

Genocide Warning: Belarus January 2022

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Warning for Belarus. The country has experienced widespread political repression since 1994 under the regime of Alexander Lukashenko, Europe's last dictator.

Lukashenko claims to have won reelection for a sixth time in 2020 with 80% of the vote, but the European Union declared the election to be neither free nor fair. During election season, internet access was [restricted](#), especially during protests, rallies, and on election day. Millions of Belarussians took to the streets to protest the results, leading to brutal crackdowns. Over ten thousand peaceful [protesters](#) were arrested and tortured.

The Lukashenko government attempts to silence any expression of dissent through arrest, imprisonment, exile, censorship, torture, and threats of murder. Lukashenko's main political rival, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, was [forced to flee](#) from Belarus under government pressure after the 2020 presidential election. Since the election, the government has imprisoned over 600 political prisoners at home and detained journalists, activists, and other outspoken critics.

Government air traffic controllers [forcibly diverted](#) a Ryanair flight to Minsk to arrest blogger Roman Protasevich, who is openly critical of Lukashenko. Belarussian Olympic sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya also [sought asylum](#) in Poland for fear of detention and punishment from the government. Tsimanouskaya refused orders to return to Belarus from the 2021 Tokyo Olympics after accusing her coaches of negligence, prompting Belarussian officials and media to label her as a traitor.

[Concern](#) for politically active exiles increased after Belarussian activist Vitaly Shishov was found dead in Kyiv, Ukraine, in August 2021. Ukrainian officials found him hanged in a park near his home, but they believe that his death was [murder masked as suicide](#). Shishov was the director of Belarussian House in Ukraine, an organization that helped Belarussian citizens escaping repression and censorship after the anti-election protests. His death has been blamed on the Belarussian KGB.

In mid-2021, [4,000 refugees](#) and asylum seekers were trapped on the Belarus-Poland border for months. They [suffered](#) from beatings, hunger, thirst, torture, sickness, injuries, and hypothermia. Belarussian border officials [prevented](#) migrants from re-entering Belarus. The Polish border patrol pushed back asylum seekers. Border guards on both sides prevented humanitarian aid from reaching migrant camps. The European Union received [criticism](#) for not sending aid, especially after the death of a one-year-old Syrian boy at the border. At least 13 people [died](#) at the Belarus-Poland border.

In addition, the build-up of Russian forces at the Belarus-Ukraine border in January 2022 is an ominous prelude to what will likely be a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Genocide Watch considers Belarus to be at **Stage 6: Polarization** and **Stage 8: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The US and EU should demand the release of all imprisoned Belarussian politicians, journalists, activists, and protesters.
- The US and EU should demand President Lukashenko's resignation, followed by free and fair democratic elections.
- International and national courts should prosecute Belarussian officials who have abused political protesters and asylum seekers who were trapped at the Polish-Belarussian border.
- Surrounding countries like Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia should assist refugees and asylum seekers and receive financial support from the EU and the US to do so.