

An Overview of Women's Work and Employment in Belarus

Decisions for Life MDG3 Project Country Report No. 11

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Management summary

This report provides information on Belarus on behalf of the implementation of the DECISIONS FOR LIFE project in that country. The DECISIONS FOR LIFE project aims to raise awareness amongst young female workers about their employment opportunities and career possibilities, family building and the work-family balance. This report is part of the Inventories, to be made by the University of Amsterdam, for all 14 countries involved. It focuses on a gender analysis of work and employment.

History (2.1.1). Belarus, severely hit by the German occupation, after the second 1945 emerged as emerged as one of the major manufacturing centres of the Soviet. It suffered heavily from the Chernobyl disaster. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, from 1994 on under president Lukashenko the country kept a command economy, though central planning disappeared. Its growth rates have been considerably throughout the 2000s, though the economy continues to be dependent on heavy discounts in oil and natural gas prices from Russia.

Governance (2.1.2). Belarus is a republic with power concentrated in the presidency. The government's human rights record remains very poor. The judiciary is not independent. Corruption continued to be a problem. Authorities harassed independent trade unions and dismissed their members. Women's participation in politics and governance is low, except for the Chamber of Representatives. The law protects women well within the family context and protects the physical integrity of women to a relatively high degree.

Prospects (2.1.3). Belarus's economy has been moderately hit by the global economic crisis. The government had to accept loans from the IMF, Russia and China. It undertook some steps to open up the country for foreign investors. In 2009, the country's GDP fell slightly and real wages by 1 to 5%. Energy-intensive and inefficient production may become the largest hindrance for recovery.

Communication (2.2). The coverage of fixed telephone connections has recently increased, but coverage of cellular telephone connections is with over 0.9 cell phones per inhabitant much higher. By 2008, the share Internet users was with 321 per 1,000 of the population rather high, but the government is growingly restricting access to the Internet. Nearly all households have a TV set. The government censored the media and repeatedly harassed and arrested independent journalists

The sectoral labour market structure (2.3.1). The sectoral labour market structure is difficult to trace. State employees constitute about 80% of the working population. With nearly 68%, women's Labour Participation Rate (LPR) in 2008 was 91% of men's. Official unemployment is low and decreasing, in particular for women. Since 1995, considerable wage increases have been allowed in Belarus, largely outpacing increases in labour productivity.

Legislation (2.4.1). Belarus has ratified the eight core ILO Labour Conventions. Yet, the Trade Union Law 2000 and presidential decrees contain serious violations of trade union rights. Specific regulations and benefits for women, including maternity benefits and paid leave on childcare, are comparatively good.

Labour relations and wage-setting (2.4.2). The independent trade union movement in Belarus is small. The law provides for the right to organize and bargain collectively; however, government authorities and managers of state-owned enterprises routinely interfered with union activities. ILO recommendations to improve the situation are not acted upon.

The statutory minimum wage (2.5.1). In December 2009 the monthly minimum wage, set by law, was BYR 229,700, or 23% of the country's average monthly wage.

Inequality and poverty (2.5.2). Directly after independence, inequality and poverty started to increase, but since 2000 the share under the official poverty line fell rapidly till 6% in 2007. However, this poverty line is set quite low, and depending on other yardsticks poverty in 2007 is estimated at 13 to 43%. Income inequality developed simultaneously with poverty, and is currently at low-to-medium level in international perspective.

Population and fertility (2.6.1). Since the 1980s Belarus is in a demographic crisis, with reduced fertility rates and high death. Between 1999 and 2009 the population decreased by over 6%. The total fertility rate, less than 1.3 children per woman, is quite low; the adolescent fertility rate is with 22 per 1,000 low.

Health (2.6.2). In 2007 there were an estimated 13,000 persons with HIV/AIDS in Belarus, which is below the regional level. The levels of public awareness of HIV/AIDS seem rather low. The life expectancy at birth for women is recently increasing. The Belarusian health care system aims to provide the entire population with universal access to care and health care benefits are extensive.

Women's labour market share (2.6.3). Women make up half of the country's labour force. In 2009 women made up majorities in wholesale and retail, restaurants and hotels, education, and public administration et cetera, and in the occupational groups professionals and clerks. At the level of legislators, senior officials and managers, the female share of 45% is high in international perspective.

Literacy (2.7.1). The adult literacy rate --those age 15 and over that can read and write-- in 1999-2006 was 98.9%, with hardly a gender gap: 99.0% for men and 98.8% for women. In 2007 the literacy rate for 15-24-year-olds stood at 99.8% for females and 99.7% for males.

Education of girls (2.7.2). In 2006, the combined gross enrollment rate in education was nearly 100%, divided in 99% for females and 100% for males. Net enrollment in primary education was for 2005 set at 87.9% for girls and 90.8% for boys. In 2007 women to men parity in secondary education was 102%. With 45% gross enrollment in tertiary education in 2007 and women to men parity reaching 141%, women's participation at this level of education is high.

Female skill levels (2.7.3). Women in the employed population have on average a slightly higher educational level than their male colleagues. More women employed are educated at tertiary level, with women to parity at 118%. We estimate the current size of the target group of DECISIONS FOR LIFE for Ukraine at about 95,000 girls and young women 15-29 of age working in urban areas in (the Belarusian equivalent of) commercial services.

Wages (2.8.1). We found for 2008 a considerable gender pay gap, totaling 25%. The pay gap seems to have grown in particular between 1996 and 2004. Women in Belarus have profited considerably less than men from their better education. Moreover, horizontal segregation has taken place with women leaving well-paid sub-sectors of manufacturing like the ICT sector, while many of them entered low-wage jobs like in education and health. The "glass ceiling" obviously widely remains in place.

Working conditions (2.8.2). Especially men in heavy manufacturing still seem often exposed to bad health and safety conditions, though the incidence of reported occupational injuries and casualties is rapidly decreasing. Unfortunately, working hours cannot be detailed by industry and gender.

1. Introduction: The Decisions for Life project

The DECISIONS FOR LIFE project aims to raise awareness amongst young female workers about their employment opportunities and career possibilities, family building and the work-family balance. The lifetime decisions adolescent women face, determine not only their individual future, but also that of society: their choices are key to the demographic and workforce development of the nation.

DECISIONS FOR LIFE is awarded a MDG3 grant from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of its strategy to support the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals no 3 (MDG3): "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women". DECISIONS FOR LIFE more specifically focuses on MDG3.5: "Promoting formal employment and equal opportunities at the labour market", which is one of the four MDG3 priority areas identified in Ministry's MDG3 Fund. DECISIONS FOR LIFE runs from October 2008 until June 2011 (See <http://www.wageindicator.org/main/projects/decisions-for-life>).

DECISIONS FOR LIFE focuses on 14 developing countries, notably Brazil, India, Indonesia, the CIS countries Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the southern African countries Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Project partners are International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Union Network International (UNI), WageIndicator Foundation, and University of Amsterdam/AIAS.

This report is part of the Inventories, to be made by the University of Amsterdam, for all 14 countries involved. These Inventories and the underlying gender analyses are listed in the Table. All reports will be posted at the project website. In this country report on Belarus the sequence of the sections differs from the table. The report covers mainly Activity nr 1.03, the Gender analysis regarding pay and working conditions (or, as Chapter 2 is called here, work and employment). Partly included (in section 2.4.1) is Activity 1.01, Inventories of national legislation; partly the analysis of national legislation has resulted in a separate product, the DecentWorkCheck for Belarus. Activity 1.02, Inventories of companies' regulations, will take place through a company survey. Preparations for Activities 1.03a and 1.03b have resulted in a number of lists, to be used in the WageIndicator web-survey for country-specific questions and their analyses (Chapter 3). References can be found in Chapter 4; Chapter 5 gives more insight in the WageIndicator.

Table 1 **Activities for DECISIONS FOR LIFE by the University of Amsterdam**

Nr	Inventories
1.01	Inventories of national legislation
1.02	Inventories of companies' regulations
1.03	Gender analysis regarding pay and working conditions
1.03a	Gender analysis start-up design of off-line gender analyses inventory
1.03b	Gender analysis data-entry for off-line use inventories

2. Gender analysis regarding work and employment

2.1. Introduction: the general picture

2.1.1. History

Belarus is a landlocked country, sharing borders with Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and the Russian Federation, with about 9.6 million inhabitants and with Minsk as its capital. The country was, jointly with current Ukraine, a center of the medieval living area of the East Slavs. This state, known as Kyivan Rus, became the largest and most powerful nation in Europe, before disintegrating in the 12th century. From the 16th century on, Belarus was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, before in 1795 being divided by imperial Russia, Prussia, and Austria. During the negotiations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, on 25 March 1918 Belarus declared independence, but this episode lasted only ten months, when the country became the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). When the Russians occupied eastern and northern Lithuania, it was merged into the Lithuanian-Byelorussian SSR. Yet, after the Polish-Soviet War ended in 1921 Byelorussian lands were split between Poland and Russia, and in 1922 the re-created Byelorussian SSR was one of the founding republic of the Soviet Union. Western Belarus remained occupied by Poland. When in 1939, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR annexed parts of Poland, this western part was reunited with the Byelorussian SSR. In between, Soviet industrialisation and agriculture collectivisation had been carried through ruthlessly. German armies invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, thereby initiating four straight years of incessant total war. The Fortress of Belarus's Brest received one of the fiercest of the war's opening blows, and will be remembered because of its heroic defense. The whole territory of Byelorussia was occupied by the Nazis. They destroyed 209 out of 290 cities in the republic, 85% of its industry and over one million buildings. Between two and three million people (a quarter to one-third of the population) lost their lives. The sizeable Jewish communities were almost completely lost in the Holocaust (wikipedia Belarus; Ioffe 2004, 2008).

After the end of the war, reconstruction was initiated promptly. Belarus emerged as one of the major manufacturing centres of the Soviet Union, emphasizing the production of tractors, trucks and machine tools, oil processing, and high-technology industries such as manufacturing microchips, electronic instruments and computers, that brought an influx of ethnic Russians into the republic. Stalin carried through a policy of Sovietisation, after his death in 1953 continued by Krushchev. Moscow limited the official use of the Belarusian language and other cultural expressions. On April 26, 1986, Reactor No. 4 in Ukraine's Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant near the border with Belarus exploded, resulting in the Chernobyl disaster. Belarus was worst hit, absorbing about 70% of the radioactive contaminants spewed out by the reactor, till the current day disastrously affecting agriculture on about a quarter of its surface. In December 1986, 22 Belarusian intellectuals sent a petition to Soviet leader Gorbachev expressing grievances in the field of culture ("a cultural Chernobyl"). The document, embodying the aspirations of a considerable part of the national intelligentsia, received no positive answer. In reaction, a number of independent youth groups sprang up, many of which embracing the national cause and asking for reform. In the summer of 1988, these aspirations, the anger of many Belarusians about Moscow's belittling of the Chernobyl disaster and its consequences, and a horrible discovery came together. In June 1988, mass graves, allegedly with up to 250,000 of Stalin's victims, were found at Kurapaty near Minsk – a discovery fuelling denunciations of the old regime. An October demonstration in Minsk, attended by about 10,000 people and dispersed by riot police, expressed support for the Belarusian

Popular Front (BPF), formed earlier in the month. Yet, the popular support for reform was relatively small. In the March 4, 1990, elections for the republic's Supreme Soviet the BPF took only 10% of the seats, and 13 days later 83% of the republic's population voted conservatively in the referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union -- even though another three months later, on June 27, the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR adopted the republic's Declaration of State Sovereignty. After a conservative coup in Moscow failed to restore the Communist Party's power, on August 25, 1991 the Supreme Soviet in Minsk declared the independence of Belarus, by giving the declaration of sovereignty the status of a constitutional document and renaming the country the Republic of Belarus. In December 1991, at two meetings in Brest and Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, leaders of 11 of 15 Soviet republics, including Belarus, formally dissolved the Soviet Union and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with Minsk as its headquarters (wikipedia's Belarus and Chernobyl disaster; Fedor 1995; Ioffe 2008).

As said, as part of the USSR Belarus had developed a diversified and extensive industrial base; it retained this industrial base following the collapse of the Soviet system. Among the CIS countries it had one of the highest standards of living, education and GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita; only the Russian GDP per capita level was somewhat higher. Prior to independence, in 1990, the shares of manufacturing and agriculture in the country's GDP, respectively 49% and 22%, were high, in contrast to the low share (29%) of services. Belarus was highly dependent on trade, in particular with the other (former) Soviet republics, with a double advantage: exporting overpriced manufactured products and importing underpriced energy and other raw materials, dependent on heavy discounts in oil and natural gas prices from the Russian republic. At the beginning of the transition, Belarus had to face the fact that 60% of its manufacturing industry was non-competitive at world market prices. In 1990-1991 the GDP and output decline was limited, but in 1992-1995 the decline deepened: over these years GDP fell by 32% and industrial production by 35%. With 2.8% increase in GDP and 3.5% in industrial output, 1996 witnessed the first growth figures. Between 1990 and 1996, Belarus's GDP fell by 35% and industrial production by 39%, serious declines but less worse than in nearly all other CIS states (Bakanova *et al* 2004; Vinhas de Souza and Havrylyshyn 2006; compare with Ukraine's decline in 1990-1996 of 57% in GDP and 50% in industrial production – see our Ukraine country report). Price liberalisation and loose monetary policies pushed hyperinflation, with consumer prices increasing 1,190% in 1993 and 2,221% in 1994 – and though contained somewhat, inflation continued to be over 50% yearly till 2002. Inflation peaks in 1999 and 2000 outstripped cash income of the population and led to a major expansion of poverty (Bakanova *et al* 2004; UNDP / Government Belarus 2005).

