

**Report by the Minister of Education
of the Republic of Belarus
in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
20 January 2020 (Geneva)**

Distinguished Mr. President, members of the Committee!

The combined report consisting of the fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Republic of Belarus on implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocols regarding child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography as well as children in armed conflicts was approved by the National Commission for the Rights of the Child at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus and **in 2018** was submitted to this Committee.

The report contains detailed information about legislative, institutional, administrative and other actions taken in the Republic of Belarus to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In this regard in my speech I would like to inform the Committee about the changes that took place in 2019, the progress in maintaining and protecting the rights and legitimate interests of children.

1. Legislation

The Republic of Belarus is continuously working on reviewing the national legal framework to ensure its compliance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In January 2019 the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Belarus “On Recognizing Children as the Ones at Risk” was adopted with the following outcomes:

it changed approaches to preventive activities with dysfunctional families for raising the efficiency of interdepartmental assistance to get families out of disadvantaged situations and for children to live with their families;

it specified the criteria and indicators of the social risk for minors.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On Family Capital” was adopted to develop a long-term support of families with many children, to stimulate birth rates growth and to promote family values.

In December 2019 amendments were introduced in a number of codes and laws of the Republic of Belarus aimed at the following:

to ensure a more active and effective application of pre-trial settlement of disputes in social relations, including involvement of mediators;

to improve legal regulation of family relations;

to implement provisions of international legal acts, including the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, in our

legislation in the field of ensuring and protecting the rights and legitimate interests of children.

A draft of the Law “On Changes in the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus” was developed, and it determined inclusion in the education sector as one of the core principles of the state policy in the area of education. Inclusion in education ensures equal access to learning and training for all students and trainees taking into account the diversity of specific individual learning needs and capacities of each and every student and trainee (gifted, talented children, students and trainees having individual needs caused by their social situation, health condition and other circumstances).

2. Coordination

The National Commission for the Rights of the Child (further referred to as the National Commission) headed by the deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus plays a coordinating role in ensuring protection of rights and legitimate interests of children.

The National Commission is composed of representatives of education institutions and non-governmental organizations. The Representative of the UNICEF Office in the Republic of Belarus Dr. Rashed Mustafa Sarwar is regularly invited to the meetings of the Commission.

In 2019 the National Commission during its meetings considered a wide range of issues related to child protection: in the field of child health and life protection; recognizing children as the ones at social risk; protection of children and young people from drug trafficking and drug use. During the onsite visits the members of the National Commission visit various organizations and institutions to learn the best practices of creating favorable conditions for child living and development.

The system of prosecutor’s offices of the Republic of Belarus is implementing a regular monitoring and supervision at all levels over implementation of the provisions of the Convention and the national legislation with the findings, which are discussed at meetings of the National Commission.

On the initiative of the Prosecutor General’s Office in April 2020 during its onsite meeting the National Commission will consider the issue “On Implementation of Activities to Combat Violence against Children and to Create Environment, which Is Favorable for Child Living and Development”.

The authorized members of the National Commission work in each regional center of the Republic of Belarus.

The Republican National Office for Rights of the Child operated in 2019, and 56 citizens, including minors, submitted requests to it; 72 written applications on protection of rights of children and teenagers as well as over

800 verbal applications and calls were submitted.

Besides public offices of the National Commission operate in all regions of Belarus, where the Commission's members hold monthly onsite meetings with children, their legal representatives, other citizens on the issues of exercising the rights of the child, their protection and support.

In October 2019 the members of the National Commission for the Rights of the Child, officials from the national administrative bodies went to Kareličy district of Hrodna region to resolve the situation of training of three children where their legitimate representative – their father – did not allow his children to attend school requiring to be reinstated in his job.

The members of the National Commission explained to the parents the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the national legislation in the field of protection of child rights and legitimate interests, which allowed to convince the parents of the necessity ensuring the right to education of the children. The family got an essential financial support with sponsors' and public organizations' funds. The education institution ensured individual classes with the children to bridge the children's gaps in knowledge.

