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# **Strategic Integration of the Belarusian Business and Policy Implications for the EU**

The forced internationalization of Belarusian businesses since 2020 has transformed a localized economic crisis into the formation of a sophisticated, high-growth-potential economic diaspora within the European Union. Drawing on a novel survey of over 114 Belarusian-rooted businesses, this brief analyzes their integration patterns and value alignment with Western markets. The findings reveal a cohort characterized by high entrepreneurial orientation, a rejection of state paternalism, and significant growth potential. This makes them a valuable asset to host-country development and a vital resource for Belarus's future economic reconstruction.

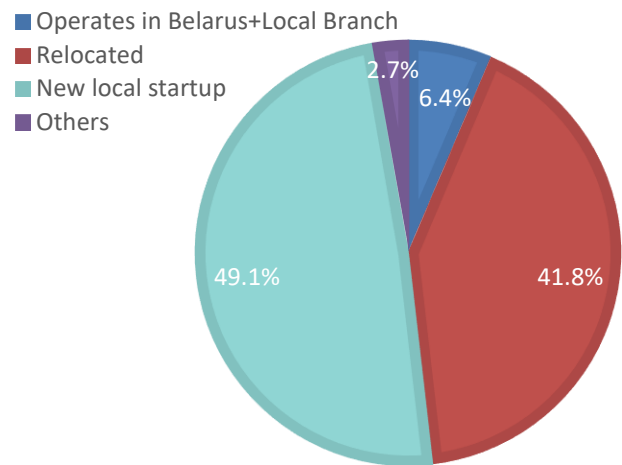
## The context: Scale and scope of the exodus

Before 2020, Belarusian business migration was a predominantly economically driven phenomenon of "gradual Europeanization" - businesses strategically pursued access to larger markets, more stable legal frameworks, and new technologies. Moreover, many Belarusian companies were born-globals (Vissak & Zhang, 2016) and considered the domestic and even Russian market as a launch pad for further expansion into developed technological markets (Marozau et al., 2021). By 2020, the private sector's contribution to Belarus's GDP reached 55%, surpassing that of state enterprises (Daneyko et al., 2020). However, the political crisis following the 2020 elections and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine fundamentally altered this trajectory, turning migration into a "survival strategy".

This "forced internationalization" occurred in two distinct waves. The 2020-2021 wave primarily consisted of individual entrepreneurs, top managers, and IT specialists who fled direct political repression. In turn, the post-2022 wave was driven by the relocation of entire high-tech and knowledge-intensive companies in order to preserve client bases and financial access after international sanctions were imposed on Belarus following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Today, the EU has inadvertently become the custodian of a substantial portion of Belarus's future economic potential. Over 300,000 Belarusians have emigrated, with an estimated 87% of them holding higher education degrees—a dramatic "brain drain" for Belarus that translates into a "brain gain" for the EU (Lvovskiy et al., 2025).

Figure 1. Origin of surveyed Belarusian-rooted businesses



Source: Authors' estimation.

The number of enterprises with Belarusian founders operating across Central and Eastern Europe is estimated at approximately 10,000 (Marozau & Danilchuk, 2024).

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, centered on a 2024 proprietary survey of 114 founders and executives of Belarusian-rooted businesses, primarily located in Poland and Lithuania. The sample covers micro- (62%), small- (30%), and medium enterprises across ICT (39%), services/trade (48%), and manufacturing (13%).

## Portrait of the Belarusian business diaspora

The Belarusian business presence in the EU is characterized by heavy geographic concentration on the eastern flank (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia), though it shows signs of maturing into a global network.

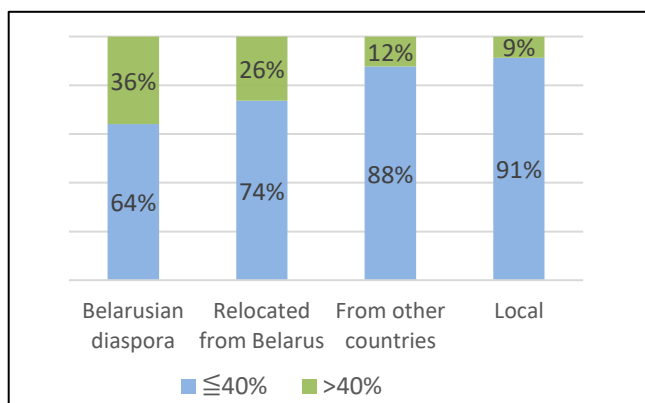
Nearly half (49%) of the surveyed companies were new local startups that were established from scratch in the current primary jurisdiction (Figure 1). Meanwhile, relocated firms – those that operated in Belarus and have fully or partially



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 2). Many 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, they continue to play a crucial role in employing and integrating Belarusian talent across EU labor markets (Lvovskiy et al., 2025).

