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Entrepreneurial Dynamism, Resilience, and Institutional Constraints in Belarus

Entrepreneurial activity in Belarus has shown notable resilience amid economic and institutional challenges. Drawing on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data from 2019, 2021, and 2024, this policy brief traces key shifts in entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations, and behavior. The findings reveal a transition from necessity-driven to opportunity- and purpose-oriented entrepreneurship, alongside persistent institutional constraints and rising regulatory uncertainty. The brief outlines policy directions to support entrepreneurship as a driver of economic resilience and individual autonomy in Belarus.

Dynamics of key indicators

Recent years in Belarus have been marked by institutional fragility and increasing state involvement in the economy. Against this backdrop, the evolution of entrepreneurship - a key attribute of the market economy approach, and one of the drivers of the Belarusian economic performance in 2010-2020 (please add reference to an earlier BEROB brief)- is of significant interest. Closely connected, and no less interesting, is the question of the dynamics in societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

A valuable lens for understanding these changes is offered by the **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)**, a research project that provides annual survey data on **entrepreneurial activity** across countries. This brief uses GEM survey data of Belarusian residents aged 18–64 (n = 2,000), representative by sex, age, and region, to examine the dynamics of entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations, and behavior in recent years.

Table 1 overviews the evolution of entrepreneurial intentions, perceived opportunities, and self-confidence. It compares the results from 2019, 2021, and 2024, with particular attention to developments between 2021 and 2024, revealing how Belarusian entrepreneurs continue to adapt to shifting economic and regulatory conditions. During this period, perceived opportunities to start a business rose by 21.9 pp, and the perceived ease of starting a business increased by 13.6 pp, signaling an improved entry environment. In line with these shifts, entrepreneurial intentions expanded by 8.6 pp.

The composition of activity also evolved. Within Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), the

Table 1. Key performance indicators

Indicator	2019	2021	2024	Change (2024 vs 2021)
External factors and self-assessment: population aged 18–64				
Positive assessment of opportunities to start a business in the next 6 months	29.5%	25.0%	46.9%	21.9%%
Ease of starting a business in Belarus	35.8%	34.5%	48.1%	13.6%%
Possession of the entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and experience needed to start a new business	42.3%	52.0%	52.1%	0.2%%
Abandoning the idea of starting a business due to fear of failure	36.9%	52.9%	52.1%	-0.9%%
Entrepreneurial intentions dynamics				
Entrepreneurial intentions: intention to start a business in the next three years	9.7%	30.1%	38.7%	8.6%%
Early-stage entrepreneurs (TEA): % of adults aged 18–64 involved in entrepreneurial initiatives established in the last 3.5 years				
Early-stage entrepreneurs	5.80%	13.5%	16.6%	3.1%%
Early-stage entrepreneurs: women	5.20%	12.8%	17.1%	4.2%%
Early-stage entrepreneurs: men	6.40%	14.2%	16.1%	2.0%%
Early-stage entrepreneurs: export-oriented	21.9%	29.1%	23.7%	-5.4%%
Motivations of early-stage entrepreneurs (TEA)				
Make the world a better place	23.2%	25.6%	36.1%	10.6%%
Achieve high prosperity	75.0%	76.1%	76.4%	0.3%%
Continue a family tradition	20.0%	15.0%	20.8%	5.8%%
Provide an income source	51.8%	71.5%	53.3%	-18.2%%

Source: GEM-Belarus, 2019, 2021, and 2024. All values are percentages; changes denote percentage points (pp).

export-oriented share declined by 5.4 pp, potentially reflecting reorientation toward domestic markets and/or heightened external constraints, while the share of ventures employing 6–19 workers increased by 5.1 pp, indicating an expansion of small teams.

Motivational profiles shifted toward purpose- and legacy-driven entrepreneurship: the share citing a desire to “make the world a better place” rose by 10.6 pp and “continue a family tradition” by 5.8 pp, whereas “provide an income source” fell by 18.2 pp. Taken together, these movements suggest a more confident, mission-oriented, and domestically focused entrepreneurial landscape.

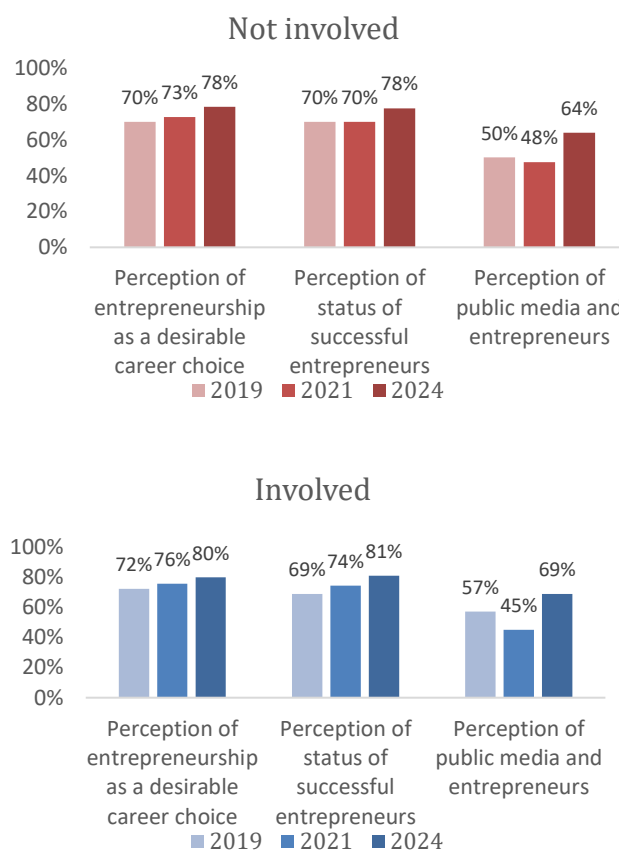
Societal Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship

