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Gender Statistics in the Republic of Belarus

1. The main strategic goal of Belarus, is to achieve sustainable human development. Successful achievement of this goal depends on an efficient social policy. Improving the situation of women is an important element of such a policy.
2. In Belarus, women represent the largest socio-demographic group. There are 5,458,000 women in this country, or 53% of its entire population. Women have been hit hard by the negative effects of the transition period, including excessive work loads on women in the workplace and in the home, the growth of unemployment and poverty among women, deteriorating working conditions, extremely poor representation of women in institutions of power, especially in the upper levels, growth of anti-social behavior and violence in the family and society, worsening public health, etc.
3. All these problems were considered and discussed in detail at national conferences, seminars and workshops. A comprehensive information which contains analysis on the situation of women was presented in a number of national reports in Belarus, that have been produced and published with the assistance of UNDP and UNICEF.
4. Several documents have been drafted and approved to assist Belarus in addressing these problems, implementing the recommendations of the Beijing conference and meeting its international obligations. These include the National Action Plan for Advancement of Women for 1996 - 2000, approved by the Belarusian government in June 1996, and the National Program "Women in the Republic of Belarus", approved in August 1996. The latter document clarifies the main activity areas listed in the Action Plan and offers their detailed definition.
5. The UNDP project Women in Development is playing a great role in resolving many of the above mentioned problems and in assisting to the government and local NGOs in the implementation at the national level of main decisions and programs adopted at recent global conferences. In Belarus the gender unit (Gender Information and Policy Center within the Ministry of Social Welfare) was established in February 1995. The goals of the center were as follows: analyzing the situation of women in Belarus; active participation in the formulation and implementation of a gender policy; formulation of proposals to improve statistical reporting; raising public awareness of gender issues by conducting workshops and disseminating statistical and other information on gender issues within Belarus and internationally.
6. The Center publishes a newsletter with the information reflecting the situation of women in Belarus, the efforts by the Belarusian government and NGOs to implement the Beijing Platform of Action. The publication also provides news on the participants in the women's movement on the national and international levels (organizations as well as individuals), and the upcoming events (workshops, conferences, visits, etc.). The publication of this newsletter is an important area of the Center's activities.

7. Recently, the amount of research into gender issues has grown considerably. National experts from the Gender Information and Policy Center, in cooperation with researchers and representatives of women's NGOs have produced a national report "Belarusian Women as Seen Through an Era" which is available . The report analyses the situation of women in the transition period, based on a large amount of statistical and sociological data .

8. In spite of all the above-mentioned success in analysis the women's status, Belarus needs to elaborate a system of statistics by integrating data deriving from diverse statistical sources and studies which contain information on women. Uniform methodological base was to be defined enabling both the routine current statistics and the data on women produced by research institutes and non-government organizations.

9. The regular Statistics in Belarus is fairly well organized and developed. There are many indicators disaggregated by sex in many of the subjects fields. The female active population and female labour force by sectors, school attendance by sex, etc. are reported by the routine statistics . During the last decade the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis succeeded in making numerous large-scale national sample surveys, supplying rich statistics of female and male dimensions.

10. On this grounds and according to the demands of the National Action Plan for Advancement of Women the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis published two statistical books on women - in 1995 and 1997, titled «Women of the Republic of Belarus».

11. However the existing statistics supplied certain information on women without being able to produce specific characteristics following gender approach. All above mentioned problems show the new dimensions and problems which the statistics on women has to face. Thus our statistics needs improvement due to the qualitative changes of society, economics and management of the country and its opening to Europe and the world.

12. The involvement of the integrated statistics on women is assigned to help in studying these problems and in formulating policy oriented issues related to the social status of women and their human rights. A role of statistics as a tool for Government policy making and for activities of the relevant state agencies and the NGO's is indispensable. Objective facts about the situation of women and men in all areas of society are necessary as support for the active efforts towards equal opportunities. Visibility is a prerequisite for change.

13. One of the unwished and acute problems at present stage is violence against women. By signing the Beijing declaration, Belarus assumed responsibility for ensuring the proper reporting and elimination of violence.

14. Violence against women is a problem which has not been addressed directly by any of the institutions in the Republic of Belarus. It has even presently not won adequate recognition as a real social problem. The basic problems in a society heading towards a market economy are believed to involve economic reforms and mass poverty whereby the study of violence against women is not regarded a top priority issue.

