

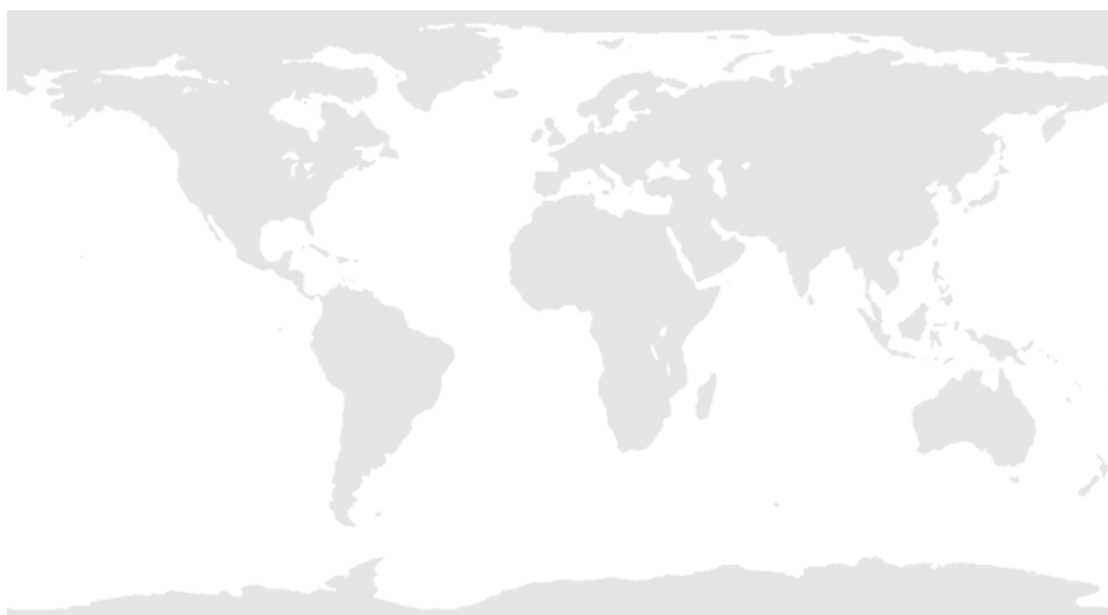


World Data on Education

Données mondiales de l'éducation

Datos Mundiales de Educación

VII Ed. 2010/11



Belarus

Revised version, September 2011.

Principles and general objectives of education

The implementation of the policy of economic and social change in the Republic of Belarus depends to a considerable extent on the human resources and, by that token, on the nation's educational level. Reforming the country's socio-economic and political life, demands that education be treated as a priority area. The leading role of education will ultimately be decisive in effecting the transformation of the Republic of Belarus into a technologically-developed, democratic state. It will become the guarantor of stability and the source of social and economic development. Within this framework, the State bases its policy on the creation and improvement of a high-quality national education system, and on public support being given, on a priority basis, to that system's development as a decisive factor in the achievement of scientific, technical, cultural and intellectual progress and the affirmation of national sovereignty.

The development of the national education system is based on the following main principles: priority status of universal human values; national culture as the basis of education; scientific approach; orientation towards international standards in education; humanism; linkage with public practice; ecological orientation; continuity and consistency; elimination of contradictions between teaching, on the one hand, and physical and moral education on the other; democracy; secular character of education; encouragement of talent and culture; and compulsory basic education.

The principal aim of the education system is to reproduce and constantly enrich the nation's intellectual, creative and cultural potential; to instill humanist ideals in children and young people; and to supply the production sector with highly-qualified and competitive specialists and workers. Other important general objectives of the national education system include:

- to create the conditions necessary for mastering the national language and other languages; to ensure the attainment of ecological, economic, legal, computer and psycho-pedagogical literacy by everyone living in the Republic;
- to promote respect and socio-psychological readiness for family life;
- to achieve a sound correlation between practical experience, school learning and individual opinion;
- to promote respect for political pluralism and democracy as forms of government and statehood, for a world order founded on the recognition of political, economic and social human rights, and for other countries and peoples and their cultural differences;
- to promote solidarity and humane relations within the society;
- to promote the shaping of harmonious and rounded personalities capable of further development and of rising to new social and political challenges;
- to support self-education, self-instruction and the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of the individual;

- to preserve and expand the intellectual property and the cultural and historic values of the Belarusian people and of the Republic's other national communities;
- to support and develop popular lore and folk crafts, national traditions, rituals and customs, to preserve and enrich the life of the mind.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The main legislative documents which regulate activities in the field of education in Belarus are the 1994 Constitution (as amended and expanded), adopted by referendum on 24 November 1996, and the **Law on Education**, the **Law on Languages**, the **Rights of the Child Act**, the **Rights of Minorities Act**, the **Act on General Principles of State Policy on Youth**, as well as other instruments.

Articles 49 and 50 of the Constitution stipulate that: "Everyone shall have the right to education. Access to free general secondary and vocational-technical education shall be guaranteed. Secondary special and higher education shall be accessible to all according to the capabilities of each. Everyone can, on a competitive basis, receive education free of charge at an appropriate State educational establishment. [...] The State shall, in accordance with the law, guarantee freedom of choice of the language of education and tuition."

The **Law on Education** was adopted by the Supreme Council on 29 October 1991. According to the Law, "The Republic of Belarus guarantees the development of education on a priority basis, the appropriate social and economic conditions for the functioning of the education system, the rights of citizens to receive general and vocational schooling, the transmission of general cultural values, and the protection of intellectual property, talent and culture." Articles 2-13 list the main objects of legislation and the principles of State policy in the educational field; enumerate the goals of education; describe the rights of citizens with regard to education and to the language of tuition and education; and show the legislative linkages between education and culture, science, ecology, public health, the production sphere, and political activities. Articles 14-23 define the structure of the system, and the objects and contents of its various levels (pre-school, general secondary, extra-mural, vocational-technical, secondary special, higher, teacher-training and training of scientific and technical personnel, advanced training and retraining of senior staff, adult education). Articles 24-29 describe the functions of the education system and the status of its institutions, including non-governmental ones, and define the mechanism of management of education, the contents of education and the organization of the study process. Articles 30-35 define the rights and duties of all participants in the education process—pupils, students, parents and teachers. Articles 36 and 37 describe the system's material and technical infrastructure and the mechanisms used for funding the system.