After Belarusian independence, structural changes in the economy remained nearly absent, both at country and at company level. The first government, headed by Vyachaslaw Kyebich and consisting of former Communist Party functionaries, took a very conservative approach to economic and political reforms. When the Supreme Soviet adopted a new constitution that went into effect on March 1994, creating the office of president, in a quickly organised election and its run-off Kyebich was beaten by Alexander Lukashenko, known as anti-corruption crusader. Soon, the differences in political-economic orientation with Kyebich turned out to be minimal. In between clashes with parliament over the issue of presidential powers, Lukashenko negotiated a Friendship Treaty with Russia, making many concessions to the mighty neighbour, such as allowing the stationing of Russian troops in Belarus. For the time being, the heavy discounts in oil and natural gas prices from Russia remained, be it not based on a Treaty provision. The “socially oriented market economy” Lukashenko claims, differs fundamentally from the German or Swedish models bearing the same name; “command economy without central planning” seems more adequate. From 1996, when classical state planning was re-introduced,

government regulated prices and foreign trade, while stalling privatisation and institutional reform. The share of the private sector in Belarus' GDP got stuck at 20%, the lowest figure of all transition economies. Between 2000 and 2007 there were hardly any privatisations of sound firms, only some firms that performed badly were privatised (Fedor 1995; Haiduk 2003; Istomina 2005; Bakanova *et al* 2006).

Economic output revived in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but skating on thin ice continued: Belarus' economy remained dependent on heavy discounts in oil and natural gas prices from Russia. However, in December 2006 Belarus and Russian gas giant Gazprom signed a deal which seemed to mark the beginning of the end of the gas discounts. A spat between Belarus and the Russian Federation in 2007 resulted in Gazprom more than doubling the prices for gas deliveries to Belarus, but still far less than the price paid by EU member states. This increase and simultaneous moves by Moscow to reduce the profitability of refining Russian oil in Belarus for re-export disrupted Belarus' plans to upgrade manufacturing industry (though the building of presidential prestige projects like large sports and business centres in notably Minsk continued). Moreover, Lukashenko made some adjustments in his policies to compensate for the reduction of Russian subsidies. He privatized some more firms, and social benefits for vulnerable groups were trimmed (Woehrel 2007; Verkade 2008; US Dept of State 2009b). Higher oil and gas prices lifted the country's current account deficit, growing rapidly and by 2008 accounting for over USD 5 billion. The reliance on Russia remained strong. In 2008 over 32% of exports went to that country, though Belarus is losing ground in the Russian market. With nearly 17%, the Netherlands was a remarkable second trade partner. Nearly 60% of imports came from Russia, and 7% from Germany (CIA World Factbook). Remarkable too is the large inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Belarus in recent years. While averaging yearly about USD 240 million from 2000-2006, FDI inflows rose to USD 1,770 million in 2007, USD 2,143 million in 2008 and a projected USD 1,326 million in 2009 (EBRD 2009a). However that may be assessed, foreign investors obviously do not stay away.

From a macro-economic view, Belarus' economy till recently did quite well. An American source has suggested that the growth figures in the 2000s have been statistically inflated (Woehrel 2007, 3), but an EU analysis supports "the argument that economic growth in Belarus is real and not just a statistical phenomenon" (ETF 2010, 2), like similar statements of international organizations acknowledge (cf. Ioffe 2008). The country's real GDP increased by 8.4% in 1998, 3.3% in 1999, 5.8% in 2000, 4.7% in 2001, 5.0% in 2002, 7.0% in 2003, 11.4% in 2004, 9.4% in 2005, 9.9% in 2006, 8.2% in 2007, and even 9.6% growth in 2008 - implying growth averages of 7.5% in 1998-2008 and even 9.3% in 2003-2008 (World Bank 2009c, UNECE 2009; EBRD 2010). Taking into account the development of the labour force, GDP growth per person employed was 5.2% in 2001, 5.8% in 2002, 7.6% in 2003, 11.9% in 2004, 8.5% in 2005, 8.8% in 2006, and recently 7.7% in 2007 and 9.0% in 2008 (authors' calculations based on ILO Laborsta and UNECE 2009). Thus, the GDP growth rate per person employed for 2001-2006 averaged 8.0%, even increasing to an average growth rate of 8.9% over 2003-2008.

In a global perspective, Belarus is located in the lower ranks of high human development. In 2006 the country ranked no. 67 on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a rating of 0.817, implying an increase between 2000 and 2006 of 0.032, after a decrease between 1990 and 2000 of 0.008. Its 2006 HDI ranking is the highest of all CIS countries, higher than Kazakstan (no. 71), the Russian Federation (no. 73), Ukraine (no. 82), and Azerbaijan (no. 97). In 2006 its GDP per capita reached USD (PPP) 9,737, ranking no. 72 in the world. The estimated earned income for men was USD 12,028, and for women USD 7,722, implying a women to men parity rate of 64% (UNDP 2008). This rather low rate does not do full justice to the position of Belarusian women in the field of work and employment.

2.1.2. Governance

Belarus is a republic. The country has a directly elected president, who is chief of state, and a bicameral parliament, the National Assembly, consisting of the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) and the Council (*Soviet*) of the Republic (upper house). A prime minister appointed by the president is the nominal head of government. In practice, however, power is concentrated in the presidency. Since his election in 1994 as president, Alexander Lukashenko has consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means, manipulated elections, and arbitrary decrees. In 2004 he used a referendum to lift the constitutional ban on his third presidential term. Lukashenko has described himself as having an “authoritarian ruling style”. He dominates the Belarusian political scene, controlling the parliament, government, security services, and judiciary through a large presidential administration and substantial extra-budgetary resources. According to observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the successive elections from 2000-2008 all failed to meet international standards of freedom and fairness. All of the 110 candidates for the lower house declared winners in the 2008 parliamentary election were supporters of Lukashenko's policies. A marked event was the 2006 presidential election, including the beating and arrest of presidential candidate Alaksandar Kazulin, who was later sentenced to five and a half years in prison for “hooliganism” (but suddenly released in 2008) – with popular indignation about the rigged elections bringing 35,000 protesters to Minsk’s central square. After these elections, the EU and the US imposed visa bans and asset freezes on high-ranking Belarusian officials, including Lukashenko. By contrast, Russia praised the conduct of the election and congratulated the president on his victory, the only G-8 country to do so (Zarakhovich 2006; Woehrel 2007; US Dept of State 2009b, 2010; wikipedia Belarus).

In 2008 and 2009, the government's human rights record remained very poor. The right of citizens to change their government was severely restricted. The government failed to account for past politically motivated disappearances. Prison conditions remained extremely poor, and reports of abuse of prisoners and detainees continued. Arbitrary arrests, detentions, and imprisonment of citizens for political reasons, criticizing officials, or for participating in demonstrations also continued. The judiciary lacked independence, trial outcomes usually were predetermined, and many trials were conducted behind closed doors. The government further restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and religion and continued to enforce politically motivated military conscriptions of opposition youth leaders. The government limited the distribution of a number of independent media outlets. State security services used unreasonable force to disperse peaceful protesters. Corruption continued to be a problem. Authorities harassed independent trade unions and dismissed their members, severely limiting the ability of the workers to form and join independent trade unions and to organize and bargain collectively (US Dept of State 2009, 2010). The US Dept of State, in presenting these overviews, shows more scepticism than for example the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), noting for Belarus in 2008 and 2009 “some encouraging developments related to the principles of multiparty democracy, pluralism and the rule of law and civil and human rights” (EBRD 2009b, 27).

The Belarusian Committee for State Security (KGB), riot police, and other security forces in 2009 continued to routinely beat detainees and demonstrators. Police beat individuals during arrests and in detention for organizing or participating in demonstrations or other opposition activities. Prison and detention center conditions remained austere and posed threats to life and health; there were shortages of food, medicine, warm clothing, and bedding, and ventilation in cells and sanitation was poor, and as a result, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other communicable diseases were prevalent. Overcrowding in

prisons, detention centers, and work release prisons was a serious problem. Persons sentenced to *khimiya*, a form of internal exile, lived in prison barracks and were forced to work under strict conditions. Authorities continued to arrest individuals for political reasons and to use administrative measures to detain political activists before, during, and after protests. The Ministry of Interior has authority over the police, but the KGB and presidential security services also exercise police functions. The president has the right to subordinate all security bodies to his personal command. Petty corruption among police is widespread. Police often detains individuals for several hours, ostensibly to confirm their identity. This tactic is frequently used to detain members of the opposition and demonstrators, to prevent the distribution of leaflets and newspapers, or as a pretext to break up civil society meetings (US Dept of State 2010).

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in 2008 and 2009 the government did not respect judicial independence in practice. Corruption, inefficiency, and political interference were prevalent in the judiciary. There was evidence that prosecutors and courts convicted individuals on false and politically motivated charges and that executive and local authorities dictated the outcomes of trials. A Constitutional Court is empowered to adjudicate constitutional issues and to examine the legality of laws; however, in practice it was subservient to the executive branch. The president appoints six of the 12 members of the Constitutional Court, including the chairman, as well as the chairmen of the Supreme Court and the Supreme Economic Court. He also has the authority to appoint and dismiss all district and military judges. Prosecutors are organized into offices at the district, regional, and national levels; they answer to and serve at the pleasure of the Prosecutor General, appointed by the president. Prosecutors are not independent. A 2006 report by the UN special rapporteur on Belarus described the authority of prosecutors as “excessive and imbalanced” because they can extend detention without the permission of judges. The report also noted an imbalance of power between the prosecution and the defense. The law provides for the right to choose legal representation freely; however, a presidential decree prohibits members of NGOs from representing individuals other than members of their organizations in court. Courts often allowed information obtained from forced interrogations to be used against defendants (US Dept of State 2009, 2010).

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, reports indicate officials continued to engage in corrupt practices. The Prosecutor General stated on June 23, 2009, that the majority of the corruption cases were related to accepting and soliciting bribes, fraud, and abuse of power. Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka in 2009 acknowledged that senior officials had often refused to assist law enforcement agencies in investigating corruption crimes. He instructed the ministries to streamline their efforts to tackle corruption and secure effective operations of anticorruption departments. The lack of transparency between the president's personal funds and official government accounts, and a heavy reliance on off-budget revenues, suggested corruption within the executive branch (Dept of State 2010). It has been computed for 1999-2003 that Belarus had an immensely large shadow economy, covering 48-50% of the official GDP (Schneider 2005). According to the World Bank's worldwide governance indicators (WGI), the comparative position of Belarus after 2000 improved on two of six indicators used though the country concerning governance still is to be found in the world's lower 20% of countries. On voice and accountability, Belarus in 2008 was in the tenth percentile, indicating that at least 90% of countries worldwide had better ratings; on political stability and absence of violence, the country reached the fourth percentile, meaning that one in three countries scored better; on both government effectiveness and on regulatory quality, it was at the border of the ninth and tenth percentiles; on rule of law the country was in the ninth percentile, with a slightly improving score, and the Belarusian score on control of corruption was in 2008 in the eight percentile, some improvement

compared to 2004 but still lower than in 2000 (World Bank 2009b). In an international survey carried out in the first half of 2006, the corruption perceived by respondents in Belarus was lower than in many other transition countries, but about as many disagreed as agreed with the statement "There is less corruption now than around 1989" (EBRD 2007).

A number of domestic human rights NGOs are active in Belarus; however, authorities are often hostile to their efforts, do not cooperate with them, and are not responsive to their views. In 2009 authorities harassed both registered and unregistered NGOs with frequent inspections and threats of deregistration and monitored their correspondence and telephone conversations. By exception, on October 22, 2009 the first deputy chairperson of the Presidential Administration, Natalia Pyatkevich held a meeting with human rights advocates. At that occasion, she stated that the government "was not politically ready" to liberalize legal practices related to civil society or take steps to improve the country's human rights record (Dept of State 2010).

In 2008 and 2009 there were numerous reports that the government coerced young persons, university students, and military conscripts to join the state-funded Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRYU). In addition, the government employed and encouraged a widespread system of BRYU informants organized into civilian patrol squads, whose supposed purpose was to encourage students to become law-abiding citizens. In 2009 such squads continued to actively recruit youths and students for various projects around the country. High school students feared that they would not be allowed to enroll in universities without BRYU membership, and university students reported that proof of BRYU membership was often required to register for popular courses or to receive a dormitory room. Universities also offered patrol members discounts on tuition (US Dept of State 2009, 2010).

In January 2008 a presidential decree replaced exit stamps with a computerized, government database to verify the validity of passports and to track citizens who travel abroad. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the database contains the names of at least 100,000 persons who are prohibited from foreign travel, including those who possess state secrets, are facing criminal prosecution or civil suits, or have outstanding financial commitments. Opposition politicians and civil society activists criticized the database, saying it restricted freedom of travel. Some persons were informed by letter that their names were in the database; others were informed at border crossings. In some cases opposition activists were either turned away at the border or detained for lengthy searches. Belarus is one of the countries with a legacy of central planning that has restrictions on internal movements. Internal passports serve as primary identity documents and are required for permanent housing, work, and hotel registration. In 2009 police continued to harass individuals who lived at a location other than the legal place of residence indicated in their internal passport (US Dept of State 2009, 2010; UNDP 2009).

Article 22 of the Belarusian Constitution states that all citizens are equal before the law. The Penal Code, adopted in 2002, punishes all violations or limitations on rights and freedoms, as well as preferential treatment based on race, ethnicity, language, origin, opinions or membership of a civil society organisation (CSO) and which does significant harm to the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of the citizen. Belarus has signed the optional Protocol referring to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On September 3, 2008, the Council of Ministers approved the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2008-2010. However, funds for execution of the Plan were not envisaged. Moreover, the Council of Equal Women's Status includes, besides government officials, only one representative of a women's organisation. The Plan, as a bureaucratic exercise, has failed to actually improve women's status (Mitskevich 2010).

Actually there are very few females in the upper ranks of management or government, though the political representation of women is not that low. Just before the 2004 parliamentary election campaign was launched, Lukashenko announced that “Women would be widely represented in parliament (...) Then the male Members of Parliament will work properly”, in a patriarchal effort to pacify the parliament that previously had demonstrated unexpected independence and to stack it with “compliant” women – and to raise his international credibility. Consequently, helped by the common practices of material support (for “approved” candidates) and intimidation (of potential supporters of independent candidates), the number of female MP’s in the 110-member Chamber of Representatives tripled from 10 to 30 (Koulinka 2006). In 2009, the Chamber of Representatives counted 35 women (31.8%) and 19 women were in the 64-member Council of the Republic (29.7%). Further, a woman chaired one of Chamber of Representative’s 20 committees, and there was one woman in the 40-member Council of Ministers (website OECD-SIGI; US Dept of State 2010; website IPU). In spite of its considerable female share, the parliament hardly contributed in tackling gender-based discrimination. When women’s organisations in 2007 were campaigning for the National Action Plan, none of the letters with this goal addressed to the female MP’s was answered. Yet, the leaders of the democratic opposition are also accused of remaining essentially patriarchal (Mitskevich 2010).

