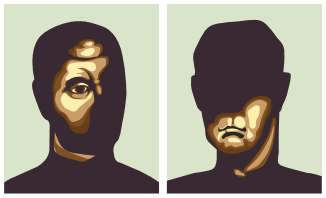
Palitsfera Working Papers No. 1/2026

BELARUSIAN STUDENTS ABROAD

NUMBERS
COUNTRIES
TRENDS



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Belarusian Students Abroad

NUMBERS. COUNTRIES. TRENDS.

Belarusian Students Abroad:
Increasing Share and the Shift in Choice between Russia and the EU.
Analysis of Dynamics in 37 Countries — Key Trends of the Decade.

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POLITICAL SPHERE

Institute for Political Studies
“Political Sphere”

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Summary

The study provides a detailed analysis of educational migration from Belarus to 35 European countries, as well as Turkey and Russia, in the period 2013–2025. During this period, the absolute number of Belarusian students abroad declined (from about 34 thousand in 2013 to 28.8 thousand in 2023), yet their share relative to the total number of students in Belarus increased noticeably. Nowadays there are approximately seven students in Belarus for every one student abroad, whereas ten years ago the ratio was one to thirteen.

Migration destinations have changed dramatically. Russia's share fell from 70% to 32% of the total, while Poland emerged as the leading destination, increasing from 11% to 44%. The shares of other countries in Eastern and Central Europe also grew significantly, while Western and Northern Europe experienced stagnation or decline.

The study identifies key trends in the geographical distribution of Belarusian students abroad and examines their underlying causes, which may be useful in the development of educational and academic programmes. The study concludes with the key findings and projections.

Keywords: *Belarus, students, migration from Belarus, education in the EU, education in Russia.*

Higher education in Belarus has undergone significant changes over the past 10–15 years. These changes have been driven both by internal crises and by large-scale regional instability. After the events of 2020, educational programmes and student life within the country faced a clear process of ideologization and increased state control. This has had a serious impact on the development of higher education.

An additional important factor shaping these changes has been the isolation of Belarus, which deepened significantly after the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. This isolation led to a sharp reduction in international academic cooperation, as well as in knowledge and academic exchange with Western countries.

At the same time, Belarusians continue to actively pursue higher education abroad. This study aims to provide a detailed analysis of educational migration from Belarus to Europe and Russia over the past decade — from 2013 to 2025 — in order to identify the intensity and directions of this process.

The relevance of the study stems from the fact that migration of Belarusian students is usually examined on the basis of fragmented or inaccurate data. As a result, both within the Belarusian context and at the European level, simplified — and sometimes erroneous—understandings of the situation emerge that fail to take into account the scale and directions of migration processes.

Analysis of educational mobility is necessary for the development and implementation of European programmes and initiatives. Thus, the study is important both for European and national institutions working with Belarusian students and for the Belarusian community, for which it is important to move discussions on this issue into the realm of fact-based analysis.

Methods and Sources of the Study

Within the framework of the study, data were collected on the number of Belarusian students in European countries and Russia from 2013 to 2025.[1] In addition, Turkey was included in the sample due to its close integration with the European higher education area.

In constructing the sample, we proceed from the assumption that the vast majority of Belarusian students abroad are concentrated in the European region, which, according to our estimates, accounts for over 95%. Outside Europe, two notable destinations can be identified: the United States (300–400 students) and China (1–1.5 thousand), while a certain number of students are dispersed across other countries worldwide. In the future, we intend to expand the geographical scope of the study; however, within the framework of this report, Belarusian students abroad are understood as those studying in the European region.

1. National and European statistical institutions may present data on the number of students in a given academic year in different ways. In some cases, the academic year is indicated (2015/2016), while in others the calendar year of the start of studies is used (2015). In this publication, we use the second approach, that is, 2015 instead of 2015/2016, 2017 instead of 2017/2018.

The year 2013 was chosen as the starting point, as the study is a continuation and development of the 2023 monitoring study by "Political Sphere".[2]

The statistics were collected from two main sources. Firstly, these included data from national statistical agencies of foreign countries, as well as from international organisations, particularly Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Secondly, the sources included direct requests to national statistical agencies and other government bodies in European countries when the required information was not available in the public domain.

Within the study, priority was given to primary statistical sources, namely national ministries and Eurostat. Despite the existence of several aggregated databases on the subject (in particular, the UNESCO database on student mobility), they were not always suitable for analysis, primarily due to incomplete data and significant time lags in the publication of information for certain countries.

Data were collected for 37 countries.[3] From 2013 to 2023, information was obtained for almost all countries. For 2024, data are available for 18 countries, including all key destinations except Germany. Unfortunately, for 2025 the statistics are fragmentary and available only for several countries.[4] These data gaps were taken into account in the analysis and in the formulation of the main conclusions.

The study includes students enrolled in bachelor's and master's programmes across all modes of study. For Russia, specialist degree programmes are also included.

After the data were collected, statistical and comparative analyses were conducted. The greatest attention was given to countries with a significant presence of Belarusian students. In this study, the significance threshold is more than 1,000 students in any year between 2013 and 2025. There are five such countries: Poland, Russia, Germany, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic.

The analysis focuses on the dynamics of the total number of students rather than on demographic, economic, and political factors influencing educational migration.

2. Prakopchyk, Lizaveta (2023). Belarusian Students in Europe: Numbers. Countries. Dynamics. Political Sphere. https://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Bel-Students-in-Europe.docx.pdf

3. 27 EU countries, as well as Ukraine, Serbia, Russia, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Turkey, Albania, the United Kingdom, and Montenegro.

4. For 2025, statistics are available only for Lithuania, Norway, and Russia. Information for the 2013 academic year is unavailable for Hungary, the United Kingdom, and Latvia. For 2013–2014, information is unavailable for Serbia and Turkey. For 2013–2015, it is unavailable for Malta. No Belarusian students were recorded in Montenegro and Albania for the entire period. These gaps should not significantly affect the analysis of the main trends in educational migration from Belarus.

Public Opinion in Belarus on Education Abroad

Several studies conducted in recent years provide important insights into the attitudes of Belarusian youth, as well as their priorities in choosing education.

In one survey, almost half of respondents (45%) stated that they would like to move to another country. At the same time, 19% not only consider such a possibility but are already actively planning it, while 15% have already begun taking steps to relocate.[5]

In a study conducted by the Institute "Political Sphere" in August 2023, parents were asked about their preferred countries for their children's education (multiple choices were allowed). Belarusian universities remain the choice for 52% of respondents.

Nevertheless, many parents would like to send their children to study abroad. The most popular destination here was Russia (41%), approximately the same share chose Western Europe and the United States (38%), 22% chose Poland, and 6% Lithuania.[6]

Both studies demonstrate significant interest among Belarusian youth and their parents in educational opportunities outside the country. The high level of activity in planning relocation and choosing educational destinations indicates substantial challenges for Belarusian society.

