



**BELARUSIAN  
INDEPENDENT  
BOLOGNA  
COMMITTEE**



**БЕЛАРУСКАЯ  
НАЦЫЯНАЛЬНАЯ ПЛАТФОРМА**  
ФОРУМУ ГРАМАДЗЯНСКАЙ  
СУПОЛЬНАСЦІ УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА



**ЗАДЗІНОЧАННЕ  
БЕЛАРУСКІХ СТУДЭНТАЎ**



**Report  
on  
Monitoring Compliance with the Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the  
Major Objectives of the Educational System Development in Line with the EHEA  
Principles and Tools.**

**Results of the implementation of the 2019 plan**

Prepared by the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the Belarusian Student Association and the Youth Labour Rights

**Minsk, January 2020**

## Summary

*The Working Plan to Implement the EHEA Tools in the Higher Education System of the Republic of Belarus in 2019 (hereinafter the “Working Plan”) was endorsed by the Praesidium of the Republican Council of the Higher Education Institutions’ Rectors on 14 February 2019 and approved by the Minister of Education of Belarus on 20 February 2019. On 20 March 2019, the Working Plan was sent to the BFUG.*

*The positive result of the 2019 Working Plan implementation is openness to the experience of reforming higher education systems in other EHEA countries. However, the European experts’ advice and recommendations have not been converted into laws and regulations implementing the new Bologna architecture, principles and tools.*

*The monitoring of the Working Plan performance in 2019 has demonstrated a low level of discharging the key commitments ensuring implementation of the Bologna tools and values. The status of the National Higher-Education Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF) remains unclear, the Instructions on Calculating the Workload of Higher Education Programmes Applying the Credit Units System has not been reformed pursuant to the 2015 ECTS Users’ Guide, no information about completing preparation of the Programme of Development of the National Higher Education Quality Assurance System is available, no information and regulations to support the procedure for recognising prior learning and no procedure for recognising refugees’ qualifications have been introduced. The Regulations for Sending Teaching Staff for Internship to Institutions of Foreign Countries approved by the Council of Ministers of Belarus have not changed the limitations on academic mobility which had existed before Belarus acceded to the EHEA. No change has occurred as regards teaching staff’s and students’ participation in the governance of universities. The issues of the social dimension of higher education and equality of access to it are not on the radar screen of the governmental education policy. The fundamental academic EHEA values are not being implemented as well. A significant shortcoming of the Ministry of Education’s work to implement the Strategic Action Plan is limited access to information and insufficient openness. The website at <http://by-eha.info> is still unavailable.*

### 1. Qualifications Framework (BelQF)

The Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Educational System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools (hereinafter the “Strategic Plan”) provided for approval of the National Higher-Education Qualifications Framework (**BelQF**) until 2019.

In the 2019 working plan, this commitment was limited to submission of the **BelQF** to the Ministry of Education for approval only (**item 1.6.**).

The publicly available information does not enable to establish the fact that this commitment has been honoured.

The website to inform stakeholders about development of the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus and implementation of the Bologna tools at <http://by-eha.info> which had been planned for setting up in 2018 is still unavailable.

**This calls into question implementation of the commitments provided for by the Strategic plan: the BelQF approval in 2019 and the possibility of its self-certification by 2020.**

*At the same time, development of the National Qualifications Framework corresponding to the **EQF-LLL** renewed beyond the Ministry of Education’s responsibility to approve the **BelQF**.*

Pursuant to resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 229 of 10 April 2019 (<http://www.mintrud.gov.by/system/extensions/spaw/uploads/files/post.-SM-Natssovet-po-kvalifikatsijam.pdf>), the Qualifications System Development Council was established. The Council was established under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus to promote shaping and implementation of the governmental policy to improve the National Qualifications System of the Republic of Belarus. ([http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/-sozdan-sovet-po-razvitiju-sistemy-kvalifikatsij-3180](http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/-sozdan-sovet-po-razvitiju-sistemy-kvalifikatsij-3180))

A web page concerning the National Qualifications System can now be found on the Ministry of Labour and Social Security's website, it covers the system structure, basic laws and regulations etc.

