



**Office for European Expertise  
and Communications**

# Analysis of the Social Service Sector in Belarus

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Executive summary



**Секторный анализ**

*достоверные данные*

*для осознанных решений*

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## **Introduction. Sector description.**

The paper presents the analysis of the sector of social service of the Republic of Belarus with a special focus at the key actors of the sector. The analysis of the sector of social service for the population of the Republic of Belarus is one of the sectoral analyses performed by the “[Office for the European Expertise and Communications](#)” (OEEC).

Analysis of the sector is commissioned by OEEC and made by the group of analysts: Tatiana Chulitskaya, PhD, lecturer at [EHU](#), researcher of [SYMPA/BIPART](#), Natalia Ryabova, Director of SYMPA/BIPART, Inna Romashevskaya, Academic Director of BIPART, Vladimir Kovalkin, analyst of BIPART, Dmitri Markushevski, Academic Director of SYMPA.

Effective social service is the prerequisite for the development of society in any country. Beside the assistance to the people who due to some reasons find themselves in a situation where they cannot ensure themselves a normal (as viewed by the society) life, it also implies activities to prevent such situations.

Social service can be provided to certain groups/categories of people or it can be targeted (based on the actual needs of people) and thus it can either be oriented at identified categories/groups of people or at certain individuals, should their personal or family circumstances be estimated as sufficient for the provision of social service or social assistance.

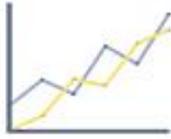
An essential component of social service is the parties involved. The state is the primary decision maker. However, the patterns of its cooperation with other actors - non-governmental organizations (including faith-based and international), for-profit organizations and individuals, which can/must be able to conduct advocacy and implementation of social service projects - can differ. These discrepancies are clearly visible at the level of different national systems and states.

In the case of Belarus, despite a well developed social service system, the issue of the cooperation of its primary actor - the government - with other actors remains open. Currently this cooperation is based rather on the soviet-era principles, when the government was simultaneously the decision maker and the primary implementer.

**The social service sector in the Republic of Belarus** as part of this analysis is understood as a totality of all organizations and individuals involved in the provision of social service aiming to help people who find themselves in difficult circumstances, facilitate their adaptation and/or re-socialization. As well as the operation of various organizations targeted at the amendment and improvement of the laws regulating this area.

Some **primary problem characteristics** of the social service sector, which are considered essential for the analysis, can be defined as follows:

- Uncertainty of the terminology and definitions used for the description of the situation in the sector.
- Difficulty in classifying the actors within the sector: all forms of government institutions, for-profit organizations and non-governmental associations.



- Domination of government in the social service, while the involvement of non-governmental organisations and opportunities for their advocating for legislative change are limited, although some steps here have been taken (in particular, the adopted mechanism of social service contracting - SSC).

- True need to involve into social service provision other types of organizations beside state-owned ones. This need is determined by both economic (expected reduction of budget expenses) and social (primarily, demographic stable tendency for the increase of the share of elderly people) factors.

- Commercialization of social service provided by state-run organizations, increase of the number of charged social services accompanied by the remaining or even growing demand for these services.

- State-run organizations predominantly provide social services to the people who are **already** in difficult circumstances. Prevention of such situations is secondary due to limited resources or a formal approach to prevention activities. Innovative resources of non-profit organizations regarding their targeted work with certain groups sometimes become the basis for the change of practices in the activity of state-run institutions, but on the whole this trend seems underrated.

Therefore, currently the social service sector exists in the situation where the state and state-run organizations are the primary agents. Taking into account the existing practices, a formal status, and the overall social, economic and political context, the introduction by state-run institutions and organizations of innovations into the sector is questionable.

An essential additional factor bringing to the forefront the problems of the cooperation between the state and non-governmental organizations in the sphere of social service is the SSC mechanism, which was put into action in 2014. At the time when this analysis was under way local authorities had just started using this social contracting mechanism, though some difficulties arising from its use have already emerged. Currently only a preliminary evaluation of the SSC and the "state - non-governmental organizations" cooperation as such in the framework of this mechanism is possible.

