

# Analysis of the migrant flow from Belarus Poland, Lithuania and other European Union countries in 2021–2022

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*SUMMARY: This paper estimates the number of Belarusian citizens who relocated from Belarus to the EU countries in 2021–2022, taking into account the available indicators of migration statistics in the host countries. The detailed analysis covers the number and structure of the Belarusian citizens who left Belarus for Poland and Lithuania, since these states have witnessed the highest migration flow from Belarus. The calculations excluded temporary labor migration. At the same time the key reasons for the people to emigrate were identified. According to the introduced methodology and available statistical data, the estimated number of relocated Belarusian citizens to EU countries is ca. 143.6–170.9 thousand people.*

*Key words: migration, residence permit, demography, visas, relocation.*

*JEL: J11, J24, F22*

## **1. Methodological approaches to assessing the number of citizens who left Belarus**

Increasing outflow of professionals from Belarus has been seriously affecting the labor market, the developments of the consumer market, and related areas already. In the long run, the exit of a highly skilled workforce, the

departures of families and emigration lead to deep demographic and economic development challenges in general.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police) of the Republic of Belarus, the number of Belarusian citizens leaving Belarus for foreign employment under employment agreements and contracts<sup>1</sup> decreased from 5,732 to 5,590 people in 2022. Belarusian citizens predominately relocated for employment in Poland (2,606), Russia (1,976), Lithuania (324), and the USA (146). However, these figures exclude the self-employed and their family members.

Labor force statistics by type of economic activity show that the net outflow of IT workers from the Information Technology (IT) domain amounted to 17,226 people in 2022 alone. There is a high degree of confidence that all these people are professionals who relocated with the outbreak of war in Ukraine for safety and security reasons and/or due to the requirements of their foreign customers. The sharp outflow process began in March 2022: the ratio of those hired to dismissed was 123% in February, and then this ratio became 57% in March, and it reached its minimum value of 26% by May (a net monthly outflow was 2,862 people). The outflow process slowed down in absolute terms by the year-end (Figure 1). However, the dynamics of foreign events does not contribute to changing this trend in the near future.

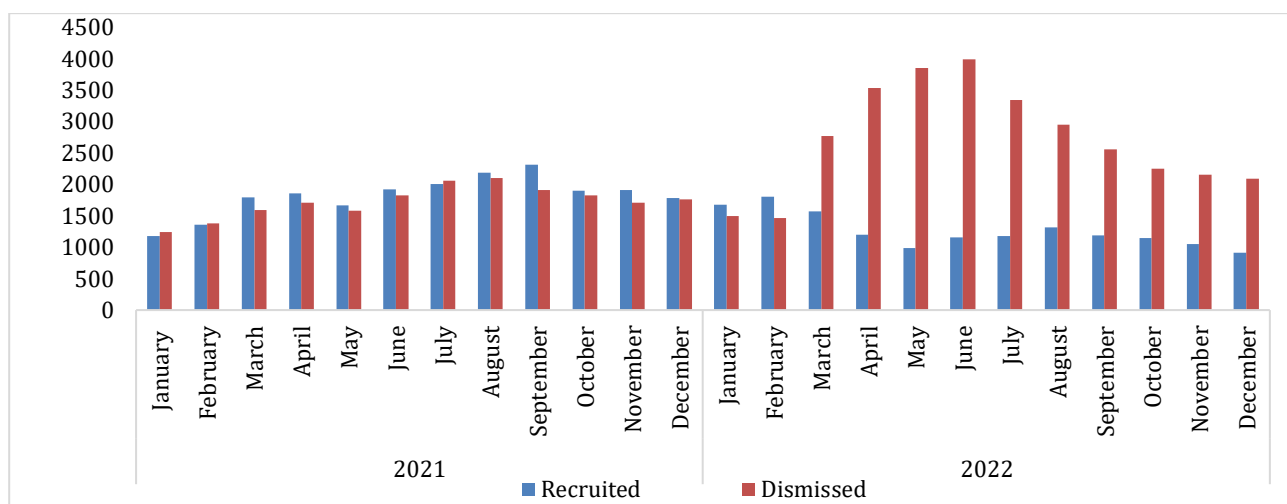


Figure 1. The number of those hired and fired under the ICT economic activity type.

Source: Data from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) [1].

In general, there was a steady decline in the employment rate in 2021 and 2022, while the already low unemployment rate was getting even lower (Figure 2). The unemployment rate (calculated according to the ILO methodology) was 4% at

<sup>1</sup> In this case, the figures include only those citizens who have entered into a foreign employment contract with the assistance of legal entities and individual entrepreneurs providing foreign employment services.

the end of 2020; it was 3.9% in 2021; and it was 3.6% in 2022 [2]. The migration of Belarusian citizens, along with factors such as COVID-19 mortality and the deteriorating demographic situation, contributed to reducing the number of the employed while reducing unemployment.

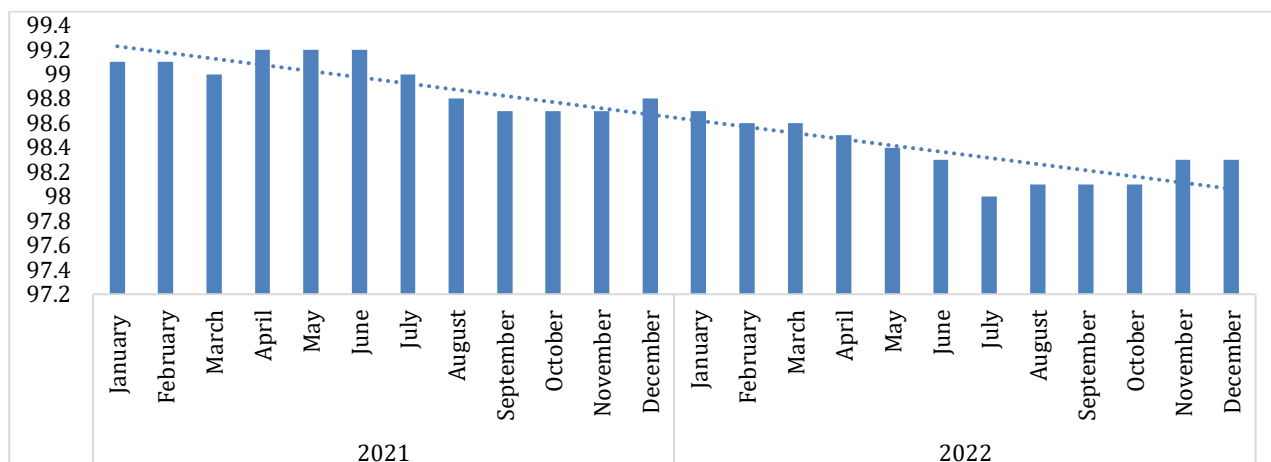


Figure 2. Employed population, % against the corresponding period of the previous year.

Source. Data from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) [3; 4].

Defining data on the number of relocated citizens and their demographic characteristics will allow getting a more comprehensive picture of losses, to identify the qualitative and quantitative consequences of the outflow of people from the country. Therefore, *the purpose of this study is to estimate the number of the Belarusian citizens who relocated to the EU countries in 2021–2022 for a long time and could potentially leave Belarus forever.*

Since the available national statistics do not allow objectively estimating the number of relocated people and their demographic characteristics, we use the available migration data from the host countries. According to the legislation of the European Union (EU), foreigners may reside in the country under a residence permit (temporary or permanent) or a national visa. An ordinary Type C Schengen visa entitles you to stay in member states of the Schengen Agreement for up to 90 days within half a year. A national annual Type D visa entitles you to stay in a particular country for 365 days; humanitarian visas issued to protect citizens of other states also fall into this category. At that, certain requirements for the submission, consideration and issuance of documents legalizing the stay of foreigners have their own particularities in each EU country.

On the one hand, information on the number of residence permits issued to Belarusian citizens is sufficient to estimate the number of migrants. However, to date, a number of factors complicate accurate estimations.

