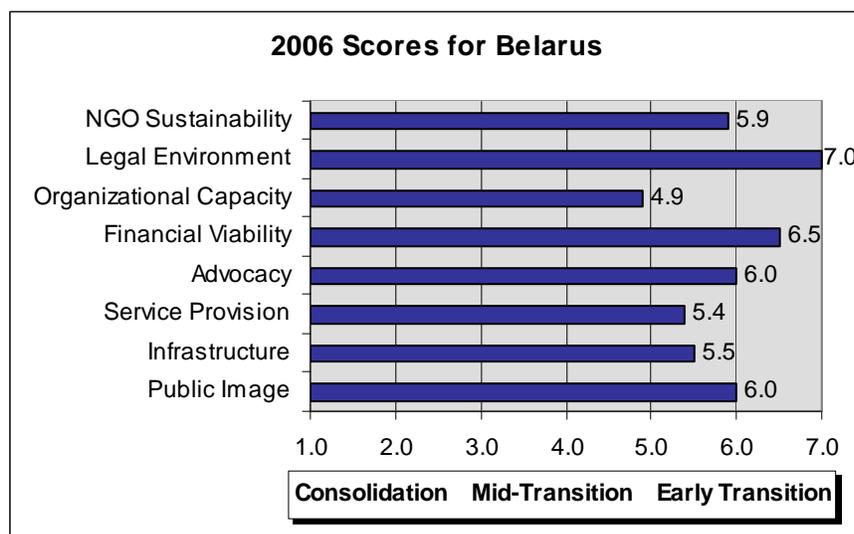


Belarus



Capital: Minsk

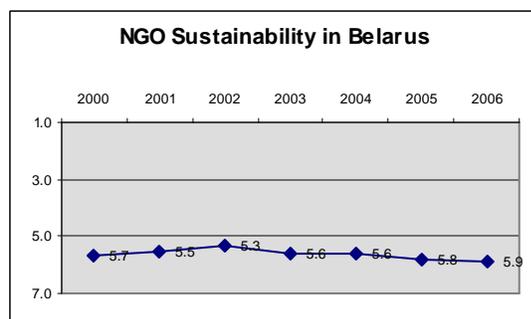
Polity: Presidential

Population:
10,293,011

**GDP per capita
(PPP):** \$7,800

NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 5.9

Over the past year, civil society was most affected by a wave of political tension brought on by the presidential elections. Government officials implementing the restrictive laws and regulations adopted in 2005; they illegally harassed, detained, and imprisoned NGO representatives, and closed down their organizations. Amendments to the Criminal Code permit government agencies to infiltrate and control unregistered organizations, and imprison their leaders. Government officials led campaigns to intimidate journalists, scholars, political activists, trade unionists, students and other citizens they perceived as a potential threat and prevented them from causing unrest. The government closed almost all human rights organizations, as well as many of the larger regional resource centers and foundations.



Corporate funding of NGO activities remains low, and even illegal due to restrictions imposed by Presidential Edict 300. NGOs generally face a large and unmanageable government bureaucracy, restrictive registration procedures, murky tax regulations, and haphazard supervision. These obstacles influence and motivate NGOs and determine how they relate to government officials, as well as identify and respond to community issues. Over the past year, some organizations have closed voluntarily, while others continue to operate unregistered and in secret, risking arrest and imprisonment of their leaders. Other organizations find ways to survive in spite of the restrictions and hurdles. The nonprofit sector provides citizens with the opportunity to express a certain degree of independence in an environment in which the government challenges any independent social space.

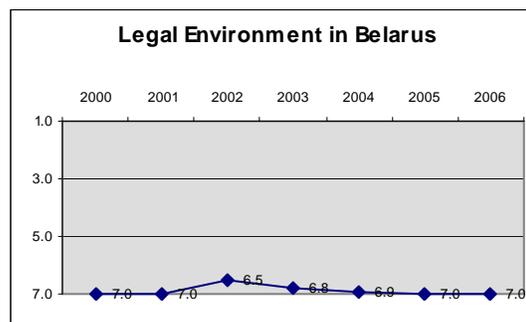
According to the Ministry of Justice, there were 17 political parties, 37 trade unions, 2,248 non-governmental organizations, 17 unions of non-governmental organizations, and 56 foundations registered in Belarus.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 7.0

Over the past year, government officials began implementing 2005 amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. The amendments make it a criminal offense to be involved in the activities of unregistered organizations; this year the leaders of *Partnerstvo* and *Malady Front*, two unregistered organizations were imprisoned under the law.

