



BELARUS

Media Landscape Guide

APRIL 2022



NETWORK

communicating with disaster-affected communities



Preface

This guide is one of a series of Media Landscape Guides which map the media landscape in different countries. The guides have been produced by the CDAC Network in cooperation with DW Akademie and supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This project is part of the global initiative “Transparency and media freedom - Crisis resilience in the pandemic”.

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Take a look at all of CDAC’s Media Landscape Guides, available in multiple languages, here: <https://www.cdacnetwork.org/media-landscape-guides>

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SECTION I:

Introduction

1.1 About The Guide

This Media Landscape Guide was produced in January 2022. It provides a snapshot of the media at this time in Belarus. It provides an analysis of the recent shocks to the media landscape and an overview of the different types of media and information sources available for Belarusians: digital media platforms, social media and messaging platforms, television, radio, and print. It covers the main and most popular media outlets.

1.2 What Does The Guide Cover And Why It Is Needed

Media was at the centre of the 2020-2021 events in Belarus and was involved in both shaping and reporting on them. Some have even called the events the “[Telegram Revolution](#).” A major outcome is that Belarusians’ attitudes toward media and its consumption have been transformed. Belarus’ communications culture and media landscape have significantly changed.

1.3 Methodology

This guide was written at a time when the communications culture and media landscape in Belarus were undergoing fundamental changes. Some content and material, including on the response to COVID-19, are no longer available because of the blocking of websites and deletion of material due to the government crackdown. As access to government sources is limited it has been challenging to gather information and data on state media, including circulations, numbers of visitors to websites, etc. Also conditions within Belarus and restrictive laws have [limited](#) the production of public opinion surveys, audience and media consumption studies and analyses.

As well as this guide, the following documents also include useful coverage of Belarus’ media landscape:

- » IREX’s “Belarus 2021 Vibrant Information Barometer,” <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/vibe-belarus-2021.pdf>
- » Freedom House, “Freedom On the Net 2021: Belarus,” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-net/2021>
- » Belarusian Association of Journalists’ “Media in Belarus 2020” (in Russian), https://baj.by/sites/default/files/event/files/2020/report_media2020_rus.pdf
- » ‘Supporting Belarusian Media: Quality, Diversity, Reach’, <https://www.dw.com/en/professional-journalism-against-the-odds-a-strategy-for-belarusian-independent-media/a-60732019>

SECTION 2:

Overview Of Communications Culture

THIS SECTION OUTLINES THE BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN BELARUS. IT LOOKS AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS, RELIGION AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN AND HOW THE MEDIA SERVES DIFFERENT GROUPS. THE SECTION ALSO EXAMINES THE POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE COMMUNICATION CULTURE AND RECENT MEDIA LANDSCAPE.

2.1 Media Background

Belarus is a Slavic country in Eastern Europe with a population of 9.45 million. It became independent following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since 1993, the country's population has steadily declined.

Freedom House categorises Belarus as a Consolidated Authoritarian Regime. In the media sphere, Lukashenka personally appoints and dismisses the heads of the major national state-owned media.

In 1997, the Council of Europe suspended Belarus' special guest status following a flawed referendum and 'massive violations of freedom of speech.' Since the early 2000s, the European Union, the United States and other countries have sanctioned the Lukashenka government for its anti-democratic practices.

2.2 Recent Media Landscape

Prior to 1991, when Belarus was still part of the Soviet Union all media in the country was controlled by the state. Since Lukashenka became president 1994 this trend has returned. In 1995 he consolidated control over state newspapers while increasing the government's indirect control over the emerging independent press through state-run publishing houses and distribution networks. The government expanded its control over broadcast media through the Belarusian State Television and Radio Company, which oversees licensing and frequency allocations for TV and radio stations. The authorities harassed and intimidated journalists from the remaining non-state media, and by the turn of the 21st century, the government directed or controlled the majority of mass media in the country. For comparison a guide to Belarus' media landscape in 2001 can be found on the IREX website.¹

This resulted in the loss of many younger consumers, who turned instead to the online space where independent outlets had already migrated to avoid government influence. This consumer shift was assisted indirectly by the fact that the government had been investing in the country's IT sector to boost the economy, spurring internet penetration. The country's state-run mass media was slow to grasp the potential of the internet and to utilise it effectively. By 2011, the internet had eclipsed radio as a source of information and, by 2014, it had done the same to print media. By 2014, there was a clear division in the country between independent and state-linked media. Since 2001, the government has intermittently restricted access to independent news websites around the times of presidential elections and other important events. Prior to the events of 2020, the internet was Belarus' "only truly pluralistic media platform."

From Soviet times onwards, most Belarusians used television as their main source of news and information. From 2010 to 2018, however, the percentage declined from 92% to 72%; By 2019, the internet had almost caught up with TV as a source of news. The blocking of critical websites around disputed elections in 2006 and 2010 stimulated the growth of political blogging and social media pages. By 2020, the country's online information landscape was dominated by independent and foreign, rather than state-run, news sources.

For a view of Belarus' media landscape prior to 2020, see IREX's Belarus Media Sustainability Indexes (2001-2019) here.² For past Freedom House reports on Belarus, including on press and internet freedoms, see here³ and here⁴. The Committee to Protect Journalists' reports on the media situation in Belarus dating back to 1999 can be found here.⁵ For

1 <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/vibe-ukraine-2021.pdf>

2 <https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi#europe-eurasia>

3 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus>

4 <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/publication-archives>

5 <https://cpj.org/europe/belarus/>

Index on Censorship reports on Belarus' media environment from 2007, see here.⁶ Reporters Without Borders' reports on the media in Belarus are here⁷. For UN reports on Belarus, including the country's media situation, dating back to 1994, see here⁸ and here.⁹ For OSCE reports on Belarus, including those by the Media Freedom Representative, see here.¹⁰

2.3 Ethnicity And Religion

About 85% of the country's population is ethnically Belarusian. Russians make up Belarus' largest minority, comprising 7.5%. Officially ethnic Polish makes up 3.1% of the population, mostly in western Belarus. There are feelings that the [Polish minority](#) has seen some persecution due to diplomatic clashes with neighbouring Poland.

Religion is highly regulated in Belarus. Approximately 73% of the population identifies with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) which receives subsidies from the Belarusian government, with the BOC's hierarchy reliant and loyal to the Lukashenka government. The Belarus Orthodox Church produces a monthly publication, [Vedomosti \(Gazette\) of the Minsk Metropolis](#).

Catholicism is Belarus's second most popular religion with 12% of the population, the majority in the western part of the country. The government has made an effort to diminish Catholic influence, considering the Church to be an ally of Belarus' Polish minority. The official website of the Catholic Church in Belarus is here.¹¹ There is also a Belarusian station linked to the Rome-based [Radio Maria network](#).

