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# Migration from Belarus and economic, social and political integration of immigrants in Lithuania

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According to the survey, about 86% of the respondents left Belarus for political reasons. Most of those who came to Lithuania are people of working age who have a permanent source of income here (almost 70% of the respondents). 68% of the respondents have a residence permit in Lithuania, 15% have a humanitarian visa, and slightly more than 8% have received official asylum or are awaiting a decision on asylum.

# Summary

- It is probable that there may be around 40,000 Belarusian citizens in Lithuania at present. This study conducted by means of a quantitative survey and in-depth interviews was aimed at determining the main reasons for Belarusians to come to Lithuania and the challenges they face in life and integration in the country.
- Russia's war in Ukraine has become a signal that temporary relocation to Lithuania may take longer than most Belarusians thought until recently. Such a situation may paradoxically stimulate the desire of Belarusians (both individuals and organizations) to integrate in Lithuania more strongly.
- According to the survey, about 86% of the respondents left Belarus for political reasons. Most of those who came to Lithuania are people of working age who have a permanent source of income here (almost 70% of the respondents). 68% of the respondents have a residence permit in Lithuania, 15% have a humanitarian visa, and slightly more than 8% have received official asylum or are awaiting a decision on asylum.
- The main reasons for the respondents to choose Lithuania rather than any other country are the possibility of obtaining a visa or a temporary residence permit in Lithuania, the absence of a language barrier, personal experience in Lithuania, a better political climate for civic and professional activities, and trust in the rule of law.
- The influx of Belarusians to Lithuania does not cause significant costs for the budget, as only 10% of Belarusians take advantage of social programs in Lithuania, and some of these programs are implemented by non-governmental organizations. According to the preliminary calculations of Invest Lithuania, in 2021 companies that have relocated their employees paid more than EUR 20 million in taxes related to employment relations (taking into account only personal income tax, without other taxes and economic efficiency multiplier).
- The influx of refugees from Ukraine and the more favorable conditions for Ukrainian citizens to integrate into the labor market did not cause tension between Belarusians and Ukrainians in Lithuania. However, it promoted distrust of the Belarusian diaspora in Lithuanian institutions, especially because the basis for more favorable conditions for refugees from Ukraine, from the point of view of the Belarusian diaspora, remains relatively unspecified.
- Belarusians feel further vulnerable due to the fact that Belarusian agencies can use consular services as a means of surveillance and pressure even when abroad (consular services of the Republic of Belarus are required to obtain migration status in Lithuania for the purposes of work, study, in order to perform actions related to family status).
- Respondents rate the sense of security in Lithuania at an average of 8.81 points out of 10, and the quality of life in Lithuania at an average of 7.62 points out of 10. Belarusians in Lithuania face challenges that are acute to all Lithuanian residents: inflation, concern about possible military aggression against Lithuania, shortage of places in children's educational institutions, long waiting time in healthcare institutions, extremely high rents, reluctance to allow individuals with children to declare their place of residence in rented dwelling (and the illegal housing and labor market).
- The study was conducted in Lithuania in June–September 2022. A quantitative opinion survey was conducted (on an online platform, with 335 respondents participating) as well as 11 in-depth interviews expanding the quantitative data analysis (5 interviews with professional human rights defenders and journalists, 3 interviews with business representatives, and 3 interviews with individuals who were not involved in civic activities until 2020 but faced repression or the risk of repression due to their political views).

# Introduction

Two biggest waves of escape from Belarus can be distinguished: fall 2020 – first half-year 2021 and the period from February 24, 2022 (and currently continuing).

The year 2020 marked a new stage in relations between the societies of Lithuania and Belarus. In 2020, along with the presidential election campaign, the biggest mass repressions in the region since the time of the Soviet Union began in Belarus. During the period from August 9, 2020 to the middle of 2022, almost 0.5% of the entire population (about 40,000 persons) were detained in Belarus for political reasons. Mass cases of torture and inhumane treatment in detention and prison facilities were recorded. Now, there are more than 1,300 political prisoners in Belarus.

These events encouraged the solidarity of the Lithuanian society with the Belarusian society as well as political decisions to simplify, even in the conditions of the pandemic, urgent relocation (the term “relocation” will be used in this report because that is how this process is usually called by the Belarusians themselves (*релокацыя*)). The mass repressions of civil society organizations and independent media launched in Belarus in 2021 were not, however, successful for the regime: despite the criminalization of both areas, only a few civil organizations or media outlets ceased their activities in Belarus.

The political situation changed even more on February 24, 2022: the Belarusian regime became an aggressor in Ukraine, the repression increased even more, with the tightening of criminal measures applied for participation in protests, expansion of the search for protest participants, and repressions on citizens who support Ukraine.

The outbreak of Russia’s war in Ukraine also marks the beginning of a new phenomenon that is little discussed. Since 2020, Ukraine was one of the most popular destinations for relocation from Belarus, both for individuals facing or at risk of repression and for non-governmental organizations and independent media. Moving to Ukraine was easier due to simpler conditions of entry and legalization, lower living costs, and the virtual absence of a language barrier. After February 24, 2022, the said groups of persons found themselves in a field of greater risk, that is in a de facto war zone, without consular support from their country and under the threat of

crackdown in case of occupation. Therefore, a large part of Belarusians who moved to Ukraine in 2020–2021 had to flee again.

There is no completely reliable, exact number of people who moved from Belarus to Lithuania. However, according to the data of national visas and permits for temporary residence in Lithuania issued by Lithuanian consular offices and the assessment of Belarusians themselves, it can be assumed that there may be about 40,000 Belarusian citizens in Lithuania at present (these preliminary estimates take into account the fact that the same person can be issued both a national visa and a residence permit in Lithuania, that there is also internal migration between Lithuania and Poland as well as, to a lesser extent, Latvia, and that some Belarusians may have repatriated to Belarus). According to the official data of the Lithuanian Migration Department, 31,280 citizens of Belarus lived in Lithuania as of the beginning of 2022<sup>1</sup>.

Belarusian citizens living in Lithuania can be divided into four groups: (1) persons who did not participate in the activities of political or civil organizations until 2020 but later on faced repression or the risk of repression personally or through their immediate environment due to participation in protests or for political beliefs; (2) employees of business enterprises relocated to Lithuania and persons who left for Lithuania due to the loss of job or professional opportunities in Belarus (may partially overlap with the first group); (3) employees and volunteers of civil organizations; (4) editorial staff of independent media.

The study conducted in Lithuania in June–September 2022 was aimed at finding answers to the following questions: How do Belarusians feel about living in Lithuania? What were the reasons for leaving Belarus? What determined the choice of Lithuania as the destination for emigration? Are Belarusians a unique group facing specific challenges? Are the challenges faced by relocatees specific only for them or relevant for all residents of Lithuania? How to facilitate integration in Lithuania for Belarusians who came from both Belarus and Ukraine?