Firstly, it can take from several months to a year or longer from the moment of applying for a residence permit to its issuance (depending on the

requirements of each individual country). During this time, the applicant lives in the country under a national Type D visa. I.e., throughout the year, the number of the Belarusian citizens who have entered the country will differ from the number of residence permit applications and the number of issued residence permits. At the same time, not all holders of the national Type D visas stay in the country for a long time, and it is impossible to find the share of such citizens.

Secondly, with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, migration departments have been overloaded, and the legalization process has become longer in European countries. Moreover, difficulties have arisen in some cases in connection with the uncertain status of the very fact of the applicant's Belarusian citizenship. In practice, some Belarusian citizens with their expired visas have been staying in the destination countries awaiting legalization since February 24, 2022.

Thus, the number of migrants from Belarus to EU countries in 2021–2022 can only be estimated approximately within a certain range of values between the number of residence permits issued, the number of national visas issued, and considering country-specific indicators. At that, the estimation methodology will vary depending on the available statistics in each country, as well as on the national rules and legalization terms. The study analyzes in detail the number and structure of the Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland and Lithuania, since these two European states have accounted for the main inflow of Belarusian citizens in recent years. The study did not take into account those Belarusian citizens who obtained citizenship of the EU countries.

Since the aggregate statistics of Eurostat was available as of 2021, for the EU countries, apart from Lithuania and Poland, migration calculations for 2022 are based on historical trends and considering the intensification of migration processes after the start of the war in Ukraine. In this regard, the exact number of Belarusians who migrated to the EU countries in 2021–2022 for permanent residence may exceed the calculated range.

Calculation of the number of the Belarusian citizens who entered Lithuania for permanent residence in 2021–2022 is based on the analysis of the data on the citizens of Belarus residing in Lithuania and the number of the applications submitted for obtaining a residence permit in Lithuania.

Two methodological approaches were applied to determine the number of Belarusian citizens who resided in Poland permanently and who had migrated into this country over the past two years. The first approach is based on the analysis of the data on the statuses obtained by Belarusian citizens entitling them to permanently reside in Poland, as well as the data on the registration of

applications for obtaining such statuses. The second approach takes into account the dynamics of the ZUS (social insurance contributions) payers and includes an adjustment for the number of the Belarusian citizens who may not pay social insurance contributions in Poland.

The main data sources were official information from the Migration Department of the Lithuanian Ministry of the Interior, Eurostat, as well as the data from the Office for Foreigners of Poland, and ZUS reports.

## 2. Lithuania

The stay of foreigners in Lithuania for the purposes of work, study, family reunification is allowed under a national Type D visa or under a temporary or permanent residence permit. A Lithuanian residence permit is issued for two years, and it is possible to extend it for a longer period depending on the purpose of obtaining it. The term for considering the application is 1 month; however, in practice, it may extend under the current circumstances [5].

According to the Lithuanian Migration Department, 9,789 Belarusian citizens arrived in the country in 2022, while 2,703 Belarusian citizens left Lithuania for other countries. However, this figure does not include, for example, those Belarusian citizens who have arrived in the country from Poland or other EU countries and who have stayed in the country awaiting legalization. Taking this into account, according to the Migration Committee data, 48,804 Belarusian citizens lived in Lithuania at the beginning of 2023, and the increase was 17,776 people or 57.3% versus the previous year (Table 1). It should be noted that although this increase is the highest in the history of observations, a large increase in labor migration from Belarus to Lithuania has been observed since 2017 in general. This has been caused by the changes in migration policy and an easier process of obtaining work permits in case of professionals of certain categories [6].

*Table 1. The number of Belarusian citizens residing in Lithuania (# persons at the beginning of the year)*

	2020	2021	2022	2023
#, persons	17,769	23,440	31,028	48,804
Growth (% vs previous year)	45.6	31.9	32.4	57.3

*Source: Migration Yearbook, Migration Department, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, Register of Aliens [7].*

The estimate of the number of the Belarusian citizens residing in the country at the beginning / end of the year most closely reflects the real number of the Belarusian citizens who arrived in the country in 2021–2022. However,

among them, there may be those who do not plan a long stay and who are not going to apply for a temporary residence permit. For example, these can be the Belarusian citizens who reside in the country under an employment visa and return to Belarus once the visa expires. Therefore, a clearer picture can be retrieved from the number of residence permit applications.

The most common grounds for obtaining a residence permit and a Type D visa are employment, family reasons, and studies at educational institutions. Belarusian citizens rank second following Ukrainian citizens in terms of the number of temporary residence permits issued in 2022 (30,815 and 83,940 residence permits, respectively). In 2022, the Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of Lithuania issued 25,101 residence permits and replaced 5,714 residence permits (30,815 permits in total). The number of residence permits issued and replaced for Belarusian citizens increased by ca. 50% in 2021 and by ca. 50% in 2022 (Figure 3):

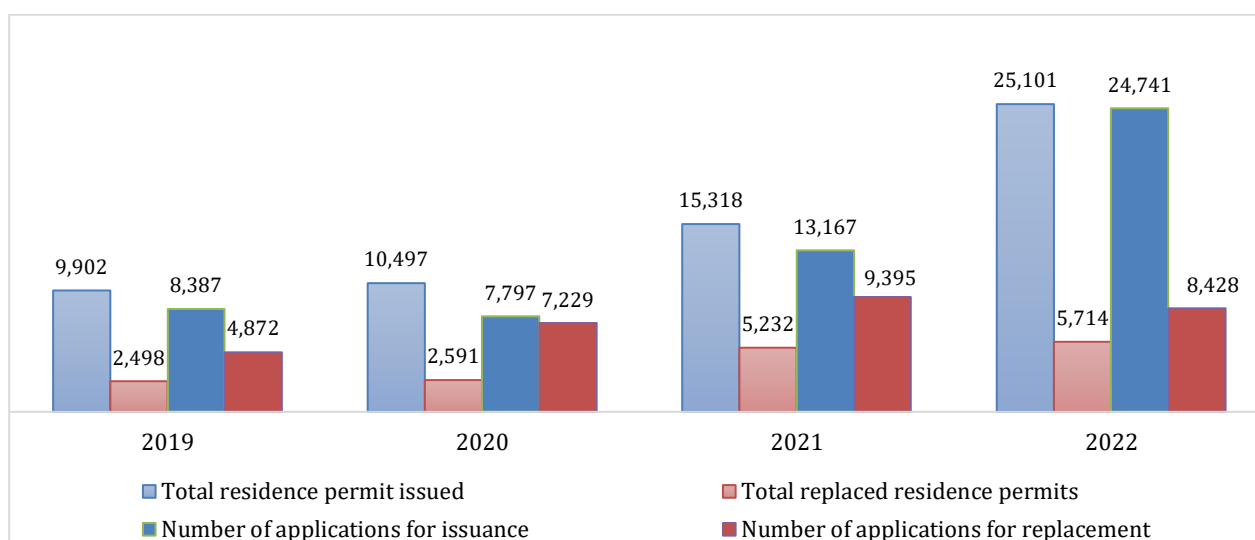
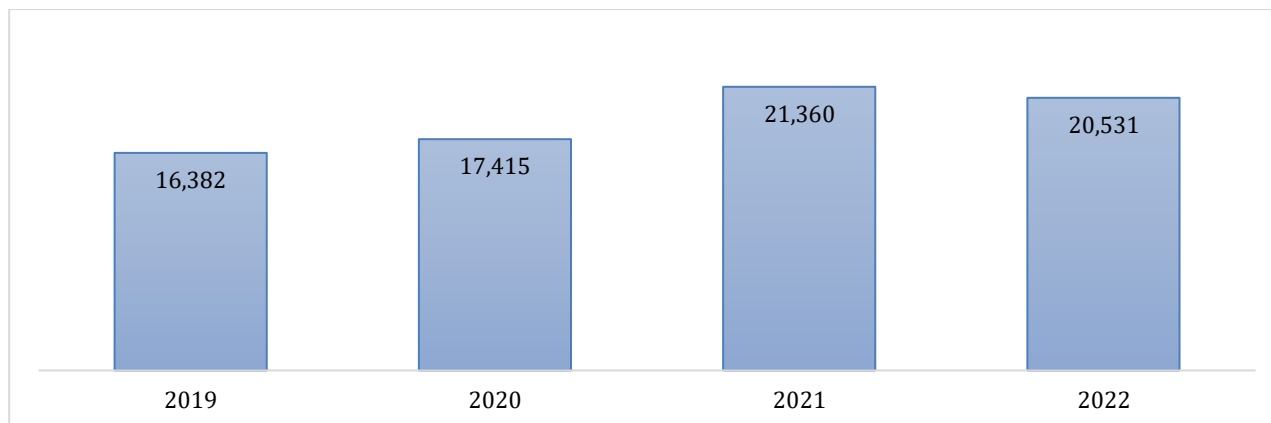


Figure 3. The number of temporary residence permits issued and replaced for Belarusian citizens in Lithuania by years.

