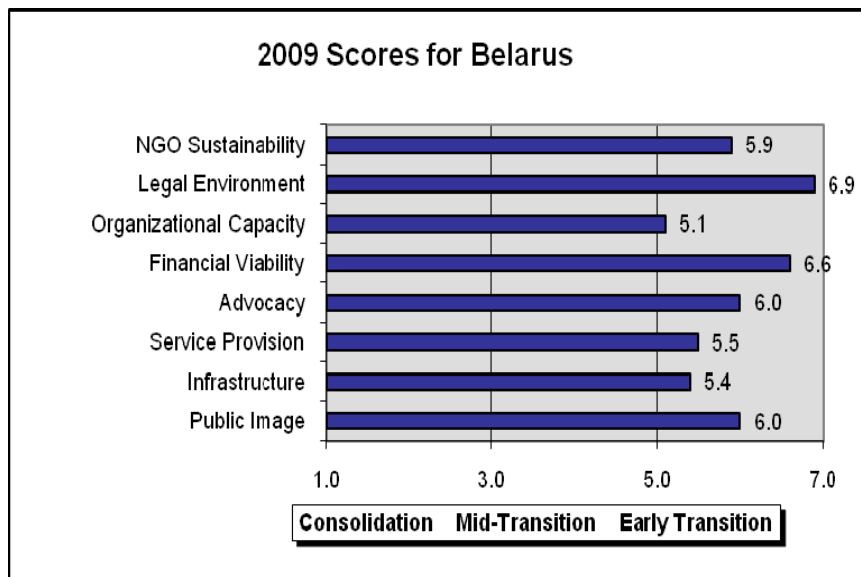


## BELARUS



**Capital:** Minsk

**Polity:**  
Republic in name

**Population:**  
9,612,632 (July 2010 est.)

**GDP per capita (PPP):**  
\$11,600 (2009 est.)

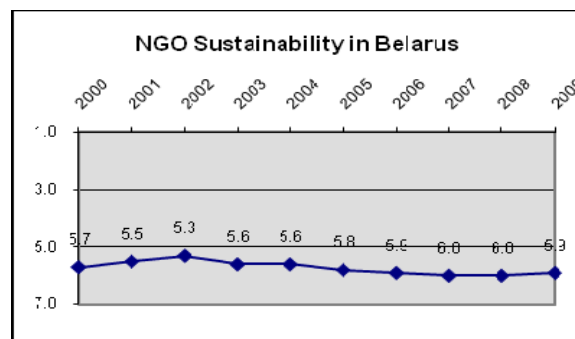
### NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 5.9

According to the Ministry of Justice, 2,216 NGOs are registered in Belarus, in addition to twenty-two unions and associations of NGOs and eighty foundations.<sup>3</sup> Some NGOs adapt to the hostile environment by registering as institutions or associations, which are not counted for statistical purposes as NGOs. The number of registered NGOs is decreasing. Fifty new NGOs were registered in the first six months of 2009, while about the same number of NGOs self-dissolved.

The government exercises strict control over NGOs. Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code, which imposes criminal liability for participating in the activities of an unregistered organization, is still in force but the government has publicly stated its readiness to review it.

The world financial crisis affected the NGO sector positively in one respect—NGOs calculated their 2009 project budgets in foreign currency, and the 20 percent devaluation of the Belarusian ruble in January made pay in the NGO sector more attractive in comparison with other sectors. Social service NGOs have started considering local fundraising as a potentially significant source of funding. For civic

education and human rights NGOs, local fundraising remains problematic. NGOs must register all of their project money at the Department of Humanitarian Activities. The government began requiring that NGOs obtain letters of support from the ministries relevant to their projects.