Other amendments adopted in 2005 affecting NGO registration and operations also had a negative impact on the NGO sector. Almost all organizations were forced to register amendments to their organizational documents, including changes to their organizational structures and the elimination of their economic activities, which are now prohibited. In addition, foundations are now required to pay higher registration fees and maintain larger endowments. The registration process was completed at the end of 2006; though the official data on the impacts of the new law are not yet published, it is clear that many civil society organizations are unable to comply with the law. In the Mogilev region, for example, 16 foundations have decided not to re-register and ceased their operations. The registration procedures are clearly described in the laws and regulations, but applicants wait for three years or more without being registered, even though many of these organizations are not involved in politics. A former Minister of Information, for example, formed an organization to address issues of local lore, history, and the economy, but it has yet to be approved for registration.

The judiciary continues to close NGOs for being “disloyal” to the government. In 2004, the judiciary closed 38 organizations and in 2005 it closed 68. This year the court closed the RADA, a youth organization, for stating in its strategic plan that it will “work on developing an alternative youth policy,” which the government found threatening. As a result, NGOs censor all of their contact with the public, government officials, and even their own membership.



The government utilizes a system of administrative warnings against NGOs; if an organization receives two or more warnings for minor infractions of the law, government officials may automatically liquidate that organization and shut it down. Many NGOs operate under a constant threat of suspension. The Ministry of Justice issued 425 written warnings in 2005, up from 264 in 2004. Those initiating new civic activities report difficulties getting their applications for legal status approved by local and regional authorities. Those known for opposing the government or being active in civil society experience even greater difficulty registering new organizations.

Since 2005, NGOs have been required to create for-profit entities in order to engage in economic activities, though few organizations are willing to risk doing so. Even those that operated social enterprises in the past have liquidated them because local administrators prohibit state institutions from contracting with non-state entities. The tax laws regarding NGOs did not change, except that organizations have to withhold 12% of their employees’ income, up from 1%, making it difficult for organizations to retain their staff.

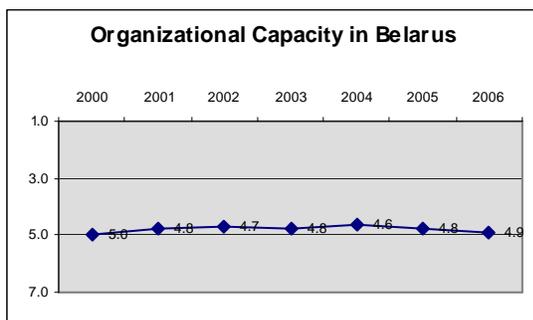
The number of qualified lawyers that provide NGOs with legal services is small, especially in the regions where legal assistance is practically non-existent. Contact information for such lawyers does not exist. As the legal and political environment deteriorates, NGOs are increasingly in need of consultations and assistance on how to protect their interests.

The NGO community considers liquidation, warnings, the inability to register, and other administrative pressures that interfere with

their activities as a declaration of war against civil society.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.9

Government restrictions and harassment, and the prohibition against conducting public opinion surveys without a permit, inhibit NGOs' ability to build local constituencies. Instead, organizations serve their members, volunteers, and other NGOs. Organizations are aware of the importance of building constituencies; they are simply unable to do so in a sustainable manner. Some large, national organizations, as well as those that are unregistered, attempt to expand their constituencies using the internet, distance learning, and other forms of technology. NGO service providers that offer special services included in State programs are more able to reach out to communities and involve more citizens in their activities.



Some organizations continue to engage in regular strategic planning, while others, limited by internal politics and external pressures, take an ad-hoc approach and respond only to emergency situations. Most organizations use both approaches, but due to the political climate, adjust their strategies and tactics several times a year. Many organizations have clear mission statements, but strategic planning is a priority for only a few leading organizations. The most advanced organizations have strategic plans to guide their activities, and even those without formal strategic plans use planning techniques such as SWOT-analysis, prioritization, historical analysis, and others.

Many organizations have yet to see the value of strategic planning in such a hostile and unstable environment.

As required by the Law on Public Associations, all NGOs generally define their internal governance structures in their by-laws, which most fail to implement. Organizations tend to choose authoritarian leaders who fail to observe principles of good governance, leading to a lack of transparency and openness. Many NGO leaders believe that if their organizations are to survive the authoritarian government, they must also be authoritarian. Unregistered organizations believe that democratic governing structures and transparency would be counter productive.