Belarus has a small but active Protestant community, at 4% of the population. The Christian Vision ecumenical group, part of the Belarusian democratic opposition, maintains a website that monitors developments regarding different Christian denominations and the ongoing political crisis in Belarus.

2.4 Languages In The Media

Belarus has two state languages – Belarusian and Russian. In the 2019 census 2.5 million spoke said they spoke Belarusian at home, many more (6.7 million) said they spoke Russian at home. Although Belarusian is a state language, its use has been downgraded by the government since 1996. It is also sometimes considered to be the language of the country's pro-democracy civil society and political opposition. Russian has become Belarus's default language of administration, business and education as well as media. A 2019 survey noted, "the language of the titular nation's majority (Belarusian) can be considered a minority language, while the language of the actual minority, Russian, dominates."

[Belarusian-language publishing](#) is not supported by the state in any significant way. Less than a tenth of all books published in the country are in Belarusian. One expert noted that the language is virtually absent from the state-controlled national media, with a few small exceptions. Television stations broadcast less than five percent of programming in Belarusian. A number of influential independent media outlets use Belarusian (listed below) - more information can be found in the Media Overview section:

State-run national media using Belarusian:

- » The small daily newspaper [Zviazda](#)
- » The radio channels [Capital Radio](#) and [Kultura](#)

Independent media using Belarusian:

- » The Poland-based [Belsat TV](#) produces content in Belarusian and disseminates it to Belarus by satellite, foreign cable networks and the internet.
- » The Poland-based [European Radio for Belarus](#) broadcasts Belarusian-language news and entertainment content via FM, satellite and the internet.

6 <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/?s=belarus&id=114715>

7 https://rsf.org/en/rsf_search?page=15&key=belarus

8 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/enacaregion/pages/byindex.aspx>

9 https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?c=18&su=29

10 <https://www.osce.org/gsearch?qr=belarus>

11 <https://www.catholic.by/>



- » Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Belarusian Service provides online news and analysis in Belarusian.
- » [Radio Racja](#), based in Poland, broadcasts in Belarusian to Poland's Belarusian minority and to western Belarus on FM and online.
- » [Nasha Niva](#), originally a 1991 revival of Belarus' oldest newspaper, publishes online in Belarusian. By 2020, it was the country's most popular source of news and information in Belarusian.
- » [Novy Chas](#), formerly a print newspaper which was closed down by the government, offers online news and information in Belarusian.
- » Onliner.by, Belarus' largest media and lifestyle portal, has committed to [publishing more of its material in Belarusian](#).
- » A number of independent regional and local newspapers and websites also publish in Belarusian.

In 2020-2021, the websites of all the independent media listed above, with the exception of Onliner.by, were blocked by the government and are now accessible only via VPNs or outside of the country.

2.5 Russian Influence

Belarus has a complex relationship with its larger neighbour, Russia and has been influenced by both Russian and Soviet culture. Belarus is part of the Union State with Russia, a loose confederation which for a long time existed only symbolically, but in the wake of recent protests the Russian influence has increased dramatically¹². After coming to power in 1994, Lukashenka sought closer ties with Russia. Belarus' economy and military are now dependent on Russian support. Belarus is viewed by Russia as an important security buffer against NATO and the EU and is part of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and is Russia's closest military ally in the post-Soviet space. However the Russian government's support for Lukashenka's crackdown on the 2020-2021 protests has led to an erosion of pro-Russian sentiment, especially in the capital of Minsk, though a [November 2021 survey](#) found that 82% of urban Belarusians still held a somewhat or very positive attitude regarding their neighbour.

¹² "Supporting Belarusian Media: Quality, Diversity, Reach". Deutsche Welle Akademie 2021 <https://www.dw.com/en/professional-journalism-against-the-odds-a-strategy-for-belarusian-independent-media/a-60732019>

SECTION 3:

Shocks To Belarus' Media Landscape

BELARUS HAS BEEN IMPACTED SIGNIFICANTLY BY SEVERAL RECENT SHOCKS THAT HAVE AFFECTED THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE. INCLUDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE AND THE 2020 DISPUTED ELECTION WHICH LED TO MASS PROTESTS AND A GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN. WESTERN SANCTIONS ON BELARUS TRIGGERED A MIGRANT CRISIS WITH THE EU WITH REFUGEES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA WERE ABLE TO TRAVEL THROUGH BELARUS TO THE EU BORDER.

3.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic And Role Of The Media

At the onset of the pandemic, state institutions, including media, downplayed the pandemic. Over 750,000 cases and over 6,000 deaths have been officially reported at the time of writing. While these statistics indicate that Belarus has some of the lowest infection and death rates in Europe deaths appear to be undercounted. An analysis by the Economist found there had been over 33,500 “excess deaths” from April 2020 through March 2021 indicating a much higher death rate than that reported by the government which may be a contributing factor to a decline in trust in the government, including in state media.

As the pandemic unfolded, the Ministry of Health created [a dedicated COVID-19 section on its website](#) and the government launched <https://stopcovid.belta.by> – the “official internet resource for informing the population about the coronavirus.” However, there was a notable lack of two-way communication with the population (a practice common in Belarus). The internet, led by independent outlets, became the main source of COVID-19 information – surpassing television. Independent digital outlets, social media and messaging apps helped citizens share their COVID-19-related stories online, including reports about overcrowded hospitals, lack of protective medical equipment and oxygen, and testing problems. By persistently making inquiries to state institutions and asking state officials tough questions, independent media acted as a watchdog and “succeeded in breaking the government’s information blockade and forcing the authorities to provide regular updates”.

Independent media played a crucial role in educating Belarusian citizens about the pandemic and promoting civic and humanitarian initiatives. Although COVID-19 still exists at the time of this guide’s writing, much of the pandemic-related content is no longer available, as the government has blocked most of the country’s independent news sites. The Belarusian Association of Journalists webpage focusing on the coverage of the pandemic by the independent media can be found here.¹³

Against the backdrop of a tense period in Russia-Belarus relations, Russian coverage was quite critical of the Belarusian authorities’ handling of the pandemic. This contributed to reducing Belarusians’ trust in state media and in the government itself.

The situation regarding vaccination played out in a similar way. According to a [2021 Study on Vaccination Attitudes and Sources of Information](#), the main sources of information for the public about COVID-19 and vaccines were online (i.e., non-state), including internet media (51% of respondents), social networks (34%), Telegram channels (17%), and forums and blogs (12%). Only 30% referred to television, 11% to government websites, 6% to public announcements, 5% to radio and 4% to the press (both broadcast and print mass media are controlled by the government). The study also revealed that television was the most frequently cited source of false news. Respondents stated that they double-check information with independent media on the internet and with foreign sources when trust in the state media is low.