3. Dissemination of Knowledge, Training and Raising Awareness on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Republic of Belarus pays attention to raising legal literacy of children and parents, including on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Maintenance of the information resource on legal topics developed for children and teenagers – the Children's legal website (mir.pravo.by) is ensured within development of the system of legal education. In 2019 over 295 thousand users browsed the website; there were approximately 730 views of the website pages.

Legal and citizenship education of students and trainees is systemic and purposeful.

The priorities of development of competences in the field of legal and civil relations are envisaged in objectives and tasks of subject curricula as well as in concepts of subjects and educational standards.

The structured and systemic approach to studying human rights is implemented in general secondary institutions within the subject program "Social Studies".

Institutions implementing the educational programs of secondary specialized education provide their trainees and students with legal education when studying the subject "Law Fundamentals".

Higher education institutions teach legal awareness when studying a wide range of subjects, including "Family Law", "Criminal Law", "Civil Law", "Social Work Legal Regulation", etc.

In 2019 the theme of improving the condition of children and protection of the rights was actively publicized: regional and national e-media published 432 articles, the leading national TV channels broadcast 144 reports and videos on protection of the rights of children and teenagers.

For the purpose of raising awareness of specialists working with children as well as children, for raising legal literacy almost 6.5 thousand education institutions installed the database "Rights of Minors" within the national information legal system "ETALON".

4. Respect of the Child's Opinion

For promoting children and young people in decision-making, developing and implementing city and district socioeconomic programs, initiating and implementing projects, programs aimed at improvement of the national legislation in the field of protection of the rights and legitimate interests in our country the following youth consultation and advisory bodies were established and have been operating:

youth parliaments;

the Public Republican Student Council;

the Republican Council of Young Trainees and Working Youth.

In 2019 members of the Public Republican Student Council became active participants of development and discussion of the following:

a draft of the Law "On Changes of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus";

a draft of the Strategy of Public Youth Policy Development-2030.

Councils of Pupil/Trainee and Student Self-Governing were established and have been operating as public formations in education institutions of all cycles for organizing work with students and trainees on solving the critical issues.

Work on establishing the Youth House at the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus is going on for supporting and developing youth parliamentary governance.

The platform "Children and Teenager-Friendly City" is successfully being implemented in cooperation with UNICEF and ensures the mechanism of coordination and monitoring of the rights of the child at the local level.

Today we have 24 cities and towns that have obtained the honorary title of "Children and Teenager-Friendly City".

In 2017-2018 the regional resource centers of youth initiatives "Stupeni" ("Steps") opened (Minsk, Barysau, Navapolack, Homiel, Brest, Mahilioŭ, Hrodna).

In February 2019 representatives of the youth parliaments in the composition of the Belarusian delegation (Darja Khrushchova from Homiel, Viktoria Pasnichenka from Navapolack, Danila Apalonik from Navagrudak)

took part in the interactive panel discussion organized by the UN HQ in Geneva.

The National Children's Educational and Recreational Center "Zubionak" ("Little Bison") has the UNICEF-supported Center of Innovations and Partnerships, and its activities aim at promotion of implementing the rights of the child, inclusion of children with disabilities, improvement of health condition of teenagers and young people and developing their creative innovation capacity.

"Equal Learning" trainings and workshops are held with children and teenagers within the framework of activities of the Center of Innovations and Partnerships where international partners take part.

Representatives of international organizations, diplomatic missions, public organizations "AKT", "Doverije" ("Trust"), the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs were active participants and organizers of different activities in the Center of Innovations and Partnerships.

Policy-makers, public figures, public administration officials are ready to communicate with modern young people within the information and education project "School of Active Citizen".

The second half of 2019 saw over 140 meetings in education institutions with trainees and students and heads of the national state administration bodies.

This year, for example, I twice met children within the frameworks of the "SHAG" ("STEP") project.

In 2020 the distant marathon "We Are Acting!" is opened, and teachers and students are provided with a unique opportunity to share their experience of implementing social projects and initiatives and to introduce their proposals for participation in social life of their region.

In 2020 for the purpose of raising responsibility of parenthood, forming a good level of parent competence in child upbringing and developing, all education institutions will implement the "Parent Universities" project, which will allow to involve the ultimate number of parents at all cycles of education in information and education work.

