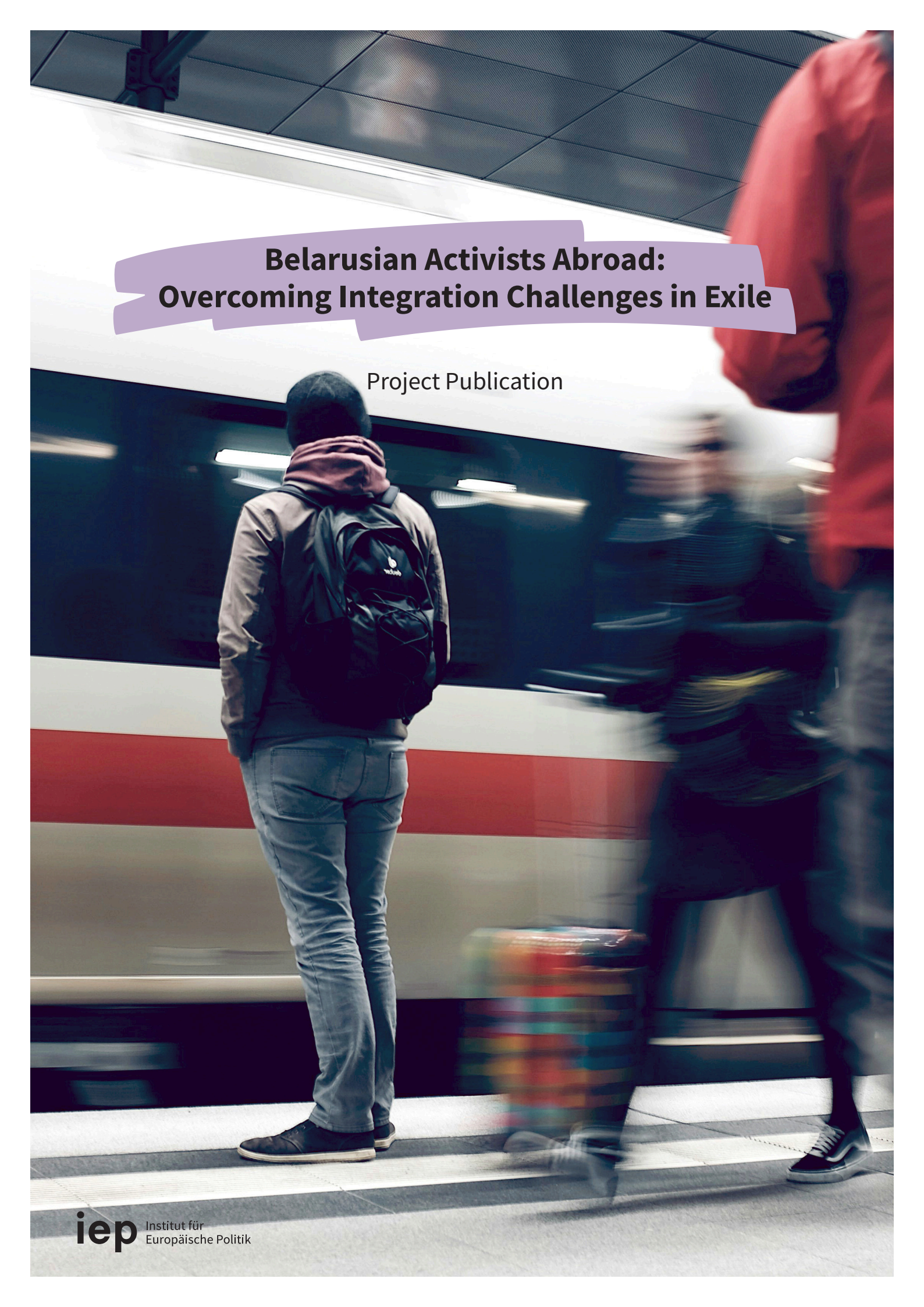


A photograph of a person with a backpack standing on a train platform, looking at a passing train. The person is wearing a grey jacket and blue jeans. The train is white with a red stripe. The background is blurred, showing other people and the train's motion.

Belarusian Activists Abroad: Overcoming Integration Challenges in Exile

Project Publication

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Background	5
What does Activism Beyond State Borders Mean?	6
Methodology	8
 1. Overview of legislation and legal practices	9
Germany	9
Poland	10
Lithuania	10
Ukraine	11
Summary on legal frameworks	12
2. Case Study Germany	13
2.1. Migration and Legalization	13
2.2. Integration and Support	16
2.3. Awareness and Spread of Information	20
2.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives	20
2.5. Summary on Germany	22
3. Case Study Ukraine	23
3.1. Migration and Legalization	23
3.2. Integration and Support	24
3.3. Awareness and Spread of Information	26
3.4. Recommendations Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives	26
3.5. Summary on Ukraine	27
4. Case Study Poland	28
4.1. Migration and Legalization	28
4.2. Integration and Support	31
4.3. Awareness and Spread of Information	32
4.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives	32
4.5. Summary on Poland	33
5. Case Study Lithuania	35
5.1. Migration and Legalization	35
5.2. Integration and Support	39
5.3. Awareness and Spread of Information	40
5.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives	41
5.5. Summary on Lithuania	43
6. Comparative analysis	45
7. Conclusion and advice for Policy Makers	47
Policy Recommendations for German Authorities	48
8. References & Secondary sources	50
9. Annex: Legal framework	52

Belarusian Activists Abroad: Overcoming Integration Challenges in Exile

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Introduction

In recent years (2020-2024), Belarusian civic activists fleeing political persecution have sought refuge in surrounding countries, including Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Their experiences reveal the complexities of migration and integration policies as well as the challenges faced by individuals seeking asylum and international protection. This research aims to explore the intersection of national legislation and the realities encountered by Belarusian migrants in these four countries through interviews with civic activists in exile and the analysis of legislation. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of migration policies in these countries reveal the diversity of approaches taken by these nations in integrating foreigners, providing access to the labor market, offering social support and protection. While some countries have developed comprehensive frameworks aimed at attracting international talent and safeguarding refugees' rights, the situation of Belarusian migrants reveals specific challenges that demand tailored solutions. Issues such as socio-political exclusion, the lack of support and, even more than that, direct repressions from the Belarusian government, difficulties in passport renewal, and challenges in obtaining necessary documents due to political restrictions underscore the need for a nuanced approach to migration policy in host countries. To address these issues effectively, a revision of existing legislation is essential, focusing on the development of specialized programs, simplification of document acquisition procedures, support in integration, and provision of legal and psychological assistance to Belarusian citizens in exile. By examining the gap between policy intent and the recent experiences of Belarusian diaspora, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on migration policy adaptation and responsiveness to the needs of individuals fleeing political persecution. It underscores the importance of flexibility and agility in addressing evolving migration challenges and reaffirms the commitment to upholding humanitarian principles in the face of shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Keywords: *migration, integration, Belarusians in exile, civic activists, diaspora, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine.*

Background

The emergence of a cohort of Belarusian activists in exile is rooted in the political upheaval and repression that has characterized Belarusian society under the authoritarian rule of Alexander Lukashenka. The political leader, who has been in power since 1994, has maintained a tight grip on power through repressive measures, manipulation of elections, and suppression of dissent. His regime has been widely criticized for human rights abuses, including political persecution, censorship, and crackdowns on civil liberties. The catalyst for the exodus of Belarusian activists into exile can be traced back to the disputed presidential election held in August 2020. The election, which saw Lukashenka claim victory with an implausibly high margin of votes, was marred by documented allegations of widespread fraud and irregularities. The announcement of Lukashenka's victory sparked mass protests across Belarus, with millions of citizens taking to the streets to demand free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners, and an end to the regime's authoritarian rule.

In response to the protests, the Lukashenka regime launched a brutal crackdown on dissent, deploying security forces to violently suppress demonstrations and arrest thousands of protesters, opposition figures, and civil society activists. Many activists faced arbitrary detention, torture, and other forms of persecution, prompting them to flee the country in search of safety and asylum.

The decision to seek exile was not taken lightly by Belarusian activists, many of whom had been directly involved in grassroots movements, opposition politics, and civil society initiatives aimed at promoting democracy, human rights, and social justice in Belarus. However, faced with escalating repression and the threat of imprisonment or violence, they were left with little choice but to leave their homeland in search of refuge and protection, particularly in Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 became the next global threat that strongly impacted Belarusians all around the world. They encountered mistrust for the actions of Belarusian authorities in supporting the Russian aggression.

The exodus of Belarusian activists into exile has had profound implications for the opposition movement and civil society in Belarus. After relocation, individuals face challenges in adapting to life in exile and rebuilding their routine in foreign countries. Even though they find it challenging to continue to organize and mobilize from abroad, they support each other and raise their voices leveraging their international networks and connections to support the struggle for democracy and human rights in Belarus beyond its borders.

What does Activism Beyond State Borders Mean?

The commitment shown by Belarusian civic activists in exile can be described as transnational activism.¹ The term refers to the mobilization of individuals, groups, and organizations across national borders to advocate for political change, human rights, and social justice on issues that transcend the state's boundaries. It involves collaboration, networking, and solidarity among activists from different countries, often facilitated by advancements in communication technology and globalization.

At its core, transnational activism recognizes that many contemporary challenges, such as human rights abuses, social inequality, require to be addressed with a deep understanding of the sociopolitical context which offers multidimensional projections on the situation of Belarusian individuals in exile. Transnational activism among Belarusian civil society in exile represents a dynamic and multifaceted response to political repression and human rights abuses under the regime of Alexander Lukashenka.² Fleeing persecution in their homeland, Belarusian activists have sought refuge in neighboring countries. However, their experiences in exile are characterized by challenges stemming from both the repressive policies of the Lukashenka regime and the legislative frameworks of their host countries, which often fail to adequately distinguish between them and the Belarusian government.

In the case of the Belarusian civil society in exile, transnational activism involves the mobilization of individuals and organizations across borders to advocate for political change, human rights, and democratic reforms in Belarus.³ These activists utilize various strategies, including lobbying efforts of the diaspora and social media activism to raise awareness about the situation in Belarus. They support fellow activists still inside the country, and motivate international actors to take action in support of the diaspora.

One of the primary challenges faced by Belarusian activists in exile is their perception by host countries as a potential security risk or being affiliated with the Belarusian government. This perception can lead to heightened scrutiny, restrictions on their activities, and limitations on their rights, including access to asylum, residence permits, and freedom of movement.

Moreover, the legislative frameworks of hosting countries often lack specific provisions or mechanisms to address the unique needs and challenges faced by Belarusian activists in exile. This can result in gaps in legal protection, inadequate support services, and limited opportunities for integration and participation in society. As a result, Belarusian activists often find themselves in a precarious legal and social position, struggling to navigate complex bureaucratic procedures and secure their rights and safety in their host countries.

While overcoming these challenges step by step, Belarusian civil society in exile between 2022 and 2024 builds a base for further engagement in transnational activism, drawing on their resilience, resourcefulness, and solidarity with fellow activists inside and outside the country. Through their collective efforts, they strive to amplify the voices of those silenced by repression, uphold the principles of democracy and human rights, and

¹ Tarrow, S. (2005). The New Transnational Activism.

² Brown, C. S. (2022). Overcoming the 'Barrier of Fear' in Order to Resist: the 2020 Protests against the Lukashenko Regime in Belarus.

³ Tarrow, S. (2005). The New Transnational Activism.

work towards a peaceful and democratic future for Belarus beyond its borders. Transnational activism thus emerges as a vital tool for Belarusian activists in exile to overcome challenges posed by authoritarianism, build international solidarity, and advocate for justice and the protection of human rights of victims of Lukashenka's regime.

Transnational activism ideally involves a close relationship with civil society at home, as activists abroad work to amplify the voices and needs of those within the country. However, in highly repressive contexts like Belarus, this connection can be severely restricted. Despite these challenges, civil society at home remains crucial for providing on-the-ground information, coordinating efforts, and ensuring that the activism abroad remains relevant and impactful. The relationship between civil society actors abroad and those in the home country is often theorized through frameworks emphasizing solidarity, resource exchange, and strategic collaboration. Theories such as the boomerang model suggest that international allies can help bypass domestic blockages by exerting external pressure on repressive regimes. This dynamic is particularly relevant in Belarus, where activists abroad act as crucial intermediaries to bring international attention and resources to support domestic civil society under severe restrictions. Increasing repression in Belarus significantly impacts transnational activism by limiting communication, increasing the risk of repression, and reducing the effectiveness of in-country activities. To cope, activists must adopt more secure and innovative methods, including using encrypted communication tools, relying on trusted intermediaries, and finding creative ways to transfer information and resources into the country. Similar movements, built by diasporic organizations also try to change the political situation in the respective countries or reach certain aims (such as Iranian Alliances Across Borders, Students for a Free Tibet, Armenian General Benevolent Union, etc.).

Methodology

To track the challenges faced by Belarusians abroad, in November and December 2023, the authors conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including civic activists, lawyers, and social workers, across four countries: Germany, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. Each country yielded seven in-depth interviews, providing a diverse range of perspectives on the experiences and challenges faced by Belarusian citizens in exile. Participants were selected based on their expertise, involvement in civil society, and firsthand knowledge of the situation of Belarusian migrants.

Data Collection. The interviews were conducted both in person and online, depending on the participants' preferences, security concerns, and logistical constraints. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews explored various aspects of the experiences of Belarusian migrants in exile, including their reasons for leaving Belarus, the challenges they encountered in their host countries, and their perceptions of migration policies and legal frameworks. In addition to the interviews, open-source information and secondary data were collected and analyzed to provide context and background information on the situation of Belarusian citizens in exile. This included news articles, reports from international organizations, and academic publications detailing the political, social, and economic conditions in Belarus and the experiences of Belarusian migrants seeking refuge abroad (such as, for example, Korshunau (2023)⁴ or Libereco (2024)⁵).

The interviewees came from diverse backgrounds, including the areas of human rights, journalism, NGOs, and activism. The respondents' statuses varied, with some having permanent residence and others awaiting decisions on their asylum applications. All relocated to Ukraine after the 2020 crackdown on protests in Belarus.

Data Analysis: The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to coding, categorizing the data into relevant themes, and identifying recurring patterns and trends across participants and countries. Challenges faced by Belarusian migrants, their interactions with migration policies, and their perceptions of legal frameworks were identified and examined in depth. The analysis of legislation pertaining to Belarusian refugees seeking asylum in Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine involved a comparative review of relevant legal documents, including national asylum laws, regulations, and procedural guidelines. This comparative analysis aimed to assess the extent to which existing legislation aligned with international standards and the perceptions of activists interviewed.

Limitations: This report is presented from the perspective of Belarusian activists focused on the challenges they face after relocating to Germany, Ukraine Lithuania, and Poland. Our primary objective is to explore the difficulties and experiences of these activists in the context of displacement, integration into new cultural and political environments, and their ability to withstand the pressure of the Belarusian authoritarian regime. Consequently, this report does not cover instances where Belarusians may have abused the system of humanitarian assistance, as such cases fall outside the scope of our research. Additionally, we do not make comparisons with the situation of Russian activists or Ukrainian refugees, as our focus is specifically on the unique situation of Belarusian activists. Also, we did not include the perspective of public officials dealing with cases involving Belarusian activists because our focus is on the personal experiences and challenges faced by the

⁴Korshunau, H. (2023). A snapshot of the Belarusian diaspora: Ties and prospects, https://newbelarus.vision/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Diaspora_Eng.pdf (access 5 July 2024).

⁵Hansen, I. and Murphy, A. (2024): "I feel like a fish out of water" Three Years of Belarusian Exodus and Exile. Libereco, April 2024.

activists themselves, rather than the administrative or governmental response to their situations.

The authors express their gratitude for the efforts of organizations providing assistance to Belarusians and acknowledge their invaluable contributions to the improvement of the situation of Belarusian activists after their relocation. However, the report aims to highlight problematic areas that remain unresolved at the time of its writing. This is not a criticism of the international system but is intended to enhance the collective efforts in supporting Belarusian migrants. Our intention is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by this group while acknowledging that there are other perspectives and issues not addressed within this study.

Ethical Considerations. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting the interviews, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and data security. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. The research adhered to ethical guidelines and principles of respect, beneficence, and justice in all interactions with participants and handling of data.

1. Overview of legislation and legal practices in respective countries

(Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine)

The following paragraphs provide an overview of legislation across Germany, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, concerning the legal status of migrants, opportunities for legalization, access to the labor market, provisions for international protection, and the possibility of obtaining travel documents for foreigners and stateless persons, as well as legal practices. Each section details the specifics of national laws, highlighting both similarities and differences among these countries. This overview offers a clear understanding of how each nation approaches the integration and protection of foreigners within their borders.

Germany

Legislation Overview: Germany's legislative framework for the employment and residence of foreigners is primarily governed by the "Residence Act and the Employment Ordinance"⁶. Legislation provides a structured approach to skilled migration and integration, setting clear guidelines for the residence and work of foreign nationals. Germany offers various residence titles, including temporary and permanent settlement permits, the EU long-term residence permit, and special provisions for education, economic activity, humanitarian reasons, and family reunification. This comprehensive and responsive framework reflects Germany's commitment to integrating foreigners into its society. Additionally, Germany's extensive international protection mechanisms include refugee status, subsidiary protection, asylum, temporary protection, and a ban on deportation. These provisions cater to individuals facing persecution, conflict, or serious harm. Germany also issues various types of travel documents to non-residents, including those for foreign nationals, refugees, and stateless persons, enhancing their mobility and security.

