

BEROC  
November 2024

# Dreaming of Entrepreneurship or Requiem for a Dream – What Kind of Future Do Belarusian Parents Envision for Their Children?

Even under current conditions in Belarus, society remains focused on freedom and fostering entrepreneurship. The perception of business as a means of minimizing interaction with the state still exists. This policy brief discusses parents' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a possible area of self-realization for their children, to analyze the role of the family in the formation and reproduction of entrepreneurial capital for future generations. The policy brief is based on a representative survey of individuals aged 18 to 64 who reside in Belarus, conducted from June to August 2024. The findings suggest Belarusian parents are largely positive toward entrepreneurship as a future avenue for their children, despite the continuing deterioration of conditions for the business sector.



The perception of private business and entrepreneurship in Belarus has undergone significant transformation over the course of the country's modern history. Emerging from the Soviet era, which was distinctly anti-entrepreneurial, both the business sector and the Belarusian society have evolved. In a context where mass privatization did not take place, society – initially skeptical of entrepreneurs, often viewing them as dishonest “speculators” – gradually came to recognize that entrepreneurs are generally hardworking individuals who not only generate income for themselves but also create opportunities for others.

Despite the Belarusian authorities' conservative and often restrictive approach toward business and entrepreneurship, pro-entrepreneurial values have taken root in the Belarusian society. This has contributed to the development of a relatively dynamic and productive private sector, increasingly seen as a desirable environment for employment and growth. From 2012 through 2020, the share of the private sector in employment increased by 7.7 percentage points, in export sales of goods and services by 23.9, and in GDP by 14.6 percentage points, respectively (Daneyko et al., 2020).

Over time, businesses in Belarus have thrived, largely due to entrepreneurial skills, investment in human capital, and adaptability to external conditions, rather than reliance on state support or natural resources.

These dynamics further accelerated when Belarusian authorities realized that relying on and investing in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) was not generating the desired economic growth and employment, and a gradual liberalization of business conditions was introduced (Daneyko et al., 2020). This liberalization allowed the government to delay urgent structural reforms needed in the SOE sector, focusing instead on reducing excess employment, which was absorbed by the growing private sector (Chubrik, 2021; BEROC, 2023).

However, following the 2020 presidential elections and subsequent mass protests, the contribution of the private sector to the economy began to be downplayed in official rhetoric. Entrepreneurs were increasingly portrayed as dishonest individuals, profiting from unjustified price increases and lacking loyalty to the state. In response, the government intensified control over entrepreneurial activities, adopting several significant legislative changes aimed at regulating prices and individual entrepreneurs' activities.

Moreover, the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Belarus in recent years have made the overall business environment more opaque and challenging. These conditions have enhanced the risk of legal violations during business operations, which in turn increases the personal risks for business owners and managers, potentially threatening their personal freedom.

In this hostile environment, families have become the decisive factor influencing one's decisions about creating businesses, and providing emotional, financial, and instrumental support.

## Family as a Driver of Entrepreneurial Careers

There is significant evidence that family upbringing plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial qualities and skills in children, which in turn positively influences their interest in starting their own businesses (Chauhan et al., 2024; Osorio et al., 2017). Parents' knowledge, accumulated experience, and willingness to provide emotional and practical support further encourage entrepreneurial aspirations in children. A family's support in developing relevant values and qualities also reflects how attractive entrepreneurship is in the eyes of parents.

Families also serve as role models, transmitting best practices and influencing children's educational and career choices (Edelman et al., 2016). This support can help young people overcome common barriers to entry into



entrepreneurship, such as lack of experience, resources, or social capital, increasing the prospect of starting their own.

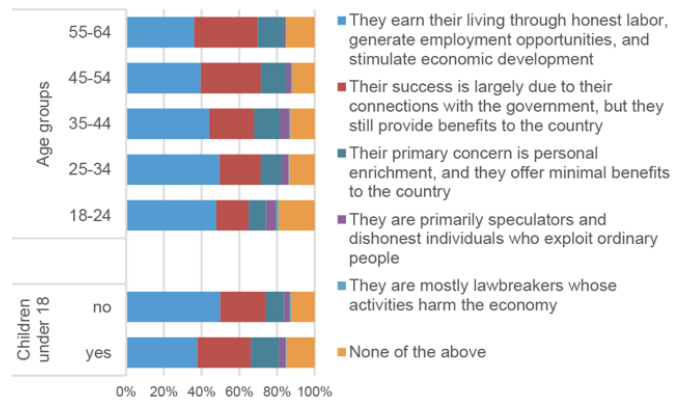
The role of family support is particularly important in environments with insufficient structural or financial backing for entrepreneurship, as is the case in Belarus (Maleki et al., 2023; Guerrero & Marozau, 2023). In such contexts, the family’s role in fostering entrepreneurial ambition becomes a key factor in enabling the next generation of entrepreneurs to succeed.

## Attitudes Towards Entrepreneurs

The perception of business in Belarus is reflected in the general attitude toward entrepreneurs and their role in the economy and society. Parents are the main influencers and role models shaping children’s entrepreneurial attitudes like risk-taking, problem-solving, and independence (Georgescu & Herman, 2020).

