

Exploring the Entrepreneurial Potential of Belarusian Migrants in the EU

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ABBA



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ABBA

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background on the Migration of Belarusians to EU Countries

After August 2020, migration from Belarus to Poland and other EU countries increased significantly, largely due to the political unrest and repression following the presidential elections in Belarus.

The elections, which took place on 9 August 2020, resulted in Alexander Lukashenko securing a sixth term in office. The elections were widely criticised by the Belarusian opposition and international observers as being neither free nor fair, leading to widespread protests across the country.

The Belarusian government's response to the protests was marked by severe crackdowns, including the arrest of thousands of demonstrators, the use of force by security forces and the targeting of opposition figures. This political repression led many Belarusians, including political activists, journalists, IT professionals and ordinary citizens fearing persecution, to seek refuge and more stable conditions abroad.

As a result, the **years 2020–2022 saw a historic peak in the migration of Belarusians to Poland and the Baltic states**, a trend further intensified by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Kazakevich, 2023). According to the Committee on Migration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), between 200,000 and 500,000 people left Belarus after August 2020. An estimated 522,000 first residence permits were issued to Belarusians by EU countries between 2020 and 2022, with Poland issuing about 95% of them, and according to a moderate estimate, between 600,000 and 650,000 Belarusians received residence documents in the EU between 2020 and 2023 (Eurostat, 2024). In 2022, Poland alone issued 285,496 residence permits to Belarusians, accounting for 92% of the total issued in the EU (Eurostat, 2024). However, these figures may not accurately reflect the total, as the statistics include different document types, such as residence permits and visas, meaning that some people may have received multiple documents – first a visa, then a residence permit.

As a result, the years 2020–2022 saw a historic peak in the migration of Belarusians to Poland and the Baltic states



The migration of Belarusians is not a recent phenomenon.

Their active migration in the late 1980s and early 1990s occurred because of changes in the legislation on travelling abroad and the liberalisation of everyday life in Belarus. There was a process of repatriation and family reunification, as well as a deterioration in the socio-economic and environmental conditions in Belarus at that time (Shakhotko, 2000). The traditional destinations of migration were Western Europe (especially Germany), the USA, Israel (Shakhotko, Bobrova, Shimanovich, 2012), as well as Canada and Australia (Shakhotko, 2000). During the 2000s, Russia and Poland became more prominent on the Belarusians' migration map. Several internal and external factors stood behind this shift, including economic stagnation in Belarus and the easing of migration legislation in Poland and Russia, particularly for certain social groups, such as holders of the Pole's Card in Poland, as discussed later in this Working Paper.

Throughout the 2010s, Russia ranked first as the main destination for labour migration, according to Belarusian statistics (Yelisseyeu, 2021). Between 2000 and 2014, labour migration to Russia increased, while temporary labour migration to EU countries remained insignificant. This was partly due to the complexity of visa procedures and the cost of visas for Schengen countries. For Belarusians, the cost-benefit balance made Russia a more attractive option, as access to the Russian labour market was much easier (Yelisseyeu, 2014). According to a national survey at the time, respondents listed Poland, the US and Germany as the most important migration destinations after Russia, with Ukraine and the Baltic states also mentioned (Yelisseyeu, 2014).

The popularity of Russia as a destination for labour migration began to shift towards Poland from 2015. This shift was driven by the economic recession in Russia from 2014 to 2016, which led Belarusians to reorient themselves towards the West. From 2015, Belarusian emigration surged, with the Belarusian diaspora in Poland increasing by 480% and in Lithuania by 700% (with Estonia's increasing by 90%, Latvia's by 40% and Germany's by 36%) (Kazakevich, 2023). Although Russia remained the preferred destination for Belarusian labour migration at the time, wage growth and simplified employment procedures in Poland contributed to the shift that occurred within a few years (Yelisseyeu, 2021).

There was a significant shift in the migration of Belarusians to Poland and Lithuania in 2017. This can be seen in the increase in the number of work permits issued that year by Poland to Belarusians: in the first half of 2017, this number exceeded the total for the whole of 2015 (4,456 vs. 1,893) (Kazakevich, 2023). Registered declarations by Polish employers for Belarusian workers reached 24,216 in 2017, compared to 5,599 in 2015 (Kazakevich, 2023). The economic stagnation in Belarus, the recession in Russia and the liberalisation of access to the Polish labour market, together with the effects of the Pole's Card, made Poland the most popular destination for migrants after Russia (Yelisseyeu, 2018).

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From 2020, Poland clearly became the main destination for Belarusians.

In 2023, the total number of Belarusian citizens residing in Poland, including labour migrants on short-term contracts, was estimated at around 180,000 to 220,000 (Kazakevich, 2023). According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 712,116 visas were issued to Belarusians between 10 August 2020 and 30 September 2023 (Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2023). Although Lithuania follows Poland in relative terms, Poland is the clear leader in terms of absolute numbers of Belarusians migrating to the country.

Poland has become the main destination for many Belarusian migrants for several reasons. One of the most important factors is its geographical proximity. Sharing a border with Belarus, Poland is a nearby and accessible refuge for those fleeing the regime. The short distance makes it easier for Belarusians to cross the border, whether for temporary stays, family reunification or permanent migration. For many, Poland became the first logical and feasible step towards safety, especially during the period of heightened repression following the 2020 protests in Belarus.

The interest of Belarusians in seeking work opportunities abroad and in collaborating with Polish companies

In addition, repressive policies in Belarus and the associated difficulties in doing business, as well as the prospect of the closure of the Polish-Belarusian border, have increased the **interest of Belarusians in seeking work opportunities abroad and in collaborating with Polish companies** (PIE, 2023). Belarus has never been an ideal country for doing business: its GDP in dollars is one tenth that of Poland's, and the economy is unstable. Despite surprisingly high rankings in the Doing Business index, Belarus scores poorly in other indices (Worldwide Governance Freedom Index). When a private company with Belarusian roots (for example Epam, Flo Health or Wargaming) expands, it often moves its headquarters and main jurisdiction to western countries, leaving a significant part of its workforce in Belarus (Danilchuk I, 2023).

Poland and Belarus share **deep cultural and historical ties**, which have made migration to Poland more attractive and smoother for Belarusians. Both nations have historically been affected by similar regional dynamics, and the linguistic similarity between Polish and Belarusian or Russian has facilitated the integration of Belarusian migrants. Many Belarusians have a **functional understanding of Polish**, which eases communication in everyday life, education and employment.



The Polish government's proactive and supportive policy towards Belarusian migrants has played a crucial role in attracting those seeking refuge from the repressive Belarusian regime. In response to the political crisis in Belarus following the 2020 elections, Poland introduced the "Solidarity with Belarus" package, a comprehensive set of measures aimed at providing direct assistance to Belarusians in need. This package included the provision of humanitarian visas, financial assistance and relocation support, with a particular focus on students, academics and individuals persecuted by the Belarusian government. In particular, the humanitarian visa programme allowed Belarusians to enter Poland and access its services without having to go through the lengthy and restrictive procedures associated with other types of migration. The Polish government also facilitated Belarusian migrants' access to the labour market and education, making Poland not only a place of refuge but also a viable long-term option for economic and academic advancement.

The presence of a well-established Belarusian diaspora in Poland, which existed long before 2020, provided a crucial support network for new arrivals. This diaspora, which had grown steadily as a result of previous waves of economic migration, political repression and historical ties, became an essential resource for newly arrived Belarusians. The existing Belarusian community in Poland helped new migrants navigate the complexities of settling in a new country, assisting with housing, employment and cultural adaptation. The presence of Belarusian community organisations, advocacy groups and social networks further strengthened the integration process for migrants, and made Poland a more comfortable and welcoming destination. This established community also played a role in amplifying Belarusian voices internationally, raising awareness of the plight of migrants and encouraging further support from the Polish government and international bodies.

According to 2023 data, Belarusians were the second largest group of foreigners in Poland, with 63,000 persons holding temporary residence permits issued for employment purposes (UdSC, 2023).

The number of applications for residence permits submitted by Belarusian citizens continues to rise steadily, indicating a sustained migration trend. It is noteworthy that migration from Belarus to Poland includes both men and women, reflecting the demographic diversity of the migrants. Of the more than 100,000 Belarusian citizens holding valid residence permits in 2023, approximately 57% were individuals aged 20–39 (UdSC, 2023). This age group consists primarily of those who are fully engaged in the labour market, demonstrating their motivation to seek employment and actively contribute to the host country's economy.

In addition to Poland, other EU countries became destinations for Belarusian migrants seeking safety, employment and a more stable political environment. Lithuania and Latvia, which share borders with Belarus, were among the countries that saw an influx of Belarusian migrants. Lithuania became a centre for the Belarusian opposition, with key opposition figures seeking refuge in the country. Over the past three years, Belarusians have become the fastest-growing group of foreigners in Lithuania, with approximately 61,000 now residing in the country (Immigrants review of Lithuania, 2024)). The majority (80%) migrated for economic reasons, working in construction and logistics or starting businesses. Despite filling labour market gaps, this influx has raised security concerns, as Lithuanian intelligence warns of potential infiltration by Russian and Belarusian agents. The issue has sparked intense public debate, with some politicians advocating stricter migration controls. Lithuania's secret services have flagged the risk of espionage among Belarusian migrants, and stringent screening procedures have been introduced. As of late 2023, over 2,000 Belarusian and Russian citizens were deemed security threats, and many were denied or had revoked residence permits and visas.

1.2. Significance of Examining Belarusian Migrant Entrepreneurship

This Working Paper focuses on the entrepreneurial activities of Belarusian migrants in Poland and other EU countries.

The entrepreneurship of Belarusian migrants offers critical insights into the economic and social dynamics within the host countries. Understanding their business activities and the challenges they face can inform policy, enhance integration efforts and contribute to the economic development of their new communities.

Migrant entrepreneurs, including those from Belarus, play an important role in their host countries, creating **employment opportunities, driving innovation and contributing to local and national GDP**. Their entrepreneurial activities can have a significant economic impact, particularly within the EU, where economic growth and innovation are often key priorities. Entrepreneurship also serves as a **vital pathway for the integration of migrants into their host societies**. For Belarusian migrants, engaging in business activities allows them to interact more closely with local communities, fostering mutual understanding and promoting social cohesion. Through entrepreneurship, migrants can contribute to the economic fabric of their new environment while also building social bridges, helping to break down cultural barriers and creating a sense of belonging. Migrants also bring a **wealth of skills, knowledge and international experience** to their business ventures. Understanding how Belarusian migrants use their human capital – such as technical expertise, language skills and intercultural experience – can **inform strategies to maximise the benefits of migration**. By better harnessing the skills of migrant entrepreneurs, host societies can tap into a valuable resource that enhances both individual success and collective economic prosperity.

Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs is **crucial for shaping effective policies that support their efforts**. Migrants often face hurdles such as limited access to finance, business networks, and legal advice. Insights gained from studying their entrepreneurial experiences can inform the development of tailored policies that promote economic integration and address these specific needs. Such policies would not only enhance the entrepreneurial success of migrants but also stimulate economic growth within the host countries.

