



BELARUS

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and also to the difficult political and social situation in Belarus, many lost their jobs and struggled to cover food, housing, and medical costs.

ASYLUM

Civil society reported that several LGBT people left the country this year to seek asylum.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In March, Journalists for Tolerance (J4T) published its periodic report monitoring hate speech in 2020 in Belarus. J4T found that 21% of media coverage on LGBTQ+ people amounted to hate speech in the second part of the year, which is twice as much as in the first half of 2020. The report found that hate speech incidents have risen exponentially since the COVID-19 pandemic started and then as protests began in response to the elections. Most content included accusations of LGBTQ+ people's negative influence on society or was a way to discredit political opponents.

Pro-government propagandists regularly called for the persecution of LGBT activists and the closure of LGBT organisations.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

On 10 July, ahead of the August elections, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus again expressed increasing concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, and the unwillingness of the government to implement previous UN recommendations.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION, AND EXPRESSION

Since the historic protests against the government in 2020, the government has continued its brutal crackdown on protesters, journalists, and civil society, through unlawful arrest, detention, violence, and ill-treatment. On 25 March for instance, the authorities carried out mass detentions against peaceful participants of Freedom Day protests. (see more under **Human Rights Defenders**)

The parliament adopted several new bills and amendments this year, which have further restricted freedom of expression, assembly and association in Europe's last dictatorship. The new legal changes make it even easier for the authorities to control the work of journalists and civil society, including by denying them accreditation,

shutting them down, blocking their online presence, or banning them from covering demonstrations. Attending unauthorised demonstrations is now punishable by up to three years in prison; those promoting "extremist activities", which remain undefined, can face up to six years. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus called the new measures "unprecedented in scope and gravity".

On 23 July, over 50 civil society organisations learned that they were simply dissolved, in what seems a complete 'cleansing' of civil society. Over 100 searches were carried out just in July.

In December, the spokesperson of A1, the largest phone network in the country, was detained in Minsk. Nikolay Bredelev is accused of sharing sensitive company information. He was filmed in what is thought to be a forced 'confession' about his sexual orientation. The head of Hyundai was also detained and forced to make a similar 'confession'.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Belarus continued making headlines for months, due to the brutal government crackdown waged against civil society.

In January, the authorities started investigating, searching, and harassing civil society organisations. On 25 January, the police searched the office of MAKEOUT, a popular magazine about gender and sexuality. On 16 February, the authorities searched and detained over 40 human rights defenders and journalists and launched a criminal investigation against over a dozen.

On 9 November, women's rights activist Olya Gorbuna was kidnapped and detained under Article 342 of the Criminal Code, i.e. violating public order - for leading the 2020 women's marches. Gorbuna heads a shelter for victims of domestic violence and has worked with survivors for almost two decades. She is openly a member of the LGBTQ community. Civil society is concerned that Gorbuna is being subjected to torture and ill-treatment in the detention centre on Akrestsina street. Civil society is demanding adequate detention conditions, a fair investigation and a fair trial for Gorbuna, who could face up to three years in prison.

