

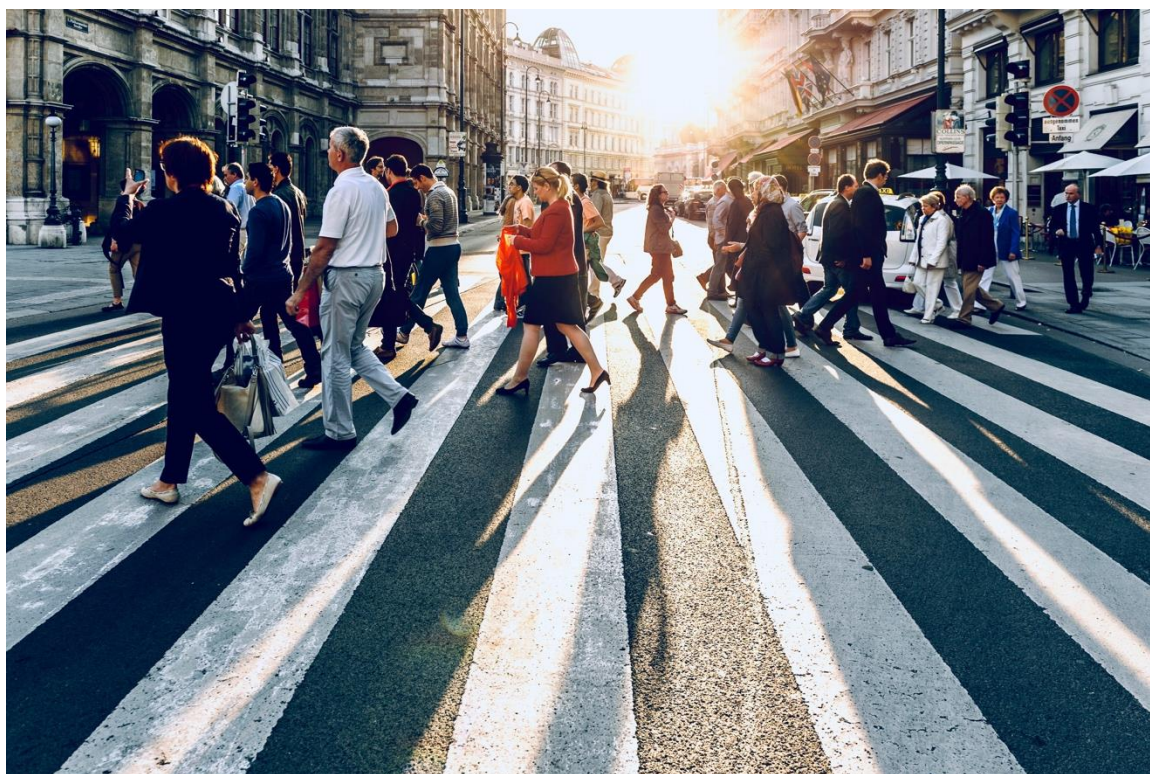
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Belarusian Entrepreneurship in the EU: A Qualitative Study of Relocated and Emerging Businesses





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ABBA – Association of Belarusian Business Abroad is the largest association of Belarusian business abroad bringing together over 100 members from 11 countries from the EU, UK, USA and Canada. ABBA’s goal is to integrate, protect the interests and develop the legal and ethical businesses of entrepreneurs with Belarusian roots for the development of New Belarus as an independent democratic country.

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1. Belarusian Entrepreneurship in the EU: Qualitative Study – Interviews with Belarusian Entrepreneurs Relocated, Opened or Starting New Businesses in the EU Countries

1.1. Introduction

Since the onset of the political crisis in Belarus in 2020 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there has been a marked rise in Belarusian migration to the EU. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 Belarusians have departed from their motherland (Committee on Migration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)). A significant number of Belarusian citizens have moved to Poland and Lithuania. By 2023, estimates indicated that between 180,000 to 220,000 (Kazakevich, 2023) Belarusians resided in Poland; whereas in Lithuania, the population reached 62,535 as of July 2024 (migracija.lt, 2024). As per the Belarusian Business Barometer, approximately 9,207 companies with Belarusian shareholders were registered in the European Union in 2024 (excluding self-employed individuals). A significant majority, around 96%, of these Belarusian enterprises are situated in Poland (74%) and the Baltic countries (22%), with Lithuania being the primary location.

What motivated Belarusians to start or relocate their businesses to Poland or Lithuania, and what their experience has been like, along with the challenges encountered by Belarusian companies in their host countries are all key points explored through insights gathered from ten interviews with Belarusian entrepreneurs.

Belarusian migrants have chosen Poland and Lithuania for business relocation or business establishment for a number of reasons. In most cases, though, Belarusians had little time to decide which EU country to relocate to. The potential for quick relocation and legalisation opportunities was crucial. This factor continues to be the most significant for Belarusian migrants who have relocated and are operating

businesses in Poland and Lithuania, as they assess whether to maintain their business activities in the host country. One of the most important factors in attracting business relocation or new businesses founded by migrants is the ability of migrants to legalise and stable migration policies in the host country. It is evident that conducting business becomes quite challenging in an environment marked by uncertainty or when there are obstacles in obtaining or renewing the necessary documents to stay in the host country.

The businesses interviewed varied in their location, industry and size of business, relocation or new business establishment and the length of business experience. Nonetheless, it was feasible to generalise the typical issues that Belarusian companies encountered in Poland and Lithuania as host countries. In addition, the interviewees highlighted the benefits of doing business in the host countries while recounting their experiences.

1.2. Methodology

This qualitative study is based on in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) with Belarusian entrepreneurs. Interviews were conducted with representatives of small businesses and sole proprietorships to gain detailed insights into their experiences and expectations. Due to the project's timeline, the research was conducted between September and mid-November. The countries in focus are Poland and Lithuania as most of the businesses of Belarusian origin are located in these two countries. There have been 10 interviews conducted among 5 female participants and 5 male participants. Currently, four businesses are functioning in Poland, with one still in the registration process, while five are established in Lithuania, two of which are contemplating a move to Poland. Among those interviewed, seven are either owners or founders of their respective companies. Two are registered as sole proprietors, one in Poland and the other in Lithuania, while one individual is in the process of planning to establish a startup in Poland. The sectors of industries include IT, logistics, consultancy, healthcare, professional services, retail trade and technology.

The interview questions covered aspects such as:

- reason for relocating/opening a business in the chosen country;
- experiences related to the process of relocating/starting a business;
- encountered difficulties and challenges.

Interviews were carried out anonymously in light of the deteriorating circumstances in Belarus, focusing solely on the industry. The interviews were conducted online using MS Teams, ensuring there were no issues with faster implementation.

In the interview, the particular focus was on the following aspects: difficulties with financing, challenges related to relocating or starting companies, issues with the business operation in a host country.

Value Added:

This study identified areas where there are opportunities to improve support for Belarusian entrepreneurs in the EU. The results can be useful for policymakers and institutions supporting business migration to the EU countries. Additionally, the findings can offer insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by Belarusian entrepreneurs, contributing to the development of targeted support measures and policies.

1.3. Poland

“Poland was a destination of comfortable migration”.

The majority of the entrepreneurs interviewed (four out of five) did not choose Poland according to the business opportunities and environment but were fleeing from Belarus or Ukraine (two interviewees firstly migrated to Ukraine after the political crisis in Belarus in 2020 and then had to flee the war in Ukraine in 2022). Consequently, the primary motivation for relocating to Poland was the more accessible process of legalisation compared to other EU nations, specifically in obtaining residency through a humanitarian visa. Additional factors influencing the decision to relocate to Poland included its geographical proximity, the presence of a Belarusian community, and the completion of studies at a Polish university.

1.3.1. Challenges

Accountancy

One of the common and first challenges that the interviewed entrepreneurs mentioned was **accountancy**. Two (out of five) of the entrepreneurs stated that it was hard to find a qualified accountant and they had changed up to three companies before they could find a good one. In one case, due to the mistakes of the accountant, a company had to pay fines. They also noted that locating an accounting service in the Russian language is quite challenging due to the influx of Belarusians migrants and Ukrainian refugees. Interviewed entrepreneurs generally prefer to work with professionals who know the Russian/Belarusian language, which makes communication with them easier. According to one entrepreneur, Russian/Belarusian-speaking accountants charge double of the market price. Such negative experiences with accountants may come from the fact that accountancy in Poland and Belarus are different. According to a consultant who supports relocation and opening business, Belarusians often do not understand how to work with Polish

accountants. In Belarus, an accountant is usually a staff member who serves for many other operational processes (ex. doing payments), including the service that in Poland belongs to the tax consultant. Therefore, in Poland an entrepreneur must **hire other professionals** for those tasks. According to an interview with an individual entrepreneur, the problem is also that there is no program allowing entrepreneurs to do accountancy by themselves.

One entrepreneur shared that the smooth process of opening business in Poland was because, in the very beginning, he found a good Belarusian accountant, who explained to him a Polish accountancy system. For this business owner, it was important to have an accountant speaking Russian because of communication and explanation of different processes like optimisation of taxes. On the other hand, a business owner who plans to open a business in Poland, while already operating one in Lithuania, seeks to employ Polish accounting specialists. This decision is based on the entrepreneur's experience in Lithuania, where they found that local professionals possess extensive expertise in this field.

Bureaucracy

Four out of five entrepreneurs assessed bureaucracy in Poland as **not business friendly**. According to them, the process is rather lengthy as it is **complicated** and sometimes requires **a higher budget allocation**. *“One piece of paper reinforces another piece of paper”*. In one case, it took a month to change a business legal address because the civil servant was on holiday. A business owner has expressed that the bureaucratic processes in Poland are quite slow, while also noting that public administration does not necessitate promptness from entrepreneurs. Another one agrees that, despite the presence of considerable bureaucracy, the public administration functions effectively and provides assistance when necessary. When talking about the quality of work of the public administration, there are no complaints in this regard.

In a bundle of bureaucratic challenges comes the issue of the **language**. Three out of five interviewed entrepreneurs noted that everything is exclusively in Polish language; therefore, the need-to-know the language is a challenge in business conducting (one entrepreneur did not have a problem with it due to prior studies in Poland). If a person does not know the language, there is a need to hire a professional, which involves additional costs.

Opening a bank account

Two out of five entrepreneurs had a problem with bank accounts in Poland. In the case of one startup, all accounts were shut down coinciding with the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while the bank requested additional documents for the corporate account. The founders struggled to prevent the bank

from closing it, providing all necessary documents that were not needed prior to the beginning of the full invasion. Currently, there is a challenge in obtaining a credit card for advertising purposes because one of the founders holds Belarusian nationality.

According to another business owner, after the start of the war, the Polish banks discriminated against Belarusians, by allegedly having an inner bank policy sanction against Belarusian nationals. One of the company's owners stated that, despite the fact that some banks do not open accounts for Belarusians, there are still banks in Poland with which it is possible to cooperate without problems.

Unavailability of financial instruments

“Now everything is clear, and lessons learnt. The only problem left is the access to investments and grants”.

The difficulties with opening a bank account for Belarusian citizens are also related to the difficulties in accessing external financing, for example through bank loans or leasing. According to an owner of a business with 15 employees, **receiving banking financial support is rather difficult** when having a Belarusian passport. Two years ago, the businessman applied for a bank loan (10,000 Euro for a warehouse) after operating 8 months on the Polish market, showing a substantial turnover – around 950,000 Euro. Nevertheless, the bank has been delaying granting a bank loan, referring either to change of the bank policy (the business should operate longer on the Polish market) or that Belarusian business carries a significant level of risk due to the negative precedents with granting bank loans to foreigners.

The same business owner observes that **financing poses the greatest challenge for small businesses in Poland**. Four out of five respondents shared this concern, while the fifth individual successfully obtained a non-repayable grant of 30,000 PLN from the Polish government to support the growth of their entrepreneurial venture. There are different financial needs of the businesses interviewed. While all of them are rather micro or small businesses in the form of sole proprietorship or company, their need varies from 100,000 USD to 500,000 USD (in that case, 80% are needed for leasing and 20% of credit). A significant majority of businesses, specifically four out of five, express a desire to secure investments for their growth. However, they recognise that this can be quite challenging, if not unattainable, for citizens of Belarus. According to one founder, the Polish market is rich for the capital, however *“there is a stigmatization of the Belarusian business in the EU”* and it is probably better to look for an investment in the USA (therefore doubts whether it is worth registering a start-up in Poland). One business owner considers that, in the current situation of not being able to attract the necessary investments, the best way is to earn and invest in business development. Four out of five businesses have utilised

their own funds to start operations because they not only see the difficulties with external financing, but also agree that there is a problem with knowledge about the availability of financial instruments in the Polish market.

Lack of knowledge and access

In case of a start-up operating in the Polish market for several years, there is still a lack of access to knowledge on how to attract the investments because of the Belarusian migrant status. The company claims that their local rivals are able to secure investments despite having less efficient business processes. There is also a lack of access to knowledge on how to apply for grants, while it is not clear from the available sources.

According to an individual entrepreneur, who works with relocated Belarusian business, there is no knowledge on how to receive governmental or non-governmental support in the very beginning. Allegedly, there is a good opportunity to receive grants for starting individual entrepreneurship (practically no grants for starting a company), however the availability of this support is rather poor due to the lack of clear information or the tricky official language or very specific conditions (i.e. hiring an employee from the employment centre). If there is information available in Ukrainian language, there is no such information in Belarusian/Russian. Another concern is that translations into English or other languages frequently do not fully align with the Polish version. Even if there are available conditions on receiving a grant for individual entrepreneurship, a regular person may not understand the official language. The available information requires additional verification for successful applications. In addition, the conditions to receive such support might be quite specific (like unemployment status, permanent residency card, specific location of business conduct) that not many migrants who plan to establish a business can fulfil. There are other opportunities like participation in training and conferences for business developments, start-ups support, however, it all requires a specific legalisation status, certain time, knowledge and sources of information, which an immigrant may not have while moving to Poland.

A business owner recognises the availability of grants and subsidies that entrepreneurs can utilise, such as those aimed at innovative business concepts and incentives for hiring unemployed individuals. However, this knowledge was gained through consultation with a specialist who assists in the grant application process.

Business registration and business conduct

Three out of five interviewees stated that there are difficulties to open/register a business in Poland being Belarusian citizens. The cases of the other two do not negate this experience but were different and are explained below. Registering an individual entrepreneurship can be a confusing process, requiring approximately 5

to 6 hours to navigate and a good grasp of the language to comprehend and finalise the necessary steps. A person willing to register the individual entrepreneurship should have certain kind of residency permits (currently, temporary permits issued for family reunion, students and people under protection but not based on humanitarian reasons, permanent residency and some types of visas issued for the holders of Card of Pole or PBH visa that are not being issued starting January 2024). A startup founder who previously established an NGO in Poland found the experience to be quite challenging. As a result, he is now reluctant to register a startup in the country because of the complex procedures involved. He believes that hiring a private business consultant is necessary to navigate the process of starting a business in Poland, which adds to the overall expenses. According to the interviewed entrepreneurs, if there are sources of information on individual entrepreneurship registration, there is no such on how to step-by-step open a legal entity and then conduct a business in Poland. To register with a company, a businessperson needs professional assistance (spółka z o.o.). There is an electronic registration system that is constantly improved; however, there are some complications in the sense of lacking the lists of necessary documents, complex templates and application forms. The consultant for relocated businesses assesses the Social Insurance system (ZUS) as *not* user-friendly in general. One of the business owners complained that the process of getting a trademark is not straightforward.

The remaining two entrepreneurs did not find the registration of business hard because one had help from the Belarusian community, who had the necessary knowledge and advised on how to complete the process. Another startup had a relocation support of the PBH and was participating in the program of soft landing organised by Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC), Venture Cafe Warsaw and EY, in liaison with the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH). The program allowed the start-up founders to receive information on how business was conducted in general, where and what kind of lawyers and accountants can be found, and how to keep up with the law. There was participation in educational meetings several times a week, where the participants could ask questions.

One business owner shared that establishing a sole proprietorship (JDG) online was relatively straightforward; however, he found that starting a company required additional guidance, which led him to seek advice from private consultants. He expressed that there is a lack of comprehensive information or clear instructions on government websites regarding the process of opening a company, necessitating the need to gather information from various sources.

Legalisation

In regard to legalisation, two out of five interviewees raised this issue. One instance involved a start-up founder who was denied a residency document because of insufficient profits. In the end, the document was received for another reason than a start-up. In another case, a business owner waited for 1.5 years to receive residency. According to him, it was even faster than could be due to the support of the business association and the Belarusian diaspora.

Other issues

Various challenges arise for each business individually, such as the struggle to find employees proficient in both Russian and Polish. Additionally, there is often confusion surrounding various permits, the validation of expertise, certification processes, customs clearance, and taxation. Some Polish partners have exhibited a discourteous demeanour following the onset of the war. Furthermore, it has become increasingly difficult to connect with Polish partners and clients due to the negative perceptions of Belarusians linked to the conflict. Lastly, there are unlawful competitive practices targeting Belarusian businesses in foreign markets, where the war is exploited to tarnish their reputation.

Overall, despite the challenges of conducting business, the business environment in Poland is assessed positively. *“If you run a business wisely, there are no problems”*. The work of the tax service is noted separately, allegedly the tax office does not fine businesses for minor mistakes, or one can do taxes online. Also, no problem with corruption, subsidies on hiring unemployed and access to other EU markets were mentioned by the entrepreneurs.

