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Improving Gender Statistics for Decision-Making

Note by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus*

Abstract

Gender policies of the Republic of Belarus are based on universally-recognized international standards. To facilitate monitoring and performance evaluation of gender-related national policies, the National Statistics Committee of Belarus is developing gender statistics, and is introducing gender-relevant indicators into its statistical practices based on international best practices. The paper describes the sources and processes for developing gender statistics in the Republic of Belarus, and outlines some findings from MICS and time-use survey data.

I. Introduction

1. Gender policies of the Republic of Belarus are based on universally-recognized international standards. The country has signed and ratified a number of United Nations documents and committed to implement the decisions aimed to protect women's interests and to achieve gender equality. This means that Belarus considers gender equality as a key priority and pursues its gender policies towards achieving gender equality.
2. Four National Action Plans for Gender Equality are considered to be some of the most important gender policies:
 - first Action Plan covering 1996-2000;

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- second Action Plan covering 2001-2005;
- third Action Plan covering 2008-2010; and
- fourth Action Plan covering 2011-2015.

3. Gender issues have also been mainstreamed into other national programmes and projects, such as Major Areas of Government Family Policies, National Action Plan to Improve the Situation of Children and to Protect Their Rights, National Demographic Security Programmes, Presidential Programme ‘Children of Belarus’ and the government employment programme.

4. Today Belarus is developing its fifth National Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020.

5. National action plans are policy documents aimed to ensure that conditions are in place for equal participation of men and women in all areas of life. Thus, one of the objectives of the fourth National Action Plan was to facilitate parity representation of women and men at all leadership levels; to mainstream gender knowledge in the education system, to build public understanding of the need of social equality between women and men in all areas of public life. This concerns maintenance and promotion of reproductive health of men, women and adolescents to sustain good levels of reproduction of population and to improve the quality of life. Special focus is made on strengthening the institution of the family and marital relationship, advocacy of the values of marriage and family, achievement of gender equality in family relationship, including involvement of men into care work and child rearing processes. Equally important is to facilitate gender equality in economic area, to further develop female entrepreneurship, to increase competitiveness of women at the labour market. Here the focus is made on transforming social mind set, on overcoming gender stereotypes related to the perception that one gender outrivals and dominates over another one.

II.

6. The responsibility for coordination of the activities under the National Action Plans rests on the National Council on Gender Policies under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus (National Council). The council consists of the representatives of legislative and executive authorities and non-governmental organizations.

7. The National Council provides a platform for dialogue to discuss progress in addressing gender equality issues, to present opinions and specific proposals to government officials.

III.

8. The identification of major trends and issues in the development of gender situation in Belarus requires a toolset including metrics and a methodology to measure gender equality in the country. This means that gender statistics are required for making decisions by government and non-government bodies and institutions in order to secure equal rights and opportunities for citizens and to avoid gender-based discrimination in the country. Being a large information resource the gender statistics play an important role in ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment because such statistics provide benchmarks for measuring progress in achieving the objectives.

9. To facilitate monitoring and performance evaluation of gender-related national policies, the National Statistics Committee of Belarus is developing gender statistics, and is introducing gender-relevant indicators into its statistical practices based on international best practices. The

efforts for building capacity in gender statistics are mainstreamed into the national strategies and plans and help to make informed political decisions.

IV.

10. The development of gender statistics in the Republic of Belarus is based on:
 - (a) **centralized government statistical surveys** held by formal statistics bodies,
 - (b) **non-centralized government statistical surveys** held by relevant government institutions,
 - (c) **administrative sources** from which formal statistics bodies receive statistics based on the agreements on information exchange concluded between the Belarus Statistics Committee and government bodies.
11. Today government statistical surveys collect gender-disaggregated data (where possible), which help in making comprehensive comparative analysis of the situation faced by women and men.

V.

12. Sample household surveys are important sources for gender statistics and analysis.
13. Thus, to collect information for measuring progress in achieving major MDG targets, in 2012, the Belarus Statistics Committee, with the support of UNICEF, conducted the **Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey to assess the situation of children and women in the Republic of Belarus (MICS 4)**. The survey helped to obtain unique data on many issues, including gender-sensitive data. For the first time in the country, the household survey addressed indicators measuring female reproductive health, women's and men's attitude towards domestic violence, men's awareness on HIV/AIDS, etc.
14. The findings of the MICS 4 are the information resource which supports improving the framework for monitoring the situation of children and women in the country; the data are used in the design and implementation of welfare programmes.
15. The survey results were presented at the meeting of the National Council on Gender Policies, at a conference attended by the Government members, government officials, academia, non-governmental and international organizations and the mass media.