5. The survey was conducted online from 4 April to 15 May 2023, with 841 participants aged 18 to 35 taking part. For more details: Socio-Political Views of Belarusian Youth. Analytical Report, 31 May 2023, p. 30. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FhgAufgCi2KUvHc_qC0R5IHJvdM7GwwX/view

6. The question was formulated as follows: "If you had to choose, which countries would be your priority for sending your children to university?" Research methodology: online survey, residents of settlements with a population of more than 5 thousand, 1,002 respondents. Period of field-work: August 2023. For more details see: Lastouski, Aliaksei (2023). Education System: Public Expectations and Assessments. Political Sphere, p. 19. https://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/%D0%A1%D0%98%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%9C%D0%90-%D0%9E%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%97%D0%9E%D0%92%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%AF.pdf

The Number of Belarusian Students Abroad

In Belarus, the number of students has been decreasing every year, primarily due to declining birth rates in the 1990s and 2000s. From 2013 to 2023, the number of students decreased by 46%.[7]

The number of Belarusian students abroad in absolute terms has also declined. In 2013, about 34 thousand were studying in Europe and Russia; after that, a fairly rapid decrease occurred, reaching its minimum in 2017 — slightly more than 22 thousand. This was followed by a period of recovery, and in the most recent year for which a full dataset is available (2023), the number of Belarusian students abroad reached almost 29 thousand.

However, the situation of Belarusian students abroad looks quite different when compared to the situation within the country. The ratio between domestic and international students has changed dramatically. The highest proportion of domestic students over the past decade was observed in 2016, when there were 13 students in Belarus for every Belarusian student studying abroad; by 2023, however, this ratio had decreased to just 7 students in Belarus per one Belarusian student enrolled in a foreign university.

Over the past decade, the number of Belarusian students in Russia has declined significantly, from almost 24 thousand in 2013 to 10.6 thousand in 2025. Measures taken by the Russian government after 2020 to attract new students from Belarus have not significantly changed the situation (see below for more details).

At the same time, the number of Belarusian students in the EU and other European countries shows the opposite trend. From 2013 to 2023, their number more than doubled — from 9.7 to 19.5 thousand. According to preliminary data, since 2023 this number has remained relatively stable at around 19–20 thousand.

7.From 380 thousand to 204 thousand students, excluding international students. National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. https://www.belstat.gov.by/by/

Belarusian Students Abroad

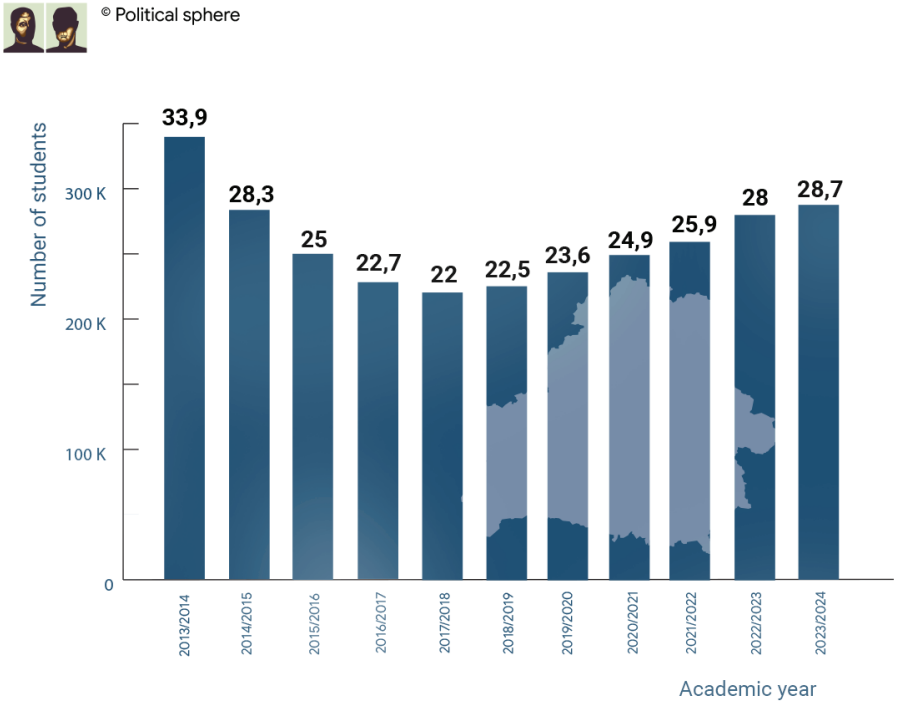

Figure 1. Number of Belarusian Students Abroad,
37 Countries, 2013–2023

Between 2013 and 2017, the average annual increase in the number of Belarusian students in European universities exceeded 400 students. From 2018 to 2022, especially after the beginning of the political crisis in 2020 and Russia's war against Ukraine, the number of Belarusian students abroad increased on average by about 1,480 students per year. This growth slowed in 2023, when the increase amounted to only 334 students.

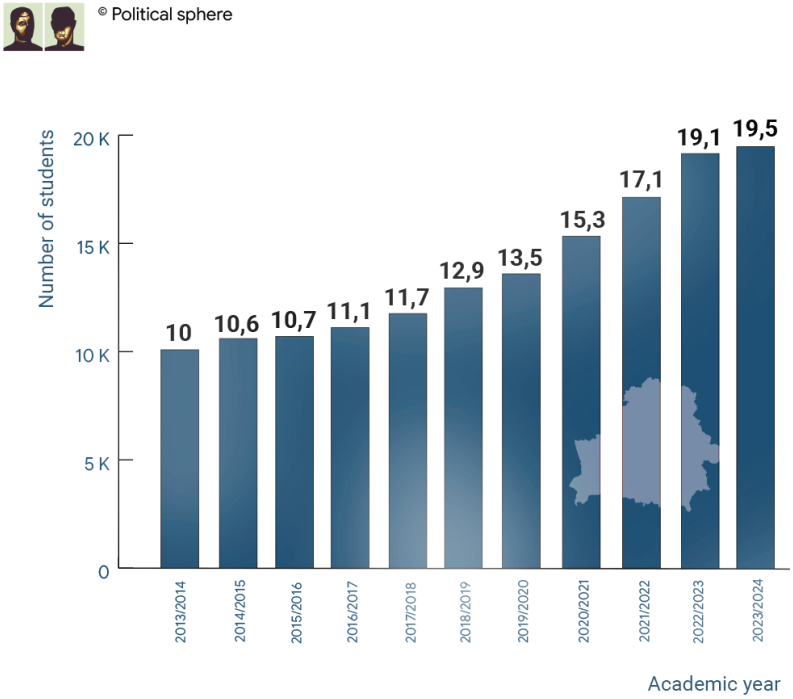

Figure 2. Number of Belarusian Students Abroad Excluding Russia,
36 Countries, 2013–2023

Distribution of Belarusian Students by Foreign Countries

Two key countries. The majority of Belarusian students studying abroad are concentrated in two countries: Poland and Russia. Between 2013 and 2024, the average share of these two countries in the total number of Belarusian students abroad was 76.6%. A decade ago, 82% of Belarusian students abroad studied in Poland and Russia. Due to the decline in the number of students in Russia, the share fell to 74% by 2017, but later increased again to 76%.

