

Analytical Paper: the state of distance education in Belarus: problems and perspectives

In Soviet times, extramural education was extremely popular in Belarus – the Soviet Union took pride in having created a system for obtaining almost all educational degrees remotely. It was the first in the world to do so.

Extramural education still remains popular, although its utilisation is less wide-spread than in neighbouring countries. Promoting distance education in Belarus would make education more accessible to broader circles of society, including those who are constrained by physical or economic factors.

The established history of extramural education, good technical equipment at universities, and the wide-spread use of high-speed Internet mean that Belarus already possesses a good basis for the development of a high quality system of distance education.

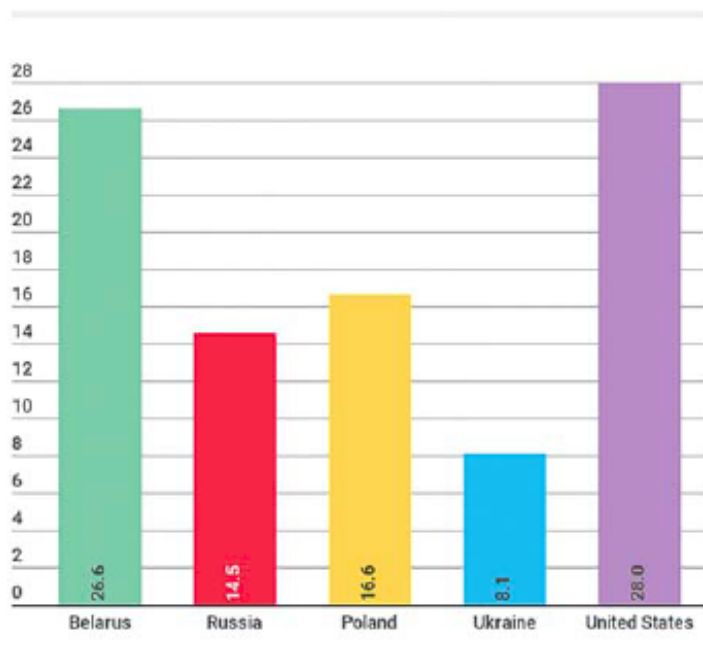
In order to create a high-quality system of distance education in Belarus, it is necessary to create a corresponding legislative base, to organise additional trainings for specialists in the sphere of education, and to expand the cooperation between universities and the companies that work in the high tech sector

Development of distance education in Belarus

After the October Revolution in 1917, Soviet authorities drastically improved the literacy rate in the USSR. Literacy grew from 56% in 1916 to 99% in the early 1970s. In addition to the compulsory eight years of education, extramural education enjoyed large-scale development, as this allowed the working masses to combine education with work.

This lofty aspiration to make higher education accessible has been preserved in Belarus, which occupies a relatively high position on the Human Development Index in comparison with other CIS countries. Thus, according to data from 2014, about 90% of the population possesses secondary or higher education.

Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people



According to the Legatum Prosperity Index 2016, Belarus surpasses Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, and certain other European Union countries with regards to access to education,

quality of education, and human potential. However, education in Belarus still suffers from a number of significant problems, as universities remain strictly regulated and insufficiently integrated into the common European space.

Moreover, the quality of available education often fails to meet the requirements of the labour market, especially when it comes to the humanities and social sciences. Belarus has retained a system of extramural education in which students attend classes once every few months to sit exams.

At present, 61% of Belarusian students are enrolled in extramural education, 39.1% of which are studying distantly. However, the classic concept of distance education remains closely linked to active use of technology. Students enrolled in extramural education in Belarus do not use interactive methods of learning, nor do they have the benefit of a flexible schedule or opportunities to create an individual educational programme.

Due to these factors, extramural education in Belarus does not qualify as distance education. According to information from the International Council on Distance Education, 14% of students in the world obtain their education distantly. Most universities and other educational institutions around the world, including in countries which neighbour Belarus, offer distance learning which often does not require a prior educational background.

[Conference](#) *panel on distance education in Belarus (December 2016, mostly in English)*

Recommendations on development of distance education in Belarus

The analytical paper suggests that in order to develop a high-quality system of education in Belarus, it is necessary to take the following steps:

Develop a normative base

Despite nominal references in the Code on Education, the system of distance education in Belarus requires special regulation and stimulation. Legislation on education should include recommendations on better organising distance learning in universities, and a description of a monitoring system. It is important that the legislation addresses the issue of financing distance education. Moreover, the structure of the distance education system (from vocational to higher education) should be delineated.

Expert and knowledge exchange

□ Belarus's recent accession to the Bologna Process will lead to the growth of contacts and exchange experiences in the sphere of education. In order to fully realise implementation of distance education, Belarus needs to train specialists in developing a distance education strategy for universities. This should take the specific features of each educational establishment and region into account. It is possible to achieve this by promoting expert assistance in the form of educational visits, exchanges, and recommendations.

Establish a centre for distance education

The relevant authorities need to follow the best practices of other countries and establish a specially designated centre which would coordinate and facilitate the development of distance education in Belarus and offer trainings for education professionals.

Rooting distance education

It is necessary to stimulate investments in the sphere of education and secure broader participation of the private sector. For the distance education system to function effectively, preparedness and support from the administrations of higher education establishments is crucial. Administrations must be willing to reform and introduce new forms of learning. There is also a need for teachers and other employees of higher education establishments to learn how to communicate and educate using technology.

- Read full paper: [The state of distance education in Belarus: problems and perspectives](#)
- Чытаць аналітычную паперу: [Дыстанцыйная адукацыя ў Беларусі: стан, праблемы і перспектывы](#)