

Profile on economic inclusion for people with disabilities and older workers: Belarus

Purpose and scope: This profile responds to the three pillars of the EBRD's *Economic Inclusion Strategy* (access to employment and skills, finance and entrepreneurship, and services) and aims to provide targeted support to the efforts of the EBRD and its partners to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and older workers. It is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of all issues affecting people with disabilities and older workers in this country. It was prepared for the EBRD using publicly available sources.

Country context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population: Belarus has a population of 9.4 million (WB, 2020). The main ethnic groups are Belarusians (84 per cent), Russians (8.3 per cent), Poles (3.1 per cent) and Ukrainians (1.7 per cent) (Belstat, 2009). • Economy: Belarus is classified as an upper-middle-income country with GDP per capita of US\$ 6,713 in 2020 (WB, 2020). In 2018, services represented 47.7 per cent of GDP, industrial production 31.5 per cent, and agriculture 6.4 per cent (ETF, 2019). After a period of growth since 2017, Belarus has recently entered a recession that is expected to deepen in 2021, in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (WB, 2020). • Prevalence/responses to Covid-19: Over 80,000 cases of Covid-19 have been reported as of October 2020 (WHO, 2020). The government has introduced a range of public health measures as well as some initiatives to support businesses affected by the economic consequences of the crisis (IMF, 2020).
People with disabilities (PWD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated 6 per cent of the total population has a disability (approx. 567,500 people) (Government of Belarus, 2018). However, only an estimated 60,000 people with disabilities are employed (Pravo.by, 2019). • Employment and skills: Employment discrimination on the basis of physical or mental disabilities (that do not impede the performance of work duties) is prohibited by the Labour Code (Art 14), and working terms and conditions for PWD should not restrict their employment rights in comparison with other workers (Art 287) (although working hours for PWD are subject to special restrictions, Art 114-117). The Labour Code also requires employers to ensure working conditions for PWD align with the needs of individual rehabilitation programmes, including the provision of necessary occupational training and work at home arrangements (Art 287). • Under the 2006 Employment Act (Art 11), local authorities establish employment quotas (applicable to available vacancies) for individuals in special need of social protection or who are otherwise unable to compete on equal terms in the labour market, a classification that includes PWD. Employers may apply for subsidies for certain workplace adjustments for PWD, including the purchase of specialised machine tools (Act on Social Protection of the Disabled, Art 20). The government offers subsidised commercial rents and preferential rates for goods and services procured by the state for companies where people with disabilities constitute more than 50 per cent of the workforce (Presidential Decree No. 150 (2012, amended 2014) and Law On Public Procurement of Goods and Services). The State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion (2016-20) includes sub-programmes focused on vocational rehabilitation of PWD, while PWD enjoy priority access to vocational training (ILO CEACR, 2020). • In practice, people with disabilities face barriers in accessing mainstream education (in part due to lack of staff capacity), while young people with disabilities may face particular challenges in entering the labour market (due to a lack of policy / programme support) (UNICEF, 2020). People with disabilities of all ages face direct and indirect employment discrimination, primarily in recruitment (US DoS, 2020; DW, 2019), while physical access barriers and the lack of adequate workplace adjustments are persistent barriers to employment for PWD (HRC, 2015). • Finance and entrepreneurship: The Taxation Code provides a number of benefits and subsidies for enterprises that are established by or employ PWD (EU/AETS Consortium, 2018). The labour, employment and social protection authorities are reported to provide guidance and practical assistance to support PWD in their business initiatives. However, there are reports of discrimination against PWD in relation to certain services, including difficulties in accessing

finance in the form of bank loans (Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, [2016](#); National Bank of the Republic of Belarus/AFI, [2012](#)).

- **Services:** The [Act on the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities](#) and the [Act on Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities](#) mandate that transport, public buildings and businesses are accessible to PWD, while [a sub-programme](#) of the State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion sets policy objectives to increase the accessibility of public spaces, buildings, transportation and information services. However, some reports indicate that, in practice, many public buildings do not meet accessibility requirements, while public transport remains largely inaccessible to many PWD (US DoS, [2020](#)).
- **Covid-19:** There is no express focus on PWD in government policy to mitigate the economic impacts of the crisis, and the impact of the crisis on PWD is not clear. According to UNDP ([2020](#)), public information about the pandemic was not clear and readily accessible for all vulnerable groups, particularly those with learning disabilities.

Older workers

- An estimated 8.1 per cent of persons aged 55-59 are unemployed (Belstat, [2020](#)). Workers aged 55-59 are most active in industry (29.5 per cent, primarily manufacturing 22.7 per cent), education (14.1 per cent) and health and social work (10.2 per cent) (UNECE, [2019](#)). The number of employed pensioners in Belarus is reported to increase every year, up from an estimated 23 per cent in 2012 (Naūrodski, [2016](#)).
- **Employment and skills:** There is no express prohibition against employment discrimination on the grounds of age in national law. However, the Labour Code prohibits the dismissal of workers within two years of retirement age. The [Employment Act](#) (Art 11) requires local authorities to set hiring quotas for older workers within two years of statutory retirement age based on annual assessment of current and projected employment levels. The [Labour Code](#) provides that people over the statutory working age can continue in employment on the basis of an independent contractor agreement (Art 261). The [State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion](#) and Sub-programme 7 of the [State Programme “Education and Youth Policy for 2016-2020”](#) address professional education for adults, but there is no express focus on older workers.
- In practice, younger job candidates are reportedly favoured over older candidates, and unemployed workers (of all ages) are rarely offered training to enhance their prospect of labour market re-entry (Naūrodski, [2016](#)). Prevalent stereotypes that characterise older workers as lacking the dynamism, efficiency and health necessary to succeed in employment may impede their employment prospects, although there is reportedly growing recognition among employers regarding the benefits of hiring and retaining older workers (such as increased loyalty). However, job adverts that set maximum age limits are reportedly common (UNECE, [2019](#)).
- **Finance and entrepreneurship:** There is no express policy focus on older workers with respect to access to finance and entrepreneurship, and no available information on which to assess older workers’ engagement in entrepreneurial activity in practice.
- **Services:** There is no express policy focus on older workers. Access to services may be especially limited for older people – and older workers – in rural areas (UNECE, [2019](#)).
- **Covid-19:** There is no express focus on older workers in government policy to mitigate the economic impacts of the crisis. The impact of Covid-19 on the economic participation of older workers is not yet clear, but special public health measures may affect access to employment for older workers.

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