

Characteristics of the “Old” and “New” Belarusian Diasporas

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JEL codes: F22, J15

Executive Summary

Over the past five years, the Belarusian diaspora has undergone a cascade of upheavals that have radically changed both its size and its qualitative composition. Hundreds of thousands of people have left Belarus, and a substantial part of the country’s business sector, independent media, and civil-society structures have ended up abroad. This dynamic gives grounds to speak of the existence of at least two large diasporic groups – the “old” and the “new” diaspora – with the dividing line between them running through the year 2020.

Drawing on a comprehensive study combining a qualitative component (30 in-depth interviews) and a quantitative component (a CAWI survey), this report analyzes the overall state of the Belarusian diaspora and the existing differences between the groups that comprise it, distinguished by the timing of their migration from Belarus.

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Bullet Points

- Belarusians abroad see their diaspora as a decentralized system of self-organizing communities, which is not always viewed positively.
- Perceptions of the diaspora vary by country: in Poland and Lithuania there is more of a sense of organized diaspora communities, whereas in Germany the diaspora is perceived as more diffuse and in competition with the Russian-speaking space.
- The criteria for identifying oneself with the diaspora are nationality, a sense of commonality with other Belarusians, and participation (even minimal) in diaspora activities.
- In assessing the state of diaspora communities, respondents tend to emphasize what unites rather than what divides these communities. Existing tensions are described more as interpersonal than intergroup.
- Potentially conflict-prone factors include: a) the contrast between those engaged and those not engaged with Belarusian issues, and b) differences between “political refugees” and “economic” migrants.
- At present there are no fundamental or significant contradictions within the diaspora; the Belarusian diaspora is best described as a community of like-minded people.
- Relations between the different waves of migration from Belarus are characterized as calm, and even fairly warm.
- Belarusians rate their own efforts to adapt to their new countries of residence as effective.
- At present, the success of adaptation has little bearing on decisions about a potential return to Belarus.

INTRODUCTION

Today the Belarusian diaspora is a dynamic phenomenon with a steadily growing size, an evolving structure, and multi-directional activity. At the same time, although by the late 2010s the Belarusian diaspora could theoretically have numbered several million people, there had been practically no comprehensive research devoted to it. In many respects the diaspora remained a kind of “thing in itself,” of interest only to a small number of Belarusian activists and historians.¹

Recently the situation has begun to change. The starting point of this shift can be considered the processes of social self-organization during the first wave of COVID-19, when members of the Belarusian diaspora helped Belarus find, purchase, and transport resources needed to fight the pandemic. This was followed by the first wave of politicization of Belarusian society (including the diaspora) during the 2020 electoral campaign, and subsequently by the repressive suppression of the Belarusian revolution. A third important factor was the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation in February 2022. Thus, within a short period the Belarusian diaspora: a) went through a stage of self-awareness and separation from the broader post-Soviet space, and b) received several successive waves of migration from Belarus, which increased its size by several hundred thousand people. These processes gave a powerful impetus to the development of both the Belarusian diaspora itself and applied research on it.²³

Today the Belarusian diaspora has both characteristics common to all diaspora communities and specific features shaped by the Belarusian context. Its transformation has brought to the fore the idea of distinguishing between the so-called “old” and “new” diaspora: those who left Belarus before and after the events of 2020–2021.⁴

Our basic hypothesis is that there is a substantial difference between these two diaspora subgroups, divided both by differing experiences of (non-)participation in the revolutionary events at home and by the consequences of differing lengths of residence in

¹ See, for example, Kipel (1993), Hardzienka (2010), Shabeltsev (2021), and others.

² See (Korshunau, 2022).

³ See (Luzgina and Koreyvo, 2023) and (Korshunau, 2024).

⁴ Although in fact this is not a unique problem. Many diasporas periodically identify the presence of different groups within their own structure.

other countries. An additional hypothesis was formulated as follows: the particular features of the division into “old” and “new” diaspora will manifest differently across different country contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the project is a comprehensive sociological study consisting of two stages:

Stage 1 – qualitative research (in-depth interviews) – to identify the substantive aspects of self-identification and perception among representatives of the “old” and “new” Belarusian diaspora. In total, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted in the summer of 2024, 10 in each country – Poland, Lithuania, and Germany. In each country, 5 representatives of the “new” diaspora and 5 representatives of the “old” diaspora were interviewed. Within each country group, respondents of various professions and employment types were selected to ensure a spread of opinions. Each group included people working in journalism or IT, members or representatives of civic associations, people employed in science and education, people employed in business, individual entrepreneurs, the self-employed (freelancers), and people in blue-collar occupations employed in construction and logistics.

Stage 2 – quantitative research (a CAWI survey) – to identify trends in the perception of various diaspora groups. The object of the study is the active segment of the pro-democratic part of the Belarusian diaspora. The study was conducted in partnership with the “Narodnaye apytanne” [People’s Survey] initiative; the achieved sample size was 535 people. The characteristics of the achieved sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the achieved sample

<i>Sample characteristics</i>	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
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people	532	211	230	91
Gender, %				
Male	63,4	63,0	64,8	60,4
Female	36,3	37,0	34,8	38,5
Other	0,4	0,0	0,4	1,1
Age, %				
18-30	16,3	18,5	16,1	12,1
31-40	42,2	38,9	47,0	37,4
41-50	31,6	35,1	27,8	34,1
51-60	7,7	5,2	7,0	15,4
61 +	2,2	2,4	2,2	1,1
Countries (5 largest by number of respondents), %				
Poland	55,6	63,3	63,2	18,2
Lithuania	9,8	11,9	10,5	3,4
Germany	7,2	3,8	7,5	13,6
United States	4,9	3,3	2,6	14,8
Georgia	2,5	3,3	2,6	0,0

Limitations of the study

The achieved sample characterizes not the entire Belarusian diaspora, but rather its more active, pro-democratic part (a limitation typical of any diaspora study); it has limitations in terms of representativeness, but it does allow us to capture the general trends in how diaspora communities perceive the issues under study.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BELARUSIAN DIASPORA

Overall, at present Belarusians abroad see their diaspora as a decentralized system of self-organizing communities, which is not always viewed positively (Fig. 1).

– ...it's a lot of different groups where people come together based on shared interests. I know, for instance, that there are at least five women's groups, where the girls get together and do various networking, and talk. I know there's an IT group, and I know there's a group for mothers with children.

LS46Zh2⁵

– I'm still afraid to call the clusters of Belarusians, the communities of Belarusians, a diaspora. In the sense that yes, there are people. That's clear. But I wouldn't say there's any coherent structural unity.

PN30Zh4

On a scale from “fragmented” (1) to “unified and structured” (10), the state of the Belarusian diaspora is rated on average at 5.5 points.

At the same time, assessments of the state of the diaspora vary somewhat among representatives of different migration waves: the most recent wave (2022+) gives an average score of 5.2, the 2020–2021 wave – 5.6, and earlier waves – 5.0. These assessments are based on respondents' own experience, so they say more about the degree to which different migration waves are involved in diaspora processes and structures than about the diaspora itself: a greater degree of involvement is characteristic of the 2020–2021 wave, and a lesser degree of earlier waves.

⁵ The report includes quotations from the in-depth interviews, which appear in italics in the text. To ensure respondents' anonymity, the captions accompanying the quotations are coded as follows: country (P – Poland, L – Lithuania, G – Germany), “new” or “old” diaspora (N – “new,” S – “old”), age, gender (M – male, Zh – female), occupation (1 – employed in journalism or IT; 2 – members or representatives of civic associations; 3 – people employed in science and education; 4 – employed in business, individual entrepreneurs, self-employed/freelance; 5 – blue-collar occupations, employed in construction, drivers).

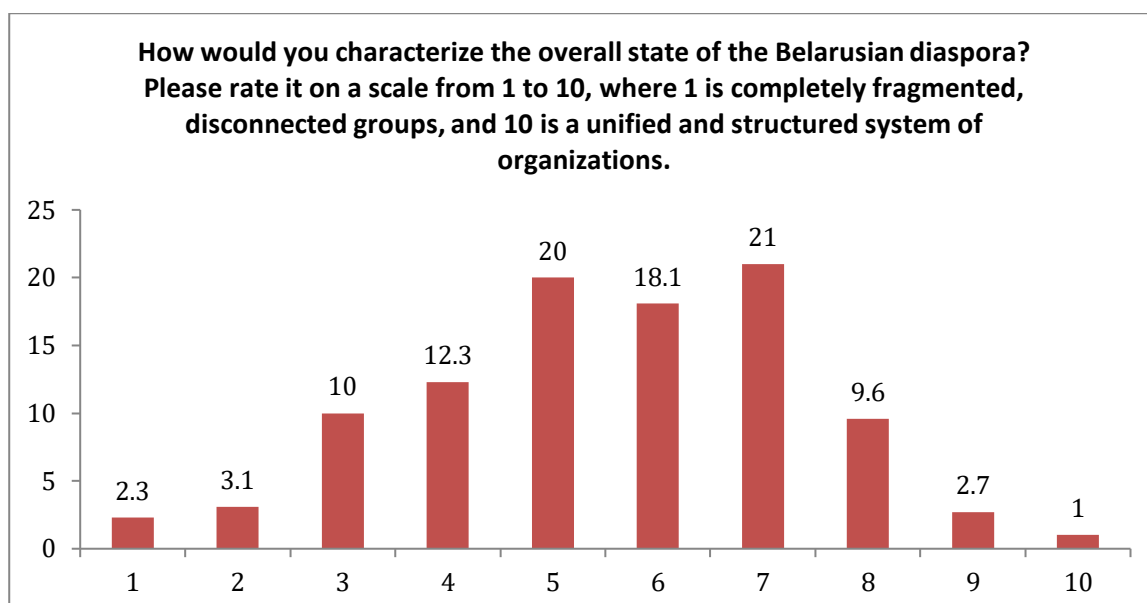


Figure 1 – Assessment of the state of the Belarusian diaspora

Perceptions of the diaspora are similar among respondents from different migration waves across different countries: it is associated with a “community of communities” or with all people of Belarusian nationality (Table 2). It is worth noting the diffuseness of opinions here – respondents apparently find it difficult to take an unambiguous position on this question. However, the perception of the diaspora is clearly not associated with any need for institutional or organizational formalization.