During the study, a quantitative survey of the opinion of Belarusians living in Lithuania was conducted (a total of 335 respondents answered the questions by filling out a questionnaire on an online platform), 11 in-depth interviews with Belarusians living in Lithuania (5 interviews with professional human rights defenders and journalists, 3 interviews with business

representatives, and 3 interviews with individuals who were not involved in civic activities until 2020 but later on faced repression or the risk of repression due to their political views).

### MYTH 1: Belarusians choose Lithuania only out of necessity

The survey was targeted at the group of the Belarusian diaspora that arrived in Lithuania in 2020 or later. The answers to the survey show that one third (34%) of survey participants arrived in Lithuania in 2022. It is likely that, together with the flow of secondary emigration from Ukraine, this will be the largest wave of Belarusians who have arrived in Lithuania so far. Irrespective of the relocation method (i.e. business relocation or individual decision to leave the country), the absolute majority of migrants from Belarus leave the country for political reasons: this reason was stated by 86.07% of the respondents (several options were available). In other words, economic sanctions against Belarus are not the most important factor promoting emigration to Lithuania.

#### When did you arrive in Lithuania?

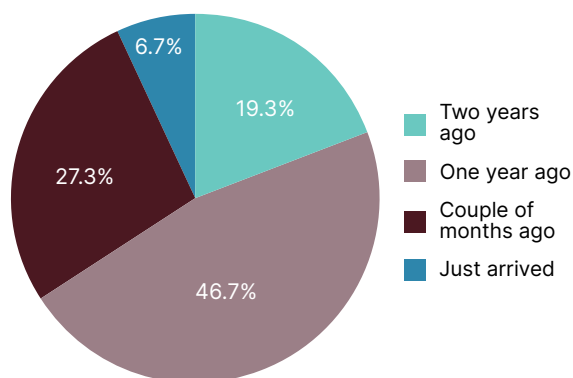


Chart 1. Entry to Lithuania

31.07% of the respondents stated that they left for job-related or economic reasons. In the context of this study, this is not necessarily a typical economic migration of individuals, it is rather associated with the relocation of businesses, non-governmental organizations and independent media to Lithuania. Such a conclusion is suggested by the assessment of personal security in Belarus and Lithuania. In Lithuania, financial instability is more often mentioned as a risk that reduces the sense of security, while in Belarus the experience of repression (personal or of close environment) and the absence of the rule of law are unequivocally dominant.

#### For what reasons did you leave Belarus?

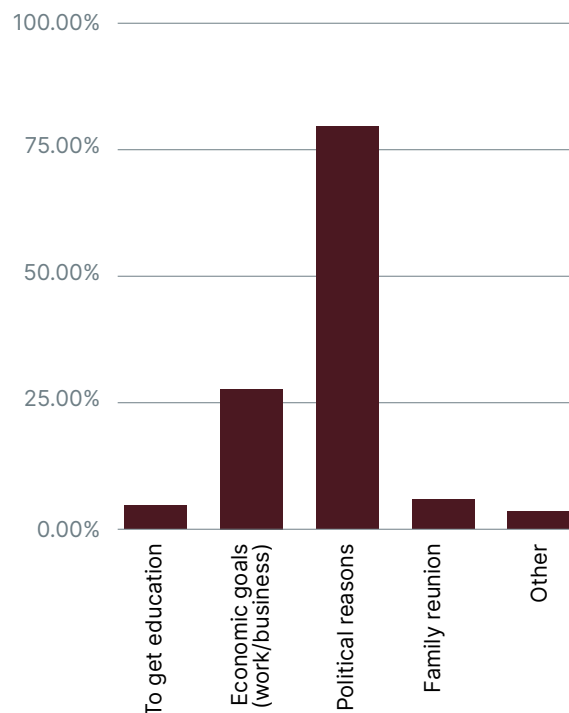


Chart 2. Reasons for exit

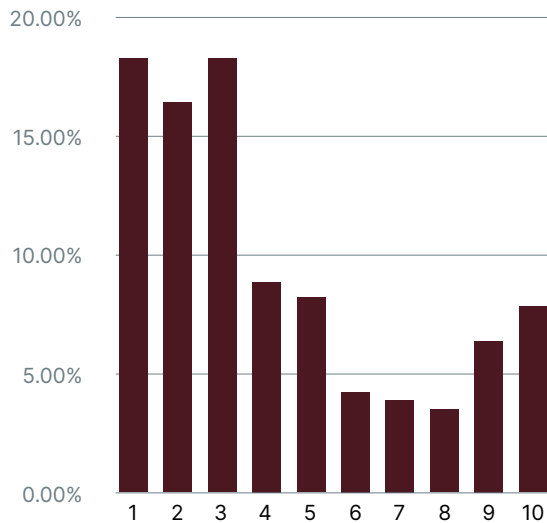
The respondents rated the sense of security in Belarus before leaving as 4.17 points out of ten. The survey provided an opportunity to comment on one's assessment: in the comments, more than half of the answers were related to personal fear or experience of arrest, imprisonment or torture, or concerns that this could happen to people in the immediate environment (family, workplace, etc.). The answers related to fear of the future, the war in Ukraine, and the lack of law enforcement in Belarus are indicated in the second, third, and fourth places. During the in-depth interviews, respondents indicated that active citizens in Belarus were deliberately pressured to leave.



*In a KGB police station, they interrogated: Do you know that your friend is already in Warsaw, maybe you need to go to Warsaw, too? There are many such stories of making pressured to leave. If you don't like it here, just go.*  
Interview with respondents

## How would you rate your sense of security before leaving Belarus?

(from 1 to 10)



**Chart 3.** Sense of security in Belarus

As the main reason why it was Lithuania where they chose to go, almost half of the respondents indicated the possibility of obtaining a visa and/or a temporary residence permit in Lithuania (45.96%). In fact, this confirms the successful policy of the Lithuanian institutions aimed at ensuring that persons affected by repressions have the opportunity to temporarily move to Lithuania and thus avoid repressions.

“Other reason” was stated by 32.72% of the respondents. This category (with additional explanations) is absolutely dominated by answers related to the absence of a language barrier and personal experience in Lithuania (respondents have previously visited or lived in Lithuania, know Lithuania, the country seems closer in terms of mentality, respondents have personal or business connections here). The second most frequent reason in the “other” category is the transfer of the workplace (business, non-governmental organization or media outlet) for working from Lithuania. The less frequently mentioned reason is geographical proximity (opportunity to meet relatives, the possibility to return more easily if and when such an opportunity arises). There were also a few answers “I didn’t choose” or “There was no other option”.