According to information of 12 November 2019 provided in the publication available (<https://1prof.by/news/obshhestvo-i-profsoyuzy/v-belarus-gryadut-profstandarty/>) and on the Ministry of Labour's website ([http://www.mintrud.gov.by/nac\\_sist/](http://www.mintrud.gov.by/nac_sist/)), ten sectoral qualifications councils have been established: at the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Architecture and Construction, the State Property Committee, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the High Technologies Park Administration.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security is participating in the events of the Employment, Vocational Education, and Training project financed by the European Union within which 45 standards will be developed in Belarus by 2021. Some of them will be prepared in 2020 already. The National Qualifications Framework taken into consideration in the professional standard will consist of eight levels. All components of the National Qualifications System and the National Qualifications Framework will be prepared by 2022. (Source: В Беларусь грядут профстандарты. - Access mode: <https://1prof.by/news/obshhestvo-i-profsoyuzy/v-belarus-gryadut-profstandarty/>).

According to the information of 17/12/2019 on the website at [edustandart.by](http://edustandart.by), the draft Guidelines for Application of Professional Standards in Designing Higher Education Programmes and the draft Guidelines for Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Transfer, Readmission, and Academic Mobility have been prepared by the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) probably (access mode: <https://edustandart.by/vse-novosti/utverzhenie-dokumentov/101-metodicheskie-rekomendatsii-po-otsenke-rezultatov-obucheniya-i-uchetu-professionalnykh-standartov>

Clause 4.5 of the Working Plan provided for a meeting of the Praesidium of the Republican Council of the Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) Rectors titled *Mechanisms of Coordinating the Requirements of the Labour Market, Professional Standards, and Higher Education Content*. The timeframe is October to December. The activity owner is the Republican Council of the HEIs' Rectors.

No information about the meeting of the Praesidium of the Republican Council of the HEIs' Rectors on the issue stated which was planned for October to November 2019 is available on the website of the Republican Council of Rectors (<http://srrb.niks.by/>).

It is particularly disturbing that the Strategic Plan commitments are not brought in line with the areas of the governmental education policy. In the absence of other documents approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus pursuant to the law, we have to focus on the **Concept of Developing the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Long Term until 2030** approved by the Minister of Education. This document is stated to be the one *defining the objectives, basic areas, and priorities of the governmental policy* in the field of education, the mechanisms of their implementation until 2030.

However, it does not include any plans of consistent implementation of numerous provisions **of the Strategic Plan**.

In particular, this concerns bringing the structure of the higher education system in line with the Bologna architecture. The prospects of including the third cycle in the higher education system are not stated, development of the short cycle is excluded due to convergence of ISCED 5 with ISCED 4 and transition to a single type of the education institution combining these levels of vocational education. The importance of the second cycle of higher education already amounting to less than 5% of the student population keeps decreasing. The political decision to limit master programmes to training only research and teaching personnel (Resolution of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 122 of 17 December 2018) has already resulted in reduction of admission to master programmes by 21%. Therefore, actual achievements in the Bologna architecture development as well as prospective plans of its development in Belarus are missing.

## **2. Quality Assurance**

Pursuant to the 2019 working plan, the following is provided for concerning quality:

the Strategic Plan until 2020 provided for measures to improve internal procedures of higher education quality assurance at all HEIs as well as to prepare laws and regulations for operation of an independent quality assurance agency to ensure operation of the national quality assurance agency in full by 2022.

The 2019 working plan expressed the objectives quite insignificantly.

The following was planned:

1. Preparing and providing information about the current system of higher education quality assurance in the Republic of Belarus to the ENQA.
2. A workshop on the issues of development of the national system of higher education quality assurance (with participation of experts of the World Bank and the ENQA).
3. Preparing a programme of further development of the national higher education quality assurance system.

However, even these limited plans were not implemented in full.

No information about the current system of higher education quality assurance in the Republic of Belarus for the ENQA is available either on the ENQA's website or on the websites of the Ministry of Education and the NIHE.

Information about the workshop on the issues of development of the national system of higher education quality assurance (with participation of experts of the World Bank and the ENQA) is not available.

Information about preparing the programme of further development of the national higher education quality assurance system is not available.

The Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Education which received this task cannot perform it because it only focuses on arranging accreditation of universities and their academic programmes and does not have sufficient qualified personnel to prepare a project related to modernising the entire system.

No publicly available evidence of preparing laws and regulations to support operation of the independent quality assurance agency has been found as well.

In 2019, a number of international conferences and seminars on the higher education quality issues were held. It included a 2019 workshop at the NIHE with participation of Caty Duykaerts, the Head of the Executive Unit of the Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

(AEQES), the Vice President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) who introduced the participants to the international approaches to education quality assurance as well as spoke about the ENQA's activities. It is possible that the consultation was provided but reliable information is not available, the workshop results have not been published.

On 30 December 2019, a round table on higher education issues with S. A. Kasperovich, the Department Director of the Ministry of Education, the rector of the National Institute for Higher Education, and the rectors of the leading universities participating was held at BelTA's press centre. The participants mentioned the need to improve the professionals' training quality at the background of the higher education system correspondence to the labour market demand. The issues of implementing the national plan of Belarus' integration into the Bologna process, including establishment of an independent accreditation agency, were not raised.

### **3. Recognition of Qualifications**

Pursuant to the 2019 working plan, the following measures were to be taken:

“3.1. Expanding the number of agreements on mutual recognition of academic credentials.”

According to the Ministry of Education, mutual qualifications recognition agreements with Georgia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe have been signed or prepared. Students' exchange with all of the above countries is virtually non-existent. The progress in the field of direct bilateral recognition should therefore be considered insignificant.

“3.2. Measures will be taken until 2019 to expand the information activities by ENIC Belarus (provision of information and activities by ENIC Belarus in English).

Creation of the English version of the ENIC Belarus website.

Updating information for the country page on the ENIC/NARIC website.”

The activity owner is the NIHE.

The English version of the NIHE's website is in its infancy. The services mentioned there include the Belarusian ENIC as well but only general information about the office's tasks is available. A link to the web page with requirements to the applicant concerning recognition of qualifications in English (<http://nihe.bsu.by/foreign-diplomas-and-degrees-recognition>) is missing. This link provides access to a three-language application form in the PDF file.

On the ENIC/NARIC website, Belarus' web page is undated but provides references to the 2017 information.

Performance of this item of the plan should be considered far from complete.

“3.3. Laws and regulations to support the recognition procedure of prior learning and of refugees' qualifications will be prepared.

Preparation of the instructions for recognising refugees' education.”

The activity owners are the Ministry of Education and the NIHE.

No progress information is available.

No information has been published concerning the new UNESCO document, the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education.

## 4. Transparency Tools

### ECTS

Section 4 of the Strategic Plan set an objective to implement an ECTS-based credit units system pursuant to the revised ECTS Users' Guide by 2020.

However, as of the end of 2019, the old Instructions on Calculating the Workload of Higher Education Programmes Applying the Credit Units System approved by the Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus on 06/04/2015, i.e. without amendments implementing the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide is in force and effect.

Despite lack of progress in implementing the revised 2015 ECTS Users' Guide, a number of new regulatory documents were approved, such as: the Procedure for Designing and Approving Curricula to Implement the Content of the First-Cycle Higher Education Programmes (access mode: [https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/nd\\_poryadok-razrabotki-i-utverzheniya-uchebnykh-planov-1-st\\_270519.pdf](https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/nd_poryadok-razrabotki-i-utverzheniya-uchebnykh-planov-1-st_270519.pdf)), the Procedure for Designing and Approving Syllabi and Apprenticeship Programmes to Implement the Content of Higher Education Programmes (access mode: [https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/nd\\_poryadok-razrabotki-i-utverzheniya-uchebnykh-programm-i-programm-praktiki\\_27\\_05\\_19.pdf](https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/nd_poryadok-razrabotki-i-utverzheniya-uchebnykh-programm-i-programm-praktiki_27_05_19.pdf)), Guidelines for Designing and Approving Curricula and Individual Study Plans of Master Students to Implement the Content of the Second-Cycle Higher Education Programme (access mode: <https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/metodicheskie-rekomendatsii-po-razrabotke-i-utverzheniyu-uchebnykh-planov-i-ind.pdf>), Guidelines for Organising Independent Study by Students (Military Students, Trainees) (access mode: <https://edustandart.by/media/k2/attachments/metodicheskie-rekomendatsii-po-organizatsii-samostoyatelnoj-raboty-studentov-kur.pdf>), the outdated but still current Education Code as well as the Instructions which provisions do not fully comply with the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide were used in preparation of the above documents.