The top NGOs have a paid staff, though it is insufficient to implement their planned activities. Limited sources of legal funding hinder the ability of NGOs to hire staff and pay salaries, or honor the right for social protection. Professionals in the work force tend not to view NGOs as potential employers. NGO staff is not always highly professional, and though organizations recognize the importance of investing in their staff, professional development within the NGO sector is limited.

Most developed NGOs have modern office equipment or use equipment belonging to other organizations. NGOs in small towns, however, lack access to office equipment and the internet, or people that know how to use such technologies. New organizations without established contacts with donors or experience managing unregistered funds generally do not have office equipment or contacts with organizations that do. Similarly, unregistered organizations and initiatives are unable to rent office space or acquire necessary equipment. Meetings are generally held in the members' residences and organizations are cautious about inviting new members.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.5

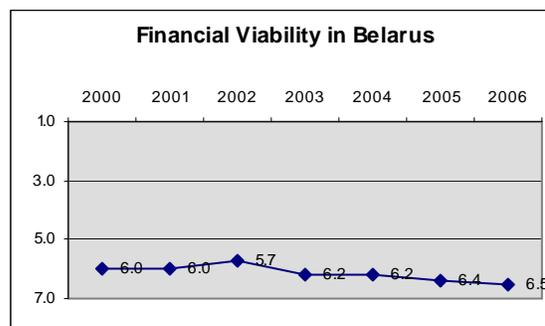
Domestic philanthropy and local funding for NGO activities is generally nonexistent. Local businesses fear scrutiny and sanctions for donating to NGOs, and limit their support to in-kind donations. NGOs that criticize the government have no chance of receiving domestic support, while pro-government NGOs enjoy full support and funding. In one example, President Lukashenko signed a presidential decree requiring public financing for the Union of Writers of Belarus, which was created as an alternative to the union of Belarusian Writers founded by Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas and other national writers. The presidential decree creating the UWB requires that the state fund salaries for the board members and heads of regional offices, as well as office rent, utilities, transportation and funding for other activities.

Legal limitations, including a lengthy and complicated process for registering foreign grants, restrictions on corporate sponsorship and economic activities, and the lack of government grants and contracts, prevent NGOs from diversifying their funding sources. NGOs are unable to collect significant membership fees due to the small number of members and the inability of members to pay high fees. Though the government provides quasi-NGOs and GONGOs with funding and material support, it does not promote transparency or strong financial management. The Law on Public Associations requires that NGOs present their financial statements and

ADVOCACY: 6.0

Relations between the NGO and government sectors are generally hampered by political, ideological, legal, and administrative constraints. NGOs in some fields of work, however, are able to develop cooperative relationships with government officials. The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection created a public council in order to incorporate NGO expertise in government policy making.

narrative reports, but such reports usually lack a full accounting of the organizations' activities and use of funding.



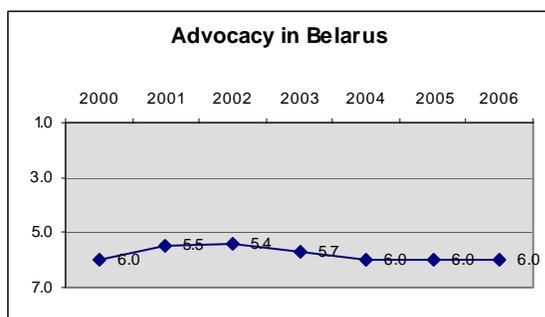
Despite the legal and political environment, experienced organizations with strong ties to foreign donors are able to receive grants for their activities, though such funding is generally unregistered. Newly established organizations lack resources, access to information about potential donors, and training in project development. Most NGOs, especially those outside the capital, are unable to afford an accountant. The decreased number of active organizations has diminished the competition for donor funds.

The State does not create any incentives to promote financial viability. Government policy instead, forces NGOs to operate in secret, marginalizing them and fomenting conditions for persecution. The overall impact is that the sector degrades and distorts its values and principles of transparency and accountability to the public.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and its local offices frequently engage organizations that promote the interests of disabled persons. State institutions and local administrators only deal with established NGOs that are loyal to the government, and disregard all others.

