

# Independent Belarusian Culture 2025: Actors, Challenges, and the Future

Results of the Baseline Study

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# Introduction

The Belarusian Council for Culture, in partnership with the Danish Cultural Institute, has analysed the sphere of Belarusian independent culture as part of an evaluation of the *efficiency of the realization* of the ArtPower Belarus programme, which is funded by the European Union.

Such an assessment is essential to those who are engaged in solving problems within the sphere of Belarusian culture, including those who are developing strategies, programmes, and initiatives aimed at nourishing the cultural field in ways that correspond to the needs of Belarusian cultural entities and the problems faced by civil communities. Apart from that, this form of analytics is valuable to cultural workers—especially to those who, through their work, are seeking to improve, facilitate, or advocate for the interests of Belarusian culture. It can also be fairly assumed that the increase in knowledge about Belarusian culture, together with the research and comprehensive analysis of this complex field, will help to develop shared strategic stances among entities of diverse Belarusian communities on the path toward democratic and sustainable social development.

A methodology was developed in 2023, and an initial study of the Belarusian independent cultural field<sup>1</sup> was carried out to make an assessment of its state of development at the beginning of the realization of the ArtPower Belarus programme. In 2024, by the end of the programme's first phase, a second analytical evaluation was conducted, which made it possible to compare the state of Belarusian culture in 2023 and 2024 and to identify areas where positive or negative changes<sup>2</sup> had taken place.

**This study covers the period from autumn 2024 to autumn 2025** and is based on the analytical approach and methodology laid down in the two previous evaluations, which ensures that the obtained data can be juxtaposed with the previous studies.

## Problems and Objectives of the Research

Between 2020 and 2022 the Belarusian cultural sphere experienced the impact of three major shocks: the COVID-19 pandemic, an internal political crisis accompanied by mass repressions against civilians, and the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, in which official Belarus aligned itself with Russia. These events significantly influenced changes in the cultural field, led to the mass emigration of cultural workers, and initiated a process of rethinking the role of culture as an instrument for maintaining identity and solidarity. Over time, two cultural ecosystems have formed—inside Belarus and in emigration—developing under different conditions but still preserving certain connections.

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1. The public part of this report is available here: [byculture.org/baseline\\_research](http://byculture.org/baseline_research)

2. The public part of this report can be accessed here: [byculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/pole-nezalezhnae-belorusskiae-kultury-2024-aktary-vykliki-buduchnya.pdf](http://byculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/pole-nezalezhnae-belorusskiae-kultury-2024-aktary-vykliki-buduchnya.pdf)

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In 2023–2024 the situation began to stabilize and gradually took on the features of a new status quo. Inside Belarus, despite strict restrictions and continuing repressions, cultural activity has been recovering, especially in the sphere of music and within small local initiatives. Cultural entities who have decided to remain in the country have been searching for new, relatively safe forms of public activity, while the younger generation is demonstrating a renewed interest in the Belarusian language and cultural heritage. However, this growth remains unstable and is, to a large extent, the result of a weak foundation.

Meanwhile, in 2024, Belarusian culture in emigration experienced stagnation: the number of large events decreased, the level of political mobilization within the diaspora declined, and the broader audience's interest in Belarusian cultural initiatives weakened. At the same time, we observe an increase in new initiatives and projects in European countries, as well as a reorientation toward both local and international audiences.

Many cultural entities became more professional, learned to work within grant programmes, established new partnerships, and sought to strengthen their competitiveness at the international level. This kind of strategy opens new opportunities but also carries the risk of losing sight of the Belarusian context and of assimilation into the European cultural field.

Thus, in 2024 the Belarusian cultural field was shaped by a complex combination of crisis and adaptive tendencies. On the one hand, barriers remain between the internal and external parts of the community; on the other, the role of creative activity as a tool for maintaining identity and social solidarity remains significant and, in some cases, is growing. Under these conditions, independent Belarusian culture continues to serve as an important factor in social transformation and a driver of positive societal change.

**The purpose of this research** is to describe the field of initiatives whose work is directed toward the development and promotion of Belarusian culture, to analyse the problems and prospects of their growth, and to assess the changes and dynamics within the Belarusian cultural field over the past year, beginning with the autumn of 2024.

The main research method is **semi-structured interviews** with cultural leaders and activists. The selection of interviewees was formed by acknowledging different areas of activity across the cultural sphere. In total, **nineteen interviews were conducted**.

As an additional method, fifty Belarusian cultural organisations and initiatives took part in an **online survey**. The results are not intended to be representative, but it should be noted that organisations with diverse characteristics and backgrounds took part. The distribution of respondents across key characteristics (formal status, thematic focus, period of existence) corresponds closely to the broader picture of the cultural sector reconstructed with the help of open sources. The only characteristic that

cannot be determined reliably is whether an organisation or initiative is based inside or outside the country, since the survey was fully anonymous for safety reasons. A careful analysis of the responses suggests that cultural workers (entities) from inside of Belarus took part, but nothing more specific can be stated.

The empirical basis of the research also includes open media materials, social-media posts, and analytical and research publications on the topic.

Research period: August—October 2025.

## **Overview of the Independent Belarusian Cultural Field**

Assessing the size of the Belarusian cultural sector is a highly ambitious task. Numerous obstacles are created by political circumstances: the absence of reliable statistical data, the forced absence of publicity, the semi-underground character of much cultural activity inside Belarus, and the dispersion of Belarusian organisations around the world.

We do not claim to offer a complete or fully accurate assessment of the size and density of the cultural field. Our observations are based on monitoring open sources (media, social networks, award lists, data from other studies and institutions) as well as on additional surveys—not as large-scale as we would have preferred—and therefore are not exhaustive.

At present we have information about approximately 500 independent organisations<sup>3</sup> and initiatives active within the sphere of Belarusian culture, 458 of which were carrying out continuous work at the time of this research<sup>4</sup>. As before, the field includes agents of different organisational forms and types: public associations, commercial and non-commercial entities, creative collectives and informal initiatives, foundations, and associations. During this research we expanded the list of data sources, which made it possible to discover organisations that existed during earlier measurements but were not previously acknowledged in the analytical base.

This year we also paid greater attention to Belarus-based organisations: more initiatives emerged from obscurity and began public activity. The situation inside the country additionally made it necessary to include several state entities in the study, reflecting the tendency of cultural activity to mimic forms acceptable to the state.

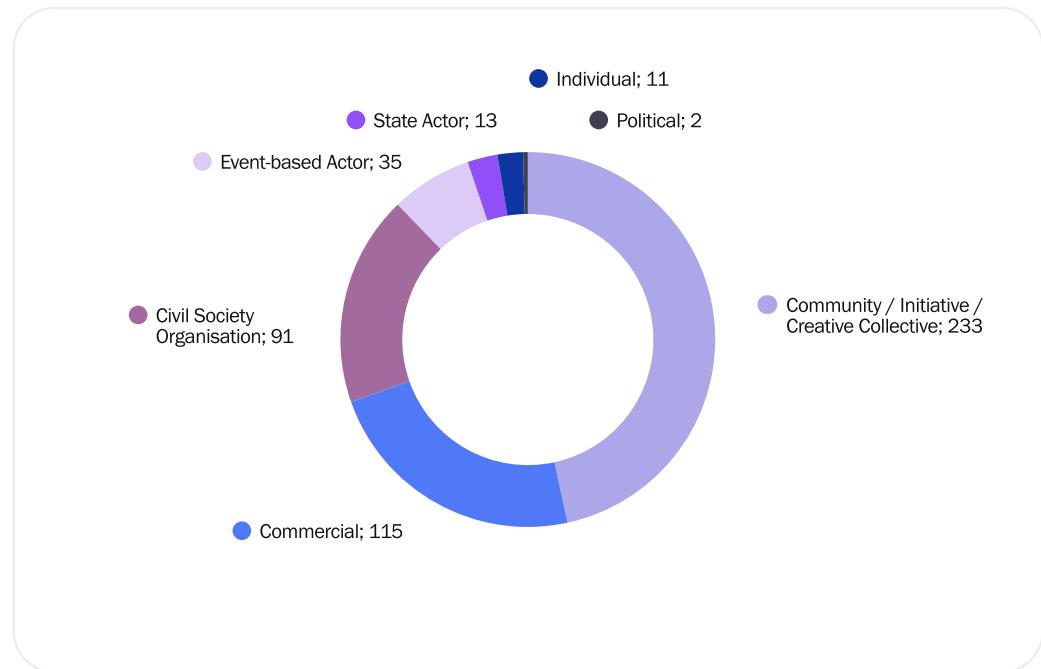
Almost half of the entities active in the field of independent Belarusian culture are communities, initiatives, and creative collectives. The choice by these entities of such forms of existence is dictated by the importance of causality, flexibility, and freedom of action. A significant portion of this group consists of musical ensembles and theatrical or stage collectives.

