



The power of connection

a guide to the Belarusian independent media in exile

CONTRIBUTORS

Pavel Bykouski
Mariya Sadouskaya-Komlach
Elena Vereshchagina
Natalia Belikova

DESIGN & LAYOUT

...

This guide is a continuation of the Press Club Belarus's strategic report "Exiled. Effective. Essential". It explores the role of independent Belarusian media in the country's information landscape, their unique value propositions for society, and their strategic importance in strengthening democracy across the region.

Prepared by Press Club Belarus with the support of the Council of Europe.

Quoting or reproducing this material, in part or in full, is permitted only with proper reference to the original document.

© 2025 Press Club Belarus
Warsaw, 2025

Table of contents

How this guide came about.....	3
Key takeaways	5
1. From domestic information space to the exiled Belarusian independent media ecosystem	7
1.1 How is Belarus’s information environment structured?	7
1.2 Unique value proposition as a key to diverse audiences	10
1.3. Evolving ecosystem.....	12
2. Evaluating Belarusian independent media in exile as providers of quality journalism (EMFA and CoE standards).....	19
2.1 Belarusian exiled media as actors within the EMFA context.....	19
2.2 Belarusian exiled media in the lens of the Council of Europe	21
3. Recommendations	22
For European institutions	22
For host-country governments	22
For donor organisations	23
For media organisations.....	23
4. Annexes	24
Annex 1. Glossary	24
Annex 2. Methodology.....	27
Annex 3. Comparative matrix assessing various media types by quality journalism criteria	30
Annex 4. Key target audiences and unique value propositions of BEIMO.....	35
Annex 5. The EMFA Framework.....	39
Annex 6. Digital Belarus 2025	41
Annex 7. Bibliography.....	42

How this guide came about

This guide, “The Power of Connection: A Guide to the Belarusian Independent Media in Exile”, is written for European institutions, host-country governments, donor organisations, and the Belarusian independent media community itself. Its purpose is simple but urgent: to raise the visibility of exiled Belarusian media among European partners and to show why these outlets, which operate under extreme pressure, remain essential providers of high-quality journalism and vital contributors to European democratic resilience.

This guide expands on the Press Club Belarus’s strategic report "Exiled. Effective. Essential"¹, which examined the emergence of the Belarusian independent media ecosystem. It explains the position of the ecosystem within Belarus’s tightly state-controlled information space and aims to further unpack the crucial value of the exiled media ecosystem for media pluralism in Belarus, highlighting its strength and unique identity.

Moreover, for the first time, Belarus’s independent media ecosystem is being assessed against European standards of quality journalism, as outlined in the European Media Freedom Act, (EMFA)².

We wrote this guide with European institutions in mind – in order to offer the analytical foundation needed to recognise Belarusian exiled media as legitimate and high-quality media service providers under the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). Such recognition is not symbolic; it is a practical safeguard that can protect journalists from surveillance, political interference, and other forms of transnational repression. As well, to pave the way for potential investment in these media.

This guide is intended for the governments of host countries that provide refuge to Belarusian media professionals, particularly Poland and Lithuania, where most Belarusian media professionals are now based. The guide proposes steps to ease legal and professional barriers. These include enabling access to national media support schemes, simplifying the recognition of journalistic credentials, and ensuring both physical and legal protection for journalists forced to work in exile.

For donor organisations, the guide encourages a shift from fragmented, short-term project grants toward long-term institutional support. Stable financing is essential for sustaining editorial independence, retaining talent, and enabling outlets to plan confidently for the future.

Finally, for Belarusian independent media outlets (BEIMO) themselves, the guide offers recommendations to strengthen internal governance, enhance transparency, reinforce self-

¹ Gorchinskaya, Kateryna, Paviel Bykoŭski, and Natalia Belikava. Exiled. Effective. Essential: Supporting the Belarusian Independent Media Ecosystem. Minsk: Press Club Belarus, 2025. https://press-club.pr.o/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025_Press-Club_EXILED_EFFECTIVE_ESSENTIAL.pdf

² European Union. Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act). Official Journal of the European Union, L, no. 202, July 10, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj/eng>

regulation, and invest in systematic, data-driven audience research. It also encourages deeper collaboration within the ecosystem to maintain shared standards and collective resilience.

Press Club Belarus is grateful to the Council of Europe for making this report possible.

Key takeaways

Belarus's exiled independent media organisations (BEIMOs) have to operate in **an information space dominated by total state control**. Inside the country, they compete with a powerful, centralised propaganda system that consolidates state-owned outlets, Russian broadcasters, pro-government bloggers, and nominally private media constrained by censorship.