Belarusian law protects women well within the family context. Article 18 of the Marriage and Family Code sets 18 year as the legal age at which both men and women can marry. Polygamy is prohibited by law. The Marriage and Family Code stipulates parental authority is exercised equally by both spouses, and that both parents have the same rights and responsibilities in relation to their children. There is no discriminatory legislation in the area of inheritance. Article 23 of the Marriage Code states that both spouses have equal rights to the ownership, tenure and disposal of the property acquired during the course of the marriage, without drawing any distinction on the source of the income used to acquire it. The law includes provisions to support the financial independence of women. Belarusian legislation does not discriminate against relation to rights of ownership for access to land, access to property other than land, or access to bank loans. These laws seem generally to be applied in practice (website OECD-SIGI; US Dept of State 2010).

The law protects the physical integrity of women to a relatively high degree. The Criminal Code as of 2002 contained a significant expansion of provisions for punishing sex-related crimes; spousal rape is now also considered a crime under criminal law. However, violence against women, in particular sexual violence such as rape, sexually motivated murder and sexual harassment, remains a significant problem. Some traditional Belarusian cultural stereotypes result in a certain level of tolerance for violence against women. A 2006 Amnesty International report concluded that measures taken by authorities to protect women against domestic violence were insufficient. According to a 2008 study released by the Belarus State University's Center for Sociological and Political Research, four out of five women between ages 18 and 60 claimed that they were subject to psychological violence in their families. One in four women suffered from physical violence, and 13% of women reported that they were sexually abused by their partners. Women remained reluctant to report domestic violence due to fear of reprisal and social stigma. According to the study, only 6% of male and 46% of female victims of domestic violence sought professional assistance. NGOs operated crisis shelters primarily in Minsk, but they were poorly funded and received only limited support from the government. Sexual harassment reportedly was widespread, but currently no specific laws, other than those against physical assault, address the problem (website OECD-SIGI; US Dept of State 2010).

Though the law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons, trafficking in 2009 remained a serious problem: the country continued to be both a source and transit country for trafficked persons. Women

were primarily trafficked to Russia, the European Union (particularly Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Lithuania, Austria, and the Netherlands), the Middle East (particularly Israel, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates), and Turkey. Most female victims of trafficking were seeking a way to escape bad economic circumstances or situations involving domestic abuse. Reports by the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicated that traffickers were usually members of loosely organized criminal networks with connections to larger international organized crime rings, brothels, clubs, or bars in destination countries. Traffickers lured victims through advertisements, via modeling and employment agencies, and by personal approaches through friends and relatives to offer jobs abroad or solicit marriage partners. The government's antitrafficking efforts were coordinated by the Internal Affairs Ministry's department on Combating Trafficking in Human Persons. NGOs were more active in the areas of prevention and rehabilitation. Government sources confirmed that victims were more likely to trust assistance from NGOs than from government. The government continued to distribute information through state institutions, show antitrafficking commercials on state television, place materials at local and foreign diplomatic posts, and organize roundtables and seminars for NGOs and government officials. Authorities continued to enforce strong measures to discourage and control freedom of movement, which they justified in part as antitrafficking measures (US Dept of State 2010).

For 2008 the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum ranked Belarus no. 33 of 130 countries. For two of the four yardsticks used, rather high scores were attached to Belarus: no. 26 concerning the position of women in economic participation and opportunity, and --with other countries, like Ukraine and Kazakhstan-- no. 38 for health and survival, while the country ranked no. 72 for educational attainment and no. 52 for political empowerment. In the lower high income group of countries, Belarus took a prominent position (Hausmann *et al* 2008¹). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the SIGI Gender Equality and Social Institutions Index ranked Belarus 19th of 102 countries in 2008 (website OECD-SIGI).

2.1.3. Prospects

A World Bank research note as of July 2009 states: "The global economic crisis is exposing households in virtually all developing countries to increased risk of poverty and hardship", adding "While in the short-run, the non-poor may be the most affected by the crisis, experience from past economic and financial crises suggests that the adverse impacts are likely to spread in the medium-term to poor households." The World Bank note ranked Belarus among the 75 countries that will be moderately exposed to the crisis, showing decelerating growth. It is rated in the category of countries with low fiscal capacity, meaning the government has little fiscal space to counteract the poverty effects of the crisis (Cord *et al* 2009). Belarus was affected by the global crisis not so much through financial channels as through the fall in external demand because of its openness for trade with Russia, Ukraine and other CIS countries. Since September 2008, sales to these countries dropped sharply with the price relations (terms of trade) deteriorating. The price of Russian gas continued to increase, while the price of Belarus's key genuine export product, potassium, fell heavily. Fiscal space turned to be small indeed. In January 2009 declining export revenues forced the National Bank of Belarus (NBB) to devalue the Belarusian Ruble by 20.5%. In the same month the authorities agreed a USD 2.5 billion stand-by arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was increased to USD 3.5 billion in June. The package of measures agreed with the IMF followed the traditional path and included strengthening fiscal discipline, in particular through restraining wages in the public sector. Given that

¹ To be included in this index, a country must have data available for a minimum of 12 indicators out of 14; Belarus had two indicators missing (Hausmann *et al* 2008, 7).

international markets have been effectively closed for Belarusian borrowing since the onset of the financial crisis, the government in this respect relied on Russia and China. China has granted Belarus a three-year currency swap line of USD 2.9 billion, while the Russian government has disbursed a total of USD 3 billion in loans (EBRD 2009a; 2009b) – meaning that Belarus has large debt repayments looming.

The Belarusian authorities drew up an anti-crisis plan, consisting of four blocks: liberalizing the economic environment (deregulation); support of key enterprises; stimulation of domestic demand notably via a state housing construction program, and a joint action plan with Russia. Deregulation measures, including easing the opening of businesses, tax law reform, and price liberalization, resulted in a no. 58 ranking in the “Doing Business 2010” survey of the World Bank instead of the 115th spot in 2008 and the 82nd in 2009 (EBRD 2010; World Bank 2010b).² Already by the end of 2009, the president ordered the NBB to extend a line of credit totaling USD 1.4 billion for the two largest Belarusian banks, Belarusbank and Belagroprombank. Finally, the joint Russian - Belarusian plan did not get off the ground, and Belarusian export to Russia fell by more than 40% (cf. Rakova 2010). Important were developments on the oil front. On January 27, 2010, Belarus and Russia agreed on changes to the 2007 oil supply agreement following intense negotiations. Based on the new agreement, Russia will impose the full export duty on crude oil exported to Belarus, except for the portion identified for domestic consumption which will be duty-free. As a result, subsidies from Russia will continue but at a lower level (IMF 2010).

According to the National Statistics Committee of Belarus (Belstat), in 2009 Belarus notched up a 0.2% growth of its GDP against 2008. According to Belstat (website), the country’s average real wage level fell by 1% in 2009, and though in the manufacturing industry wages with 4.5% fell considerably stronger, these decrease are rather modest compared to other CIS countries. Though the reliability of this information can be questioned, it is not very unlikely either. The IMF (2010, 6) confirmed that “the government refrained from raising wages in 2009 and delayed an increase in pensions until November (2010)”³. Belstat (website) for January-April 2010 notes 6.1% GDP growth compared to the same four months of 2009, which may imply about zero growth when the real GDP if producer and consumer price increases are taken into account. The IMF (2010, 8) emphasizes that adapting the economy to the new oil import terms will slow the pace of recovery in 2010. It expects Belarus’s real GDP to increase this year by 2.4%. If Russia realizes its intention of gradually raising domestic oil prices to international levels, that could lower this pace substantially. For the time being the IMF judges the Belarusian authorities’ reaction on the January 2010 oil shock as “strong.” They increased domestic prices of oil

² The “Doing Business” method of benchmarking the costs of labour regulation for business, originating in the “deregulation school” of the 1980s and the related “Washington consensus”, is highly questionable from a methodological viewpoint. (Developments in) the country ranking may often be at odds with social desiderata, at least in the short run. Socio-political conditions need to be taken into account (cf. Lee *et al* 2008; Benjamin and Theron 2009). In Belarus, for example, privatisation under the current political conditions may lead to substantial larger income inequality, as once-only profits from the selling of state firms will be much higher than regular business profits. These profits may easily accrue to the president and his cronies, also against the backdrop of the lack of transparency on the boundaries between his personal funds and official government accounts.

³ An IMF review (2010, 8) states: “Early in 2009 the President had suggested that average wages in the economy should be raised to USD 500 a month before the end of the year, which would imply an increase of over 40% from end-2009 levels. In response to (IMF, authors) staff concerns about this announcement (especially given presidential elections planned for early 2011) the authorities reiterated their commitment to disciplined income policies.”

products and are cutting production by state-owned refineries to avoid a large increase in subsidies (IMF 2010, 15).

Though the crisis has not impacted on the Belarusian economy that much as in most CIS economies, the prospects for recovery of Belarus are modest and conditional. The IMF (2010) expects GDP growth for 2009-2012 to slow down to 3.2%. International organisations maintain that this prospect –leave alone higher growth rates – depends on “further reforms to liberalise prices, the commercialisation of operations in the financial sector, streamlining taxation and the introduction of other measures to improve the business environment” (EBRD 2010). Obviously, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank, the European Commission and other organisations are willing to cooperate with Belarus aiming at such structural reforms. Though it seems that they have recently created some openings in this direction, quite some frictions with their aims remain. In 2009 privatization stalled again, the selling of Belpromstroibank to Russia’s Sberbank being the main exception. The prospects for further privatization are unclear: a draft Privatization Law was submitted to parliament but not enacted (IMF 2010). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME’s) continue to face harsh business and legal conditions, with access to capital as a major constraint; government support for SME’s merely remains lip-service. The largest economic-technological challenge may be posed by efficiency measures needed to compete in the world market, in particular aiming at energy efficiency. Large-scale production in Belarus remains very energy intensive by international standards, using many inefficient and environmentally unfriendly technologies (EBRD 2009b). Productive investment remains quite low. Most recently some of the regime’s economic showpieces seem near bankruptcy, like the 5,000-staffed Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ) where production in early 2010 nearly totally collapsed (website Chapter97; website Belstat).

2.2. Communication

Adequate communication facilities are absolutely essential for the DECISIONS FOR LIFE project. Belarus has been making progress in recent years in developing its telecom sector, after inheriting at independence in 1991 a telephone system that was antiquated, inefficient, and in disrepair. Currently, fixed telephone density is rising and the domestic trunk system is being improved, though Belarus lags behind its neighbours in upgrading its telecom infrastructure (CIA World Factbook). The coverage of fixed telephone connections per 1,000 of the population has increased from 150 in 1990 via 280 in 2000 to 391 or 3.7 million main lines in use in 2008 (World Bank 2009a; CIA World Factbook). The number of cellular phones in use, which was only 5 per 1,000 in 2000, has grown very rapidly after the turn of the century, to 905 per 1,000 or nearly 8.7 million cell phones in 2008 (CIA World Factbook). In 2007 mobile cellular networks covered 93% of the population. In that year the average mobile phone use was 500 minutes per user per month, a large amount and three times the average for Europe and Central Asia. With USD 11.80 per month, the price basket for mobile service was in the middle range, though more than seven times the price basket for residential fixed line service: USD 2.60 (World Bank 2009a).

Although several alternative operators have been registered for fixed telephony, state-owned Beltelecom (Beltelekam) is still the sole provider in this market. Belarus cannot be considered to have anything approaching a liberalised telecom market (EBRD 2009b). The law prohibits authorities from intercepting telephone and other communications without a court order. In practice authorities monitored residences, telephones, and computers. The law allows the KGB, the Internal Affairs Ministry, and certain border guard detachments to use wiretaps, but they must first obtain a prosecutor's permission. However, the lack of prosecutorial independence rendered these due process protections meaningless.

The Ministry of Communications has the authority to terminate telephone service of those who breach the law (US Dept of State 2010).

The EBRD (2009b, 29) has called the Internet “an increasingly vibrant source of news from independent and opposition journalists in Belarus”, pointing out that Internet penetration rates in Belarus are among the highest in CIS countries. According to the CIA World Factbook, in 2008 the share of Belarusian Internet users had grown to 321 per 1,000 of the population, as it noted 3,107 million Internet users on a population of nearly 9.7 million; for 2007, international sources (World Bank 2009a; UN MDG Indicators) noted 290 per 1,000 coverage, thus indicating continuous growth. With a price basket of USD 10.50 per month, access costs were moderate in international perspective but rather high related to local purchasing power. A very low share, in 2007 2.8% of all Internet subscribers, were fixed broadband subscribers; with 264 bits/second/person, the country’s network is slow (World Bank 2009a). In 2009, 113,115 Internet hosts were counted (CIA World Factbook). There were in 2007 just 2.1 secure Internet servers per one million people, less than one-tenth the Europe - Central Asia average (World Bank 2009a).

It can be questioned how “vibrant” Internet use in Belarus may continue to be. In 2008 and 2009 the government partially restricted access to the Internet, and monitored e-mail and Internet chat rooms. Internet café owners were required to maintain records of their customers and submit them to government security services. By law Beltelecom and other organizations authorized by the government already had the exclusive right to maintain Internet domains. In December 2009, the Council of Ministers drafted a bill that would provide for registration of all Internet media outlets and identification of all Internet users and would allow authorities to block access to “extremist” and other objectionable websites. The bill, not subject to public discussion, would also make Internet service providers accountable for information released by customers. On December 30, 2009, president Lukashenko stated that the government should “establish order” on the Internet to “rigidly regulate and hold responsible” Internet users. On February 8, 2009, a new media law had already entered into force; it was widely criticized by domestic and international NGOs and press advocates. Under the law, the government may legally block any unregistered websites, regardless of their origin. In response to the government's interference and Internet restrictions, many opposition groups and independent newspapers switched to Internet domains operated outside the country. The few remaining independent media sites with domestic “.by” domains practiced heavy self-censorship. Heavily restrictive requirements on Internet use have been formalised in government Decree 647 of April 29, 2010. From July 1, 2010, it would only be possible to go online in an Internet café after personal identification of the user. All information concerning Internet use has to be stored for one year, and to be shown on request of the authorities, including KGB and courts. The content of this decree has once more brought on wide domestic and international criticism (US Dept of State 2009, 2010; website Charter97).