Three significant countries. Among other countries that attract Belarusian students, three can also be classified as significant: Germany, Czech Republic, and Lithuania. In each of these countries, between 1 and 1.6 thousand Belarusian students studied over the past three years. The two key countries (Poland and Russia) and the three significant countries (Germany, Czech Republic, and Lithuania) account for more than 90% of Belarusian students studying abroad.[8]

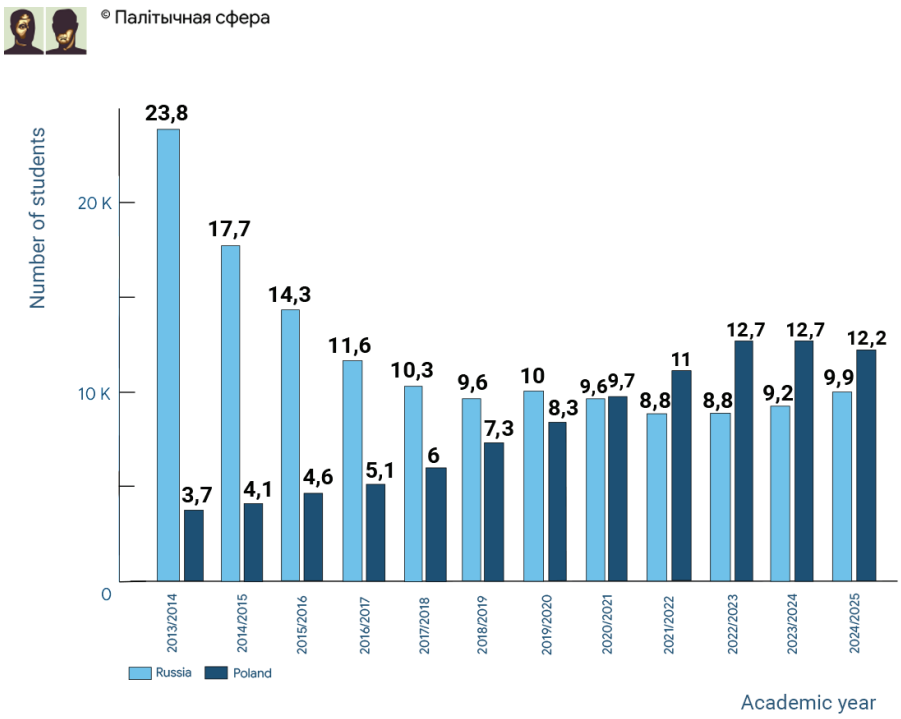

Figure 3. Number of Belarusian Students in Poland and Russia, 2013–2024 (light blue - Poland, dark blue - Russia)

8. The average share of these countries in 2013–2024 amounted to 91%.

Other countries with a notable number of students. Among the less popular but still notable destinations are four countries where more than 200 Belarusian students study: Italy, Slovakia, France, and Ukraine.[9] Between 100 and 200 Belarusian students study in five countries: Austria, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Finland, and Norway. (see Table 1). In other countries, dozens of Belarusians study, while in some cases (Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Croatia, and Romania) there are only a few.

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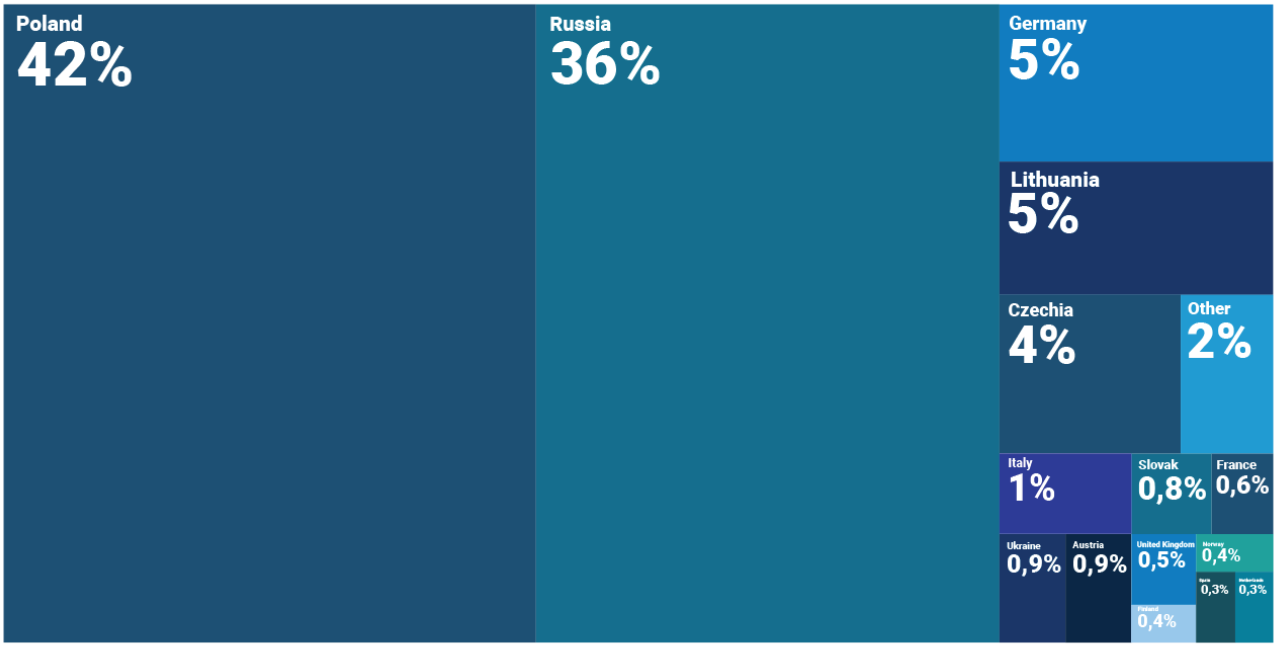

Figure 4. Distribution of Belarusian Students by Country (%), 2022/2023

9. To reduce the influence of random fluctuations in numbers, we use here the average number of students in 2021–2023, that is, after the beginning of the political crisis in Belarus and before the most recent year for which statistics are available for all countries. The average number of students in France was slightly below 200 (199.33), but we considered it possible to classify it among the noticeable countries. The number of Belarusian students in Ukraine reached its maximum in 2020 (454); after the start of the war, their number declined sharply—to 112 by 2024.

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Country	Number, thousand / share of students
Key countries	
Poland	12,15 (44,05%)
Russia	8,98 (32,57%)
Significant countries	
Germany	1,62 (5,88%)
Lithuania	1,37 (4,97%)
Czech Republic	1,04 (3.77%)
Countries with a noticeable number	
Italy	0,4 (1,45%)
Ukraine	0,26 (0,96%)
Slovakia	0,23 (0,83%)
France	0,2 (0,72%)
Austria	0,17 (0,62%)
Great Britain	0,13 (0,47%)
Finland	0,11 (0,40%)
Norway	0,11 (0,41%)
Netherlands	0,11 (0,41%)
Total number	**27,58 thousand. (100%)**

Table 1. Total and Relative Number of Belarusian Students by Country, Average Values for 2021–2023 [10]

10. The figures are rounded to the nearest tens. The average number and average share for 2021–2023 are presented.

Zones of Growth and Decline of Belarusian Students

Zones of growth. An analysis of country-level dynamics, excluding countries where the average number of students did not exceed 10, makes it possible to identify the main zones of growth of the Belarusian student presence. Primarily, these are the new EU member states in Eastern Europe.[11] Based on the average increase in the number of Belarusian students over the entire study period, stable growth was observed in 14 countries. If only the last five years are taken into account, there are 19 such countries.[12]

The absolute leader in terms of growth rates was Slovakia: the number of Belarusian students increased from 18 in 2013 to 426 in 2024. The average annual growth rate over the study period therefore, exceeded 30%. Very high growth rates were also demonstrated by Serbia (30.5%), Turkey (23%), and Malta (27.5%). For these countries, unfortunately, the data are incomplete, which makes it difficult to identify trends reliably. The number of students in Malta remains small (21 students), while the rapid increase in Serbia from 6 students in 2021 to 64 in 2022 was clearly connected with the start of the war in Ukraine, followed by a rapid decline in subsequent years. Only Turkey can be considered a notable new destination, with 103 Belarusian students as of 2023.

