

Social and demographic portrait of a public servant in Belarus

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the quantitative and qualitative composition of public service is constantly raised among experts and authorities. This topic is driven by their understanding that Belarus has an excessive number of public servants with a relatively low level of training. Attempts are being made to increase the salaries of public servants by reducing their number, which may boost the entrance of more motivated and qualified personnel into the sector.

In this article, we will discuss how social and demographic characteristics of public servants have changed over the past years. Most data for the study was taken from statistical bulletins published by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) every two years¹. The latest available data provide a snapshot of the composition of public service for 2019. To assess changes, each indicator is compared to previous years - 2017 and, especially, 2015, after which there was a significant reduction in the number of public servants.

In the methodological regulation on the collection of statistical information developed by Belstat, the term “public servant” is interpreted in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Public Service”², while available data on the number of public servants does not include employees of law enforcement agencies (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Security Committee, State Border Committee, Department of Financial Investigations, Security Council, Operational and Analytical Center, Investigative Committee, State Forensic Examinations Committee), that is, only data on civilian public servants are publicly available. The number of employees performing military service and service in paramilitary organizations (these categories are identified in accordance with the new Law “On Public Service” of 2022³) is classified information. This distorts the picture of the total number and share of public servants among the economically active population and affects individual indicators (for example, the gender ratio should be more balanced, since male employees prevail in the law enforcement agencies).

¹ Labor and Employment collections for 2016, 2018, and 2020 https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_18061/

² Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Public Service”, No. 204-3 of June 14, 2003, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=h10300204>. In 2022, a new Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Public Service” No. 175-Z was adopted and came into force, but in the methodological regulations and collections of Belstat for the reviewed period the data are interpreted in accordance with the Law of 2003.

³ Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Public Service”, No 175-3 of June 1, 2022, <https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=h12200175>

CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC SERVANTS BY SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

The number of public servants in Belarus in the first decade of the XXI century exceeded 50 thousand people. For a long time, there was a need to reduce their number, and such attempt was conducted in 2013 by means of the Presidential Decree No. 168⁴. The number of public servants decreased by 12% in the first year after the adoption of the Decree. (Figure 1). In subsequent years, further optimization of the number of employees continued. As a result, by 2019 the number of public servants decreased by 35% compared to 2011.

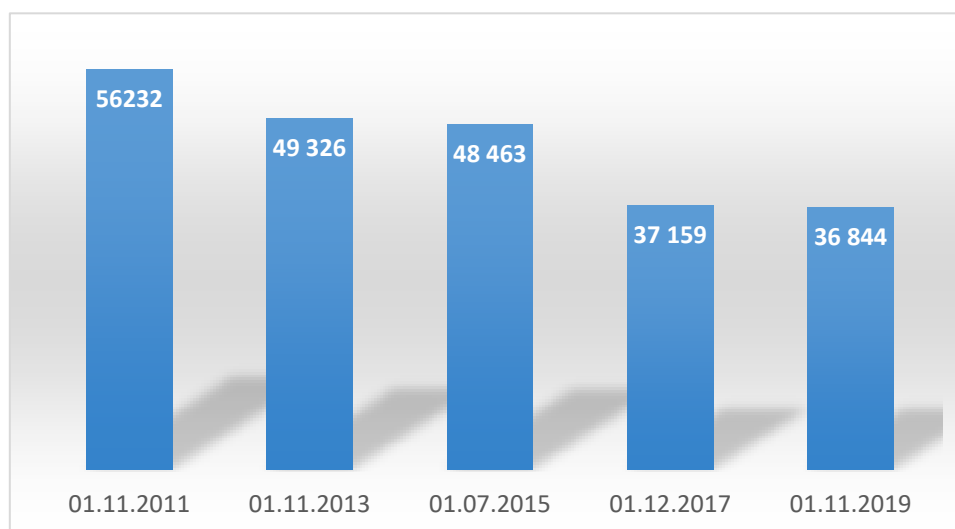


Figure 1: Number of public servants (person).

The reduction in the number of public servants has had little effect on their demographic characteristics. Throughout the period analyzed, women remain the majority among public servants; their share decreased from 70.1% to 68.6% between 2015 and 2019, although this seems to be a temporary fluctuation rather than a trend.

