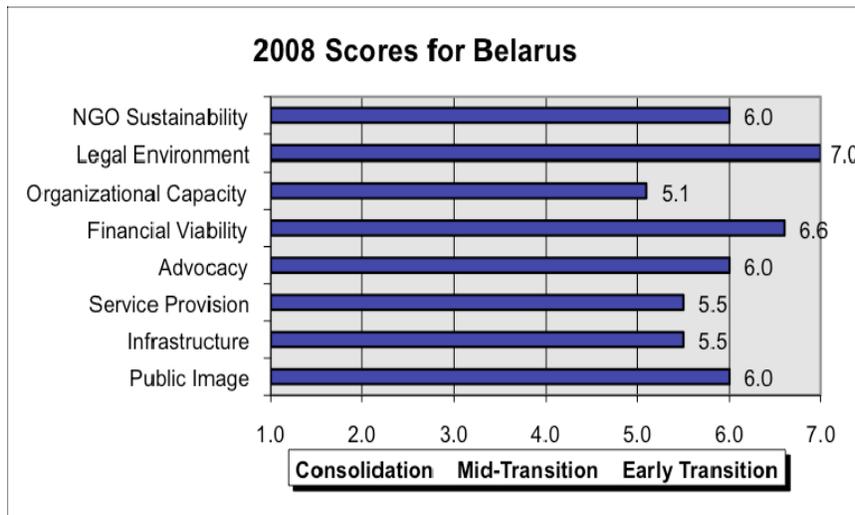


BELARUS



Capital: Minsk

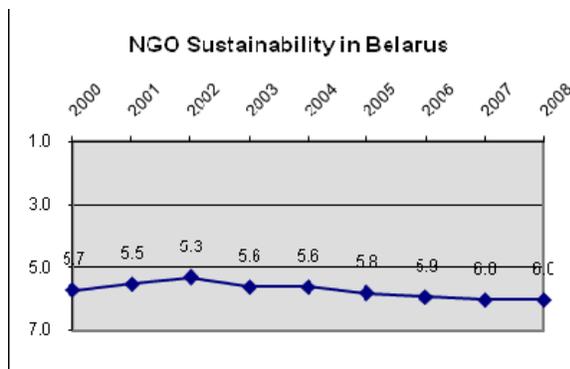
Polity:
Republic in name

Population:
9,648,533 (July 2009 est.)

GDP per capita (PPP):
\$12,000 (2008 est.)

NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 6.0

The NGO sector in Belarus remained at the same level of sustainability over the past year, though the situation showed a gradually worsening tendency.



About 2,300 NGOs, seventy-three foundations, and twenty-one associations are registered in Belarus. According to statistics from the website www.pravo.by, as of November 14, 2008, sixty-nine national NGOs were newly registered in 2008. The number of registered local NGOs is 1,350, and fifty-three registered in 2008. Nine foundations registered, as well as two NGO associations and many branches of political parties, trade unions, and NGOs. The registration of 7,628 new NGO branches suggests that it is easier to register branches of

existing NGOs than to register a new organization.

Many NGOs have failed to register, or have lost their registration. The number of unregistered NGOs is close to the number of officially registered NGOs, an indication that the sector has increasingly moved underground in order to keep functioning.

Registration continues to be problematic for NGOs that are not openly pro-government and for those that are blacklisted for their activities. Movement for Freedom, led by former presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich, was denied registration three times before it obtained its formal status in 2008. The NGO Nashe Pokolenie, uniting senior citizens and pensioners, was also denied registration.

The legal environment has been hostile to NGOs for several years. NGOs are adapting to the difficult legal situation in order to carry out their activities.

Advocacy skills of some NGOs, such as women's NGOs, entrepreneurs' associations, and NGOs for people with disabilities, improved. A coalition of women's NGOs led an advocacy campaign which in September 2008

resulted in government approval of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2008–2010. Overall, NGO advocacy efforts are impeded by the environment.

NGOs remain dependent on foreign donors. Service provision by NGOs varies according to the amount of funds raised from foreign donors. NGO infrastructure has slightly improved due to NGOs restructuring their functions. Some NGOs assumed the functions of resource centers and grantmaking intermediary support organizations (ISOs). NGOs' public