This Working Paper argues that Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs introduce diverse cultural perspectives and practices to their host countries, often leading to innovative business models and services. Such **cross-cultural exchange** enriches the business landscape by fostering creativity and innovation, essential to local economic growth. Another key aspect of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship is the **formation of transnational networks**. Migrant entrepreneurs frequently maintain ties with their home country, creating diaspora networks that facilitate the exchange of ideas, capital, and talent across borders.

*Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs is **crucial for shaping effective policies that support their efforts**. Migrants often face hurdles such as limited access to finance, business networks, and legal advice.*

Moreover, studying Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs can reveal the strategies they use to overcome such obstacles as discrimination, language barriers and navigating unfamiliar regulatory environments, providing **valuable lessons in resilience and adaptation**. These insights can be useful for developing better support mechanisms for migrants and for understanding how individuals and communities thrive in the face of adversity. Documenting the success stories of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs can also serve as inspiration for both migrant and native populations.

Lastly, comparing Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship with that of other migrant groups provides a broader insight into how various cultural, social, and economic factors shape entrepreneurial success across different contexts.



1.3. Objectives of the Working Paper

The primary goal of this Working Paper is to **deepen our understanding of Belarusian migration to the EU, focusing specifically on entrepreneurship among Belarusian migrants**. The Working Paper aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

Assessing the scale and characteristics of Belarusian migration to the EU.

The first specific objective is to provide a detailed overview of the scale of Belarusian migration to the EU. This includes examining the demographic and socio-economic profiles of Belarusian migrants, such as their age, gender, level of education, and sectors of employment.

Exploring entrepreneurial inclination among Belarusian migrants.

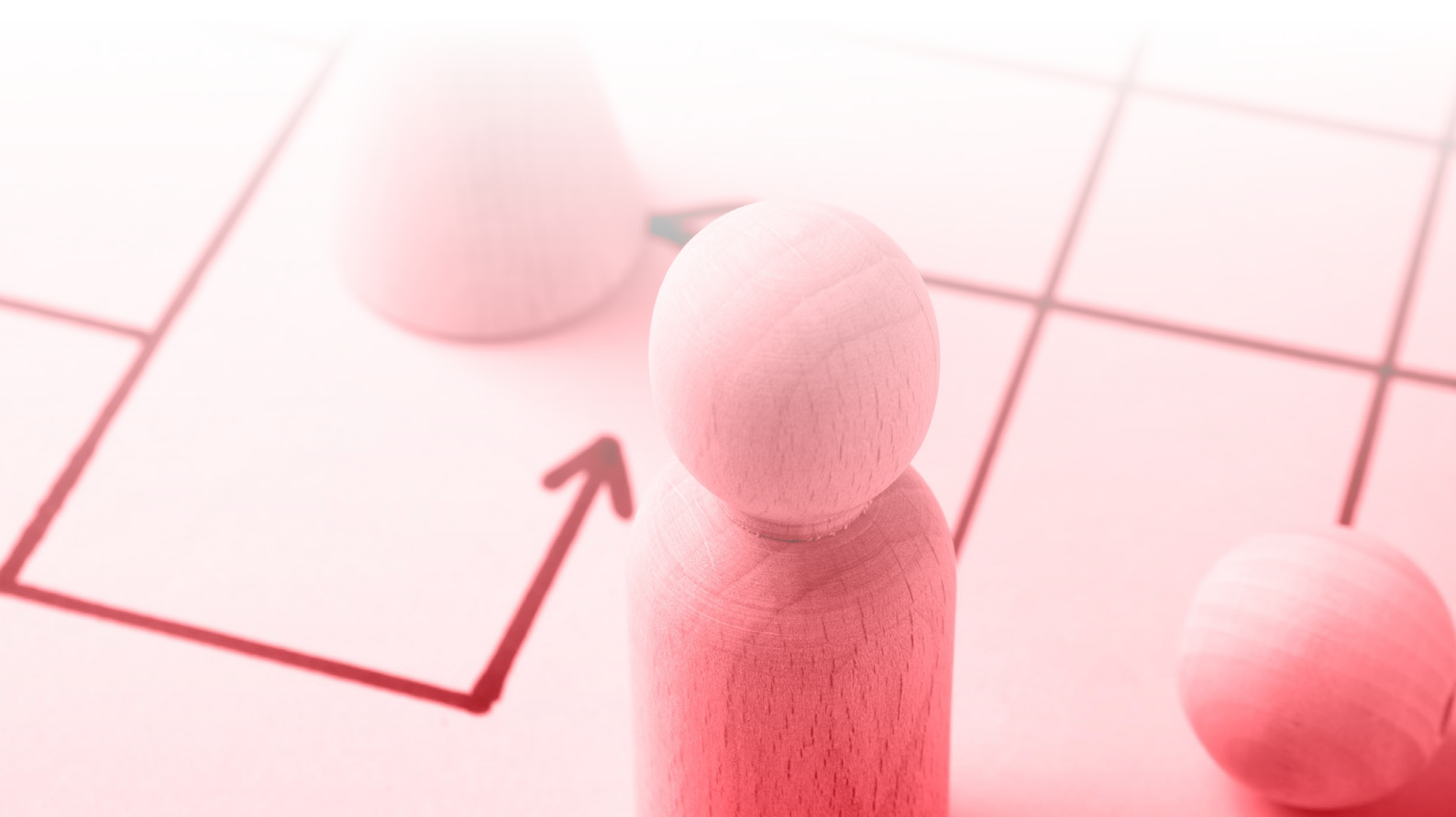
The second specific objective focuses on investigating entrepreneurial tendencies within the Belarusian migrant population. This involves identifying the extent to which Belarusian migrants are inclined to start their own businesses, the types of businesses they are involved in, and the sectors to which they contribute. By exploring these entrepreneurial tendencies, the report aims to highlight the potential of Belarusian migrants to contribute to the economic landscape of their host countries through business creation and innovation. Understanding the drivers behind their entrepreneurial efforts also sheds light on how migrants perceive entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic integration and social mobility.

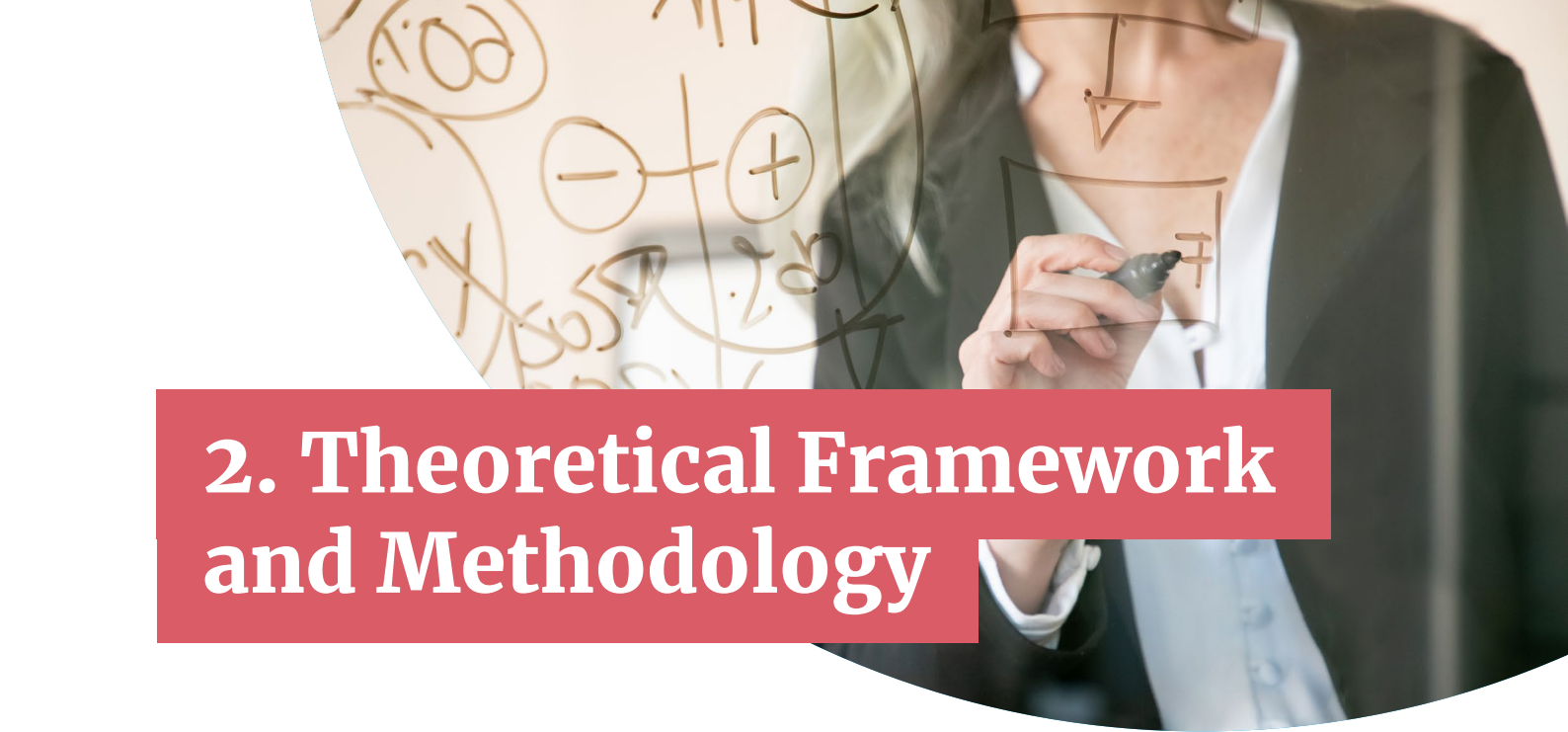
Identifying key challenges and opportunities for Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs.

One of the key components of this Working Paper is to analyse the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs. This includes identifying obstacles such as access to finance, regulatory barriers, language difficulties, discrimination and limited access to business networks. At the same time, the Working Paper explores the opportunities that Belarusian migrants leverage, such as their unique skills, cultural adaptability and transnational connections.

Assessing the impact of existing EU MS policies on Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship.

The final specific objective of the report is to assess the impact of current EU MS policies on Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship. The Working Paper assesses to what degree these policies facilitate or hinder the entrepreneurial efforts of Belarusian migrants, and highlights areas where policy adjustments could enhance support for migrant entrepreneurship.





2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Migrant entrepreneurship is defined and approached from various angles. Some scholars focus on the cultural and structural integration of migrant entrepreneurship, where migrants use their cultural background and socio-economic resources to gain a competitive advantage in business (Yuniarto, 2015).

Others point out that migrant entrepreneurship can arise out of necessity or opportunity, with the term encompassing broader concepts such as refugee, ethnic and diaspora entrepreneurship (Akin & Reyhanoğlu, 2022). These overlapping terms highlight how war, political conditions and economic opportunities can lead migrants to develop entrepreneurial ventures. Finally, the transformation from worker to entrepreneur is another aspect seen among migrant communities (Fee & Rahman, 2014).

Immigrant entrepreneurship is most often defined as **the undertaking of entrepreneurial activities, particularly the creation of new ventures, by first- or second-generation immigrants** (Castles & Miller, 2011). This definition is adopted for the purposes of this Working Paper.