Data on the incidence of personal computers (PCs) in Belarus vary widely. By 2005 the UN MDG Indicators set it at to 0.81% -- for Europe and Central Asia a very low share (UN MDG Indicators). However, an international survey held in the first half of 2006 found that over 40% of the responding urban households and 11% of rural households had a computer at home (EBRD 2007).

Ownership of television sets is undisputedly widespread. It was estimated that in 2007 97% of all households had a television set, 10% points growth compared to the share in 2000 (World Bank 2009a). The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government did not respect these rights in practice and enforced numerous laws to control and censor the media. Authorities videotaped political meetings, conducted frequent identity checks, and used other forms of

intimidation. The new media law as of February 8, 2009 further restricted press freedoms. The law subjects online news sources to the same regulations as print and broadcast media, requires reregistration of already existing media, mandates accreditation of journalists, and limits support from foreign organizations to 30%. State-owned media dominated the information field and maintained the highest circulation and viewership. In 2009 the state-owned postal system, Belposhta, and the state-owned kiosk system, Belsayuzdruk, continued to refuse to deliver and sell 11 independent newspapers. In 2007 Belposhta removed three popular Russian newspapers (*Kommersant*, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*) from its subscription list. However, other Russian newspapers, including *Izvestiya*, were distributed. Media analysts asserted that the newspapers were removed because of reporting critical of Lukashenko's policies. Local authorities frequently warned independent editors and journalists to avoid reporting on certain topics and not to criticize the government. Journalists reporting for international media focused on the country, such as the Polish-funded independent satellite channel Belsat and Polish radio station *Radio Racyja*, continued to receive warnings from the prosecutor's office for working without accreditation (US Dept of State 2010).

In 2009, the government continued to harass, assault, and arrest journalists. Security officers continuously hampered independent journalists from covering Solidarity Day and other protests in Minsk. The government censored the media. It repeatedly targeted the Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ), a leading voice for press freedom and independent journalism, for punishment. Many publications were forced to exercise self-censorship. Authorities warned, fined, or jailed members of the media who publicly criticized the government. The government tightly controlled the content of domestic broadcast media. On April 9, 2009, the president reiterated earlier remarks, stating that private stations would not be allowed to operate in the country. Only the state-run Belarusian Radio and the four state-controlled television networks Nationwide TV (ONT), the First National Channel, STV, and Lad were allowed to broadcast nationwide. The government continued to use its virtual monopoly on television and radio broadcasting to disseminate its version of events and minimize all opposing viewpoints. State television coordinated its propaganda documentaries with the country's security services. Local independent television stations operated in some areas and reported local news; however, most were under government pressure to forego reporting on national issues or risk being censored. Such stations were frequently pressured into sharing materials and cooperating with authorities to intimidate local opposition and human rights groups that met with foreign diplomats. Under the law, the government may close a publication after two warnings in one year for violating a range of restrictions on speech and the press. The Information Ministry can suspend periodicals or newspapers for three months without a court ruling. The law also prohibits the media from disseminating information on behalf of unregistered political parties, trade unions, and NGOs (US Dept of State 2010; website IFJ).

2.3. The sectoral labour market structure

The available Belarusian labour market statistics hardly compare with those of nearly all other countries, in particular in indicating the sectoral labour market structure. The National Statistical Committee (Belstat) over the last decade counts about 92% of all employed –about the same share for men and women-- as employees and own-account workers, with the other 8% rather haphazardly spread over the categories employers, including paid family workers; unpaid family workers; workers not classifiable by status / members of producers' cooperatives, and contributing family workers (cf. ILO Laborsta). Moreover, the Belarusian labour market statistics nearly totally lack any division by gender. Thus, we are not able to produce the regular Table 2, showing employment by employment

status and gender over a number of years, like we presented in the other DECISIONS FOR LIFE country reports. We can only show here a division of total employment by public and private sector.

The table below shows a continuous decrease of the employment share of the public sector, in 2000-2007 by nearly 7%points, fully caused by a decrease in the employed by publicly-owned enterprises. A recent Belstat (2010) publication indicates that employment has grown to 4,621,000 persons by the end of 2009, implying an increase of 117,000 (2.6%) in 2008 and, in spite of the global economic crisis, still 27,000 (0.6%) in 2009. The new figures also show that the share of the public sector has decreased a further 2.8%points, to 47.7% in 2009; in that year with 50.7% the private sector for the first time employed more than half of all; the share of employed by foreign-owned firms also grew, to a still modest 1.6% in 2009, as did the share of mixed firms, to 3.3%. In practice, the share of employed in the genuine private sector is much smaller in Belarus, since corporatized public enterprises and collective farms are classified as private sector employers.

Table 2 Employment by large sectors, Belarus , 2000, 2005 and 2007

		2000		2005		2007	
		x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%
Public sector		2,540	57.2	2,251	51.7	2,262	50.5
of which	general gov't sector	1,070	24.1	1,071	24.6	1,082	24.2
	publicly-owned enterprises	1,470	33.1	1,180	27.1	1,179	26.3
Private sector		1,901	42.8	2,099	48.3	2,215	49.5
of which	domestic private	1,830	41.0	1,929	44.4	2,018	45.1
	mixed with foreign shares	61	1.4	114	2.6	130	2.9
	foreign-owned enterprises	16	0.4	56	1.3	67	1.5
Total		4,441	100.0	4,350	100.0	4,477	100.0

Sources: ILO Laborsta, Table PS; website Belstat; Belstat 2010

Recently international sources (ITUC 2009; US Dept of State 2010) conclude that state employees constitute approximately 80% of the country's working population. The study of small and medium-sized enterprises in Belarus ends up in about the same conclusion. The number of privately owned enterprises in Belarus remains small. In 2008 there were approximately 51,000 registered small enterprises, of which around 39,000 were fully operational. As a consequence small enterprises account for modest levels of employment (about 440,000 in 2008, or 10%), which also means that their contribution to economic development is limited. Even if the 212,000 for 2008 registered individual employers (entrepreneurs) are added (nearly 5% of the employed), the level of entrepreneurship per head in Belarus is below that of most other CIS countries, including Russia and Ukraine (Smallbone and Welter 2010).

Of the total Belarusian population, by 2008 4,9 million persons were counted as economically active (the share of the population over 14 of age in employment or registered unemployed). Only 0.5% of the economically active, 25,100 people, were aged 65 and older: see Table 3 (next page). If we leave out this group of elderly citizens in order to comply with the internationally comparable Labour Participation Rate (LPR) or Employment-to-Population ratio (EPOP) that only takes stock of the labour force aged 15-64 in percentages of the total population of the same age, we can calculate the over-all LPR or EPOP at 71.0% (*MDG Indicator 1.5*), or 4,901,000 on 6,905,000 people. This implies a position in the middle ranks among the 14 countries in our project. With respectively 74.9% for males and 68.1% for females, the

“corrected” female LPR in 2008 was 91% of the “corrected” male rate (the so-called women to men parity). Remarkable is that, except for the youngest and oldest cohorts, the LPR’s of men and women come quite close, with middle-aged women (40-49 of age) even showing slightly higher LPR’s.

Table 3 Economically active population and labour participation rates by gender and by age group, Belarus, 2008

	all		male		female	
	x 1,000	LPR	x 1,000	LPR	x1,000	LPR
15-19	70,7	10.2	45,0	12.6	25,7	7.6
20-24	556,9	67.5	295,3	70.4	261,6	64.5
25-29	666,2	85.7	345,5	88.3	320,7	83.0
30-34	632,4	88.1	319,4	89.6	313,0	86.7
35-39	608,7	90.1	296,2	90.4	312,5	89.7
40-44	626,3	90.6	297,4	89.7	328,9	91.5
45-49	710,4	89.3	335,3	88.1	375,1	90.4
50-54	631,8	85.6	296,1	86.2	335,7	85.1
55-59	319,6	55.0	191,1	73.3	128,5	39.9
60-64	78,5	19.2	50,9	29.7	27,6	11.7
65+	25,1	1.9	15,6	3.7	9,5	1.0
Total 15+	4926,8	59.7	2487,8	66.1	2438,9	54.5

Source: ILO Laborsta, Table E5

If we apply the same “corrected” calculation to 2000 figures, the outcomes show that LPR’s overall have increased slightly between 2000-2008, from 73.8% to 74.9% for males and somewhat more for females, from 66.3% to 68.1% (also resulting in 91% women to men parity). The LPR’s of the youngest cohorts fell substantially between 2000 and 2008: for the females 15-19 of age from 14.9% to 7.6% and for their male peers from 21.1% to 12.6%, as well as for the females 20-24 of age from 70.0% to 64.5% respectively for the males of the same age from 78.3% to 70.4% (all data: ILO Laborsta). This decrease may be partially due to higher enrollment in education, partially to larger unemployment. In Belarus female LPR’s remain very high compared with other CIS countries, and obviously working is regarded as a need consistent with the prevailing two-breadwinner strategy of Belarusian households. Only in the poorest households female participation in the labour market is found to be lower, which in turn may aggravate poverty -- the so-called poverty trap mechanism (Pastore and Verashchagina 2008).

The economically active population was in 2008 about 290,000 larger than all employed, bringing total unemployment (including discouraged workers and others not officially registered as unemployed) at about 6%. This is higher than the official unemployment rate, based on the unemployed registered with the Agencies for Labour, employment and social protection, of 0.8% overall by the end of 2008 – 0.7% for (14,700) men and 1.0% for (22,600) women, but still rather low. In spite of the global crisis, in 2009 official unemployment grew only marginally: by the end of the year the numbers were respectively 17,300 for men and 23,000 for women (Belstat 2010). Like before under worsening conditions, earlier than laying off employees companies kept their employees in service eventually with shortened working hours and reduced wages (cf. Fedor 1995); obviously the old practice of forcing employees to take leave without pay instead has been replaced by a “modern” form of flexibility using temporary contracts (see sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2).

In the 2000s official unemployment initially went up to 3.1% in 2003, due to growing female unemployment (3.9% in 2003), as to decrease regularly to the 2008-2009 level. Demand in the early 2000s

was still oriented towards traditional “male” occupations in mainly manufacturing (cf. Government Belarus 2005, 20). With the change of Belarus’s growth pattern towards services, the “male-biased” demand for labour withered away, as did the female overrepresentation in unemployment. In 2008, 45% of the official female unemployed were 16-29 of age, against 35% of the male employed – about the same shares discernible throughout the 2000s. Official unemployment among higher-educated women (ISCED levels 5 and 6) had relatively decreased in the 2000s, from about two in three unemployed women in the early 2000s to less than half in 2008, a trend that was less clear among unemployed men (all data 2000-2008: ILO Laborsta).

2.4. National legislation and labour relations

2.4.1. Legislation

Belarus has ratified the eight core ILO Labour Conventions, i.e. no’s 29, 87, 98, 100, 105, 111, 138 and 182. As a matter of fact, Belarus carried over the Soviet Union’s 1956 ratifications of Conventions 87 and 98 when it became independent (ITUC 2009, 2010). The Constitution provides for freedom of peaceful assembly; however, both the Trade Union Law of January 2000 and several presidential decrees contain serious violations of trade union rights. Only registered political parties, unions, or NGOs may request permission to hold a demonstration of more than 1,000 persons, and denials are common. Security forces frequently forcibly dispersed participants, often causing injuries. Organizers must apply at least 15 days in advance for permission to conduct a public demonstration, rally, or meeting. Government officials are required to respond no later than five days prior to the scheduled event. However, authorities generally refuse permits to opposition groups or grant permits for demonstrations away from city centers. Authorities use intimidation and threats to discourage persons from participating in demonstrations, openly videotape participants, and issue heavy fines or jail sentences on participants of unsanctioned demonstrations. Police and other security officials beat and detain demonstrators before, during, and after unsanctioned peaceful demonstrations (US Dept of State 2009, 2010; ITUC 2009).

The law provides for freedom of association; however, in recent years the government severely restricted it in practice. All NGOs, political parties, and unions must register with the Ministry of Justice. Decree No. 2 of January 1999 required all previously registered unions at the national, industry and enterprise level to re-register. If a union is not registered, its activities are banned and the organisation has to be dissolved. The long and complicated procedures include an obligation on the unions to provide the official address of their headquarters. This is often their workplace or the premises of the enterprise. A letter from the management confirming the address is usually required, making unions completely dependent on the good will of the employer. A government commission reviews and approves all registration applications; in practice its decisions have been based largely on compatibility with the government's authoritarian philosophy. Decree No. 2 also sets forth minimum membership requirements at the national, branch and enterprise levels that are so high that they make it almost impossible to create new unions, and it undermines the position of existing ones. At the national level, there must be a minimum of 500 founding members representing the majority of the regions of Belarus. A list of names must be sent to the Ministry of Justice. In 2005 a number of amendments to laws and regulations were introduced to make trade unions’ compulsory dissolution even easier. Moreover, presidential decrees and ordinances lay down stringent conditions for the receipt of foreign assistance for activities in the country. These decrees, applicable to trade unions and other CSOs, attempt to isolate independent trade unions from their partner organisations abroad and to limit the capacity of the

unions to protest against continued violations of workers' rights (US Dept of State 2009, 2010; ITUC 2009).

During 2009 authorities frequently harassed and intimidated organization founders to abandon their membership in groups seeking registration to deny the group the number of petitioners necessary for registration. The government continued efforts to suppress independent unions and bring all union activity under its control. Its efforts included frequent refusals to extend employment contracts for members of independent unions and refusals to register some unions. The law provides for the right to strike, but the January 2000 Labour Code imposes severe limitations on that right. It sets out very complicated conciliation procedures that would take at least two months. The strike must also be held in the three months following the failure of the conciliation procedures. The president may suspend a strike for a period of up to three months or even cancel one, in the interests of national security, public order, public health, or when the rights and freedoms of others are threatened. Moreover, the duration of the strike must be specified in advance and a minimum service must be ensured. Management and local authorities also blocked worker attempts to organize strikes on many occasions by declaring them illegal (US Dept of State 2010; ITUC 2009).

The law forbids the exploitation of children in the workplace, including a prohibition on forced and compulsory labor, and specifies policies for acceptable working conditions. The government generally implemented these laws in practice. The minimum age for employment is 16; however, a child as young as 14 may conclude a labour contract with the written consent of one parent or legal guardian (US Dept of State 2010).