1.4. Lithuania

In the vast majority of cases, Lithuania became a choice for relocation/opening of the business because of the fast possibility of migration to that country. Among the main reasons were similar mentality, geographical proximity to Belarus, lack of language barriers (English/Russian), facilitation in legalisation. In some cases, the business was already registered in Lithuania, there were programs for startups or a person previously graduated from Lithuanian university. Someone had relatives and other connections there.

One business owner opened a business in Lithuania as there were no opportunities to find a job. For the majority (except two owners working in IT), the business in Lithuania has been a different activity to the one they did in Belarus. The interviewee did not expect much from the business environment while moving, however assessing it as positive.

1.4.1. Challenges

Legalisation

“What kind of business can you talk about if you don't have documents? And security”.

The main problem for Belarusian entrepreneurs in Lithuania appeared to be legalisation, specifically the governmental approach to Belarusian migrants that occurred after the war started in 2022. Four out of five interviewees expressed concerns regarding legalisation.

It is important to separate the issues of legalisation and the speed of issuing documents, since entrepreneurs did not state any problems with the latter, or the bureaucratic process (which will be described below).

At the same time, legalisation was one of the reasons prompting entrepreneurs to come to Lithuania. For the IT sector, there was a program for startups (simple landing), which facilitated a straightforward application process for residency under the program. An entrepreneur in the IT sector who moved to Lithuania before 2022 stated that it was easy to legalise in Lithuania. After the Russian full invasion of Ukraine, many Belarusians started to have problems with their documents, particularly those who had previously served in Belarusian government positions or the military. According to the owner of an IT company, the primary need of legalisation now is not provided in Lithuania; therefore, as an entrepreneur, it is hard to think about business until this necessity is fulfilled. Currently, he considers

Poland as a long-term solution due to the security and prospect for Belarusians in terms of legalisation.

Another entrepreneur has similar feelings; due to the political situation in Lithuania, he feels uncertain as his residency ends in a year and a half, and he does not know what to expect as the prolongation of his residency is linked to his business performance. Therefore, he considers Poland as a destination for further migration as it is challenging to grow a business and enhance performance without psychological safety and while living in an unstable environment with family. According to him, the “romantic aspect” of Lithuania (language, closeness to Belarus, similar mindset) became a disadvantage for a Belarusian migrant and many start-ups are preparing to relocate and looking for new opportunities.

“There is a tense environment, and it is psychologically difficult - no one asks how you are doing psychologically”.

Positions regarding the length of legal proceedings were divided. One business owner noted that the process of receiving residency is quite long and the police department and immigration have more interest in national security than business. While two other entrepreneurs assessed the process as fast – i.e. receiving a permit (blue card) within 9 days only and in another case legalisation took 3 months.

Investments

“There is a bias to Belarusians in investing. There is also no ‘safe pillow’ for risking. Bank loan could solve the situation, but it won’t bring the needed network”.

All the businesses interviewed have been opened and developed using funds from their respective owners.

According to one entrepreneur from the IT sector, there is not much investment potential in Lithuania neither for Belarusian nor for the local projects. He is also reluctant to invest his own money to develop the business because of the uncertain political situation towards Belarusians in Lithuania.

Three out of five businesses either do not require financing for their operations, as they have no immediate plans for expansion, or they rely on their own revenue. The circumstances for the remaining two businesses are quite different. One company stated that, despite having a proposal for a bank loan due to the big turnover, because of the uncertainty of being a migrant and due to the geopolitical situation, such a responsibility seems unnecessary and risky. They are looking for an investment in 1 mln Euro; however, many investors do not want to invest in their business due to the risks related to the geopolitical situation. The owner also

mentioned that, despite the availability of numerous government grants and support for their industry, their status as young and relatively unknown companies prevents them from accessing these resources. Also, according to them, to receive grants in Lithuania, one needs to have contacts.

Another interviewed company looked to attract 1.2 ml Euro to start manufacturing the equipment in Lithuania. According to the owner, there are no more grants available in Lithuania. Despite having potential investors, it is difficult to attract investments for businesses of Belarusian origin. Among all the businesses interviewed, this one was notable for receiving financial assistance from the EBRD, which covered 50% of the training costs related to relocation and business operations, as well as reimbursing 60-70% of the expenses associated with certifying the equipment sold by the company. The second IT company interviewed expressed that, should the need arise, they do not possess the knowledge of where to seek out grants, investments, or subsidies. Previously, they applied for some grant programs for a startup but did not get it as they were not considered a startup anymore.

An interviewed individual entrepreneur shared that this form of business gives more possibilities for receiving a bank loan. In addition, in Lithuania, there is also a bank institution, where there are not that many requirements to receive a loan (it is given based on the guarantee) but the interest rate is higher.

Ability to open a bank account

One out of five interviewed entrepreneurs had a problem with opening a bank account in Lithuania. According to the business owner, despite having a work contract, work permit and a visa, A Lithuanian bank declined to open a bank account, citing a lack of sufficient grounds for residency in Lithuania and the necessity of possessing a temporary residence permit. However, after receiving a residence permit, the same bank still refused to open a bank account due to the bank policy. The other bank also did not yield any success. The business owner faced the closure of a corporate account in Lithuania as well.

The remaining four entrepreneurs either did not identify the opening of a bank account as a challenge or indicated that it was not a problem for them. One individual noted that it is feasible to open a current account online, while another founder mentioned that they did not have a bank account in Lithuania at all. One business owner, who knows the situation in Poland, stated that, in Poland, it is more problematic in comparison to Lithuania.

Hard to find professionals

Two out of five entrepreneurs stated that it is rather difficult to find the right professionals in the local market as there are a small number of professionals with the necessary qualifications and the required level of preparation (not mentioning

language and mentality). There is a need to train employees. It was also noted that it is impossible to do sales without a Lithuanian employee in the staff.

Three other entrepreneurs do not require employees to run their businesses or, particularly in the IT sector, have Belarusian freelancers working primarily in Poland, with some also in Lithuania or other non-EU countries. One IT business owner mentioned that assembling a team in a single office in Lithuania is costly. Most of the entrepreneurs surveyed expressed a preference for collaborating with Belarusians, citing the advantages of shared networks and similar mindsets and work ethics. One business owner noted that migrants tend to be more driven in their performance, as they lack established connections in the host country and have a strong need to succeed. At the same time, three out of five interviewed use the services of local professionals in accountancy and as lawyers, as according to them, they possess a good qualification and helped to make the process of registering/conducting business smoother by knowing all local nuances.

1.4.2. Positive aspects

Simple bureaucracy

Entrepreneurs who were interviewed praised the clear and transparent bureaucracy processes in Lithuania. For instance, online public administration services are available, making bureaucracy straightforward. A comprehensive guide is published, providing all the essential information for relocating or starting a business. It is also possible to establish a business within two weeks, and there are no issues with submitting various documents digitally. Mobile ID is accepted, and documents are accessible in English, Russian, and several other languages. Those who had experience with bureaucracy in Poland noted that, in Lithuania, it is simpler and faster. In Poland, a person must go to the public administration in person, whereas, in Lithuania, it can be done online.

An individual entrepreneur, who was interviewed, described the registration process as transparent and straightforward, and characterised their business experience in Lithuania as favourable. However, according to them, the instructions on governmental websites could be unclear and sometimes it is rather difficult to sort out the issue. Nevertheless, one can receive an explanation (also in English) on step-by-step process via phone contact in any public administration. The tax declaration in case of individual activity can be done via phone with the consultant. In the case of individual activity (there are two different types – individual entrepreneur and individual activity which is easier to register), the downsides include a **lack of specific requirements and accounting**, which can lead to confusion when filing a tax declaration.

There is information support to deal with bureaucracy in public administration in Lithuania. There are free master classes on legal issues done by the Red Cross, Order of Malta and the Centre of Refugees, where migrants can receive all necessary information and explanations regarding the bureaucratic process. After the influx of the Belarusian migrants and Ukrainian refugees there was a social necessity of the services that would help the migrants to deal with the local bureaucracy.

Entrepreneurs interviewed highlighted several advantages of conducting business in Lithuania, including the state's principle of trust (where income declarations are not subject to verification), the widespread use of the English language, a culture of punctuality and clarity in business dealings, a robust technological sector, and the availability of documentation in both English and Russian.

1.5. Conclusion

The problems with legalisation and inconsistent migration policies in case of Lithuania appear to be particularly challenging for conducting business, despite the many other difficulties Belarusian companies encounter in their host countries. The importance of consistent immigration laws not only influences the choice of Belarusian entrepreneurs when moving, but also affects their decision to either stay, develop, scale the business in the host country or move the business to another country with more favourable migration policies.

There are other challenges that relocated or newly established businesses face in the host countries. It appears, that over time, companies are finding ways to address their challenges. It is worth highlighting the important role of the Belarusian community in the host country for Belarusian business operations, while many business people are looking for information, support, and professionals there. The challenges that the businesses interviewed have faced or are still facing vary depending on the country, its industry and size. Nonetheless, Poland's and Lithuania's policies are the main cause of the disparities in business issues.

The influx of Belarusian migrants has presented Poland and Lithuania with both an opportunity and a challenge. The businesses created or relocated affect not only the economies of these countries, but also the business environment, social and political spheres. The development of business by Belarusian migrants largely depends on the policies of these two countries, where the majority of businesses with Belarusian capital are located.

2. Belarusian Women Entrepreneurs in the EU: Qualitative Study – Interviews with Belarusian Women Entrepreneurs Relocated, Opened or Starting New Businesses in the EU Countries

2.1. Introduction

The political crisis in Belarus in 2020, and Russia's militarised aggression against Ukraine in 2022, resulted in a significant intensification of migration flows from Belarus to the EU countries. Poland and Lithuania became the primary emigration destinations for Belarusians in the EU. During the period 2021-2023, these two states accounted for an average of 96% of the first residence permits¹ issued to Belarusians among all 27 EU Member States (Eurostat, 2025a). In absolute numbers, an average of 223,998 first residence permits per year were issued to Belarusian citizens in Poland during this time (Eurostat, 2025a). This led Poland to be the leader in this indicator against the background of other EU countries. In Lithuania, the average number of first residence permits issued to Belarusian citizens per year during the same period was 13,716 (Eurostat, 2025a). Moreover, according to Poland's official migration statistics, the number of Belarusian residents with valid residence permits in Poland reached 137,455 at the end of 2024, constituting the second largest immigrant group in the country (UdSC, 2025). According to Lithuanian migration statistics, as of the beginning of January 2025, 57,511 citizens of Belarus were registered in Lithuania, which also makes the population of Belarusian immigrants the second largest among other immigrants (Migracijos Departamentas, 2025). It is also important to note that for many years in immigration flows to Lithuania, the majority of immigration flows to Lithuania were made up of Lithuanian citizens

¹ A residence permit is also considered to be a first permit if the time gap between the expiry of the old permit and the start of validity of the new permit issued for the same reason is at least six months, regardless of the year of issue of the permit (Eurostat, 2025b).

returning to the country (about 82%), while immigrants from third countries accounted for only 15%. However, since 2017, this trend has undergone a notable shift. By 2023, the proportion of returning Lithuanian migrants had decreased to 25%, while the proportion of immigrants from third countries had increased to 74%, with Belarusians constituting 31% of the total share of non-EU immigrants (EMN, 2025).

The composition of emigration flows from Belarus to Poland and Lithuania is mosaic – it includes various groups of migrants, including labour migrants, forced migrants and refugees, educational migrants, business relocates and others. When considering the ‘new’ Belarusian emigration through the prism of socio-demographic characteristics, it is important to note that the majority of those arriving in Poland and Lithuania are young and economically active citizens of Belarus (UdSC, 2023; Kazakevich, 2023: 14). The gender structure of the population of Belarusian immigrants in Poland is somewhat asymmetric, with a slight predominance of men. In 2024, men accounted for 57.9% and women for 42.1% of the total number of registered Belarusian immigrants in Poland (UdSC, 2025). In Lithuania, however, the gender imbalance is more pronounced: at least 70% of Belarusian immigrants are men and about 30% are women (Kazakevich, 2023: 13).

In the context of the aforementioned, the objective of the research presented in this report was to explore the entrepreneurial experiences of Belarusian women in the EU, with a particular focus on Poland and Lithuania. The study concentrated on identifying the distinctive characteristics of Belarusian women's entrepreneurial activities, as well as the pivotal factors and barriers that influence their propensity to initiate or maintain a business while residing in a country of immigration.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania in the context of the relocation of Belarusian companies and entrepreneurs within the broader wave of Belarusian emigration. The notable business risks present in Belarus's current political environment play a crucial role in motivating Belarusian entrepreneurs to seek opportunities abroad. Their active participation in migration activities between Belarus and certain EU nations contributes to the overlap between political and economic migration (Marozau & Danilchuk, 2024). This phenomenon is further substantiated by the fact that, as of 2024, approximately 9,207 companies with Belarusian shareholders (excluding individual entrepreneurs) have been registered in the EU, with the majority of these registered companies based in Poland (77%), followed by Lithuania (9%), which, nevertheless, positions it as the leader among the Baltic States in this regard (Belarusian Business Barometer, 2024).

In this context, studying the experience of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in emigration is especially important. Because unlike men, women tend to pursue entrepreneurship less frequently, and when they do opt for this path, they approach the initiation, management, and growth of their businesses in distinct ways (Andrejuk, 2015: 230). Moreover, for migrant women, entrepreneurship can be a path to economic independence, improvement of social status and active participation in the labour market. Operating in complex social, institutional and economic contexts, migrant women face different challenges, often confronting inequalities, power structures and dominant narratives related to entrepreneurship (Homel, 2022: 34).

The main questions of the research presented in this report were formulated as follows: What are the peculiarities of the unique entrepreneurial experience of Belarusian women in the EU, especially in Poland and Lithuania? What are the specific factors and barriers that determine their motivation, challenges, and opportunities for starting or continuing their entrepreneurial activities while in emigration?

The search for answers to the posed study questions was carried out within the framework of qualitative research – interviews with Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania. The Belarusian women migrants who participated in the study had different socio-demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial experience. This diversity of the sample allowed to obtain a relative completeness of qualitative data, based on which it was possible to analyse the unique entrepreneurial experience of Belarusian women entrepreneurs, as well as the factors and barriers that determine their motivation, problems and opportunities at the start and continuation of their entrepreneurial activities in the host country.

2.2. Methodology

This qualitative research was based on in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) (see Düvell, 2012; De Janasz & Katz, 2021) with Belarusian women entrepreneurs. The application of this research method allowed for a focus on Belarusian women migrants as active actors in the host society. This approach enabled an analysis of their entrepreneurial experience, as well as the factors and barriers that determine their motivation, challenges and opportunities at the start and continuation of their entrepreneurial activities while emigrating.

The research was conducted from February to mid-March 2025, with a focus on female representatives of small businesses and individual entrepreneurs. The participants were Belarusian women migrants running or planning to start their business activities in Poland or Lithuania, as these two countries have the majority of businesses of Belarusian origin (see introduction). The semi-structured interviews with Belarusian women entrepreneurs were conducted according to a pre-designed scenario (guide), i.e. a general interview script with a set of questions of research interest was prepared. However, the order of the questions discussed, their final formulation, as well as the appearance of additional clarifying questions depended on the entrepreneurial experience and the content of each respondent's narratives.

The interview questions covered the following aspects:

- the formation of migration aspirations and the influence of entrepreneurial experience;
- factors influencing entrepreneurial activity in the country of immigration;
- aspects of social and professional integration of Belarusian women into the host society;
- the influence of personality characteristics and gender on the vision of entrepreneurial activity;
- strategies for achieving entrepreneurial success in the host country;
- the influence of crises and local challenges on entrepreneurial activity;
- specifics of transnational entrepreneurial activity;
- perceptions of returning to Belarus to do business.

Ten interviews were conducted with six women living in Poland and four women living in Lithuania. In Poland, the median age of the respondents was 36.5 years, and the average length of stay in Poland was five years. Two out of six respondents were

married, three respondents were single, and one was divorced. Three of the respondents had children, and two of the three respondents had adult children. All Belarusian women interviewed in Poland had higher education, and half of the respondents had business experience in Belarus, as well as experience working abroad. The areas of professional engagement for Belarusian women surveyed in Poland prior to their emigration included marketing, design and construction, woodworking, consulting, and catering engineering. The respondents in Poland were engaged in a variety of sectors, including services and trade, consulting, tourism, and manufacturing.. It is also important to note that four women were entrepreneurs and served as either co-founders or founders, while two respondents were in the process of starting entrepreneurial activities as self-employed individuals and founders.

The median age of Belarusian women interviewed in Lithuania was 47.5 years, and the average period of residence in Lithuania was 3.75 years. The majority of respondents (three out of four) in Lithuania were married, while one was divorced. All interviewed women in Lithuania have children, both adult and minor. Additionally, most of the respondents have higher education, one respondent has incomplete higher education, and most of the respondents had no entrepreneurial experience before emigration; however, half of the women have experience working abroad or with foreign partners. The areas of employment for Belarusian women surveyed in Lithuania prior to their emigration were diverse, encompassing sectors such as printing, senior management, skilled trades, and content specialisation. The respondents in Poland were engaged in a variety of sectors, including services and retail trade, renewable energy, handicraft production, and educational services. At the time of the interviews, most of the respondents were involved in business as founders or co-founders, while one respondent was in the process of starting a business as a founder.

