

Actors of transformation: An analysis of Belarusian business integration and alignment with the EU business environment



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Abstract

The forced internationalization of Belarusian businesses in the wake of political repression since 2020 and the war in Ukraine presents a unique case study in economic diaspora development and institutional alignment. The flight of hundreds of businesses and thousands of skilled professionals to European Union host countries is a critical factor shaping both the immediate host economies and the long-term prospects for Belarus. While existing studies document the scale and challenges of this economic emigration, there remains a significant gap in understanding the institutional and market values held by these relocated business owners and their alignment with the EU's established economic framework. Leveraging a novel dataset derived from a comprehensive survey of 114 valid Belarusian-rooted businesses operating in the EU, supplemented by World Values Survey, GEM data for Belarus, and business surveys conducted in Belarus before 2020, this paper aims to fill that gap and quantify the values, entrepreneurial orientation, and integration patterns of Belarusian-rooted businesses operating in the EU. The findings suggest this diaspora should be viewed less as traditional economic migrants and more as a distinct cohort demonstrating strong value alignment and acting as an agent of deeper European integration. This empirical foundation enables the analysis to move beyond anecdotal evidence and assess the precise nature of their integration and potential future influence.

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1. Introduction

The development of a strong private sector is essential not only for economic growth but also for safeguarding sovereignty and advancing democratic transformation of transition economies and Belarus in particular (BEROC, 2023a). A vibrant private sector naturally diversifies the economy, reduces reliance on state monopolies, and limits vulnerability to external political pressure (World Bank, 2012). Building innovative, globally connected companies is the most effective route to economic self-sufficiency. At the same time, entrepreneurial values – autonomy, accountability, initiative, and horizontal cooperation – form a foundation for democratic culture (Audretsch & Moog, 2022; Panasevich et al., 2024).

In Belarus, the more than 10-year liberalization of the business environment enabled the private sector to become the most dynamic part of the economy, surpassing the contribution of state-owned commercial enterprises to exports and GDP by 2020. In 2020, private businesses became increasingly socially and politically active – first in response to the pandemic, and later during the 2020 presidential election campaign and subsequent protests (Bornukova & Friedrich, 2021). The ensuing political crisis, marked by widespread repression and the systematic dismantling of civil society, has precipitated an exodus of human and entrepreneurial capital unprecedented in its scale and nature (Luzgina & Koreivo, 2023). Confronted with an untenable domestic environment wherein private business became synonymous with political risk, entrepreneurs have had to adjust to reactionary government measures, navigate the impact of international sanctions on Belarus, and contend with the repercussions of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Many forward-looking and globally oriented entrepreneurs have relocated their operations, talent, and aspirations to neighboring EU member states, primarily Poland and Lithuania (Marozau & Danilchuk, 2024).

This study argues that the Belarusian business diaspora’s decision to relocate and aggressively expand within the rigorous EU market, coupled with their proactive embrace of liberal principles, highlights their unique potential as agents of future transformation for Belarus. This community is framed not as a passive recipient of aid or a mere subject of migration policy, but as a potent cohort of active agents who seek to build, innovate, and compete. This makes the business diaspora a vital political and cultural bridge, poised to facilitate Belarus’s future convergence with European social and economic norms. This potential has yet to be fully comprehended or leveraged by EU policymakers. Amid global turbulence, the situation of Belarusians and Belarusian businesses should be considered not solely within domestic political debates in neighboring EU states but within a broader regional strategic framework. In this regard, by constructing a comprehensive portrait of the Belarusian business community in the EU, the study endeavors to shift the policy discourse from abstract discussions of Belarus’s potential European integration toward a more evidence-based and tangible perspective. The central argument posited is that the EU has inadvertently become the custodian of a substantial portion of Belarus’s future economic potential. Recognizing, nurturing, and integrating this asset is not merely a matter of sound migration policy; it constitutes a strategic imperative for fostering a democratic and prosperous future

in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

This study addresses four primary research questions:

1. What is the quantitative and qualitative profile of the Belarusian business diaspora in the EU with respect to its scale, sectoral composition, origins, workforce structure, and performance outlook?
2. What are the principal barriers and challenges these enterprises encounter in their efforts to integrate into the EU's market?
3. To what extent do the fundamental economic values and market principles of Belarusian entrepreneurs align with the core tenets of the European Union's market economy?
4. What strategic policy actions can European Union institutions and host-country governments undertake to mitigate the identified challenges and leverage this diaspora as a pivotal asset for the future economic and social transformation of Belarus?

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to facilitate a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis. The study is based on a quantitative analysis of a unique, proprietary survey dataset containing responses from top managers and owners of Belarusian-rooted businesses operating primarily in the European Union. This survey, conducted in 2024, furnishes an unprecedented quantitative baseline, detailing the firms' characteristics, challenges, outlook, and underlying values. This quantitative foundation is subsequently enriched, contextualized, and interpreted through a systematic synthesis of key qualitative and policy studies published between 2021 and 2024. By integrating the “what” of the quantitative data with the “why” and “how” of the qualitative literature, this study offers a uniquely robust and nuanced analysis. This methodology permits not only the identification of statistical trends but also an understanding of the human experiences and motivations that underpin them, culminating in findings that are both empirically sound and deeply contextualized.

To answer research questions, information on the current state, challenges, and development prospects of Belarusian-rooted businesses operating in Europe was collected in two stages. The first stage involved the collection and analysis of data on Belarusian companies active within the European region. Sources included data aggregators drawing from public and private business registers, open-source online publications, social media and messaging platforms, as well as information provided by business associations, professional clubs, and Belarusian diaspora communities abroad. Given the relatively limited number of such enterprises – estimated at approximately 10,000 across Central and Eastern Europe – and the fact that around 80% were established following the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus, constructing a representative survey sample presented a considerable challenge. A key determinant of response rates was the level of trust: amid ongoing repression by Belarusian authorities against entrepreneurs and the pressure exerted on BEROCC and its staff, companies' willingness to participate in the survey was largely contingent upon their confidence in the integrity of the research initiative.

In the second stage, a custom-made online questionnaire was disseminated among Belarusian entrepreneurs and top managers, who led businesses operating abroad. Communication with respondents was conducted through targeted outreach based on databases compiled from registry information aggregators, as well as through business associations and professional networks, some of which served as intermediaries. Direct contact with business representatives was also employed where appropriate. As a result, 114 completed questionnaires were obtained from founders and executives of Belarusian companies operating in Europe. The composition of the sample encompasses all key sectors in which Belarusian-rooted businesses are represented.

3. From economic emigration to forced internationalization: a historical review

The pre-2020 context: gradual Europeanization

Before 2020, Belarusian business migration was a persistent yet measured phenomenon, impelled primarily by economic logic rather than political necessity. For decades, entrepreneurs contended with structural impediments in the domestic market, including recurrent economic and financial crises and the narrowness of the domestic market, which served as constant push factors for international expansion (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). Despite operating within a state-dominated economy where regulations could be arbitrarily rewritten (Ivy, 2013), the private sector demonstrated remarkable dynamism and growth. This environment inadvertently cultivated a resilient and innovative class of entrepreneurs, adept at navigating uncertainty and creating value within a non-market system (BEROC, 2023b). By 2020, their endeavors had yielded visible results: the private sector's contribution to Belarus's GDP had surpassed that of state enterprises, accounting for 55% of the total. The share of private companies' exports in total goods and services nearly doubled from 27.4% in 2012 to 51.4% in 2019, showcasing their escalating competitiveness and global orientation (Daneyko et al., 2020). This period was characterized by a gradual, voluntary Europeanization, as businesses strategically pursued access to larger markets, more stable legal frameworks, and new technologies. Moreover, many Belarusian companies were born-global (Vissak & Zhang, 2016) and considered the domestic and even Russian market as a launch pad for further expansion to the developed technological markets (Marozau et al., 2021). The migration was selective and planned, representing a natural evolution for an increasingly sophisticated private sector.

The 2020 inflection point

The political crisis following the August 2020 presidential elections signified a violent rupture with the past, fundamentally altering the nature and drivers of business migration (Bornukova & Friedrich, 2021). The subsequent crackdown, characterized by legal and physical pressure on private enterprises perceived as disloyal, transformed emigration from a strategic choice into a "survival strategy". This shift precipitated two distinct waves of what may be termed "forced internationalization." The initial wave, spanning 2020-2021, was composed largely of individual entrepreneurs and specialists, particularly from the highly mobile IT sector, who fled direct political persecution, arbitrary arrests, and an increasingly hostile business climate (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). A second, larger wave commenced after February 2022. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, facilitated by the Belarusian regime, triggered a cascade of international sanctions and severe reputational damage. Consequently, Western clients began severing ties with Belarusian companies, rendering it impossible

for export-oriented businesses to continue operating from within the country. This development expanded the scope of relocation from individuals to entire companies, which were now compelled to move not only to protect their staff but also to preserve their client base, supply chains, and access to the global financial system. The choice was no longer between remaining and departing, but between relocating the enterprise or witnessing its collapse.

Scale and scope of the exodus

The post-2020 exodus represents one of the most significant movements of human and entrepreneurial capital in the region's recent history. The magnitude of this migration, documented across multiple studies, is staggering. It is estimated that over 300,000 Belarusians have emigrated since 2020, with Poland emerging as the primary destination, having issued 255,600 first residence permits alone (Luzgina & Koreivo, 2023). Crucially, this was not a random cross-section of the population; an estimated 87% of these emigrants possess a higher education degree, signifying a substantial brain drain for Belarus (Lvovskiy et al., 2025). This constitutes a devastating loss of the very demographic required to drive innovation, economic modernization, and future growth. This human exodus was mirrored by a corporate one. Between August 2020 and June 2022, at least 2,100 companies relocated fully or partially to the EU, with Poland and Lithuania absorbing 90% of this flow (Naŭrodski, 2022). By September 2024, the number of companies with Belarusian capital operating in Poland had surged to 7,169, marking a 20% increase over the preceding year, while Lithuania had experienced a decline – from 850 in 2023 to 564 in 2024 (Marozau & Danilchuk, 2024).