Source: Migration Yearbook, Migration Department, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania [7].

A temporary residence permit is usually issued after six months to a year of residence in the country under a Type D visa. This means that, for example, residence permits issued in 2022 were obtained by those Belarusians who stayed in Lithuania, including those who stayed there in 2021. In terms of visas, Belarusian citizens obtained 20,531 national (Type D) visas in 2022 (Figure 4). The maximum number of issued national visas was in 2021: 21,360 visas. A residence permit usually means moving into the country of destination and plans for a longer stay in it; and in case of the holders of Type D visas, it is

difficult to determine the share of people residing in Lithuania for a long time, since for many of them, this may include periodic arrivals.



*Figure 4. The number of national Type D visas issued.*

*Source: Migration Yearbook, Migration Department, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania [7].*

Finally, 505 people obtained a permanent residence permit in Lithuania in 2022, which was a record-breaking figure for Belarusian citizens. In 2021, this figure was 315 permits; it was 102 in 2020, and it was 162 in 2019. The indicator of the number of permanent residence permits issued quite accurately captures the number of Belarusian citizens who, with a high degree of probability, have left their country forever. However, it is impossible to estimate the contribution of the indicator to migration processes by years, since a permanent residence permit is issued after at least 5 years of residence in the country.

In general, the growth in the number of emigrants from Belarus to Lithuania in 2021–2022 can be estimated in the range between the annual increase of the Belarusian citizens living in the country and the number of their applications for a residence permit (Figure 5), i.e., from **25.4 to 37.9 thousand people**.

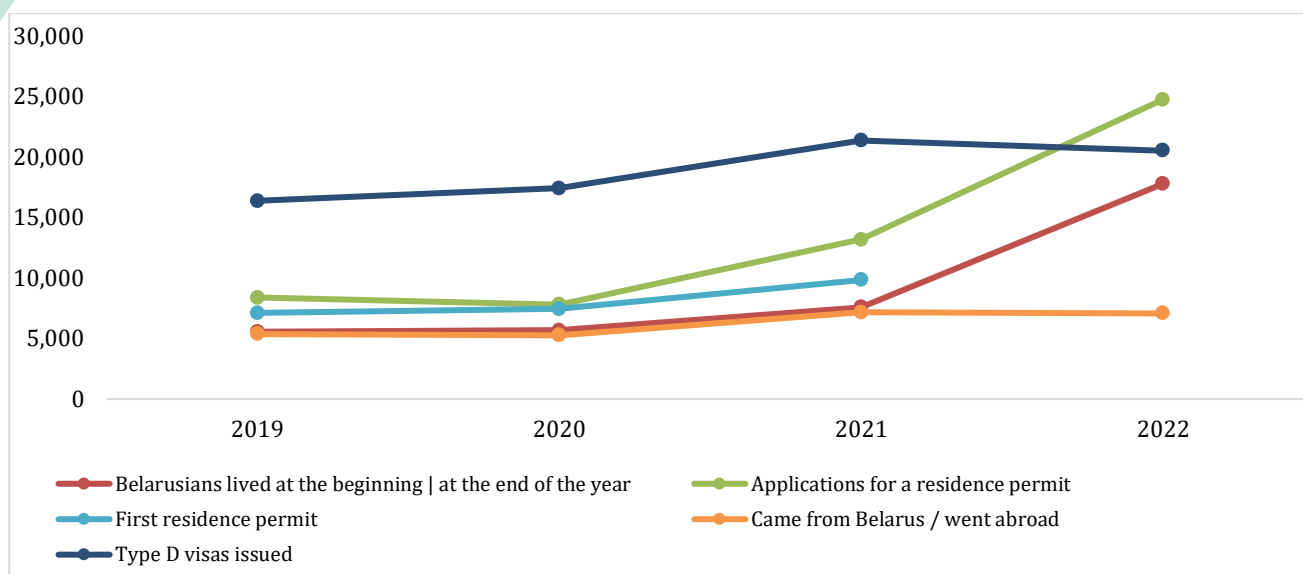


Figure 5. Dynamics of the Belarusian citizens who arrived and obtained national visas and residence permits in Lithuania in 2019–2022.

Source: Migration Yearbook, Migration Department, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania [7].

### 3. Poland

#### 3.1 Dynamics of immigration processes

Poland is the most popular country in the European Union that Belarusian citizens consider for relocation and employment. According to the Polish Migration Service, as of the beginning of 2023, 65 thousand Belarusian citizens lived in Poland and had statuses for permanent residence<sup>2</sup>. At that, in 2022, almost 70 thousand Belarusian citizens applied for obtaining one or another permanent residence status, and 41.5 thousand people received decisions (but not documents) on their status. This data does not include employment visas, student visas, Pole's Cards, and PBH (Poland Business Harbor) visas. In this regard, it is necessary to make an allowance for the fact that some applicants applied for a document repeatedly (e.g., they extended the validity period of a residence permit). However, the share of such Belarusian citizens has been small in the last 2 years compared to the rapidly growing number of applicants (Table 2).<sup>3</sup>

Even considering these assumptions, it can be argued that more than 100,000 Belarusian citizens could permanently reside in Poland as of the beginning of 2023. For

<sup>2</sup> Here and below statuses for permanent residence include permanent resident permit, temporary resident permit, supplementary protection and other residence statuses, allowed to live in the country.

<sup>3</sup> This assertion is further substantiated in more detail.



example, at the end of 2020, there were less than 45 thousand Belarusian citizens in Poland, including the numbers of submitted applications and decisions made [8].

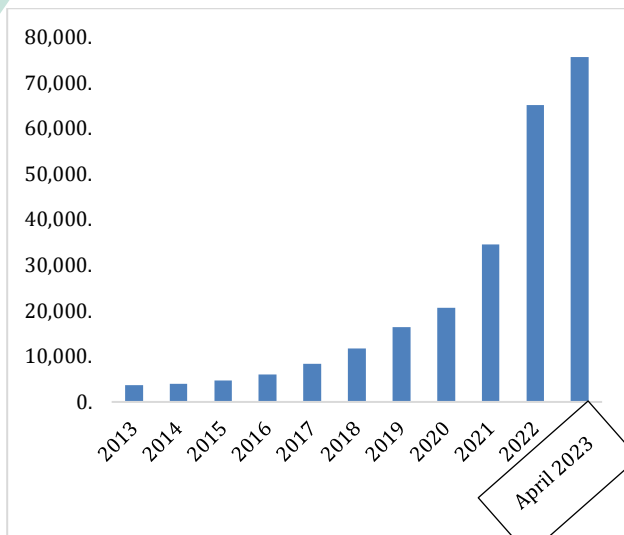
*Table 2. Information on the number of the Belarusian citizens who had documents for permanent residence in Poland, who received decisions, who applied for a document for permanent residence in Poland, # of persons.*