15. Violence and crimes are of particular interest in developing the integrated statistics on women and in clarifying them at least for two reasons: the first one, the crimes became an enormous and unexceptedly fast spreading phenomena menacing all people's groups since the last several years and, secondly, because of the traditional and invisible violence in everyday life, in the family and at work.

16. The regular statistics is able to compile all categories of crime and the processed data are annually published. But the Ministry of Internal Affairs started to compile a data bank of the victims of crimes disaggregated by sex only from 1993 (table 1).

Table 1. **Women suffering as the result of crimes**

Type of crime	1993			1996		
	Number of people having suffered from crimes	Number of women	Percentage	Number of people having suffered from crimes	Number of women	Percentage
All crimes	38 611	15 477	40.1	49 901	21421	42.9
Murder and attempted murder	756	244	32.3	997	338	33.9
Premeditated grievous bodily harm	1427	385	27.0	1486	402	27.1
Premeditated actual bodily harm	772	385	49.9	980	554	56.5
Rape and attempted rape	553	553	100.0	484	484	100.0
Hooliganism	3548	1041	29.3	5153	1346	32.4
Theft		8558		24 405	11 065	45.3
Burglary	2988	936	31.3	3405	1340	39.4
Mugging	835	241	28.9	1251	414	33.1
Swindling	544	288	52.9	1692	614	36.3
Extortion	282	59	20.9	476	89	18.7
Other crimes	3319	805	24.3	4529	1426	31.5

Source : Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

17. Statistics cannot show the full picture of this worrying phenomenon. The total number of women victims is obviously much higher since official statistics do not reflect all cases of violence, especially violence in the family and undetected crime. However statistics clearly show that the growth rate for women suffering crimes outstrips that of men (table 2).

Table 2. **The growth rates of the numbers of women and men who are victims of crime**

Crime victims	1993	1996	Growth rate
Women	15 477	21 421	+ 38.4%
Men	23 134	28 480	+ 23.1%
Total	38 611	49 901	+ 29.2%

Source : Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

18. In October 1996 in Belarus, the *Public Opinion* sociological research agency was commissioned by the UNDP to carry out a first sample survey on the subjective and objective aspects of personal safety, including violence against women. The results showed that 42% of men and 25% of women had been beaten up at least once in their lives. This ratio changes, however, when it is a question of repeated, systematic physical violence - this had been suffered by 2% of women and 0.5% of men.

19. The moral degradation of society and the increase in crime has created an atmosphere of fear. It is characteristic that women feel much more vulnerable than men, and are forced to live under the burden of real or imaginary threats.

20. Social research shows that violence and abuse begins in the family. Unfortunately there are no general statistics on violence in the family in Belarus, but the problem can nevertheless be analysed objectively. First of all, the statistical records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs contain a group of crimes which are categorised as being caused by jealousy, arguments and other everyday problems. To some extent this study brings to light cases of violence in the family to be brought Secondly, the state of family relations can be studied by sociological agencies. These sources allow to evaluate the degree of danger which women are subject to within their own homes, and to establish the reasons for this alarming phenomenon. But in Belarus such a survey was conducted only in 1996.

21. It is generally considered that violence within the family is limited to dysfunctional families, the families of alcoholics, and poor families. The above mentioned research, however, shows that violence is not always connected with alcohol abuse or poverty by far. Psychological violence is very widespread in family relations : rudeness in 48% of families, mutual denigration in 14% of families, and physical violence in the form of beating in 6% of families. Rudeness in relationships is considered normal family interaction by the majority of men and women. The number of families where the husband threatens the wife harshly (beats her, threatens her, drives her out of the house, and so on) is 3.5 times higher than the number of families where a wife threatens her husband harshly. Women are the ones who are subjected to the most physical violence from their spouses (29.0% of women and only 3.0% of men).

22. The consequences for the victims of violence in the family can include death, physical injury, psychological distress which is sometimes irreversible, suicide, and loss of self-respect. Constant rudeness can provoke women into retaliatory violence towards their husbands or partners, but on the whole this is in the interests of self-defence. The situation is now changing, however, and women are resorting to violence more often.

23. Financial abuse is witnessed in the personal use of finances by the «head of a family». When a woman is forced to beg for money from her husband for joint household expenditures and children's clothes, as well as when a husband refuses to contribute money for his wife's health care, we witness abuse, violence and unique form of enslavement.

24. Elderly women who live alone in urban or rural areas are often the victims of violence: they are robbed, tortured, strangled and burned.

