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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

### Seventh periodic report submitted by Belarus under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2019\* \*\*

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

\*\* The annexes to the present report may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.

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## Introduction

1. Under articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Belarus hereby submits its seventh periodic report on implementation of the provisions of the Covenant.
2. The report has been prepared in response to the list of issues addressed to Belarus by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights prior to submission of the seventh periodic report (E/C.12/BLR/QPR/7) and taking into account the Committee's concluding observations.
3. The report contains information on legislative, administrative and other measures taken in Belarus to give effect to the provisions of the Covenant.

### A. Issues of particular relevance

4. In accordance with its Constitution, Belarus recognizes the precedence of the generally recognized principles of international law and ensures that its legislation is consistent with them.
5. Legislation is subject to a mandatory legal review of its compliance with the Constitution and with the international agreements to which Belarus is a party. The Constitutional Court carries out a mandatory preliminary review to decide, before they are signed by the Head of State, whether laws adopted by the parliament are in conformity with the Constitution and with the international legal instruments ratified by Belarus.
6. The Constitutional Court has used the Covenant in its review of laws, including the following:
  - Pensions Act
  - Act on Preventing the Spread of Diseases Posing a Danger to Public Health and HIV
  - Social Services Act
  - Act on State Benefits for Families Raising Children
  - Act on Guarantees of Social Protection for Orphaned Minors, Minors Deprived of Parental Care and Young Persons Who Were Orphaned or Deprived of Parental Care as Minors
  - Public Health and Disease Control Act
7. Belarusian legislation at all levels is consistent with the relevant rules of international human rights law. The basic provisions of the Covenant are incorporated into national legislation, which explains why the Covenant has not been invoked directly in judicial decisions.
8. A new version of the Code on the Judicial System and the Status of Judges has been in force since 24 January 2017. Pursuant to article 127 of the Code and in order to strengthen the judicial system and ensure the independence and autonomy of the judiciary, a new judicial body has been established, the National Conference of Judges. Its membership includes Constitutional Court judges, Supreme Court judges, 20 judges of other courts of general jurisdiction from each of the country's provinces and a further 20 from the city of Minsk, elected by the relevant judicial conferences of the provincial (and Minsk city) courts and provincial (and Minsk city) economic courts. The National Council of Judges, elected by the Conference, is competent to discuss judicial practice and the development of legislation, study and disseminate good practices of the judicial authorities and come up with recommendations to enhance their work.
9. Belarus is a committed and consistent supporter of the prohibition and elimination of forced labour and is a party to the fundamental International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on forced labour.

10. Article 41 of the Constitution prohibits forced labour, except for work or service required by a court sentence or in accordance with a law proclaiming a state of emergency or war. The definition of forced labour according to article 13 of the Labour Code is work exacted from a worker under the menace of any kind of coercion, including as a means of political coercion or education or as a punishment for holding or expressing political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social or economic system, as a method of mobilizing and using labour for purposes of economic development, as a means of labour discipline or as a punishment for having participated in strikes.

11. Forced labour does not include work carried out as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law under the supervision of the public authorities responsible for upholding the rule of law during the execution of sentences or work carried out pursuant to the law on military service or emergencies.

12. Presidential Decree No. 3 of 2 April 2015 on the prevention of social dependency has undergone major conceptual changes. In accordance with Presidential Decree No. 1 of 27 January 2018 amending Presidential Decree No. 3, which entered into force on 25 January 2018, substantial amendments were introduced to Decree No. 3, and a new version of the instrument was presented under a new name. Decree No. 3 of 2 April 2015 was renamed the decree on the promotion of employment. It is especially noteworthy that the provisions concerning the tax levied on employable non-working persons to finance State expenditure, and in particular the provisions concerning the initiation of administrative proceedings for failure to pay the tax, have been fully removed from the latest version of the Decree. In accordance with Decree No. 1 and Presidential Order No. 111rp of 5 July 2017, citizens who paid the tax are to be reimbursed the amounts they report having paid. Approximately 80 per cent of the tax collected has now been paid back from the budget.

13. The provisions stipulating that persons outside the labour force who are capable of working must pay for a number of public utilities (hot water, gas and heating) at rates unsubsidized by the State are not incompatible with the Covenant.

14. These rules are intended to encourage citizens who may be involved in the shadow economy and do not wish to work legally and also citizens with an antisocial lifestyle to seek legal employment or self-employment with payment of taxes, which will enable such citizens to fully enjoy the protective mechanisms provided by the State in accordance with labour and social legislation.

15. To the greatest extent possible, groups of persons who do not work for reasons beyond their control or owing to special life circumstances have been excluded from the group of economically inactive persons who are subject to the provisions on payment for services at full rates: this includes registered unemployed persons, persons with disabilities, persons without dispositive capacity, pensioners, spouses of military and diplomatic personnel, persons caring for children under the age of 7 years (or children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years or three or more children), full-time students, persons whose labour contract has been terminated (for between 3 and 6 months from the date of dismissal, depending on the cause), graduates of educational establishments (until the end of the calendar year), persons under medical observation or follow-up care and persons working or studying abroad.

16. The main aim of Decree No. 3 is to help as far as possible all working-age jobseekers to find suitable lawful employment. Citizens who do not work for reasons beyond their control or owing to specific life circumstances or who are in a difficult situation are supported by the State and pay for public utilities at a subsidized rate.

17. Nuclear safety and transparency are an absolute priority for the Belarusian atomic energy programme. Belarus makes every effort to achieve this, making maximum use of international expert capacity. Belarus has organized a number of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) review missions to assess nuclear safety and intends to continue this work. The reports of all the completed IAEA review missions have been published.

18. The Integrated Regulatory Review Service mission (October 2016) team concluded that Belarus has fully established regulatory infrastructure for nuclear and radiation safety and has demonstrated its commitment to upholding the principles of nuclear and radiation safety. A plan of action to implement the recommendations and proposals of the IAEA

Integrated Regulatory Review Service mission in Belarus has been developed, approved by the Government and is now being carried out.

19. The Site and External Events Design Review Service mission (January 2017) team stated that the appropriate steps had been taken to ensure protection for the Belarusian nuclear power plant from a worst-case external event.

20. The Emergency Preparedness Review mission (October 2018) team concluded that Belarus has effective and robust mechanisms for emergency preparedness and response. During the mission, good practices were identified and strong points and areas for improvement were highlighted. Based on the findings of the mission, a plan of action to implement the recommendations and proposals of the IAEA mission to appraise the preparedness and response of Belarus for a nuclear or radiological emergency was developed, approved by the Council of Ministers (the Government) on 18 March 2019, and is now being carried out.

21. Belarus voluntarily conducted a comprehensive risk and safety assessment (stress tests) of the Belarusian nuclear power plant using European Union methodology. The results of the stress tests underwent a peer review by European nuclear safety regulators. In line with European practice and based on the principle of “intelligent ownership” recommended by the peer review team, a national action plan based on the stress tests of the Belarusian nuclear power plant was produced and published on the website of the Department of Nuclear and Radiation Safety (Gosatomnadzor) of the Ministry for Emergency Response (<https://gosatomnadzor.mchs.gov.by/>).

## **B. Implementation of the Covenant**

### **Maximum available resources**

22. Between 2009 and 2018, there were no persons in Belarus living under the international poverty line. Statistical data for the past 10 years on changes in the other requested indicators are included below in the statistical annex to the report.

23. Targeted State social assistance is part of the public social support system. The concept of targeted State social assistance corresponds to the targeted social assistance schemes recommended by the Committee in its general comment No. 19. The purpose of targeted State social assistance is to provide social support to low-income families and individuals in difficult life situations.

24. Pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 41 of 19 January 2012 on Targeted State Social Assistance, citizens of Belarus and foreign nationals and stateless persons with permanent residence in Belarus are entitled to such assistance.

25. The basis for categorizing a family (individual) as low-income is the per capita subsistence level.

26. Decisions to grant (or refuse) targeted State social assistance and on its types, forms, amounts and the period of provision are taken by standing committees of local authorities.

27. The targeted State social assistance system comprises four social benefits, including, for low-income families (individuals), a monthly social allowance and the provision of food for children under the age of 2 years. One-off social payments are made to persons in difficult life situations.

28. Monthly social allowances are provided to low-income individuals and families for between 1 and 12 months, taking into account the measures taken by the families (individuals) to improve their financial situation. The amount of this benefit is equal to the difference between the means test threshold and the per capita family or personal income. If the means test threshold is raised during the period that the monthly social allowance is being paid, its level is recalculated, which enables the incomes of low-income citizens to be maintained at the level of the social protection floor throughout the period during which support is provided.

29. One-off social payments are made to families (individuals) in difficult life situations beyond their control that disrupt their normal livelihood, as long as their per capita income

does not exceed 150 per cent of the means test threshold. Such payments are made once a year and their level is set at an amount up to 10 times the per capita subsistence level.

30. Food for children in their first two years of life is provided to families with children under the age of 2 whose income is below the means test threshold for reasons beyond their control and to families with twins and higher-order multiples regardless of income.

31. Targeted State social assistance in the form of food for children in their first two years of life is provided in kind every six months until the child reaches the age of 2 years.

32. The social benefit for reimbursement of diaper purchases is provided to children under the age of 18 with a grade IV impairment and persons with a category I disability based on a medical certificate showing the need for diapers and documents showing proof of purchase, regardless of the per capita income of the family or individual.

33. The level of the benefit is set at an amount not exceeding one and a half times the per capita subsistence level. This social benefit is provided four times per calendar year and its cumulative annual level is six times the per capita subsistence level.

34. Number of beneficiaries of targeted State social assistance, in thousands:

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
205.9	165.4	220.2	281.9	200.7	217.8	251.3	290.4	310.2	302.3

35. In 2018, 302,300 persons received a total of 92.5 million Belarusian roubles in targeted State social assistance.

36. In 2018, 87,700 persons were allocated 23.8 million Belarusian roubles in monthly social benefits; 43,900 persons were allocated 5.1 million Belarusian roubles in one-off social payments; 146,700 persons received 42 million Belarusian roubles in reimbursement of diaper purchases; and more than 24,000 children were provided with food worth 21.5 million Belarusian roubles.

37. The targeted State social assistance system is improved based on economic changes and the needs of the population. Pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 211 of 15 June 2017 on improvements to the procedure for providing targeted State social assistance, as from 1 July 2017 the social support measures were strengthened for families caring for minor children in which both parents (or one parent in a lone-parent family) have category I or II disabilities or one of the parents has a category I disability and the other is his or her carer. The period during which such families receive the monthly social benefit has been increased from 6 to 12 months.

38. To increase the incomes of such families, when their per capita income is calculated to determine their entitlements to individual types of targeted State social assistance, the amount of monthly social benefit they have already received is excluded, as is the cash equivalent of the reductions and subsidies they receive in accordance with legislation, and corrective coefficients are not used.

39. In Belarus, mechanisms to identify, combat and prevent corruption and its causes and contributing factors have been established and put into practice: comprehensive anti-corruption legislation is in place; the practical actions of government agencies and other organizations to combat corruption have been arranged; and international cooperation to counter corruption has been organized.

40. The Programme to Fight Crime and Corruption for the period 2017–2020 is being implemented and measures to improve the work of crime prevention entities and engage the general public in fighting corruption are being carried out.

41. Anti-corruption training has been organized for various types of officials and for ordinary citizens as part of teaching programmes at various educational institutions. Such training is aimed not only at developing the trainees' moral character but at making their professional activities more effective.

42. The anti-corruption system combines accountability measures for corrupt conduct and prohibitive mechanisms with measures to encourage and give people incentives to adopt lawful conduct and cooperate in anti-corruption matters. At the State level, such motivational mechanisms include rewards and other payments made to persons who help detect corruption.

43. An important preventive mechanism is the requirement for government officials and candidates to become officials to sign a commitment to comply with the restrictions prescribed by law. Compliance with the commitment is monitored.

44. Government officials and other persons specified in Act No. 305-Z of 15 July 2015 on Combating Corruption must declare their income and assets.

45. Non-compliance with the income and asset declaration procedure is subject to administrative liability under article 23.9 of the Code of Administrative Offences. In 2018, such administrative penalties were imposed on 748 persons.

46. Prompt identification of conflicts of interests is one of the main elements of preventing corruption. Disciplinary measures, including dismissal, are imposed for non-compliance with the procedure for preventing and dealing with conflicts of interests. In 2018, the procuratorial authorities identified 37 offences in this area. Disciplinary action was taken against the perpetrators.