*Unfortunately, workload calculation in hours still prevails in both the education standards approved and in the above documents. A perfunctory mention of credit units calls into question the efficiency and quality of the work done, the documents adopted, and their compliance with the requirements of the Bologna process.*

### Diploma Supplement

The Roadmap for Higher Education Reform yet planned to prepare a plan to ensure free automatic issue of the Diploma Supplement in the format designed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and UNESCO in a widespread language (other than Russian).

Statutory amendments ensuring free automatic issue of the Diploma Supplement have not been implemented yet.

In the Strategic Action Plan, the Diploma Supplement implementation progress is limited only to expert recommendations on the digital Diploma Supplement implementation. However, no information has been found about holding the Higher Education Digitalization Prospects: Improving Education Tools, Teaching Techniques, and the Diploma Supplement international workshop seminar planned for 2019.

## 5. Mobility of Higher Education Teaching Staff and Students, Internationalisation

The 2019 working plan of the Ministry of Education provided for certain measures to implement the Strategic Plan.

Pursuant to **clause 5.2, Regulations for Sending Teaching Staff for Internship to Institutions of Foreign Countries** resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus was passed (No. 367 of 05/06/2019). The document has left unchanged limitations on academic mobility which existed prior to Belarus' accession to the EHEA; the internship period is limited to one week for higher education managers, it is still required to have internships of the higher education teaching staff and students approved by the superior ministry if they exceed ten days.

**Clause 5.3** of the 2019 working plan provided for organising selection of foreign nationals to earn degrees at the Belarusian HEIs.

In 2019, the first international competition was held pursuant to the Regulations for Providing Grants to Foreign Students to Study at the HEIs of the Republic of Belarus. It is difficult to consider its results satisfactory: 41 applications were submitted for 100 grants, 22 of which were approved. In other words, 78% of the free education slots for foreigners had not demand. The failure was caused by lack of the adequate information support.

This is evidenced by the progress of implementing measures to expand export of education services (entry student mobility): the websites of the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Belarus had sections with the Study in Belarus banner, they described the Belarusian HEIs but the materials are provided in Russian only. Beyond the post-Soviet countries, this activity is virtually useless.

In 2019, work was continued to expand the list of higher education specialities with studies in English (**clause 5.1**), including in distance learning. According to the Ministry of Education, 27 Belarusian HEIs offer such opportunities in 181 programs of the first cycle of higher education (in 2018 – 13 institutions and 39 programs).

The 2019 plan (**clause 5.4.**) provided for a meeting of the Republican Council of the HEIs' Rector titled Best Practices of Development and Implementation of the Internationalisation Strategies of Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus. No information about this meeting and its results is available on the website of the Republican Council of the HEIs' Rector yet, information about the issue consideration by the Praesidium of the Council of the Rectors on 5 December 2019 is available.

No information about implementation of some provisions of the plan is available publicly. In particular, this concerns the national monitoring of the student population pursuant to the Eurostudent methodology (**clause 5.5.**). No evidence is available that such a survey was held.

However, major concern is that a number of the provisions of the Strategic Plan have not been included in the 2019 working plan of the Ministry of Education. We are referring to establishment of the regulatory framework to implement joint academic programmes and double-degree programmes, develop mechanisms for recognising academic mobility outcomes, to plan semesters ("mobility windows") in new education standards. No work was carried out in these areas.

## **6. Lifelong Learning and Social Dimension of Higher Education**

In the period until 2019, the Strategic Plan (**clause 6.1.**) provided for engaging international advisers, including from the European Training Foundation, to prepare the basis for organising work on laws and regulations to support recognition of prior learning in order to prepare the procedure for recognising prior learning in 2021.

The 2019 plan (**clause 6.2.**) envisaged to analyse the international practice of recognising prior learning. However, no information about such analysis was found publicly available.