The age composition did not undergo significant changes either (Fig. 2). It is fairly balanced, as employees of the most active working age (30-49 years) continue to prevail. In 2019, the average age of a public servant was 42.2 years. However, it is worth noting the downward trend in the share of young people under 29 and the increase in the share of employees in the 40-49 age cohort, which, if this trend continues, will lead to an older age profile of public servants. There is no significant difference in age composition between men and women, with only the 40-49 age group being dominated by women (36.6% women vs. 30.2% men in the 2019 data) and the 60+ age group being dominated by men (5.8% men vs. 1.5% women in the 2019 data). The higher proportion of men over 60 is due, on the one hand, to the effects of the pension reform

⁴ Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 168 of April 12, 2013 “On Some Measures to Optimize the System of State Bodies and Other State Organizations, as well as the Number of Their Employees”. https://kodeksy-by.com/norm_akt/source-%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%20%D0%A0%D0%91/type-%D0%A3%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7/168-12.04.2013.htm

(in 2019, men retired at 61 and a half, women - at 56 and a half) and, on the other hand, to men holding higher positions, and because of that, men tend to continue working after retirement.

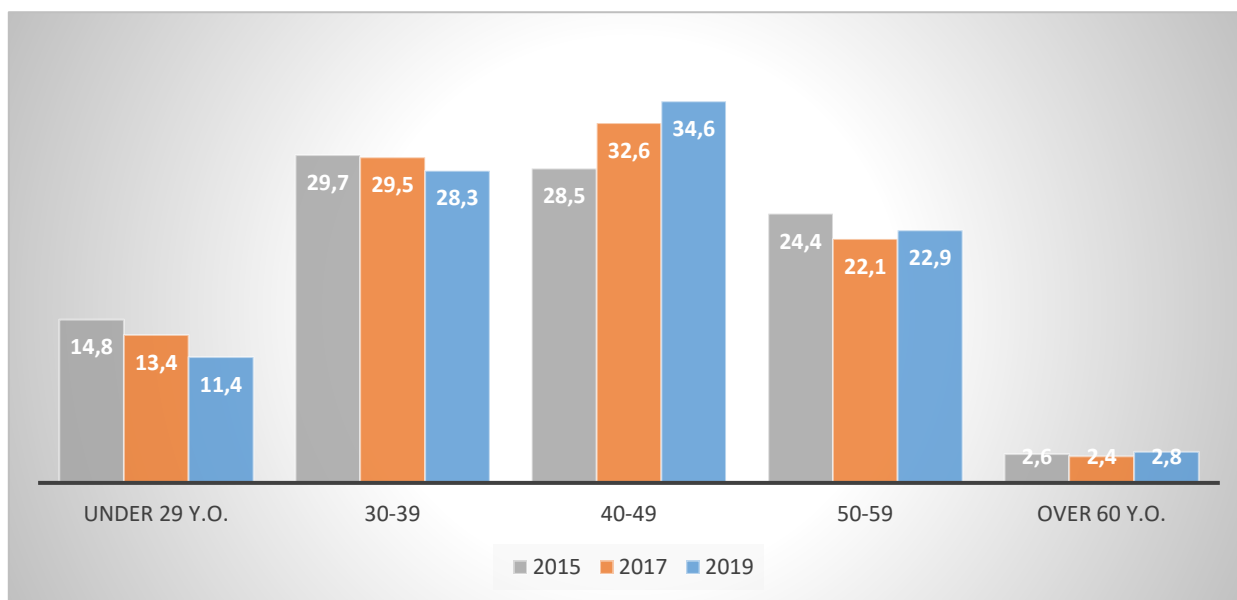


Figure 2. Dynamics of age structure of public servants (%)

It is worth noting that during the most intense decline in the number of public servants between 2015 and 2017, the largest declines (about 30% of the total) occurred in the under-29 and over-50 age groups, especially among females in these age cohorts. During this period, the number of women over 60 years old was halved. The decrease in the number of employees over the age of 50 contributed to the rejuvenation of the managerial staff (the share of heads of organizations and structural subdivisions and their deputies aged 40-49 grew over this period) and a decrease in the share of lower-ranking employees in older age groups (the share of specialists and leading specialists aged 50-59 declined).

The level of education of public servants is high, majority of them have university education (97.9% in 2019); the share of specialists with specialized secondary education (2%) or without any secondary or higher education (0.1%) is insignificant. There is no noticeable difference in the level of education by gender, with a slightly higher proportion of women with specialized secondary education (2.3% vs. 1.3% of men). Between 2015 and 2019, there was an increase in the share of employees with higher education (93.6% in 2015). In terms of positions held, the smallest number of persons with higher education is among leading specialists (92%). Interestingly, 3.1% of heads of organizations and their deputies have specialized secondary education, while there were 4.8% of them in 2015.

