

Breaking Walls, Forging Bridges: The Entrepreneurial Adaptation of Belarusian Refugees in Poland and Lithuania

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Abstract

We examine how Belarusian refugee entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania adapt to shifting institutional environments. Combining 35 semi-structured interviews with qualitative content analysis, we identify a recursive four-stage adaptation process: Establishing Social and Economic Entry Points; Navigating Institutional and Economic Structures; Responding to Institutional and Policy Shifts; and Transforming Business Strategies for Market Adaptation. These strategies evolve across three institutional phases: Humanitarian Welcome, Economic Pragmatism, and Security-Driven Migration Control. As policy environments grew more restrictive, entrepreneurs recalibrated by shifting between co-ethnic support, institutional engagement, and digital reinvention. We challenge linear models of refugee integration, revealing a dynamic, policy-responsive process.

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