According to the existing legislation the following providers of social services currently work in Belarus in the system of social service:

- **state-run organizations** (*for example, nursing clinics, gerontological centres, residential social service institutions, including territorial centres for social service, re-socialization centres, etc.*);

- **other legal entities**, including non-governmental for-profit and non-profit organizations;

- **individual entrepreneurs.**

The analysis covers **state-run, non-governmental** (including international) **organizations**, involved in or aspiring to get involved in social service and/or involved in the



corresponding advocacy practices related to the adoption and implementation of decisions in this area.

The analysis covers the organizations, which define their primary target groups for the provision of services as follows:

- low-income persons
- orphans
- families with multiple children
- persons of no fixed abode
- unemployed
- people with disabilities
- people in problem families
- people who served a sentence and were released from places of detention
- people who survived the death of a close relative, etc.

With that, individual entrepreneurs and volunteer initiatives were not included into the range of actors under study due to both their limited numbers and minimum involvement into the work of the sector. However, the study of the practices of public-private partnership, corporate social responsibility (CSR), charity work by Belarusian businesses are considered as interesting areas for further research.

### **Description of the study**

The **object** of the analysis is a set of organizations and institutions, both state-run and non-governmental, involved in or aspiring to get involved in the social service in Belarus starting from 2000 and until now.

**The goal** of the analysis is to analyse the current situation, problems and prospects for further development of the social service sector in Belarus using quality and quantity data (obtained during the survey of state-run and non-governmental organizations, semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the sector, discourse analysis of the statements by public officers as well as the analysis of secondary data) to demonstrate the dynamics and the development trends of the sector, structure and roles of key actors, services offered by them and the results of their activity.

Study assumptions:

1. Currently, considering the existing practices for the implementation of the social policy in general and the social service provision policies in particular, **the primary provider of social services in Belarus is the state** and state-run related organizations. The third sector (non-governmental organizations) are involved but to a very limited extent. There is a disproportion regarding the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the sector, where large organizations dominate and receive support from the state for their activity on a non-competitive basis.

2. There have been changes in the sphere of state policy towards the **commercialization of the social services provided by the state**, which is due to both limited funding and the increasing number of individuals (first of all, elderly people), who can claim such services.



3. Considering the narrowing possibilities for the government to support the social service system to the same extent as it is done today, there is **a possibility that in future non-governmental organizations will be involved more often** (an example of **social services contracting**), and there will be more attempts to engage businesses and shift a part of the social responsibility to the business community. Along with that, the government and governmental bodies lack understanding of the alternative ways of providing social services.

4. **Non-governmental organizations** due to both "positive practices" and capacity for innovations **have better opportunities, if compared to the government, for the prevention of** difficult situations in the lives of people who are potentially at risk, as well as regarding the adaptation of those who had already found themselves in difficult situations. They need the government to provide them with more opportunities for the work in the sector.

5. **The population of Belarus are not quite aware of the existing social services**, which is due to both difficulties in obtaining information and the practices of the "suppression" of information by the respective state-run organizations due to various reasons (lack of sufficient resources for the service provision, insufficient professional competence of the staff, etc.)

6. **The government is the only entity determining the target groups for the provision of social services** based on its own perception of those most in need (currently these are primarily elderly people). Certain risk groups (for example, parents/foster parents of HIV-positive children) can remain outside the social service system.

### **Results of the analysis**

In general, based on the data obtained during the analysis one can mention a quite high level of the development of the social service. The issues of the identification of actors of the social service system and their cooperation with each other remain to a large extent open. The retained from the soviet era dominance of the state in making political decisions and implementing social service projects help maintain the current development level. However, taking into account the peculiarities of the social and economic development of the country and the region, the social sector obviously needs (or will need) some revision and a more active engagement of alternative actors, including non-governmental organizations. The latter might help strengthen the capacity for the prevention of difficult situations in life, when people become users of the social service.

The performed analysis of the legal, social and economic context in which the sector exists and develops, as well as the analysis of the respective state policy has shown positive and problematic peculiarities of the social service in Belarus. The assessment of the socio-economic situation indicates the necessity of change in the sector, which is due to the objective difficulties of maintaining the current funding of social policy, and due to a specific national situation with certain problems in employment and demography (ageing of population).