The migration of Belarusian businesses disproportionately comprised the vanguard of Belarus's modern economy, serving developed high-tech markets. The IT sector, a key driver of pre-2020 growth, was most severely affected, with globally recognized startups such as Flo Health, PandaDoc, and Wargaming relocating their operations (BEROC Research Lab, 2024). This selective outflow indicates that the diaspora now concentrated in the EU is not a mere sample of the Belarusian economy, but rather a concentration of its most valuable, innovative, and forward-thinking entrepreneurial assets.

While relocation in 2020–2022 was often rapid and reactive, more recent movement has become deliberate and structured. Consequently, the development of Belarusian-rooted businesses in the EU remains one of the foci of international organizations and stakeholders supporting the democratic movement of Belarusians, rather than policymakers and business support organizations in recipient countries.

4. Profile of the Belarusian business diaspora in the EU

Scale, geographic, and sectoral distribution

The survey sample reflects the heavy geographic concentration of the Belarusian business diaspora on the EU's eastern flank, establishing their primary country of operations in Poland, followed by Lithuania (ZPP, 2023). Their appeal stems from a confluence of geographic proximity, cultural familiarity, and proactive (at least initially) government relocation programs, such as the Poland Business Harbour initiative, which was specifically designed to attract IT specialists and companies from the region (BEROC Research Lab, 2024).

As shown in Figure 1, Poland clearly dominates in the sample, serving as the operational base for 61% of the surveyed firms. The remaining surveyed companies are evenly distributed across several locations: the United States (10%), Belarus (10%), Lithuania (9%), and other countries (10%). This suggests a pattern of moderate diversification beyond Poland, with continued relevance of the country of origin (Belarus), regional proximity (Lithuania), and emerging global reach (USA and other jurisdictions). Overall, while Poland remains the central hub, a notable share of businesses is spread across both neighboring and transatlantic contexts.

In the survey sample, 62% of firms are micro-enterprises, 30% are small enterprises, 7% are medium-sized enterprises, and only 1% are large enterprises (Figure 2). These figures underscore that most firms are lean and agile operations, often characterized by limited staffing and high flexibility, including readiness for further relocation. This distribution reflects that the relocation wave predominantly consisted of micro- and small-sized enterprises, as larger firms typically encounter significantly greater logistical, financial, and legal barriers to transferring their operations abroad. Furthermore, the dominance of micro and small enterprises suggests the emergence of a dynamic business ecosystem, wherein smaller firms demonstrate a heightened capacity to adapt swiftly to new market environments.

Nearly half (44%) of surveyed firms operate in the broad Services & Trade sector, covering consulting, education, logistics, finance, and other service industries – illustrating the versatility of Belarusian businesses abroad (Figure 3). The ICT sector dominates the sample, representing 37% of firms, which reflects both its mobility during the relocation wave and its central role in the knowledge economy (BEROC Research Lab, 2024). The remaining 19% are active in Manufacturing & Construction, signaling continued investment in production-oriented activities despite higher infrastructure demands.

The majority of surveyed firms were established recently, reflecting a wave of new entrepreneurial activity among Belarusian-rooted businesses abroad (Figure 4). According to the survey, 83% of firms were registered between 2020 and 2025, with 49% founded during 2020–2022 and an additional 34% during 2023–2025. Only 12% of firms were founded in the 2011–2019 period, and a mere 5% date back to 2004–2010. This age structure points to a predominantly young business cohort, likely shaped by recent political, economic, and migration dynamics. The recency of firm registration may also reflect the accelerated internationalization and re-establishment of Belarusian entrepreneurs in new host countries over the past five years.

While the survey shows a strong ICT concentration, broader registry data indicate that sectors such as trade, logistics, and construction make up a larger share of all Belarusian-owned firms in countries like Poland. This implies some sampling bias toward tech-oriented networks but still captures the most dynamic and internationally integrated part of the Belarusian business diaspora. Nonetheless, it accurately captures the profile of the most visible, dynamic, and globally oriented segment of the relocated business community. Some businesses operate across multiple sectors and thus selected more than one category in the survey.

● Poland ● Belarus ● Lithuania ● USA ● Other

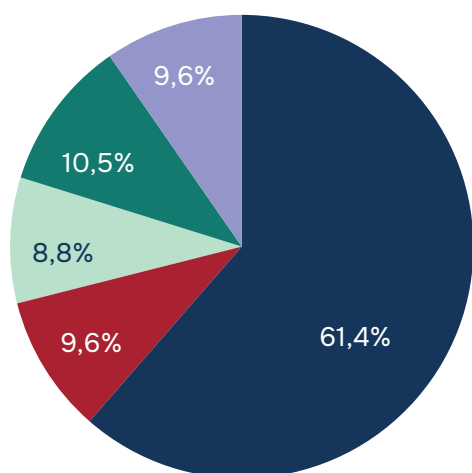


Figure 1. Primary country of operations for surveyed Belarusian businesses

● Micro ● Small ● Medium ● Large

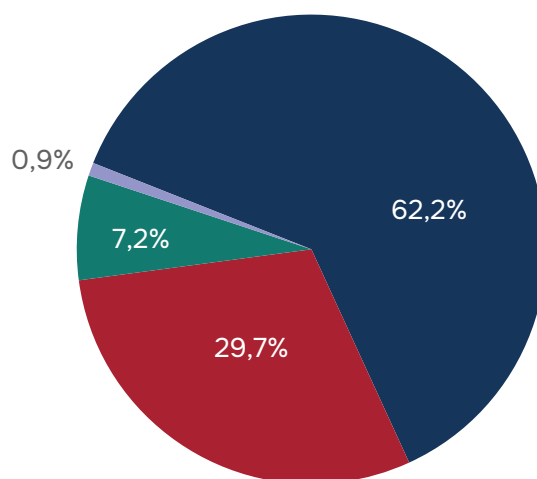


Figure 2. Size of surveyed Belarusian businesses

- ICT
- Manufacturing and Construction
- Services and Trade

- 2004-2010
- 2011-2019
- 2020-2022
- 2023-2025

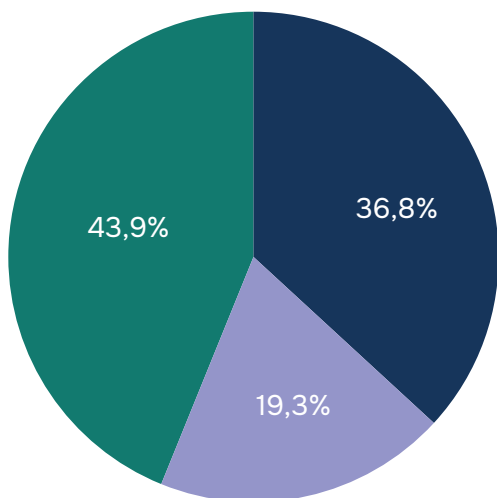


Figure 3. Surveyed Belarusian businesses by sector

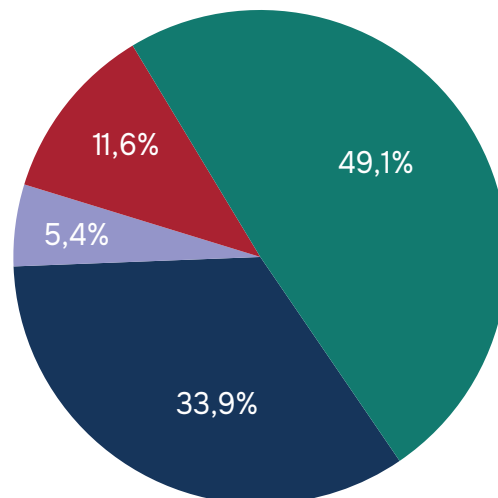


Figure 4. Surveyed Belarusian businesses by year of foundation

Source: Analysis of survey data

Origin and labor composition

An even more notable pattern emerges in the distribution of firm origins: nearly half (49%) of the companies were new local startups that were established from scratch in the current primary jurisdiction (Figure 5). Meanwhile, relocated firms – those that operated in Belarus and have fully or partially moved – make up 42% of the sample. Only 6% continue to operate in Belarus while opening branches abroad. This distribution underscores a shift toward local entrepreneurial formation, suggesting that the diaspora is not merely transplanting existing structures but actively generating new ones. The nearly even presence of relocated and new local startup firms reflects a dual pathway: one of continuity and adaptation, and another of innovation and reinvention.

Analysis of workforce composition reveals a heavy reliance on Belarusian talent, both from recent relocations and the existing local diaspora (Figure 6). A breakdown of firms by the share of Belarusian employees highlights this trend.

Among the companies analyzed, 36% report a medium to high share (41–100%) of employees from the Belarusian diaspora, and 26% report similarly high levels of relocated Belarusians in their teams. In contrast, only 12% of companies report a medium to high share of employees from other countries, and just 9% report the same for local employees (e.g., Lithuanians in Lithuania or Poles in Poland). This pattern reflects the fact that many of these businesses are still relatively small and founder-driven, with hiring networks often rooted in trusted

Belarusian professional circles. However, as these companies grow and mature, many may begin to prioritize specialized skills and experience over nationality, leading to more diverse and internationalized teams over time. In their current phase, however, Belarusian-led firms continue to play a crucial role in employing and integrating Belarusian talent across EU labor markets (Lvovskiy et al., 2025).

