



**Office for European Expertise
and Communications**

Analysis of the Gender Sector in Belarus

Executive summary



Секторный анализ

достоверные данные

для осознанных решений

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Background

The analysis of the Gender Sector is one of the sectoral analyses commissioned by the Office of European Expertise and Communications (OEEC).

The sector dealing with issues of gender equality includes the organizations and initiatives which frame and implement the policy of gender equality in the Republic of Belarus, conduct activities in the area of gender equality on the territory of the country and/or beyond its borders when due to some reasons such activities cannot be carried out in Belarus.

Analysis of the gender sector, where activities are conducted by state, international organizations, and civil society actors, was carried out at the request of OEEC in 2014 by the team of analysts composed of Olga Yanchuk, Svetlana Burova, and Olga Petrukovich backed up by Elena Demidova, Olga Grinkevich, and Natalia Kurilovich.

Methodology

The *object* of the analysis was actors dealing with the issues of gender equality in the Republic of Belarus. The *subject* of the analysis was the conditions and types of activities of the sectoral actors aimed at the promotion of gender equality, as well as the effectiveness of these activities.

The purpose of this analysis is to study the sector, conditions of its functioning and to offer the results of the study for public discussion and for their further application by governmental institutions, scientists, media, activists of the civil society, international organizations and other stakeholders within the country and abroad so that they possess the information necessary to frame their work plans and define their priorities and options in the sector development.

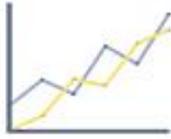
The analysis was based on the data from regulatory acts of international and national level, sociological studies, assessment of socio-economic situation in the country, as well as the experts' evaluation data obtained in the course of individual and group interviews. The sample was formed of **thirty five** experts - 3 men and 32 women (**21** experts took part in the individual interview, **14** experts were participants of two focus groups). They were selected by the method of snowball from the actors that deal with the issues of gender inequality in the country and have gained a certain public recognition in Belarus. Experts were different in age and represented governmental institutions, international organizations, and civil society.

Quantitative and qualitative methods based on gender approach were used in the analysis.

Legal and socio-economic environment, attitude of the general public to gender issues

Belarusian Constitution declares that *all citizens «shall be equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of their rights and legitimate interests»*.

Principles of equality and non-discrimination before the law in family relations, educational, professional, social and political, cultural, and other spheres are stated in the



Constitution (Art. 22, 32, 42), the Family and Marriage Code (Art. 20), and the Labor Code (Art. 14, 19). Other legal documents of Belarus are gender neutral. Thus, **there is a legal and regulatory base where gender equality is fixed, but it doesn't contain mechanisms of real protection of these rights in case of their violation.**

Belarus has signed and ratified a set of basic UN documents aimed at protection of women's interests and achievement of gender equality: Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), Additional Protocol to this Convention (2004); Declaration of IV World conference on women (Beijing, 1995), United Nations Millennium Declaration. International commitments of Belarus suggest that ***national gender policy is framed by Belarusian state and the state defines gender equality as one of its priorities.***

National action plans to achieve gender equality serve as the main legal instrument of gender policy. Coordination body in the sphere of gender equality is the National Council on gender policy at the Council of Ministers of Belarus. In the Ministry of labor and social protection there is a department of population, gender and family policy. Local Executive Committees have departments of targeted social assistance and gender issues. Despite the presence of all these institutions and tools in Belarus, gender approach is not used while developing state plans and programs, gender analysis of taken decisions is not used either. ***There is no strategy of gender development, and the current policy has no systematic approach.***