Status type	2019	2020	2021	2022
Those who had permanent residence documents (cumulatively)	16,263	20,356	34,414	65,007
Those who applied for permanent residence status (per year)	12,807	13,913	32,823	6,924
Those who received decisions, but not a document, on acquiring permanent residence status (per year)	11,841	10,458	21,534	41,459

*Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland) [8].*

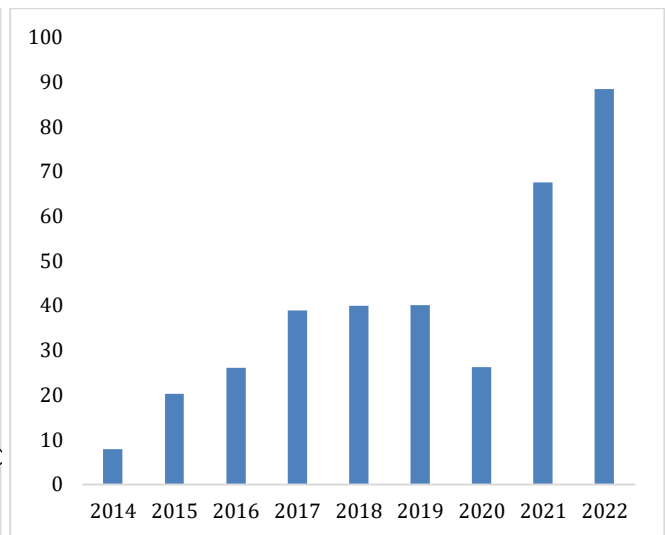
In general, the migration inflow of Belarusian citizens to Poland is explained not only by the fact that Poles have a mindset close to Belarusians, similar traditions, a fairly understandable language and a capacious labor market, but also by additional opportunities to legalize their stay. The Pole's Card program has been effective since 2008 [9]. Since 2020, Belarusian citizens have been able to obtain national visas for IT specialists — Poland Business Harbor, which allow not only to stay in the country permanently, but also to work there. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Poland has started issuing not only humanitarian visas, but also humanitarian residence permits, as well as a travel document (since January 1, 2023) to Belarusian citizens who have been forced to flee from Belarus for political reasons and who have not been able to renew their Belarusian passports.

Despite the fact that the Belarusian authorities have had a very negative attitude towards obtaining the Pole's Card by Belarusian citizens, no official strict measures have been taken to limit this process. Amendments to the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Belarus were drafted only in 2022; and the amendments were adopted in January 2023; now, the Law states that citizens of Belarus who have citizenship of another state, residence permits and other documents that give privileges and benefits in another state (the Pole's Card just falls under the latter definition) are obliged to report this to the competent authorities [10], and the possession of such documents can create barriers to employment in the civil service, and this can be taken into account in the social and legal domains [11]. These actions of the Belarusian authorities can be seen as one of the attempts to limit the outflow migration to Poland, which has increased through the past few years.



*Figure 6. The number of citizens of the Republic of Belarus with a status confirmed by an issued document that allows their permanent residence in the Republic of Poland, # of people.*

*Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland) [8].*



*Figure 7. Dynamics of Belarusian citizens obtaining a status that allows them to reside permanently in the Republic of Poland, an increase ratio (%) versus the previous year.*

Indeed, the above figures indicate that the number of people who are entitled to reside in Poland has been growing year by year. This growth slowed down in 2020 (Figure 7), which was most likely due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The pace of migration of Belarusian citizens to Poland accelerated in 2021. These processes are explained by the gradual easing of pandemic restrictions while maintaining incentives for people to leave Belarus for political reasons. residence in Poland occurred in 2022. This growth was provoked by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. On the one hand, people have been leaving for Poland and other countries due to the deteriorating political situation, fear of the country's direct involvement in the war. On the other hand, due to the loss of the Ukrainian market and the imposition of Western sanctions, the economy of Belarus has begun to decline, and the deterioration of the reputation of Belarus on the global stage has led to the fact that the main service sectors in the Belarusian economy, such as the IT industry and transport, have started shrinking, and businesses and workers in these industries have started looking for job opportunities in other countries.

Since IT professionals and their families simply need to obtain a Polish PBH visa and then, based on it, a residence permit, the IT industry has started considering Poland as one of the most attractive jurisdictions for relocation. As a result of these processes, the IT industry, which had consistently demonstrated a positive contribution to the GDP of Belarus in previous years, showed a negative result in 2022. At the same time, Poland and Lithuania-based IT businesses with Belarusian roots have been showing

positive dynamics both in terms of the number of new registered companies and in terms of hiring employees.

In Poland, in addition to the IT sector, Belarusian citizens have been actively registering businesses in such sectors as the transport industry, construction and finishing works, as well as wholesale trade. This business activity has created more favorable opportunities for the relocation of Belarusian citizens and their families [12].

The acquisition of the following statuses has given the right to permanent residence and work in the Republic of Poland: a refugee status (*status uchodźcy*), a permanent residence permit (*pobyt stały*), a temporary residence permit (*pobyt czasowy*), a permanent residence permit for a family member of an EU citizen (*Pobyt stały członka rodziny obywatela UE*), a supplementary protection (*ochrona uzupełniająca*), a residence permit for a long-term EU resident (*pobyt rezydenta długoterminowego UE*), and others.

*Table 3. The main types of legal statuses of Belarusian citizens for permanent residence in Poland (cumulatively), # of persons.*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Q1-2023
Refugee status	62	64	173	364	414
Permanent residence permit	11,558	14,079	20,728	30,745	33,304
Temporary residence permit	4,342	6,047	12,550	29,928	37,123
Supplementary protection	7	33	765	3,852	4,534
Residence permit of a long-term EU resident	333	389	356	311	293

*Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland) [8].*

Belarusian citizens have mainly obtained permanent and temporary residence permits. Moreover, a permanent residence permit had prevailed compared to other statuses until 2022, and then, as of the beginning of April 2023, a temporary residence permit became the most popular (Table 3). Most likely, this trend is explained by the fact that mostly Belarusian citizens with the Pole's Card or those with Polish roots had relocated to Poland before 2020. People with the Pole's Card had been eligible to get a permanent residence permit immediately. Economic and political migration has begun after the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, which has provoked an increase in applications for temporary residence permits based on ordinary national visas. The number of Belarusian students in Polish higher educational institutions has increased. Also, the number of refugee and supplementary protection statuses obtained by

Belarusian citizens has increased significantly in the last two years. In 2020, 98 people had such legal grounds for staying in Poland, and as of the beginning of April 2023, this number was almost 5,000 people.

If we consider the ratio of men and women, then before 2017, the share of Belarusian women living in Poland had been over 55%, and the share of Belarusian men living in Poland had been less than 45%; and starting from 2018, the number of Belarusian citizens with the right to permanent residence in Poland has started increasing primarily due to more active immigration of Belarusian men into the country. As a result, as of the beginning of April 2023, the share of Belarusian female citizens was 42.2%, and the share of Belarusian male citizens was 57.8% (Figure 8). In part, this trend could be explained by the growing demand for transport and construction sectors' professionals in Poland, and these are the sectors where more male workers are employed. In 2022–2023, an additional incentive for males to move from Belarus could be the threat of being drafted into the army due to hostilities in Ukraine.

