Belarusians are either very lucky people who have achieved gender equality, or most simply do not notice gender discrimination. The results of Pact’s survey show that this topic is on the periphery of public opinion, among both men and women, although there is a slight difference in their perception of the problem.

This piece ends the series of analytical articles based on the Pact-commissioned national representative survey of Belarusians’ attitudes toward reforms, social contract, foreign policy, gender-related issues, civil society, media and the role of the state. The poll was conducted in August-September 2019.

Summary Findings

- Most Belarusians do not believe that they have faced gender discrimination and do not consider it a burning problem for the country.
- Men notice inequality less often than women.
- Of the small group of respondents who faced gender discrimination, the majority experienced it in the context of employment and professional activities.
- The efforts of all stakeholders combating gender inequality – NGOs, international organizations and the state – are practically invisible to society.

Gender inequality is a phenomenon that is rather distant from Belarusian mass consciousness. More than 70% of Belarusians either believe that it does not exist in our country, or do not understand what this notion means.

Survey respondents’ answers change with age. Almost half of older respondents (61-75 years old) do not understand what gender inequality is, while among young people (18-29 years old) this number is less than 25%. Awareness of the reality of this problem also decreases with age: 15% of young people and only 7% of older people agree that it is a relevant issue for Belarus.

When the results are disaggregated by gender, there are few surprises. Women, who are more commonly affected by gender inequality, consider it a problem for the country more often than men do.
9% of male respondents believe gender inequality is an issue for Belarus, while 44% do not; among women, the ratio 15% to 35%.

One of the possible explanations is not just the fact that men face discrimination less often, but also that they view gender roles in society in a slightly different way. Earlier polls have shown that men are 10%-15% more likely than women to say that cooking, washing, cleaning the house, caring for children and helping them with their homework are women’s responsibilities (IPM, Belarus Population Values Survey, 2018). Similar results were found by assessments of business qualities: Belarusian men are 9%-16% more likely than women to agree that men are better suited to be political leaders and to manage enterprises, and that it is more important for men to acquire higher education (European Values Study, 2017).

The fact that the majority of Pact poll respondents do not consider gender inequality a problem for Belarus does not mean that people consider it a norm in general.

41% of Belarusians fully or partially agree that gender inequality negatively affects the development of the society and the country. 30% disagree with this notion.

The majority of Belarusians report not having faced gender inequality in their lives. After excluding those respondents who are not familiar with the term, the remaining 1031 people were asked if they had ever personally faced this problem. Of this group, 79% answered “no”, and only 5.5% answered “yes”. The remaining respondents refused to answer or found it hard to answer.

Do the vast majority of Belarusians truly live in an environment of gender equality? Are most Belarusians unaware of inequality even when they witness or suffer from it? These questions cannot be definitively answered. However, the breakdown of survey answers by the gender of respondents provides some especially interesting insight into these questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever faced the problem of gender inequality?</th>
<th>(%) of 1031 respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to say</td>
<td>9,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is an almost twofold gender difference among those who answered “yes”. A similar gap exists among those who found it hard to answer. Based on these results, women are both more likely to face instances of gender discrimination, and to face situations that border on gender discrimination, but which they cannot definitively interpret one way or another.
The narrow pool of people who said that they have faced gender inequality (57 respondents in total) were asked to elaborate. While it is impossible to draw statistically significant conclusions from such a small sample, it is notable that 31 people identified instances of gender inequality occurring in the context of “employment, professional activity”.

This result is confirmed and expanded upon by the data from more in-depth studies of gender discrimination in Belarus. According to the survey of Gender Perspectives NGO (August 2018), the most common form of discrimination is questions asked of women during job interviews about marital status and plans for children. 35% of female respondents faced this situation, and nearly 10% were denied a job based on their answers.

Even higher rates of gender discrimination were revealed by the 2017 study conducted by JOBS.TUT.BY – a popular employment portal. Of 901 women surveyed, 62% were asked such questions when applying for a job. In addition, women said that they experienced sexual harassment from a colleague or a manager four times more often than men did (10.2% vs. 2.4%).

Considering the small share of Pact survey respondents that reported personally facing gender inequality, the higher numbers from other polls suggest that Belarusians (including women) often do not identify gender discrimination as such.

There are two possible explanations. Either gender terminology is still unfamiliar to most people and they therefore do not think in such terms, or the majority of those who have experienced discrimination consider it mundane - a social norm that does not require any additional reflection.

Given that most Belarusians are not aware of gender inequality, it is not surprising that the work of organizations combating it remains almost invisible.

Half of the Pact survey respondents report not being interested at all in the problem of gender inequality in Belarus; the other 15% found it hard to answer the question, and 7% were certain that no one is combating it in Belarus. Another 19% do not know anything about anti-discrimination initiatives, but would like to know more. Hence, to greater or lesser degrees, a total of 91% of respondents are ignorant of gender inequality issues. This data is relevant to a smaller sample of 1,031 Belarusians – only those who said they were familiar with the term “gender inequality”.

Of the remaining minority, 3.2% believe that the state is combating gender inequality, 2.3% think that NGOs do this job and 2.2% believe that these are the efforts of international organizations. It is significant that the visibility of anti-discrimination efforts is at the level of sampling error for a topic that directly affects the interests of a much larger part of the society. These and other survey data demonstrate a clear failure of the communication strategies of gender equality stakeholders active in anti-discrimination work.

The national public opinion survey referenced in this paper was commissioned by Pact, conducted by MIA Research and funded by USAID. The survey was conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews at the respondents' place of residence. The survey sample of 1,507 people interviewed was fully representative with the permissible sampling error of 3%.

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