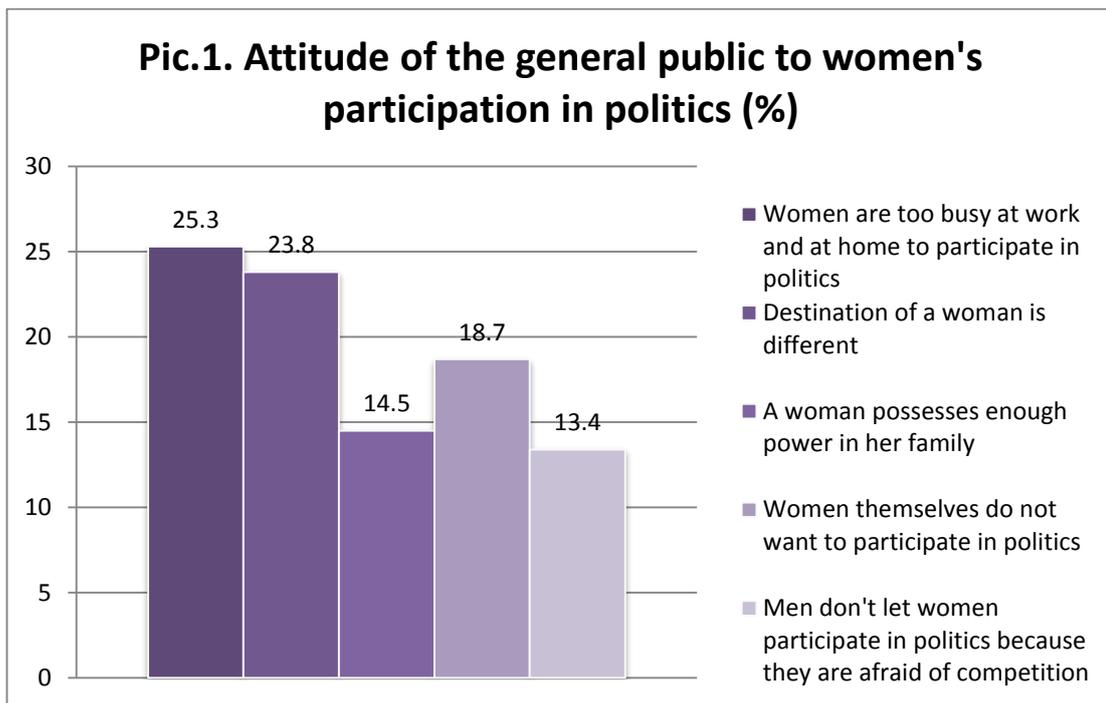
There are ***international technical assistance projects implemented in Belarus to strengthen the capacity of the state in dealing with gender issues***, however, these projects are not cross-cutting in nature and ***are implemented in a certain narrow area*** – domestic violence, human beings trafficking, conscious parenting.

There are direct and non-direct forms of gender discrimination in the country that are not considered as such by the majority of population and representatives of the authorities. Belarus became one of 27 countries in the world that achieved the goal of the women's participation in the decision making process. ***Fifty four women out of 174 delegates of both Chambers were selected to the National Assembly in 2012***, however, this indicator was achieved thanks to the introduction of a quota for women and it is not a naturally driven fact. The widely spread opinion among men-delegates about 32% of women in politics is that ***“it is good to have women in a men's team because women's presence ennobles such a team”*** and ***“beautifies” Belarusian politics”*** which gives women pure “decorative” function. In Belarus women's share in the total number of the employed population reaches nearly 54%, but in 2012 the nominal average monthly salary of women made only 74.5% of the salary of men. Near 55% of working women have higher and secondary vocational education, men's rate is only 38%. Thus, having a higher level of education, women are represented in the decision making domain to a lower degree than men and their income is also less than that of the men. There are discrimination practices in relation to women while selecting them to



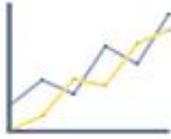
higher education establishments, for example, the Academy of the Ministry of Interior. Women's right to choose a profession or occupation is limited (See Resolution of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection as of 12 June 2014 with the List of hard works and works with harmful and (or) dangerous labor conditions where women's labor is prohibited).

Belarusian society is mostly patriarchal, gender stereotypes related to the life of women and men in family and society are characteristic of more than a half of the adult population.



The majority of respondents believe that politics is not a female occupation, women are too busy at home and in jobs, woman's purpose is in something different, women have enough power in their family, they do not really want to participate in politics. Only 13,4% pointed out to a discrimination aspect there, namely that "men don't let women in politics as they are afraid of the competition". The majority of the population does not consider it necessary to change anything; however, women's opinions in the context of gender equality are more progressive than men's. The men's opinions are more conservative.

Concerning the understanding by the general public of the meaning of "gender" the majority of people have no idea about such term. Those who heard this term associated it with the notion of "feminism", "fighting for women's rights". Gender issues are wrongly perceived as specifically female. Nevertheless, near half of the population understand the term "gender equality" as equal rights and opportunities for women and men. In a public discourse, however, oftentimes there is a substitution of notions, distortion of meanings when the term "gender equality" is associated with the promotion of same-sex relationships, with the denial of a family institution, with the formation of a sexless person.



Actors of Gender Sector

Sector actors are represented by the state, international organizations, civil society, academic community, and media. All the actors of the sector have different level of gender sensitivity and their own agendas in this sector.