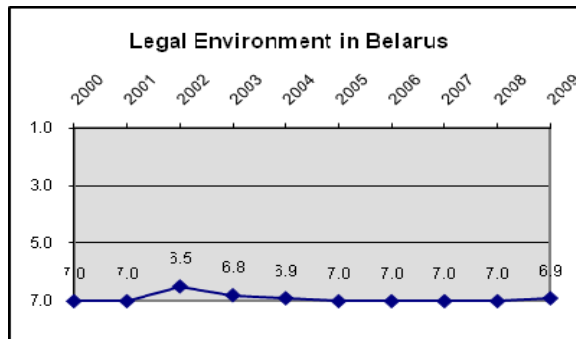
NGOs have become more tenacious in pursuing channels of communication with the government. They advocated for NGO participation in government coordinating and advisory commissions and conducted several advocacy campaigns, which unfortunately did not achieve positive results. Coalitions and networks engaged in more active networking;

the year 2009 witnessed the sixth Congress of the Assembly of Democratic NGOs.

NGOs provide unique services, but there is no state mechanism to contract social services out

to NGOs and NGOs do not recover costs. Though NGOs became more active in electronic media, the public is still unclear about the concept of an NGO.

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 6.9



The business community noted favorable changes in registration of noncommercial organizations of entrepreneurs as NGOs, funds, and unions. NGOs founded by known activists continued to be refused registration. Lawsuits on refusals of NGO registration were generally decided in favor of the registration body. The following NGOs were twice refused registration: the Assembly of Democratic NGOs, the human rights NGOs Nasha Vesna and Berasteiskaya Vyasna, youth NGOs Social Democrats and Modes, and cultural and educational NGO Spadchyna in Grodno.

The Ministry of Justice declared its intent to simplify the NGO registration procedure and to amend the Law on NGOs. The Chamber of Representatives considered these amendments, which independent experts say expand the range of legitimate grounds for refusal of registration.

Article 193-1 of the Criminal Law still subjects the activities of unregistered NGOs to criminal punishment. Under this article, the prosecutor issued two warnings each to the Union of Poles in Belarus and the Brest affiliate of the Young Front. Later in 2009 the administration declared its readiness to review Article 193-1 and to change the criminal punishment to administrative punishment, but has not changed the law to date.

Presidential Decree No. 1 introduced the simplified declarative principle of registration on February 1 for all economic entities, including noncommercial organizations such as institutions and associations. Some NGOs such as the Right Alliance, Green Network, the Association of Small and Medium Business, and the Association of Leaders and Publishers of Regional Press used this opportunity to legalize their activities.

Registered NGOs must have a legal address in nonresidential premises. NGOs receive no discounts for renting state property. Most NGOs whose activities were not designated by a special state commission as having a “humanitarian nature” saw their rents increase tenfold in the past year and a half. In October, Presidential Edict No. 518 “On some issues of rent and free use of property” was issued (it entered into force in 2010). According to the edict, NGOs will have rental discounts. The Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship participated in developing the draft edict.

Property owners and government representatives found excuses not to provide space for NGOs’ events. Local officials did not provide space for the Movement for Freedom’s meetings aimed at nominating delegates to Euroforum, a youth network, and NGOs had to postpone the conference “Forum of Eastern Partnership Civil Society: Agenda for Belarus.” For the first time in several years, however, NGOs managed to hold major events: the sixth Congress of the Assembly of Democratic NGOs, the fourth Congress of the Belarusians of the World organized by the NGO Batskauschyna (Fatherland), and the conference “Participation of Belarusian Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Initiative.”

Available local lawyers (though they are few), the increased competence of NGO activists, and

special Internet courses meet NGOs' needs for legal support.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.1

Most NGOs actively seek to build constituencies for their initiatives. For example, the NGO Third Sector's e-newsletter last year was 90 percent targeted at NGO representatives, while now 60 percent of recipients are not affiliated with an NGO. NGOs actively involve young people, pensioners, and university lecturers. Cooperation of NGOs with state institutions is expanding.