Figure 2. Staff composition of surveyed Belarusian-rooted businesses



Source: Authors' estimation.

## Business Dynamics and Resilience

Despite the trauma of forced relocation, these businesses exhibit a remarkably entrepreneurial orientation and a focus on expansion rather than mere survival. An overwhelming 74% of firms prioritize expansion, a stark contrast to businesses remaining inside Belarus, where only about one-quarter plan to expand (BEROC, 2023). 64% of respondents anticipate increasing their staff over the next year. While they initially provide a "safety net" for other Belarusian emigrants, 40% of firms are now actively recruiting local Polish or Lithuanian specialists to help with localization.

Only 18% of firms would consider moving back to Belarus even if the political situation changed immediately. This indicates that the "exodus" has resulted in a permanent structural change; these businesses are becoming European entities with Belarusian roots.

## Navigating the European market: challenges, responses, and support needs

As the Belarusian-rooted business becomes more established in new countries, issues of initial adaptation and legalization are becoming a thing of the past.

The most frequently reported barrier is difficulty entering new markets, selected by 39% of respondents (Figure 3). 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.

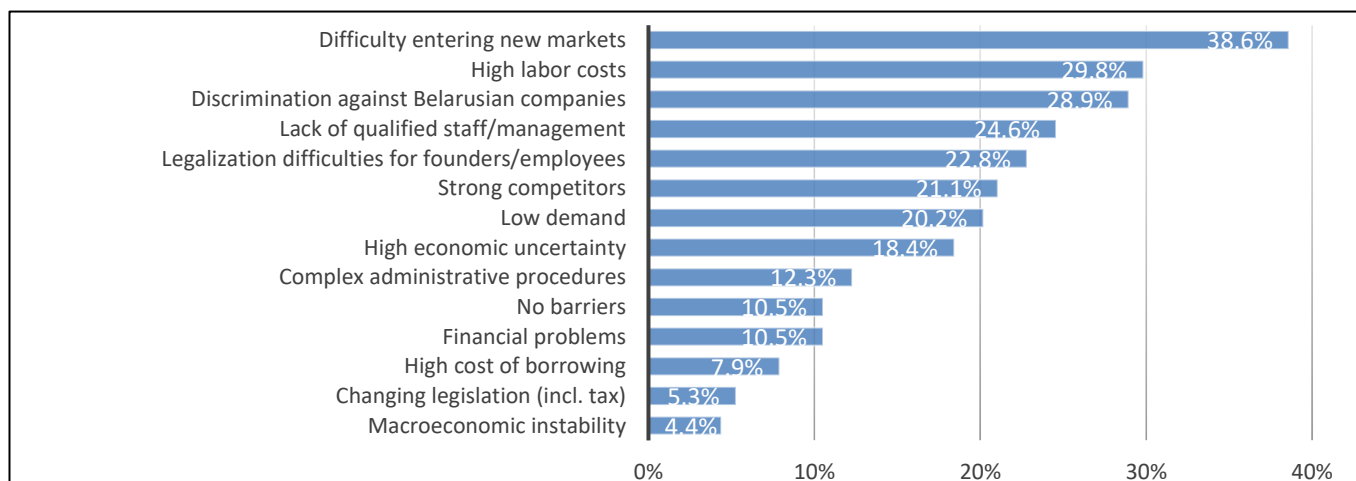
A substantial share of firms, citing a lack of qualified personnel or management (25%) and noting difficulties related to the legalization of founders and employees (23%), point to significant constraints in human capital and the administrative burdens associated with cross-border employment and residency requirements.

Meanwhile, Belarusian entrepreneurs have shown a high entrepreneurial orientation, focusing on two main strategic directions: optimization of internal

processes and adaptation of product/market strategy (Figure 4).