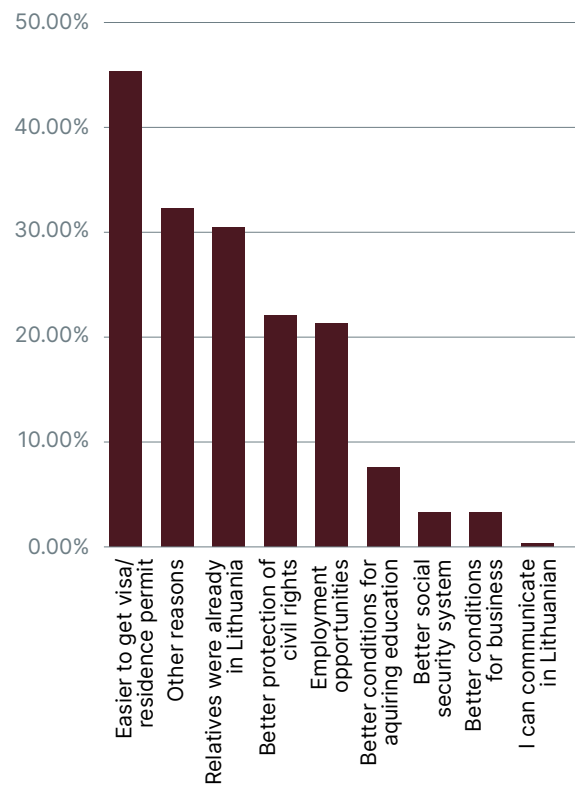


*We moved to Lithuania because we saw that Lithuania offers opportunities for legalization. After all, you go, roughly speaking, where you are treated in a friendly way. The main argument was the moment when the Prime Minister said that discrimination would not be allowed in Lithuania. Maybe it doesn't seem important to you [laughs], but Lithuanian politicians seem to us like people who stand by their words.*

Interview with respondents

The third most frequent reason (30.88%) is related to the fact that the persons who decided to leave already had relatives or a potential support system (of friends or family members) in Lithuania. 22.43 % stated a better political climate (the opportunity to engage in political or civic activities) as the reason. 21.69% noted better employment opportunities.

## Why did you choose Lithuania, and not some other country?

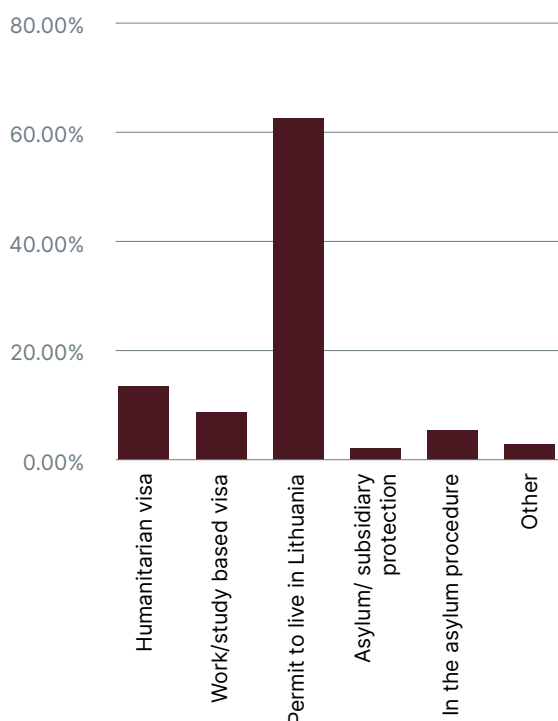


**Chart 4.** Reasons for choosing Lithuania

67.75% of the respondents have a residence permit in Lithuania, 14.58% arrived with a humanitarian visa, 9.49% came with a study or work visa, slightly

more than 8% of the respondents were granted asylum or temporary protection in Lithuania (or the procedure for granting asylum is still ongoing). 502 Belarusian citizens submitted their first or repeated asylum applications in Lithuania from the beginning of 2020 to the end of July 2022<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted that persons who are still subject to the asylum procedure as well as persons who are in Lithuania with a D visa issued by another Schengen state or type C visa, are not entitled to obtain a work permit using the simplified procedure and are, therefore, the most vulnerable group in a financial sense.

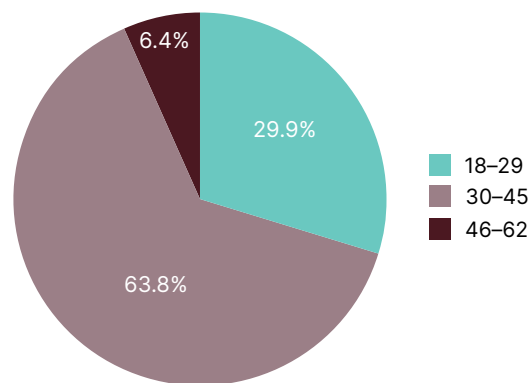
### At the moment, what is your legal status in Lithuania?



**Chart 5.** Legal status

The absolute majority of individuals who participated in the survey are aged 18–45. Such a result partly reflects the group of society that participated most actively in protests in Belarus in 2020 and later. On the other hand, this is the most mobile group of society. In interviews, the most common reasons why Belarusians choose not to leave (despite the risks) include personal health problems or caring for relatives as well as the worry that, due to their more advanced age, they may have to face poverty if integration fails.

### Your age group?

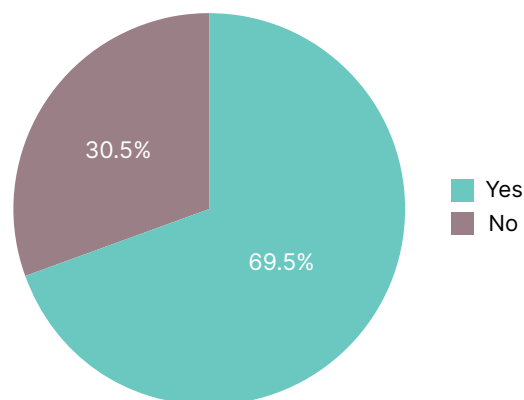


**Chart 6.** Age group

### MYTH 2: Belarusians in Lithuania are a burden on the budget

As already mentioned, the absolute majority of the respondents do not apply to Lithuanian institutions for political asylum, which is mostly due to the opportunity to work and not losing mobility. 69.49% of the respondents have a permanent source of income in Lithuania. 79.31% of persons with a permanent source of income in Lithuania work under employment contracts, and another 21.67% work independently.

### Do you have a regular source of income in Lithuania?

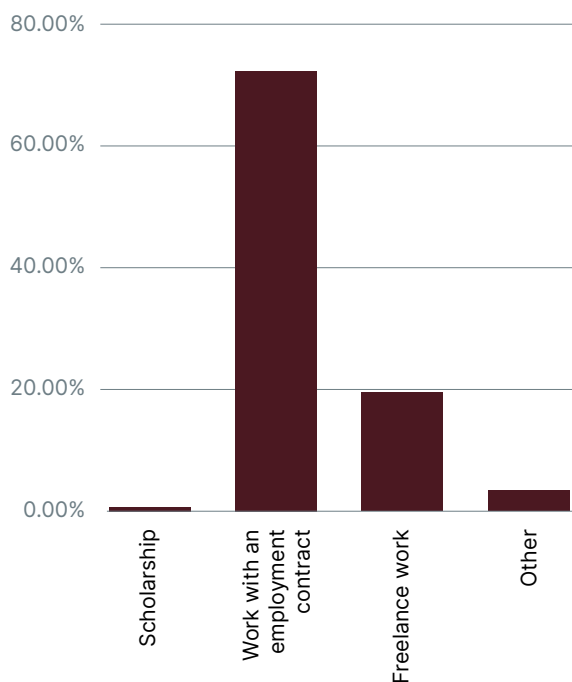


**Chart 7.** Regular income

Among Belarusians who do not have a permanent source of income in Lithuania, 61.11% live on their savings or are supported by relatives living in Belarus or other countries. 43.33% are supported by his or her partner or spouse. It should be noted that among those who do not have a permanent source of income in Lithuania, there are more women (39.41%) than men (18.70%), in turn women are a much more financially vulnerable group.