Table 2. Distribution of responses to the question “Which of the following statements do you agree with?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
The diaspora is officially registered organizations	0,4	0,5	0,0	1,1
The diaspora is all Belarusian communities, initiatives, and groups, including those not officially registered	49,0	49,8	47,8	49,5
The diaspora is all Belarusian men and women abroad	49,0	48,3	50,4	47,3
Hard to say	1,7	1,4	1,7	2,2

One caveat needs to be made here: based on our preliminary analysis of the situation, we initially used a dichotomous division of Belarusian emigration into the “old” and “new” diaspora. However,

over the course of the in-depth interviews, respondents repeatedly raised the idea that there is also a certain distinction between those who left before and after 2022. On this basis we put forward a refined hypothesis about the existence of at least three significant groups within the Belarusian diaspora, the differences between which are tracked throughout this report. These are the following diaspora groups, or waves of emigration: a) pre-revolutionary – those who left Belarus before 2020, b) post-revolutionary – those who left during 2020–2021, c) post-war – those who left in 2022 or later.

It should be noted that, despite a degree of consensus in the answers to the quantitative survey questions, within the in-depth interviews respondents very often emphasized the importance of the formal component – the need for an institutional and organizational base for diaspora communities as a guarantee of their active functioning.

– There is a separate Belarusian diaspora, an organized one, as far as I know.

PN32M

– ...there are large Belarusian organizations here, various ones, they have, well, large representations.

LN26Zh4

– ...if you look at an actual official diaspora, then after 2020 it took shape in Germany. Specifically, the official Belarusian diaspora.

GN41Zh1

Such discrepancies between the quantitative and qualitative measurements may indicate a mismatch between theoretical, abstract knowledge (“the diaspora is everyone”) and practical observations, compounded by people’s own wishes (the diaspora as a cohesive structure).

At the same time, practically all respondents note that relations among members of the Belarusian diaspora are predominantly calm, regardless of when and from where people arrived in the country.

Perceptions of the structural features of the Belarusian diaspora vary by country.

Poland

In Poland, all respondents noted that the diaspora consists of a multitude of groups without any hierarchical subordination or structural unity. In effect, it is a conglomerate of self-organizing communities, where the dividing criterion is orientation toward solving everyday problems in general, or participation in specific forms of activity:

– There's a division between Belarusians who simply arrived and are interested exclusively in migration issues and everyday matters... And the second group is people who are united by some additional interest, beyond the everyday.

PN32M2

The integrating mechanisms are the need for communication, the search for shared interests, and mutual assistance. Among the forms of communication noted, the following can be distinguished:

- mutual-aid groups, including territorial ones (“There are city-based ones, where people help each other with legalization, with settling into a new area, sometimes gathering for their own events” – PN36M5);
- associations based on political views (“For some people the national idea and democratic principles matter, so they form their own groups” – PS36M2);
- interest-based groups (“There's some sort of hangout there, a feminist circle, I know. There's a literary circle. There's a trendy hangout like that” – PN30Zh4);
- professional communities (“I'm a doctor, and we communicate within a fairly narrow medical circle” – PN47Zh3).

In respondents' view, there is currently a fragmentation along lines of interest, as well as a decline in cohesion compared to 2020–2021. Nevertheless, Belarusians see potential for the diaspora to come together, primarily through the presence of a coordinating component:

– I think these are scattered communities and groups that, nevertheless, share a common basis and would readily come together under conditions that favor it. So I don't see any total fragmentation or disunity.

Lithuania

According to respondents, in Lithuania too the diaspora does not form any single structure. It includes residents of Belarus who came for temporary or seasonal work, as well as those who came to settle permanently, including for political reasons.

– Formally, there are said to be around 60,000 Belarusians registered in Lithuania. Of these, the largest part, 30,000–40,000, are long-haul truck drivers. The second part, maybe 10,000–15,000, are, to use a not-very-politically-correct word, guest workers, construction workers, and others. The third part of the diaspora, the most visible one, is political migrants, and IT workers are partly connected with them too. There is a fairly clear divide between those who cannot return to Belarus and those who travel there periodically.

LN38M4

Thus, one dividing line has to do with the political status of people from Belarus, and another with the activities of organizations oriented toward representing Belarusians' interests. This is an important point that Belarusians from other countries did not mention: in Lithuania there is competitive rivalry between these organizations:

– If you turn to organization number one for some kind of help, and then you go to organization number two, and organization number two finds out that you turned to organization number one, organization number two won't help you.

LN26Zh1

Another tension has to do with the question of interaction between generations:

– Older people, who came here and lived through the Soviet Union, are people of the Soviet Union, and nothing changes for them. They won't even listen.

LS50M5

As in the Polish case, for the Belarusian diaspora in Lithuania the zones of crystallization are interest-based groups, territorial communities, and mutual-aid groups. There is also, among the diaspora

community in Lithuania, a live demand for mutual coordination and support of diaspora communities' activities.

Germany

A specific feature of the Belarusian diaspora in Germany is its small size (compared both with the situation in Poland or Lithuania, and with the Russian or Ukrainian diasporas in Germany).

– Belarusians dissolve into other diasporas precisely because, compared to the Belarusian one, the Ukrainian and Russian diasporas are very large. That is, there are a lot of Russians here, a lot of Ukrainians.

GN27Zh4

On the other hand, respondents emphasize that it was precisely in Germany that a formally and organizationally structured Belarusian diaspora emerged, which helped people become aware of themselves and orient toward promoting active forms of activity:

– If you look at an actual official diaspora, then after 2020 it took shape in Germany. Specifically, the official Belarusian diaspora.

GN41Zh1

– Our demarche showed that we are one of the few diaspora in Europe – if not the only one – that is unified.

GS57M5

Belarusians in Germany agree that their diaspora is rather fragmented, that there has been a certain decline in solidarity since 2022, and that there are some misunderstandings between those who have assimilated and those who arrived more recently.

Overall, Belarusians' perceptions of the state of their diaspora in their countries of residence are not very clear-cut. Respondents note the existence of various diaspora communities (often even a developed network of them), but they often find it difficult to characterize them more concretely, to identify or simply describe them, remaining at the level of merely declaring that diasporas exist. At the same time, there is a

fairly pronounced country-specific pattern in perceptions of the diaspora:⁶

- Polish respondents often emphasize the existence, in their places of residence, of a developed and active Belarusian diaspora;
- respondents from Lithuania sense the presence of various diaspora communities (Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian) and a relatively organized form of activity of the Belarusian diaspora;
- respondents from Germany likewise note the existence of various diasporas, but more often emphasize the diffuseness of the Belarusian diaspora, both territorially and organizationally,
- a separate point (especially among residents of Germany) is the existence of a shared Russian-speaking space that previously united representatives of different countries. After 2022 this space began to fall apart, and the diaspora began to separate and mutually distance themselves from one another.

Diasporic identity and activity

Belarusians abroad have a positive attitude toward their diaspora and identify with it fairly readily. Interestingly, of all the participants in the in-depth interviews (30 cases), only two firmly did not consider themselves part of the Belarusian diaspora, and another two expressed doubts about whether they could count themselves as such. At the same time, the criteria for self-identification with the diaspora community differ.

It is clear that the key aspect of belonging to the diaspora is national identity and a sense of commonality with other Belarusians: national identity is linked to national and ethnic self-awareness, while the sense of belonging is mediated by a readiness for mutual assistance. The latter is also determined by the presence of shared ideological and political views, a sense of Belarusians' openness to interaction and communication (primarily with other Belarusians), and pride in Belarusian culture and the Belarusian people, which allows one to maintain a connection with Belarus and "Belarusianness" within oneself.

⁶ As a rule, respondents feel the presence of the Belarusian and Ukrainian diasporas more strongly, and the Russian diaspora less so. In general, with regard to the Russian diaspora, even allowing for the partial Russian-speaking character of other diasporas, respondents prefer to keep their distance ("I don't know anything about Russians," "I'm not aware about Russians").

– I consider myself part of the Belarusian people. And that's why I consider myself part of the diaspora.

PN47Zh3

– I am de facto part of the diaspora. On the criterion that I am a Belarusian living in Lithuania and feeling myself to be Belarusian.

LN38M4

Respondents often emphasize the importance of having an organizational structure and cohesion for the diaspora's effective development. The functioning of the diaspora is associated primarily with providing mechanisms of social protection and help for "one's own." Involvement in the diaspora implies providing economic and organizational support, help with social adaptation, and psychological support.

However, ideas about the specific organizational forms this should take are rather vague. Belonging to the diaspora is equated with membership in some community, or with participation in events and activities organized by other members of the diaspora.

The question of participation in diaspora events is often resolved in the context of the need to recognize one's personal responsibility and to take active steps in order to count oneself as part of the diaspora:

– I'm still working within the Belarusian context, I'm still organizing various Belarusian events for Belarusian men and women. I'm still a participant in similar events organized by someone else.

LN23Zh2

– The Belarusian diaspora exists for as long as people keep asking, "who else if not me?"

GS57M5

This is accompanied by the view that the diaspora can be understood as the cohesive part of the community that is engaged not only in social support, but also in promoting Belarusians' interests and defending their views, rights, and freedoms in the country of residence.

– The active ones are probably the ones who write petitions to the Lithuanian government saying, we're good kitties, please stop banning everything for us in this country.

LN23Zh2

– These people need to be united in some group and somehow represent their interests in Lithuania... The same problem with expiring passports needing renewal. But it seems to me that all of this should be done by the Belarusian diaspora.

LS45M2

It should be emphasized that respondents' doubts about their belonging to the diaspora are not due to a denial of their connection with the Belarusian community, but on the contrary, are linked to an inability to participate more actively in diaspora life because of everyday circumstances.

The quantitative data show a very high degree of diaspora identity (Table 3). Almost 90% of Belarusians abroad identify themselves with the diaspora. The share of those who deny such belonging is comparatively small, though it is somewhat more noticeable among representatives of the pre-revolutionary wave. It is also worth noting that representatives of the pre-war waves feel more confident in their sense of belonging to the diaspora, whereas among the post-war wave the shares of unequivocally and less confidently positive responses are roughly equal.

Table 3. Distribution of responses to the question "Do you consider yourself part of the Belarusian diaspora?" by migration wave (in %)

	Total		2022+		2020-2021		Before 2020	
Definitely yes	54,1	88,7	45,5	88,6	62,2	91,3	53,8	83,5
Rather yes	34,6		43,1		29,1		29,7	
Rather not	7,5	8,6	7,6	8,1	5,7	7,0	11	13,2

Definitely not	1,1		0,5		1,3		2,2	
Hard to say	2,6		3,3		1,7		3,3	

Most respondents consider the main criteria for belonging to the diaspora to be a sense of commonality with other Belarusians and at least minimal participation in its activities. Maintaining ties with Belarusians is also of significant importance, and this is especially significant for representatives of the post-revolutionary wave (Table 4).

Let us emphasize that respondents predominantly rely on passive criteria of belonging. This is especially true of representatives of the post-war wave, since among those surveyed from the pre- and post-revolutionary waves the share of those emphasizing the importance of organizationally and institutionally structured forms of activity within diaspora activity is noticeably higher.