In a recent survey of 2,000 Belarusian respondents aged 18 to 64, including 826 parents of children under 18, participants were asked to select the statement that best describes their attitude towards Belarusian entrepreneurs. The findings suggest that individuals with children under 18 tend to have a more positive view of business and are more likely to choose favorable statements about entrepreneurs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Attitudes towards entrepreneurs



Source: Calculations based on survey data. Note: The graph displays the answers to the question “Which statement best describes your attitude towards Belarusian entrepreneurs?” and is displayed as percent of respondents in the corresponding group.

Almost half of the respondents who have children under 18 (49.9 percent) describe their attitude towards entrepreneurs as the most positive option choice as they “earn their living through honest labor, generate employment opportunities, and stimulate economic development”. This share is significantly higher than among respondents without children (37.8 percent). A very positive attitude toward Belarusian entrepreneurship is also characteristic of young cohorts of respondents aged 18–24 (47.7 percent) and 25–34 (49.5 percent). This resonates well with the distribution found in a previous study by the IPM Research Center and BEROCC (2019) and indicates that recent changes in the official rhetoric and entrepreneurship-related legislation have not yet damaged the public image of Belarusian entrepreneurs and businessmen.

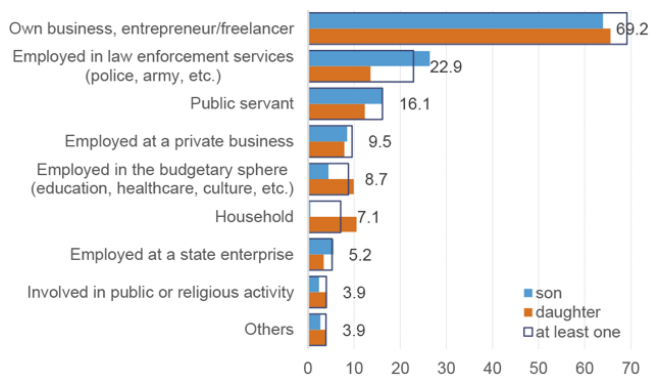
## Preferred Careers for Children

In the survey, Belarusian parents were asked to select areas of employment (choosing no more than three options) in which they would like to see their sons and daughters. The vast majority (69.2 percent) chose the option “to run their own business, to be entrepreneurs/freelancers” as the desired future for their children. Among other popular areas of activity were entrepreneurship’s antipodes; work within law enforcement agencies (22.9 percent) and civil service (16.1 percent).



Interestingly, the choice of a future related to entrepreneurship for a child does not significantly differ by the child's gender (see Figure 2).

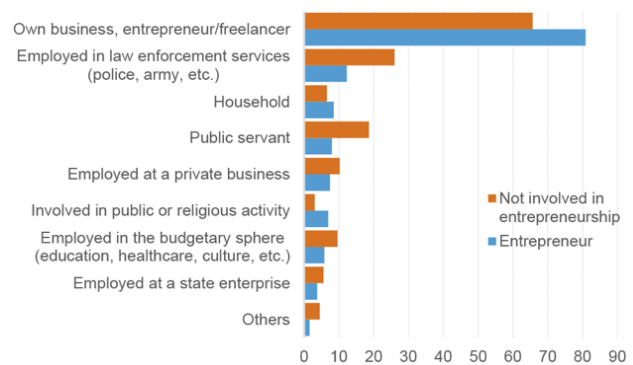
Figure 2. Preferred careers for children, by gender



Source: Calculations based on survey data. Note: The graph displays the answers to the question “What would you like your child to do in the future?” and is displayed as percent of respondents in the corresponding group.

As one might expect, parents-entrepreneurs more often associate their children's future with entrepreneurship (80.9 percent) compared to non-entrepreneurial respondents (65.7 percent) (see Figure 3). Similarly, female entrepreneur respondents more often than others prefer their daughters to engage in business in the future (80.9 percent). This level of approval of an entrepreneurial future for daughters may be related to an understanding of the self-realization opportunities that business provides for women, compared to other employment options. Working “for themselves” allows women to avoid barriers and limitations encountered when working for an employer and it may also be associated with schedule flexibility and an ability to improve work-life balance.

Figure 3. Preferred careers for children, by parents' occupational background



Source: Calculations based on survey data. Note: The graph displays the answers to the question “What would you like your child to do in the future?” and is displayed as percent of respondents in the corresponding group.

