city, one must search the entire Belstat database.

There is a lack of regularity in data collection and a lack of transparency. Many indicators are collected only once every five years or less. For example, studies were conducted in 2020–2021, with the next wave planned for 2026. When exporting data from Belstat in CSV format, the files lack explanations and formulas for how indicators are calculated.

Particularly challenging is the problem of obtaining spatial data: GIS data is virtually unused officially for analyzing spatial aspects of cities; Spatial information (maps, zoning, green spaces) is absent from official statistics.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Belstat has significant gaps in official statistics, including neglect of topics important for monitoring SDG 12, such as microplastics in water, phthalates in toys, and heavy metals in products. Even when data exist, it is often incomplete or one-sided.

Experts note that previously there was an opportunity to communicate with government representatives or operators and recyclers to verify information and receive answers to questions. However, since 2021, data have provided an incomplete picture of SDG 12 progress. This makes it impossible to understand what truly lies behind the numbers.

Another problem is the insufficient number and high cost of independent laboratories in Belarus for analyzing chemicals and heavy metals. Government laboratories refuse to work upon request from NGOs unless there is an incident. Even gathering obvious information (e.g., photographing product labels, collecting data on containers) can be dangerous for citizens assisting NGOs. Any activity is perceived as suspicious, and fear of repercussions prevents even basic research.

SDG 13: Climate Action

One-time measurements or insufficient sensors in Belarus result in poor climate monitoring and unreliable data. For example, a single meteorological station may record data for an entire city, which does not reflect real conditions in different districts (wind flows, temperature anomalies, etc.). Similarly, a single PM sensor in one location does not reflect pollution in other parts of the city.

This also applies to the recording of extreme weather events, which affect both the economy and society. For instance, if a meteorological station records no wind, but strong gusts in the city center have caused property damage, a court would rely on official statistics, which do

not reflect the local situation. The lack of reliable data hinders urban management planning and makes it impossible to warn people with respiratory diseases and others.

SDG 15: Life on Land

The volume of SDG 15 data is insufficient — even within state agencies (forestry enterprises, nature reserves), the data is lacking, with records being superficial and sporadic.

There is no systematic data collection: for many species of wildlife and ecosystems, data is gathered irregularly or only during projects, without follow-up measurements, leaving researchers and scientists without visibility of trends.

Previously, institutes of the National Academy of Sciences and NGOs accumulated data through foreign aid projects. However, since 2020 and subsequent repression, NGO projects and joint monitoring have diminished. Citizens and independent experts also lack access to the cadastre of fauna and flora, which is accessible only to specialists with a Belarusian SIM card and official position.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the government of Lukashenko:

1. Involve specialized organizations and international partners in data collection and analysis.
2. Use multiple sources of information and cross-check data through various methods and publications.
3. Engage NGOs and civil society initiatives to conduct more comprehensive and objective monitoring.

For the International Community:

1. Ensure that Belarus is not ranked in the international or regional indexes unless independent civil society is given the opportunity to conduct a peer review of the data, following practices used in indexes such as the CCPI Index.
2. Support civil society experts and organizations in exile in developing alternative data systems to ensure accurate and independent information about the situation in Belarus.