

bi-monthly newsletter

BelarusDigest

ABOUT

DIGEST

POLITICS

ECONOMY

SECURITY

SOCIAL

MYTHS

Abortion In Belarus

Paula Borowska

18 July 2013



Belarus remains one of the leaders among post-communist countries when it comes to the abortion rate. In 2012, nearly 27 thousand pregnancy terminations took place in Belarus.

Although the authorities restricted the abortion law in 2013, Belarus still remains more liberal than the majority of Western countries. The present shape of the abortion law in Belarus bears the legacy of Soviet times when ending a pregnancy was widely available and has been practised since 1920s.

Supporters of the liberal abortion law argue that poor socio-economic conditions should justify the decision to end a pregnancy. On the other hand, Catholic and Orthodox churches and Belarusian pro-life movements emphasize the Christian dimension of the abortion and call for respecting traditional values. Apart from the hot ideological discussion over abortion, Belarus today is struggling with demographic problems typical to all European societies and its need to rethink its present social policies.

Present Abortion Law in Belarus: Back to the Soviet Times

According to the World Health Organisation, "Eastern European countries have the highest estimated abortion rates in the world". The experts, however, underline that a number of abortions there dropped dramatically between 1995 and 2004, probably due to the increased use of contraception.

Year	2000	2009	2010	2011
Number of abortions	121,900	30,86	27,662	26,858

Source: Ministry of Health of Belarus

Many think that abortion remains popular in Belarus because of insufficient knowledge about modern birth control methods. They often advocate education on family planning beginning early in a child's school years as one of the key issues to protect teenagers against unwanted pregnancy.

Others, with the Christian churches at the forefront, explain the wide use of abortion by the crisis of values in Belarus aftermath the Soviet times.

Serious changes that limit abortion

The roots of today's high abortion rate go back probably to legislation created during Soviet times. Its authorities legalised abortion on demand back in the 1920s and since then it has been widely practised. Other communist countries took after Moscow and also opened the window for a rather wide use of abortion.

Soviet Belarus implemented its abortion law in 1950s and with minor changes to them, they have remained in force until recently. Before 2013, the law permitted abortion in different ten cases. For example, divorce during the time of a pregnancy or the imprisonment of a husband now are no longer give a woman a right to have an abortion.

Today the new law permits abortion only up until the 22nd week at the latest if pregnancy is a result of rape or a woman lost parental rights. Due to the social conditions, a woman can decide on abortion until 12th week. Latvia allows abortion on request only within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. Lithuanian law also permits women to have an abortion until the twelfth week of pregnancy. In Ukraine, women can end pregnancy until the 12th week but in some cases also they are permitted to end a pregnancy up until the 22nd week. Both Ukraine and Lithuania are now considering placing further restrictions into their abortion laws. Poland has banned abortion in the 1990s. Now Poles cannot legally terminate pregnancy except in three situations: when the health or life of a woman is at stake, if there is a malformed fetus or when the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act.

A scale of abortion in Belarus

Belarus Digest 922

Myths about Belarus

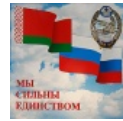
Is Belarus "the last dictatorship in Europe"?



Political freedoms in Belarus are severely restricted, especially in comparison with other European countries.

However, the authorities are a long way from controlling all spheres of society, as would happen in a totalitarian state. Elections,...

Are Belarusians pro-Russian?



Most Belarusians do not have access to independent media and as a result public opinion in the country is determined by the state-run media.

However, despite the pro-Russian and anti-Western rhetoric which dominates this media, only a minority (...)

Is Belarus' national religion Russian Orthodox Christianity?



There are no reliable statistics. It is generally considered that more than half of the Belarusian population

are Russian Orthodox and about a third of the population are Roman Catholics. Protestants account for about 25% of the population. However...

[More myths >](#)

Follow @belarusdigest 789 followers

Recent stories



Shadow Economy Threatens the Future of Belarus

Last month the Deputy Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Belarus confirmed that the government wants to introduce a new tax...



Live Streaming of Belarus Research Council's Debate 'What Belarusians Think'

The Eastern Europe Studies Centre and the Belarus Research Council are organising the third live panel discussion What Do ...



Getting to know Belarus: Recreation and Tourism

As the World Hockey Championship 2014 approaches, the organising committee and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus announced that they plan to...

Latest comments

Country	Percent of known pregnancies ending in legal abortions in 2010
Russia	39.9
Latvia	27.9
Ukraine	26.2
Belarus	23.6
Lithuania	16.4
Poland	0.16

Source: www.johnstonsarchive.net

The Belarusian Ministry of Health reported that nearly 27 thousand abortions in 2011. When comparing 2010 and 2009 the number is steadily dropping.

The chart to the right presents the percentage of aborted pregnancies in 2010 in Belarus and neighbouring countries. However, many illegal incidents take place in so called "underground abortions", particularly in countries with stricter laws. They remain under-reported and thus certainly decrease the overall numbers.