This creates **a deeply asymmetric environment**: the state-controlled sector enjoys vast resources and unrestricted access to audiences, while BEIMO are geographically cut off from the market and revenue opportunities, operating under severe technological and legal restrictions.

Nevertheless, **BEIMOs have maintained strong links with domestic audiences by placing their needs at the core of editorial and content strategies**. This efficiency has been strengthened by the emergence of a new level of self-organisation – the Belarusian exiled independent media ecosystem (BEIME) – which allows the sector to **preserve influence even amid repression**.

BEIME ensures media pluralism, it unites national, regional, niche, and investigative outlets, as well as news agencies, freelancers, and media support organisations. This diversity expands audience reach and strengthens trust in verified information, countering fragmentation and preventing the formation of information bubbles.

BEIMOs utilize advanced audience segmentation to tailor content, moving beyond simplistic political or demographic labels to create **a Unique Value Proposition (UVP)** based on a nuanced understanding of people's lived experiences, emotional states, and everyday needs

The BEIMOs remain **rooted in public-interest journalism**, consistently prioritising social, economic, political, and human rights issues, alongside history and culture. They actively promote democratic values and institutions. To reach diverse audiences and maintain relevance, these outlets maintain a strong presence across all major platforms and social media channels.

BEIMOs are **committed to high professional and ethical standards**, which are reinforced through self-regulation tools like the sector's Ethical Code. This commitment positions them as a community of high-quality media aligned with European standards of journalism.

Today, BEIME serves a **dual purpose**: providing domestic audiences with an alternative to state and Russian propaganda, while also supplying European institutions, researchers, and policymakers with reliable insights into developments in Belarus.

Due to the destruction of traditional business models and monopolisation of the domestic advertising market, the vast majority of exiled media entities function as non-profit structures, making them **reliant on long-term institutional (core) donor funding** for sustainability.

Belarusian independent media **meet the criteria** for media service providers and high-quality media service providers under the **European Media Freedom Act** and should be recognised accordingly – with EU-level protections, including the right to operate freely, source confidentiality, and safeguards against surveillance.

1. From domestic information space to the exiled Belarusian independent media ecosystem

1.1 How is Belarus's information environment structured?

To understand the context in which independent media operate, it is essential to examine key actors targeting audiences inside Belarus – in terms of their access to those audiences, the infrastructure and distribution networks available to them, and their adherence to professional and ethical media standards.

Today, Belarus's information environment is divided into two asymmetrical parts. On one side lies the state-controlled media field, operating within the existing legal framework, backed by extensive national infrastructure and unfettered access to audiences. On the other stands the independent media sector in exile: forced to operate outside that legal framework, subjected to criminalisation of both production and consumption³ of their content.

