



4.3. Journalists and media workers

Journalistic activity in Belarus is under complete state control,[489](#) with the situation having deteriorated after 2020.[490](#) Since 2021, virtually all independent Belarusian media have been dismantled,[491](#) and left the country, with the crackdown affecting also those who had switched their focus to non-political content.[492](#) Reporters without Borders (RSF) identified Belarus as the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists until the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022.[493](#)

Suppression of independent media, as well as of civil society organisations (CSOs), continued to intensify throughout 2024[494](#) and 2025.[495](#) In the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index, Belarus ranked 166th out of 180 countries, one place down from 2024, reflecting ‘massive repression of independent media outlets,’ characterised by censorship, coordinated raids on media offices and homes of media workers, mass arrests, and violence.[496](#)

The authorities use anti-extremism legislation as a primary tool to criminalise independent reporting and restrict access to information,[497](#) forcing independent journalists to leave the profession or to leave the country.[498](#) To avoid prosecution, non-state media sources which continue to operate in the county are forced to ‘rigorous censorship.’[499](#)

Most independent media outlets and the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) have been declared extremist and banned.[500](#) By the end of 2025, according to BAJ, 42 media projects were designated as extremist formations,[501](#) a designation that criminalises any involvement with such outlets, including for those journalists no longer connected to them at the time of the designation.[502](#) Participation in such media, including subscribing to or working with them, is punishable by up to seven years in prison for aiding extremist activities.[503](#)

Sources noted that journalists and media workers face arbitrary arrests,[504](#) detentions,[505](#) raids and searches[506](#) at media outlets and journalists’ homes,[507](#) seizure of devices,[508](#) and occasional attacks.[509](#) As reprisal for their work,[510](#) the authorities punish them through vaguely defined anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws, often applying the relevant legislation retroactively,[511](#) with courts handing down lengthy sentences[512](#) in closed door trials.[513](#) As of the end of December 2025, 28 media workers were in detention,[514](#) with at least 12 detained on politically motivated charges in 2025.[515](#)

In December 2024, the entire editorial staff of the regional publication Inter-press in the city of Baranavichy was arrested, with seven journalists of the outlet charged with ‘aiding extremist activity.’[516](#) In August 2025, four journalists from the related regional news portal BAR24 were convicted under the same charges. In February 2026, two heads of the portal were sentenced to 12 and 14 years in prison on the charges of treason (Article 356 of the Criminal Code).[517](#)

In a case of individual prosecution, in July 2025, a journalist was sentenced to 10 years for treason and revealing state secrets.[518](#) In September 2025, a prominent independent journalist was convicted to four years in prison on extremism charges for writing articles and commentaries critical to the government.[519](#) In February 2026, a criminal case on treason charges was sent to court against a journalist who left Belarus in 2021 and returned to the country in January 2026.[520](#)

According to BAJ, at least 600 journalists have left Belarus,[521](#) with many continuing to face reprisals even in exile,[522](#) such as searches of their properties and freezing of their bank accounts in Belarus, investigations[523](#) and trials *in absentia*, inclusion on international wanted lists, and seizure of their property in Belarus.[524](#)

Families of independent journalists and media workers, including of those abroad,[525](#) were reportedly subjected to home searches, intimidation[526](#) and threats, with some of them asking rights groups not to publicise their cases out of fear of retaliation by the authorities.[527](#)

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