The Strategic Action Plan (**clause 6.2.**) provided for measures *to study the international practice* of the first-job placement of the HEIs' graduates to prepare proposals to the Government to revise the current system of the graduate's first-job placement.

In 2019, the **Monitoring System of Employment of University Graduates: Scenarios and Methodology Proposed for the Republic of Belarus** workshop was planned with international experts participating. However, no information about it is publicly available.

No information about the analysis of the HEIs' activities to help their graduates find their first job is available as well.

Within the Evidence-Based Tertiary Education Policies for Better Employment in Belarus project by the World Bank, the **Guide to Writing and Using Learning Outcomes for Higher Education Staff in Belarus** was prepared and published in 2019.

However important, it does not address the issue of graduates' employment directly.

Of all measures taken by the Ministry of Education in 2019, one can refer to those related to the reform of the graduates' employment system the clause of the **Organisation of the Teaching and Learning Process at Higher Education Institutions in the 2019/2020 Academic Year** Guidance Letter of the Ministry of Education which mentions a preferential tool to be used in the first-job placement of the tuition fee-paying graduates. Persons with disabilities, special developmental needs, orphans, and abandoned children have an advantage in this case.

Otherwise, 2019 is not marked by any significant change in the social support of the graduates (in particular, employment upon graduation).

No new version of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus has been adopted. Certain Issues of Mandatory First-Job Placement, Mandatory New Job Placement, Job Placement, Further Job Placement of Graduates, Reimbursement of the Funds Spent for Their Training, and of Special-Purpose Training of Professionals, Workers, Employees Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 821 of 22 June 2011 was not amended. (Amendment of Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 821 of 22 June 2011 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 527 of 12/07/2018 **does not include** any mention of any rights of the tuition fee-paying graduates)

The tuition fee-paying graduates have received no additional rights and guarantees. As previously, they are covered by the job placement procedure in case of jobs available upon mandatory job placement of the graduates who did not pay a tuition fee and in case of the graduate's wish. Among the graduates of the universities of medicine, the practice of mandatory first-job placement of all graduates (including tuition fee-paying graduates) upon internship training has tightened up. The tuition fee-paying graduates are virtually unable to independently find an internship upon their studies. The senior management of healthcare institutions refuse to issue personal applications because, in this industry, this action equals corruption (according to the senior management of the healthcare institutions and representatives of the universities of medicine). In this environment, the tuition fee-paying graduates of the universities of medicine have to consent to an internship under their university assignment and therefore to mandatory first-job placement. In the recent two years, mandatory first-job placement has covered even those graduates who have paid for their internship themselves. Such graduates are still obliged to undergo mandatory first-job placement, and they are denied their right to independent employment.



The senior management of the HEIs often shrug off the care to find jobs to place their graduates. The number of applications from employers for graduates undergoing mandatory first-job placement has significantly reduced every year, especially in humanities specialities. This is why the responsibility to find the first job is shifted to the graduates themselves who have to find a job for mandatory first-job placement. A job provided is not always related to the speciality.

The tools which were presented to the BFUG as facilitating the graduates' employment in the **National Report of the Republic of Belarus on Carrying Out the Strategy on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in line with the EHEA Principles and Tools (May-December 2018)** report are actually inefficient.

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus' website at *ИдиРаботай.Бел* (<https://gowork.1prof.by/>) is a specialized service to search for a first job. The homepage states that the system has over 4,000 CVs. As of 15 January 2020, two vacancies in Minsk were registered in the system – a blacksmith and a marketing professional. The system has no vacancies for other regional centres. A brief analysis enables to conclude that the system is not a viable and useful platform for students and graduates to find a job.

Large universities have established local websites to find a job and internship.

The system to support employment of the young professionals of the Belarusian State Economics University is at <http://job.bseu.by/>.

The career centre of the Belarusian State University is at <https://cv.bsu.by/>.

On these websites, graduates can post their CVs as well as learn about employers' vacancies available. However, the vacancies posted are very few (42 vacancies only for all faculties of the BSU), and they are often not related to the specialities.