Practice for Belarusians: Belarusians in Germany face several practical challenges regarding their legal status and the ability to obtain or renew necessary legal documents. The Belarusian government's decree halting the renewal of passports at its embassies abroad significantly affects Belarusians who cannot return to their home country for fear of political persecution. Without a valid passport, these individuals face difficulties in renewing or obtaining residence permits in Germany. Germany offers pathways for Belarusians to obtain or renew their residence status through individual assessments, though this process requires clear evidence of the risks involved in returning to Belarus. Additionally, Belarusians seeking asylum must provide documentation proving persecution, which can be difficult to secure. Although this problem applies to other countries as well, German administrative bodies, as a rule, do not consider the provided documents convincing, because Belarus is not considered an unsafe country by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another critical issue is the registration of births and the granting of citizenship for children born abroad, potentially rendering them stateless. Legal assistance from NGOs and community organizations is crucial for navigating these challenges.

⁶ Gesetz über den Aufenthalt, die Erwerbstätigkeit und die Integration von Ausländern im Bundesgebiet [Act on the Residence, Employment and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory], https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/aufenthg_2004/ (accessed on 4 June 2024).

Poland

Legislation Overview: Poland's legislative framework for foreigners is encapsulated in the "Law on Foreigners"⁷ and the "Law on Providing Protection to Foreigners"⁸. These laws establish the principles for the stay and protection of foreigners on Polish territory. Poland offers a variety of legalization pathways, including temporary residence permits for employment, business, education, scientific research, volunteering, family reunification, victims of human trafficking, and other special circumstances. The labor market is accessible through work permits, seasonal work permits, the EU Blue Card, student work permissions, and provisions for entrepreneurship. Poland's international protection statuses include refugee status, subsidiary protection, temporary protection, tolerance stay, and humanitarian stay, reflecting its adherence to international and EU standards. The country also issues travel documents for various categories of foreigners (like students, politically persecuted individuals, skilled workers, etc.), further facilitating their mobility and integration.

Practice for Belarusians: Belarusians seeking to legalize their status in Poland face a range of issues, including bureaucratic complexities and economic challenges. The recent political unrest in Belarus and the conflict in Ukraine have significantly increased the number of Belarusian asylum seekers. Belarusians can pursue legalization through various channels, including political asylum, employment, or studying, each with its own bureaucratic hurdles. Employment opportunities are often hindered by language barriers and the recognition of qualifications. Additionally, many Belarusians struggle with expiring or lost passports and limited renewal options at Belarusian consulates. Polish legislation allows Belarusians to obtain a foreigner's travel document, but securing affordable housing and dealing with the legalization of newborn children remain significant challenges. Support from NGOs is crucial, although resources are limited.

Lithuania

Legislation Overview: Lithuania's legislative framework for foreigners is outlined in the "Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners"⁹. This law sets the conditions for foreigners to reside and work in the country. Lithuania provides several pathways for legalization, including temporary residence permits for citizenship restoration, employment, business, study, and special circumstances like protection from political persecution and impediments to deportation on grounds of health issues. The labor market is accessible through work permits, the Blue Card system for highly skilled professionals, seasonal work permits, student work permissions, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Lithuania also offers comprehensive protection aligned with international standards and EU directives, including refugee status, and temporary protection. Travel documents such as alien's passports, stateless person's travel documents, and refugee travel documents are issued to eligible individuals, supporting their mobility and rights.

⁷ Ustawa z dnia 12 grudnia 2013 r. o cudzoziemcach [The Law on Foreigners], <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=w-du20130001650> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

⁸ Ustawa z dnia 13 czerwca 2003 r. o udzielaniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [The Law on providing protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland], <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20031281176> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

⁹ Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymas dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties [Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners], <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/ru/legalAct/TAR.42837E5A79DD/Yuymhquemj> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

Practice for Belarusians: Belarusians in Lithuania face legislative and practical challenges, particularly due to recent stricter migration and asylum measures. The 2021, in response to weaponized migration from the territory of Belarus, amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens introduced more stringent asylum controls, including automatic detention and limited access to legal and bureaucratic procedures. In 2023, to address the same problem of weaponized migration, Lithuania legalized pushbacks,¹⁰ allowing border officials to deny entry and forcibly return migrants without standard asylum procedures, raising human rights concerns. Despite these hurdles, procedural adjustments for temporary residence permits aim to streamline applications for Belarusians. However, economic integration remains challenging due to language barriers and qualification recognition issues, and social integration is complicated by cultural differences and limited social networks. High housing costs further exacerbate these challenges for Belarusians.

Ukraine

Legislation Overview: Ukraine's legal framework for foreigners is built around several key laws, including the "Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons,"¹¹ the "Law on Refugees and Persons in Need of Complementary or Temporary Protection,"¹² and the "Law on Immigration."¹³ These laws establish the foundation for the legal status and rights of foreigners in Ukraine. The country offers a range of legalization opportunities, including permanent residence, refugee status, additional protection from political persecution, employment, international assistance projects, religious activities, NGO activities, foreign business representation, the banking sector, cultural/scientific/educational/volunteering activities, media representation, business ownership/investment, student visas, family reunification, and military service. The labor market is accessible through work permits, employment and 'short-term employment' contracts, provisions for refugees and asylum seekers, seasonal work, student work, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Ukraine provides various forms of international protection, including refugee status, asylum, complementary protection, and temporary protection. The country also issues travel documents to recognized refugees and those in need of complementary protection, facilitating their mobility.

Practice for Belarusians: Belarusians in Ukraine face significant difficulties in legalizing their status, particularly due to the ongoing war. Problems include the cessation of acceptance of documents by state agencies, requirements by Ukrainian authorities for Belarusians to leave the country to update their status without guarantees of reentry, and difficulties applying for residence permits due to the suspension of migration services. Many Belarusians involuntarily become illegal immigrants and are subjected to fines. Despite these obstacles, the State Migration Service of Ukraine has expressed readiness to consider applications individually. Key challenges include obtaining residence permits, navigating asylum procedures, securing employment amidst economic instability, legalizing documents issued by Belarusian authorities, and integrating into Ukrainian society amid language barriers and cultural differences.

¹⁰ Schulten, L. (2023): Lithuania legalizes pushbacks (accessed on 8 June 2024) <https://www.dw.com/en/lithuania-legalizes-pushbacks/a-65495471>.

¹¹ Закон України Про правовий статус іноземців та осіб без громадянства [Law of Ukraine On the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3773-17#Text> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

¹² Закон України Про біженців та осіб, які потребують додаткового або тимчасового захисту [Law of Ukraine On Refugees and Persons in Need of Complementary or Temporary Protection], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3671-17#Text> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

¹³ Закон України Про імміграцію [Law of Ukraine On Immigration], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3671-17#Text> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

Summary on legal frameworks

The legislative frameworks of Germany, Poland, and Lithuania demonstrate comprehensive approaches to the integration and protection of foreigners. Each country has developed detailed laws and policies to manage the residence, employment, and protection of foreign nationals, reflecting a commitment to international standards and the integration of migrants. The situation in Ukraine differs significantly due to the ongoing Russian war.

For Belarusians, each country presents specific challenges:

- Germany: issues with passport renewal, complex asylum processes, and challenges in birth registration.
- Poland: struggle with bureaucratic complexities, economic challenges, and issues with document renewal and legalization.
- Lithuania: stricter migration and asylum measures, economic and social integration challenges, and high housing costs.
- Ukraine: significant difficulties due to war, including cessation of document acceptance and uncertainties concerning their legal status.

Addressing these issues requires tailored programs, simplified document acquisition procedures, and robust integration and support initiatives to ensure the effective inclusion of Belarusian migrants into these host countries.



2. Case study Germany

2.1. Migration and Legalization

Acquiring a **Standard German Schengen Visa** presents considerable challenges, as data provided by the former German ambassador to Belarus shows, indicating a backlog of approximately 50,000 visa applicants in 2023. Despite the embassy's processing capacity of about 400 visas per day, the progress in reviewing visa applications is notably slow. The interval between the application submission and the embassy appointment spans six months, with an additional two months typically required until the embassy visit itself.

In the case of a **Humanitarian Visa** and emergency circumstances, expedited visa issuance within a brief time-frame, often a matter of hours, is facilitated through the direct contacts of the Civil Society Organization (CSO) Belarusische Gemeinschaft RAZAM e.V. with the German Embassy in Belarus. The remaining respondents indicated that obtaining a humanitarian visa for Germany is not typically feasible. This underscores the rarity of the mechanisms involved in applying for and acquiring such a visa, necessitating direct personal contact either with the German Embassy or with a reputable intermediary organization, such as RAZAM e.V., which maintains a connection with diplomatic authorities.

If an individual finds themselves situated in a safe third country, such as Georgia or Turkey, the process of applying for and receiving a humanitarian visa in Germany may extend to a similar duration as that of a standard visa application.

Unlike Lithuanian and Polish humanitarian visas, the German variant is not classified as a national visa but falls under **the Schengen visa category**. Consequently, it does not provide the bearer with the opportunity to seek employment within the country, apply for residency, or enjoy other associated rights. At the same time these visas allow travel through Europe, while national visas don't.

Work Visa

Qualified individuals who are already residing in Germany can pursue a **Working (National) Visa**, which requires securing employment with an employer willing to complete the requisite documentation and submit it to the German Ministry of Labor. Subsequently, the Ministry conducts an assessment to ensure the applicant is suited to the position and that there are no eligible German or EU citizens available for the role. This process typically spans 1-3 months and hinges on factors such as the applicant's proficiency in German, the authentication of their academic credentials by the state, and the willingness of an employer to navigate bureaucratic procedures.

When applying for a **work/student visa** and subsequent residency in Germany, individuals are required to demonstrate their financial capacity to support themselves through various means:

- Maintaining an account with a minimum balance of 12,000 EUR, from which withdrawals are restricted for a period of one year. Withdrawals from this account are typically limited to fixed amounts per month. This

requirement poses a significant obstacle for many Belarusian migrants, as the specified sum of money is often beyond their means.

- Securing guaranteed scholarship support from a university or fund when applying for a visa or residency for educational purposes.
- Providing a guarantee letter (Bürgschaft) from a relative or individual residing in Germany who has sufficient income to support the migrant. This document assures the embassy or migration department that the sponsor will ensure the migrant's well-being and safety, assuming full responsibility for their welfare.

Throughout the application process, the applicant is unable to obtain employment and does not receive any financial or other type of assistance from the state. Consequently, they must possess adequate financial resources to cover legalization expenditures and sustain themselves during this period. Given the high cost of living and rent in Germany, as well as a lack of funds required for legalization, the majority of Belarusians opt for relocation to other countries.

An additional challenge for migrants seeking employment in Germany is the **recognition of their diplomas and education** by the German authorities. Firstly, all documents must be apostilled, a procedure that can only be completed in Belarus, and is therefore not feasible for migrants that relocated due to political persecution. Secondly, the process of diploma validation can be time-consuming and requires extensive documentation preparation that prolongs the time of waiting till being employed.

Moreover, there persists a notable **lack of awareness among German employers** regarding the complexities involved in hiring foreign workers, posing additional challenges for migrants to convey and explain all the requirements to the potential employer.

The inability to legally work and the lack of funds to sustain themselves in Germany frequently place migrants in challenging circumstances, compelling them to seek **illegal/half-legal employment**. This contributes to an expansion of the shadow economy. Nonetheless, illegal employment in Germany is far less prevalent than in Poland and Lithuania, where it constitutes a wide spread issue at the national level, significantly affecting the labor market.

Residence permits

Individuals possessing compelling evidence of persecution in Belarus may seek a **visa for international protection under Section 22** of the German Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz), which states: "A foreigner may be granted a temporary residence permit for the purpose of admission from abroad for reasons of international law or on urgent humanitarian grounds," and later receive **temporary residency permit on the basis of the international protection**.¹⁴ However, a restriction of this visa is that an application from within Germany or other EU member states is not possible. Rather, asylum seekers must be based either within Belarus or in another non-EU country.¹⁵ This asylum visa application process is protracted, as the individual initially applies to the German Embassy in Belarus, after which the embassy forwards the documents to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for scrutiny and verification of the applicant's papers and circumstances. The Ministry assesses the severity of persecution on a case-by-case basis and determines the required documentation and evidence. Since 2020, only 300 such visas have been issued for Belarusians. In contrast, following the commencement of mobilization for the

¹⁴ Alternative to humanitarian residency permit in Poland and Lithuania.

¹⁵ According to the Dublin Regulation the responsibility for examining an asylum application falls primarily upon the member state where the asylum seeker first entered the European Union. This principle is known as the "first country of entry" rule.

armed forces in Russia on September 21, 2022, approximately 2,000 such visas were granted to Russian citizens.

The duration of the process for obtaining **a temporary residency permit under Section 22 of the German Residence Act** varies considerably, contingent upon factors such as the characteristics of the applicant, the quality of the presented evidence for persecution, and the involvement of intermediary organizations advocating on behalf of the applicant. For instance, individuals with prominent public profiles, substantial evidence of persecution, and endorsement from reputable organizations in communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may expedite the process, sometimes concluding it within 1-2 weeks. That said, as our respondents state:

“In less favorable circumstances, the process may extend to as long as 9 months. Regrettably, throughout the application period, applicants receive no assistance or support.”

Typically, to initiate an application for **any residency permit** in Germany, individuals must, first of all, schedule an appointment at the local Migration Department. However, obtaining such an appointment can be extremely challenging, with a waiting period typically ranging from 1 to 3 months, as reported by migrants. Subsequently, the process of acquiring the residency permit itself generally extends over a duration of approximately 8 weeks. Nevertheless, some activists have reported waiting for the issuance of their residency permits for up to 7 months, leading them to remain in the country illegally.

To apply for residency, a migrant in Germany must provide evidence of public health insurance, proof of a registered place of living in Germany, documentation demonstrating financial self-sufficiency (similar to visa requirements), evidence of study or employment in Germany, or evidence of persecution if a residence permit is sought under Section 22. Additionally, a specific migration form must be completed. In contrast to Lithuania and Poland, migrants in Germany seldom encounter challenges in registering their place of residence, as landlords typically rent out properties legally, pay taxes, and are legally obliged to register tenants at the rental address. In Lithuania and Poland, landlords frequently exploit the situation to their advantage by selling registrations in the apartments they own.

Asylum

Another option available to individuals is to seek **asylum**, a process that can be initiated when the individual is already in Germany. However, asylum seekers encounter challenges as they are compelled to reside in refugee camps and are deprived of the right to work in Germany. Nonetheless, an asylum seeker may be exempted from residing in a refugee camp if they can provide evidence demonstrating their ineligibility for such placement, such as being engaged in ongoing studies at a university with official registration. Apart from basic shelter and food, asylum seekers may receive language courses, though their availability is inconsistent. Belarusian CSOs specializing in migration and legalization matters in Germany, such as RAZAM e.V., caution Belarusians against pursuing asylum and suggest it only as a last resort due to the adverse conditions within refugee camps, lengthy procedural delays lasting several years, and the elevated likelihood of rejection. According to statistics provided by a representative of RAZAM e.V.:

“Approximately 1,000 Belarusian nationals have applied for asylum since September 2020. Of these, 37 applicants have received favorable decisions, 248 have been met with negative outcomes, while the remainder are awaiting adjudication.”¹⁶

¹⁶ The statistics provided are as of the time of the interviews, namely December 2023.

Both applications for asylum and international protection under Section 22 are quite complex and require **substantial evidence of persecution** in the form of protocols, photos, videos, official documents, and more. Unfortunately, many Belarusians lack paper evidence due to the deliberate refusal of security forces and the KGB (Committee for State Security) to provide records of arrests, searches, seizures of property and equipment, as well as other documentation that could substantiate the applicant's allegations of persecution.

Additionally, many respondents highlighted **outdated and non-digitalized approaches** in the application process, wherein

“applicants are required to print out and mail a substantial amount of paperwork, sometimes resulting in an application packet totaling up to 150 sheets.”

Some Belarusian activists which relocated allege **favoritism** in the adjudication of applications for international protection or asylum among Belarusians. Specifically, they observe that highly prominent Belarusians, such as sports figures and renowned artists, tend to receive favorable decisions, whereas less visible activists who have encountered persecution in Belarus and subsequently fled often receive negative outcomes.

Separate difficult cases involve Belarusian individuals who sought refuge from political persecution in Ukraine and were present during the Russian invasion, subsequently fleeing the conflict and now facing limitations in applying for international protection under Section 24. This is due to the Ukrainian authorities' previous decision to grant Belarusians legal status in Ukraine without providing residency documentation. Consequently, **Belarusian war refugees** lack evidence of their presence in Ukraine during the period of the Russian incursion and, therefore, cannot use the same mechanisms of legalization and support as Ukrainian refugees.

2.2. Integration and Support

Germany offers integration programs, social protection, health insurance, financial and other types of support only to **refugees with official asylum status or persons under international protection as stipulated by Section 22 of the German Residence Act**, but only after a positive decision has been made. Throughout the application process, no support is provided by the state, apart from asylum seekers, who are accommodated in refugee camps (they are not allowed to live somewhere else) where they receive basic sustenance and have access to situational language courses, plus minimal financial support up to 200 euros per month.