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a collapse in public confidence in and reliance on state-controlled media and a corresponding rise in trust and use of independent online media in Belarus. [A November 2020 study](#) found that Belarus ranked 50 of 58 countries in terms of level of public trust in information about the pandemic provided by their government. Conversely, analysis by the [Baltic Internet Policy Initiative](#) found a 32% rise in weekly audiences of online media, 11% for social networks, and 8% for YouTube in the first quarter of 2020. The study linked the significant growth in online media audiences with the pandemic.

¹³ <https://baj.by/be/content/covid-19>



3.2 The 2020 Election, Protests And Government Crackdown

In August 2020 during the pandemic and a faltering economy Lukashenka called for a presidential election. [Surveys and reports from the field](#) indicated that many Belarusians wanted change. Independent media, particularly political bloggers, played a key role during the campaign period. One of Lukashenka's initial challengers was activist blogger [Siarhej Tsikhanouski](#). Lukashenka's campaign, like in past elections, was suspected to have included the disrupting of the country's independent media sphere. In May 2020, protests broke out over the government's handling of COVID-19 and its restrictions on campaign events. Tsikhanouski was barred from running by the government and he and his blogging and campaign team were arrested. More than 40 journalists, including 8 bloggers, were detained while covering challengers' campaigns. On election day, Tsikhanouski and several prominent bloggers were among the country's 24 recognised political prisoners.

Prior to the August election, the [authorities banned media outlets](#) from conducting independent public opinion polling. Around the election, the government launched an unprecedented effort to block key sources of information. On August 9, election day, the authorities initiated a nationwide shutdown of the internet that lasted for 61 hours. When the government declared Lukashenka to be the winner, citing improbable tallies, Belarusians took to the streets in protest. Social media (VK – the Russian-owned VKontakte) and messaging platforms (Telegram) were used to organise demonstrations.

Immediately after the election, the government blocked more than 70 websites, including at least 25 media sites. This, and the shutdown of the internet, pushed Belarusians to use the Telegram messenger, which became “the main driver of information.” [According to indirect data](#), in mid-August 2020, the messenger had over 2.4 million active users in Belarus, or roughly one-third of the nation's total online audience. Around 10 non-state newspapers were forced to close down after state-owned publishing houses and distributors refused to print and distribute them.

There were at least 62 documented cases of physical violence against journalists during the election period. Protests continued to the end of the year. The [Belarusian Association of Journalists reported](#) that, in 2020, 477 journalists were arrested, 97 imprisoned, and 9 criminally charged; reporters spent more than 1,200 days behind bars. 12 bloggers were sentenced to a total of 133 years in prison. A partial chronicle of actions against independent media in 2020 can be found here.¹⁴

3.3 The 2021 Migrant Crisis

In May 2021, the government diverted a Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania while it was in Belarusian airspace and forced it to land in Minsk in order to arbitrarily detain Roman Protasevich, a prominent Belarusian political blogger working from exile. EU and US leaders denounced the move and launched a new round of sanctions against Belarus. In retaliation for the sanctions, the Belarusian government organised what experts described as a “hybrid attack” on the borders with the EU by orchestrating “a programme of state-sponsored human trafficking” that brought refugees from the Middle East and Africa to Belarus and then sent them into the border areas. Following negotiations, Belarusian officials deescalated the crisis and began forcibly repatriating the refugees. The crisis generated European-wide press coverage, exacerbated EU divisions over migrant policies, and ratcheted up tensions between Belarus and its western neighbours.

¹⁴ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/treason-extremism-and-beatings-how-independent-media-risks-everything-in-belarus/>

SECTION 4:

Current Media Landscape

THE RECENT SHOCKS IN BELARUS HAVE LED TO UNPRECEDENTED CHANGES TO THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN THE COUNTRY. THEY HAVE ALTERED THE CONSUMPTION HABITS OF AUDIENCES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY ACCESS AND RECEIVE INFORMATION AND USE THE MEDIA.

4.1 Impacts On The Media

The events of 2020-2021 radically reshaped Belarus' media and communication landscape. Government attempts to limit the influence of the independent media sector has coincided with an increasing lack of trust and confidence in state media. [An online survey](#) which took place just after the election and during the protests, in September 2020, found that 54.3 % of respondents primarily consumed independent media, 29.4 % primarily consumed state-linked media, and only 16.3 % consumed an equal measure of each. A preference for independent media dominated every demographic segment of the survey, except for those over 55.

A [November 2021 survey](#) concluded that Belarusians are consuming less news but are getting this news from a broader range of sources. In September 2021, 85% of respondents reported consuming at least one blocked media outlet and 38% of them used a VPN. A [September 2020 online survey](#), found some 53% of respondents indicated that they had significantly changed their media consumption habits over the three months prior to the survey – online media (Telegram and TUT.by) had experienced the largest increase in consumers and state TV (the channels ONT and Belarus 1/2) the greatest loss of consumers.

The government campaign against independent media continued throughout 2021. During that year, 113 journalists were detained, 29 were jailed, and 146 media offices and journalists' homes were raided. Reporters spent more than 8,700 days behind bars. Of the hundreds of journalists and media workers arrested since August 2020, 33 remain in prison at the time of writing.

More than 100 domestic and foreign websites, including news and information sources, remain blocked, more than 270 civil society organisations, among them media-related groups, have been declared illegal, and more than 300 Telegram channels have been criminalised by the government. [Reporters without Borders' 2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Belarus 158 of 180 countries, calling it the “most dangerous country in Europe for media personnel.”

The number and scope of news sources easily accessible by Belarusians has been drastically reduced as many independent outlets have been blocked or forced to stop publishing. Banned news sites and bloggers must now publish from abroad and rely more on social media and messenger platforms, making it difficult to ascertain their reach and impact. One study, conducted in September 2020 and September 2021, found that news outlets' migration to these platforms has resulted in content that is shorter and less detailed.

Independent outlets outside of Belarus are using their Telegram app channels to quickly crowdsource news, opinions, insights, and visual materials from their readers in Belarus on a daily basis. News and information websites operated by Belarusians outside the country continue to have significant influence inside Belarus. For instance TUT.by was reaching 62.5% of Belarus' internet audience until it was blocked by the government in May 2021. According to a [Chatham House study](#) conducted three months after the site was blocked, 90% of the urban population still knew of it and 40% considered it to be their most important source of information. Now, publishing from abroad and renamed Zerkalo.io, the outlet continues to be one of the country's most popular news sources, generating over 5 million monthly views, according to Similarweb.