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 7.0

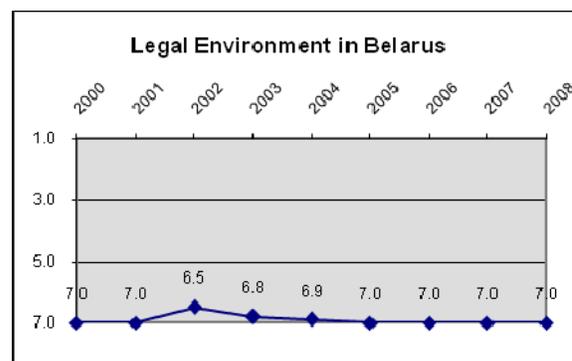
Registration of new NGOs depends on the will of the relevant government bodies. For example, during the last year only five out of ten groups that received legal assistance with registration from the Assembly of Democratic NGOs of Belarus and the Foundation for Legal Technologies Development were able to register. Organizations such as Belaruskaya Khristianskaya Demokratia (Belarusian Christian Democracy), Malady Front (Young Front), and Movement Za Svabodu (Movement for Freedom) were refused registration several times. Their members are potentially criminally liable for participating in the activities of an unregistered organization and could be charged and imprisoned.

The law obliges NGOs to have a legal address at rented premises. NGOs are not allowed to have offices in privately owned apartments or houses, and must register at nonresidential premises, most of which are owned by state agencies or state-controlled companies. In April 2008, Presidential Edict no. 533 came into effect introducing new rules on state property rentals and putting NGOs on the same rent scale as commercial entities. This measure has increased rents for NGOs tenfold and forced many NGOs whose activities are not of a "humanitarian nature" to dissolve.

Belarusian laws limit NGO fundraising and use of particular sources of funding. To receive and use foreign assistance, NGOs need to register

image, however, is worsening. NGOs are constantly marginalized and state-controlled media intensively promote GONGOs. New GONGOs like Belaya Rus, which has over 12,000 members, have been registered.

While NGO experts considered NGO sustainability to be deteriorating, the overall score remains the same as last year only because of the fact that the situation in the sector is uneven. The most mature Belarusian NGOs, however few, continue functioning and reaching their tactical and strategic goals.



the funds and activities through highly bureaucratic procedures. NGO Novye Litsa (New Faces) has failed for four years to register any of its five projects. NGOs can obtain sponsorship from local businesses only for the goals set by Presidential Edict no. 300 or with the president's personal approval. Even acknowledged social service organizations providing assistance to children with disabilities witnessed a sharp decrease in donations from business. The law forbids NGOs to generate income from service provision. Funding of NGOs from the state budget is also forbidden, with the exception of a number of youth and children's NGOs that are on a special government register.

Belarusian legislation restricts the territory of an NGO's operations. Depending on their registration status, NGOs can operate at the national, regional or local level. Local youth NGO Focus Group, registered in Minsk, was

given a warning in 2008 for operating outside Minsk.

The administration is ready to find any excuse to hamper NGOs' activities. Visa denials of foreign experts invited by Belarusian NGOs have increased. NGOs cannot officially rent space for planned events.

NGOs who conducted advocacy campaigns against construction of a nuclear power station

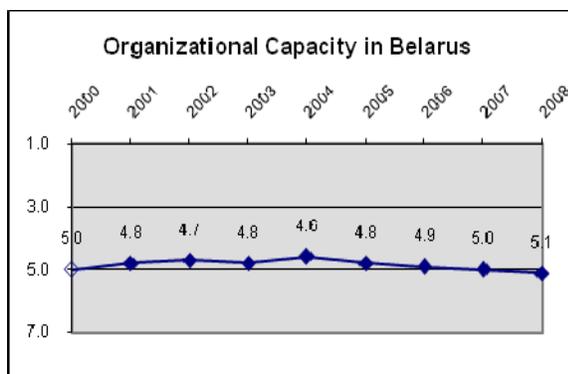
in Belarus and in favor of the amendment of electoral legislation were subject to harassment.

Professionals in NGO law and related legislation are few and Belarusian higher education institutions do not train noncommercial law specialists. Few lawyers are eager to work in the NGO sector because such work does not offer prestige or attractive pay.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.1

The number of NGOs that have to operate in violation of the law is growing in Belarus and includes social service NGOs as well as those conducting pro-democracy activities. Activities of unregistered groups are prohibited by Belarusian laws and such groups can be administratively and criminally prosecuted, as can NGOs spending unregistered funds. The state has designated only a few priority development areas for which NGOs are allowed to raise and register foreign funds. International donors continue funding Belarusian NGOs, however.

In the current environment, NGOs avoid transparency. They abstain from publicly announcing their events and reporting their activities. As a result, NGOs do not build local constituencies. They involve new people into their activities through personal contacts and referrals.



Experienced NGOs managed to adapt to the unfavorable economic and political environment

and plan strategically. Strategic planning has become a response to the aggressive environment and a tool towards sustainability. Examples of NGOs and networks that have strategic plans are the Association of Youth NGOs RADA, the Belarusian AIDS Network, and the Assembly of Democratic NGOs of Belarus.