47. In 2018, 2,469 criminal offences involving corruption were recorded in Belarus, as follows:

- 1,168 cases of bribe-taking
- 574 cases of embezzlement
- 124 cases of overstepping of authority or powers
- 355 cases of bribery
- 11 cases of failure to act by an official
- 5 cases of acting as an intermediary for bribery
- 2 cases of money-laundering

48. In 2018, the law enforcement authorities prosecuted 1,089 persons, of whom 433 were sentenced to deprivation of liberty, for corruption offences.

49. Of those persons prosecuted for corruption, 29 were in a position of responsibility. For example, the Deputy Minister for Emergency Responses, the Deputy Minister of Health and the manager of the social protection fund of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection were all sentenced to deprivation of liberty for bribe-taking and abuse of authority.

### **Non-discrimination**

50. The Constitution guarantees the right of all citizens of Belarus without discrimination to equal protection of their rights and lawful interests (art. 22).

51. The legal rules on the prohibition of discrimination and the constitutional principle of equality are developed in many sector-specific pieces of national legislation, governing different areas of social relations (for example, labour relations, social protection, protection of public order, protection of children's rights, the media, advertising, public service and exercise of the right to judicial protection). The above-mentioned set of rules, in conjunction with the Constitution, constitutes fully developed anti-discrimination legislation.

52. Legislation to combat all forms of discrimination is being continuously improved through amendments to the relevant laws and regulations.

53. The adoption of a separate anti-discrimination law is not compatible with the sectoral organization of the Belarusian legal system. The adoption of a separate instrument would significantly narrow the scope of anti-discrimination regulations.

54. Persons who believe that they have been subjected to discrimination in employment have the right to apply to the courts to end the discrimination.

55. A labour relations dispute may be taken to court by both workers and employers, and also procurators, trade unions acting in defence of the rights and legally protected interests of their members and, under circumstances set out in national law, other organizations and individuals.

56. Employees do not have to pay legal expenses in individual labour disputes.

57. In 2018, the general courts of Belarus tried 9,162 civil cases involving labour disputes (10,619 in 2017 and 12,843 in 2016).

58. More than 80 per cent of claims seeking payment of wages were met, as were more than 30 per cent of claims for reinstatement, more than 93 per cent of compensation claims for property damage caused by workers in the course of their duties and more than 60 per cent of claims in other types of labour disputes.

59. Based on a distillation of jurisprudence and following discussions on the upholding of rules prohibiting discrimination in labour relations and the fulfilment of labour guarantees for women and workers with family obligations, on 5 December 2017 the Presidium of the Supreme Court adopted Decision No. 7 on the practical application by the courts of the legislative standards governing the labour of women and other workers with family obligations.

60. The Presidium of the Supreme Court informed judges of the importance of a thorough examination in court of any claim made by an employee of labour discrimination on the part of an employer. Judges are recommended to consider the entire range of rights and guarantees provided for by labour legislation and local regulations on employers for women workers and other employees with family obligations.

61. Act No. 345-Z of 7 January 2012 on Preventing the Spread of Diseases Posing a Danger to Public Health and HIV is intended to ensure universal access to diagnosis, treatment, care and social support for persons with HIV and other diseases constituting a public health hazard and to reduce the spread of HIV and other diseases constituting a public health hazard among population groups with a high risk of contracting such diseases.

62. Lessons learned from the work of national human rights institutions show that the establishment of such an institution must be accompanied by the allocation of adequate resources for the satisfactory discharge of its mandate.

63. Belarus has a well-developed system of specialized bodies bringing together the State and civil society to protect and promote various categories of human rights, including:

- National Commission on the Rights of the Child
- National Council on Gender Policy
- Inter-Ethnic Advisory Council
- Interfaith Advisory Council
- National Interdepartmental Council on Disability

64. Belarus continues to study international experience in the operation of human rights institutions and consider the possibility and desirability of supplementing its national system with a human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

65. The rights of persons living with HIV are protected through the direct applicability of article 22 of the Constitution on equal rights and the restriction of rights. The legal status of persons living with HIV has the same form and content as that of other citizens.

66. A list of the medical indications and contraindications for receiving an education was defined in Ministry of Health Decision No. 128 of 22 December 2011. The list does not include HIV. Accordingly, children with HIV face no restrictions on receiving preschool, general primary and secondary or specialized education.

67. Pursuant to Act No. 2435-XII of 18 June 1993 on Health Care, all citizens are entitled to accessible health services:

- Free medical care in public health-care facilities, based on the minimum State social standards for health care
- Medical care from State health-care organizations, non-State health-care organizations and individual practitioners providing medical services in accordance with the procedures prescribed by national law, paid for at the person's own expense or at the expense of legal entities and other sources not prohibited by Belarusian legislation
- Accessible medicines
- Disease control and prevention measures to ensure public health
- Medical examinations

68. Labour legislation does not include any laws or regulations containing discriminatory references to HIV-positive persons or prohibiting the recruitment of persons with an HIV-positive status.

69. In accordance with article 14 of the Labour Code, all discrimination – namely, the restriction of employment rights or the granting of any benefit on the basis of sex, race, ethnic origin, language, religious or political convictions, membership or non-membership in trade unions or other public associations, financial situation, official position, age, place of residence or physical or mental disabilities that do not hinder the performance of the job duties concerned or other circumstances unrelated to professional competence or not specified in the worker's job description – is prohibited.

70. The decision to employ a person in a particular job or position is made by the employer, taking into account the legally mandated qualification requirements for applicants to perform the job or take up the position.

71. In view of the provisions of the Labour Code, workers with HIV have no distinguishing characteristics in terms of labour relations and can therefore work without any restrictions.

72. Moreover, HIV status does not constitute grounds for an employer to terminate an employment contract.

73. As at 1 January 2019, Belarus had 26,979 registered cases of HIV, 20,953 persons living with HIV and a prevalence of 220.7 per 100,000 population.

74. On 1 June 2017, the Ministry of Health approved a clinical protocol for the diagnosis and treatment of patients with HIV, which takes full account of World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations. Universal access to HIV treatment has been in place since 2018, along with regulations on the use of express blood tests as a first diagnostic stage, which reduces the number of steps between first contact with a health-care organization and diagnosis.

75. Subprogramme 5 on HIV prevention of the State Programme on Public Health and Demographic Security in Belarus for the period 2016–2020 is being implemented, which includes the procurement of antiretroviral drugs and diagnostic test systems to ensure universal access to treatment.

76. The treatment programme includes 15,530 patients, of whom 1,167 are being treated in correctional facilities. The HIV diagnosis and antiretroviral treatment for these patients is paid for from the State budget. As at 1 January 2019, 74.1 per cent of HIV-positive patients requiring treatment were covered by combined antiretroviral therapy.

77. To eliminate vertical (mother-to-child transmission) of HIV and cases of HIV transmission linked to the provision of medical care, all children born to mothers with HIV are given adapted milk formula for bottle-feeding.

78. To reduce the spread of HIV among groups of people with a high risk of infection, all preventive programmes recommended by WHO are implemented in the country. The country has 19 centres offering methadone replacement therapy for drug users, 7 mobile prevention clinics for drug users, 3 social support centres for persons living with HIV and drug users and 48 anonymous counselling centres for key groups with the highest risk of HIV infection.

With cooperation from voluntary associations offering HIV services, the coverage of key groups at a high risk of HIV infection by preventive measures has reached 44.5 per cent.

79. To change negative public attitudes to the HIV/AIDS issue in Belarus, a unified HIV/AIDS communication strategy is being implemented, which constitutes an innovative approach to communication for preventive campaigns. In order to develop tolerant social attitudes towards HIV-positive persons and improve the quality of life and increase the involvement of persons living with HIV in preventive programmes and antiretroviral therapy adherence programmes, round tables, training courses, seminars and conferences are held, covering medical, psychosocial, legal and other issues.

80. Freedom of association is a constitutional right guaranteed to all.

81. As at 1 July 2019, 15 political parties, 25 trade unions and 2,955 voluntary associations were registered in the country. Also registered were 39 unions or federations of voluntary associations, 213 foundations and 7 national government/civil society organizations.

82. The number of branches of voluntary associations is increasing annually. During 2018, registration was completed for 6 branches of political parties, 731 branches of voluntary associations and 1,256 branches of trade unions. As at 1 January 2019, a total of 1,180 party branches, 25,295 trade union branches and 43,063 voluntary association branches were registered.

83. The majority of voluntary associations are established to address challenges in areas such as youth work, education, social services and health care.

84. Registered voluntary associations include: sport and fitness clubs; charities; young persons' and children's organizations; advocacy, cultural, recreational and educational organizations; organizations of ethnic minorities; organizations of persons with disabilities as a result of war or work injuries; veterans organizations; organizations for science and technology or the preservation of nature, historical monuments or culture; artists' organizations; and women's organizations.

85. Belarus, as a modern State governed by the rule of law, facilitates the establishment of all types of voluntary associations: neither privileges nor exclusions are applied to voluntary associations concerned with the economic, social or cultural rights of citizens. The procedure for establishing a voluntary association is governed by Act No. 3254-XII of 4 October 1994, the Voluntary Associations Act.

86. The priority for State development at the current time is the constitution of civil society and a democratic State governed by the rule of law.

87. The legislation on voluntary associations of Belarus has arrived at a qualitatively new stage of development.

88. In February 2014, amendments to the Voluntary Associations Act came into force, under which the rules on the establishment and official registration of voluntary associations and political parties have been simplified.

89. Previously, in order to found a national voluntary association, 50 founder members were required: 10 each from four of the country's provinces and 10 from the city of Minsk. The amendments provide for a lowering of the number of founders from the provinces and Minsk required to represent the association. In addition, the procedures for State registration of changes to the charters of voluntary associations and political parties, for their disbanding and for the registration of their branches have been simplified.

90. The legislation does not include any provisions that impede the submission of registration documents by a voluntary association whose application for State registration has previously been rejected. Once the violations have been addressed and shortcomings remedied, the founders have the right to resubmit the documents to the registration body. A voluntary association may be refused State registration only on the grounds specified in the Voluntary Associations Act.

91. In 2019, a bill on amendments to laws pertaining to the activities of political parties and other voluntary associations was drafted. The bill was aimed at improving the legislation

on the establishment and activities of voluntary associations and political parties. The bill incorporates a number of amendments related to simplifying the establishment and operations of voluntary associations and political parties (non-profit organizations). They include a reduction in the number of founders required to set up a non-profit organization and the introduction of the possibility for non-profit bodies to hold their meetings online, submit their documents in electronic format and use the workplace of their directors as their legal address. During the drafting process for the bill, all its provisions were discussed with representatives of non-profit organizations in a specially established working group. Moreover, a public debate on the bill was organized on the Belarus Legal Forum, on which everyone could submit suggestions and comment on the text. Thirty suggestions and comments were left.

92. The passing of legislation ensuring the greatest possible simplification of interactions between voluntary associations and government agencies is a defining feature of a modern approach to the legal regulation of voluntary associations.

### **Equal rights of men and women**

93. Article 262 of the Labour Code prohibits the involvement of women in the performance of physically demanding work and work in harmful or hazardous conditions, underground work, except certain underground jobs (non-manual labour or sanitation and domestic services) and any other types of work that involve the manual lifting and carrying of heavy loads exceeding the established weight limits for women. This provision is in force to protect women's health during the discharge of their employment duties.

94. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Decision No. 35 of 12 June 2014 contains a list of physically demanding jobs and jobs with harmful or hazardous conditions, for which women may not be recruited (List No. 35).

95. List No. 35 currently contains 181 items, including types of physically demanding work and work in harmful and hazardous conditions and the titles of jobs for which female labour is prohibited. List No. 35 previously included 252 items.

96. Owing to changing working conditions in specific industries (types of work or profession), primarily related to improved production methods and the introduction of new technologies, the total number of jobs with harmful or hazardous working conditions for which it is prohibited to recruit women has been reduced.

97. The prohibitions stipulated in list No. 35 are only valid if the work carried out at a specific site is classed as work with harmful or hazardous conditions, based on a workplace conditions assessment report. This means that such prohibitions are applicable to tasks and jobs for which safe and healthy working conditions are not assured.

