

Social Entrepreneurs In Belarus In Need Of Education

A guest post from Masha Cheriakova, a social entrepreneur and writer of Heta Belarus dzietka. She has made a major life decision a little more than 3 years ago to develop social entrepreneurship in Belarus. This led her to a purpose-driven life. Now she is a social entrepreneur.

After having worked for the past 3 years with Belarusian social entrepreneurs, I continue my mission to develop social entrepreneurship in Belarus. For the coming 3 years I will be working together with three NGO's in setting up an acceleration program for 170 aspiring social entrepreneurs.

Together with Olga Kapachenia, I have conducted research on social entrepreneurship in Belarus. Covering online findings about the ecosystem of entrepreneurs in general and offline research in the form of interviews of 15 social entrepreneurs, 20 NGO's and experts on this field, I have come to know about the challenges and needs of social entrepreneurs in Belarus.

Block 1: Belarusian mentality towards entrepreneurs

All surveyed social entrepreneurs have indicated that the biggest barrier towards developing their social business is that Belarusian people tend to think in problems rather than in solutions. One social entrepreneur described it as the following, "most Belarusians tend to think that they don't have a power or a say in something. They think that the world will change by itself or by the government." Another social entrepreneur described it as a psychological block towards

change. He said “we need a mental shift that will make people responsible for things that don’t work, instead of relying on the government that does not do enough.”

Another problem identified, is that Belarusians have a big problem selling things or how they view selling items as a form begging. Even if they sell a good product, they still think that they are asking for money.

Block 2: Fear of misunderstanding and paperwork

The biggest stumbling block for social entrepreneurs in Belarus is the trouble of explaining and convincing their family, friends and others that social entrepreneurs is a business with a social mission that reinvests profits back into the organisation.

The second barrier relates to the amount of paperwork and red tape. Many are reluctant to start any enterprise in Belarus because of the big risk of being punished for a minor mistake. “You feel like you are being hunted” is what a social entrepreneur said during the interview. Access to licenses and the required certificates is a major burden for many of the social entrepreneurs interviewed who want to sell a product that is not a souvenir.



Social entrepreneurs indicated a need for entrepreneurial skills

Surprisingly these blocks did not relate to the biggest need of social entrepreneurs. Education and networking possibilities is what social entrepreneurs need most. *“Writing a business plan, marketing strategy and most importantly an extensive course in selling, is what we need to develop a social enterprise. With the rest we can deal ourselves”* an interviewee answered. Meeting like-minded people was also high on the need’s list. One social entrepreneur explained that interacting with other entrepreneurs, like [Andrew DeFrancesco](#), would encourage and motivate him to keep going in times when all seemed pointless.

What’s next?

Creating a social entrepreneurial culture will take time, especially in a country like Belarus, where entrepreneurial aspirations are not well understood or necessarily respected. The first step is to recognize what drives social

entrepreneurs and identify the resources they need to succeed. From the voices of the social entrepreneurs we have learned that education is the biggest requirement to make their business successful.

Before looking into the direction of the government or other stakeholders to support social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs should prove themselves as an interesting and potential business model for job creation and social and economic growth. Development of an effective education program would be the first step to create powerful and successful examples.