The government crackdown on websites in the country has also increased the importance and popularity of news sites outside of Belarus that are run by foreigners. It has also changed the way foreign media covers Belarus. For an analysis of this process, including conclusions and recommendations, see [here](#).¹⁵

15 <https://newbelarus.vision/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-changing-media-image-of-Belarus-abroad-in-2020-2021.pdf>

Belarusian independent media are also serving as crucial two-way communication channels with users sharing photos, videos and other information. An important focus of Belarusian independent media's reporting are human interest stories particularly about the thousands of Belarusian political refugees who had moved to Ukraine in 2020-2021.

A good summary the development of Belarusian exile media, their strategies and their cooperation abroad can be found in the paper 'Supporting Belarusian Media: Quality, Diversity, Reach', which highlights the difference between journalistic offerings and activist initiatives¹⁶.

4.2 Russian Media And Belarus

In October 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov met with Lukashenka to confirm "a shared understanding of the need to create maximally comfortable conditions for the Russian media in Belarus." As in Russia, most Russian media operating in Belarus follows the Kremlin line, the exception is independent Russian bloggers and experts, whose online materials are popular in Belarus.

Russian TV channels, the Belarusian editions of Russian newspapers, and Russian online platforms are all popular in Belarus due to their high-quality production. A 2021 survey found that Belarusians tended to use Russian media rather than Belarusian as their main sources of information.

Russian media content plays an essential role in the Belarusian mass media space. Monitoring in 2018-2020 found, for example, that Russian-made content made up more than 60% of primetime programming for Belarus' leading TV channels. Another monitoring found that some 80% of the content of ONT, Belarus' most popular TV channel, is comprised of Russian content. Russian advertisers also play an important role in television and online media in Belarus. Prior to the 2020 protests and Russia's intervention, Belarusians' trust in Russian media and the Belarusian editions of Russian mass media was relatively high.

To help quell the protests against Lukashenka, the Russian government provided media experts, including journalists, technicians and PR specialists, to Belarusian state television. One assessment found that the members of Belarusian society that may be most susceptible to Russian media influence are pensioners, active Orthodox Church believers, the unemployed and military personnel. Another survey focus group noted that Belarusian media consumers aged 40 and over tend to prefer Russian TV and Belarusians who consume more state media are more likely to trust Russian media.

Many Belarusians see Russian media as more professional and less biased than Belarusian state media. One 2021 survey found that, in the midst of the Belarusian government's crackdown on independent media, more Belarusians have turned to Russian media as an alternative. It also found that Belarusians use Russian media to verify information from Belarusian media. Russian media was ranked second in a 2021 ranking of monthly media audiences in Belarus. Another study indicated that the government's closing of TUT.by correlated with an audience shift towards Yandex – a Russian search engine and news aggregator – which tends to favor Belarusian and Russian state media resources, especially in regard to the political news. Russian media remains, however, among the least trusted of institutions by Belarusians.

4.3 Media Landscape At A Glance

According to Datareportel as of January 2021:¹⁷

- » 79.7% of the population lives in urban centres, and 20.3% in rural areas.
- » The internet penetration rate is 82.8% and there are 7.82 million internet users, an increase of 343,000 (+4.6%) between 2020 to 2021.
- » There are 3.90 million social media users in Belarus, equivalent to 41.3% of the total population. (social media figures may not equate to unique individuals).
- » Overall literacy for adults over 15 is 99.8% (virtually the same for both genders).

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN agency for ICT and the official source for global

¹⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/professional-journalism-against-the-odds-a-strategy-for-belarusian-independent-media/a-60732019>

¹⁷ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-belarus?rq=belarus>



ICT statistics,¹⁸ in 2020 mobile cellular coverage of the population was 100% and the percentage covered by at least a 3G or 4G mobile network was 99% and 89%. In 2020, 77% of households had access to the internet at home; in 2019, 66% of rural households had internet access at home, compared to 83% of urban. Key data is summarised below:

Figure 1: Communication Infrastructure at a glance from ITU 2020 data

Service	Fixed-line telephone	Mobile cellular	Mobile broadband	Fixed-line Broadband
Number of connections	4,406,585	11,704,084	8,653,920	3,255,552
Per 100 inhabitants	47	123	91	34.5

4.4 Media Preferences And Trusted Media

An August 2021 survey on Media Consumption and Media Literacy found that, after the events of 2020, the internet is the main and most frequently used source of information in Belarus. When asked which sources they use most often to obtain news, the survey's respondents indicated:

- » Websites and internet media (71%)
- » Social networks (54%)
- » Family and friends (35%)
- » Telegram channels and other messengers (34%)
- » TV (31%)
- » Online forums and blogs (14%)
- » Radio (10%)
- » Press (4%)

The same survey found that Belarusians consider online sources of information to be the most trusted:

- » News websites and internet media (34%)
- » Telegram channels (21%)
- » TV (13%)
- » Difficult to say (30%)

For Belarusians, “online sources” generally mean non-state or independent sources. TV, radio and the press would generally be characterised as state media. Four Chatham House surveys in 2021¹⁹ found that almost two-thirds of urban Belarusians distrusted state media and state media was the least trusted of any state institution. Conversely, Belarusians trusted independent media more than any other independent or pro-democratic institution.

¹⁸ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Dashboards/Pages/Digital-Development.aspx>

¹⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LDFvVtUQ5OkpeAVBEwaUSR5o-a25iwr/view>

SECTION 5:

Media Overview

THIS SECTION PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN AND MOST POPULAR MEDIA OUTLETS.

5.1 Digital Media

Website figures are difficult to determine due to Belarusian audiences accessing them via VPNs and their continued significant reach via social media and messaging platforms. Based on the Alexa rating²⁰ of the Top 50 websites in Belarus and Similarweb rankings, the Top 5 news websites inside Belarus in late 2021 were:

Figure 2 The Top 5 news websites in late 2021

Website	Alexa ranking	Description	Owner	Similarweb stats in November 2021
Yandex.by	#4	Search engine, News and media aggregator	Russian	123.2 mln visits, 96% from BY
Onliner.by	#6	News and lifestyle	Independent	32.1 mln visits, 88.5% from BY
Myfin.by	#32	Financial news	Independent	13.6 mln visits, 75.6% from BY
Belta.by	#40	News agency	State	7.5 mln visits, 79% from BY
Sb.by	#46	Website of newspaper	State	7.8 mln visits, 75% from BY

- » Sb.by is the website of the government's leading newspaper Belarus Today. Its media kit presents the following audience figures: 5.7 million visitors per month, 200,000 unique views a day, and 14 million page views a month. However, public opinion surveys either don't feature Sb.by or indicate that it trails independent media sites in terms of popularity and importance. Interviews with experts point to two possible explanations for this contradiction: 1) the popular Russian news aggregator Yandex.by, which favors government sources, is boosting Sb.by's totals; and 2) the government crackdown on independent websites has led to a growth in visitors to the state's primary site since the surveys were conducted.