The law establishes a standard work week of 40 hours and provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week. Because of the country's difficult economic situation, many workers worked considerably less than 40 hours per week, and factories often required workers to take unpaid furloughs due to lack of demand for the factory's products. The law provides for mandatory overtime and holiday pay and restricts overtime to four hours every two days, with a maximum of 120 hours of overtime each year. According to various sources, the government was believed to effectively enforce these standards (US Dept of State 2010). It should be noted that the right to change jobs is restricted. According to presidential decree No. 29 a worker has the right to change the job only after the expiration of his / her contract or when both sides will come to such an agreement (website Wageindicator / Belarus-mojazarplata).

Of particular relevance for the young female target group of the DECISIONS FOR LIFE project is the following labour legislation, based on the Labour Code and more specific regulations as mentioned below (website Wageindicator / Belarus-mojazarplata; ILO-Travail database; ILO Natlex):

- the duration of maternity leave shall be 70 calendar days for prenatal leave and 56 calendar days for postnatal leave; in case of complicated confinement and in case of multiple births, maternity leave shall be granted for 70 calendar days pre- and postnatal each (Belarus Labour Code, in act since 26.07.1999 № 296-3, Section 184);
- women who are insured and have paid contributions into the State social insurance system shall have the right to maternity benefits. Maternity benefits shall be paid on the basis of a medical certificate; the right to payment of such benefits shall start after 30 weeks of pregnancy and is granted for the normal duration of maternity leave (126 calendar days) and during any extension thereof. The rate of maternity benefits is 100% of the average salary and not less than 50% of the minimum per capita subsistence wage (Act of 30 October 1992 on State benefits for families raising children, Sections 5, 6 and 7; Act № 2435-XII in act since 18.06.1993 on Health

care; Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection No. 17 of 26 January 2009 section 1.1);

- parental leave is allowed for the working mother or father or other relative of the child to whom the custody of the child has been assigned until the child reaches three years of age (Labour Code, Section 185);
- partially paid leave on childcare can be used by the mother, the father of the child or other relatives, who take care of the child. It can be used continuously or partially, until the child reaches the age of three years (Parental leave benefit). Childcare benefits amount to 80% of the minimum subsistence wage (Labour Code Section 271; Act of 30 October 1992 on State benefits for families raising children sections 4 and 14; Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection No. 17 of 26 January 2009 section 1.4);
- part-time work may be requested by the working mother or father or other relative of the child to whom the custody of the child has been assigned until the child reaches three years of age. The reduced working time has to be less than half of the normal monthly working time. The person keeps the right to monthly states allowances (Labour Code, Section 185);
- the duration of regular holidays cannot be less than 24 days. State vacation days which may happen during regular holidays are not included in it and are not paid for (Decree № 157, 26.03.1998).

2.4.2. Labour relations and wage-setting

The government-controlled Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) is the largest union, claiming about four million members; however, that number is likely seriously inflated, since the country's total workforce is only slightly larger. The Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BCDTU or BKDP), with three constituent unions totaling 9,000 members, is the main independent union. BKDP is affiliated with the ITUC (website ITUC). The government combined administrative measures and a system of fixed-term contracts with individual workers (covering 90% of the total workforce), mostly from one to five years in length, to discourage membership in independent unions and in regional, national, and international labour organizations. The government's response to criticism is that the law provides all necessary remedies. However, the ILO supervisory bodies have noted on several occasions that the Belarusian judiciary, in its present state, is not an adequate recourse for redressing trade union rights violations, and that complaints concerning trade union rights violations have either been totally ignored or routinely dismissed by prosecutors' offices (US Dept of State 2010; ITUC 2009).

The law provides for the right to organize and bargain collectively; however, government authorities and managers of state-owned enterprises routinely interfered with union activities and hindered workers' efforts to bargain collectively, in some instances arbitrarily suspending collective bargaining agreements. At the beginning of 2004, Belarus was subject to the ILO Commission of Inquiry procedure. The Commission's report, published in October 2004, stated that trade union rights were blatantly violated in Belarus. The ILO Commission ruled that anti-union legislation should be repealed and adopted 12 recommendations aimed at bringing national law and practice into line with international standards. The government's approach was not to take measures pertaining to these individual pieces of legislation, but to promise that the new trade union law would resolve all problems. When the draft of a new Law on Trade Unions finally saw the light of day in May 2007, the BKDP dubbed it "the law on state control over trade unions", since the draft gave authorities wide-range powers to inspect trade

union documentation and activities. ILO intervention convinced the government to abandon the draft law (ITUC 2009). According to the ITUC, the joint efforts of the international confederation and the ILO may have brought some understanding by the Belarusian government of the importance of developing industrial relations based on international labour standards and good faith communication with the social partners. Indeed, initial steps have been taken. For example, some improvement could be noted in the social dialogue after the BKDP finally re-gained its official seat in the National Council for Labour and Social Issues (NCLSI) in 2007. The BKDP also was a signatory to the tripartite General Collective Agreement for 2009-2010; like in other CIS countries, this annual agreement, based on tripartite consultation and negotiation, is the cornerstone of collective bargaining, and the basis for regional and sectoral collective agreements. Yet, on July 30, 2009 the FTUB issued recommendations for the employers to sign collective bargaining agreements only with the most represented trade unions irrespective of whether there were members of other trade unions among the personnel. The BDKP leadership argued that such measure would violate the rights of trade unions. Since 2004 the government has required state employees to sign short-term work contracts. Although such contracts may have terms of up to five years, most expired after one year, which gave the government the possibility of firing employees by simply declining to renew their contract. Many members of independent unions, political parties, and civil society groups lost their jobs because of this practice. Employment protection is circumvented the same way. For example, though the law grants women the right to three years of maternity leave with assurance of job availability upon return, employers often refuse to renew a woman's contract when she becomes pregnant (US Dept of State 2010; ITUC 2009).

Most recently the ITUC blamed the fact that the government of Belarus organised a high-profile event with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on 27-28 April 2010 in Geneva, aimed at attracting potential foreign investors to Belarus. Indeed, the background document for the event prepared by UNCTAD concedes that there is a significant lack of compliance with the ILO's core labour standards and a lack of respect for the rule of law and contractual obligations in general. The UNCTAD review underlines that the economy still "maintains the key features of a planned economy", which inevitably requires centralised patterns of political power, institutions and decision-making processes. "These are not simply technical or legal matters but represent direct and targeted infringements of the principles and respect of the fundamental labour rights enshrined in ILO standards," ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder commented. Persecution of independent trade unions has continued even while ILO monitoring processes have been in place. The government's occasional signs of goodwill in the past, Ryder continued, have not made up for the continuing and familiar litany of violations, and currently the government's position is characterised mainly by inaction. "As long as ILO recommendations are still not acted upon, extreme caution should be exercised with regard to the impact on the working people of Belarus of any initiative of this nature," Ryder concluded, adding: "Belarus must firstly respect labour rights and establish genuine industrial relations, and then would be able to attract foreign investment that can really benefit its working people" (ITUC 2010).

Wages in Belarus are set highly administrative and centralized. The tariff system is binding in the so-called budget (state) sector, as said covering about 805 of employees; the small private sector has little wage autonomy. In the budget sector, wages are determined in three steps: on the basis of a tariff scale, a tariff rate of the first grade, and a tariff qualification guide. The guide contains detailed characteristics and ranking orders of professions and types of labour. The ratio between the highest and lowest wages in the tariff scale would be over 8:1, but because of the fact that the lowest nine classes receive state subsidies, this ratio is lowered to about 5:1. Seniority rules are also important in Belarus's wage building (Pastore and Verashchagina 2006).

2.5. Minimum wage and poverty

2.5.1. The statutory minimum wage

The statutory minimum wage is the state minimal social standard in the sphere of paying for work in normal working conditions and in case of fulfilling the set labour norms. It is set mostly annually by the Council of Ministers and subject of indexation taking into account inflation. Since August 1, 2009, the minimum monthly wage is BYR (Belarusian Ruble) 229,700 (at the mid-January 2010 rate approximately USD 74) and BYR 1,360 per hour. This was a nominal raise of 10% compared to the earlier minimum wage rate – no real increase, as consumer prices officially rose by 10.1% in 2009 (website Belstat). According to the US Dept of State (2010) the NMW⁴ did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. In November 2009 the country's average monthly wage was BYR 1,012,900 (USD 324) (website Belstat), implying that the minimum wage was a quite low 23% of that average.

2.5.2. Inequality and poverty

Despite all justified objections against the current Belarusian regime, it cannot be denied that after the turn of the century till quite recently the country's economic growth has been robust and followed to a considerable level a pro-poor path. An EU institution has recently observed that, compared to other CIS countries, "the growth structure in Belarus has been much more beneficial for labour", adding: "Growth in labour-intensive sectors coupled with wage and income policies have helped to ensure that the benefits of recent growth has been broadly shared by the population" (ETF 2010, 2). The government has put a strong emphasis on maintaining pro-poor growth and high employment rates. By contrast, the country's seemingly good employment performance has likely been due mainly to the postponement of reforms and to cheap energy, both supporting low-productivity growth. Since 1995, real wages have largely outpaced the modest increases in labour productivity. Though creating inflation, in the longer run the wage increases contributed to the maintenance of minimum living standards for a substantial share of the population. Yet, the wage increases may also have lowered workers' incentives to advocate economic reforms (Brixiová and Volchov 2004, 2005; Brixiová and Égert 2010).

Though exact measurement of living standards in the first years of independence is lacking, it may be taken for granted that they deteriorated between 1990 and 1995. That was largely due to the steep decline in production and wages coupled with hyper-inflation. The decreasing birth and fertility rates (see section 2.6.1) may deliver proof in this direction. In 1995, the majority of the poor stayed in poverty between four and nine months a year (Grigorieva and Grigoriev 2009). Then, from 1996-1998 the share of the population living under the official, income-based national poverty line showed a decrease, from 38.6% in 1996 to 32.1% in 1998. Yet, in 1999 a high inflation rate outstripped cash incomes and led to a shockwise growth in the share of the poor, up to 46.7% of the population in that year. Since 2000, cash income of the large majority has stabilized and considerable economic growth rates enabled relatively high cash income increases and high social expenditure (throughout 1995-2004 13-14% of GDP), in turn substantially reducing the poverty rate. The share of the population under the official poverty line decreased from 41.9% in 2000, via 30.5% in 2000, to 17.8% in 2004, 12.7% in 2005 and even to 5.8% in 2007. The reduction of extreme poverty⁵ seems even more remarkable, from 3.2% of all households in

⁴ Incorrectly set by the Dept of State (2010) at BYR 220,080 monthly.

⁵ Households are considered extremely poor if their per capita disposable income is twice as low as the minimum subsistence budget (see next footnote).

1995 to 0.9% in 2005 (UNDP / Government Belarus 2005; Istomina 2006; website Belstat). However, the use of other poverty yardsticks than the current low official poverty line would bring the poverty share for 2007 of Belarus on 13 to 43%, depending on the yardstick chosen.⁶

Nevertheless, the official figures provide a rather good insight in the structure of poverty. Already in 2004 poverty had become much more transient than a decade earlier: on average it lasted three months, and less than 8% of the population remained poor all year long. The main concentrations of poverty continued to be in rural communities, where in 2004 with 20% the share of poor households nearly doubled that in cities and urban settlements. The highest poverty levels were in rural Chernobyl-affected districts. The cash incomes of rural households were by then on average 29% less than in cities. One-fifth of the income of the rural poor came from sale of farming produce and from a private plot of land, against less than 5% of income of the poor from cities and urban villages. Concerning household composition, poverty in 2004 was highest among families with three or more children (52%), followed by those with two children (26%). Among single-parent families –in three of four cases run by single mothers – poverty was also considerable, up to 40% for single parents with two or more children. A remarkable outcome was that overall the share of women below the poverty line in 2004 (17.6%) remained slightly lower than the share of men (18.2%). A gap in favour of women had been in place since 1995, though mostly somewhat larger (0.1 – 2.6% points). Education matters strongly: the poverty rate in 2004 was 22% for people with primary or lower education, falling to 17% among those with secondary education and to less than 11% for those with specialized secondary education, whereas it was only 3% among those with completed tertiary education (Government Belarus 2005; UNDP / Government Belarus 2005; ILO Laborsta).

Inequality, though still modest, seems to have increased in the mid-1990s, as to fall slightly afterwards to a rather low level. The share of the expenditure of the poorest 20% in total expenditure, in 1995 set at 10.8%, fell to 8.5% in 2000-2002 but recovered partly to 8.8% in 2005 (UN MDG Indicators). The Gini coefficient (a measure that rates 0 as perfect equality and 1.00 as perfect inequality) increased directly after independence, indicating larger inequality (Pastore and Verashchagina 2006); between 1997 and 2005 showed a rather volatile but in the end also falling trend, from 0.354 in 1997 to 0.337 in 1999 and 2000, rising to 0.343 in 2001 and 0.326 in 2005,⁷ thus indicating less inequality (UNICEF, cited in Richardson *et al* 2008, 4)⁸, and in international perspective to be traced in the lower middle range.

⁶ Since 1999, all individuals or households with incomes below the minimum subsistence level according to the Law on the Subsistence Minimum qualify as poor and are eligible for state support. It has been argued that the needs for various groups –officially set by government experts in conjunction with employer associations and trade unions-- only cover a very extreme minimum of goods and services needed. For instance, a jacket or coat is assumed to last a person of working age eight to nine years. Accordingly, the official poverty line is set low and the incidence of poverty is relatively low as well. Adopting instead the EU risk of poverty threshold (60% of the median equivalent household income) would imply a poverty incidence in Belarus for 2007 of about 13%, thus more than double the official incidence. Moreover, according to this last yardstick the poverty rate did not decrease between 2000 and 2007. If one starts from a yardstick based on required calories for minimal consumption, taking the WHO recommendation of minimal calorie use (2,100 kcal/day) as a threshold, the share of poor households for 2007 would even end up at 42.8% instead of 5.8% (Grigorieva and Grigoriev 2009).