Table 4. Distribution of responses to the question “In your view, meeting which conditions allows a person to be considered part of the Belarusian diaspora?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
To feel a sense of commonality with Belarusians	77,6	76,8	77,8	79,1
To take part, at least occasionally, in the shared activities of the Belarusian diaspora	61,3	62,1	60	62,6
To maintain ties with Belarusians	58,5	58,8	62,2	49,5
To be of Belarusian nationality	53,6	57,3	51,3	50,5
To hold a passport of a citizen of Belarus	23	24,2	23	19,8
To actively participate in the shared activities of the Belarusian diaspora, to help organize events	17	14,2	18,3	20,9
To be a member of an officially registered Belarusian diaspora organization	9,2	5,7	10,4	14,3

Other	1,3	0	3	0
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All Belarusians, regardless of how long they have been abroad, are to one degree or another interested in the activities of Belarusian communities. For the most part, participation is relatively passive and mainly involves occasionally attending events organized by Belarusians abroad (Table 5).

Representatives of the pre-revolutionary wave more often take an active part in organizing events and are interested in online communities. Belarusians of the post-revolutionary wave more often emphasize the regularity of their participation. Representatives of the post-war wave, more than others, follow Belarusian media for information about Belarusians abroad.

Table 5. Distribution of responses to the question “Do you take part in the activities of Belarusians abroad?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
I actively take part in the activities of Belarusians abroad and in organizing such events	9	6,2	9,6	14,3
I regularly attend events organized by Belarusians abroad	17,2	14,2	22,3	12,1
I occasionally attend events organized by Belarusians abroad	36,5	41,7	35,4	28,6
I follow the activities of Belarusians abroad in chats or online communities	20	19,4	17	26,4
I follow the activities of Belarusians abroad through Belarusian media	11,2	14,7	9,2	8,8
I am not interested in the activities of Belarusians abroad	3,7	1,9	3,9	7,7

DEMARCATIION LINES WITHIN THE DIASPORA

Before turning to an analysis of what distinguishes the different groups of Belarusians abroad, it should be noted that respondents themselves tend to emphasize what unites members of the Belarusian diaspora. The study data confirm that within the Belarusian diaspora there is a demand for maintaining communication with compatriots. The overwhelming majority of participants in the in-depth interviews noted that they actively maintain ties with other Belarusians and have a fairly wide circle of contacts among people from Belarus.

Only in exceptional cases is communication with compatriots limited for the sake of adapting to the norms of life in another country:

– If you move to live in another country, it's not entirely right to socialize and live within the diaspora, because you socialize less specifically within the country itself – you need to communicate more with the people who live in that country. And at first my goal was actually to communicate less with members of my own diaspora.

LN26Zh1

The quantitative data confirm the high intensity of communication among diaspora members, both with each other and with Belarusians inside the country (Table 6).

The main circle of communication with people in Belarus follows this hierarchy: relatives (94.4%), friends (76.6%), colleagues (30.0%). Naturally, the highest intensity of communication is characteristic of the most recent, “post-war” migration wave – the sum of responses to this question was 257.8%; for the “post-revolutionary” wave this figure is 234.3%, and for the “pre-revolutionary” wave, 217.6%. Among the notable features is the comparatively high intensity of communication with friends among earlier waves of Belarusian migration.

Table 6. Distribution of responses to the question “With whom of those who currently live in Belarus do you keep in touch?”* by migration wave (in %)⁷

⁷ Questions marked with an asterisk (*) allow multiple response options

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
With relatives	94,4	95,7	94,3	91,2
With friends	76,6	77,7	72,2	84,6
With colleagues who remained in Belarus	30,0	39,8	25,2	19,8
With like-minded people	28,1	33,2	27,4	17,6
With former neighbors	11,8	11,4	15,2	4,4
No contact, ties have somehow been lost	0,9	0	1,3	2,2

The structure of communication within the diaspora is different (Table 7). Here two positions come first – friends (65.5%) and those who live nearby (65.3%), followed by like-minded people (41.7%) and colleagues (36.8%).

Table 7. Distribution of responses to the question “With which Belarusians, who have also left Belarus, do you maintain closer relations?”* by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
With friends	65,5	65,4	64,6	67,0
With Belarusians who live in the same city or country as me	65,3	65,9	67,2	60,4
With like-minded people	41,7	41,2	41,0	44,0
With colleagues	36,8	40,8	38,4	23,1
With relatives	31,7	35,5	28,4	29,7
I do not maintain ties with Belarusians	2,6	2,4	2,6	3,3

Speaking of the frequency of communication, almost half of respondents communicate with compatriots several times a week or even every day (here representatives of the “revolutionary” emigration wave have the largest share). Others communicate less often (the share of such respondents is highest among representatives of the pre-revolutionary diaspora); those who do not communicate with compatriots at all are, in fact, very few (Table 8).

Table 8. Distribution of responses to the question “How often do you communicate with Belarusians who have left Belarus (excluding relatives)?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Daily	23,6	22,7	28,3	14,3
Several times a week	24,0	23,7	24,8	23,1
Several times a month	30,3	30,8	28,7	31,9
Once a month or less often	18,4	19,0	14,8	26,4
We do not communicate	3,7	3,8	3,5	4,4

The online survey data are consistent with the qualitative material. In the in-depth interviews, respondents emphasized the importance of family and friendship ties, noted the importance of maintaining professional connections (most often in the context of informal communication), as well as the integrating role of shared territory of residence:

– First of all friendship [ties], and then professional ones, and then, on the principle that you’re from Belarus too.

LN38M4

– All of this is because we’re here. If, for example, we hadn’t moved, we wouldn’t communicate with these people so often. That is, it’s sort of a friendship-territorial thing... You’re in a foreign environment, and you try to find something familiar, something understandable, that was part of your previous life.

GN27Zh4

In addition, an important factor in forming and maintaining communication within the Belarusian milieu is national identity. Respondents often emphasize the importance of belonging to the Belarusian community, of being aware of oneself as part of Belarusian society, a positive orientation in attitudes when communicating with compatriots, and the presence of mutual understanding and support:

– If a Belarusian meets a Belarusian, we’ll always meet up, talk, share our views. A Belarusian to a Belarusian is a Belarusian, as they say.

LS50M5

– I felt this sense of solidarity, and I realized that in all my time in emigration, while I communicate with people who aren't from Belarus, there's so much of my own pain that I can't share with them, discuss certain topics, because it's just not something they can understand... Only Belarusians will understand me.

LN26Zh1

Shared ideological views are also of considerable importance. In the course of the interviews, respondents often emphasized the significance of shared convictions and the communication problems caused by their absence:

– The strongest ties are ideological ties. Most of my friends and acquaintances support certain political movements.

PN36M5

– Stronger ties with people who moved after 2020 and who are like-minded.

PS40Zh3

In characterizing their relations with other Belarusians, interview participants often emphasized the importance of mutual support and assistance, and also mentioned specific organizational forms of activity: creating organizations to help Belarusians (psychologically, legally, with socialization), help with emigration and employment, with finding housing and legalization, political activity, and volunteer work chats.

– Belarusians try very hard to stick together, to feel somehow more comfortable and safer here. Mostly they also come together in interest-based circles. Someone sings in a choir, someone dances, someone attends language clubs.

LS45M2

So, according to respondents' assessments obtained in the in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the diaspora is perceived by Belarusians abroad as a complexly organized community in which there are quite a few differences and dividing lines.

At the same time, a common trend is the emphasis that contradictions

or conflicts within the diaspora are predominantly local and even everyday in character, and are not linked to any shared strategies of behavior.

– There are conflicts everywhere, people are everywhere. I don't think it depends on whether we're Belarusian or not... There are individual personal conflicts between people, but it doesn't rise to the level of groups.

PS40Zh3

– It's clear there can always be disagreements over anything between individual people. For me to single out particular groups – specifically diaspora – that have contradictions at the group level, probably no, there aren't any.

LN38M4

The quantitative research data generally confirm this last point. The most popular answer to the question about differences/conflicts within the Belarusian diaspora was the option stating there are none – chosen by 37.1% of respondents (Table 9). Among the factors potentially provoking differences or conflicts, the most frequently cited is the contrast between those involved in Belarusian issues and those distanced from them – 32.5% – as well as a certain tension between “political refugees” and “economic” migrants, noted by 10.1% of respondents.

Table 9. Distribution of responses to the question “In your view, between which groups of the Belarusian diaspora do the greatest differences or even tension exist?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
I don't see any significant difference or major conflicts in the Belarusian diaspora	37,1	38,5	37,5	31,9
Between those involved in “Belarusian issues” and those distanced from them	32,5	34,6	29,0	36,3

Between “political refugees” and “economic” migrants	10,1	10,6	12,1	4,4
Between people who left Belarus in different years	3,6	2,9	4,5	3,3
Between Russian-speaking and Belarusian-speaking Belarusians	1,1	1,9	0,4	1,1
Between Belarusians of different generations, different ages	1,1	0,5	0,9	3,3
Between Belarusians who live in different countries	1,0	0,5	0,4	3,3
Between the more well-off and the less well-off	1,0	1	0,4	2,2
Other	12,5	9,6	14,7	14,3

The results of the in-depth interviews allow us to substantively illustrate the existence of such “demarcation lines.” Moreover, the way various issues are represented (and the emotional intensity of the arguments about them) differs somewhat between the qualitative and quantitative stages of the study – for all the caveats such a comparison entails. Thus, according to the in-depth interviews, one of the most problematic issues within the Belarusian diaspora is the contrast between economic and political emigrants, which affects how they integrate into diaspora life.

– ...the reasons why they moved abroad. Because this also carries over into how well individual people integrate and whether they participate in diaspora life, or simply how they behave in the course of communication. This matters too – whether they’re economic migrants or political ones.

PS40M5

– There are tensions between political immigrants and economic ones... there are “economic” chats, general chats, where people say: “no politics, please.”

PN32M2

This is a multifaceted problem. It is linked not only to the disintegration of the community along an “us–them” divide, but also to a heightened sense of social insecurity and injustice among “economic migrants,” given that political emigrants can often make use of a wider range of benefits and advantages in the new country.

– As economic refugees, we can also lose our jobs here, a huge number of people have run into that too, and end up in the same boat, only without any help, because they're not political refugees...

LN26Zh1

On the other hand, this can provoke resentment on the part of “political refugees” when people who left for economic reasons try to use political-protection measures to legalize their status.

– ...I have acquaintances who left entirely for economic reasons, migrated economically, but very improperly made themselves out to be “politicals,” which I get really angry at them about, because it's dishonest.

GN30Zh2

Next comes the field of everyday life and the specifics of adaptation to a new living environment. Here a contrast is drawn between people who are passive and detached from anything Belarusian, and those actively participating in diaspora life; between those actively involved in volunteer activity and those who have withdrawn from such activity due to “mental and psychological burnout, the inability to keep existing in a toxic environment”; between those who have learned to live a new life and those still living through the events of the 2020s; and between the politically active and the politically indifferent.