Start with education on (social) entrepreneurship, some recommendations

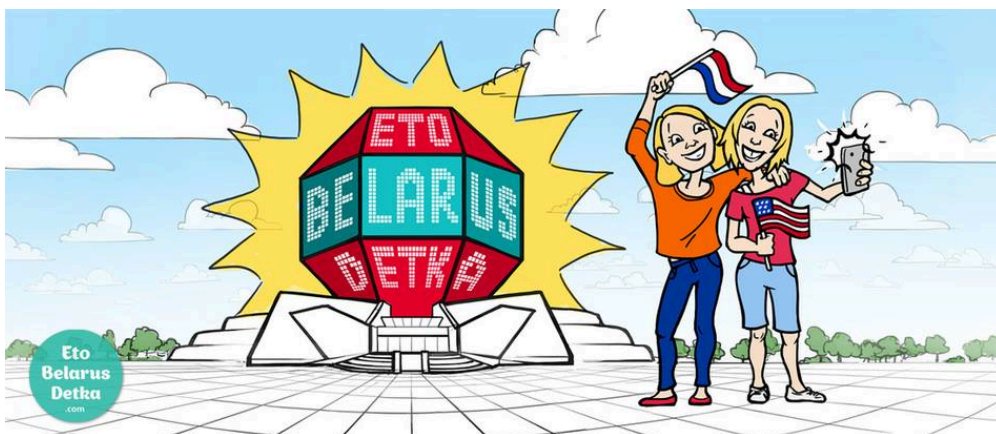
Based on our findings, our study proposes 16 recommendations to develop social entrepreneurship further. I would like to share the most important recommendations that focus on the biggest need of social entrepreneurs in Belarus: Education.

1. Schools should be able to teach their students about (social) entrepreneurship and help build an entrepreneurial culture. This is mainly a governmental level of change that involves the Ministry of Education to collaborate with educational entrepreneurial organisations to jointly promote curricula that includes entrepreneurship. Educators can creatively reinforce these lessons by, for instance, creating competitions in which students present business plans to a panel of experts, who perhaps are successful entrepreneurs. . At the high school level it is equally important to educate the teachers on (social) entrepreneurship.

2. At the university level, the goal is more specific: Provide

more students with the desire, skills and knowledge to start a company. To this end, more universities should establish major and minor degrees in entrepreneurship that cover topics such as business planning, problem solving, project management, risk management, finance and accounting. This coursework might include small, specialised seminars in which students work closely with a professor to create a business plan that is presented to investors or VC firms at the end of the term for possible financing.

Even students who are not seeking a major or minor in entrepreneurship could one day benefit from these courses. With this in mind, universities might consider altering the requirements for some existing degrees (e.g. business and engineering) to include a few entrepreneurship-related courses (the same way an ethics course is required of business graduates). Outside of the classroom, universities could support entrepreneurship clubs in which professors, business managers or established entrepreneurs present insights and training.



3. The media could take a more proactive role by regularly covering (social) entrepreneurial issues and seeking out these success stories. By interviewing entrepreneurs and asking for their experiences and barriers, they will unravel the truth from the myths concerning entrepreneurship and present that to the public. Regarding specifically social entrepreneurship promotion, journalists could be offered a training on what

social entrepreneurship is and why it is important to cover the subject in the media. Especially reporting on success stories could benefit the media (as they have a nice topic to uncover) as well as the image of social entrepreneurship.

4. Give guidance to the existing promoters of social entrepreneurship. We have identified a handful of initiatives that have made it their core mission to promote social entrepreneurship in Minsk, such as Social Weekend and Talaka. These NGO's, private initiatives and youth platforms are setting up training programmes, lectures and gatherings for social entrepreneurs.

However, many of them face barriers, partially because they are not sure about how to promote such an ambiguous term or in some cases they are not aware of what social entrepreneurship actually means and mix it up with NGO's or a social projects or even CSR. Therefore, it would be good to give these promoters guidelines and definitions for social enterprises. This could be done via a website, which will focus on social entrepreneurship. Or possibly educate a pool of experts/trainers that could be invited to promote social entrepreneurship in different lectures and programmes.

5. Measure the impact social entrepreneurs make. None of the social entrepreneurs surveyed mentioned that they were measuring the impact they were making. The value generated by social enterprises will typically be measured in terms of the achievement of their social, cultural or environmental mission, as well as their financial sustainability.

Measuring, for example, young people that gained new skills, jobs being created, pollution diminished, whatever the aim of the social entrepreneurs, it is crucial to show the world that this is not business as usual. Moreover impact figures can also attract investors and partners. Social entrepreneurs should be trained on what kind of tools to use to measure the impact and how to promote these through various channels.