In light of the persistent tense circumstances in Belarus subsequent to the political crisis of 2020, a series of anonymous interviews were conducted with Belarusian female entrepreneurs. The objective of these interviews was to provide a comprehensive account of their entrepreneurial experiences. The interviews were performed online using the multi-functional videoconferencing platform MS Teams. The use of this programme for interviews is due to its relative accessibility for both the researcher and the respondents than traditional face-to-face interviews. In addition, the use of videoconferencing platforms for conducting interviews, levelling the temporal and spatial gap, ensuring security, reducing the costs associated with accessing transnational respondents, maintaining social distance and protecting privacy and confidentiality. However, it is important to note that conducting interviews using such video conferencing software can be fraught with

practical problems such as technical problems during the interview process, as well as a possible breach of intimacy compared to face-to-face interviewing, all of which can affect the quality of the research conducted (Khan & MacEachen, 2022).

The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with Belarusian women entrepreneurs were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (see Merton, 1975; Aronson, 1995; Boyatzis, 1998; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2011). This method of analysis is widely recognised as one of the most effective approaches to investigating social phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Value Added:

This study has identified areas where there are opportunities to enhance support for Belarusian women entrepreneurs in the EU. The findings may prove useful for policymakers and organizations involved in supporting business migration to the EU. In addition, the results offer insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by Belarusian women entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to the development of targeted support measures and policies.

2.3. Belarusian Women Entrepreneurs in Poland

2.3.1 Formation of Migration Aspirations and Entrepreneurial Experience

Motivation for emigration and entrepreneurship

The majority of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland had not previously intended to migrate. Their decision to do so was instead shaped by the political instability and significant risks posed to both their entrepreneurial activities and personal safety in their country of origin. Respondents cited the prevailing conditions as the primary reason for their inability to remain in Belarus and continue their business operations. Nevertheless, some attempted to sustain their enterprises under the new circumstances. However, Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine in 2022 became the decisive factor that accelerated their emigration. The influence of Russia's military aggression on migration decisions is illustrated in the case of one respondent, whose business – although no longer viable in Belarus – had a transnational structure, with one of its branches located in Ukraine. The unfolding events there rendered further operations unfeasible.

“After the events of 2020, everything changed. Firstly, I realized that it had become unsafe to stay in the country”.

“This moment came [to emigrate] when the war [in Ukraine] started. Then we literally packed up and left in one day”.

“My personal move took place after the war [in Ukraine] began, as it became impossible to do business in Minsk, and even more so in Ukraine”.

For some respondents, however, the deteriorating situation – marked by a political crisis at home and military conflict in Ukraine – was not the main factor influencing their decision to depart. Instead, they were primarily motivated by the desire to access educational opportunities, either for their children or themselves, in Poland.

“The main motive for relocation was my children's education”.

“My mum insisted that I study in Poland. That's how I ended up in Poland, where my initial goal was to get an education”.

Although many respondents had prior entrepreneurial experience in Belarus, not all had a clear plan for transferring or restarting their business ventures in the host country following forced emigration. For some, their entry into entrepreneurship in Poland was accidental or born out of necessity. Faced with difficulties in securing employment and adjusting to new socio-economic conditions, they turned to self-

employment, simultaneously recognising opportunities to launch commercial activities.

“I didn’t realise what I was going to do in another country, and I thought, ‘Why not?’ That’s how I ended up in entrepreneurship – more out of naivety and adventurism”.

“When it was time to look for a job, I found it difficult. It was then that I started hearing about the possibility of getting a grant to develop my own business”.

A portion of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland made a conscious decision to transfer their business or establish a new one in their host country. Their actions were primarily driven by existing client demand and emerging market opportunities. Migration from Belarus, encompassing a diverse group of individuals, concentrated largely in countries such as Poland and Lithuania. This trend created a situation in which business relocators often followed their clientele, generating a cycle of migration and economic opportunity. Additionally, after conducting a market analysis in the host countries, respondents often found that the goods or services they had previously offered were still in demand. This discovery served as an added incentive to continue or adapt their previous business models, potentially paving the way for access to broader EU markets.

The research also revealed that, due to a lack of resources necessary to replicate their businesses exactly as they existed in Belarus, many women relied on their sector-specific experience, initially working as employees in related fields. At the same time, they began developing strategies for launching new entrepreneurial ventures.

“Our company is in the design business, and after 2020 many clients started to move for political reasons, opening offices in Warsaw”.

“In Belarus, I had a company that managed turnkey projects. In Poland, I work in the same field, now within a large company, but that doesn’t stop me from creating something of my own on the side”.

Influence of entrepreneurial experience on starting or continuing an activity in emigration

The impact of prior entrepreneurial experience on the ability of Belarusian women to establish or sustain businesses in Poland was found to be non-uniform. A lack of formal business management skills – often the result of previous experience limited to freelancing or self-employment – was observed to hinder the entrepreneurial

efforts of some respondents. They noted that the essential components of successful entrepreneurship, such as strategic planning, financial literacy, and robust networking, were frequently lacking. As a result, the absence of structured entrepreneurial experience in Belarus is perceived by some as an obstacle to integration into the host society and a factor that delays the acquisition of new business practices and competencies.

“Lack of experience was a major inhibiting factor. I had to spend a lot more time on things that now seem obvious”.

Conversely, for other respondents, their experience of running businesses in Belarus under conditions of constant instability cultivated a high level of stress resilience and an ability to adapt swiftly to new challenges. One participant highlighted this contrast by comparing the reactions of Polish and Belarusian entrepreneurs to economic changes, noting that Belarusians are more accustomed to uncertainty and, therefore, perceive fluctuations more calmly. The turbulent entrepreneurial climate in Belarus – marked by unpredictability – has, for some women, reduced fear of the unfamiliar and normalised risk-taking as part of the entrepreneurial journey.

“When changes unfavorable for entrepreneurs take place in Poland, local communities often react with panic: ‘Everything is gone!’. But for us, Belarusians, the reaction is different: ‘Ha-ha, we’ve been through this before’”.

Belarusian women entrepreneurs also emphasised the stark differences between the business environments in Poland and Belarus. For instance, they noted that Minsk and Kyiv are more similar in business culture than Warsaw and other European cities, prompting a necessary shift in traditional business approaches. Even experienced entrepreneurs realised the necessity to reassess and restructure their strategic vision in response to these differences.

“It took the first year and a half to figure out the mental differences, business approaches, and processes”.

“Belarusian entrepreneurs came with their own rules, which they were used to in Belarus, and tried to apply them in Poland”.

For many, emigration was not solely a forced decision but also an opportunity to reflect on and redefine their professional trajectory. A number of women were compelled to take temporary jobs but continued to nurture ambitions of launching or reviving their own businesses. This affirms the idea that migration, while challenging, can also serve as a catalyst for professional growth and reinvention.

“When you're standing on solid ground and there's a moment of choice, you start to think: do I want to keep doing this, or do I still want to do what I like to do”?

Legal considerations surrounding entrepreneurship in Poland play a significant role in determining the viability of business endeavors. Many women face bureaucratic obstacles related to documentation, underlining the importance of legal status for sustaining or initiating entrepreneurial activity.

“The only thing holding me back is not having a resident card, but it's a year and a half away”.

Background experience and choice of entrepreneurial direction

The research shows that the prior business experience of Belarusian women significantly influences their choice of entrepreneurial activity in Poland. Many women opt for areas similar to those they previously worked in, allowing them to avoid restarting their careers from scratch. This strategy enables them to leverage existing knowledge, professional networks, and reputations for a smoother transition into new business ventures.

“When I was thinking about what to open, I knew immediately that it had to be related to something I was already doing and experienced in”.

“In this way, my past experience helped me avoid the risk of going completely into an unfamiliar field”.

In entrepreneurship, some women chose to remain within their established niches. One example is an entrepreneur who continued in business consulting, drawing on her prior experience, which had already earned her a degree of recognition and credibility.

“Now I have old clients coming back to me periodically that I worked with years ago”.

Others launched new businesses rooted in their previous experience and personal interests. Success in these cases often depended on industry-specific knowledge and the ability to adapt to local market conditions.

“I didn't need a radical retraining – I was already versed in the field”.

For some women entrepreneurs, backgrounds in management and market research served as a strong foundation for business shifts. One entrepreneur with a history in the salon industry in Belarus pursued the same field in Poland, relying on the

expertise of her business partner. Another, after conducting market research and recognising a promising niche, chose to enter the healthy sweets production sector.

“I'm not a hairdresser and never have been, but I have had experience working in a beauty salon”.

“I thought about it for a long time, and eventually came to the conclusion that healthy eating is something that is close to my heart”.

Many of the interviewed businesswomen emphasised the importance of existing contacts and customer bases in developing their businesses. Some reported that former clients from Belarus continued to reach out to them in Poland, helping them establish a business and gain a competitive edge. Utilising professional connections from previous employment was commonly cited as a means to bypass the initial challenges of starting from scratch. Nonetheless, the ability to adapt to new circumstances and a different market continued to pose a considerable challenge. For instance, an entrepreneur who launched author tours found the Polish market highly competitive, forcing her to rebuild her network from the ground up, as her previous contacts were no longer relevant.

“Besides, I already had useful contacts formed during my employment”.

“There are plenty of people willing to take such tours, but the competition is also huge”.

“Our business is not oriented towards the Belarusian or Ukrainian community, but towards the Polish market”.

2.3.2. The Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Activity in the Host Country

Factors affecting entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland point out several key factors driving their decision to start or keep their businesses in the host country. These factors include the support of the Belarusian diaspora in Poland, improved economic prospects, a legal environment conducive to business, individual values and aspirations for entrepreneurship, as well as family situations. This support and these opportunities can significantly impact outcomes. The support of the Belarusian diaspora was a decisive factor for many Belarusian women entrepreneurs, especially when they were just starting out. This is mentioned by many female respondents. Many of these women relied heavily on this support in the first months of their emigration. Diaspora members played a crucial role by sharing valuable insights, serving as initial customers, and assisting in establishing a local customer base. They also facilitated connections with potential business partners. However,

as time passed, this support diminished. Consequently, women entrepreneurs were compelled to adapt swiftly, fostering greater independence and fully embedding their operations within the local economy of the host nation.

“That wave of solidarity actually allowed us to survive the first six months”.

At the same time, the growth of certain economic sectors in Poland, such as commercial real estate and construction, created demand for services in these areas and was an advantage for some respondents who had offerings in these sectors. Moreover, the qualitative data show that many of the respondents wanted to continue or start their business in those areas of activity that brought them not only economic benefits but also personal satisfaction of their interests and allowed them to realise their professional and creative ambitions. This means that there is not only a pragmatic interest in involving Belarusian women in entrepreneurship, but also a personal value component in their choice of business trajectory.

“Warsaw is being rebuilt literally in the moment”.

“Firstly, it's the desire to do what I like and to be able to influence what I do”.

“I did the calculations and realized that it's better to do what I love, even if I don't get much”.

Simultaneously, for some respondents, entrepreneurship served as a means to regain their financial stability following emigration, which prompted them to actively seek market opportunities and create new niches. In addition, some of the respondents embarked on entrepreneurial ventures not out of personal ambition, but to assist in an already established family business. This allowed them to integrate more quickly into the market, utilising available resources and experience.

“In Belarus we had everything, but here we started from scratch”.

“In the end, I had to take over the management, although initially I didn't plan to do it seriously”.

“The competition is high, but after a few years in Minsk, when everything collapsed and just stopped after 2020, I'm just happy to see a revitalized market”.

The laws of the country turned out to be no less important for Belarusian businesswomen. Ease of doing business was the main reason for the respondents to choose entrepreneurship. State support for small business, grants and subsidies were also important for women entrepreneurs in the new market.

“In Poland, not every foreigner can register a sole proprietorship, but my legalisation status allowed me to do so”.

“I received a non-refundable state grant, which was quite easy to apply for”.

Decision to continue or change the direction of entrepreneurial activity

In the context of emigration, the Belarusian women entrepreneurs who participated in the study made their decisions to change or maintain their field of activity based on a deep and rational analysis of various factors present in the new environment. These analyses ultimately shaped their readiness to start new entrepreneurial ventures in specific sectors and played a decisive role in determining whether to continue and adapt their pre-emigration activities in the host country.

For some women, business became not only a source of stable income but also a pathway to legalisation in the host country. The possibility of registering a business and the favourable legal conditions in certain sectors influenced their decisions, making specific economic niches more appealing for launching or relaunching a business.

“Business became one of the ways of legalization. We had some savings and we decided to invest them in the business”.

“If the finances weren't there at all, we probably would have had to look for something else, but fortunately there was no such need”.

The in-depth assessment of the local market and its potential, carried out by the female respondents before starting or continuing their business activities, had a significant impact on their chosen trajectory. For the majority of Belarusian women entrepreneurs, demand trends and the level of competition were key indicators in the final decision on which field to enter or remain in within the host country. Some encountered a shrinking market in the sector where they had previously operated, which compelled them to adapt or completely shift their line of business.

“The kind of activity that was profitable and successful in Belarus will not be in such demand in Poland”.

“The market for us has narrowed down a lot. Belarusians have become afraid to apply to agencies”.

“I don't think it is strategically correct to focus exclusively on immigrants, as it narrows the audience”.

In other cases, a favourable economic climate enabled them to preserve their original field of work and develop it in a new format. For Belarusian women entrepreneurs, personal hobbies and professional competences also played a meaningful role in choosing their entrepreneurial path. For many respondents, it was important to continue doing what they loved – especially if they already had a

client base and professional contacts. These factors helped mitigate the risks associated with starting anew and, together with their accumulated experience, enabled them to build successful development strategies.

“I love my job and there was no point in changing anything drastically”.

“I really love this job. It brings joy to people”.

“I already had a base of contacts and clients who were interested in my services”.

In some cases, the decision to continue or change business activities was discussed within the family or with business partners. Moreover, a sense of social responsibility towards their employees – expressed through a desire to preserve jobs – also influenced some Belarusian women entrepreneurs to avoid making drastic changes.

“My husband and I discussed the move; I didn't make the decision alone”.

“When I left recruitment, our team disbanded and everyone started to develop on their own”.

“In such a situation, we had to make decisions quickly, look for projects and provide the team with work”.

2.3.3. Social and Professional Integration

Features of social and professional integration in the host society

Belarusian women entrepreneurs, in the process of their social and professional integration into the new conditions of the host country, actively utilised social networks and professional communities. They sought support from like-minded individuals, which facilitated a smoother entry into the new business environment. Business associations also played an important role in their integration, providing not only access to essential information but also the support needed for business sustainability. Moreover, as the Belarusian businesswomen themselves point out, assistance from more experienced compatriots who had already established themselves in the host country proved especially valuable.

“I found myself in the Association of Belarusian Business Abroad business community. Participating in the events helped me to go beyond my usual social circle and broaden my perspective on business”.

“The Belarusians, who had already had business in Poland for a long time, helped me by giving me valuable advice”.

It is also worth noting that some respondents used the education system as a tool for adaptation and professional growth during their entry into the new society and business environment. Formal training and professional retraining in the host country not only enabled them to acquire new skills, but also helped expand their network of contacts – further impacting their career opportunities and business development.

“The best way to integrate is to enter a training programme [...] All my current connections and the colleagues I work with have come about precisely because of my studies”.

Since most Belarusian women entrepreneurs were essentially forced to emigrate, the language barrier emerged as one of the most significant challenges in their integration process. Limited knowledge of the Polish language during the initial stages hindered networking, interaction with government authorities, and business operations. Nearly all entrepreneurs emphasised that fluency in the language of the host country was essential for full participation in professional circles and for the successful development of their business.

“The hardest part of it all was the language”.

“It was not easy to master the language in two years, but it's difficult here without it, especially if you want to be part of a professional community”.

“At conferences, they will gladly speak to you in English, but in the evening, when you have a glass of Prosecco, everyone switches to Polish – and no one will switch for your sake”.

Bureaucratic and legislative barriers also posed significant challenges. Women faced various legal obstacles concerning licensing, taxation, and other elements involved in operating a business. Adapting to local regulations required time as well as financial investments in legal and accounting support. Additionally, some respondents experienced gender-based challenges in their professional environments, particularly in traditionally "male" industries such as construction. However, as Belarusian women entrepreneurs noted, over time, their professional competence and achievements reshaped the attitudes of colleagues and competitors, enabling them to secure confident positions within their industries.

“I have spoken to different accountants several times, and now I more or less understand how to proceed”.

“In Poland, especially in the construction sector, attitudes towards female executives can be quite specific”.

Respondents also noted that differences in corporate culture between Belarus and the host country influenced their integration process. New approaches to business management required adaptation, but also presented fresh perspectives, enabling them to implement improved practices in their own ventures.

“In Polish companies, the boss is just a manager, not the ‘father’ of the company to whom everyone owes allegiance”.

“The competition here is high, and not everyone is excited about the new players coming in”.

The role of foundations and associations in the process of social and professional integration of Belarusian women entrepreneurs

It is worth considering the important role played by Belarusian foundations and associations supporting Belarusian business abroad in the process of social and professional integration of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in the host country. For example, many respondents noted that the Association of Belarusian Business Abroad, which supports them at different levels, provided significant assistance in their comprehensive integration into the host society.

A key element of the assistance provided by Belarusian foundations and associations abroad to women entrepreneurs from Belarus was the emotional and psychological support they received. Many respondents noted during the interviews that participation in such communities helped them feel more confident in the new society. Even if the associations or foundations did not provide direct financial or business support, realising that they had support reduced their stress and feelings of uncertainty, making the integration process easier.

“This realisation, that in case of need there is someone to turn to, psychologically relieves a lot of stress”.

In addition, membership of associations has enabled some women entrepreneurs to participate in training programmes, increase their knowledge of doing business abroad and access resources of which they were previously unaware. For example, some entrepreneurs took courses at the Belarusian Solidarity Centre, which helped them to structure their knowledge and increase their confidence in their professional skills.

“The course was dedicated to opening a business: how to choose the right field, what types of financial assistance are available in Poland, and how to obtain them”.