According to experts, *the state has to be the main interested actor in carrying out policy of gender equality, however it doesn't act as that*. The legislature represented by deputies generally demonstrates patriarchal approach and doesn't see the need for the law on gender equality. Some executive authorities demonstrate mimicry when in different situations their representatives try to fit in the right set of mind of a certain audience, changing their positions thus distorting the sense of gender policy. Some ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, substitute gender approach for sex roles approach in their activities. It was noted that the state cannot render the full scope of social and educational services due to the absence of required financial, institutional and human resources.

International organizations and donor community support the gender equality policy.

The most pro-active gender sector actors are civil society organizations, in particular women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The overall efforts of NGOs are hardly seen or heard, or influencing the public opinion. However, these organizations are often the unique positive actors who bring up gender equality values and emphasize the need for the state to adhere to its commitments in gender equality policy. These actors also monitor how certain gender issues are resolved by the state. The most active NGOs and their leaders are International NGO "Gender Perspectives", "Belarusian Young Women Christian Association", "Women's Independent Democratic Movement", "Radislava", and the feminist initiative "Gender Route". There are only 32 NGOs working in gender sector. There are other NGOs that deal with gender issues, but their activities are either less public or the quality of the information they provide is questionable according to some experts. Human rights NGOs in Belarus demonstrate no particular interest in gender issues. Moreover there are no gender sensitive specialists.

Political parties rather oppose than support the ideas of gender equality despite the fact that their programs declare democratic values and freedoms. Some political parties signed the National Gender Platform, but gender ideas were not made part of their programs.

Trade unions are not engaged in protection of gender rights of the employees. Their activities are based on sex roles approach that is aimed at protection of motherhood and childhood.

Media, in general, reproduce patriarchal ideas of business and the state, and sometimes gender ideas of international and civil society organizations. Media have no clear agenda and information policy on gender; at times they lack understanding of those controversial views they publish. Journalists are mainly gender non-sensitive and only few are dealing with gender issues.



Academic community practically stays idle. Gender science is not recognized by the state and it is not developing as a separate field of science. Scientists who were known for dealing with gender issues at the end of 90s – beginning of 2000s are leaving the public space now. Current gender topics develop within academic community thanks to individual initiatives of a small number of people who quite often are female activists of civil society. One of the actors in gender sector related to academic community is the European Humanities University (EHU) with its Gender Masters program in Vilnius. The EHU trains experts who are well prepared in theory, but they are considerably detached from the Belarusian realities.

Church as an institution is against the ideas of gender equality. Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) and the state signed a cooperation agreement and they both demonstrate the same approach towards some issues that contradict those declared in gender policy. These are demographic and family policies based on promotion of “traditional values”, which are built upon the patriarchal sex roles model, and the restriction of women’s right to abortion. However, there is a small team of female specialists within BOC who support ideas of gender equality. They belong to the BOC Union of Sisterhoods and promote such ideas among their colleagues.

NGOs of the gender sector provide a wide but not comprehensive range of ***social services*** that improve the quality of life of the population. There are a number of NGOs in gender sector¹ whose activities and achievements are most vivid and easy to evaluate. They provide the following services:

1. *assistance to the victims* of domestic violence and victims of trafficking in human being;
2. *educational services* for different groups of population in the areas of prevention of domestic violence and trafficking in human being, on the issues of gender equality as a factor of personal and society development, on gender stereotypes in media and marketing;
3. *information and consultation services* about organizations working in the area of prevention of domestic violence, trafficking in human being, about NGOs services;
4. *intermediary services* in obtaining required assistance – follow up, assistance in paper work, and referral.

Activities of the gender sector actors bear some fruits. The following ***most significant achievements in dealing with gender issues in Belarus*** are noted:

1. The functioning of the National Council on Gender Equality and its membership have improved. There are 4 female representatives from NGOs in this Council and it creates more favorable conditions to influence decision making in the gender policy.
2. The Ministry of Interior with the assistance from international organizations and NGOs promoted the new law “On the Basics of Activities to Prevent Delinquency” (2014)

¹NGOs in gender sector mentioned by experts as those rendering various types of social services: International NGO “Gender Perspectives”, “Belarusian Young Women Christian Association”, “Women’s Independent Democratic Movement”, “Radislava”, «Club of Business Women», Borisov Women Social NGO «Provintsia», «Mogilev Women Center of Support and Self Education», «Belarusian Organization of Working Women».



which introduces the term “domestic violence”, adds NGOs to the list of actors dealing with prevention, and applies protection measures for victims of domestic violence.

3. From 1995 National action plans to achieve gender equality have been adopted at the state level. Some of the propositions from NGOs were accepted; NGOs are identified as co-implementers of those plans.