Refugees holding official asylum status or individuals under international protection who demonstrate severe financial hardship may also be eligible for **legal assistance from a social lawyer provided** by the state. However, migrants often express dissatisfaction with the efficacy and motivation of these legal representatives to address their cases.

“Legal support and consultation on migration issues for Belarusians in Germany and other related topics are primarily facilitated by RAZAM e.V. or by Belarusians who have undergone the migration process themselves and are able to share their experiences.”

A significant challenge for asylum seekers, in addition to being compelled to reside in a camp and facing restrictions on employment and financial hardship for up to 3 years, is the lack of choice regarding their **assigned location**. The camps are typically situated in small, rural areas where residents lack access to necessary information and support from NGOs and the Belarusian diaspora. Furthermore, the state frequently relocates asylum seekers after they have already settled in, requiring them to adapt to a new environment and different social circumstances once again.

The asylum seekers, applicants for international support, and other Belarusian migrants may receive modest financial aid in case of successful fundraising, legal counsel, humanitarian assistance, and other forms of **support from Belarusian and international CSOs/NGOs** in Germany. Examples include the Belarusische Gemeinschaft RAZAM e.V., Arbeitskreis Belarus, Deutsch-Belarusische Gesellschaft e.V., German Marshall Fund, Libereco e.V. – Partnership for Human Rights, German Marshal Fund, German Caritas Association, IT-Talaka e.V. (primarily focused on supporting relocated Belarusian IT specialists), among others. Additionally, some assistance is offered by the **Belarusian diaspora**, primarily in the form of humanitarian aid and advisory support.

In case of **international protection under Article 22** of the German Residence Act, the state provides the same support to the Belarusian migrants, as to Ukrainian war refugees under Article 22 S.1 (AufenthG): “A foreigner may be granted a residence permit for admission from abroad for reasons of international public law or urgent humanitarian reasons”.¹⁷ Specifically, this entails a monthly allowance of around 400 euros per month, permission to work in Germany, standard health insurance, social securities, access to social housing, integrational and German language courses. Once a refugee or internationally protected person secures employment and becomes liable for taxes, the monthly allowance is adjusted based on their income, and social security and health insurance contributions are deducted from their salary in accordance with the German labor code.

It is important to note that many respondents highlighted the exceptional quality of the German **healthcare system**, emphasizing migrants’ ability to receive medical procedures and treatments not available in their home countries, and even access to covered services such as consultations with psychologists and dental work, which are typically paid for in other countries. Nonetheless, the extended waiting period for a doctor’s appointment can be a significant deterrent.

However, the **housing situation** in Germany, particularly in major cities, poses a significant challenge due to high demand and limited availability of rental properties. This issue is compounded for migrants who are unfamiliar with the language and the intricacies of the housing market. As a consequence, they are frequently deceived by scammers and find themselves in challenging circumstances. Moreover, interviewees stress, that, owing to the substantial demand,

“Landlords often impose stringent requirements on prospective tenants, such as presenting salary statements to demonstrate sufficient financial capacity, providing employment contracts, and providing other documentation, which may pose challenges for migrants to obtain, even without considering the language barrier.”

¹⁷ Art. 22 S. 1, Gesetz über den Aufenthalt, die Erwerbstätigkeit und die Integration von Ausländern im Bundesgebiet [Act on the Residence, Employment and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory], https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/aufenthg_2004/_22.html (accessed on 4 June 2024).

Despite Germany's persistent shortage of qualified personnel, migrants continue to face significant **challenges in securing employment**, primarily due to the language barrier. Proficiency in the **German language** is a prerequisite across various employment sectors, as well as for effective social interaction with colleagues and integration into German society. Thus, as our respondents note,

“language proficiency represents a formidable obstacle for [Belarusian] migrants in Germany, impacting not only their employment prospects but also their ability to integrate and socialize within society.”

Courses for **professional requalification** are available to migrants, subsidized by the state. Additionally, specialized **technical education** is widespread, where individuals study a technical field while simultaneously gaining practical experience through work. As part of such programs, participants receive a salary for their work, and upon completion, many have the opportunity to remain employed at the same workplace where they underwent requalification. However, it is worth noting that such education is often conducted **in German, posing a challenge for many migrants**. For example, the minimal prerequisite for enrolling in a requalification course is B1, while for certain universities, C1 proficiency is mandated.

A significant advantage in Germany is its **tuition-free higher education system** for programs taught in German. While university education in English typically incurs fees, scholarships are available, offering Belarusian migrants the opportunity to pursue further studies or acquire education in fields more relevant to the German labor market. Nevertheless, **language barriers** remain a significant obstacle for migrants seeking to access these educational opportunities.

Support for **vulnerable migrant groups** in Germany is primarily offered by local and international CSOs. These entities encompass various initiatives, including women's organizations, LGBTQIA+ support groups, and organizations catering to people with disabilities. While there are currently no NGOs specifically dedicated to supporting Belarusian vulnerable groups, there are organizations focused on serving Russian-speaking communities in Germany, which may also include Belarusians (such as Intercultural Center for Women, “Belarusische Gemeinschaft RAZAM e.V.”, “Deutsch-Belarusische Gesellschaft e.V.” etc.).

Refugees and internationally protected individuals with an official status, such as single mothers, large families or families with **dependent children**, are eligible for supplementary financial assistance from the state, a family package of health insurance coverage and access to larger social housing units.

Similarly, **individuals with disabilities** can access additional support from the state. However, the process of validating disabilities in Germany is intricate and bureaucratic, often spanning a year or two, if not longer. Once the disability is validated, a person with disability is provided with hi-tech modern equipment such as electric wheelchairs, beds with lifts, cars for people with disabilities, or other special devices, to facilitate their everyday life and participation in society. Speaking generally, Germany exhibits a much more **advanced barrier-free environment** and support compared to other countries. Another issue is that the pension for people with disabilities is often not sufficient (especially for migrants who have to rent an apartment) and once an individual with a disability enters the workforce, even at minimum wage, state benefits are typically withdrawn.

When considering the **labor market for individuals with disabilities** in Germany, it is important to note the existence of legally enforced quotas stipulating the minimum number of employees with disabilities that larger companies and enterprises must hire. However, in practice, these requirements are frequently unmet, with many employers opting to pay fines rather than employ individuals with disabilities. As a result, according to data from

the Statista Research Department,¹⁸ in 2023 the employment rate of individuals with severe disabilities in Germany stood at approximately 4.53%.

The environment for **LGBTQIA+ individuals** in Germany exhibits a markedly greater degree of safety, tolerance, and support compared to Belarus and other Eastern European nations. However, the extent of this support varies significantly depending on whether an LGBTQIA+ individual resides in a major urban center such as Berlin or in smaller towns and rural areas across Germany. Major German cities typically host numerous support groups, initiatives, communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to the welfare of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Nevertheless, language barriers may present challenges once again, underscoring the importance of acquiring proficiency in English and, preferably, German to fully engage with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The issue of **gender discrimination and equality** in Germany, while less pronounced than in Eastern European countries, still persists according to statistical data. Although there is a notable presence of women in the labor force and in upper management positions, men continue to dominate statistically. The FüPoG¹⁹ (Act for the Equal Participation of Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the Private and Public Sector) was implemented in 2015, establishing a mandated quota of at least 30% representation for both genders in leadership roles within the private and public spheres. However, in practice, this legislation has resulted in a maximum representation of 30% for women, with men occupying the remaining positions in executive boards, politics, and other leadership roles. Therefore, the existence of a so-called **glass ceiling** remains a prevalent issue in Germany. However, certain state institutions, universities, and funds offer support programs, mentorships and scholarships tailored for women in tech, business, and other typically men-dominated fields.

For **migrant school children**, navigating the educational landscape in Germany poses significant challenges exacerbated by **language barriers**. Given that all classes are conducted in German, students are required to fully engage with the German curriculum, regardless of their comprehension levels. Moreover, migrant children are obligated to attend both the general German curriculum and integration and language classes. This, as our respondents say,

“leads to compounded stress experienced in adjusting to a new environment, trauma resulting from oppression or persecution experiences in their home country, and inability to socialize with peers.”

Additionally, the **German education system operates differently** from systems in other countries. Upon completing the fourth year of schooling, students in Germany are streamed into either Gymnasium (which prepare students for higher education, i.e. university) or regular schools (that lead to receiving vocational education) based on their academic performance. Consequently, migrant children entering Germany in the fifth grade or beyond encounter obstacles in enrolment, particularly in Gymnasium, which necessitates **proficiency in German** and successful completion of **complex entrance exams**. This discrepancy often perpetuates **inequality**, hindering migrant children's prospects of accessing higher education in Germany as they struggle to compete with their German counterparts. Thus, migrant students, even those who excelled academically in their home

¹⁸ Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderung auf dem Arbeitsmarkt in Deutschland nach Teilindikatoren im Jahr 2023, Beschäftigungsquote Schwerbehinderter (in %) [Inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market in Germany by sub-indicators in 2023, employment rate of severely disabled people (in %)], <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1233749/umfrage/inklusion-auf-dem-deutschen-arbeitsmarkt/> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

¹⁹ FüPoG II - The gender quota on the Executive Board, July 27, 2022, Covington Alert. Link: <https://www.cov.com/en/news-and-insights/insights/2022/07/fupog-ii--the-gender-quota-on-the-executive-board> (accessed on 3 July 2024).

countries, may find themselves relegated to regular schools, and consequently receive vocational secondary education primarily due to language barriers.

Moreover, **school attendance is rigorously enforced** in Germany, with significant fines (varying on the state - from EUR 35 to EUR 300 for a day of absence) imposed on parents if their children are found to be absent during school hours. This enforcement poses additional challenges for migrant children and their parents, as **children may resist attending school** due to difficulties in socializing and understanding the language of learning.

Another challenge for migrant parents is **enrolling** their children in school due to the lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedures. Some parents have reported waiting up to a year to enroll their child in school.

Furthermore, **securing kindergarten** placements for children at preschool age presents a significant challenge due to the scarcity of available spots in kindergartens and a shortage of other professional child care providers. It is important to note that this shortage affects both migrant and German families alike, highlighting broader systemic issues within the German childcare infrastructure.

2.3. Awareness and Spread of Information

Awareness among migrants regarding available support programs in Germany significantly varies depending on their **location**. In major cities like Berlin, abundant information resources are accessible, supplemented by a sizable Belarusian diaspora that offers guidance. Conversely, in smaller towns and rural areas, informational resources for migrants are markedly scarce. However, online communication channels such as Belarusian and Russian-speaking Facebook groups provide valuable insights and support and connect migrants with the communities in their neighborhood.

Belarusian NGOs and representatives of Civil Society in Germany express a keen interest in disseminating more information and organizing additional initiatives and events for the Belarusian migrant community. Nevertheless, they are constrained by lack of financial resources and limited capacity of their staff who are mostly volunteers.

2.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives

The majority of respondents indicated that the support provided by the state, both in terms of **financial assistance** and through **programs aimed at supporting activists**, such as scholarships, fellowships, and grants for NGOs/CSOs, is inadequate. Particularly, they note:

“While such programs do exist, the demand significantly outstrips the supply.”

Additionally, the support programs for activists and NGOs are often of short duration, typically lasting from 3 to 6 months, leading to instability in the lives of Belarusian activists and NGOs, who must frequently navigate periods without assistance. This instability is particularly pronounced for cultural figures, artists, and journalists. Financial stability and the absence of institutional support pose significant challenges for Belarusian NGOs in Germany, impacting their capacity to sustain their activities. Additional funding is required to facilitate volun-

teer compensation, provide employment opportunities for Belarusian exiles, and support a broader range of projects and initiatives aimed at assisting Belarusian migrants and fostering cultural endeavors.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some Belarusian NGOs in Germany receive funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and German foundations, although the funding has been cut recently. In contrast, Belarusian NGOs in Lithuania and Poland lack support from their respective host countries and primarily rely on crowdfunding, membership fees, and assistance from international organizations for their survival and operations.

Furthermore, there is a conspicuous **lack of support for vulnerable migrant cohorts**, including women with children, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. This gap could be addressed through the allocation of increased financial resources and humanitarian aid tailored to these specific demographics, alongside the implementation of targeted projects aimed at addressing their needs.

Furthermore, the prevalence of **fatigue and burnout** within the Belarusian civil society sector and diasporas is increasingly apparent. Numerous Belarusian activists lack the energy and resilience to engage in activities and projects, leading them to withdraw from the field of activism. Consequently, there is a clear necessity for anti-burnout initiatives and psychological support for representatives of the Belarusian civil society. This could encompass consultations with psychologists or participation in retreats aimed at fostering resilience and well-being. Additionally, many Belarusian migrants who have experienced oppression and persecution often struggle psychologically due to the traumatic nature of their experiences. This highlights a need for psychological support, which can be prohibitively expensive.

Many Belarusian activists also assert that support and opportunities for various migrant groups are not equitable. Specifically, they note that Ukrainian migrants receive significantly more benefits and assistance from the state. Additionally, numerous programs offer support, scholarships, and fellowships exclusively available to Ukrainians, while other migrants are neglected regardless of their situation. Representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in Germany advocate for **equal support**, and that Belarus needs to be recognized as an unsafe country to simplify migration procedures. It remains to be seen whether this work will lead to some practical developments, however the example of Sweden, which recently recognized Belarus as an unsafe country, after several years of indifference towards the situation of Belarusian migrants, offers some hope.

The respondents also emphasized the necessity of **reducing the bureaucratization and duration of migration procedures**, if possible. Furthermore, they advocated for a **decrease in the financial capacity requirements** for relocating individuals. They also articulated a desire to lessen the German language demands for at least politically persecuted migrants and refugees to ensure their access to work, education, requalification, and other integration processes.

The interviewees also highlighted the necessity for **dialogues with local authorities** to apprise them of the challenges encountered by migrant communities and collaborate on finding solutions.

2.5. Summary on Germany

To sum up, the processes of migration and legalization in Germany are often characterized by high expenses, bureaucratic intricacies, and, ultimately, a lack of positive decisions for many Belarusians. This is attributed to

several factors, including the high cost of living and lack of support during the application period, language barriers, strict procedures of application for asylum and international protection, the German state's limited interest in Belarusian refugees or politically persecuted migrants, and the fact that Germany is rarely the first country of entry for Belarusians (Dublin Regulation), making migration due to political persecution and legalization challenging thereafter.

Hence, the predominant demographic among Belarusian migrants in Germany typically comprises economically well off migrants – individuals of high qualification who possess the financial means to undergo visa application and other legalization procedures, as well as sustain themselves financially in Germany post-migration.

Meanwhile, German authorities are interested in attracting a greater influx of skilled labor across various professional domains and are in the process of revising its migration legislation to streamline migration and legalization procedures.²⁰

Only refugees granted official asylum status and individuals classified as internationally protected persons under Section 22 of the German Residence Act are entitled to comprehensive support from the German state. However, obtaining these statuses is challenging for Belarusians due to stringent evidentiary requirements for demonstrating persecution. Those unable to attain these statuses can receive modest support from Belarusian and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as from the Belarusian diaspora in Germany.

However, once an individual successfully proves political persecution in their home country and obtains asylum or international protection, their legal residency in the host country is guaranteed, and they become eligible for comprehensive state support. But such occurrences remain rare.

The German language is a key and significant impediment for Belarusian migrants and migrants willing to enter the German labor market, integration, and socialization within the host society. Moreover, knowledge of the German language plays a crucial role in educational pursuits and requalification endeavors within the country. Consequently, the majority of migrants relocating to Germany already possess proficiency in German or at least possess rudimentary language skills, which are essential for survival, particularly in smaller municipalities and rural areas.

Support for vulnerable migrant groups in Germany is primarily offered by local and international NGOs, supplemented by state provisions such as additional assistance for families with dependent children, single parents, large families, individuals with disabilities (once a disability is validated), and other marginalized groups.

Migration to Germany may be conducive for highly skilled migrants proficient in German who possess the financial means to undergo visa application and other legalization processes, as well as are able to afford the cost of living in Germany. Pursuing higher education in Germany can be an excellent choice for students and applicants proficient in the German language, owing to the high quality of education and the absence of tuition fees.

²⁰ German immigration policy: What's changing in 2024? Oliver Pieper, January 1, 2024, Deutsche Welle. Link: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-immigration-policy-whats-changing-in-2024/a-67753472> (accessed on 3 July 2024).

3. Case study Ukraine

3.1. Migration and legalization

Until 2022, Belarusian citizens arriving in Ukraine were accepted on the basis of Article 26 of the Ukrainian Constitution as well as legal provisions in the field (see Table 1 below). These laws as well as the 1992 Agreement on visa-free entry of citizens of the Republic of Belarus to Ukraine and citizens of Ukraine to the Republic of Belarus, the 2009 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on visa-free travel of citizens authorized Belarusians to arrive in Ukraine with no visa requirements and to legally stay there during 180 days (90 days per 6 months).²¹ In 2020, as our respondents note,

“Against the backdrop of mass immigration of Belarusians to Ukraine due to the domestic crisis, the law was changed and allowed Belarusians to stay up to 180 days in Ukraine, instead of the previous 90 days per six months²².”