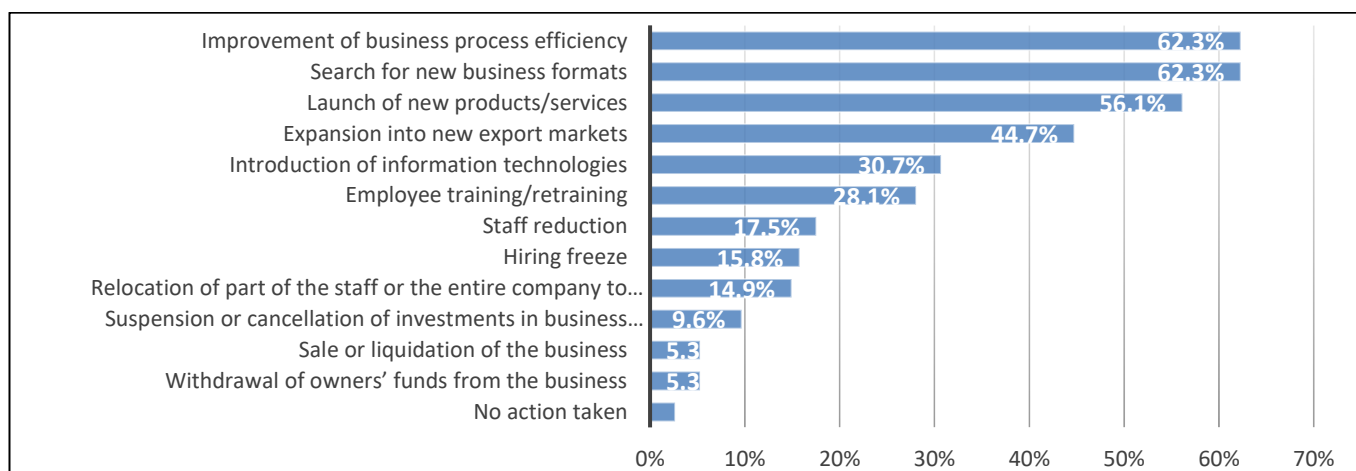
When asked what would most help the company's development, Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU expressed a strong consensus that political and legal normalization is far more relevant than immediate economic aid or market-specific support. The end of the war in Ukraine (58.8%) as the highest-ranked factor underscores that the geopolitical instability caused by the war is the single largest drag on their business, impacting everything from security to market perception (Figure 5).

Figure 3. Key barriers hindering growth and expansion



Source: Authors' estimation.

Figure 4. Steps taken to minimize the impact of risks and enhance competitiveness



Source: Authors' estimation. Note: Several options could be selected.



Figure 5. What would most help business development?



Source: Authors' estimation. Note: Several options could be selected.

## The analysis of value alignment

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). The combination of a long-term societal shift toward market principles (Daneyko et al., 2023) and the unique psychological profile of Belarusian entrepreneurs has profound political implications. 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).

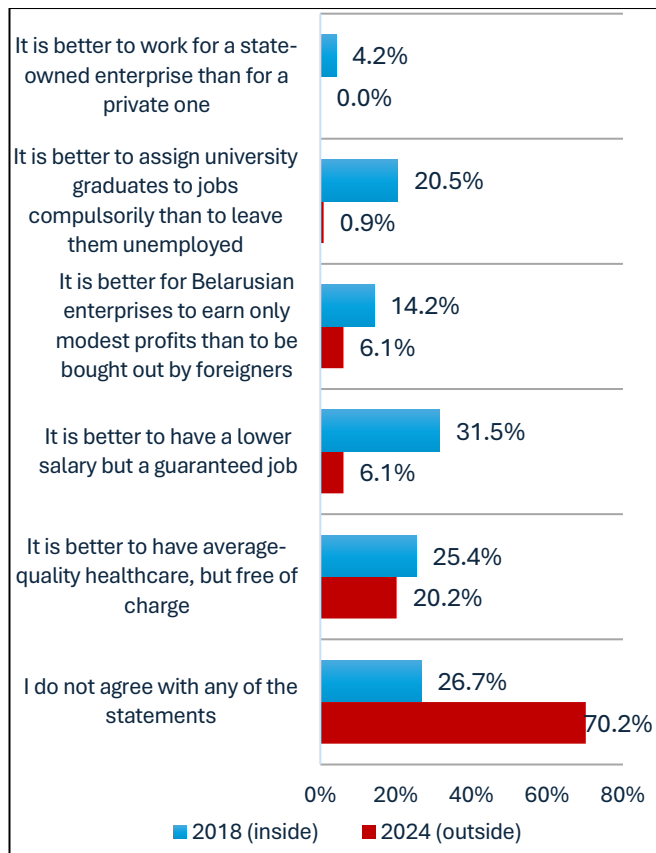
Compared to a survey of businesses inside Belarus in 2018, the 2024 the Belarusian business diaspora operating outside the country holds a stronger commitment to self-reliance, risk-taking, and core market principles than business representatives operating inside Belarus just a few years earlier (Marozau & Apanasovich, 2026). It strongly supports free pricing, the end of subsidies to