On the basis of the Law, the general secondary education system includes the following cycles: elementary, basic and secondary (eleven or twelve years of study, ages 6 to 17/18), which can exist separately or as part of a basic or secondary school. Education begins at age 6 or later in the light of medical indications and with the consent of the parents. The year 1 syllabus can be taught in kindergarten. The State, as



represented by the relevant executive organs, defines a set of minimum standards for the contents of general secondary education, including a list of compulsory subjects and an indication of the minimum amount of tuition in each subject. School curricula, syllabi and textbooks take account of differences in students' interests and capabilities. Individual syllabi, extra-mural activities and optional subjects are introduced with a view to meeting students' individual needs and developing their creative abilities, and schools, gymnasiums and lyceums offering in-depth study of specific subjects are established. Basic and secondary schooling ends with final examinations.

The **Law on Languages** of 1990 provided the legal framework for the adoption of Belarusian as the national language, and gave Russian the status of the language of communication for the various nationalities in the Republic. By a referendum held in May 1996, citizens expressed their will to confer the status of national language on both languages. The Languages Act in force, therefore, no longer fulfils the function of regulating the utilization and development of Belarusian, Russian and other languages, and needs to be amended and supplemented as appropriate. The bill **On amendments and additions to the Law on Languages** enshrined the use of both national languages on an equal basis in all spheres of public life, proclaims the exercise of the right to choose to be educated in one of the national languages, and guarantees the right of persons belonging to the Republic's other nationalities to be educated in their mother tongue.

Educational legislation also includes Cabinet decisions and Presidential decrees. In recent years the Council of Ministers has adopted a number of decisions and resolutions, including the programme for general secondary education development 2007-2016, approved on 31 May 2007; the programme for secondary vocational training development 2006-2010, approved on 19 August 2006; the programme for initial vocational training development 2006-2010, approved on 23 March 2006; and the 2007 draft programme for the development of innovative education 2008-2010 in the perspective of 2015. (Borisova & Kuusela, 2009).

During the period 2001-2007, the following laws were issued: the amended **Law on Education** (2002); the **Law on Initial Vocational Training** (2004); the **Law on General Secondary Education** (2006); and the **Law on Higher Education** (2007). Another new element implemented since 2003 is the unified state examination, a national test in certain subjects taken by all students at the end of general secondary education. (Agranovitch, 2005).

The Ministry of Education has drafted and adopted many normative documents, decisions, instructions, letters and recommendations, aimed at improving the education management system, reforming all sectors and levels of the national education system, and improving the social status and social security situation of pupils, students and teaching staff. The Ministry's scientific departments have drafted concept documents on: education and training; State school education; education, training and preparation for life of children with mental and physical handicaps; the secondary school reform; the contents of general secondary education; educational standards; the Belarusian national school; etc. The main objective of these documents is to create a national education system that meets international standards and present-



day requirements, and is capable of autonomous development in accordance with the needs of the individual and society.

The draft concept of the **Code for Education** of the Belarus Republic was approved in April 2008 by the Council of Ministers with a view to providing an overall education strategy regulating all levels of the education system. The content of the draft Code is based on the approved laws regulating the education system and it is not designed to introduce conceptual changes. According to the Code, the milestones of education policy are compulsory basic education and the transition towards compulsory general secondary education, continuity in education, priority of human values, human rights and the human character of education, which means free choice in teaching methods for trainers and educational institutions. (Borisova & Kuusela, 2009).

In line with the **Presidential Decree No. 15 “Of several issues of general secondary education”**, issued on 17 July 2008, the decision has been taken to reintroduce the eleven-year general secondary education structure that was being replaced by the new twelve-year model within the framework of the reform launched in 1996 (in accordance with the Decree the President of Belarus “On the preparation and implementation of general education reform”, issued on 4 January 1996). Despite the fact that the implementation of the reform was positively assessed, the results were considered negative. The twelve-year structure was considered a reason for delaying the entry of young people into working life and requiring a substantial annual increase of the state education budget. (*Ibid.*).

Administration and management of the education system

Education in Belarus is placed under the control of State organs: the National Assembly (Parliament) and the Council of Ministers; the Ministry of Education (with its subordinate institutions and organizations), and local government bodies.

The management of the education system in Belarus is the responsibility of the State and society. The functions of the **Council of Ministers** in the educational sphere are the following: to define the requirements of the State in respect of education and to establish procedures for monitoring the manner in which these requirements are met; to approve model decisions concerning educational institutions and organizations and to define procedures for their establishment, reorganization and closure; to approve model documents relating to education and the procedure for their issuance; to define procedures for funding educational institutions and organizations, for paying staff salaries, and standards and procedures for the provision of social security to pupils, students and teaching staff.

The **Ministry of Education**: implements State policy and conducts State monitoring within the educational field; approves standard curricula and other requirements in respect of general secondary education and special schools; organizes the preparation and publishing of textbooks, teaching aids and methodological materials; defines standards for funding educational establishments and providing them with material and technical supplies, subject to budget appropriations and resource availability; establishes, reorganizes and closes down State-managed



educational establishments and institutions and registers their status; takes decisions on matters relating to extra-mural education in higher education establishments and specialized secondary schools; supervises the methods and co-ordinates the activities of all educational establishments and educational organizations in the territory of the Republic.

Local (Regional) Councils and their executive organs: ensure the development of education, taking into account the national particularities of the region and its social and economic development prospects, and define requirements in respect of the level and structure of the training of teachers and specialists; establish, reorganize and close down schools and other educational institutions in accordance with established procedures, and register their status.

The education management system is characterized by internal and external components. The internal component includes management organizations and institutions which directly belong to the education system. They can be subdivided as follows: institutions directly participating in management; institutions providing management support; and the educational establishments themselves. This component is made up of organizations and institutions of the national education system and its education and training institutions. It is a complex, widely-ramified structure of the hierarchical type, with external links at all levels.

The internal component can be divided into three levels. The top level is formed by the Ministry of Education, the higher education establishments under its control and their research institutes, experimental farms, health institutions, print shops, etc., as well as national-level schools and organizations providing various kinds of support to the education management process. National-level institutions carrying out activities and research within the definite educational branches include: the **National Institute of Education** (preschool and general school education); the **Institute of Higher Education**; and the **Institute of Professional Education** (vocational education).

