

Quality of Gender Equality in Belarus

Various publicly available indexes portray Belarus as a country with high gender equality.

Belarus carried the 6th highest UNDP's [Gender Development Index \(GDI\)](#) value and ranked 31st in the 2014 [Gender Inequality Index \(GII\)](#). In comparison, GII ranks for Russian Federation and the United States are 54 and 55 respectively.

At the same time, social and political life in Belarus lacks influential women. While promoting equal employment of women, state predominantly practises selective appointment of women to high posts in politics and state owned enterprises based on their loyalty to the regime.

In addition, patriarchal thinking dominates social system in which male remains the primary authority figure central to social organisation and the central role of political leadership.

Declared Gender Equality

Measures to ensure equal opportunities for men and women have been an integral part of the social policy of the Belarusian state. Belarus ratified a number of international documents on gender equality and combating discrimination on grounds of sex.



The National Council on Gender Policy at the Council of Ministers currently implements its fourth national action plan for gender equality for 2011 – 2015. Priority in this document

is given to the situation of women in the socioeconomic sphere, issues of reproductive health, development of gender education, prevention of [domestic violence](#) and others.

President Alexandr Lukashenka significantly increased the number of women in representative bodies using his almost complete control over the political system of Belarus. On 14 April 2014 Lukashenka in his address to the National Assembly and the Belarusian people said: "Women in parliament should represent no less than 30 – 40 per cent. This will make Parliament stable and calm." Today women indeed occupy 30.1 per cent of parliamentary seats. Parliament, however, has no real real authority in Belarus as it merely rubber-stamps decisions of the executive.

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Women lack representation in the highest echelons of the [executive branch](#). While one of the deputy prime-ministers is a woman ([Natalia Kačanava](#)), out of 24 ministers, only two (8 per cent) represent females. The highest number of women ministers never exceeded three and occurred only once in the government of 2004 – 2005, when women held the posts of Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Minister of Healthcare, and Minister of Taxes and Duties.

In Belarus, a woman never served as a chair of regional executive committee, the highest executive position of one of the six administrative regions in the country.

Women in Business

The situation with women in Belarusian business is rather mixed. According to U.S. research firm [Expert Market](#), which looked at data from the International Labour Organisation Statistical Office (ILO) 2014, Belarus ranks 6th in the world

with 46.2 per cent among the countries that have a higher percentage of female CEOs than men.

Many first world countries including the U.S. are outside top 10 countries on that list. The U.S. for example ranks at number 15 with 42.7 per cent of women in managerial positions.



Women in Belarus can indeed become heads even at the higher managerial levels: [Aliena Kudraviec](#), the present General Director of JSC "[Belarus Potash Company](#)", one of the world's largest suppliers and exporters of potash fertilisers, is a woman.

Currently replaced by males, females managed such Belarusian giants as "Kamunarka" and "Spartak", confectionery factory "Slodych", and garment factory "Elema".

The high rating of the number of female CEOs Belarus, however, only gives a general picture of who is who in business in Belarus. Belarusian National Statistical Committee does not keep records of the number of entrepreneurs by gender, but it shows that women compose around 53 per cent of population in the country. However, the list of top 300 Belarusian businessmen in 2014, annually composed by an online Belarusian newspaper *Ezhednevnik*, included only fourteen female names (less than 5 per cent).

Women's presence on the board of large companies does not surprise anyone. However, the majority of female entrepreneurship in Belarus mainly develops in the form of small companies in retail and wholesale trade, catering, educational, and professional services.

Covert and Overt Interference with Gender Equality

One of the causes of selective business or political representation of women hides in patriarchal mentality of many Belarusians. The majority sticks to the installation that men should have the prerogative of making money, whereas women should adhere to household chores.

One can see a paradox in public remarks of the female Chair of the Central Election Commission of Belarus [Lidzija Jarmošina](#) about participation of women in [the post-election protests](#) on 19 December 2010. She said

These women should sit at home and cook borsch [traditional beetroot soup – BD] instead of walking on the square. It's a shame for a woman to participate in such events. I can understand when a girl is young and foolish. But when a woman is aged, then, sorry, something is wrong with her intelligence.

All women occupying high positions only perform purely structural function ensuring the reproduction of a model, in which the head of the state – "batska" or paternal leader – acts as a guarantor of stability. As a result of merging of politics and economics, the government of Belarus with all resources in its hands, has acted as a "father" providing for the livelihood of its "family" – the people of Belarus.

International rankings and organisations recognise that Belarus has made considerable progress in aligning social status of men and women. However, regardless that women in Belarus can occupy high business and political posts, such practise is not widespread. On the one hand, Belarusian society still remains full of gender stereotypes. On the other hand, state appoints only loyal females to high posts to

ensure the functioning of the government vertical.