At the time of this guide's writing, the most recent published ranking of websites by Gemius²¹ for Belarus was for September 2021. The top half of media websites in the Gemius Top 20 for that month were as follows:

Figure 3 The media websites in the Top 10 in September 2021

Website	Ranking	Description	Owner	Number of real users ²²	Reach ²³
Onliner.by	#1	News and media	Independent	2.3 mln	43.44%
Myfin.by	#3	Financial news	Independent	1.5 mln	29.38%
Bobruisk.ru	#9	Website of a local newspaper in Bobruisk	Independent	482,000	9.13%
Officelife	#10	Business news	Independent	442,000	8.37%
CityDog.by	#11	Minsk city digital magazine	Independent	422,000	7.99%
Pressball	#12	Webpage of sports newspaper	Private but pro-government	373,000	7.07%
Zerkalo.io	#13	News and media	Independent (blocked, declared extremist)	N/A	6.42%
Aif.by	#14	Website of newspaper	Belarusian edition of Russian media	296,000	5.62%
Gordonua.com	#15	News and media	Ukrainian media (blocked for "distributing extremist materials")	249,000	4.72%
Tribuna	#16	Sports news and analytics	Independent (blocked, declared extremist)	N/A	4.54%

The Gemius ranking included five popular independent websites that are blocked in Belarus and accessible only via VPNs. There are no state online news or politics websites in the ranking.

²⁰ The sites are ranked by their 1-month Alexa traffic rank. The 1-month rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over the past month. The site with the highest combination of visits and pageviews is ranked #1.

²¹ The Gemius ranking is based on a cross-platform analysis of Belarusian users accessing the websites through PCs and mobile telephones. However, the ranking includes only those websites with an installed Gemius counter and therefore does not cover 100% of Belarus' internet audience.

²² Real users is the number of Internet Users (visitors) in a given target group who visited (generated at least one page view) the selected node(s) in a specified time period. This indicator relates to the actual number of persons – not computers, cookies or IP addresses.

²³ Reach is the ratio of the number of visitors in a given target group who visited the selected node(s) in a specified time period to the number of Internet users in the given target group who accessed the Internet in a given month. This indicator is expressed as a percentage.

- » Onliner.by is the largest independent portal in Belarus. With the government's closure of TUT.by, formerly the country's leading independent portal, Onliner adopted a "common sense" approach and reduced its news and political coverage. It is "the last large independent online media outlet in Belarus" with registered status.
- » Gordonua.com and Obozrevatel.com are leading Ukrainian media outlets followed by Belarusians. Belarusians are increasingly accessing them to obtain news and to follow developments within neighboring countries.

BELARUSIAN WEBSITES ABROAD A number of independent news websites popular in the country are based abroad or have relocated their offices outside of Belarus. According to a 2021 Chatham House survey and another 2021 survey, the Top 5 exterior news and information sources operated by Belarusians for Belarusians are:

- » Zerkalo.io – the successor to TUT.by, once Belarus' largest and most popular web portal. The website has a narrower focus than the former portal; it concentrates on the political, economic and social news of Belarus. Zerkalo operates TUT.by's social media accounts, which are still run by the publication's former social media team. In 2021, the government declared TUT.by and Zerkalo.io to be "extremist" outlets. Two surveys found that Zerkalo/TUT.by remained a Top 5 source of information for Belarusians in 2021.
- » Belsat TV and European Radio for Belarus – expat broadcasters that also operate popular websites with streaming features. Both sites are blocked by the Belarusian government and declared to be "extremist" outlets.
- » Nasha Niva – a 1991 revival of Belarus' oldest newspaper, the publication was one of the country's most popular online sources of news and information, and the most read in Belarusian, prior to 2021, when it was blocked. The outlet continues to publish online from outside Belarus. A 2021 survey found it to have a greater monthly audience than the Belarus Today state newspaper. In January 2022, the Belarusian government declared Nasha Niva to be an "extremist" organisation.
- » Charter 97 – originally a human rights and political organisation that operated one of Belarus' first online news and information websites. It was forced to move out of Belarus and its website was later blocked by the Belarusian government. According to a 2021 Chatham House survey, Charter 97 remains a Top 5 important source of social and political information.

WESTERN WEBSITES Because of government pressure against independent Belarusian outlets, western sources of news and information play an oversized role in Belarus' media landscape. The following are the most popular and are frequently cited by Belarusian media:

- » Svaboda.org, the website of the US government-supported Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Belarusian Service (colloquially known as "Radio Svaboda"/"Radio Liberty"), is a leading provider of news and analysis to Belarusian audiences. In 2020, its website attracted 33.2 million visits, 59 million page views, and 13.7 million unique visitors. In 2020, the government blocked the site and, in 2021, declared the outlet to be "extremist." It also operates popular social media pages.
- » Deutsche Welle (DW), Germany's public and international broadcaster, provides online news and information to Belarus via a [dedicated subpage](#) as well as YouTube and Telegram channels. The DW website was blocked in Belarus by the government in 2021.

A 2021 Chatham House survey found that Radio Svaboda and DW were among the Top 20 most known and most important sources of political and social information for Belarusians.

NEWS AGENCIES The Belarusian government reports that there are nine news agencies operating in Belarus. However, during the protests of 2020-2021, BelaPAN, the country's only independent news agency, was shut down by the authorities. Interfax-West, which is owned by Russia's Interfax, was forced to close its office in Belarus in late 2021. The field is dominated by the state-run Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA), the country's largest news agency:

- » BelTA is the only official source of government news. In addition to its popular website, BelTA is also a publisher. It produces the 7 Dnei (7 Day) news and analysis weekly and Belaruskaya Dumka (Belarusian Thought), a monthly magazine that examines politics, policy and ideas.

- » The National Press Center is state-owned; it's webpage and news page can be accessed here.²⁴
- » Dom Pressy is a state publishing company that also operates a press center.

THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION The main political body of the Belarusian democratic forces, the Coordination Council, was established by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, whom many western governments and Belarusians recognise as the winner of the August 2020 presidential election. Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council are now based outside of Belarus. The Coordination Council's website includes a news page. Tsikhanouskaya's webpage and social media pages are here.²⁵

- » The Rada BNR webpage and social media pages can be found here.²⁶

5.2 Social Media

According to We are Social, 46% of the Belarusian population uses social media. More users (59.8%) are women than men (40.2%). Instagram is the most popular platform for those under 30. Residents of Minsk tend to use Facebook for news content. The government is not able to classify social media platforms as “extremist” as they are not owned or operated by Belarusians, but they can label social media groups or pages “extremist.” The authorities have also successfully requested that social media platforms remove specific materials.