uncompetitive firms, and rejection of economic paternalism (e.g., guaranteed jobs over higher salaries) (Figure 6). This alignment means that the diaspora has internalized the "European" institutional mindset, making them natural partners for EU economic initiatives and the primary "agents of transformation" for a future democratic Belarus.

Moreover, the shared experience of forced migration, combined with the resilience and adaptability of Belarusian entrepreneurs (Marozau, 2023), has fostered collaboration and ecosystem-building across Poland and the Baltic states. This commitment to market principles is evident in the rapid emergence of Belarusian business associations and informal networks across the EU (Krasko & Daneyko, 2022). While such spontaneous civil society development is atypical for Belarus, it aligns closely with the EU's decentralized business environment (Greenwood, 2002). In contrast to post-2020 Belarus, where the state restricts independent business organizations and advocacy (Marozau, 2023), the diaspora has quickly formed self-governing, trust-based networks. These organizations substitute for weak institutional trust at home, mitigate geopolitical risks, and provide advocacy, networking, and



Figure 6. Paternalistic and protectionist preferences of entrepreneurs inside and outside Belarus



Source: Marozau & Apanasovich (2026)

representation to host-country and EU institutions (Marozau & Danilchuk, 2024), demonstrating the diaspora’s capacity for democratic self-organization.

## Conclusion and Implications

The relocation of Belarusian 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.

To unlock the full value of this asset for regional growth and long-term transformation, a strategic recalibration of policy is needed.

First, the Belarusian business diaspora should be understood as a distinct and underutilized contributor to the European economy—shaped by geopolitical disruption yet strongly aligned with EU market norms and integration pathways. The barriers these businesses face are not typical SME challenges but structural frictions that limit investment, scaling, and value creation in host countries. Addressing these frictions would deliver direct benefits to local economies through job creation, tax revenues, and industrial capacity. Fuller market participation could be supported through trust-building within local business ecosystems, consistent access to finance, greater legal predictability for founders and key staff, and appropriate risk-sharing instruments for capital-intensive sectors such as manufacturing. In parallel, regulatory clarity enabling banks to



distinguish between sanctioned or state-linked entities and independent Belarusian firms would reduce unnecessary de-risking that suppresses legitimate economic activity within the EU.

Second, the Belarusian business diaspora represents a strategic asset for the future economic and democratic reconstruction of Belarus, whose value depends on being anchored and strengthened within the EU today. Operating in European markets allows these entrepreneurs to accumulate capital, managerial experience, institutional trust, and familiarity with EU regulatory and governance standards - assets that will be critical in a post-authoritarian transition. Retaining this community within the European economic space ensures that future reconstruction efforts can draw on actors already embedded in EU value chains, rather than relying solely on external assistance or ad hoc capacity-building.

Targeted funding mechanisms and professional networks can support this long-term role by enabling transparent links with the remaining private sector in Belarus, preserving skills, business relationships, and market knowledge that would otherwise erode over time. Finally, cross-sectoral initiatives involving entrepreneurs, civil society, and democratic actors can strengthen diaspora cohesion and amplify its contribution as a carrier of economic know-how and democratic practices. Joint efforts around education, skills development, and employability are particularly valuable, as they address EU labor market needs while preparing the groundwork for Belarus's eventual reintegration into the European economic and institutional space.

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