## 7. Fundamental EHEA Values

The Strategic Action Plan provided that, as of 2018-2019, the HEIs would take additional measures to improve the mechanism of the teaching staff and students' participation the HEI governance.

*In the Russian version:*

*In 2019-2020, additional measures will be taken to **include students' representatives in the commissions to assess the quality** of academic programmes and for higher education specialities and HEI accreditation. Besides, additional measures will be taken to **organise public associations in the field of education** for the purpose of social formation, development and realisation of the personal potential of students and teaching staff, of their rights and legitimate interests protection.*

The measures planned for 2019 contribute to expansion of actual participation by students and teaching staff in HEI governance too little.

Students' engagement in accreditation commissions provided for by this plan is still not guaranteed. This item of the plan is not being implemented.

Approval of the 2020-2030 Youth Policy Development Strategy planned for 2019 has not occurred yet. The content of this document is not publicly available at the moment.

The meeting of the Praesidium of the Council of Rectors on voluntary work development at the country's universities held in February 2019 demonstrates that this work evolves under the control of the HEIs' administrations and as part and parcel of their ideological outreach. (All universities have

volunteer centres established, the employees of the centres are responsible for selecting volunteers, training them, and coordinating their work, the Interagency Volunteer Movement Coordination Council operates)

In 2019, nothing was done to satisfy other commitments under the Strategic Plan in terms of implementing the fundamental EHEA values.

No evidence of incorporation of the principles of Magna Charta Universitatum and the Recommendations of the Council of Europe (Rec/CV (2012)7) concerning the government's responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy into the national education system is available.

No indications of implementing the provisions of the communiqués of the EHEA ministers of education's summits are available, especially with regard to ensuring equal access to higher education.

However, we do not find any indications of the intent to implement the fundamental EHEA values not only in the Strategic Plan implementation but also in the document stated by the Ministry of Education to be the basis for the Strategic Action Plan – **the Concept of Developing the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Long Term until 2030**

In particular, no single task related to the social dimension of higher education and its accessibility improvement can be found among the main higher-education tasks. The document claiming to present the education policy prospects until 2030 is completely oblivious to the challenge of ensuring better inclusivity of the higher education system.

At the same time, the higher education accessibility has only decreased in the recent decade.

The data of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus indicates that the admission rate of higher education institutions (% of the 17-year-olds' cohort) dwindled by 20% from 85.6% to 64.8% in 2011-2018.

The proportion of **rural schools' graduates** entering higher education institutions keeps decreasing. Their share is thrice as low as the share of rural school students in the total secondary-school students' population. This also affects access of the **Belarusian-speaking youth** to higher education since 90.6% of the school students studying in Belarusian are rural school students while the higher education system is totally Russified. At present, no preferential tools to support these vulnerable groups exist. Such a tool used in the past as separate competition of the urban and rural youth for admission to HEIs was cancelled in 2014.

Accessibility of higher education for people with disabilities keeps decreasing. Since 2011, the total number of this category of students has dwindled from 1,637 in 2011/12 to 915 in 2017/18. Their share in the student population has decreased from 0.44% to 0.34% in the period. This is thrice as low as the disabled students' share in the secondary school system.

One of the few vulnerable groups of youth which can still enjoy some elements of positive discrimination is orphans. However, the efficiency of this tool is questionable. In Belarus, this population group can use benefits when entering an HEI: the right to enter most specialities of the first higher-education cycle (ISCED 6) without competition. However, numerous other issues which do not allow to enjoy this benefit for entering and studying at an HEI have not been addressed yet. The situation with **orphans** and abandoned children has not improved. If 2,113 students of this category were enrolled in ISCED 6 in 2010/11, which amounted to 0.55% of the student population, only 1,136 persons, or 0.50%, were enrolled in 2017/18.

One of the key objectives of the education policy in the EHEA member countries is to ensure gender balance in access to higher education

The Ministry of Education apparently does not believe that gender imbalance in higher education exists in Belarus, so it does not pay attention to this issue while defining the education policy. However, the problem exists.

Gender imbalance is particularly pronounced in the second cycle of higher education. Admission to master programmes demonstrates the tendency of a decreasing proportion of women among those newly admitted in this cycle. Instead of establishing gender balance, new gender imbalance has emerged. The share of women admitted to master programmes decreased from 57.0% in 2010/11 to 41.4% in 2017/18.