– ...there are those who are completely passive and completely detached from anything Belarusian, that is, living their own life, with just work and TV, and a small circle of contacts... There are active ones, who organize, coordinate, and generally set the trends and directions for where the Belarusian diaspora – and the whole world – is heading.

PS39M4

– ...they've broken away. Probably these two main reasons are a sense of danger and mental, psychological burnout, the inability to keep existing in a toxic environment.

LS46Zh2

– It's more, I think, that there's a difference rather than a conflict – there are people who come here and

that's it. They basically forget what was left behind, what's happening there; here is a new life, and it's great. There are people who are still living through the events of the 2020s... Maybe it's just not a conflict but a different context for different people... But these are people who, even living in Belarus, wouldn't particularly have gotten along, because one lives by one set of concerns, the other by another.

GN27Zh4

– In principle, there are people who are quite active, but they're more politically active. And there are some people who are already tired of politics, don't want that politics anymore. And there are people who didn't care about it in the first place.

GS53Zh3

Another point is a complex one: contradictions arising from value-based and political motives. These take many forms – for example, in attitudes toward the military actions in Ukraine, toward the Belarusian democratic forces, and in perceptions of those who are radically or oppositionally minded versus those who hold other views, and so on.

– There are more radically minded, demanding people, oppositionists – the kind who think that if your car's license plate has a red-and-green flag on it, you're a traitor to the Motherland and deserve to be spat on. This is between supporters and opponents of the regime.

PN40Zh5

– There are also value-based points of division, and pretty serious, irreconcilable ones too. Right-left, attitudes toward women, LGBTQ people, vulnerable groups, supporters of the idea of a nation-state versus opponents, and so on.

PN30Zh4

– And if we're talking about political groups, you know, our political activists don't always find common ground among themselves, and accordingly that trickles down into the diaspora too...

THE “OLD” AND “NEW” DIASPORA

Talk of dividing the Belarusian diaspora into an “old” and a “new” one is not new; it was already going on in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It resumed with particular force after the cascade of events triggered by 2020 and the several waves of migration from Belarus they set off. At the same time, the Belarusian case has at least one important difference from other cases. According to the view that circulates in mass consciousness, 2020 was the moment the Belarusian diaspora was born as a phenomenon.⁸

One can agree or disagree with this, but in any case it is obvious that 2020 had an enormous impact on the Belarusian diaspora. The results of the quantitative measurement show that representatives of the Belarusian diaspora tend to agree that, before that, the Belarusian diaspora essentially did not exist (at least not in the form in which we know it today). Thus, overall 41% of respondents support this thesis to one degree or another, while 26% partially or completely disagree with it (Table 10).

It should be noted that the largest share of those agreeing that the Belarusian diaspora did not exist before 2020 falls precisely on the group with the longest experience of living abroad (63%, versus 35–37% among later waves of emigration).

Table 10. Distribution of responses to the question “Many people say today that before 2020 Belarusians were diffused within the Russian-speaking diaspora and that the Belarusian diaspora as such did not exist. Do you agree with this statement?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total		2022+		2020-2021		Before 2020	
Completely agree	9,4	40,5	6,2	37,2	10,9	35,4	13,2	62,7
Rather agree	31,1		31		24,5		49,5	
Rather disagree	20,3	26,1	17,6	24,3	20,5	25,7	24,2	29,7
Completely disagree	5,8		6,7		5,2		5,5	
Hard to say	33,4		38,6		38,9		7,7	

Despite its fairly high prevalence in mass consciousness, the thesis that there was no Belarusian diaspora before 2020 requires some clarification. Previous research shows that the core structures of the Belarusian diaspora were

⁸ See, for example, (Second and Third..., 2004).

formed long before the fateful year 2020: “the core of the Belarusian diaspora formed before 2015. These people managed to integrate into new societies while remaining Belarusians; in effect they were the ones who formed the Belarusian diaspora that grew many times stronger after the events of 2020” (Korshunov and Kudrevich, 2023).

On the other hand, there is the effect of comparing what existed before 2020 with what has developed after 2020. Such a comparison shows that the “pre-revolutionary” Belarusian diaspora was not very large, was relatively weakly organized, and was more a sparse network of enthusiasts devoted to “Belarusianness.” In the terminology of G. Sheffer (Sheffer, 2004), it could be described as “dormant,” which contrasts sharply with the system of multi-level communities and organizations that we know the Belarusian diaspora to be today. That is, indeed, 2020 shifted the Belarusian diaspora to a completely different level of existence and functioning, drawing in even those who had emigrated earlier (Korshunau, 2022).

– ...after 2020, the people who came here now make up the core of my friends. And I keep very close contact with them. Plus, thanks to this, I got to know not only people who left after 2020, but also people who had lived here for a long time but who, in general, hadn’t been united or particularly visible to each other.

PS40Zh3

The ambiguity in how the timing of the diaspora’s formation is perceived, and where the boundary lies between its division into “old” and “new,” also shows up in respondents’ answers to the question of when exactly this division of the Belarusian diaspora occurred (Table 11). The most common answer was a denial that the diaspora is divided along this criterion at all: 43% of respondents indicated that there is no significant division among Belarusians abroad into an “old” and a “new” diaspora.

Nevertheless, a similarly sized share of answers went to another option, which fixes the division between the “old” and “new” diaspora precisely in 2020. It is notable that denying a difference between the different waves of Belarusian emigration is more characteristic of more experienced emigrants, while emphasizing 2020 is more characteristic of “newcomers.”

Table 11. Distribution of responses to the question “Today one can often hear about a division of the Belarusian diaspora into an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ one. In your view, at what point did the diaspora divide into ‘old’ and ‘new’?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
There is no significant division among Belarusians abroad into an “old” and a “new” diaspora	42,8	40,8	41,7	50,5
In the 1990s	1,3	0,9	1,7	1,1
In the 2000s	2,4	2,4	2,2	2,2
In the 2010s	4,9	3,3	4,8	8,8
In 2020	39,8	42,7	40,4	31,9
In 2022	4,9	6,2	4,8	2,2
Other	3,9	3,8	4,3	3,3

The clear distancing of migrants who left before 2020 from the old diaspora is due not only to the small size and dispersal of that diaspora, but is probably also linked to a number of complex factors, namely:

- resentment toward the masses – dissatisfaction with the large number of fellow citizens who migrated to third countries and dissolved into foreign settings;
- the diaspora’s near-total apoliticism before 2020 – from today’s vantage point, this feature can be seen in an extremely negative light;
- self-limitation to folklore – a minimal range of spheres chosen for diaspora activity, which are moreover of little interest to a broad audience in general and to younger generations in particular;
- the “Soviet-ness” of the diaspora – a substantial number both of structures overall (especially in the post-Soviet space) and of individuals who retained a Soviet-Russian identity and/or support the Belarusian regime.⁹

⁹ For examples, see Zverko, 2023, Sluchak, 2009, and others.

– *They support Russian policy, they support Lukashenko. That's the old diaspora.*

LS48Zh4

Images of the diaspora groups

The specifics of the Belarusian view of the “old/new” diaspora naturally also shape the “subjective” images of these communities that circulate in mass consciousness. In the in-depth interviews, respondents repeatedly voiced and emphasized the idea that before 2020 a Belarusian diaspora as such did not exist at all. That is, there were people living in another country who considered themselves Belarusian, but one could not call them a diaspora.

– *The birthday of our diaspora is August 9, 2020.*

GN41Zh1

That is why the image of the “old” diaspora (Fig. 2) is often associated with assimilation into local traditions and culture. On the other hand, a significant characteristic of the image of the “old” diaspora is its role in maintaining Belarusian traditions and culture. Its representatives are characterized as people who identify themselves with Belarus, who support national identity and culture, and who are oriented toward and contribute to preserving Belarusian culture and language:

– *These are, first and foremost, people focused on preserving some national core – language as a symbol, language as a symbol, I suppose, above all, from what I've seen at a couple of meetings, but no more than that; I think it really is basically the national core and that's it.*

GN44M3

There is also criticism of representatives of the “old” diaspora, related to the fact that they distance themselves from Belarusian culture and identify with Russian culture.



Figure 2 – Representation of the image of the “old” diaspora

Another notable aspect of the representation of the “old” diaspora is its identification with the images of certain politicians or political movements – Zianon Pazniak, the old opposition, the “old” political leaders, the BNR [Belarusian People’s Republic]:

– *The image of Pazniak? I thought of Pazniak.*

LN23Zh2

– *For some reason there’s this misconception that the entire old diaspora worships Zianon. There is such a thing. But it’s fundamentally wrong. What does Europe teach? To think critically... Here’s an addition to the question of how the old opposition differs from the new one. Because we already have a notion of specifically European democracy. The new opposition’s notion of democracy is one they brought back from a concentration camp.*

GSM575

– *I have a formed image of the diaspora of the old politicians. It’s a very vivid image for me. These are people who live by old politicians and old views on everything happening in Belarus, by old hopes of some kind. They’re usually negative, usually very hard to talk to. Without exception,*

they always know their history well. Their general mood is heavy, just a heavy psychological background. And they're usually not receptive to any new present-day influences.

PS39M4

– You could describe them as 'nashchadki BNR' [heirs of the BNR]. It's a diaspora that took shape back in the 1920s, and probably, at the very least, the ideological heirs of that quite old diaspora... The old diaspora is the Lutskevich Museum, all that kind of activity.

LN38M4

The image of the “new” diaspora (Fig. 3) is, as one would expect, stereotypically associated with youth, with something new, with various forms of activity. Several trends can also be traced in its description.

First and foremost, this is an active, creative, ideologically inspired milieu, people with a confident civic stance who organize events, participate in associations, are open to active engagement, adaptive, support one another, and hope for the best, are inclined toward organization and mutual assistance, and are interested in what is happening in contemporary Belarus. According to some respondents, the new diaspora has attitudes oriented toward national identity and Belarusian culture. They emphasize preserving traditions, stress their identity, and distance themselves from Russian or Soviet culture. In some cases, the politicization or oppositional character of the new diaspora is emphasized – its ideological orientation – but mostly in a positive sense, as a way of sustaining activity and solidarity.

The other pole of assessments of the new wave of emigration has to do with an emphasis on the need for adaptation and legalization in the new country. Newly arrived people have limited opportunities to participate in diaspora activities, since their attention is focused on everyday matters, learning the language, and finding employment. This, among other things, also fosters an orientation toward cosmopolitanism.

– For the most part, life is bound up, especially in the first years, with everyday matters: how to see a doctor,

where to buy boiled sausage, how to enroll a child in school, how to find a job, how to get legal status.

PN40Zh5

In some cases there is negative experience of interaction with recent migrants, related to a demanding attitude on questions of support and to an excessively active expression of oppositional views.