Another important aspect of the support provided by Belarusian foundations and associations to Belarusian businesswomen is assistance in obtaining grants and financial support to start or develop business activities. Some respondents were helped by associations not only to find out about available funding opportunities but also to apply for them, thereby increasing their chances of successfully obtaining funding. This emphasises the active role of such associations in supporting Belarusian women on their path to entrepreneurial success.

“I found an interesting programme ‘Most+’ for Belarusians, contacted Association of Belarusian Business Abroad for help in filling out the application, and they assigned a specialist who worked with me. As a result, I won a grant and went to Amsterdam”.

Networking and business contacts proved to be as valuable to Belarusian businesswomen as financial support. Associations enabled businesswomen to share experiences, find new partners and clients, and adapt to the particularities of doing business in a new country. However, respondents' expectations of such funds and associations varied. Not all Belarusian businesswomen participating in the study actively sought support, highlighting the crucial role that foundations play for newcomers in the field. *“If we talk about support, it was probably more about networking than about any specific resources”.*

“In Association of Belarusian Business Abroad, they immediately found me an excellent lawyer who helped with the preparation of letters for a whole week.”

“I often see that my clients, who are just starting their activities, need help [...] But in my case, it was different: I already had experience in this field.”

Concurrently, the level of trust in associations was not consistently high. It was asserted by some respondents that transparency in the operations of such organisations was of paramount importance, given that their success is contingent not solely on the resources they provide, but also on the trust within the community.

“Belarusian organizations I worked with were not always transparent enough, and therefore we were unable to establish long-term cooperation”.

2.3.4. Personality and Gender in Entrepreneurship

Women in entrepreneurship: role perceptions and impact on conduct of activities

Belarusian women entrepreneurs have different perceptions of their role in business in the context of the host country, encountering both new opportunities and challenges. Many respondents have no internal doubts about their role and express confidence in their feminine strength.

“I have never had any internal doubts about myself because I am a woman. For me, this is not a question at all”.

These women do not view their femininity as an obstacle in business. They do not face discrimination and primarily regard themselves as independent professionals. Moreover, some participants in the study expressed the opinion that women often adapt more quickly than men – especially in emigration – which allows them to discover new avenues for development more successfully.

“If we don’t count IT specialists, I generally see that women find themselves in a new place much faster”.

Nevertheless, in certain fields, such as construction and commercial design, gender stereotypes persist, and women entrepreneurs often have to prove their competence. This is particularly noticeable in Poland among older entrepreneurs, who may be skeptical of female executives. In such cases, women note the need to artificially elevate their status in order to be taken seriously.

“Even if they treat you well, there is still the thought in the air that ‘construction is not a woman’s business’”.

“At every networking event, I heard the same thing five times an evening: ‘Hire a Polish man, let him go to meetings – you won’t sell anything yourself’”.

“I once went to a meeting with clients, wore non-prescription glasses, and chose a formal suit to look more mature and solid”.

Despite the existence of bias, Belarusian women feel supported within the business environment of the host society. According to some respondents, gender stereotypes in Poland are gradually fading – especially in large cities – and women entrepreneurs receive support not only from their female colleagues but also from men, which creates favourable conditions for professional development and growth.

“We were renting houses and again communicated with a wonderful woman. Maybe it’s just luck, but I always come across good people”.

Simultaneously, numerous Belarusian women entrepreneurs who were interviewed noted that emigration is altering traditional gender roles. Women more often take the lead in both their families and in businesses, while men sometimes find it more difficult to adapt to the new conditions. In some cases, this results in negative remarks from men; however, women generally choose to overlook such remarks and remain committed to their objectives.

“Many husbands, having moved abroad, have taken a more passive position”.

“Sometimes you can hear unpleasant comments: ‘Oh, these women came, opened businesses, and their husbands support them.’ But that doesn’t bother me at all”.

One distinct point emphasised during the interviews with Belarusian women entrepreneurs was the contrasting views on gender inequality between Belarus and Poland. Some Belarusian businesswomen noted that gender stereotypes are more pronounced in Belarus, whereas, in Poland, the business environment is more inclusive towards women. Here, women more frequently occupy managerial positions, and gender is not seen as a significant barrier to doing business.

“In Belarus, this was important: without a certain status, people could look down on you. In Poland, I don’t notice this”.

“There is no status problem here – people just sit down at the negotiating table and communicate as equals”.

“There are many women in Poland who firmly hold businesses in their hands”.

Personal characteristics and their influence on entrepreneurial activity

When asked how personal characteristics and past experiences impact business management, many respondents said that entrepreneurship is not just a way to earn money for them, but also a means of building a community of like-minded people. They emphasised that building strong relationships with customers and business partners goes beyond commercial interaction and serves as the foundation of their entrepreneurial activity.

“We regularly hold free events: art exhibitions, photo expositions, meetups [...] People are drawn to it, and many companies from other cities, when coming to Warsaw, write: ‘[...] can we drop by and work for an hour?’ They know they will always be welcome”.

“I enjoy talking to people because through communication I exchange energy”.

One of the challenges faced by Belarusian women in business is finding a balance between emotional openness and business determination. Their tendency towards empathy and their desire to help others often conflict with the necessity of being firm when making important decisions. Many acknowledged that achieving this balance requires self-reflection and the conscious development of their own leadership style.

“Now I understand that I cannot be a 'good' leader for everyone. I was always taught to be a good girl, to please everyone, but life has shown that this is not possible”.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that many Belarusian women entrepreneurs prefer not to chase quick profits, but instead focus on developing strategies rooted in careful analysis and gradual progress in their chosen field. This balanced and consistent approach, grounded in pragmatism, helps reduce the likelihood of failure and supports confident movement toward long-term goals.

“My strategy is ‘measure seven times, cut once.’ I try to understand everything thoroughly, make sure I can accomplish what I’ve planned, and only then offer it to others”.

While caution remains an important element of their work, many women recognise that mistakes are a normal part of the entrepreneurial journey and do not view them as failures, but rather as opportunities for personal and professional growth. This perspective demonstrates their capacity to gain knowledge from experiences and their strong resilience in the face of stress. Importantly, through the process of running a business, they have cultivated persistence, quick thinking, and confidence in their abilities – qualities they identify as key to entrepreneurial success.

“Last year, we tried many different options in advertising, in working with partners, tested different approaches. Something didn’t work? Okay, we move on. It was just a hypothesis that wasn’t confirmed. The main thing is not to stop”.

“In business, especially when dealing with authorities such as the tax office, you need to be strong and not show weakness. It’s important to correctly read the mood of your interlocutor, because sometimes you only get one chance to negotiate something”.

Skills, opportunities and challenges of Belarusian women entrepreneurs compared to local entrepreneurs

Belarusian women entrepreneurs, comparing themselves with their local counterparts, identify both their strengths and the differences in how they overcome difficulties and seize opportunities. Many respondents indicate that their anxiety levels surpass those of Polish businesswomen. This is largely due to the necessity of adjusting to a new environment, the somewhat intricate nature of bureaucratic processes, language obstacles, and the apprehension of committing errors. On the other hand, according to Belarusian female entrepreneurs, the

experience of doing business in an uncertain environment has made them more flexible – albeit at the cost of increased stress levels.

“They don’t have the anxiety that often accompanies Russian-speaking entrepreneurs”.

“Local entrepreneurs have been working in stable conditions for many years and don’t expect major changes. Whereas many of us are constantly in a state of heightened anxiety”.

“When the tax reform was carried out in 2022, it caused panic among them. But for us, who are used to working in conditions of constant change, it wasn’t something scary”.

Belarusian women who participated in the interviews also noted that Polish entrepreneurs have greater access to international education and practical experience abroad, which is perceived as standard practice. In contrast, Belarusian women often lacked access to such opportunities. Moreover, interviewees emphasised that Polish female entrepreneurs possess a clear advantage in terms of market orientation and familiarity with local infrastructure, which gives them a significant competitive edge.

“In Poland, it’s mainstream: many designers and architects study in Italy, Denmark, Germany, and then return”.

“I don’t have that experience – I didn’t study abroad, that’s just how it happened”.

Another challenge for Belarusian women entrepreneurs is limited access to social and financial resources. According to some respondents, their Polish colleagues can count on the support of their family, friends, and the business community, in addition to having access to more favorable financial resources. This provides them with a more confident start and facilitates scaling up their businesses – advantages that Belarusian entrepreneurs often lack.

“It’s easier for them to get a loan because they have guarantors – family, friends”.

“They already have their basic needs covered: they have housing, they don’t pay huge rents”.

Nonetheless, Belarusian entrepreneurial women, who are accustomed to instability, tend to be more adaptive. According to some respondents, unlike them, Polish entrepreneurs operate in a more predictable economic environment, which allows them to focus less on the need for quick adaptation. However, flexibility and

the ability to respond promptly to new challenges give Belarusian entrepreneurs a unique advantage.

“When an inspection comes, they calmly speak their language, and everything goes smoothly”.

“We are in a constant state of starting up, and that opens up more opportunities for business”.

Belarusian women entrepreneurs, in spite of various challenges, are adept at recognising lucrative opportunities and skillfully utilising their strengths to foster growth. According to the interviews, they view competition as a stimulus for development. The same respondents noted that Polish businesswomen, being more accustomed to stability, are sometimes less proactive in seeking new opportunities. Thus, the experience of operating under conditions of uncertainty fosters a special kind of resilience and the ability to adapt quickly among Belarusian women entrepreneurs.

“Competition is the engine of progress”.

“Yes, they have certain advantages, but we have the opportunity to bring something new and make it better”.

The role of family in entrepreneurship

Kinship ties play a crucial role in supporting Belarusian women who are running or starting businesses abroad. This support is manifested not only in financial assistance, but also in emotional encouragement and, at times, in direct involvement in business management. Many Belarusian female entrepreneurs noted that, without the financial support of their relatives, it would have been difficult for them to realise their ventures – clearly demonstrating the importance of family for success in entrepreneurship. For instance, the guarantees provided by one respondent’s father helped her obtain financing, while another received start-up capital through her spouse’s investment.

“If not for my husband, who still fully supports us, I wouldn’t have managed”.

“My mother and sister supported me not only morally, but also financially, because for a whole year, or even more, I was without work”.

“My dad became my guarantor, and my family as a whole provided me with great support”.

Beyond material assistance, emotional support holds great value. In one case, a respondent’s husband not only fully believed in her ideas, but also actively helped her, significantly boosting her entrepreneurial motivation. In another case, a

respondent's mother persuaded her to apply for a grant, which ultimately provided her with the necessary capital. These stories illustrate how a family's belief in a woman entrepreneur's potential can strongly influence her determination and desire to grow in her chosen field.

“He always responds, and most often, he offers his support himself”.

“When I had almost lost hope, she kept persuading me: ‘At least find out, at least try’”.

In several households of Belarusian women entrepreneurs, assistance extended beyond mere guidance and financial support, evolving into collaborative business ventures. For instance, one respondent's husband provides legal support when possible. In another case, a woman's sister conducts market analysis, while her mother and sister are the first to test new ideas. Such an organisation of work helps to minimise potential setbacks and enables quicker adaptation, forming a solid foundation for entrepreneurial activity.

“Now all the children are involved in our family business [...] The older they get, the more opportunities and responsibilities I entrust to them”.

“They joined several trips and also helped by leaving comments”.

However, not every aspiring Belarusian entrepreneur relies on family support. Some choose an independent path, depending on professional networks and business contacts rather than on family resources. In such cases, relatives remain uninvolved, not interfering in the business – a situation also common among Belarusian women entrepreneurs who participated in the research.

“For me, this is a huge advantage because if I start my business, I will already have a reliable person who can help”.

“My business is primarily a collaboration with two colleagues [...] My parents didn't even know what I was doing”.

2.3.5. Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success

Strategies in entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women who want to succeed in business use a variety of approaches that allow them to adapt to the peculiarities of the local market and ensure the development of their enterprises. An important aspect for the majority of respondents was the methodical expansion of their customer base. Many acknowledged that maintaining a consistent presence in the market fosters customer loyalty, whereas active advertising, particularly on online platforms, may not always deliver the anticipated results. Therefore, they emphasised the

importance of building trust in relationships with clients and using personalised marketing strategies.

“The longer you stay in one place, the more customers you have, the more interactions you get”.

“Nowadays, I rarely invest in advertising – only when a new specialist joins”.

“Word of mouth is generally the best form of advertising”.

Being part of local business communities and attending industry events have proven just as crucial to their success. Networking with other entrepreneurs in the region helped them gain a better understanding of the local business climate and opened doors to potential collaborations. This broadened their professional network and allowed them to adjust to the new environment more quickly.

“We compiled a list of all business clubs”.

“At business meetings, you can introduce yourself to an audience of 30–40 entrepreneurs”.

Taking into account the needs of the regional audience has become an essential part of Belarusian women’s business tactics. Realising the importance of understanding customer behaviour for a successful launch or business development, some study participants began to modify their services and promotion methods based on the preferences of potential clients. Personal recommendations and publications in local media played a significant role in popularising their services. Positive reviews and articles in regional outlets helped attract new clients and strengthen their reputation.

“Poles perceive information differently, and sometimes even our simplest advertising materials don’t get the message across”.

“I used to think it was important to support only ‘our own,’ but now I realize that this is not always the right approach”.

“A publication in a Polish media outlet led to calls from potential clients”.

In challenging times, Belarusian women entrepreneurs have demonstrated the value of adaptability and flexibility. In difficult circumstances, conventional methods often fall short, and entrepreneurs realised the need to swiftly rethink and restructure their business models. Continuous learning and staying updated on the latest technologies are central to their professional growth. Many are actively involved in self-development, learning digital tools, and implementing advanced solutions such as artificial intelligence. This enables them to optimise workflows and enhance productivity.

“I’ve accepted a simple truth: do your job and be ready for any changes”.

“It’s important to be flexible and ready for change. You must be able to pack your business into a suitcase”.

“AI helps me with my work”.

“Some examples of AI usage are simply astonishing”!

It is also worth noting that for Belarusian women entrepreneurs, securing funding and developing long-term strategies have been key steps towards sustainable success. Some deliberately sought investments and developed plans to scale their businesses, thereby increasing capacity and overcoming financial barriers to growth.

“For solid production, around 80,000 euros are needed, and for a minimal start – at least 50,000”.

“According to my business plan, I need investments, and that’s why I attend events”.

“To find investors, you need to talk about yourself as much as possible, attend events, and meet people”.

The key resources for successful entrepreneurship

In order to gain a foothold in the business environment of the new country, Belarusian women entrepreneurs utilised various opportunities that helped them develop professionally. Access to financial resources was identified as a pivotal factor in this process. Attracting investment was key to starting and expanding their businesses, but many had trouble finding the necessary funds. Their limited credit experience and difficulties in accessing investment platforms often put them at a disadvantage compared to local entrepreneurs. In the pursuit of self-sufficiency, a proportion of women deliberately eschewed credit, thereby impeding the growth of their companies.

“Of course, it is impossible to develop a business without money [...] You can only move quickly if you have sufficient financing”.

“My expenses were higher, and the opportunities to raise funds were fewer. This was my biggest problem at that moment”.

“The financial aspect? Of course! Any business requires significant financial investments, so I would put finances first”.

“We do not want to give up a share in the business or take on additional obligations... Therefore, despite the difficulties, we manage on our own”.

The existence of an established network of contacts, both professional and personal, was also identified as playing a key role in their success. The capacity to establish and utilise these networks in a business context proved to be a valuable instrument for augmenting clientele, identifying reliable collaborators, and securing essential support. In their new environment, modern marketing strategies, such as advertising in online communities, interaction with popular bloggers, and targeted advertising on services such as Telegram and Facebook, helped them to promote their business. Through these methods, female entrepreneurs were able to quickly establish their presence and attract potential customers.

“The most valuable and useful thing I receive is new contacts and partnerships”.

“Social networks, such as Telegram chats like ‘Mama Gdansk’, brought us many clients”.

Reputation was also an important resource for successful entrepreneurship. In areas where customer trust is paramount, such as design and construction, Belarusian female entrepreneurs faced certain difficulties. The short track record of their companies and lack of experience in a new market sometimes caused doubts among clients. This required additional measures to create an image of a reliable partner and gain the trust of customers.

“For many of them, it is important that we have experience and reputation in the market [...] Financial risk and risk of deadlines are very important issues for them”.

“Our competitors are companies that have been on the market for 20 years, and for them, we are truly a 'young' company”.

In addition to financial and human resources, emotional support had a significant impact on business development. Entrepreneurial women often said that the faith and understanding of family, colleagues and people with similar interests strengthened their resolve and helped them overcome difficulties. It was this psychological resilience that was particularly important in difficult times, allowing them to remain enthusiastic and move forward with the company's growth. In addition, administrative and legal aspects posed serious difficulties. Inconsistencies in legislation, accounting peculiarities, along with lengthy and confusing contracting procedures could create tangible obstacles. This forced businesswomen to spend more time learning new rules and developing effective business management methods within the legal system of the host country.

“It is very important to have people around you who believe in you: family, friends, colleagues [...] The main thing is not to give up”.

“I received the most important resource – time. And it is this time that I have sacrificed for a year and a half to start my business”.

“One time we almost lost a tender due to a mistake in the annual report [...] It was unpleasant, but, in essence, you can’t do anything about it other than apologise”.

“In Poland, everything happens much slower than I am used to [...] For example, a project that was supposed to be completed in September can drag on until February”.