Summary of MICS 4 results in Belarus

16. The indicators of reproductive health are proxy indicators of healthcare system's ability to provide adequate access to care for pregnant women; and they give information on the use of skilled attendance at birth.
17. The survey results showed that all women (100%) gave birth in the attendance of skilled health personnel (doctors, nurses or midwives) and almost all pregnant women (99.9%) delivered in health facilities.
18. For prenatal care future mothers use not only free services provided by government health facilities but commercial services as well. The survey showed that about 57% of pregnant women relied only on free prenatal care services, about 3% of pregnant women relied only on

commercial services and another 40% used both. The decision to use commercial health services in most cases was made by women together with their husbands.

19. Reviewing reproductive plans of women of fertile age is interesting for addressing demographic issues in the country. The survey reviewed reproductive intentions of women aged 15-49 in general, as well as women who were pregnant at the time of the survey.

20. The results showed that 42% of women of fertile age were willing to give birth to a child. More than half of them (56%) plan to give birth in the nearest 5 years. Eighty four per cent of married women plan to give birth in the nearest 5 years.

21. MICS 4 collected data on different activities in families which facilitate child development, early education and preparation to schooling.

22. In total, adult household members involved 96% of children under five into 4 and more activities helping them to get prepared to school. It is interesting that not only mothers but also fathers do it: the survey showed that fathers were teaching 68% of children.

23. Incidence of different types of violence and threats of violence against women is one of key obstacles to achieving gender equality.

24. The available formal statistics fail to give a full picture of such problem as domestic violence in the country because the practice shows that only about a half of victims of physical and sexual violence seek assistance.

25. MICS 4 included a module 'Attitude towards domestic violence'. The standard module contained some guiding questions the responses to which help to assess as to what respondents believe to be tolerable behaviours in the context of domestic abuse.

26. As proposed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection the module on attitude towards domestic violence was expanded to incorporate questions on:

- (a) reasons of domestic violence;
- (b) whether a husband/partner uses violence;
- (c) how often a husband/partner uses violence;
- (d) assistance sought after violence;
- (e) measures to counter domestic violence; and
- (f) physical violence by parents in childhood.

The cited reasons of domestic violence included:

- (a) alcohol abuse (cited by 79% of women and 57% of men),
- (b) jealousy (43% of women and 45% of men),
- (c) mental disorders and emotional state (35% of women and 30% of men);
- (d) social and economic disadvantage (20% of women and 25% of men); and
- (e) behavioural stereotypes (12% of both women and men).

27. Amongst other reasons of domestic violence both women and men mentioned drug use and provocative behaviour of women which invited aggression by their husbands/partners.

28. Based on the survey results almost 12% of women have ever experienced some violence from their husbands, almost half of them left houses to flee violence and about 40% of these women sought assistance.

29. Sixty per cent of population aged 15-49 believe that teaching youth to respect each other is an efficient measure to counter domestic violence, 40% of women and 30% of men supported the adoption of tougher laws, almost 40% of respondents believe that professional counsellor is necessary. Tougher laws were mainly supported by women living in cities and towns (42.6%), aged 30-34 (48.1%), with higher education (42.2%) and most better off (46.2%).

30. A bit more than 10% of respondents called social advertisement to be an efficient measure to counter domestic violence.

31. All these data give information basis for identifying reasons and nature of violence and on the other hand, help in elaborating strategies to counter gender-based violence through changing values and behavioural patterns.

32. It should be noted that in our country domestic violence is already recognized as a social problem at both social and government levels. Some steps have been made over the past years to prevent domestic violence and to provide assistance to victims through the legislation. The existing criminal, civil and administrative legislations contain relevant articles applied to cases associated with violence against women and children, including in families.

33. In January 2014, Belarus adopted the Law on the fundamental activities to prevent offences which laid the basis for prevention of different offences, including alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

34. As a result, the number of registered administrative 'domestic' offences increased by one third in 2014, totalling about 42,000 offences, vs. 33,000 offences registered in 2013. The statistics demonstrate that the problem that was not prominent before is now regulated by new statutory provisions.

35. At present a concept note of a separate law on domestic violence is being prepared in the country.

VI. Summary of female employment in the Republic of Belarus

36. One of the specifics of Belarus is a high employment level of women. The female employment rate in Belarus is 65%, including 83% among women of active working age.

37. The employment rate is high among women with minor children (90%). However, most (61%) working women who have minor children have only one child under 18, almost one in three women has two children and 7% have three and more children.

38. Women are now more often invited to senior positions. In recent years there are more women at senior positions: from 47% of total headcount in 2010 to 48% at the beginning of 2015. Almost one in three CEOs is a woman.

39. Boosting competitiveness of female labour force has always been a priority for the national Government.

40. The annual government employment programmes include special measures to provide employment for women.

41. The measures taken have helped to improve the situation with female unemployment. Thus, at the end of 2005 women accounted for 69% of all unemployed, whereas at the beginning of 2016 - 32%.