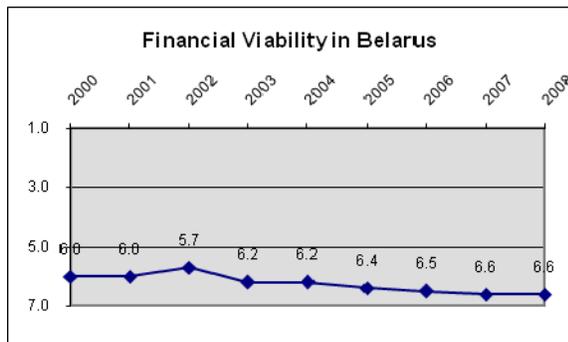
Local grassroots NGOs and unregistered civic initiatives have neither clearly defined missions nor strategic plans. Their plans are short-term and reactive, following the opportunities offered by donors or big national NGOs.

NGOs' internal management and decision-making systems are becoming less transparent in the unfavorable environment. The year 2008 was marked by numerous internal organizational conflicts caused by money issues and lack of transparency. Registered NGOs submit annual reports to state registration bodies, but they do not make them public.

Most NGOs had to move from their offices to smaller ones or decided to forego office space because of the tenfold increase in rent. It is difficult to find even commercial space for NGO meetings, as property owners who rent out space to NGOs are often harassed by authorities. Leaders of NGOs keep office equipment in their own apartments, thus limiting members' and volunteers' access to equipment and information. Low salaries and lack of benefits resulted in a low number of qualified professionals working for NGOs.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.6

Financial viability of NGOs is weak because of the restrictive legislation and administrative environment. Funds raised must be officially approved and registered, and used for presidential priorities such as mitigation of the Chernobyl accident, social support, and humanitarian aid to disadvantaged groups. Other methods of fundraising lead to penalties including closure.



On May 29, 2008, Presidential Decree no. 10 and Decree no. 24 were issued to enhance control over usage of foreign grants. Now, before applying for registration of a grant with the Department of Humanitarian Aid (a substructure of the presidential administration), NGOs have to get approval for project activities from the relevant ministry.

Leading NGOs are successful in obtaining financial support from international donors. Inexperienced, regional NGOs have limited access to international funding and their financial viability depends on re-granting programs implemented by well-developed NGOs. The majority of NGOs understand

ADVOCACY: 6.0

The decision-making process in Belarus has limited potential for NGO participation because all key decisions are made by the presidential administration. There are no locally elected governments. Still, even in such an environment NGOs find opportunities to advocate for their target populations.

financial diversification as getting funds from more than one international donor.

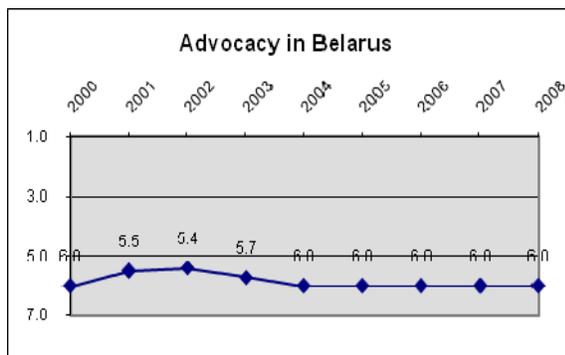
The majority of Belarusian NGOs underestimate local resources. Only a few leading NGOs that provide services for vulnerable populations, such as Mothers against Drugs, BelARDA, and Belarusian Children's Hospice, allocate resources to local fundraising. Belarusian AIDS Network launched a fundraising campaign at Slavyanski Bazaar Music Festival in Vitebsk. Though they invested more money than they collected, the campaign was a rare effort by NGOs to raise local funds. Some social service NGOs managed to get in-kind contributions from local authorities. For instance, regional branches of the Belarusian Association of Assistance to Disabled Children and Young People use office space in state Territorial Centers for Social Services. On the other hand, such NGOs risk becoming controlled by and dependent on the state.

NGOs are prohibited from conducting revenue-generating activities. Their only option is to set up an independent commercial enterprise, such as the enterprise of the Association of People with Disabilities, which has existed since the Soviet era.

NGO financial systems are vulnerable to potential mismanagement. Executive responsibility and financial authority are concentrated in the hands of the NGO leader. The leader and at most a few close associates control all the resources and details of the annual budget and programs. NGOs practice separate accounting systems for the authorities and for international donors.