● Operates in Belarus+Local Branch
 ● Relocated ● New local startup ● Others

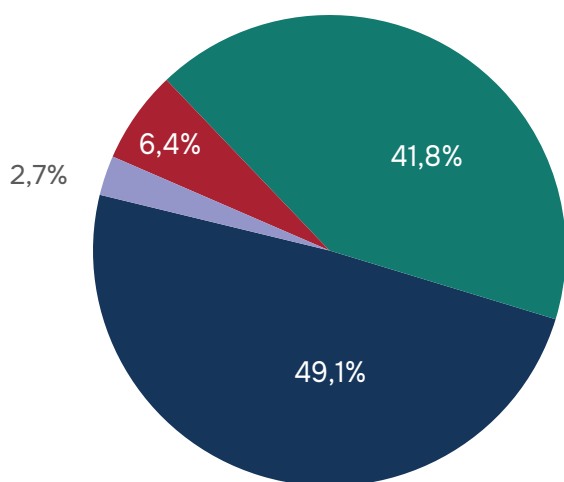


Figure 5. Origin of surveyed Belarusian businesses

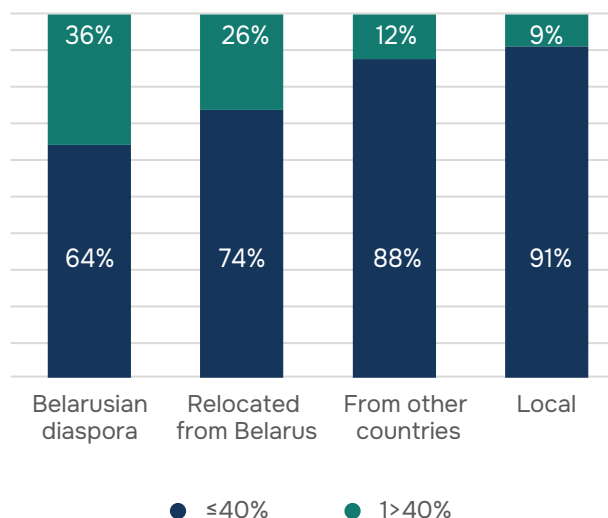


Figure 6. Staff composition of surveyed Belarusian businesses

Source: Analysis of survey data

Business future outlook

Although the survey did not capture retrospective performance indicators such as revenue or profit growth, the forward-looking data paints a clear picture of optimism and a focus on expansion. An overwhelming majority of the surveyed companies – 75% – identify business expansion as their primary current focus (Figure 7). In contrast, 21% are focused on maintaining the achieved level, and only 4% report a focus on business downsizing. This distribution, which is mostly stable across broad sectors (Figure 9), marks a clear shift away from the survival-oriented mindset that characterized the early stages of relocation. Instead, it reflects a growing confidence within the diaspora business community and a clear orientation toward growth, consolidation, and long-term investment in their new environments. In contrast, the last sampled surveys of businesses inside Belarus documented that only about one-fourth of companies planned to expand their activities (BEROC, 2023c). This comparison demonstrates a more ambitious and growth-oriented posture of Belarusian businesses in the EU, which may be attributed to a more predictable economic and business environment, as well as access to larger markets. Only 18% of surveyed businesses reported that they considered relocation to other countries,

with the highest share of 23% in the Manufacturing & Construction sector. The popular destinations are from Lithuania to Poland and from Poland to the USA.

This expansionary mindset is clearly reflected in hiring projections. A combined 64% of respondents expect their number of employees to increase over the next year – 46% anticipate a slight increase, while 18% foresee significant growth (Figure 8). 25% expect no change, and only 10% anticipate a decrease in workforce size (6% a significant decrease and 4% a slight one). Over 60% of firms in all three broad sectors plan to increase their staff, with the Manufacturing & Construction sector projecting the highest staff expansion at 73% (Figure 10). Furthermore, between 19% and 30% projects “No change,” meaning that minimal firms (less than 5% in Services & Trade, and Manufacturing & Construction) are planning any significant workforce reduction.

These indicators suggest that, despite the ongoing challenges of relocation and integration, the Belarusian business diaspora is not in a defensive position. On the contrary, it is actively pursuing growth, investing in capacity, and planning to create more jobs. This strong and confident outlook signals both resilience and a deep belief in the community’s potential to integrate, compete, and succeed in a market-based environment of the EU.

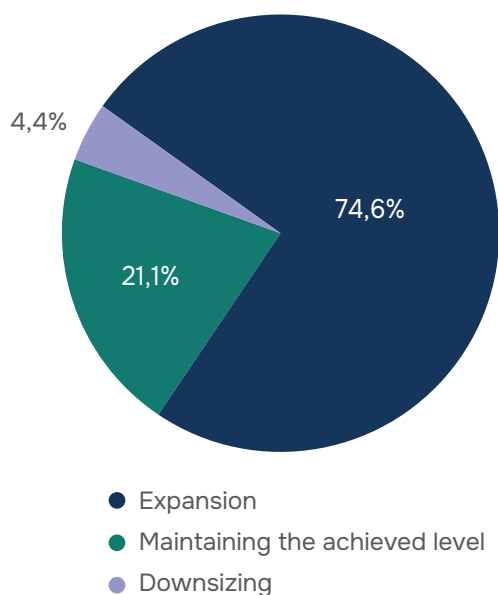


Figure 7. Strategic focus of surveyed Belarusian businesses

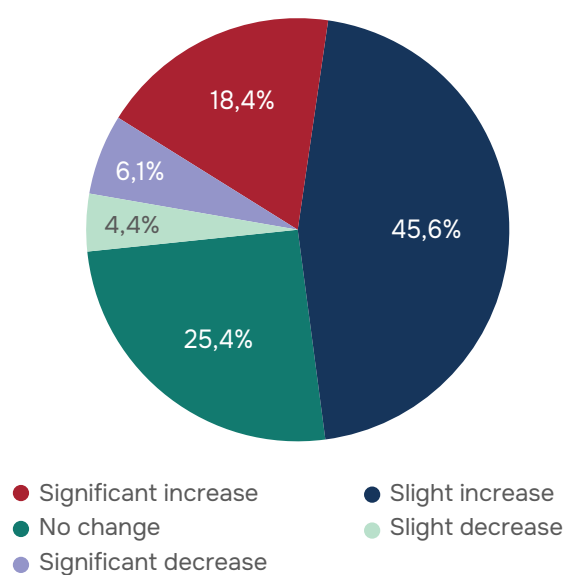


Figure 8. Hiring projection of surveyed Belarusian businesses

Source: Analysis of survey data

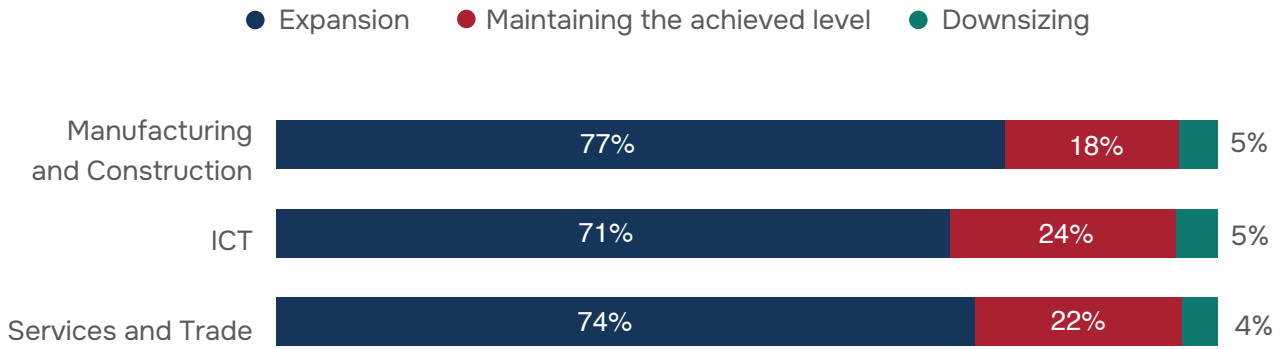


Figure 9. Strategic focus of surveyed Belarusian businesses by sector

Source: Analysis of survey data

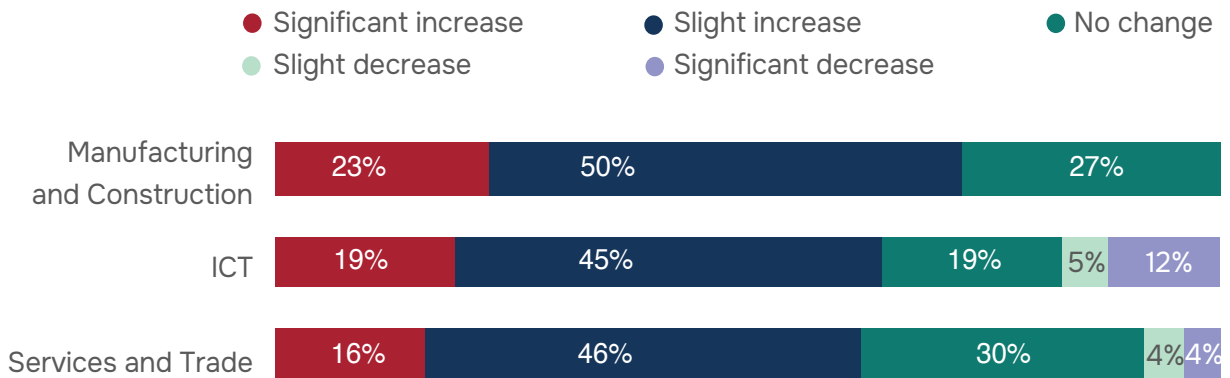


Figure 10. Hiring projection of surveyed Belarusian businesses by sector

Source: Analysis of survey data

5. Navigating the European market: challenges, responses, and support needs

Key barriers

The integration of Belarusian-rooted businesses into the EU single market is accompanied by a diverse array of challenges. These include both conventional obstacles faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and those that are more specific to the geopolitical and legal circumstances surrounding the Belarusian diaspora. As the Belarusian-rooted business becomes more established in new countries, issues of initial adaptation are becoming a thing of the past. New challenges related to business process optimization, finding financing, employees, and clients are coming to the forefront.

To capture these dynamics, the survey asked respondents to identify up to five key barriers hindering their company's growth and expansion. The results highlight the multidimensional nature of the constraints these firms encounter.

The most frequently reported barrier is difficulty entering new markets, selected by 39% of respondents (Figure 11). This is followed by high labor costs, particularly in terms of salary expectations (30%), and disparities in treatment of companies with Belarusian origins (29%). These three factors reflect a combination of structural and perception-based challenges that affect firms' ability to scale operations across borders.