Migrant entrepreneurship plays a transformative role in both the economy and local communities by bringing unique competencies, revitalising industries and fostering economic exchange between countries of origin and host countries (Glinka, 2018). Migrants are often seen as central to job creation and economic recovery, as their ventures extend beyond ethnic markets into innovative sectors that benefit the wider economy (Desiderio, 2014). Compared to natives, migrants have a higher propensity to be entrepreneurs, often due to their greater risk tolerance and ability to face the challenges in assimilating into traditional labour markets. This trend is evident in developed countries, where migrant business ownership exceeds that of natives, particularly in the US (Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Fairlie, 2012). However, migrant entrepreneurs often face barriers, such as limited access to capital, cultural resources and networks. As a result, they gravitate towards low-capital industries such as retail or catering, which require less local expertise but offer modest returns (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

The “mixed embeddedness” model introduced by Kloosterman emphasises the dual importance of ethnic resources and external market conditions, highlighting how the regulatory environment shapes the entrepreneurial success of migrants in different countries (Kloosterman et al., 1999).

It allows for a combination of the analysis of contextual factors and key actors (immigrant entrepreneurs) and the opportunity structure – the market and institutional framework of the host country. This model challenged the prevailing view that migrant entrepreneurs thrived mainly because of their reliance on co-ethnic social capital networks. Instead, Kloosterman and his colleagues emphasised the importance of considering the integration of these entrepreneurs into the larger external business environment. This includes competing with established local firms and complying with government-imposed regulatory frameworks, which in some European countries can create direct barriers to entry for non-natives (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

The “mixed embeddedness” model is notable for incorporating government regulatory frameworks into its analysis, drawing a comparison between the relatively deregulated markets of Anglo-American countries and the more heavily regulated systems of mainland Europe. This contrast suggests that immigrant entrepreneurs may find **greater opportunities in less regulated markets** such as the UK than in more regulated countries such as Austria and Germany. This difference may explain the faster growth of migrant-owned businesses in the UK (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Sepulveda et al., 2011). The model highlights the critical influence of both market dynamics and regulatory conditions on the success and characteristics of migrant entrepreneurship.

This Working Paper focuses on the regulatory environment, particularly the measures introduced by selected EU MS in response to the post-August 2020 wave of immigration from Belarus. The following sections examine the regulatory environment, the effectiveness of the respective policies in supporting immigrant entrepreneurship, the barriers faced by immigrant entrepreneurs, and the factors that stimulate immigrant entrepreneurship.



2.2. Methodology Overview and Sources of Data

This section outlines the methodology used to conduct the research and collect data for the Working Paper. A **mixed-methods approach** was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative research phases to provide a comprehensive analysis of the migration patterns, challenges and contributions of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs. The key elements of the methodology are outlined below:

| Quantitative phase

The quantitative phase involved the use of descriptive statistics to summarise information and migration patterns of Belarusian migrants to the EU. The aim of this phase was to provide a broad statistical understanding of the scale of Belarusian migration and the socio-economic profiles of migrants.

| Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase of the Working Paper was designed to gain deeper insights into the experiences of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs by collecting detailed, contextual information through case studies, with the aim of showcasing real-life experiences of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs. These **case studies** highlight the unique strategies used by successful entrepreneurs, the challenges they faced, and how they overcame them. They serve as concrete examples of how entrepreneurship contributes to economic integration.

Although the research followed a structured approach, significant challenges arose in conducting the case studies. Many potential participants – Belarusian business owners in Poland and other EU MS – either declined to participate or did not respond, and in several cases individuals who had initially expressed interest subsequently lost contact. There were probably several factors at play here, including the fear of potential repercussions for participating in the Working Paper (despite the guarantee of anonymity) and a reluctance to disclose personal information, especially if it related to political or business activities that might attract attention.

All interviews with Belarusian entrepreneurs for the case studies were conducted in Russian to ensure comfort and clarity for the respondents. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases were synthesised to draw comprehensive conclusions regarding the entrepreneurial landscape for Belarusian migrants in the EU, with a focus on Poland.

Strict **ethical guidelines** were followed during the research to ensure the protection and privacy of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation, and steps were taken to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. All data was kept secure to prevent unauthorised access or use.

2.3. Limitations of the Working Paper

The methodology used in this Working Paper recognises the inherent limitations in obtaining a fully representative sample of Belarusian enterprises.

The primary objective of the Working Paper was not to capture the full spectrum of Belarusian entrepreneurial activity across the EU, but to gain in-depth insights into the participants' experiences while acknowledging the presence of sampling bias. As a result, while this paper provides valuable observations, it does not offer a comprehensive or statistically representative view of all Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs.

One of the main challenges faced was **the potential for response bias**. Given the sensitive nature of migration and entrepreneurship, participants may have been inclined to give socially desirable answers, particularly during interviews. Issues such as fear of political repercussion or concerns about disclosing personal information may have influenced the way respondents presented their experiences. This may have affected the authenticity of the data, particularly on issues such as the challenges faced and respondents' views on their host country's policies.

The quantitative **analysis relies heavily on self-reported data**, which introduces potential inaccuracies. The interviews may not fully capture the complexity of entrepreneurial motivations, strategies and outcomes. This reliance on self-reported data may also miss nuanced aspects of the entrepreneurial journey that might emerge through more detailed or observational methods. Quantitative measures alone may also not fully capture the wide range of factors influencing Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship.

The dynamic nature of migration policies and economic conditions in the EU MS further complicates the relevance and applicability of the findings over time.

The dynamic nature of migration policies and economic conditions in the EU MS further complicates the relevance and applicability of the findings over time. Migration frameworks and support systems for migrant entrepreneurs are subject to change due to changing political landscapes or economic crises. Therefore, what is true at the time of this Working Paper may not be applicable in the future as new policies are introduced or economic conditions evolve. This temporal limitation should be considered when interpreting the findings.

It is important to note that, while informative, the findings of this Working Paper cannot be generalised to other migrant groups or contexts beyond those examined here. The socio-political, economic and regulatory environment in the analysed EU MS is unique and shapes the entrepreneurial experiences of Belarusian migrants in specific ways. The findings of this research are therefore most relevant to Belarusian entrepreneurs in this context and may not necessarily apply to other migrant populations operating in different regions or under different regulatory conditions.



3. Government Support and Policies for Belarusian Migrant Entrepreneurs

Since 2020, Poland and the Baltic states have been the main destinations for Belarusian migrants. In 2023, around 96% of Belarusian enterprises in the EU were registered in these countries, with 74% in Poland and 22% in the Baltic states.

Consequently, this section of the Working Paper focuses mainly on the government policies of Poland and Lithuania, given their importance in the context of Belarusian immigration. Government policies and support have had a significant impact on the development of Belarusian business in these countries. However, these processes took different paths in Poland and Lithuania.

3.1. Poland

3.1.1 Poland. Business Harbour Programme

Overview

Poland decided to **provide direct support for the entrepreneurship of Belarusian migrants** in its territory through a special initiative facilitating the relocation of businesses from Belarus and the establishment of new businesses in Poland. As result, several factors have driven the relocation of companies from Belarus to Poland. These include not only geographical proximity, cultural affinity and access to the expanding EU market with its provisions for the free movement of goods and services, but also the availability of legal channels for relocation and support for SMEs, and investment and training opportunities offered by the Polish government's **“Poland. Business Harbour” (PBH) initiative** (Krasko & Danko, 2022).

The “Poland. Business Harbour” programme was launched in August–September 2020 to attract Belarusian IT specialists to Poland. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the GovTech Centre in the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Development and Technology, the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH) and the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (Gulczynska, 2023) were among those responsible for organising and implementing the programme.

Specific criteria had to be met to participate in the programme, which primarily targeted Belarusian specialists with engineering degrees and experience in the IT sector.

PBH provided interested participants with detailed information on how to set up a business in Poland, manage employee and family relocation, and access legal and visa support through a “business concierge” model.

Before 2020, Belarus’s IT sector was much smaller than Poland’s, but it was growing rapidly and had highly qualified specialists. In 2019, Belarus had 54,200 IT specialists and 1,500 IT companies, including major firms such as Viber and World of Tanks (Drożdż, 2021). The aim of the programme was to facilitate the entry of Belarusian innovators (start-ups), programmers and entrepreneurs into Poland, enabling them to establish businesses while also addressing the needs of the Polish IT sector. Before the launch of PBH, only 10% of Belarusian IT specialists chose Poland as their destination (Wilczek, 2021). The PBH initiative had several key aspects. It offered a comprehensive package of relocation support not only for IT specialists but also for their families (PBH, Website of the Republic of Poland). A crucial element of the programme was the facilitation of links between Belarusian entrepreneurs and potential investors or grant providers (B2B).

In addition, a comprehensive list of companies offering specific job opportunities was published on the programme’s official website. PAIH also set up a special hotline, available in both Russian and English, to provide basic information about the programme. Participation in the initiative allowed Belarusian citizens to start a business in Poland on the same terms as Polish citizens.

In addition, to the relocation package for IT specialists, there was another area of support within the PBH. The Startup Hub Poland (SHP) Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, **supported Belarusian start-ups with the best growth potential by helping them relocate, providing grant opportunities and accelerator support, and connecting them to the high-tech market in Poland.**

For more than three years of PBH’s work with the Belarusian business community, there was a simplified visa procedure that gave priority to applicants in Polish consulates. Most importantly, this type of visa did not require the holder to obtain a work permit in Poland. In the period from 10 August 2020 to 30 September 2023, the number of positive visa decisions issued to Belarusian citizens for PBH was 88,529 (Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2023).

SHP Foundation, supported Belarusian start-ups with the best growth potential by helping them relocate, providing grant opportunities and accelerator support, and connecting them to the high-tech market in Poland.



Evaluation of PBH

According to PAIH, the existence of the “Poland. Business Harbour” programme has had a significant impact and resulted in **the attraction of high-quality IT specialists with unique qualifications**, who have contributed to the active development of the Polish IT sector. For example, almost 6,000 programmers, mainly from Belarus, were recruited by the largest Polish employer, which transferred all its activities from Belarus to Poland. Thanks to the large supply of specialists, it was possible to fill the existing gaps in the market and ensure that Poland is an important hub for the IT sector in the EU. Such a positive outcome has led to further investment in Poland and increased government tax revenues.

According to the Ministry of Development and Technology, a total of 8,982 enterprises were established in Poland within three years from 2020 by people who qualified for the PBH programme (Babakova & Gomon, 2024).

On 26 January 2024 the government announced that the PBH would be suspended until the verification system for candidates (both specialists and companies) was improved. The reasons for such a decision by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs were **discrepancies between the number of PBH visas issued and the number of specialists arriving in Poland**. In total, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued 88,529 PBH visas to Belarusians by 2024 (Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2023). According to the Main Directorate of the Border Guard, every seventh person with a PBH visa crossed the border with Poland (13,500 people from 2020 to 2023: 1,114 Belarusians entered Poland in 2020, almost 6,600 in 2021, 3,380 in 2022, and 2,214 in 2023). It was unclear where the other specialists who had received visas had gone. Various explanations were possible: specialists and their family members could apply for visas several times, some could enter via Lithuania or Latvia, some specialists worked remotely from Belarus due to the company’s policy on taxation when employing foreigners. There are also opinions that PBH visas were issued for the wrong purposes, which were not part of the initiative (Announcement regarding the suspension of the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Poland. Business Harbour Program, 2024)). Some specialists applied for PBH visas on the grounds that, after arriving in Poland, they had started to work in a field other than IT.

