



4.5. Former political prisoners

As of end of February 2026, the number of former political prisoners stood at 3 356.⁵⁴⁹ Between July 2024 and December 2025, 617 political prisoners were released through a series of presidential pardons and diplomatic negotiations to relieve US sanctions against Belarus.⁵⁵⁰ After the release of 227 political prisoners between July and December 2024,⁵⁵¹ 14 political prisoners were released and transferred to Lithuania.⁵⁵² In September 2025, 52 political prisoners, including 14 foreign nationals, were released⁵⁵³ and similarly transferred to Lithuania.⁵⁵⁴ In December 2025, following the negotiations with the US administration, 123 political prisoners, including several prominent opposition figures and human rights defenders, were released⁵⁵⁵; 114 of them were sent to Ukraine and 9 to Lithuania.⁵⁵⁶ This was followed by the release of 250 political prisoners on 19 March 2026.⁵⁵⁷

Sources noted that the release of political prisoners amounts to forced exile in practice⁵⁵⁸ or *de facto* deportation,⁵⁵⁹ as many of those released were transferred abroad directly from a prison.⁵⁶⁰ Prior to their release, security officers confiscated or destroyed their identification documents,⁵⁶¹ such as passports or other identity papers.⁵⁶² For example, 14 former prisoners expelled to Lithuania in September 2025 and 18 prisoners expelled to Ukraine in December 2025 had no identity documents with them.⁵⁶³ Similarly, political prisoners freed on 19 March 2026, including 15 individuals transferred to Lithuania, were reportedly released without passports or other identity documents.⁵⁶⁴

Former political prisoners who remain in Belarus face strict supervision beyond the standard regime applied to released convicts.⁵⁶⁵ This includes regular reporting to police stations,⁵⁶⁶ a requirement to remain at home between 22:00 and 6:00 and obtain police permission to leave their district of residence,⁵⁶⁷ and frequent police visits to their homes.⁵⁶⁸ In some cases, supervision is conducted on a weekly or even daily basis, creating conditions comparable to house arrest.⁵⁶⁹

The supervision period may last several years and, in some cases, up to ten years. Failure to comply with these obligations can result in additional criminal charges, including prosecution under Article 422 of the Criminal Code 'Evasion of preventive supervision', which is punishable by up to two years of imprisonment, and immediate arrest.⁵⁷⁰ These restrictions, combined with possible new charges,⁵⁷¹ force many to leave the country.⁵⁷²

Additional systemic restrictions are applied to those included in the lists of persons involved in extremist and terrorist activities.⁵⁷³ Particularly those on the list of persons involved in terrorist activities are reportedly prohibited from holding SIM cards or bank accounts, which prevents them from making basic financial transactions such as paying for housing. While there were

cases when several persons had been removed from these lists, this procedure remains difficult.
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Beyond these formal restrictions, former political prisoners are denied 'meaningful employment opportunities', as employers, including in the private sector, may be pressured not to hire former political prisoners by the authorities. Consequently, former political prisoners are effectively marked out and prevented from rebuilding 'a normal life', which pushes many to leave the country.[575](#)

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