Additional barriers relate to internal capacities and regulatory environments. A substantial share of firms (25%) cited a lack of qualified personnel or management, while 23% noted difficulties related to the legalization of founders and employees in host countries. These issues point to significant constraints in human capital and the administrative burdens associated with cross-border employment and residency requirements.

Several other responses reflect typical market dynamics faced by SMEs. These include strong competition (21%), low demand (20%), and high levels of economic uncertainty (19%). While such factors are not unique to diaspora-led firms, they compound the existing difficulties and reinforce the need for strategic adaptability.

A smaller yet non-negligible group of firms reported challenges with administrative and financial systems. These include complex and time-consuming administrative procedures (12%), financial problems such as credit debt or delayed payments from counterparties (11%), and high costs of borrowing (8%). Moreover, a minority of respondents highlighted concerns related to changing legislation, including tax laws (5%), and broader macro-economic instability, such as exchange rate fluctuations and inflation (4%).

Interestingly, 10% of respondents indicated that their firms do not face significant barriers, suggesting that a portion of the population has either developed effective strategies to navigate the host environment or benefits from sectoral or geographic advantages.



Figure 11. Key barriers hindering their company’s growth and expansion

Source: Analysis of survey data

The analysis identified significant differences across sectors regarding the barriers companies encounter. Thus, for the Services & Trade sector, the top three barriers reported are: “Discrimination against Belarusian companies” (36%), suggesting geopolitical factors constrain commercial activity; “Lack of qualified staff/management” (34%), highlighting a critical human capital challenge; and “Difficulty entering new markets” (30%), indicating structural hurdles in scaling operations. Within the ICT sector, the top three barriers for firms are: “Difficulty entering new markets” (45%), reflecting high competition and saturation in EU tech markets; “Low demand” (41%), pointing to challenges in aligning offerings with global market needs and securing contracts; and “High labor costs” (29%), which significantly impact profitability and scalability in this service-intensive sector outside Belarus. For the Manufacturing & Construction sector, the top three barriers are highly concentrated: “Difficulty entering new markets” (46%), underscoring high capital intensity and stringent regulatory requirements; “Legalization difficulties for founders/employees” (41%) highlighting challenges in establishing presence and securing staff; and “High labor costs” (36.4%), a major operational expense driven by the need for skilled and often unionized labor.

In general, the data reveals that market entry and operational costs are universal challenges, with “Difficulty entering new markets” ranking in the top three for all three sectors. However, the nature of barriers varies sig-

nificantly across industries. The Services & Trade sector is uniquely challenged by disparities in treatment, indicating political sensitivity and non-market factors influencing their operations. In contrast, the Manufacturing & Construction sector faces major friction from “Legalization difficulties for founders/employees”, suggesting a greater impact from regulatory instability and complexity. The ICT Sector grapples primarily with “Low demand” alongside high EU operating expenses. These sectoral differences highlight the necessity for tailored policy responses rather than blanket support measures to aid Belarusian businesses in the EU effectively. These findings illustrate the dual burden faced by Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU: they must contend with the general pressures of market competition while simultaneously addressing challenges linked to their legal status and national origin.

A comparison with the internal Belarusian business environment reveals a stark divergence in challenges. Before the socio-political crisis (2018), businesses inside Belarus struggled primarily with internal fiscal instability, citing high tax rates and variable legislation (IPM Research Center, 2018). By September 2023, the internal focus had become operational survival, driven by an acute lack of staff (due to emigration) and supply difficulties (due to sanctions and closed borders) (BEROC, 2023c). In contrast, Belarusian businesses operating in the EU face an acute geopolitical market penalty, where external obstacles like difficulty entering new markets and explicit unequal treatment dominate, illustrating that managing political association is now a primary operating cost outside the home country.

Despite the variety and complexity of these obstacles, the majority of entrepreneurs remain optimistic. Only 6% of respondents expressed the belief that external barriers are insurmountable and would likely lead to business closure. In contrast, 94% of respondents view these challenges as manageable and surmountable, exceeding the record-high 90% observed in Belarus in 2023. This widespread perception of resilience and adaptability suggests that, while the barriers are significant, they do not preclude successful integration and growth.

Businesses’ responses to challenges

The analysis of businesses’ responses to obstacles and risks indicates that, under external pressure and operational complexity, businesses are focusing on two main strategic directions: optimization of internal processes and adaptation of product/market strategy. For the overall sample, the primary priorities are “Searching for new business formats” (62%) and “Improvement of business process efficiency” (62%) (Figure 12). The Manufacturing & Construction sector is concentrated on searching for new business formats (77%). This indicates that, facing the most severe challenges in market access and regulation, manufacturing companies are actively restructuring their fundamental approaches to business to fit new markets and niches. In the Services & Trade sector, the most popular measures are “Searching for new business formats” (66%) and “Launching of new products/services” (66%). In the ICT Sector, the clear leader is “Improvement of business process efficiency” (67%). Thus, the focus in the ICT Sector is shifted towards internal efficiency to combat high labor costs,

whereas the Services & Trade sector concurrently seeks new markets, which is likely a response to the problem of low market awareness and market entry difficulties.

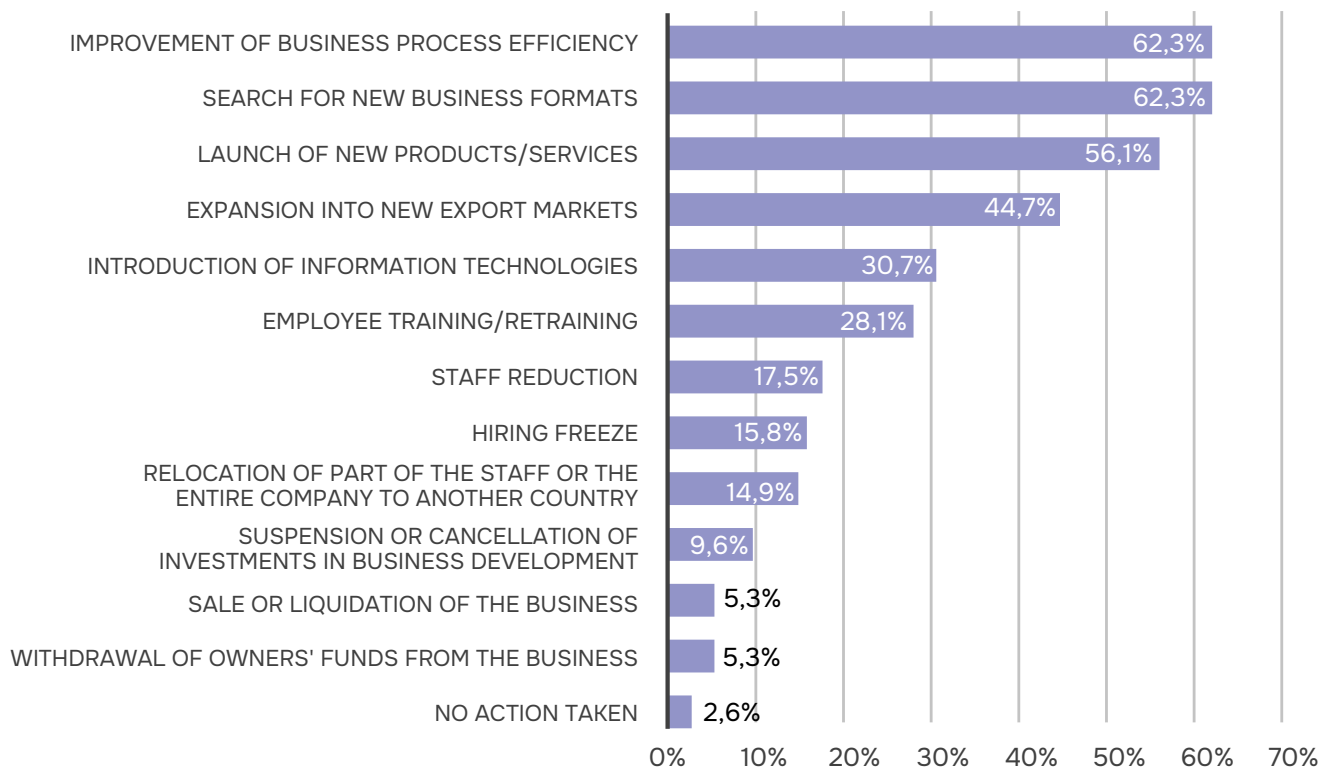


Figure 12. What steps is your company taking to minimize the impact of emerging risks and enhance competitiveness? (could be selected all that apply)

Source: Analysis of survey data

The political and regulatory wishlist

When asked what would most help their company’s development, Belarusian businesses in the EU expressed a strong consensus that political and legal normalization is far more relevant than immediate economic aid or market-specific support. The top three most desired accelerants all relate directly to the macro-environment and their reputation (Figure 13).

End of war in Ukraine (58.8%) as the highest-ranked factor underscores that the geopolitical instability caused by the war is the single largest drag on their business, impacting everything from security to market perception. Next, a high figure for “Restoration of the reputation of Belarus and Belarusians” (54.4%) directly confirms the finding regarding “Discrimination” as one of the crucial barriers. Businesses believe that recovering their national brand image is essential to overcoming non-market barriers and fostering trust with EU clients and

partners. More than half of respondents mentioning the “Simplification of legalization procedures for Belarusian-rooted businesses in EU countries” (53.5%) highlights the administrative friction and costs involved in obtaining visas, residence permits, and registering entities. While “Changing legislation” was a barrier, the strong demand for simplification stresses that existing regulatory complexity is a primary block to efficient operation and growth, particularly for sectors reliant on staff mobility (like ICT).

The data clearly indicates that, for the Belarusian business community in the EU, the development pathway is not primarily economic – it is fundamentally geopolitical and administrative. The highest-ranking factors are outside the control of individual companies and require political resolution and regulatory simplification from EU member states. Less than a quarter of respondents cited technical economic issues such as “Stability of legislation regulating business activities” (21.9%) or “Reduction of interest rates on loans” (14.9%) as top priorities, suggesting that their current capacity for growth is being throttled by political and migratory issues, which must be addressed before market-based tools become effective.