GEM assesses societal attitudes among working-age adults across several dimensions: (i) entrepreneurship as a desirable career choice; (ii) perceived social status of successful entrepreneurs; and (iii) perceptions of how public media portray entrepreneurship. Figure 1 compares individuals involved in entrepreneurial activity and those not involved in 2019, 2021, and 2024.

Among the involved, perceptions have generally trended upward across all three indicators. Views of entrepreneurship as a good career and the social status of successful entrepreneurs both show steady improvement over the past five years, while attitudes toward media portrayal follow a more fluctuating pattern—declining during the pandemic period and recovering substantially by 2024. Among those who were not involved, the pattern is similar but at lower levels.

Overall, attitudes are consistently favorable and trending upward across both groups, with especially notable post-2021 improvements in perceived social status and media portrayal.

Figure 1. Perceptions of entrepreneurship by involvement in entrepreneurship (% of adults aged 18–64)



Source: GEM-Belarus, 2019, 2021, and 2024.

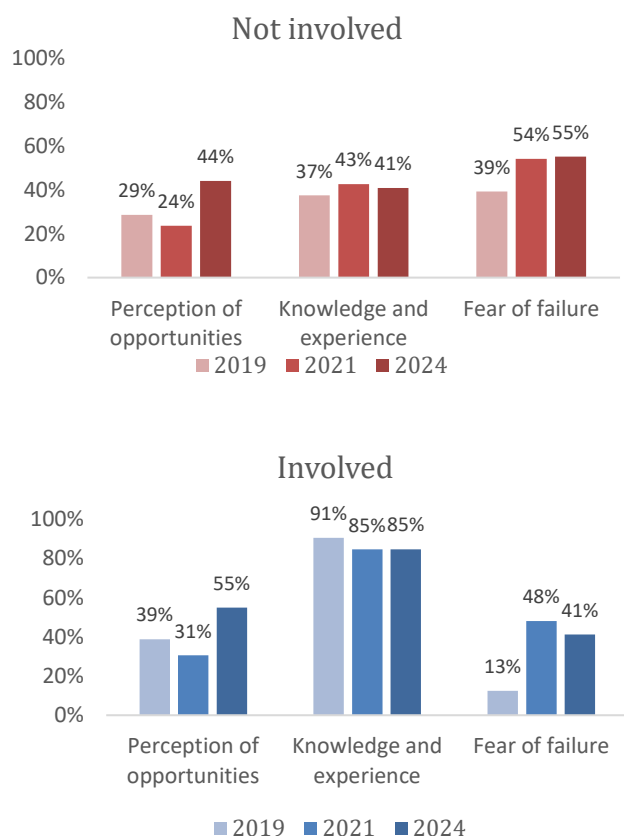
Entrepreneurial Self-Perception Characteristics

The level of entrepreneurial self-perception helps explain why some individuals decide to start a business while others do not. Tracking its evolution over time allows us to assess the dynamics of societal perceptions of hardships associated with an entrepreneurial career, which reflects both subjective attitudes and actual barriers.



Figure 2 presents the indicators assessing the perceived favorability of conditions for starting a business, the perception of having the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to launch a new venture, and the fear of failure.

Figure 2. Characteristics of entrepreneurial self-perception (% of adults aged 18–64)



Source: GEM-Belarus, 2019, 2021, and 2024.

Perceptions of favorable conditions in Belarus improved markedly from 2019/2021. Among non-entrepreneurs, 44% expect good opportunities in the next six months (24–29% in 2019–2021). Among entrepreneurs, 55% view conditions as favorable (31–39% previously). Still, the share of all adults rating external conditions as favorable remains below half, at 47%.

As expected, perceived capability is higher among entrepreneurs: in 2024, 85% of entrepreneurs and 41% of non-entrepreneurs report sufficient

knowledge and skills. Fear of failure is more common among non-entrepreneurs (55%, unchanged from 2021); among entrepreneurs, it fell by 7 pp to 48% in 2024.