The most popular social media platforms for Belarusians are YouTube, Facebook and VK (the Russian-owned VKontakte). A 2021 survey found that YouTube and VK are the social media preferred by Belarusian users for discussions about political news. Another survey revealed that the most popular social media for obtaining news are VK (63%), Instagram (53%), OK (33%), Facebook (28%) and TikTok (18%). A Chatham House survey identified VK and Facebook as the most important sources of socio-political news.

YouTube has become more important in Belarus because it serves as an alternative to the country's state-run television channels. A November 2021 survey noted an increase in the number of socio-political vloggers and a corresponding growth in the Belarusian YouTube community; 74% of respondents named YouTube as an important source of information. Unlike YouTube, Facebook and VK do not provide country rankings of pages.

Figure 4 The following channels regularly hold positions in the Top 5 of most viewed YouTube channels in Belarus (data from December 2021):

YouTube Channel	Description	Number of views	Number of subscribers
Realna Belarus	Real Belarus positions itself as “one of the last surviving blogs raising acute social issues in the society” and has the largest number of comments and likes.	6.8 mln	193,000
NEXTA Live	Launched in 2014, it is one of the oldest information and analytical YouTube channels focusing on Belarus and one of the most outspoken opponents of the government.	4.7 mln	157,000
Belsat News	YouTube channel of leading independent media outlet.	3.2 mln	454,000
TUT.by	YouTube channel of leading independent media outlet.	3.2 mln	1.4 mln
Malanka Media	Among the newer YouTube-based independent media, launched in July 2020; Lightning Media offers daily news and weekly live broadcasts.	1.7 mln	104,000

All five of the above channels are independent, based outside of the country and are critical of the Belarusian government. All have been declared “extremist” by the government. For the results of monthly monitoring of YouTube channels targeting Belarus, see here.²⁷

MESSAGING PLATFORMS Messaging platforms have become an increasingly popular source of news and information. An August 2021 study on Media Consumption and Media Literacy in Belarus found that 75% of respondents aged 18-74 actively used messaging platforms as news and information sources and only 18% didn't use these platforms at all. Among these platforms, Viber and Telegram had the largest share at 66% each. Telegram is more popular among younger audiences (80% of those aged 18-24 use Telegram and 50% use Viber), while the older population prefers Viber (78% to 62%). Telegram plays a more significant role as a news source for the country's urban population, especially in Minsk, where 76% of respondents use it, while Viber is more popular in the regions.

²⁴ <http://bpc.by/>

²⁵ <https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/>

²⁶ <http://www.radabnr.org/en/>

²⁷ <http://www.infopolicy.biz/?p=18681>

Telegram is the most important for Belarusian media outlets and their audiences, particularly those interested in politics, due to its usability, circumnavigation, dissemination and privacy features. The events of 2020 have been called “The Telegram Revolution”, with dozens of independent websites blocked and online outlets forced to operate outside the country, their Telegram channels now play a major role in the media landscape. The government’s strategy of labeling hundreds of Telegram channels as “extremist” has not reduced the demand for them among the protest audience. One popular political analyst and online commentator noted that, despite the government’s attempts to make independent sources of information appear as toxic as possible, the so-called “fear effect” of these measures on Belarusian audiences is close to being exhausted. According to a [November 2021 survey](#), 70% of respondents did not unsubscribe from Telegram channels after they were labeled “extremist”.

The Top 10 Telegram channels in Belarus according to Telemetr are:

Figure 5 Top 10 Telegram channels in Belarus on February 21, 2022

Telegram Channel	Description	Category	Number of subscribers	Avg. number of views per post (over 7 days)
NEXTA_Live	NEXTA_Live At the peak of its popularity in the August 2020 protests, the channel reached 2.2 million subscribers. In October 2021, the government declared the channel “extremist,” it had 926,000 subscribers. Today it focuses more on political issues in the Eastern Europe region.	News and Media	819,100	264,400
Zerkalo News	Telegram channel of the popular independent media outlet.	News and Media	388,900	172,700
NEXTA_TV	A second channel produced by NEXTA, it focuses on news, analysis and insights regarding Belarus.	Not specified	352,400	124,500
Belarus golovnogo mozga	Belarus of the Brain is the project of popular political bloggers.	Politics	161,700	52,400
Onliner	Telegram channel of the popular independent media outlet.	News and Media	125,400	43,700
Pul pervogo	The [Press] Pool of Number 1 is the only pro-governmental channel in the Top 10; it is likely affiliated with the government. The channel often publishes insights not covered by the official state media.	Politics	104,400	66,400

Since 2021, the government has been declaring hundreds of popular Telegram channels “extremist” including four of the channels in the Top 5 (highlighted in red above). Only two government entities – the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Construction and Architecture – have official channels in the Top 30.

While all channels declared “extremist” lost a significant number of subscribers, they remain influential sources of information for Belarusians. More information on the leading Telegram channels that are critical of the government can be found here.²⁸

5.3 Television

The government reported there were 98 television stations in Belarus as of December 2021. The Belarusian authorities own or control virtually all television broadcasting in the country. There is one Belarusian TV channel not controlled by the Belarusian government – the Poland-based Belsat TV.

Television is popular in Belarus; 93.5% of the population watched TV at least once a month during the second half of 2021 and 58.1% viewed it once a day. There are more female (60.8%) viewers than male (39.2%). More than three-quarters of the television audience is 35 and older; 15.4% is 18 to 34 years old. The most frequent watchers are men and women 65 and older.

Since the events of 2020-2021, public trust in television as a source of news has been low, and trails news websites and social media.

The National State TV and Radio Company (BelteleRadio) operates 7 major channels:

- » [Belarus 1](#) – the government’s main national channel.
- » [Belarus 2](#) – an entertainment channel with a focus on young people.
- » [Belarus 3](#) – the state’s cultural channel.

²⁸ <https://motolko.help/en-articles/unsubscribe-time-what-is-happening-with-popular-telegram-channels-in-belarus/>

- » [Belarus 5](#) – the state’s sport channel.
- » [Belarus 5 Internet](#) – the online version of the state’s sport channel.
- » [Belarus 24](#) – the state’s international satellite channel.
- » [NTV-Belarus](#) – a localised version of the state Gazprom-owned NTV channel in Russia. NTV-Belarus mostly airs Russian content, with only a few locally-produced shows.

