



Overview of the Civic Education Sector in Belarus

Background

[The Office for European Expertise and Communications \(OEEC\)](#) in partnership with the Brussels-based [Office for Democratic Belarus \(ODB\)](#) launches a series of sectoral overviews with the goal to examine capacity of Belarusian civil society organizations vis-à-vis a number of identified sectors. The overviews foresee collection of data on activities of and services offered by civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders within each given sector from various sources.

The sectoral overviews will take into account the existing monitoring and evaluation results, expert opinion, stakeholder feedback, statistical and polling data as well as qualitative assessments.

The series of sectoral overviews intend to help establish development trends for non-state actors, assist in measuring impacts of civic activities and services in the context of the country development needs. OEEC and ODB are confident that this approach will strengthen the overall capacity development policies by making the necessary data available to civic activists, practitioners and other domestic and international stakeholders. Research results should serve as a useful feedback for all interested parties engaged into civil society development in Belarus.

The first sectoral on civic education commissioned by OEEC and implemented by the research team composed of Vladimir Korzh, Valery Zhurakovski, Olesya Obrazhey and Ekaterina Anoshko.

Over the course of 2013 five more overviews are scheduled on the following sectors: energy, environment, gender, regional development, and social service delivery.

Methodology

Civic education in this overview is defined as the upbringing and training of socially active citizens aimed at cultivating and developing their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are necessary for participation in the life of the country and its society.”



The *object* of the research was CSOs which position themselves as providers of civic education services. The research team contacted the most visible providers in civic education and by the snowball methodology composed a list of CSOs that were considered by the respondents as most active in the sector. The subject of the research was the field of civic education in Belarus.

This overview of civic education was drafted using the desk research of documents (regulatory acts, curricula, and publications in the domain of civic education) as well as *qualitative* methods which included structured individual interviews and 2 focus groups with CSO practitioners.

The sample was formed through the method of snowball. The existing CSO database were used as an additional source of information/ Respondents of individual interviews were representatives of 15 CSOs most often named as civic education organizations by minimum three experts.

As a result of the research 11 individual interviews and 2 focus groups with the total amount of 25 most recognized experts with the average of 15 year experience in civic education were held. CSOs they represented have the average of 14 years of activities in the domain of civic education. The share of civic education in overall activities of these CSOs is about 40%.

Regulatory Framework

The main regulatory document on education in Belarus is the Code on Education. The exact term “civic education” is absent from Belarusian legal/regulatory framework. However, [Article 18 of the Code on Education](#) specifies that the priority goal of upbringing in formal educational institutions is the “formation of citizenship, patriotism and national consciousness on the basis of state ideology”. The detailed description of components of cultivating citizenship through upbringing is defined in the Concept of Continuous Upbringing of Children and Students in Belarus.

Thus, all formal educational institutions have upbringing integrated in the educational system, thus, providing civic education based on state ideology.

Civil Society Organizations and any other registered organizations in accordance with the Code on Education and their statutory documents can provide civic education services as part of additional education.

CSOs as Civic Education Providers

In the course of the research the respondents named over 40 CSOs—providers of civic education in Belarus. These CSOs are not only educational but also youth, women, human rights,



ecological, cultural, community development, and others. Among the most often named by the respondents were [Educational Center POST](#) (Minsk), [Third Sector](#) (Grodno), [ACT](#) (Minsk), [Methodology Community AHT-CSI](#) (Minsk), [Alternative Youth Platform](#) (former RADA) (Minsk), [Center for Legal Transformation](#) (Minsk), [Ecohome](#) (Minsk), [Green Network](#) (Minsk), [Belarusian UNESCO Clubs](#) (Minsk), VIT (Grodno), [Association of Life-Long Education](#) (Minsk), [EuroBelarus](#) (Minsk), [Lev Sapieha Foundation](#) (Minsk), [Social Projects](#) (Gomel), [Youth Education Center Fialta](#) (Minsk).

The respondents' notion of civic education is cultivating socially active citizens who participate in the community life and share democratic and national values. Respondents' list of competences to be cultivated in Belarusian citizens through civic education programs corresponds to the Recommendations of the European Parliament of the Council on Key Competences for Life-Long Learning¹. In practice, however, the civic education by Belarusian CSOs focuses a lot on the formation of competences of civic activism while there is lack of emphasis on civic competences in content knowledge, that is, the knowledge of mechanisms and structures of Belarusian legal system, principles, documents, and ideas significant for Belarusian constitutional democracy, of political mechanisms for representing public opinion and making political changes.

