

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



CONTRIBUTION OF
NON-PROGRAMME COUNTRIES TO
EU YOUTH WIKI
CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATION
BELARUS

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5.1. General context

Main concepts

Encouraging youth participation as a concept for contributing to the development of the Republic of Belarus has been actively developed since 1991 when the country gained its independence after the collapse of the USSR. International aid support and grant schemes for supporting youth organisations entered Belarus and have funded several sound initiatives.

One such key action targeted the development of a youth representation body in the face of the [Belarusian Youth National Council “RADA”](#), which was formed in 1993. There was a period of consultation with the [Council of European National Youth Councils](#) (CENYC) on forming and transforming the national umbrella youth organisation, stressing the leading role of newly established independent organisations such as “RADA”. This organisation represented a rather strong community of youth organisations and initiatives which were elaborating their strategy on the principles of democracy and open access.

At the same time came the [Belarusian Committee of Youth Organisations \(BCYO\)](#), founded by the [Belarusian Republican Youth Union](#) in 1993. In fact, the BCYO tended to act as the national umbrella organisation following close co-operation with state bodies and receiving sound funding for its activities from the state budget. For several years there existed two national umbrella organisations in Belarus that spoke for youth organisations with different ideological lines. However, “RADA”, as the umbrella youth council organisation in Belarus, represents the country at the European Youth Forum. Meanwhile, the BCYO, as an umbrella network organisation, acts only *de jure*. An understanding of these processes taking place in Belarus in the 1990s is sufficiently important for comprehending the present situation in the youth sector of Belarus.

Institutions of representative democracy

The constitutional structure of the Republic of Belarus is a sovereign unitary presidential republic. The legislative body of the country is the National Assembly, whereas the judiciary system is ruled by the Supreme Court.

The term for each presidency is five years. Under the 1994 Constitution, the president could serve for only two terms as president, but within the amendments to the Constitution resulting from the referendum in 2004, the term limit was eliminated.

Belarus is governed within a centralised system including the hierarchical system. For the youth sector, there is the [Ministry of Education](#) and its specialised Department of Youth Affairs and Ideology at the top of the executive hierarchy, whereas each region and district has their local and regional Departments of Education where a [Division for Youth Affairs and Ideology](#) is incorporated.

The main representative institution in the Republic of Belarus is the National Assembly, which has as its lower house the House of Representatives and as its upper house the Council of the Republic of Belarus.

The House of Representatives has the power to appoint the prime minister, make constitutional amendments, call for a vote of confidence in the prime minister, and make suggestions on foreign and domestic policy. The Council of the Republic has the power to select various government officials, conduct an impeachment trial of the president, and accept or reject the

bills passed by the House of Representatives. Each chamber has the ability to veto any law passed by local officials if it is contrary to the Constitution.¹

At the same time, local councils of deputies shall be elected by the citizens of the relevant administrative-territorial units for a four-year term. Local councils act as local legislative bodies. In the meantime, the heads of local executive and administrative bodies are appointed and/or dismissed by the President of the Republic of Belarus.²

The president is elected for a term of five years. The last presidential election took place in Belarus in 2015, the next one is expected in 2020. The elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus take place every four years; the last one took place in 2016 and the next one is expected in 2020. However, the President of Belarus has proposed to have elections to the National Assembly in November 2019 (the date is not confirmed yet).

Voting is based on a voluntary principle by ballot.

5.2. Youth participation in representative democracy

The election system in Belarus is open to everyone older than 18, allowing a young person to vote. At the same time, this age limit is applicable also to various national and local referenda and exceptional situations where the right of the voter is applicable, e.g. extraordinary elections due to the president's death, revolution, or *coup d'état*.

All citizens as well as all young people of Belarus are guaranteed their voting right implementation even if they are not present at their residence address due to imprisonment, completing their national military service, hospitalisation in a medical institution or migration transfer.

However, a young person should be no younger than 21 if they want to be elected to the lower house of the National Assembly – the House of Representatives. If young people aspire to be elected as the members of the Council of the Republic, the age limit required from them is being no younger than 30 years. The minimum age of a candidate running for the post of president in Belarus is 35 years.

There is no discrimination by gender principle either to voters or candidates. For instance, the 2016 elections to the lower house – the House of Representatives – demonstrated the following tendency: there are 38 women and 72 men making 110 members in total. Nevertheless, the average age of all the deputies is 49.7 years.³

Belarus, being a partner country of the European Union, was not included in the turnout for the latest European elections. At the same time, the latest elections conducted in Belarus showed a rather high presence at the voting points.⁴ Nevertheless, several resources indicate on a compulsory character of voting spread among young people from the rural areas studying in large towns and cities. This is practised through the tool of manipulating the lists of students who run for

1 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20071217035445/http://www.president.gov.by/en/press19332.html>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

2 Ibid.

3 Elections of Deputies to the House of Representatives, available at www.belarus.by/ru/government/belarus-elections/elections-of-deputies-of-the-house-of-representatives, accessed on 30 August 2019.