Another reason for the suspension of the PBH programme could be that it had lost its relevance. According to some experts, four years after the protests were enough for the IT specialists to move to Poland, and many Belarusians began to take advantage of the programme, obtaining visas to travel to the EU, but not moving themselves or their businesses to Poland (Belsat, 2024).

In 2024, after the suspension of the PBH, the PAIH conducted an internal audit of 50 IT companies that recruited employees under the PBH (Visas were issued, IT specialists did not arrive, 2024). Although not all companies have submitted their reports yet, it is known that 13,600 employees received a PBH visa under the business route, and of them 9,500 moved to Poland and 8,400 applied for a temporary residence permit (excluding family members, which is about 40%) (Visas were issued, IT specialists did not arrive, 2024). However, these figures do not explain the disproportion between the number of PBH visas issued and the number of specialists arriving in Poland. Ultimately, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided that the PBH had not achieved its objectives, and suspended the programme. IT specialists are still being welcomed to Poland through the submission of visa applications under the general rules, but this procedure has become much more difficult. In the meantime, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to work on improving the visa issuing process and try to find solutions for better verification of the initiative's beneficiaries. In the meantime, Polish visa centres will not be accepting applications for PBH visas.

IT specialists are still being welcomed to Poland through the submission of visa applications under the general rules, but this procedure has become much more difficult.

3.1.2 Challenges to Opening a Business in Poland

Belarusian companies wanting to establish themselves in Poland have faced several major challenges. First and foremost, there are **restrictions on foreigners starting a business in Poland and difficulties with legalisation based on running a business** (Babakova & Gomon, 2024). As a result, migrants rarely start a business when they move to Poland. To establish a sole proprietorship or any other commercial company, partnership or general partnership in the country, Belarusian citizens must have a residence permit authorising them to do so (Information and service website for entrepreneurs, 2021).

At the same time, the Polish government is facilitating the procedures for obtaining a residence permit for Belarusians holding the Polish Card. The document was introduced in 2007 and its benefits have been extended over the years. The Polish Card allows the holder to obtain a free long-term national Polish visa, facilitates employment in Poland by not requiring a work permit, and allows one to obtain a university scholarship. Since September 2016, the Polish Card has allowed its holders to acquire Polish citizenship after one year of permanent residence in Poland, and since September 2017 – to receive state financial support during the first nine months of residence.

Due to the influx of Belarusian migrants and war refugees from Ukraine, there has been an **increased burden on the public administration and a prolongation of the administrative procedure for residence permits**. Applicants must wait several months for a decision, and it takes up to 6 months to print the residence card itself (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

Another important issue concerns **the process of opening a bank account**. It can happen that a bank refuses to open an account for a Belarusian entrepreneur because the latter does not have a PESEL number. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, some banks began to refuse to open accounts for Belarusians, but the practice is more systemic – the general principle has not changed. There are, however, cases where a bank has suspended its services to Belarusian citizens, such as BNP Paribas Bank in Poland, even to Belarusians with permanent residence permits (Does Polish bank BNP Paribas discriminate against Belarusians?, 2023). In other Polish banks, a Belarusian needs a residence permit and personal presence to open an account (Kyky, 2024). In general, Polish banks are reluctant to open accounts for non-residents.

Another difficulty for Belarusian entrepreneurs is communication with public administration offices: although the law allows for multilingual forms and publications, not many offices use them. Moreover, the information presented in English on a website may either differ from the Polish version or be outdated (Babakova & Gomon, 2024).

According to the 2022 study by the Economic Research Centre (BEROC), companies relocating from Belarus to Poland have faced such challenges as obtaining work visas for relocated personnel, accounting problems (especially the complexity of tax legislation was noted) and confusing tax laws, bureaucracy and poor quality of services, high taxes and complex labour legislation, and difficulties and misunderstandings in the market (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). General problems of Belarusian business in Poland included: searching for investments; access to premises, equipment, and licences; consulting – especially legal; and lack of contacts, partnerships and connections (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022).

Discrimination based on nationality and the attitude of the local population can have a major impact on business development. According to research, among all neighbouring nationalities (Slovaks, Czechs, Lithuanians and Germans), Poles had the least positive attitude towards Belarusians and Russians (Wiśniewski, 2020, p. 231). Other research shows that the attitude of Poles towards Belarus has changed over time: in 2020, 31% of Poles perceived Belarus's attitude towards Poland as unfriendly, while in 2023 it was 82% (Mazurkiewicz & Sygnowski, 2023, p.16). For most respondents, connotations with the word "Belarus" were unfavourable. The number of Poles who considered Belarus a friendly nation also decreased from 63% in 2020 to 34% in 2023.

The deterioration of attitudes towards Belarusians and Belarus itself led to cases of discrimination and hostility on ethnic grounds. A 2022 survey (Alampiyev & Bikanau, 2022) showed that 31% of Belarusian respondents in Poland experienced discrimination in various forms: personal insults and threats in interpersonal contacts, refusal of institutional services in a bank, refusal to rent an apartment; 33% of the respondents who reported discrimination were unable to obtain banking services in Poland.

According to the Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour in Poland, cases of discrimination and xenophobia increased after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and have very often been based on top-down decisions rather than individual actions. Several cases were submitted to the prosecutor's office, but many more were not considered due to a lack of evidence.

3.1.2 Shift of Government Support to Belarusians in 2024

Unlike the Baltic countries, Poland has not stopped issuing national visas to Belarusians, except for PBH visas. However, since the political scandal of 2023 involving alleged corruption in the granting of travel visas by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the suspension of the PBH initiative in January 2024, it has become much more difficult for Belarusians to obtain Polish visas – even for holders of the Polish Card and students (Half a year of waiting and refusal⁶ 2024). According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this situation is due to there being a process of “defining the priorities of Polish migration policy, which will contribute to the tightening of the visa system” (Belsat, 2024). The process of issuing visas in previous years is being investigated at the time of this Working Paper by the prosecutor’s office, the Central Anticorruption Bureau, the Supreme Audit Office and the Parliamentary Investigative Committee (Visas were issued, IT specialists did not arrive, 2024).

Since the new government came to power in Poland at the end of 2023, there has been a dramatic decrease (by between 50% and 90%, depending on the type of visa) in all types of visas issued to Belarusians.

Since the new government came to power in Poland at the end of 2023, there has been a dramatic **decrease (by between 50% and 90%, depending on the type of visa) in all types of visas issued to Belarusians**. Whereas in 2023 a total of 114,598 work visas were issued to Belarusians, in 2024 (data valid until 14 June) – only 32,233 were issued. In 2020–2023, some 55,000 humanitarian visas were issued to Belarusians, while in 2024 such visas were issued to a total of 542 citizens of Afghanistan, Belarus, Palestine, Russia, Syria and Ukraine (Visas were issued, IT specialists did not arrive, 2024). It has already become difficult to apply for a Polish visa, as there are practically no places available on the Polish VFS Global website. Those who wanted to apply had to pay intermediaries (from 200 to 700 Belarusian rubles – about EUR 50–200). In addition, the submission of documents now depends on place of residence, and the applicant should confirm their residence while applying.

During the period when PBH was active there were virtually no refusals. After its suspension, however, around 10% of IT workers began receiving work visa refusals (Example of visa randomness after PBH cancellation, 2024). Refusals are much higher in the case of other types of visa. In the past, there was no need to present additional documents at the border, but since the suspension of the PBH programme Polish border guards have tightened their checks on Belarusians entering the country on these visas (Entry to Poland with a PBH visa has become more stringent, 2024). Many Belarusian specialists complain that Polish border guards do not allow them to enter Poland with PBH visas, demanding that they present employment contracts, B2B agreements, or documents of established individual entrepreneurship. There are cases of a six-month ban on entry to Poland for a person holding a PBH visa but without additional documents, and refusal of entry to a person with an invitation from an employer (Euroradio, 2024). Border guards are able to call company managers to double check. If a person has a sole proprietorship in Poland, they should obtain an extract from the CEIDG and a contract with a contracting company. The same applies to family members of specialists entering the country on PBH visas (with documents confirming the spouse’s employment) (Entry to Poland with a PBH visa has become more stringent, 2024). There are cases when Belarusians owning businesses in Poland are unable to apply for a visa due to the complications of the process.

The political crisis in Belarus in 2020 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 contributed to the unprecedented mass migration from Belarus of mainly the middle class of Belarusian society, including entrepreneurs, managers, specialists and students.

Given the deterioration of the economic and political situation in Belarus, the intensification of political repression, and the general decline in living standards and living conditions, the migration of Belarusians to Poland will continue.

However, in 2024 Poland's visa policy has complicated matters. Due to the tense situation on the Polish-Belarusian border and the Polish government's plans to seal it, it seems that there will not be any liberalisation of the visa policy for ordinary Belarusians (not to mention those suffering from political persecution) (Belsat, 2024). Compared to the rest of the EU, Poland issued a record number of work visas between 2020 and 2022 – almost 2 million – and allegedly there was not much control or verification of people arriving (The end of the visa Eldorado, 2024). As in the Baltic countries, the new Polish government fears that with the influx of Belarusians, agents of Lukashenko and Putin could enter the country, threatening national security (Belsat, 2024). The recent change in Poland's visa policy towards Belarusians may affect the number of specialists or entrepreneurs coming to Poland.

To sum up, the Polish government's policy of attracting and supporting Belarusian business can be considered successful, given the growing number of Belarusian companies in Poland. As of September 2023, there are 5988 companies in which at least one of the shareholders is a Belarusian company or a person with Belarusian citizenship (Central Economic Information Centre), and 11,716 individual entrepreneurs were registered between 01.2022 and 06.2023. It is worth noting that this situation is due not only to the initiative of the PBH or the informational and legal support for Belarusians planning to move to Poland, but also to the trend that has emerged over the last decade in the attractiveness of Poland as a migration destination for Belarusians.

In addition, the introduction of the Pole's Card, through which tens of thousands of Belarusians have moved to Poland to study or work in recent decades, has created an active diaspora and Belarusian contacts for other Belarusians arriving in the country.

Despite these positive developments, Poland should continue to make its labour market more attractive and facilitate the employment of Eastern European specialists, as Poland is often not the first choice of labour destination and can serve as a stepping stone to other EU countries. The shortage of labour (regardless of sector) in Poland could be one of the reasons for the government to see the political and economic crisis in Belarus in 2020 as an opportunity for the country to fill the gaps in labour supply.

3.2. Lithuania

3.2.1 Support for Business Relocation After August 2020

At the beginning of the political crisis in Belarus in 2020, there was strong support for Belarusians in Lithuania, which became a reason for many Belarusian companies, especially from the IT sector, to relocate to Lithuania. **According to data from 2023, there were 42 IT companies with 4092 relocated specialists in the country** (this number may be higher in reality), **with a total of 850 companies with Belarusian roots** („I’m stuck.” IT people (don’t) want to leave Lithuania, 2023). Some of the largest, such as EPAM and Wargaming, joined the 100 largest taxpayers in Lithuania. In 2023, EPAM paid more than EUR 20 million in taxes, double that of 2022 (EPAM and Wargaming again became the largest IT businesses in Lithuania in terms of taxes, 2024).