High growth rates were also recorded in Eastern European countries such as Estonia (13%), Poland (11.8%), Slovenia (11.5%), and Czech Republic (6%). Among the countries of "old" Europe, notable growth rates were recorded only in Finland (7.2%), the Netherlands (9.1%), and Portugal (5.6%). A modest increase in the number of Belarusian students was observed in Greece (2.7%), Austria (1.8%), and Spain (1.5%).

Zones of stagnation. For three countries, growth or decline over the study period falls within the range of ±1%, which we interpret as stagnation. These include three countries — Belgium (0%), Lithuania (–0.38%), and Bulgaria (–0.42%). Among these, Lithuania represents an important case, which we will examine in more detail below.

11. In this case, Eastern Europe refers to all post-communist and European post-Soviet countries.

12. For comparison, only the years for which complete statistics are available are taken into account. The full study period is 2013–2023, and the last five years are 2019–2023.

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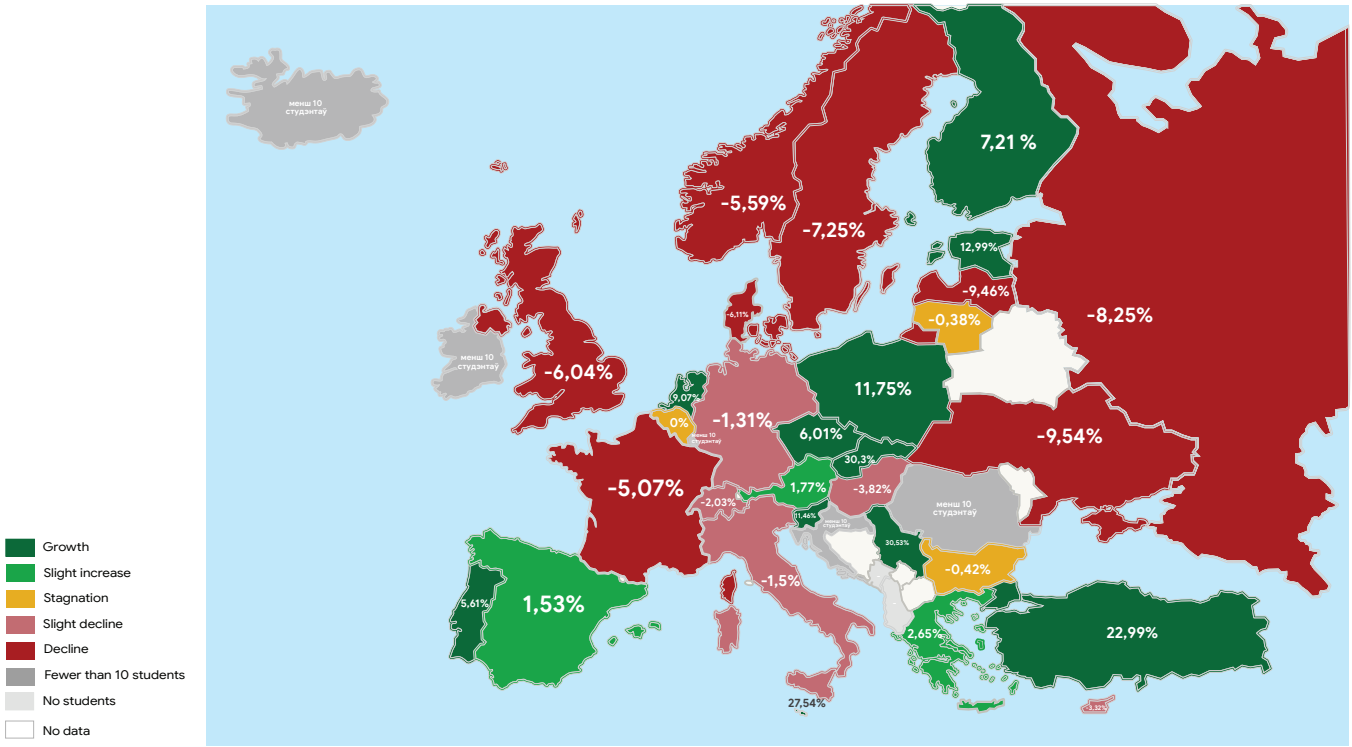

Figure 5. Average annual growth and decline in the number of Belarusian students by country, 2013–2023. Map of Europe with numerical indicators. Green indicates growth, yellow indicates stagnation, and red indicates decline.

Zones of decline. In other countries, the number of Belarusian students decreased between 2013 and 2023. The highest rates of decline were recorded in three post-Soviet countries: Latvia (–9.5%), Ukraine (–9.5%), and Russia (–8.3%). These are followed by countries in Western and Northern Europe: Sweden (–7.3%), Denmark (–6.1%), the United Kingdom (–6%), Norway (–5.6%), and France (–5.1%).

The zone of relatively modest decline includes Hungary (–3.8%), Cyprus (–3.3%), and Switzerland (–2%), as well as such important countries in terms of total numbers as Germany (–1.3%) and Italy (–1.5%).