4 Belarusian Telegraph Agency on youth participation in elections, available at www.belta.by/society/view/vybory-2015.-rol-molodezhi-v-izbiratelnoj-kampanii-vozrastaet-ermoshina-158254-2015/, accessed on 30 August 2019.

a placement in the university dormitories. Teachers and responsible university personnel may require the students on the list to attend elections and participate in early voting before the actual day of elections.⁵

Young people as political representatives

Regardless of the fact that Belarus introduced the parliamentary system as its legislative body, the number/share of deputies/representatives from political parties is very low there. The latest elections to the House of Representatives, in particular, demonstrated that only 16 people are members of any political party in Belarus, whereas the rest are non-party ones.

The practice of including youth wings to a party is very weak in Belarus, which consequently leads to low interest in parliamentary representation and lack of participation in the existing parties.

Within the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus it is stated that a young person should be no younger than 18 if they want to be elected to the local council of deputies – the local representation body. It is worth mentioning that there is no quota of seats reserved for young people.⁶

One of the latest innovations that may take place in the nearest future in Belarus within the legislative representation system is the intention to introduce the youth parliament at the National Assembly. The intention system was declared in 2018; however, the process is still at the planning stage.⁷

5.3. Youth representation bodies

The Belarusian National Youth Council “RADA” is a youth umbrella organisation for 20 youth associations, being created with the purpose of consolidating the youth organisations and initiatives of Belarus. *De jure*, the Belarusian National Youth Council was liquidated in 2006 due to judicial restrictions imposed by the state towards public associations and organisations. Since then RADA has been operating underground and independently in financial and ideological policies whereas some other youth organisations and activists receive regular donations from the state budget. The Youth Council “RADA” provides opportunities for youth to struggle for their rights at local, national, European levels as well as for financial support of youth initiatives in those areas. RADA as the umbrella youth council organisation in Belarus represents the country at the European Youth Forum.

Taking into consideration further international platforms for representation of the Belarusian youth, it is necessary to mention the [Commonwealth of Independent States Youth Interparliamentary Assembly](#). It appears mainly as a platform for discussions on the relevant issues identified by the member countries. Its documents always have been drafted in a recommendatory

5 The case of obligatory voting of youth is described here available at <https://news.tut.by/economics/580784.html>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

6 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. Part III, Chapter 1, Article 64 available at <http://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/pomniki-gistoryi-prava-belarusi/kanstyutsyynae-prava-belarusi/kanstyutsyi-belarusi/kanstyutsyya-1994-goda-sa-zmyanennyami-i-dapa-nennyami/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

7 On youth parliament, available at www.pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2018/february/27596/, accessed on 30 August 2019.

manner. The latest session was dedicated to the issues of the modern family, whereas the recommendation paper was drafted on the mechanisms of online democracy.⁸

At the national and local levels, the practice is to involve young people in the UNICEF-initiated programme “Adolescent Parliament”⁹ implemented within the international initiative of Child-Friendly Cities.¹⁰ Within such programme, by June 2019 there were established 26 adolescent parliaments in the regional cities and district towns of Belarus. The programme is closely implemented with the local executive councils (*ispolkom*) and aims to foster youth representation not only at the level of consultations but at the level of policy making as well.

Under the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 65-Z of 7 December 2009 “On the Foundations of State Youth Policy”¹¹ there is an important component foreseeing youth representation. Involving young people in the formation and implementation of the state youth policy is one of the principles of the state youth policy. In this regard, under the Ministry of Education, two youth councils have been set up which directly participate in decision-making processes addressing youth issues.¹²

The first one is the [Youth Council](#) that operates under the state budget and is governed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus. However, the system of work and representation mechanisms remains unclear.

The second one is the [Public Republican Student Council](#) under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. It includes representatives of all 51 higher education institutions of the country.¹³ The main objective of the council is to provide support to competent specialists seeking efficient solutions to problems in the education system by creating necessary conditions for a broad public dialogue involving young people. Competences of the council include issues of student self-governance.

Student youth council mechanisms are better described in section 5.7 “Learning to participate” through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

5.4. Young people’s participation in policy making

At the level of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus youth policy issues are entrusted to the [Parliamentary Commission for Health, Physical Training, Family and Youth Policy](#). The areas of its consultation competence include marriage and family legislation, health legislation, youth policy issues, physical training and sports legislation, and tourism legislation.

[The National Social and Economic Development Programme for 2016-2020 \(NSED 2016-2020\)](#) was adopted on 15 December 2016 by the Decree of the President of the Republic of

8 Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Youth Assembly, available at https://iacis.ru/eng/pressroom/news/komissii_mpa_sng/the_young_cis_interparliamentary_assembly_held_its_10th_anniversary_meeting_in_the_tavricheskiy_pala/, accessed on 30 August 2019.

9 UNICEF Initiative, available at <https://detivgorode.by/en/parlaments/what-is-parlament/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

10 Child-Friendly Cities by UNICEF, available at <http://childfriendlycities.org/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

11 Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 65-Z of 7 December 2009 “On the Foundations of State Youth Policy”, available at www.pravo.by/upload/docs/op/H11600434_1477602000.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2019.