Belarusians could obtain a visa or a temporary residence permit in Lithuania. According to the Department of Migration of the Ministry of Interior of Lithuania, as of 1 July 2024 there were 62,535 Belarusians with valid residence permits in Lithuania (Immigrants Review of Lithuania, 2024) out of a total population of 2.8 million.

The geographical proximity (especially of Vilnius to Minsk), the lack of a language barrier, the support programmes for small business opportunities in the country and the large number of Belarusians already living in Lithuania were the main reasons for companies to relocate (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). Lithuania planned to **actively attract the Belarusian IT sector**. For this reason, the government, through the state-funded investment promotion agency Invest Lithuania, presented a relocation guide offering the Belarusian IT sector a “fast-track” relocation of companies and their employees by facilitating the visa procedure. Between 2020 and 2023, it worked: entire Belarusian technology companies moved to Vilnius, bringing thousands of their employees and their families with them (Kučinskis, 2023).

The two best known programmes supporting Belarusian business migration and Belarusian migration in general are: **one organised with the support of Invest Lithuania, and another called “International House Vilnius”**.



Evaluation of PBH

There was a significant government initiative to support the relocation of Belarusian companies to Lithuania. The Lithuanian investment promotion agency, Invest Lithuania, which aims to connect foreign companies with Lithuania, worked between 2020 and 2023 on 42 projects (25 new companies established in Lithuania, and 17 expansions of existing ones) involving Belarusian companies, the vast majority of which were technology companies (Žemaitis, 2023). The agency actively supported the Belarusian IT sector in relocating to Lithuania, until the moment when relocation became more difficult for Belarusians due to the government restrictions introduced after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Other governmental support instruments included a simplified procedure for issuing a national visa (D) to Lithuania in 2021, a relocation guide on housing, schooling and kindergartens, and webinars on integration (Žemaitis, 2023).

“International House Vilnius”

The significant influx of Belarusians for such a small country as Lithuania led to the introduction of another initiative at the local level, which indirectly contributed to supporting the development of Belarusian business in the country. In 2021, the official tourism and business development agency of the city of Vilnius, Go Vilnius, and a programme for attracting foreign specialists to Lithuania, Work in Lithuania, launched a joint initiative in the Vilnius City Hall called “International House Vilnius”. This initiative aims to provide free advice on residency, employment, taxes, social and health insurance, and starting a business. The office includes 10 key administrative institutions: Migration Department, State Tax Inspectorate, Employment Service, Migration Information Centre “I Choose Lithuania”, “Sodra”, State Health Insurance Fund, “Regitra”, Vilnius City Council, Enterprise Lithuania Business Development Agency and Vilnius Tourism and Business Development Agency Go Vilnius (Migration Information Centre “I Choose Lithuania”, 2024).

3.2.2 Shift of Government Support for Belarusians in 2022

With the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the government's policy towards Belarusian migrants changed, and this affected the situation of Belarusian companies in the country. **Restrictions were introduced on Belarusians entering the country, national visa applications were suspended, and in some cases the country refused to renew residence permits or even cancelled them.** There was a report in July 2023 that the authorities cancelled the work permits of several employees of Belarusian companies (Several Wargaming employees in Lithuania unexpectedly had their residence permits revoked, Zerkalo, 2023), allegedly because of their previous service in the Belarusian army. According to the Belarus Business Centre, Lithuania is the EU leader in the number of discriminatory legal acts against a company's Belarusian nationality (origin of capital) (Loiko, 2024).

Such a change in the government's policy towards Belarusian migrants affected the attitude of Lithuanians towards Belarusians. The situation of Belarusian businesses in the country is affected by the caution of Lithuanian companies in working with Belarusian companies. As a result, some companies are faced with the **challenge of suppliers refusing their services**. The revenues of many Belarusian companies have decreased because customers refuse to work with them. There is also a problem with employees: some Lithuanian employees refuse to work in Belarusian companies, and there are restrictions in the relocation of the Belarusian employees due to the suspension of the acceptance of national visa applications from Belarusian citizens (Antonovskaya, 2024).

Many Belarusian companies are looking for opportunities to relocate from Lithuania to Poland, where the legislation is more favourable to Belarusian migrants.

As a result of such government actions, the number of Belarusian companies in the country has shrunk by 37% (Loiko, 2024). The number of employees is also falling, for example in EPAM there were 10% fewer registered specialists in January 2024 than at the beginning of 2023 (EPAM and Wargaming again became the largest IT businesses in Lithuania in terms of taxes, 2024).

Since 2023, Lithuania's policy has focused on its national security in a way that began to worsen the situation of Belarusian migrants. In 2023, among other restrictive measures against citizens of Belarus and Russia, the Lithuanian government wanted to adopt restrictions on preventing Belarusians from applying for Lithuanian citizenship and on issuing residence permits, but the decision was taken to abandon such a move (From sanctions to Litvinism, 2023).

According to the Department of Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 2023, 1,644 citizens of Belarus were recognised as a threat to Lithuania's national security: 562 people were denied a temporary residence permit (as of 1 July 2024, 58,673 Belarusians have a temporary residence permit in Lithuania), 343 temporary residence permits were not renewed, 450 had their previously issued residence permit revoked; 2 people were denied a permanent residence permit; 8 had their permanent residence permit revoked; and 279 were denied a Lithuanian national visa (From sanctions to Litvinism,, 2024). The assessment of the national security threat was based on the information about a person's connection with or possible military service in the Belarusian army, work in the nuclear industry of Belarus, and the results of mandatory surveys conducted post 2022, asking about attitude towards the war in Ukraine and the ownership of Crimea (Lithuania recognizes 1,644 Belarusians as a threat to national security, 2023).

3.2.3 Other Challenges of Running a Business

In addition to legalisation and worsening attitudes towards Belarusian migrants, there were several problems that businesses encountered, despite major government support for Belarusian business immediately after 2020. These included **the cautious attitude of banks towards foreign business and the high cost and complexity of legalising personnel** (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). Businesses also complained about the reputation and representation of interests of Belarusian migrants (which largely affects businesses), restrictions related to sanctions, business registration issues such as taxes and invoice registration, and bureaucracy in various departments in general (Krasko, Daneyko, BEROC, 2022).

The situation for Belarusians worsened after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when most Lithuanian banks refused to open bank accounts if the head of the company was a Belarusian citizen without a national visa or residence permit from one of the EU states (Starting a business and establishing companies for foreigners, 2023).

These included the cautious attitude of banks towards foreign business and the high cost and complexity of legalising personnel



3.3. Other EU MS & EU level

Latvia was interested in attracting Belarusian companies in 2020, but there is no evidence that the country is still interested in doing so. The absence of a favourable government policy towards Belarusian migration, especially to attract Belarusian IT specialists, cannot be explained by the fact that there are indications of there being a shortage of labour in the Latvian IT sector and that there will be even greater demand for labour in this area in the future (Supule, 2023, p. 177).

In 2020, the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (LIAA) provided Belarusian companies with advice on setting up operations in Latvia, and set up special working groups to help them obtain temporary residence permits and open bank accounts. However, by the end of 2021, only 16 Belarusian companies had registered in Latvia (Belarusian business in Latvia under security scrutiny, 2023).

The share of companies with Belarusian capital in Latvia remains unchanged. In 2023, according to the open data platform “Okredo”, there were 559 companies whose shareholders were Belarusian citizens (There are still many capital companies of Russia and Belarus in Latvia, 2023). Due to the legislative restrictions on obtaining visas and temporary residence permits after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, migration to Latvia decreased. The number of Belarusian citizens residing in Latvia with valid residence permits as of 1 July 2024 was 4,584 people (data from the Migration Department of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia). Already in 2022, the number of Belarusians arriving in Latvia decreased by half compared to 2021. The number of residence permits issued in the first half of 2023 showed a significant decrease.

Estonia did not become a country of Belarusian migration.

Compared to Lithuania and Latvia, Estonia was not in a hurry to open its borders to Belarusian migrants at the beginning of 2020, but was only interested in attracting Belarusian IT companies (Estonia ready to accept IT firms from Belarus, but not refugees, 2020).

There are 82 companies with some Belarusian ownership established since 2020, and not all of them are economically active (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia, 2024). There are 2,872 Belarusians living in Estonia with a valid residence permit (Police and Border Guard Board of Estonia, 2024). In 2022, Estonia introduced restrictions on short-term employment of Belarusian citizens in Estonia and on the issuance of temporary residence permits or visas for employment or business and study purposes. New Estonian legislation aims to prevent the creation of new grounds for stay or residence for employment or business purposes. This, together with unfavourable conditions for small businesses, non-IT jobs and increased cost of living, makes Estonia less attractive as a destination for Belarusian business migration. Overall, Belarusian migration to the country is very low, with Estonia issuing only 328 first residence permits (both visas and residence permits) to Belarusians in 2022 (Eurostat, 2023).

The European Union has responded to the exodus of companies with Belarusian capital from Belarus and Russia to the EU by providing €4 million through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). These funds will be used until the end of 2025 (Usov, 2022) to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of Belarusian origin adapt to new markets, including integration into supply chains and development of digitalisation. The funds will cover training, targeted advisory support, workshops, seminars and networking events.

Businesses also have access to the EBRD's flagship SME support programme – the Advice for Small Business (ASB) Programme (EU and EBRD offer help to Belarusian SMEs abroad, 2023). This programme aims to provide Belarusian enterprises with the necessary tools and industry expertise for their growth and development so that they can bridge the knowledge gap, gain market experience and improve their sustainability. The eligibility criteria for support are Belarusian ownership, a minimum of 3 months of operation, less than 250 employees and annual turnover of less than €50 million in a non-prohibited industry. By the end of 2025, the programme aims to provide knowledge and skills to 150 Belarusian SMEs, train 30 consultants and provide direct advisory support to 90 companies (Advice for Small Businesses, EBRD Vilnius Office). The EBRD also plans to include its Star Venture programme in its support for SME start-ups, in partnership with local accelerators, providing standard advice, online mentoring and links to investors. There is no publicly available information on how many beneficiaries of the programme have received support so far.

The European Union has responded to the exodus of companies with Belarusian capital from Belarus and Russia to the EU

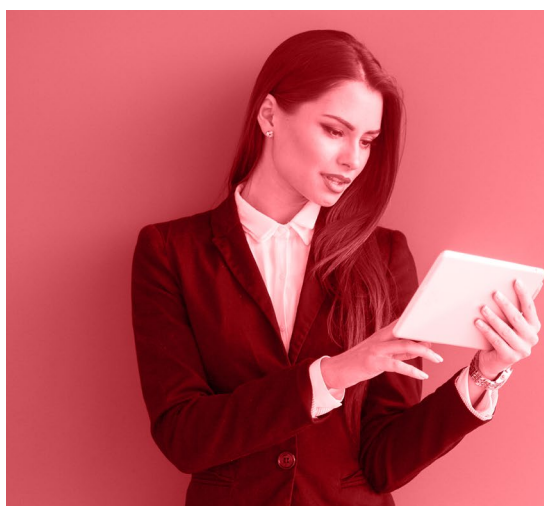
3.3. Can EU Countries Benefit From Belarusian Entrepreneurship?