2.3.6. Impact of Crises and Localised Challenges

Impact of crises on entrepreneurial activity

Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian crisis on the border between Belarus and Poland and the armed conflict in Ukraine have had a significant impact on the business of Belarusian women working in Poland. Caught up in the changing circumstances, they have had to rethink their business practices, invent new approaches and look for ways to sustain and grow their businesses in a period of uncertainty.

One of the first effects of these events was a change in customer demand. Reduced purchasing power due to accelerated price increases and changing customer behaviour, particularly in the service sector, has led to a reduction in demand. Many consumers have begun to save money and use familiar services less frequently, prompting some of the women interviewed to look for ways to retain their customers. In order not to lose their audience, they changed their prices, offered cheaper options and focused on improving the quality of their services.

“For example, girls who used to go for root touch-ups every month now do it once every two to three months because many are starting to save money”.

In addition, economic and political instability has increased competition for clients, especially in areas where migrant entrepreneurs were already successful. The emergence of new waves of migration redistributed market forces, requiring Belarusian entrepreneurs to react quickly and adapt to new realities. In order to maintain their positions, many of them started seeking unique attributes, such as a personalised approach for each client, an elevated standard of service, and a broader range of offerings.

“In our field, for example, competition is increasing because of the large number of Ukrainian studios, which often engage in price dumping”.

In times of general instability, adaptability and speed of decision-making have become key qualities for female entrepreneurs. Those who anticipated potential economic fluctuations, made contingency plans and managed their resources strategically were able to mitigate negative consequences and adapt more quickly to changing circumstances.

“My crisis began last summer when the number of clients sharply decreased”.

“Crises that have occurred recently did not break me, but rather pushed me forward. I realized that you can't just sit and wait for the 'best moment'”.

Uncertainty also affected planning for the future. Due to fears of new risks, some Belarusian women entrepreneurs temporarily suspended the expansion of their projects, concentrating on maintaining the current level of profit and stability of their businesses. In the current environment, this decision proved to be the right one, as it allowed them to avoid serious financial losses and remain in the market.

“For me, the main concern now is that if something happens, I won't be able to pay my employees, and they depend on me”.

Despite the difficulties caused by the crises, they also became a stimulus for the development of business acumen. A number of Belarusian women in business noted that the need to adapt to new realities allowed them to move away from standardised ways of working, revise plans and identify new areas for expansion. Thus, difficult periods proved to be not only a test of strength but also a chance for change, encouraging businesswomen to seek original and innovative solutions. In addition, the situation was affected by seasonal fluctuations and structural shifts reinforced by the crises. In addition to general economic trends, businesses were affected by natural changes in consumer demand, which required sound financial strategies and methods to mitigate seasonal slippages.

“I decided not to create a large structure, as I did before”.

“In addition, summer always brings a decrease in activity – many people go on vacation, and no one opens new businesses”.

Finally, Belarusian women doing business in Poland have demonstrated their aptitude for adapting to a constantly changing environment, finding ways to develop steadily even in unpredictable conditions.

“I did not rule out the possibility of a new pandemic, so when considering issues related to loans and business operations, I found information that in such cases, measures could be taken”.

Overcoming challenges in the entrepreneurial process

During the research, alongside examining global macro challenges, a significant focus was placed on understanding how Belarusian women conducting business in Poland navigate the local, everyday obstacles that frequently arise in their economic endeavors. The interviews revealed that an important individual method of overcoming difficulties and problems was the ability to stay calm and act reasonably. A significant number of businesswomen noted that self-control and restraint are particularly important in difficult circumstances. It helps them avoid hasty decisions and create carefully considered strategies, which reduces the risk of failure. In addition, as the female participants in the study noted, they quite often resorted to professional help, realising that expert advice can make a difference at a crucial time. In such cases, connections in the business community were very useful, providing access to up-to-date information and the opportunity to share experiences.

“It is important to stay clear-headed. I needed to cool my head and look at the situation from a rational point of view”.

“It is important to remember that if you need help, you shouldn’t hesitate to ask for it”.

In addition, differences in the tax system, special requirements for registering their activities and high fines required them to have in-depth knowledge of local legislation and strict compliance with applicable rules and regulations. However, as some of the interviewed women noted, they were still able to find effective solutions to their difficulties due to their determination, focus on continuous learning, and timely consultations with experts.

“I actively use the internet and artificial intelligence, so when I have questions, I just reread information and search for the necessary laws”.

“There was an instance with a 30,000 PLN fine [...] I just read their contract and realized that they made a mistake”.

Getting used to the new linguistic and cultural environment was a tangible challenge for most of the women interviewed. Mastering the Polish language and understanding the subtleties of business communication when interacting with Polish clients and partners required considerable time and energy from Belarusian businesswomen. Nevertheless, some of them, who had experience of doing business abroad before moving, managed to capitalise on this situation, turning their cultural knowledge into a competitive advantage and expanding their international network of contacts.

“In Poland, the situation is similar: we often start a sentence in Polish and finish it in English [...] In the end, it creates a real mess in the head”.

“Such an international team and having offices in different countries undoubtedly helps us with sales”.

It is also worth pointing out that, during the interviews with Belarusian female entrepreneurs, it became clear that, despite the difficulties faced by many respondents in seeking grants and funding, most of them did not perceive these problems as insurmountable. Conversely, certain entrepreneurs sought to identify alternative means of attracting investment by developing unconventional financial models and opening up new sources of income. This approach also demonstrated their adaptability and resourcefulness in managing their businesses. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they gradually became acquainted with the bureaucratic processes required to operate successfully in a new country. This knowledge helped to reduce risk and accelerate the development of their business.

“Grants for business development in Poland are very few, but I always adhere to the opinion that nothing is impossible for me”.

“When I first arrived, every bureaucratic delay irritated me [...] But over time, I got used to it and came to terms with it”.

2.3.7. Characteristics of Transnational Entrepreneurial Activity

Peculiarities of transnational entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women in Poland show transnational entrepreneurship characteristics; they can integrate into the host country business environment while keeping strong international connections and perspectives for further growth. One of the main features of their entrepreneurial approach is diversification and adaptation to new situation. In addition, many Belarusian women entrepreneurs want to expand their activities by adding new directions and adapting to market trends. For example, integrating online into offline business shows their flexibility and ability to respond to changing consumer needs. Such decisions not only help them to adapt to new business environment but also to reach more clients beyond local market.

“I think I will develop the direction online, for example, through online stores.

This will be a slightly different direction, but still everything will be gradual”.

Another important part of their transnational business is managing multicultural teams and intercultural communication. Their international business requires them to interact with employees, clients and partners from different cultures. Many

entrepreneurs say that the need to work in a multilingual environment has forced them to be more flexible in their management. They leverage the global dimension of their business as a marketing strategy to enhance their brand and attract customers. These strategies indicate a conscious use of international business positioning to gain an advantage.

“In our team, there are more and more people from different cultures and countries. For example, we have an architect from Germany, a salesperson from South Africa, and of course, Belarusians”.

Many Belarusian women entrepreneurs also have international experience which helps them to adapt faster in the new market. Those with international business background have more confidence in navigating cultural differences and building strong networks. As one entrepreneur explained, *“Having broad international background gives me flexibility and understanding of different nationalities”*. Such experience reduces adaptation barriers and allows to implement best practices from other markets, making their businesses more robust and competitive. And finally, geographical expansion and business scaling are part of their strategy. Many Belarusian women in Poland do not limit themselves to local market but plan to expand into other European countries. *“One business can start in Poland and then expand into Europe,”* one of them revealed. Long term thinking and understanding of market and phased development for sustainable growth.

Thus, Belarusian women in Poland are adaptable, cross-culturally sensitive, skilled networkers, and forward-thinking expansionists. They are capable of diversifying, managing multicultural teams, leveraging their experience, and planning for broader market reach. In addition, they are well-positioned to succeed in the Polish market and become dynamic players in the European entrepreneurial landscape.

Entering new markets: strategies and resources

Belarusian women use many different ways and tools to get into new markets. They are flexible, network strategically and use existing connections to minimise market entry risks and grow sustainably. One of the ways they do this is piggybacking off an existing client network to go international. Many businesswomen follow their corporate clients to new locations and leverage existing trust and relationships. This reduces the barriers to entry into foreign markets as companies prefer to work with trusted partners rather than new and unknown service providers. Plus, it gives Belarusian entrepreneurs an edge over local companies as they can offer continuity and consistency of services across multiple regions.

“I would say that we are like 'stuck' to these companies that have international presence and many offices”.

Another is pricing to get and keep clients in new markets. Many Belarusian businesswomen adjust their pricing to make their services more attractive in competitive environments. This allows them to get initial traction, build long term relationships and gradually enter new business areas. They can win contracts in industries where local companies rule by pricing right. Working with local businesses is a big part of their market expansion strategy. Collaborating with established companies within the country assists Belarusian entrepreneurs in understanding cultural and regulatory distinctions. This is especially important when going to countries with complicated business environment like UAE or Cyprus where having a local partner will give you insights into consumer behaviour, legal requirements and industry specifics.

“We can offer them a discount or a better price so that they work with us instead of a local company”.

“I believe that without partners, it’s very difficult to achieve success, especially in new markets”.

Using their existing customers, competitive pricing and strategic partnerships Belarusian women entrepreneurs build a base for their business in new markets. They fit into different business cultures and regulatory systems, maintain relationships between countries, and manifest themselves as transnational entrepreneurs.

2.3.8. Perception of Returning to Belarus

Prospects for returning to Belarus to conduct entrepreneurial activities

Belarusian women entrepreneurs have a very different attitude towards the idea of returning to their homeland to develop their business. Views on this matter range from a definitive no to a conditional yes, contingent upon significant changes. Some Belarusian businesswomen are categorically against returning to Belarus and their decision is not only based on the current economic and political situation but also personal reasons. The education of their children is a significant factor in this decision. They believe that the quality and dependability of the education available in their current country ensures a promising future for their family. As a result, even if conditions in Belarus were to improve, a return there seems unlikely.

“I don't see myself in Belarus in the near future. I have young children; they are in second and fourth grade, and I can't imagine how I could send them back to a Belarusian school”.

“I don’t want to return to Belarus to do business, I don’t want to, I don’t even consider it”.

Some do not reject the idea of coming back but admit Belarus is no longer a hub for them professionally. Many businesswomen have either stopped their business in their home country or support it formally without being actively involved. This indicates a gradual disconnection from the Belarusian market, accompanied by a lack of interest in returning, even on a professional level. Additionally, there are those who claim they will come back, but only if significant economic and political transformations occur. They believe that the current business environment is quite risky; however, with potential changes on the horizon, they are not dismissing the possibility of returning to business in Belarus. On the other hand, some still stay connected to the Belarusian business community but remotely. They participate in programs and consultations, share their expertise, support start-ups and help them to adapt to new reality, but do not plan to come back to business.

“I don’t see such an opportunity”.

“If ever there are conditions for democratic and legal business in Belarus, maybe I would open a branch there, if things go well in Poland”.

Hence, most Belarusian women do not want to go back or will only do so if there is a big change. Stability, security and long-term business development in the country where they are already located are important to them.

“I really thought about it and would like to share my experience with Belarus, especially in a new Belarus where talented Belarusians could return and stay to build a new society”.

Conditions necessary for returning and doing entrepreneurial activity in Belarus

Belarusian women entrepreneurs who want to get back to business in their home country demand significant changes in the political, economic and social spheres. Their main argument is that, without a stable and clear business environment, entrepreneurial risk will be too high. One of the main conditions for return, according to the women entrepreneurs, is the reform of the political system. They believe that democratisation, reduction of administrative pressure on the private sector and effective fight against corruption are a must. In today's environment, entrepreneurship faces unpredictability due to the erratic decisions made by government agencies. For many entrepreneurs, the essential factor is legal certainty – the assurance that they can operate their businesses without the threat of legal action or unforeseen disruptions from authorities.

“I think the main reason is a major policy change”.

“The most important thing is the fight against corruption, especially at the higher levels of power. Corruption destroys small businesses, burdening them with unrealistic taxes or simply taking away their property”.

“In Belarus, everything happens selectively and at the discretion of the authorities”.

“In Poland, for example, entrepreneurs are initially given a certain amount of trust, within which they can act and start their business. Here, they won’t be disturbed or looked for reasons to persecute unless there are serious grounds for intervention”.

Entrepreneurial women also see the need for comprehensive reforms. Among the top changes they mention are economic transparency, government support for private business, attracting foreign investment and creating an investment friendly environment. Without access to finance and equal conditions of competition the Belarusian economy will not be able to offer businesses competitive alternatives to foreign markets where conditions are more attractive. But the problem is not just political and economic. Many Belarusian women entrepreneurs say that existing social stereotypes also hinder private initiative. They talk about the gap between the image of a modern entrepreneur and the public perception. Business in Belarus is mistrusted; there is no culture of supporting private entrepreneurship and people who start their own business are generally viewed with suspicion. This creates an unfavourable environment for entrepreneurship even with economic and political improvements.

“People don’t like entrepreneurs, and in society, there is this deep contradiction. My ancestors were lifted up on pitchforks because they had more than others. This egalitarianism that exists in society, it will live on for a long time”.

Some women entrepreneurs do not return to manage traditional businesses but to focus on social and educational initiatives. They see themselves as sharing their experience, being part of small business support programmes and developing non-profit initiatives that make a positive impact.

“If I were to open a business in Belarus, it definitely wouldn’t be in the beauty sector. I would most likely choose something related to education or social projects”.

“In my home country, there are too many people whose views and mentality are foreign to me. These are people with whom I have always felt uncomfortable”.

Hence, the return of Belarusian women entrepreneurs is tied to big changes in the country. However, they will only contemplate operating in Belarus if the economy is stable, the laws are well-defined, and business conditions are favourable.

2.4. Belarusian Women Entrepreneurs in Lithuania

2.4.1. Formation of Migration Aspirations and Entrepreneurial Experience

Motivation for emigration and entrepreneurship

The ambitions of Belarusian women entrepreneurs regarding emigration and their motivation to do business are influenced by a combination of political, economic, social and personal factors. The primary motivations for the majority of respondents to emigrate included forced relocation, the pursuit of personal freedom and new opportunities as well as family circumstances. These factors not only prompted their emigration but also influenced their decision to establish or continue business in the host country.

For many Belarusian women entrepreneurs, the reason for forced migration was political persecution in the form of threats and possible arrest. One of the research participants said it was impossible to stay because of fear and pressure from the authorities. Another participant was arrested for her beliefs and actions. Hence, the main reason these women sought asylum and aimed for new life and work opportunities overseas was the political situation in their home country.

“It wasn't planned, I wasn't prepared to leave. Essentially, we left with one backpack”.

“I got an ‘extremist’ file of 75 pages. There was no need to explain much – the outcome was clear[...] I took my backpack, my laptop – and flew out”.

For women who had held leadership positions in Belarus, this presented an opportunity to escape the limitations imposed in their homeland. In the new environment, they could express themselves and act according to their principles and develop their business without constant interference from state structures. One respondent said emigration was a kind of ‘choice to be free’ for her. The aspiration for independence has emerged as a significant driving force for numerous women

seeking self-fulfilment by launching their own enterprises. Also, immigration to Lithuania turned out to be not only a political but also an economic decision for many Belarusian women among those who participated in the study. In the host country (i.e. Lithuania), women had to find ways to support themselves and their families. One of them had to start her own business in Lithuania to achieve financial stability. Others saw the move as an opportunity to realise their ambitions in a more favourable and promising economic environment. For example, one respondent noted that the emergence of a promising renewable energy market in Lithuania was very encouraging as Belarus was closed off to such opportunities due to monopolistic practices and administrative obstacles. Despite all the negative context surrounding the forced emigration of Belarusian women entrepreneurs, their exodus provided them with an opportunity to bring their business concepts to life and apply their professional skills.

“If you want to be free, to say what you think, rather than listen to what you're told, you make a choice”.

“When I came to Lithuania, I realized: here I can do everything I want. The first thing I did was start a business. Because I needed something to live on”.

“In Belarus, all solar parks are already privatised by 'the right people', but in Lithuania, this market is actively developing”.

Also, for some Belarusian women, the decision to immigrate to Lithuania was influenced by family circumstances, particularly the employment of a spouse who was already residing and working in that country. Over time and by adapting to the new environment, however, they successfully carved out a niche for themselves in the world of entrepreneurship. The presence of relatives and social ties in Lithuania helped some of the respondents to settle in and start their business more quickly. Besides, emotional and functional family assistance played an important role in their decision to start their own entrepreneurial activity.

“Initially, my motivation to move to Lithuania was tied to my husband's job”.

“I have family – my godparents are Lithuanians. I also have relatives in Poland, but I have always felt a stronger connection to Lithuania”.

Influence of entrepreneurial experience on starting or continuing an activity in emigration

Research indicates that Belarusian women entrepreneurs have a connection between their previous business experience and their ability to establish or run a business in Lithuania. Generally, those with a background in business, particularly

in management, reported feeling more confident and ready to work in a new country. However, those who did not have such experience felt apprehensive and unsure, but better business conditions in Lithuania and forced migration itself prompted them to adapt and seek new opportunities.

Delving deeper into the experiences of Belarusian women who had experience in business management in their home country, it becomes evident that they approached the initiation of new ventures in Lithuania with significantly greater confidence. Their knowledge and experience of the necessary and partly universal processes of entrepreneurship facilitated their adjustment to the new setting. For example, one of the interviewed women entrepreneurs said that her experience in Belarus provided her with a clear starting point for establishing a business in a foreign environment. This foundational knowledge empowered several Belarusian women to embark on new projects without fear of the unfamiliar. Even women who held managerial positions, but did not own businesses in Belarus, had valuable skills for entrepreneurship such as strategic thinking, relationship building with business partners, and project management. This gave them confidence in their transition to independent business in the new environment.