12 Country Sheet on Belarus, available at <http://pjeu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9038134/Country+Sheet+Belarus-2016.pdf/b1bf1b76-b3c9-46e6-8c3d3fd3b7f7eb58>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

13 YouthWiki Chapter 1 on Belarus. Youth Policy, available at https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9848726/Belarus_YouthWiki+Chapter+1.pdf/de7f8648-a5cc-ee7e-1afe-b778823db7d1, accessed on 30 August 2019.

Belarus No. 466. For the first time, the “development of the potential of youth and its active involvement in the creation of an economy of knowledge (Youth)” was indicated as one of the five key priorities of the NSEDP 2016-2020.

Regardless of the fact that several youth organisations that are working very closely with government bodies at the executive level propose an opportunity for young people to be included in public consultations and discussion on various issues (for instance, the one suggested by the Public Republican Student Council¹⁴), there is an unsteady mechanism of including young people to the level of actual policy making.

Nevertheless, as was mentioned above, a possible introduction of the youth representative body, i.e. Youth Parliament at the National Assembly, is expected in the near future.¹⁵

5.5. National strategy to increase youth participation

Being a legislative representative body, Belarusian Parliament entitled National Assembly, is rather weak since, the final decision-making step is usually carried out by the executive body of the country – the President of the Republic of Belarus. As a result, it sequenced to a rather indifferent/inactive interest among young people to participate in the decision-making process.

Perspective to compete for the job-placement and the building own career path building in the governmental institutions as well as in the largest youth organisations of Belarus seems to be more attractive for young people with aspiration to public service in the country. That is why programme and project activities provided by youth organisations rather respond to short-term objectives. At the same time, it in some way responds the needs presented by young people themselves: to acquire skills in leadership, project and team management, public speaking.¹⁶ Such claims look like an action plan for upbringing youth leader rather than a concept for youth participation as a coherent learning process contributing to social and civic development of the country, including all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities. A youth participation strategy has not been drafted in Belarus yet.

Taking into consideration that there is no separate document to framework youth participation, governmental and non-governmental organisations operate with the documents stipulated below.

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus defines a young person as one who has reached the age of 18 and is eligible to use their right to vote. Therefore, the main criterion applicable for acquiring the description “youth” is that defined by the age limit. In accordance with the information from the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus dated 1 January 2019, the number of young people living in the country is 2 121 000. Under the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 65-Z as of 7 December 2009 “[On the Foundations of State Youth Policy](#)”, youth include citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons permanently residing in the Republic of Belarus aged between 14 and 31.

14 Republican Student Council, available at <https://vk.com/studsovetmo>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

15 On Youth Parliament, available at www.pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2018/february/27596/, accessed on 30 August 2019.

16 Research. The Belarusian Civil Society: Dynamics of Change in an Unfriendly Environment, available at https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/DOC/1/2018_Civil-Society-Belarus_EN.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2019.

In October 2016 updates were made to the state youth policy in the Republic of Belarus. In particular, the Law on Making Amendments and Agenda to the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 65-Z of 7 December 2009 “On the Foundations of State Youth Policy” was adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. The new concepts/definitions, like mentorship and youth personnel policy, were included in the law. Among other novelties this law encourages a public authority to establish advisory councils in the field of state youth policy and widely co-operates with youth non-governmental organisations (youth NGOs).¹⁷

Excepting the legal regulation of the state youth policy, there is a separate legal framework for the volunteering component development in it. [The Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus](#) approved by the Ministry of Education No. 128 of 16 November 2015 establishes that “youth volunteering activities” is “a wide range of activities including the traditional forms of mutual support, self-support, formal providing of service and other forms of civil participation to the good of the wide society with no account to financial compensation”.

In the meantime, under the law “youth volunteering” is defined as “socially oriented activities implemented by youth themselves or through their participation in youth organisations or youth unions oriented at the impersonal solution of socially important objectives”.

The framework for developing social and civic competences among the youth of Belarus is based on the official statement by the Ministry of Education from November 2017, “[Conceptual Approaches to the Development of System of Education of the Republic of Belarus by 2020 and to the perspective by 2030](#)”.

It has been declared by the National Institute for Higher Education that a new strategy on youth policy will be developed in Belarus by the end of 2019. However, since December 2018 no public information has appeared on the updates in drafting and presenting the planned strategy.

5.6. Supporting youth organisations

The legal/policy framework for the functioning and development of youth organisations is the fundamental basis for the legal framework construction of youth policy in the Republic of Belarus which is presented and regulated by the Law of the Republic of Belarus “[On the Foundations of State Youth Policy](#)” No. 65-Z of 7 December 2009.

As was mentioned in the Youth Wiki Chapter 1, Belarus Youth Policy Government is an another key document stating and regulating youth policy and support of youth movement and organisations. There it is also mentioned that the youth policy that is incorporated into the National Strategy for the Sustainable Social and Economic Development of Belarus for the period till 2030. The strategy underlines that youth policy aims to improve considerable conditions for self-organisation, promoting active and effective growth and participation in civil society life.¹⁸

Meanwhile, an essential component is present in the Concept on Organising Youth Volunteering Movement in the Republic of Belarus (Концепция организации молодежного волонтерского (добровольческого) движения в Республике Беларусь) approved by the Ministry of Education on 16 November 2015 under the No. 128. The Concept on Volunteering Movement

17 YouthWiki Chapter 1 on Belarus. Youth Policy, available at https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9848726/Belarus_YouthWiki+Chapter+1.pdf/de7f8648-a5cc-ee7e-1afe-b778823db7d1, accessed on 30 August 2019.