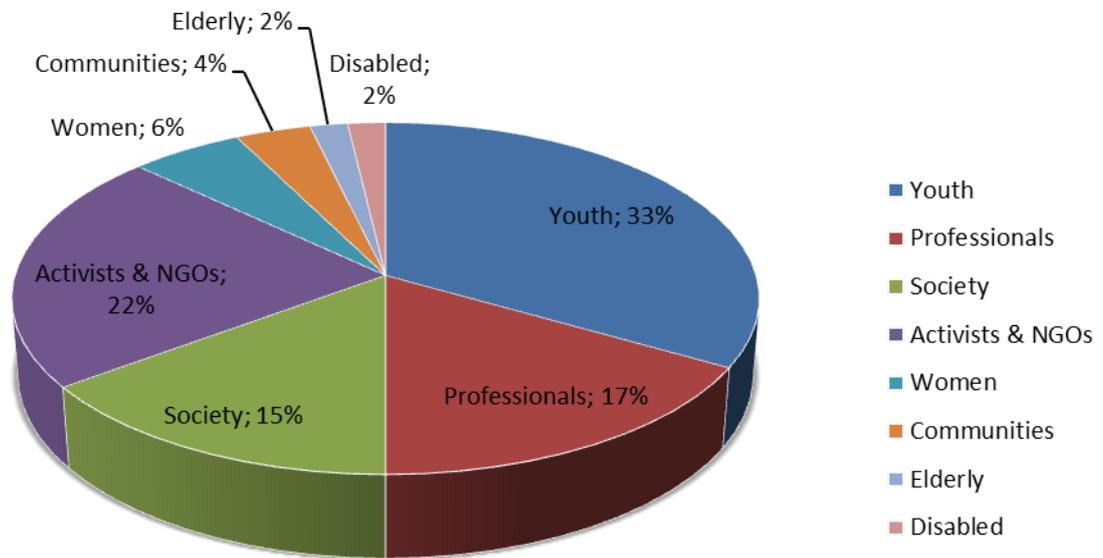
"...CSOs of civic education are providing services aimed at activism, leadership, and human rights, but the content is missing. Civic education should educate an individual to take decisions about the state and its citizens, about what kind of the state it should be. Activism needs to be filled with the whole range of notions making you aware that when you act beside your house you are acting on the scale of the whole country..."

There is a broad variety of target groups getting civic education services from CSOs-providers: youth, elderly, educators (teachers, lecturers, trainers), CSO activists, journalists, eco-activists, students, middle-aged people, professionals from state and non-state sectors, middle class, and even "all those seeking the weird".

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf



Civic Education: Target Groups

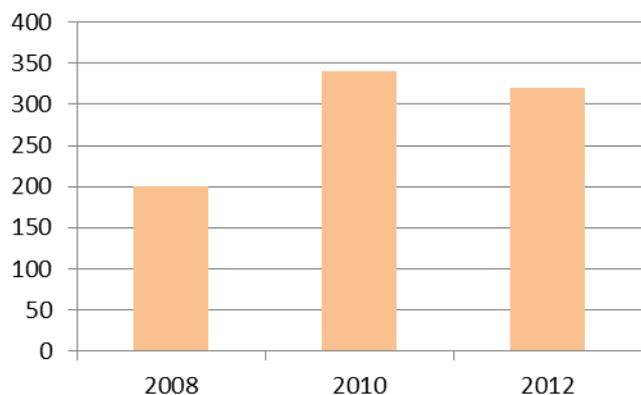


The chart above shows the breakdown of CSOs-providers vs. populations these CSOs target with civic education services, based on the interpretation by the research team of activities of over 40 CSOs, named by the respondents to be most recognized in the civic education field.

According to the respondents, over the past 5 years 10 CSOs-respondents provided civic education programs to the total number of near 25,000 participants. However, 70% of the total number is attributed to the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs.

The analyzed data shows that the average yearly coverage by a single CSO is about 300 participants including single-time trainees. Educational schools providing education for party members demonstrate even lower average.

The data says that even if all mentioned CSOs-providers of civic education are equally effective in outreach as CSOs-respondents the overall outreach by civic education programs does not exceed 100 000 participants in 5 years, which makes about 1,2% of the population of 14 years of age and older. Taking into



Pic.2. Average of participants in programs of civic education CSOs-respondents



account the fact mentioned by the respondents that most pro-active citizens attend trainings more than once in more than one CSO, the coverage tends to be even lower.