⁷ Other international sources, notably CIA World Factbook and UNDP, conclude to lower Gini ratios that would position the country in the lower ranks concerning inequality. The CIA World Factbook sets the Gini ratio for 2005 at 0.279. The UNDP / Government Belarus assessment (2005, 6) also mentions much lower Gini ratios, though the trend remains the same as we mentioned in

2.6. Demographics and female labour force

2.6.1. Population and fertility

Since the 1980s Belarus is in demographic crisis, with reduced fertility rates and increasing death rates, ending up in depopulation. While with an average 0.1% increase the period 1987-1997 witnessed a very slight yearly population growth, between 1997 and 2007 the country's population decreased by an average 0.5% annually – a decrease in Europe only surpassed by that of Ukraine (0.8%). In the first five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union the birth rate, already low, fell by almost 30% (Grigorieva and Grigoriev 2009), and continued to fall from 13.9 in 1990 per 1,000 of the population to 9.2 per 1,000 in 2005 (Richardson *et al* 2008). Afterwards, it slowly recovered to 9.7 per 1,000 of the population in 2009: after Ukraine's birth rate the lowest rate in Europe and far below replacement level. The total fertility rate (TFR, the number of births a woman would have if she survived to age 50) fell continuously from 1982 on, and is for 2009 estimated at 1.24, one of the world's lowest TFR's (CIA World Factbook). UNDP 92009) expects the Belarusian TFR for 2005-2010 to end up at 1.3. The death rate showed a long-term increase. It grew from 10.7 per 1,000 of the population in 1990 to 13.5 in 2000 and 14.5 in 2005, and from then on decreased slowly. For 2009 the death rate is set at 13.9 per 1,000. Life expectancy has been falling too, in particular for males; for women lately some rebound has been visible: see the next section. Because of the differences between birth and death rates, the natural decrease of population went up to a record 40-50,000 per year in 2000-2005; from 2005 on, when the gap between death and birth rates was no longer widening, this decrease diminished but it was still 26,000 in 2008 and 25,200 in 2009. Net migration does not offset the natural decrease, though in recent years it has been growing, to 12,200 in 2009, of which over 10,000 from other CIS countries (sources: WHO 2009; wikipedia Demographics of Belarus; CIA World Factbook; Belstat 2010; Richardson *et al* 2008; World Bank 2009e).

The preliminary result of the 2009 Census was a population size of 9,493,000, whereas the 1999 Census counted 10,143,000 inhabitants: a decrease with a further 650,000 in a decade – 6.4%, or an average 0.5% yearly. 2009 saw a rapid fall in population size, of 196,000 or 2.0%. By then, 5,070,000 inhabitants were female (53.4%), 4,417,000 male. Of course, the population has aged rapidly, in particular its female part. By 2009, 14.7% of the population aged 65 and above, against 13.4% in 2000 and 10.7% in 1990. In 2009 the number of females aged 65 more than doubled the number of males of the same age (948,000 against 447,000), while with 18.4% the share of older women in all women nearly doubled that of their male peers (9.9%). In 2009 the median age was 38.6 years, with a large gender difference: 41.6 years for females and 35.6 years for males (CIA World Factbook; Belstat 2010).

The urbanisation rate in Belarus stood in 2009 at 73.8% of the total population, a rather high share in international perspective. Earlier shares were 56% in 1980, 66% in 1990, 70% in 2000 and 72.4% in 2006 (World Bank 2009a; Belstat 2010), implying a long-term increase but slowing down from an average 0.9%points yearly growth in the 1980s till 0.4%points growth yearly in the late 2000s. International sources do not expect further urbanisation, though recent prognoses of the national statistical bureau

the text, moving from 0.258 in 1997 to 0.269-270 in 1999-2000, rising to 0.278 in 2001 and then falling to 0.254 in 2003 and 2004. The most recent estimate, of UNDP (2009) for 2007, ends up at 0.279.

⁸ Synchronous decreases over time of inequality and poverty are not self-evident, as the statistical relation between the two conceptions can be rather complex. The development of the Gini coefficient does not necessarily reflect how shifts in the income distribution impact on poverty.

seem to point at further urban growth (CIA World Factbook; Belstat 2010). By far the largest city is Minsk, with nearly 1.8 million inhabitants (website Belstat).

For an indication of the situation of our target group, the adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women 15-19 of age) is of special importance. For 2006 UN statistics set this rate at 21.6, in international perspective a rather low figure. In 1995 the adolescent fertility rate was still 39.6, and from then on a continuous decrease took place, via 22.0 in 2000 (UN MDG Indicators). As said, the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 years for both women and men. This minimum age can be lowered by a maximum of three years in the case of pregnancy or the emancipation of a minor. Thus, early marriage does occur, but it is relatively uncommon. A 2004 United Nations report estimated that 6% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed (website OECD-SIGI). In that year only 2.4% of households were run by a person younger than 25 of age (ILO Laborsta). The share of all live births by mothers under 20 age is rather low and continuously decreasing: from 14.3% in 1995, via 11.5% in 2000 and 9.1% in 2005, to 8.5% in 2006. In 2006, the mean age for women at birth of their first child was 24.0 years (WHO, cited in Richardson *et al* 2008).

2.6.2. Health

By the end of 2007 there were an estimated 13,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS in Belarus, or 158-180 per 100,000 of the adult population, according to statistics compiled by international organizations. This share is clearly below the regional level (WHO 2009). By 2007, it was estimated that about 1,100 people had died from HIV/AIDS in Belarus (CIA World Factbook). The HIV epidemic in the country has reportedly stabilized, with the annual number of newly reported HIV diagnoses varying only slightly since 2003 (US Dept of State 2010). Most new HIV infections are being reported in and around Minsk and in the provinces of Brest and Vitebsk. The epidemic is largely concentrated among injecting drug users, with a high HIV prevalence found in this population. However, increasing numbers of new HIV cases are attributed to unprotected sex and more women are being affected by HIV. In wide-scale HIV testing in 2006, 80% of new HIV cases in women were attributed to unsafe sex. With HIV prevalence of about 1% found among female sex workers, unsafe paid sex appears to be a minor factor in the epidemic. About one in ten sex workers also injected drugs in 2006, although condom use levels were relatively high (in 2006, 70% of sex workers said they used a condom at last paid sex) (UNAIDS / WHO 2008).

More generally, public information in Belarus about the spread of HIV/AIDS seems rather limited. With 34% in 2007, the proportion of 15-24-year-old females with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS was moderate; a comparable figure for their male peers is lacking (WHO 2009). With assistance from international organisations, a wide range of harm reduction initiatives has been introduced to slow the spread of HIV. The directly observed treatment, short course (DOTS) strategy has been supported in Belarus since 2003; however, tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant cause of death and is not yet well contained (Richardson *et al* 2008). In 2007 the coverage of Anti Retro-Viral Therapy (ART) among people with advanced HIV infection stood at 20%, higher than in other CIS countries (WHO 2009). Nevertheless, also in 2009 societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS remained a problem and the illness carried a heavy stigma despite greater awareness and increased tolerance towards persons infected with the virus. For example, maternity wards no longer had separate facilities for HIV-infected mothers. The UNAIDS office stated that there were still numerous reports of HIV-infected individuals who faced discrimination (US Dept of State 2010).

For 2000-2005, the probability of not surviving to age 40 in Belarus was estimated at 6.7% of the relevant age cohort, a relatively high share but not as high as in Ukraine (8.4%) and the Russian Federation (10.7%)(UNDP 2008). For 2009, life expectancy at birth was set at an average 70.6 years: 64.9 years for males and 76.7 years for females (website Belstat). Again, though the Ukrainian and Russian scores are lower (in 2006 respectively 67.7 and 65.2 years against 68.8 for Belarus – UNDP 2008), the transition years initially meant a considerable deterioration. In 1990, the respective figures were 71.3 (total), 66.3 (men) and 75.8 years (women), and in 2000 69.0 (total), 66.4 (men) and 74.8 years (women). Thus, whereas male life expectancy started to decrease after 2000, and did so rapidly, the female rate, already decreasing in the 1990s, showed a considerable rebound in the 2000s. These different trends resulted in a widening of the gap between female and male life expectancies to the extreme value of 12.8 years (CIA World Factbook; website Belstat; World Bank 2009e).

The leading causes of mortality among women in Belarus in 2005 were first diseases of the circulatory system (508.5 per 100 000 of the population), second cancers (111.5 per 100,000), and third external causes, including injuries and poisoning (63.3 per 100,000). While the long-term health impact of the Chernobyl disaster is still hotly contested in the international arena, there is a widely held belief in Belarus that the disaster has caused a significant increase in cancers and other diseases among the population. Yet, research has shown that the Chernobyl accident contributed only to significant increases in thyroid cancer. By 2002, 4,000 cases of thyroid cancer had been reported in children and adolescents in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia of which many most likely attributable to radiation exposure. It seems that the largest public health problem created by the accident has been the impact on mental health for those affected. Key public health challenges relate to the high levels of alcohol consumption and smoking in Belarus (wikipedia Chernobyl disaster; Richardson *et al* 2008).

Couples and individuals in Belarus have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of children, and have the information and means to do so free from discrimination. Access to information on contraception and skilled attendance at delivery and in postpartum care are widely available. Women and men are given equal access to diagnostic services and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (US Dept of State 2010). The Belarusian health care system aims to provide the entire population with universal access to care, which according to the Constitution is free at the point of use. Health care benefits are extensive. All care costs are covered and there is no rationing of services in the state sector. Efforts to reorient financial resources from the hospital sector to primary care and to introduce technical efficiency have been slow. The basic characteristics of the USSR system remain in place, and the hospital sector is still dominant. Though the health system has been effective in lowering infant and maternal mortality, this overshadows health promotion activities relating to non-communicable diseases or ill health (Richardson *et al* 2008). The traditional high priority given to maternal and child health has remained. By 2006, all births in Belarus were attended by skilled health personnel (a health professional), a situation already reached in the early 1990s. In 2007, the country had the highest density of doctors and nurses of all Central and Eastern European countries (Richardson *et al* 2008; WHO 2009). Child mortality rates have been falling and are currently low in worldwide perspective, and even below EU averages. In 2005 neonatal mortality (deaths during the first 28 days of life per 1000 live births) stood at 3 per 1,000 live births, compared to an EU average of 3.3 (World Bank 2009e). The reported infant mortality rate (probability of dying between birth and age 1 per 1,000 live births) was 6.3 in 2005 and an estimated 6.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009,⁹ rather low in

⁹ With 11 per 1,000 for 2008, UNICEF (website) estimated the infant mortality rate higher, though the UNICEF figures also show a downward trend.

international perspective as well as indicating progress: the rate for 1990 was 12.1 and that for 2000 9.3. The under 5 mortality rate (probability of dying between by age 5 per 1,000 live births) was 8.5 by 2007, also showing progress as this rate came down from 15.0 in 1990 and 12.3 in 2000. The sex ratio at birth is 1.06 boys against 1.00 girls. With 10.3 per 100,000 live births in 2005,¹⁰ the official maternity mortality rate was also low (World Bank 2009e; WHO 2009; CIA World Factbook; UN Data; Richardson *et al* 2008).

Official figures state that access to improved sanitation is high, indicating 93% in 2006; remarkably, with 97% the registered share was higher in rural areas than in urban areas (91%) (WHO 2009). However, most health inequalities seem detrimental for the rural population. Older WHO figures indicated that in 2002, 78% of the population living in urban households were connected to the water supply system, while in rural areas just 22% had access. Other survey data have shown that 37% of rural respondents depended on wells and other sources of water that were not “on tap”, and on the countryside hot running water was a rarity, with 76% of rural respondents having no access. For urban respondents, only 3% depended on wells and other sources of water not on tap, and only 16% had no hot water on tap (cited in Richardson *et al* 2008, 11).

2.6.3. Women’s labour market share

Unfortunately, for Belarus there is no recent division available of the full labour force by industry and gender. Belstat for 2009 has only published shares of seven main sectors in total employment. We have included these in Table 4, and added our estimates of the shares by gender – based on various sources about Belarus and a comparison with other CIS countries, in particular Ukraine. The reader has to be aware of the rough approximations. Starting point is that by 2009 women made up 50% of the total labour force.

Table 4 Employment by industry and gender, total labour force, Belarus, 2009

	all		male		female	
	x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%
agriculture, forestry, fishing	409	9.3	249	11.3	160	7.3
manufacturing	1,153	26.2	898	40.8	255	11.6
construction	396	9.0	306	13.9	90	4.1
transport, storage, commun.	334	7.6	190	8.6	144	6.5
wholesale and retail, restaurants and hotels	625	14.2	250	11.4	375	17.0
education	427	9.7	85	3.9	342	15.5
other (incl. public administrat., defense, health, social work, finance)	1,056	24.0	222	10.1	834	37.9
Total	4,400	100	2,200	100	2,200	100

Sources: employment all: website Belstat; employment by gender: authors’ calculations based on various sources

If our estimates are not far from Belarusian reality, a majority (53%) of all employed females are working in education, public administration, health, social work, and finance and real estate – the latter in Belarus predominantly a state affair, and likely employing about 25,000 women or slightly more than 1%. About 375,000 or 17% of all females may be employed in the other “commercial services”, wholesale

¹⁰ With 35 in 2003, UNDP estimates of the maternity mortality rate were considerably higher, but again also UNDP time series indicated a downward trend (Richardson *et al* 2008).

and retail as well as restaurants and hotels. The share of all female employed working in manufacturing has decreased to less than 12%, whereas the share of males in manufacturing remains above 40%. Overall, we estimate that in Belarus approximately 400,000 women were most recently employed in the equivalent of what we named “commercial services” in our other country reports.

Table 5 presents the female employment shares by industry for 2009. We should emphasize that these outcomes are fully based on our estimates as described above. Education and public administration, health, social work and finance jointly show a large female majority of about 80%; wholesale and retail, restaurants and hotels follow with 60% females, whereas the other four industries have female minorities.

Table 5 Female employment shares by industry, total labour force, Belarus, 2009

	x 1,000	%
agriculture, forestry, fishing	160	39.1
manufacturing	255	22.1
construction	90	22.7
transport, storage, communication	144	43.1
wholesale and retail, restaurants and hotels	375	60.0
education	342	80.1
other (incl. public administration, defense, health, social work, finance)	834	79.0
Total	2,200	50.0

Sources: authors’ calculations based on various sources

Table 6 maps the development of industry shares in total employment in the last two decades, based on Belstat data. The table shows a substantial decrease of the employment share of agriculture, forestry and fishing, with about 5%points per decade, and a slower decrease of manufacturing, which seems to slow down after 2000. After 2000, both construction as well as transport, storage, and communication showed a rebound. The clearest grower is the service industry, wholesale, retail, restaurants, and hotels, with a share more than doubling in 19 years’ time. The considerable expansion in public services employment –education, health, public administration-- in the late 1990s (cf. Brixiová and Volchok 2005) has obviously not sustained throughout the 2000s. After all, the employment share of service-type activities remains limited in Belarus, even in comparison with most other CIS countries.