Social programs in Lithuania are used by only 10% of Belarusians. A quarter of them use support provided by the Belarusian diaspora's and other non-governmental support funds at no cost to the Lithuanian budget.

If yes – what is your source of income?



**Chart 8.** Source of income

In other words, the assumption that the Belarusian diaspora costs the budget a lot is not justified. According to the study, one of the main needs is more opportunities to work on a self-employment basis (possibly with a humanitarian visa or to obtain a residence permit in Lithuania for self-employment) and more consultations and opportunities to receive financing for starting a business. In other words, the Belarusian diaspora is interested in the possibility of creating a job for themselves and others. When assessing business relocations, according to the preliminary calculations of Invest Lithuania, in 2021 companies that have relocated their employees paid more than EUR 20 million in taxes related to employment relations (taking into account only personal income tax, without other taxes and economic efficiency multiplier, such as goods, services purchased in Lithuania and others)<sup>3</sup>. In other words, the economic impact of the influx of Belarusians to Lithuania is rather positive.

Living in Lithuania: “We also think that Ukraine is the most important, but we worry about ending up vulnerable”

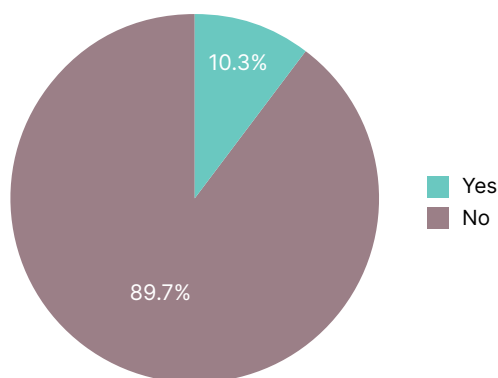


*Some are worried because they see that Belarusians have big problems in Ukraine: their cards are disabled, people are left without funds, residence permits are no longer issued to them, they are sent out of the country. I think there is a fear that this could happen here as well.*

Interview with respondents

The sense of security is unequivocally one of the most important factors in assessing the quality of living in Lithuania. Respondents rate the sense of security in Lithuania at an average of 8.81 points out of 10. In general, the quality of living in Lithuania is also assessed positively by respondents (at an average of 7.62 points out of 10).

Do you benefit from any of the social security programs in Lithuania?



**Chart 9.** Use of support programs

What affects the positive assessment of the quality of living in Lithuania most of all? About a third

of the respondents indicated that they are not in danger of repression in Lithuania for their political views or direct professional activities. One fifth of the respondents indicated that Belarusian agencies would not reach them in Lithuania. About a third noted a functioning rule of law. Among the factors that reduce the sense of security, those mentioned most frequently include financial challenges and the possible loss of job (and, accordingly, migration status), high inflation, difficulties in finding housing (especially housing where one can declare a place of residence as this is required to obtain a temporary residence permit in Lithuania), changes in the migration system (difficulties in obtaining a temporary residence permit after the outbreak of the Russia's war in Ukraine), the risk of war, the risk of an energy crisis, and a high crime rate.

**||** *There are concerns and many discussions with colleagues about [possible] Russia's aggression against Lithuania. There is a general understanding that aggression is impossible because Lithuania is a member of NATO. But sure... No one expected an attack on Ukraine either. So, of course, we are discussing what we would do. Someone is thinking of leaving, someone says he will stay to buy a field kitchen trailer and join volunteers, someone says we will stay and fight.*  
Interview with respondents

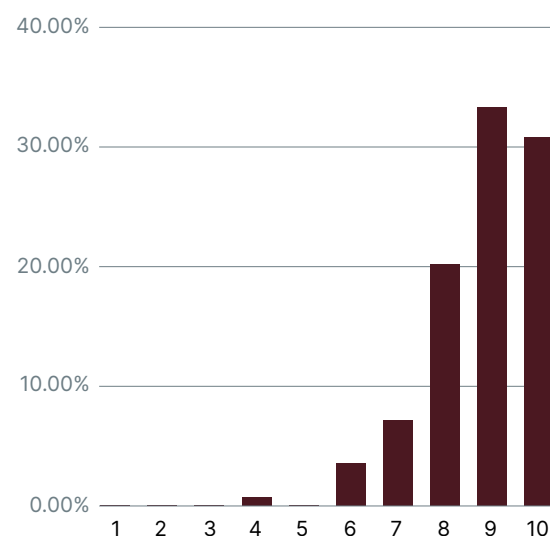
During the in-depth interviews, the respondents often emphasized that the sense of security does not appear immediately after leaving: after arriving from Belarus, the adaptation period takes up to several months (the psychological impact on the relationships in couples and families requires special attention).

In other words, one of the most important factors determining the sense of security and, to a large extent, the quality of living in Lithuania is independence from Belarusian agencies. However, one of the main differences in the situation of Belarusians compared to Ukrainians (but not necessarily to refugees from other countries) manifests itself here: Ukrainian citizens can apply for consular support to the institutions of their state, while consular services to Belarusians (or their non-provision) often become a means of pressure of the Belarusian regime against Belarusian citizens in Lithuania.

**||** *In Belarus, during the active phase of the protest, those of us who were involved... the police and special services came to people actually every morning, most often this is done at 6 o'clock in the morning, to make sure they are at home. And accordingly, sleep was very bad, worry was high. I got up at six in the morning and waited for them to come for me. Not too good for mental health. After relocation, the paranoia about unfamiliar cars and being watched went away after about two weeks.*  
Interview with respondents

### How would you rate your sense of security in Lithuania?

(from 1 to 10)