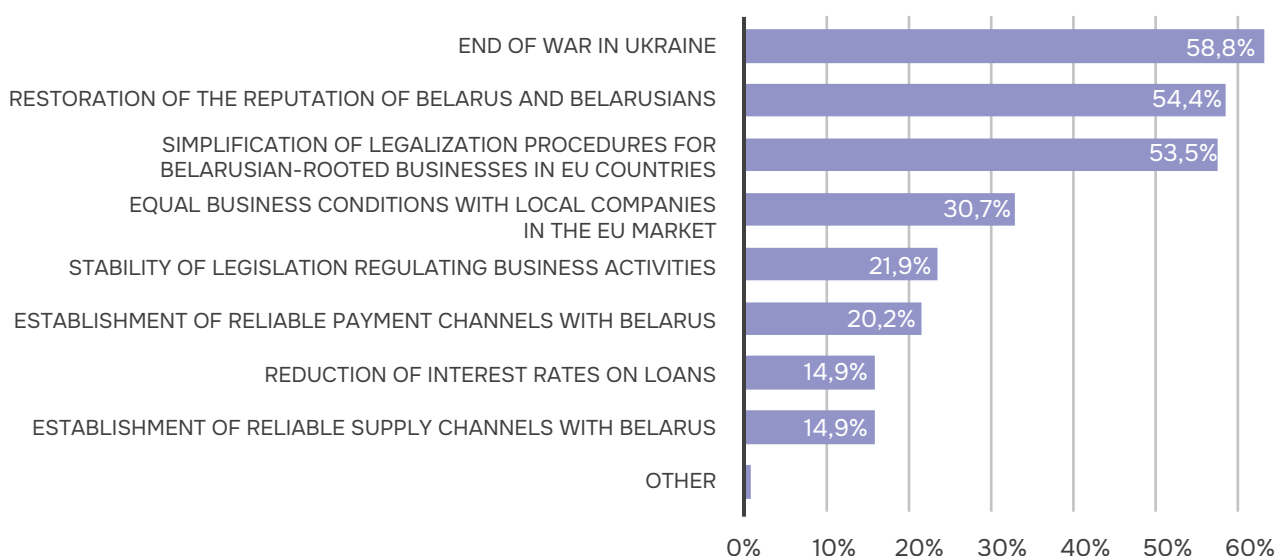


Figure 13. What would most help your company’s development at the moment? (could be selected all that apply)

Source: Analysis of survey data

Support needs

Survey findings show that the most important support measures for business success, regardless of location, are grant support (58%), networking with local entrepreneurs (50%), and networking with fellow entrepreneurs (49%) (Figure 14). The responses show a clear split between the capital-intensive Manufacturing & Construction sector and the service-oriented ICT and Services & Trade sectors. The ICT Sector exhibits the strongest demand for networking support, with “Networking with local entrepreneurs” (74%) and “Networking with other

Belarusian entrepreneurs” (60%) being the top priorities. This indicates that, for the mobile and competitive IT industry, the greatest need is for integration into the local EU business ecosystem – finding partners, building trust and relationships. The Services & Trade sector shows a more balanced reliance on grants and networking: “Grant support” (60%) appeared the most desired measure. Other desired aids include “Networking with other Belarusian entrepreneurs” (48%) and “Support in product/service realization (online platforms, exhibitions, etc.)” (42%). This suggests businesses in this sector are struggling with both market access (hence the need for platforms and exhibitions) and the high cost of operations (driving the need for direct grant support). The Manufacturing & Construction sector prioritizes financial support, demonstrating its higher dependence on capital and investment for long-term projects compared to the service industries. Grant support (59.1%) is a leading factor, followed by “Access to borrowed funding (loans, investments, etc.)” (50%), suggesting that while loans are necessary, direct non-refundable support is still highly valued to mitigate geopolitical risk.

These priorities underscore the significance of securing financial resources and building strong professional networks to bridge the gap between Belarusian-rooted businesses and the established EU environment. The high demand for grant support across all three sectors (55% to 60%) highlights the widespread need for risk mitigation and capital to overcome reputational hurdles and high operational costs without incurring further debt. The ICT and Services & Trade sectors prioritize Networking with local entrepreneurs, confirming that their primary obstacle is not a lack of product or skill, but rather a lack of trust and connectivity within EU markets. The Manufacturing & Construction sector’s unique emphasis on access to borrowed funding stresses a fundamental difference in capital structure, requiring solutions focused on de-risking larger, longer-term debt and equity investments necessary for production scale.

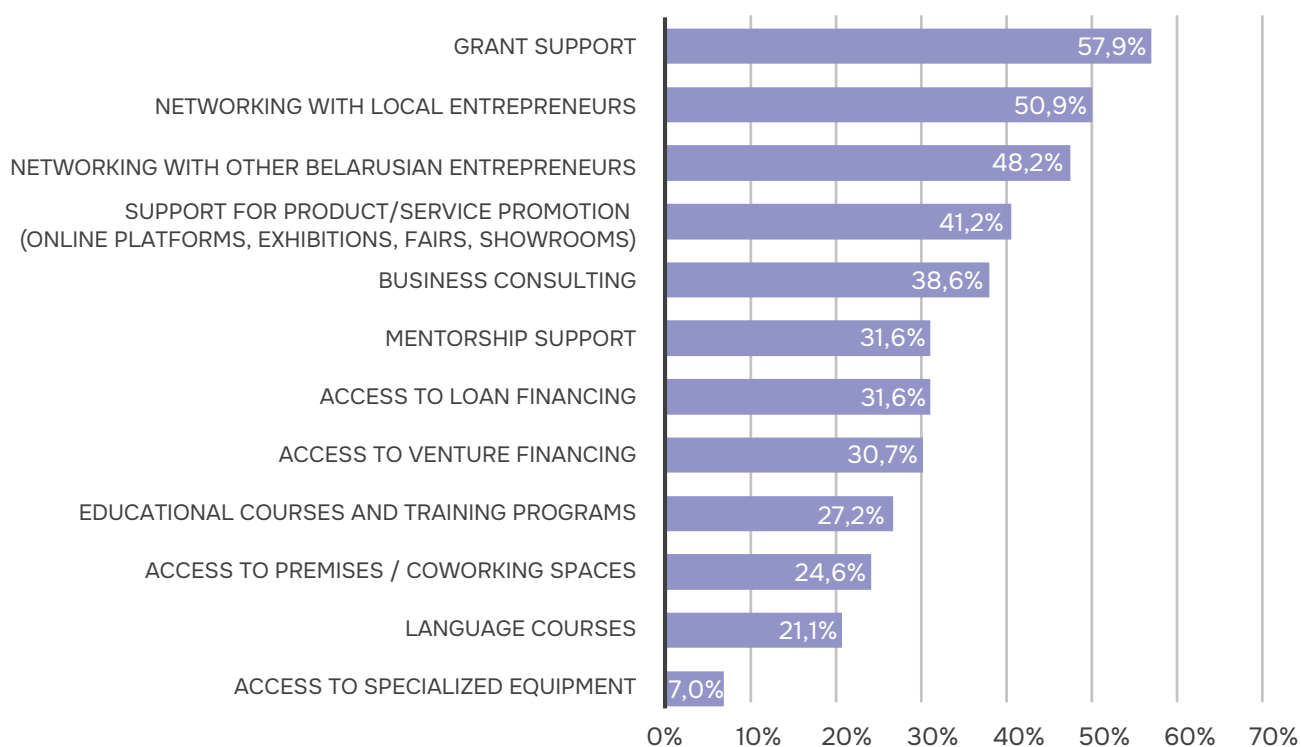


Figure 14. What types of support would be most important for the success of your business? (could be selected all that apply)

Source: Analysis of survey data

The rise of diaspora business associations

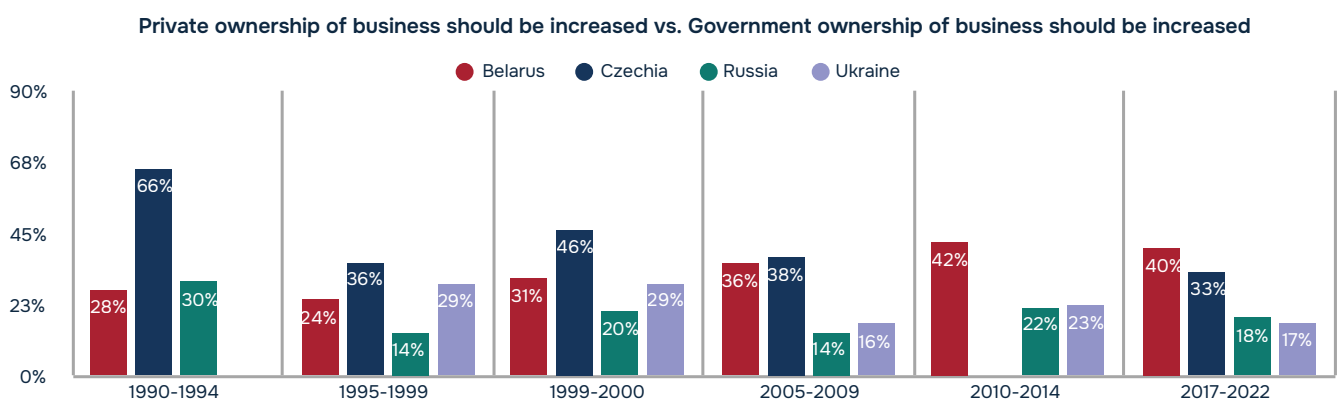
The shared history of forced migration, new challenges, as well as the innate resilience and adaptability of Belarusian entrepreneurs (Marozau, 2023), appeared to be prerequisites for collaboration, joint efforts, and the development of a sound ecosystem across Poland and Baltic countries. The commitment to market principles has rapidly manifested in a practical and institutional form: the proliferation of Belarusian business associations, clubs, and informal communities across the European Union (Krasko & Daneyko, 2023). This phenomenon is new and crucial, as it represents the spontaneous development of civil society structures that are atypical for Belarus and deeply characteristic of the EU's decentralized business environment (Greenwood, 2002). In post-2020 Belarus, the state tightened control over organized social and business groups, often limiting their function to compliance and information dissemination rather than genuine advocacy or mutual support (Daneyko et al., 2021). In stark contrast, the diaspora has, in a very short period, established functional, self-governing networks in host countries, which is a clear indicator of the diaspora's capacity for democratic practice. These organizations fulfill a critical function that the state in Belarus actively suppresses: collective action and advocacy. By building peer-to-peer trust and creating formal structures for cooperation, these groups actively substitute for the non-existent institutional trust and stability of their home country. They serve to mitigate the geopolitical risk and unequal treatment faced by their members by providing networking opportunities, legal and practical consultation, and, most importantly, trying to act as a collective representative to local governments and EU institutions (Marozau, 2024). It demonstrates that these entrepreneurs are capable of deploying the democratic institutions – freedom of association, voluntary collective action, and self-governance – to solve their shared challenges.