A coalition of women's NGOs led an advocacy campaign that resulted in government approval of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2008–2010. Business associations consistently campaign to change public opinion in favor of entrepreneurship and market economy-oriented legislation. Some results have

been achieved, such as the simplification of administrative procedures for registration of commercial companies. The rule of the “golden share,” which allowed the government to maintain a single share in a privatized company, was abolished, limiting the state’s opportunities to interfere in the activities of joint stock companies.



For three years, NGO ACT has actively promoted the concept of social contracting. Donors provided funding for research on social contracting in 2009, and the social contracting mechanism was made a part of the National Program on HIV Prevention for 2009–2010. The Belarusian Association of Assistance to Children and Young People with Disabilities successfully advocated for the interests of children with disabilities, retaining their benefits despite government attempts to abolish them, and securing state funding for new services for disabled children. NGO Our House has been successful in advocating for changes to the regulations on keeping detainees in

SERVICE PROVISION: 5.5

Service provision has not improved in Belarus. One of the significant factors is the lack of a mechanism for social contracting of NGO services by the state. Efforts of Belarusian NGOs to promote such a mechanism have not succeeded so far, though the government provides financial support for GONGOs like Belarusian Republican Youth Union, Republican NGO Belaya Rus, and Belarusian Republican Pioneer Organization.

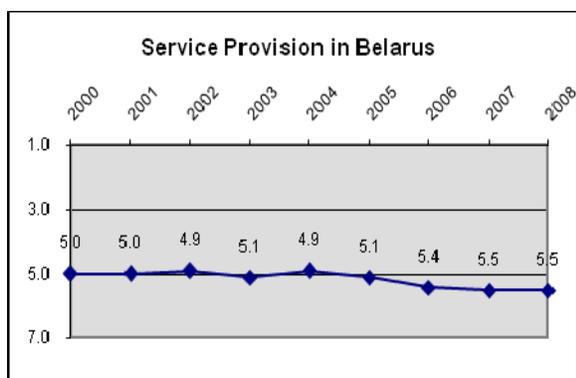
temporary detention centers. A coalition of ecological NGOs advocated for certification of organic agricultural products. NGO advocacy efforts lack solidarity, however. Most successes have been achieved by single NGOs, not coalitions.

Collaboration between NGOs and state bodies is problematic. Effective communications are based on personal relationships. Administrative bodies tend to use NGOs’ resources rather than build partnerships with NGOs. For example, the Public Coordination Committee, a consultative body of governmental and nongovernmental experts, has been operating for seven years at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. The ministry uses the committee as a tool for reporting on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and for raising international donor funds. NGO attempts to stimulate public debate about environmental concerns, such as the nuclear power station or logging, are suppressed, however.

Though a number of NGOs have improved their advocacy skills, most NGOs are extremely skeptical about the potential for lobbying campaigns to succeed.

Due to NGOs’ lack of media skills and the unwillingness of state media to cover NGO activities, the general public does not perceive NGOs as significant actors in political and social processes.

NGOs cannot legally charge fees for their services according to the law. The complicated financial reporting system in Belarus discourages NGOs from collecting membership fees unless they can afford an accountant to ensure that amounts are reported correctly to the tax department. But many NGOs collect membership fees and rely on them for financial survival.



Social service NGOs that implement officially registered projects offer a range of services, but only for target groups mentioned in state programs. These include people with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, and people living with HIV/AIDS. Pro-democratic, human rights and civic education NGOs are either unable or unwilling to promote their services

INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.5

The NGO community of Belarus does not have an infrastructure to ensure broad access to support services, although the situation has improved slightly. In past years some resource centers and ISOs were forced to close. Regional administrations block efforts of resource centers to operate or to create new resource centers. While other NGOs and their networks have assumed some of their information sharing and training functions, these services are neither regular nor consistent. Some NGOs consider resource centers unnecessary in Belarus because in their experience resource centers and re-granting ISOs often manipulated other NGOs.

Some support functions are carried out by other NGOs and networks. GreenBelarus provides web resources with ecology-related information and consulting. The Assembly of Democratic NGOs of Belarus provides legal services, surveys, publications, and an e-mail information network exchange. RADA Association of Youth NGOs conducts surveys and research in youth policy, and provides training, re-granting, and consulting, as well as intermediary services

openly and to use different technologies to reach their target populations.

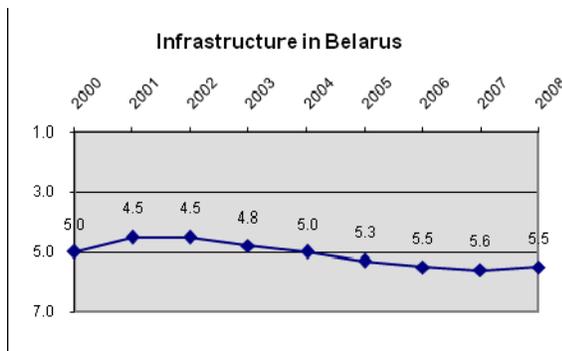
NGOs try to find alternative ways to reach their target populations by registering other forms of noncommercial, nongovernmental organizations. Homeowners' associations, for example, promote local self-governance.