Most advocacy organizations with important technical and organizational capabilities that once spoke out on social, economic, and

political issues were closed by the State. NGOs have attempted to fill these roles but lack the resources and skills capacities. At times, new organizations are limited by narrow strategic perspectives and weak ties with other stakeholders. Over the past year, amendments to lobbying and advocacy regulations have discouraged NGOs from participating in the political process. In 2005, the Assembly of Democratic NGOs made efforts to reform the Law on Public Associations to ease restrictions on advocacy. The legislature, however, ignored their efforts.



Despite these difficulties, experienced organizations unified efforts to promote important issues. Environmental organizations for example, campaigned against the State's construction of a nuclear power plant. Pro-democracy groups organized *campaign 16*, in which they conduct public events on the 16th day of every month to raise awareness of the disappearance of public figures. The Belarus Organization of Working Women (BOWW) led housing associations to lobby the Ministry of Housing and Communal Services to develop educational programs for residential building

SERVICE PROVISION: 5.4

The restrictive legal framework and financial instability have weakened the ability of NGOs to provide ongoing, quality services. The variety of goods and services provided has narrowed due to prohibitions against trainings, seminars, mass actions, and campaigns, as well as funding shortages, and the inability for services organizations to register. The State often co-opts civil society innovations and successes as its own, and downplays the role of

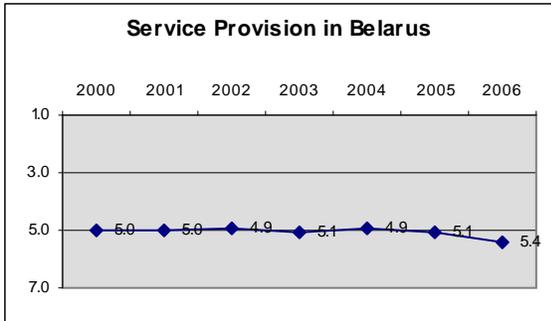
managers. NGOs that assist farmers to develop tourism in rural areas drafted and lobbied for the adoption of the Edict on Agro/Eco Tourism. Think tanks joined efforts to develop the National Business Agenda for Belarus for 2006-2007, which is a strategy for creating the mechanisms necessary for a favorable business environment.

Though non-registered networks and coalitions are prohibited by law, NGOs were more active in networking this year. Organizations engaged in civic education, redefined their missions, goals, and membership, and began drafting civic education standards. RADA, an unregistered association of youth organizations, decided to draft legislation regulating youth issues. RADA will present the draft to new politicians who may be more open to improving youth policies.

Recognizing that individuals must know their rights in order to defend them, NGOs have initiated public campaigns to inform people of their individual and family rights, as well as their rights to gender equality and to live free from spousal and child abuse.

The ability of NGOs to lobby or advocate on behalf of their constituents is more limited than in the past. Advocacy groups are in need of financial support, which is less available, and even those with funding must obtain special approval from the government. NGOs are generally unable to produce newsletters or videos, or benefit from workshops, public hearings, or posters. Non-registered networks and coalitions are prohibited and their members risk criminal prosecution.

NGOs. State support is limited to pro-government organizations such as the Belarus Republican Union of Youth, Union of Women, sports clubs, veterans' organizations, and others. At times, local administrators support NGO activities as a means of accessing donor resources to solve local problems.



Experienced, well-developed organizations with stable sources of foreign funding continue to provide quality services and promote innovations. POST, an educational NGO, partners with a business development organization to offer a training course that promotes entrepreneurship among teenagers. It also organized successful computer literacy training for the elderly. ACT partnered with a team of Lithuanians to promote mechanisms for contracting for social services. BelAPDI created workshops for disabled youth to prepare them for the job market. Despite these inspiring examples, most organizations, especially those in rural areas or who are unregistered, encounter significant obstacles to serving their

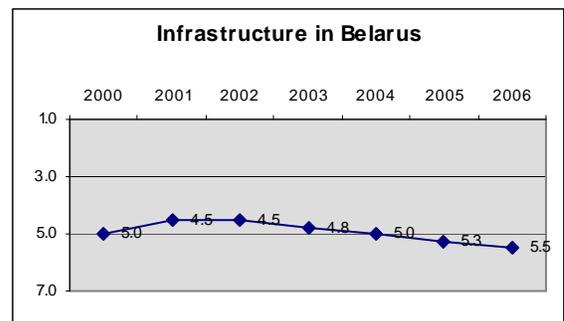
clients. NGOs are generally unable to conduct needs assessments and instead rely on their own experiences and understanding.

