



4.4. Human rights defenders and lawyers

4.4.1. Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders in Belarus face arbitrary detention in retaliation for their professional activities.^{[528](#)} One human rights defender in detention was convicted to seven years in prison ^{[529](#)} for providing a human rights organisation ‘with information about politically motivated criminal cases in courts.’^{[530](#)} In December 2025, two human rights defenders were pardoned as part of US negotiations with the Belarusian authorities.^{[531](#)} On 19 March 2026, three human rights defenders were released following a presidential pardon.^{[532](#)}

The authorities use anti-extremism legislation against human rights defenders. In August 2025, the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, established in 2023 by Belarusian attorneys in exile, was declared an extremist formation. Consequently, its members face criminal prosecution for involvement in extremist activities in relation to their professional duties, including providing legal counselling on trials conducted *in absentia* and assisting with complaints to international human rights bodies.^{[533](#)}

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RSF, Belarus, n.d., [url](#)

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Viasna Human Rights Center, Vital Chopik, n.d., [url](#)

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Viasna, Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

- ^{[531](#)}

Reuters, Ales Bialiatski, who won Nobel prize while behind bars, is freed from prison in Belarus, 13 December 2025, [url](#); Viasna Human Rights Center, Uladzimir Labkovich, n.d., [url](#)

- ^{[532](#)}

Article 19, Belarus: Release of Nasta Lojka and over 200 other political prisoners, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

- ^{[533](#)}

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Belarus, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 6 February 2026, [url](#), para. 81

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