## Attitudes Towards Entrepreneurship

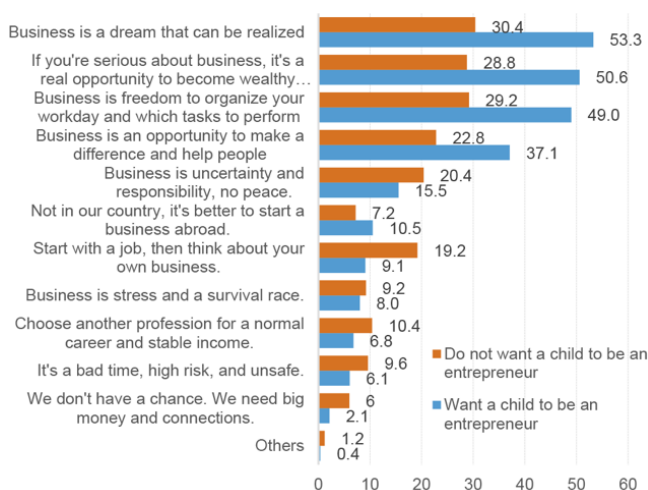
The attitude towards entrepreneurship was captured by asking parents to choose what they would tell their children if they expressed the intention to become entrepreneurs. Based on interviews and a pilot survey, multiple statements that carried positive, neutral, and negative connotations were presented in the questionnaire (see Figure 4).

Parents interested in their children becoming entrepreneurs in the future tend to foster a positive view of entrepreneurship through encouraging messages about business. From the results, parents tell their children that business is “dream, wealth, and freedom”, with more than half of the respondents who wish for their children to have an “entrepreneurial destiny” choosing this triad to convey that business is a positive path.

Among those who do not see their children in entrepreneurship, these categories also dominate in justifying the attractiveness of business. However, those parents are more cautious and tend to warn their children about the associated risks of uncertainty and instability.



Figure 4. Attitudes towards entrepreneurship



Source: Calculations based on the survey data. Note: The graph displays the answers to the question “Which statements best describe what you would tell a child if he/she expressed a willingness to become an entrepreneur?” and is displayed as percent of respondents in the respective group. Respondents were asked to select all applicable response options.

Overall, the selection of positive associations by most parents indicates a high level of support for children’s interest in entrepreneurship within families. By choosing the triad “dream, wealth and freedom”, parents emphasize priorities related to the formation of free individuals and see potential in their children for engaging in business in the future, despite the existence of, and appeal from, other career choices. Employment (regardless of ownership structure) is much less frequently considered as an appealing prospect for children’s future. The likely rationale is the dependent position of employees within the current sociopolitical context, which partially undermines the benefits of private-sector employment. Therefore, many respondents may perceive employment as “captivity” – in contrast to the freedom associated with entrepreneurship. Thus, the current generation of parents largely want their children to have minimal interactions with the state.

## Conclusions

Despite the current challenging conditions for business in Belarus, many parents still see entrepreneurship as a pathway to independence

and freedom for their children. The role of the family in nurturing entrepreneurial potential should not be underestimated in this context. The fact that many parents see entrepreneurship as a means of self-realization for their children indicates a sustained positive perception of business within the population, despite the recent years negative portrayal of entrepreneurs in official media outlets.

For many, business is associated with the positive triad of “dream, wealth, and freedom”. This is particularly true for the current generation of parents, whose worldviews were shaped during the relatively open periods of the late 1990s and early 2000s. For them, entrepreneurship represents a means for their children to achieve personal freedom and self-realization without having to leave the country.

However, there is a notable contrast between these aspirations and the reality of doing business in Belarus today – a divergence that could prove pivotal for the future of private business in the country. Entrepreneurship in Belarus has the potential to either become a chance for future generations to help develop the nation (“**dreaming of entrepreneurship**”) or, if suppressed further, a missed opportunity (“**requiem for a dream**”).

There is no guarantee that future generations of Belarusians will share the same positive attitude toward entrepreneurship and pro-democratic values as their parents, if they lack real opportunities to start and run businesses or public success stories. The “fork” in the future of entrepreneurship in Belarus has another critical dimension: if parents no longer see opportunities for self-realization within the country, they may consider leaving it. Following the 2020 political crisis, Belarus has seen significant emigration driven by the risks of domestic criminal prosecution and the search for safety abroad.

The main implications for the decisionmakers concerned with a future stable, predictable and democratic Belarus, could thus be the following:





1. Supporting entrepreneurship as a driver of democratic values: In a non-democratic environment, entrepreneurs are known to act as carriers and multipliers of pro-democratic values such as freedom, personal responsibility, and self-determination. (Audretsch & Moog, 2022; Marozau, 2023). The (still) positive attitudes to entrepreneurship, intergenerational transmission of entrepreneurial values, and overall survival of the Belarusian private should be perceived, and treated, as a foundation for counteracting (some of the) ongoing negative institutional developments.
2. Transmitting pro-entrepreneurial values to future generations: With the same idea in mind, it is important to support families transmitting pro-entrepreneurial values to future generations by complementing their efforts through, e.g., education. This can be realized by offering additional training programs for children and adolescents, such as financial literacy schools, business clubs, and leadership schools.
3. Advancing the role of female entrepreneurship: The increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to transfer values, particularly to daughters, and thereby preserving entrepreneurial capital and overcoming gender inequality issues in Belarus.

## Acknowledgment

The study underlaying this policy brief was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). BEROC acknowledges support by Pyxera Global whose financial and technical assistance for INNOVATE is part of a USAID-funded activity to support the innovative-based economy and private sector growth in Belarus.

The contents of this brief are the sole responsibility of BEROC and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.



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