18 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9848726/Belarus_YouthWiki+Chapter+1.pdf/de7f8648-a5cc-ee7e-1afe-b778823db7d1.

foresees active involvement of young people in social and civic development of the country as well as their professional and personal by the means of active participation.

It has also been stated that a new strategy on youth policy will be developed in Belarus by the end of 2019.

Public financial support

The youth policy components such as youth activities and youth volunteering are included in the [State Budget of the Republic of Belarus](#). According to the latest version updated for 2019, youth policy as an incorporated part of the [State Programme “Education and Youth Policy” for 2016-2020](#) has gained financing from the state budget in the sum of 6 381,8 million BYN (what makes approximately 3 000,0 million Euro). As specified above, only a limited number of youth organisations is granted with some of the parts of this sum for competing state grant programme for their activities. Most of the activities financed from the state budget line goes for supporting youth activities in the institutions of the formal education, support for extra-curricular activities and programme activities of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union – the largest youth organisation in the Republic of Belarus.

At the same time, there are several opportunities for youth organisation working in Belarus to gain external financial support for their programme activities from developing partners of Belarus.

For example, the European Commission centralised and decentralised financial support going through the Programme of Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe, national funding support schemes of the European Union states, e.g. Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Support in Germany, Polish Aid, Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, Slovak Aid, Swedish International Development Agency, etc. The quite favourable geographical position of Belarus permits it to be included in some cross-border co-operation programmes such as “Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus” and “Poland-Belarus-Ukraine”. The size of a grant varies from €10 000 up to €2.5 million.

Almost all the European programmes for Belarus funding support are aimed at developing cross-sectoral co-operation between non-governmental and governmental sectors in Belarus.

Initiatives to increase the diversity of participants

In the case of Belarus it is important to underline the specific feature of national framework for supporting youth organisations, including only those which are in consideration of the political and ideological preference of the current government and excluding those which prefer to keep their own strategy independently. Nevertheless, organisations involved in state support in the Republic of Belarus target the great majority of young people reaching them in rural areas, small towns and some disadvantaged areas, i.e. suburban territories.

Simultaneously, one of the largest inclusive projects aimed at young people who are orphans in order to include them in youth participation activities and to ensure the diversity of the local youth communities, is the one supported by the European Commission within the framework of the EU4Youth strand. The EU4Youth Project “Employability and Stability in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine” aims to improve youth employability in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine, developing business skills among social vulnerable youth in order to promote their active participation in the labour market. The budget of the project is €1.5 million.

5.7. “Learning to Participate” Through Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Policy framework

The national strategy for responding to social and civic competences and their development among young people in the Republic of Belarus is described particularly in the policy paper “Education and Youth Policy”.¹⁹ The policy targets young people as the main beneficiary of the education system by means of formal and non-formal learning. Formal education is provided by the institutions under government co-ordination, i.e. schools of secondary and vocational education, universities, colleges, and non-formal education is expected to provide through the work of youth art and comprehensive education centres. Meanwhile the policy underlines that the youth component of it is expected to be implemented by the youth organisations included in the [List of youth organisations benefiting from state financial support](#).

The framework for developing social and civic competences among the youth of Belarus is based on the official statement by the Ministry of Education of November 2017. The statement “[Conceptual Approaches to the Development of System of Education of the Republic of Belarus by 2020 and to the perspective by 2030](#)” (the statement) is closely interlinked with a vision of the policy in learning declared by the President of Belarus at the National Assembly in 2017. The strategic aim is stated “to shape education system of a quality level responding to the needs of the innovative economy and principles of sustainable development”. Consequently, it may be concluded that in Belarus the system of learning aimed at developing youth social and civic competences is directly dependent on the economic trends both at the national and international levels.

It worth mentioning that the policy together with the statement cover as their target groups of children and young people (up to age 31) with various backgrounds regardless of their status in the country (citizen, migrant, temporary residents, refugee status) receive education at primary, secondary and higher educational institutions.

Formal learning

The system of formal learning in Belarus is provided by the institutions under the management of local and regional authorities under the national co-ordination of the Ministry of Education.

The system of education in Belarus is divided into the following levels:

- pre-school,
- primary and secondary,
- vocational (professional),
- higher,
- post-graduate,
- further education,
- inclusive education,

19 Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus By-Law No. 250 of 28 March 2016, On Ratification of the State Programme “Education and Youth Policy” in 2016-2020, available at www.government.by/ru/solutions/2450, accessed on 30 August 2019. Annex 13 to the State Programme “Education and Youth Policy” in 2016-2020 Complex of the Activities of the Sub-Programme 11 “Youth Policy” available at www.government.by/upload/docs/file14103e1e3236d937.PDF, accessed on 30 August 2019.

- education for sustainable development.

Within the above-mentioned system, the social and civic competences are incorporated in curricula for general and vocational education at upper secondary level. Citizenship education is a separate subject only at the level of secondary education, whereas at the further levels it is knitted in the programmes for the other subjects such as social science, history of the country, history of the Great Patriotic War, international relations, political geography. It is worth mentioning that in general social and civic learning, pupils are interrelated/incorporated with most of the extra-curricular activities in the system of formal education.