Gender imbalance is particularly obvious in various education profiles.

Some groups of specialities have a firmly established reputation of men's or women's specialities. Thus, it has not been possible to improve women's access to Engineering and Technologies specialties. The share of women studying in this profile has decreased from 27.7% in 2010/11 to 22.5% in 2018/19.

No particular progress has been noticed in efforts to address gender imbalance in other education profiles.

The [Amendment of the Laws on Efficient Operation of the National Defence Organisation](#) Law passed on 28/06/2019 dramatically reduces training accessibility for male students aged 18-27 years who are subject to conscription. It is estimated that about 3,000 of such prospective university students will encounter obstacles when exercising their right to lifelong learning, including entering HEIs upon graduation from vocational secondary education institutions.

The educational statistical data in Belarus does not reflect the situation with other vulnerable and underrepresented students' groups. However, there are no grounds to believe that these youth groups are in a better situation. The results of the school students' assessment carried out in Belarus for the first time (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)) demonstrated that they are greatly dependent on the socio-economic situation and the place of residence of students. This gap in the results shows that the secondary as well as higher education system in Belarus does not overcome social inequality, and the strategies of its future development until 2030 ignore this challenge entirely.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The results of the 2019 working plan implementation demonstrate greater openness of the Belarusian education system to foreign experience than before as well as formal recognition of the value of the European expert examination and recommendations.

However, so far discussions, expert consultations, and preparation of plans for further work do not result in implementation of the Bologna tools and principles in the Belarusian laws and academic practice.

In 2019, neither work on the Higher Education National Qualifications Framework (BelQF) nor the reform of the Instructions on Calculating the Workload of Higher Education Programs Applying the Credit Units System pursuant to the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide were completed although this was within the powers of the Ministry of Education.

No progress can be observed in establishing an Independent Quality Assurance Agency, free automatic issue of the Diploma Supplement, implementing the EHEA values, diversifying the employment

system of the HEIs' graduates – of all those objectives which were set forth back in the Roadmap and form part of the Strategic Action Plan.

It is particularly disturbing that the Strategic Plan commitments are not brought in line with the areas of the governmental education policy set forth in the **Concept of Developing the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Long Term until 2030** (approved in the late 2017). It is therefore difficult to expect timely and full implementation of the Strategic Plan objectives.

A significant shortcoming of the Ministry of Education's work to implement the Strategic Action Plan is limited access to information and insufficient openness.

The website at <http://by-ehea.info> is still unavailable.

### **One could recommend to:**

The Government and the Ministry of Education:

- *To organize a new open discussion of amendments of the education laws (Education Code) and related laws with a view to consolidate in them all provisions ensuring implementation of the Strategic Action Plan, the EHEA values and instruments.*

The Ministry of Education:

- *To review the education policy content with a view to include in it the objectives of more complete implementation of the Bologna instruments , EHEA values and principles. To respectively amend the **Concept of Developing the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Long Term until 2030**.*
- *In preparing annual plans for the Strategic Action Plan implementation, to focus on prompt consolidation of those Bologna instruments and standards which do not require amendments of the Education Code in the laws and regulations of the Ministry of Education.*
- *To ensure that higher education is truly accessible to vulnerable population groups. To submit proposals to the Government concerning implementation of up-to-date preferential instruments for promotion of an inclusive higher education system.*
- *To include in the working plans specific measures to implement the principles of Magna Charta Universitatum and the Recommendations of the Council of Europe (Rec/CV (2012)7) concerning the government's responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.*
- *To strengthen the social dimension of annual plans, to ensure priority implementation of the objectives to expand actual students' participation in the HEIs' governance according to the EHEA principles and values.*
- *To ensure greater transparency of the Strategic Action Plan implementation. To complete preparation of the website at <http://by-ehea.info> with a view to inform all stakeholders and organisations about the higher education reform in accordance with the EHEA principles.*

The HEIs' senior management

- *Within their powers, to implement the EHEA instruments and values, to pay special attention to expanding participation of students and teaching staff in the universities' governance.*