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3. A year ago, at the time of the previous study, we had information on 266 entities. This number has since been expanded by adding organisations and initiatives that emerged over the past year and by incorporating data on entities that had remained outside our scope in the previous assessment.
4. The analytical database includes organisations and initiatives that were active at the beginning of 2023, as well as those established between 2023 and 2025.

It should be noted that despite their informal and flexible character, many of these groups represent stable communities and initiatives that have been active for many years.

**Diagram 1. Distribution of organisations and initiatives by type (formal status)**



The next largest clusters by number are commercial and public organisations. In many cases, the distinction between them is not straightforward. A considerable number of public organisations have a commercial component to their activity; many entities are registered as commercial enterprises yet rely heavily on personal and volunteer contributions, additional charitable fundraising, and so on. Moreover, since it is currently easier and safer to establish a commercial organisation than a public one inside the country, this has become one of the ways independent cultural entities practice institutional mimicry.

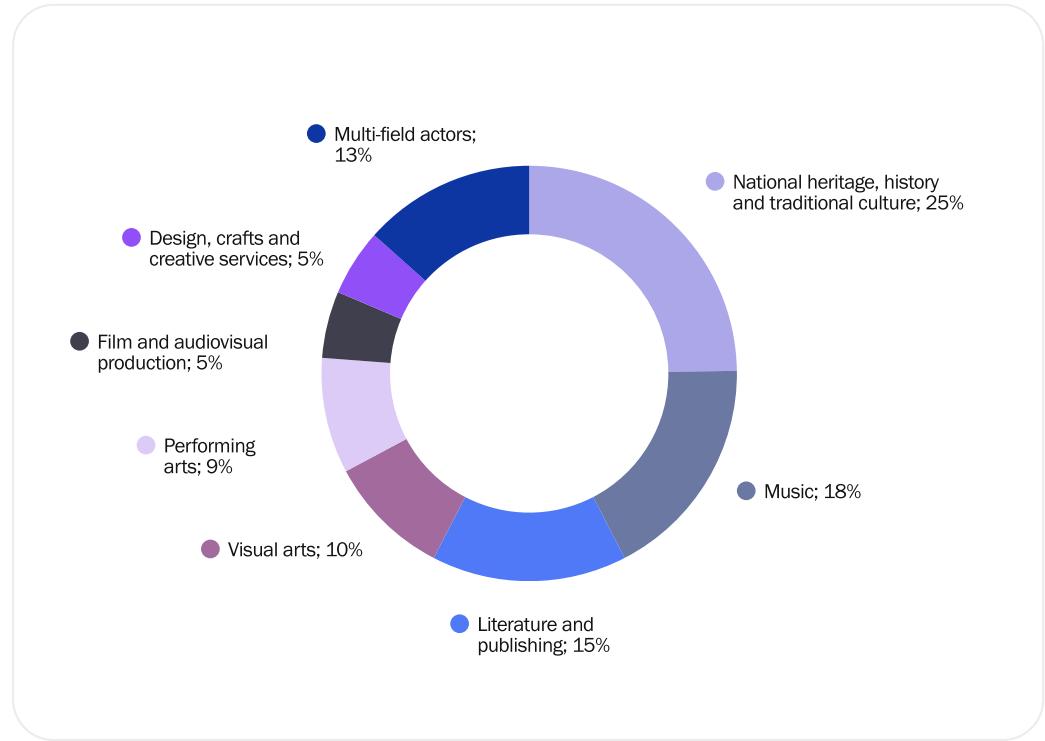
We additionally identified a separate category of entities described as event-based: by this we mean companies, awards, festivals, fairs, and similar structures. Large-scale and regular events—most often the product of the combined work of different entities—effectively function as independent entities within the cultural field.

Another, much smaller category consists of individual projects. We did not include cultural actors who operate as individual producers (artists, musicians, actors, artisans, writers, etc.<sup>5</sup>) in the analytical sample; however, we deemed it necessary to include in the general list those individual-production projects that demonstrate stable activity (one example being individual media projects and podcasts).

When looking at the distribution of entities across the cultural fields in which they carry out most of their work, the Belarusian landscape appears relatively balanced. The largest cluster is that of national heritage, history, and traditional culture—a broad category encompassing many themes

and genres, yet its strong representation may also indicate the particular relevance of this direction under current conditions. A significant share of entities is concentrated in the fields of music and literature. Visual and performing arts are represented in nearly equal proportions, while the smallest clusters are film and audiovisual production, as well as activities related to design and various artistic crafts.

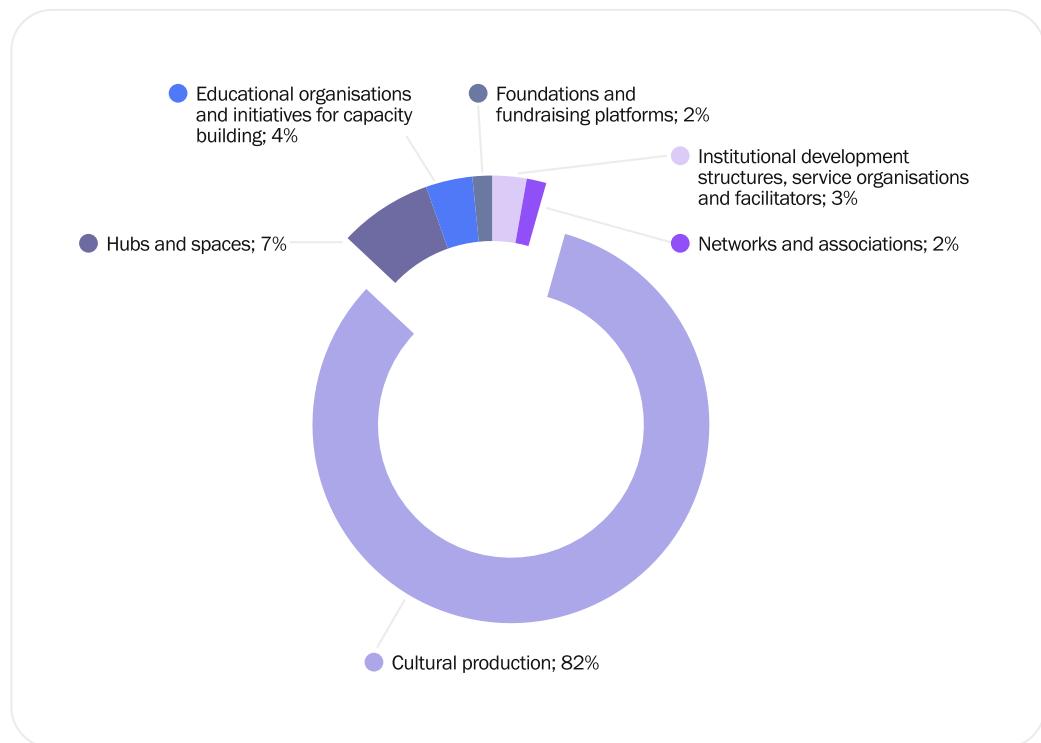
**Diagram 2. Distribution of organisations and initiatives by the cultural fields within which their main activity takes place**



A large share of entities (13%) cannot be assigned to any single cultural field, as they work across several spheres or are formed according to a different principle altogether (around an idea, a thematic direction, or shared values). A significant part of this category consists of hubs and multifunctional spaces that play an infrastructural role for various cultural fields.

Most entities are direct participants in the process of cultural production at different stages. There are also *infrastructural organisations* (service providers and facilitators, foundations, physical spaces). In percentage terms, their share may appear small, but this is natural. It is also worth mentioning the small number of organisations engaged in *education* (many of which focus on creative education for children rather than professional training). This appears to be a very problematic point, as state institutions are offering increasingly poor-quality education, while Belarusians abroad also face difficulties accessing specialized training.