Officially it is declared that a cross-cultural approach is applicable towards the system of education in Belarus. However, it still works in that topic only from the perspective of raising awareness of other cultures; meanwhile young people from different cultural backgrounds, usually from foreign student, migrant and/or refugee environments, stay isolated from the informal communication with young people of Belarusian origin.

Taking into consideration that citizenship education is a separate subject in secondary school (student age 10 to 18), teachers as providers of such education at the formal learning level are trained within their programmes at the departments of history in the universities (mainly, pedagogical universities situated in each of the regional cities). There does not exist a separate training programme for teachers on citizenship education. Only those who are trained in history teaching are able to choose citizenship as their second specialisation.

The Belarusian secondary level of education includes Social and Civic Theory as a separate subject in years 4 to 11. The recommended taught time for this subject is one academic hour per week (45 minutes). However, it is necessary to underline that specific activity on raising awareness for political participation is implemented in the Belarusian system of formal learning under the title “The Unified Day of Information”. The taught time of such a learning activity is 45 minutes per month. The practice of its implementation is wider described in section 5.8, “Raising Political Awareness Among Young People”.

With regard to the main learning objectives stated for the teachers of Social and Civic Theory in Belarusian schools, the necessity to develop critical thinking and the ability to reach knowledge in humanities in order to develop his/her competences and self-realisation are stressed. Values of involvement, participation and creation are the key ones there. Moreover, [the Instruction Letter for training social and civic competences at secondary level of formal education](#) underlines the relevance of developing skills of adaptation to various life conditions and areas of professional realisation.

Non-formal and informal learning

The Belarusian system of education is closely interrelated/inter-connected with the non-formal and informal education that is provided by the youth centres of further and art education. The Ministry of Education co-ordinates the network of such centres that are directly dependent on the local and regional executive committees. Each executive committee has a division for youth affairs and ideology at the Department of Education, meaning that they have the same policy so they act within their support measures in order to gain the expected results planned to achieve the national level.

Within the programmes implemented by such centres, social and civic competences are enriched by means of organising and participating in various competitions, meetings, concerts,

historic intellectual clubs, discussion and debate systems. Some of the youth parliaments are located in the centres of further and art education, which directly contributes to the development of young people's social and civic competences.

However, it is rather important to mention that methods of non-formal and informal learning for contributing to the civic and social competences of young people are also applicable in the system of formal education, particularly in schools and universities.

The participative structures within formal secondary education level in Belarus is shaped into the form of school self-governance by pupils. Each school in Belarus is highly recommended to found its own school governance so as to allow schoolchildren to participate in the social and civic activities of its educational institution at a representative level. There is an example of an [average school governance](#), which states its close correlation with the Education and Youth Policy as well as with the Statement on Conceptual Approaches to the Development of System of Education of the Republic of Belarus by 2020 and to the perspective by 2030.

As a practice for training school staff and pupils to enhance their skills to participate in decision-making structures, the Division for Youth Affairs and Ideology at the local or regional authority, co-ordinating the particular educational institutions, i.e. secondary school, youth centres and vocational schools, provides special training sessions on the ideological content of self-governance as a non-formal educational tool. At the same time, it is impossible to omit that pedagogical staff assigned for co-ordinating self-governance bodies at school is usually overloaded with other duties and responsibilities which are not connected with their teaching subjects as well as co-ordinating a self-governance body. This consequently leads to unsteady results of self-governance practice and lack of interest among young people to be involved there.

School self-governance bodies do not receive financial support separately from the budget lines of the Youth and Education Policy but they have the right to run for the grant programmes that may be opened within the action plans of the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless the schedule and plan of grant-giving programmes in this ministry is irregular and consequently does not contribute to self-governance bodies at schools to gain sustainability.

Paradoxically, youth parliaments that are in fact absolutely separate and independent self-governance bodies within an educational institution structure-receive supported by the Ministry of Education and/or other national or international organisation, may be an accelerator for youth initiatives and their voice to be heard at least at the regional level and at maximum at the international one. The example of the joint project between the UNICEF Representative Office in Belarus and the [Office for Initiatives Promotion](#) demonstrates sound success in supporting youth parliamentary practices among the young people of Belarus. The project was financed by the Polish Aid Programme, co-ordinated by the UNICEF Office and implemented by the youth organisation Office for Initiatives Promotion. Within the project there were a series of workshops and training courses targeting school and centre staff, youth workers and young people. As a result the national delegation consisting of young people from local youth parliaments participated in the project organised within the 40th Session of the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

Self-governance bodies of young people are also presented at the higher educational institutions of Belarus. Student councils present a fairly independent approach than school ones. They also benefit from the financial support offered by the university budget that is usually awarded in the form of financial advance to stipend received by some students. Notwithstanding, student councils are tightly incorporated in the centralised system of youth policy operated and

implemented at a higher educational institution by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRYU). A recent call for youth project proposals was completely implemented by the BRYU where the student councils acted only as mediators in dissemination and visibility actions. Thus, there is no kind of specific policy initiative which aims to encourage formation of partnerships between youth organisations, even those included in the list of Youth and Education Policy Support, and student representative bodies. Since the BRYU benefits from a rather monopolised right to the state budget for youth support, there are youth representative organisations, bodies and initiatives which are in greater need of such partnership from financial and ideological point of their development.