98. To address the issue of employing women in industries and jobs included in list No. 35, employers must take steps to introduce health measures and eliminate the factors that stand in the way of such employment.

99. Since 2016, the number of positions with harmful or hazardous working conditions has decreased by 108,900 (656,000 positions in 2016, 547,100 in 2018).

100. The social and economic status of women in Belarus is rising every year. Women account for more than 53.4 per cent of the population and 49.8 per cent of the economically active population and they participate in almost all fields of activity. For every 1,000 men in the country, there are 1,146 women; in the age group of 65 years and over, the figure is 2,061 women.

101. Women successfully run their own businesses, create jobs and work as middle and senior managers. The proportion of leaders (lawmakers and heads of government agencies, voluntary associations, businesses and non-profit organizations) who are women is 47.3 per cent and the proportion of women among professionals is 71.2 per cent.

102. On the Belarusian labour market, women typically have a higher level of education than men. Among employed women, 38.2 per cent have higher education and 26.7 per cent have specialized secondary education, while the equivalent figures for men are 27.4 per cent and 18 per cent.

103. Women are widely represented in government: they account for 67.4 per cent of government employees of all levels and 56.2 per cent of heads and deputy heads of organizations.

104. As at 1 January, 32.5 per cent of the members of the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic of the sixth National Assembly (the lower and upper houses of the parliament of Belarus) were female. In the previous parliament, the proportion of women members was 29.2 per cent, as at 1 January 2015. Women account for 48.2 per cent of members of the local councils of deputies.

105. The second International Forum of Women Leaders was held in Minsk in October 2018, to draw attention to the issue of women's participation in government and decision-making. The first Forum took place in 2016.

106. The National Plan of Action on Gender Equality for the period 2017–2020, the fifth such policy document, is being implemented. Implementation of the plan is directly facilitating the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It is focused on resolving the most pressing issues regarding the position of women.

107. One of the avenues being explored to achieve gender equality is the reduction of the “double burden” on women of balancing life and work responsibilities so that they may realize their full potential.

108. The addition to the Labour Code of provisions on paternity leave (entry into force in January 2020), the national Family of the Year contest, community initiatives such as the Papa Pro forum and “father school” projects, and media coverage of issues related to equality in the family are concrete steps taken to promote gender equality in the family.

109. Currently, society is undergoing a transformation in the way it perceives the roles of both parents in child-rearing and childcare and in the distribution of roles within the family.

110. According to data from a survey on family formation, stability of family relations and fertility in the changing socioeconomic conditions of the life of Belarusians under the international Generations and Gender Programme, (10,000 respondents between the ages of 18 and 79 years), the majority of the population (56 per cent of respondents) recognize families and children as equally important for men and women. When asked “Whose task is it to take care of the house and children, men's or women's?”, a majority of respondents (58 per cent) replied that it was equally the task of men and women. In addition, 84 per cent of men and 78 per cent of women stated that decisions on child-rearing were shared equally between partners.

### **Right to work**

111. In 2018, the national unemployment rate according to ILO methodology (in the 15–74 age group) was 4.8 per cent, which constituted a decrease of 0.8 percentage points since 2017 (in 2017 the figure was 5.6 per cent).

112. As at 1 January 2019, the level of registered unemployment was 0.3 per cent, a decrease since 1 January 2018 of 0.2 percentage points (from 0.5 per cent).

113. As at 1 January 2019, 12,500 persons were registered as unemployed, which was 45.4 per cent fewer than on 1 January 2018 (22,900). Of the total number of unemployed persons registered with the labour, employment and social protection authorities, 37.9 per cent were women and 62.1 per cent were men; 20.3 per cent were inhabitants of rural areas. The average age of a registered unemployed person at the end of 2018 was 42 years. Additional information is provided below in a separate annex to the report containing statistical data.

114. Youth employment in Belarus is addressed under both the general employment policy and under the government youth policy.

115. The basic package of measures to provide employment to unemployed young persons and the necessary financial resources to achieve this are part of subprogramme 1, Employment Promotion, of the State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion for the period 2016–2020, approved by the Government.

116. Vocational education for unemployed young persons, especially minors with no work experience, and often no vocational training, are the subject of particular focus. Approximately 40 per cent of the total number of persons referred for education by the employment service are young persons.

117. Particular attention is paid to careers advice work. To provide priority employment assistance to school leavers with no work experience, the labour, employment and social protection authorities make efforts to encourage employers to recruit such young persons to allow them to obtain practical work skills.

118. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Decision No. 58 of 10 October 2016 stipulates the procedure and conditions of work placements for unemployed persons to obtain practical work experience with partial compensation of employers for the wages paid.

119. Unemployed persons of at least 18 years of age who wish to set up as a sole trader, or start a private unitary enterprise or farm, to provide agritourism services or produce handicrafts, are provided with grants from an extrabudgetary State social protection fund. On average, approximately 35 per cent of unemployed citizens who receive grants to set up their own businesses are young persons.

120. At the same time, a mechanism intended to reduce the imbalance between supply and demand on the labour market, by forecasting and coordinating the work of government agencies in establishing the needs of the economy for staff of different levels of qualification over a five-year period, is set out in Council of Ministers Decision No. 1016 of 26 December 2017 on certain issues related to forecasting the workforce needs of the economy.

121. The measures taken have enabled a reduction in the level of youth unemployment. According to household survey data, the level of unemployment among young persons between the ages of 16 and 30 decreased from 8.6 per cent in 2012 to 6.6 per cent in 2018.

122. As at 1 January 2019, 586,000 persons with disabilities, including 31,700 children under the age of 18 years, were registered with the labour, employment and social authorities.

123. The number of persons with disabilities increased by 3,100 over the course of 2018. Persons with disabilities account for 5.9 per cent of the general population.

124. As at 1 January 2019, the number of persons with disabilities of working age stood at approximately 190,000, of whom almost 60 per cent have statements of fitness for work. More than 67,000 persons with disabilities have a job, or 56.2 per cent of those with such statements.

125. The necessary legal framework is in place to uphold the right to work of persons with disabilities. The State provides additional guarantees in the area of employment assistance for persons with disabilities.

126. On application to the labour, employment and social protection authorities, this group is entitled to a broader range of options for employment assistance, including:

- Information about job vacancies
- Referral for a work placement with a specific employer or in a specific trade or profession, including in the additional positions created in specialized organizations
- Employment under established quotas
- Priority access to vocational training and to training in a trade or profession, paid for from the resources set aside to fund employment measures
- Reintegration into the labour market
- Support (including financial) for persons to organize and develop their own businesses

127. All services provided to unemployed persons by the State employment service are available to unemployed persons with disabilities in line with their individual rehabilitation programmes.

128. A bill is currently being drafted with the aim of building the capacity to achieve the highest possible employment rate of persons with disabilities. It will provide for a range of

measures to improve the work placement and employment mechanism for persons with disabilities, including:

- Setting of quotas on the recruitment of persons with disabilities in organizations
- Provision of a personal assistant to help persons with disabilities with employment
- Funding and reimbursement of expenses for enterprises of all forms of ownership that create jobs for persons with disabilities, including specialized positions

### **Right to just and favourable conditions of work**

129. An integrated approach to improving working conditions and occupational health and safety is ensured through the application of the measures set out in the State programme, which define the purpose and main areas of activity in this field, generally for five-year periods. Currently, the State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion for the period 2016–2020 is being implemented in the country. It has five subprogrammes, including subprogramme 2, Occupational Health and Safety. The objectives of subprogramme 2 are to improve occupational health and safety conditions for workers and reduce work-related injuries and diseases in the country.

130. The proportion of jobs with harmful or hazardous working conditions was 25.8 per cent in 2018 (28.6 per cent in 2016); the incidence of occupational diseases was 0.19 per 10,000 workers in 2018 (0.24 in 2016); and the rate of occupational injuries was 51.26 per 100,000 workers (52.26 in 2016).<sup>1</sup>

131. A monitoring system has been established to check compliance with labour and occupational health and safety legislation, including public oversight. Monitoring involves preventive and warning measures taken by the monitoring agencies in cooperation with the entities being monitored, including:

- Monitoring operations followed by issuance of recommendations to eliminate and prevent the shortcomings detected
- Awareness-raising on how to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and implement them in practice
- Provision of information to monitored entities (including over the Internet and in the media) about typical violations found during inspections by the monitoring agencies
- Seminars, round tables and other events

132. Monitoring of actual working conditions in organizations and of the grounds for compensation for work in harmful or hazardous conditions is achieved partly by producing a database of the outcomes of workplace conditions assessment reports.

133. In 2018, as part of its oversight of compliance with labour and occupational health and safety legislation, the State Labour Inspectorate Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection performed 1,676 monitoring operations, 2,101 assessments requested by businesses, 90 unannounced inspections and 927 special investigations of accidents at work. It also examined approximately 1,800 notifications from government agencies related to violations of wage payment deadlines and considered almost 1,200 complaints from citizens.

134. As a result of these measures, the State inspectors have advised (or ordered) business to desist from 67,000 violations of labour and occupational health and safety legislation, including 2,600 violations related to non-compliance with wage payment deadlines and 197 concerning the minimum wage. To prevent deaths and injuries among employees, employers have been required to stop the operations of 13 businesses, 26 construction sites, 208 factories and workshops and more than 2,900 individual machines, machine tools and other manufacturing equipment items which posed a danger to employees' lives and health, and to suspend 11,000 workers under article 49 of the Labour Code. Based on the findings of

<sup>1</sup> Based on the operating data of the State Labour Inspectorate Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the insurance company Belgosstrakh.

Department inspectors, 2,306 officials have faced disciplinary measures for breaches of the labour and occupational health and safety legislation.

135. In 2018, the Department issued 7,204 notifications of violations of labour and occupational health and safety legislation to government agencies and higher-level organizations.

136. In 2018, the Department continued to implement a package of measures intended to improve the knowledge and awareness of citizens in the area of labour and occupational health and safety legislation, making extensive use of the media and modern information technology. Accordingly, State inspectors made 2,953 media appearances and took part in 5,635 conferences and seminars, 557 meetings of local executive and administrative bodies or their subdivisions, and 1,092 meetings of occupational injury prevention commissions (or other commissions) at which matters related to health and safety at work and compliance with employees' labour rights were discussed. This was in addition to verifying the occupational health and safety knowledge of 52,300 heads and deputy heads of organizations, occupational health and safety officers, key staff, heads and specialists of occupational health and safety services, members of commissions to test the knowledge of occupational health and safety on the part of organizations (government departments) and other officials.

137. The number of workers who have been the victim of an industrial accident is:<sup>2</sup>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fatal</i>
1991	21 628	402
1995	13 027	345
2000	8 218	258
2005	4 530	244
2010	2 612	234
2015	2 102	123
2017	1 689	115
2018	2 020	144

138. Frequency rate of work-related injuries per 100,000 persons (2018):<sup>3</sup>

<i>General</i>	<i>Including:</i>	
	<i>Serious</i>	<i>Fatal</i>
51.3	17.8	3.7

139. Presidential Decree No. 18 of 24 November 2006 on additional measures for the State protection of children in disadvantaged families was adopted to ensure protection for the rights and legitimate interests of children in disadvantaged families and to foster responsibility among parents who do not fulfil their obligations to care for and maintain their children.

140. The obligation to reimburse the costs of child maintenance begins on the date children are placed in State care and stops once the child maintenance costs have been recovered in full.

141. Unemployed parents who are required to reimburse the costs of maintaining children in State care are subject to work placement to ensure that they fulfil their obligations to maintain and care for their children. Decisions regarding work placements for unemployed

<sup>2</sup> Based on the operating data of the State Labour Inspectorate Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the insurance company Belgosstrakh.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the operating data of the State Labour Inspectorate Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the insurance company Belgosstrakh.

parents are made by a court, which issues the court order for work placement and then sends it to the labour, employment and social protection agency.

142. The labour, employment and social protection agency determines the organization of the work placement for unemployed parents required to reimburse the costs of maintaining children in State care, ensuring that they are paid enough to fulfil all their monthly reimbursement obligations and still be left with at least 30 per cent of their salary.

143. In 2018, the labour, employment and social protection agencies received orders from city and district courts to place 4,057 such persons in work. Permanent jobs were found for 3,567 persons.

144. The medical and social rehabilitation of persons in substance abuse recovery clinics is intended to encourage them to stop using psychoactive substances and prepare them to fulfil their social duties, including employment, once they leave the clinic. The organization of vocational training, retraining or professional development to help engage such persons in employment is an important part of this process.

