



Project Information Document/ Integrated Safeguards Data Sheet (PID/ISDS)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 09-Oct-2018 | Report No: PIDISDSC25420



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country Belarus	Project ID P167992	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Belarus Tertiary Education Project (P167992)
Region EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	Estimated Appraisal Date May 16, 2019	Estimated Board Date Dec 13, 2019	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) Republic of Belarus	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

The DO is to modernize Belarus' tertiary education sector to improve the teaching and learning environment and the labor market relevance of programs.

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

SUMMARY

Total Project Cost	50.00
Total Financing	50.00
of which IBRD/IDA	50.00
Financing Gap	0.00

DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	50.00
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Environmental Assessment Category
B - Partial Assessment

Concept Review Decision
Track II-The review did authorize the preparation to continue



Other Decision (as needed)

NA.

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

As the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for FY18 – 22 highlights, Belarus has achieved inclusive growth over the last 25 years with an impressive reduction in poverty, but changes are needed for its development to be sustainable and fast enough to meet society's expectations. Growth has been driven by capital investment and has been dependent on foreign borrowing, imports of subsidized fuel and economic developments in Russia. Investment decisions have not always been driven by competitiveness criteria and until recently public expenditure and wages have periodically been growing faster than productivity.

The Program of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for 2016-20 (Program 2016-20) has the objective of improving living standards through enhanced competitiveness, innovation and an increase in the volume and efficiency of overall investment. There are four main program areas: unleashing entrepreneurship and enhanced macro-economic management, promoting innovation-based growth, developing human potential and the quality of life, and promoting the green economy. Accordingly, the Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCD, 2018) identifies *maintaining Belarus' human capital edge* as one of the key tasks that lie ahead. However, maintaining and enhancing productivity will require substantial reforms including in tertiary education, in particular at a time of demographic decline.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

In the face of demographic decline and strained public budgets, strengthening the human capital base and endowing effectively young people with relevant skills has become a major concern for many countries, including Belarus. The relevance of advanced and generic skills in modern societies and their labor markets renders higher education¹ particularly important in this respect. The tertiary education system of Belarus consists of 51 institutions, including 42 public and 9 private ones (National Statistical Committee, 2017), a significant share of which is located in Minsk. Public financing for education amounts to 5 percent of GDP, but only 11.3 percent of the education budget goes to higher education (National Statistical Committee, 2017).

The number of students has declined from 362,900 in 2014 to 284,300 in 2017 (National Statistical Committee, 2018), with private enrolment accounting for around 10 percent of the total. Currently, most students are enrolled in 4, 4.5 or 5-year undergraduate programs. However, the degree structure is changing in connection with Belarus' accession to the Bologna Process in 2015: Undergraduate programs leading to the Specialist diploma are transformed into (partly shorter) Bachelor's degree programs, while Master's degree and related programs are developed further. Promoting the connection between higher education and the labor market throughout this transition process has been identified as particularly important by Belarusian higher education stakeholders. The modification of the degree and program structure adds to other tasks lying ahead of Belarus as a member of the Bologna Process. These include a shift toward a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning complemented by, amongst others, a systematic consideration of learning outcomes in higher education and appropriate quality assurance arrangements. Belarus, furthermore, has a well-

¹ In this note, the terms tertiary and higher education are used interchangeably. Higher education normally refers to university education while tertiary education includes all forms of formal education following and building upon (upper) secondary education, i.e. it also includes education delivered by Universities of Applied Science (UAS) and/or via short-cycle programs, for example.



developed distance education sector with a long history. Around 139,200 of the 313,200 undergraduate students were enrolled in distance education programs in the academic year 2016/17.² However, the process of digitalization in higher education provides new opportunities and challenges for promoting Belarusian higher education and increasing its efficiency, pertaining also to forms of provision based on face-to-face interaction in the classroom.

There is awareness amongst policymakers about the need to increase the quality and efficiency of tertiary education services provision, and to modernize the system. In this context, the Government of Belarus and the World Bank have started preparing a Tertiary Education Project (TEP) which will focus on infrastructure investments and digitalization in tertiary education but also on other innovations in teaching and learning and on the implementation of the Bologna Process, for example, by supporting the development of university-internal and external quality assurance.