**Chart 10.** Sense of security in Lithuania

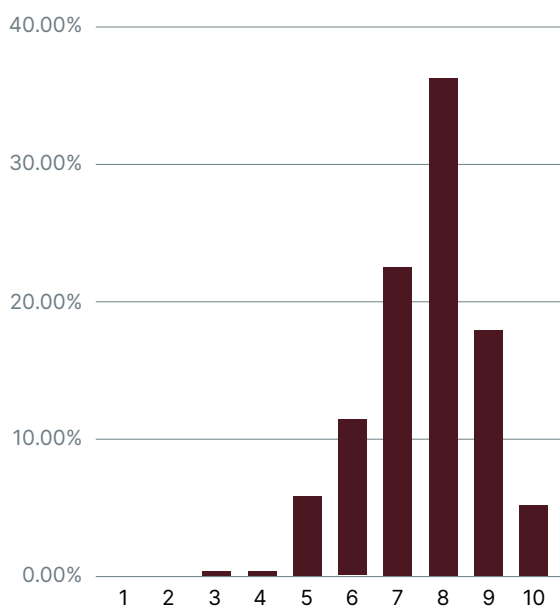
The problem of discrimination is not particularly pressing in Lithuania, but it still exists. 49.2% of the respondents said that they did not face discrimination in Lithuania on the basis of their being Belarusians. 28.9% did not encounter discrimination personally but indicated that they had heard of such cases. 8.5% of the respondents faced discrimination when searching for housing, 5% faced it in the labor market (reluctance to hire after learning that the person is Belarusian, reluctance to hire with a humanitarian visa, other inappropriate treatment from employers). The answers "other" also mentioned mistreatment in public institutions, hooliganism in public places, and difficulties related to bank accounts. Cases of discrimination may be inversely proportional to the attention of state institutions to



this issue as well as to scarce information about where to turn to if encountering discrimination. It is worth emphasizing that at the beginning of Russia's attack on Ukraine, the Lithuanian institutions took a clear and firm stance on discrimination and probably managed to control the situation. It is possible that as the information field was gradually given over to possibly propaganda sources, the cases of discrimination were broadcasted and emphasized purposefully; on the other hand, in the absence of consistency in the position of politicians, cases of discrimination could have become more frequent. In the first half of 2022, a study commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung showed that 16% of the respondents faced discrimination or hostility in Lithuania, and this was the lowest indicator among the countries compared (Lithuania, Poland, and Georgia).<sup>4</sup>

### How would you rate the quality of the life in Lithuania?

(from 1 to 10)



**Chart 11.** Quality of living in Lithuania

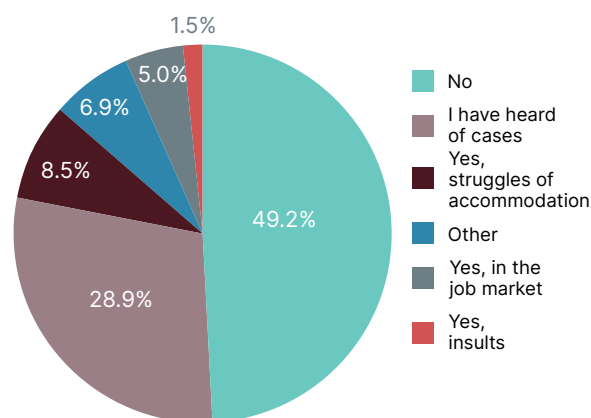
As shown by the results of the quantitative survey, Russia's war in Ukraine adversely affected the well-being of more than half of the respondents in Lithuania. Individuals who stated that their situation had changed positively since the beginning of the war emphasized that they volunteered, helped refugees in Lithuania or went to the Ukrainian-Polish border, to Ukraine, and that helped them overcome the feeling of fear, gave them the opportunity to answer accusations about Belarus' involvement in the conflict. The absolute majority of those who indicated the adverse effects of the war stressed inflation and

difficulties in renting housing, rents, and fear of war. Some of the respondents also emphasized queues in customer service departments of the migration institution. Problems with temporary residence permits in Lithuania are often mentioned (although, in fact, the difficulties with temporary residence permits in Lithuania were short-term and related to the amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens, which were adopted in 2021 and came into force on February 1, 2022; however, many Belarusians who faced the problems regarded them as a "punitive measure" after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine).



*If you hold a passport of any country, that country should protect you, but it is absolutely not the case of Belarusians. Also, there are no international protection mechanisms, you need to constantly communicate with the Belarusian authorities, you cannot become divorced or get certificates without them. Control does not end after you leave. I know two stories: people went to the Belarusian consulate to change their passports, they were told that the passports need to be collected at a registration point in Belarus, and it is not safe for a person to go there. Legalization in Lithuania requires various certificates (for example, a certificate of clean criminal record), for which you have to stand in lines and pay money to the regime.*  
Interview with respondents

### Did you ever encounter discrimination in Lithuania based on the fact that you are from Belarus?



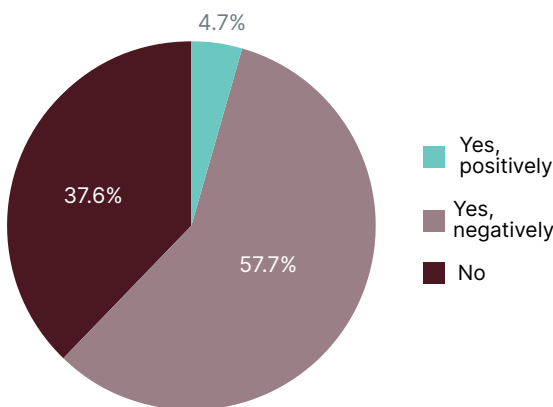
**Chart 12.** Manifestations of discrimination

Belarusians living in Lithuania drew attention to the fact that Ukrainian citizens in Lithuania have a different status: obtaining a work permit, support for studies remain the main issues.

# What help do Belarusians need?

The main needs for support are related to very practical aspects: entering a job requires skills, self-employment and paying taxes require information and opportunities; besides, understandable information about medical services, more places at Russian-language educational institutions are needed.

## Has the war in Ukraine affected your situation in Lithuania?



**Chart 13.** Impact of the war in Ukraine

68.42% of the respondents named Lithuanian language courses as the mostly needed type of support: first of all, this is important when looking for employment opportunities, and also as a way to integrate, network and orientate oneself in Lithuania more quickly. 46.24% of the respondents mentioned medical assistance as one of the main needs (36.88% indicated the lack of information about medical services and a language barrier as the main problems in dealing with the healthcare sector), and 43.98% stated the need for legal advice, especially advice on migration status, employment and tax issues.



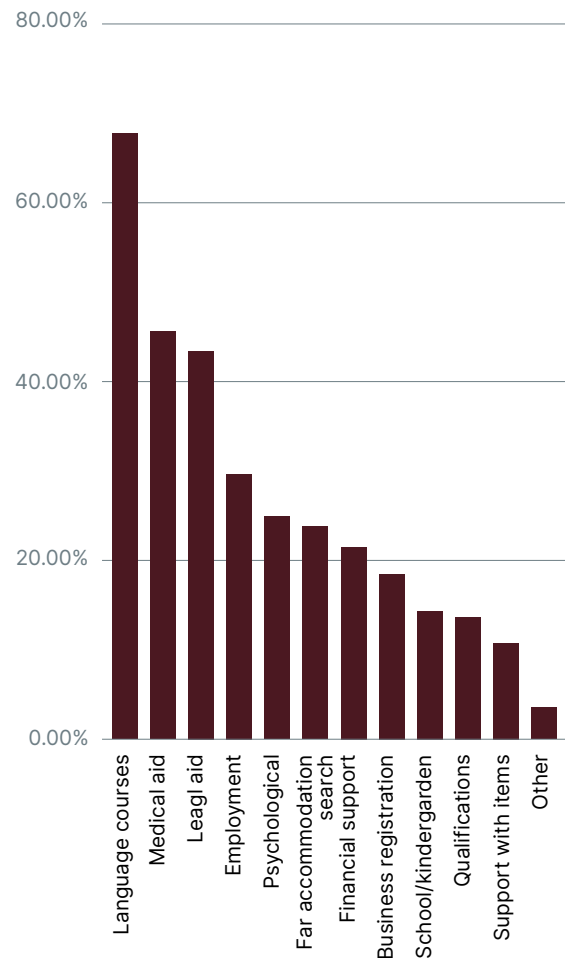
*Paying taxes and Sodra state social insurance contributions is not complicated, but we pass information from person to person. Those who know how teach others what to do. The system itself is not complicated, but due to the lack of information, so far we are learning through personal experience.*