145. The conditions for the placement of citizens in substance abuse recovery clinics are set out in chapter 5 of Act No. 104-Z of 4 January 2016 on the procedure and conditions for the referral of citizens to substance abuse recovery clinics and the living conditions within them.

146. The age, capacity to work, state of health, skills and qualifications of citizens resident in substance abuse recovery clinics is taken into account for the organization of work placements. Remuneration, annual paid leave and other types of leave are provided in accordance with labour legislation.

#### **Trade union rights**

147. As at 1 January 2019, 24,952 trade union organizations and 42,877 branches of voluntary associations were registered.

148. The number of trade unions has decreased since 2010, from 33 to 28. This was caused by a restructuring (merger or association) of certain trade unions for the purpose of consolidating and optimizing their work.

149. In accordance with article 41 of the Constitution, citizens have the right to protect their economic and social interests, including the right to join trade unions.

150. In line with this provision, the legal foundations for trade union activity are laid down in Act No. 1605-XII of 22 April 1992 on Trade Unions and Presidential Decree No. 2 on certain measures to regularize the work of political parties, trade unions and other voluntary associations.

151. Belarusian citizens have the right to form the trade unions of their choice, on a voluntary basis, and to join trade unions subject to the rules of the organization concerned. Trade union activity may be restricted only in cases prescribed by national law in the interests of national security, public order or to uphold the rights and freedoms of others. Trade unions independently draft and approve their own statutes, determine their own structures, elect their governing bodies, organize their own activities and hold meetings of their elected bodies.

152. Pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 4 of 2 June 2015, in order to improve the handling of trade union formation and activities, the minimum threshold to form a trade union or engage in trade union activity of 10 per cent of the workers or students in an organization is no longer applicable. Only the provision requiring a trade union to have at least 10 founders (members) has remained in place.

153. This change has facilitated the enjoyment by workers of their right to join trade unions and was intended to further enhance the protection of their social and labour rights and interests.

154. In accordance with article 14 of the Constitution, social and labour relations between government agencies, employers' organizations and trade unions are based on the principle of social partnership.

155. The National Council on Labour and Social Affairs has been set up to ensure cooperation between the Government, national employers' associations and trade unions on the implementation of socioeconomic policy and the protection of citizens' labour rights and economic and social interests. This joint body continuously contributes to developing and applying an agreed socioeconomic policy, aimed at the protection of the labour rights and economic and social interests of workers and improvement of the living standards of the population.

156. Belarus has been an ILO member since 1954 and has ratified the following ILO conventions concerning trade union rights: the Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) and the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154). Under the ILO supervisory mechanism, Belarus submits government reports on the implementation of these conventions according to the timetable of the International Labour Office.

### **Right to social security**

157. One of the types of social security in Belarus is the State pension system.

158. In Belarus, the right to a State pension in old age or following loss of capacity to work or the loss of a breadwinner is guaranteed by the Constitution and a number of laws and regulations.

159. Pursuant to Act No. 1596-XII of 17 April 1992 on Pensions, citizens receive an occupational pension (contributions-based) on the basis of age, number of years worked, disability or loss of a breadwinner. Citizens not entitled to an occupational pension receive a social pension (non-contributory), which is paid to women who have reached the age of 60 years and men who have reached the age of 65 years (with no additional requirements), in the event of disability (adults and children with disabilities) and to children on the loss of a breadwinner.

160. The State pension system (occupational and social pensions) covers almost all persons without the capacity to work who require it.

161. One of the indicators in the national system of decent work indicators (section 9, Social Protection) is the share of the population above statutory pensionable age registered with the labour, employment and social protection agencies and benefiting from an occupational pension. In 2017, this indicator stood at 96.4 per cent.

162. Share of the population above statutory pensionable age registered with the labour, employment and social protection agencies and benefiting from an occupational pension as a percentage:

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
95.2	95.1	95.0	95.1	95.0	94.5	94.3	94.0	94.6

163. Number of old-age pension beneficiaries registered with the labour, employment and social protection authorities in thousands of persons:

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
2 454.3	2 454.3	2 486.9	2 512.2	2 537.3	2 559.7	2 592.8	2 619.3	2 593.7

164. The actual coverage of older persons by the State pension system is even higher, since older persons who receive the social pension or citizens receiving pensions from other government agencies (military personnel and equivalent) are not included in calculations of the above indicator.

165. Since 2019, the share of the population above statutory pensionable age receiving an old-age pension has been monitored as an indicator for achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 1.3 (national indicator 1.3.1.1). This indicator will more objectively reflect the coverage of older persons by the State pension system, since its calculation will include beneficiaries of social pensions and persons who receive pensions from other government agencies (military personnel and equivalent).

166. The stable functioning of the pension system and payment of pensions at a socially acceptable level is a priority for the State.

167. Occupational pensions are recalculated in line with the growth in average wages at least once a year. In 2018, occupational pensions were recalculated three times, pursuant to decrees issued by the Head of State.

168. Minimum occupational pensions are also indexed on the basis of increases in the per capita subsistence level (usually once per quarter). Social pensions are indexed in the same way (based on the increase in subsistence level, generally on a quarterly basis).

169. The minimum occupational and social pensions are regularly increased in line with changes in the cost of living.

170. Number of annual pension recalculations based on increases in per capita subsistence level:

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Minimum occupational pensions	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4
Social pensions	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4

171. The level of the occupational old-age pension is maintained at approximately 40 per cent of the average wage.

172. Almost no pensioners are now categorized as impoverished: the proportion of beneficiaries with a pension below the subsistence level has been less than 1 per cent since 2011. The statistics are provided below in the statistical annex to the report.

173. In recent years, pension spending has accounted for approximately 9 per cent of gross domestic product.

174. The minimum number of years of employment with payment of contributions is gradually increasing, to 20 years in 2025 (until 1 January 2014 the requirement was 5 years), as is the pension age, which will have increased to 58 for women and 63 for men by 2022. For socially disadvantaged groups (for example, mothers of large families or persons who have had disabilities since childhood and their parents) and citizens working in harmful conditions, the requirements on employment history and pension age are lowered. The conditions for obtaining an occupational old-age pension entitlement remain accessible to citizens.

175. Unemployment benefit is paid from an extrabudgetary State social protection fund financed by mandatory social insurance charges on employers.

176. In accordance with Act No. 125-Z of 15 June 2006 on Employment, the State guarantees the following to unemployed persons:

- Unemployment benefits
- Study grants on referral by the labour, employment and social protection authorities
- Financial assistance to unemployed persons and members of their families

177. The level of unemployment benefits and grants are determined in relation to a basic amount.

178. The minimum level of unemployment benefit is 70 per cent of the basic amount and the maximum is twice the basic amount.

179. Unemployed persons with a dependent child under the age of 14 or a child with a disability under the age of 18 receive 10 per cent more unemployment benefits, while persons with three or more children of the relevant age or two or more children with disabilities receive 20 per cent more.

180. Unemployment benefits cannot be paid for more than 26 calendar weeks in each 12-month period, calculated from the date of registration with the labour, employment and social protection authorities.

181. For unemployed men with more than 25 years and women with more than 20 years of employment history, the period in which unemployment benefits are paid is increased by an additional 2 weeks for each year of service.

182. As at 1 January 2019, 5,800 persons were receiving unemployment benefit (46.2 per cent of persons registered as unemployed). The average level of unemployment benefit in December 2018 was 26.4 Belarusian roubles.

183. Citizens legally registered as unemployed who find themselves in difficulty may be provided with targeted State social support (monthly social benefit for disadvantaged persons or one-off social benefit for persons in difficulty with incomes less than 150 per cent of the subsistence level).

184. Financial support for unemployed persons takes the form not only of unemployment benefit but of financial assistance, the possibility of a temporary work placement and participation in paid community work for extra income while seeking permanent employment.

185. The State is currently implementing a targeted labour market regulation policy to address the issue of social protection for unemployed persons. Priority is given to active employment policy measures aimed at developing the capacities of workers, effective vocational retraining efforts, and anticipatory training programmes for workers whose jobs are under threat in order to retrain them in professions in demand on the labour market and help them adapt to the real needs of the economy.

### **Protection of the family and children**

186. The Labour Code contains a number of articles aimed at the equal enjoyment of rights by men and women, including in child-rearing. Specific regulations applying to the employment of women and workers with family obligations are contained in chapter 19 of the Labour Code.

187. Article 185 of the Labour Code contains a binding rule stating that leave to care for a child under the age of 3 years must be provided at the request of the family to a working father or other relative or family member of the child, if the child's mother takes up employment or is a sole trader, notary, lawyer or creative professional, produces handicrafts or provides agritourism services.

188. The law provides that each family has the right to decide for itself which of the working parents will care for a child and so take childcare leave until the child reaches the age of 3 years.

189. A father taking leave to care for a child under the age of 3 years has all the same benefits as a mother. While a father is on leave to care for a child under the age of 3 years, he may choose to work part-time (no more than half the normal working month) at his main workplace (in another job or position) or at a different place of work.

190. Act No. 219-Z of 18 July 2019 on amendments to laws (entry into force 28 January 2020) was adopted to improve legislation concerning equal rights and opportunities in labour relations. The Act provides for:

- The right to short-term paternity leave on the birth of a child to be cared for by the family (up to 14 days in the first six months of the child's life)
- Extension of the right of persons caring for children with disabilities under the age of 18 to choose their annual leave during the summer period to fathers and stepfathers
- Extension of the guarantees for working mothers to working single parents

- Lifting of the prohibition on overtime work, work on public holidays and weekends, and business trips for women with children under the age of 3

191. In 2018, a study of gender roles in Belarusian families was conducted and proposals were developed to improve the organizational and legal methods of ensuring the equal involvement of both parents in the child's life, including after the end of a marriage or when the child's parents are unmarried.

192. In Belarus, the State guarantees the availability of free and accessible preschool education and the preschool education system is developing dynamically.

193. As at 5 September 2018, 3,803 educational establishments offering preschool education were in operation, catering for more than 435,000 children, including 72,400 infants and toddlers (between the ages of 2 months and 3 years). In rural areas, 1,713 such establishments were operating for more than 59,000 children, including approximately 7,000 infants.

194. Taking parental needs into consideration, children, including infants, receive preschool education in different types of establishment (nursery schools, combined nurseries and kindergartens, kindergartens, kindergartens or combined nurseries and kindergartens for children with health problems, preschool child development centres) with different forms of ownership (public and private) and different opening hours (2 to 7 hours, 10.5 hours, 12 hours, 24 hours). Preschool educational establishments are accessible to children from different social groups.

195. Based on parent demand, short-stay preschool groups (2 to 7 hours) are established: mother and child groups, adaptation groups, playgroups, evening groups, weekend groups and seasonal and year-round playgrounds. Since 2014, the number of such groups has increased by 2,477, while the number of children attending has increased by 19,400, to reach 5,376 groups with 45,400 attendees in 2018 (in 2014 there were 2,899 groups for 25,986 children). In 2018, rural areas had 1,313 short-stay groups (2 to 7 hours) for 8,060 infants.

196. The measures taken have enabled preschool education coverage for children between the ages of 1 and 3 years to be increased to 44.3 per cent and 22.9 per cent in rural areas.

197. The leading position of Belarus among Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member States for preschool education coverage has been reinforced. The proportion of children between the ages of 3 and 6 who receive a preschool education increased from 95.4 per cent in 2015 to 96.4 per cent in 2018. In rural areas, coverage stood at 68.3 per cent in 2015 and 2018.

198. In the past three years, the proportion of children between the ages of 1 and 6 years who receive a preschool education has increased (74.8 per cent in 2016, 75.8 per cent in 2017 and 79.4 per cent in 2018). In rural areas, the equivalent figure was 51.7 per cent (49.4 per cent in 2016 and 49.8 per cent in 2017).

199. Full coverage of school preparation for 5-year-olds, which had been achieved in previous years, has been maintained, which ensures that children from all social groups in Belarus begin school with equal opportunities.

200. From 2013 to 2018, the internal affairs authorities identified 615 trafficking-related offences (covered under the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime), of which 15 were direct cases of trafficking in persons. The authorities shut down 95 networks taking people out of the country for exploitation and 1 network bringing them in. In the process of curbing the spread of prostitution (as one of the main drivers of sexual exploitation), 8,011 persons have been subject to administrative proceedings for selling sexual services.