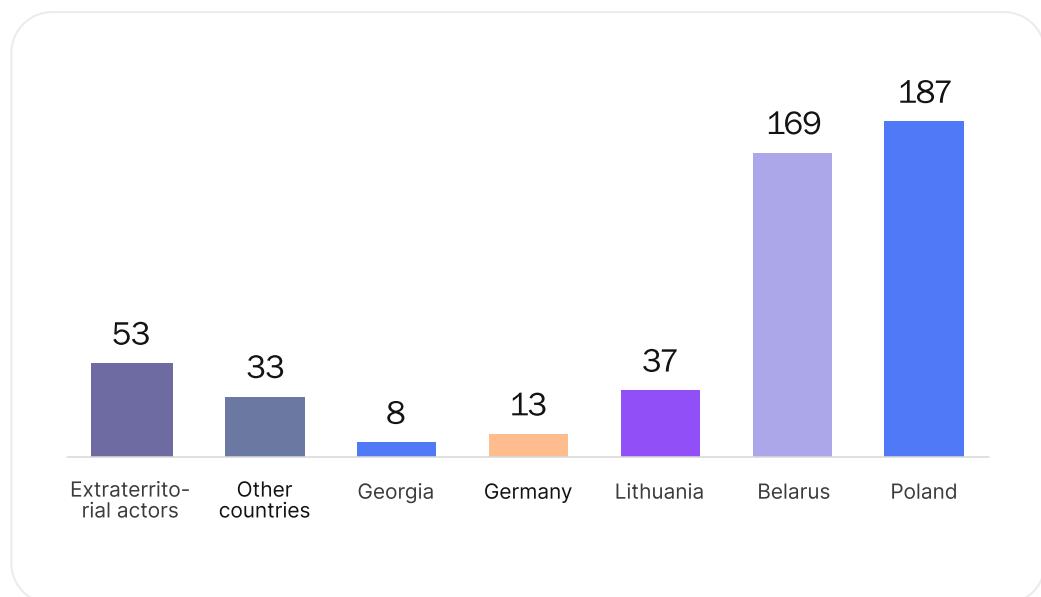
**Diagram 3. Distribution of organisations and initiatives by their main function**



**Spatial characteristics and dynamics of activity**

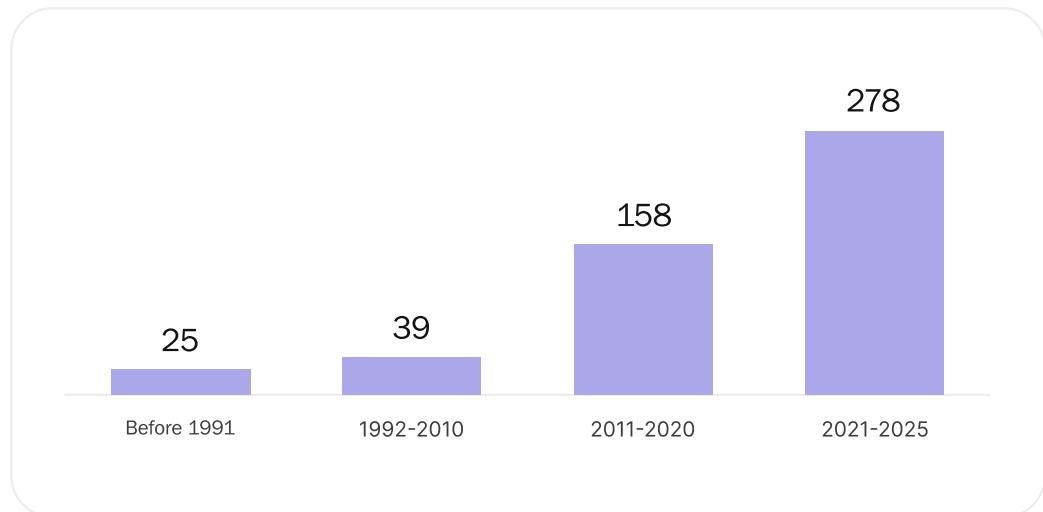
By country of residence or functioning, Poland and Belarus continue to dominate among entities of independent Belarusian culture. Some of the other represented countries include Lithuania, Germany, and Georgia. About 10% of organisations and initiatives have an extraterritorial character—these are distribution-based organisations present in two or more countries, so-called nomadic creative collectives without stable attachment to any one location, as well as certain online initiatives for which geographical location is either irrelevant or impossible to identify.

**Diagram 4. Distribution of organisations and initiatives by country of permanent residence**



One of the indicators by which the sector's development dynamics may be assessed is the emergence of new organisations and initiatives. More than half of the actors included in our research focus were established after 2020.

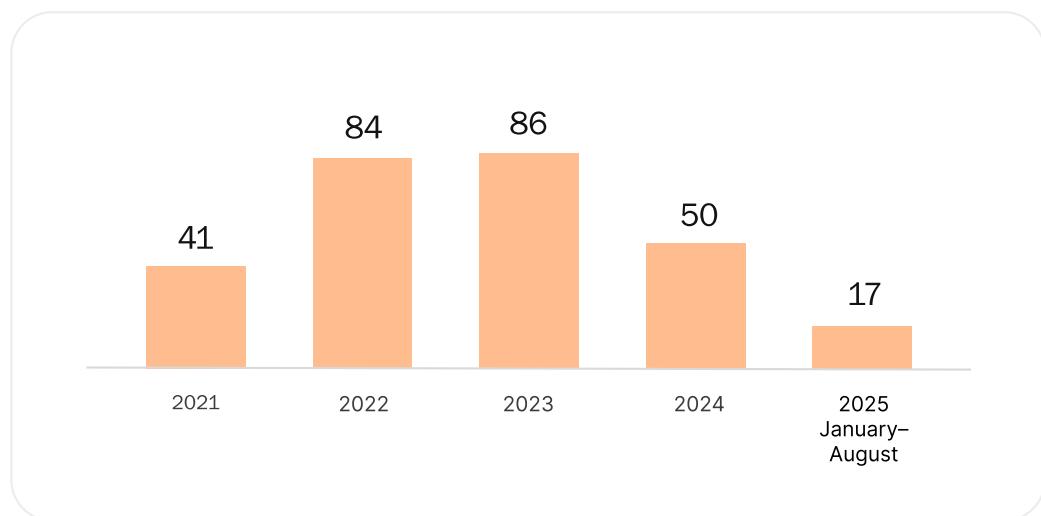
**Diagram 5. Distribution of organisations and initiatives by period of establishment**



A small but important portion of the sector consists of organisations that were founded during the Soviet time (most of them historical entities that have intensified their activity over the last five years), as well as organisations and initiatives from the early independence period and the 2000s. It is worth noting that many organisations and initiatives created during the last pre-crisis decade (2011–2020) have managed to survive in one form or another. A considerable number of them experienced relocation, interruptions in activity, or had to radically change their formats, modes of work, and teams—yet they managed to preserve the identity and continuity of their projects.

An analysis of the emergence of new organisations and initiatives over the past five years shows that the most intensive growth occurred in 2022–2023<sup>6</sup>, when the Belarusian cultural sector began to reassemble itself under new conditions. It is likely that in 2021 many more initiatives were created than those included in our analytical base; however, a large number of them had ceased to exist by early 2023, which serves as the temporal starting point of this study. Around 75% of the organisations and initiatives founded during this period were created in emigration or have an extraterritorial status.

**Diagram 6. Distribution of organisations and initiatives formed after 2020 by year of establishment**



Since 2023 at least eight organisations included in our research have permanently ceased to function. Another thirty-four projects have been put on pause—meaning they haven’t carried out active work over the past year, remaining instead in search of new locations, resources, or formats. An analysis of activity on social networks indicates a higher number of entities near a crisis state: some initiatives clearly cannot continue functioning at the desired scale but still attempt to maintain contact with their audiences and search for new sources of support. At the same time, a portion of organisations and initiatives that began their work before 2020—especially inside Belarus—have, on the contrary, increased their public activity during the past year.

One of the most visible dividing lines in the sphere of Belarusian culture remains the split between cultural entities who stayed in Belarus and those who work within Belarusian cultural field abroad. The geographical distribution of organisations outside Belarus is fairly broad. The largest concentrations of Belarusian cultural entities can be found in Poland and Lithuania<sup>7</sup>—the main destinations of Belarusian refugees and relocated professionals. Among countries “far abroad,” those with notable Belarusian cultural presence include the Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States.

### **Connections and interactions among cultural entities. Networks, associations, and coalitions**

Regarding the overall level of communication and interaction in the Belarusian cultural field, experts this year noted a continuation of the general tendency observed at the previous stage of research. One of the main reasons is the stabilization of the sector in recent years, along with established development models and networks of professional partnerships and external relationships. Interaction among Belarusian cultural entities is

7. Previously, Georgia was also included on this list, but due to changes in the country’s political climate, many cultural actors, along with other members of the Belarusian civil society, have been forced to relocate to other countries.

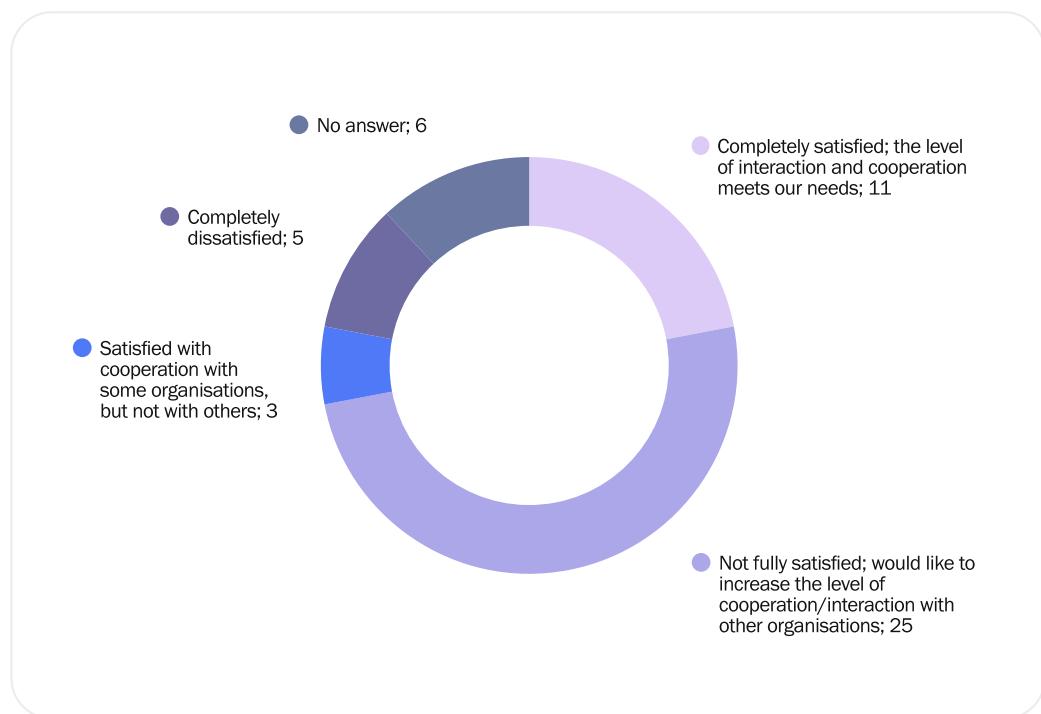
less frequently described as an abstract problem; instead, it is increasingly framed in practical terms, with clear understanding of why, with whom, and under what conditions cooperation may be expanded.