Following Belarus' accession to the Bologna Process, a pan-European higher education reform initiative, in 2015 and using a pre-tertiary education project as a starting point, the World Bank intensified its dialogue with Belarusian counterparts in the area of tertiary education in 2016. After an initial co-organized Bologna-related event in 2015, it was agreed that the Bank would support the sector in the following areas i) labor-market relevance of degrees and ii) distance education and digitalization of higher education.

The Bank subsequently engaged through Technical Assistance with two workshops and two notes on the listed topics as outputs. These outputs were delivered in FY17; however, the policy dialogue on tertiary education continued and intensified in FY18. This was achieved via joined missions with the general education team in September 2017 and February 2018. In parallel, the team contributed to the development of the new CPF and related consultations. In June 2018, the newly composed tertiary education team conducted an identification mission for the TEP which was followed by a project preparation mission in September 2018.

Relationship to CPF

A new CPF was developed and endorsed in FY18. Tertiary education figures prominently in the new CPF in the context of 'maintaining the human capital edge' of Belarus and preparing graduates for a rapidly changing labor market. The CPF sets out to 'reinforce support for improved education and tertiary education to enhance innovation and competitiveness' (CPF, 2018, 6). According to the CPF (2018, 21) a Tertiary Education Project would contribute to improving 'the relevance of higher education to the economy. It will support greater focus on STEM subjects, on innovation and research, on linking education and training with enterprises, and on integration with the Bologna Process, the standard for tertiary education for Europe, covering inter alia a three-cycle degree structure (Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate), employability, quality assurance as well as mobility and recognition of degrees'.

C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

The DO is to modernize Belarus' tertiary education sector to improve the teaching and learning environment and the labor market relevance of programs.

Key Results (From PCN)

This objective will be reached by: (a) modernizing higher education institutions' infrastructure and facilities towards a

² Data provided by the Republican Institute of Higher Education, Belarus. While the term used is 'distance learning', in fact, this seems to be more of a blended approach with distance elements and direct interactions.



sustainable and inclusive teaching and learning environment; (b) supporting innovative and technology-enhanced student-centered teaching and learning approaches; (c) promoting better alignment of graduates' skills with labor market needs through better quality and relevance of degrees ; and (c) supporting Belarus in implementing the Bologna Process which includes providing assistance for establishing an adequate quality assurance mechanism.

The Project's achievement of the PDO will be measured via the following indicators:

- A three-cycle degree structure in line with the requirements of the Bologna Process is in place and being implemented
- The newly established Belarus quality assurance agency is a full member of ENQA³ and listed on EQAR⁴

Intermediate indicators to measure the progress of each component will be developed during the appraisal phase. They could include the following:

- Percentage of targeted higher education institutions with improved facilities
- Direct project beneficiaries (#), e.g. students benefiting from revised curricula, of which female (%)⁵
- Beneficiaries that assess that project investments reflected their needs (%)⁶
- Percentage of sub-projects with joint design of study programs developed by participating higher education institutions and employers
- External and internal quality assurance mechanisms in place and operational
- The Ministry of Education promotes the graduate tracking system, e.g. by producing (#) policy papers on the relevance of higher education study programs using information collected through the graduate tracking system

D. Concept Description

Component 1: Modernization of the tertiary education teaching and learning environment

The modernization of the Belarus tertiary education system will be supported under the project through the enhancement of the physical environment for teaching and learning and curriculum reform at the tertiary level. Efficiency of education and the enhancement of the learning environment are inextricably linked. True efficiency in the sector can only be realized when fiscal savings are complemented with investments in quality-enhancing inputs (qualified staff, modern facilities, appropriate information technology and laboratory equipment). Research evidence increasingly points to positive relationships between the physical conditions of education institutions and student learning. For example, Hanushek (1995) found that of 34 production function studies in developing countries that investigated the links between physical facilities and student learning, a large majority revealed a positive effect on learning achievement of education institution infrastructure quality.⁷ In addition to general aspects of teaching and learning environments, accessibility of tertiary

³ <http://www.enqa.eu/>

⁴ <https://www.eqar.eu/>

⁵ Direct project beneficiaries will be further refined during preparation.

⁶ Satisfaction surveys would be designed to collect feedback from both students who benefitted from improved degrees and employers. The definition will be refined during preparation.