As of 2024, Belarusian citizens did not need a visa to enter Ukraine. That said, as another interviewee noted, the access is limited, and

“Only Belarusians who have valid residence permits or those officially invited for political reasons and other types of circumstances are allowed to enter Ukraine.”

To **apply for a residence permit**, Belarusians are required to present their passport, valid health insurance, and the payment of an administrative fee. Temporary residence permits are issued for one year, with the possibility for further extension. Although Belarus was known for mass violations of human rights and Belarusians were immigrating to Ukraine even before 2020, no policy has been designed to develop a more permanent solution for this group, and asylum applications were rarely considered and approved. As a consequence, with mass political immigration after 2020, Belarusians settled down as economic migrants rather than refugees, staying in Ukraine for 180 days and, meanwhile, finding employment opportunities to stay legally afterwards.

This state-of-affairs, in turn, created problems in the context of the **escalation of Russia’s war on Ukraine in 2022**. Many people are in a legal ‘grey zone’ due to the Lukashenko regime’s involvement in the invasion. As one-year residence permits started to expire, many people found themselves in an uncertain position as to how to prolong it and extend their stay in Ukraine.

“Many Belarusians reportedly fled to EU countries due to the war, but also various legal issues linked to their stay in Ukraine.”

²¹ О вступлении в силу Соглашения между Правительством Республики Беларусь и Кабинетом Министров Украины о безвизовых поездках граждан, подписанного 12 июня 2009 года [On the entry into force of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on visa-free travel of citizens signed on 12 June 2009], https://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/bbcb7645156d9c38.html (accessed on 4 June 2024).

²² Деякі питання перебування в Україні громадян Республіки Білорусь [Some issues of stay in Ukraine for citizens of the Republic of Belarus], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1302-2020-п#Text> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

In the first months of the war, the Free Belarus Center²³ conducted a survey, asking Belarusians to report on their situation in Ukraine. Based on many responses, the organization started to draw attention to the cases of discrimination and problems related to legalization of Belarusians' residence in Ukraine.²⁴

In October 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine announced the adoption of a Resolution according to which the residence permits issued before 24 February remained valid²⁵. However, several respondents said:

“Belarusians started experiencing uncertainty with regard to the legalization of their stay in the future and potential changes of legislation.”

Since the decision of Lukashenka's regime to stop issuing Belarusian passports abroad, many Belarusians whose passports approached the expiration date or expired faced further difficulties, even with moving within Ukraine, where in the context of war, document checks occur more frequently.

Following the Ukrainian legislation, Belarusians are entitled to **apply for refugee status** if they had to flee their country due to political reasons. In practice, this process is lengthy, and there are few cases when such status was granted. This situation is not new, however. Even before the 2022 invasion, it could take years before the application was processed, and some Belarusians left Ukraine for another country in the EU. To start the process, a person is required to report to the State Migration Office of Ukraine with an application to be recognized as a refugee. On the day this application is received, a certificate of application for protection in Ukraine is issued. In the absence of the national passport, this document may serve as the only ID for some people. However, it is only accepted by few employers and often does not provide access to social services.

3.2. Integration and support

Since Ukraine re-gained its independence in 1991, its migration policies have been based on a number of international treaties and agreements, also transposed into the national legislation (see Table 1 below). However, despite such declarations, the practical implementation and design of migration policies contain flaws. First of all, as one interviewee stressed,

“there does not seem to be a standardized, coherent policy towards refugees in Ukraine. The example of Belarusians, but also, for example, citizens of Central Asia, whose applications are often rejected, demonstrate a lack of willingness to acknowledge the risks and threats these people face at home.”

As a consequence, people fleeing persecution in their countries of origin often opt for staying as economic migrants or with time leave to other countries, mainly in the EU. In addition, even those Belarusian opponents of the regime who joined Ukraine's Armed Forces continue to face problems with legalization of their stay in Ukraine and access to bank accounts and other social services.²⁶

²³ The Free Belarus Center (FBC) is a non-profit initiative created in Ukraine in 2020 to provide humanitarian and international advocacy responses to the political crisis in Belarus.

²⁴ See Appeal of Free Belarus Center to Ukrainian authorities from 2022: <https://freebelarus.center/2022/08/09/zverennya/> (last access 3 July 2024).

²⁵ The text of the Resolution (in Ukrainian) can be found at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1202-2022-%D0%BF> (last access 3 July 2024).

²⁶ See for example, a report from Belsat (in Belarusian): <https://belsat.eu/news/11-04-2023-vajskovy-bilet-zsu-nichoga-ne-znachyts-uk-rainski-bank-admoviusya-abslugouvats-bajtsa-palka-kalinouskaga> (last access 3 July 2024).

Second, Ukraine, similar to other Central and Eastern European countries, experiences higher levels of emigration than immigration. As of 2020, the UN reported that Ukraine was home to 5 million migrants, with around 76% of them coming from Europe.²⁷ Most immigrants come from the so-called “post-Soviet space”, and thus could more easily integrate facing limited language barriers. As a consequence, as our interviewee noted,

“despite the existing laws and regulations, there does not seem to exist a systematized policy or approach towards immigrants and state-driven programs of support.”

On the other hand, the non-governmental sector seemed to be more vibrant and oriented to accommodate the needs of people arriving in Ukraine. Organizations such as **The Right to Protection (Pravo na Zahist)**²⁷ tailored their activities to the needs of immigrants by providing legal assistance and information. At the same time, there are no known governmental or non-governmental programs of support tailored to the needs of migrants and refugees from vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ community.

However, the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion became a turning point for the position of Belarusians in Ukraine. In 2022, bank accounts of Belarusian citizens were blocked for the first time. Reportedly, with the help and lobbying by the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Belarusian journalists residing in Ukraine could get access to their accounts again.

Nevertheless, the second blocking of bank accounts took place in 2023 with no exceptions. As a consequence, Belarusians struggled, for example, to receive salaries from employers. Oftentimes, having no other option, employers – based in the EU – had to be very flexible and agree to transfer payments to the Ukrainian accounts or to pay in cash upon visits of their employees to EU countries.

Asylum seekers faced further difficulties with receiving financial support provided by the UN. While the transfer was arranged via the Ukrainian Post (*UkrPoshta*), post offices reportedly agreed to accept only Ukrainian passports or relevant ID documents. Belarusian documents and a certificate from the migration service were not considered, making it impossible to receive these payments.

Similarly, CSOs and various initiatives, which had relocated or were established in Ukraine after 2020, had to adapt their activities with the onset of the full-scale war. In particular, as respondent noted,

“[Since 2022] CSOs reoriented their work towards helping Ukrainians alongside Belarusians.”

However, in the post-2022 period, additional challenges emerged. For instance, one organization started to organize evacuations from Ukraine. However, because they are a Belarusian organization and used buses with Belarusian number plates, fake information started to circulate that the buses were going to Belarus. Although evacuations continued, some people stopped trusting the initiative. Another challenge is linked to the attempts of such organizations to nuance the position and role of Belarus in the war and express support for Ukraine via cultural activities. In this context, some events – like film screenings, exhibitions, food tasting, commemorations of important events – continued to be held on initiative of local activists or with the support of Ukrainian non-state organizations and activists. However, many of these organizations faced a backlash from the local population. Several interviewees mentioned their perceived lack of knowledge about the situation in Belarus, following the 2020 election fraud.

²⁷ Migration Data Portal: Ukraine, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/ukraine/migration-overview> (last access 3 July 2024).

²⁸ Право на захист [Right to protection], <https://r2p.org.ua/en> (accessed on 4 June 2024).

3.3. Awareness and spread of information

There is **no central hub or organization** that coordinates the process of integration and support upon the arrival of migrants and refugees to Ukraine. None of the interviewed activists mentioned any help from the Ukrainian state beyond the 180 days granted for an extended legal stay. Belarusian migrants mostly relied on their informal contacts as well as Ukrainian and Belarusian networks and friend groups for finding ways of integrating into the local communities and accessing other useful information.

Organizations such as The Right to Protection and **Free Belarus Center** continue to provide legal and informational support to Belarusians. One of the interviewees shared that he had received legal advice and help from The Right to Protection, while others mostly relied on their informal circles and friends to receive further information about their stay in Ukraine.

3.4. Advice Based on the needs of civil society representatives

Belarusian and Ukrainian human rights activists, civil society representatives, and representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in Ukraine have voiced their concerns regarding the legal status of Belarusians in Ukraine and access of Belarusians to social services in Ukraine. Following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, many found themselves in a precarious situation with regards to their residence documents in Ukraine, ability to access bank accounts, and access to education, among other things.

While several Ukrainian (and Belarusian) CSOs have designed different forms of support for immigrants, there has been a lack of coordination and support from the Ukrainian state. Thus, bottom-up initiatives and activities oriented toward helping Belarusians asylum seekers and immigrants have been overshadowed by the higher political dynamics between the two states. While not recognizing the results of the 2020 presidential elections, the Ukrainian government has maintained a rather ambivalent approach to both the regime and the opposition. The context of the war has further marginalized the grassroots activities aimed at helping Belarusian refugees as priorities shifted towards helping internally displaced persons (IDPs) and lobbying for international support for Ukraine.

Belarusian civil society actors, human rights defenders and activists are further worried about the underrepresentation of information regarding the legal status of Belarusians in Ukrainian media. Many cases of discrimination against Belarusian in Ukraine are discussed within the Belarusian diaspora, but do not seem to reach the broader Ukrainian public. While Belarusians try to reach out via cultural and other types of activities, such events often get canceled or blocked due to the public and political agenda towards Belarus.

Against this backdrop, interviewed activists and experts believe that the problems with migration policies could be more efficiently addressed as part of Ukraine's EU integration agenda. While civil societies and activists from both countries continue to advocate for a resolution of discrimination cases and better migration policies, integration of the rights of migrants into the agenda of EU-Ukraine relations could help to streamline and raise the importance of this issue by putting it in the context of the discussion about human rights in general.

3.5. Summary on Ukraine

As of 2024, Belarusians need valid residence permits or official invitations to enter Ukraine. Temporary residence permits are issued for one year and can be extended. Despite political persecution in Belarus, asylum applications in Ukraine are rarely approved, and as a result many Belarusians settle as economic migrants. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine complicated matters, placing many Belarusians in a legal grey zone. The Ukrainian government announced in October 2022 that residence permits issued before the invasion would remain valid, but many still faced uncertainty about their future status.

Ukraine lacks a standardized policy for refugees, often treating Belarusians as economic migrants. Despite laws allowing Belarusians to apply for refugee status, the process is lengthy and rarely successful. Many Belarusians face discrimination and legal challenges, such as blocked bank accounts and difficulty accessing social services. Non-state organizations like The Right to Protection provide legal assistance, but support is fragmented. The 2022 Russian invasion exacerbated these issues, with many Belarusians experiencing further difficulties in legalization and integration.

There is no central hub for coordinating support for migrants in Ukraine. Belarusian migrants rely on informal networks and non-state organizations for information and assistance. Groups like The Right to Protection and the Free Belarus Center offer legal and informational support, but many Belarusians depend on personal contacts.

Belarusian and Ukrainian activists advocate for better legal status and access to services for Belarusians in Ukraine. The Ukrainian state has provided limited support, focusing instead on internal displacement and international lobbying. Improved migration policies could be addressed as part of Ukraine's EU integration agenda, emphasizing human rights and reducing discrimination against Belarusians. Enhanced coordination between civil society and the state, along with greater media coverage of Belarusian issues, is necessary for effective support and integration.

4. Case Study Poland

4.1. Migration and Legalization

As of September 2023, the issuance of **Polish humanitarian visas** for Belarusians escaping persecution has been halted for reasons that remain unclear. Previously, humanitarian visas were typically granted to Belarusians experiencing repression within a timeframe ranging from two weeks to a month and a half. Representatives of the Belarusian House in Warsaw suggest that following the parliamentary elections in Poland on October 15, the consular department **temporarily suspended** the issuance of humanitarian visas pending “new recommendations” on the matter. These forthcoming recommendations are likely to be provided by the newly formed Polish government.

However, the NGOs and CSOs aiding Belarusians facing migration and legalization issues, such as BYSOL²⁹, indicate that avenues for obtaining a humanitarian visa still exist, contingent upon intermediary organizations maintaining direct communication channels with the Polish consulate in Belarus or the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Nevertheless, since September 2023, the criteria for obtaining humanitarian visas have become significantly more stringent, necessitating compelling evidence of persecution, a requirement posing challenges for many Belarusians seeking refuge from repression. Moreover, the processing times for visa applications have considerably lengthened. While previously humanitarian visas were typically granted to Belarusians subjected to repression within two weeks to a maximum of 1.5 months, the current timeframe extends to several months, and sometimes even longer. Although, in comparison with Lithuania, it remains feasible to apply for and receive a Polish humanitarian visa in Georgia, Russia, and Turkey, albeit with a protracted processing period and the prerequisite of substantiating solid evidence of persecution.

The situation regarding visa issuance for Belarusians is also closely linked to the notable **reduction in the diplomatic representation of Poland in Belarus**, a demand imposed by the Belarusian regime. The shortage of staff in embassies and consulates has resulted in prolonged visa issuance procedures and their associated complications.

However, in general, Belarusian migrants in Poland as well as NGOs addressing the concerns of Belarusian migrants and refugees assert that Polish authorities continue to demonstrate considerable **loyalty and support towards Belarusians**. A robust **dialogue** has been established **between the Polish government and Belarusian representatives**. There have been several successful instances of legislative changes benefiting Belarusians, as a result of such dialogues, with additional laws aimed at simplifying the lives of Belarusian migrants in Poland currently under review.

As of January 26, 2024, Poland also ceased the issuance of visas to Belarusian citizens under the “**Poland. Business Harbor**” program, marking another measure taken against Belarusians facing persecution in their homeland. Initially established in 2020 for Belarusian IT specialists and their families, the Poland.Business Harbor program offered various advantages but soon became a means for Belarusians seeking political asylum.

²⁹ For further information, check their website: <https://bysol.org/en/> (last access 3 July 2024).

However, as of September 4, 2023, Poland has reinstated the issuance of **tourist visas** to Belarusian citizens and continues to provide **national work visas**. Nevertheless, securing an appointment at the consulate to submit an application has become exceedingly challenging due to the overwhelming influx of applications. Therefore, Belarusians residing within the country frequently resort to travel agencies to schedule appointments at the embassy or consulate, but their services often come as a financial burden.

The **document package** required for a Polish visa is standard, but in contrast to Germany, there are no stipulations regarding financial resources or the submission of bank account statements.

It is important to note that a humanitarian visa grants the **right to work** in both Poland and Lithuania. While employers in Lithuania may be hesitant to hire individuals with such visas, it has been a common practice in Poland for many years.

Every migrant holding a Polish humanitarian visa is entitled to a **humanitarian residency permit** valid for 2 years. The state does not offer direct support to holders of humanitarian residency permits. However, they are permitted to work in the country and thus contribute to its economy, pay taxes, and consequently avail themselves of social security benefits and healthcare services. It should be noted that individuals with a humanitarian residency permit are prohibited from engaging in entrepreneurship activities, taking loans from Polish banks or purchasing real estate in Poland.

A substantial obstacle faced by many migrants is the protracted process of obtaining a **humanitarian residency permit**. According to interviews,

“acquiring humanitarian residency typically spans from six months to a year due to the large volume of applications and the strain on the Polish migration system. In certain voivodeships (the highest level administrative division in Poland), the procedures have even extended to two years.”

In the event of an **emergency**, legal experts, human rights advocates, and activists advise against waiting for a visa but rather suggest crossing the border without it or seeking refuge in the nearest safe country. A politically persecuted individual may approach the nearest Polish border guard upon reaching the border and declare their need for **international protection** and/or **asylum**. Alternatively, they can flee to the closest safe country that does not require visas for Belarusians. Subsequently, they can apply for a Polish visa in that country and then arrive in Poland, where they can declare their intention to seek asylum at the migration department. However, this route may entail greater length and complexity.

Both asylum and international protection require evidence of persecution, however the requirements for asylum are stricter and not many Belarusians receive official refugee status. After officially announcing the intention to seek asylum, the applicant needs to prepare all the evidence of persecution and migration forms within 2 weeks, submit them to the migration department and go through 1-2 interviews. Our interviewee note:

“The process of asylum seeking could take from 1,5 to 6 months and sometimes more. But usually, all the decisions are made by the migration department in 2,5 months.”

Asylum seekers and those seeking international protection **do not have the right to work**, posing a challenge for some individuals who may resort to illegal employment in construction and other technical fields. The illegal market and shadow economy is a big issue in Poland.

Asylum seekers and individuals seeking international protection are entitled to **health insurance**, funded by the state. This coverage includes emergency medical services as well as treatment for non-urgent medical conditions. However, obtaining appointments with doctors outside of emergency services typically involves waiting several months and may pose challenges.

Upon applying for asylum, individuals who lack accommodation in Poland are offered accommodation in a refugee camp. They receive a one-time financial support of 140 Polish zloty (32.43 EUR) for clothing and basic necessities, along with a monthly allowance of 50 Polish zloty (~11.58 EUR) until a decision on their asylum application is made. Families and pregnant women often receive a separate room in refugee camps.