6. Agents of transformation. The analysis of value alignment

The resilience and expansionary goals documented in the survey analysis raise a fundamental question regarding the set of internal values that enables Belarusian entrepreneurs to consistently pursue growth despite significant external political and administrative headwinds (Marozau & Kosyak, 2022). This section shifts the focus from the external environment to the seamless European integration and alignment of the business community, examining whether their mindset is compatible with the foundational principles of the market economy. The analysis is built on the premise that sustained success and effective integration are impossible without a deep-seated commitment to core values such as competition, private ownership, and self-reliance.

The evolution of pro-market values within Belarusian society highlights the decades-long shift from state paternalism to individual responsibility and private initiative (BISS, 2021). The analysis based on data from the World Values Survey and European Values Study (Daneyko et al., 2023) shows that since the mid-1990s, Belarusians have steadily moved away from a purely state-centric outlook (Figure 15) that increasingly aligns with European norms while simultaneously diverging from its Eastern neighbors, Russia and Ukraine.

Support for private ownership increased from 24% in 1996 to 40% in 2018, while around two-thirds of respondents consistently affirm that competition is beneficial. Equally important is the rise of individual responsibility as a guiding principle: by 2018, 46% of Belarusians prioritized self-reliance over state welfare, representing a 30 percentage-point increase since 1996.



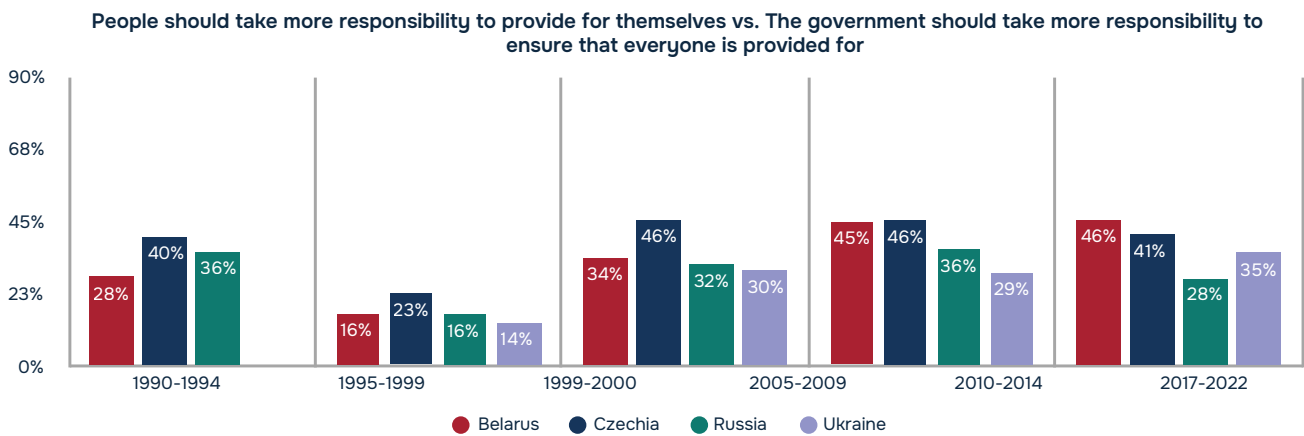
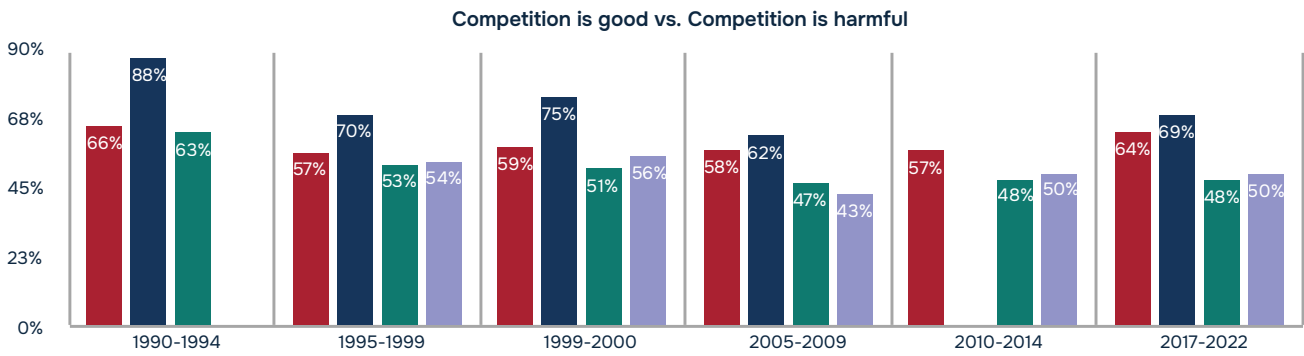


Figure 15. Comparison of market-related values by country

Source: Analysis of the World Values Survey data

Although the Adult Population Survey by Global Entrepreneurship Monitor for Belarus revealed notable differences in entrepreneurial values and perceptions between individuals in Belarus who have started a business and those who have not (Figure 16), at the societal level, both groups converge in their views: entrepreneurship is widely regarded as a desirable career path, and entrepreneurial success is associated with high social status (GEM-Belarus, 2025).

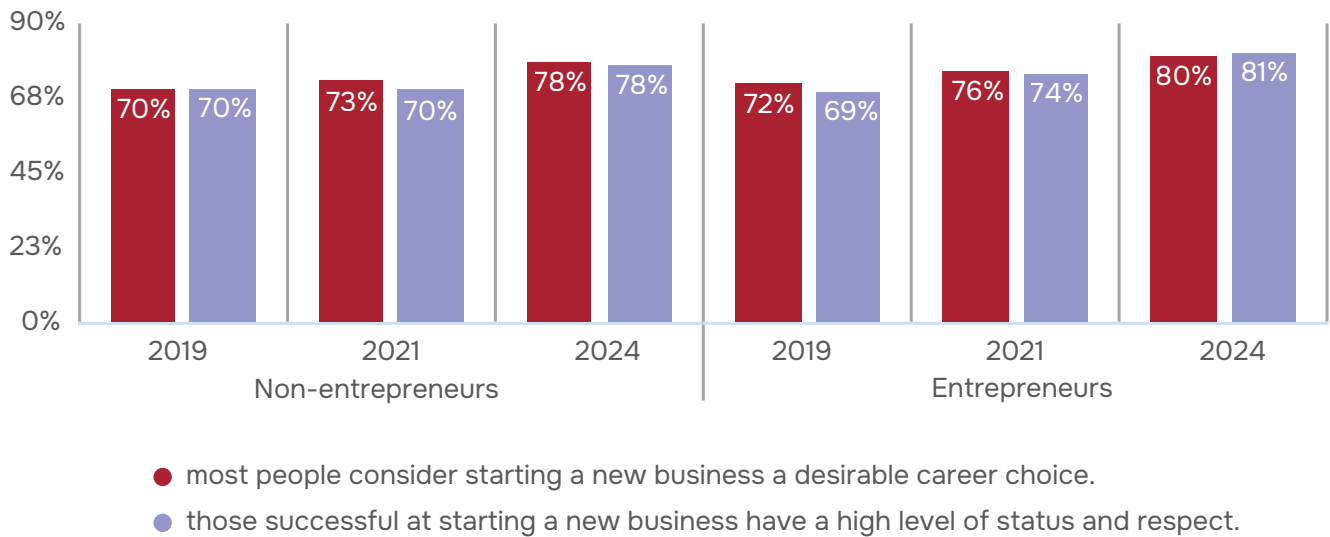


Figure 16. Comparison of market-related values by country

Source: GEM-Belarus (2025)

Overall, the GEM results highlight that self-efficacy, risk orientation, and opportunity recognition remain the key distinctions between entrepreneurs and the general population. At the same time, broader societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship are widely shared (GEM-Belarus, 2025). These evolving economic, entrepreneurial, and pro-democratic values – rather than explicitly political or cultural ones – served as unifying factors for Belarusian society during the 2020 protests (Daneyko et al., 2023).