The breakdown of the number of public servants **by positions held** is of particular interest. For example, 49.5% of all public servants in 2019 held managerial positions (heads of organizations, structural subdivisions, their deputies and assistants). At the same time, 57.1% of men were in senior positions, while for women the figure was 46%. Women also had the highest number of

chief specialists (38%), whereas among men only one in five was a chief specialist, while one in three was the head of a structural subdivision (Figure 3).

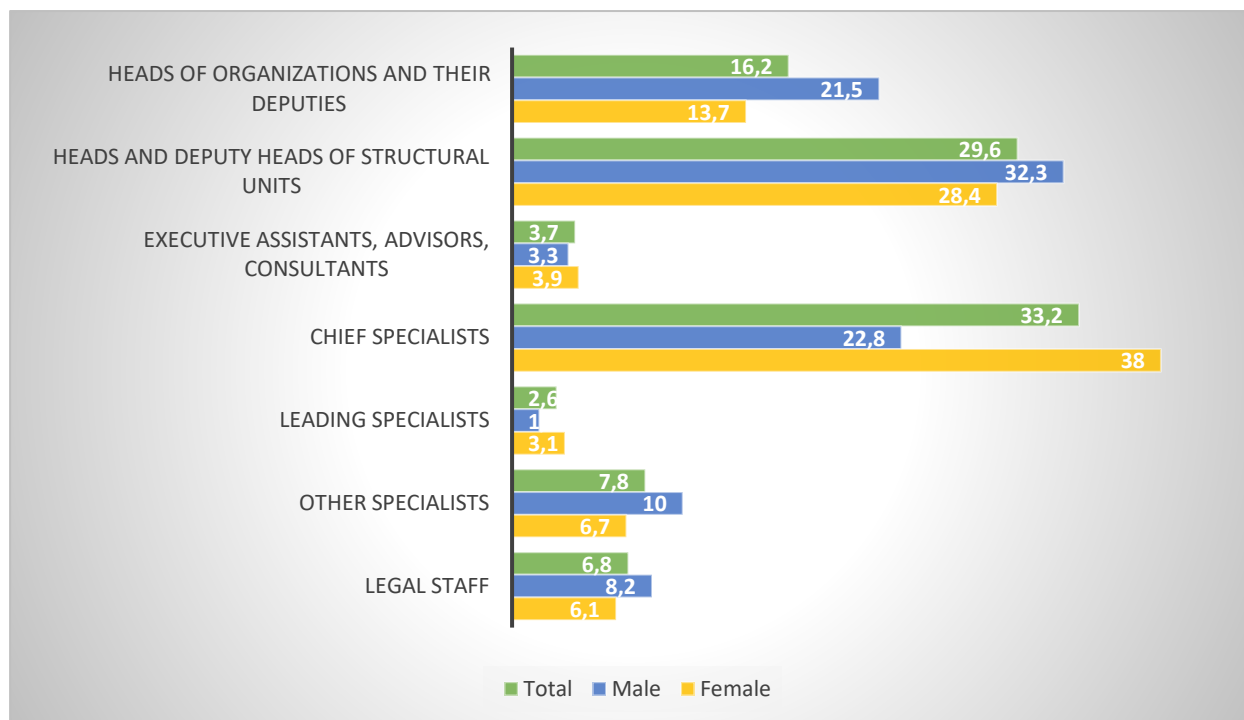


Figure 3. Public servants by positions held, 2019 (%)

From 2015 to 2019, the share of chief specialists decreased (from 36.1% to 33.2%) and the share of managerial staff increased (in 2015, managers and their deputies accounted for 42.6%). The main changes occurred between 2015 and 2017. The number of non-managerial staff in general decreased the most, while the number of managerial staff decreased insignificantly. Thus, the reduction of public servants after 2015 mainly occurred at the expense of non-managerial specialists, who bear the main burden of performing functional duties. Some of them were transferred from the category of public servants to regular employees, including through the reorganization of certain support services⁵, which is indirectly confirmed by the growth of the overall number of people employed in public administration from 184.2 thousand in 2015 to 188.8 thousand in 2016⁶.

The decline in the share of employees in non-managerial positions correlates with a decline in the share of employees with less than 3 years of experience, which fell from 16% in 2015 to 10.4% in 2019 (Figure 4). During the same period, the share of employees with more than 25 years of public service experience increased (this indicator is higher among men than among women).