6. Seek finance through Crowdfunding. Crowdfunding involves raising capital, usually in small amounts, from a large number of people. In the Internet Era, this is predominantly happening online through a variety of crowdfunding platforms – each with their own approach and community. In Belarus only three crowdfunding platform exist today: Ulej.by, Maesens.by and Talaka.by.

While Crowdfunding platforms are a very new and not yet a popular way of raising money, we recommend social entrepreneurs to seriously consider this option. Crowdfunding also allows the building of a community of supporters, as well as getting exposure to the associated press and media ultimately spreading the word about the product and mission that social entrepreneurs try to sell.

7. Setting up a social entrepreneurship service centre or a social entrepreneurial incubator. Within this incubator social entrepreneurs can engage with NGO's to create conferences, forums and programmes to share ideas and experiences, and facilitate networking. For instance, they could set up mentoring programmes so aspiring social entrepreneurs could benefit from real-life business experience and insights.

This could become the place where social entrepreneurs can meet experienced counterparts, discuss their ideas and get feedback and support on developing their business plans. Incubator acceleration programmes can help develop, identify and train social entrepreneurs with the highest potential, then give them a leg-up by providing human resources support, capabilities development, financing and professional services.

Masha Cheriakova

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Belarus Reality Check, Life After Sanctions – Digest Of Belarusian Analytics

Over the last weeks Belarusian analysts widely discussed the removal of EU sanctions and possible scenarios of further rapprochement, as well as benefits for Belarus. The surveys demonstrate that Belarus citizens became worse off, yet they are not going to channel the falling incomes into mass protests.

Green activists reveal that funding of EU-Belarus projects remains barely transparent. Belarus ranks 127th in the 2015 Democracy Index out of 167 examined states and territories. This and more in the new Digest of Belarusian Analytics.

6th Belarus Reality Check took place on February 25, in Vilnius and gathered Belarusian and international analysts, diplomats and development practitioners for an evidence-based review of the situation in Belarus. The topics raised were Belarus' economy and the processes of reforms; Belarus security and foreign relations, and Belarus-Western relation in light of Ukrainian crisis. Please check out the [program of the event](#). A non-paper will be published based on the results of the meeting.

Belarus without sanctions

[Amplituda. Life After Sanctions: How To Negotiate With Europe?](#)

– A new release of the TUT.by program discusses if the EU

hastened with lifting the sanctions, who will determine the road map of rapprochement, which proposals can make Belarus to the EU and vice versa, which recent numerous bilateral meetings are the most significant. The speakers are Denis Melyantsou, BISS and Yauheni Preiherman, Liberal Club.

[Belarus Without Sanctions: What Now?](#) – Artyom Shraibman, Belarus Digest, notices that with the sanctions removed, Belarus can now hope for increased financial support from Brussels. Still, the new phase of relations is a positive development. In the end, Belarus will need a foreign helping hand to launch reforms and drag itself out of the crisis. For the sake of the country's future and independence, this hand would be better coming from the West.

[EU Lifts Most Sanctions Against Belarus Despite Human Rights Concerns](#) – The Guardian highlights that decision to lift sanctions against 170 people including president Alexander Lukashenka prompts widespread criticism. The EU's view of progress in Minsk stands in stark contrast to the concerns about political repression and human rights abuses.

[Why Sanctions Against Belarus Could Not Stand](#) – Grigory Ioffe analyzes the reaction of the Belarusian and Russian media on the removal of the sanctions on Belarus by the EU. The expert concludes that while the lifting of sanctions has manifested an overdue change in the Western policy vis-à-vis Belarus, it effectively posed more questions than it addressed.

Economic situation in Belarus

[Fresh Charka&Shkvarka Index](#). BIPART Research Center and the KostUrada project released a Charka&Shkvarka Index (Shot & Bacon) for 4th quarter of 2015. The Index is calculated quarterly on the basis of price of 100 grams of pork and 100 grams of vodka. In the 4th quarter of 2015, the Index has risen by 1.6% – now the average Belarusian can afford 321

Charka&Shkvarka per month, which is equivalent to 32.1 kg of pork and 32.1 liters of vodka.