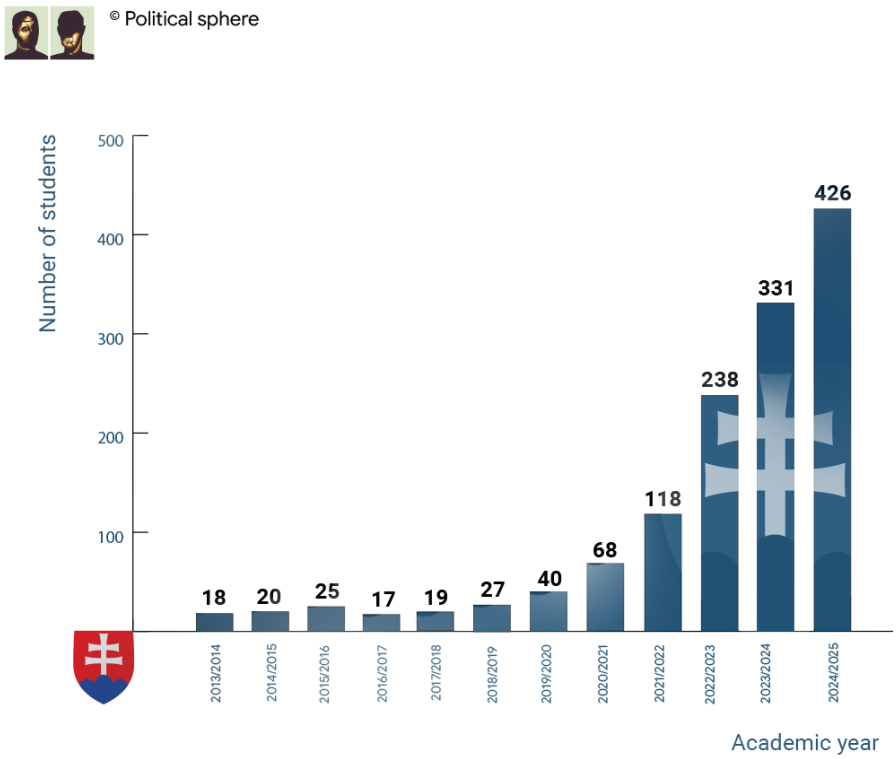

Figure 6. Slovakia – Leader in the Growth Rate of Belarusian Students, 2013–2024

Trends of Recent Years. If only the last five years for which statistics are available for all countries (2019–2023) are analysed, an expansion of the growth zone of Belarusian students and an acceleration of growth rates in most countries can be observed. Against the background of decline over the entire period, recent years have seen growth in Italy (+16%), Cyprus (+35%), and Switzerland (+1.2%). Against the background of stagnation over the entire period, Lithuania (+15%) and Bulgaria (+10%) also demonstrated growth in recent years. Growth rates increased noticeably in Spain (+9.7%) and Slovakia (+52.6%), while in Estonia, by contrast, growth slowed to +1.8%. As expected, the rate of decline accelerated in Ukraine (–15%), while in Russia the decline slowed significantly (–1.6%).

Belarusian Students in selected Countries

Belarusian Students in Poland

Poland is the main destination of migration for Belarusian students. In this country, Belarusians constitute about 12% of all international students, which makes them the second largest group after Ukrainians (43.8%).[13]

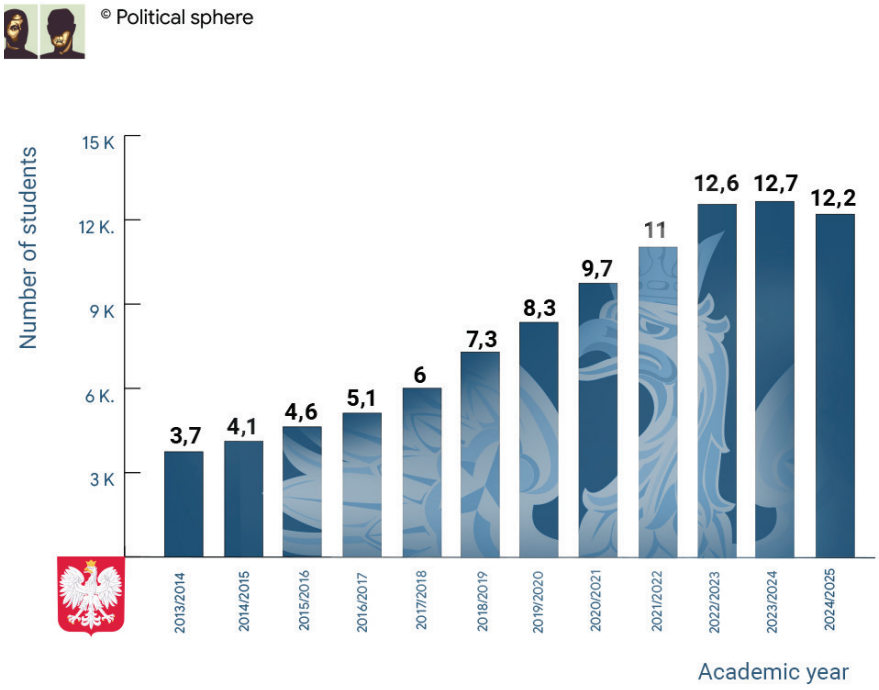

Figure 7. Number of Students from Belarus in Poland, 2013–2024

Since 2013, the number of Belarusian students in Poland has increased more than threefold over the following decade, rising from 3.7 thousand to 12.7 thousand in 2023. This growth was already quite pronounced before 2020. It demonstrates sustained interest in obtaining education in this country, especially after 2018, when foreigners with Polish language proficiency at the C1 level were granted the opportunity

13. Szkolnictwo wyższe w roku akademickim 2024/2025. Główny Urząd Statystyczny https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkolnictwo-wyzsze-w-roku-akademickim-20242025,8,11.html

to study free of charge.[14]

From 2014 to 2022, the average annual increase in the number of students was about 1,000. Peak values occurred in 2020–2022 (an increase of 1.3–1.6 thousand), which was the result of the political crisis of 2020 and the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine. In 2023, growth slowed and amounted to only 22 students, and in 2024, for the first time during the period under analysis, the number of Belarusian students decreased by as many as 500.

The decline can be explained by the weakening of the wave of political migration from Belarus that began after the protests of 2020 and the start of the war in Ukraine, as well as by the tightening of admission rules and bureaucratic procedures.[15] This particularly concerns new requirements for the recognition of documents, which affected not only admission but also the continuation of studies. Additional complications were related to obtaining student visas, which affected not only Belarusians but also all international students, whose numbers began to decline after 2023.

It is not yet clear how stable the decline will be, but there are grounds to assume that the peak of growth has already passed and that the number of Belarusian students in Poland will stabilise at the level of 11.5–12.5 thousand.

14. Na jakich zasadach cudzoziemcy podejmują i odbywają naukę w polskich szkołach wyższych.". Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki. https://www.gov.pl/web/nauka/na-jakich-zasadach-cudzoziemcy-podejmuja-i-odbywaja-nauki-w-polskich-szkolach-wyzszych.

15. For example, from 1 July 2025, a law in Poland requires foreign applicants to confirm their knowledge of Polish at a level not lower than B2. At the same time, only state or international certificates are recognised, while internal examinations lost their validity from 1 August. The law was adopted during the admission campaign, and some language examinations took place in October–November, when the admission campaign at many universities had already ended.

Belarusian Students in Russia.

For a long time, Russia was the leading destination for Belarusians seeking higher education abroad, but the situation has changed significantly over the past decade. In 2013, there were 23.85 thousand Belarusians studying in Russia, while in 2025 their number amounted to 10.6 thousand.