If an asylum seeker chooses not to stay in a camp, the Polish state provides compensation. This compensation amounts to 25 Zloty (5.80 EUR) per day for a single person, 20 zloty (4.64 EUR) for a family of two, and 15 zloty (3.48 EUR) per person for families of three or more. The total compensation is approximately 180 EUR for a single asylum seeker, 278.20 EUR for a family of two people, and a higher amount for larger families depending on the number of children. Additionally,

*“In the context of Poland, a significant portion of Belarusian asylum seekers are granted what is commonly termed as **additional or complementary protection**.”*

This framework functions as a strategic tool for the Polish state to alleviate the strain on its migration infrastructure and economy, while simultaneously granting protection to individuals lacking sufficient evidence of persecution. Complementary protection entails the issuance of a residency permit in Poland valid for a duration of two years, accompanied by the right to engage in employment within the country. Notably, this designation does not entail financial assistance or integration support from governmental entities. However, in contrast to humanitarian residency permits, complementary protection offers individuals the entitlement to pursue entrepreneurial activities, access loans and mortgages from financial institutions, and engage in real estate transactions within the Polish Republic.

Asylum is given only in rare cases of very serious, well-evidenced persecution,³⁰ danger to life and imprisonments, as well as when a person is enrolled in the INTERPOL base by the Belarusian regime. This does not happen often, because INTERPOL clearly recognizes requests from Belarus as politically charged. However, in some cases, when the Belarusian authorities claim the person for example, evades tax payments, INTERPOL considers the request (as, for example, happened with Belarusian creative director Andrey Gnet³¹). **Refugee status** entails a three-year residency permit and a Geneva Convention Travel Document valid for the same duration. Asylum also includes participation in an individual integration program wherein refugees are assigned

³⁰ According to statistics, published by the Polish Office for Foreigners, in 2022 as many as 3132 Belarusians applied for asylum, with only 174 of them being granted refugee status and 29 being rejected.

³¹ Режиссеру грозит экстрадиция из Сербии в Беларусь [The film director faces extradition from Serbia to Belarus], Sanya Klyayich, February 19, 2024, Deutsche Welle. Link: <https://www.dw.com/ru/reportaz-iz-suda-v-belgrade-belorusskomu-aktivistu-grozit-ekstradiicia-iz-serbii-v-belarus/a-68301043> (last access 3 July 2024).

a mentor and may enroll in language courses, receive assistance with job search, undergo requalification if necessary, and receive consultation on various matters. Moreover, they are eligible for financial aid amounting to approximately 750 Polish Zloty (173 EUR) monthly. Additional financial support is available for single parents and families with children dependent on the size of the household.

4.2. Integration and Support

Only officially recognized refugees who were granted asylum in Poland receive support from the state, including a monthly financial allowance, participation in an individual integration program, access to language courses, assistance with job search, requalification if needed, legal assistance, and other services. However, other migrants may seek assistance from Belarusian and international NGOs and CSOs, such as BYSOL, the Belarusian Solidarity Centre, the Free Belarus Centre, the Partyzanka Initiative, the Belarusian House in Warsaw, the Belarusian Youth Hub, the Country for Life Foundation, various private Belarusian refugee shelters, and others.

These organizations provide a range of services, including emergency and non-emergency evacuation from Belarus, consultations and support with humanitarian visas and residency permits, legal advice on migration issues such as asylum and international protection, humanitarian aid such as clothing and food, fundraising support and financial aid for political prisoners and persecuted Belarusians, psychological support, assistance with integration and requalification courses, language courses in Polish and English, educational and scholarship programs, support and safe spaces for vulnerable groups of Belarusian migrants, cultural projects, co-working and networking spaces, and more.

“Overall, the level of support extended to Belarusians by Belarusians is notably higher in Poland compared to other relocation destinations, which is due to the sizable Belarusian diaspora and the concentration of Belarusian NGOs and CSOs in the country.”

When discussing **integration processes**, Poland emerges as a relatively accommodating country; however, mastering the Polish language presents a significant challenge for many Belarusian migrants. Without proficiency in Polish and/or English, they often encounter a language barrier that hinders their access to qualified employment opportunities and impedes their socialization and integration into Polish society.

Parents frequently encounter challenges when seeking to enroll their children in schools and kindergartens, and Belarusian children are often subjected to bullying by their Ukrainian counterparts. Many Belarusian migrants report instances of discrimination from Ukrainians in Poland, while Polish citizens generally exhibit a greater degree of tolerance.

Turning to vulnerable groups, Poland is known for its **violations of women’s rights**, particularly reproductive rights, although this issue affects the entire Polish community rather than just migrants. LGBTQIA+ individuals generally feel safer in Poland than in Belarus, and the younger Polish population tends to be supportive and tolerant. However, there is an active conservative segment within Polish society.

People with disabilities face numerous obstacles, including challenges in validating their condition and a lack of accessibility and suitable living conditions.

4.3. Awareness and Spread of Information

The general awareness among Belarusian migrants regarding legal migration procedures, support programs, and organizations offering consultations on these topics is relatively high. The majority of relocants receive necessary information and assistance from a variety of primarily Belarusian NGOs and CSOs.

Compared to other relocation destinations for Belarusians, Poland boasts a sizable Belarusian diaspora and a substantial number of Belarusian and international NGOs and CSOs offering extensive support and hosting a diverse array of events and activities for Belarusians residing abroad.

4.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives

Many relocated individuals have reported that the individual integration program is not functioning effectively, and numerous refugees and political migrants who are enrolled in it receive insufficient attention and assistance. This issue is attributed to the high influx of refugees and political migrants from Ukraine and Belarus, overwhelming the Polish migration system and resulting in an insufficient number of mentors to support each refugee. Additionally, the financial allowance for refugees is provided as a single lump sum at the end of the year rather than as monthly payments, leaving refugees without financial support during their initial months in the country. Measures should be taken to **enhance the integration program** and **establish a systematic approach to monthly financial support payments** for refugees. Furthermore, many refugees report that the **allowance of 750 zloty is inadequate** and insufficient to cover basic living expenses in the country.

It is also imperative to **expedite the process of obtaining humanitarian residency permits**, as it often takes even longer than the asylum process and leaves migrants without legal status for extended periods, since their visas already expire. Additionally, migrants are advocating for equal rights in areas such as entrepreneurship and real estate acquisition, similar to those granted under other types of residency permits.

Moreover, many migrants highlight the outdated mechanisms of application procedures and support systems, along with a **lack of digitalization and automation** in migration processes and assistance programs. All documentation must be printed, and notifications regarding migration procedures and status decisions are typically sent via regular mail. Similarly, monthly financial allowances are disbursed in cash at post offices.

Belarusians and other migrants also express a need for **more and higher-quality Polish language courses** as proficiency in Polish is often a prerequisite for obtaining qualified employment. While free courses are available, the demand exceeds the supply, and the quality of instruction is frequently subpar.

When discussing the job market, securing legal, official employment in Poland can be a challenge for migrants, especially those not speaking Polish. They are frequently recruited by labor agencies that hire them in illegal, off-the-books employment without their full awareness. This renders them unwittingly liable for an administrative offense, exposes them to exploitation by employers, including inhumane work conditions, non-payment and deceit, leaving them with nothing.

Another **vulnerable group** of migrants comprises **Belarusian pensioners**, who are ineligible for pensions in Poland. They must earn their livelihood despite varying states of health, which may not always permit en-

agement in employment. Support for such individuals is necessary, as well as for **migrants with disabilities**. They often encounter challenges in validating their disabilities in Poland and receive limited support and inadequate healthcare relative to their condition. Other vulnerable groups that require more attention include released political prisoners and Belarusian veterans of the war in Ukraine. Although programs for their rehabilitation, resocialization, and support do exist, they are often of short duration and do not offer sufficient assistance and support for individuals coping with the aftermath of imprisonment and war.

Representatives from Belarusian NGOs and activists have highlighted the issue of **insufficient financial resources**, which consequently leads to a shortage of qualified personnel within the civil society sector. NGOs often offer inadequate salaries, making them uncompetitive in the labor market for recruiting skilled staff. Additionally, many civil society workers find themselves overburdened, having to fulfill the roles of 2-3 people, leading to burnout and high turnover rates within NGOs.

Furthermore, in an effort to reduce taxes, many NGOs do not officially employ staff but instead engage them as contractors under entrepreneurship agreements. This places workers in a vulnerable position, as they lack health insurance, social security benefits, and paid vacation. The lack of funding also results in poor equipment and the use of illegal software by NGOs, posing cybersecurity risks for these already vulnerable organizations persecuted by the Lukashenka regime. Assistance with finding a proper, legal employment is an important step towards the integration process of a migrant into a country's economy and society and should not be neglected.

Addressing these challenges requires **increased funding** for NGOs and CSOs supporting Belarusian migrants, refugees, and related causes. NGO representatives and activists would also benefit from **psychological support**, as many of them require assistance due to experiences of persecution in their homeland, separation from their families and friends, burnout, depression, and other psychological conditions. Representatives of the third sector also express a desire for **increased cooperation among Belarusian, Polish, and international NGOs** to mutually strengthen each other's efforts and enhance integration processes. Furthermore, Belarusian activists advocate for additional **spaces dedicated to cultural and civic activities** and events for Belarusians, facilitating **community-building and networking** opportunities. Currently, the demand for such spaces exceeds the available supply. Additionally, support and consultation services are required for Belarusians seeking to initiate their own businesses or entrepreneurial ventures in Poland.

4.5. Summary on Poland

In general, Poland exhibits a strong commitment and loyalty to Belarusian migrants and refugees compared to other host countries, offering relatively straightforward migration and legalization procedures. However, the influx of migrants from Ukraine and Belarus has strained the Polish system, leading to lengthy procedures, particularly for obtaining humanitarian residency permits. Additionally, the insufficient Polish diplomatic representation in Belarus and recent elections and change of Polish government further complicate visa issuance processes. Migrants advocate for the digitalization of migration procedures to expedite processes and enhance convenience for migrants and refugees.

Integration into Polish society is generally straightforward, though many migrants encounter language barriers when underestimating the complexity of the Polish language. There is a demand for more and higher-quality Polish language courses to address this issue.

Financial support and integration programs for refugees should be improved as well, but their malfunctioning is primarily linked to the large influx of migrants and refugees from Ukraine and Belarus, that caused the overwhelmed state of Poland's migration system, which was not prepared for such developments.

Some vulnerable groups face difficulties in the Polish Republic, especially pensioners, women, children and their parents, people with disabilities, released political prisoners and Belarusian veterans of war in Ukraine.

Compared to other relocation destinations, Poland benefits from a sizable Belarusian diaspora and numerous Belarusian and international NGOs that maintain high awareness among migrants regarding legalization and migration procedures, as well as available support programs.

Representatives of NGOs highlight funding shortages, resulting in a lack of qualified staff, burnout, and other issues among activists and members of Belarusian civil society. Consequently, there is a need for psychological support and anti-burnout activities.

Belarusian migrants and NGO representatives express a desire for cooperation with Polish and international CSOs, and advocate for more activities, spaces, civic, and cultural events for Belarusians, given the substantial Belarusian diaspora in Poland and the shortfall in meeting their demands.

5. Case study Lithuania

5.1. Migration and Legalization

In 2022, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs **suspended National and Schengen visas** to citizens of the Russian Federation and Belarus in solidarity with Ukraine and its people undergoing Russian military aggression and ensuring the interests of the national security of Lithuania.³² This measure provides exceptions only for individuals of Lithuanian descent, family members of citizens of EU countries (including the Republic of Lithuania), and applications endorsed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. Hence, it is increasingly difficult to apply for and obtain Lithuanian Schengen or National Work visas for Belusians.

However, the humanitarian corridor that was established in 2020 by Lithuanian authorities to rescue Belarusians fleeing the repression still exists but in a very limited way and is managed predominantly by Freedom House³³ which allows to establish a “one-window mechanism” for consideration of cases. This corridor allows Belarusians under threat to get a humanitarian visa in the Lithuanian consulate in a quick fashion (in the most extreme cases within the period between one to several days) to ensure their quick departure from the country. Also, they can get a consultation on the most safe and discreet ways to cross the border. Freedom House, authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, plays an important role in maintaining the humanitarian corridor, issuance of both humanitarian visas, and humanitarian residency permits. The direct or mediated connection with this organization (via other trusted NGOs or activists) facilitates the application for humanitarian visa, and later humanitarian residency in Lithuania.

The **requisite documentation** for applying for a Lithuanian Humanitarian (National) visa includes a mediation letter from Freedom House,³⁴ a narrative detailing persecution in a free-form format, proof of insurance, a passport-sized photograph, and completed visa and political application forms. The political application form requires applicants to articulate their stance toward Russian authorities, their alignment in the conflict in Ukraine, and attribution of crimes, among other aspects. Only applicants who formally declare their support for Ukraine and disapproval of the actions of the Russian and Belarusian regimes are eligible for visa issuance.

Regrettably, this situation engenders significant **insecurity for political migrants** fleeing persecution. Primarily, they are compelled to complete such a form while still residing in Belarus. Additionally, Lithuanian authorities have publicly announced this requirement as mandatory for the completion of the political application form and the regular application form, thereby alerting the Belarusian regime to the fact that every recipient of a Lithuanian visa is considered a political adversary, potentially subjecting them to detention and arrest.

Regardless, the **visa application process** must be closely coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Freedom House, or its intermediary organizations. Once the applicant has gathered all the necessary evidence of persecution or found a third person who can intercede on their behalf, the visa application procedure tends to proceed swiftly and smoothly. After establishing contact with relevant organizations and proving being politically persecuted by the Belarusian regime, the applicant must wait approximately one week to secure an appointment at the Lithuanian Embassy in Belarus, followed by an additional week to obtain the visa itself.

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs suspends the issuance of visas to Russian citizens, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-suspends-the-issuance-of-visas-to-russian-citizens:34901> (last accessed on 4 June 2024).

³³ Galles, P. (2023, June 5). *Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile* (Doc. 15783). Report for the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Group of the European People's Party, Luxembourg. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/report-addressing-the-specific-challenges-faced-by-the-belarusians-in-/1680ab3442> (last accessed on 3 July 2024).

³⁴ Euroradio (2024): Belarusians have a hard time in Lithuania, <https://euroradio.fm/en/belarusians-have-hard-time-lithuania> (last accessed on 9 June 2024).

That said, some persecuted activists find themselves without sufficient time and are often compelled to resort to illegal means of fleeing or take a plane to any available safe country, particularly if they are under a non-exit obligation due to a pending criminal case.

In **urgent situations** necessitating **immediate departure** from the country, legal experts and human rights advocates advise against waiting for a visa and instead recommend seeking refuge in an available safe country such as Georgia or Turkey. Those countries are safe for fleeing Belarusians, meaning, they will not deport them and/or launch a criminal persecution of them following orders from Russia/Belarus. However, due to the current high demand for such flights, the associated costs are prohibitive for many migrants. Emergency evacuation guidance is offered by some organizations such as BYSOL and Dapamoga.³⁵ Freedom House strongly opposes illegal border crossings, even for the sake of rescue. BYSOL and Razam (another Belarusian NGO engaged in Belarusian migration affairs, working in several countries) typically adhere strictly to the regulations imposed by Freedom House and advise people to leave to the nearest safe country.

Unfortunately, there still exists a **limited awareness** among Belarusians regarding the humanitarian corridor and their opportunity to secure a humanitarian visa to leave the country. Besides, many individuals are hesitant to reach out to Belarusian organizations for assistance, fearing potential leaks of their personal information. Furthermore, numerous individuals have reported extended waiting periods when attempting to communicate through intermediary organizations, with some indicating that responses were only received after a month, by which time they had already found alternative means of departure.

Important to note, **migrants who initially flee to countries like Turkey or Georgia** face significant challenges. According to respondents, obtaining a Lithuanian visa in these countries is often deemed impossible by the Lithuanian Embassy, which requires residency in Turkey or Georgia for application. However, again, individuals with direct personal contacts NGOs in Lithuania, dealing with the verification of cases, may find assistance in obtaining a visa regardless of residency regulations.

In exceptional circumstances, **Schengen visas** may also be issued, but solely through direct channels with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the mediation of a reputable international organization that maintains communication with the Ministry. Nevertheless, such occurrences are extremely rare.

The subsequent step after obtaining a visa and arriving in Lithuania is applying for **humanitarian residence permit**, which is granted for a duration of one year. The procedure is identical to applying for a humanitarian visa and necessitates the same set of documents, comprising the mediation letter from Freedom House and the political form, which must be completed anew for each application.

There are several alternative avenues of legalization available to Belarusians, which many opt for as they afford a longer period of legal residency in the country, typically two or three years compared to the standard one-year term. Specifically, skilled professionals, individuals in the IT sector, and migrants with stable employment support

³⁵ See for example, the Evacuation application form (in Russian): https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe7behzymkMXeN6_1vh-PyfoiJS9Lio1UotpvXhL7ywp1EXgK/viewform or the BYSOL website: <https://bysol.org/en/bs/relocate/> (last accessed on 9 June 2024).

have the option to obtain a **work residence permit** valid for 2 years, or residency based on **the Blue Card** for 3 years. Additionally, there is the option of a **student residency permit**, which is granted for 1 year for educational purposes. However, as our respondents noted:

“due to the heightened political tensions in the country, there has been a notable increase in discrimination against Belarusians in Lithuanian national media and politics.”