201. There has been no significant increase in trafficking-related offences over the reporting period, which indicates that the preventive and other measures taken are effective.

202. Comprehensive measures to combat trafficking in persons, mostly aimed at prevention, are currently being taken in Belarus.

203. Anti-trafficking programmes are implemented, with the active engagement not only of government agencies but of non-governmental organizations. While such programmes were initially concentrated on the criminal prosecution of traffickers, focus has subsequently shifted to the prevention of trafficking in persons, the operation of telephone hotlines, the production of public service advertising and the protection and rehabilitation of victims, fully benefiting from the capacity of the International Organization for Migration and civil society organizations.

204. Pursuant to Act No. 350-Z of 7 January 2012 on Combating Trafficking in Persons, the Government adopted decision No. 485 on 11 June 2015, approving the regulations governing the procedure for identifying victims of trafficking, the procedure for completing the questionnaire for citizens who could have been victims of trafficking or related offences and the procedure for submitting the information contained therein. In accordance with these regulations, a national mechanism to identify victims of trafficking in persons and refer them for rehabilitation is up and running in Belarus.

205. From 2013 to 2018, the internal affairs authorities identified 824 victims of trafficking in persons, including 173 minors. Of these victims, 770 had been subjected to sexual exploitation and 54 to labour exploitation.

206. Rehabilitation referrals were made for 264 victims (the rest did not require assistance at the time of identification).

207. The legislation provides that, when a citizen is identified as a possible victim of trafficking in persons or related offences, the competent authorities inform the person of his or her right to benefit from protective and rehabilitation measures, ascertain what kinds of assistance the person requires, determine the State or other organizations that provide such assistance, refer and, if necessary, accompany the person to these organizations for provision of the protective and rehabilitation measures.

208. Victim rehabilitation services are among the functions of the local social services centres (146 in total) and the municipal family and children's social services centres in Homiel and Minsk, which operate within the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection system. These centres also provide assistance to victims of domestic violence.

209. A network of 24-hour crisis rooms is in operation to increase access to temporary shelter services. As at 1 January 2019, there were 132 crisis rooms in the country.

210. Improvements in the effectiveness of efforts to assist victims of trafficking and domestic violence are continuously monitored by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

211. In 2018, 679 persons stayed in a crisis room, including 4 victims of trafficking in persons.

212. Applicants receive social services: temporary accommodation, psychosocial, information and advisory services and humanitarian assistance. Applicants are also referred for vocational training and given help to find work.

213. The temporary shelter service is provided free of charge to victims of trafficking in persons.

#### **Right to an adequate standard of living**

214. The right to housing for Belarusian citizens is guaranteed under article 21 of the Constitution.

215. The realization of this right is governed by the Housing Code, under which:

- Citizens are free to choose how to improve their housing situation.
- The State guarantees that low-income citizens who are unable to work are provided with social housing on rental terms.
- Citizens on low incomes who are in need of better housing receive State support for the construction and purchase of housing.

- A transition is taking place with respect to the provision of housing and payment of rent based on total floor space.
- Citizens may freely dispose of residential properties that they own, in accordance with the law.
- All housing rights are protected by the courts.
- The rights of the general public to monitor compliance with housing laws have been broadened.

216. In order to realize these objectives, the Government has approved the Framework for the Improvement and Development of the Housing and Communal Services for the period up to 2025, the State Programme for Comfortable Housing and a Favourable Environment for 2016–2020 and the State Programme for Housing Construction for 2016–2020.

217. The State Programme for Housing Construction provides for an increase in housing provision from 26.36 m<sup>2</sup> per person (in 2015) to 27.3 m<sup>2</sup> (in 2020).

218. Housing law provides for the right of citizens to be registered on the list of those in need of better housing conditions, the inclusion of certain groups in lists for social housing and the construction of housing with State support. Further information is provided in the statistical data annexed to this report.

219. The regulations on the registration of citizens in need of better housing and on the procedure for allotting housing from the State housing stock, which were approved by Presidential Decree No. 563 of 16 December 2013 on certain issues relating to the legal regulation of housing relations, provide for 12 grounds on which citizens have the right to be registered on the list of those in need of better housing. They include:

- Having a total living space of less than 15 m<sup>2</sup> per person or 10 m<sup>2</sup> per person in the city of Minsk
- Living in the same room, or in a one-room apartment, with other citizens who have illnesses that render communal living impossible (list established pursuant to Ministry of Health Decision No. 202 of 22 December 2012)
- Living in a one-room apartment with another citizen (whether or not the citizen is a close relative), with the exception of a spouse
- Living in a special home for veterans, older persons or persons with disabilities, or in a residential home for older persons and persons with disabilities who have a category III disability or whose disability status has been revoked, if such persons no longer have a home to which they can return
- Living in housing that has been deemed to fall below established sanitary and technical standards and living in private rented accommodation

220. Persons in need of better housing who have the right to social housing are included not only in the general register of citizens in need of better housing, who numbered some 663,800 across the country as at 1 January 2019, but also in separate lists drawn up by executive committees.

221. As of 1 January 2019, 3,990 persons with disabilities were registered as being in need of better housing and as having the right to social housing.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Persons entitled to social housing (all groups)</i>	<i>Persons with disabilities entitled to social housing</i>
Brest province	88 684	1 897	530
Viciebsk province	66 484	3 018	317
Homieĺ province	89 260	2 837	567
Hrodna province	69 125	2 346	369
Mahilioŭ province	63 192	3 284	558
Minsk province	88 434	4 857	1 095

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Persons entitled to social housing (all groups)</i>	<i>Persons with disabilities entitled to social housing</i>
Minsk (city)	198 664	1 126	464
<b>Total</b>	<b>663 843</b>	<b>19 365</b>	<b>3 990</b>

222. A wide range of persons (18 groups) have been identified by law as having the right to social housing. The regulations on the registration of citizens in need of better housing grant this right to groups including:

- Heroes of Belarus, Heroes of the Soviet Union, Heroes of Socialist Labour and Full Cavaliers of the Orders of Glory and Labour Glory
- Veterans and disabled veterans of the Great Patriotic War
- Veterans and disabled veterans of foreign wars
- Persons who have had disabilities since childhood as a result of wounds, traumatic injury or other severe injury sustained as a result of hostilities during the Great Patriotic War or the impact of hostilities
- Citizens who fell sick or suffered from radiation sickness caused by the impact of the Chernobyl disaster or another radiation accident
- Families raising children with disabilities

Other groups entitled to social housing include:

- Citizens living in housing that has become unfit for habitation as a result of natural or artificial emergencies, hostilities or acts of terrorism
- Citizens with illnesses and those who have children in their families who have illnesses that render communal living impossible (list established pursuant to Ministry of Health Decision No. 202 of 22 December 2012)
- Orphaned children and children without parental care who have been emancipated as a result of a court order or have married and young persons who were orphaned or deprived of parental care as minors
- Citizens, including military personnel transferred to the reserve or discharged who have disabilities as a result of wounds, traumatic injury, other severe injury or illness that occurred while carrying out their military service obligations (official duties)
- Unemployed persons with category I or II disabilities living alone
- Unemployed pensioners living alone
- Persons on low incomes, including:
  - Persons with category I or II disabilities, with the exception of persons with disabilities who are unemployed and those who have disabilities as a result of the Chernobyl disaster or another radiation accident
  - Pensioners
  - Families with many children
  - Citizens who have taken custody of three or more orphaned children or children without parental care

223. Payment is not charged for social housing, but only for housing and communal services.

224. The following are the basic principles of State policy in the field of environmental protection:

- Respect for the right of citizens to a favourable environment

- Ensuring conditions favourable to the life and health of citizens and reducing the harmful impact of business and other activities on the environment with due regard to economic and social factors
- Transparency in the work of State bodies and voluntary environmental protection associations and the provision to citizens of complete, reliable and timely information about the environment
- The binding nature of the obligation of State bodies, voluntary associations, other legal entities and citizens to participate in environmental protection activities

225. The law provides for mandatory environmental impact assessments for business projects and for draft policy documents that, when implemented, will have an impact on the environment or involve the use of natural resources or both. The right of public participation in environmental decision-making and the right of access to information about the environment are also established in law. It is an offence to violate these legislative provisions.

226. As a result of the work done in 2018 to develop a system of special conservation areas, the geographical coverage of these areas reached 8.9 per cent of the total area of the country (coverage of at least 8.0 per cent is needed for national environmental security). As at 1 January 2019, there were 1,289 special conservation areas.

227. In fulfilment of the commitments made by Belarus to implement the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the total amount of equipment and waste containing polychlorinated biphenyls has decreased by more than 15 per cent since 2015.

228. As a result of the measures adopted, by 2019, there were fewer storage facilities containing unusable pesticides, and the amount of waste stored in them had fallen by 35 per cent. Over the period 2015–2017, the volume of hazardous waste stocks (hazard categories 1 to 3) fell by 12 per cent.

229. As a result of the introduction of international standards and environmental requirements to prevent the production and circulation of industrial waste, the amount of industrial waste sent for burial has fallen by 41 per cent over the last five years.

230. A public environmental coordination council has been established on a permanent basis under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection in order to facilitate interaction among voluntary associations involved in environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources. There are 23 voluntary associations in the council.

231. In 2018, the council held three meetings to consider the drafting of a bill on amendments to article 100 of the Environmental Protection Act, No. 1982-XII of 26 November 1992, and a strategy on managing water resources in the context of climate change for the period up to 2030 and to prepare for the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

232. The council's workplan for the year and the agendas and minutes of its meetings are published on the official website of the Ministry in a section entitled "Interaction with the general public and the business community".

233. Laws and regulations submitted for public discussion, including those considered by the council, are uploaded to a section of the website of the Ministry entitled "Public discussions".

234. In 2018, in the context of public outreach and ensuring public access to information on the environment, the authorities replied to 488 applications submitted by citizens concerning such issues as State environmental reviews, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and assessments of environmental security in relation to radiation within the time frame established by law.

235. Particular attention was devoted to the construction of a factory for the production of sulphite bleached wood pulp at the Svyetlahorsk pulp and paper plant, a public limited company, with a capacity of 400,000 tons per year; a battery factory for the limited liability company iPower, with its own natural gas boiler, in Brest, Brest free economic zone, Airport district; and the construction of a plant to produce special vehicles and refurbish an existing facility in the Kalodzishchy industrial hub, Minsk district.

236. Extensive awareness-raising was carried out through meetings and correspondence on environmental issues relating to these facilities, which to a certain extent reduced social tensions with citizens who were opposed to their construction. Experts from the Ministry carried out visits to these facilities.

237. In order to keep the public informed about amendments to environmental protection legislation and the implementation of the environmental protection requirements set out in Presidential Decree No. 7 of 23 November 2017 on the development of entrepreneurship, experts from the system of the Ministry carried out awareness-raising over the course of the year through participation in press events, conferences, seminars and meetings. The total number of events was 2,842. They took the form of meetings, seminars, study, trips and discussions with the public, business figures and workforces.

238. The Ministry and local bodies have used social networks to keep the public informed about environmental activities.

239. In order to instil an attitude of environmental responsibility among the general public, the road map for more effective public awareness-raising over the period 2018–2020, approved by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection on 18 July 2018, was drawn up and is being implemented. Guidelines have been developed for the local committees of the Ministry responsible for monitoring public opinion on specific thematic areas in the field of environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources.

240. Measures are being taken to mitigate the impact of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as part of State programmes to reduce the risk of adverse effects on the health of citizens affected by the Chernobyl disaster and facilitate a transition away from rehabilitating areas in favour of their sustainable socioeconomic development while ensuring that radiation safety requirements are fully respected.

241. A State programme to mitigate the impact of the Chernobyl disaster for 2011–2015 and for the period up to 2020 is currently being implemented. More than half of the funds allocated to its implementation have been set aside for social protection, medical care and the rehabilitation of those affected. Further information has been provided in a separate annex to the present report.

242. The measures set out in the State programme are funded from the resources set aside for that purpose in the national and local budgets and from other sources provided for by law, in accordance with the lists of facilities, goods, work and services drawn up by contracting agencies under the State programme.