All the other organisations or initiatives working on the issues of youth participation are formally able to participate in various calls for youth project proposals co-ordinated either by the Ministry of Education or the Belarusian Republican Youth Union Central Committee. However, none of the organisations or initiatives has been granted financial support from the state budget so far. At a certain level, it is possible to state that top-level programmes of youth policy which establish, encourage or support education projects relating to the promotion of civic and social competences are discriminatory to some extent and do not guarantee equal access to the resources of any organisation or initiative that may possibly be interested in grant-seeking from the state budget. Therefore some of the organisations and initiatives which have started some actions on parliamentarian culture of young people, developing their social and civic competences have been implemented thanks to the funds received from the international funding opportunities.

Working with international funding allows organisations to develop in more detail the issues of social inclusion and equal access to participation, human rights and democratic values, meaning of pluralism and ways to develop critical mind thinking. These projects implemented in Belarus, however, seem to have fewer participants but tend to include young people with fewer opportunities and from disadvantaged groups, e.g. migrant youth, young people from rural areas and economically and socially disadvantaged groups.

Quality assurance/quality guidelines for non-formal learning

The Ministry of Education, acting as the key implementer of youth policy in the Republic of Belarus, performs the role and functions of guaranteeing quality assurance of non-formal learning activities realised by the state-run institutions. The Ministry of Education monitors quality assurance in that field by means of comprehensive analysis of the situation in the youth sector and analysis of those trends that may become relevant. Meanwhile, the determinant for the course of the youth policy is also a statement of the economic and political climate in the country. As can be seen from the above sub-point “Policy Framework”, the trends in learning and partnership within the youth sector is strongly dependent on the economic trends, that was also underlined by the President of Belarus.

Learners’ satisfaction enquiries, monitoring of the numbers of participants taken part in any learning activity or programme gives the ground to understand that access to information on participation is widely spread and reached many beneficiaries, whereas the relevance of the activities implemented seems to be out of the real needs of a target group.

It is worth mentioning that the needs analysis based approach is mostly and more often applied by the organisations co-operating with international consortia and foundations. International experience allows youth sector experts and specialists to assess the quality of the activities and projects in youth participation connecting it coherently even during the projects being implemented.

Educators' support

Belarusian organisations working with youth participation issues seem to be very active in capacity building of learning providers from all institutions across the sector. As for learning providers, here it is necessary to address representatives from both state-run and non-governmental sectors. They are teacher trainers, non-formal education workers and youth workers. The support opportunities presented below are aimed at continuous training and certification relating to youth work and at some extent to the development of social and civic competences.

The [National Institute for Higher Education](#) provides a course on youth policy and socio-cultural communication. Specialists, teachers from state-run educational institutions, leaders of youth councils and organisations, and youth workers are invited to enrol on the course. As a result they graduate with a certificate on youth work competences.

The [Association of Life-Long Learning and Enlightenment](#) in co-operation with the Representative Office of the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V.) implemented the project “Learn to Act” funded by the European Union and co-funded by DVV International (from the funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ)). Under this project most 100 representatives of NGOs from the sphere of further education, CSOs, other organisations, including 240 managers and trainers as well as 60 representatives of grass-root initiatives have participated. It is worth mentioning that the project tends to involve young people at several stages; however, specialists, youth workers and teachers who work with different youth groups were involved. The organisation runs the website [adukatar.net](#) with manuals and tools for applying a non-formal education approach in contributing to social and civic competences. The Association of Life-Long Learning and Enlightenment also holds a Festival of Non-Formal Education, where all interested organisations and initiatives working on the issues of social and civic competences may participate and exchange opinion with colleagues and experts. This activity definitely contributes to the network opportunities of youth workers.

The [Youth Education Centre “Fialta”](#) [has](#) since 2017 run a training programme “Pool of Youth Workers” aimed at training specialists, experts and leaders working with young people in Belarus motivated in developing youth social and civic initiatives.

5.8. Raising Political Awareness Among Young People

Information providers/counselling structures

Belarus has introduced the system of the Unified Day of Information that are obligatory to be organised by all state-run and governmental organisations. Consequently, various issues of political and economic development, meaning and function of the rule of law, collective memory and other issues are prepared by specially trained and assigned staff, usually recruited from the departments on ideology in an institution. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that young people are not targeted for the Unified Day of Information separately. Schools (both vocational and secondary), universities and colleges, youth centres and clubs of national and regional scope are to have such activities once per month. It is worth mentioning that the Unified Day of Information is

also organised at all the workplaces of the institutions and enterprises that are state-run. For example, the topics may be titled as following:²⁰

- Victory, Independence, Memory (dedicated to the commemoration day of the liberation of Belarus during the Great Patriotic War, which is in Belarusian state historic narrative is referred to the events of the Second World War),

- Key aspects from the President's Address to the Belarusian People and National Assembly,²¹

- Parliament – representative and legislative body of the country,

- President of the Republic of Belarus – the guarantor of the constitution, rights and freedom of a human and citizen.