As noted by experts, education, professional training (management in particular) and the development of shared infrastructure for the distribution and promotion of Belarusian culture are among the areas requiring collective work.

An interesting synchronizing presence in the sector is the initiative of the Forum of Cultural Organisations: semiannual meetings of representatives of the Belarusian cultural community abroad, held in different cities. As of autumn 2025, two such forums have taken place, dealing with issues of strategic development, current challenges, and future prospects.

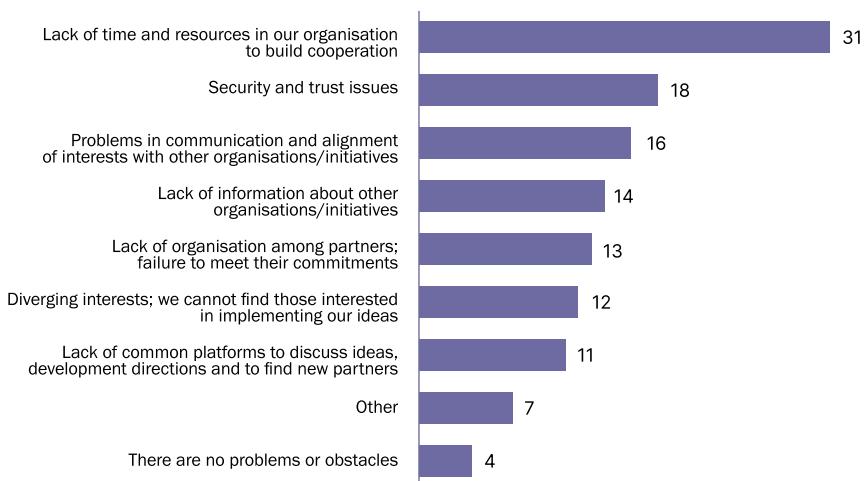
Survey results show that, compared with last year, satisfaction with the level of interaction has slightly increased. As in the previous year, half of the respondents would like to raise this level, yet the share of those fully satisfied with the situation is now twice as high as the share of those fully dissatisfied, which is a positive shift.

**Diagram 7. Satisfaction with the level of interaction among organisations in the cultural sector (online survey)**



At the top of the list of obstacles preventing organisations from achieving the desired level of cooperation and interaction, as in previous years, is the lack of time and resources devoted to building interaction. Next come issues of security, trust, and difficulties in communication and aligning interests with other entities. Although direct comparison with previous surveys is not entirely correct, it is notable that last year “the absence of common platforms for dialogue” was much higher on the overall rating; this year it appears at its bottom.

**Diagram 8. Problems and obstacles in the processes of cooperation (online survey)<sup>8</sup>**



Fewer than half, which is more than the last year, of respondents—20 out of 50—noted interaction with Belarusian network or umbrella organisations. Among organisations with which regular or situational cooperation took place during the past year, the most frequently mentioned are the Belarusian Council for Culture, Belarusian PEN, and the Institute of the Belarusian Book. Also repeatedly cited were the information platform Sekktor, the Center of Belarusian Culture in Białystok, the Belarusian Youth Hub, Free Belarus Center, the Tutaka Foundation, and Ambasada Kultura. The Belarusian Independent Film Academy, the International Union of Belarusian Writers, and the Belarusian Language Society were also mentioned.

Over the past year the Belarusian cultural landscape abroad has seen the emergence of several new entities aiming to represent parts of the cultural field, work on its development and promotion, and advocate for its interests. These are “institutes.” In 2024–2025 at least two such structures were established—the **Institute of the Belarusian Language** among them (the second is not named for security reasons). There is also information about the planned creation of an **Association of Belarusian Publishers**.

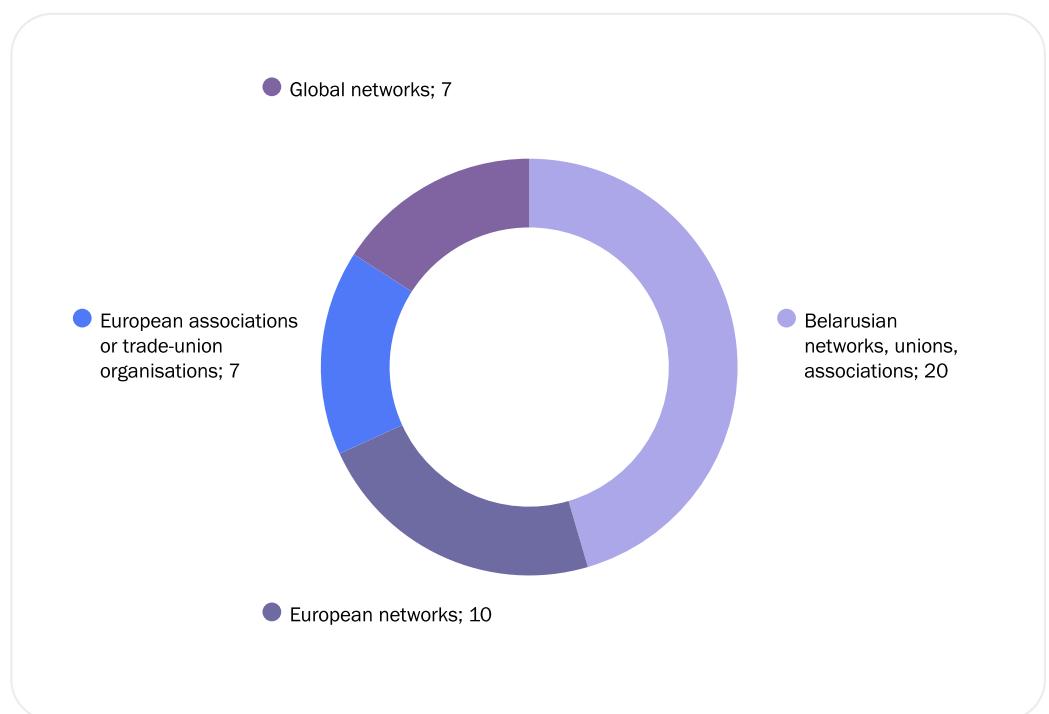
As for the effectiveness of these structures: despite earlier skepticism toward the ambitious aims of such institutions, most experts now view their existence rather positively. This is due in part to a more realistic sense of identification of adequate niches and directions of activity.

Experts consider the Belarusian Council for Culture the most influential actor in the sector today, as it possesses the strongest resource base for supporting creators and projects in the field. The Belarus Beehive project is also noted for creating opportunities for the development of infrastructure. Respondents in the online survey named the Belarusian Council for Culture, Belarusian PEN, the Belarusian Institute of Public History, the Institute of the Belarusian Book, and the International Union of Belarusian Writers as influential organisations.

Experts emphasize the importance of building contacts with non-Belarusian cultural organisations in countries of residence and integrating into local cultural communities, as well as joining international professional networks. Many respondents abroad view these approaches as strategic—particularly organisations that describe themselves as “apolitical,” which often have minimal systematic contact with other Belarusian entities. The situation is different for entities for whom political engagement is an inherent part of their work: they tend to form clusters with similar institutions in their city or region.