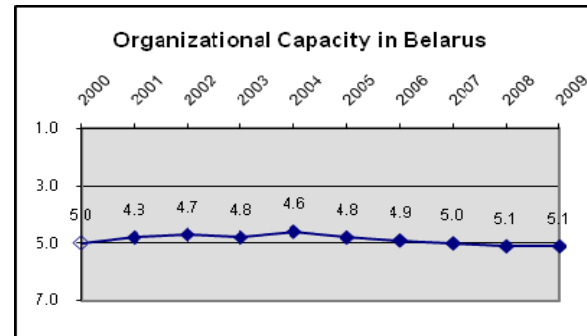
Strategic planning has become the norm for bigger, mature NGOs. Some NGOs perform strategic planning together with donors. Regional NGOs, however, are less successful in having a clear understanding of their missions and development strategies. Office rent problems and the lack of diversified sources of funding demonstrate the weakness of NGOs' strategic plans.

Most NGOs have no clear division of functions between governing and executive bodies. The governing bodies of the Assembly of Democratic NGOs and the Minsk Capital Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers each consist of about fifty people who do not exercise real oversight.

Transparency of NGO activities is low primarily due to the hostile legal environment, with some exceptions. The NGO Health into XXI Century publishes the results of its activities and financial reports on its website. Most NGOs rely on one donor, which fosters a lack of transparency.

## FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.6

Fundraising is not a regular practice for most NGOs, with some exceptions. The NGO Health into XXI Century raises funds for assistance to sick children. The Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs established a volunteers' camp by investing funds raised from a factory. Mothers against Drugs from Pinsk raised money

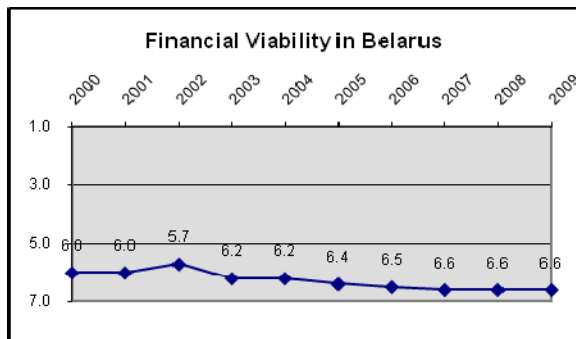


Fewer staff moved from NGOs to businesses. People working for NGOs received reasonable financial incentives from ongoing projects, but NGOs have limited permanent staff. Donors introduced restrictions on the amount of project funds that can be spent on salaries. More volunteers are involved in NGOs' activities and they are better managed. Several NGOs base their activities exclusively on voluntary work, like the Grodno branch of Belarusian Children's Hospice. Red Cross branches created effective volunteer teams. The ABC of Entrepreneurship in Minsk had considerable growth in the number of volunteers.

Space rental and utility payments are unreasonably high for NGOs. In many cases NGOs rent office space only to have a legal address. For example, an NGO in Gomel rents three square meters of a utility room in a stairway. NGOs' equipment is aging, especially in the regions. Purchasing office equipment has become an unpopular budget item for most donors.

from local businesses, bought a house, and equipped it as a rehabilitation center for drug abusers. The Velcom mobile phone company sponsored the international contest "Wings of Childhood" organized by the Belarusian Association of Children and Young People with Disabilities, in partnership with the trade union

of Belarusian State University. The Belarusian Children's Hospice demonstrates effective fundraising practices. Pro-democracy, human rights, and civic education NGOs fail to raise local funds. Local authorities harass the few businessmen who sponsor ads of NGOs' events in the independent press, putting their businesses at risk.



Many leading NGOs successfully raise funds from international donors, but only projects that address the state's national priorities are able to complete the obligatory registration procedure for donor funds. Membership dues are the only legal source of funding for many NGOs, covering a minor part of their expenses.

Registered NGOs submit annual reports on their activities and volunteer projects to registering bodies, and provide accurate reports to donors.