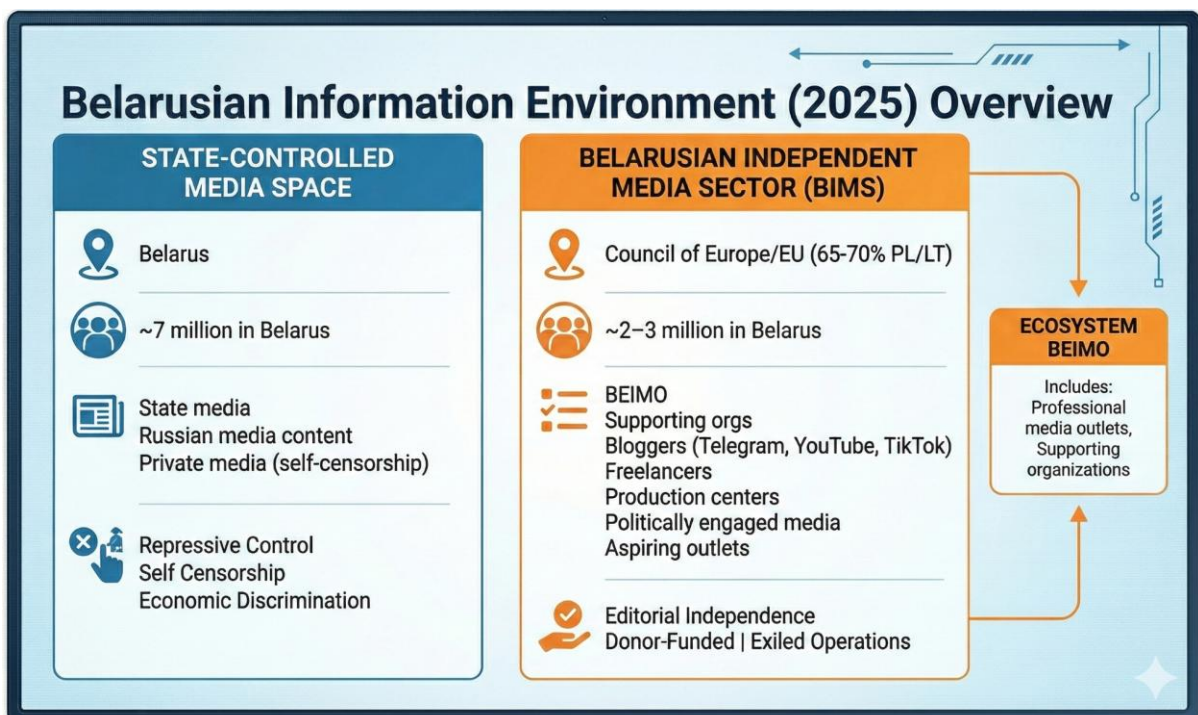


Diagram 1, Sources: https://www.mediamester.by/pdf/week_report220.pdf and PCB Media Lab

³ Belarusian Association of Journalists, "State Policies in the Field of Media Regulation in the New Belarus", BAJ.Media [online], February 12, 2024, <https://baj.media/be/mediyaprava/gosudarstvennye-politiki-v-oblasti-regulirovaniya-media-v-novoy-belarusi/>

The state-controlled information sphere in Belarus operates as a unified system serving political power. It combines state-owned outlets, Russian state-controlled broadcasters, pro-government bloggers, and a small number of nominally private media constrained by censorship. Together, they shape a tightly managed communication environment that suppresses independent voices and amplifies official narratives.

State-owned media dominate the landscape, functioning as instruments of political control rather than journalism, they include TV channels, print, radio and presence on all digital platforms and social media. Their leadership is appointed by the president or his subordinates⁴, and their content follows the communication agenda of the authorities⁵. Russian state-controlled outlets – both, legacy and digital media – further reinforce this system: financed and directed by the Kremlin, they extend propaganda⁶ across borders, supplying content for hybrid Belarusian-Russian channels and blurring the boundary between domestic and foreign messaging.

Privately owned media that remain inside the country operate under strict self-censorship, legal pressure, and an almost fully monopolised advertising market, which forces many outlets to avoid sensitive topics. There are numerous bloggers on platforms such as Telegram, VKontakte, and YouTube reproduce state propaganda in less formal formats, often relying on non-transparent funding schemes and violating journalistic standards.

Taken together, this state-controlled space enjoys full access to national infrastructure, resources, and audiences.

The independent segment of Belarus's information environment can be described as the Belarusian Independent Media Sector (BIMS) – a diverse system that includes bloggers, production centres, media outlets, and even foreign government-backed media serving Belarusian audiences.

By 2025, a core group within this sector reached a new level of self-organisation, evolving into what is now known as the Belarusian Exiled Independent Media Ecosystem (BEIME). BEIME is a cohesive, collaborative network that operates across borders while maintaining strong connections with audiences inside the country.

Audiences inside Belarus remain the primary target and a strategic priority for media organisations within the BEIME. Their activities are designed first and foremost to inform, engage, and support Belarusian citizens despite the restrictions of the domestic information environment.

⁴ President of the Republic of Belarus, "Personnel Decisions Regarding the Leadership of Several National Media Outlets", accessed October 24, 2025, <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/prinjatije-kadrovyx-reshenij-v-otnoshenii-rukovodstva-rjada-respublikanskix-smi-18055>

⁵ Media IQ, Divided Reality: Analysis of Belarusian Media in 2024 (May 6, 2025), <https://mediaiq.info/razdelennaya-realnost-analiz-belarusskih-smi-v-2024-godu>

⁶ Media IQ, "The West's Main Goal Is to Worsen the Lives of Millions of People'. 'It's Bad Where There Is No 'Russian World', According to Kremlin Propaganda" (March 31, 2023), <https://mediaiq.info/osnovnaya-cel-zapada-uhudshit-zhizn-milionov-ljudej-ploho-tam-gde-net-russkogo-mira-po-versii-kremljovskoj-propagandy>

Free from political control and state ownership, these media uphold professional and ethical standards, share democratic values, and sustain a free flow of verified information. Within BIMS, BEIME functions as a cooperative ecosystem that connects exiled newsrooms and support organisations, fostering collaboration, innovation, and resilience across the sector.