“...civic education in Belarus is beating around in the water, neither drowning nor floating. The performance factor is getting low. At present you need to make three times more efforts to gain the same results you were getting ten years ago...”

However, respondents understand civic education in its broader meaning - not only as teaching/training but also as civic education campaigns reaching out to general public and widening the topics. The examples of CSOs focusing on campaigning related to civic education are Budzma! and Nash Dom. Their outreach is potentially broader – a sociological study by Budzma! showed that 9% of the public are aware of Budzma! campaign.

The outcomes of different interventions in civic education as well as the effectiveness of direct services vis-à-vis mass media campaigns are unclear because CSOs-providers do not regularly evaluate the long-term results.

“...if we take a look at the country as a whole, the overall impacts are non-existe...”t.

State as Civic Education Player

The state cultivates citizenship through the upbringing integrated into formal educational system, through state ideological work at most enterprises and institutions, as well as through the state mass media, thus ensuring massive outreach of the state upbringing activities. Mass media not included, the ideological and upbringing work of the state covers about 70% of the youth (14-31 years old) and 40% of working people (about 2 million). On the other hand, the government is efficient in limiting CSOs' civic education activities through administrative control of CSOs.

Respondents named the Belorussian state as a key stakeholder of civic education for Belarusians with the state ideological system as a competing civic education framework in the country. While both CSOs and the state use the same terminology, respondents suggest that the main difference is in the content of the programs from the standpoint of values: CSOs, reportedly, promote active citizenship and informed participation while the government cultivates law obedient behavior without questioning the status quo.

“...civic education in the authoritarian, undemocratic state is aimed at reproducing authoritarian culture and authoritarian person – a person who would prefer to obey, who feels comfortable when the decisions for him are taken by somebody else...”



Other Sectoral Players

In addition to civic education provided by Belarusian CSOs and the state upbringing system, respondents named several out-of-country programs that provide civic education for Belarusians, though these programs were not mentioned among the effective key actors in the sector.

Key Findings

Over 40 CSO today provide civic education services in Belarus. The **understanding of civic education** by the Belarusian CSOs principally corresponds with the European approach to civic education stated in the **documents of the European Council**, with the special focus on national specifics and interests. The overview of the civic education CSOs' existing programs shows, however, that there are **practically no programs aimed at civic education in its classical meaning**. CSOs include components of civic education into their other projects, e.g. the Golden Age University is a part of the program aimed at raising the quality of life and status of the elderly people.

The CSOs, however, express concern with the alleged controversy and differences existing in their approaches to civic education, which suggests **lack of communication and cooperation** within the sector.

Regulatory framework in Belarus **does not prohibit CSOs to participate in civic education** processes; **democracy-related issues are not contradictory to the Constitution** of the Republic of Belarus where the country is named a “democratic, social state based on the rule of law”. However, the cases of including CSOs in the lists of co-implementers of the state programs are few. Civic educational CSOs make attempts to **build cooperation with the state educational** system but the attempts are **sporadic** and have not yet become a determining factor of the development of democratic civic education in the country.

The Belarusian state system itself is a pro-active actor in the sector of civic education and ensures a broad outreach and a systematic provision of sectoral programs due to an efficiently running system of upbringing in the educational institutions and a **well-developed infrastructure of ideological work** at the level of local authorities and medium and large enterprises.

The Belarusian **civic education by the third sector is stagnating**, with no evident growth of the sector. The determining factors hindering the progress in civic education in Belarus are the unfavorable state political framework and the lack of coordination among the sectoral actors.



There is currently no actor in the civic education in Belarus who could mobilize CSOs' efforts and resources for the sake of civic education.

While **fundamental civic education programs are based on the need of the society** to cultivate national and political culture of citizens with universal values of democracy and human rights it is not feasible to study the needs of target groups in the contents of such an education but it is important to study which forms and methods of education meet at their best the specifics of each target groups.

Civic education by Belarusian CSOs is overwhelmingly focused on cultivating the competences *of civic participation*. It **lacks, however, the proper focus on civic knowledge**, the knowledge of legal mechanisms and structures of Belarusian state, principles, documents and ideas meaningful for constitutional democracy of Belarus, of political mechanisms for representing public opinion and making political change.

Civic education programs implemented by Belarusian CSOs are conditioned by their assumption that in the authoritarian Belarusian state a full-fledged civic education is not possible and a lot of knowledge and skills of democratic behavior are not applicable.