– Most people arrived with a narrative like ‘you owe us,’ and this showed up in everything – in demands for help, in public statements, and in the constant demonstrations and rallies that were held here all over the city almost every other day, that aggressive energy.

LS46Zh2

Overall, throughout the in-depth interviews, the image of the “new” diaspora was associated with categories such as “tired,” “burning out,” coming to terms with the fact that “this is long-term,” yet “not losing hope.”

To summarize, the perceptions of the “old” and “new” diaspora are often abstract and stereotyped; images are formed within a framework that opposes “traditional and settled” versus “active and moving toward a new future.” In this opposition, the “new” diaspora is the more appealing. Respondents – even those who formally belong to the so-called “old” diaspora (by length of time since leaving Belarus) – tend to distance themselves from it; this nominal distance is clearly visible in the figures (Figures 2–3), which present the results of an analysis of verbal descriptions of the different diaspora groups, showing that the “old” diaspora is “THEM,” while the “new” one is “US.” Let us stress that these are the results across responses from representatives of all waves of Belarusian emigration.



An extremely problematic area for everyone, regardless of the timing of emigration, is the question of legalization. And of particular importance is the experience of the trauma of 2020, linked to the specific way these events are perceived by their “participants” versus their “observers.”

The quantitative measurement also included a block of questions aimed at identifying the components of the images of the “old” and “new” diaspora. The block consisted of several statements, and for each of them respondents were asked to assess which diaspora group it fit best. The distribution of answers turned out to be substantially skewed toward the “new” diaspora: for all the proposed characteristics, the mean values of the responses were above 5 points, that is, in the half representing the “new” diaspora specifically. This is probably a continuation, in a sense, of the “logic of denial” of the existence of the Belarusian diaspora before 2020 and of the absence of a formed image of it.

Table 12. Distribution of assessments of statements on a 10-point scale, where 1 corresponds to the “old” diaspora and 10 to the “new” diaspora, by migration wave (mean values for the sample overall and by subsample)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
They include more political refugees than economic migrants	7,40	7,73	7,11	7,40
They are more politically active	7,31	7,50	7,22	7,20
They support other Belarusians more	7,13	7,05	7,25	7,04
They are more interested in Belarusian culture	6,39	6,41	6,37	6,31
They are more “sviadomyya” [nationally conscious]	5,72	5,71	5,67	6,00
They are more oriented toward adaptation and integration into the new society	5,70	5,57	5,63	6,18

Although the answers obtained provide almost nothing for understanding the formed images of different groups within the Belarusian diaspora, there are several points that are interesting for understanding the specific features of different waves of Belarusian migration.

First, there is a predominance of political refugees within the “new” diaspora. Moreover, this self-perception is noticeably more pronounced for representatives of the post-war wave than for the post-revolutionary wave of emigration.

The second point is a high degree of political activity. And again, the post-war emigration wave attributes this self-descriptive marker to itself more often than the other two waves.

The third aspect – and a self-descriptive marker of the post-war wave – is interest in Belarusian culture. On this indicator, the post-war migration group is also higher than the others.

The fourth characteristic is support for other Belarusians, which, in terms of self-perception, is more characteristic of representatives of the post-revolutionary migration wave.

As for representatives of the pre-revolutionary waves of Belarusian migration, they tend to attribute to the “new” diaspora such qualities as “sviadamasts” [national consciousness] and a readiness for adaptation and integration.

It is worth noting here that respondents tend to interpret the question of adaptation and integration into the new society rather as the need for legalization.

– People who arrived recently, of course, are now facing those pressing tasks of adaptation, legalizing their housing, work, and so on, which for people who have lived here a long time have already been resolved.

PS40Zh3

Relations between diaspora groups

Whatever the differences between the various waves of emigration, or the images of their representation in different subgroups, in respondents' view none of this has fundamental, differentiating significance at the interpersonal level. Respondents characterize relations between different waves of migration from Belarus as calm and even fairly warm. Respondents emphasize the absence of any truly serious conflicts, noting that interaction is a matter of personal culture and respect for the moral principles and rights of others. It can also be noted that, as a rule, descriptions of this experience are not very emotionally charged, which indicates a genuinely neutral perception of the situation.

Overall, three types of assessment can be identified regarding the character of interaction among Belarusians who arrived in other countries of residence at different times:

- generally positive,
- neutral,
- and the presence of certain tensions.

In the course of the interviews, respondents often noted a positive orientation in relations between people with different experiences of living in the countries under study. This concerns support both from newly arriving Belarusians and help with adaptation and integration, and the willingness of long-time residents to provide it.

– It doesn't matter when someone left Belarus – 10 years ago, 15 years ago – there's something to talk about either way, and either way everyone cares deeply about their country.

PN30Zh4

– ...those who came earlier help pull along those who came later.

PN36M5

– We have a lot of people who came here much earlier, and there's a lot of support felt here – people say, 'Come on, if anything, I'll tell you, show you how things work.' So the support is really substantial,

GN27Zh4

The perception of relations between the “old” and “new” diaspora as neutral is primarily due to the fact that they may simply not intersect. People who have lived abroad for a long time have already assimilated into their country of residence and have no particular need for contact with newcomers; they live according to their own everyday routines and concerns.

– ...there aren't any tensions at all, because a person either doesn't interact with the diaspora at all if they've fully assimilated. They're not interested, and they don't feel any sense of commonality. Or if they do feel some sense of commonality – ok, cool, you're from Belarus, I'm from Belarus too – then of course there won't be any tensions.

LN38M4

Some respondents, while emphasizing the neutrality of the interaction, point to certain differences in how phenomena and processes are perceived by representatives of different generations of the diaspora. On the one hand, there's a sense that people who arrived recently feel a stronger connection, are more aware of themselves as Belarusians, and distance themselves from representatives of other diaspora communities. On the other hand, those who left long ago are fairly well adapted and have already formed their own views, including on political issues.

– Belarusians who left later have a clear sense that they are Belarusian, even if they are Russian-speaking. Belarusians are not Russians, not part of a Russian milieu.

GN41Zh1

– Those who left before 2020 seem to adapt better, because they left by choice. Most often also because of an unwillingness to live under a dictatorship.

LS37Zh1

– Those who left earlier probably have more radical views on what needs to be done now. They're more inclined to criticize the democratic forces. And it's harder for them to understand people who are still inside Belarus.

LN23Zh2

The likelihood of relations becoming problematic is noted from the side of both the “new” and the “old” diaspora: one of the conflict zones is the question of who should support whom and to what degree, while a second dividing line runs along generational lines (this is especially noticeable among representatives of the Lithuanian diaspora). The latter is related to the fact that one part of the diaspora holds on to its long-established (“outdated”) political views, while the other prefers an alternative viewpoint.

– I often heard, ‘You weren’t even in Belarus in the 2020s, you weren’t beaten there... You sat it out over here, everything was great for you, so you owe us, and you should be helping us.’

LS46Zh2

– These old diaspora people support Russian policy, they support Lukashenko.

LS48Zh4

– They see us to some extent as enemies – well, not enemies, but opponents. But it's all tied up, of course, with television, with politics, with Russian propaganda... The old ones are stuck in their youth. Waiting for Putin.

LS50M5

– There are ‘Soviet Belarusians,’ with the Soviet mentality in their heads, who call themselves Russians. There are those who left as teenagers and adapted well. And there are those who complain all the time and don’t like Germany.

LS37Zh1

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DIASPORA GROUPS

As already noted, both the qualitative and the quantitative stages of the study revealed a dominant attitude affirming the relative unity of the Belarusian diaspora (even though it consists of independent communities and initiatives). As a generalizing or equalizing narrative, the absence of significant differences between the various groups of the Belarusian diaspora is emphasized, in particular between the different waves of emigration from Belarus. In theory, the dominance of such an attitude, affirming the primacy of internal homogeneity and solidarity rather than heterogeneity and confrontation, is a positive factor for the dynamics of any social system. At the same time, an objective difference between the various diaspora groups – or waves of Belarusian emigration – does of course exist.

Study participants agree that objective differences exist between the various diaspora waves, but they emphasize that such differences have no fundamental significance for the Belarusian diaspora.

The main demarcating factor is length of residence, which is linked to assimilation and adaptation in the host country. People who have lived there a long time have already gone through the process of adaptation – they know the language, the local culture and traditions, they are employed and fairly stable, and have experience dealing with the authorities or even citizenship. Meanwhile, those who arrived recently still have to solve many complex and pressing tasks related to legalization and finding work. “Newcomers” find it psychologically harder to come to terms with the circumstances they find themselves in, which is often related both to the unexpectedness of the move and to the loss of social status and social capital (symbolic and otherwise) under the new conditions.

Some respondents in the in-depth interviews expressed an alternative view. They emphasized that the older generation of emigrants faced much greater difficulties in adapting, being alone in an unfamiliar setting; they had to solve the problems of learning the language, finding employment, and adjusting to unfamiliar customs on their own. Meanwhile, contemporary Belarusian emigrants have access to help finding housing and work, to psychological support and support with legalization, but either don’t appreciate this or don’t want to leave their comfort zone.

A second differentiating factor is the motivation for leaving. In respondents' assessment during the in-depth interviews, whereas the main reasons for emigration before 2020 were economic, labor-related, and everyday in nature, after 2020 emigration occurs mainly for ideological and political reasons. At the same time, the involuntary nature of the departure weighs more heavily on emigrants' moral and physical state, but stimulates integration and strengthens intra-diaspora ties. Earlier waves of migration, being better prepared and knowing the language, have less need of support through solidarity with compatriots.

Analysis of the in-depth interview results revealed that one of the factors that may polarize the diaspora is the "ideological" question. On the one hand, the "new" diaspora may harbor resentment over unequal treatment of political migrants. On the other, representatives of the "old" diaspora often emphasize that they had long been aware of the political problems and made a rational decision well in advance.

– They think, 'We left Belarus over politics, so we consider ourselves much more important, we rank ourselves above other people.'

PS30M510

– I knew Lukashenko was a bad person and a bad president long before others did, and the people who arrived after '20 probably found this out a bit later, which is why they were surprised, which is why it's not so easy for them to find their footing in Poland.

PS36M2

Assessments of the political orientation of different generations of the diaspora can also point in different directions. Some emphasize the "Soviet-ness" of the older generation, while others, on the contrary, believe it is much better informed about the situation in Belarus, since representatives of the "new" wave are oriented toward adaptation and cosmopolitanism.

– They live in the Soviet Union and want that Soviet Union to be restored.