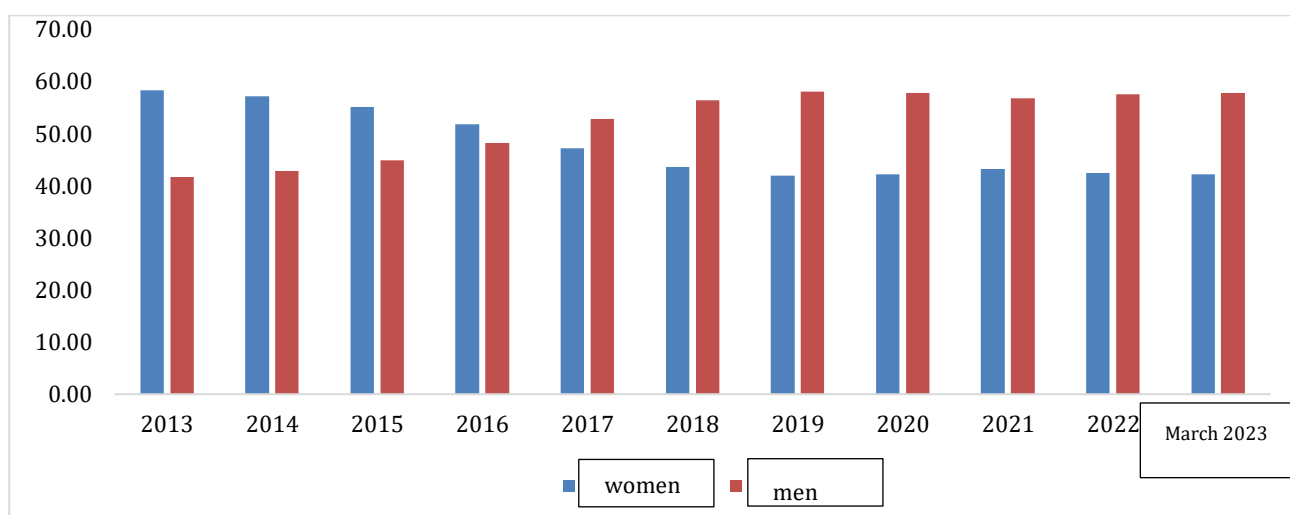
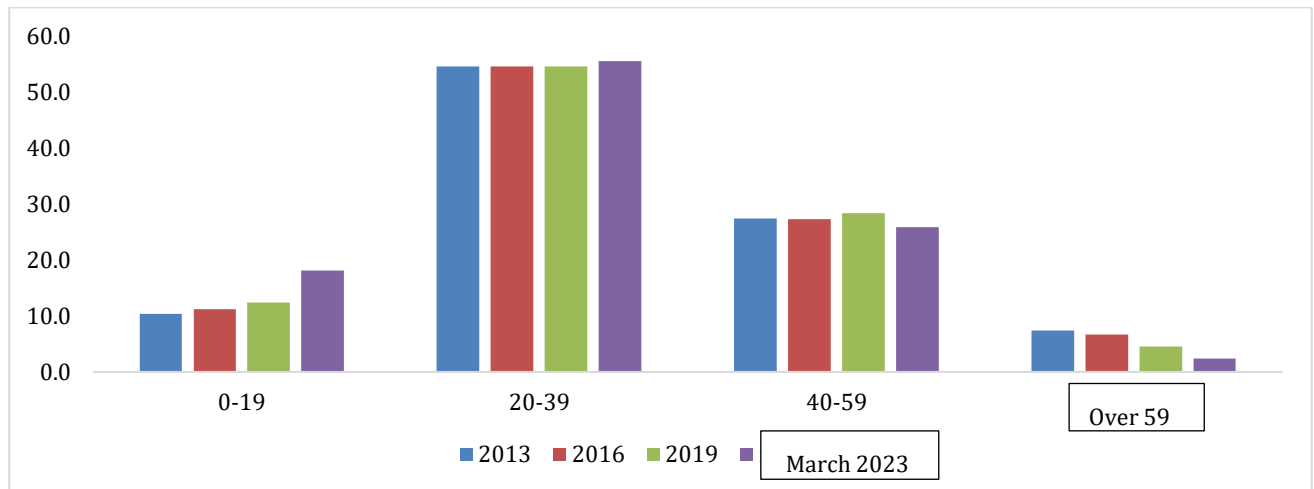


Figure 8. Shares of men and women who have obtained permanent residence status in Poland, %.

Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland) [8].

As for the age of the arriving people, traditionally — over the past decade — over 50% have been people aged 20-39 years. At that, the share of children and young people aged under 19 years who have obtained a residence permit has been increasing in recent years. At the same time, the percentage of people of retirement and pre-retirement age decreased from 7.4% in 2013 to 2.4% at the beginning of April 2023 (Figure 9). This suggests that the people who left Belarus for Poland in recent years were young people, families with children, and workers who were still far from retirement. At the same time, older citizens were in no hurry to leave Belarus. In this regard,

it can be stated that Poland has only benefited from the influx of young professionals, students, and young families with children, while Belarus has been losing its potential labor force and resources to replenish its Social Protection Fund (SPF).



*Figure 9. Age structure of the citizens of Belarus who have obtained a long-term legal status for residing in the Republic of Poland, %.*

*Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland) [8].*

The analysis carried out gives an idea of the intensity of migration and the age / sex structure of Belarusian citizens in Poland, but for a more accurate understanding of how many Belarusian citizens moved into this country to live there, a more detailed study is required.

### ***3.2 Estimation of the total number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland as of the beginning of 2023***

When assessing the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland, one can try to analyze the statistics on the number of issued employment visas, humanitarian visas, and PBH visas. Belarusian citizens obtained **over 500,000** Polish visas from August 10, 2020 through to January 31, 2022. At the same time, Poland issued **278,181 visas** in 2022 alone. The majority of them were a Type D visa: 259,427 visas. If we dive into details, then 100,503 people obtained the 05a employment visas. 61,365 people obtained the 23 PBH visas. 46,121 people obtained the 18 Pole's Cards. 24,364 people obtained the 21 humanitarian visas. 19,784 people obtained the 06 employment visas. 8,982 people obtained the 04 doing business visas. 3,144 people obtained the 09 university studies visas. 2,118 people obtained the 11 training course or retraining visas [13].

It should be taken into account that a part of people who had the PBH visa, employment visas or the Pole's Card, or a study visa used to obtain a

residence permit within a year. Also, some people with the PBH visa or the Pole's Card did not relocate to Poland. Some Belarusian citizens obtained visas repeatedly (humanitarian visas, PBH visas, employment visas). In 2022, the dynamics of visa issuance had to be more active after February due to the outbreak of war. One can only assume that holders of ordinary employment, study and humanitarian visas used them mostly to relocate to Poland. At that, Poland has been issuing its humanitarian visas only since August 30, 2022 [14]. I.e., not all people with humanitarian visas have managed to apply for or to obtain a humanitarian residence permit. Given the large number of assumptions, it will be challenging to estimate the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland by the number of national visas issued.

**Approach 1.** To ensure a more accurate calculation of the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland, one can analyze the data on the number of Belarusian citizens who have obtained and who are waiting to obtain the right on permanent living in the country.

The process of acquiring the status of permanent living often takes six months to a year (from the moment a person registers to submit his/her documents and until s/he obtains a permanent residence plastic ID card). Therefore, Belarusian citizens who obtained visas in the second half of 2022 will most likely get a decision on obtaining their residence permits only in 2023. This process was superimposed by the relocation of Belarusian citizens from Ukraine to Poland, and they often lacked proper paperwork. Moreover, Poland has been issuing its humanitarian residence permits only since July 9, 2022; and the document-processing period could extend due to the large influx of migrants from Ukraine in 2022.

Based on the above, the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland (as of the beginning of 2023) should be equal to the number of Belarusian citizens having residence permits plus the number of resident applications submitted in 2022 and in Q1-2023, adjusted for the possible number of applications for permanent status approved in 2022.

Given that a part of the residence permits applications received in 2021 was approved in 2022, we should deduct 50% of the submitted residence applications from the number of the obtained residence permits for permanent living in order to avoid double counting when estimating the number of Belarusian citizens residing in Poland. The total number of Belarusian citizens residing in Poland should also include the number of Belarusian citizens who applied for residence status in Q1-2023, since people take several months usually — from the date of their arrival in Poland till the date of their application — before they submit their documents to get a temporary residence permit or a permanent residence permit. In addition, we should subtract 10% from the number of all applications for permanent living, since a part of the applicants could reapply.