Interview with respondents

For 30.08% of the respondents, assistance in finding a job is relevant; 25.19% pointed out the need for psy-

chological help; 24.06% indicated assistance in finding housing as an important need (it should be noted that women face discrimination more often than men when looking for housing: 12.24% of the women stated that they had encountered this type of discrimination, and this may be associated with landlords' discriminatory attitudes regarding women's financial stability); a large share of illegal rents and the reluctance to allow declaring the place of residence, especially for persons who have minor children, remain the main obstacle. 21.80% indicated the need for financial support (it is also more relevant for women, as they less often have a permanent source of income), 18.80% stated the need for assistance in registering a business, 14.66% mentioned registering children in educational institutions (a higher need for places at Russian or Belarusian-language education institutions is emphasized). 13.91% of the respondents highlighted the need for consultations on the recognition of qualifications (it is especially relevant for specific occupations, for example, in the medical field).

## What type of support do you need in Lithuania?



**Chart 14.** Need for support

During the interviews, the respondents also highlighted specific problems (such as dealing with cases of domestic violence or treatment of serious illnesses) that are difficult to identify quantitatively or assess their prevalence in this study. On the other hand, even if these problems are relevant only for a small part of individuals who arrived from Belarus, their solution, if possible, would require additional governmental or non-governmental efforts.

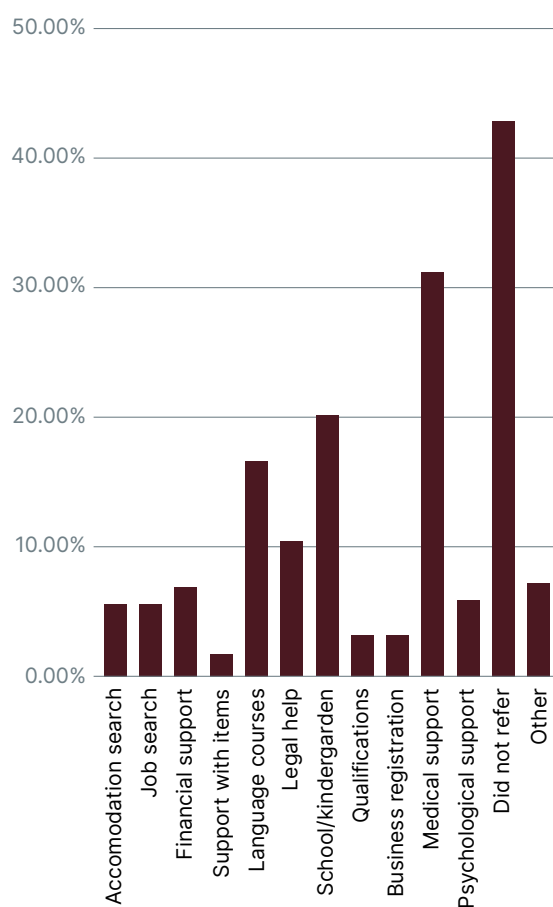
**II** *I think that the problem of domestic violence is also topical. It may not be very common, it is not visible and I have no idea how to solve it. If you have moved with your family and you have nothing, no income, then you are very vulnerable, sometimes you are even prohibited from working. When you are in another country, you don't know where and whether you can turn to somewhere, where you can stay temporarily.*  
Interview with respondents

## Assessment of education and health services in Lithuania

Only slightly more than half of the respondents (55.71%) used the services of the healthcare system in Lithuania, 29.62% used the services of the education, training or guardianship system of minors. The persons who used these state services, when asked to assess the services according to the 10-point system, assessed the quality of the services positively. The respondents assessed the work of the healthcare system at an average of 7.25 points, and the education and training services at an average of 8.01 points.

The fact that the aforementioned services are used by a rather small part of the individuals is related to the relatively young age of the respondents as well as the fact that women are more likely to administer issues of children's activities and health issues (i.e. only about half of the respondents). However, the challenges that Belarusian citizens face in those areas are likely to be universal.

For what type of support do you refer to the national, municipal institutions or non-governmental organizations?



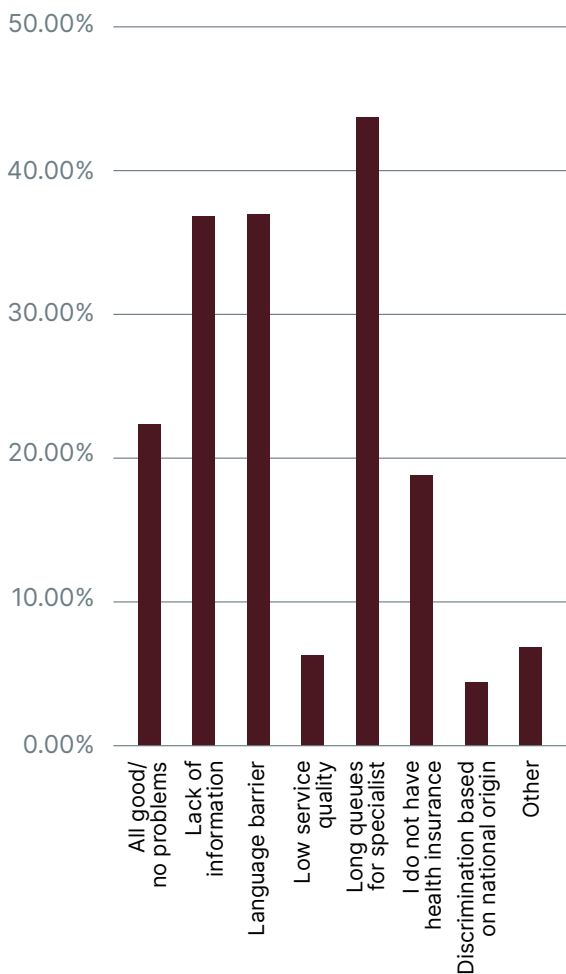
**Chart 15.** Search for support

A fifth of the respondents (22.50%) stated that they had not faced any difficulties in the field of healthcare. Long specialist waiting time remains the main challenge in the healthcare sector (43.75% of the respondents encountered this problem). 36.88% of the respondents answered that they encountered a language barrier and the same share of the respondents stated that they faced a lack of information (how and when they can register, who and when can receive free medical assistance, it is not always possible to immediately find a specialist who speaks a foreign language). For about a fifth of the respondents (18.75%), the most pressing problem is that they do not have health insurance. This problem is topical for individuals who have humanitarian or Schengen visas and who are not yet employed. Persons who do not have a temporary residence permit in Lithuania do not have the opportunity to register self-employment and pay health insurance and social insurance contributions themselves. Pregnant women are the most vulnerable in such a situation

(without health insurance, the costs of prenatal care and childbirth services are particularly high). Among other problems, study participants cited the fact that private health insurance (especially if purchased in Belarus) virtually never covers the cost of treatment. Challenges in obtaining the COVID-19 vaccine and staff misconduct were also mentioned.