Other state-owned channels:

- » RTR-Belarus – a localised version of Russia’s RTR-Planeta. RTR-Belarus airs mostly Russian content, with only a few locally-produced shows.
- » ONT – the state’s second national channel and a localised version of the Russian state’s Channel One.
- » Mir – the localised version of an international TV channel established by the Confederation of Independent States (CIS); based in Russia, its Belarus affiliate is here.²⁹
- » Belarus 4 – oversees regional TV broadcasting, covering the country’s 5 regions beyond Minsk. Links to the regional platforms can be found here.³⁰
- » STV – covers the capital region as well as the entire country; it is the third national TV channel and also rebroadcasts Russia’s REN TV.
- » Links to state-run regional and local TV channels in Belarus can be found here.³¹

Non-state channels:

- » Belsat TV – a Polish-based channel supported by Western sources and staffed by Belarusian reporters broadcast via satellite and the internet. A 2019 [survey](#) found 13% of adult Belarusians watched the channel and 40% knew of it. A 2021 [survey](#) found Belsat TV to be a more important source of information than any state TV channel. Most of the outlet’s Belarusian audience watch the TV channel online as it was banned from cable and digital networks in Belarus, as the first media entity to be declared “extremist” by the authorities in 2021.

In terms of popularity, during the second half of 2021, the Top 5 television channels were:

- » ONT
- » Russia-Belarus (RTR-Belarus)
- » NTV-Belarus
- » Belarus 1
- » Mir

For a ranking of the entire Top 22 of major channels in the second half of 2021, see here.³² For updated weekly and monthly rankings, see here.³³ In a 2021 [Chatham House survey](#) of urban respondents, TV performed less well as an “important source of socio-political information”, however television remains the most important source of information for the pro-government segment of the Belarusian audience.

News programming comprised 15% of all TV programming during the monitoring period. In terms of news consumption, there is no monitoring of most-watched TV channels. According to Mediameter, the most popular news programs in the second half of 2021 were:

- » “Results of the Week with Irada Zeinalova” – NTV-Belarus
- » “Our News” (evening edition) – ONT
- » “News of the Week” – RTR-Belarus
- » “Saturday News” – RTR-Belarus

29 <http://by.mir24.tv/>

30 <https://www.tvr.by/company/o-nas/>

31 <http://belsmi.by/index/smi/televidenie/>

32 https://mediameter.by/pdf/Result_report.pdf

33 <https://mediameter.by/>

- » “Our News” (afternoon edition) – ONT

5.4 Radio

The Belarusian authorities own or control all radio broadcasting within the country. The government reported there were 163 radio stations in Belarus as of December 2021, of which about 30 were FM. The National State TV and Radio Company (Belteleradio) operates 5 radio stations. There are two Belarusian radio stations broadcasting into the country from abroad that are not controlled by the Belarusian state.

Some 27% of Belarus’ population listens to the radio; approximately 660,000 (24.1%) were tuning in each day during the second half of 2021. More than 50% of listeners listen in their cars. More men (27.8%) than women (20.9%) listen to radio. Most listeners are 35 to 54 years old. In 2009, more than 40% of respondents to a survey used radio as a source of information; but by 2018, it was less than 13%. Only one radio station, the Poland-based European Radio for Belarus (which also broadcasts online), appears in a 2021 survey of audience media preferences; it ranked 13th out of 17 outlets/sources. It was also cited in a 2021 Chatham House survey of “important” and “most important” sources of socio-political information. No state radio channel appeared in either survey.

The National State TV and Radio Company (Belteleradio) operates 5 radio stations: the First Channel, Radio Belarus, Kultura (Culture), Radio Stalitsa (Capital Radio) and Radius FM. Links to them can be found here.³⁴ The two most important channels are:

- » The national First Channel, which broadcasts mostly news and information. During the second half of 2021, the First Channel ranked only 24th in popularity.
- » Capital Radio, the first and only FM station wholly in Belarusian, is a national station that offers news and entertainment with a focus on Minsk.

Belteleradio also oversees a radio station in each of the country’s 5 regions beyond the capital. Links to more than 70 state-run regional and local radio stations throughout the country can be found here.³⁵

Channels independent of the government:

- » The Poland-based European Radio for Belarus (colloquially known as Euroradio), was established and is run by Belarusians (it is supported by Western public and private sources). It broadcasts news and entertainment content via FM, satellite and the internet. Since the protests in 2020, Euroradio’s audience has grown seven-fold. A 2021 survey found that Euroradio had a larger audience than any state radio channel. One media institute [reported](#) that its monthly listeners and readers numbered about 3 million people in 2020. The Belarusian authorities blocked access to Euroradio’s website in 2021.
- » Radio Racja, based in Poland and supported by the Polish government, broadcasts to Poland’s Belarusian minority and to western Belarus (the Brest and Grodno regions) via FM and an online streaming platform. There are no current statistics for the number of Racja’s radio listeners or its website audience. The outlet’s website was blocked by the Belarusian government in 2021.

The Top 5 most popular radio stations in terms of audience share in the second half of 2021 were:

- » Radio ROKS
- » Radio Unistar
- » New Radio
- » Humor FM
- » Russian Radio (Minsk)

For a complete ranking of the Top 34 national and regional channels in the second half of 2021, see here.³⁶ Future bi-annual rankings will be here.³⁷ None of the top ranked radio stations focus on news; they are commercial entities offering mostly

³⁴ <https://www.tvr.by/eng/radio/>

³⁵ <http://belsmi.by/index/smi/radio/>

³⁶ https://mediameter.by/pdf/Result_report.pdf

³⁷ <https://mediameter.by/>

music. In terms of news, they tend to draw on official state sources to avoid difficulties with the authorities.

5.5 Print

The Belarusian government reported that 451 newspapers and 782 periodical titles were published in 2021. The state controls the vast majority of the papers that produce news and information. Belarusians' consumption of print media is declining. Newspaper circulation in the country is reportedly falling at a rate of 10% annually. While this decline follows a global trend, one official noted that part of the problem in Belarus is that all state newspapers, which dominate the market, tend to publish the same information.

Two newspapers with print editions, Belarus Today and The Republic, were the only outlets with print editions in a 2021 ranking of media audience preferences, ranking 16th and 17th, respectively, of 17 outlets/sources – both are state publications. After the events of 2020-2021, only one independent national newspaper and three independent regional papers continue operating in the country; their circulation is negligible.

State publications: the Belarus Today Publishing House, owned by the Presidential Administration, oversees the country's five largest print newspapers:

- » Belarus Segodnya/Belarus Today (formerly Soviet Belarus) is the government's main newspaper; it is published four times a week. As of 2019, it had a circulation of 190,000. Together with its popular webpage the publication is one of the government's leading sources of influence in the country.
- » Znamya Yunosti/The Banner of Youth is a weekly targeting young people with a print run of 40,000.
- » Respublika/The Republic is published four times a week with a circulation of 28,000.
- » Narodnaya Gazeta/The People's Newspaper is a weekly with a print run of 26,000.
- » Selskaya Gazeta/the Rural Gazette appears three times a week and has a circulation of 25,000.