5. Family Environment

The mechanism of interaction of state agencies responsible for prevention of family disadvantage, early detection of social risks for children has improved its efficiency within the ten-year implementation of Decree No. 18 of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On Additional Measures on State Protection of Children in Disadvantaged Families" dated as of 24 November 2006:

the specific weight of orphans and children without parental care in the total number of child population of the country decreased from 1.6 percent in 2007 to 0.97 percent in 2018;

the number of children who lost parental custody due to their deprivation of parental rights reduced by 13 percent: from 2, 702 in 2007 to 1, 377 in 2018.

The approaches to preventive work with disadvantaged families for raising efficiency of interdepartmental; assistance for getting families out of disadvantaged situations and for children to live in their families changed last year:

recognition of children as the ones at social risk is ensured by decision-making at the level of district executive committee (municipal administration) of the interdepartmental collegiate body – a coordination council;

specific interdepartmental activities are identified aiming at elimination of disadvantage causes and conditions and based on a focus and deep analysis of the family condition.

The efficiency of implementing new approached to social orphanage allowed to reduce the number of children withdrawn from families under decisions of the commissions responsible for decision-making for minors.

The state statistics reporting indicates that the number of such children within nine months last year reduced by over 800 children in comparison with the similar period of 2018.

6. Children Deprived of Family . Adoption.

The Republic of Belarus ensures implementation of the right of each child to living and upbringing in a family as declared in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Continuing work is carried out for development of family forms to involve a child in for upbringing after losing parental care due to different reasons.

National adoption is a priority form for such children according to the Belarusian legislation.

In 2019 nationals of the Republic of Belarus adopted 409 children, and within the period of 2011 to 2019 there were adopted 4, 692 children, including 2, 460 children (45.9 percent) – from orphanages and social care homes.

Last year 78 children were adopted by foreign families from Italy, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

The network of family-type children's homes is developing. In 2019 we opened 14 family-type children's homes with 80 children, including 16 (20 percent) of them coming from care homes and orphanages.

Within 9 years the number of family-type children's homes and their inmates increased by 1.8 times (as of early 2011 – 157 family-type children's homes and 1,020 inmates, as of late 2019 – 283 family-type children's homes and 1,864 children there).

Development of family-type institutions for orphans and children without parental care allows to reduce a network of the social care and residential institutions.

Within the recent 9 years the network of residential and social care home institutions reduced by 57 percent (from 57 institutions in early 2011 to 25 – in September 2019), and the number of their inmates – by 80 percent (from 7,771 to 1,534).

Reference:

Currently there are 12 children's homes, 2 residential care homes for orphans and children without parental care, 5 special residential schools with orphans and children without parental care, 5 children's villages and 1 children's community.

As a result of the focus work on development of family-type forms of upbringing 81 percent of children related to orphanage category live in families of Belarusian nationals (71 percent – in 2011).

7. Violence, Abuse and Neglect

Much attention in the Republic of Belarus is paid to prevention of violence against minors.

In 2018 the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children Ms. Marta Santos Pais had an official visit to Belarus. She visited official events as well as attended the state education institution “Secondary School No. 9 of Minsk”, met schoolchildren as well as representatives of children's and youth councils (parliaments), national bodies of public administration, UNICEF.

When visiting the school Ms. Marta Santos Pais got to know how the system of education governing bodies worked as well as the system of education institutions in the field of preventive measures, detection and elimination of violence against children and its causes, activities related to assistance to underage violence victims, and besides she had discussions with pupils and representatives of the children's and youth councils (parliaments).

The Republic of Belarus implements a system of informing parents, care-takers, custodians and or police officers by the teaching staff about signs of violence against children and teenagers.

Mediation as one of the most prospective ways of efficient dispute resolution with involvement of the third neutral party is being actively implemented.

In 2019 projects of school mediation services started in 58 education institutions, which allowed to teach children how to overcome crisis

situations, reduce number of school conflicts, form equal partner relations between the educational process participants in resolving upbringing issues.