**It is very difficult, of course, for those who come with serious health problems, when the treatment is very expensive, for the elderly people. If a person has a humanitarian visa, medical services are chargeable and very expensive. Similarly, in a situation when there are children in the family, the treatment costs are very high. A separate group, although it may be quite small, is people with HIV and tuberculosis. In this situation, the person needs to continue treatment to survive.**  
Interview with respondents

What kind of difficulties did you face in the healthcare sector in Lithuania?



**Chart 16.** Issues in the healthcare sector

In the field of education, approximately half of the respondents who had experience in using these services (50.62%) did not encounter any problems. About a fifth of the respondents (19.75%) indicated a language barrier and difficulties in adaptation as the main problems in schools and preschool facilities. The lack of information is a smaller challenge in this area than in receiving medical services (it was faced by 9.88% of the respondents) but administrative challenges and a complicated admission procedure are relevant for 14.81% of the respondents. 8.64% of the respondents named the lack of psychological support for children as a pressing challenge, another 8.64% mentioned other challenges, such as the general lack of places at educational institutions where the language of instruction is Russian, especially after the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine, the quality and content of textbooks in Russian, and the lack of high-quality Lithuanian language courses for children).

## Activism in the diaspora and plans for Belarus

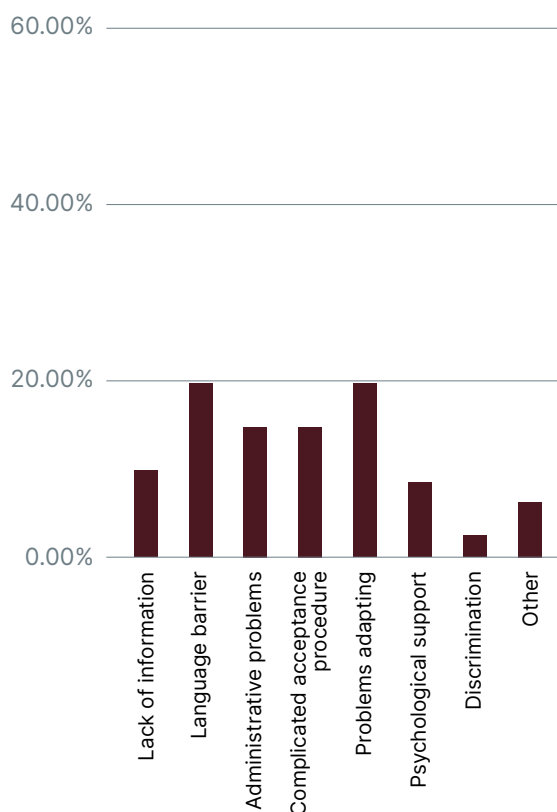
Doubts about the prospects of returning to Belarus is the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine which is not directly reflected in the survey but became evident during the in-depth interviews. In in-depth interviews, the respondents named the fact that they manage to continue to engage in activities aimed at changes in Belarus as one of the biggest achievements after moving to Lithuania (restructuring of relocated organizations, new projects, participation in protests, implementation of educational activities intended for the diaspora or assistance to newly arrived persons were mentioned).

**There are three types of relocatees. The first come and forget Belarus. The second remain completely on the political agenda and do not assimilate. And the third, who adapt but keep politics in their lives, want to influence opinion.**  
Interview with respondents

The broken ties with relatives, friends and colleagues who left in Belarus, as well as the fact that some of the Belarusians who arrived do not have time or oth-

er resources to continue participating in civic activities, were indicated as one of the biggest losses. Nevertheless, involvement in the diaspora's initiatives remains high among the Belarusians. 76.25% of the respondents stated that they knew the diaspora organizations operating in Lithuania, while 35.77% stated that they were involved in their activities. 34.48% of the respondents answered positively to the question of whether they intend to return to Belarus if the opportunity arises, 20.69% of the respondents answered negatively, and 44.83% indicated that they could not answer. During the in-depth interviews, a deeper context of the answers was revealed: the role of Belarus in the war with Ukraine raised serious doubts as to whether the current regime in Belarus (and the attitude of Western countries towards Belarus) could change in the near future.

### What kind of problems did you face in the education and care for the minors sectors, if you use these services?



**Chart 17.** Problems in the education sector

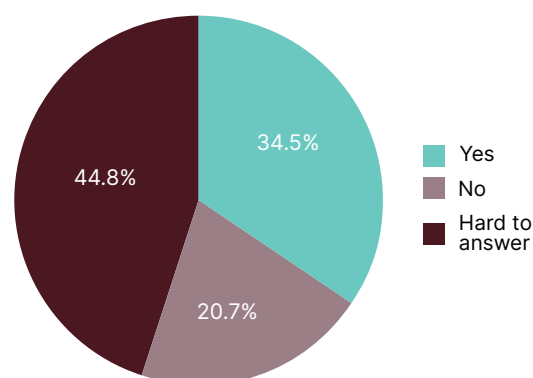
*Before February 24, if the government had changed, we would have returned. After February 24, the situation is no longer the same. Even if the regime changes, the prospects for the country will be very, very poor. Belarus is involved in a very terrible story, and we will hardly be able to launder the reputation of the country in our generation. In the past, for example, Belarusian IT companies were a certain quality mark, or, as they say, were a positive connotation. Now the situation is obverse. Even if Putin left, Lukashenka left, there would be many years of transformation ahead.*

*I won't go back until many changes happen: full independence from Russia, change of the regime, and free elections. Until the activities of NGOs become safe, until when there are no repressions in general.*

Interview with respondents

In other words, the involvement of the Belarusian regime in Russia's war in Ukraine became a signal to Belarusians that the factors hindering the success of the revolution are not only the regime in Belarus, a local change of the regime would not necessarily be transformative, and the events of 2022 will leave long-term political, social and economic consequences, relevant even after the change of the political system.

### Are you planning to go back to Belarus?



**Chart 18.** Prospects of return

# Conclusions and recommendations

Studies on the integration of people forced to emigrate from their country is not a completely objective and easy experience: the people participating in interviews and surveys have to balance between a multiple sense of responsibility (comparing their situation with the situation of those who remain in the country, the situation in Ukraine, etc.), the necessity to take advantage of the opportunity to express their needs and worry about appearing ungrateful or doubts that expressing the needs will not be used for the purposes of domestic politics.