⁵ Ramasheuskaya I., Rabava, N. “What Governs those who Govern the State: Motivation of Belarusian Public Officials in Numbers”, 2016 https://bipart.eu/picture/library/motivation_final_0.pdf (in Russian)

⁶ “Labor and Employment”, 2020 https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_18061/

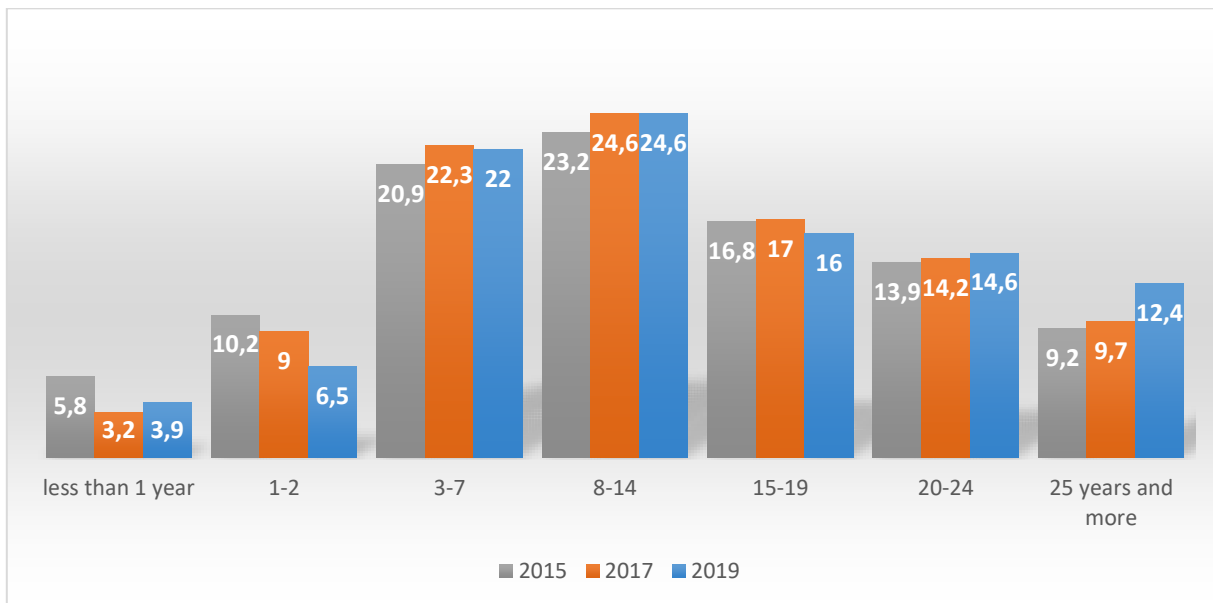


Figure 4. Dynamics of the structure of public servants by length of service, 2015-2019, %

In 2019, the majority of employees had between 3 and 14 years of service (46.6%). Logically, lower-level employees had a shorter length of service record (most had 3 to 7 years), while managers and their assistants had more than 8 years of service (Figure 5). At the same time, back in 2015, the length of service of specialists and leading specialists was not concentrated in the 3-7-year cohort, but was distributed more evenly, i.e., some employees were not promoted, but, regardless of the length of service, remained in a lower-paid position.