There are several important considerations regarding the potential benefits for EU countries from Belarusian migration, particularly in the context of entrepreneurship and labour market dynamics.

While the influx of skilled Belarusian workers and entrepreneurs, particularly from the IT sector, has the potential to help alleviate labour shortages and contribute to economic growth, the scenario is not without challenges and complexities.

Belarusian migration could **address some of the pressing demographic and labour issues** facing the EU. With population projections showing a decline after 2026, and a shrinking working-age population (Eurostat, 2023), the EU countries most affected by this trend – such as Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia – could benefit significantly from an inflow of skilled migrants. For example, Lithuania has already experienced positive effects, including an increase in tax revenues, the establishment of new businesses, and a rise in real estate demand due to the higher-than-average salaries of Belarusian IT specialists (Belarusian Business Migration Research of the Causes and Consequences of Belarusian Business Migration since 2020, 2024). This influx has brought much-needed young and skilled workers into the labour market, which could help mitigate the projected declines in the working-age population and reduce the pressure of an aging population on public welfare systems.

The migration of Belarusian entrepreneurs, particularly in the IT sector, is well-timed for the EU, where labour shortages, especially in highly skilled sectors, are becoming more acute. The growing demand for IT specialists, combined with the fact that many Belarusian migrants possess valuable skills in this area, suggests a potential win-win situation for both migrants and host countries. As of 2022, one-third of EU employers reported labour shortages, with 6% of EU companies unable to find workers with IT skills, a figure that has nearly doubled since 2014 (Gulczynska, 2023). By providing an immediate pool of qualified professionals, Belarusian migration could help address this gap, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the process.



However, the benefits of Belarusian migration, especially for entrepreneurship, are not automatic or evenly distributed. Several hurdles must be addressed for this migration to translate into sustained economic benefits for the EU.

While Belarusian migrants bring valuable skills, visa and bureaucratic restrictions have created significant hurdles.

Since 2024, there has been an increase in visa refusals for Belarusians, and procedures for obtaining visas in some EU countries, such as Germany, have become more complicated.

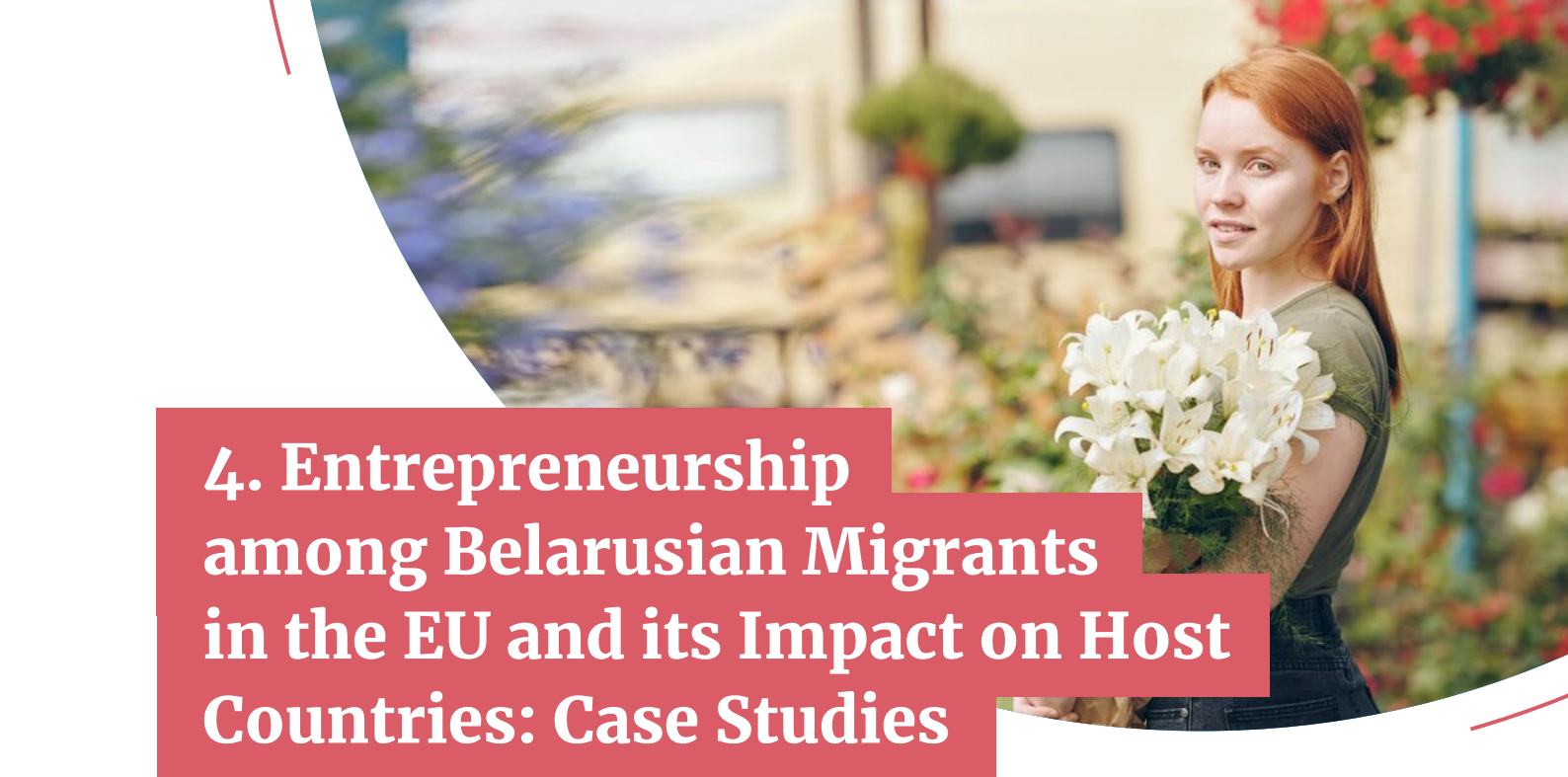
Long waiting periods – sometimes up to 10 or 11 months – could slow the migration of entrepreneurs and skilled workers, potentially limiting the positive impact on EU economies. This visa bottleneck could also encourage irregular migration or push skilled Belarusians to seek opportunities in more accessible non-EU countries, reducing the potential pool of talent available to EU labour markets.

The sudden influx of skilled migrants can also create **tensions within host countries**. For example, while higher-paid Belarusian IT professionals have contributed to tax revenues and economic growth in Lithuania, their presence could exacerbate existing inequalities or fuel resentment if local workers perceive them as competitors for jobs or housing. In addition, political and social opposition to increased immigration in some EU countries could hinder the full realisation of these benefits.

For the EU to maximise the benefits of Belarusian migration, particularly in terms of entrepreneurship, several measures need to be taken. Simplifying visa procedures, offering more robust integration programmes and creating clear pathways for Belarusian entrepreneurs to set up businesses are all essential. In addition, policymakers must ensure that the benefits of migration are equally distributed across different regions and sectors to prevent localised economic booms from creating wider social disparities. By addressing these challenges, Belarusian entrepreneurship could become a long-term asset to the EU's labour market and economic landscape.

While Belarusian migration presents significant opportunities for EU countries in terms of population growth, labour market replenishment and innovation, it also poses challenges that need to be carefully managed.

Without addressing bureaucratic, social and political barriers, the potential benefits may not be fully realised, and some EU countries may miss out on the economic boost that skilled migration can bring.



4. Entrepreneurship among Belarusian Migrants in the EU and its Impact on Host Countries: Case Studies

This chapter explores the landscape of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurship. It highlights the structural barriers faced by migrant entrepreneurs and the wider socio-economic impact of their ventures.

By presenting case studies – and success stories of Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs – the chapter provides insights into the evolving role of Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU and the conditions shaping their long-term prospects.

4.1. Introduction: An Overview of Entrepreneurship Among Belarusian Migrants

The ICT sector has been the main area of economic activity for Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU, reflecting the pre-existing strength of Belarus as a regional technology hub.

Post-2020, a significant proportion of Belarusian tech specialists and IT companies have relocated, particularly to Poland, Lithuania and Estonia, taking advantage of government programmes and investment incentives. In Poland, for example, 10% of Belarusian ICT professionals had migrated as of April 2021, with a further two-fifths considering a similar move (Notes from Poland, 26.04.2021). Many of these professionals have either launched startups or joined existing companies, contributing to the local tech ecosystem.

Lithuania has also emerged as a key destination for Belarusian tech companies, with notable examples such as the Imaguru startup hub, which relocated from Minsk to Vilnius after being forcibly closed by the Belarusian authorities. As of the beginning of 2022, the Imaguru community has supported more than 300 startups and helped attract more than \$160 million in investment, demonstrating the significant role of Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU's innovation landscape (Startup Lithuania, 10.01.2022). Estonia, with its advanced e-residency programme and digital economy, has also been a destination for Belarusian IT specialists.

A growing number of Belarusian entrepreneurs have entered the **e-commerce and digital services sector**, using their expertise in digital marketing, software development and online retailing. Given the low barriers to entry and scalability of e-commerce, many Belarusian migrants have established online businesses that cater to both local and international markets. Platforms specialising in dropshipping, software as a service (SaaS) and digital content creation have become common among Belarusian entrepreneurs.

Belarusian migrants have also established themselves in the **retail and consumer goods sectors**, particularly in areas such as fashion, handicrafts and speciality foods. Many Belarusian entrepreneurs have focused on niche markets, offering handmade products, traditional Belarusian goods and artisanal items that appeal to both the Belarusian diaspora and local consumers. The rise of online marketplaces and direct-to-consumer sales channels has enabled Belarusian entrepreneurs to reach a wider audience and operate efficiently without the need for significant physical infrastructure.

The hospitality sector has also seen an influx of Belarusian entrepreneurs opening restaurants, cafes and catering businesses specialising in Eastern European cuisine. Belarusian professionals have also entered the **consulting and professional services sector**.



4.2. Success Stories, Challenges and Opportunities for Belarusian Migrants as Entrepreneurs in the EU

This section of the Working Paper presents **three case studies of Belarusian entrepreneurs who moved to Lithuania, Latvia and Poland** and faced the challenges of rebuilding their businesses in a new environment.

These stories, based on interviews conducted in 2024, provide a snapshot of the economic, legal and social realities faced by migrant entrepreneurs as perceived during this period. While the names used are fictional and all interviews have been anonymised, the experiences they reflect are real – and illustrate the resilience, adaptability and determination required to succeed in a foreign country.

Olga's Journey:

From political exile to entrepreneurial reinvention in Lithuania

As the political landscape in Belarus became increasingly repressive in the wake of the 2020 protests, Olga, a seasoned entrepreneur and owner of a successful chain of print shops, was faced with an impossible choice: **stay and risk persecution, or leave everything she had built behind in search of safety.**

In early 2021, she made the painful decision to emigrate. Lithuania, with its geographical and cultural proximity, seemed the logical destination – not just as a place of refuge, but as a temporary solution until, she hoped, political change would allow her to return home.