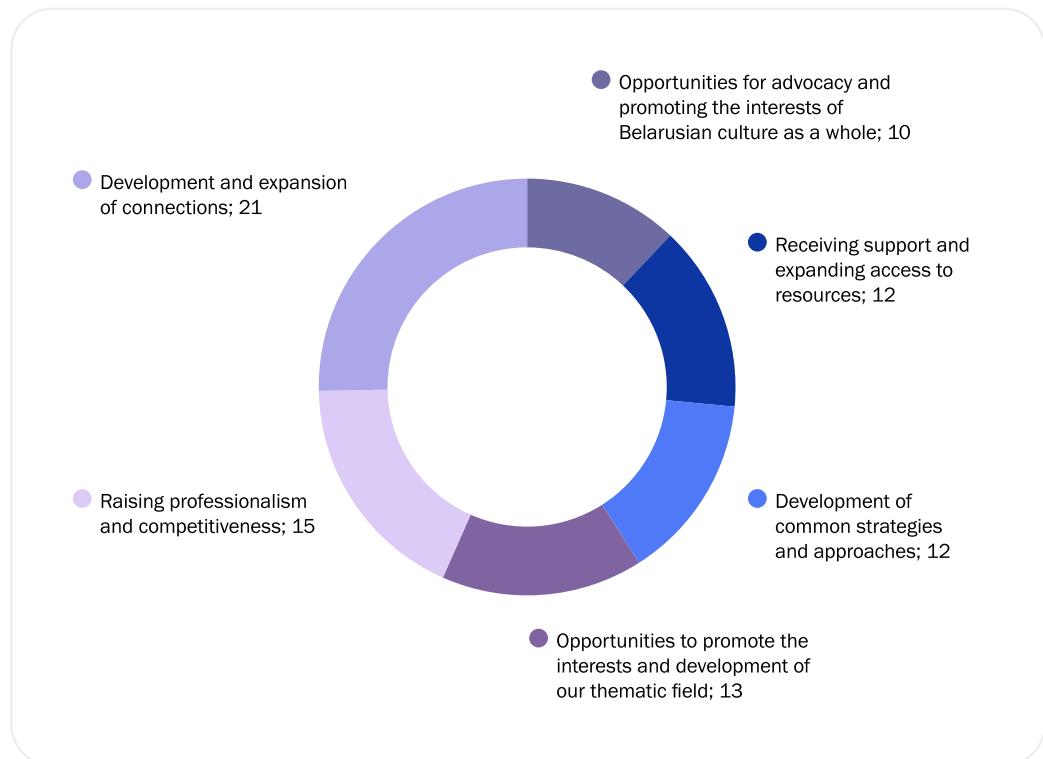
Survey results also show an active trend toward engagement with the international cultural environment: one in five respondents noted that their organisation interacts with European organisations. There is also a slightly lower but noticeable level of cooperation with European associations, unions, and global networks.

**Diagram 9. Number of organisations/initiatives interacting with network or umbrella structures (online survey)**



Among the goals and outcomes of network interaction, respondents place the development and strengthening of connections—i.e., increasing social capital—and professional development at the top of their priorities. Developing common strategies and advocating for the interests of Belarusian culture appear lower in the ranking. In other words, participation in networks and associations is more often aimed at integrating entities into the broader cultural field than at advocating specifically for Belarusian cultural interests.

**Diagram 10. Goals of participation in network and umbrella organisations (online survey)<sup>9</sup>**



As for the ridge between those who left and those who stayed, the situation hasn't changed compared with the last year: two parts of the cultural field continue to develop along separate tracks, connected largely through personal contacts among individual cultural actors. One manifestation of this divide is the gradually decreasing interest of the domestic audience in the work of artists who reside permanently abroad.

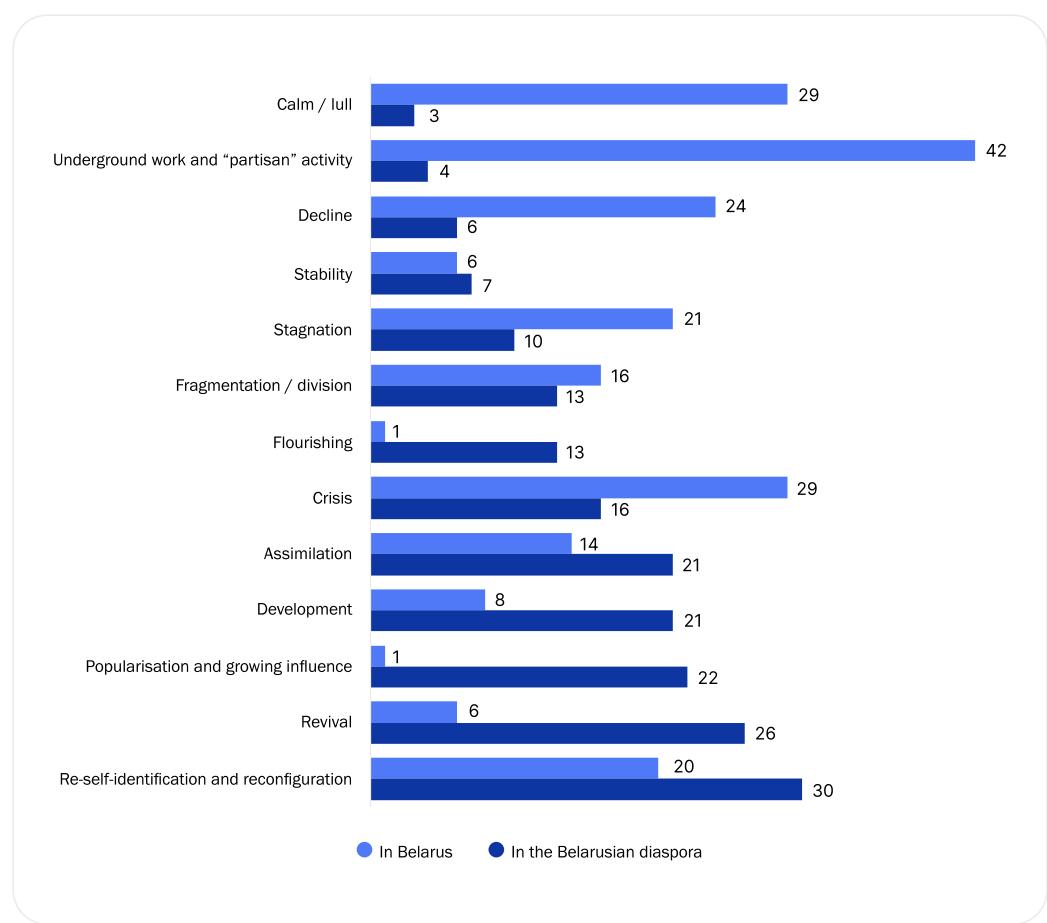
Inside Belarus the development of cultural networks unfolds along several trajectories. Those who remained in the country, despite the risks, tend to maintain limited public visibility—this also affects the level of interaction. Contacts are primarily limited to a trusted circle of colleagues and long-standing partners. Performers and artists of the younger generation are, naturally, more inclined to communicate, expand their audience, and so on. They also make active use of opportunities offered by state venues, which in recent years have attempted to diversify their programs more than ever before.

# The State of Development of the Belarusian Independent Cultural Field, 2024–2025

## General trends and tendencies

The most widespread characterization of the current situation—as last year—is “redefinition and reassembly.” Respondents chose this descriptor more frequently than any other (ratings inside and outside Belarus). This term also unites entities from both sides of the border: according to nearly all other descriptors, the situation is evaluated in almost opposite ways. While the state of the cultural field abroad is most often described as reassembly, revival, popularization, rising influence, and development, the situation in Belarus is seen primarily as underground activity and “partisanship,” crisis, quietness, or decline.

**Diagram 11. Assessment of the state of the cultural field inside Belarus and abroad (online survey)<sup>10</sup>**



It is notable that 21 out of 50 respondents named assimilation as one of the defining features of the Belarusian cultural field in exile. Unlike adaptation or integration, this is a worrying trend—confirmed by our monitoring of self-presentation and media activity of actors, some of whom gradually obscure or underplay the Belarusian origins of their projects.

Based on interviews with experts and survey data, several overarching trends in the independent Belarusian cultural sphere can be identified:

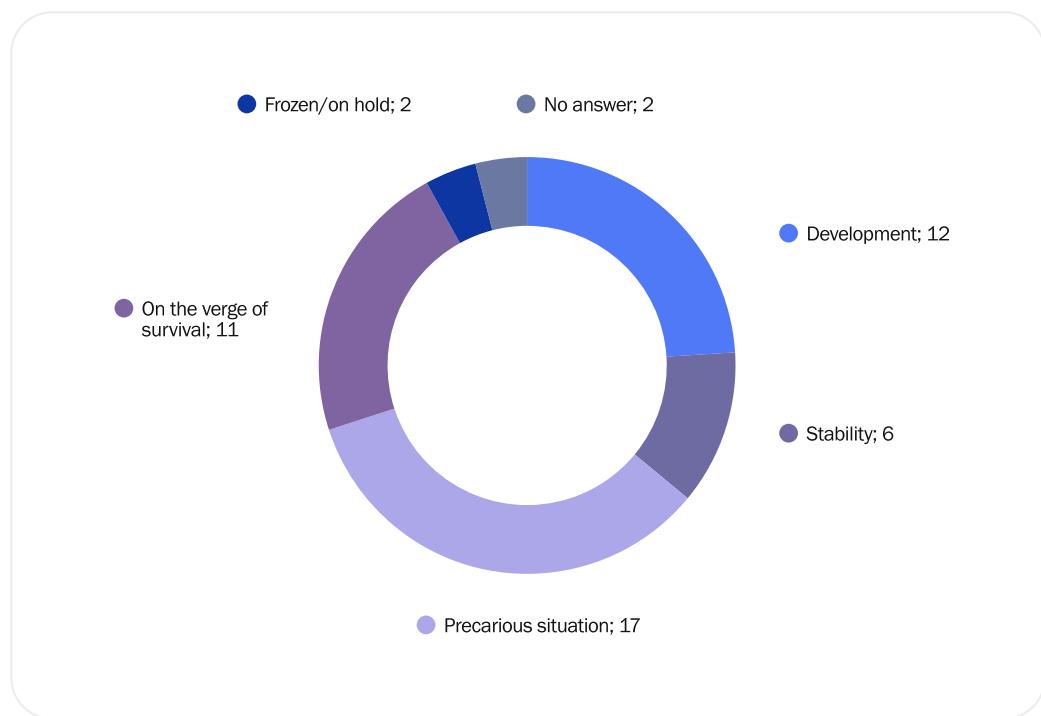
1. **Positive audience dynamics.** Over the past year audiences both inside the country and abroad have demonstrated increased interest in cultural participation. High demand for culture and the revival of the cultural field were noted last year, but this year it has generated an unprecedented number of initiatives from independent (commercial, semi-commercial, etc.) venues and state institutions. Among the diaspora (where we observed a decline in interest last year), similar processes are visible—but with caveats. Inside Belarus audiences show high readiness to consume cultural products (sometimes regardless of quality), while external audiences require additional efforts to capture attention (e.g., effective PR).
2. **Limited permission for Belarusian-ness within the country:** growth of nationally oriented cultural production. One of the clearest cultural trends inside Belarus is the production of works and events dedicated to cultural heritage. This includes the growth of Belarusian-language internet content and pro-Belarusian media. Over the past year, state demand for Belarusian-themed content has become especially evident. The situation of 2021–2022, when public use of the Belarusian language carried certain risks, is gradually receding. Yet this permission has explicit boundaries: “safe” and non-controversial forms of Belarusian identity are sanctioned (folklore, ethnography, tradition). Clear red lines remain regarding alternative interpretations of history or contemporary issues. A field of “managed authenticity” is emerging, where initiatives balance between legality and self-censorship.
3. **Spread of participatory and community-driven cultural consumption.** Formats involving audience participation, which include workshops, creative courses, co-creative labs, have become particularly popular. So have reflective formats such as book clubs, film clubs, and collective cultural outings. This trend is reinforced by the growing number of commercial venues hosting such events, as well as the rise of hybrid cafés and bars with concert and lecture facilities.
4. **Continued integration of Belarusian culture abroad into the international cultural landscape.** As in previous years, Belarusian cultural entities abroad are actively engaging with local and international markets while building partnerships and entering global professional networks (mostly European). The other side of this positive trend is assimilation—some entities, for various reasons, distance themselves from Belarusian identity.
5. **Shift away from political themes while retaining the legacy of civic(communal) mobilization.** Starting around 2023 and continuing now, many entities have moved toward cultural production positioned as “culture outside politics” and have stepped back from themes related to 2020, repression, or solidarity. Yet many features of the field shaped by the civic mobilization of 2020–2021 remain: interest in national content, strong diaspora communities, and growing influence of heritage-oriented themes.
6. **Gradual formation of proto-institutional frameworks and reconsideration of their place in the cultural landscape.** Despite difficulties, several new proto-institutions were created in 2024–2025. Over time these organisations have clarified their roles, focusing on advocacy, drawing international attention to sectoral issues, providing urgent assistance, and preserving archival and historically valuable records.

7. **Search for more sustainable resource models.** Cultural entities continue to move beyond traditional grant funding, diversifying income through commercial components (merchandise, ticket sales, paid services) and crowdfunding. There are growing attempts to engage financial support from more affluent parts of the diaspora through personal networks of sponsors and patrons.

## Current challenges and problems

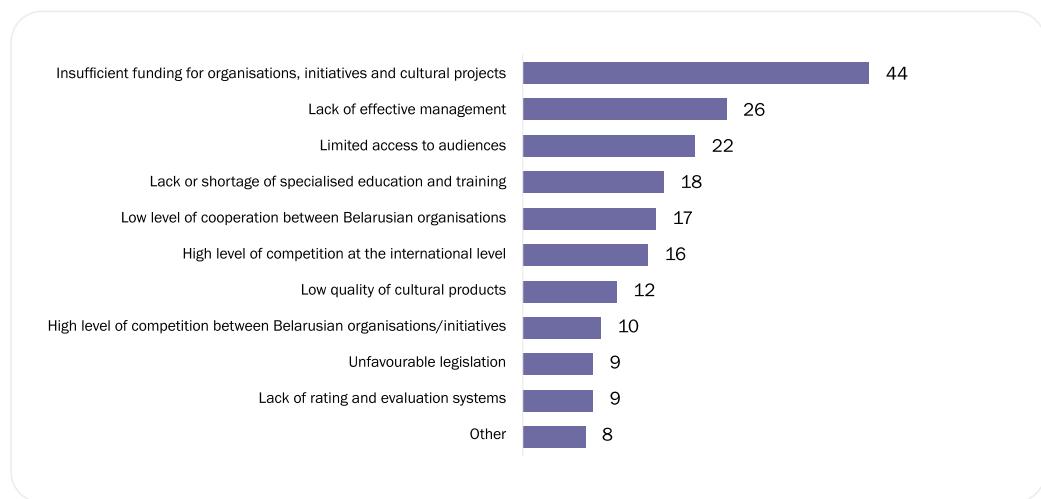
Despite the mixture of positive and negative trends, the overall condition of the field remains far from stable. One in three organisations in the survey describes its condition as unstable, and one in four as being at the edge of survival or in a frozen state. Slightly more than a third of actors describe themselves as being in a state of development or stability.

**Diagram 12. the state of existence of organisations/initiatives according to self-assessment (online survey)**



The ranking of problems measured over the past two years remains largely unchanged where the overwhelming leader is **insufficient funding**, followed by challenges of building **effective management** and **reaching audiences**. The lack of specialized education is also among the top issues. One shift is that the previously stable concern—the low level of cooperation between Belarusian organisations—has become somewhat less acute; while previously it was named by more than half the respondents, this year its relative importance decreased.

**Diagram 13. Ranking of problem relevance according to online survey<sup>11</sup>**



At the same time, the level of competition—both within the international field and among Belarusian entities themselves—has increased. Among other difficulties added by respondents to the proposed list were the weak interaction between culture and business and the underdevelopment of cultural products (which correlates with the broader issue of resource scarcity and the search for sustainable models); challenges of cross-border cooperation complicated by different conditions, legislation, and political and economic contexts across countries; and the emergence of a new cultural “bureaucracy” preoccupied with distributing grants rather than developing culture in collaboration with creators.

Analysing the problem field with the expert community allows us to highlight the following challenges<sup>12</sup>:

- 1. Chronic underfunding and “draining” of creativity by project logic.** The complex financial situation and the continuous “rat race” of moving from project to project or running multiple complex projects simultaneously leave almost no resources (human, temporal, financial, etc.) for strategic or long-term endeavors (creative exploration, program planning and joint cooperations with other entities, network expansion, organisational development). Even the most successful figures note that, at best, they break even, let alone accumulate resources for growth. While some programs aimed at institutional development allow creators to breathe, such opportunities are scarce.
- 2. Lack of infrastructure (managerial, promotional).** In most sectors, there are no large, stable booking agencies, production centers, tour operators. Often, creators have to assemble the production–promotion–sales chain themselves, but few players have the necessary competencies or market access. Without intermediary institutions, many good projects fade immediately after the completion period.
- 3. Weak media ecosystem and PR, resulting in insufficient visibility of Belarusian culture.** The shortage of large specialized media reviewing,

11. When answering the question, respondents were allowed to select multiple options from those which were provided.

12. The list only reflects the most relevant negative trends at present. Many long-term challenges remain outside the scope of this analysis, including those related to the negative consequences of the 2020 political crisis and the Russia–Ukraine war (repressions, censorship, Russification, etc.).

critiquing, and promoting Belarusian cultural products, along with limited distribution channels for information about Belarusian events, makes Belarusian culture insufficiently visible even to Belarusians. Practice shows that many members of the diaspora could be engaged in cultural circulation but simply are unaware of opportunities abroad. Moreover, without strong PR channels and professional “translators” for international market languages, Belarusian projects struggle to enter international networks and festivals. One of the problems is the involvement of the domestic Belarusian audience in foreign-Belarusian cultural circulation, mirrored by the challenge of attracting Belarusian expatriates to domestic cultural achievements.