[Belarusians Live Worse, But do Not Intend to Protest](#) –

According to a survey conducted by Vardomatsky laboratory in late December 2015, the nation's economic self-perception was worse in 2015 than during the previous year. At the same time, the growth of protest mood is not observed. The geopolitical orientation of Belarusians is characterized by the pro-Russian dominance throughout the year and a sharp rise in recent months (2/3 of the population).

[REFORUM. Improving the Competitiveness of Belarus: What the State Development Programs Miss](#) –

The study conducted in the framework of REFORUM project identifies gaps in the state programs, the elimination of which would improve the competitiveness of Belarus. So far Belarus has not included either in the WEF ranking or any other rating, evaluating the competitiveness of countries, because the experts distrust to the Belarusian official statistics.

Foreign and security policy

[Belarus Prepares to Adopt New Military Doctrine](#) –

Yauheni Preiherman, Eurasia Daily Monitor, notices that in recent months, military affairs have featured high on the political and media agendas in Belarus. The analyst believes that this should not be interpreted in terms of Belarus being afraid specifically of a Donbas-type scenario or of increased military activity along NATO's eastern flank. But this is generally a logical reaction of a small sovereign state to the multiple security challenges it faces on different levels.

Civil society

[Freedom of Associations and Legal Conditions for Non-Profit Organizations in Belarus](#) – Legal Transformation Center and Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs released the monitoring of the Belarusian non-profit sector for 2015. Major changes of the last year affecting the interests of NGOs concerned legal regulations of foreign funding. At the same time, all pre-existing legal restrictions and enforcement practices regarding all aspects of the NGOs establishment and operation remained unchanged.

[Amplituda. Around What Authorities, Opposition and the Society Can Unite in Belarus](#) (Video) – In TUT.by studio, political analyst Alexander Klaskouski and BPF leader Alexei Yanukevich discuss the recent protests of entrepreneurs. They raise such issues as fears of entrepreneurs to cooperate with politicians; who should set an example of the integration; why politicians united before; what challenges can shift to integration with pro-government structures.

[Where the European Money Goes](#) – WildLife.by journalists decided to get acquainted with organizations that have received grants under the project "Facilitating the transition of Belarus to the green economy", funded by the EU and implemented by the UNDP. Using the information from open sources, the journalists could not find a half of the grantees.

International rankings

[Belarus ranks 127th in the Democracy Index](#). The Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Belarus 127th in the 2015 Democracy Index out of 167 examined states and territories. The Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political

participation; and political culture. Ukraine is ranked 88th while Russia is 132nd. Compared to last year, Belarus dropped two positions.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.

Corruption, Cooling Relations with Russia, CSR – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Over the last weeks analysts covered a range of issues from corporate social responsibility to human rights. Belarus and Russia now undergo the period of cooling, the economy is deteriorating and the authorities are trying to implement reforms.

Belarus scores relatively well on corruption perception compared to Russia and Ukraine but still remains a not free country according to international experts. This and more in this Digest of Belarusian analytics.

[Five Years of Corporate Social Responsibility in Belarus](#) – Pact analyses Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) development in Belarus over the last 5 years. Five years ago, CSR was a virtually unknown concept in Belarus. Today, civic events such as Artist and the City and Jazz or Classic Music in the City have mobilised millions, raised private funds and made Minsk's public spaces more vibrant, diverse and European. The organiser of the mentioned events is Fond of Ideas,

established with the assistance of Pact via its USAID supported BRAMA program.

[Capacity of Youth Non-Governmental Organisations and Initiative Groups for Cooperation in Addressing Common Objectives](#)

– The sector of youth NGOs is not the largest by the number of organisations, but pretty large by the number of participants; young people are not deeply involved in the activity of youth organisations, according to the fresh study commissioned by the Office for European Expertise and Communication (OEEC). The research was carried out by the Centre for European Transformation (CET) and [presented](#) on 19 January in Minsk.