Belarusian CSO civic education **fails to effectively cultivate a democratic culture** of the rule of law because of limited outreach by civic education programs, though some new programs have been recently launched in the sector. Experts assess the 5-year outreach by **CSO educational programs** as not exceeding 100 000 participants, which is about **1,2% of the population** of Belarus aged 14 and older. **Internet is hardly used by any form in civic education programs** though Belarus's internet penetration has been increased from 26% in 2007 to over 50% in 2012. At the same time the outreach by the state upbringing and **ideological activities**, media outreach excluding, cover **about 45%**, namely, 3,6 mln people aged 14 and older.

Short-time programs - 1-2 years - is yet another factor decreasing the effectiveness of civic education; programs lasting for 3-5 years and more have better results.

Decreasing number of civic education CSOs and experts in recent years leads to the **loss of best practices**. Respondents witness that there are regions in Belarus where not a single CSO provides services in civic education. An organization which would demonstrate the leading responsibility for the development of civic education sector is also currently missing in the country.

Civic education programs in Belarus implemented by CSOs remain largely funded by Western donors. Respondents mention **few cases of local fund-raising and paid services** but name them an exception to the usual practice. A small share of local resources in the activities of civic education CSOs is caused not as much by the lack of pro-activity on behalf of CSOs in fundraising but more by the existing legal framework considerably limiting the chances of CSOs to raise and use local funds. In addition the cost-effectiveness of neither the whole sector nor different educational tools has been evaluated.



Concerning the assessment of their programs civic education **CSOs place emphasis on monitoring of the quality of the process and outputs, while program outcomes and impacts remain largely unstudied.** The existing civic education programs produce different kind of results but they have never been systematically evaluated at the national level. Nor have there been made a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of broad-scale PR-campaigns versus individual educational events with the direct involvement of the participants.

The **key needs of civic education CSOs are:** developing the expertise of trained civic education specialists in terms of quantity and quality; developing institutional capacity of civic education CSOs and their networks, especially at the regional level; mobilizing resources for long-term educational programs; developing theoretical, research, and methodological components of CSO civic education activities; broadening best practice sharing.

Recommendations

The following can become the main development trends of civic education by the Belarusian third sector:

- institutional development of the civic education sector through the establishment of specialized organizations such as Centres for Adult Education, assistance to long-term educational programmes, as well as support to the activity of associations and networks involved in the development of civic education in their respective fields;
- organization of the process of communication between the major providers of civic education services aiming to shape a consistent vision of the objectives, notions and contents of civic education. This communication should take the form of discussions, scientific and methodological meetings and exchange of practical experience; participation in the design and implementation of joint research and educational programmes;
- advocating for the inclusion of democratic civic education into the state system of pre-school and secondary education supported by the idea of the democratic state based on the rule of law as stipulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus;
- development of diverse civic education programmes with due consideration for the interests of various target groups based on a common value system. Most effective programmes possessing the potential of reaching a wide audience should be spread among a large number of NGOs;
- the cultivation of civic participation competences should be complemented with the basic knowledge of legal mechanisms and structures of Belarus; principles, documents, ideas, and confrontations meaningful for the constitutional democracy of Belarus; of the political mechanisms for representing public opinion and bringing about political change;
- ensuring broad outreach of civic education by means of involving a wide range of providers into the field – NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations, initiatives, businesses – everybody who can purposefully integrate civic education into their educational programmes and activities;



- combination of educational programmes with civic campaigns including innovation-based forms such as animated cartoons and videos for children and other age groups using internet and social networks having in mind high internet penetration (from 26% in 2007 to 54% in 2013);
- organization of the consistent training and further training of civic education experts both among educational NGOs and a wider range of stakeholders: trade union leaders, business trainers, social workers, religious figures, etc.
- advocating by the third sector of the possibilities of mobilizing local resources for their activity, which will have a favourable effect on civic education too;
- monitoring the outcomes and impacts of civic education programmes should become a standard for NGOs. New civic education programmes should be designed and supported subject to thorough cost-benefit analysis and evaluation of previously achieved results;
- increased effectiveness of the educational activity of NGOs in civic education is possible on condition of enlarging expert capacity, organizational development of the NGOs and networks within the civic education sector, especially at the regional level, providing resources for long-term educational programmes, developing scientific, research and methodological support to the activity of NGOs in the sector of civic education.