The second level is formed by **Regional Education Boards**, the Minsk City education board, and the educational establishments under their control. These boards report to the Ministry of Education, and are responsible for applying the unified policy at its own level. The third level includes **District** and **Municipal Education Departments**, and preschool establishments (kindergartens, nurseries, children's homes, etc.) and schools under their control. Education departments at this level report to the regional or Minsk City education boards.

The external component includes institutions and organizations outside the State education system which provide various forms of support to the central education management system (EMS) but do not directly belong to the national education system. They include various legislative, executive and supervisory bodies, foreign scientific and methodological centers and non-civil service institutions and organizations dealing with educational matters. The structure of the external component, which consists of institutions and organizations outside the State education system interacting with the Ministry in organizational matters, can be represented as having two levels.

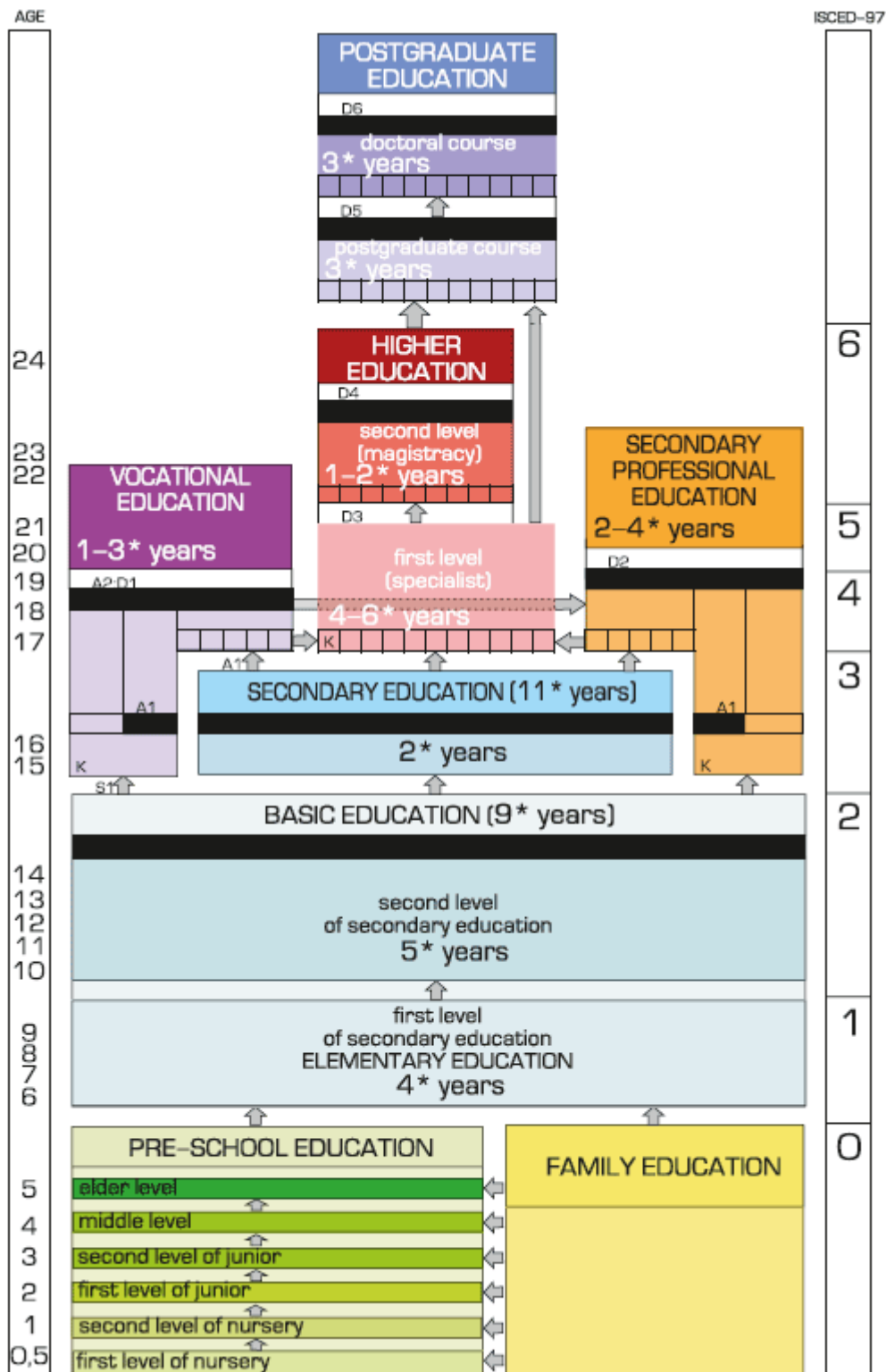


The **Inspection for Educational Establishments** is at the core of the national system of quality assurance. The Inspection is independent from the Ministry and educational establishments but it is subordinated to the Council of Ministers. It organizes attestation and accreditation procedures of the educational establishment. The evaluation and analysis are under the responsibility of independent evaluators who are recruited by the Inspection from the best specialist from universities, research institutes, etc. The evaluators are part of expert commissions but every evaluator acts separately. The Inspection formally revises the reports of the evaluators and takes the final decision.

The Ministry of Education collaborates with many governmental and non-governmental bodies, national corporations and banks, the **National Academy of Sciences** and various private funds in matters pertaining to the development of educational projects and programmes, the definition of priority areas in education, and international cooperation.

Structure and organization of the education system

Republic of Belarus: structure of the education system



Source: Educational Services for Foreign Students, *Higher education in the Republic of Belarus*, 2010.



Pre-school education

Preschool education caters to children from birth to less than 3 years of age (nurseries) and in the age group 3-6/7 years (kindergartens). There are public and private alternative preschool establishments (nurseries, kindergartens, kindergarten-nurseries and play groups, family-type children's establishments and boarding homes of various kinds) using different types of programmes.