In February 2020 the Agreement on Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Public Association “Belarusian Republican Union of Lawyers” deems to be signed for strengthening and developing cooperation in the field of creating conflict-free educational environment, implementing new forms and techniques of mediation and restorative justice when working with underage children.

In 2019 the Ministry of Education supported the initiative of UNICEF and the Belarusian State Pedagogical University named after Maxim Tank to adapt and implement the Croatian model “Safe and Enabling Environment in Schools (SEES)” in our education institutions.

The republican team of fast response was organized, involving leading specialists in the field of psychology: Doctors of Psychology and PhDs in Psychology.

Members of the fast response team on their own initiative or when getting information about a possible violation of the rights of minors:

visit the education institution;

investigate the situation;

take measures to provide psychological support to children and teenagers;

submit proposals to the Ministry of Education.

The example of their activities includes criminal liability of a principal and his deputies, who allowed uneducational forms and methods of children’s upbringing.

8. Health Improvement

The Republic of Belarus commits itself to implement the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding health improvement, formation of healthy lifestyle among children and teenagers. The organizational and methodological activities to assure summer recreation and health improvement campaign are held every year. The national health improvement campaign in summer 2019 covered approximately 400 thousand children and teenagers. About 12 thousand children and teenagers had health improvement and recreation outside the Republic of Belarus, with support of non-governmental organizations and foreign partners.

In the period of summer health improvement and recreational campaign in 2019 under invitation of the President of Belarus the National Children’s Educational and Recreational Center “Zubrionok” (“Little Bison”) was visited by children from Syria, China, Japan, Poland, Egypt, India, Vietnam. 799 children from these countries visited the most beautiful places of the country and made friends with Belarusian children.

During profile leadership events organized in the center of “Zubrionok” (“Little Bison”) with the international health improvement and recreation campaigns I personally had 10 meetings with children and trainees/ students.

9. Mental Health of Children and Teenagers

Taking into account modern challenges the country pays much attention to the necessary psychological support for children and teenagers as well as their legitimate representatives.

In 2019 the Republican Center of Psychological Support opened and its major activity now is to ensure comprehensive psychological, social and pedagogical| educational support.

Psychologists and teachers of the Center held 762 consultations over the period of its operation.

The Center operates an upgraded and updated multi-section website.

Reference:

The website contains information about the Center, contacts of its specialists, news, event announcements, specific information, which is easy to comprehend and will be useful for teenagers, parents and teachers.

The website has an embedded chat giving to each and every child, parent and teacher in Belarus an opportunity of anonymous appeal for help or support in a critical situation. There is a mobile app of the website as well for users.

The Center’s employees and leading scientists and teachers of the Department of Social and Family Psychology of the BSPU Institute of Psychology developed and have been implementing the professional development program “Work of a Psychologist from an Education Institution to Provide Support in Crisis Situations”.

Regional networks of crisis psychologists were established comprising 125 people. Professional development is regularly ensured for psychologists; content of curricula and programs of higher education specialties are regularly updated.

A new resolution of the Ministry of Education was adopted on a social and educational\ pedagogical center with the positions of lawyers, specialists of social and pedagogical centers ensure a comprehensive system of psychological support and social and educational assistance to the minors and their legitimate representatives in the territory of the respective administrative municipal unit.

Last year lawyers, social mentors and teachers of social and pedagogical centers took part in over 23 thousand court proceedings protecting the rights legitimate interests of underage citizens.

In 2020 the Ministry of Education is planning to comprehensively study the international best practices of psychological support for children

and teenagers and implement a number of pilot projects in this area for the purpose of improving the psychological support services.

We would be grateful for willingness of international experts to share efficient methods and techniques in this field.

For implementing the advanced techniques in protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the child as declared in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, currently the Republic of Belarus cooperates with UNICEF in working out the following Country Program of Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 2021-2025.

In conclusion, I would like draw your attention to the interdepartmental composition of our delegation. It includes authorities from the Prosecutor General's Office, representatives of the Supreme Court, the National Center for Legislation and Legal Research, virtually all profile ministries involved in ensuring interests of the child.

We are interested in holding a professional and efficient dialogue today with the Committee's members and in further cooperation taking into account your recommendations.

Thank you for attention!