Perceptions of Entrepreneurship Across Countries

To better understand the dynamics above, we conduct a comparative analysis of Belarus and its neighboring countries, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. It allows us to situate Belarus within a broader regional context and assess whether its entrepreneurial attitudes differ meaningfully from those of neighboring countries.

The comparative analysis of entrepreneurial self-perception demonstrates similar characteristics across these countries (Figure 3): roughly half of their population report having the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to start a business. At the same time, about half of respondents cite fear of failure as a barrier to starting a business, with the lowest share recorded in Latvia (45%) and the highest in Poland (55%).

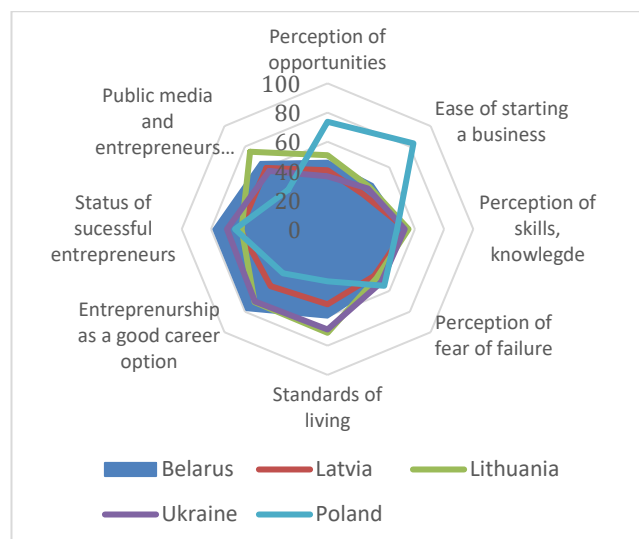
Regarding the perceived favorability of conditions for starting a business (perception of opportunities), responses vary across countries: only 36% of the population in Ukraine sees good opportunities for business creation, while in Poland this share reaches 74%. In Belarus, Lithuania, and Latvia, perceptions are similar, with 40–50% of respondents rating the external environment as favorable for business start-up.

Notable cross-country differences also appear in perceptions of successful business stories in the media and in the attractiveness of entrepreneurship as a career choice. Interestingly,



the most negative assessments on these two indicators in 2024 were recorded in Poland.

Figure 3. Attitudes toward entrepreneurship in Belarus compared with reference countries



Source: Global GEM report 2024–2025.

Conversely, Belarus shows the highest share of adults who consider entrepreneurship a good career choice (79%), while Lithuania leads in positive assessments of media coverage of entrepreneurship (75%). In all countries, respondents generally agree that entrepreneurs enjoy a high social status and respect. The lowest share of agreement is observed in Lithuania (59%), and the highest in Belarus (78%).

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

GEM-2024 findings confirm notable resilience of the Belarusian private sector: early-stage entrepreneurship and the pool of potential founders are expanding, and motivations are shifting from necessity toward opportunity and purpose. Entrepreneurs increasingly view business creation as a vehicle for autonomy and social

contribution, even under growing institutional and regulatory constraints.

This resilience is by all means a positive development - a strong private sector is vital not only for growth but for long-term sovereignty and democratic progress (Audretsch and Moog, 2022). Entrepreneurship in Belarus functions as a sphere of independent self-realization; supporting it means supporting the most autonomous and productive part of society (Marozau, 2023; Daneyko, Panasevich and Marozau, 2023).

Yet, this dynamism unfolds within a fragile environment where excessive regulation, political risk, and legal uncertainty remain major barriers. The tension between societal resilience and institutional fragility is the defining feature of Belarusian entrepreneurship today, and it may threaten the positive momentum in entrepreneurship tomorrow.

Against this background, practical steps to strengthen resilience can be pursued by different stakeholder groups:

Domestic stakeholders (entrepreneurs and associations)

- Build and strengthen professional and peer networks—at home and within the diaspora—for mentoring, collaboration, and mutual support.
- Amplify diverse success stories (including non-tech and small-scale ventures) to normalize entrepreneurial risk-taking and inspire new entrants.

External stakeholders (international organizations, donor agencies, and diaspora networks)



- Expand access to grants, concessional finance, and investment for Belarusian-led and EU-oriented enterprises.
- Provide tailored mentoring and training on international markets, sustainable business practices, and ESG standards.
- Support transnational business education and exchange programs—such as MBA tracks and mobility initiatives—to preserve skills and networks.

In a more enabling institutional context, the state could also play a constructive role in fostering entrepreneurship. Under different political conditions, supportive public policies could help unlock the sector's potential—for instance, by reducing bureaucratic burdens, ensuring predictable taxation, guaranteeing property rights, and recognizing the private sector as a source of innovation and employment. While such measures remain aspirational in the current environment, articulating them highlights what would be required for entrepreneurship to become a pillar of inclusive and sustainable development.

Without an enabling, predictable environment, Belarus risks losing its entrepreneurial potential. In turn, strengthening and safeguarding the entrepreneurial momentum would lay the groundwork for a future trajectory of greater openness, stability, and self-determination.

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