“I had a rough idea of how to start my business: what to begin with, how to set everything up – should I look for premises first or open the company first? In general, I already knew this process because I went through all this back home once”.

“I always worked in top positions, so I felt like a business owner. At 23, I became the deputy CEO [...] I knew how to organise it properly: where to go, how to find partners, what steps to take”.

Her extensive experience empowered her to confidently establish her business in the host country. But for some Belarusian women in Belarus, it was hard to start their own business due to strict state rules, administrative barriers and unstable economy. Moving to Lithuania opened new opportunities that had not been available before. In this context, one of the respondents revealed during the interview that her business was profitable in Belarus but the state pressure forced her to leave her entrepreneurial activity.

“In Belarus, my business was economically viable, but then the pressure from the authorities, constant taxes, and restrictions forced me to close my business”.

Other respondents in the study expressed concerns about the restrictions on business operations in their home country. Consequently, for these Belarusian women, emigration has provided an opportunity to pursue their aspirations without the hindrance of bureaucratic and political challenges. At the same time, on the other hand, women without business experience faced internal obstacles and fears, particularly regarding financial and legal issues. Simplified business registration in Lithuania and good economy, however, facilitated their initial steps. For example, one respondent explained that, because of her lack of experience, her primary challenge was her limited commercial knowledge, which made her approach to establishing her business very cautious.

“My main problem was the lack of experience in the commercial sphere. I was very cautious about it and delayed attempts to start my own business. I had fears – I didn’t know how to work with payments, gifts, finances”.

At the same time, however, simpler procedures and access to professional help in Lithuania helped her overcome her fears and register her business.

Background experience and choice of entrepreneurial direction

Pre-emigration entrepreneurial or corporate activities of Belarusian women had a significant impact on their choice of the field of activity and business plan after moving to Lithuania. Respondents who had experience in running a business or working in large companies tended to choose areas where they could effectively use their skills, while those who had no such experience started their entrepreneurial journey with a gradual entry into these activities.

Most Belarusian women entrepreneurs interviewed for the study preferred industries where they could apply their professional skills based on their existing knowledge. An interviewee with a solid background in marketing and management within the energy sector emphasised that effective planning was crucial to her success.. She also mentioned that strategy development serves as the cornerstone of any business, providing a clear roadmap to achieve objectives. Hence, her extensive experience and knowledge in certain areas have granted her the entrepreneurial flexibility and adaptability to operate in new environments, enabling her to enter the Lithuanian market. Moreover, it was easier for Belarusian women with certain skills to find a niche that matches their previous activities. For example, an entrepreneur with 17 years of experience in ceramics said that the skills she had learned in Belarus were very useful for her planned business activities in Lithuania. Thus, her ability to transfer her knowledge and skills to entrepreneurship significantly eased her decision regarding her business focus. Confidence in choosing a familiar field of activity not only reduced risks, but also facilitated a smoother transition into a new environment.

“Strategic planning has never been difficult for me because the key in any business is to correctly define the goal, build the strategy, and adjust it as you go”.

One of the interviewees made a gradual transition to entrepreneurship, starting with more common jobs and then deciding to start her own business. A Belarusian woman with a philological education recounted her seamless journey into the world of entrepreneurship. For a considerable amount of time, she worked using her knowledge and skills, including interviewing, transcribing audio recordings, and proofreading texts. However, once in exile, she decided to set up an online language school. This example demonstrates that even without direct business experience, it is still possible to successfully launch a project. Moreover, her lack of initial entrepreneurial skills did not prevent her from succeeding, but rather encouraged her to consistently develop the necessary competences.

“It may seem that a philologist is exclusively a teacher [...] But I was involved in various projects; I did interviews, transcriptions, and worked as a proofreader”.

Also, it is worth noting that Belarusian women with entrepreneurial experience made decisions based on the characteristics of the host country's market. For example, one entrepreneur pointed out lack of serious competition in Lithuania which was the basis of her business strategy. This strategic thinking based on her previous knowledge and analysis of the local market allowed her to take advantage of the open market and show how previous experience and careful approach to entrepreneurship helped her to make decisions on market opportunities. Engaging with foreign companies has provided several female entrepreneurs with essential insights and skills regarding the cultural subtleties of conducting business in unfamiliar settings. A participant in the study who had experience working with foreign partners mentioned the need to be culturally sensitive in her work. According to her, previously acquired ability to adapt to cultural differences has been instrumental in her successful engagement with the Lithuanian market, enabling her to overcome possible difficulties such as differing communication approaches.

“In Lithuania, we had absolutely no competitors”.

“Each country has its own nuances[...] For example, in Lithuania, people find it difficult to say ‘no’ [...]”.

2.4.2. The Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Activity in the Host Country

The Factors affecting entrepreneurial activity

When analysing the reasons that motivated Belarusian women to start or expand their businesses abroad, a diverse array of incentives emerges. For many female participants in the study who decided to embark on entrepreneurship, an important incentive was the practical support of family and like-minded individuals. This assistance, whether emotional or practical, facilitated the process of launching a business. By relying on strong social ties, Belarusian women entrepreneurs were able to overcome the fears and doubts inherent in starting a business in a new country and create a solid foundation for its growth.

“If it hadn’t been for her, I probably wouldn’t have decided to launch anything here. Or I would have dragged it out for a long time. But together, it became easier – that’s how it all started”.

For many Belarusian women who have started their own businesses in Lithuania, the business environment is a far cry from what they were used to in their home country. The structured and supportive environment was a reality that was previously unthinkable. One of the businesswomen mentioned the ease and speed of setting up a business in Lithuania. Another participant mentioned the big difference in the business process between the two countries. For instance, in Belarus, administrative barriers and pressure from officials made the Lithuanian market much more interesting and convenient for Belarusian women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Lithuania's advanced infrastructure and contemporary digital resources have significantly facilitated the initiation and expansion of businesses. Innovations such as electronic document management and simplified registration process created perfect conditions for new companies to be launched.

“In Lithuania, you can open a company in a week if you have a Belarusian passport. If you have a European passport – in one day. Everything is done electronically, even the bank account can be opened in a day”.

“After Belarus, I’m not scared of anything. When someone starts complaining about local difficulties, I say: ‘Go to Belarus, live there – you’ll understand that this is all child’s play’”.

A significant advantage for women in Belarus has been the availability of financial assistance, such as grants and government initiatives. This support has provided

valuable resources for launching or expanding their own enterprises. In Lithuania, grants for small businesses help mitigate risks for entrepreneurs. However, as noted by one interviewee, many Belarusians remain unaware of these opportunities due to insufficient information. Therefore, access to resources and knowledge can greatly influence the choice to embark on a business venture. With financial backing, women are more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours.

“The labour exchange holds grant support programs for small businesses several times a year [...] Here, we’re talking about 30,000 euros, and this opportunity comes twice a year”.

“For many Belarusians, this remains an unknown and inaccessible opportunity, because they simply don’t know where to look for such support”.

At the same time, for some Belarusian women, business serves not only as a means of generating income but also as a platform where they can express their identities and connect with their cultural heritage. Some of the respondents revealed, that through their business, they are willing to help their fellow Belarusians who moved to Lithuania and offer them not only goods and services but also a sense of community. Thus, entrepreneurship becomes a tool to strengthen their sense of belonging and self-awareness, as well as develop the Belarusian community abroad and keep the national identity.

“My main motivation wasn’t finance [...] I felt that Belarusian emigration needed education, self-realization, and the preservation of its culture”.

The decision to continue or change the direction of entrepreneurial endeavours

After moving to Lithuania, many Belarusian women entrepreneurs faced a difficult dilemma, either to continue their previous business or switch to a new one. Various personal, professional and external factors influenced the decision-making process. For some, it was market demand, difficulties to establish local business connections or to work with unique products. For others, it was to continue in the same field while still modifying their approach to align with the evolving market conditions. One of the respondents had previously run a printing and design business in Belarus and adapted her business to the local market by creating Belarusian and Lithuanian souvenirs. Despite her experience in Belarus, she still struggled to establish relationships with local printing companies and had to restructure her business to fit the market. Another Belarusian woman with experience in energy and management saw an opportunity in Lithuania’s growing green energy sector. The crisis in Belarus was the reason to look for new opportunities and the government support for green energy in Lithuania was seen as a viable option. The possibility to

pursue her passion for green energy, which was not possible in Belarus before, motivated her to continue in this field.

“We adapted right in the process of working, focusing on demand [...] During the process, we saw what was in demand”.

“We have long been interested in green energy, but it was impossible to implement it in Belarus”.

And for some, the reason to continue was personal attachment to the field. For example, one Belarusian businesswoman was passionate about ceramics and decided to continue her craft as part of her business. She loved art and her partner supported her so she could continue her business under forced emigration. Another respondent’s background in philology and her drive to preserve cultural heritage and promote national identity inspired her to pursue a career in teaching, which eventually evolved into an entrepreneurial venture offering online language courses.

“I realised that I love ceramics too much to give it up”.

“I’m very happy that he helps me realise my ideas”.

2.4.3. Social and Professional Integration

Features of social and professional integration in the host society

Belarusian women entrepreneurs faced various challenges and opportunities during their social and professional integration into the Lithuanian business environment. Social integration often depended on their language skills, existing networks and the general attitude of Lithuanian society towards Belarusian migrants. For many, the language barrier was a big obstacle, limiting their ability to communicate with local customers and authorities. As one respondent explained, *“Lithuanian customers rarely come, maybe two per day. But even if they do, we can communicate if they want to buy something”*. This segmentation of the market often led to Belarusian entrepreneurs relying heavily on their own diaspora, reinforcing the divide between them and the local community. But some were actively trying to break this pattern, reaching out beyond the Belarusian business circles. As another respondent said, *“I don’t limit myself to the Belarusian diaspora. I have already met four Lithuanian ceramic artists and we communicate”*. Such interactions not only helped with language adaptation but also created business opportunities.

Belarusians in Lithuania changed over time. At first, Belarusian entrepreneurs were welcomed with open arms and were seen as educated people who could contribute to the economy. *“In 2021, Belarusians in Lithuania were literally carried on hands.*

Everyone knew these were people with education, money, smart kids, who open businesses and create jobs.” But as geopolitics heated up, so did the mistrust towards Russian speaking migrants. Still many Belarusian women entrepreneurs found a way to integrate by proving themselves and to the local community.

As for professional integration, the decision to continue a previous business or start a new one was influenced by many factors: financial resources, legal complexity and market demand. Some entrepreneurs faced bureaucratic obstacles and could not keep their first business going. One interviewee said: *“When we opened our store, [...] was no longer around [...]. No one wanted to work with me: neither banks nor financial services”*. Others with more resources and business skills managed to grow their business. *“I opened one company, then a second”* said another, showing how entrepreneurial experience and access to funding can make the transition easier.

Engaging in networking and participating in business communities played a crucial role in achieving professional integration. Business associations, such as the Association of Belarusian Business Abroad (ABBA), gave advice on investment opportunities, financial management and market adaptation. One of the respondents said: *“They gave me two very useful consultations. The first was about finding investors and getting bank loans in Lithuania. The second was about sales strategies, where a Lithuanian businesswoman shared her experience on market operations”*. Participation in networking events and conferences also helped Belarusian women entrepreneurs to establish contacts with potential partners and clients. *“I attended various events: networking meetings, Belarusian clubs, concerts and the ‘Belarusian House’”*. But as businesses grow, the need for networking decreases. *“In Warsaw I am less active in events [...] because my network and audience are already built,”* explained one entrepreneur. This is the natural process of integration – once a business is stable, external help is less necessary.

Beyond formal business networks, informal communities also mattered. F27, a club for Belarusian founders, was one of them. *“They only accept founders who have been through crises and are still working. It’s a great community where you find people with the same questions as you,”* one said. These communities helped businesses grow and gave Belarusian entrepreneurs a sense of belonging in the integration process.

Despite the options available, some entrepreneurs chose not to rely on external funding especially grants because of the bureaucracy and long waiting periods. *“I never applied for grants or even considered them. I am now very happy I didn’t because many grant programs are being shut down,”* one said. For her, financial independence and direct client engagement were more important. *“If there are clients there is a business. If not then it’s not a necessary venture.”*

Ultimately, the integration of Belarusian women into Lithuania proved to be a multifaceted challenge, involving language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, the establishment of social networks, and the development of personal business strategies. Some found support in business associations and networking events, while others relied on self-sufficiency and direct engagement with customers. As time passed, many were able to navigate these challenges and emerged as resilient and capable professionals within the Lithuanian market.

The role of foundations and associations in the process of social and professional integration of Belarusian women entrepreneurs

During their social and professional integration into the Lithuanian business environment, Belarusian women entrepreneurs used various funds and business associations for support. The Association of Belarusian Business Abroad (ABBA) was instrumental in providing consultations and networking opportunities that helped many women to enter the local business environment. By connecting with these associations, Belarusian women got access to information on regulations, investment opportunities and practical tips on how to overcome bureaucratic hurdles.

Businesses also helped to professionalise these entrepreneurs. Through industry conferences, networking events and closed business clubs such as F27 women were able to make meaningful professional connections and share experiences with peers who were going through the same challenges. These connections helped them to adapt to the Lithuanian market and collaborate to develop new business models for the new economy. Additionally, the role of experienced compatriots who had already settled in the Lithuanian business environment was crucial. Some women entrepreneurs were able to receive direct mentorship and guidance from those who had gone through the local regulations and financial system. This peer support gave them confidence and practical solutions to overcome administrative and operational obstacles, including opening bank accounts, receiving financial services and dealing with tax policies.

“They create networking, and you meet useful people. When I was invited to a conference, it was very”.

“This is a closed club of Belarusian founders. They accept only business founders who have survived a crisis and are continuing to work”.

“Belarusians are now scattered around the world. And it’s great that in this club you find people who have the same questions as you”.

Besides networking and mentoring, formal training programs and business consultations from the Association of Belarusian Business Abroad enabled

Belarusian women to enhance their skills. For example, investment strategies and access to credit consultations helped some women receive adequate funding and grow their business. Educational programs and workshops facilitated their adaptation and equipped them with the knowledge necessary to compete in the Lithuanian market. Even with the available support, certain women entrepreneurs in Belarus encountered delays in receiving assistance. In the initial stages of relocation, they had to rely on themselves and their personal network before organisations responded. But as their business grew, the role of these organisations was key to long term sustainability.

“Association of Belarusian Business Abroad helped a little with consultations, I even went with them to an exhibition – that was great”.

“I wrote to them, and they provided two very useful consultations. The first consultation was about investment – where to find investors in Lithuania, how to do it step by step, and in which banks you can get loans”.

“When we first arrived, we moved around on our own, looking for places to go. After escaping from Belarus, I immediately wrote to all possible funds.

Someone replied only after 15 hours”.

Some were limited by bureaucratic and financial constraints. Some applied for grants and external funding, while others preferred to stay independent and avoid long application processes and financial reporting. This illustrates the various ways in which Belarusian women pursued professional success in Lithuania.

“The cost of our services ranges from 1,000 to 4,000 euros, and after two years, you might get 200-300 thousand [...] but that doesn't suit me”.

“I never applied for grants, never submitted applications, and didn't even consider such an opportunity”.

In general, Belarusian women entrepreneurs were integrated into Lithuanian society and business environment with the help of professional associations and networking platforms. These frameworks equipped them with essential knowledge, resources, and a sense of community and resilience, enabling them to establish and expand their businesses in a new environment.

2.4.4. Personality and Gender in Entrepreneurship

Women in entrepreneurship: role perceptions and impact on conduct of activities

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania see their professional roles in a business environment that is very different from what they were used to in Belarus.

Their views on gender roles in entrepreneurship vary; some say competence and confidence trump gender biases, others acknowledge the stereotypes but see them as challenges to be managed. As one entrepreneur said, *“If you are competent and confident your gender doesn’t define your success. People judge you on your professional skills and business results”*. Another respondent described the stages women go through in leadership positions, noting that the initial viewpoint frequently shifts from undervaluation to an acknowledgment of their knowledge and managerial abilities.

Compared to Belarus, many respondents claimed that Lithuania is more women friendly. Lack of gender stereotypes in specific industries and having less bureaucratic and administrative barriers make the business environment generally more supportive. One entrepreneur in ceramics industry said: *“In Belarus, I often heard comments about my work, why a woman should do such hard work. Here, I did not encounter such attitudes”*. In addition, Lithuania’s business regulations and economic stability offer a sense of security so women can focus on growth rather than navigating unpredictable restrictions.

Business and personal life also plays a role in how Belarusian women entrepreneurs set up their businesses in Lithuania. Some see the importance of financial support from partners which can provide stability in the early stages of business development. But the risks of mixing business and personal relationships are obvious, as one entrepreneur said, *“When business and personal relationships overlap the stakes are much higher. You risk not only financial loss but also loss of clients and reputation”*. Hence, while financial interdependence can give security, many women prioritise autonomy in business decisions.

One of the key aspects of adaptation in Lithuania is self-sufficiency and control over your business. Several entrepreneurs mentioned that it was better to have your own business rather than a partnership, especially when building a personal brand. As one woman explained: *“At first, I thought about finding a partner to grow my business but soon realised that having full control allowed me to stay true to my vision and minimise risks”*. This is a common trend among Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania – independence, strategic thinking and adaptability are key to their success.

Personal characteristics and their influence on entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women in Lithuania are able to adapt, plan and manage teams which shapes their business approach in the new environment. Flexibility and a willingness to embrace change are essential components of their entrepreneurial journey. Many respondents say that their ability to take challenges and turn obstacles into opportunities has been the key to their success.