NGO services are often of high quality and in great demand by other NGOs and even state bodies. Unfortunately, such products and services cannot be produced in sufficient quantities. For example, popular publications such as the NGO magazine *Aducatar* are issued in limited editions. Social services in high demand are provided only for a group of clients for as long as donor funding lasts. Services provided by NGOs are based less on the identified needs of clients and more on available funds for specific projects. Most such projects lack a longer-term sustainability component.

between Belarusian and European umbrella NGOs and programs. Each oblast capital has NGO centers that provide NGOs with access to office equipment, training, and re-granting of foreign funds to local grassroots NGOs.

Local trainers are few, there is no accessible database of such trainers, funding is insufficient, and no new cadre of trainers is emerging. Still, Belarusian NGOs have good training opportunities, as well as capable local trainers and consultants in management and other NGO-related fields. Trainings and materials are provided to NGOs in Russian and Belarusian, but the variety of training topics is narrow.

Awareness of the advantages of coalitions is slowly growing within the NGO community, and antagonism between NGOs operating in similar spheres is not as evident as in previous years. Examples of existing coalitions are the Assembly of Democratic NGOs of Belarus with 234 NGO members, the Association of Civic Education with nineteen participating NGOs,

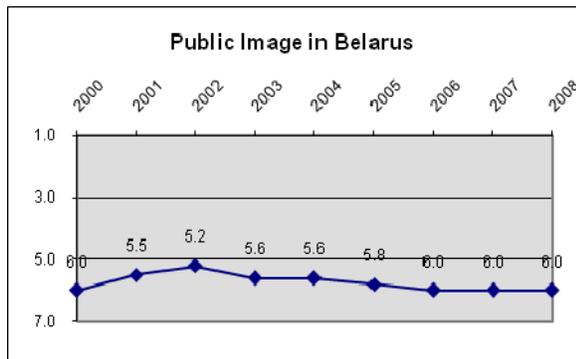


and the Belarusian AIDS Network with ten AIDS service NGOs.

Examples of NGOs working in formal or informal partnership with local business, government, and the media are fewer than last year. Some positive examples did occur in the fields of agritourism and informal education. Intersectoral partnerships are more successful in local communities, though in general they are dependent on personal contacts.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 6.0

Due to the hostile environment, many NGOs avoid publicity. For security reasons they limit their constituents to people they trust. NGOs are becoming disconnected from the public.



assess, but it seems to be an effective tool in building an alternative NGO space.

The government makes enormous efforts to marginalize NGOs and minimize their recognition in society. Business does not consider NGOs as valuable resources or potential partners unless NGOs are very proactive and consistent in their outreach efforts.

NGOs generally lack resources to employ professional public relations specialists. A number of leading NGOs are aware of the importance of a positive public image. There are examples of long-term and well-designed public awareness campaigns to promote civic education and private entrepreneurship. For example, a leading business association developed the National Business Platform to involve businessmen and entrepreneurs in lobbying the government for legislative and administrative changes. Many of their suggestions were incorporated into new regulatory measures. Such successful examples are still few and do not characterize the sector in general, however.

NGOs are poorly aware of the importance of having and implementing an ongoing communications strategy. Some NGOs use national and regional mass media occasionally, but state-controlled media omit NGOs' names, overemphasize the significance of GONGOs, and occasionally feed negative information about NGOs to the public.

NGOs use alternative channels of communication such as websites, e-mail lists, list serves and publications. Most NGO websites are poorly designed and few are regularly updated. The Internet and e-mail are very popular tools and sources of information about all kinds of civic initiatives. Despite their virtual absence in the official print and electronic media, NGOs are a tightly knit community and news spreads fast. The importance and density of this communication and networking is hard to

It is sometimes easier for social service NGOs to improve their public image. In 2008, a group of NGOs dealing with HIV/AIDS issues made an effort to promote its public image and developed a professional code of ethics of HIV/AIDS trainers. The initiative was donor-driven, however, and the code has not yet gained broad support.

Annual reports, which are required by the Ministry of Justice, do little to build NGOs'

public image. The reports are formal and do not reflect the real picture of NGOs' activities and budgets. NGOs see annual reports as a tool of

state control over NGOs rather than a tool to promote transparency.