LS50M5

– The older waves are quite interested in the situation, in what's happening in the country. Those who

*left in the most recent wave, especially in '22, are already just looking forward...
They have a somewhat different set of concerns, more cosmopolitan, I suppose.*

GN44M3

This raises the question of the activity of various parts of the Belarusian diaspora, some oriented toward supporting it and expressing its interests, others toward assimilation and dealing with everyday matters. There is a view that it is precisely the “new” wave of the diaspora that consists of political and ideological activists connected to Belarus. There is also a somewhat different angle here, emphasizing that it is precisely the “old” wave that has the time, financial, and organizational resources for ideological struggle, unlike the “new” wave, which has not yet integrated.

Differences in values and perceptions

The differences declared during the qualitative measurement between the different waves of Belarusian migration are in many respects subjective, manifesting more at the level of interpersonal communication. The results of the quantitative measurement, aimed at identifying substantive differences between the various diaspora groups, did not reveal any significant differences.

In particular, there is no significant difference between representatives of different migration waves in terms of the level of paternalism – the diaspora is oriented rather clearly against paternalism (Table 13).

Table 13. Distribution of assessments of (anti-)paternalistic statements on a 10-point scale by migration wave (mean values shown in the table)

	Total	2022+	2020- 2021	Before 2020

1 – “People should bear more responsibility for providing for themselves,” 10 – “The state should bear more responsibility for providing for people”	4,0	4,0	3,9	4,0
1 – “The unemployed should have the right to refuse a job that doesn’t suit them,” 10 – “The unemployed should accept any job or lose their unemployment benefits”	4,0	3,9	4,0	4,6
1 – “Competition is good,” 10 – “Competition is bad”	2,1	2,1	2,2	2,2
1 – “The share of private property in business and industry should be greater,” 10 – “The share of state property in business and industry should be greater”	2,3	2,3	2,2	2,5
1 – “Private business is more efficient than state business,” 10 – “State business is more efficient than private business”	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,0
1 – “Effort is needed in order to earn well,” 10 – “Luck and connections are needed in order to earn well”	3,3	3,3	3,2	3,3

All the Belarusians surveyed abroad share an emphasis on the importance of competition and the advantages of private business, respect for the rights of the unemployed, and the importance of both personal responsibility and one’s own efforts to achieve material well-being. The only difference is observed among representatives of the pre-revolutionary migration waves, who are somewhat softer than other groups regarding the rights of the unemployed and the demand that private property should dominate over state property.

The anti-paternalistic attitudes shared across all migration waves are also clearly evident in the distribution of an additional block of value-related questions (Table 14).

Table 14. Distribution of assessments of value statements by migration wave (the table shows coefficient values ranging from +1.00 – completely agree, to –1.00 – completely disagree)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
An entrepreneurial career is a good career choice	0,54	0,52	0,52	0,59
I have sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience to run a business	0,11	0,09	0,11	0,18
Better to have average medical care, but free	-0,43	-0,46	-0,45	-0,34
Better to have a lower salary, but a guaranteed job	-0,69	-0,72	-0,68	-0,66
Civil peace and political stability justify some restriction of freedoms	-0,72	-0,71	-0,73	-0,71
Better to work at a state enterprise than a private one	-0,79	-0,82	-0,78	-0,76
Better to assign graduates to jobs by force than to leave them unemployed	-0,88	-0,89	-0,88	-0,90

The data show respondents' general confidence that business is a good career choice, although not everyone is confident that they have enough competence to engage in entrepreneurship.

Also shared is a rejection of statements such as “Better to have average medical care, but free,” “Better to have a lower salary, but a guaranteed job,” and “Better to work at a state enterprise than a private one” – on these points representatives of the post-war migration wave express themselves more uncompromisingly. The block concludes with a shared rejection of the ideas of a) restricting certain freedoms for the sake of political stability and b) the forced assignment of university graduates to jobs.

A certain radicalism of the most recent wave of Belarusian migration, noted above regarding pro-liberal positions, can also be traced on several other points (Table 15).

Table 15. Distribution of assessments of value statements – 2, by migration wave (the table shows coefficient values ranging from +1.00 – completely agree, to –1 – completely disagree)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Among Belarusians who have gone abroad, most have stopped supporting the protest movement and are dealing exclusively with their own personal affairs	0,12	0,13	0,10	0,14
Belarusians working in state positions or state companies in Belarus support the regime of A. Lukashenko	0,11	0,16	0,09	0,07
Belarusians abroad have a distorted picture of what is happening in Belarus and of Belarusians' moods	0,08	0,00	0,13	0,11

First, such respondents are more inclined than others to accuse Belarusians working at state enterprises of supporting the Lukashenko regime; second, they are less inclined than others to agree that Belarusians abroad have a distorted picture of what is happening in Belarus

When it comes to assessments of contemporary Belarusian society, or more precisely its democratically minded part, there are no fundamental differences in these assessments. According to respondents, the main differentiating factor for the pro-democratic part of Belarusian society is support for different political forces (Table 16).

Table 16. Distribution of responses to the question “In your view, between which groups of democratically oriented Belarusians are there significant contradictions today?”* by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Between supporters of different political forces (loosely speaking, between the “Pazniak camp,” the “Babaryka camp,” and the “Tsikhanouskaya camp”)	46,6	41,5	51,6	46,7

Between “pro-European,” “pro-Russian,” and “neutral” Belarusians	37,2	34,1	34,5	50,0
Between those who advocate the need for active resistance to the regime and those who believe there is currently no possibility of active resistance	34,7	35,6	35,9	31,1
Between those who live in Belarus and those who have left	32,2	31,7	34,1	30,0
Among those who hold conservative-nationalist versus liberal-civic values	15,0	15,6	13,5	17,8
Other	14,8	18,0	13,5	10,0

Representatives of the post-revolutionary migration wave pay attention to this factor more often than others. In second place is the difference in geopolitical views. More than a third of respondents say this can divide supporters of change; this difference is emphasized more often by representatives of the pre-revolutionary migration waves. About a third of respondents believe the potential demarcation lines lie between those who support or do not support the idea of active resistance to the regime, and between those who live in Belarus and migrants (this position was noted somewhat more often by representatives of the post-revolutionary and post-war waves).

In fourth place is the growing difference between the Belarusian diaspora and Belarusians inside Belarus, also noted by practically every third respondent, without meaningful variation by length of time in emigration. Attachment to conservative or liberal values is perceived as a source of tension between different groups of Belarusians to the smallest degree.

All the differences described both in this section and in all the preceding ones are fairly conditional. There is no large difference between the diaspora waves to speak of; in fact, one has to go looking for divergences between them. From this we can put forward the following thesis:

from a values-and-ideology standpoint, the Belarusian diaspora is a homogeneous formation – the diaspora unites like-minded people

To test this thesis – that is, to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the time of departure from Belarus and other variables – pairwise correlation coefficients were calculated. No substantial variety of differences was found between the different diaspora groups. Some differences can be observed only with respect to those questions whose perception is naturally shaped by length of time abroad:

- a weak inverse relationship between time of migration and assessments of the overall state of the Belarusian diaspora: representatives of newer waves tend to give higher ratings (see above),¹⁰
- a weak inverse relationship between time of migration and acceptance of the idea that no independent Belarusian diaspora existed before 2020: representatives of earlier waves of migration are more inclined to agree with this position (see above),
- a weak inverse relationship between time of migration and assessments of the success of adaptation: representatives of earlier migration waves feel more confident,
- a weak direct relationship between time of migration and willingness to return to Belarus: naturally, representatives of newer waves are more likely to be ready to return home.

Reasons for emigration and adaptation success

Real differences between the different diaspora groups appear only when large temporal factors come into play. In particular, the pre-revolutionary waves are characterized by a predominance of motivations of free choice: the search for opportunities for self-realization (47%), new experience (40%), or a country in a better economic position (31%) (Table 17). Compared to the others, this group also has a larger share of positive reasons – a job offer (26%) or leaving to study (23%). Overall, this is confirmed by the statements made by respondents in the in-depth interviews.

Both post-revolutionary waves of migration are characterized by a predominance of motivation driven by negative stimuli, linked to the likelihood of persecution by the Belarusian regime (78% for the post-war wave and 71% for the post-revolutionary

¹⁰ For the correlation coefficient values, see the table in the Appendix.

wave) and a general sense of personal insecurity against the arbitrariness of the Belarusian authorities (70% and 57% respectively). It is also worth noting that representatives of the post-war wave are characterized by a greater diversity of migration motivating factors than the post-revolutionary wave (the sum of the different response choices is 262% and 225% respectively).

**Table 17. Distribution of responses to the question “Why did you leave Belarus?”*
by migration wave (in %)**

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
I feared persecution by the authorities (but no “case” had been opened against me at the time of the move)	63,9	78,2	71,3	13,2
Due to a feeling of insecurity, lack of safety	57,4	70,1	57,0	30,8
I saw no prospects for self-realization	28,4	27,0	22,6	47,3
Because of economic problems within the country	17,8	19,4	11,3	30,8
To avoid administrative or criminal punishment imposed on political grounds (a case had already been opened)	16,1	15,6	22,2	1,1
I was offered a job	14,0	14,2	9,1	26,4
I wanted to try a new experience, to test myself	13,5	8,1	8,3	39,6
I wanted to see the world	8,2	5,7	4,8	23,1
For family reasons (marriage, family reunification, etc.)	7,7	6,2	4,8	18,7
I enrolled in an educational institution	5,8	1,9	2,6	23,1
I planned to find a new job	4,1	3,3	2,2	11
Other	9,7	12,7	8,7	4,4

Among representatives of the post-revolutionary wave, the share of those for whom the motivating factor was avoiding administrative or criminal punishment imposed on political grounds, with a case already opened, is noticeably higher – 22% (16% for the

post-war wave and only 1% for the pre-revolutionary wave). At the same time, for the post-war wave, unlike the post-revolutionary one, factors related to the search for opportunities for self-realization, economic problems within the country, and the availability of job offers turned out to be more significant.

It should be emphasized that, with regard to assessing the motives for emigration, we would not recommend dividing them into political and economic reasons, still less attributing them to particular waves. In the Belarusian case these positions can hardly be separated or contrasted with one another at all. For example, the absence of prospects for self-realization, which for pre-revolutionary emigration is the main motivating factor, cannot unambiguously be interpreted as an economic reason. It is quite possible that it may be political in nature, since the restrictions imposed by the regime were present throughout its entire period of rule. This is especially true given the fact that pressure on political and civic activists (including deprivation of the right to practice one's profession) had been exerted by the Belarusian authorities long before 2020.

If we look at the motivation for migration among Belarusians to different countries, we see a fairly clear relationship between the different migration waves and specific "destination" countries (Table 18). Thus, in particular, Poland and Lithuania took in the new, "forced" migration waves (in the case of Lithuania one can also see the results of the relocation of Belarusian businesses – reflected in the response option "I was offered a job"). Earlier migration waves, for which the motivations of achievement and free choice were more characteristic, were oriented more toward Germany and other countries.