More and more Belarusian women, as in the Western Europe, consciously plan when to start the family. Certainly, each case is individual, but often they have one shared factor: economic circumstances. In the majority of cases, women wish to have children, but first they want to achieve financial stability.

Pro-life Movement in Belarus

In November 2012 the Catholic and Orthodox churches have jointly appealed to the Belarusian authorities for restriction of the abortion law. The Christian churches agree that abortion goes too far in Belarus.

The Churches support the pro-life movement in Belarus. Apparently, their campaigning forced the authorities to seriously re-consider amendments to the abortion law. One initiative, called 'Pro-life Belarus', aims to promote values such as family and the protection of life. It is a social movement that acts in close cooperation with the Orthodox Church.

Another organisation, Open Hearts Foundation works in Mahiliou, mostly with the Catholic Church. Both engage themselves into organising lectures, seminars and supportive meetings. They offer also free counselling on maternity- and pregnancy- related issues for women throughout Belarus.

Abortion and the Demographic Reality

A high abortion rate, together with a low birth and death rates all matter when it comes to demographic problems in Belarus. Like many other European countries, Belarus is also struggling with a decline in population. In the data revealed by the National Statistics Committee, the birth rate in 2013 reached a level of 11.9 per 1,000 population. On the contrary, a death rate is estimated at 14.2 per 1,000 population.

Not surprisingly, Belarusian authorities want to reverse this trend. On 17 June First Deputy of Presidential Administration, Aliaksandr Radzkou, called to make large families fashionable in Belarus. Alexandr Lukashenka also likes to talk about reversing the negative demographic trends in Belarus. But despite the talk and attempts to reverse the situation, Belarusians are getting married less and the number of [divorces](#) has increased over the last years.

A better way would be to implement a set of consistent policies encouraging both men and women to be able to "afford" having children. State benefits for families with children or support for housing might work in Belarus. However, increasing the [economic difficulties](#) taking hold in Belarus may make implementation of these plans more difficult.

Of course, changes in the abortion law will not resolve Belarus's demographic problems. Belarusians should have more forums to discuss issues of abortion, contraception and family planning. For now, the Internet remains the only place to do so.

Paula Borowska

is an analyst with the Centre for Transition Studies in London

Tags: ABORTION ABORTION LAW IN BELARUS CATHOLIC CHURCH DEMOGRAPHY IN BELARUS ORTHODOX CHURCH PAULA BOROWSKA PRO-LIFE IN BELARUS SOCIAL

1125 reads PRINT FORWARD PDF

Tweet 2

Like 5

Related posts



Ukrainian girl

Democracy from Russia?! What a joke. Poor Belarusians, May God help them preserve their identity and overcome all the obstacles, especially, the ones coming from Russia.

[Does Russian Opposition Differ With Putin On Belarus?](#) · 2 weeks ago



Dane

Many problems would have been solved, if Little father Stalin had made Kaliningrad a part of the belarusian ssr...

[New Round of Lukashenka's Game](#) · 2 weeks ago



Noname

Great intro to a series of articles! I'm interested to learn more about the inability of the author to "form a solid social group" and related "fairly closed culture" of Belarusians. I think that..

[Getting to Know Belarus: An American's Year in Minsk](#) · 3 weeks ago



Belarus Freedom News

Who guarantees that the Rosatom power plant(s) in Avstravets ever would become property of the Republic of Belarus? Which Belarusian expert has ever seen or read any contractual facts about the...

[Belarus and Lithuania: A Tale of Two Nuclear Power Plants](#) · 1 month ago



belarusdigest

Yes, it was a technical glitch. Thanks for letting us know.

[Top Four Myths about Belarusian Higher Education](#) · 1 month ago

Limits of Religious Tolerance: Protestantism in Belarus
Two Christmases in One Country
Orthodox Church is Losing Belarus

0 comments



Leave a message...

Newest Community

Share Settings

No one has commented yet.

Subscribe Add Disqus to your site

Found a typo? Select spelling error with your mouse and press Ctrl + Enter

Recommendations

- The Youngest Pensioners in the World**
9 people recommend this.
- Sex Tours Save the Belarusian Tourist Industry**
36 people recommend this.
- Re-Writing History in Belarus**
13 people recommend this.
- Belarusian Government: Getting Older and Less Capable of a Reform**
14 people recommend this.
- Young Fashion Labels from Belarus - a New Export Hit?**
6 people recommend this.
- Belarus Risks Becoming only State Stripped of EU Trade Preferences**
3 people recommend this.
- Painful Lessons of Eurasian Integration**
4 people recommend this.
- The Rise and Fall of Affordable Housing in Belarus**
3 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

Follow us



Support Belarus Digest



ABOUT US WRITE FOR US WORK WITH US CONTACT US PRIVACY POLICY LINKS MOBILE VERSION