Primary education

The reformed elementary school, oriented towards school entry at age 6, provides a four-year programme including the preparatory year (in accordance with the reform of schools of general education introduced in 1996). The first year syllabus can be taught either in the elementary school or in kindergarten. General secondary education is organized into three levels: elementary education, or the first level of general secondary education, lasting four years (including the preparatory year on the basis of the 1996 reform); basic secondary education, covering five years; and complete general secondary education (grades 10 and 11/12). Elementary education is compulsory.

Secondary education

The five-year basic secondary school is compulsory. Students can receive instruction at different levels (with in-depth study of certain subjects), and can specialize in natural sciences, humanities, technology, the arts or sports in the higher grades. Upon completion of grade 9 students have to pass the examinations to receive the certificate of basic education. Basic school graduates can continue their studies in the form of combined vocational and general training at a vocational-technical or specialized secondary educational establishments, or they can continue their general secondary education in general education schools, gymnasiums or lyceums. At the end of grade 11 (general secondary education) students sit the final examination and if successful receive the certificate of (complete) general secondary education. Vocational education programmes are offered in different types of school. Vocational-technical schools offer one- to two-year programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification, and three-year programmes leading to a diploma of vocational training and general secondary education. Professional lyceums offer three-year programmes leading to a diploma of vocational training and general secondary education. Vocational and technical colleges offer three- to four-year programmes for the training of middle-level specialists (grade 9 graduates) and two- to three-year post-secondary programmes for grades 11 graduates.

Higher education

Higher education institutions include higher colleges, institutes, academies, conservatories and universities. Higher colleges offer two- to three-year programmes leading to the diploma of junior specialist. The duration of programmes leading to the diploma of specialist (higher education diploma) or the bachelors' degree is generally four to five years (five years in the case of dentistry, veterinary and architecture; six years in the case of medicine). At the postgraduate level, advanced specialist diploma programmes last one year; programmes leading to the master's diploma take one to



two years to complete. An additional three years of study and research following the master's are required for the award of the diploma of candidate of sciences. The diploma of doctor of sciences requires at least three additional years of advanced research concluding in the defense of a thesis. In 2009, the national education authorities announced the intention to join the Bologna process.

The school year begins on 1 September for all grades and lasts thirty-four weeks; holidays take up a total of thirty calendar days. School-leaving examinations at Level II (grade 9) and at Level III (grades 10 and 11) are held in June.

The educational process

Pre-primary education

According to the Education Act, the objective of preschool education is to develop the children's natural desire to learn and to familiarize them with their environment, and to assist the children's physical and mental development. The leading role in preschool education is played by the family. Preschool establishments educate the child by introducing it to the language, culture and traditions of its people and to the culture of other nationalities living in the territory of the Republic.

Nurseries, kindergartens, kindergarten-nurseries and play groups with flexible, daytime or round-the-clock hours of attendance, family-type children's establishments and boarding homes of various kinds are established in the light of the requirements of the family and of society at large. State organs, enterprises, public associations and individual citizens give financial, psychological and pedagogical assistance to families.

The main objectives of preschool education are:

- to teach the skills and work habits necessary for the child's orientation and adequate performance in the world he/she is learning to know;
- to identify and develop individual capabilities and gifts, to form the personality and to develop its creative potential;
- to protect and strengthen the child's health and to instil basic habits of a healthy lifestyle;
- to facilitate the child's timely and trouble-free transition to school.

There are public and private alternative preschools using different types of programmes. Many children do not enter school at age 6 and prefer to repeat the last year of preschool education. The possibility of taking the first year of general education in kindergarten has created additional problems. Furthermore, financial and material difficulties increased.

There is freedom to choose from different educational programmes, all of which are drawn up by the National Institute of Education and the State Pedagogical University. These programmes, which have titles such as Harmony, Enchantment, The family, etc., are based on the personality-oriented model of interaction (child-parent-preschool teacher). Through the most interesting and effective programme,



called First Steps, it will be possible to continue the transformation of preschool and elementary education into a system that incorporates the latest attainments of national and world practice in that field, to develop and introduce new forms of cooperation between the kindergarten, the family and the social environment, to establish centers for work with families in different parts of the country, and to develop and support new alternative methods of teaching and bringing up infants. The programme has four main components: education (of children, parents and teachers); involvement of parents in the education and instruction process; health (physical and mental); and the provision of socio-psychological services to all participants in the pre-school education system (children, parents, teachers).

The first national experience-based programme (*Praleska*) provides guidance to teachers and in order to help them to refine the methods used to support and assess the child's physical and mental development. At the same time it also encourages the teacher to provide each child with its own development programme, which must then be adjusted and correlated with the common programme.

The tendency is towards developing variable programmes, methods and teaching aids from among which the teacher can choose when carrying out different activities with the children. A new model of preschool establishment (the "open" kindergarten, where parents participate directly in the educational process by acting as assistants to the kindergarten teacher or play-group leader) has been developed with the same end in view. The further development of the preschool education system within the context of the general school reform includes, among other, the preservation of the existing public system of preschool establishments; the elaboration of standards and a system of licensing and accreditation of preschool establishments; different possible scenarios of receiving elementary education; improved cooperation with the family; improved training of preschool teaching staff; the necessary conditions for the introduction of compulsory preschool education from age 5.

In 1997, there were 4,511 preschool establishments in operation in the country, including 2,852 managed by the central level and 1,659 under departmental management. In terms of type of establishment, there were: 2,756 general and 1,027 special preschool establishments; 13 infant development centers; 27 sanatorium-type establishments; 28 establishments for children with physical or mental handicaps; 497 combined-type establishments; and 163 kindergarten schools, attended by a total of 444,200 children. About 76% of all pre-school establishments operated a five-day week and 24.2% a six-day week; 0.4% of the kindergartens and nurseries were open round the clock. About 61 of the 5-year-olds (71.5% in urban areas and 48.7% in rural areas) attended senior kindergarten groups. In the same year, preschool education employed 55,500 teachers, 99.9% of whom were female teachers. Their educational qualifications were as follows: 35.1% had higher education; 22.7% incomplete higher education; 59.2% specialized secondary education; and 3% general secondary education. About 12% of the total number of college-educated staff, 1.5% of staff with incomplete higher education, and 41.5% of staff with specialized secondary education had obtained a special qualification in preschool education. Training for preschool specialists is provided at pedagogical universities, pedagogical institutes, colleges and teacher training schools.