Let us assume that a maximum of 10% of applicants reapplied because the number of applicants in 2022 was several times higher than the number of Belarusian citizens who were eligible for permanent residence in Poland in 2020 and 2021. In addition, as of the end of 2020, 68.8% of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland had a permanent residence permit; and a permanent residence permit shall be renewed once every 10 years. 6,000 people had a temporary residence permit at the end of 2020, and 12,600 people had it at the end of 2021; the validity period of a temporary residence permit is 1-3 years. Even if we assume that 50% of the people who had a temporary residence permit at the end of 2021 will have to update their temporary residence permits in 2022, then this number will not exceed 7,000 people in any case, i.e., 10% of the submitted applications. Let us assume that the number of the re-applied temporary residence permits did not exceed 10% in Q1-2023, taking into account the increased intensity of issuing national visas in 2022.

As a result, the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland under residence permits and under submitted residence applications can be: *the number of Belarusian citizens who applied for a permanent residence status in 2022 \* 90% — the number of Belarusian citizens who obtained residence permits in 2022\*50% + the number of Belarusian citizens who had a residence status at the end of 2022 + the number of Belarusian citizens who applied for a permanent residence status in Q1-2023 \* 90% = 69.9 thousand \* 0.9 — (15.3 thousand) + 65 thousand + 21.5 \* 0.9 thousand = **132 thousand persons.***

**Approach 2.** Another approach can consider the number of ZUS payers (ZUS is the Polish Social Insurance Institution, which is similar to the Belarusian Social Protection Fund (SPF)). In 2020, 50.6 thousand Belarusian citizens paid ZUS contributions; there were 71.2 thousand of them in 2021, and, as of the end of 2022, 108 thousand Belarusian citizens made social contributions in Poland [15]. The number of such Belarusian citizens in Poland reached 116 thousand people at the end of March 2023 [16].

Until second part of 2020, seasonal workers, drivers, construction workers and other Belarusian specialists who had come to Poland under employment visas had been able to consider work in Poland as temporary. The situation changed in 2021 and 2022. The number of Belarusian citizens who obtained residence permits sharply increased. In addition, the number of people who were in the process of obtaining a temporary or permanent residence permit increased significantly. The number of the latter increased significantly over 2 years (from 13.9 thousand people in 2020 to 32.5 thousand people in 2021, and to ca. 70 thousand people in 2022). As a result, in 2022, the number of Belarusian citizens who applied for permanent residence status and obtained



permits exceeded the number of ZUS payers for the first time in the last 5 years. Therefore, even considering the fact that some categories of Belarusian citizens, such as non-employed spouses, children and students, are not ZUS payers, the majority of Belarusian citizens working in Poland will reside in this country permanently.

*In the 2020–2021 academic year, 9,739 students from Belarus studied in Poland; in the 2021–2022 academic year, there were 11,075 students from Belarus<sup>1</sup> [17]. Given that over 3,000 student visas and several thousand visas for retraining were issued in 2022, the number of students from Belarus should have increased at least by 2-3 thousand and amounted to over 13-14 thousand students in 2022.*

It is possible to estimate the number of Belarusian citizens who reside, but do not pay social insurance contributions in Poland, by summing up the number of students (assuming that a small part of them can pay the ZUS contributions at their workplaces<sup>4</sup>), the number of registered Belarusian citizens aged under 16 years (8,046 people in 2022), then by making an adjustment for the share of non-employed spouses (5-10%), and by dividing the sum by the total number of Belarusian citizens having permanent residence status at the end of 2022:

$$(8046+13000+3250//6500)/65007*100 = 37\% // 42\%.$$

Thus, the estimated number of Belarusian citizens who do not pay the ZUS contributions ranges from 37% to 42%.

**Table 4.** *Data on the number of ZUS payers, the number of Belarusian citizens who have obtained or have applied for permanent residence status in Poland.*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Q1-2023
ZUS payers, thousand people <sup>5</sup>	24	34.1	42.8	50.6	71.2	105.9	116
The number of Belarusian citizens who have applied for residence status (for the period), thousand people	9.5	11.6	12.8	13.9	32.5	69.9	21.5
Number of Belarusian citizens with residence status, thousand people	8.3	11.6	16.3	21.5	34.4	65	75.7

<sup>4</sup> A person is not obliged by law to pay the ZUS contributions if s/he is employed under a contract agreement; a contract agreement is the employment arrangement used by students most frequently.

<sup>5</sup> Data on the number of Belarusian citizens who were ZUS payers in 2022 and in Q1-2023 have been taken from the sources [19; 20].



The ratio of the number of Belarusian citizens entitled to permanent living in Poland to the number of ZUS payers	0.34	0.34	0.37	0.42	0.5	0.61	—
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Source: Data from the Office for Foreigners (Poland); *Cudzoziemcy w polskim systemie ubezpieczeń społecznych – XII 2021* [8; 18].

If the share of children, students and unemployed spouses among the ZUS payers is in the range of 37%–42% of taxpayers, then their number will be 39.2–44.5 thousand people. In this regard, when calculating the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland at the end of 2022 based on contributions to ZUS, their number = ZUS payers + (37%/42% of ZUS payers: includes children, students and unemployed spouses) = 105.9 thousand + (39.2 thousand/44.5 thousand) = **145.1 thousand // 150.4 thousand** Belarusian citizens.

The above calculations cannot accurately determine the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland. Nonetheless, the exact figure with a high degree of probability is in the range **from 132 thousand to 150.1 thousand people**.

### ***3.3 Estimated total number of Belarusian citizens who relocated to Poland for permanent living in 2021–2022***

Compared to 2020, the number of Belarusian citizens entitled to permanent living in the country increased by 55.2 thousand people (2.7 times) in April 2023. The number of Belarusian citizens with the right to permanent residence increased by 44.5 thousand people in 2021–2022.

**Approach 1.** Considering that some Belarusian citizens living in Poland still have visas only, then the following number of people could enter Poland for permanent residence in the given period (2021–2022): *Belarusian citizens who obtained their residence documents in 2021–2022 + Belarusian citizens who applied for permanent residence status in 2022 \* 90% — Belarusian citizens who obtained permanent residence status in 2022 \* 50% + Belarusian citizens who applied for permanent residence status in January–March 2023 \* 90% = 44.5 thousand + 69.9 thousand \* 0.9 — 30.6 thousand \* 0.5 + 21.5 thousand \* 0.9 = 111.5 thousand people.*

**Approach 2.** If we calculate the entry of Belarusian citizens based on the ZUS payers database, we will get the following figures: (ZUS 2022 payers — ZUS 2020 payers) + (ZUS 2022 payers — ZUS 2020 payers) \* 37%/42% = (105.9 thousand — 50.6 thousand) + (105.9 thousand — 50.6 thousand) \* 0.37/0.42 = 75.8//78.5 thousand people.

At the same time, the second approach is not accurate in this case, since some ZUS payers had been able to work in Poland under employment visas before second part of 2020, and they had not relocated to Poland for permanent

residence. I.e., the structure of the ZUS payers could change significantly in 2 years.

**Approach 2.1** To ensure a more accurate assessment, let us calculate the possible number of Belarusian citizens who have entered the country by applying the second approach based on the calculation of the conditional number of the ZUS payers.

If we take the number of Belarusian citizens entitled to permanent residence in Poland by year and find the share of such Belarusian citizens in the total number of the ZUS payers, then we can determine how many of them could conditionally live and pay social insurance contributions (social taxes) in Poland in 2020 based on the structure as of 2022.

Thus, the conditional value found allows to determine the number of Belarusian citizens in 2021–2022 taking into account the change in the structure between the ZUS payers and those Belarusian citizens who were entitled to permanent residence, i.e., we exclude the factor of seasonal workers.