But starting over in a new country was far from easy. Although she had years of experience in the printing industry, Olga quickly realised that simply replicating her Belarusian business model in Lithuania was not an option. Instead, she pivoted – opening a souvenir shop and a clothing production line with printed designs. This transformation was not just a business move, but a testament to the resilience and adaptability of immigrant entrepreneurs, who often have to reinvent themselves to survive in unfamiliar markets.

The early days in Lithuania were a mixture of hope and struggle. Anna benefited from refugee support programmes, including rent and wage subsidies, which provided an important safety net during the transition period. These initiatives, offered by the Lithuanian government to help new arrivals, were instrumental in helping her get on her feet. However, bureaucracy proved to be one of the first and most persistent obstacles. Dealing with red tape, unhelpful officials and conflicting information made the process of setting up her business frustratingly slow. The language barrier compounded these difficulties, making it harder to navigate institutions and connect with potential business partners.

However,
bureaucracy proved to be one of the first and most persistent obstacles.

As if these challenges were not enough, the socio-political climate soon changed in a way that made Olga's journey even more precarious. When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the perception of Belarusian immigrants in Lithuania changed almost overnight. Despite having fled the very same authoritarian regime that supported the war, Olga and others like her found themselves under increased scrutiny and suspicion. This shift was part of a wider pattern across Europe, where global crises often lead to growing mistrust of migrant communities, regardless of their individual circumstances.

Economic pressures added another layer of complexity to Olga's struggle. High taxes and high rents in the centre of Vilnius put a significant strain on her small business. Like many entrepreneurs trying to establish themselves in competitive European capitals, she found that maintaining profitability was a constant challenge. The situation worsened as refugee support programmes were phased out, leaving her with a meagre financial cushion. It became clear that while short-term assistance had been helpful, there was a lack of long-term strategies to support immigrant entrepreneurs beyond the initial start-up phase.

Despite these difficulties, Olga found ways to adapt and move forward. The support of non-governmental organisations proved invaluable. Through these networks, she gained access to vital business information, contacts and mentoring – resources that helped her navigate Lithuania's complex regulatory and business landscape. More importantly, she identified a niche in the market: unique, locally produced souvenirs that stood out from mass-produced imports. This differentiation allowed her to carve out a place for herself in Vilnius's competitive tourism industry.

Although her business remained small, its impact was significant. Olga created jobs, employing both locals and fellow refugees, making a tangible contribution to the Lithuanian economy. Her shop added to the cultural vibrancy of the city, offering visitors a chance to take home something truly original. Despite financial difficulties, she paid her taxes regularly, underlining the fact that immigrant-owned businesses are not just beneficiaries of state support, but active contributors to their new home countries.



Natalia's Journey:

Rebuilding a medical career in Latvia

For Natalia, an experienced maxillofacial surgeon from Belarus, the decision to move to Latvia was driven not by professional ambition but by necessity. As political tensions in Belarus escalated, it became increasingly difficult for her to stay in her home country. Two years ago, she made the life-changing decision to leave her established practice behind and start afresh in Riga. But what she thought would be an easy transition turned into a maze of bureaucratic, linguistic and financial challenges.

Setting up a medical practice in a new country proved far more complex than she had anticipated. The biggest hurdle was obtaining a Latvian medical licence, which required passing a series of demanding specialist exams. Despite her extensive qualifications and years of experience, she had to revalidate her expertise through a foreign system that often felt rigid and exclusionary. The licensing process was time-consuming and emotionally draining, delaying her ability to resume work and earn an income.

Adding to the challenge was the language barrier. Although Natalia had worked with international patients before, mastering Latvian to a level that would allow her to communicate effectively with both patients and medical authorities became a daunting task.

Unlike other sectors where English or Russian could be used professionally, the medical field required fluency in the local language. For Natalia, this meant months of intensive study, attending courses and practising communicating in an unfamiliar language – all while struggling to find financial stability.

Despite various international initiatives claiming to support Belarusian professionals and entrepreneurs abroad, institutional support was virtually non-existent. Neither governmental nor non-governmental organisations provided the kind of tangible support she had hoped for. There were no structured programmes to guide migrant medical professionals through the licensing process, nor financial support to help them bridge the income gap during their transition. What was advertised as support often amounted to little more than vague recommendations and bureaucratic dead ends.

The economic consequences of the move were immediate and severe. Back in Belarus, Natalia had built up a thriving private practice, earning a stable and comfortable income. In Latvia, her income dropped significantly, forcing her to adjust her lifestyle and rethink her financial future. The cost of re-establishing herself in a foreign country – paying for language courses, licence fees and office space – was overwhelming. It became clear that while migration offered safety and stability, financial security was something she would have to fight for all over again.

But despite these obstacles, Natalia remained determined. She found solace in the sense of security that Latvia offered – an environment where she no longer had to worry about political persecution. This change of perspective proved invaluable. She realised that while economic hardship was a significant burden, the ability to work without fear, to build something new without political interference, was its own kind of success.

From Minsk to Warsaw:

Pavel's journey to building a coffee empire in Poland

For Pavel, a seasoned entrepreneur from Minsk, the decision to move to Poland in April 2022 was neither impulsive nor sudden. He had been thinking about moving his business abroad for years, but it was only after careful consideration that he took the plunge. Poland's geographical proximity to Belarus allowed him to stay in touch with his family, while linguistic and cultural similarities made it easier to adapt. More importantly, he saw Poland as a country with economic stability and a strong, independent currency – factors that made it an attractive business destination.

When he arrived in Warsaw, Pavel took a strategic approach. Unlike many entrepreneurs who rush into opening a business, he spent the first three months carefully studying the market. He walked through different neighbourhoods, observing footfall, competition and customer behaviour to find the perfect location for his cafe. Having prepared all the legal documents in advance with the help of a lawyer, he had little trouble with formal company registration, which could be completed online. However, he did face challenges in opening a bank account, as he encountered scepticism from financial institutions due to his Belarusian citizenship. It took some persistence, but he eventually solved the problem.

Pavel's patience and careful planning paid off. Today, he owns two successful cafes in Warsaw, with a third on the way. His flagship café quickly gained popularity, attracting locals and tourists alike. His cafes now employ 60–70 people, including Belarusians, Ukrainians and Poles, with a strong emphasis on hiring bilingual staff who can serve customers in both Polish and Russian.

Its success can be attributed to a few key factors: a unique product that stands out in a competitive restaurant market, carefully chosen locations with high footfall, and an effective digital marketing strategy that uses social media to build a loyal customer base.

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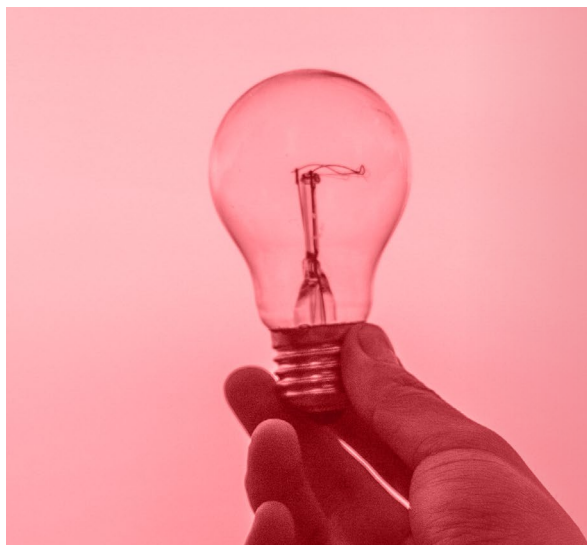
However, running a business in Poland was not without its challenges.

However, running a business in Poland was not without its challenges. The high costs of doing business, especially employee wages and insurance, came as a shock compared to Belarus. He had to adapt his business model to meet these financial demands. Navigating the Polish tax and administrative system also took time and effort. Although he did not find the system overly complex, there was a learning curve in adapting to the new bureaucratic processes.

As a Belarusian citizen, Pavel also faced certain legal restrictions. He was unable to open a sole proprietorship, which limited his business structure options. On a personal level, he also struggled to find accommodation as some landlords were reluctant to rent to Belarusian citizens.

Despite these obstacles, Pavel is optimistic about his future in Poland. His expansion plans include opening more cafes and possibly moving into new areas of the catering market.

In the long term, he is also considering investing in real estate to expand his foothold in Poland beyond the restaurant industry. Unlike some migrant entrepreneurs who see their move as temporary, Pavel has no plans to move his business elsewhere. He sees Warsaw as the ideal place for long-term growth, preferring Poland's economic stability and business potential to the uncertain landscape in Belarus.



The experiences of Belarusian entrepreneurs in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland reveal both the barriers and opportunities that migrant entrepreneurs face when setting up in a new country.

While each case is unique, **common patterns emerge regarding bureaucratic obstacles, financial pressures and socio-political challenges, as well as opportunities for business innovation, market adaptation and economic contribution.** These case studies illustrate how migrant entrepreneurs navigate these factors and what measures could be taken to better support their integration into the host economies.

One of the main obstacles for Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU is **navigating complex legal and administrative systems.** While company registration is relatively straightforward in some countries, other aspects of business formalisation – such as obtaining a medical licence (Latvia), securing a bank account (Poland) or dealing with administrative inefficiencies (Lithuania) – cause frustration and delays. In addition, Belarusian nationals often face legal restrictions that limit their ability to operate as sole proprietors, complicating their business structures.

The transition from an established business in Belarus to a new venture in the EU often involves a significant loss of income in the early stages. Entrepreneurs must cover relocation costs, licence fees and higher rents and wages, often without any initial financial stability. The phasing out of short-term refugee support programmes exacerbates the problem, leaving many struggling to remain profitable. **The high cost of doing business** – in particular employee wages, insurance and taxes – was a major challenge for all the entrepreneurs interviewed, making financial planning and adaptation crucial.

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While some entrepreneurs benefit from linguistic similarities (e.g. Polish and Belarusian), sectors such as healthcare require fluency in the host country's language to operate effectively. In Latvia, the need to master Latvian was a significant time and cognitive burden for a medical professional seeking re-registration. **Language barriers** also make it difficult to communicate with government institutions, clients and potential business partners, slowing down the integration process.

Migrant entrepreneurs do not operate in a vacuum; their success is influenced by public perceptions. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2014, some Belarusian migrants experienced increased suspicion in their host countries. Despite having fled an authoritarian regime themselves, they sometimes faced negative stereotypes due to Belarus' political alignment with Russia. These societal tensions created additional barriers to trust, affecting interactions with landlords, financial institutions and local communities.

Although various initiatives claim to support Belarusian entrepreneurs abroad, in practice many struggle to access tangible assistance. Entrepreneurs are often left to navigate bureaucratic hurdles on their own, with little structured guidance on how to secure licences, funding or legal advice. The **lack of long-term support mechanisms** for migrant businesses beyond initial relocation assistance limits their growth potential and sustainability.

Migrant entrepreneurs are **reinventing their business models to fit the new economic landscape**. In Lithuania, a print shop owner transformed her business into a souvenir and clothing brand, recognising the demand for locally produced, unique products. The ability to identify gaps in local industries and offer culturally distinctive goods or services gives Belarusian entrepreneurs an edge in differentiation.

