

Belarus - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Belarus, officially the Republic of Belarus, is a country in Eastern Europe. It is a landlocked state that is bordered by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, Belarus declared independence as the Belarusian People's Republic. Their attempt at independence failed, and they were conquered by Soviet Russia in 1919. Belarus remained part of the Soviet Union until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Alexander Lukashenko has been the country's president since 1994. Lukashenko's governing style has prompted many Western scholars to dub Belarus "Europe's last dictatorship."²

Official languages: Belarusian, Russian

Ethnic groups: 83.7% Belarusian; 8.3% Russians; 3.1% Poles; 1.6% African; 1.7% Ukrainians; 3.2% Other

Government: Unitary presidential republic

- President: Alexander Lukashenko
- Prime Minister: Sergey Rumas

Death penalty: Retentionist

Population: 9.5 million

Life expectancy: 74 years³

Under-5 mortality: 4 per 1000⁴

Adult literacy: 99.6 percent⁵



Section 1: Overall Development

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ⁶



0.796 – Very High Human Development ⁷

According to the UNDP, Belarusians enjoy a gross national income per capita of \$15,629, and could expect to have on average 15.7 years of schooling. Compared to other countries with a similar gross national income per capita, this is considered a high HDI.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Respected ⁸

In 2017, there were no reports of the government or its agents committing arbitrary or unlawful killings. There were also no reports of deaths from torture.

Freedom from disappearance



Partially Respected ⁹

In 2017, there were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of the government. However, there have still been no developments in the investigation into the disappearances of government officials in 1999 and 2000.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ¹⁰

Belarusian law prohibits such practices, yet many reports detail the maltreatment and abuse of suspects during criminal and administrative investigations. There are also numerous reports of physical and psychological abuse of army conscripts, detainees, and activists.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected ¹¹

Despite laws limiting arbitrary detention, there are countless reports of authorities arresting or detaining individuals for political reasons. Authorities have also used administrative measures to detain activists before, during, and after planned protests.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected¹²

Corruption, inefficiency, and political interference in judicial decisions are rampant. There is a blatant lack of judicial independence and impartiality. Additionally, there are numerous reports of courts convicting individuals on erroneous, politically-motivated charges.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Largely disrespected¹³

Despite the law prohibiting such actions, authorities use wiretapping, video surveillance, and a network of informers. Security forces have been known to target activists and opposition members with arbitrary searches and interrogations.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹⁴



Score: 52.59, Rank: 155 / 180 – Highly controlled, limited or intimidated¹⁵

More than 100 journalists were arrested in 2017 alone. The harassment and imprisonment of freelance journalists has reached unprecedented levels. State media propagates biased news, and individuals cannot publicly criticize the government without fear of reprisal.

Freedom from academic censorship



Largely disrespected¹⁶

Educational institutions must teach an official state ideology that reveres the accomplishments of Lukashenka and the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, educational institutions have the right to expel students who engage in antigovernment activities.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Largely disrespected¹⁷

Authorities deny most requests by opposition groups to hold demonstrations. An atmosphere of repression and the threat of imprisonment deter individuals from organizing protests. Furthermore, the registration process for NGOs, parties, and unions is highly politicized and prejudiced.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹⁸

By law, all religious activity by unregistered groups is banned. Minority religious groups have also experienced some difficulty registering and obtaining buildings to use as places of worship.

Freedom of movement



Partially respected¹⁹

There are some reports of the government restricting the right of former political prisoners to travel abroad.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Partially respected²⁰

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and there exists a procedure to evaluate refugee claims. However, there have been reports detailing how the state has failed to provide protection for many asylum-seekers coming from Chechnya.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{21 22}



6 / 7 – Not free²³

Belarus is an authoritarian state in which dissent is stifled through arrest, imprisonment or intimidation. Freedom of association and expression are not upheld in practice.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²⁴



6 / 7 – Not free²⁵

Elections continue to fall short of democratic standards. There is no limit to the number of terms the President may serve consecutively. As a result, Lukashenka has remained head of state since 1994. Only two of the parliamentarians in the legislature are not affiliated with Lukashenka.

Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²⁶



Score: 44%, Rank: 68 / 180 – Some corruption²⁷

Anti-corruption legislation is vague and requires improvement. Additionally, these laws are poorly enforced and officials often engage in corruption without fear of reprisal.

Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²⁸

Authorities have been reluctant to cooperate with human rights groups, and international NGO representatives have often experienced difficulty gaining admission into the country. Authorities largely ignore local and international groups' calls for human rights improvements.

Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁹



No threat listed – Limited dangers to minorities³⁰

According to Minorities Rights Group International, Belarus does not have any minorities which face an immediate threat of violence.

Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)³¹



Score: 73.7%, Rank: 30 / 144 – Somewhat unequal rights³²

Women remain grossly underrepresented in the political sphere and continue to earn lower wages than their male counterparts.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)³³



Score: 75.2%, Rank: 79 / 165 – Somewhat protected³⁴

Issues of child exploitation, poverty and abuse are pervasive in Belarusian society. However, advances have been made on issues pertaining to children's health.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Largely disrespected³⁵

Discrimination against individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual or mental disabilities is commonplace in Belarus. Very few public areas are accessible to individuals who are disabled. Disability rights organizations also often experience difficulties organizing advocacy activities.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Largely disrespected³⁶

The Romani minority consistently face governmental and societal discrimination. There is also hostility toward proponents of the national culture; those who seek to promote the Belarusian language are seen as political opponents. There are also many reports of anti-Semitic incidents.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{37 38}

Although same-sex sexual activity has been legal in Belarus since 1994, the LGBTQ community continues to face harassment, discrimination, and abuse. Moreover, households headed by same-sex couples do not enjoy the same legal protections as opposite-sex couples.

Section 7: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Largely disrespected³⁹

The law protects one's right to organize and bargain collectively, but does not protect against anti-union discrimination. Opposition members and activists have difficulty finding work due to government pressure on employers.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected⁴⁰

Regulations against forced labor are rarely enforced and there are few resources dedicated to preventing compulsory labor.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Respected⁴¹

Minimum age of employment and protection of children from child labour is generally respected and enforced in Belarus.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Partially respected⁴²

The law establishes minimum conditions for workplace safety, but these laws are largely ignored by employers. Furthermore, the law does not allow for workers to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardizing their employment.

Right to employment



5.6% - Reasonable unemployment⁴³

In 2015, Lukashenko instated a law that would tax the unemployed. Due to popular dissent, this law was finally cancelled some 2 years later.⁴⁴

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Belarus: Overview." Amnesty International. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/belarus/>

³ "Life Expectancy at Birth." The World Bank. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN>.

⁴ "Mortality Rate, Under-5." The World Bank. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sh.dyn.mort>.

⁵ "Belarus." UNICEF, based on 2012. Accessed September 13, 2018. https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/belarus_statistics.html.

⁶ The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI)

is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁷ "Human Development Indicators: Belarus." UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BLR>.

⁸ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 Belarus." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

¹⁰ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹¹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁴ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹⁵ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

¹⁶ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 Belarus." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁷ "Belarus." World Report 2018: Belarus. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/belarus>.

¹⁸ "Belarus." International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁹ "Belarus." World Report 2018: Belarus. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/belarus>.

²⁰ "Belarus." World Report 2018: Belarus. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/belarus>.

²¹ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

²² Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed September 13, 2018.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2018>.

²³ "Belarus." Freedom in the World 2018: Belarus. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/belarus#a2-cl>.

²⁴ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2018>.

²⁵ "Belarus." Freedom in the World 2018: Belarus. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/belarus#a2-cl>.

²⁶ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²⁷ "Belarus." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.transparency.org/country/BLR>.

²⁸ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 Belarus." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018.

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁹ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

³⁰ "Belarus." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018.

<https://peoplesunderthreat.org/countries/belarus/>.

³¹ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights.

³² "Belarus." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2016. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=BLR>.

³³ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable.

³⁴ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 Belarus." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018.

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁷ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 13, 2018. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 Belarus." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁴⁰ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁴¹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁴² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁴³ "Belarus." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018.

https://www.ilo.org/gateway/faces/home/ctryHome?locale=EN&countryCode=BLR®ionId=2&_adf.ctrl-state=966n1b2ee_4.

⁴⁴ "Belarus Wanted to Tax Its Unemployed 'Parasites.' Then the Protests Started." The Washington Post. March 10, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/10/belarus-wanted-to-tax-its-unemployed-as-parasites-then-the-protests-started/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3f886ee55ea5.