**ADVOCACY: 6.0**

Lines of communication between NGOs and policymakers are growing due to the participation of NGOs in state-created public advisory councils. The presidential administration created one such council. A public coordinating council on mass media issues has also been formed. The Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship initiated the creation of a public advisory council on anti-corruption issues.

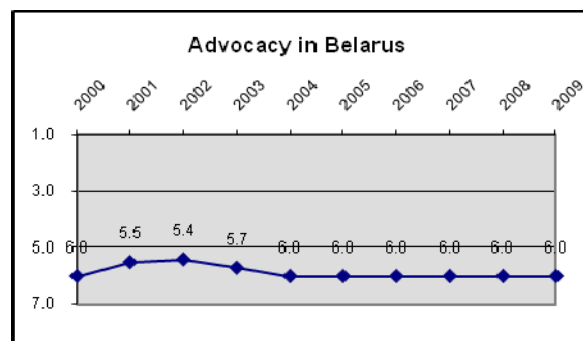
Councils on the issues of people with disabilities have been formed in Gomel and Pinsk, a Council on the Development of Entrepreneurship has been formed in Vitebsk, and the Minsk executive committee created an oblast council on NGOs and political parties.

But often even NGO leaders are not fully aware of their organization's finances. NGOs do not practice independent financial audits. Leading NGOs are developing sound financial management systems. When regional branches of the Belarusian Association of Children with Disabilities experienced serious problems in financial management, specialists went to the regions to conduct trainings.

As in past years, the state funds the activities of GONGOs like the Belarusian Union of Young People Belaya Rus and Pioneer Organization, but such state funding is decreasing.

State organs contract NGO specialists and experts, but the money paid for the service goes to the specialist and not to the NGO she or he represents. The only possibility for an NGO to earn such income is to establish an independent commercial structure. A number of NGOs, primarily NGOs of people with disabilities, have established commercial structures, but they are at risk because of the financial crisis, the unfavorable business development situation, and the low competitiveness of their products. The Minsk branch of the International NGO of Ecologists built and sold houses made of straw building blocks, virtually the only success story in 2009.

Cases of local advocacy are becoming considerably fewer, however, due to the restrictive environment and because NGOs are too weak to engage sufficient numbers of active citizens.



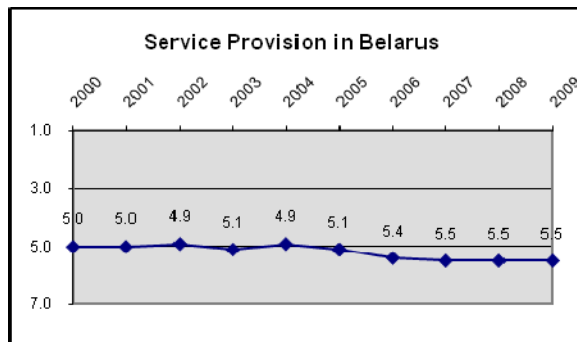
Many independent ecological and human rights organizations were not allowed to take part in public hearings on the construction of a nuclear power station in the town of Ostrovets. Russian nuclear power expert Andrei Ozharovski, coordinator of the Ecoprotection group, was kept under arrest for seven days for hooliganism in Ostrovets before the opening of public hearings.

NGOs conducted a series of public awareness campaigns. Amnesty International conducted a campaign for the abolition of the death penalty. The Assembly of Democratic NGOs conducted the campaign “Stop 193-1” for the abolition of criminal liability for the activities of unregistered NGOs. Organizations of people with disabilities are lobbying for the accession of Belarus to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The fund named after Lev Sapeha is lobbying for the laws on local self-government to conform to the norms and principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The NGO Protection of Birds is lobbying at the international level for the absorption of greenhouse gases through the preservation of marshes. “Budzma!” launched a national cultural revival campaign.