⁷ Similar results have been observed throughout Latin America (Duarte, Bos and Moreno 2010; Duarte, Gargiulo and Moreno 2011; and UNESCO-LLECE 2008), Africa (Michaelowa and Wechtler, 2006; Joseph and Wodon, 2014; Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994; and World Bank, 2004), and high-income countries like the United States (Berner, 1993; Earthman, Cash and Van Berkum, 1996; O'Neill, 2000; Rydeen, 2009; and Earthman, 2002).



education facilities to staff and students with disabilities and compliance with environmental standards need to be ensured. Development and implementation of an infrastructure improvement package for receiving universities is thus an important priority.

The client has already collected project proposals (referring to infrastructure needs) from higher education institutions which seek a modernization of infrastructure and the teaching and learning environment. Proposals from universities were selected focusing on:

- (i) *regional higher education institutions*, as they have an important role to play in creating and fostering a dynamic social and economic environment, and
- (ii) *higher education institutions aspiring to become entrepreneurial universities* (“Universities 3.0”). The project would support the creation of learning spaces that are conducive to bolster entrepreneurial culture (i.e. through the creation of incubators, innovation hubs, etc.).

MoEd envisages Component 1 and 2 to focus on the ‘development of innovative capacity of higher education institutions for improving the quality of learning and research in line with labor market development prospects’ (status 24 August 2018). To achieve this, *inter alia* the following activities would be supported under Component 1:

Sub-component 1.1: Modernization of the physical environment for teaching and learning

This sub-component will focus on the rehabilitation of buildings and premises of higher education institutions in order to a) improve the overall conditions for teaching and learning and b) create a barrier-free environment for learning and improving access and working and learning conditions of staff and students with disabilities by creating an inclusive learning and working environment and c) improve energy efficiency of buildings and premises.

Sub-component 1.2: Enabling high quality practical training

This sub-component will focus on modernization of laboratories of higher education institutions to support practical aspects of students training especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects; it will include modernization of laboratory and research equipment as well as facilities for laboratory and practical tutorials, while ensuring sharing and efficient use of facilities.

Component 2: Innovations in teaching and learning

MoEd takes an active interest in innovative approaches to the rehabilitation of universities’ buildings and facilities, including best international practices and experience on the development of conducive environments for tertiary level learning which will be covered under Component 1. However, MoEd and the World Bank team agree, that this will be complemented by curriculum reforms focusing on learning outcomes approaches, relevance of tertiary education for the labor market including effective teaching and learning practices in line with modern labor market demands, mobility and transparency tools like ECTS – the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, Diploma Supplement, etc. as well as measures to support innovative teaching and learning through digitalization.

During project preparation, the World Bank will in parallel implement a grant from the British Government which focuses on enabling evidence-based tertiary education policies. Under this grant, a handbook for the establishment of learning outcomes will be developed which will provide guidance for future curriculum reforms as well as a proposal for a graduate tracking system, tracing students’ transition into the labor market. Such a system could help policy makers as well as



families and students to make more informed choices. If accepted by the Government, the graduate tracking system could be piloted, evaluated and rolled out under the project.

Component 2 sets out to support different ways of promoting and implementing innovations in the teaching and learning process and on the institutional level.

Subcomponent 2.1: Development of learning outcomes and curriculum reform

The Belarus' National Qualifications Framework which contains generic learning outcomes (in the form of knowledge, skills and competences defined per degree level) is currently in draft form. The definition of generic learning outcomes is an important step towards development of the new degrees (Bachelor, Master). While further work is assumed to involve sector councils for certain groups of professions, the definition of learning outcomes of the program level will be an important task requiring support under the new project. One of the outputs of the EFO work will be a handbook for the development of learning outcomes in the context of Belarus higher education. However, in order to carry out this task successfully in the future, academics will need to be trained and supported through advisory work (consultant services). Subsequently, universities will need to modernize their programs (and develop new programs) in accordance with the established learning outcomes which also reflect the needs of the labor market. Again, this work will need to be accompanied by training and consultant services (expert advice) as well as possible peer learning events and cooperation with experienced academics and institutions in Europe.

Subcomponent 2.2: Internationalization of higher education and mobility tools

Internationalization is an important goal of Belarus' higher education sector. In Belarus, there is a clear interest in good practices in other countries and a willingness to share local experience. Internationalization does not only support the modernization of higher education institutions and the teaching and learning process, it can also be an important income source for higher education institutions. Finally, internationalization and the introduction of mobility tools (like ECTS) play an important role in the Bologna Process and thus form part of Belarus' commitments. In addition to training activities and expert advice (consulting service), this sub-component could support twinning projects involving Belarus and foreign universities, peer learning events and possibly study visits to countries and institutions featuring best practice examples, as well as support pan-European activities like participation in EUROSTUDENT⁸.

