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The Social Services Sector Today

Healthcare

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Over the past few years, the Belarusians saw the mortality rate and the incidence of diseases rise sharply.

The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis figures for 1990–2002 indicate that general health status has been worsening and life expectancy has shortened.

The health of residents of Chernobyl-stricken areas remains a serious problem. The incidence of diseases, for instance of thyroid, has been on the rise.

The Belarusians' health worsened not so much due to environmental factors, however, as due to inefficiencies in the monopolized State healthcare system. The government hampered the development of private healthcare services, while still being unable to provide effective free-of-charge healthcare.

On the one hand, healthcare is suffering from increasing penury, and access to services for low income groups has become limited. On the other, the authorities have been throwing stumbling blocks at investments in private healthcare and research, with public healthcare losing its highly skilled professionals in effect.

In addition, many public health services are no longer free of charge. Hospitals charge patients for drugs, consumables and surgeries. Health benefits for residents of radiation-contaminated areas have been reduced due to shor-

tage of funds. That led to increased incidence of diseases and a higher mortality rate.

Table 12. Disease Incidence

Indicators	Years		
	1990	2001	2002
Total population, in thousands (beginning of year)	10188,9		9950,9
Life expectancy at birth	71,1	68,5	
Life expectancy at birth (women)	75,6	74,5	
Life expectancy at birth (men)	66,3	62,8	
Congenital malformations*	6	9	
Neurological and sensory organ disorders*	265	491	
Blood diseases*	14	24	
Cardiovascular diseases*	116	189	
Tumors*	49	73	
Infectious and parasitic diseases*	308	375	
Skin and connective tissue diseases *	245	393	
Skeletal system and connective tissue diseases*	188	366	
Number of newly registered diseases 000s	5638	7169	

* Newly registered cases per 1,000 cases.

In 2002, the Council of Ministers passed a directive on minimum healthcare guarantees that restricted the range of free-of-charge services to primary medical and sanitary aid, emergency aid for certain conditions, aid to mothers giving birth at maternity hospitals and aid to children under 18.

The government actually acknowledged the crisis of the free-of-charge healthcare system, one that remains largely unchanged from the Soviet era.

Social security system

Belarus' situation is unique in terms of social support for people who cannot cope with their financial problems. Governments of the world's richest co-