Table 6 Industry shares in employment, Belarus, 1990, 2000 and 2009

	1990	2000	2009
agriculture, forestry, fishing	19.1	14.1	9.3
manufacturing	30.9	27.6	26.2
construction	11.1	7.0	9.0
transport, storage, communication	6.0	5.8	7.6
wholesale and retail, restaurants, hotels	6.4	11.0	14.2
education	8.4	10.4	9.7
other (incl. public administration, defense, health, social work, finance)	18.1	24.1	24.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: 1990, 2000: Pastore and Verashchagina 2006, 361; 2009: website Belstat

Finally, we should have liked to present an actual picture of the Belarusian labour force by occupational group and gender, but at this point we only found rather outdated statistics, as of 2000: see Table 7. They indicate that by that year with 45% women were (already?) rather well represented in the highest occupational layers, of legislators, senior officials and managers, and with 67% overrepresented among “professionals”.¹¹ The ranks of clerks are largely dominated by females. By contrast, with 16% women made up a low proportion of plant and machine operators and assemblers; their share in craft and related trade workers is rather low too, though not that low compared to for example Ukraine.

Table 7 Female share in occupational groups, Belarus, 2000

	%
legislators, senior officials, managers	45
professionals	67
clerks	88
craft and related trade workers	28
plant & machine operators, assemblers	16
Total	50

Source: UNECE 2009

There are various indications that the female shares in higher-ranked occupations have not been lowered in the 2000s. For instance, an official source states that women in the mid-2000s made up 51% of the staff of scientific institutions (Petkevich 2007). In the next section we will show that by that time over four in five secondary school teachers were women. However, in a country with deep-rooted patriarchal and traditionalist attitudes concerning woman’s roles, women often have not been able to make the “final step” to top-ranking and decision-making positions. Thus, in Belarus the “glass ceiling” seems quite strong (cf. Mitskevich 2010).

2.7. Education and skill levels of the female labour force

2.7.1. Literacy

Traditionally, like in other former Soviet countries literacy has been quite high in Belarus. The country’s adult literacy rate –those age 15 and over that can read and write – in 1999-2006 was, according to the UNDP Human Development Indicators, 98.9%, divided in 99.0% for men and 98.8% for women, of course resulting in nearly 100% women to men parity (UNDP 2008). For 2007 the youth (15-24-year-olds) literacy rate was with 99.8% for young women and 99.7% for young men even higher; these levels had already been reached in 1999 (*MDG Indicator 2.3*, derived from UN MDG Indicators and based on UNESCO data).

¹¹ It is unclear whether the category “professionals” includes “technicians and associate professionals” as distinguished normally in occupational statistics. This would expand the occupations covered from, for example, secondary and tertiary education teachers and high-skilled medical staff to primary school teachers and nurses. The presented table has also left out the categories “service, shop, sales workers”, “skilled agricultural and fishery workers”, and “elementary occupations”.

2.7.2. Education of girls

Belarus's spending on education has fallen relatively since independence, and its high level has not been maintained. In 2000-2007, public expenditure on education was 9.3% of total government expenditure, one of the lowest shares in CIS countries (UNDP 2009). The country's education system is centrally managed and controlled (ETF 2010). Government-mandated textbooks contain a heavily propagandized version of history and other subjects. All schools, including private institutions, are considered political bodies that must follow state orders and cannot be headed by opposition members. The education minister has the right to appoint and dismiss the heads of private educational institutions. In October 2009, Deputy Education Minister Tatsiana Kavalyova stated that ideology remained "the backbone" of education in the country. She also noted that every educational institution maintained an ideology department. In 2009 the government continued to ban teachers and democratic activists from promoting the wider use of the Belarusian language (website UNICEF Belarus). Education is free, universal, and compulsory during 10 years from entrance age 6 (primary school, preschool is not compulsory) until graduation age 15. As a matter of fact, in 2005 school life expectancy was 10.4 years for both sexes, thus somewhat longer than compulsory duration, showing that many pupils stay at school till fully finishing secondary education at age 16 (UIS 2010).

Education appears to be the area in which gender equality in Belarus has been most fully achieved (Government Belarus 2005, 19). After 2000, the combined gross enrolment rate in Belarusian education went up to nearly 100%, like in 2005: 99% for females and 100% for males -- or a women to parity of 99% (UNDP 2008; WHO 2009). Preschool education has gained massive popularity and the net enrollment rate in preschool has increased considerably after 1998. It is currently high, also higher than in most other CIS countries: a net enrollment rate in 2005 of 89.3%, with boys' enrollment a fraction higher (89.8%) than girls' (88.8%) (UIS 2010).

Primary education is included in what is called general secondary education, including primary school (years 1-4), basic school (years 5-9), and complete secondary education (years 10-11). After finishing basic school, vocational training as well as education at specialized institutions can be followed. Like in the former Soviet system, vocational training (VET) is highly valued and emphasized. The development of new VET standards is currently underway, oriented towards broad specialist training (ETF 2010). The VET system includes vocational schools, vocational lyceums and vocational colleges. Specialized institutions include technical schools, colleges, schools-colleges of arts, gymnasium-colleges of arts, professional technical colleges, linguistic gymnasiums-colleges, and higher colleges (website Government / education in Belarus). The net enrollment rate in primary education is rather high with a slightly higher enrollment of boys: in 2005 90.8% for boys and 87.9% for girls, or 97% women to men parity. In that year, however, boys' survival rate to the last primary grade, 98.5%, was somewhat lower than girls' score of 100%, pointing at girls' overall good learning capacities. Since 1990, survival rates have been constantly near 100%, with mostly a slight advantage for girls. By contrast, in 2005 with 97.2% the primary completion rate of boys was nearly 5%points higher than girls' 92.6% (UIS 2010), most likely as (poor) parents take girls in rural areas out of school before completion, unfortunately a near-universal phenomenon (cf. UNICEF 2005). It is interesting to note that teaching in primary schools is nearly exclusively a female job: in 2005 99.3% of primary school teachers were women (UIS 2010).

In the 2000s, secondary school enrollment -- in international terms, meaning enrollment in years 5 to 11-- has substantially increased in Belarus, for girls and boys alike. In 2005 the gross secondary enrollment rate was slightly higher for girls than for boys: in 2005 96.9% against 95.3%, thus 102% women to men parity (UIS 2010). The same women to men parity was reported for 2007 (UN MDG Indicators). With 8.9

: 1 in 2005, the pupil-teacher ratio in Belarus is extremely low in secondary education. Secondary teaching is also for a large part a female job: in 2005 over four in five (80.2%) secondary school teachers were women (UIS 2010).

Belarusian tertiary education has, notably in the beta sciences, deserved a good international reputation. There are altogether 57 higher education establishments, of which 43 state-owned (among which 28 universities), 13 private and two run by religious organisations. The government claims that only the very best students can study at state cost; full-time students with positive grades receive a monthly allowance. Though Belarus does not officially participate in the Bologna process, reforms have been carried out to bring studies in line with a two-level Bachelor and Master system as realised throughout Europe. At the same time the old 5-year curriculum is still in use. In the 2000s, enrollment in tertiary education has grown considerably, and with 34 students per 1,000 inhabitants in 2008 Belarus had a rather high rate considering its GNP per capita level. This rate implies that about 45% of the eligible five-year group after secondary education has enrolled in tertiary studies, thus about doubling the enrollment rate of 1999 (sources: ETF 2010, website Permanent Mission – higher education; website Belstat, graduates distribution). University-level education has been “feminized”, with young women enrolling in considerable larger amounts than their male peers. Traditionally more females than males studied in Belarus’s higher education, but the women to men parity rate kept on increasing here, from 111% in 1991, via 132% in 2000, to 141% in 2007. The traditional gender division, however, is still strongly visible, with female shares of 69-74% in teacher-training, economics, law, and –though less familiar in West Europeans-- medicine, while men comprise 71% of those studying science and technology and 69% of those studying architecture and construction (Government Belarus 2005; Petkevich 2007; UN MDG Indicators).

Like for other CIS countries, most outspokenly for Ukraine (see our Ukraine country report), for Belarus it has been found that in particular tertiary education bears the inheritance of the plan economy of the Soviet era with its emphasis on heavy industry. Academical curriculae are suggested to be biased towards the beta sciences and engineering, whereas formation of qualifications in business, law, and social sciences is lagging behind. Skill shortages in the latter fields may hamper the shift from agriculture and industry towards services, albeit in Belarus occurring at a slower pace than elsewhere in CIS countries. Within the services industries, such skill shortages mostly afflict modern and expanding firms (Brixiová *et al* 1999; Brixiová and Volchok 2004, 2005; World Bank 2009f). By contrast, in the 2000s the numbers of university graduates in business/economics, arts/humanities/social science and law showed the highest growth rates, higher than those in technical/engineering (website Belstat, graduates distribution). It is possible that the bias at stake is actually being corrected by students’ preferences.

2.7.3. Female skill levels

Table 8 (next page) presents the division for 2008 of the economically active population of Belarus (aged 15-65) by gender and educational attainment,¹² based on authors’ calculations using various sources and following the ISCED division. Due to the limited amount of available information, the insecurity margins hidden in this table are considerable. Yet, we judge our exercise worthwhile as it may improve our estimates of the size of the target group of our project. The table first clarifies that in international perspective the Belarusian population has a rather high educational level. Second, that women are better represented at the highest educational level (ISCED 5-6, university level), with women to men parity at

¹² Note that these levels indicate the educational/skills level of the economically active, *not* the skills demanded in the workplace.

118%. This gap was already visible in the 1990s and has increased since then (cf. Pastore and Verashchagina 2006). By contrast, males are more represented at the specialized secondary level (ISCED 3-4), with skills largely obtained through vocational courses. Here, women to men parity is 82%. If we attach a 1 to 5 ranking to the five levels, starting with 1 for ISCED X-0, the outcomes show a minimal advantage for females: the overall female rating is 3.62, the male one 3.61.¹³

Table 8 Total labour force by highest level of education completed and by gender, Belarus, 2009

	all		male		female	
	x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%	x 1,000	%
no education completed (ISCED X-0)	-	-	-	-	-	-
basic level (incompl. second.) (ISCED 1-2)	220	5.0	120	5.5	100	4.5
secondary level, general (ISCED 3)	2,265	51.5	1,114	51.8	1,151	52.3
secondary level, specialized (ISCED 3-4)	965	21.9	530	24.1	435	19.8
tertiary level (ISCED 5-6)	950	21.6	436	19.8	514	23.4
Total	4,400	100.0	2,200	100.0	2,200	100.0

Sources: authors' calculations based on website Belstat and other sources

We can now produce an estimate of the size of the target group of the DECISIONS FOR LIFE project for Belarus, the girls and young women aged 15-29, working in urban areas in the equivalent of what we named "commercial services" in our other country reports. The current total size of the female labour force aged 15-29 in Belarus can be estimated at 600,000. Given an urbanisation rate of 74%, about 444,000 girls and young women are living and working in urban areas. Of this 440,000, slightly more than one in five¹⁴ or about 95,000 girls and young women can be estimated to belong to our target group as they worked in commercial services. Some 40,000 to 45,000 (depending on the economic conditions) girls and young women will enter into commercial services employment in the next five years.

2.8. Wages and working conditions of the target group

2.8.1. Wages

We already noted the substantial wages allowed in Belarus since 1995, that largely outpaced increases in labour productivity. Nevertheless, in contrast to other CIS countries authorities and (state) firms have generally avoided large wage arrears (Brixiová and Volchok 2004). Though up-to-date wage information for Belarus is rather scant, it is possible to give a rough picture of wages by gender, and thus an indication of the magnitude of the gender pay gap:¹⁵ see Table 9 (next page). The wage gap is smallest in agriculture and largest in manufacturing. Based on the figures presented we can estimate the average pay gap in the non-manufacturing sectors (services, education, government) for 2008 at 27%.

¹³ Compared to the other three CIS countries under scrutiny in our project, the female rate for Belarus is second after the Ukrainian female score (3.69), while the male rate for Belarus is highest, slightly higher than the male rates for Ukraine (3.60) and Azerbaijan (3.59).

¹⁴ We calculate with a 4% points overrepresentation of girls and young women aged 15-29 in commercial services compared to women over age 29.

¹⁵ Using the international standard formula for the gender pay (or wage) gap: ((wage men – wage women) : wage men) x100).

Table 9 Average (monthly) wages by industry and by gender, Belarus, 2008, in 1,000 BYR

	total	male	female	<i>m/f gap</i>
Agriculture and fishing	667	694	624	10.1
All other industries	1,035	1,240	871	29.8
Of which manufacturing	1,091	1,284	859	33.1
Total	987	1,148	848	25.1

Source: ILO Laborsta

Between 2000 and 2008, the average nominal wage increase was 959%, divided in 988% for men and 876% for women. In the 2000s the overall gender pay gap in Belarus in the end has been quite stable: from 25.4% in 2000 it grew to 28.8% in 2004, as to return to 25.1% in 2008. The persistency of the pay gap is the more disappointing for women, as at the same time they “repaired” their arrears in education and in education even took a slight advantage compared to men. These outcomes are confirmed by detailed analyses, concluding to a strong increase of the gender pay gap between 1996 and 2004, in the last four years turning out in particular disadvantageous for women in the upper half of the income distribution. This evidence indicates that women in Belarus have profited considerably less than men from better education. Especially for better qualified jobs they have been confronted with job discrimination – with men “closing the ranks”. Underneath this disappointing result a massive process of horizontal segregation has taken place, which has led an increasing number of women to leave well-paid sub-sectors of manufacturing like the ICT sector. At the same time many relatively high-skilled women entered into low-wage public service jobs like in education and health. Between 2004 and 2008, these labour market changes may have slowed down, resulting in a somewhat smaller pay gap, but the “glass ceiling” likely remains in place. High-skilled women in Belarus tend to put more weight to their professional growth, which may make the clash with prevailing stereotypes more grim (cf. Pastore and Verashchagina 2006, 2007).