The purpose of this study is to encourage non-governmental and governmental institutions of Lithuania to pay attention to the needs expressed by and to sensitively evaluate the comments of the relocatees. People who have moved to Lithuania do not have the opportunity to vote, and a standard “social contract” between the government and the population is not an option for them. In such cases, one has to rely on the needs expressed during surveys and the assessment of the situation. Open, good-natured communication between state institutions and politicians about which needs can and cannot be met (and for what reasons) would be the next step in developing a healthy relationship of trust.

In summary of the information obtained during the surveys and interviews, the following most important conclusions and recommendations to state and non-state Lithuanian institutions working with emigrants from Belarus can be distinguished:

- The influx of Belarusians to Lithuania does not create significant costs for the budget. On the contrary, it is very likely that the economic impact is positive: by becoming actively involved in the labor market and developing businesses, Belarusian relocatees potentially create more benefits compared to the support provided by Lithuanian institutions to those individuals who need it. Social programs in Lithuania are used by only 10% of Belarusians. In addition, some of the programs used by the incomers are implemented by non-governmental organizations. This would confirm the assumption that Belarusians contribute to the growth of Lithuania's prosperity in an economic sense.
- Although the majority of the Belarusian relocatees have a source of income and do not need

comprehensive state protection, it is important to ensure their involvement in the economic life of Lithuania as quickly as possible. Proficiency in the Lithuanian language is a priority need because the respondents (whose structure, most likely, corresponds to that of all Belarusians living in Lithuania) seek maximum employment. According to the data of the survey, a fifth of the relocatees would like to be able to work on a self-employment basis or develop a business and thus create jobs for themselves and others. Enhancing the availability of Lithuanian language courses for all age groups and promoting self-employment are particularly important in order to increase the financial stability of women and the psychological well-being of families.

- The war in Ukraine created new challenges for Belarusians who moved to Lithuania. The relatively high flow of refugees from Ukraine and the more favorable conditions created for Ukrainian citizens to integrate into the labor market did not cause tension between Belarusians and Ukrainians in Lithuania, but fueled mistrust between the Belarusian diaspora and Lithuanian institutions. Most lacking things are communication and explanations about the reasons for more favorable conditions for refugees from Ukraine and whether this can change. In the long term, more certainty is needed regarding the application or non-application of different status to those arriving from Belarus and those arriving from Ukraine.
- Belarusians also feel to be further vulnerable due to the fact that Belarusian agencies can use their consular services as an additional means of surveillance and pressure. Consular services of the Republic of Belarus are often required in order to obtain migration status in Lithuania for the purposes of work, study and to perform actions related to family status. In this regard, flexibility and attention to individual situations is very necessary. The administrative changes in Lithuania's migration policy also cause a sense of insecurity and tension, even if they are not related to political decisions regarding sanctions against Belarusian citizens.
- The separation of the Belarusian opposition, civil society and independent media from the political regime involved in the war in Ukraine was a particularly important political signal in the spring of 2022. However, continuity and reassurance (clarity in the long term) of such a Lithuanian policy is extremely desirable. With a lack of certainty, the status of relocators remains in an

informational vacuum that encourages political manipulation and hinders successful integration.

- Russia and Belarus' aggression against Ukraine became a signal that temporary relocation in Lithuania could transform into that of a long-term nature. Such a situation can stimulate the desire of Belarusians (both individuals and organizations) to integrate more strongly in Lithuania. Currently, only about a third of the respondents would be ready to return to Belarus in the event of the change of the regime. The main factors driving the uncertainty are Belarus' dependence on Russia and Russia's role as an aggressor in the region. Despite this, the involvement of the Belarusian diaspora in civic activities aimed at changes in Belarus remains very high (about one-third of the respondents actively participate in them, and more than two-thirds of the respondents know about such initiatives).
- It is important to note that there are several groups that are relatively small in the overall context, but face disproportionately greater personal challenges: these are individuals awaiting a decision on asylum and deprived of access to the labor market; individuals facing domestic violence; individuals with critical and chronic illnesses as well as pregnant women who do not yet have health insurance. More active cooperation of institutions with the non-governmental sector should be encouraged in order to ease the situation of these most vulnerable groups.
- Belarusians in Lithuania face the same challenges that are acute for all Lithuanian residents. However, based on the positive assessment of the quality of living (most respondents rated it at 8 points out of ten or higher), it can be assumed that people who came from Belarus understand such problems well and usually do not consider them as discrimination targeted specifically on them. However, like other groups of refugees (using the term "refugee" in a broad sense), these challenges are more difficult for them to overcome due to the absence of an institutional and social system ensuring them security as well as the fact that these challenges manifest themselves in the context of drastic life changes. Among the main challenges, the most important are inflation, worry about possible military aggression against Lithuania, lack of places at children's educational institutions, long waiting time in healthcare institutions (and the lack of information about the functioning of the healthcare system), extremely high rents, reluctance

to allow individuals with children to declare their place of residence in rented dwelling (and the illegal housing and labor market). During the interviews, the need to receive more information in Russian from state institutions about civil protection if there is a risk of Russia's aggression was also emphasized.

- Specific challenges were also noticed: due to the decision of the Belarusian political regime to get involved in Russia's war in Ukraine, Belarusians in Lithuania face additional mistrust (reluctance to employ, rent housing, inappropriate treatment in public places). Almost one-fifth of the respondents faced such situations after the outbreak of the war. During the interviews, the respondents noted that such cases decreased after the assurance from the Lithuanian government that discrimination would not be tolerated in Lithuania. However, it is important to stay focused on the issue of potential discrimination.
- For some Belarusians, the decision not to issue tourist visas to residents of Belarus became extremely acute. The issue of visas was emphasized in most of the interviews (perhaps because it was an important issue during the period when the interviews were conducted). Some of the respondents mentioned that due to the fact that tourist visas were not issued, it was no longer possible to meet relatives in Lithuania. Another part of the respondents also emphasized that due to the suspension of tourist visas, persons facing repressions cannot leave Belarus or they have to do it illegally (a considerable number of asylum seekers cross the border between Lithuania and Belarus illegally). There are, however, relatively few asylum seekers in Lithuania, and it is also important to emphasize that persons who illegally crossed the border between Belarus and Lithuania do not necessarily apply for asylum in Lithuania. It should be noted that the inability to leave in such situations is often associated with a great deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus, and less so with Lithuania's visa policy. From the end of 2021, criminal charges for alleged offences that previously were treated as administrative offences are already being brought and the accused are banned to leave the country. In such cases, the person cannot leave even with a humanitarian visa. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations that help individuals apply for humanitarian visas can take measures to raise awareness of the mechanisms of obtaining a humanitarian visa.

- The stable and secure situation of relocatees from Belarus in Lithuania is a part of Lithuania's national security, but more often not in terms of risk, but in terms of resources. Belarusian non-governmental organisations providing support to Ukraine work in (or partially function from) Lithuania, and they cooperate with Lithuanian civil society organizations for common goals. Belarusian independent media and repressed

persons who left Belarus are active in Lithuania. In the short term, cooperation with the organizers of the aforementioned civic initiatives and the media ensures a better understanding of the processes of the Belarusian regime, which can be vital. In the long term, high-quality and friendly coexistence can become an important basis for good bilateral relations.



# Endnotes

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