“The word ‘impossible’ excites me. When someone says it can’t be done, I say: ‘Maybe for some, but not for me’”.

This and problem-solving attitude allow Belarusian women to navigate Lithuanian business. Their desire to achieve professional goals despite external obstacles creates resilience and long-term sustainability. As one of the respondents said, *“If you have a goal and move towards it with confidence, discipline becomes natural”*. This discipline helps them to stay focused and competitive even in times of economic uncertainty.

One of the key elements of their entrepreneurial strategy is team management. Many businesswomen stress the importance of building strong, reliable teams that can work well in uncertain situations.

“You can’t do everything alone; you need people who will stand by you through fire and water”.

In Lithuania where networking and collaboration play a big role in business development, building trust and loyalty within the team is a competitive advantage. Belarusian women entrepreneurs apply their leadership skills not only to internal team dynamics but also to strategic partnerships to ensure long term business growth.

Innovation and creativity shape their business models. Entrepreneurs in the arts, education, and digital sectors emphasise the significance of integrating diverse skill sets – such as marketing, design, and teaching – to create distinctive and competitive initiatives.

“I am always generating ideas and writing them down. Planning and multitasking help me to turn my creative vision into reality”.

This ability to combine different competencies allows Belarusian businesswomen to be flexible and responsive to market demands. Their willingness to try new things and refine their strategy helps them to build loyal customer base and grow their business.

Beyond professional skills, personal qualities like empathy and communication also play a big role in their success. Many entrepreneurs, especially those in-service industry, stress the importance of building trust-based relationships with clients and partners.

“For me, the most important thing is to create equal and respectful relationships between all participants”.

This emphasis on meaningful communication is especially relevant in Lithuania where cultural and social differences can be a challenge. The ability to build connections, understand local business norms and foster mutual respect allows Belarusian women entrepreneurs to create sustainable businesses and navigate the local market.

In the end, success of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania is shaped by their adaptability, strategic thinking, leadership and creativity. Their ability to merge professional expertise with resilience and innovation allows them to overcome challenges, integrate into the business community and build strong competitive businesses in their new environment.

Skills, opportunities and challenges of Belarusian women entrepreneurs compared to local entrepreneurs

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in the process of adapting to the business environment in Lithuania found several differences between themselves and local entrepreneurs. One of the most striking was the ease of doing business and services. While Lithuanian entrepreneurs navigate the system with ease, Belarusian women entrepreneurs face challenges like language barriers and slow state institutions. Numerous individuals have noted that communicating in Lithuanian with officials tends to result in faster service, while using Russian often leads to delays. And while in Belarus pre-arranged companies handled accounting and legal issues smoothly, in Lithuania finding reliable specialists was an extra challenge that complicated business.

“Lithuanians here, of course, have it much easier. If you speak Lithuanian, everything gets resolved quickly: no queues, with a smile, and you can calmly discuss the weather”.

Another difference Belarusian women entrepreneurs noted was work ethic and business approach. Many claimed that Belarusians are result-oriented, resilient and can work under pressure. Lithuanians tend to be focused on processes, exhibiting a formal and administrative approach, which can occasionally result in a slower work pace. This difference in business approach influenced the way they interacted and had to adapt to.

“Belarusians are much more hardworking and productive than Lithuanians. This is because Belarusians are used to working and are results-oriented, not process-oriented”.

Another significant distinction was the level of state support and resources available. In Lithuania, local entrepreneurs have many government backed

initiatives, startup subsidies and financial aid programs. Belarusian women entrepreneurs said that such support was almost non-existent in their country where starting a business was often limited by strict policies and lack of institutional support. But they also mentioned that some business services such as banking and bureaucratic processes were more streamlined in Belarus than in Lithuania where it can be slow.

“In Lithuania, there is state support that allows artists to work comfortably [...] In Belarus, there was very little support”.

Corporate culture and professional networking also played a role. Belarusian entrepreneurs found Lithuanian professionals to be more open and willing to share knowledge, so business is more collaborative. That is different from Belarus where professional networks tend to be more exclusive. Numerous individuals have noted that this transparency facilitates quicker knowledge sharing and smoother integration into the local business environment.

“Lithuanian ceramists are very open and friendly. They are eager to share experiences and answer questions, unlike in Belarus, where many were more closed”.

And cultural and language differences affected Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania. Language was a big obstacle for those who did not speak Lithuanian. It was hard to communicate with state institutions and to be part of professional circles. In addition, differences in society and attitudes towards entrepreneurship affected business and overall experience of working in new country.

“When you come from Belarus to Lithuania, you realise that many state processes and services are organised differently here”.

Despite all these obstacles, Belarusian women entrepreneurs demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness, leveraging their strong work ethic and problem-solving abilities to establish and expand their businesses in Lithuania. They joined professional communities, sought support from fellow countrymen and used educational opportunities to overcome initial obstacles and get into the local business environment. These experiences showed the differences between Belarusian and Lithuanian entrepreneurs and the ways Belarusian women navigated their new surroundings.

The role of family in entrepreneurship

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania often say family is key to their business, both emotionally and practically. In many cases, family members are not just passive supporters but active participants in the business. Some entrepreneurs

have involved their children in management or daily operations to ensure continuity and trust in the business. For example, some said their children were involved in market analysis or even official leadership in the company. Family members play a crucial role in business development, extending their involvement beyond mere assistance.

“My son helps too. He is older now and provides support, doing market analysis. Although he is only 15, he is already actively involved in the project”.

“When I couldn’t open an account in my name, we registered her as the director. Later, we didn’t change anything, and she still holds this position”.

Besides direct involvement, family is a stabilising and motivating factor for Belarusian women entrepreneurs. Many mentioned that, without the support and practical help of their husbands or relatives, their entrepreneurial journey would have been much tougher. Emotional support is especially important in overcoming the uncertainty of doing business in a new country. Some women shared stories of their husbands being actively involved in business planning, helping to visualise and organise the workspace or providing financial backing so they could focus on their entrepreneurial activities. This family involvement gives a sense of security and stability and allows women to tackle business challenges with more confidence.

“My husband became my pillar in this sense, both financially and in many other aspects”.

“We sat together and planned where everything would be placed in the space, and he even created a 3D model”.

“When you come up with something, and the people who are supposed to support you actually support you – it’s invaluable”.

Besides practical help, family obligations are a big motivator for Belarusian women in Lithuania. Many mentioned that they wanted to provide financial security for their children and future for them. The necessity for access to education, stable housing and overall well-being of their families pushed them to find innovative solutions and to persist in their business endeavours, even in the face of the difficulties associated with relocation and adjustment. This balance between personal goals and family responsibilities creates a situation where family not only supports but actively fuels the drive to succeed.

“I realised that I need to come up with something that will provide for our family. I want us to have our own home, so that my daughter can go to university”.

“Nevertheless, I understand that everything must be balanced: family, work, personal projects”.

Ultimately, family significantly impacts the entrepreneurial paths of Belarusian women in Lithuania, extending beyond conventional support. This influence is multifaceted, encompassing direct participation in business, emotional encouragement, financial backing, and motivational boosts. Together, these elements empower Belarusian women entrepreneurs to demonstrate resilience and achieve success in establishing and expanding their businesses in a new setting.

2.4.5. Strategies for Entrepreneurial Success

Strategies in entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania used many different strategies to succeed in the new business environment. Their ability to adapt to changing market conditions and try new things was key to their integration. Flexibility and responsiveness to market was the key to overcoming the initial hiccups. Some entrepreneurs tried to copy business models that worked in Belarus but soon realised that consumer behaviour and market structure were different. For example, one of the respondents said that her original approach of using sales people did not work in Lithuania so she had to change her strategy. Others saw the shift in digital marketing trends and adjusted their content strategy to fit the growing popularity of short video formats, especially on TikTok. Through experimentation and evaluation, they identified the business models that resonated with local consumers.

“For example, I tried to apply in Europe the model that had worked successfully in Belarus. The result? A complete failure. I hired salespeople – it didn’t work. Then I realised that what is effective for us does not work here”.

“Two years ago, I had already started working with visual materials, not just texts. But then I realised that it was no longer developing because people had switched to TikTok and short video formats. I had to adapt”.

Another key was their service and customer focus. Many said prompt responses to customer queries even outside of business hours was key to client retention and loyalty. By delivering great service and addressing customer needs swiftly, they could build their reputation and attracted corporate clients. This customer focus laid the groundwork for long term business.

“When you respond to messages even at 10 PM or on a Sunday, clients appreciate it. Some people need help immediately, and if you assist them urgently, they will definitely come back”.

Building professional networks and getting into the local business community was also key. Unlike Belarus where personal connections rule, in Lithuania trust and credibility were established through local business circles. Entrepreneurs explained that being introduced by local Lithuanians was important as it opened doors to potential partners. Also relying on Russian-speaking professionals limited business growth so many sought legal and consulting services from local specialists who knew more about Lithuanian regulations and market. Platforms such as LinkedIn play a crucial role in networking, allowing entrepreneurs to connect with local professionals and enhance their visibility within the business community.

“If a local person, for example, a Lithuanian, introduces you, you pass the check immediately and become ‘one of them’”.

“The main mistake of Belarusian entrepreneurs is looking for Russian-speaking contacts and working only with Russian-speaking lawyers who don’t know the local specifics”.

“LinkedIn works great in Europe. The more local professionals you have in your contacts, the higher the trust”.

Digital tools and social media were a big factor in their success. Entrepreneurs used various channels, Instagram, TikTok, online communities to attract and engage with audiences. Some offered free content, webinars and trial products to generate interest and build a loyal customer base. Word of mouth and collaborations with other businesses amplified their reach, showing that organic marketing works. Being able to switch between different marketing approaches kept them competitive and responsive to consumer trends.

“I offer free lessons, free products to bring people to my product and get them to subscribe to my content. Word of mouth helped with this – people started spreading the information”.

Collaborating with local experts and ensuring full compliance were essential for successful business operations. Entrepreneurs recognised the intricacies of Lithuanian labour and tax regulations and required assistance to effectively navigate these challenges.

By surrounding themselves with local professionals – lawyers, accountants and business advisors – they could simplify administrative tasks and avoid legal traps.

Some also faced challenges with employee management and emphasised the importance of understanding labour laws to prevent disputes and have a stable work environment.

“To effectively enter a new market, you need to surround yourself with local specialists: lawyers, accountants, partners”.

“We found a loophole in the law and finally dismissed her in September, but she immediately filed a complaint against us with the labour commission”.

In general, Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania were adaptable, customer focused, networked, digital and compliant. By continuously adjusting and learning from the market, they managed to settle in the competitive environment and have a way to growth and long-term success.

Key resources for successful entrepreneurship

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania used many different resources to start and grow their businesses in a new economy. One of the most important was financial resources. Many entrepreneurs said that personal savings were a must, as external financing (bank loans) was seen as risky and unpredictable. Fear of financial instability and bureaucratic hurdles to get grants made many women rely only on themselves. Some sold their previous businesses and assets in Belarus to have a stable financial base for their new business in Lithuania.

“As for resources, I was fundamentally against taking a loan. We used only our own money because it was scary”.

“Of course, you can try to get a grant, but this process is endless: going through institutions, bureaucracy, waiting for decisions. I simply cannot spend so much time on this”.

“I sold my entire business at home, sold my car, and here, to be able to buy everything: equipment, premises, to set everything up [...]”.

Besides financial capital, experience and adaptability were key. Many entrepreneurs said their business experience helped them navigate new situations, hone their strategy and adjust to market changes. This adaptability was most obvious in the shift to digital where entrepreneurs went remote, used online tools, social media and everything to keep and grow their business.

“If it weren’t for this experience that I went through, everything could have turned out differently”.

“When COVID started, I moved my team to remote work [...] We completely switched to online: telephony, meetings – everything became digital. It worked”.

And time and human capital were also key. Entrepreneurs spent a lot of time networking, meeting potential clients and building trust in the local business community. Some said investing time in building relationships with Lithuanian professionals and getting into local networks helped their business grow faster. And being able to attract and retain good people was good for the stability and growth of their business.

“The main resource was time, which I could use, as well as human resources and their opinions”.

“I spent a lot of time attracting people, but when they came, they were already my clients”.

Another significant aspect was marketing and engaging with the audience. Belarusian women entrepreneurs used paid ads, content marketing and social media outreach. Many took a step by step approach, first offering free resources to attract potential customers and then converting them into paying customers. This approach to audience engagement helped them build their customer base and brand in a crowded market.

“When there was no paid advertising, it was difficult. But when growth started, it became easier to work with the audience”.

“At first, people subscribed to free materials, then they could subscribe to my course”.

“I went through this journey together with the groups that gathered through these resources”.

In general, Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania were successful because of their financial independence, experience, flexibility, networking and marketing. With these resources, they could overcome obstacles, get into the local market, and secure long term for their business.

“A very strong motivation is not just to live, but to survive. This is what makes you keep going”.

2.4.6. Impact of Crises and Localised Challenges

Impact of crises on entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania faced significant challenges due to recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the shifting migration landscape. However, their experiences varied widely, with some finding unexpected opportunities for growth and transformation amidst adversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic was global, but had a mixed impact on women owned businesses in Belarus in Lithuania. Some entrepreneurs had minimal restrictions, especially those serving Belarusian clients. Some individuals transitioned to online platforms, which, although broadened their customer reach, also resulted in burnout and prompted a re-evaluation of their careers. The crisis was a catalyst for digitalisation; many adopted new communication and sales strategies that changed their long-term business approach.

“In fact, there was no real lockdown, nothing was closed. We worked every day without stopping”.

“If not for them, I might have continued doing what I was doing before. But after the pandemic, I faced burnout”.

“The pandemic influenced the shift to online communication. It became the norm”.

Ukraine war had a much bigger impact on business. Economic uncertainty, security concerns and public opinion towards Belarusian migrants changed the market and consumer behaviour. Many entrepreneurs had to re-think their business strategy, some even looked for alternative jurisdictions to register their company. The changing socio-political landscape also played a role – initial solidarity with Belarusian migrants in Lithuania faded over time and affected both customer loyalty and professional network. Some businesswomen said that the perception of Belarusian entrepreneurs changed which is why they had trouble establishing and maintaining trust with local customers.

“The most serious risk is still the war”.

“When we arrived in 2021, everything here was decorated with white-red-white flags, and the support was strong. But when the war started, it felt like everything was just submerged in water”.

“At a forum, the Lithuanian Minister of Defence came and spent 30 minutes talking about the country’s readiness for defence. How can you talk about business in such an environment”?

In spite of these challenges, certain women entrepreneurs in Belarus viewed the crises as an opportunity for a fresh start. With economic and political instability, they looked for new markets, diversified their services and used international networks to keep their businesses afloat. Many joined professional communities and business associations which provided vital support – legal advice and financial resources. Support from fellow Belarusian migrants who had already adapted to the Lithuanian business environment was especially useful, helping newcomers to navigate the bureaucratic and regulatory jungle.

“Any crisis is a great time to start something new. When something closes, other opportunities open up”.

And also, the adaptation process showed that learning is continuous. Several entrepreneurs engaged with Lithuania's education system to undergo professional retraining, acquire new skills for business growth, and integrate into the local market. Networking through education added to their career and business growth.

Belarusian women entrepreneurs had to overcome language and administrative barriers. Language was the biggest obstacle at first. They could not communicate with local clients and navigate the legal framework. Many had to invest time and money in language courses and legal advice to comply with the regulations. And adapting to different corporate cultures required flexibility but also opened up new business opportunities to integrate new practices into their business.

While crises brought uncertainty and challenges, they also made many Belarusian women entrepreneurs more resilient and innovative. By using support networks, adapting to new business models and developing professionally they managed to not only survive but, in some cases, even grow their businesses. Turning adversity into opportunity is the hallmark of their entrepreneurial journey in Lithuania.

Overcoming challenges in the entrepreneurial process

Belarusian women in Lithuania face numerous challenges, yet they demonstrate remarkable resilience. They navigate the complexities of new business through psychological support, organized problem-solving, networking, and opportunities for professional growth.

Emotional resilience is a big part of their journey. Many business women are stressed by competition and external pressures and some seek professional help. One entrepreneur shared how she turned to therapy and medication to manage the

emotional load of moving and business adaptation. This highlights the significance of mental health for achieving sustained success. By acknowledging their struggles and getting the right support they stay stable and productive.

“I had a psychologist working with me for a long time, then another one joined. And then, when that whole situation [...] happened, it was antidepressants, pills to sleep, pills to wake up [...]”.

A rational approach to problem solving is also important for them. Instead of seeing problems as impossible to solve, Belarusian women entrepreneurs seek specialised help for legal, financial and operational issues. They hire lawyers for migration matters, accountants for financial management and outsource or have in-house teams to optimise their business. Such an approach reduces stress and speeds up their integration into the Lithuanian business world.

“Migration issues are solved with lawyers, accounting – with accountants. If you need a team, you analyse available resources, bring in outsourcing, or build your own workforce”.

Networking and professional support systems help them to adapt. Belarusian women in business know the importance of building connections and seek advice from experienced professionals. Instead of waiting for problems to happen, they anticipate the challenges and consult experts beforehand. This proactive approach reduces risks and helps them to make informed business decisions. Business associations and peer networks are also a valuable resource, with access to information and support that helps to business to be sustainable.

“I didn’t wait for issues to arise, I looked for people in advance with whom I could consult”.

And many entrepreneurs see challenges as opportunities. Instead of seeing difficulties as obstacles, they reframe them as a chance to improve. As one entrepreneur explained, *“Over time, I have come to see challenges not as problems but as a chance to refine my business model”*. This allows them to not only adapt but also to improve their business.