Together with a rise of **residency denials and deportations**, receiving a non-humanitarian residency has become increasingly perilous for Belarusians. As a result, many opt for humanitarian residencies or, if they have sufficient evidence of persecution, apply for asylum. Alternatively, some choose to **relocate to other countries**, with Poland being a common destination. While precise statistics regarding the number of Belarusian and Russian political migrants relocating to other countries are unavailable due to the **sensitive nature of migration status and discrimination**, migrants assert that this figure is substantial and continually rising. Another important factor driving the relocation of political and other migrants from Lithuania is the **high cost of living relative to salaries in the country**.

According to the “International Peace Bureau Monitoring Report”³⁶, in August 2023 **more than 1700 Belarusians were classified as posing a threat to Lithuania’s national security**, resulting in a five-year ban from entering the European Union. Within this cohort, 910 individuals faced the imminent risk of deportation to Belarus (their cases are still pending). Regrettably, a substantial portion of these individuals comprised activists persecuted in Belarus, who face the threat of arrest and imprisonment upon returning to their homeland. Employment in state institutions and even mandatory military service is also perceived as a potential threat to Lithuania’s national security, serving as grounds for denial of residency or visa issuance and subsequent deportation. This policy applies even to individuals holding non-political positions within state organizations, such as cleaning staff or other non-political roles.

Political tensions and discrimination cases especially increased due to so-called “**Litvinism**”³⁷: in the second part of 2023 in the Lithuanian public area arose a discussion on “Litvinism” as a branch of Belarusian nationalism and historical theory according to which Belarusians are presented as the leading ethnos in the creation and governance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, making use of stolen Lithuanian national symbols, such as “Pahonia”, and expressing claims of Lithuanian territory and the capitol Vilnius in particular.³⁸ The position of some Lithuanians in the state’s structure and decision-making processes contributes to the alleged seeming threat posed by Belarusians, as they might have territorial claims on Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, that is quickly spread by the national media. Despite Lithuanian intelligence disapproving the existence of the “Litvinism” phenomenon and officially stating that “there are no organized groups promoting the so-called Litvinism ideology, a radical branch of Belarusian nationalism, in Lithuania”³⁹, certain Lithuanian politicians and media continue to employ this term, perpetuating hate and discrimination against Belarusian migrants.

³⁶ Monitoring Report on the Situation of Belarusian Refugees in Lithuania. International Peace Bureau, August 2023. Link: <https://ipb.org/report-on-the-situation-of-belarusian-refugees-in-lithuania/> (last accessed on 9 June 2024).

³⁷ See for example, Страх перед литвинизмом. Какая Беларусь нужна Литве: авторитарная или демократическая? [Fear of Litvinism. What kind of Belarus does Lithuania need: authoritarian or democratic?], Tomas Valkauskas, September 04, 2023, LRT.lt. Link: <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2068525/strakh-pered-litvinizmom-kakaia-belarus-nuzhna-litve-avtoritarnaia-ili-demokratich-eskaia> (last accessed on 9 June 2024).

³⁸ More in the Article of Hanna Vasilevich, New East Europe, “Litvinism: when history becomes securitized”: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/03/07/litvinism-when-history-becomes-securitized/> (last accessed on 3 July 2024).

³⁹ There are no Litvinist groups among Belarusian diaspora – intelligence, Augustas Stankevičius, LRT, 2024.03.20 09:50, Link: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2229342/there-are-no-litvinist-groups-among-belarusian-diaspora-intelligence> (last accessed on 3 July 2024).

Lithuanian politicians are using this approach to demonstrate to their constituents their purported efforts to combat perceived threats from KGB agents and the so-called “invisible enemy”. This treatment of Belarusians can also be interpreted as a component of a broader **political campaign**, particularly in light of the upcoming elections in Lithuania. Specifically, the presidential elections are scheduled for May 2, 2024, followed by elections to the European Parliament in June 2024, and elections to the Seimas (National Parliament) on October 13, 2024.

Another issue raised by the migrants is the **verification process conducted by the State Security Department** after the submission of residency applications. This verification can take up to 5-6 months, significantly longer than the official procedure of 1-3 months, a fact often undisclosed to applicants. Consequently, individuals may find themselves in a situation where their documents expire while awaiting verification, resulting in their illegal presence in the country. As a result, they may face termination from their jobs, exclusion from the healthcare system, and their children may be removed from schools until their new residency is issued.

Another avenue for legalizing the status of a Belarusian migrant facing persecution is by seeking **asylum**. However, some applicants have reported incidents where the Migration Department refused to accept their asylum documents and attempted to dissuade them from applying, a practice linked to the aforementioned political interests of the Lithuanian state or insufficient proof of persecution by the Belarusian regime (for example, some Belarusians were being accused of merely fleeing from conscriptions by the Belarusian forces). Moreover, migration lawyers say that the decisions regarding asylum claims are often influenced not by the quality and quantity of evidence of persecution but by the individual inspector's inclination to assist or not.

*“The **asylum procedure** can span from a few months to 1.8 years, with permission to work granted after a 6-month waiting period for the decision.”*

Before that, the asylum seeker is prohibited from working and is provided with accommodation in a refugee camp along with basic food provisions. However, they are not obliged to remain there if they are registered at an alternative place of residence. Prior to the decision being rendered, the asylum seeker is also ineligible for financial aid, healthcare, and other forms of support. In instances requiring emergency medical assistance, Caritas or the Order of Malta typically provide coverage, and sometimes humanitarian aid like clothes and food. Among other organizations that assist asylum seekers, refugees and repressed Belarusians, are Dapamoga, BYSOL, Our House, Maisto Bankas (providing food), and others. If the applicant's asylum claim is rejected, they are entitled to free legal assistance from a lawyer and have the right to appeal to a Lithuanian court and renegotiate the decision. Human rights defenders and legal experts point out that statistics indicate that in the majority of cases, the Lithuanian justice system aligns with the asylum seeker and adheres to international law, prioritizing it over the interests of the Lithuanian state.

After the asylum seekers received **positive feedback on their application**, they receive a permanent residency permit for 5 years, **allowance** of 314 EUR per month for a year and more for families with kids up to 3 years plus 250 EUR compensation of the apartment rent (if providing an official contract⁴⁰). Migrant families with children also receive 80 EUR before the start of the school year to prepare their children for school, as well as some humanitarian aid in the form of clothes and food from Belarusian NGOS (Dapamoga and Nash Dom) and Maisto Bankas. Migrants with refugee status are also enrolled into integration programs and receive an individual mentor with whom they meet monthly or bi-monthly. **Integration programs** include language courses, health insurance, social security and other benefits.

⁴⁰ It is uncommon to have an official rental contract in Lithuania because most landlords avoid paying taxes.

However, the bulk of refugees granted asylum in Lithuania assert that **the financial assistance** provided by the state is **inadequate for sustaining a livelihood in Lithuania**. High rental costs and inflated prices for goods exacerbate their financial predicaments.

A significant advantage that was reported by the interview partners, is that if an individual is granted humanitarian residency or asylum, they can apply for and obtain a **Schengen visa for their close relatives**, such as parents, children, and siblings.

5.2. Integration and Support

As previously stated, migrants are ineligible for any support from the Lithuanian state unless they receive official asylum, a process that usually takes time. Occasionally, certain charity organizations and Belarusian NGOs provide humanitarian aid, including food, clothing, legal counsel, language courses, and temporary shelter (e.g., NGO Dapamoga), along with very basic emergency medical assistance. Essentially, an asylum seeker or political refugee awaiting a humanitarian residency permit is placed in a challenging situation, if they lack saved financial resources to sustain themselves until official residency is granted.

Many Belarusians awaiting humanitarian residency, a process that could take up to 4-5 months, hold humanitarian national visas, officially granting them permission to work in Lithuania. However, a significant challenge arises as **employers are reluctant** to hire individuals with such a status. Similarly, asylum seekers, upon waiting for 6 months, obtain permits to work in the country, yet employers show little interest in hiring individuals with unclear legal status.

*“Individuals with insufficient financial resources, the most prevalent scenario, are **compelled to engage in illegal employment**, frequently encountering exploitation.”*

They endure inhumane working conditions, unpaid labour, employer coercion, fraud, and in some cases, become involved in administrative and criminal repercussions due to unwitting involvement in illicit financial schemes. Another problem is that migrants who are facing exploitation at work and inhumane conditions, often don't know about their rights in Lithuania and where they can seek help.

Both Belarusian migrants and lawyers report that the above-mentioned experiences pose one of the most significant problems for migrants that, on the one hand, put them into **difficult positions both economically and legally**, and on the other hand undermine Lithuanian economy and strengthen the shadow market. Representatives of Belarusian NGOs, civil society and lawyers, advise Lithuanian authorities to grant work permits to asylum seekers and people waiting for official documents work permits right to work in the country, since it could resolve a lot of issues both for the migrant and for the country.

*“Furthermore, there is a need to establish **equivalent employment conditions** for Belarusian political migrants and refugees, akin to those enjoyed by Ukrainians.”*

Ukrainian nationals can legally engage in employment immediately upon arrival in the country, without the need to validate their diplomas, and can undertake skilled labor immediately (e.g., medical practitioners). **Encouraging employers to hire Belarusians and other vulnerable groups of political migrants** would be advantageous, as is the case with Ukrainian citizens, employers of whom receive financial incentives, tax reductions, and other benefits when employed.

However, some relocants who have managed to obtain residency or /asylum and secure employment report an **improvement in their quality of life and living conditions in comparison with their homeland**. They also highlight the empathetic and humane treatment they receive as migrants and refugees at the Migration Department. But it appears that this largely **depends on whether the political migrant applied for humanitarian residency or asylum before or after the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine**. This event significantly altered the legal approach and attitude towards Belarusians for the worse.

Speaking about **vulnerable groups**, large families and single parents with children are provided with additional financial allowance if possessing official asylum status in Lithuania. Some events and activities are available for women in business, women with children, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and etc, provided by some charity, humanitarian and civil society organizations, such as Caritas, Dapamoga, Nash Dom, Freedom House, Belarusian House and others. The Lithuanian environment for LGBTQIA+ people is safer and more tolerant than in Belarus, but some LGBTQIA+ representatives and organizations report discrimination and lack of funding from the state and foundations due to their “non-traditional” status, as well as occasional hate from conservative groups of Lithuanian population.

5.3. Awareness and Spread of Information

The issue lies in the **absence of a centralized hub** where migrants can obtain legal counsel on migration and legalization procedures. Currently, various NGOs offer such assistance, yet each holds differing perspectives on legalization in Lithuania and offers conflicting advice, leading to confusion among migrants and bad decisions that have consequences later for their children, relatives and themselves. Among these organizations are “Dapamoga,” which predominantly encourages asylum applications immediately upon migration; “Freedom House,” representing Lithuanian state interests, advocating for humanitarian residencies; and the “BYSOL Solidarity Foundation” and NGO “Razam,” aligning with Freedom House’s lead as an authoritative entity in the country. Additionally, significant pressure from the Lithuanian state and Freedom House, which holds a monopoly over the humanitarian corridor, humanitarian visa issuance, and humanitarian residency permits, dissuades Belarusians and other persecuted migrants from seeking asylum, as it does not align with Lithuania’s national interests. However, migrants’ circumstances vary, necessitating different legalization mechanisms, but consultative organizations either adhere to the tacit policies of the Lithuanian state or their own convictions.

*“For instance, families with **adolescent children** (aged 16-17) applying for humanitarian residence permits encounter significant challenges regarding the legal status of their offspring upon reaching adulthood.”*

If these young individuals are not officially persecuted by the regime and lack a valid basis for staying in the Republic of Lithuania, they face hurdles in obtaining legal residency. While hypothetically, such youth could enroll in a college or university in Lithuania, they must pass the Lithuanian language exam, which poses a significant obstacle. Additionally, the majority of Lithuanian universities conduct their studies in the national language, further complicating matters. Furthermore, Belarusians as foreigners are ineligible for tuition-free education in Lithuania and often struggle to afford vocational or higher education for their children. Although scholarships are available, they are highly competitive, and children of migrants who do not speak Lithuanian or don't possess proficient English skills find it challenging to compete with other applicants. Moreover, another requirement for such children seeking student residency is to demonstrate financial capacity, typically by having at least 5,000 euros in their bank account, a sum that many Belarusian families in exile cannot afford.

Information for migrants is also disseminated by the **Lithuanian Migration Department**. However, according to activists and Belarusian lawyers specializing in Lithuanian migration law, the consultations, information, and advice provided by the Migration Department are frequently inaccurate and biased towards protecting the national interests of the Republic of Lithuania, rather than aiding migrants in selecting the appropriate legalization mechanism.

5.4. Advice Based on Needs of Civil Society Representatives

Belarusian civil society representatives, lawyers, and human rights defenders have voiced concerns regarding the **opacity of the migration and legalization processes**, highlighting the heavy **dependence on a singular organization**. This reliance poses challenges for numerous political migrants who lack personal connections with authorized entities. Moreover, it fosters an environment conducive to legal corruption and abuse of power, as reported by certain activists, lawyers, and human rights defenders.

In addition, the authorized body and its intermediary institutions often **do not have sufficient capacity** to handle the flow of requests for political migration and leave migrants without a response and the necessary assistance. There have been cases of migrants fleeing political persecution being pushed back or deported.

Another concern is the **discrimination against Belarusians** in Lithuania at the level of national media, politics, and migration/legalization processes. These factors also influence the attitudes of Lithuanian nationals toward the Belarusian diaspora and its representatives.

Belarusian civil society representatives, lawyers, and human rights defenders recommend that both Lithuanian authorities and media address the **dissemination of disinformation concerning Belarusian migrants** and their purported threat to national security. They advocate for efforts to counter the spread of the imposed “Litvinism” phenomenon and discrimination at all levels, given that the migration of Belarusians is advantageous for the Lithuanian economy and demographics, which are experiencing crises.⁴¹

⁴¹ Statistics Lithuania (2022). Lietuvos gyventojai 2022 [Lithuanian residents 2022]. Retrieved from <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/lietuvos-gyventojai-2022/salies-gyventojai-gyventoju-skaicius-ir-sudetis> (last accessed on 6 June 2024); Eurydice (2024). Lithuania: Population, Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions. Retrieved from <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/lithuania/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions> (last accessed on 6 June 2024).

The potential infiltration of individual Belarusian political migrants by agents of influence from Belarus and the Kremlin is a possibility, but in many ways exaggerated by Lithuanian politicians and overstated by the Lithuanian media.

Additionally, Belarusian activists expressed dissatisfaction with the equation of Belarusians with Russian migrants and laws that infringe on their human dignity and rights. For example, the government planned to deprive Belarusian and Russian migrants of the opportunity to buy real estate in Lithuania,⁴² and to take away the right to apply for citizenship⁴³ and obtain it (in the end these two bills were not adopted).

Simultaneously, the integration of migrants into the Lithuanian labour market and society is often facilitated by the **widespread use of the Russian language**. Russian-language schools for children are available, and sectors of the labor market in Lithuania, particularly those with ties to Eastern Europe and Central Asia, actively seek Russian-speaking workers. Speaking about schools, there exists the Belarusian speaking Francysk Skaryna gymnasium in Vilnius, the private Belarusian school “Stembridge”, and the Belarusian University in Exile European Humanities University. However, as one of our respondents noted,

*“there is prevalence of **strong pro-Kremlin sentiments within Russian-speaking schools in Lithuania**, coupled with support for the Lukashenka regime among Lithuanian Russian-speaking educators and staff. Consequently, many parents opt to transfer their children to different schools due to these ideological pressures.”*

Another significant concern pertains to the **psychological well-being of political migrants** who have fled persecution upon arriving in Lithuania. Without legal documentation, they are ineligible for psychological and medical assistance in the country. While certain Belarusian NGOs offer psychological consultations for such individuals, this often proves insufficient, particularly in cases involving serious psychiatric conditions such as severe PTSD, deep depression, schizophrenia, suicides and others. Moreover, representatives from NGOs and the Belarusian Civil Society highlight a **high prevalence of burnout** leading to depression among activists. They express the need for psychological assistance, which is often inadequate through free services provided by charity organizations, retreats, professional training and other supporting and motivating/inspiring activities.

When discussing the needs of NGOs and civil society organizations, the majority of them have reported problems regarding the **lack of funds** to conduct their activities and support Belarusian and other relocated individuals, political migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. More sustainable funding and institutional assistance is needed both from the state and international organizations.

Insufficient funding within NGOs exacerbates the **absence of social security for activists** employed within these entities. Frequently functioning as volunteers or contractors under individual activity certificates (entrepreneurship), these individuals bear the responsibility for their tax obligations and overlook matters such as health insurance, accounting, etc. This helps NGOs to significantly reduce income and social taxes, and accordingly reduce the cost of a workplace. Even in instances of formal employment, salaries within NGOs typically fall short of competitiveness when compared with those offered in the commercial labour market. Consequently, this disparity often results in a shortage of qualified personnel within NGO sectors. It is recommended to alleviate this issue by implementing **tax reductions for NGOs and their representatives**.

⁴² Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2023). Legal Act Retrieved from <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/b4170a00cdef11ed9b3c9397e1236c2a> (last accessed on 6 June 2024).