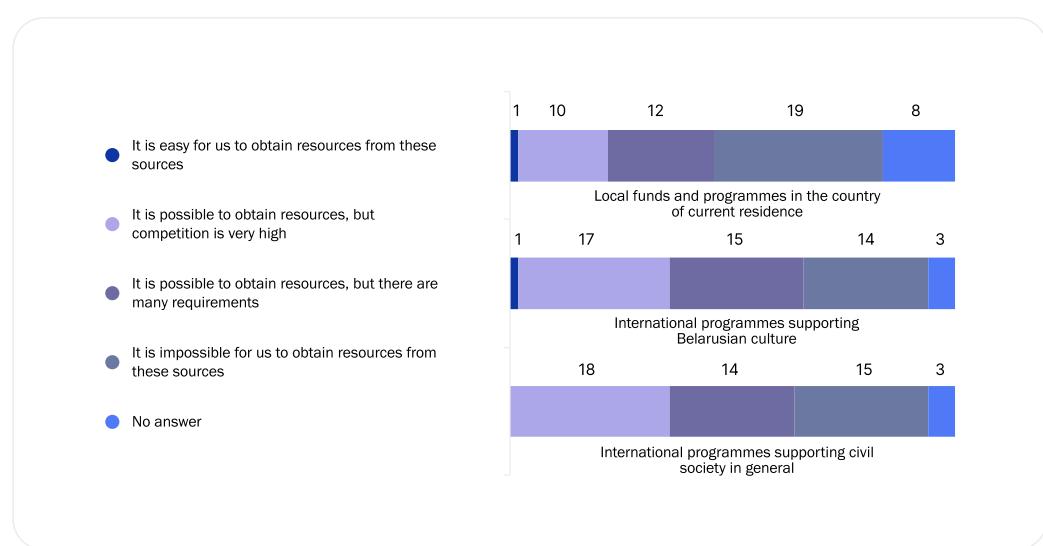
4. **Decline in domestic interest in émigré culture.** On one hand, this is a natural phenomenon linked to the impossibility of live contact between creators and their audiences; on the other, artificial restrictions such as political censorship and criminalization of public performance create different “worlds” where informational bubbles and mismatched life creates divergent perceptions of reality at home and abroad. This desynchronization reduces overall empathy and demand for cultural products not present in everyday contexts. Themes raised in émigré authors’ work are increasingly perceived by domestic audiences as “not about us” and “not for us.”
5. **Intensifying generational gap due to geographic separation.** Many cultural experts consider one negative feature of contemporary Belarusian culture to be the generational divide, previously manifested in younger creators rejecting their predecessors’ experience and attempting to start from scratch. This maximalist stance was often moderated by joint participation in cultural circulation. Today, however, a significant portion of bearers of entire layers and milestones of cultural creativity resides abroad, while in the country, a de facto silence is imposed on them by the regime, creating a real risk of materializing the generational divide among creators and the loss of long-term achievements in the independent cultural sphere.
6. **Absence of a system for collecting and analysing open data.** There are no regular metrics on expenditures, sales, geography, audiences, or other aspects of cultural activity. Without such market analysis, it is difficult to plan distribution, select markets and marketing strategies, build joint initiatives, or convince partners and donors of effectiveness. Strategies remain intuitive and fragmented.
7. **Trend toward simplified content.** The last and most controversial feature of today is the spread of various popular and amateur projects that, on the one hand, allow engaging a wide layer of the population (both consumers and creators), but on the other often demonstrate average-quality content. Experts note that this floods the field, devaluing professional work and training audiences to accept simpler art. The situation somewhat resembles the cultural boom of 2020, when the public field was maximally open to mass expression. The difference today is that production and consumption are predominantly entertainment- or broadly humanistic-oriented.

## Analysis of main models for sustainable resource provision

Financial support remains one of the most pressing issues for the Belarusian cultural field abroad. It is no less relevant for domestic entities, though solutions need to be explored differently. It is clear that international programs supporting the Belarusian communities in general, and Belarusian culture in particular, do not allow sustainable and independent development of Belarusian entities.

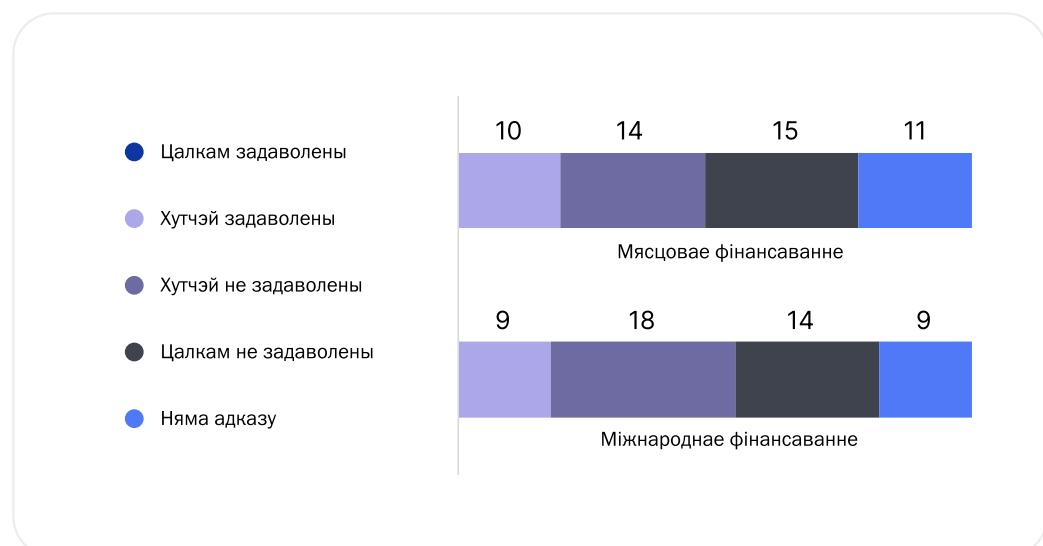
A few survey participants noted that obtaining grant resources from international or local funds and programs poses no problem for them, while about a third consider these sources entirely inaccessible for their organisation or initiative.

**Diagram 14. Assessment of the accessibility of international and local funding sources (online survey)**



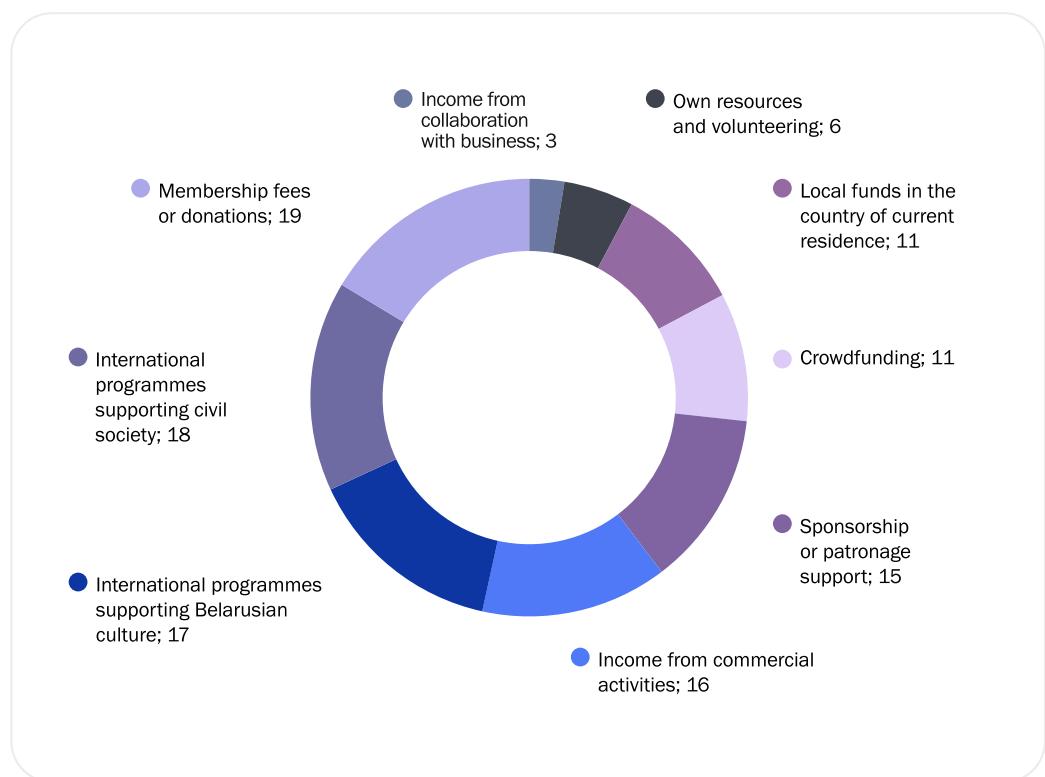
The level of satisfaction with access to international and local funding is low—only one in ten respondents is somewhat satisfied and none are fully satisfied.

**Diagram 15. Level of satisfaction with access to international and local funding (online survey)**



Organisations and initiatives continue to seek alternative funding sources. Survey results show that in practice many Belarusian entities already use various resource acquisition methods, combining at least two sources of funding. None of the types of sources dominate by frequency of use while volumes may differ significantly. Most often, in addition to international support, entities use membership contributions and donations, sponsorship or patronage, and commercial activities. More than one-fifth of respondents (11 out of 50) also reported using mechanisms such as crowdfunding and local funds in the country of residence over the past year.