243. The State Programme provides for measures to ensure:

- Social protection, medical care, health-resort treatment and recuperation for the affected population
- Radiation protection and the targeted application of protective measures
- Radiation monitoring and radioactive contamination control
- The socioeconomic development of affected regions

244. Existing legislation establishes a system of benefits, rights and guarantees for citizens who participated in the emergency response to the Chernobyl disaster and those who were evacuated or resettled or who moved to a new place of residence from areas contaminated by radiation or who live and work in areas contaminated by radionuclides.

245. The system of medical monitoring, check-ups, diagnosis and treatment, recuperation, and health-resort treatment has helped repair the harm that the disaster caused to the health of the affected citizens.

246. A network of 12 specialized institutions, namely children's rehabilitation and recuperation centres, has been set up to provide children with health-resort treatment and ensure their recuperation. They welcome organized groups of children all year round. Every year since 1990, Belarusian children have made more than 1 million recuperation trips abroad.

247. Every year, free meals are provided for children living or studying in the radioactive contamination area.

248. An array of preventive measures implemented in the agricultural sector and an effective radiation monitoring service in the agro-industrial sector ensure that consumers receive food that meets established safety requirements.

249. State policy for mitigating the impact of the Chernobyl disaster is based on a shift away from post-disaster rehabilitation measures in favour of the development of the socioeconomic potential of the affected regions. The measures being taken to reduce radiation exposure include upgrading populated areas, providing high-quality drinking water and reducing local fuel use. Investment projects are being carried out to ensure the socioeconomic development of the affected areas and create jobs.

250. Since 1986, social and sanitation conditions in the affected areas have been improved through the construction of more than 68,800 apartments and houses, including 239 settlements with essential infrastructure. Settlements and areas in which large numbers of displaced persons live were equipped with facilities. In addition, 157 general education schools with a capacity of 48,000 places, 116 kindergartens and nurseries with a capacity of 18,600 places, outpatient clinics and facilities with a capacity of 21,500 visits per shift, and hospitals with a capacity of 5,000 beds were also built.

251. In order to improve the environmental situation in the affected areas, 3,800 km of gas pipelines have been laid, over 22,000 houses have been supplied with gas, more than 2,200 km of water pipelines have been laid to provide clean water, and deferrization plants and artesian wells have been constructed.

252. A total of 113.5 km of roads were built for cars, and populated areas were enhanced.

253. Rehabilitation, sports and cultural facilities are currently being constructed and renovated.

#### **Right to physical and mental health**

254. The health-care system in Belarus continues to be State-run, providing quality free medical services and thereby helping to fulfil the constitutional right to health care. The main goal for the health-care system in future is to consolidate these achievements and improve health indicators.

255. Health care is being developed in accordance with the Strategy for the Development of Health Care in Belarus for the period up to 2020. A strategy for the development of the pharmaceutical industry for 2019–2025 has also been drawn up.

256. Medical care in Belarus is provided in health-care institutions:

- At the district level: midwife stations, community hospitals, nursing homes, outpatient clinics, general practitioners' clinics and central district hospitals
- At the inter-district and provincial level: general outpatient clinics, general hospitals, clinics, emergency hospitals and rehabilitation centres
- At the national level: general outpatient clinics, general hospitals, clinics, national centres for applied research, a national medical rehabilitation hospital and rehabilitation centres

257. Active efforts are being made to develop alternatives to inpatient treatment: day-care units and home care. In 2018, more than 686,000 patients were treated through the use of day-care units and home care.

258. In order to ensure that older persons receive the appropriate medical and social care, there are 103 nursing homes in the country with 2,709 beds. There are 4,677 nursing care beds in total, in which 18,900 persons were treated in 2018.

259. Medical care is provided by more than 55,400 physicians and 126,900 mid-level medical practitioners in 612 hospitals and 1,443 outpatient institutions and clinics.

260. Today, the health-care system in Belarus offers virtually the entire spectrum of medical services, thereby obviating the need to send citizens abroad for treatment and allowing them to avail themselves in Belarus itself of the most technologically advanced medical, health and rehabilitation services.

261. The infant mortality rate for infants weighing more than 500 g at birth fell from 4.0 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 2.5 per 1,000 in 2018 and remains the lowest in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

262. The under-5 mortality rate fell from 5.4 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 3.4 per 1,000 in 2018.

263. A few isolated cases of maternal mortality are recorded each year. In 2018, three cases were recorded, giving a maternal mortality rate of 3.4 per 100,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is one of the indicators that shows the stability of the Belarusian health-care system and is comparable to the maternal mortality rate in such countries as Finland, Israel and Poland.

264. Since 2010, there have been reductions in the numbers of deaths from respiratory diseases (by 37.2 per cent), from certain infectious and parasitic diseases (by 42.0 per cent), from circulatory system diseases (by 7.9 per cent) and from external causes (by 43.9 per cent). There has been an increase in mortality due to diseases of the nervous system, musculoskeletal system and connective tissue.

265. The increase in life expectancy from 70.4 years in 2010 to 74.5 years in 2018 (from 64.6 years to 69.2 years for men and from 76.5 years to 79.4 years for women) is an indicator of improved quality of life.

266. The establishment across the country of national centres for applied research has contributed significantly to the development of world-class technologies in Belarus. The centres provide a close link between research and practice, thus accelerating the actual application to health care of scientific breakthroughs. There are 16 national centres for applied research in Belarus and 1 centre for applied research in Minsk.

267. High-tech medical care has been introduced not only in the network of national specialized medical centres, but also at the regional level. In every province in the country, there are hospitals with heart surgery units that are equipped to carry out coronary angiograms, operations to implant pacemakers and artery stents, including of the coronary artery, and aorto-coronary bypass operations. In 2018, there were 2,203.5 heart surgeries per 1 million population, 447.4 open-heart surgeries per 1 million population and 4.3 transplants per 1 million population.

268. All trauma units in provincial and emergency care hospitals perform complex, high-tech orthopaedic surgery and the latest restorative and reconstructive surgery. Computer-assisted three-dimensional planning of hip operations and minimally invasive osteosynthesis for severe fractures of long bones of the leg are some of the techniques that have been developed and introduced.

269. The techniques introduced in neurosurgical services include high-tech surgical methods, endoscopic-transcranial approaches to benign skull base tumours in the anterior cranial fossa and the sellar/chiasmatic region, a minimally invasive method of spinal decompression and stabilization surgery and a protocol for monitoring patients with drug-resistant forms of epilepsy and adapting their treatment on an ongoing basis following neurosurgical intervention.

270. Children are increasingly benefiting from cardiac surgery thanks to the work of the National Paediatric Surgery Centre for Applied Research.

271. With regard to the treatment of blood cancer in children, considerable progress has been made and is comparable with leading world centres. The overall long-term survival rate of children with such diseases is 74 per cent and, for some forms (lymphogranulomatosis and nephroblastoma), exceeds 90 per cent. This is the second highest survival rate in Europe. Belarus ranks eighth in the world for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia outcomes in children, ahead of such countries as Finland, Israel, Japan and the United States of America (*The Lancet*, 2017).

272. The use of assisted reproductive technologies has been one of the achievements of the health-care sector. They have a 43.1 per cent success rate, which is in line with world averages.

273. This has been made possible by the acquisition and rational use of state-of-the-art equipment, the training in the best European clinics of highly qualified medical personnel, and the creation of favourable conditions for the development of medical science.

274. Expendables and components manufactured in Belarus are widely used in high-tech operations.

275. The groups entitled to receive medicines on preferential terms or free of charge, provided that these are prescribed by a physician from the list of basic medicines, are defined by law.

276. Government Decision No. 1650 of 30 November 2007 on certain issues relating to the free and subsidized provision of medicines and dressing materials for specific groups sets out a list of conditions in respect of which citizens have the right to receive, free of charge, medicines from the list of basic medicines approved by Ministry of Health Decision No. 65 of 16 July 2007.

277. In Belarus, there are local companies that produce medicines, making good quality and affordable products available to the public.

278. The health-care funding model of Belarus fully ensures equal access to high-quality medical care. The current challenges are to improve the effectiveness of health-care expenditure, bring about a shift away from an outsized network of inpatient facilities towards a system of primary medical care designed to control non-communicable diseases, promote healthy lifestyles and facilitate an active and healthy life in old age, which will make it possible to reduce health-care costs and ensure that available resources are put towards addressing key problems, in view of such factors as the likely burden of an ageing population.

279. In Belarus, the procedure for the provision of psychiatric, psychotherapeutic, drug addiction and psychological treatment is regulated by law. There are several legislative and regulatory acts in place to govern the main areas of activity, including check-ups, the implementation of compulsory safety and treatment measures, the provision of psychotherapeutic and psychological assistance, the management of inpatient social service institutions and the prevention of suicidal behaviour.

280. This enables medical institutions that offer psychiatric services to do so consistently and on a long-term basis at every level of the health-care system (district, city, provincial and national).

281. In 1999, Belarus became one of the first countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States to adopt a law on psychiatric care and guarantees of patients' rights. One of the fundamental principles of the development of psychiatric care was to ensure every citizen of Belarus accessible and free psychiatric care regardless of social status or income, a place of residence with the least restrictive conditions possible and the absence of discrimination against or infringement of the rights of persons with mental or behavioural disorders.

282. The provision of psychiatric care is currently regulated by the Provision of Psychiatric Care Act, No. 2/1901 of 12 January 2012. In November 2019, it was amended to make psychiatric care more accessible for patients with borderline mental disorders or illnesses.

283. A draft clinical protocol for the diagnosis and treatment of mental and behavioural disorders has been developed for specialist physicians providing primary health care.

284. The provision of psychological assistance is regulated by the Psychological Assistance Act, No. 2/1708 of 1 July 2010.

285. Guidelines on the provision of psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance to victims of domestic violence and guidelines on addressing aggressive behaviour were drafted and approved pursuant to Ministry of Health Order No. 1421 of 28 December 2018.

286. An indicative list of methods and techniques recommended for the provision of psychological assistance in State health-care institutions (Ministry of Health Order No. 662 of 29 June 2018) and an instruction on the provision of psychological assistance in State health-care institutions (Ministry of Health Order No. 663 of 29 June 2018) have been drawn up and approved.

287. A number of legislative and regulatory acts of the Ministry of Health provide for increased interdepartmental cooperation with the Ministries of Labour and Social Protection, Education and Internal Affairs.

288. The implementation of policy documents regulating the development of psychiatric care (the Framework for the Development of Psychiatric Care in Belarus for 2007–2010 and the action plan for its implementation over the same period) led to the creation of a new, sustainable, balanced and effective model for providing such care without significantly increasing the health-care budget and initiated a transition away from closed inpatient facilities with long periods of confinement towards a system of psychiatric care that is largely integrated into the general health-care network, with minimal confinement.

289. The Framework for the Development of Psychiatric Care in Belarus for 2016–2020 and an action plan for its implementation are currently being put into practice. This will shift the emphasis of psychiatric care away from psychiatric health-care institutions towards general health-care institutions and reduce stigma.

290. A comprehensive plan for the prevention of suicidal behaviour was implemented over the period 2009–2012 and led to the creation of a system for preventing suicidal behaviour.

291. In every province and in the city of Minsk, an emergency psychological service operates a helpline. All health-care institutions display information, including the telephone numbers in each region, on the emergency psychological assistance helpline, anonymous psychological counselling units and psychotherapy units at outpatient clinics, and the telephone number of the one-stop national children's line (the children's helpline, 8-801-100 1611).

292. A set of measures to prevent suicidal behaviour in Belarus over the period 2015–2019 is currently being implemented. As a result of the implementation of these instruments, indicators show that suicide rates have continued to fall, from 20.5 per 100,000 population in 2017 to 19.0 per 100,000 population in 2018, which resulted in the recategorization of Belarus as a country with an average suicide rate (under 20.0 per 100,000 population).

293. Belarus currently has 5,705 psychiatric beds, or 6.0 per 10,000 population. Compared to 2008, the total number of beds in psychiatric inpatient facilities decreased by 14.8 per cent as a result of the use of intensive therapeutic techniques in psychiatric inpatient facilities and the development of outpatient and day-patient psychiatric care.

294. There are 1.54 places in day-care units for patients with mental or behavioural disorders per 10,000 population (1,459 places). The number of places in day-patient facilities has increased by 23.4 per cent since 2008.

295. The coverage of psychiatrists and drug addiction specialists has increased slightly since 2008 and now stands at 0.99 posts per 10,000 population, compared to 0.75 per 10,000 in 2008.