The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2005 found that more than 86% of children aged 36-59 months were attending preschools or centers of preschool education and development. Urban-rural differentials were significant: the figure was as high as 90.1% in urban areas, compared to 79.1% in rural areas. The share of young children attending educational classes at the preschools or centers of preschool education and development was lower in the age group 36-47 months (81.3%) than in the age group 48-59 months (90.6%). Overall, 92.9% of children who at the time of the survey had reached age 6 and were attending the first grade of primary school were attending preschool the previous year. The proportion among boys was slightly higher (96.1%) than girls (90%). (MSA & UNICEF, 2007).

According to the National Statistical Committee, by the end of 2009 there were 4,097 institutions providing preschool education, of which 2,007 in urban areas and 2,090 in rural areas. The total enrolment was some 372,800 children, of whom 309,500 in urban areas and 63,300 in rural areas. The percentage of children aged 1 to 5 years attending preschool institutions was estimated at 78.5% (86.7% in urban areas and 53.7% in rural areas). (NSC, 2010).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

The aims of elementary education are not limited to the three 'Rs' (reading, writing and arithmetic). The following objectives are of particular importance at this stage: education in the broader sense; development of the child's personality; acquisition of elementary knowledge about nature, man and society, of basic work and study habits, of fundamental ideas about interpersonal relations, correct speech, personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle. Continuity, which is of the utmost importance in the transition from play to study, is established in the first years of school and in preschool establishments of the kindergarten-school type. Differentiation is achieved principally by varying the teaching process itself, i.e. the rate at which a subject is studied, offering a wide choice of activities, adapting study requirements to individual capabilities, organizing remedial groups on the basis of psychologists' and doctors' recommendations.

The concept of reform of schools of general education defines the main tasks at this stage of general education as follows: to develop further the individual child's physical and mental capacity and moral and spiritual instincts; to instil a steady interest in study; and to impart basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, the rudiments of social behaviour and study habits, thus laying the foundations for the child's understanding of the world and enabling it to proceed to the next level of education.

Elementary school teaching is adapted to the stages of the child's intellectual development and the growth of its cognitive activities. It begins with an integrated course based on an integral, figurative concept of reality, that being the way in which children of this age perceive the world around them. The predominant form of instruction at this stage is didactic play. Subject teaching, which presupposes the child's ability to identify separate components of the surrounding reality (subject definition stage), as well as specific phenomena (subject teaching stage), is introduced in the next phases of elementary general education. The transition to subject teaching is an essential precondition for cognition and for the satisfaction of the child's nascent



interest in study. Elementary education may thus be structurally represented as follows: development of practical reading, writing and numeracy skills and habits (preparatory year); laying the foundations for subject study (language, literature, nature study, mathematics); preparation for the transition to systematic subject study.

The basic school curriculum is characterized by its logical completeness, in other words, a full range of subjects is offered within the framework of State-approved standards. The basic school graduates must have acquired knowledge which he/she will use in later life irrespective of the trade or profession chosen and of whether he/she opts for further education or vocational training. The school must make the student aware of available possibilities, equip him/her with the means of exercising a choice, help him/her to discover and develop his/her capabilities and show different ways in which those capabilities can be applied. Education in civics, transmission of knowledge about the state and society, and preparation for fulfilling one's civic duties are a special task. The new basic school curriculum contains less study courses and subjects. This was achieved among others by: integrating the contents of the subjects taught; structuring them according to their fundamental or secondary nature; rearranging lesson contents in a structurally logical way, in accordance with the new objectives, tasks and functions of instruction at each level; designing open-ended study courses on the modular principle.

On 24 June 1997 the Ministry of Education issued an Order "On the curricula of schools of general education (SGE) in the Republic of Belarus for the school year 1997/98," which served as the normative basis for the gradual introduction of new educational contents and for changing the number of hours allocated to each subject, and which also specified the length of the school year, including school holidays. The Levels I-II curricula and timetables approved by the Order are shown in the tables below:

First level of general secondary education (Grades I–IV): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	I	II	III	IV
I. Core component (compulsory):				
*Introduction to school (1 st month)	*	–	–	–
Belarusian language	6	7	7	7
Russian language	2	3	3	3
Language of national minorities	2	2	2	2
Foreign language	–	–	0–3	0–4
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
Man and the world	2	2	2	1
My Motherland Belarus	–	–	–	2
Arts and crafts	2	2	2	2
Visual arts	–	–	–	0–1
Practical training	–	–	–	0–1
Music	1	1	1	1
Physical training	3	3	3	3
Total core component (max.)	20	22	22	23
II. <u>Optional subjects (max. two weekly periods):</u> foreign language; rhythm and dancing; rudiments of linguistic culture; theatre; drawing and decorative crafts; swimming	2	2	2	2
III. School component ⁽¹⁾				
Total weekly periods (max.)	23	26	27	28

⁽¹⁾ Defined and allocated by the school board on the basis of the difference between the total prescribed number of hours and the number of hours included in the core and optional components. (Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes).

Second level of general secondary education (Grades V–IX): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
I. Core component (compulsory):					
Belarusian language	5	5	3	2	2
Belarusian literature	2	2	3	2	3
Russian language	3	3	3	2	2
Russian literature	1	2	2	2	2
Language of national minorities	3	3	3	2	2
Literature	1	1	1	1	2
Foreign language	3	3	2	2	2
Mathematics	5	5	5	4	5
Data processing	–	–	–	2	1
History of Belarus	1	1	1	1	1
World history	2	1	2	1	1
Man and society	–	–	–	1	1
The World	2	2	–	–	–
Geography	–	2	2	2	2
Biology	–	–	1	2	2
Physics	–	–	2	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	–	2	2
Technical drawing	–	–	1	1	–
Music	1	1	1	1	–
World artistic culture	–	–	–	–	1
Physical training	3	3	3	3	3
Practical training	2	2	2	2	2
Specialized training	–	1	1	1	–
Total core component (max.)	30–31	34–35	34	35	35
II. Optional subjects: second foreign language (L2); L2 literature; study of the country (according to L2 chosen); technical translation; typing (in L2); astronomy; introduction to economics; basics of business studies; nature and society; pre-vocational training.					
	2	2	2	7	14
III. School component ⁽¹⁾					
Total weekly periods (max.)	37	39	40	40	40

⁽¹⁾ Defined and allocated by the school board on the basis of the difference between the total prescribed number of hours and the number of hours included in the core and optional components. (Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes).