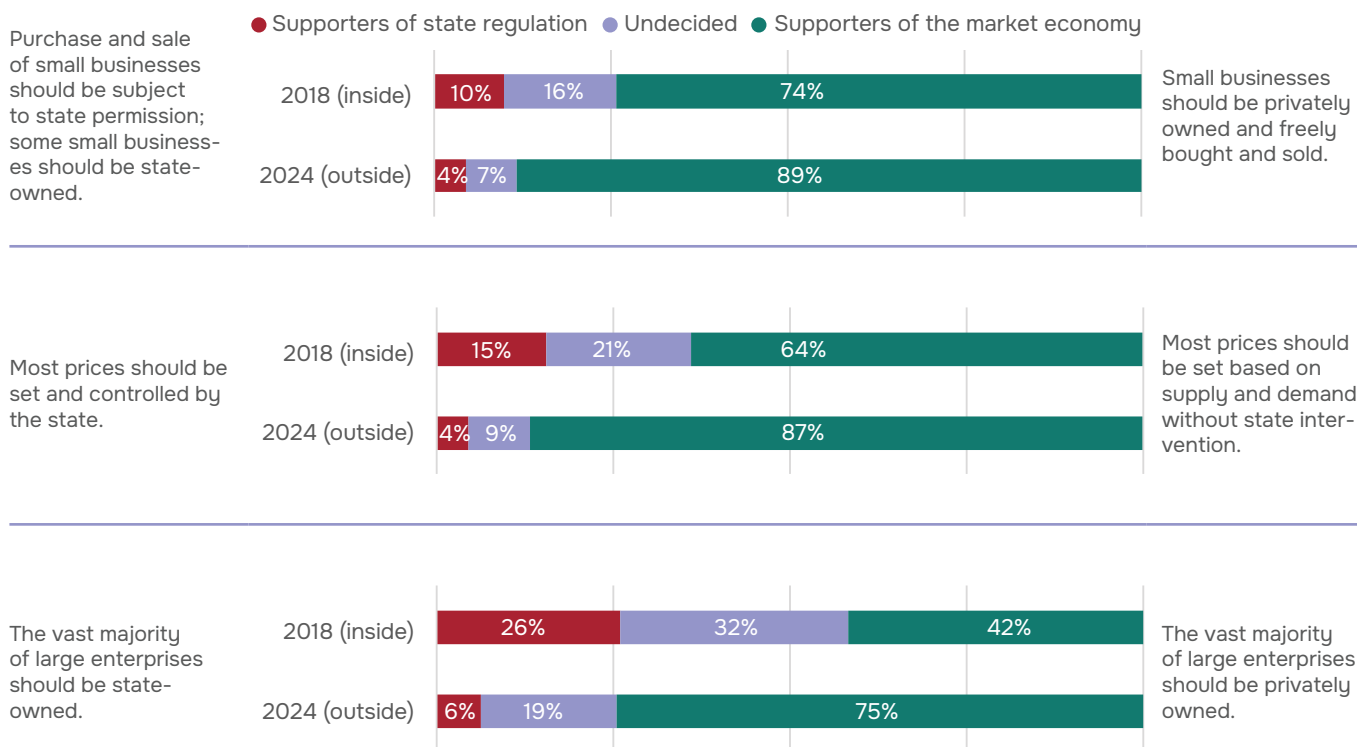
The combination of a long-term societal shift toward market principles and the unique psychological profile of Belarusian entrepreneurs has profound political implications. In general, previous research collectively positions the entrepreneurial class – and by extension, the business diaspora – as a proactive, motivated, and democratically aligned segment of Belarusian society (Bornukova & Friedrich, 2021). Their strong preference for self-reliance over state welfare, their belief in the benefits of competition, and their demonstrated risk tolerance are not merely business characteristics; they are foundational democratic values centered on individual agency and responsibility (Audretsch & Moog, 2022; Marozau, 2023). Unlike the general population, which still tempers its market views with expectations of state-led redistribution, entrepreneurs have clearly rejected paternalistic trade-offs, embodying a mature commitment to the free-market principles (Urban, 2018) that underpin European economies.

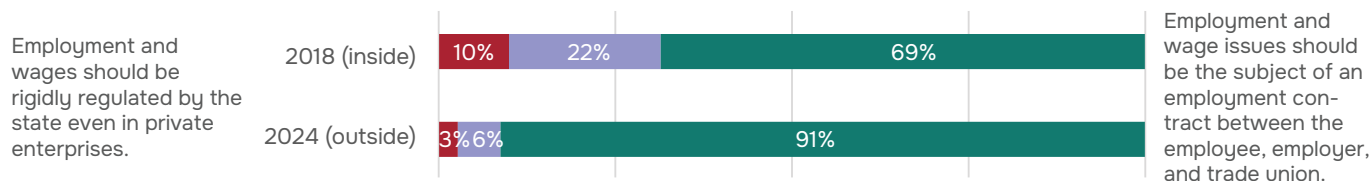
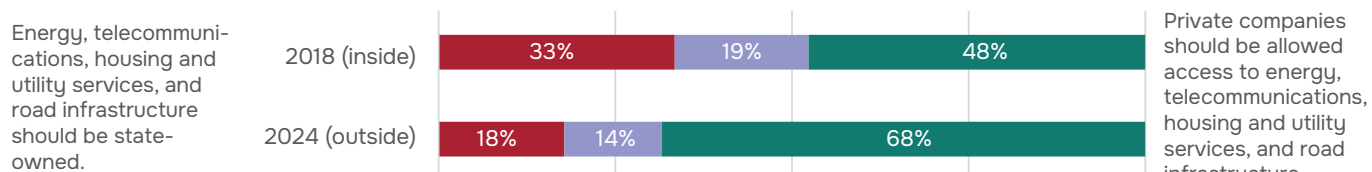
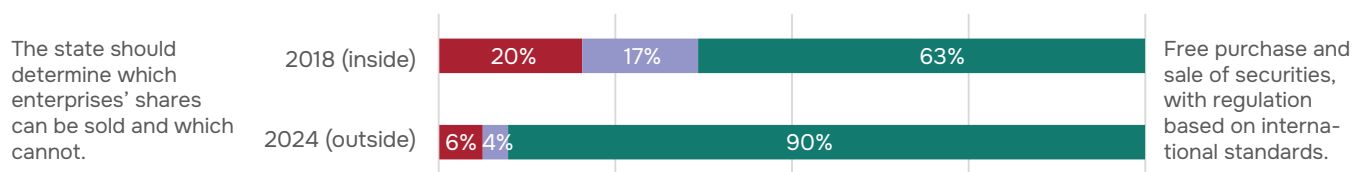
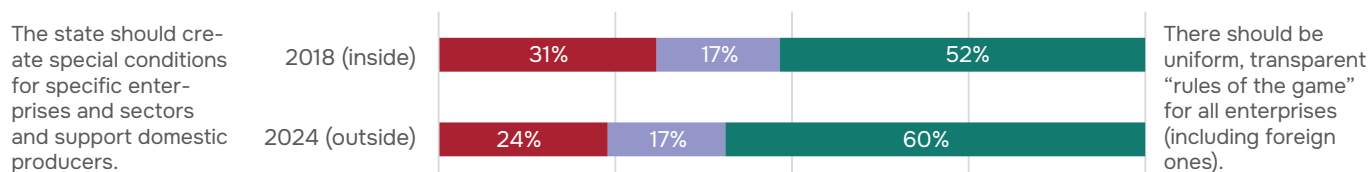
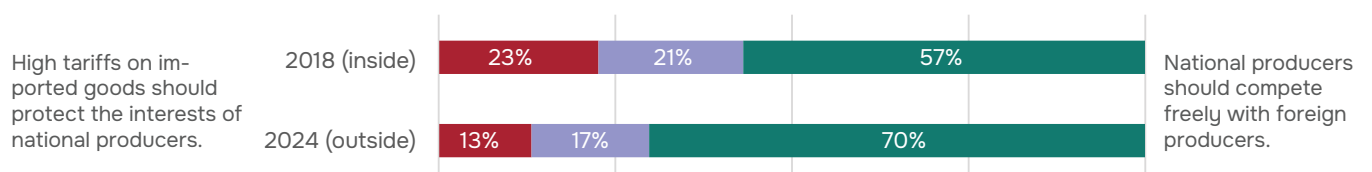
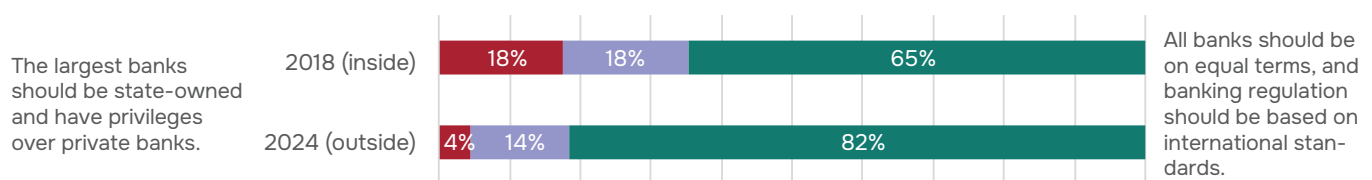
Following these ideas, the embracement of the foundational principles of a liberal market economy was tested using responses to sixteen items and compared to results obtained from the business survey in Belarus in 2018 (Urban, 2018). Each survey item presented respondents with a forced choice between two contrasting economic positions: one reflecting a statist or interventionist approach, and the other embodying the principles of a free-market economy. Across the board, the responses demonstrate a strong and recurring preference for the latter. While the intensity of this support varies across issues, the general pattern is clear – Belarusian business leaders show a broad commitment to liberal economic norms. Respondents who scored 1 to 2 are

marked on the chart as supporters of state regulation, 3 as undecided, and 4 to 5 as supporters of the market economy.

The comparison provides evidence that the Belarusian business diaspora operating outside the country holds a stronger commitment to self-reliance, risk-taking, and core market principles than business representatives operating inside Belarus just a few years earlier (Figure 17). The strongest consensus appears in key domains such as private ownership of small enterprises, the regulation of labor relations through contractual freedom, and the importance of competitive market mechanisms. Respondents overwhelmingly support the idea that property, including land and company shares, should be freely traded under transparent, internationally recognized rules. There is also strong opposition to state intervention in pricing, favoring instead the self-regulating forces of supply and demand. Respondents also reject the notion that uncompetitive firms should be propped up by state subsidies, favoring instead a market-based test of viability.

At the same time, support for market-oriented principles surged among the diaspora compared to 2018 in nearly every category. Most notably, the diaspora exhibits a near-unanimous commitment to private autonomy, supporting the idea that employment and wages should be the subject of an employment contract (vs. state regulation) – 91%; sharing the belief that small businesses should be privately owned and freely bought and sold – 89%; supporting the free purchase and sale of enterprises (vs. state determination) – 90%, showing a clear preference for transparent, global financial rules.