296. Between 2008 and 2018, the number of initial diagnoses of mental and behavioural disorders increased by 2.6 per cent and, by 2018, stood at 718.1 cases per 100,000 population (68,162 persons). The average annual increase was 0.26 per cent.

297. People are admitted to psychiatric hospitals in Belarus for observation and treatment on a voluntary basis, with the consent of the patient or his or her legal representative, in accordance with articles 16, 17 and 34 of the Provision of Psychiatric Care Act. Institutional psychiatric care is provided to patients in the least restrictive environment possible to ensure their safety and the observance by medical workers of their rights and legitimate interests (Provision of Psychiatric Care Act, art. 35).

298. A system of judicial control is in place to monitor the involuntary admission of persons to psychiatric hospitals on a continuous basis. Persons with mental disorders may be hospitalized and receive treatment without their consent (compulsory treatment) only in the manner prescribed by law (Provision of Psychiatric Care Act, arts. 36–39), which helps in upholding the legitimate rights and freedoms of the citizens in question. Only a court decision may serve as grounds for the involuntary admission and treatment in a psychiatric inpatient facility, in accordance with article 392 of the Code of Civil Procedure of Belarus.

299. Hospitalization involving the use of coercive safety and treatment measures is possible only in accordance with a court ruling or order on the use of coercive safety and treatment measures in the form of compulsory treatment in a psychiatric institution, in accordance with articles 101 to 106 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

300. The State Programme on the Health and Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2020, which was approved by Government Decision No. 200 of 14 March 2016, is currently being implemented in the country.

301. Health-care institution indicators show a positive trend in the provision of medical care to persons with psychoactive substance dependence.

302. In the first 11 months of 2019, 15,598 persons, or 164.6 per 100,000 population, were recorded by health-care institutions as having received an initial diagnosis of a substance use disorder (compared to 16,411 persons, or 172.9 per 100,000 population, in 2018). Of these, 14,325 (151.2 per 100,000 population) were diagnosed with alcohol dependence, compared to 15,109 (159.2 per 100,000 population) in 2018, and 875 persons (9.2 per 100,000 population) with alcohol-induced psychosis, compared to 861 persons (9.1 per 100,000 population) in 2018. Of the patients diagnosed over the course of these 11 months, 3,103 were women (74.7 per 100,000 population), compared to 3,288 (145.1 per 100,000 population) in 2018.

303. The total number of minors recorded by health-care institutions as having received an initial diagnosis of a mental or behavioural disorder involving psychoactive substance abuse in the first 11 months of 2019 represented a reduction of 25.0 per cent compared to the same period in 2018.

304. Belarus has created 446 full-time addiction psychiatrist posts for the provision of drug addiction treatment to adults and 85.5 full-time addiction psychiatrist posts for the provision of drug addiction treatment to children. Of these, 350.5 are full-time addiction psychiatrist posts for the provision of outpatient drug addiction treatment to adults and 84.25 are full-time addiction psychiatrist posts for the provision of outpatient drug addiction treatment to children.

305. In order to raise public awareness of the dangers of smoking and prevent tobacco-related diseases, a national awareness-raising campaign is conducted twice a year (in November and May) under the slogan “Belarus against Tobacco”.

306. Every year, Belarus observes various health awareness days, including the International Day against Drug Abuse (1 March), World Autism Awareness Day (2 April), World Health Day (7 April), World No Tobacco Day (31 May), Alcoholism Prevention Day (7 July), World Suicide Prevention Day (10 September), World Mental Health Day (10 October) and World No Smoking Day – Preventing Cancer (the third Thursday in November).

307. The main focus of the preventive measures taken by the relevant bodies and departments is to encourage the public to lead a healthy lifestyle, counter existing risk factors and raise awareness of the negative consequences of using psychoactive substances. Preventive outreach work takes both traditional and new forms: round tables and press conferences, cinema and video screenings, competitions, exhibitions and themed evening functions, public speeches, one-on-one counselling sessions, telephone helplines, and health education in schools. Active use is made of online resources, which are one of the most in-demand and effective sources of information and a way of reaching the largest number of consumers from different target audiences.

308. The National Centre for Applied Research on Mental Health currently has a pilot medical and social rehabilitation centre for persons with psychoactive substance dependence syndrome.

309. In the period up to 2015, Belarus saw a significant increase in the number of crimes related to trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as in the number of persons involved. In 2014, the rate of growth in such crimes reached its highest level, 46.1 per cent.

310. The situation in this period was directly linked to the wide spread of so-called “smoking blends” (spices, blends, etc.) in the country.

311. Legislative amendments combined with practical measures are a timely and essential means of countering drug trafficking. As a result of the measures taken, there has been a decrease in the total number of recorded drug crimes, including those committed by minors, and in cases of psychoactive substance intoxication.

312. The number of persons admitted to a health-care facility following a psychoactive substance overdose fell by a factor of 4 (from 1,351 to 327), including by a factor of 20 among minors (from 223 to 11).

313. The comprehensive plan of action on the adoption of effective measures to combat drug trafficking and prevent drug abuse, including by children and young people, and ensure the social rehabilitation of drug addicts has acquired strategic importance since it was first drawn up in 2015.

314. The plan is based on a number of analytical, practical, organizational and preventive activities. Law enforcement and other State bodies and voluntary and religious organizations are involved in the implementation of the plan.

315. All government bodies are currently working on the prevention of drug addiction.

316. Drug addiction has a latency period in Belarus, as in other countries. The data on the lag between first-time drug use and drug dependence and on the total number of drug users in the country correlate with data from international experts. In order to prevent latent drug addiction, the Ministry of Health is implementing a number of measures to encourage drug users to seek early specialized drug treatment, including:

- Expanding low-threshold treatment programmes for drug users
- Expanding rehabilitation services for persons with psychoactive substance dependence syndrome
- Reviewing clinical protocols for substitution therapy and developing a uniform procedure for substitution therapy

317. The creation of pomogut.by, an online social information resource, was an important step. The website was set up to improve efforts to prevent drug addiction and to provide assistance to drug addicts, co-dependent persons and others who have experienced the problem of drug addiction. On 18 October 2018, the pomogut.by one-stop counselling centre (call centre) was launched.

318. The rehabilitation of drug addicts is the focus of considerable attention in Belarus. The aim is to socialize them and ensure their full reintegration into the community.

319. The internal affairs agencies conduct awareness-raising activities in order to prevent and combat excessive alcohol consumption and alcoholism and to instil healthy lifestyle habits. In 2018, media outlets posted 3,400 pieces on the prevention of offences related to excessive alcohol consumption and alcoholism, including 605 on television, 1,400 on the radio and 1,500 in newspapers. There have been 187 special events for the press on such topics.

320. In the media, 788 pieces were published on promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing excessive alcohol consumption, alcoholism and the harmful effects of consuming home-distilled and industrial spirits.

321. In order to prevent alcohol consumption among young people, teachers attend training seminars in educational institutions on the mechanism for the early detection and prevention of alcohol consumption among young people.

322. Internal affairs officers make widespread use of augmented reality technologies in order to draw children's attention to the visual information on display in the legal knowledge corners of educational institutions. Police officers use Quick Response (QR) codes as a way of storing information.

323. As a result of the measures implemented, the number of crimes committed by persons under the influence of alcohol fell by 5.8 per cent (from 16,018 to 15,091).

324. The number of persons not in employment or education who committed crimes under the influence of alcohol decreased (by 4 per cent, from 8,650 to 8,306), as did the number of persons with criminal records who committed crimes under the influence of alcohol (by 3.8 per cent, from 4,650 to 4,472).

325. In addition, it should be noted that, by the end of 2018, the number of road traffic accidents caused by drivers who were under the influence of alcohol had fallen (by 19.9 per cent, from 361 to 289), as had the numbers of persons killed (by 18.4 per cent, from 87 to 71) or injured (by 17.9 per cent, from 396 to 325) in such accidents.

326. The number of minors who participated in criminal acts while under the influence of alcohol also fell over the reporting period (by 3.5 per cent, from 257 to 248).

327. In recent years, the legislation in place to prevent smoking has been improved and tightened in Belarus. Presidential Decree No. 28 of 17 December 2002 on the State regulation of the production, sale and consumption of raw tobacco and tobacco products (as set out in Presidential Decree No. 2 of 24 November 2019 on amendments to presidential decrees), which entered into force on 27 July 2019, regulates electronic smoking devices and their liquids, tobacco consumption devices, and certain standards and rules applicable to the distribution and consumption of tobacco products. Restrictions have also been imposed on the places where electronic smoking devices and their liquids and tobacco consumption devices may be sold and used. There is a ban on the sale of the such liquids.

328. According to the stepwise approach to surveillance (STEPS) survey on the prevalence of non-communicable disease risk factors in Belarus among persons aged 18 to 69 years, which was conducted in 2016–2017, 29.6 per cent of respondents currently smoke. In 2010, according to a survey of behavioural risk factors among the population of Belarus, 30.6 per cent of persons aged 16 years or over smoked and 27.1 per cent did so on a daily basis. Smoking tobacco consumption stands at 48.4 per cent among men (versus 47.1 per cent in 2010) and 12.6 per cent among women (versus 17.0 per cent in 2010).

329. In 2018, in order to promote healthy lifestyles, experts from the bodies and institutions responsible for State health and safety inspections made more than 8,000 television appearances, more than 10,000 radio appearances, published more than 10,000 articles in the press and held 453 round tables and 227 press conferences to promote responsible behaviour and prevent addiction and disease. Online resources are an effective source of information that make it possible to reach the largest number of information users from different target audiences. During the current year, over 35,000 items of information on health preservation and promotion have been posted on the Internet.

330. Belarus has developed a national model for family planning and men's health services.

331. The country has a developed system for the medical monitoring of girls, including adolescent girls.

332. Girls are screened by obstetric gynaecologists at the age of 2 or 3 years, as they enrol in a preschool education institution, at the age of 5 or 6 years, if they have not been examined previously, and once a year between the ages of 15 and 17 years.

333. Around 14.0 per cent of couples are infertile. Marriage and family clinics have been set up in every provincial centre and in the city of Minsk. There are also assisted reproductive technology units. The number of abortions is falling year on year. Between 2010 and 2018, it fell by a factor of 1.3.

334. Pregnant women are subject to medical supervision and receive all types of medical care on an outpatient and inpatient basis during pregnancy and during and after childbirth and also medical care for newborns. The proportion of births that take place in an inpatient facility is 99.8 per cent.

335. There are 2,635 obstetric gynaecologists working in Belarusian medical facilities (5.4 per cent of all physicians).

336. A multilevel perinatal care system has been set up and is operational. It is based on the principle of equal access to appropriate and effective specialized medical care.

337. The country currently has 1 level IV perinatal care centre, the National Mother and Child Centre for Applied Research 17 level III perinatal care centres and 27 level II perinatal care centres.

338. In Belarus, contraceptive devices are available to the public, including to men. Citizens may choose to use whichever method of contraception they wish.

339. The State has taken steps to ensure the availability and accessibility of various methods of contraception. The country's network of pharmacies offers a wide range of contraceptive devices, including barrier, mechanical and hormonal contraceptives, which cost no more than US\$ 10 a month on average. A doctor's prescription is required to obtain hormonal contraceptives, with the exception of emergency contraceptives.

340. In Belarus, women have the right to decide for themselves whether they wish to have children.

341. Pre-abortion psychological counselling has been introduced with a view to reducing the psychological burden on women or couples. At health-care facilities, pre-abortion psychological counselling is made available and provided to women who seek termination of a pregnancy. A full-time psychologist post has been created at women's clinics to provide pre-abortion counselling.

342. More than 20 per cent of women who underwent pre-abortion counselling decided to keep their child.

343. During pre-abortion counselling, the woman (and her partner, if so desired) is given full information about the harm done by abortion and the possible complications of terminating a pregnancy.

344. By 2018, the abortion rate for women of childbearing age had fallen to 10.5 per 1,000 women of that age (from 13.5 per 1,000 in 2010) and for adolescent girls to 0.48 per 1,000 (from 1.8 per 1,000 in 2010).

### **Right to education**

345. Higher education in Belarus is available to everyone in accordance with his or her individual capacities. Everyone may, on the basis of a competitive examination, receive the appropriate education free of charge in a State educational institution. This right is guaranteed under article 49 of the Constitution.