The weekly lesson timetables for elementary and basic secondary education in 2008 are presented in the tables below:

Belarus. First level of general secondary education (grades 1–4): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
<i>Core component:</i>				
Belarusian language	3	3	3	3
Belarusian literature	3	3	3	3
Russian language	1	2	2	2
Russian literature	–	1	1	1
Foreign language	–	–	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
Man and the world	1	1	1	1
Visual arts	2	1	1	1
Practical training & drawing	1	1	1	1
Physical education and health	2	2	2	2
<i>Sub-total core component (max.)</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>School component:</i>				
Elective subjects	6	7	6	6
Total weekly periods (max.)	24	26	27	27

Source: Ministry of Education, *Decree No. 58* of 21 July 2008. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in grade 1 and 45 minutes in grades 2-4.

Belarus. Second level of general secondary education (grades 5–9): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Core component:</i>					
Belarusian language	3	3	2	2	2
Belarusian literature	2	2	1/2	1/2	1/2
Russian language	3	3	2	2	2
Russian literature	2	2	2/1	2/1	2/1
Foreign language	2	2	2	2	2
Mathematics	5	5	4	4	4
Biology	–	1	2	2	2
Physics and astronomy	–	1	2	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	2	2	2
Computer studies	–	1	1	1	1
Man and the world	1	–	–	–	–
Geography	–	1	1	2	1
History of Belarus and of the world	2	2	2	2	2
Social sciences	–	–	–	–	1
Visual arts	1	–	–	–	–
Practical training & drawing	1	1	2	2	2
Physical education and health	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Sub-total core component (max.)</i>	24	25	27	28	28
<i>School component:</i>					
Elective subjects	8	8	8	8	10
Total weekly periods (max.)	32	33	35	36	38

Source: Ministry of Education, *Decree No. 58* of 21 July 2008. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Upon completion of grade 9 students have to pass the examinations to receive the certificate of basic education. Basic school graduates can continue their studies in the form of combined vocational and general training at a vocational-technical or specialized secondary educational establishments, or they can continue their general secondary education in general education schools, gymnasiums or lyceums.

The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2005 found that 75.5% of children who were of primary school entry age (age 6) were attending the first grade of primary school. Besides, it is necessary to note that 22.9% of children were attending the first grade at the preschool establishments. In 2005 the majority of children aged 6-9 (93.2%) were attending primary or general secondary school, 6.4% attended preschools and were enrolled into the primary school education programme, and only 0.4% of children did not attend educational establishments. The school net attendance ratio was 95.9% in the case of children aged 10-16. All children that completed successfully the last grade of primary school in 2004/05 were found at the moment of



the survey to be attending the first year of basic secondary education (grade 5). (MSA & UNICEF, 2007).

According to the National Statistical Committee, at the beginning of 2009/10 there were 3,719 institutions providing general education (mostly day-time institutions, e.g. 3,664), including 217 primary schools, 615 basic schools, 2,513 general education schools, 213 gymnasiums, 31 lyceums, seven combined lyceum-colleges, 68 special needs education schools, and 55 evening schools. The total enrolment was about 1,006,700 students, of whom: 11,300 pupils in primary schools, 29,600 students in basic education schools, 803,100 in general education schools, 132,200 in gymnasiums, 8,300 in lyceums, 3,000 in combined lyceum-colleges, 8,900 students in special needs education schools, and 10,200 in evening schools. This total also included nine private general education institutions with an enrolment of 586 students. The total number of teachers was about 135,300. Out of 111,536 teachers (excluding multiple jobs holders), 202 were primary school principals, 613 were basic school principals and 504 deputy principals, 2,763 were principals of general secondary schools and 6,833 were deputy principals. Of the 23,327 teachers teaching in primary classes (of whom 0.6% were male teachers), 82.9% had higher education and 17% had specialized secondary education. Of the 77,294 grades 1-11/12 teachers teaching selected subjects, 91.9% had higher education and 7.7% had specialized secondary education. Furthermore, in 2009/10 there were 11 infant homes taking care of 1,113 children, 34 children's homes with 2,343 children, nine boarding houses with 983 children, and 44 general education boarding schools with 5,598 children. (NSC, 2010).

Secondary education

Basic school graduates can continue their studies in the form of combined vocational and general training at a vocational-technical or specialized secondary educational establishments, or they can continue their general secondary education in general education schools, gymnasiums or lyceums. At the end of grade 11 (general secondary education) students sit the final examination and if successful receive the certificate of (complete) general secondary education. Vocational education programmes are offered in different types of school. Vocational-technical schools offer one- to two-year programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification, and three-year programmes leading to a diploma of vocational training and general secondary education. Professional lyceums offer three-year programmes leading to a diploma of vocational training and general secondary education. Vocational and technical colleges offer three- to four-year programmes for the training of middle-level specialists (grade 9 graduates) and two- to three-year post-secondary programmes for grades 11 graduates.

The weekly lesson timetable of complete general secondary education in 2008 is shown below:

Belarus. Complete general secondary education (grades 10 and 11): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade	
	10	11
<i>Core component:</i>		
Belarusian language	1/2	1/2
Belarusian literature	1/2	1/2
Russian language	2/1	2/1
Russian literature	2/1	2/1
Foreign language	2	2
Mathematics	4	4
Biology	2	2
Physics and astronomy	2	3
Chemistry	2	2
Computer studies	1	1
Geography	2	1
History of Belarus and of the world	2	2
Social sciences	1	1
Physical education and health	2	2
Initial military and health training	1	1
<i>Sub-total core component (max.)</i>	27	27
<i>School component:</i>		
Elective subjects	12	12
Total weekly periods (max.)	39	39

Source: Ministry of Education, Decree No. 58 of 21 July 2008. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

The main aim of vocational and technical education is to train senior personnel and to equip students with work habits and professional skills, combined with a general education and mental and physical development. The requirement for entering a vocational and technical education establishments (VTEE) is completion of general secondary education, of nine-year basic secondary education (in which case the VTEE must also provide a general secondary education course), or practical experience in a trade. Vocational education is offered in vocational-technical schools (VTS); inter-school training and production *kombinats*, centers and other establishments; or directly at the workplace.