⁴³ Delfi.lt. (2023). Seimas apsisprendė: ribojimai Rusijos ir Baltarusijos piliečiams bus, bet ne pilietybei [Seimas decided: restrictions will be for citizens of Russia and Belarus, but not citizenship]. Retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/seimas-apsisprendo-ribojimai-rusijos-ir-baltarusijos-pilieciams-bus-bet-ne-pilietybei-92985825> (last accessed on 6 June 2024).

Moreover, interview partners express concerns regarding **limited opportunities for Lithuanian language practice and integration into Lithuanian society**. Belarusians and other migrants often remain within their social circles and have minimal interaction with the local population, hindering their integration efforts. It is suggested that organizing additional activities and events to facilitate engagement between migrants and the local community could address this issue.

Some respondents also highlighted the **absence of dialogue between Belarusian and Lithuanian NGOs**, which would have the potential to mutually strengthen both parties.

5.5. Summary on Lithuania

Lithuania's decision to suspend the issuance of National and Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens significantly limits migration options. Exceptions are minimal, restricted to those with Lithuanian descent or direct endorsements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The humanitarian corridor remains the primary legal pathway for Belarusian refugees.

However, this centralized control results in bottlenecks and limited access, requiring migrants to have connections or seek mediation from approved organizations. The visa application process, requiring declarations against the Belarusian regime, poses serious risks for applicants still in Belarus. Public announcements of these requirements by Lithuanian authorities further endanger potential migrants by alerting the Belarusian regime.

Legal experts advise immediate relocation to available safe countries, due to slow and bureaucratic visa processes. Organizations like BYSOL and Dapamoga provide guidance. Migrants face significant challenges in securing long-term residency permits due to heightened political tensions and discrimination. Non-humanitarian residencies have become increasingly perilous, leading many to opt for humanitarian visas or seek asylum.

Integration into Lithuanian society and the labor market is difficult, especially for those on temporary humanitarian visas. Employers are reluctant to hire individuals with uncertain legal status, pushing many migrants into illegal employment and subsequent exploitation. The rise of "Litvinism" rhetoric has fueled discrimination against Belarusians, with media and politicians portraying them as national security threats. This has exacerbated difficulties for Belarusian migrants in securing legal status and integrating into society.

The asylum process is lengthy and fraught with bureaucratic obstacles. Even after receiving asylum, financial assistance is inadequate, failing to cover the high cost of living in Lithuania. However, some integration programs and support services are available through various CSOs. There is a critical need for psychological and social support for migrants, many of whom suffer from severe mental health issues due to persecution. Existing CSO services are often insufficient, particularly for serious conditions. CSOs face funding challenges, leading to inadequate support for migrants and their own employees. Increased financial and institutional support from the state and international bodies is essential to enhance their capacity and effectiveness.

Migrants often lack accurate information on their legal options due to conflicting advice from various organizations. Establishing a centralized hub for legal counsel and information could alleviate confusion and aid in better decision-making. Increased interaction between migrants and the local population, as well as collaboration between Belarusian and Lithuanian CSOs, could foster better integration and mutual understanding. Organizing community events and activities could bridge cultural and social gaps.

Comparative analysis of the challenges and opportunities for Belarusian Diaspora in Germany, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania

The Belarusian diaspora faces unique positions, challenges, and opportunities across Germany, Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania. Each country offers a distinct environment shaped by its policies, societal attitudes, and the support available from both state and non-state actors.

Germany presents a rather beneficial and at the same time challenging environment for Belarusian migrants. The visa application process is lengthy and bureaucratic, often requiring personal contacts and intermediary organizations for successful outcomes. The issuance of humanitarian visas remains rare, and the process for recognizing foreign diplomas and obtaining residency is complex. High living costs and the necessity of substantial financial proof add to the difficulties. Many Belarusians in Germany struggle with limited awareness among employers about hiring foreign workers, leading to a reliance on illegal employment. Despite these challenges, Germany offers integration programs, language courses, and support for recognized refugees. NGOs like RAZAM e.V. play a crucial role in providing legal and humanitarian assistance. For skilled professionals, work visas and Blue Cards offer more stable residency options, presenting a pathway to long-term integration.

In Ukraine, Belarusians had the advantage of visa-free entry and a 180-day stay based on bilateral agreements. Many Belarusians relocated to Ukraine after the 2020 protests and subsequent repression in Belarus, seeking refuge and stability. However, the legal landscape in Ukraine presents significant uncertainties. The situation has been further complicated by the 2022 Russian invasion, which led to expiring residence permits and restrictive entry conditions. Applying for refugee status in Ukraine is a lengthy and often unsuccessful process, leaving many Belarusians in legal limbo. Discrimination and financial challenges, such as blocked bank accounts, have been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict. While state support is minimal, non-state organizations like The Right to Protection and the Free Belarus Center offer crucial legal assistance and information, helping Belarusians navigate these complex challenges. Integrating migration issues into Ukraine's EU accession discussions presents an opportunity to improve migrant rights and support.

In Poland, the Belarusian diaspora benefits from a historically supportive environment. Poland has been a haven for Belarusians, offering humanitarian visas and work opportunities. The presence of a large Belarusian diaspora and active NGOs, such as BYSOL and the Belarusian House in Warsaw, ensures extensive support ranging from legal advice to humanitarian aid. However, recent changes have introduced new hurdles. The issuance of humanitarian visas and visas under the "Poland.Business Harbor" program has been halted, complicating the migration process. Despite these setbacks, Poland continues to show loyalty and support toward Belarusians, with ongoing legislative changes aimed at simplifying their lives. The active dialogue between Polish authorities and Belarusian representatives helps address many of the challenges faced by the diaspora. While obtaining consulate appointments remains difficult due to high demand, the supportive network of NGOs provides a critical lifeline for many Belarusians.

Lithuania offers a mixed landscape for the Belarusian diaspora. The entry and stay of Belarusians is facilitated by a humanitarian corridor, allowing visa-free entry for 180 days. However, the process is heavily dependent on a single organization, leading to legal insecurity and challenges in accessing social services and employment.

The high cost of living and economic pressure drive many Belarusians to relocate to other countries, such as Poland, where the environment is perceived as more supportive. Discrimination and political tensions, exacerbated by media portrayals, add to the difficulties faced by Belarusians in Lithuania. Non-state organizations like The Right to Protection and the Free Belarus Center provide essential support, but state-driven programs are limited. The potential for more streamlined migration policies as part of Lithuania's EU commitments and human rights discussions offers hope for better integration and support in the future.

In summary, the Belarusian diaspora experiences a diverse range of challenges and opportunities across Ukraine, Poland, Germany, and Lithuania. While Poland and Lithuania offer relatively more supportive environments due to active civil society organizations, Germany and Ukraine present more significant legal and bureaucratic hurdles. Each country's unique context shapes the experiences of Belarusian migrants, highlighting the importance of tailored support and coordinated efforts to address their needs.

7. Conclusion and advice for policy makers

This research presents the dynamics of transnational activism among Belarusian citizens in exile and the intersecting challenges they face within their host countries' legal frameworks. Through interviews with civic activists, lawyers, and social workers across Poland, Germany, Lithuania, and Ukraine, as well as a comprehensive analysis of legislation and open-source information, key insights have emerged within the framework of transnational activism.

Primarily, the narratives of Belarusian migrants in exile underscore the complex interplay between political persecution in their homeland and the legal and political context of their host countries. Despite fleeing from repression under the Lukashenka regime, many activists encounter obstacles in accessing asylum, legal recognition, and support services due to misconceptions about their affiliations or perceived security risks.

Furthermore, the examination of legislation regarding Belarusian refugees seeking asylum reveals divergent approaches across host countries, impacting migrants' rights and protections. While some nations demonstrate alignment with international standards and humanitarian principles in their asylum policies, others lack adequate provisions to address the specific needs of activists fleeing authoritarian regimes.

The perceptions of activists regarding migration policies often reveal a disconnection between policy intent and implementation, highlighting systemic barriers to effective protection and support. Activists express frustration with bureaucratic hurdles, limited access to legal resources, and restrictions of their rights, indicating a gap between the principles lying at the basis of host countries' legislation and the realities faced by Belarusian migrants.

In light of these findings, there is a compelling call to action for a more coherent and rights-centered approach to migration policy that recognizes the democratic agency and contributions of Belarusian activists in exile. Strengthening legal frameworks to accommodate the unique challenges faced by activists, enhancing access to legal support, and fostering greater international solidarity are imperative steps in upholding the principles of transnational activism.

Host countries must adopt a nuanced understanding of the experiences of Belarusian migrants and ensure that migration policies align with the principles of democracy, human rights, and social justice. By addressing systemic barriers and fostering collaborative efforts between civil society, governments, and international stakeholders, host countries can play a pivotal role in advancing the aspirations of Belarusian migrants and nurturing a more inclusive and just global community.

7. Policy Recommendations for German Authorities:

1. **Enhancing access to legal assistance.** German authorities should prioritize the provision of accessible and affordable legal assistance to Belarusian civic activists seeking asylum or international protection. This includes expanding legal aid programs, increasing funding for refugee support organizations, and ensuring that all migrants have access to qualified legal representation throughout the asylum process.
2. **Streamlining asylum procedures.** To address bureaucratic delays and ensure timely processing of asylum claims, German authorities could streamline asylum procedures for Belarusian migrants. This could involve implementing fast-track procedures for political opposition and individuals fleeing political persecution, establishing specialized units to handle Belarusian asylum cases, and providing clear guidance on documentation requirements and application procedures.
3. **Recognizing political persecution.** It is important to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by Belarusian activists fleeing political persecution and ensure that asylum decisions take into account the political context in Belarus. This includes providing training to asylum officers and decision-makers on the situation in Belarus, as well as adopting flexible interpretation of asylum criteria to accommodate the specific circumstances of Belarusian migrants.
4. **Ensuring access to support services.** German authorities should ensure that Belarusian migrants have access to essential support services, including housing, healthcare, education, and psychosocial support. This may involve expanding social welfare programs, facilitating integration initiatives, and collaborating with civil society organizations to address the diverse needs of migrants and their families.
5. **Take measures to combat discrimination and xenophobia.** The relevant policy and proactive measures to combat discrimination, xenophobia, and hate crimes targeting Belarusian migrants are needed in times of Russian war in Ukraine. This includes raising awareness about the contributions of migrants from Belarus to German society, promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, and implementing robust anti-discrimination laws and policies to protect the rights of all individuals, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.
6. **Facilitate family reunification.** Recognizing the importance of family unity, German authorities should facilitate family reunification for Belarusian migrants separated from their partners and relatives due to persecution or displacement. This may involve expediting family reunification applications, providing financial assistance for travel and resettlement, and offering support services to reunified families to promote successful integration and social cohesion.
7. **Engage in diplomatic efforts.** German authorities should engage in diplomatic efforts at the international level to address the root causes of political persecution in Belarus and advocate for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This includes collaborating with European Union partners, international organizations, and civil society actors to exert diplomatic pressure on the Lukashenko regime, support the democratic movement in Belarus, and promote accountability for human rights violations.

8. **Help with identification documents.** Alternative solution for expiring IDs is needed to solve the issue with expiring and non-reapplicable in Belarus passports.

By implementing these policy recommendations, German authorities can demonstrate their commitment to upholding human rights, protecting vulnerable populations, and promoting solidarity with Belarusian migrants forced to flee political persecution. These measures not only contribute to the well-being and smooth integration of Belarusian nationals in Germany but also uphold the principles of democracy, freedom, and justice on the global stage.

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Annex: Legal framework

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Legislation			
The Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons The Law on Refugees and Persons in Need of Complementary or Temporary Protection The Law on Immigration	The Law on Foreigners The Law on providing protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland	The Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners	The Act on the Residence, Economic Activity and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory Residence ordinance (Aufenthaltsverordnung (AufenthV))
Country Criteria: Opportunities for legalization of stay for foreigners			
The grounds for the legalization of foreigners' and stateless persons' stay: Permanent residence: eligibility under the immigration law. Refugee status/asylum: recognition grants permanent residency, with a certificate. Additional protection: temporary legal residency during applicable circumstances, with certification. Employment: legal residency for the duration of employment, including gig contracts, with appropriate permits. International assistance projects: legal residency for project duration with a permit. Religious activities: legal residency for those involved in approved religious activities with a permit. NGO activities: legal residency for those in foreign NGO operations with a permit. Foreign business representation: legal residency for employees of registered foreign businesses with a permit.	A temporary residence permit in Poland is issued under various conditions as stipulated by the law on foreigners: Employment-related reasons: - for employment purposes. - for occupations demanding high qualifications. - for intra-corporate transfers, including long-term mobility of managers, specialists, or trainees. - for foreigners sent by a foreign employer to work in Poland. Business and education: - for conducting business activities. - for studying at higher education institutions. - for conducting scientific research, including long-term mobility of researchers. - for traineeships. Volunteering and family reunification: - for volunteers. - for family members of Polish citizens and foreigners, including long-term mobility of family members of researchers. Special circumstances: - for victims of human trafficking. - for individuals whose situations necessitate a short-term stay. - for seasonal work. - for other circumstances not explicitly mentioned but covered by the law.	In Lithuania, a temporary residence permit can be issued or amended for foreigners under following conditions: Citizenship and origin: - individuals eligible for citizenship restoration as per the law on citizenship. - individuals of Lithuanian origin. Family and employment: - cases involving family reunification. - intent to work in Lithuania, including in highly professional roles, or as part of an intra-company transfer, as specified in the law. Business, study, and special circumstances: - engagement in lawful activities, or intent to establish and operate a startup. - intent to study in Lithuania. - individuals under guardianship or appointed as guardians. Protection and health: - unaccompanied minors not returned to foreign states under specific circumstances. - individuals granted additional or temporary protection. - those who cannot leave due to needing urgent emergency medical assistance.	Based on the Act on the Residence, Economic Activity, and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory, the complete list of grounds for legalizing the stay of foreigners encompasses: General prerequisites for granting residence titles: Basic requirements applicable across various residence permits. Temporary residence Permit: For short-term stays based on specific purposes. Permanent settlement permit: For long-term residence based on certain criteria like duration of stay, employment status, and integration measures. EU long-term residence permit: For those who have resided in the EU for an extended period and meet integration and economic activity requirements. Residence for educational purposes: Including higher education, vocational training, language courses, and participation in educational exchange programs. Residence for the purpose of economic activity: For skilled workers, self-employed individuals, researchers, and intra-corporate transferees.

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Opportunities for legalization of stay for foreigners			
9. Banking sector: legal residency for employees of registered foreign banks with a permit. 10. Cultural/scientific/educational/volunteering: legal residency for related activities under treaties or programs with a permit. 11. Media representatives: legal residency for foreign media workers with a permit. 12. Business owners/investors: legal residency for those investing at least 100,000 EUR, with a permit. 13. Students: legal residency for the duration of studies with a permit. 14. Family reunification: legal residency until permanent residency or citizenship is obtained, for those joining family in Ukraine. 15. Military service: legal residency for those serving under contract, evidenced by a military ID. 16. Instructors for military/security: legal residency, including in expired document cases, until occupation ends.		5. Victims of exploitation and academic professionals: - victims of human trafficking or illegal labor cooperating with law enforcement. - individuals intending to work as teachers or researchers under contracts with research institutions. 6. Residency and education: - long-term EU residents with permits from another EU country. - foreigners who have completed certain education or training programs or research and development work in Lithuania. 7. Specific nationalities: - citizens from Australia, Japan, the UK, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and South Korea intending to work or engage in lawful activities in Lithuania.	7. Residence granted for reasons of international law or on humanitarian or political grounds: Including refugees, asylum seekers, and those granted temporary protection or residence on humanitarian grounds. 8. Residence for family reasons: For family reunification with both German nationals and foreigners residing in Germany. 9. Special rights of residence: Special provisions for former Germans, long-term residents from other EU countries, and return rights.