- The ratio of Belarusian citizens permanently residing versus Belarusian citizens paying ZUS, in 2020:  $21.5/50.6 = 0.43$
- The ratio of Belarusian citizens permanently residing versus Belarusian citizens paying ZUS, in 2022:  $65/105.9 = 0.61$
- Conditional number of the ZUS payers from Belarus in 2020:  $21.5/0.6 = 35.3$  thousand people

As a result, the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland calculated on the basis of the number of residents in Poland and the number of the ZUS payers in the structure of 2022 =  $(ZUS\ 2022\ payers - ZUS\ 2020\ payers\ (conditional)) + (ZUS\ 2022\ payers - ZUS\ 2020\ payers\ (conditional)) * 37\% / 42\% = (105.9\ thousand - 35.3\ thousand) + (105.9\ thousand - 35.3\ thousand) * 0.37 / 0.42 = 96.7 // 100.3\ thousand\ people$ .

Based on the two approaches, it follows that the main share (**from 96.7 thousand to 111.5 thousand**) of Belarusian citizens entered the territory of Poland in 2021–2022. Labor migration and migration based on Polish origin had been more typical for Belarusian citizens before 2020, which had certainly contributed to an increase in the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland, but at a rather moderate pace.

People have started relocating more actively for political reasons after the 2020 presidential election in Belarus. Belarusian citizens began to leave Belarus because of persecutions. However, the easiest relocation options for Belarusian citizens were Ukraine and Georgia throughout the fall of 2020 and into 2021. Strict quarantine restrictions were in place in Poland and other EU countries; the land border between Belarus with the EU countries locked; and air traffic between

European countries and Belarus completely stopped after the forced Ryanair transit aircraft landing in Belarus.

An active migration wave of Belarusian citizens to Poland started in March 2022, which was caused by the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the worsening economic situation in Belarus, ongoing repressions, and the outbound relocation of businesses from the country. At that, the war in Ukraine has led to the migration of people not only from Belarus, but to the migration of Belarusian citizens from Ukraine, too. On the one hand, males have been leaving Belarus because of the fear of mobilization; families have been leaving Belarus because of economic and political situation deterioration, and because businesses (in the IT industry primarily) have started relocating their staff to other jurisdictions. On the other hand, Belarusian citizens have been leaving Ukraine because of the hostilities. At the same time, Poland has been a more favorable country for primary migration (from Belarus) or secondary migration (from Ukraine, Georgia) due to a simpler legalization process.

#### ***4. Other European Union countries***

Since the generalized statistics for the EU countries are released with some delay, it is not yet possible to see how many Belarusian citizens had the right to reside in each EU country in 2022. Nevertheless, based on the structure of issuing first permits to Belarusian citizens over the recent years, one can roughly estimate: firstly, how interested Belarusian citizens are in other EU countries except Poland and Lithuania; and secondly, the number of Belarusian citizens who have obtained primary permits over the last decade.

The migration flow analysis is based on the Eurostat statistics. In accordance with the current methodology, a *resident permit* means any permit to stay in an EU member state for a period of at least 3 months. Moreover, the statistics include not only residence permits, but also some types of long-term visas. Thus, the PBH visas and the Pole's Card can be included in this category. If we talk about the *first permit*, then this includes precisely the number of permits issued for the first time. That is, if a foreign citizen applies for an extension of her/his residence permit, or for a change in its category, then the change / extension of the status will not be reflected in the data on migration flows in the EU countries. At the same time, these statistics will also include Belarusian citizens who have received a first permit but have not used it.

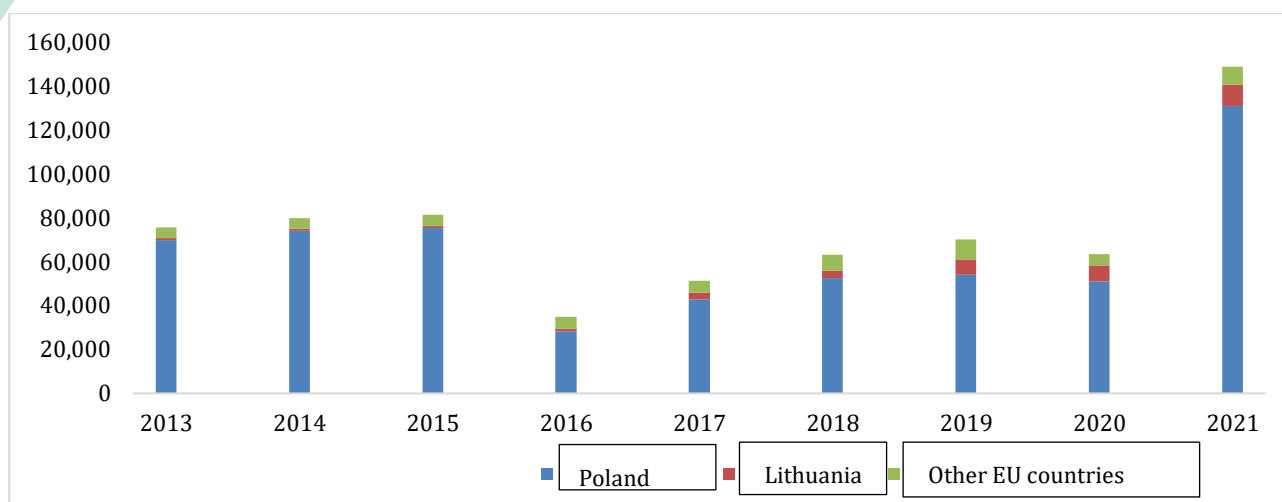


Figure 10. The share of first permits issued in Poland, Lithuania and other EU countries to Belarusian citizens, # of permits.

Source: Eurostat [21].

Looking at the current dynamics, one can see that 85%–95% (depending on the year) of all first EU residence permits have been issued by Poland and Lithuania (Figure 10). These countries have accounted for the main inflow of migrants from Belarus. At that, Poland has been leading by a large margin in the number of permits issued: it has introduced special programs (the PBH visa, the Pole's Card), which allow a larger number of Belarusian citizens to obtain the right to permanent living in the country.

At the end of 2021, Poland came out on top among the EU countries in issuing first permits to foreigners: about 1 million permits. Most permits were issued to the citizens of Ukraine (over 700,000 permits). The citizens of Belarus rank second (over 130 thousand permits). At that, Belarusian citizens ranked third in terms of the number of first permits obtained from the EU countries in 2021, following the citizens of Ukraine and Morocco (Figure 11). If we look at the number of first permits issued per 100,000 population, then in 2021: in Morocco, this figure was 400 people per 100,000 population; in Ukraine,<sup>6</sup> this figure was about 2,200 permits per 100,000 population; and in Belarus,<sup>7</sup> this figure was 1,610 permits per 100,000 population. Thus, if we look at the number of first permits issued in the EU and take the population of the country of origin of migrants into account, then Belarusian citizens ranked second, following Ukrainian citizens. At the same time, the vast majority of the permits issued to the citizens of these countries were issued by Poland. These data indicate a high rate of migration from Belarus.

<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of 2022, 37,457,971 inhabitants were registered in Morocco, and 39,701,739 inhabitants were registered in Ukraine [22].

<sup>7</sup> The population of Belarus was 9,255,524 people as of January 01, 2022. [23]

Ukrainian citizens obtained permits to reside in the EU mainly for employment purposes (87.9%), and Belarusian citizens obtained permits to reside in the EU mainly for employment (46.8%) and other reasons (45%), which most likely include the Pole's Card and humanitarian (political) reasons.