4. Gender component is being introduced into the state policy: national statistics use sex indicators, National Scientific Research Institute of Labor developed a Concept of gender equality; National Center of Legislation and Legal Research conducted gender assessment of the current legislation; legislation in the area of labor and family has been improved.

5. Efforts of NGOs led to creation of National gender platform (NGP). It calls all actors of civil society for collaboration. A memorandum on NGP implementation is signed by 28 organizations in 2014.

6. New gender organizations were established, e.g. International NGO “Gender Perspectives”; a network of 19 NGOs on domestic violence, NGP on gender issues; new civil initiatives were created (“Gender route”, ‘Gender literacy campaign”).

7. NGOs developed quality standards for social services rendered by NGOs in Belarus in the area of prevention of trafficking in human being and of domestic violence.

8. Issues related to gender marginalized and vulnerable groups of the population, e.g. LGBT-community², are being wider discussed in public.

Main development trends

Main sector trends:

1. The gender equality sector develops slowly and inconsistently
2. The number of donors funding gender projects is decreasing
3. New gender sector activists emerge and partially replace the existing ones bringing with them new methods and activities into the sector
4. Short-term contingency alliances of different actors in gender sector are formed to address the issues of common interest: joint projects, social campaigns, advocacy and lobbying of new draft laws
5. Changes in legal, socio-economic, and financial conditions related to NGOs undermine their sustainability
6. Gender specialists witness the growing inter-generation gap between existing actors of civil society
7. Gender specialists are concerned with the existing gap between gender theorists and practice, as well as with the necessity to improve theoretical and methodological basis of the activities of all sector actors

²LGBT-community — the community of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans-genders (LGBT) united by common interests, problems and purposes.



8. Some actors in gender sector professionalize, grow more mature, and become gender experts who advocate gender equality as a fundamental component of the society.

Key findings

1. Implementation of **gender equality policy** in Belarus **is a valid objective** because:
 - Direct and indirect forms of gender discrimination are practiced in the country though they are not considered to be discriminatory by the majority of the population and representatives of the authorities;
 - Belarusian state has international commitments where achievement of gender equality is stated as a priority; it also declares that the policy of gender equality is being realized in the country;
 - gender equality contributes to a sustainable development of society and to a comprehensive development of human capacity through equal inclusion of all the people into social, economic and political life of society.
 2. **Legal and normative acts** declare the equality of both sexes, although it does not contain mechanisms of judicial or other practical protection of their rights when they are violated.
 3. **There is no shared understanding and perception of gender approach** among the activists who position themselves as gender experts and trainers. Distorted understanding and inadequate translation of the gender equality message to the society discredits the idea of gender equality as a whole.
 4. Lack of understanding of gender equality creates **a conflict between state gender and state demographic policies**. In fact the conflict is not there because gender equality leads to harmonization of relations between men and women in all aspects of life including reproduction.
 5. Modern Belarusian socio-political and cultural community discuss gender equality from the position of **mainly sex role approach** and the fulfillment of natural functions by women, reproduction and manifestation of their sexuality. Men are kept beyond gender analysis.
 6. **No general gender education exists** in Belarus.
 7. **Gender issues are perceived** by the majority of the population **as pure female**. Belarusian society is mostly patriarchal. Gender stereotypes are widely spread and characteristic of more than a half of the adult population. Most women and men see no need to change anything.
 8. **Actors of the gender sector are** represented by a) the state, b) international organizations (UN agencies, European delegation, etc.), c) civil society organizations, trade unions, political parties, civil initiatives, d) academic community, and media. They all have different level of gender sensitivity, different agendas, and contribute differently to the sector development.
- State** position on gender policy is represented through the opinions of individual officials. Only a limited number of officials possess adequate understanding of the notion.



Officials limit gender policy, e.g., considering domestic violence a gender issue while women's leadership not. Oftentimes gender equality is promoted not for logical or strategic reasons but for raising funds for Belarus through international technical aid. Officials from different state structures compete with each other to shift or decline the responsibility for gender issues. Gender and health, gender and ecology, gender and economy are not among the discussed issues. It is the result of lack of state strategy and gender mainstreaming.

Donors are formally committed to the ideas of gender equality making the issue a must in the applications thus promoting gender among applicants. However, donors don't have strict and clear requirements in terms of how gender issues should be met in the applications and projects. Donors don't offer awareness building interventions, monitoring or universal methodology of measuring outcomes and impacts of gender approach.