The review of the legal context has shown quite a high level of the development of legal system, a certain dynamics of the improvement of the legislation, however, at the level of the implementation of state policy and the corresponding comprehensive programme for social service it becomes evident that the development of the legal framework is insufficient for the implementation of the effective policy in this area.

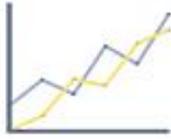
The study, as a separate topic, of the problems around social services contracting has shown that despite the overall positive assessment of this instrument (evidenced by the findings of interviews and surveys) it lacks efficiency.

The primary actor in the sphere of social service, as it was assumed at all stages of the analysis, is the state. The involvement of non-governmental organizations in the sector appears complicated. On the one hand, one cannot deny that there is certain cooperation between the government and non-governmental actors, which is especially visible at the local level (or in certain situations at the national level, in particular, the cooperation with the Belarusian Red Cross Society (BRCS). On the other hand, due to the internal problems of non-governmental organizations themselves and the ambiguous attitude of the state to these organizations, the cooperation between them is still limited. It should also be noted that the organizations working in the social service are in a complicated situation characterized by a number of factors: NGOs are few, they are financially and organizationally unsustainable, they greatly depend on external funding, etc. All these circumstances further complicate the partnership with the state.

Among the major entities working in social service (besides the state) one should mention such organization as the BRCS, which the state perceives as its partner. Besides, some organizations existing since the Soviet period: the Belarusian Society of Disabled, Belarusian Association of Visually Impaired and the organizations established later, as well as organizations working with disabled people (children), for example, BelAPDIIMI retain the status of significant actors in the sector. One should note that the latter introduced qualitative innovations into the social service, and this work was recognized by state entities and other organizations. Besides, organizations whose activity is unique (such as Belarusian Hospice) are important for the state. However, one should keep in mind that the actual number of non-governmental organizations involved in the sector is much lower than the declared amount (both registered by the Ministry of Justice and contained in the alternative data bases).

Another problem according to the analysis is the classification of the target groups for social service. The laws specify a clear list of such groups, but this list excludes the categories of people suffering from/at risk of the so called social diseases (for example, HIV-positive). Besides, many experts consider categorization in determining target groups inefficient for the present-day situation and think that it should be replaced with an individual approach (based on need). The ideas were voiced for the revision of the system for identifying the people in need for social service.

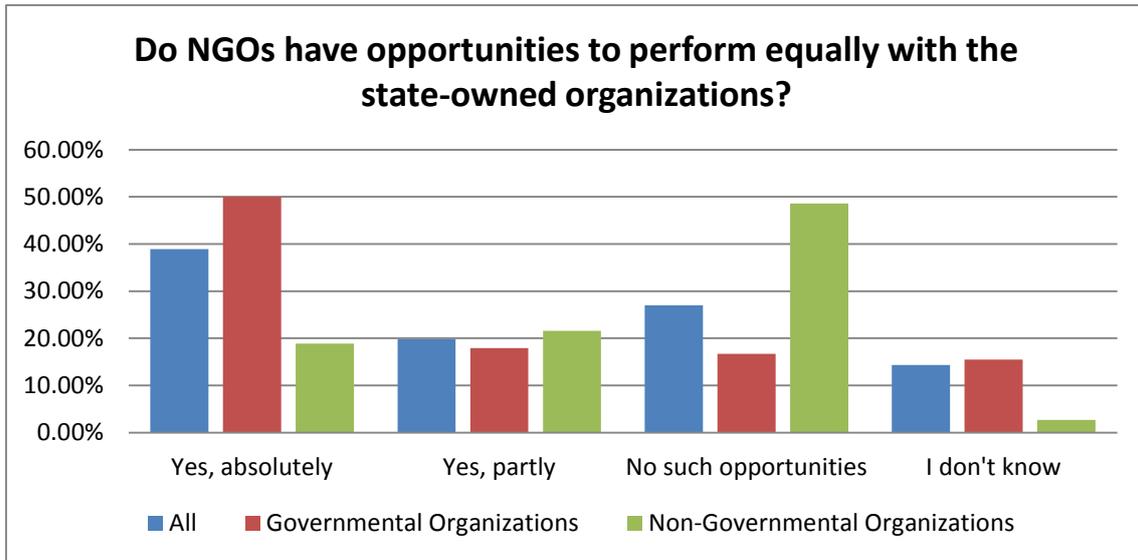
According to the interviews the assessment of the situation in the sector by the proactive actors (including their opinions on the key issues, prospects for dealing with them, and opportunities for further work in general) is controversial. Depending on the position of the