Links to the webpages of approximately 150 regional and local state newspapers can be found here.³⁸

- » Non-state newspapers: prior to the events of 2020-2021, there were approximately 20 independent newspapers publishing in Belarus. Most were forced to cease operations in the wake of the government's post-election crackdown. Today, one national paper and three regional papers continue operating in the country.
- » Argumenty i Fakty (Arguments and Facts), a Russian newspaper with a localised edition, is popular in Belarus. Owned by the Government of Moscow, it produces a Belarusian version which, as of February 2021, had a weekly print run of 107,000 copies.

There are two digital archives of Belarusian print media based outside the country. Both were founded in 1996 as private initiatives:

- » Bielaruskaja Pal'ka/The Belarusian Bookshelf is Belarus' largest online library of Belarusian-language publications.
- » Kamunikat/Message contains a large section of contemporary newspapers and other periodicals.

5.6 Media-Related Organisations

Belarus' media landscape includes a number of independent and state organisations working on media issues. The most prominent of these are:

- » Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) – the largest independent journalist organisation in Belarus; it has 1,300 members, including employees of state media. It is a member of the International Federation of Journalists. BAJ strives to promote media rights, monitor the state of the media and improve the professional quality of media in the country. In 2021, the government formally closed BAJ in Belarus; it now operates from abroad. Prior to its closure, BAJ also produced the quarterly magazine Abazhur (Lampshade).
- » Belarusian Union of Journalists (BSJ) – the country's state-supported journalists union. The BSJ has 6 regional branches and more than 2,100 members. With the Ministry of Information, the BSJ publishes the quarterly magazine

³⁸ http://belsmi.by/index/smi/pechatnie_smi/

Journalist (circulation 400 copies) and the web resource Mediana, which focuses on developments in Belarus' media space. In 2021, the BSJ froze its participation in the International Federation of Journalists citing lack of support in the face of the Belarusian government's 2020-2021 crackdown on independent media organisations.

- » Press Club Belarus – a non-governmental platform that strives to improve the professionalism of Belarus' media community, the Press Club also monitors repression against journalists, reports on media developments, and monitors media performance in Belarus. It was closed down by the government and now operates from abroad.
- » United Mass Media (formerly the Association of Regional Publishers) – an association of 15 independent publishers from Belarus' regions who produce some 20 independent print and online newspapers. Many of the association's newspapers have ceased publishing or their webpages have been blocked during the government crackdown.
- » Viasna Human Rights Center – Belarus' leading human rights organisation, Viasna (Spring) also monitors and advocates on freedom of speech, freedom of expression and media freedom issues. In 2021, the government closed Viasna; it now operates from abroad.
- » Journalists for Tolerance (J4T) – a human rights initiative that advocates for greater tolerance toward socially vulnerable groups by altering rhetoric in the media. J4T carries out research on and monitoring of hate speech in the media and educational projects for media workers and outlets on non-discrimination.
- » Human Constanta – a human rights NGO that focuses on digital rights and freedoms. It also monitors the government's use of "extremism" legislation to stifle critical voices.
- » MediaKritika – an independent information and analytical resource created by a team of Belarusian media experts to improve the quality of Belarusian journalism by providing comprehensive independent analysis of media activities in Belarus.
- » Information Policy – a website reporting on digital developments in Belarus that also presents important rankings and analysis of online outlets and pages.
- » Belarusian Solidarity Fund BY SOL Media Solidarity – a civic crowd-funding initiative based outside of Belarus that assists independent journalists and organisations repressed by the government.
- » Media Solidarity Belarus – a civic initiative that supports journalists, media workers and outlets suffering from repression in Belarus.

THE RUSSIA-BELARUS UNION STATE MEDIA

The Union State was created by the Belarusian and Russian governments in 1999 (see Section 2.4); its structures include several media entities:

- » Soyuznoye Veche (Union Assembly) – the Russia-based publication of the Russia-Belarus Parliamentary Union, produced jointly by the state-run Belarus Today Publishing House and partners in Russia. The publication covers the most significant issues and events regarding the Union State in the fields of politics, economics, science and culture.
- » SOYUZ. Belarus-Russia (Union: Belarus-Russia) – the newspaper of Council of Ministers of the Russia-Belarus Union State. It is a joint project of the newspapers Belarus Today and Russian Gazette. A weekly, it is disseminated in Belarus as an insert to the state Belarus Today. As of 2019, its print run was 187,000 copies.
- » Soyuz (Union) – the information and analysis portal of the Russian-Belarusian Union State. It is operated by the Standing Committee of the Union State and the state-run National Press Center of Belarus. The former also produces the Union State Journal.
- » BelRos – the television and radio channel of the Russia-based TV and Radio Broadcasting Organization of the Russia-Belarus Union State; it also has an office in Belarus. The TV channel is available in Belarus via cable and satellite. The radio channel's programs are broadcast by the First Channel of the state's Belarusian Radio.

5.7 Media Training Opportunities

Media training opportunities in Belarus are limited and, like other parts of the media landscape, divided between the state and independent sectors. Some of the major initiatives include:

- 
- » Belarusian State University has a Journalism Department that offers a BA in print, broadcast journalism, online journalism, and media management. Regional state universities offer a journalism specialisation in their humanities courses. The curriculum is noted to be theoretical, focusing on state media only. During 2020-2021, many journalism students were expelled for their civic activism or quit BSU's Journalism Department.
 - » European Humanities University (EHU) – an independent Belarusian university-in-exile based in neighboring Vilnius, Lithuania which offers an alternative, modern education in journalism and media. However, EHU's diplomas are not recognised in Belarus, making it difficult for graduates to be officially employed in the country.
 - » The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and the Press Club Belarus journalism and media management training for media professionals. In 2021, both were shut down by the government but continue their educational programs from abroad.
 - » BAJ launched its programme in 2011 focusing on upgrading journalism skills, in-house consultations for editorial teams, and lectures for the public. Since early 2020, all courses have been offered online because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - » Founded in 2016, the Press Club Belarus, has organised lectures, discussions and master classes for state and non-state journalists and media professionals. it has its own educational platform, “The Media Academy,” offering long- and short-term courses as well as one-day crash-courses on media management and monetisation. Despite a government raid and the 8-month imprisonment of its founders and managers, the Press Club continues its work from abroad and launched its third Media Accelerator in January 2022.
 - » Johannes Rau International Center for Education and Exchanges (IBB Minsk) – a joint German-Belarusian venture. Prior to the events of 2020, it ran a “Media Academy” programme which offered a diverse range of journalism courses, trainings, conferences and networking events for state and non-state media organisations.



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