NGOs and diaspora communities can play a crucial role in supporting migrant entrepreneurs. Those who have successfully navigated the business landscape have often relied on peer networks, industry contacts and informal mentorship rather than formal institutional support. Belarusian entrepreneurs benefit by hiring fellow migrants, creating employment opportunities for other displaced persons and reinforcing strong intra-community business networks.

Language barriers also make it difficult to communicate with government institutions, clients and potential business partners, slowing down the integration process.



4.3. Economic, Social and Cultural Impact of Belarusian Migrant Entrepreneurs on Host Countries – Reflections From Case Studies

Belarusian migrant entrepreneurs have demonstrated significant potential for stimulating economic activity in their host societies through job creation, tax contributions and market diversification.

In the case studies here, Belarusian entrepreneurs hired both locals and fellow migrants, facilitating labour market integration and reducing – at least to a modest extent – unemployment rates among displaced Belarusians. Businesses such as restaurants, retail shops and medical practices enrich the local economy by increasing consumer choice and service quality.

Research on migrant business ownership in European economies suggests that migrant entrepreneurs often introduce new business models and product innovations, thereby increasing overall market competitiveness (Glinka, 2018). Furthermore, studies suggest that migrant-owned businesses play a counter-cyclical role during economic downturns, as migrant entrepreneurs are often more resilient to market shocks due to their adaptability and flexible business strategies (David et al., 2021). However, despite their economic potential, Belarusian entrepreneurs face the structural constraints discussed above, such as high taxation, regulatory complexity and limited access to credit.

Migrant entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a mechanism for social integration, as it enables migrants to engage in economic activities that foster interaction with host communities (Eraydin, 2010). Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU have played an active role in building migrant networks, creating employment opportunities for displaced persons and strengthening transnational business relations. In addition, bilingual business environments, such as those found in Belarusian-owned cafes in Poland, promote linguistic inclusivity and cultural exchange, making businesses more accessible to both migrant and local populations.

In addition to their economic and social contributions, Belarusian entrepreneurs have enriched the cultural landscape of their host societies by introducing new culinary traditions, retail products and professional services. Moreover, the emergence of migrant-led creative industries, such as souvenir shops and fashion brands in Lithuania, demonstrates how migrant entrepreneurship can contribute to cultural innovation and artistic expression.

These ventures serve not only as economic enterprises, but also as platforms for cultural representation, helping to foster intercultural understanding between migrant and host communities.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

Since 2020, Poland and the Baltic States have emerged as the main destinations for Belarusian migrants.

The migration of Belarusian entrepreneurs has been driven by a combination of political repression, economic instability in Belarus, and targeted government policies in the host countries aimed at attracting skilled professionals and businesses. However, the level of institutional support and the long-term sustainability of these initiatives has varied considerably from country to country.

Poland's PBH programme has been instrumental in attracting Belarusian IT professionals and entrepreneurs. By offering streamlined visa procedures, business registration assistance and investment facilitation, Poland successfully positioned itself as a key hub for Belarusian businesses, particularly in the ICT sector. However, in January 2024, the Polish government suspended the PBH due to discrepancies between the number of visas issued and the actual number of specialists arriving in Poland. The termination of the programme, coupled with a tightening of visa policies, has made it more difficult for Belarusian entrepreneurs to relocate to Poland, signalling a shift in government priorities.

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Despite initial successes, doing business in Poland remains a challenge for Belarusian migrants due to complex administrative procedures, restrictive regulations on business ownership, and difficulties in opening bank accounts.

Lengthy processing times for residence permits, bureaucratic inefficiencies and changing public attitudes towards Belarusians – exacerbated by geopolitical tensions – have created additional barriers. Discrimination and difficulties in accessing financial services have also emerged as major concerns for Belarusian entrepreneurs, particularly in the wake of increasing security-related visa restrictions.

Lithuania, initially one of the most welcoming destinations for Belarusian companies, facilitated the relocation of companies through investment promotion initiatives such as Invest Lithuania and International House Vilnius. The country successfully attracted a significant number of Belarusian IT companies, contributing to Lithuania's growing technology sector. However, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Lithuania introduced restrictive migration policies, including visa suspensions and stricter national security checks. These measures led to an exodus of Belarusian companies, with many relocating from Lithuania to Poland due to a deteriorating regulatory environment.

Although **Latvia and Estonia** initially expressed interest in attracting Belarusian businesses, neither country has become a major destination for Belarusian migration. Latvia's engagement with Belarusian companies remained insignificant as the number of active Belarusian enterprises was decreasing. Estonia, which imposed early restrictions on Belarusian migration, has remained an unattractive destination due to its highly regulated business environment and lack of tailored support measures.

At the **EU level**, financial and advisory support has been provided through the EBRD, which has allocated €4 million to help Belarusian SMEs integrate into EU markets. However, the impact of this initiative remains limited, as restrictive national policies and bureaucratic hurdles continue to slow the migration of Belarusian entrepreneurs.

Despite the challenges, Belarusian entrepreneurs have made a **positive contribution to the host economies**, by filling labour shortages in the IT sector and generating tax revenues. In Poland and Lithuania, the arrival of Belarusian businesses has boosted economic growth, increased demand for commercial real estate and added skilled professionals to the workforce. However, restrictive visa policies, growing security concerns and changing political attitudes have hindered the long-term sustainability of Belarusian business migration.

To maximise the benefits of Belarusian entrepreneurship, **EU countries need to balance national security considerations with policies that facilitate business integration, financial accessibility and visa predictability**. Failure to do so could result in missed economic opportunities and encourage Belarusian professionals to seek business-friendly environments outside the EU. Simplified visa procedures, investment incentives and tailored integration programmes would be necessary to sustain and further capitalise on the contributions of Belarusian entrepreneurs in the region.

EU countries need to balance national security considerations with policies that facilitate business integration, financial accessibility and visa predictability

Their stories described in this Working Paper are a reminder that migration is not just about displacement – it is about reinvention, contribution and the pursuit of new opportunities.

For host countries, **investing in migrant entrepreneurs** is not just an act of social support – it **is an economic opportunity**. With the right policies in place, Belarusian entrepreneurs can become drivers of innovation, contributors to job creation and long-term assets for European economies. Their stories described in this Working Paper are a reminder that migration is not just about displacement – it is about reinvention, contribution and the pursuit of new opportunities.

The case studies of Belarusian entrepreneurs in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland illustrate the complex reality of migrant entrepreneurship in the EU. While they face legal barriers, financial difficulties and changing public perceptions, they also demonstrate resilience, adaptability and economic potential. Their stories highlight the **urgent need for better institutional support**, particularly in simplifying licensing procedures, providing long-term financial support and promoting inclusive policies that encourage migrant-led businesses.

5.1. Implications for Policy and Future Research

The effective integration of immigrant entrepreneurs into their host economies requires a **comprehensive, multi-dimensional policy approach that addresses structural, economic, linguistic and socio-cultural barriers**.

An essential component of such an approach is the **simplification of administrative procedures**. The current complexity of the regulatory framework often acts as a disincentive to formalise businesses, leading to inefficiencies and missed economic opportunities. The creation of dedicated entrepreneurial pathways – characterised by streamlined bureaucracy, clear guidelines and expedited decision-making processes – would not only facilitate smoother market entry for migrant entrepreneurs, but also increase overall economic dynamism. One potential mechanism for achieving this is the introduction of fast-track business registration programmes that allow skilled professionals and investors to launch ventures with minimal procedural delays.

In addition to regulatory simplification, the **establishment of specialised information centres** could play a crucial role in reducing the uncertainty associated with cross-border business migration. These centres should act as one-stop-shops offering legal, administrative and financial advice, thereby reducing the information asymmetry that often hinders migrant entrepreneurs. A **well-structured information infrastructure** could be further enhanced through digital platforms to ensure that entrepreneurs have access to up-to-date regulatory frameworks, licensing requirements and financial resources in multiple languages.



Tackling language barriers is another critical aspect of effective integration policies. While general language courses are available in most EU countries, they often fail to equip immigrants with the industry-specific vocabulary necessary for professional success. Policies should prioritise the implementation of government-funded or co-funded **vocational language programmes tailored to high-impact sectors** such as ICT, healthcare and retail. The development of sector-specific language modules, coupled with on-the-job language support, would facilitate faster economic integration and improve business success rates. For regulated professions such as medicine, specialised courses should be complemented by **simplified professional re-qualification pathways** to allow foreign-trained professionals to transition more efficiently into the labour market.

*From an economic perspective, **facilitating access to finance** is a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of migrant-owned businesses.*

Many immigrant entrepreneurs face structural barriers to securing credit due to a lack of local credit history, restrictive collateral requirements and unfamiliarity with domestic banking systems. The introduction of specialised microfinance programmes, loan guarantees and targeted grant schemes would ease the initial financial constraints and enable businesses to scale up more quickly. In addition, public-private partnerships could be used to develop financial literacy programmes that provide entrepreneurs with essential knowledge on investment strategies, financial planning and risk management.

Recognition of foreign professional qualifications remains another policy challenge, particularly for highly skilled migrants in regulated industries. Lengthy and complex validation procedures often delay or prevent skilled professionals from contributing effectively to their host economies. A more flexible and competency-based recognition framework, including fast-track assessment mechanisms and gap-filling training programmes, would allow the efficient use of migrant human capital while maintaining professional standards.

Beyond economic measures, **socio-cultural integration mechanisms** play a key role in fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. **Mentorship and networking programmes** should be systematically implemented to connect immigrant entrepreneurs with experienced local business leaders. These initiatives would facilitate knowledge transfer, market insights and social capital formation, ultimately reducing the structural disadvantages faced by newly arrived entrepreneurs. Regular networking events, business incubators and diaspora-driven investment initiatives could further accelerate integration and promote cross-sectoral cooperation.

Mentorship and networking programmes should be systematically implemented to connect immigrant entrepreneurs with experienced local business leaders.

Finally, the **promotion of diversity in business** should be actively encouraged through public awareness campaigns and targeted incentives for inclusive entrepreneurship. Raising awareness among both host communities and migrant entrepreneurs of the economic and social benefits of diverse business ecosystems can help foster an atmosphere of openness, acceptance and mutual economic benefit. Policies to support transnational business networks and diaspora entrepreneurship could further enhance the role of migrant enterprises in strengthening economic ties between home and host countries.

Successful implementation of these policies requires a **proactive and adaptive policy framework**. A key element of this approach is regular policy evaluation and evidence-based decision-making. Systematic research on the evolving needs, challenges and contributions of migrant entrepreneurs would allow for dynamic policy adjustments to ensure that integration policies remain effective and responsive to the changing economic conditions. Establishing multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanisms, including representatives from business communities, migrant organisations and public policy institutions, would promote a more inclusive and participatory policy-making process.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the long-term contributions of Belarusian businesses to economic growth, cultural diversity and social integration in their host countries.

Comparative studies with other immigrant entrepreneurial communities could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by different groups, thereby informing more effective policymaking and support mechanisms for immigrant entrepreneurs.



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