NGOs are generally unable to recover the costs associated with providing services because they are prohibited from charging fees. It is common for NGOs to exchange services for donations, which allows them to recover some of their costs and maintain their social programs. Business and professional associations recover some of their costs by collecting membership fees and providing some services for fees, though most continue to rely on external donor funding.

The leaders of most social service organizations recognize the importance of partnering with local businesses. Many NGOs believe that for-profit entities have a social responsibility to support public groups, especially charitable organizations. NGO leaders, however, report that the business sector's interest in cooperating with NGOs is waning or at least stagnating.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.5

Almost all resource centers either closed down or have redirected their resources to support their leaders' political ambitions. Other NGOs have taken over the functions of the resource centers, serving smaller, inexperienced organizations that have even less access to office equipment. Many organizations, such as the Assembly of Democratic NGOs, Third Sector, ACT, AGA, and Center Soupolnast, collect and disseminate information electronically, provide training and consultations, and distribute publications, though the lack of funding prevents them from serving all organizations in need. Many NGOs use the internet for such purposes, and have created websites such as www.ngo.by. Local grant-making organizations do not exist, and only two resource centers re-grant small funds from international donors. Some national NGOs redistribute funds throughout their own organizational structures



As noted in other sections of this report, NGOs are aware of the usefulness of coalitions and networks, and try to cooperate with one another despite the legal restrictions and lack of resources. One of the largest, most experienced coalitions, the Assembly of Democratic NGOs, updated its memberships list, and only 200 of 700 organizations remain active. As an unregistered umbrella organization, the Assembly risks legal sanctions

under provisions of the new Criminal Code. Over time, issue-based coalitions have increased in popularity, taking on such issues as civic education and environmental protection.

Over the past year, training opportunities for NGOs have decreased due to the lack of funding and legal restrictions. Belarus is home to some very professional NGO trainers that

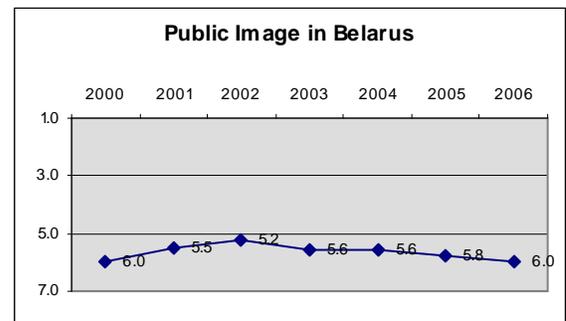
are even sought out by organizations in neighboring countries. Most local NGOs, however, lack the resources necessary to pay for their services. Training programs are sporadic and lack continuity, logic or a systematic approach. Training materials on a variety of topics are available in Russian and Belarusian. Partnership between NGOs and the business sector is rare.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 6.0

The hostile climate for NGOs is fueled by a constant flow of negative statements against the NGO sector from the government and media. Such statements present NGOs as political opponents working for regime change under the instructions from their international donors. Throughout the year, the media has published reports on the arrests of civil society leaders, as well as the criminal charges, accusations and comments made by the KGB and the President. Positive reporting by the media is reserved for organizations that are loyal to the government, or covers NGO activities without discussing the organizations themselves. The few remaining independent media outlets provide a more positive image of NGOs. Many organizations refuse coverage from the independent media, however, because their reporters often politicize activities and events, which threatens the organizations' existence.

Though many organizations produce brochures and short press releases, more are turning to the internet to post information; many of their websites have become popular. Few organizations, however, have a public relations strategy and many consider public relations campaigns as a risk in such a hostile political environment. Only the well-established organizations continue cultivating relationships with journalists and the public. Soupólnast, for example, regularly distributes news releases to its program participants. In addition, POST frequently invites journalists and stakeholders to its events, and had 80 participants attend a

recent gathering to present a publication. Almost all organizations focus on reaching out to foreign donors rather than their local constituents.



The public generally lacks an understanding of the NGO sector's role in society and is wary in its contacts with NGOs. Younger generations respond adversely to State propaganda and often sympathize with NGOs that are besmirched by government controlled media. Among the younger generations, the majority prefer informal groups and initiatives. NGOs are often unable to demonstrate their capacities to the business community and generally appeal for aid rather than offer services. NGOs do not publish their annual reports and are not fully transparent to protect their security.

The NGO sector has yet to create a code of ethics, though a process to do so was initiated three years ago. With the State's control over the sector, organizations choose partners based on shared values and previous experience working together.