NGOs are the most pro-active and motivated, especially women's NGOs. Their influence in the society is very low because they have few members and their resources are limited. Concerning collaboration between the actors, there is an occasional contingency cooperation between them but it results in no consolidation. NGOs are limited in the scale of activities, in the services they provide, and in funding because the latter requires spending a lot of time and effort to register.

LGBT-community itself and other actors do not have a shared understanding if the community activity addresses gender issues. UN agencies do not consider LGBT as a gender advocate. International donors do not mention LGBT when they require gender to be a cross-cutting issue in applications. LGBT-community itself identify themselves more as human rights sector than gender.

Media in Belarus is mostly represented by "gender non-sensitive" journalists.

Belarusian Orthodox Church is perceived by some experts as a possible partner but only in addressing a short range of gender issues and not in strategic planning of the sector development.

9. **Gender science** is not recognized either by the state or by the academic community. Men-scientists as much as other male communities ignore the existence of gender science or ridicule women involved in gender issues. Capacity of women-scientists who have good theoretical knowledge in gender is not in demand in the society.

10. Experts note individual cases of constructive **collaboration of NGOs and the state**. It is related to implementation of projects funded from international technical aid and in discussing draft laws. In practice both parties take advantage of each other. NGOs hope to get an official registration of donors' funds, and the state reports to international community the fulfillment of international obligations.

11. **Capacity of NGOs** as the most pro-active actors in the gender sector is estimated by experts as average. Such strengths as intellectual capacity of NGO members, flexibility in introducing new forms of activities, fundraising from abroad in favor of national issues, access to hardly accessible groups of clients are considerably weakened by lack of



organizational sustainability, dependency on donor's policy, lack of engaged young people, low influence on the authorities and public opinion, focus on money instead of gender, and non-involvement of men.

12. **Without men**, engaged and active in the sector, no progress in gender equality is possible.

13. There is a certain rather modest progress in gender equality in Belarus. However, the progress is accompanied with the new limiting measures in relation to NGOs, reduction of the number of donors, public defamation of the idea of gender, new regulatory acts containing gender discrimination.

14. The **main tendencies** in the sector are: controversial development, reduction of the number of donors funding gender projects, new activities brought by new actors, contingency collaborations, generation gap between the sector actors, the gap between gender theory and practice.

15. Gender experts are ready to **continue their activities in the near future** and see are optimistic about the prospects. The key ways of the sector development are consolidation of NGO efforts, international agencies and the state, their collaboration and complementarity in dealing with the issues of gender inequality.

Recommendations

- Scientific research is needed to assess the economic benefits of gender equality policy in the country. The data will help NGOs prove the necessity of the policy, advocate state strategies for gender equality as a fundamental issue of the society development. Gender policy should become a cross-cutting issue based on gender mainstreaming.

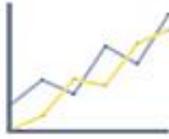
- A strategic paper is needed in the country where long-term goals and objectives of gender policy will be stated, mechanisms of its implementation will be described, roles and obligations of all the actors will be clarified, and indicators of the achievement of goals and objectives will be set up. Consequently the state budget should be planned on the basis of approved strategies and gender approach.

- The awareness and understanding of gender equality, of its essence and advantages for all the gender groups can be raised by mutual efforts of the state and NGOs in:

- providing mandatory gender education within training and re-training of officials and experts from all the areas of activity,

- introducing gender approach as a cross-cutting issue of educational system at all levels.

- Public leaders capable to make bright public presentations on television, radio, in printed media, and in internet need to be mobilized to promote ideas and benefits of gender equality in society, thus, making the gender ideas more widely spread and accepted by the population. The National plan on the achievement of gender equality for 2016-2020 should include this type of activities and persons responsible for their implementation.



• More favorable conditions for the key actors of the sector need to be created to develop their capacity and motivate them for higher level of self-activism and sustainability. The ways for that are:

- advocating liberalization of the legislation on public associations;
- mobilizing stakeholders to demonstrate political will in introducing gender mainstreaming approach;
- engaging more men in gender sector making them like-minded partners;
- advocating equal with other NGOs rights for the organizations associated on the basis of common interests for joint realization of civil, social, cultural and other rights of gender marginalized and vulnerable groups of the population, e.g. LGBT;
- mobilizing trade unions to promote more professionally the legislation and protection of the workers' rights, especially of those workers who are exposed to gender discrimination;
- mobilizing NGOs to raise the level of their own knowledge, of awareness of their target groups in gender issues, and to ensure continuity between generations of those specialists who work in the sector.