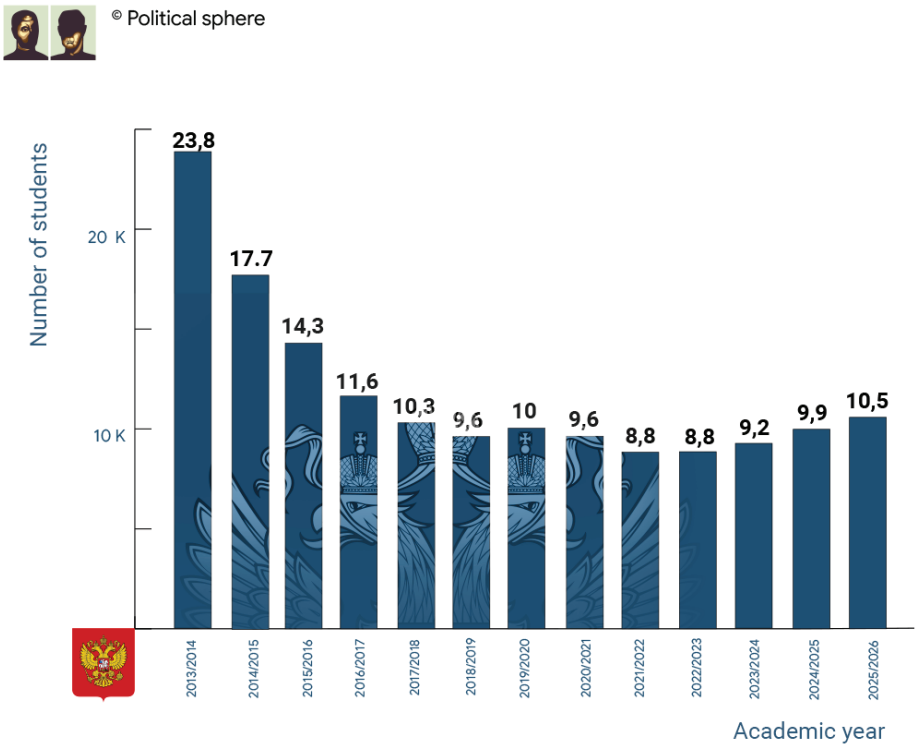

Figure 8. Number of Belarusian Students in Russia, 2013–2025

The minimum was recorded in 2021—8.8 thousand. The simplification of admission rules at Russian universities for students from Belarus in the spring of 2021[16] slightly changed the situation, and since 2023 a noticeable increase has been observed; nevertheless, the current figures remain far from those of a decade ago. It should be noted that the growth in the number of Belarusian students in Russia is occurring against the background of the stabilisation of their numbers in EU countries.

An analysis of the number of Belarusian students in Russia requires two important clarifications that are not always taken into account when analysing First, Belarusian citizens who choose Russian universities mostly study in part-time and blended for-

16. Admission Procedure for Higher Education Programmes—Bachelor's Programmes, Specialist Programmes, and Master's Programmes. Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation. https://www.minobrnauki.gov.ru/upload/iblock/912/912b7b4cabb2d9b433cbf7e1738856d3.pdf

mats. This means that they study remotely, are only weakly integrated into the cultural and social environment of their universities, and are oriented primarily toward the formal paid acquisition of a diploma. The possibility of obtaining a diploma through study in Russia under a simplified programme and with reduced requirements likely plays a key role in the choice of Russian universities.

While in European countries the share of distance learning formats is small—for example, in Poland it is about 11%,[17] in Russia in 2025 the share of part-time study was 24.1%, and that of blended study was 47.6%.

The substantive difference between part-time and blended forms of study in Russian universities is small. The latter form began to gain popularity among Belarusian students only after 2021; before that it averaged about 4%. These changes are primarily related to the specifics of the legal regulation of the status of educational programmes rather than to changes in the content and methods of teaching. The importance of distance learning formats for Belarusian students has changed over time: it was highest at the beginning of the study period (73–77%), then gradually declined to almost half by 2021 (51.5%), but later increased again to 71.7%. In absolute terms, in 2025 this amounted to 7.6 thousand distance-learning students compared to 3 thousand full-time students.

The second important point concerns the role of Russian state funding in supporting Belarusian students. Contrary to the widespread perception within the Belarusian community, it is relatively limited and currently covers only 15.1% of Belarusian students. Previously this figure was higher, but it never exceeded one third of the total. State funding consists of 96–97% resources from the federal budget, with only a few percent coming from the budgets of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and from local budgets. Support from Russian budgets at different levels is received mainly by full-time students, among whom the share of state-funded places in 2025 amounted to 43.7%. This amounted to 1.3 thousand students; an additional 290 students studied part-time and in blended formats funded by the federal budget. All other students received their education under paid tuition contracts, some of which are financed from the budget of Belarus.

17. RAD-on systema. https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/

Belarusian Students in Lithuania

Belarusians constitute one of the largest groups among international students in Lithuania. Belarusians ceased to be the leading group only after the start of Russia's full-scale military actions against Ukraine in 2022, when assistance programmes for Ukrainian students were launched.

Over the past decade, the dynamics of the number of Belarusian students in Lithuania have been uneven. The highest value occurred at the beginning of the period, when in 2013 their number amounted to 1.68 thousand. This was followed by a steady decline, which reached its lowest level in 2019 at 818 students.

The political crisis in Belarus in 2020 led to a reversal of this trend, and the number of students began to grow rapidly due to the expansion of scholarship programmes, as well as a new wave of investment in the European Humanities University. Growth continued until 2023, when Lithuanian universities hosted about 1.61 thousand Belarusian students. In the following two academic years, the number declined and stabilised at slightly above 1.5 thousand.

The majority of Belarusian students in Lithuania study at EHU, where more than 75% of them are concentrated, but the general trend after the political crisis in Belarus[18] was the growing importance of other Lithuanian universities due to targeted scholarship programmes. Before 2020, on average about two hundred Belarusians studied at regular Lithuanian universities; in 2020 this number increased to 363, and in 2022 to 411.[19] Later the number began to decline and by 2025 amounted to 324 students.

18. The average share of EHU in 2013–2025 was 76.6%. As of 2025, it was 78.6%.

19. Kazakevich, Andrei; Velichkaite, Vika (2023). Collecting the Facts: Migration from Belarus to Lithuania Before and After the 2020 Crisis. PS #1/2023, Political Sphere. https://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Migration_Report_LT_2023-1.pdf