In 1997, there were 249 VTEE, including 241 establishments controlled by the Ministry of Education with a total enrolment of over 122,000 students. They included one higher technical school, twenty-six higher vocational schools and five regional centers of vocational education. The vocational and technical education system provided training in 400 industrial trades. Training in VTEE was provided by 13,951 specialists, including 3,906 teachers and 7,363 holders of the master of production training diploma. In addition, there were 226 daytime VTS, 192 of which also offered general education courses.



The VTEE are changing towards a system of training industrial workers for a range of integrated trades, with specialization in a particular trade or trades in the final stage of training, depending on the needs of industry and of the students' own wishes. The practice of training in only one trade is losing ground. Since 1996/97, some VTEE have been training qualified workers who also receive a general education with in-depth study of certain general-education subjects; in other words, these VTEE are beginning to introduce lyceum classes.

The vocational school curriculum has three components: general education; general vocational; and special. The general education component includes a range of humanities subjects, a range of science and mathematical subjects, and physical training. The general vocational component ensures the breadth and fundamental character of the vocational education the student receives. It also involves the study of the objects, subjects, nature and contents of his/her future vocational activity. The special component ensures the assimilation of specialized knowledge, habits and skills and incorporates special theoretical disciplines, as well as two forms of practical training – production training and production practice. Each component includes a time reserve which can be used in the light of regional particularities, the special features of the educational establishment and the student's chosen trade, the qualifications to be obtained, and the individual student's anticipated chances of obtaining them. In addition to the main components, students are offered supplementary extra-curricular educational services in the form of optional classes and vocational counselling.

Specialized secondary education forms a distinct stage in the continuous education system. It is offered by institutions of several kinds, including technical secondary schools and colleges. One of the areas of SSE reform is the preparation of a new register of specialized subjects, branches and qualifications. The underlying principle consists in broadening the specialized subjects and grouping them together into several branches, so as to make it easier for school-leavers to find employment or to switch to another specialty or qualification. More than twenty new specialized subjects have begun to be taught in the Ministry-controlled SSE institutions over the past few years. For the most part they are subjects in the humanities and economics fields. Several higher technical schools have started offering training in such new subjects as: business studies, banking, environmental studies, biochemical production, design, social work, etc. The further development of specialized secondary education entails the creation of new types of institutions, such as colleges and educational/scientific and educational/scientific/industrial associations involving various combinations of vocational-technical, specialized secondary and higher education establishments.

SSE includes theoretical instruction, production practice, and tests designed to evaluate the results of training at the end of each term and at the end of the whole training period. The final training stage is planned depending on the specialization chosen, and can take the form of presenting a diploma project, passing State examinations in certain subjects, or passing a State examination in an entire branch of study. During the practical training period students can obtain a qualification in one or several working trades within their chosen branch of study.

The model structure of a standard curriculum for a SSE institution is as follows:

- *General education component (44 to 46%):* Social studies and humanities cycle: philological subjects; historical subjects; rudiments of social and human sciences; optional subjects. Natural sciences and mathematics cycle: mathematics; physics (including an astronomy section); chemistry; biology. Physical training. Specialized training.
- *B. Professional/vocational component (54 to 56%):* General vocational cycle: basic general science subjects (in line with the specialization branch); general technical; electro-technical; chemical-biological; natural sciences; mathematical economics; psycho-pedagogical; social-economic. Core (compulsory) subjects: industrial safety; ecology; economics; management; law; computer science; computer software. Special cycle: techniques in the special sector or industry; equipment; techniques and organization of production processes (in the professional/vocational activity chosen). Specialization cycle.

Practically all SSE institutions are fee-paying on a contractual basis. Contracts are of different kinds, including bilateral contracts between educational establishments and private citizens, or educational establishments and enterprises (State-owned or privately-owned); or trilateral between educational establishments, citizens and enterprises. Special-purpose admission and training of specialists for specific enterprises and institutions is practiced.

According to the National Statistical Committee, in 2009/10 there were 223 institutions providing vocational training with a total enrolment of 106,700 students. In addition, there were 211 specialized secondary education institutions (including 12 private institutions) with a total enrolment of 166,600 students (including 21,200 students in the private sector), of whom 49,200 students enrolled in correspondence courses. (NSC, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Law on Education addresses the issues of control over the quality of education and defines state control as a regular activity for measuring how education content and quality correspond to education legislation and national standards. Quality control, as stated in the Law, is arranged through self-assessment, inspection and attestation.

Self-assessment is a type of quality control implemented at school level in accordance with the procedures set up by the Ministry of Education. The report on self-assessment is produced and presented to the external body during the attestation. Inspection is arranged mostly by the local administration to control different areas of school activity. It is organized regularly several times per academic year; for example, extra-curricular activities with students in vocational schools are often inspected. Attestation is a type of control and assessment procedure covering the overall activity of schools and mostly tests the extent to which the training content, level and quality correspond to education standards. It is arranged once every five years according to the regulations set by the Ministry of Education.



Regardless of the pattern of ownership, all education establishments are subject to an accreditation procedure, which takes place every five years. Accreditation aims at confirming adequate levels of quality and content of education and training, which should meet the requirements of the established educational standards. Accreditation entitles the education establishment in question to issue a standard certificate of education of a corresponding level. Although learning outcomes are key indicators of quality, student marks in final exams and final qualification tests have little to do with the learning outcomes-oriented concept of quality. In vocational education programmes the emphasis is more on input to the system such as the modernization of curricula and equipment and the upgrading of teachers and trainers' skills as the main factors ensuring quality in vocational education and training.

There is a special department in the Ministry of Education responsible for quality concept development and quality regulations in education. As a result, operational department officials show little consideration of quality concept development and stay outside the debates on quality. Instead, operational departments are mainly involved in quality control and information provision and they therefore find it problematic to participate in quality concept development as they consider it outside their remit.

The draft Code for Education emphasizes the need to review existing norms in the control system. It presents a quality management system and identifies new quality procedure norms. It introduces new terms such as "independent quality assessment" and "monitoring" in the legal framework. It may also enhance the involvement of all education authorities in quality concept development in the future and make them more active in its implementation. (Borisova & Kuusela, 2009).