Sub-component 2.3: Digitalization

A new concept of development of technology-enhanced teaching and learning' in the Republic of Belarus until 2025 has been prepared; tertiary education plays a prominent role in this strategy. Sub-component 2.3 will support related activities on the tertiary level. Belarusian State University, Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radio-electronics, Grodno State University, Republican Institute of Higher Education and the Main Information and Analytical Center (GIAC) of the MoEd provided their inputs for the composition of this component. Criteria/a clear rationale for support under this component are under development and will be communicated to the Bank team. Certain activities under this component, e.g. industry-relevant trainings, could potentially be co-funded by employers⁹.

⁸ <http://www.eurostudent.eu/>

⁹ More broadly during project preparation and in line with the new Maximizing for Finance Development (MFD) strategy, the World Bank team and the Government of the Republic of Belarus will explore potential opportunities for increasing the leverage and effectiveness of WBG's engagement through the mobilization of private sector investment, expertise and finance in support of the project development outcomes.



Further, there are ongoing discussions on the potential establishment of a Virtual University. This would include the creation of an online (web-based) education platform through which the Virtual University would service future distance learners. An initial investment list for this sub-component contains hardware and software items required for the construction of the envisaged online platform. The organizational model under which this platform would be operated - especially the division of tasks and responsibilities between the new Virtual University and the existing higher education institutions in developing, offering, and certifying future distance learning programs requires further discussion, as well as how MoEd will ensure that all students profit from digitalization and it results in an overall higher quality of provision. In this context, MoEd considers, for example, the establishment of centers for digital skills.

Component 3: Quality Assurance (QA)

Internal and external quality assurance are key aspects of the Bologna Process and in fact of all well-functioning tertiary education systems. While external quality assurance serves accountability purposes (but also within the framework of a more formative approach supports enhancement of provision), the main responsibility for quality assurance lies with higher education institutions themselves (Berlin Communique, 2003). Thus, external QA needs to be complemented by internal QA to avoid overly bureaucratic systems and ensure ownership.

Options and modalities for the establishment of an external quality assurance agency were discussed at the QA workshop on 05 June 2018. While various aspects of the establishment of the new agency (including capacity building and physical investments) should be supported under the TEP, MoEd and WB team agreed that it will be important to also support universities in their endeavors to strengthen internal QA under this component, e.g. through peer learning events. MoEd envisages the following sub-components:

Sub-component 3.1: Establishment of an external quality assurance system for tertiary education

This component will include the development of a legal framework for the external quality assurance system in tertiary education in line with ESG-2015¹⁰. In particular, work under this component will support the establishment of an ESG-compatible National Quality Assurance Agency (BQAA). The project will fund infrastructure and equipment of the new body as well as capacity building and training for leadership and staff of the new agency. This could also extend to peer learning events, study visits to well-established European QAAs, etc.

Sub-component 3.1: Development of internal quality assurance

Work under this component will include the development of the legal framework for internal quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG-2015). It will include support to higher education institutions for the development and adoption of the internal quality assurance system in line with ESG-2015 e.g. through capacity building measures, peer learning and trainings. This will be needed since internal QA at nearly all institutions is currently based on ISO certification; however, many HEIs consider this process-driven approach as unsuitable for their type of institutions.

Component 4: Project Management:

The objective of this component is to ensure adequate support for the implementation of the proposed project activities. To this end, the proposed project would finance consultant services, training directly related to project implementation, financial audit, and selected operating expenses. MoEd currently envisages the following under this Component (status 24 August 2018): *The provision of support (including consultants' services and training) for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project, including remuneration for the staff of the Project Implementation Unit and the carrying out of the project audits.*

¹⁰ https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf



SAFEGUARDS

A. Project location and salient physical characteristics relevant to the safeguard analysis (if known)

The Project is country wide however exact location of the higher education institutions is not fully known. The list of final higher education institutions to be funded out of the project will be agreed during project preparation. Majority of these higher education facilities are located in the built-up areas. These are without significant environmental features and are little likely to be impacted with proposed project activities.