346. Citizens of Belarus, foreign nationals and stateless persons permanently residing in Belarus, and foreign nationals and stateless persons who have been granted refugee status or asylum in Belarus have the right to enter the competitive examination to receive higher education in State higher education institutions funded from the national budget, if they have never before received this level of education funded from the budget, or in State or private higher education institutions for a fee.

347. The statistics for the 2018/19 academic year show that the following are enrolled in higher education institutions:

- 268,102 undergraduate students, including 142,447 women (53.1 per cent) and 845 persons with disabilities
- 14,705 master's students, including 5,919 (40.3 per cent) women and 23 persons with disabilities

348. There are 113,297 persons enrolled in specialized secondary education, of whom 57,439 (50.7 per cent) are male and 55,858 (49.3 per cent) female. There are 771 students with disabilities, who represent 0.7 per cent of the total.

349. There are 65,705 persons enrolled in vocational training, of whom 44,145 (67.2 per cent) are male and 21,560 (32.8 per cent) female. There are 557 students with disabilities, who represent 0.85 per cent of the total.

350. As at 1 September 2018, 996,018 students were enrolled in general secondary education. Of these, 503,774 (50.6 per cent) were male and 492,244 (49.4 per cent) female.

351. Records are kept of children aged 0 to 18 years with a view to ensuring that they may exercise their constitutional rights as citizens to education and that basic general education is universal and compulsory, facilitating the transition to compulsory general secondary education, identifying children who are not in education and taking measures to return them to school, and creating conditions conducive to the effective functioning and development of the general secondary education system.

352. The child registration procedure is set out in the regulations on the procedure for the registration of children required to undergo general secondary education, which were approved by Government Decision No. 1493 of 8 November 2006.

353. As at 15 September 2018, the database on children with special physical or psychological needs included 161,694 children with such needs, of whom 12,646 were children with disabilities. This amounts to 8.67 per cent of all children aged under 18 years.

354. The following measures are being taken to expand the opportunities available to children with special physical or psychological needs in the area of education:

- The draft of the new Education Code has been amended to focus State education policy on the principle of inclusive education, thereby ensuring equal access to education for all students with due regard to their individual educational needs and individual capacities (whether they are gifted, talented or have particular needs owing to their life situation, health or other circumstances).
- Pilot projects are being conducted with a view to developing inclusive educational processes.
- Work is under way to create an adaptive, barrier-free learning environment in educational institutions.
- Special schools and boarding schools are being streamlined (their number has fallen by 38.7 per cent over the last 10 years).
- The Inclusive Education Institute was established at the special education department of the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University, which trains teaching staff to work with children with special physical or psychological needs.
- With the support of the United Nations Children's Fund, a national inclusive education resource centre has been opened, and work is under way to set up provincial resource centres.
- Students with autism in preschool, general secondary or special education institutions and students with locomotor impairments and blind students in general secondary or special education institutions receive personalized educational support.
- At all levels of the education system, active awareness-raising efforts are being made to foster a culture of inclusivity and tolerance towards disability.
- National, provincial and regional events are held with the participation of children with special physical or psychological needs, including those with disabilities, and their peers.

355. In Belarus, the opportunity to receive education is given to all children, regardless of the nature and extent of their impairments.

356. Inclusive education approaches are set out in legislation and strategic planning documents, including the National Strategy for the Sustainable Socioeconomic Development of Belarus for the period up to 2030 and the State Programme on Education and Youth Policy for 2016–2020.

357. The Socioeconomic Development Programme of Belarus for 2016–2020 identifies the development of inclusive education as an important area. There are thus plans to create an optimal network of educational institutions providing inclusive education, model educational institutions for integrated instruction and training, and resource centres at special education institutions.

358. The Ministry of Education has adopted a number of documents aimed at developing inclusive education, including an inclusive education framework for persons with special physical or psychological needs in Belarus and a plan of action for its implementation over the period 2016–2020. The Ministry has also approved a set of guidelines on the development of the education system for the period up to 2020 and onwards up to 2030, in which developing inclusive education processes and ensuring that all persons involved in the educational process are prepared to realize the concept of inclusion have been identified as goals for the period up to 2030.

359. Gender relations in modern society are studied as part of module 1, on the social sphere, of the curriculum for the subject Social Science for students in tenth grade (higher secondary level) at general secondary education institutions. The curriculum was approved pursuant to a Ministry of Education decision of 27 July 2017.

360. Guidelines for teachers who lead classes on gender relations in modern society have been uploaded to the national education portal <https://adu.by/>.

361. Co-education in general secondary education institutions is aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes. Co-education gives students the opportunity to learn how to communicate with the opposite sex, enables them to grow up around alternative ways of thinking, fosters partnerships between the sexes and instils a spirit of tolerance in them. Nevertheless, there are also educational institutions in Belarus that admit only girls (for example, the Zhodzina Girls' Gymnasium, a State educational institution) or boys (for example, the Minsk City Cadet School, a State educational institution).

362. Reproductive and sexual health issues are taught in general secondary education institutions with due regard to the ages of the students.

363. In ninth grade, as part of the subject Biology, five hours are devoted to the reproductive system and the development of the human body. The issues are considered as part of this topic include the concept of reproduction and the development of the human body, the male and female reproductive systems, fertilization, pregnancy and childbirth, puberty, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, and factors detrimental to the development of the human body (alcohol, nicotine and toxic substances).

364. The preparation for military service and medical training course for students in the tenth grade includes a module on the medical and biological aspects of sex education, to which eight hours are allocated. The topics covered in this module include problems in relationships between boys and girls, reproductive health, contraceptives, pregnancy, abortion and its consequences, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and prevention of AIDS.

365. Reproductive and sexual health issues are covered in the health and safety course: as part of the module on healthy lifestyles, which is taught in the fifth grade, three hours are devoted to the study of alcoholism and its social consequences and impact on human reproductive health and to the study of drug addiction and its social consequences and impact on human reproductive health.

366. General secondary education institutions run programmes of optional classes on family and gender, which have been approved in accordance with the established procedure: Preparing Students for Family Life, in the tenth or eleventh grade, and Basic Gender Awareness, in the tenth and eleventh grades.

367. There are no restrictions in the country's laws and regulations on the schooling of pregnant adolescent girls in general secondary education institutions.

368. In accordance with paragraph 56 (3) of the rules on the assessment of students who have mastered the content of general secondary education curricula, which were approved pursuant to a decision of the Ministry of Education of 20 July 2011, female students with children aged under 3 years are exempted from all leaving examinations, upon application, provided that they have a passing score.

## Cultural rights

369. The legal status of ethnic minorities, including their ability to choose their language of education and training, is regulated by a number of legislative acts, including the Constitution (art. 50), the Ethnic Minorities of Belarus Act, No. 260-Z of 1 January 2004 (art. 6), and the Education Code (art. 90).

370. The basic principles of State policy in the area of culture are set out in the Culture Code.

371. Citizens who live in Belarus and are members of ethnic minorities or have a different cultural background have the right to observe and develop their ethnic culture, raise their children in their ethnic and cultural traditions, use their native language and establish cultural contacts with members of relevant ethnic communities living abroad.

372. Citizens of Belarus have the right to set up cultural voluntary associations, including creative unions, and to join existing ones. Resources from the national budget are allocated to support ethnic and cultural associations on an ongoing basis.

373. Over 140 nations and peoples are represented in Belarus. There are 193 ethnic and cultural voluntary associations in Belarus, of which 9 are associations of Azerbaijanis, 4 of Armenians, 2 of Afghans, 2 of Greeks, 3 of Georgians, 1 of Dagestanis, 43 of Jews, 1 of Iranians, 2 of Kazakhs, 1 of Koreans, 10 of Lithuanians, 1 of Moldovans, 2 of Germans, 1 of Palestinians, 69 of Poles, 15 of Russians, 1 of Syrians, 2 of Tatars, 2 of Tatar-Bashkirs, 1 of Turkmens, 1 of Turks, 12 of Ukrainians, 5 of Roma, 2 of Chuvashes and 1 of Estonians.

374. There are 21 ethnic and cultural voluntary associations attached to the National Centre for Ethnic Cultures. In 2018, they conducted 371 events. Belarus has traditionally hosted the National Festival of Ethnic Cultures, which brings together all the ethnic minorities living in the country. The festival promotes mutual understanding and cultural enrichment. In 2018, more than 800 persons from 35 ethnicities took part in the closing events of the twelfth National Festival of Ethnic Cultures, and 14 celebrations of ethnic cultures were held in the Upper Town of Minsk, including celebrations of Georgian, Korean, Moldovan, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Swedish and Estonian cultures. There were several events on ethnic languages, alphabets and decorative arts, ethnic and State symbols, the anniversaries of cultural and historical figures, and popular holidays and rituals.

375. The Inter-Ethnic Advisory Council under the Office of the Commissioner for Religious and Ethnic Affairs remains active in drawing up recommendations for the formulation of State policy in support of ethnic minorities. The Council is made up of members of more than 20 of the ethnic groups represented in Belarus.

376. Members of ethnic minorities have the same rights as all citizens of Belarus to education, including in the area of culture. If citizens belonging to different ethnicities so wish, local authorities may freely establish kindergartens or separate kindergarten groups and general education schools or classes in which the language of instruction is that of an ethnic minority. The Ministry of Education supports the establishment of such educational institutions.

377. Belarus currently has schools and separate classes in which the sole language of instruction is Polish, Lithuanian or Hebrew.

378. More than 60 weekend schools have been set up at ethnic and cultural associations. They enable around 5,000 people from 14 ethnicities to study their native language, history and culture.

379. Universities in Brest, Hrodna and Minsk train teachers of Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian. With State support, newspapers are published in Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian.

380. Since 2016, the country's first project for the Roma diaspora, entitled "Roma education – a new vision for the future", has been implemented in Homiel province. In 2018, the country's first festival of Roma culture took place in Homiel.

381. There is an active Polish Institute in Minsk, which promotes Polish culture and the Polish language and establishes contacts between scientific, literary and cultural figures from Poland and Belarus.

382. Russian is the second State language in Belarus and is studied and taught across the country.

383. At the postgraduate-degree level (master's level), the student may select either Russian or English as the language of instruction, which, in turn, reflects the fact that the upbringing, education and development of students is a multicultural process.

## C. Good practices

### **Coordinating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**

384. Belarus is committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is taking specific steps towards its realization at the national level. In order to lay the institutional groundwork for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the overall coordination of activities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the President of Belarus appointed M.A. Shchetkina, Deputy Chair of the Council of the Republic, the upper house of the National Assembly of Belarus, as the national coordinator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Under her leadership, the Sustainable Development Council was established. It is made up of deputy-level representatives of State bodies and institutions. The Council has held three meetings, on 4 September 2017, 1 June 2018 and 26 June 2019.

385. A regional sustainable development group has been set up in every province. On 28 June 2019, the country's first forum on sustainable regional development was held in Mahilioŭ.

386. In order to involve the general public in work towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the Council cooperates with the Sustainable Development Partnership Group, in which representatives of business, voluntary associations and academia are involved.

387. A parliamentary group on the Sustainable Development Goals has been established under the National Assembly. On 19 December 2017, the Council of the Republic held an open parliamentary hearing on partnership among the branches of government as a prerequisite for successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The recommendations adopted at the hearing were referred to the Government for implementation and oversight. On 17 December 2018, the progress made in implementing these recommendations was reviewed at an enlarged meeting of the parliamentary group.

388. Work is under way to incorporate the global monitoring indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals into the national system of statistics. The country has drawn up a national list of indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, which includes 255 indicators. At the end of 2018, a national platform for reporting on the indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> was launched as the primary tool for monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

389. The National Strategy for the Sustainable Socioeconomic Development of Belarus for the period up to 2030 and the Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of Belarus for 2016–2020 are key policy documents on future development issues. In 2018, Belarus began the process of drafting a national sustainable development strategy for the period up to 2035, in which the Sustainable Development Goals will be taken into account. It is expected that the draft national strategy will have been drawn up by the end of 2019.

390. On 24 January 2019, the first National Sustainable Development Forum was held in Minsk. It had more than 450 participants, including members of the Government, the parliament and State authorities.

391. A website on the Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus ([www.sdgs.by](http://www.sdgs.by)) has been created to ensure that citizens have access to information on the Goals. Work is also being done on social networks: a Twitter account on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus has been set up and is actively being promoted.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://195.50.6.73/sites/belstatfront/home.html>.