25. Violence in the family remains to a large degree outside the legal system and away from public attention for many reasons. Among them are women's desire to preserve their family, the inter-dependence of offenders and victims, the desire not to bring the authorities into family conflicts, the desire not to 'wash dirty linen in public', and also the difficulty of relating certain acts of violence to criminal acts. In the eyes of society, violence is still a family affair. Belarusian folklore still retains proverbs like 'No beatings means there's no love' and 'You always hurt the ones you love'. This stereotype means a dull existence for many women and an endless round of sophisticated bullying and beating. Due to the republic's current housing system, divorce hardly ever means an end to the bullying, because divorced couples are often doomed to live in the same flat, under the same roof.

26. Moreover, there is a need to look into violence in the family not just as a medical and social problem beyond state control, but also as a socially significant and relevant problem which must be addressed without delay.

27. There is an increase in the number of women who have become victims of sexual violence : sexually motivated murders, enforced prostitution, sexual harassment at work, trade in 'live goods', etc. Only rape and attempted rape, however, are represented in statistical records. Despite the decrease in the number of crimes officially registered in this category from 538 in 1993 to 484 in 1996, and the number of crimes against minors dropping from 268 (or 49.8% of the total number) to 209 (or 43.2% of the total number), this tendency does not give much cause for optimism as specialists believe that the number of rapes and related crimes is five to ten times more than is shown in the official statistics.

28. The victims do not always report what has happened, and there are two main reasons for hiding it. The first is psychological (subjective), since rape is a serious trauma with life-long consequences for women and the way they relate to those around them. Medical or instructional courses are being organised for women, and clubs and associations are being set up. The second reasons are objective, namely the lack of experience or specialised services to provide the necessary support, coupled with the situation in the courts, which are unable to advocate women.

29. As the 1996 sociological survey showed, women experience rape most often in their early adulthood (46.0%) and youth (29.0%), but it also happens in maturity (17.0%) and in childhood (1.2%). Half the victims were subjected to rape more than once, and it turned into a deep psychological trauma for 1 in 4 women. In Belarus, violence against women in intimate relationships is part of an everyday life, and is not recognised as being a serious social problem. Moreover, there are various taboos in this area which are shored up by traditional feelings of shame, guilt and fear of being found out, especially in small towns and villages. Most terrible of all is that in each of the six regions of the republic every year, there are five or six cases of fathers raping their daughters.

30. Sexual violence can occur when the victim's dependence or vulnerability is used to force an intimate contact. More and more often, girls and young women can only get jobs depending on whether or not they agree to provide various sexual services, especially in the private sector. If a person forces a woman who is materially or professionally dependent on them into sexual contact so as to satisfy perverted sexual desires, they are liable to criminal punishment by the Criminal Law Code of the Republic of Belarus (Article 116). However, in the past two years there have been no cases of legal proceedings resulting from this article and there are no statistical data about the cases of sexual harassment at work

31. Prostitution exists in the Republic of Belarus and according to the estimates of specialists is increasing rapidly. Unfortunately, statistical reports from the Ministry of Internal Affairs only reflected the number of women given official charges (warning or fines). In 1990 the number of such women was 3 and in 1992 it was 11. These data do not reflect the real picture. Since 1993 such data have not been collected.

32. Within the Republic of Belarus, there is no legal standard which clearly defines prostitution or which supports the apprehension and punishment of people who practice it. As a result, law-enforcement bodies are unable to control this phenomenon or estimate its scale.

33. A new and as yet unstudied type of violence against women is the trade in women for the sake of prostitution. Meanwhile the use of women in international 'live goods' trading networks for prostitution has become one of the areas in which organised crime has been directing its efforts. Whereas previously, the majority of women sold on the sexual services market came from developing countries of Asia and Africa, nowadays the majority of them come from former socialist countries, including Belarus. The trade in women has become one of the most widespread forms of illegal immigration into the countries of Western Europe. In many cases, women who arrive or have been brought over from their home countries are sold to brothel owners. Their documents are taken away from them, they are often locked up and subject to physical violence if they try to escape. As a rule, they live in isolation and do not know the local language. In addition to this, their position as illegal immigrants prevents them from turning to the authorities.

34. The demand for cheap labour in Western Europe for doing housework and performing services can also lead to harsh treatment of women immigrants, and physical violence and forced prostitution are not uncommon.

35. It is not the home countries of potential and actual victims that have shown the greatest alarm regarding this problem, but the countries of Western Europe. Many of them have recently carried out investigations, held conferences and seminars, and set up organisations to help such women. But nowadays people in the former socialist countries are beginning to understand the seriousness of the problem of the trade in women.