B. Borrower’s Institutional Capacity for Safeguard Policies

The project intends to utilize the expertise of the existing Project Implementation Unit (PIU) in charge of the implementation of the ongoing Belarus Education Modernization Project. This PIU has experience in the preparation and implementation of the Environment Management Framework for the ongoing education project, as well as conducting capacity building activities for sub-projects' implementers. PIU capacity will be enhanced to manage both (the on-going and proposed) projects. A clear performance structure for PIU will be defined and sufficient resources identified to cover safeguards requirements in the ESMF.

C. Environmental and Social Safeguards Specialists on the Team

Ruxandra Maria Floroiu, Environmental Specialist
Aimonchok Tashieva, Social Specialist
Oksana Rakovych, Environmental Specialist

D. Policies that might apply

Safeguard Policies	Triggered?	Explanation (Optional)
Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01	Yes	Rehabilitation of higher education institutions may have an impact on the localized environment. The draft list of proposed renovations to the facilities include thermal insulation of exterior walls, replacement/repairs to roofs, replacement of windows, interior repairs, setting up barrier-free environment (ramps, elevators etc.). These interventions would apply both to educational premises and dormitories and have limited, short-term adverse environmental impacts. As the project impacts are likely to be only construction related therefore the project has been categorized as B, and



		any high risk and/or Category A-type subprojects will be screened out. As the exact location of participating higher education facilities is unknown, the project will prepare Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF).
Performance Standards for Private Sector Activities OP/BP 4.03	No	This Policy is not applicable to the project therefore not triggered.
Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04	No	No natural or critical habitat is present within, close or adjacent to the higher education facilities therefore this Policy is not triggered.
Forests OP/BP 4.36	No	No forests are present in the project area as defined in the Policy therefore this Policy is not triggered.
Pest Management OP 4.09	No	The project activities do not use or promote use of pesticides as defined in the Policy therefore this Policy is not triggered.
Physical Cultural Resources OP/BP 4.11	TBD	Some of the buildings to host rehabilitation activities may be classified as national cultural heritage sites, which will be assessed during the preparation of ESMF.
Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10	No	No indigenous peoples are present is present within, close or adjacent to the higher education facilities therefore this Policy is not triggered.
Involuntary Resettlement OP/BP 4.12	No	All rehabilitation works under the project are expected to take place within the existing educational facilities and no land acquisition is expected. The screening process will ensure that buildings selected for rehabilitation do not require additional land and that the building selected do not have mixed ownership or pending claims from individuals. In addition, the actual situation in Belarus is supported by the well-enforced regulatory framework that prohibits squatters and vendors within territory of the school compound, thus permanent or temporary physical or economic displacement as the result of the project is not expected.
Safety of Dams OP/BP 4.37	No	The project activities do not involve any works at or closer to dams as defined in the Policy. This Policy is therefore not triggered.
Projects on International Waterways OP/BP 7.50	No	The project does not include activities which impact water bodies related with international waterways as defined in the Policy. This Policy is therefore not triggered.
Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60	No	The project is not located in Disputed Areas as defined in the Policy. The Policy is therefore not triggered.



E. Safeguard Preparation Plan

Tentative target date for preparing the Appraisal Stage PID/ISDS

Apr 15, 2019

Time frame for launching and completing the safeguard-related studies that may be needed. The specific studies and their timing should be specified in the Appraisal Stage PID/ISDS

During the preparation mission, and once the lists of participating higher education institutions and planned interventions are finalized, the safeguards team will perform a screening mission to assess the project environmental and social risks and safeguards requirements. The safeguards team would also assist the PIU in launching the environmental and social assessment process leading to the preparation of Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and preparing the safeguards documentation for the project. The ESMF will be prepared prior to the project appraisal, disclosed locally and at the World Bank site.

CONTACT POINT

World Bank

Nina Arnhold
Senior Education Specialist

Borrower/Client/Recipient

Republic of Belarus
Alexander Turchin
First Deputy Prime Minister
contact@government.by

Implementing Agencies

Ministry of Education
Irina Starovoytova
Deputy Minister
root@minedu.unibel.by

Serhei Kasperovich
Head of the Main Department of Professional Education
sergeak@mail.ru



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20433
Telephone: (202) 473-1000
Web: <http://www.worldbank.org/projects>

APPROVAL

Task Team Leader(s):	Nina Arnhold
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Approved By

Practice Manager/Manager:	Harry Anthony Patrinos	12-Oct-2018
Country Director:	Alexander Kremer	25-Oct-2018