The government made changes in over twenty regulations at the initiative of entrepreneurs’ associations. The Belarusian Association of Journalists managed to make several changes to the new Law on Mass Media (although international pressure also played an important role). NGO ACT initiatives to promote social contracting resulted in research on the issue by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. NGO coalitions lack solidarity and public support. NGOs have weak capacity to use available advocacy mechanisms; NGOs did not submit a single public complaint to the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention in Belarus, even though there were numerous violations of the convention.

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) in cooperation with the Brussels-based Office for Democratic Belarus (ODB) put forward a policy proposal “What Eastern Partnership Should Bring to Belarus,” addressing how the Eastern Partnership framework may contribute to the social transformation and Europeanization of Belarus.<sup>4</sup> The proposal received broad media coverage and both the EU and the Belarus government drew from its ideas.

**SERVICE PROVISION: 5.5**



NGOs provide basic social services and services in areas such as economic development and environmental protection. The variety of services is not growing due to the restrictive legal environment, but some NGOs, especially in the social sphere, are providing services with higher quality and an individual approach to the client. These services are in demand by NGOs’ target populations. Belarusian Children’s

Hospice started offering the service of respite care for terminally ill children. The Belarusian Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities introduced new techniques for care of children with disabilities. ACE produces regular publications on civic education. BISS conducts research and issues publications related to social and economic issues.

The sector’s product line has only slightly diversified. Business associations expanded their seminars to the student community and initiated a club of young entrepreneurs in Vitebsk. More consulting services and information are available on NGOs’ websites.<sup>5</sup>

NGOs are gradually shifting to providing services that reflect the needs and priorities of their constituents. Often leading NGOs implement activities after having assessed needs,

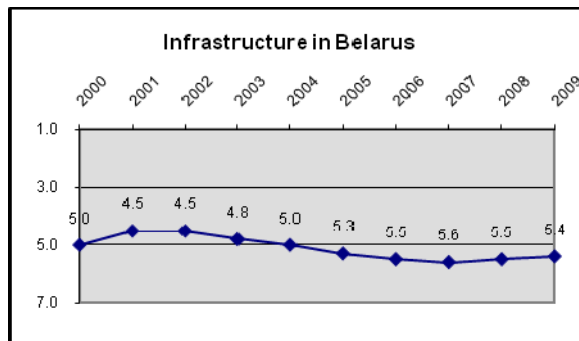
though legal restrictions and lack of resources limit the possibility of conducting surveys. Some NGOs' services are aimed at social changes, and constituents are reluctant to use them openly. The world financial crisis highlighted new needs, such as the need to provide foreign language training, but even in large towns NGOs are not ready to meet such needs. In small towns and villages markets for NGO services are nonexistent. NGOs are increasingly providing goods and services to constituencies broader than their own memberships. Church organizations and Belarusian State Pedagogical University invite NGO experts on women's issues and disability issues to conduct lectures and provide

consulting. The Belarusian Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities possesses unique literature and technologies; even the presidential administration refers people who seek assistance in disability issues to this NGO.

Even though some goods and services are in demand, NGOs fail to recover costs by charging fees for services. The procedure is so confusing that NGOs prefer to avoid cost recovery.

The government at the national and local levels recognizes the value that NGOs can add in the provision of social services, but in most cases this recognition is symbolic.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.4



NGOs, especially in the regions, feel the need for ISOs and resource centers. Local NGOs that position themselves as resource centers implement unregistered projects and their activities lack transparency. In Grodno Oblast, resource centers are in five or six towns, but only a narrow circle of NGOs has access to them. The former association of resource centers is in the process of discussing options for the continuation of its operations. Leading NGOs such as Green Network have started providing resource center services. The consortium Euro-Belarus and the Third Sector have expanded informational services for their members and partners.

NGO Vzaimoponimanie is redistributing funds provided by the German foundation Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft. This experience, the first of its kind in Belarus, could be a valuable model for other organizations. Local

NGOs re-grant small sums among initiative groups and other NGOs, but the selection criteria are not transparent and information cannot circulate openly because these activities are not official.