The script of topics is prepared by the co-ordinating body, i.e. executive committees. Sometimes topics may be presented by representatives of youth in such institutions who are members of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union.

If young people work on representing such topic they usually address some of the national resources which possess all the necessary information on an issue they need. Among others, there is a [National Portal for Law Information](#). The materials for the Unified Day of Information are strongly required to take only from the government or officially registered organisations. However, the primary resources for young people to comprehend the scenario they received are:

1. [President of the Republic of Belarus](#),
2. [Upper House of Belarusian Parliament](#) – the Council of the Republic of Belarus,
3. [Lower House of Belarusian Parliament](#) – the House of Representatives,
4. [Ministry of Education](#).

The method of organising the Unified Day of Information of national co-ordination for raising awareness among young people for their participation does not receive a separate budget within the system of public financial support. At the same time, the Budget for Supporting Education and Youth Policy²² includes only a limited number of youth organisations officially registered. This happens because of tight incorporation of the staff responsible for such events in the existing system of an institution's management. However, some youth organisations, officially registered and included in the Republican Register for Youth and Children Organisations Receiving State Support,²³ may apply for some of the grant programmes of regional or national scope. As an example, one such grant-giving call was related to the issue of combating corruption.²⁴

20 Topics for the Unified Day of Information are set by the local or regional authorities – executive committees (*ispolkom*). The mentioned example is taken from the Gomel Regional Executive Committee, available at <http://gomel-region.by/ru/edin-ru/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

21 The National Assembly is a two-chamber parliament in Belarus. It consists of the Council of the Republic (the upper house) and the House of Representatives (the lower chamber).

22 Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus By-Law No. 250 of 28 March 2016, On Ratification of the State Programme “Education and Youth Policy” in 2016-2020, available at www.government.by/ru/solutions/2450, accessed on 30 August 2019. Annex 13 to the State Programme “Education and Youth Policy” in 2016-2020 Complex of the Activities of the Sub-Programme 11 “Youth Policy” available at www.government.by/upload/docs/file/14103e1e3236d937.PDF, accessed on 30 August 2019.

23 Republican Register for Youth and Children Organisations Receiving State Support, available at <https://edu.gov.by/sistema-obrazovaniya/glavnoe-upravlenie-vospitatelnoy-raboty-i-molodezhnoy-politiki/upr-molodezhi/obedineniya/reestr/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

24 Ministry of Education Call for Proposal, available at <https://edu.gov.by/sistema-obrazovaniya/glavnoe-upravlenie-vospitatelnoy-raboty-i-molodezhnoy-politiki/upr-molodezhi/polozheniya/%D0%A3%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D0%BF%D1>

Youth-targeted information campaigns about democratic rights and democratic values

A significant part of the information campaign target covered by the government on promoting youth participation is implemented during the Unified Day of Information. Notwithstanding it is quite evident that these activities, being duly incorporated in the system of formal education and government rule of the ideological sphere, do not cover the issues of democratic rights and values in their broad, multi-levelled and pluralist notion. Regardless of the statement made by the President of Belarus concerning the high level of political consciousness of Belarusians,²⁵ it is worth mentioning that the principles of pluralism guaranteeing variety of opinions and ways of political and cultural expression are not very well presented for young people during their formal education. For that reason youth organisations and initiatives work closely with representatives of various international organisations, agencies and foundations so as to spread the word on democratic values.

One such example is the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Information Centre located in Minsk and run by the Office for Initiatives Promotion. The Information Centre is an initiative realised by the SALTO Resource Centre for Eastern Europe and Caucasus which aims to spread wider information on youth opportunities within EU programmes following the principles of democratic development of the national and local scope. The Information Centre annually organises a number of information and political awareness-raising activities among the young people of Belarus aimed at those from rural areas and small towns.

The Council of Europe Information Point in Minsk works on the issues of proliferation of hate speech, withdrawal of the death penalty, children and human rights as well as on the issues of combating corruption and human trafficking. It has regular activities and is based at the premises of the Belarusian State University, which gives an opportunity for closer co-operation with this institution on the above-mentioned topics.

Youth initiative's portal [Adukacyja.info](http://adukacyja.info) introduced a game-oriented awareness-raising course on the European values of democracy and human rights. The title of the course is "Teach Yourself on Europe".²⁶ The course consists of several training courses and workshops aimed at young people directly. Approximately 50 participants graduate from the programme annually. As one of the outcome disseminated among young people in Belarus is the set of tests and video-manuals on issues of European integration, human rights, political participation, equality and EU history this programme.

Promoting intercultural dialogue among young people

Youth organisations benefiting from the state financial support for some of their activities are particularly involved in building the intercultural dialogue among young people within the

[%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F.DOCX](#), accessed on 30 August 2019.