42. At the same time, there are issues with female employment. And one of such issues is professional segregation. Though women have better education than men, they are mostly

employed in low paying jobs and sectors (education, health, where salaries are lower than national average salary). Women still have low representation in business and entrepreneurship.

43. As a result, average salary of women is about 76% of average salary of men.

44. Apart from horizontal segregation (conventional division of sectors into male and female sectors) another reason for the gender pay gap is a social role of women who have to provide care to children, to bring them up and to keep the house; often this happens at the expense of employment and career. However, in these days Belarus women focus more on employment and career and start thinking about family only after being educated and having stable income.

VII.

45. The **time-use survey** conducted in 2014 considerably expanded the gender statistics indicators.

46. The survey results were presented at the meeting of the National Council on Gender Policies under the Cabinet of Ministers which took place in November 2015.

47. The survey results were presented to different users, including mass media, as a statistical publication 'How We Use Our Time' and during the roundtable 'Use of Time by People'.

Summary of time-use survey results in Belarus

48. The survey results confirmed the existing gender stereotypes in the society about the distribution of family roles and helped to build a picture of gender-based differences in the use of time. Thus, the structures of daily time-use by working women and men (aged 16 and over) are different.

49. According to the Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics the largest differences in the structure of time-use during 24 hours among working women and men are found in two groups: household and children care and free time. Thus, *after personal care and maintenance* (10 h 25 min) and *work* (6 h 15 min), working women use more time for *household and child care* (3 h 47 min) and then for *leisure (or free time)* (3 h 7 min a day). At the same time, men after *personal care and maintenance* (10 h 30 min) and *work* (6 h 57 min), use most time for *leisure* (4 h 11 min) and then for *household and child care* (2 h 2 min).

50. Working men work on average 42 minutes a day longer. In their turn, working women spend 1 h 45 min a day longer for household care.

51. A working week of employed people takes 45 hours, including about 43 hours for working women and 48 hours for working men. Working time of urban women is 9.2% shorter than that of working men, and 11.7% shorter for rural women, which reflects high likelihood that women work part-time in some sectors of economy as well as different time expenditure for get from home to work and back.

52. Time spent for household care is a considerable part of the total time of the population aged 10 and over, of which about 80% is time spent for housework, about 9% is time for purchasing goods and services and about 11% is time for caring for and helping children.

53. Numerous activities related to housework and care for children are lengthy during off-duty hours, especially for women: household activities take on average about 20 h 46 min a week of working people, including 26 h 29 min for women and 14 h 14 min for men.

54. The sample survey data confirmed the existing separation of roles in household activities between women and men. Food preparation was indicated by 94.9% of women vs. 45.6% of men. Eighty five per cent of women and only 29.7 per cent of men washed up. Garment and shoe care was done by 49.2% of women vs. 6.2% of men. But men more often than women performed activities for home construction and maintenance (9.2% vs. 1.7%), vehicle maintenance and repair (21.5% vs. 0.9%).

55. The total workload which consists of paid work (working time and time related to work) and non-paid work (household activities) is the following: on average working women work for about 70 hours a week, whereas working men work 7.5 hours less (62 h 53 min). The ratio of paid and non-paid work for working women is 62% (paid work) and 38% (non-paid work), and for working men it is 77% and 23% respectively.

56. The length of free time considerably varies among different population groups. Thus, working men have it 1.3 times as much as working women do, in towns and cities the difference is 34.7%, in rural settlements –32.2%.

57. The overall pattern in the usage of free time by working household members is that most people use in a passive way, mainly to watch TV and to listen to the radio. Thus, on weekdays women and men spend for this about 50% of their free time, and about 40% on weekends. Working women spend only 3.7% of their free time for reading of fine literature, working men - 1.6%. One should note that only 19.4% of working women and 9.1% of working men indicated that they spend time for this activity.

VIII.

58. The Belarus Statistics Committee has established, since 2000, the gender statistics database which is based on the framework of Gender Statistics Indicators for the following thematic areas: economy, poverty, education, health, demography, children and adolescents, violence, authorities and decision-making in the society and in a household, communication means and environment. The system was evolved from the gender indicators of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), taking into account the national specifics and proposals made by the National Gender Policies Council under the Council of Ministers. The framework of indicators served as a blueprint for developing the Gender Equality Concept Note in Belarus.

IX. Conclusion

59. In conclusion, the improvements in gender statistics in Belarus which provide data for analysis required to make decisions and to adopt gender-related policies and programmes, as well as the implementation of the National Action Plans for gender equality, have helped to achieve progress in addressing the issues of equal rights and opportunities, both domestically and globally. According to the latest data Belarus is one of 15 countries in the world where the human development index of females equals or is higher than that of males. For the Gender Inequality Index Belarus is 31st among 155 countries of the world, and for the Maternity Index its ranking is 25.