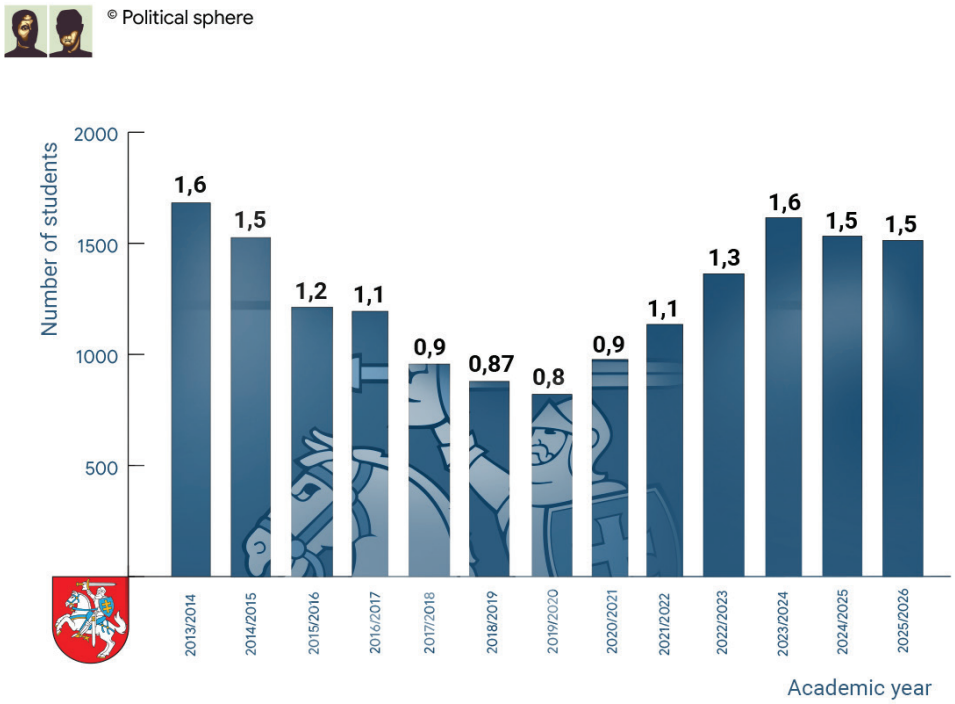

Figure 9. Number of Belarusian Students in Lithuania, 2013–2025

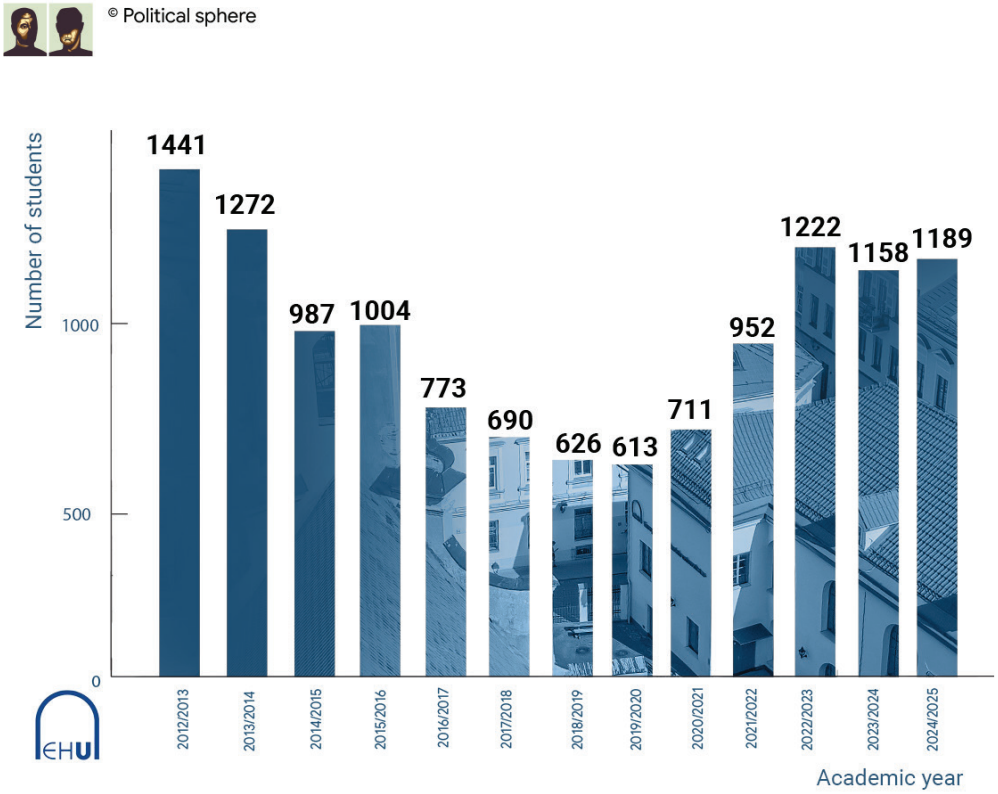

Figure 10. Citizens of Belarus at EHU, 2013–2025

Belarusian Students in Germany

Since the 1990s, Germany has remained a stable destination for educational migration from Belarus; however, during the period under analysis a decline followed by stagnation was observed. A gradual decrease in the flow of students from Belarus continued until the political crisis of 2020. In 2013, the number of Belarusian students was 1.9 thousand, but by 2019 it had fallen to a minimum of less than 1.6 thousand. Since 2020, very slow growth has been observed, which is better interpreted as stagnation at a level slightly above 1.6 thousand.

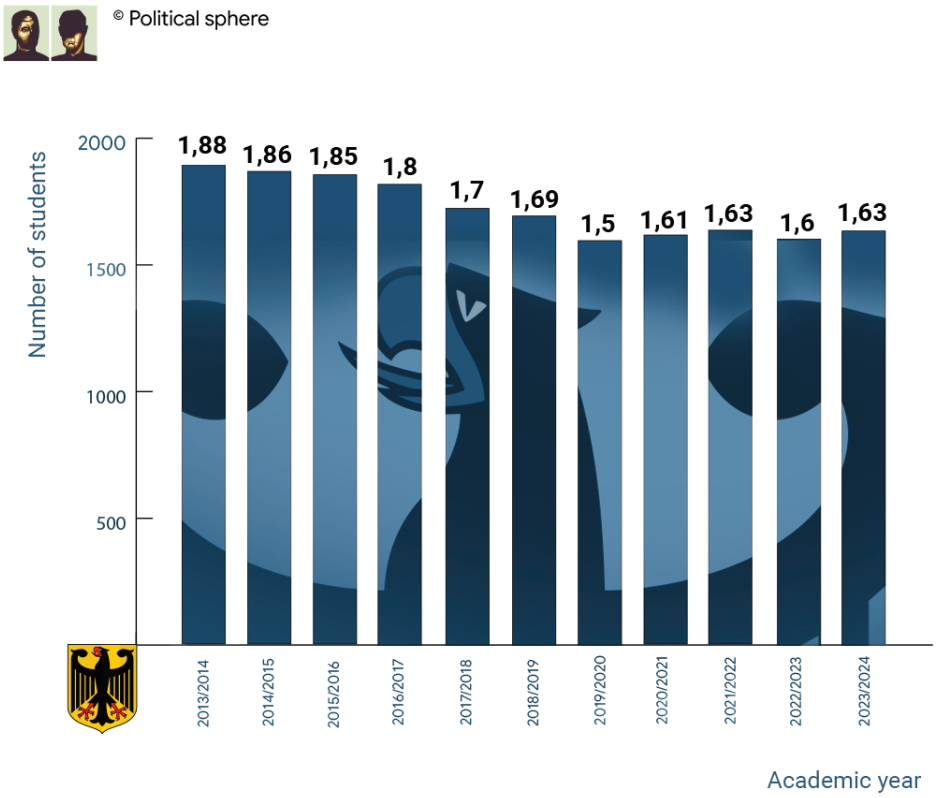

Figure 11. Number of Belarusian Students in Germany, 2013–2023

Belarusian Students in the Czech Republic

Belarusian Students in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic is a relatively new destination for educational migration from Belarus. From 2013 to the 2023 academic year, the number of Belarusian students in the Czech Republic almost doubled, increasing from 577 to 1,096 students. As in Poland, one of the key factors contributing to this growth is the possibility of free education in the Czech language.

After the start of the war in Ukraine, the Czech Republic introduced restrictions for Belarusian students that apply mostly to technical specialisations.[20] Despite this, the number of students from Belarus continued to grow: in 2022 it exceeded 1,000, and a year later reached a peak of almost 1.1 thousand. In the most recent year for which statistics are available (2024), the number decreased slightly by a few dozen students. This indicates sustained interest in Czech education, reinforcing the country's status as an important destination for educational migration.