2.8.2. Working conditions

The Belarusian law establishes minimum conditions for workplace safety and worker health; however, in 2009 employers are reported to often ignoring these standards. Workers at many heavy machinery plants did not wear minimal safety gear. There is a state Labour Inspectorate, but it obviously lacks authority to enforce employer compliance and often ignored violations (US Dept of State 2010). The authorities do only publish very limited information on working conditions. Occupational injuries is the main regularly reported issue to the ILO. The statistics in question show a gradual decrease of reported fatal incidents, from 258 (6.4 per 100,000 employed) in 2000 to 185 (5.1 per 100,000) in 2008. In that year, casualties among men (172 or 10.2 per 100,000) are relatively nearly 15-fold those among women (13 or 0.7 per 100,000). The incidence of reported non-fatal cases fell even more rapidly, and for both sexes with about the same speed. In 2008, in total 7,960 cases were reported (199 per 100,000), falling to 2,815 (78 per 100,000). In this category the gender difference was less outspoken: in 2008 1,985 men (118 per 100,000) got a non-fatal injury, against 830 women (43 per 100,000) (all data: ILO Laborsta).

Working hours, which we could document for most other DECISIONS FOR LIFE countries in detail by industry and gender, are for Belarus only divided for agriculture / forestry / fishing and all other industries, and not at all by gender. In 2008, average monthly hours for agriculture et cetera were set at 177, and for all other industries at 155 (ILO Laborsta). This situation emphasizes the importance of the WageIndicator for Belarus in revealing working hours and other working conditions.

3. Basic information for WageIndicator Questionnaire

3.1. Introduction

Preparations for the DECISIONS FOR LIFE Activities 1.03a and 1.03b have resulted in a number of lists, grouped in this Chapter and to be used in the WageIndicator web-survey for country-specific questions and their analyses. This basic information can be used on-line, but if needed also off-line. The lists contain information on educational categories and ISCED levels (3.2), regions (3.3), ethnic groups (3.4.1) and languages (3.4.2).

3.2. List of educational categories and ISCED levels

Below, a full list of the educational categories used in Belarus, designed for use in the web-survey and including the ISCED levels attached to them, can be found.

Table 10 List of educational categories in Belarus (by 1/1/2010)

ru_BY		Translation ru_BY	ISCED
112101	BLR Pre-school	Дошкольное	0
112102	BLR Primary school (Grades 1-4)	Начальная школа (1 - 4 классы)	1
112103	BLR Basic school (Grades 5-9)	Средняя школа (5 - 9 классы)	2
112104	BLR General Secondary school	Полное среднее образование	3
112105	BLR Specialized Secondary school	Специализированное среднее образование	3
112106	BLR Vocational school	Профессионально-техническое училище	4
112107	BLR Bachelor degree	Степень бакалавра	5
112108	BLR Bachelor degree - Medicine	Степень бакалавра медицины	5
112109	BLR Diploma of Specialist	Дипломированный специалист	5
112110	BLR Master's Degree	Степень магистра	5
112111	BLR Candidate of Science degree	Кандидат наук	6
112112	BLR Doctor of Science	Доктор наук	6

3.3. List of regions

Below, a full draft list of the regions in Belarus, designed for use in the web-survey, can be found.

Table 11 List of regions in Belarus (by 1/1/2010)

ru_BY	ru_BY			Translation ru_BY	Translation ru_BY
1120010000	1120010131	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Baranavicy (Baranovici)	Брестская область	Барановичи
1120010000	1120010832	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Beloozersk	Брестская область	Белоозёрск
1120010000	1120010232	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Bjaroza (Bereza)	Брестская область	Берёза
1120010000	1120010331	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Brest	Брестская область	Брест
1120010000	1120010932	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Gantsevichi	Брестская область	Ганцевичи
1120010000	1120011032	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Drogichin	Брестская область	Дрогичин
1120010000	1120011132	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Zhabinka	Брестская область	Жабинка
1120010000	1120011232	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Ivanovo	Брестская область	Иваново
1120010000	1120010432	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Ivacevici (Ivacevici)	Брестская область	Ивацевичи
1120010000	1120010532	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Kobryn (Kobrin)	Брестская область	Кобрин
1120010000	1120010632	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Luninec	Брестская область	Лунинец
1120010000	1120011332	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Lyahovichi	Брестская область	Ляховичи
1120010000	1120011432	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Malorita	Брестская область	Малорита
1120010000	1120011532	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Mikashevichi	Брестская область	Микашевичи
1120010000	1120010731	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Pinsk	Брестская область	Пинск
1120010000	1120011632	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Pruzhany	Брестская область	Пружаны
1120010000	1120011732	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Stolin	Брестская область	Столин
1120010000	1120019704	BLR Brest	BLR Brest A village (less than 10,000)	Брестская область	Другой город
1120010000	1120019805	BLR Brest	BLR Brest Rural area	Брестская область	Сельская местность
1120020000	1120020832	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Baran	Витебская область	Барань
1120020000	1120020932	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Braslav	Витебская область	Браслав
1120020000	1120020131	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Vitebsk	Витебская область	Витебск
1120020000	1120020232	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Hlybokaye	Витебская область	Глубокое
1120020000	1120021032	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Gorodok	Витебская область	Городок
1120020000	1120020332	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Lepel	Витебская область	Лепель
1120020000	1120021132	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Novolukoml	Витебская область	Новолукомль
1120020000	1120020431	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Navapolatsk	Витебская область	Новополоцк
1120020000	1120020531	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Orsa	Витебская область	Орша
1120020000	1120020632	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Polatsk	Витебская область	Полоцк
1120020000	1120020732	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Pastavy	Витебская область	Поставы
1120020000	1120021232	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Tolochin	Витебская область	Толочин
1120020000	1120029704	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk A village (less than 10,000)	Витебская область	Другой город
1120020000	1120029805	BLR Vitebsk	BLR Vitebsk Rural area	Витебская область	Сельская местность

ru_BY	ru_BY			Translation ru_BY	Translation ru_BY
1120030000	1120030131	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Gomel (Homel)	Гомельская область	Гомель
1120030000	1120030232	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Dobrus	Гомельская область	Добруш
1120030000	1120031032	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Jelsk	Гомельская область	Ельск
1120030000	1120030432	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Zytkevicy	Гомельская область	Житковичи
1120030000	1120030332	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Zlobin	Гомельская область	Жлобин
1120030000	1120030532	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Kalinkavicy	Гомельская область	Калинковичи
1120030000	1120030631	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Mazyr	Гомельская область	Мозырь
1120030000	1120031132	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Petrikov	Гомельская область	Петриков
1120030000	1120030732	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Recyca (Recica)	Гомельская область	Речица
1120030000	1120030832	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Rahacau (Rogacev)	Гомельская область	Рогачёв
1120030000	1120030932	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Svetlahorsk	Гомельская область	Светлогорск
1120030000	1120031232	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Hoiniki	Гомельская область	Хойники
1120030000	1120039704	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel A village (less than 10,000)	Гомельская область	Другой город
1120030000	1120039805	BLR Gomel	BLR Gomel Rural area	Гомельская область	Сельская местность
1120040000	1120040232	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Bjarozauka	Гродненская область	Берёзовка
1120040000	1120040332	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Vaukavysk (Volkovyjsk)	Гродненская область	Волковыск
1120040000	1120040431	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Hrodna (Grodno)	Гродненская область	Гродно
1120040000	1120040532	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Lida	Гродненская область	Лида
1120040000	1120040632	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Masty	Гродненская область	Мосты
1120040000	1120040732	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Navahrudak (Novogrudok)	Гродненская область	Новогрудок
1120040000	1120040132	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Asmjany	Гродненская область	Ошмяны
1120040000	1120041032	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Skidel	Гродненская область	Скидель
1120040000	1120040832	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Slonim	Гродненская область	Слоним
1120040000	1120040932	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Smarhon	Гродненская область	Сморгонь
1120040000	1120041132	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Schuchin	Гродненская область	Щучин
1120040000	1120049704	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno A village (less than 10,000)	Гродненская область	Другой город
1120040000	1120049805	BLR Grodno	BLR Grodno Rural area	Гродненская область	Сельская местность
1120050000	1120050101	BLR Minsk-City	BLR Minsk-City Minsk	Минск	Минск
1120050000	1120050202	BLR Minsk-City	BLR Minsk-City The suburbs of Minsk	Минск	Пригород Минска
1120060000	1120060132	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Berezino	Минская область	Березино
1120060000	1120060331	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Barysau (Borisov)	Минская область	Борисов
1120060000	1120060432	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Vilejka	Минская область	Вилейка
1120060000	1120060232	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Volozhin	Минская область	Воложин
1120060000	1120060532	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Dzjarzynsk	Минская область	Дзержинск

ru_BY	ru_BY			Translation ru_BY	Translation ru_BY
1120060000	1120060632	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Zhodzina	Минская область	Жодино
1120060000	1120061132	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Zaslavl	Минская область	Заславль
1120060000	1120061232	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Kletsk	Минская область	Клецк
1120060000	1120061332	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Kopyl	Минская область	Копыль
1120060000	1120061432	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Logoisk	Минская область	Логойск
1120060000	1120061532	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Luban	Минская область	Любань
1120060000	1120060732	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Marina Horka	Минская область	Марьина Горка
1120060000	1120060832	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Maladзецna (Molodecno)	Минская область	Молодечно
1120060000	1120061632	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Nesvizh	Минская область	Несвиж
1120060000	1120060932	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Slutsk	Минская область	Слуцк
1120060000	1120061732	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Smolevichi	Минская область	Смолевичи
1120060000	1120061031	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Salihorsk	Минская область	Солигорск
1120060000	1120061832	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Starye dorogi	Минская область	Старые Дороги
1120060000	1120061932	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Stolbtcy	Минская область	Столбцы
1120060000	1120062032	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Fanipol	Минская область	Фаниполь
1120060000	1120062132	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Cherven	Минская область	Червень
1120060000	1120069704	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk A village (less than 10,000)	Минская область	Другой город
1120060000	1120069805	BLR Minsk	BLR Minsk Rural area	Минская область	Сельская местность
1120070000	1120070431	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Mahilyow (Mahileu)	Могилёвская область	Бобруйск
1120070000	1120070632	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Bychov	Могилёвская область	Быхов
1120070000	1120070131	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Babruysk	Могилёвская область	Горкі
1120070000	1120070732	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Klimovichi	Могилёвская область	Климовичи
1120070000	1120070832	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Kostukovichy	Могилёвская область	Костюковичи
1120070000	1120070232	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Horki	Могилёвская область	Кричев
1120070000	1120070532	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Asipovichy	Могилёвская область	Могилёв
1120070000	1120070932	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Mstislavl	Могилёвская область	Мстиславль
1120070000	1120070332	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Krychaw (Krichev)	Могилёвская область	Осиповичи
1120070000	1120071032	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Chausy	Могилёвская область	Чаусы
1120070000	1120071132	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Shklov	Могилёвская область	Шклов
1120070000	1120079704	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev A village (less than 10,000)	Могилёвская область	Другой город
1120070000	1120079805	BLR Mogilev	BLR Mogilev Rural area	Могилёвская область	Сельская местность
1129900000	1129942800	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Latvia	За рубежом	Латвия
1129900000	1129944000	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Lithuania	За рубежом	Литва
1129900000	1129961600	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Poland	За рубежом	Польша

ru_BY	ru_BY			Translation ru_BY	Translation ru_BY
1129900000	1129964300	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Russian Federation	За рубежом	Россия
1129900000	1129980400	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Ukraine	За рубежом	Украина
1129900000	1129999900	BLR Abroad	BLR Abroad Other country	За рубежом	Другая страна

3.4. List of languages

Below, a list of the languages most used in Belarus and designed for use in the web-survey, can be found.

Table 12 List of languages in Belarus (by 1/1/2010)

ru_BY	Source list	Translation ru_BY
112001	BLR Belarusian	Белорусская
112002	BLR Russian	Русский
112998	BLR Local dialect	местном диалекте
112999	BLR Other language	другой язык

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 time: (http://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/travmain.sectionReport1?p_lang=en&p_countries=ID&p_sc_id=1001&p_year=2009&p_structure=2) Maternity Protection:
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5. What is WageIndicator?

WageIndicator has websites in 50 countries. In every country, a national website has a free Salary Check. This Check provides detailed information about the wages, on average earned in a wide range of

occupations, taken into account personal characteristics, such as tenure/age, education, supervisory position, region and alike.

Apart from the Salary Check, the websites in many countries have attractive web-tools, such as Minimum Wage Checks, DecentWorkCheck, Gross-Net Earnings Check, and alike. In addition, most websites have content about wages, working conditions, labor standards and related topics. Each country has at least one website. Multilingual countries have two or more websites. In addition, many countries have websites for target groups, for example women or youth. The project website is www.wageindicator.org.

Worldwide, the national WageIndicator websites attract large numbers of web-visitors. The websites are consulted by workers for their job mobility decisions, annual performance talks or wage negotiations. They are consulted by school pupils, students or re-entrant women facing occupational choices, or by employers in small and medium sized companies when recruiting staff or negotiating wages with their employees.

In return for all free information provided, the web-visitors are encouraged to complete a web-survey, which takes 10 to 20 minutes. The survey has detailed questions about earnings, benefits, working conditions, employment contract, training, as well as questions about education, occupation, industry, and household characteristics. This web-survey is comparable across all countries. The web-survey is continuously posted at all WageIndicator websites, of course in the national language(s) and adapted to country-specific issues, where needed. The data from the web-survey are used for the calculations, underlying the Salary Check. For occupations with at least 50 observations in the national database a salary indication can be calculated. The Salary Checks are updated annually.

The project started in 2000 in the Netherlands with a large-scale, paper-based survey to collect data on women's wages. In 2001 the first WageIndicator website with a Salary Check and a web-survey was launched. Since 2004, websites were launched in European countries, in North and South America, in South-Africa, and in countries in Asia. All large economies of the world currently have a WageIndicator website, among which the USA, the Russian Federation, China, India and Brazil. From 2009 onwards, websites are being launched in more African countries, as well as in Indonesia and in a number of post-soviet countries. More information about the WageIndicator Foundation and its activities can be found at www.wageindicator.org.