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Country Criteria: Opportunities for legalization of stay for foreigners			
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UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Conditions for access to the labor market			
The access to the labor market for foreigners and stateless persons is facilitated through a legal and regulatory framework designed to meet the labor demands of the economy while ensuring the protection of rights for both local and international workers. The country acknowledges the value of integrating global talent into its workforce, offering various pathways for employment and entrepreneurship. Legal framework: Ukraine's employment of foreigners is primarily regulated by the Law on Employment and the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons. These laws set forth the conditions for employing foreigners, outlining the rights and responsibilities of employers and foreign workers. Work permits: A work permit is essential for employers to legally hire foreigners or stateless persons for temporary work in Ukraine. This permit is also available to DIIA City residents, enabling them to engage foreigners in gig contracts. The issuance of work permits is based on the employer's application and adherence to Ukrainian legislation. Employment and Gig contracts: Foreigners arriving in Ukraine for employment or to sign gig contracts, and those who have legally obtained a work permit during their stay, are considered legally residing in Ukraine for the duration of their employment. This ensures a straightforward process for both employers and foreign nationals seeking work opportunities. Refugees and protection seekers: Individuals applying for refugee status or complementary protection can engage in temporary employment. Ukrainian citizens, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities within the labor market.	The framework for foreign workers' access to the labor market is structured to accommodate the economic needs of the country while safeguarding the rights and interests of both Polish and international employees. Recognizing the importance of a skilled and diverse workforce, Poland has implemented various policies and regulations to facilitate the employment of foreigners. Legal framework: The primary regulations governing the employment of foreigners in Poland include the Act on Foreigners and specific provisions within the Polish Labor Code. These regulations delineate the conditions, under which foreigners may be employed, and outline the rights and obligations of both employers and foreign workers. Work permits: Most foreigners intending to work in Poland are required to obtain a work permit. The permit application is typically initiated by the employer and must be justified by the lack of suitable local or EU candidates for the job. Work permits are categorized into different types depending on the nature of the work and the duration of the employment. Seasonal work: To address labor demands in seasonal sectors like agriculture and tourism, Poland offers a simplified procedure for obtaining seasonal work permits for non-EU nationals. These permits allow for employment for up to six months within a calendar year. EU Blue Card: Poland participates in the EU Blue Card scheme, aimed at highly skilled non-EU professionals seeking employment in Poland. Eligibility criteria include having a recognized university degree and a job offer with a salary at least 1.5 times the average salary in Poland. The Blue Card provides several advantages, including a path to long-term residency and family reunification rights.	The access to the labor market for foreigners is governed by a set of laws and regulations designed to streamline the process while ensuring the protection of both the local workforce and foreign employees. The country has opened its doors to skilled professionals from abroad, recognizing the benefits of cultural diversity and the global exchange of knowledge and expertise. Legal framework: The primary legislation regulating the employment of foreigners in Lithuania includes the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and the Labor Code. These laws define the conditions under which foreigners may engage in work activities within the country. Work permits: Generally, foreigners need to obtain a work permit to be employed, which is issued by the Lithuanian Labor Exchange. The permit is granted based on the employer's application, provided there is no suitable candidate within the local or EU labor market for the specific job. Highly skilled employment: The Blue Card system facilitates the employment of highly skilled non-EU professionals. It offers several benefits, such as a simplified application process and the possibility for family reunification. To qualify, applicants must have a higher education degree and a work contract or binding job offer in a high-skilled sector with a salary at least 1.5 times the average gross annual salary in Lithuania. Refugees and protection seekers: Individuals granted refugee status or additional protection have the right to work in Lithuania, ensuring they can support themselves and contribute to society.	Germany offers a structured and comprehensive framework for the access of foreign workers to its labor market, emphasizing skilled migration, integration, and social inclusion. Policies and regulations are designed to attract international talent to address skilled labor shortages and promote economic growth while ensuring the protection of workers' rights. Legal framework: The employment of foreigners is governed by the Residence Act and the Employment Ordinance, outlining the conditions under which foreigners may work in Germany. Work permits and visas: Foreign nationals generally require a work permit or visa to be employed in Germany. The type of permit or visa depends on the nationality of the worker, the duration and type of employment, and the level of qualification. Blue Card EU for highly qualified workers: Germany's Blue Card EU is targeted at highly skilled non-EU professionals. To qualify, applicants must have a university degree and a job offer with a minimum salary threshold. The Blue Card offers various benefits, including simplified residence conditions and family reunification. Skilled workers: Germany has specific provisions for skilled workers with vocational training. Foreigners with recognized qualifications and a job offer in their field can obtain a residence permit for employment. IT specialists: Given the high demand for IT skills, Germany offers opportunities for IT specialists without a formal degree but with significant work experience and a job offer in the IT sector.

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Conditions for access to the labor market			
Seasonal work: Similar to other countries, Ukraine allows for seasonal employment in specific sectors, facilitating the issuance of work permits for non-resident workers to meet temporary labor shortages. Student work: International students in Ukraine may work part-time during their studies without needing a separate work permit, allowing them to gain practical experience and manage personal expenses. Entrepreneurship: Foreign entrepreneurs can obtain a temporary residence permit to start and operate a business in Ukraine. The country is keen on attracting foreign investment and innovation, providing a supportive environment for startups and business ventures. Family reunification: Family members of foreign workers legally residing in Ukraine are allowed to join them and may obtain work permits, enhancing the integration process and family unity. Protection and rights: Foreign workers in Ukraine enjoy the same labor rights as Ukrainian nationals, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and social security benefits. Ukraine is committed to ensuring a discrimination-free environment and protecting foreign workers from exploitation.	Student work: International students can work in Poland without a work permit for the duration of their studies, providing them with an opportunity to gain work experience and manage their living expenses. Full-time students can also work full-time during their holidays. Entrepreneurship and startups: Foreign entrepreneurs can apply for a temporary residence permit to start and run a business in Poland. The country offers a supportive ecosystem for startups, with numerous accelerators, incubators, and government programs designed to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. Family reunification: Family members of foreign workers legally residing in Poland can join them and are eligible to work without a separate work permit, promoting family unity and integration into Polish society. Protection and rights: Foreign workers in Poland are entitled to the same employment rights as Polish nationals, including minimum wage standards, work conditions, and access to social security benefits. The Polish government is committed to ensuring fair treatment for all workers and has mechanisms in place to protect foreign workers from exploitation and discrimination.	Seasonal work: For seasonal employment, non-EU citizens can apply for a seasonal work permit, allowing them to work in certain sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and tourism for up to six months within a year. Student work: International students in Lithuania are allowed to work part-time for up to 20 hours per week during their studies without the need for a work permit. This opportunity enables them to gain practical experience and support themselves financially. Entrepreneurship: Foreigners interested in starting a business in Lithuania can apply for a temporary residence permit for business purposes. The country offers a conducive environment for startups and entrepreneurs, with various support mechanisms in place, including innovation hubs and financial incentives. Family reunification: Spouses and children of foreigners legally residing in Lithuania for work purposes may join them and are eligible to seek employment, contributing further to the integration and social cohesion within the country. Protection and rights: Foreign workers in Lithuania are entitled to the same rights and protections as Lithuanian employees, including minimum wage, working hours, and safety standards. The government ensures that foreign workers are not subjected to discrimination and that their contributions to the Lithuanian economy are valued.	Researchers and scientists: Special visa categories exist for researchers and scientists coming to Germany, providing streamlined entry and residence conditions. Seasonal work: For sectors like agriculture, forestry, and tourism, Germany issues seasonal work permits allowing non-EU nationals to work for up to six months within a 12-month period. Student work: International students are allowed to work part-time for up to 120 full days or 240 half days per year without a work permit, facilitating their financial independence and practical experience. Entrepreneurship and self-employment: Foreign entrepreneurs can apply for a residence permit to start a business in Germany, provided their project has economic interest or regional need and they have the necessary funding. Job seeker visa: Highly skilled individuals can apply for a job seeker visa, allowing them to stay in Germany for six months to seek employment. Refugees and protection seekers: Recognized refugees and individuals granted asylum or subsidiary protection have access to the labor market without restrictions, supporting their integration and self-reliance. Integration and language courses: Germany offers integration and language courses to migrants, aiding their social inclusion and improving job prospects. Protection and rights: Foreign workers in Germany enjoy comprehensive labor rights, including fair wages, social security benefits, and protection against discrimination and exploitation.

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Provisions on international protection			
In Ukraine, international protection for foreigners encompasses various legal statuses that provide safety and legal rights to individuals fleeing danger or persecution in their home countries. Grounded in international agreements, EU directives adapted to Ukrainian legislation, and national laws, these statuses aim to ensure the humane treatment and support of refugees and asylum seekers. Here are the key forms of international protection available in Ukraine: Refugee status: Awarded to individuals who demonstrate a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion in their home country. Those granted refugee status in Ukraine are entitled to a permanent residence permit, access to healthcare, education, the labor market, and the possibility of applying for Ukrainian citizenship after a certain period. Asylum: Ukraine may grant asylum to foreign nationals and stateless persons for humanitarian reasons or to protect their rights and freedoms. Similar to refugee status, asylum provides a pathway to permanent residence and integration into Ukrainian society, including employment rights, healthcare, and education. Complementary protection: Offered to individuals who may not qualify for refugee status but cannot return to their country of origin due to a risk of serious harm, such as torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or a threat to life. Complementary protection grants a temporary residence permit, with the possibility of renewal, and includes rights to work, access healthcare, and education.	In Poland, international protection for foreigners includes several types of status, each designed to offer safety and legal residence to individuals fleeing persecution or serious harm in their home countries. These statuses are grounded in international and EU law, as well as Polish immigration legislation. Here are the primary forms of international protection available in Poland: Refugee status: Granted to individuals who can demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugee status provides a right to stay in Poland, access to social assistance, healthcare, education, and the labor market. It also allows for family reunification and, eventually, the possibility of applying for Polish citizenship. Subsidiary protection: Offered to individuals who do not qualify for refugee status but face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their home country, such as the death penalty, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. Subsidiary protection grants similar rights as refugee status, including a residence permit, access to the labor market, healthcare, and education. Temporary protection: May be granted in situations of mass influx of displaced persons from countries where there is a widespread threat to civilian life or safety. Temporary protection is a collective protection mechanism that provides immediate and temporary right of stay to large groups of individuals. It offers basic rights and needs, including accommodation,	In Lithuania, international protection for asylum seekers and refugees is defined by comprehensive legislation that aligns with international standards and EU directives. The framework ensures the provision of safety and legal rights to individuals fleeing persecution, conflict, or serious harm. Here's an overview with additional detail: Refugee status: Awarded to individuals who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, cannot or fear to seek protection from their country of citizenship, or in the case of stateless persons, from their country of habitual residence. Persecution may originate from the state, groups, or organizations controlling the state or a significant part thereof, as well as non-state actors, particularly when these entities are unable or unwilling to offer effective and durable protection. Additional protection: Granted to asylum seekers who cannot return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, the risk of execution, or a serious personal threat to life, health, safety, or freedom resulting from indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. Temporary protection: Implemented in response to a decision by the Council of the European Union regarding the influx of aliens into the EU or the risk thereof. The Lithuanian government, upon the proposal of the Minister of the Interior, can adopt regulations on temporary protection, allowing individuals entitled to such protection to enter and stay in Lithuania without the usual requirements for valid travel documents, health insurance, or other documents.	In Germany, international protection for foreigners is designed to offer refuge and legal rights to individuals escaping persecution, conflict, or serious harm in their home countries. Grounded in both international conventions and European Union directives, as well as German national laws, these protections ensure the safety and support of refugees and asylum seekers. Here's an overview of the key forms of international protection in Germany: Refugee status: Granted to individuals who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, cannot return to their country of origin. Those recognized as refugees in Germany receive a residence permit, access to the labor market, healthcare, education, and social benefits, and the possibility of applying for permanent residence and citizenship after certain conditions are met. Subsidiary protection: Offered to individuals who do not qualify for refugee status but would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their home country, including the death penalty, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or a serious threat to life or integrity due to armed conflict. Subsidiary protection grants similar rights as refugee status but typically with a residence permit of a shorter duration, which can be extended. Asylum: Based on Germany's constitutional law, asylum is provided to those persecuted on political grounds. It offers a right of residence and similar benefits to refugee status, including access to the labor market, healthcare, education, and social services.

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Provisions on international protection			
4. Temporary protection: May be provided in the event of a massive influx of displaced persons escaping armed conflict, natural disasters, or other emergencies in their home countries. Temporary protection is a collective mechanism that offers an immediate but temporary right to stay, along with basic rights and necessities such as temporary accommodation, healthcare, and sometimes limited access to the labor market. Each form of international protection in Ukraine requires applicants to undergo a formal application and assessment process, which is managed by the State Migration Service of Ukraine, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international organizations when appropriate. Successful applicants receive not only legal status and protection but also support for integration into Ukrainian society, including assistance with language learning, employment, and accommodation, to facilitate their adaptation and self-reliance in a new environment.	healthcare, and access to the labor market. The duration of temporary protection is determined by the EU Council in response to specific situations. 4. Tolerance stay: This form of protection can be granted to individuals who do not qualify for refugee status or subsidiary protection but cannot be returned to their country of origin for humanitarian reasons or because of obstacles that prevent their return. It is a temporary solution, providing a legal stay but with more limited rights compared to refugee status or subsidiary protection. 5. Humanitarian stay: Granted on the grounds of significant humanitarian considerations or to protect family life, humanitarian stay is another form of legal protection that allows foreigners to reside in Poland legally. It considers individual circumstances, including health issues, family ties, and children's welfare. Individuals seeking international protection in Poland must go through a formal application process, typically starting with an asylum application. The Office for Foreigners is the main governmental body responsible for processing these applications and making decisions regarding the grant of international protection.	Conditions for issuing a national visa or residence permit may be waived for individuals unable to meet these requirements for objective reasons. Lithuania's approach to international protection emphasizes not only the legal recognition of refugees and asylum seekers but also the importance of effective and durable protection against persecution. The legislation caters to individuals facing threats from both state and non-state actors, ensuring a broad scope of protection that includes measures against torture, inhuman treatment, and risks arising from armed conflicts. Through temporary protection measures, Lithuania also demonstrates its commitment to EU solidarity in managing large-scale displacement crises, providing immediate and practical support to those in dire need.	4. Temporary protection: This mechanism can be activated in situations of mass influx of displaced persons, providing immediate and temporary right of stay, access to basic services, and sometimes limited access to the labor market. It's designed to offer protection until it's safe for individuals to return to their home country. 5. Ban on deportation (Abschiebungsverbot): This status is applicable when neither refugee status nor subsidiary protection is granted, but there are still compelling reasons why a deportation would violate Germany's international obligations or would be inhuman or degrading. Individuals with a ban on deportation receive a residence permit, albeit often with more restrictions compared to refugee status or subsidiary protection. Applicants for international protection in Germany must go through a comprehensive asylum procedure, starting with an application at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Following an individual assessment, BAMF decides which form of protection, if any, is applicable. Successful applicants are also offered integration courses, language training, and assistance with housing and job searches to support their new start in Germany.

UKRAINE	POLAND	LITHUANIA	GERMANY
Country Criteria: Possibility to obtain travel documents			
A person recognized as a refugee and a person in need of complementary protection who has reached the age of sixteen has the right to obtain a travel document for traveling abroad in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation of Ukraine. A child who is separated from his/her family and is recognized as a refugee or a person in need of complementary protection has the right, at the request of his/her legal representatives, to obtain a travel document for traveling abroad before reaching the age of sixteen.	Successful applicants receive not only a right to stay but also integration support to help them adapt to life in Poland, including language courses, integration programs, and assistance in finding employment and housing. Polish travel document for a foreigner shall be issued to a foreigner who has lost his/her travel document or whose travel document has been destroyed or has become invalid, and it is not possible for the foreigner to obtain a new travel document, when the foreigner has been granted: • permanent residence permit; • a residence permit for a long-term EU resident; • a temporary residence permit referred to in Article 186(1)(9) (temporary residence granted in connection with a visa issued for humanitarian reasons); • subsidiary protection; • a residence permit for humanitarian reasons. A foreigner who is granted refugee status shall be issued a travel document provided for in the Geneva Convention.	A citizen of a foreign state who has the right of temporary or permanent residence in the Republic of Lithuania but does not have a valid passport of a citizen of a foreign state or a travel document corresponding to it, or whose passport has been lost or destroyed and who, for objective reasons, cannot obtain it from the competent institutions of the country of origin, may be issued an alien's passport according to the procedure established by the Minister of the Interior. A stateless person who is not a citizen of a foreign state and has the right to reside temporarily or permanently in the Republic of Lithuania but does not have a valid travel document of a foreign state may be issued a stateless person's travel document provided for by the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in accordance with the procedure established by the Minister of the Interior. A refugee permanently residing in the Republic of Lithuania shall be issued a refugee travel document for travel to a foreign country in accordance with the procedure established by the Minister of the Interior. The refugee's biometric data for identity verification, i.e. face image and two fingerprints, shall be electronically recorded in the refugee's travel document, except in cases provided for in Regulation (EC) No. 2252/2004. An alien granted subsidiary protection residing in the Republic of Lithuania is issued an alien's passport on general grounds.	Travel documents issued by an authority for non-residents include in particular • travel document for foreign nationals (Reiseausweis für Ausländer) • travel document for refugees (Reiseausweis für Flüchtlinge) • travel documents for stateless persons (Reiseausweis für Staatenlose) Travel documents are issued with biometric features and cannot be extended. Therefore, after their validity has expired, a new travel document must be issued. Only travel documents with a validity period of up to one year (temporary travel document) are issued without biometric features. Foreign nationals from non-EU countries can be issued with a German substitute passport in the form of a travel document for foreign nationals in the case that it is not reasonably possible to obtain from the authorities of the country of origin a passport or substitute passport. If the state of non-possession of a passport is only temporary, then a travel document for foreigners can only be issued if compelling reasons exist for this.

June 2024

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About IEP

Since 1959, the IEP has been active in the field of European integration as a non-profit organisation. It is one of Germany's leading research institutes on foreign and European policy. IEP works at the intersection of academia, politics, administration, and civic education.

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Layout: Djahle Krebs

Cover photo: © Mike Kotsch/Unsplash

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Supported by:



In cooperation with: Ukrainian Expert Foundation (UEF) and Research and Action for a Democratic Accountable and Resilient Belarus (RADAR_BY)

Disclaimer

The publication is part of the project “VisiBYlity for Belarusian democratic actors” (July 2023-June 2024). The project's goals are capacity building, advocacy and research for more attention for the Belarusian diaspora in the German and European public. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the IEP.