**Diagram 16. Use of different funding sources by Belarusian cultural organisations and initiatives (online survey)<sup>13</sup>**



Thus, the focus on resource diversification is gradually moving from rhetoric into practice. Experts today identify several promising directions for sustainable resourcing:

- Hosting paid events (ticket sales, etc.);
- Commercial sales of products, souvenirs, merchandise;
- Diaspora philanthropy and patronage;
- Crowdfunding, tax deductions, paid memberships and subscriptions;
- Development of hybrid activity formats (cultural spaces within bars or cafés, coworking, workshop).

The model of **paid events** on stage and as part of the festivals is described by respondents as viable under three conditions: a clear offer (high quality, genre, names, format), systematic communication (PR partnerships, media promotion, engagement with diaspora and local audiences), and competitive pricing. The psychology of pricing is emphasized: many initiatives avoid free

13. When answering the question, respondents were allowed to select multiple options from those which were provided.

formats to shift audience expectations. Experts also note unpredictability of sales, high transactional costs (rent, technical equipment, marketing), and dependence on venue reputation and management capacity. Growth tends to rely not on spontaneous demand but on professional production of works and without it, even quality content produces only sporadic spikes rather than stability. Coordination between event organizers to prevent calendar oversaturation is also crucial.

In publishing, music, and some other cultural sectors, **commercial sales** are a basis for sustainability. Experts stress infrastructural bottlenecks like absence of a general distributor, fragmented channels, where each platform requires separate management, logistical risks, and the need for work on the online product map (showcase, metadata, reviews). Successful cases benefit from diaspora distribution networks, partnerships with local retailers, and joint fairs, but without specialized management, the model remains limited. In artistic and multimedia initiatives, souvenir and merchandise sales can generate additional income and serve as a “club currency”, which is a symbolic contribution in exchange for community expansion.

**Diaspora philanthropy and the development of patron networks** are seen as potentially the largest source for developing independent Belarusian culture. Positive assessments come with the caveat. Patronage is fruitful where there is a transparent history of impact, a coherent donor journey, and professional communication with business and communities. Nonetheless, the scale is limited and potential not fully utilized; without lowering entry thresholds, segmenting offerings, and systematically engaging small and medium donors (including via club formats), this source remains narrow and vulnerable. For some initiatives, a stable circle of patrons is the only way to survive; for others, it is important but not decisive. Overall, initiatives like the Belarusian Patrons’ Club are still developing; their impact remains selective.

Various grassroots funding mechanisms, such as temporary fundraisers or regular contributions (tax deductions, subscriptions, etc.), are considered the most dynamic. Platforms include **Belarusian Magistrates, the Belarusian Patrons’ Club, Gronka, the “Build Your Own” campaign on Svae<sup>14</sup>**, and global services like **Patreon and Buy Me a Coffee**. Experts are cautious: well-executed PR communication can raise one-off sums, but as ongoing support, these instruments rarely work effectively. Tax deductions in countries of residence are seen as having greater potential if legally structured and paired with professional community engagement (accountants, IT, local business).

An alternative to pure ticket sales for events is hybrid spaces (cafes and bars) where the cultural component exists alongside non-cultural goods or services. Conversely, having an additional competitive advantage supports growth of commercial revenue—typically cafés and bars where lectures, performances, and workshops can occasionally take place.

Summing up trends and reflections, no single model of resource provision is a panacea. Experts consider a sensible combination of different models (including grants) according to the scale and profile of the organisation to be the most successful strategy.

# **Key Findings: The Diverse Tempo of Emigrant Cultural Activity; New Architecture of Publicity and a Chance for Understanding**

**1. Cultural Emigration moves at Different Speeds.** By observing the adaptation of Belarusian cultural entities within foreign environments since 2020, it is possible to see how the trajectories of those cultural entities have diverged.

Last year, we noted the existence of two idealized (in the sense of purity) mode of development:

- Attempts to stay on the 2020 track and continue the politically protest-oriented discourse, and rely on a core of nationally engaged Belarusian émigrés;
- Attempts to step out of the limited circle and find ways to realize oneself in the international cultural space.

In addition to these paths, persistent questions remain about finding sustainable resource mechanisms, expanding professional communities, seeking partners, and so on.

Current analysis shows a departure from the development model based on solidarity between the international community and protesting Belarusians. New points of support—both financial and thematic—are being sought across the entire émigré cultural community. However, the outcomes and success of this process vary greatly across different areas. Some cultural entities have, over five years, deeply integrated into the foreign cultural landscape and feel quite comfortable within it, while others are only beginning this journey.

## **2. Emphasis on Multiculturalism as a New Opportunity for Integrating**

**Belarusian Culture into the European Landscape.** In previous research, we wrote about the challenges of maintaining identity and ties with Belarus while integrating into foreign cultural landscapes. At the time, we noted the risk of merging with the European context, leading to a reduction in Belarusian-language cultural production with a clear Belarusian context. Furthermore, after the peak of international attention in 2020–2021, the visibility of Belarusian culture abroad significantly decreased. But today, a positive extension has emerged in this contradiction. Belarusian culture abroad, without losing itself, can demonstrate openness to other cultures and find space to develop and expand its creative reach (for example, through experimental practices such as multilingual projects).

**3. Independent Culture in Belarus:** New Architecture of Publicity. Since 2020, political, legal, and ideological conditions have remained inconvenient, to say the least, for creative work. Many important cultural directions and entities have been excluded from public life. Nevertheless, over five years, the public sphere has been enriched with various initiatives and products that have emerged outside the state infrastructure. The number of events and the volume of creative output indicate the formation of a new, legal, and public independent cultural field.

The development of this process could have been observed since approximately the end of 2022. And this is not about the creators who were placed on the so-called blacklists and were prohibited to engage in creative

work (though many of them adapted and, through commercial or self-sustaining projects, managed to emerge from creative obscurity), but rather about rebuilding the architecture of public presence for independent culture, which is now often entertainment-oriented in form and safe in content, with its own rules, points of attraction, communities, and more or less autonomous processes. This coexistence between independent culture and a strongly ideologized state culture, however, is not without surprises and risks.

It is worth pointing out the existence and development of cultural expressions and forms that deliberately avoid public visibility. House concerts, private gatherings, and other formats continue to be natural for the Belarusian art community.

**4. National Identity Through Entertainment: A Fragmented Revival of Belarusian Culture.** Since late 2022, cultural life in Belarus has been gradually reviving. The overall shape of a newly rebuilt cultural ecosystem is becoming clearer, but development remains uneven. Much of the cultural field now operates in an entertainment-oriented mode, prioritizing entertainment and recreation over engagement with pressing social issues. Public art, with rare exceptions, avoids politically sensitive, conflict-laden, or ideologically risky topics. Artists tend to focus on timeless themes (love, life and death, nature) creating works that may feel distant from everyday Belarusian struggles. Audiences are offered a wide range of creative and intellectual leisure experiences. Even in these lighter formats, meaningful cultural content can be found, often explored through these universal, enduring themes.

Many initiatives that are focused on ethnography, folklore, national heritage, and traditions function in a similar way. While they may seem recreational, they carry a clear cultural and moral dimension. On one hand, they attract audiences who share certain values; on the other, they project Belarusian identity outward, helping to preserve and strengthen it in a broader context.

**5. Belarusian Cultural and Ideological Policy: Between Belarusization and Sovietization.** A notable trend in recent years is the tacit support for Belarusian culture by official institutions. This “soft permission” can be passive or active: encouraging, maintaining, or even producing and spreading Belarusian cultural content. Compared to the cultural thaw of 2015–2019, today’s policies are more restrictive and laden with risk, with state institutions or loyal platforms taking central, guiding roles.

The underlying logic seems clear: despite drifting toward the “Russian world,” Belarusian elites since 2014 have been focused on preventing the collapse of national and political identity. Interestingly, this “soft Belarusization” is often balanced by public appeals to the Soviet past. For example, during the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory, state-run platforms highlighted both WWII liberation and historical figures of the Soviet era, mixing national pride with nostalgic content. As a result, cultural policy offers two alternatives to counter ultra-nationalist Russian narratives: an “alternative national” narrative and the one with nostalgia for Soviet times.

By looking at current trends, a visionary hypothesis emerges. **A national cultural narrative could provide a space for dialogue and understanding.** In the years before 2020, soft Belarusization allowed some mutual recognition between state-aligned and independent cultural entities, fostering limited cooperation. These gains were largely erased during the political confrontation of 2020–2021, when public discourse emphasized

division, hostility, and “us versus them” thinking. Today, however, there is potential for a platform where audiences divided by the events of 2020 could meet. Such a space could promote both shared appreciation for national cultural achievements and minimal interaction between previously opposed groups. While it is too early to tell if this vision will fully materialize, the foundation for voluntary, long-term social harmony in Belarus still exists.



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