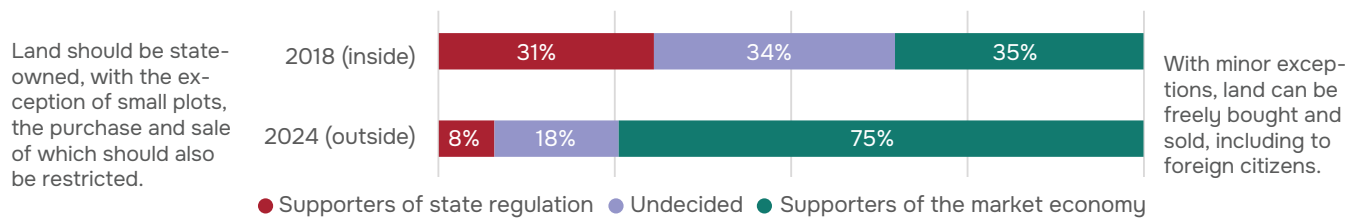


Figure 17. Comparison of market-related values of entrepreneurs inside and outside Belarus

Source: Analysis of survey data and IPM Research Center (2018)

This growing commitment to market-oriented principles is further substantiated by an analysis of attitudes toward broader social and economic trade-offs, which reveal a consistently individualistic and entrepreneurial mindset. In the final section of the survey in 2024, respondents were invited to indicate agreement with a series of statements reflecting paternalistic and protectionist preferences (Figure 18). These included propositions such as “It is better to have a lower salary but a guaranteed job,” “It would be better if Belarusian enterprises earned not very large profits, but were not bought up by foreigners,” and “It is better to distribute graduates by force, but not to leave them unemployed.” Respondents could choose more than one answer. A striking 70% of participants (vs. 27% in 2018) selected “I don’t agree with any of the statements,” clearly rejecting all the paternalistic and state-dependent views presented. 21% agreed that average but free medical care is preferable.

Support for the remaining statements was marginal: only 6% agreed with the notion that a lower salary is acceptable in exchange for guaranteed employment, and the same share endorsed the idea that foreign investment in Belarusian enterprises should be avoided even at the expense of profitability; 1% favored forced graduate placement to prevent unemployment; and not a single respondent agreed that it is better to work for a state enterprise than a private one. This widespread rejection of paternalistic trade-offs underscores a culture of self-reliance and market realism. It reflects a worldview rooted in risk-taking, personal responsibility, and a positive-sum understanding of competition and ownership. These are not abstract preferences but hard-earned convictions, shaped by experience in an environment where state intervention was frequently inefficient, arbitrary, or counterproductive. Rather than seeking protection or guarantees, the respondents demonstrate an internalized belief in agency, meritocracy, and open economic engagement. This mindset, resistant to the allure of state paternalism, is emblematic of a mature entrepreneurial class already operating within the normative framework of European market democracies.

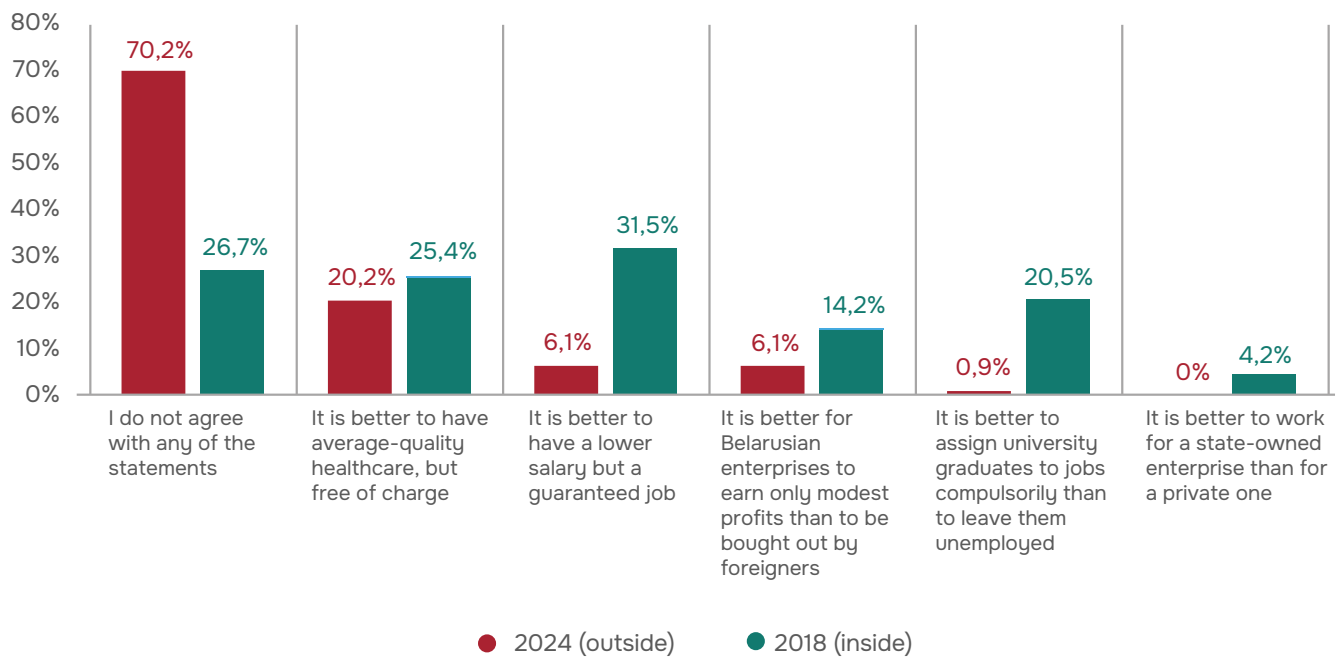


Figure 18. Comparison of paternalistic and protectionist preferences of entrepreneurs inside and outside Belarus

Source: Analysis of survey data and IPM Research Center (2018)

7. Conclusion and policy recommendations

The data analysis consistently demonstrates that the Belarusian business diaspora in the EU is operating with an expansionary mindset. An overwhelming 74% of surveyed companies are focused on business expansion, compared to only about a quarter of companies inside Belarus. This strong growth orientation, coupled with projected workforce increases, frames this community not as a passive recipient of aid or a mere subject of migration policy, but as a potent cohort of active agents – individuals and firms who, by their nature, not only seek to build, innovate, and compete but do so from a foundation of shared economic values. This evidence suggests that the post-2020 wave of Belarusian entrepreneurial relocation is not a typical case of economic migration but a politically driven process of “forced internationalization” that has led to the displacement of some of the country’s most innovative, resilient, and forward-looking enterprises. Crucially, the relocation of these entrepreneurs to the EU does not represent a break with the past so much as a fulfillment of long-standing aspirations, but these values appear to have developed before, often in defiance of a more centralized and restrictive policy environment in Belarus. Consequently, success abroad is based on the entrepreneurial principles already cultivated under challenging conditions and is not merely the result of adapting to new institutional settings. Strong alignment with liberal market values – including private ownership, individual initiative, fair competition, and transparent governance – positions Belarusian entrepreneurs as a foundational pillar of a future democratic Belarus integrated into the European family. Therefore, supporting this diaspora is not merely a question of solidarity or migration management. It is a high-return strategic investment that strengthens the EU’s economic base, supports democratic transition in its neighborhood, and affirms the values that underpin the Union itself. Tailored interventions are needed to address their legal vulnerabilities and enable their full participation in EU markets.

From a strategic perspective, two key policy imperatives emerge.

First, EU institutions and member states must go beyond standard SME support measures and treat the Belarusian business diaspora as a distinct policy constituency shaped by geopolitical disruption but endowed with high integration and growth potential. The specific wishlist identified – prioritizing the end of the war in Ukraine, the restoration of the reputation of Belarus, and the simplification of legalization procedures – are not typical requests for economic development. Instead, they represent a demand for the removal of geopolitical and administrative friction that currently impedes their inherent capacity for growth.

Support measures, therefore, should be less focused on basic business training (which is relatively low priority), i.e., shift from traditional SME assistance to combining equal access to mainstream business support with targeted interventions aimed at reducing the structural disadvantages.

Programs designed to support this community must prioritize the following:

- De-risking and trust-building measures should directly address treatment disparities by funding robust networking with local entrepreneurs (as strongly desired by ICT and Services & Trade firms) and providing equal access to finance (incl. grants, vouchers, and subsidies) to mitigate the risk premium associated with their origin.
- Implement targeted policies to simplify legalization for founders and key employees, recognizing that administrative delays are a direct bottleneck to expansion and job creation within the EU.
- For the Manufacturing & Construction sector, policy should focus on providing access to borrowed funding through guarantee schemes or de-risked investment mechanisms that recognize the sector's long-term capital needs while offsetting geopolitical uncertainty.
- Stimulation of cross-cutting projects and initiatives that involve the capabilities of different actors and stakeholders should promote a sense of community and solidarity within the Belarusian diaspora. One of the overarching topics of joint efforts of Belarusian entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, and democratic forces could be education and employability of Belarusians in the EU.

Second, the Belarusian business diaspora should be recognized as a long-term strategic asset for regional transformation. Supporting their stability and growth not only contributes to local economies but also cultivates a new entrepreneurial elite capable of driving the democratic reconstruction of Belarus. In this regard, European policymakers must recognize, empower, and strategically engage this community as both a driver of integration and a vector of change. In this regard,

- The European Commission, in partnership with Member States, should explore the creation of a standardized, streamlined temporary residency and work permit pathway or the expanded use of existing instruments (e.g., the EU Blue Card) for Belarusian entrepreneurs and essential employees. This pathway should take into account their displacement due to political and economic repression by the regime that actively undermines European security.
- The promotion of a positive narrative about the diaspora's economic contributions and low integration risk, countering stereotypes and disparities in treatment, would address the most frequently cited barriers and align with the diaspora's strong preference for merit-based competition. This narrative should also advocate the role of the business diaspora as a driver of the re-Europeanization of Belarus.

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