36. There are many causes of violence. They take the shape of a combination of socio-cultural, psychological, economic and other factors, none of which can be blamed for causing the violence on their own.

37. One of the most complicated and important causes of violence is a general level of cultural development of a society. In relation to sexual violence, many psychologists researching rape consider it to be a problem not only of sex but also of power.

38. Violence against women is manifestation of the historically unequal power ratio between men and women in the family and in society, which have led to male domination and discrimination against women. In this situation, however, it is not only women who suffer. Men suffer not less, most of all from the masculine stereotypes imposed on them. This has been furthered by a tidal wave of films and books in which the nature of true manhood is identified with murderers, rapists and aggression.

39. Social upheavals are cause of violence in society. The republic's citizens think that the main reasons for this tendency are economic problems: a lowering standard of living, increasing poverty, price rises, the delays in wage payments, and growing unemployment. The history of civilisation shows us that great changes in a society are accompanied by growing aggression, and Belarus is no exception. The eternally patient, peaceful and kind people are nowadays often aggressive and cruel, especially when their socio-economic status is catastrophically declining.

40. Almost as important are the socio-psychological causes : unrealistic hopes, the loss of former social guidelines, a lack of faith in the future, and social instability. The crisis in which our society finds itself is leading to an increase in the number of problematic situations. This forces people to take new and unusual decisions, which is in itself uncomfortable and often stressful. Some psychologists state, not without reason, that modern violence is, in the vast majority of cases, a kind of neurotic protest of individuals against various stressful factors which are weighing down on them, and against social conditions that they find it difficult to adapt to. By using violence, strong people can quickly attain their desired goal.

41. A significant part of the population uses alcohol as a means of escape from difficult situations. As a rule, alcohol abuse and rough behaviour accompany and complement each other.

42. One of the reasons leading to violence is society's tolerance. The results of the same 1996 survey show that women are not at all tolerant when it comes to violence. They are more often against violence in the home than men. The majority of women (68.0%) and 50.0% of men consider violence at home to be inadmissible. There are half as many women who consider the use of violence at home to be admissible as there are men (14.0% and 26.0% respectively). These men and women often believe in physical force when bringing up children.

43. Men also permit the use of physical force against women (1 in 4, or 1 in 5 men, and 22.0% with no particular opinion). It is worth noting that 12% of Belarusian women also consider it permissible for a man to use physical violence against her in certain situations. This opinion is not due to age or marital status, but to the level of education. Women who got a higher education have a greater sense of their own dignity and a stronger negative attitude towards violence against themselves.

44. Consequently, the problem of violence is of great concern for Belarus. The kinds of violence perpetrated against women are more varied, more frequent and more sophisticated than those used against men. The results of widespread violence against women are not just a deterioration in health, a reduction in vitality, and psychological distress but also the fact that women's desires remain unfulfilled. Violence in the family denies women the chance to be happy in their personal lives. Violence at work and sexual harassment often force women to leave their profession. In addition, the current state of society means that women who have suffered violence are denied the chance to save themselves from becoming victims except with great difficulty.

45. The most important aspect of the combat with violence against women is to solve the underlying socio-economic problems. This means raising people's spiritual and material living standards, reducing tension in society, providing people with social and legal protection without sex discrimination, and creating a situation where any forms of violence are considered to be inadmissible. This will require efforts on the part of society as a whole in order to change the current situation.

46. Positive changes in this area depend on large-scale public involvement and the participation of non-government organizations. Some efforts in this area have already been made. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has submitted proposals to the drafts of the new Criminal and Administrative Codes aimed at increasing sanctions for violent crimes against women and teenagers and to ensure the proper payment of alimony and child benefits. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has set up a working team to formulate a program to prevent prostitution. This year preparatory work has started to set up a crisis center for women victims of sexual and domestic violence. However, very little progress has been made so far.

47. It is extremely necessary to adjust the national legislation to the international standards, promote legal education and set up crisis centers for long term and emergency relief, as well as to open telephone counselling centers and set up a system to inform women on different types of assistance available to them.

48. Belarus needs a broad analysis of violence and crime and elaboration of a policy to halt these practices. Various educational, medical, legal and social care institutions must involve themselves in this field. Violence against women is not a private matter or the right of men to punish or use women. The abuse of women is a violation of human rights. Women's non-governmental organisations and the media can now help the public to understand the problem of violence and to put it in the centre-stage.