Other Calls for Proposals under the Ministry of Education available at <https://edu.gov.by/sistema-obrazovaniya/glavnoe-upravlenie-vospitatelnoy-raboty-i-molodezhnoy-politiki/upr-molodezhi/polozheniya/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

25 Statement by the President of the Republic of Belarus on level of political consciousness of Belarusians, available at <http://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2019/april/34188/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

26 Five Reasons to Educate Yourself on the EU, available at <https://adukacyja.info/pyac-prychyn-adukavac-syabye-pra-yewropu/>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

scope of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Within this geographical scope financial support is provided for organising different forums and seminars both for young people and specialists working with youth, i.e. youth workers, youth organisation leaders and youth trainers, in these very countries. One such latest activity was the Youth Organisations Forum of the CIS held in Moscow in December 2018.²⁷

As regards the projects and opportunities open for the young people of Belarus to raise awareness on international political issues, acquire public speaking skills and be trained in building the intercultural dialogue, there are opportunities provided by such activities as modelling and stimulating different international organisations. For instance, international conferences of Minsk International Model UN,²⁸ closely co-operating with the UN Agencies' representative offices in Belarus, aim to simulate discussion and decision-making processes in various bodies of the UN agencies. Sessions are conducted in English and attract more than 300 people aged 14-15 years annually. European Youth Parliament²⁹, acting in Belarus, help young people to acquire and master their social and civic competence. However, only one session has taken place in Belarus. For all interested young people from Belarus, there is an opportunity to participate in a session of the European Youth Parliament abroad.

Promoting transparent and youth-tailored public communication

Belarusian civil society organisations aim to provide young people wider opportunities for their communication with public bodies.

Taking into consideration the fact that state organisations have applied the principle of “one window”, which allowed to shorten the time and hierarchical path for solving any problem, young Belarusians are rather weak in using this tool for public communication. The situation is also ambivalent due to the fact that youth representation bodies within the system of local and regional authorities in Belarus do not introduce and implement regular communication policy with publicity and specifically with young people. As a result it leads to exclusion of certain groups of young people. Meanwhile other youth organisations, working mainly with international organisations', foundations' and agencies' representatives in Belarus, tend to cover young people's interest in political and cultural expression of the pluralist approach in opinion providing them with a wider number of the activities with the issues of intercultural communication, transparency, right for public information and communication, as well as the opportunities for youth direct participation in change making.

5.9. e-participation

There are few tools available for young people to enhance their participation at local and national levels. However, one of the e-initiatives aimed at promotion of the online tools for participation of the citizens particularly in Belarus is the [Baltic Internet Policy Initiative](#). This platform also allows citizens to participate in social and civic issues through the tool of electronic

27 Commonwealth of Independent States Youth Forum held in Moscow, available at www.cis.minsk.by/news.php?id=10385, accessed on 30 August 2019.

28 Minsk International Model United Nations available at <http://mintmun.org/committees-councils-agenda.html>, accessed on 30 August 2019.

29 European Youth Parliament in Belarus, available at www.members.eyp.org/national-committees/eyp-belarus, accessed on 30 August 2019.

petitions which are also available for young people. E-petitions may be initiated by anyone over 18. Electronic petitions may also stand as the indicator for the relevant issues, particularly youth issues. For instance, one of the latest [e-petitions initiatives](#) was on prohibiting amendments to the law on obligatory military service that has become a quick response to the [action of the Deputies in the House of Representatives](#) drafting the stricter regulations for service holding in the army of Belarus.

One of the contemporary innovative developments in youth support activities can be the digital application RADAR initiated by the Youth Council “RADA”. The application tends to provide full and wider information on the activities and trends in the sector for youth workers. Nevertheless, the application has not yet been released, which is why it is difficult to judge on its scope.

Many of the organisations and initiatives use newsletters and social media groups for spreading information. The latter works most efficiently, as some communication specialists of youth organisations have stated.

5.10. Current debates and reforms

Belarus is just at the beginning of its path on building youth active participation compared with European Union member countries.

Nowadays, it is quite evident and visible work results in capacity building of young leaders, youth workers, specialists, teachers and trainers from various youth organisations both co-operating closely with state bodies and within the sector. However, it is a pity to emphasise the polarisation within the youth sector, which is primarily rooted in the lack of open and transparent access to state budget financing for youth participation activities.

At the same time, there is no youth parliament as a possible platform for young people not only to practise their skills in public speaking, debating and moderating discussions by the tools of modelling crisis situations and role-playing. The Youth Parliament body is an important part of any pluralist country with values of equality and democracy. Since young people do not have a place for their voice to be heard, being one of the vulnerable social groups, they express a lack of interest towards public service at the legislative level which results in weakening the National Assembly as a parliamentary body of the Republic of Belarus.

It worth mentioning that there is no debate initiated yet on the quota for seats reserved for young people at the Parliament; nevertheless if young people see themselves heard and listened to in the legislative bodies both at local and national levels, they will definitely express higher interest towards political participation.

Most of the issues and stagnation in introducing a Youth Parliament body in the system of youth policy in Belarus is highly likely sequenced from a weakened and unstable economic situation that does not allow governmental bodies to move forward and sustainably in promoting youth parliamentarianism.

One of the greatest achievements reached within the issue of youth participation is the number of the international activities young people from Belarus are involved in. The European Commission and a huge number of national aid programmes from the EU member countries contribute to the development of the youth sector in Belarus basing their approach on the needs analysis tools which allows to respond present needs of youth in Belarus.