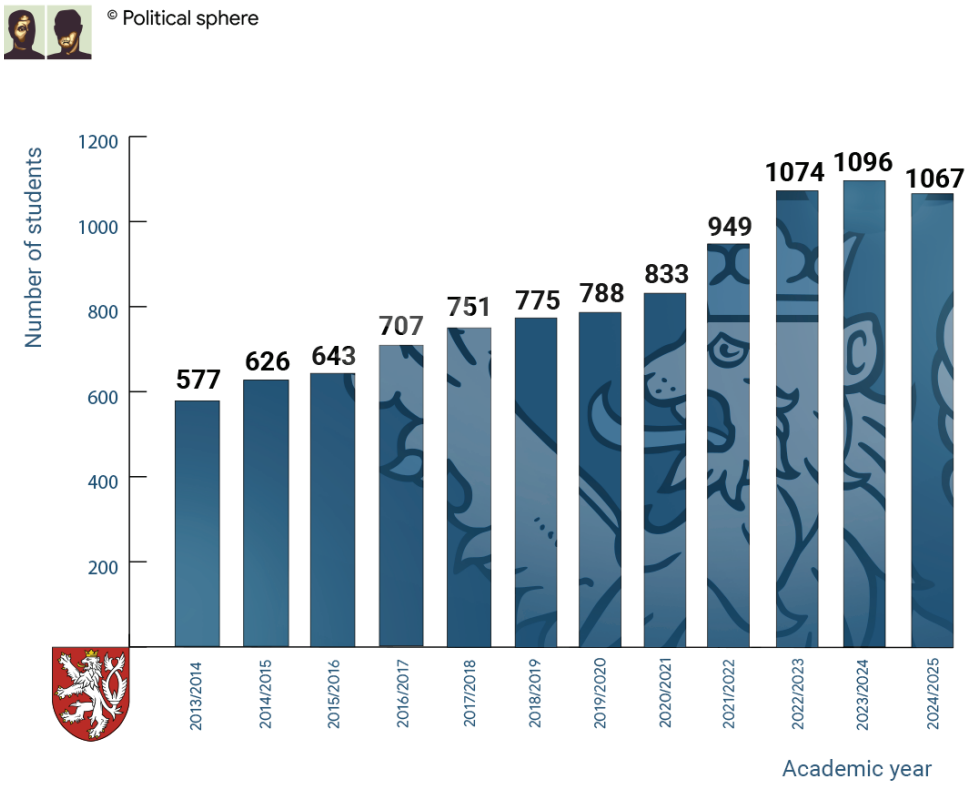

Figure 12. Number of Belarusian Students in the Czech Republic, 2013–2024

20. Restrictions for applicants and students from the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus at universities in the Czech Republic. https://www.educationcenter.cz/blog/ogranicheniya-dlya-studentov-iz-rossii-i-belarusi-v-vuzah-chehii/

General Conclusions

Total numbers and fundamental changes

The total number of Belarusian students abroad has slightly decreased since 2013, from about 34 thousand to 28.8 thousand in 2023, with a minimum in 2017 (about 22 thousand). However, taking into account demographic changes, the decline in the youth population and the number of students within Belarus, the relative importance of education abroad has increased. Currently, there are approximately seven students in Belarus for every student abroad, whereas ten years ago (2016) the ratio was one to thirteen.

In addition, fundamental changes have occurred in the geography of Belarusian students abroad. While in 2013 about 70% of such students studied in Russia, by 2023 Russia's share had declined to 32%, and now almost 70% study in Europe, mainly in EU countries. Thus, the growth in the number of students abroad is associated with increasing interest in the European direction.

The most important countries

At present, Poland is the leading destination for Belarusian students, accounting for more than 44% of the total number, whereas in 2013 it accounted for only 11% of Belarusian students abroad. Russia ranks second, and together these two countries attract about 76% of all students. With a significant gap from the leaders, three other important destinations follow: Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Germany. The share of each ranges between 3% and 6%, and together the five most important destinations attract more than 90% of Belarusian students.

Decline in the role of Russia

The decline in the role of Russia as an educational destination can be considered the first significant trend of the decade. Its share fell from 70% to 32%, and in absolute numbers from 23 thousand to about 10 thousand. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of Belarusian students in Russia, unlike students in Europe, study in part-time and blended formats. Distance students account for more than 70% of the total. Only about 3 thousand students study in full-time programmes. As of 2025, about 1.6 thousand citizens of Belarus received support from federal and other budgets, mainly full-time students. The rest (85%) pursue their studies on a fee-paying basis.

Growing Attractiveness of Eastern Europe

Another striking trend is the growing significance and attractiveness of Eastern Europe, that is, the regional redistribution of educational migration within the European space. This is reflected both in the phenomenal rise in the importance of Poland and in the recovery of Lithuania's position, as well as in the emergence of the Czech Republic and Slovakia as important destinations. Growth in the number of Belarusian students has been observed in most countries of the region, including Estonia, Slovenia, Serbia, and others. As a result, over the past decade the importance of Eastern Europe has more than doubled—from 24% to 56%, from 6.9 thousand students to 16.1 thousand in absolute numbers.

Stagnation and decline in Western and Northern Europe

In Western and Northern Europe, the opposite trend can be observed. The share of these countries has declined or stagnated, and the absolute number of Belarusian students has also decreased. The share of Western Europe declined from 11% to 10%, from 3.2 thousand to 2.8 thousand students. Northern Europe showed a similar trend—a decrease in the number of students from about 332 to 260. In Southern Europe, by contrast, gradual growth could be observed, although the absolute numbers remain small. The key factors behind the greater attractiveness of Eastern Europe are likely geographic proximity, significantly lower costs of living and studying, as well as a more dynamic labour market that allows students to remain in the country and integrate more quickly.

Forecasts

Dynamics of numbers

The overall number of Belarusian students abroad in recent years has been around 27 thousand. Considering the demographic and economic situation in Belarus, as well as changes in EU migration policy, this figure can be regarded as a peak level and, unless significant new internal or regional crises occur, one should expect either stabilisation of this number or its gradual decline.

Stability of the new geographical structure

The geographical transformation has most likely been completed, and the new distribution structure will persist in the short and medium term. The majority of Belarusian students abroad (60–70%) will study in the EU and other European countries, while Russia's share will remain around one third, with distance forms of study predominating there. The attractiveness of Russia will be supported by the Russian language and the possibility of relatively easily obtaining a formal diploma. The main factors behind the attractiveness of the European destination will be the higher quality of education, the broad international recognition of diplomas, and the prospects for employment and naturalisation in EU countries.

Possible changes and vulnerable destinations

The two key countries (Poland and Russia) will continue to attract up to 70% of all students. Together with Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Germany, they will account for around 90%, although a gradual expansion of the geography and a slow increase in the importance of secondary destinations can be expected. Turkey may have particular potential in this regard.

The inclusion of new countries in the "big five" (more than 1 thousand students) appears unlikely. Countries that have demonstrated rapid growth in the number of Belarusian students (such as Slovakia) remain relatively small and will find it difficult to reach such a high level of Belarusian student presence. In Western European countries, significant growth is unlikely due to high costs of education and living, higher admission thresholds, complex migration rules, and other restrictions.

Among the "big five", Lithuania appears the most vulnerable to falling out, as the number of Belarusian students there strongly depends on the existence of the European Humanities University, its status, and support from European institutions.

The end of the war could revive the attractiveness of Ukraine as an educational destination, but the prospects will strongly depend on regional security and stability.

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