organization in the sector, institutional and/or personal practices the whole range of assessments has been demonstrated from strictly positive up to sceptically negative. Should these assessments be combined with the discourse of various representatives of authorities and the socio-economic context of the activity of the sector's organizations, it would be even more difficult to determine the prospects for further development. Along with that, we should point out two significant problems as well as the prospects for the sector development: the need to adopt social service standards and standards for the evaluation of the efficiency of the actors functioning in this area and the projects they implement - both state-run and non-governmental organizations. There is an obvious tendency for the commercialization of a part of social services as an actual possibility for the further development of the sector. This trend is due to the need to reduce budget expenses for the social service, the demographic situation in the country, and the "anti-dependency" policy declared at the level of the state. A wider involvement of for-profit organizations in the sector predetermined by the above factors seems quite probable.

On the whole, the cooperation of the state with non-governmental organizations in the sphere of social service in Belarus is currently rather at its initial stage. Despite a number of positive developments at the level of the legislation (in particular, the recently adopted social contracting mechanism), as well as the cases of successful cooperation between state organizations of various levels with non-governmental organizations, they are more individual cases than a sustainable trend. Along with that, the continuation of the cooperation is perceived as quite real and obviously necessary for both parties - the state and non-governmental organizations. Besides, an important step for further cooperation should become not just a formal execution of the new partnership instruments but their effective practical implementation (for example, the elimination of all problems identified in the course of the analysis or mentioned by NGOs with the implementation of the social contracting).

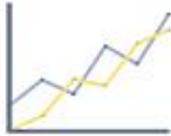
The diagram below shows what the actors, according to the survey, think about the opportunities of NGOs to perform equally with the state-owned organizations in the sector. Opinions of governmental and non-governmental organizations differ: the former are sure that the opportunities are equal, the latter do not agree.



### Recommendations

The following could be proposed as the recommendations for the development of the social service sector and a more intensive engagement of non-governmental organizations into the sector:

1. Legislators should **formalise in the legislation** the following key **principles of the provision of social services**: universal access, justice, equality, inclusion, responsibility.
2. Legislators and corresponding executive bodies should **improve the legal environment in order to create favourable conditions for the operation of non-governmental organizations**: simplify the procedure for the registration of a legal person, reduce rent rates for non-governmental organizations, simplify the procedure for the registration of international humanitarian and charitable aid, etc.
3. Legislators and corresponding executive bodies of various levels should promote a **better engagement of non-governmental organizations** both at the stage of policy implementation and **policy design and decision making in the social service**.
4. Responsible state bodies (first of all, the Ministry of Labour) in the course of the engagement of the representatives of non-governmental organizations should develop and introduce **the system of the social service quality standards**.
5. Legislators and corresponding executive bodies (in particular, Research Institute of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection), in order to **improve the targeted character of social assistance**, should explore the possibility of a **shift from helping certain categories of people to individual help** based on actual need.
6. Legislators and corresponding executive bodies (Ministry of Labour) and local executive bodies should continue **using social service contracting** with due regard for the available international experience, and help **remove controversies** between the formal framework and the possibilities for the implementation of this mechanism.
7. National and local executive bodies along with non-governmental organizations should consider the possibility of **conducting free training workshops** on the organization



and participation in the social service contracting both for its organizers (executive committees) and potential participants (non-governmental organizations).

8. National and local executive bodies along with non-governmental organizations should explore the possibility of **establishing a unified and a transparent type and procedure of reporting for organizations** about the results of the implementation of social service contracting projects.

9. Executive bodies (Ministry of Labour) and local executive bodies should promote the **creation of a communication platform** (possibly an Advisory Council) for governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations for the design and implementation of the overall policy and individual activities in the field of social service. In particular, **advisory councils in social service contracting** at local authorities with the participation of non-governmental organizations.

10. Mass media should perform awareness-raising activities to shape up the perception of non-governmental organizations as a promising partner of the state in the area of social service.