Teaching staff

Usually primary school teachers are trained at specialized secondary education institutions (teacher training schools and colleges) offering programmes lasting three to four years, and at the pedagogical universities and institutes (four- to five-year programmes). Secondary school teachers are trained at pedagogical universities and institutes. An approximate breakdown of teachers employed at different levels of the education system by the type of studies completed is shown in the following table:

**Training of teachers and educators at various levels of the education system
(1997/98)**

Level and type of education	Type of institution	Conditions of admission	Breakdown by syllabus taken	Qualification/type of diploma
Preschool education	Teacher training school or college, pedagogical university (institute), level I	Competitive examination – applicant must have incomplete secondary (9 grades) or secondary education	Social studies and humanities, 20-22%; natural sciences and mathematics, 10-12%; psycho-pedagogical studies, 12-13%; special subjects, 40-45%	Diploma of specialized secondary education, qualified as teacher or educator
Basic general secondary education	Teacher training school or college, pedagogical university (institute), level I	Competitive examination – applicant must have incomplete secondary (9 grades) or secondary education	Social studies and humanities, 20-22%; natural sciences and mathematics, 10-12%; psycho-pedagogical studies, 12-13%; special subjects, 40-45%	Diploma of specialized secondary education, qualified as teacher or educator
Complete general secondary education	Pedagogical university (institute), level I	Competitive examination – applicant must have completed secondary education	Social studies and humanities, 20-25%; general science, 35-45%; special cycle, 25-30%; special subjects, 10-15%	Qualified as basic school teacher
Complete general secondary education	Pedagogical university (institute), level II	Competitive examination - applicant must have completed secondary education	Social studies and humanities, 20-22%; natural sciences and mathematics, 10-12%; psycho-pedagogical studies, 12-13%; special subjects, 40-45%	Diploma of higher education, qualified as secondary school teacher
Technical and vocational secondary education	Industrial-pedagogical polytechnic	Competitive examination - applicant must have completed vocational-technical or secondary school	36 hours of study per week	Diploma of specialized secondary education, qualified as master of industrial training
Higher education	Pedagogical university (institute), level III, HEE according to specialization		Social studies and humanities, 20-25%; general science, 35-45%; special cycle, 25-30%; special subjects, 10-15%	Diploma of higher education



Curricula and syllabi introduced in the last few years place special emphasis on training in psychological disciplines. In teaching educational methods, attention is focused on psychological aspects, aiming at equipping each graduate with a professional grasp of psychology which will help him/her to find the right individual approach to each student.

The system of certification of teaching and schools management staff is an important aspect of the staffing issue. The idea underlying this system is that the professional skills and management abilities of graduates from teacher training establishments must be assessed not only by persons from the world of education, but also by representatives of other sectors of the economy. Here a distinction must be drawn between the State system of certification of teacher training college graduates, and the systems used on the open market. The former is governed by specific legal regulations, while the latter may apply more stringent criteria than the legal norms in force. What is needed is a normative system with certificates specially designed for each category of teacher training establishments that will take account of the interests of the graduates' potential future employers and of the whole of society.

Between 1995 and 1997, fifteen educational establishments for the retraining and advanced training of senior staff were established (one academy, four institutes, five university departments and five training centers). During the same period, licenses were issued for 21 new non-state educational establishments or branches thereof serving the same purpose. As a result of the reorganization of regional Teacher Upgrading Institutes into educational establishments of a new type, the level of the teaching provided has greatly improved in terms of both scientific content and teaching skills. The old institutes, which had been set up in the 1940s, had not been subdivided into departments or faculties, and this lack had been reflected in the quality of their work.

Twelve normative legal documents were drafted and adopted between 1995 and 1997, with the aim of improving the organization and operation of post-diploma training of senior staff. The role of higher and secondary special schools and of the vocational-technical education system in retraining teachers in market-oriented subjects has been strengthened. During 1995 to 1997, 130 educational establishments within the retraining and advanced training system were accredited. A special programme entitled "Development of the system of retraining and advanced training in the Republic of Belarus in the years 1998-2000" was drawn up in 1997 with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of post-diploma education. A Council on problems of retraining and advanced training of senior staff was established by a Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 15 August 1995, in order to ensure the application of a unified policy in the field of post-diploma education, coordinate all aspects of work being done in that sphere, and strongly enhance the Ministry of Education's influence on that work.

The decision was taken to create a number of educational establishments that will focus their attention on specific areas of education, the provision of scientific and methodological materials to those areas, and the training and advanced training of senior teachers and educationalists. The Institute of Professional Education and the Institute of Innovative Techniques, attached to the State Polytechnic Academy, were established to this end. The parent organization of the advanced training system is the



Academy of Post-Diploma Education. Its duties include the organization, scientific direction, coordination and methodological guidance of purpose-oriented training of teaching and research staff for regional retraining and advanced training institutes. The Academy manages a database of advanced innovative teaching methods and experiences, providing advisory and methodological services to regional and other institutes and to the teaching profession in general.

The State policy on post-diploma education is based on the following principles: to meet as fully as possible the needs for highly qualified teaching staff; to develop an operational strategy for the development of the staff training and re-training system; and to provide economic, legal, organizational and other guarantees in this area.

The rights and duties of teachers and the main socio-economic parameters of their activities are set forth in the Law on Education and the Trade Unions Act. Teachers in Belarus have had to face many social, economic and professional problems in recent years, including: the teaching profession's loss of social status and prestige; low salaries and an inadequate system of payment; poor housing and other living conditions; heavy and sometimes excessive workloads, which often entail the deterioration of teaching quality; and insufficient use made of the socio-economic and professional privileges available to teachers.

In the first half of 1997, the average salary of all staff employed in education was 1.64 million roubles (US\$69.6 at the average weighted National Bank rate), or 74% of the average monthly wage in all branches of the economy. During the same period, the average teachers' salary was 1.96 million roubles, or 74% of the average earnings of industrial employees, a lower figure than in the first half of the preceding year. Young trained teachers and preschool staff with a monthly wage of 1.3-1.5 million roubles, which corresponded to only 60% of the minimum consumer budget, were below the official poverty line.

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For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>