In March the Assembly of Democratic NGOs held its congress with 330 participating NGOs, the first such event since 2004. In September the Association of Civic Education held the Week of Non-Formal Education with events in five oblasts; for the first time, other NGOs and business education organizations took part. The consortium Euro-Belarus involved nine organizations in preparation for the Civil Society Forum in Brussels. At a November conference, NGOs discussed the agenda of the Forum of Civil Society of Eastern Partnership for Belarus.

Professional capacity building organizations provide good quality services. NGOs such as the Belarusian Association of Children with Disabilities and the Belarusian Association of Journalists train their own trainers in capacity building. Last year new training topics responded to the need to develop capacity in the use of new media. Capacity-building NGOs discussed creating an association as well as developing the market for their services. Intersectoral partnerships are still underdeveloped. One factor is the requirement to register NGO projects at the Department of

Humanitarian Activities and to obtain letters of support from relevant ministries. Social service organizations are more successful compared with other types of NGOs in registering their projects, but even they do not have officially

signed partnership agreements with ministries. Social NGOs like Belarusian Children's Hospice provide the rare examples of partnerships with businesses that result in financial support.

## **PUBLIC IMAGE: 6.0**

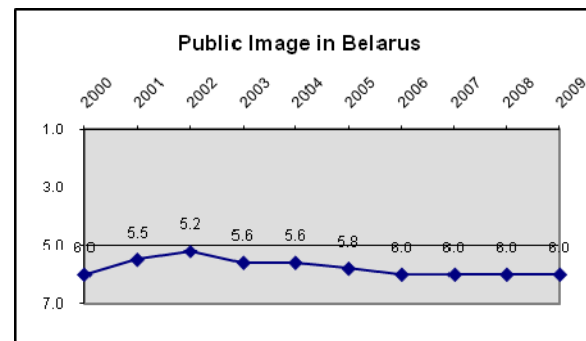
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Most NGO activities are not covered or only slightly covered by the media. When NGOs manage to create news, journalists from state-owned media prefer not to mention their names. Not only is there an unwritten rule to hush up the role of NGOs, but NGOs themselves fail to work effectively with journalists. Most NGOs lack professional PR specialists. Only a few NGOs possess a public communications strategy. Exceptions include the Association of Bird Protection and Belarusian Children's Hospice.

Media covered the events of the Association of People with Disabilities in Wheelchairs and the Week of Non-Formal Education organized by the Association of Civic Education. Electronic media covered some Green Network events. The public often does not consider such activities to be NGO activities, though. Sometimes NGOs manage to not only attract attention to their causes but to receive full media coverage.

Many well-known NGOs, such as ACT, Syomaya Hran (Seventh Facet), and the Third Sector, created their own Internet portals and made efforts to reach beyond their members and target groups. Web platforms operated by activists (Generation.by), young professionals (CDMAG), and an association of NGOs (Budzma!) also try to reach broader target groups. IPM Research Centre's web platform (<http://research.by>) provides information and analytical support to Belarusian and foreign companies and international organizations. Many NGOs fail to inform the public regularly about themselves and their activities. Registered

NGOs often fail to do so because of weak PR capacity and lack of resources. Unregistered initiative groups fear detection by law enforcement. Most funding for NGOs comes from abroad, so NGOs' PR efforts are aimed primarily at foreign donors. This is especially true for unregistered initiative groups whose missions often do not address community priorities.



Authorities engage in dialogue with NGOs while taking decisions on key economic and social development issues, even if international organizations and the changing political environment often drive such dialogue. Public advisory and coordinating councils often have little influence on decisions. IPM Research Centre and BISS facilitate a dialogue on economic and social development issues with civil society structures and state organizations. IFLT actively participates in forums related to Eastern Partnership, and the Research Institute of the Ministry of Labor invited an ACT representative to help with the development of a social contracting framework.