**Table 18. Distribution of responses to the question “Why did you leave Belarus?”*
by country (in %)**

	Germany	Lithuania	Poland	other countries
I feared persecution by the authorities (but no “case” had been opened against me at the time of the move)	44,7	76,9	74,1	44,4
Due to a feeling of insecurity, lack of safety	39,5	51,9	64,6	49,7
I saw no prospects for self-realization	31,6	11,5	29,6	31,1
Because of economic problems within the country	7,9	15,4	16,3	23,8
To avoid administrative or criminal punishment imposed on political grounds (a case had already been opened)	15,8	17,3	17,7	12,6
I was offered a job	13,2	26,9	9,5	18,5
I wanted to try a new experience, to test myself	13,2	0,0	9,9	25,2
I wanted to see the world	7,9	5,8	5,4	14,6
For family reasons (marriage, family reunification, etc.)	21,1	5,8	3,7	12,6
I enrolled in an educational institution	18,4	1,9	3,1	9,3
I planned to find a new job	7,9	0,0	3,7	5,3
Other	2,6	11,5	9,9	10,5

In addition to assessing migration motivating factors, one of the key tasks of the study was to assess adaptation mechanisms. Overall, diaspora members, regardless of the timing of migration, are oriented toward adapting to their new places of residence. The difference in their positions is mainly due to length of residence in the country.

The choice of adaptation tools is fairly predictable and logical. The main and most frequently used forms of adaptation are learning the language of the host country, legalization (obtaining a residence permit), and finding work (Table 19).

A specific feature that distinguishes the different migration waves is the orientation toward taking the next step in legalization – obtaining citizenship of the new country. This is more pronounced

among representatives of the post-revolutionary wave – 55% – while for representatives of the post-war wave this figure is 49% (for the pre-revolutionary waves it is relatively low, 35%, which is quite natural, since about half of them already have citizenship other than Belarusian).

Table 19. Distribution of responses to the question “What steps are you taking to adapt to the country you live in?”* by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
I am learning the language of this country	80,0	75,8	80,9	86,8
I obtained a residence permit in this country	70,6	73,0	77,8	48,4
I found a job in this country	57,7	52,1	56,5	74,7
I plan to obtain new citizenship	49,3	48,8	55,2	35,2
I try to socialize more with local residents	38,6	35,5	39,6	42,9
I am looking for a job in this country	12,4	14,2	12,6	6,6
I am applying for a residence permit in this country	11,4	15,6	10,4	3,3
I plan to learn the language of this country	9,6	12,8	10	1,1
I obtained new citizenship	9,9	0,9	2,2	50,5
I found a partner among local residents	5,8	2,8	3,5	18,7
I am looking for a partner among local residents	4,3	5,2	4,3	2,2
I do not plan to adapt	1,9	2,4	1,7	1,1
Other	3,2	2,8	2,6	5,5

The adaptation pathways chosen by representatives of the Belarusian diaspora vary noticeably by current country of residence. Among those living in Germany, the share of those who have already found work is higher, as is the share of those focused on developing and maintaining contacts with local residents. Belarusians living in Lithuania lead in the number who have obtained citizenship of that country, but among them the share of those planning to obtain it is noticeably lower compared to other countries. Those living in Poland are ready for linguistic

adaptation, but are somewhat less successful in finding work compared to residents of other countries.

Table 20. Distribution of responses to the question “What steps are you taking to adapt to the country you live in?”* by country (in %)

	Germany	Lithuania	Poland	other countries
I am learning the language of this country	89,5%	63,5%	84,4%	74,7%
I obtained a residence permit in this country	71,1%	86,5%	79,6%	47,3%
I found a job in this country	71,1%	57,7%	56,1%	57,3%
I plan to obtain new citizenship	65,8%	19,2%	56,1%	42,0%
I try to socialize more with local residents	57,9%	26,9%	38,1%	38,7%
I am looking for a job in this country	21,1%	1,9%	12,9%	12,7%
I am applying for a residence permit in this country	5,3%	1,9%	15,0%	9,3%
I plan to learn the language of this country	0,0%	11,5%	11,2%	8,0%
I obtained new citizenship	10,5%	0,0%	3,7%	25,3%
I found a partner among local residents	10,5%	5,8%	1,7%	12,7%
I am looking for a partner among local residents	10,5%	3,8%	4,4%	2,7%
I do not plan to adapt	0,0%	3,8%	0,3%	4,7%
Other	2,6%	0,0%	1,7%	7,3%

What matters is not only understanding which adaptation and integration tools are being used, but also a self-assessment of how successfully they are being applied (Table 21). The quantitative results allow us to state that the success of adaptation is fairly high across all waves of Belarusian emigration. 83% of respondents believe they are adapting either fully (21%) or partially (62%) successfully. As one would expect, representatives of earlier waves of emigration report a higher level of adaptation. Country-specific patterns are also evident here: while 82% and 84% of respondents in Germany and Poland respectively report successful adaptation, in Lithuania only 73% of respondents do so.

Table 21. Distribution of responses to the question “How would you rate how successfully you are adapting to the new country?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total		2022+		2020-2021		Before 2020	
Completely successfully	20,8	82,6	11,8	78,6	18,3	81,3	48,4	95,7
Rather successfully	61,8		66,8		63,0		47,3	
Rather unsuccessfully	8,4	11	9,5	11,4	9,6	13,5	2,2	3,3
Completely unsuccessfully	2,6		1,9		3,9		1,1	
Hard to say	6,4		10		5,2		1,1	

For comparison: the Ukrainian diaspora adapts significantly worse. Data from a 2024 study indicate that almost two-thirds (64%, to be precise) of Ukrainians have failed to adapt successfully to living conditions in their new countries of residence (Migration Sentiments, 2024).

In theory, adaptation success affects assessments of one’s own prospects for returning to Belarus. However, this influence is probably mediated by the length of time spent abroad. For this influence to manifest itself, a period exceeding an interval of 4–5 years is needed. This is suggested by a comparison of the distribution of responses across different groups of Belarusian emigrants, set against the data of the 2022 study (Table 22).

The data show that on the question of (not) returning, fundamental differences appear, roughly speaking, on either side of the year 2020; the difference between the post-revolutionary and post-war waves is minimal. At the same time, comparing the data from the 2022 and 2024 studies shows several important things:

the share of those planning to return to Belarus has barely changed (42.1% in 2022 and 39.4% in 2024),

over two years, the number of those who have not yet decided whether they will (not) return home has decreased by almost half (from 16.3% to 32.6%),

at the expense of the latter, the share of those who have currently decided they will not return to Belarus has grown (from 25.3% in 2022 to 44.4% in 2024).

Table 22. Distribution of responses to the question “Do you plan to ever return to Belarus to live permanently?” by migration wave (in %)

	2022 study ¹¹		Total		2022+		2020-2021		Before 2020	
Definitely plan to	17,8	42,1	13,9	39,4	15,2	42,2	16,5	45,2	3,3	17,6
Rather plan to	24,3		25,5		27		28,7		14,3	
Rather do not plan to	19,8	25,3	30,9	44,4	29,4	38,9	30	40,9	36,3	66,0
Definitely do not plan to	5,5		13,5		9,5		10,9		29,7	
Hard to say	32,6		16,3		19,0		13,9		16,5	

The resulting shares are certainly not an absolute indicator of Belarusians abroad’s readiness or unwillingness to return to Belarus. The figures obtained reflect respondents’ current views, which will, first, change over time (and this dynamic is already noticeable), and second, will depend both on the specifics of the situation in Belarus and on how Belarusians are treated in their countries of residence.

And it is likely that one of the key factors affecting the scale and speed of repatriation will be developments within Belarus itself. The quantitative survey asked whether a change of the Lukashenko regime would affect the decision to (not) return to Belarus – 89% of respondents answered that a change of regime would affect their decision to one degree or another (Table 23).

Table 23. Distribution of responses to the question “Will a change in the current regime of Alexander Lukashenko affect your decision to return to Belarus?” by migration wave (in %)

	Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
This would significantly increase the likelihood of my returning	73,1	73,5	78,3	59,3
This would slightly increase the likelihood of my returning	15,7	13,7	14,8	23,1

¹¹ Korshunov and Kudrevich, 2023.

This would not affect my decision at all	8,2	8,1	6,1	14,3
Hard to say	3	4,7	0,9	3,3

However, a time factor is at play here as well. Looking at the distribution of responses, we see that while the “Lukashenko factor” is significant for three-quarters of respondents among the newer migration waves, among those who left before 2020 it is significant for only 60%. Note that in the 2022 survey, the significance of the “Lukashenko factor” was noted by 88% – 15 points higher. In other words, we are seeing a decline in the significance of this factor, although it remains very high to this day.

CONCLUSION

Belarusians abroad see their diaspora as a decentralized system of self-organizing communities, which is not always viewed positively. The diaspora as a phenomenon is perceived ambivalently: on the one hand it can be fairly amorphous and, in principle, encompass everyone who has left the homeland; on the other, respondents clearly wish to see the diaspora community become more cohesive and organized.¹²

Perceptions of one's own diaspora in the country of residence tend to be vague and stereotyped. Respondents note the existence of various communities but find it difficult to characterize them more specifically. At the same time, there is a country-specific pattern in how the diaspora is perceived: in Poland, respondents speak of the existence of a developed and active Belarusian diaspora; in Lithuania, the Belarusian diaspora coexists with other diaspora communities and has a relatively organized form of activity; in Germany, the Belarusian diaspora is small and more diffuse. Here the situation is complicated by the presence of a much larger and more organized Russian-speaking space.

Belarusians have a positive attitude toward their diaspora and identify with it comparatively readily. The criteria for identifying oneself with the diaspora are nationality, a sense of commonality with other Belarusians, and participation (even minimal) in diaspora activities. At the same time, representatives of the pre-revolutionary migration waves more often take part in organizing events and are interested in online communities; regularity of participation in diaspora events matters for the post-revolutionary wave; representatives of the post-war wave, more than others, follow Belarusian media for information about Belarusians abroad.¹³

In assessing the state of diaspora communities, respondents tend to emphasize what unites rather than what divides these communities. What unites them is a shared traumatic experience, "ideological" closeness, and a readiness to provide support. This emphasis on

¹² 5.5 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is "fragmented, elements not connected to one another" and 10 is "unified and structured."

¹³ We make this caveat because we recorded instances of self-limitation in diasporic identity, related to a low self-assessment of one's own activity on behalf of both Belarus in general and the diaspora in particular.