Language, bureaucratic processes, and cultural differences pose significant challenges to their professional integration. Initially, insufficient proficiency in the Lithuanian language hinders effective communication with local clients and authorities, necessitating additional time and effort to address this barrier. Furthermore, navigating legal matters related to licensing and taxation demands a financial commitment for expert guidance. Adapting to diverse corporate cultures requires flexibility, yet it also introduces fresh perspectives and ideas into the

business environment. Despite all this, they still manage to adapt and persevere. By using support networks, continuous learning and strategic problem solving, they not only survive but grow. Additionally, they turn obstacles into opportunities that define their entrepreneurial journey and lead to long-term success in the host country.

2.4.7. Characteristics of Transnational Entrepreneurial Activity

Peculiarities of transnational entrepreneurial activity

Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania have a global mindset and a long-term strategy that goes beyond the local market. From the outset, numerous individuals view Lithuania not as a destination, but rather as a launching pad to global opportunities. They are actively looking to connect in Western Europe and beyond, using Lithuania's geographical and economic advantages to scale up globally.

“I will sell not only in Lithuania but in America and Europe. This will be an international story, not just one country”.

Despite their aspirations, Belarusian women in business encounter barriers linked to national identity. Some respondents explained that they were met with prejudices that blocked their access to the Lithuanian market. Thus, they were forced to look for alternative markets in Poland and Portugal where they could find a more business friendly environment.

“The project is good, but you will not be accepted because you are Belarusian. This is a security issue”.

Flexibility and adaptability are key to their entrepreneurial approach. With changing market conditions, they adjust their business strategies, sales channels and marketing methods. *“Right now, I am working on a catalogue and completely reorienting my website towards wholesale customers”*, says one of the respondents. Evolution is a must. The capacity to scale is crucial, as certain entrepreneurs perceive that the niche markets in Lithuania may not be sufficiently large to support sustainable growth.

The utilisation of digital technologies and social media for business promotion is a crucial aspect of transnational entrepreneurship. Many Belarusian women entrepreneurs use targeted online marketing to reach customers even in distant locations. *“We are working on a legal framework because setting up targeted advertising for Belarusians in Estonia is quite complicated,”* one of the interviewees

says, highlighting the regulatory hurdles in digital advertising. And viral content is important too, as entrepreneurs try to increase brand awareness through organic online engagement.

Working in a political environment, they are also careful in their professional lives. Many prefer to be apolitical as public political views can affect the stability of their businesses. *“I try to be careful. Even when I was in Belarus, I avoided problems with advertising regulations,”* says one. This is the broader need to balance entrepreneurial spirit with political and economic uncertainty.

Hence, Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Lithuania are a dynamic and flexible bunch. Their global thinking, adaptability, use of digital tools and careful navigation of political risks shape their business paths. While national identity and regulatory issues still exist, they can innovate and go beyond local markets and are the players to watch in the European economy.

Entering new markets: strategies and resources

Belarusian women entrepreneurs entering new markets use various strategies and tools to adapt to changing circumstances and minimise risks. One of the most popular is step by step and market testing. Most women entrepreneurs do not rush to scale up their business but rather take small steps, test the market, and prepare products. This way, they not only get to know the new market better, but also avoid big financial losses in case of failure.

“I am still imagining how I will do it step by step. Well, I’ll make samples, take photos, then make this small catalogue and then just go there and go to all the shops [...]”.

An essential component of the strategy involves the proactive engagement in partnerships and networking. Women entrepreneurs in Belarus actively cultivate and sustain professional networks to discover new opportunities and address challenges.. Partnerships play big role especially in legal and financial issues.

“If it’s impossible to open a bank account with Belarusian passport, partner will tell you how to do it”.

Digital platforms and marketing tools also play a big role in market expansion. Online commerce and online shops allow women entrepreneurs to reach the international market without being physically present in the country. This way, they save on logistics and office costs and can use international marketing channels like targeted ads and Etsy.

“As soon as the first products, even the first toys, are available we start photographing them and working on our website and Etsy shop”.

Flexibility and adaptability become key when uncertainty is the norm and political and economic factors can change the environment overnight. Belarusian women entrepreneurs often face forced changes but they are able to adjust to complex situations. That is how they find non-standard ways to develop their business which is one of their strengths:

“Well I’m used to life putting me in a desperate situation. It’s only then that I start to act [...]”.

Despite being used to their own resources, some Belarusian women entrepreneurs are starting to look at external funding – grants and investment programs.

“We are not used to free money and are wary”.

Therefore, Belarusian women entrepreneurs use different tools and resources to enter new markets: gradual market testing, partnerships, digital platforms, flexibility and external funding. And they succeed in adapting to new environment and overcoming the challenges of business growth.

2.4.8. Perception of Returning to Belarus

Prospects for returning to Belarus to conduct entrepreneurial activities

Belarusian women entrepreneurs contemplating a return to Belarus for business purposes highlight the political climate as a crucial element affecting their choices. Notably, a significant number of them believe that a return would only be feasible if there are shifts in the country's political environment. As one interview fragment indicates, return would be prioritised *“if there is a change in the political climate”*, which emphasises the crucial role of political stability for the decision to return. A similar point of view is also heard in other interviews where women indicate that, *“if the political situation in Belarus changes, of course I would want to return”*.

However, despite political barriers, Belarusian businesswomen express their readiness to return to the country if the situation improves. A segment of the interview discusses the desire to return to the ‘new Belarus’ and actively participate in the process of the country's transformation. This indicates not only a physical return, but also a desire to contribute to the development and creation of new opportunities. *“I will gladly return to the new Belarus. I will make it green, I don't even doubt it”*, notes one of the respondents, emphasising not only readiness to return, but also active participation in the transformations that may take place in the country.

In addition, women entrepreneurs consider returning to Belarus not only as a return to their homeland, but also as an opportunity to expand their business. One of the respondents says that in case of changes in the political situation, it would be *“not about returning alone, but about expanding the business”*. This reflects the businesswomen's understanding that shifts in the political landscape open new horizons for growth and business development in Belarus.

Nevertheless, the difficulties faced by Belarusian women entrepreneurs in the context of political instability remain significant. One of the most serious problems is the legalisation of business, which is becoming *“very complicated and even criminalised”*. As a result, many female entrepreneurs are forced to look for alternative solutions, such as transitioning to an online model, which is also becoming more favoured in the context of political instability. This shift to an online platform allows them to maintain flexibility in their business and continue operating without being tied to a physical presence in Belarus. *“I moved to an online format, and it suits me very well”*, notes one interviewee, stressing that although she enjoyed working with clients in person, the need to adapt to changes in the country led to optimisation of the workflow.

Belarusian women entrepreneurs view the possibility of returning to Belarus for business as feasible; however, this is contingent upon changes in the political landscape. At the same time, they are ready to participate in the economic and social transformations of the country, should conditions allow. The development of online formats and the use of flexible working methods are also becoming important aspects of their strategy for the future.

Conditions necessary for returning and doing entrepreneurial activity in Belarus

Belarusian women entrepreneurs who are considering returning to their homeland highlight several key changes that need to happen in Belarus for business and professional growth to be possible. First and foremost, political stability and reforms are needed. Many entrepreneurs say the current political climate, with unpredictability, is a major deterrent to their return. The absence of institutions along with state interference in the economy creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, making long-term planning impossible. Transparent governance, freedom of speech and no political manipulation are the key to rebuilding trust in the business environment.

“Political manipulations must stop [...]”

“Fear and uncertainty in such a situation are very strong”.

In addition, external geopolitics also plays a significant role in shaping the perception of safety and feasibility. Some respondents mention that ongoing

regional conflicts, along with Belarus's involvement in geopolitics, increases the risks associated with doing business. For these entrepreneurs, the prospect of return becomes realistic only if Belarus pursues a neutral foreign policy and builds international partnerships based on economic rather than political interests. Achieving peace and alleviating external political pressures would enhance Belarus's image as a credible and autonomous economic participant.

“The war must end”.

“If Belarus becomes democratic, at least in the long run”.

Reforms and business friendly environment are equally important. Entrepreneurs assess the business environment in their host countries against that of Belarus and note significant disparities in taxation, financial assistance, and administrative effectiveness. Many believe that bureaucracy, high taxes and corruption hinder entrepreneurship in Belarus, while in Lithuania or Poland, government incentives, subsidies and transparency of the law create a thriving business. To draw entrepreneurs back to Belarus, the country must implement significant economic reforms, such as offering tax incentives, streamlining the registration process, and establishing financial support programs for small and medium-sized enterprises. Clear and fair economic policies will not only stimulate business growth but also restore confidence among business owners.

“Here in Lithuania, there are excellent conditions for farmers, for example, subsidies for purchasing equipment”.

“The economy of Belarus is essentially destroyed, and everything needs to be rebuilt”.

Additionally, legal predictability along with a stable regulatory environment is key to investment climate. Entrepreneurs say the current legal system in Belarus is unpredictable with constant regulatory changes that create unstable environment. Several respondents say laws that were once allowed can become illegal overnight and result in losses. Host countries have a structured and reliable legal system that allows for long term planning. A transparent and consistent legislative framework in Belarus would reduce risks and encourage local and returning entrepreneurs to invest in the country.

“It is very difficult when what used to be legal later becomes illegal”.

And finally, a supportive business environment through professional networks, education and mentorship opportunities would greatly assist returning entrepreneurs in their reintegration efforts. Many Belarusian women entrepreneurs who relocated successfully integrated into foreign business communities by using

networking opportunities, professional associations and training programs. In Belarus, creation of similar platforms – business incubators, mentorship programs and international partnership initiatives – would facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation and help returning entrepreneurs to adapt and contribute to the economy.

Thus, Belarusian women entrepreneurs will return only if the country changes radically, becomes stable, open and business-friendly. Only then will Belarus become a place where women entrepreneurs feel safe, where they are respected and where they can stimulate growth.

2.5. Conclusion and Recommendations

2.5.1. Conclusion

The example of Belarusian women who emigrated to Poland and Lithuania under the influence of political turbulence, economic uncertainty and the need to feel safe can be seen as a dynamic process of adaptation, sustainability and strategic development in new socio-economic conditions. That process was driven by their resourcefulness in rebuilding their careers and integrating into the business world of their host countries. These women, originating from challenging circumstances, have demonstrated remarkable strength and resilience. Language barriers, red tape and cultural differences were just a few of the obstacles they overcame. And yet, they actively employed strategies to ensure their businesses not only survived but thrived in the long term.

One of the key elements of their integration was the active use of social and professional networks. Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania connected with migrant communities, business associations and local professional circles to enter the market. Support from like-minded people and more experienced compatriots was crucial in their adaptation process, offering both practical help and emotional encouragement. These networks helped them navigate the legal and administrative jungle, with assistance in taxation, licensing and regulatory compliance. Many women also saw formal education and professional retraining as a tool for integration and career development, to acquire new qualifications, expand their professional network and strengthen their business.

Belarusian women entrepreneurs who came from the country's entrepreneurial scene found that experience was not always enough to prepare them for the EU business environment. Where business culture, consumer behavior and regulatory frameworks are concerned, they had to – and often did – rethink their strategies from scratch. Many initially found it tough to get to grips with structured business planning and marketing—the hallmarks of a more developed European business context. But that same exposure to instability and unpredictability that had long characterised Belarus made them incredibly resilient and adaptable. That allowed them to flip their business models and adjust to new market conditions with ease. What distinguished them was their skill in harmonising flexibility with meticulous planning. This balance was crucial to their success. In Poland and Lithuania, Belarusian women entrepreneurs have shown remarkable resilience in navigating the competitive market conditions. They have found that social media, digital marketing and word-of-mouth recommendations are the real game-changers when it comes to getting customers and building their brand. Many of them have also formed partnerships with local businesses to boost their presence in the market. That dual drive – economic sense and a genuine social mission – is what often sets

these women apart. In Lithuania, you see that social mission come to the fore. Many women entrepreneurs are motivated not only by financial gain but also by a commitment to safeguarding their cultural heritage, uplifting their communities, and advancing democratic principles. This dedication is evident in the initiatives they establish through their businesses.

In Poland and Lithuania, which are known for their open business environments, Belarusian women entrepreneurs encounter distinct challenges – particularly in sectors that have historically been dominated by men. Many of the women we spoke to reported encountering patriarchal attitudes. But as they proved themselves – through their skills and business successes – those attitudes began to change. They gained confidence in their fields and established themselves as leaders. That process of integration was also where the biggest challenges lay. Initially, adapting to different corporate cultures and management styles proved to be challenging. But it ended up opening doors to new perspectives – and opportunities for growth – that they might never have seen otherwise.

Language barriers were one of the biggest challenges – particularly at the start of business operations. This was primarily due to the fact that many individuals were not proficient in Polish or Lithuanian. As a result, their networking opportunities were restricted, interactions with authorities became significantly more challenging, and communication with customers posed considerable difficulties. Nearly all of those we interviewed concurred that mastering the language is crucial for effective professional and social integration. Additionally, successfully maneuvering through the bureaucratic systems of those countries demanded significant effort, financial resources, and, frequently, assistance from legal professionals to ensure adherence to local regulations.

Their decision to stick with their old business models or switch to new industries was influenced by many factors, including financial stability, market demand and personal career goals. Some stayed in their old fields, others took the chance to reinvent themselves and explore new business directions that matched local market needs. Whatever their choice, most were committed to long term stability and success in the host country, refusing to return to Belarus under current political and economic circumstances.

Most respondents do not see themselves returning to Belarus for business anytime soon. But if they were to reconsider, that would require some serious reforms. Democratisation, less government interference and better market conditions would be a good starting point. And even then, many are skeptical about those changes happening anytime soon.

In the end, the stories of Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania show how migration changes professional paths and economic opportunities. They are a part of the bigger picture of transnational entrepreneurship where

adaptability, resilience and strategic networking are key to success. By navigating legal, cultural and economic challenges they have become valuable assets to their host countries and created a sense of community among fellow migrants. Their stories prove that flexible business and continuous learning is key in this globalized and fast changing world.

2.5.2. Recommendations

Development and support of specialised language and business adaptation programs

One of the biggest challenges for Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania is the language barrier at the beginning. It limits access to information, complicates interactions with government institutions, hinders customer communication and prevents full integration into professional communities. Hence, it is essential to implement targeted adaptation programs that provide language training and introduce the business environment of the host country. These programs should combine intensive Polish or Lithuanian language courses with modules on legal regulations, marketing, taxation and intercultural communication. It would be especially good if courses were developed in cooperation with already successful migrant entrepreneurs who can share practical experience. Government, business incubators or NGOs can support these programs. This type of support would help women to adapt faster to new conditions, minimize the risks associated with the initial phases of business operations while enhancing the likelihood of achieving sustained success in the long run.

Strengthening and institutionalising professional support networks

The research highlights the importance of professional and social networks that help women entrepreneurs to navigate bureaucracy, share knowledge and find emotional support. But, in most cases, these networks are informal which limits their scalability and consistency. In this case, it would be good to create institutionalised support platforms – clubs, cooperatives or associations for Belarusian women entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania. These structures could organise regular meetings, training, mentorship programs and business fairs. They could also be a bridge between migrant-run businesses and local authorities, business communities and educational institutions. It is also important to make them accessible not only in capital cities but also in regional areas. Institutionalised communities create a reliable setting for exchanging knowledge, facilitate the search for partners and investors, and promote greater integration. They can also serve as collective representatives of migrant entrepreneurs in dialogue with the state.

Expanding access to business financing and microcredit

Financial stability is one of the key factors whether a woman stays in her original field or starts a business tailored to the host country's market. In practice, however, migrant women face difficulties to access loans and grants because of lack of credit history, documentation, guarantors or understanding of application procedures. Therefore, we need to create specialised financial tools – microfinance programs, investment funds and grants for migrants, especially women. These programs should provide not only funding but also mentoring and accounting support. There is also social investment support – initiatives that fund businesses with social mission, which is very relevant in Lithuania. Integrating these financial solutions into state or European programs (e.g. through European Social Fund) would increase their reach and sustainability. These would lower the entry barriers to entrepreneurship, stimulate new businesses and jobs and contribute to broader economic integration.

Promoting positive case studies and role models in public discourse

Stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes – especially in traditionally “male-dominated” industries – hold back the growth and recognition of Belarusian women entrepreneurs. One of the best ways to counteract this is to promote Belarusian women entrepreneurs through media, educational events and business forums. Public recognition of their achievements creates new role models and is a powerful motivator for other women. Government and non-governmental organisations can launch awards, competitions and documentary projects about the entrepreneurial journey of migrant women. These stories are especially effective when they show not only financial success but also community contribution, cultural preservation and democratic values. Such representation changes public opinion, encourages young people to think about entrepreneurship and strengthens the ties between migrant and host communities. In addition, visibility of such leaders promotes the business reputation of the Belarusian diaspora and opens new business opportunities.

Systemic support for professional retraining and lifelong learning

Many Belarusian women entrepreneurs, despite their experience, need to re-invent their business models in the EU. This means understanding new markets, structured business planning, marketing and management. Retraining and professional development becomes not only an adaptation tool but also a personal growth one. But access to quality education for migrants is limited due to financial, language and administrative barriers. Thus, we need to create accessible retraining programs for migrants. These could be offered by universities, employment centers and NGOs. They should be flexible (online, evening classes), provide support with paperwork and scholarships or partial subsidies. Special attention should be paid to digital skills which directly impact business success today. Enhancing skills empowers

women entrepreneurs to become more competitive, facilitates quicker business growth, and encourages greater involvement in the socio-economic activities of the host country.

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