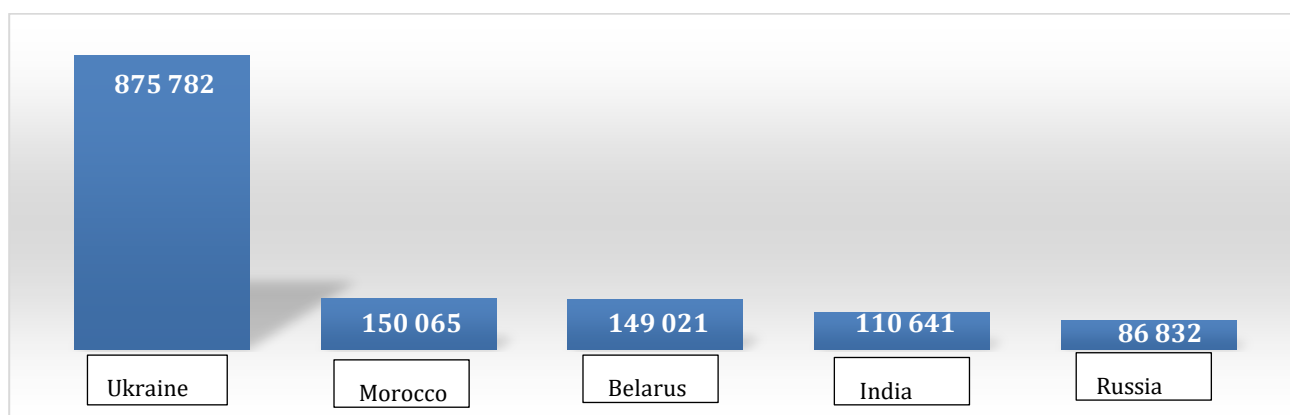


Figure 11. Leading countries in terms of the number of first EU permits issued in 2021, # of primary permits.

Source: Eurostat [21].

Poland and Lithuania continued being the most attractive countries for migration for Belarusian citizens in 2022. At that, 55,432 Belarusian citizens obtained a first residence permit in other EU countries over the entire period of observations (from 2012<sup>8</sup> to 2021). These statistics do not include people with refugee status or temporary protection.

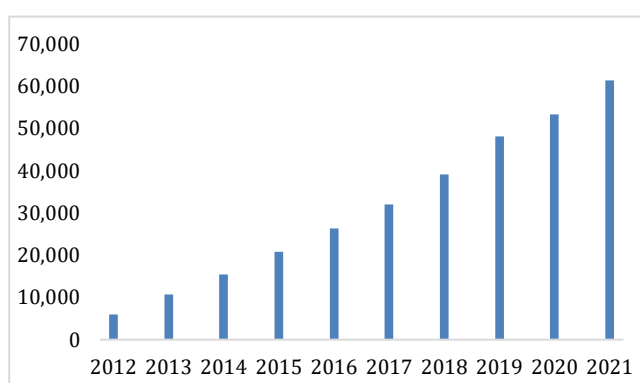


Figure 12. Number of first permits issued, cumulative total (excluding Poland and Lithuania), pcs.

Source: Eurostat [21].

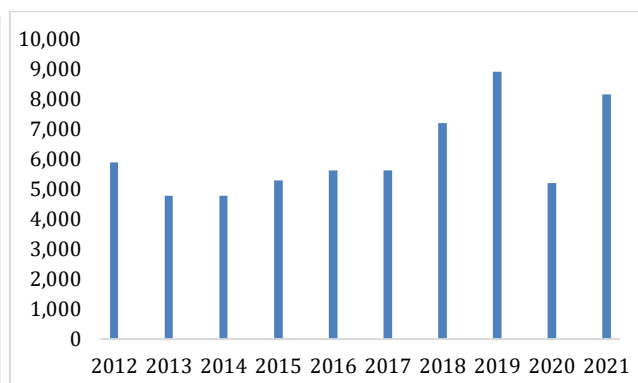


Figure 13. Number of first permits issued per year (excluding Poland and Lithuania), pcs.

Some of the people who obtained their first residence permits could travel outside the EU or even not use their first residence permits. However, it

<sup>8</sup> The 2021 statistics have no data on Liechtenstein and Croatia.

should be taken into account that there are no simplified procedures for obtaining national visas or special statuses for permanent residence in most European countries, unlike Poland. Therefore, the number of Belarusian citizens residing in these EU countries should not differ much from the number of permits obtained. The potential growth of the number of immigrants from Belarus in 2022 should also be taken into account. In this regard, it is possible to conclude that **61.3 thousand Belarusian citizens** entered the EU countries (excluding Lithuania and Poland) in 2012-2021 (Figure 12). At that, it is challenging to estimate the percentage of permanently residing Belarusian citizens, since some of them could eventually return to their homeland. However, based on the Lithuanian indicators (the case of Poland is less evident here, as there are opportunities for obtaining residence status easier, which not everyone uses), it can be assumed that the percentage of non-returning citizens was small.

Taking the increasing emigration from Belarus in 2022 into account, the number of Belarusian citizens who have entered the territory of the EU for permanent residence **may reach 73 thousand people** or more (61.3 thousand people + the number of first residence permits issued in 2021\* 1.6<sup>9</sup> (13,235 people)). Then, **about 21.5 thousand Belarusian citizens could relocate to the EU (except Lithuania and Poland) for permanent residence (13,235 + 8,272) in 2021-2022.**

### ***5. The total number of Belarusian citizens who entered the EU countries for permanent residence in 2021-2022***

If we sum up the estimate number of entries of Belarusian citizens into the EU for permanent residence in 2021-2022, we get the following figures:

1) Migration to other EU countries in 2021-2022 + growth of the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Lithuania in 2021-2022 (lower level) + growth of the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland in 2021-2022 (lower level) = 21.5 thousand + 25.4 thousand + 96.7 thousand = **143.6 thousand people.**

2) Migration to other EU countries in 2021-2022 + growth of the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Lithuania in 2021-2022 (upper level) + growth of the number of Belarusian citizens permanently residing in Poland in 2021-2022 (upper level) = 21.5 thousand + 37.9 thousand + 111.5 thousand = **170.9 thousand people.**

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<sup>9</sup> The factor of 1.6 has been taken based on the growth rate of the number of Belarusian citizens residing in Lithuania and the growth rate of the number of residence permits issued by Lithuania in 2022 compared to 2021 (1.57 and 1.64, respectively).

The conducted research reflects the migration flows of Belarusians to Poland and Lithuania quite accurately. In other EU countries, the number of migrants from Belarus may be recalculated upwards after receiving EU statistics on migration for 2022.

Belarusians relocated not only to EU, but also to Georgia, Uzbekistan and other countries of the former Soviet Union, the states of Asia, North and Latin America. However, even the results of the study indicate active emigration processes. The number of people who left the country is comparable with the total population of the city of Baranovichi (Belarus), if compared at the upper end of the range, and this exceeds the total population of the entire Orsha district of Belarus, if compared at the lower end of the range [24].

## ***6. Conclusions***

Migration flows from Belarus to the EU countries intensified in 2021–2022. One of the consequences of this process was the reduction in the number of people employed in the Belarusian economy, while the unemployment rate was reducing in the country. In 2021, Belarusian citizens ranked third among all migrants to the EU countries who obtained first residence permits. Most of the first permits issued to Belarusian citizens in the EU in 2013-2021 were issued by Poland. Until 2021, the main reasons for Belarusian citizens to migrate to Poland had been the desire to earn money and to relocate based on Polish roots; then, in 2021-2022, people relocated because of fear of persecution for political reasons, because companies relocated their staff, because Belarusian companies relocated their business fully or partially, because of the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, because of fear of mobilization, and because of economic reasons. The expansion of reasons for relocation has predetermined the change in the age and sex structure of migrants. In the last two years, the share of males among Belarusian citizens entitled to permanent residence in Poland has increased. As the age structure is concerned, the share of children and young people aged under 20 years has increased, while the share of people aged 59+ years has decreased. Based on the calculations made, 96.7 thousand to 111.5 thousand Belarusian citizens migrated to Poland in 2021–2022 alone. In total, 143.6 thousand — 170.9 thousand Belarusian citizens entered the EU countries for permanent residence in 2021-2022. It should be taken into account that data on migration for the EU countries, with the exception of Lithuania and Poland, are available only for 2021, so the exact number of Belarusians who moved to the EU countries in the last two years may exceed the calculated range.



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