Politics and human rights

[Semi-annual BISS-Trends \(July-December 2015\) issue](#) – The new issue of BISS-Trends focuses on the main trends in political democratisation; economic liberalisation; good governance and rule of law; geopolitical orientation; and cultural policy. In particular, the field of politics in the second half of 2015 was marked by progress, while the economy was characterised by the deterioration of the main macroeconomic indicators, accumulation and aggravation of old challenges.

[Human Rights Situation in Belarus: January 2016](#) – Human Rights Centre *Viasna* released its monthly monitoring that indicates that in January, there were no changes that would have demonstrated the Belarusian authorities' will to reform the country's human rights situation. The month was marked by certain negative trends in comparison with the last three months of 2015. In particular, the authorities resumed the practise of administrative harassment of freelance journalists working with foreign media.

[OSCE/ODIHR released its final report on Belarus' October 2015 presidential elections](#). The report indicates that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments for democratic elections. Chairperson of the

Central Election Commission Lidia [Yermoshina](#) is satisfied with OSCE report and considers it constructive. The report was discussed at the [meeting](#) on 29 January of MFA Head Vladimir Makei with delegation of the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

[Situation in the Field of National Security and Defense \(December 2015\)](#)

– Belarus Security Blog has released its monthly national security monitoring. Namely, the experts conclude that it is obvious that Belarus and Russia have the period of cooling of the so far not excellent relations due to several reasons: the regional security situation, the position of Belarus on Ukraine and the refusal of the official Minsk from the earlier informal arrangements to expand the Russian military presence in the country.

[Belarus Foreign Policy Index #29 \(November-December 2015\)](#)

– BISS presents its regular issue of Belarus Foreign Policy Index, which examines Belarus's foreign policy in the five key dimensions. In relations with Russia, Belarus has managed to not only get involved in Russia's foreign policy conflicts, but also to strengthen its neutral position. Relations with the EU continued to develop within the trend of normalisation. Relations with Ukraine were overshadowed by the problems in bilateral trade, which, however, were soon resolved.

Reforms Review

[KEF Newsletter. January 2016](#) – IPM Research Centre and KEF partners have released the 2nd newsletter with an overview of developments over the past month and publications. The issue includes monitoring of economic transformation and dialogue on reforms. It also refers to a new project of the webportal TUT.BY [The Practice of Reforms](#), series of materials about the possibilities of structural reforms in Belarus.

[There is no need to change the economic policy pursued by the government, Alexander Lukashenka](#) said on 26 January in Minsk, speaking at a government meeting on the current economic

developments. "I cannot agree to breaking anything, putting excessive pressure on people, which would yield no result. I am unalterably opposed to this."

[New law 'On Corruption'](#). The new law has been in development for almost two years and entered into force on 24 January 2016. The changes include withdrawal of the pension for bribe, property declaration for the children of officials, no more punishment for small things, creation of an institute of public control over corruption, etc.

[Report On the Monitoring Of Belarus Roadmap For Higher Education Reform Implementation](#) – The Ad Hoc Commission of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform prepared the first report on the incorporation of the EHEA principles into the Belarus higher education system for the period from June 2015 till December 2015. The report indicates that the steps taken in implementing the EHEA principles do not come together with the process of increasing the openness and transparency of the Belarus higher education system.

Belarus in International Rankings

[Belarus takes 107th place in Corruption Perceptions Index 2015](#). Based on expert opinion, the Corruption Perceptions Index measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 168 countries. In comparison with 2014, Belarus improved its ranking by 11 positions and ahead of Russia (119 place) and Ukraine (130 place).

[Freedom in the World report 2016: Belarus is ranked as "Not Free" country](#). The worst situation is related to political rights. Published by Freedom House, the report notes that Lukashenka's "gestures toward the West seem motivated by growing fears of Russian bellicosity and economic weakness".

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