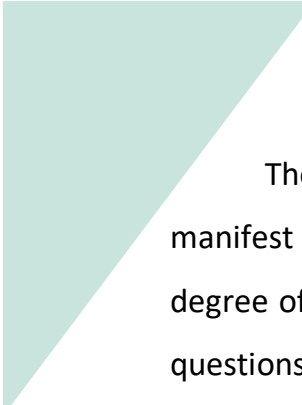
similarities leads to a denial of any fundamental disagreements or demarcation lines within the diaspora. Where disagreements do exist, they are defined as personal rather than reaching the intergroup level. Among the factors that could provoke conflicts, respondents cite: a) the contrast between those engaged and those not engaged with Belarusian issues, and b) differences between “political refugees” and “economic” migrants.

It is telling that no opposition between the “old” and “new” Belarusian diaspora was found. Moreover, a substantial part of Belarusians abroad tend to believe that there is no “old” Belarusian diaspora as such – because before 2020 it simply did not exist. This is undoubtedly an exaggeration, produced by comparing the “diaspora” life of Belarusians abroad before and after 2020. With all due respect for the “old” Belarusian diaspora, the structures and communities created after 2020 look more organized and larger in scale.¹⁴

The specifics of the Belarusian view of the “old/new” diaspora naturally shape the images of these groups circulating in mass consciousness. The images of the “old” diaspora are contradictory and even ambivalent. On the one hand, its role in preserving Belarusian culture and identity is recognized and respected; on the other, dissatisfaction is voiced with a number of characteristics attributed to it (assimilation into local communities, retention of “Soviet-ness,” conservatism, and so on). The “new” diaspora, by contrast, has more unambiguous characteristics. It is described mainly as young, active, and creative, yet at the same time “tired” and “burning out,” coming to terms with being “here for the long haul,” but “not losing hope.”

Whatever the differences between the various waves of emigration, in respondents’ view none of this has any differentiating significance – relations between the different waves of migration from Belarus are characterized as calm and even fairly warm. Respondents emphasize the absence of any truly serious conflicts, noting that the existing features of interaction are matters of personal culture and respect for the moral principles and rights of others. The quantitative data confirm the value-and-ideological homogeneity of the Belarusian diaspora.

¹⁴ Studies show that the core of the diaspora community formed before 2020.



The only criteria of difference of any significance are large temporal factors that manifest over long time intervals. Thus, length of time abroad is objectively linked to the degree of a migrant's adaptation to the new country (the latter being largely equated with questions of legalization); different periods of departure abroad were associated with different predominant motivations for emigration, and so on.

As for the success of adaptation to the new country, representatives of the Belarusian diaspora rate the effectiveness of their efforts in this direction highly: 83% of respondents believe they are adapting to some degree successfully. This share is expected to grow over time. For now, this factor does not have a very strong effect on decisions about potential repatriation: as two years ago, around 40% of respondents say they are ready to return to Belarus. At the same time, the share of those who have not yet decided whether to return home has declined. As a result, the number of those who currently do not plan to return has grown (from 25% to 44%). An important factor that will continue to influence decisions about repatriation is the "Lukashenko factor" – that is, a change of the ruling regime in Belarus – although its significance is gradually declining over time.



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Appendix

Distribution of responses to questions on the characteristics of the “old” and “new” diaspora

		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora the statement applies to: “They include more political refugees than economic migrants,” where 1 is closer to the “old” diaspora and 10 closer to the “new” diaspora	1	1,7	0,8	2,3	2,2
	2	2,0	0,8	3,1	2,2
	3	5,6	4,8	7,7	2,2
	4	3,3	3,2	3,1	2,2
	5	11,6	10,4	13,1	11,1
	6	4,6	5,6	3,8	4,4
	7	12,6	11,2	14,6	11,1
	8	21,5	20,0	17,7	35,6
	9	12,6	12,8	11,5	15,6
	10	24,5	30,4	23,1	13,3
		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora the statement applies to: “They are more interested in Belarusian culture,” where 1 is closer to the “old” diaspora and 10 closer to the “new” diaspora	1	2,0	2,4	0,8	4,4
	2	2,0	2,4	2,3	0,0
	3	4,3	2,4	3,1	13,3
	4	6,0	3,2	8,5	6,7
	5	30,2	36,0	29,5	17,8
	6	10,0	6,4	14,0	8,9
	7	11,0	12,0	7,8	15,6
	8	15,0	17,6	14,7	6,7
	9	7,6	5,6	8,5	11,1
	10	12,0	12,0	10,9	15,6
		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora the statement applies to: “They support other Belarusians more,” where 1 is closer to the “old” diaspora and 10 closer to the “new” diaspora	1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
	2	0,3	0,8	0,0	0,0
	3	1,0	1,6	0,0	2,2
	4	1,0	0,8	0,8	2,2
	5	25,8	23,6	28,1	24,4
	6	11,1	13,0	10,2	8,9
	7	14,4	17,1	12,5	13,3
	8	21,5	20,3	18,8	31,1
	9	11,4	10,6	14,1	6,7

	10	13,4	12,2	15,6	11,1
		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora best fits the statement: "They are more politically active," where 1 is closer to the "old" diaspora and 10 closer to the "new" diaspora	1	1,3	1,6	0,8	0,0
	2	0,7	0,0	0,8	2,2
	3	1,0	0,8	0,8	2,2
	4	2,7	1,6	3,9	2,2
	5	20,0	18,5	22,5	17,8
	6	8,0	7,3	9,3	6,7
	7	13,0	11,3	12,4	20,0
	8	20,3	22,6	17,1	22,2
	9	16,7	19,4	15,5	13,3
	10	16,3	16,9	17,1	13,3
		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora best fits the statement "They are more nationally conscious," where 1 is closer to the "old" diaspora and 10 closer to the "new" diaspora	1	4,0	2,4	4,7	6,7
	2	3,3	4,0	3,1	0,0
	3	8,3	8,9	6,2	13,3
	4	7,7	6,5	10,1	4,4
	5	32,7	35,5	33,3	22,2
	6	11,0	10,5	11,6	11,1
	7	8,0	8,1	8,5	6,7
	8	11,3	12,1	8,5	17,8
	9	6,7	6,5	6,2	8,9
	10	7,0	5,6	7,8	8,9
		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Please rate, on a 10-point scale, which diaspora best fits the statement "They are more oriented toward adaptation and integration into the new society," where 1 is closer to the "old" diaspora and 10 closer to the "new" diaspora	1	3,3	2,4	3,9	4,4
	2	3,3	2,4	4,7	2,2
	3	8,7	7,3	10,9	6,7
	4	10,7	16,1	7,8	4,4
	5	34,8	37,1	34,4	31,1
	6	6,0	6,5	5,5	6,7
	7	8,0	4,8	8,6	13,3
	8	9,0	11,3	6,3	11,1
	9	7,7	5,6	9,4	6,7
	10	8,4	6,5	8,6	13,3

Pairwise correlation coefficients of the above questions with time since leaving Belarus

		Pearson's R	Spearman correlation
How would you rate how successfully you are adapting to the new country?	Value	-0,237	-0,262
	Approximate significance	,000 ^c	,000 ^c
How would you generally characterize the state of the Belarusian diaspora?	Value	-0,121	-0,101
	Approximate significance	,006 ^c	,021 ^c
Today many people say that before 2020 Belarusians were diffused within the Russian-speaking diaspora and that the Belarusian diaspora as such did not exist. Do you agree with this statement?	Value	-0,199	-0,179
	Approximate significance	,000 ^c	,000 ^c
Do you plan to ever return to Belarus to live permanently?	Value	0,106	0,104
	Approximate significance	,015 ^c	,016 ^c

How much do you agree with the following statements?		Total	2022+	2020-2021	Before 2020
Belarusians abroad have a distorted picture of what is happening in Belarus and of Belarusians' moods	Completely agree	10,5	8,5	12,7	9,9
	Partially agree	46,3	43,1	48	47,3
	Rather disagree	32,6	36,5	27,1	38,5
	Completely disagree	9,4	11,4	10	3,3
	Hard to say	1,3	0,5	2,2	1,1
Among Belarusians who have gone abroad, most have stopped supporting the protest movement and are dealing exclusively with their own personal affairs	Completely agree	8,6	7,1	7,8	13,2
	Partially agree	52,5	56,4	51,3	46,2
	Rather disagree	27,9	26,1	29,6	28,6
	Completely disagree	8,8	9	9,1	7,7
	Hard to say	2,2	1,4	2,2	4,4
Belarusians working in state positions or state companies in Belarus support the regime of A. Lukashenko	Completely agree	11,4	13,7	10	9,9
	Partially agree	44,7	46	44,8	42,9
	Rather disagree	34	29,9	35,7	38,5
	Completely disagree	6	6,2	5,7	5,5
	Hard to say	3,9	4,3	3,9	3,3
Civil peace and political stability justify some restriction of freedoms	Completely agree	1,1	0,9	0,4	2,2
	Partially agree	6	5,7	6,1	6,6
	Rather disagree	23,4	25,6	21,8	23,1
	Completely disagree	63,9	61,6	65,5	64,8
	Hard to say	5,6	6,2	6,1	3,3
Better to have average medical care, but free	Completely agree	1,7	0,9	1,3	4,4
	Partially agree	17,4	15,6	17,9	18,7
	Rather disagree	44,8	50,7	40,2	42,9
	Completely disagree	31,1	29,4	34,9	26,4
	Hard to say	5,1	3,3	5,7	7,7
Better to assign graduates to jobs by force than to leave them unemployed	Completely agree	1,1	0,9	1,3	1,1
	Partially agree	1,1	0,5	1,3	1,1
	Rather disagree	13,3	14,7	12,2	12,2
	Completely disagree	83,1	82,5	83,5	85,6
	Hard to say	1,3	1,4	1,7	0
Better to have a lower salary, but a guaranteed job	Completely agree	0,6	0,9	0,4	0
	Partially agree	7,3	4,3	8,3	11
	Rather disagree	29,5	34,6	25,2	29,7
	Completely disagree	58,9	57,8	60,4	57,1
	Hard to say	3,7	2,4	5,7	2,2

Better to work at a state enterprise than a private one	Completely agree	0	0	0	0
	Partially agree	2,8	0,5	4,4	3,3
	Rather disagree	21,6	25,1	18,5	20,9
	Completely disagree	69,4	69,2	70,9	67
	Hard to say	6,2	5,2	6,2	8,8
An entrepreneurial career is a good career choice	Completely agree	31,1	31,8	29,3	34,1
	Partially agree	51,1	48,3	53,7	51,6
	Rather disagree	3,9	6,2	3,1	1,1
	Completely disagree	1,1	0,5	2,2	0
	Hard to say	12,7	13,3	11,8	13,2
I have sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience to run a business	Completely agree	13,1	12,8	13,5	12,1
	Partially agree	41,5	38,4	41,3	50,5
	Rather disagree	31,4	36	28,7	26,4
	Completely disagree	6,9	5,2	8,7	6,6
	Hard to say	7,1	7,6	7,8	4,4