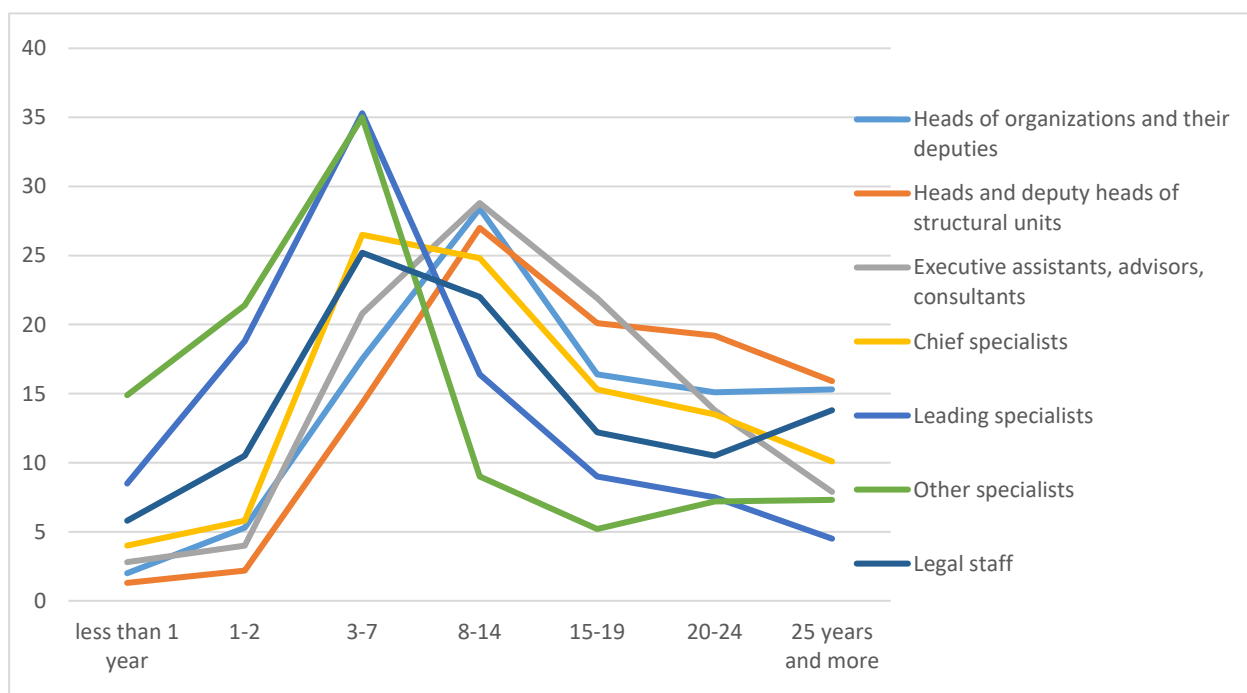


Figure 5. Length of public service by position, 2019, %

Unfortunately, no data on the number of public servants by regions is available after 2015, so it is impossible to say whether the ratio of the number of public servants by regions has changed after the reduction. According to the data for 2015, the largest number of public servants was naturally located in Minsk (11,918 people or 25% of all public servants), where the population is higher and all the central government bodies are concentrated. In other regions, the number of employees was distributed evenly and amounted to about 6 thousand people in each region. However, in relative terms, the smaller the population in an administrative area, the higher the number of public servants per 10 thousand population, since the full list of administrative procedures entrusted to state bodies requires a full staff, the reduction of individual specialists can lead to administrative dysfunction.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the described social and demographic characteristics, we can draw the following portrait of an average public servant: a woman aged 30 to 49, with a higher education, holding a position of chief specialist or, less often, the head or a deputy head of a structural unit, work experience varies from 3 to 14 years. Despite the reduction of the number of public servants by almost a quarter from 2015 to 2019, there were no fundamental changes in social and demographic indicators.

There is still gender imbalance among public servants: men, despite their small number, occupy leadership positions more often and have longer length of service records. For example, there are only a few women among top managers, and men completely dominate among heads of executive committees. For the most part, the “glass ceiling” for women is the position of a deputy head of an organization.

During the most significant reduction in the number of public servants from 2015 to 2017, women, especially those of older age (mostly retired ones) and with low qualifications (specialists and leading specialists), were more likely to be dismissed. This improved the qualitative composition of employees - the share of employees with higher education and the share of employees in managerial positions increased. However, formal signs of improving the quality of employees do not indicate their real level of qualification. There is still a problem of low professionalism of officials in Belarus, which is associated with the existing system of selection for vacant positions⁷ and the lack of modern educational programs and training courses of good quality, including those abroad.

The reduction of middle-ranking employees led to an increase in the workload of the remaining employees and the change in the ratio of managerial and non-management positions. After reduction, managers ended up with fewer subordinates, the number of functional duties of employees has not decreased, and in some organizations even increased because of unclear redistribution of responsibilities between departments. As a result, irregular working hours, execution of tasks assigned by several managers instead of one, which may contradict each other⁸, have become a norm. This affects the quality of the work performed and leads to faster professional burnout.

These working conditions do not contribute to the attractiveness of employment in the public service for young people. The decrease in the share of employees under 29 years and with up to 3 years of work experience indicates an outflow of young employees, who, for example, do not see opportunities for development and switch to private sector jobs after the end of their mandatory work placement⁹. The reduction in the number and share of young people leads to

⁷ From state governance to public administration: how can public administration be assessed in Belarus? BIPART, 2022 https://bipart.eu/picture/library/pa_reform_sigma_2022_eng.pdf

⁸ Public servants turnover in Belarus. BIPART, 2020 <https://bipart.eu/picture/library/motivaciya.pdf> (in Russian)

⁹ In Belarus there is a system of forced two years employment obligations for graduates whose education is governmentally funded.

a situation where organizations are dominated by more experienced employees, in active working age. Technically, this situation contributes to the most intensive professional development and growth among public servants, but, in reality, the motivation of people who remain in this sphere is often unclear. We can assume that this leads to “negative selection” when employees do not see employment opportunities in other spheres, so they are afraid of being fired and demonstrate loyalty to the leadership in order to have prospects for career growth. In addition, the trend of an increasing proportion of employees aged 40-49 years may lead to an ageing of the demographic portrait of a public servant, and turnover among young people will reduce the continuity of generations and the flow of new ideas into the sphere of public administration.