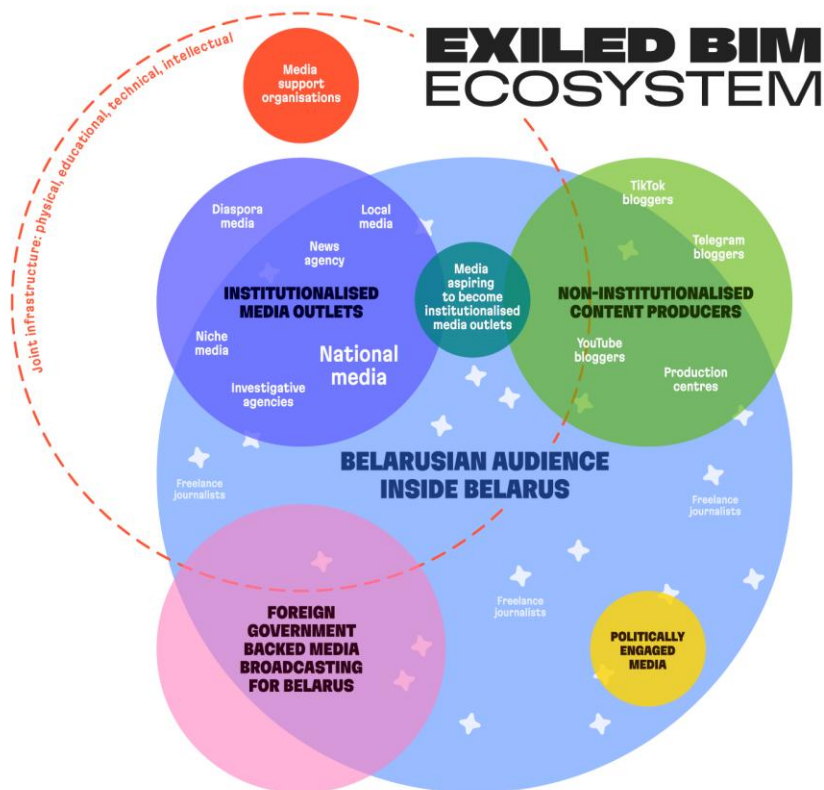


Diagram 2, source: PCB Media Lab, Belarusian exiled media sector, representation of different actors. The ecosystem is contained inside the dashed red boundary.

Further details on the structure and characteristics of the Belarusian information environment – including an assessment of how different media actors meet the criteria of quality journalism – are provided in Annex 2.

1.2 Unique value proposition as a key to diverse audiences

All media outlets within the ecosystem (“institutionalised media outlets” in Diagram 2) conduct systematic work to identify and segment their audiences and to design strategies for reaching each segment. For them, this is an organic part of their overall strategy – directly linked to fulfilling their mission.

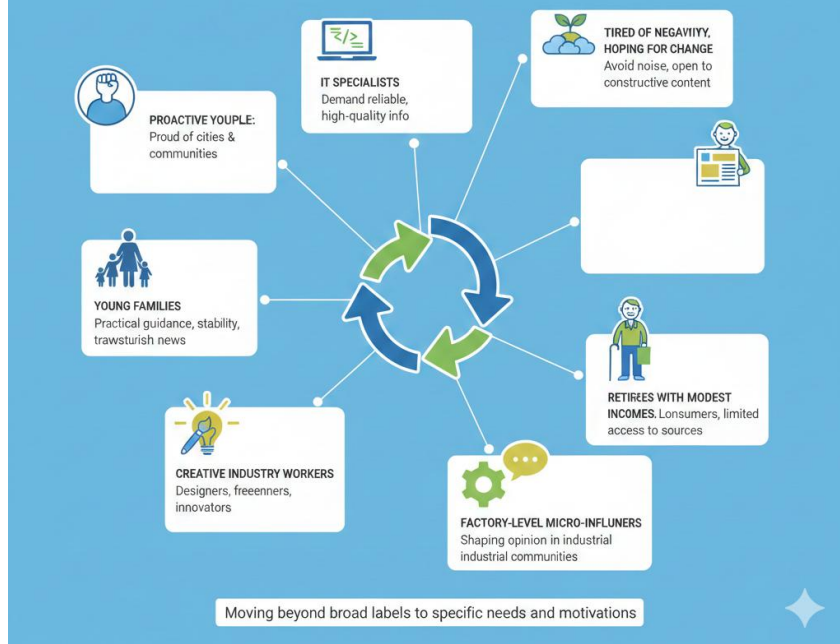
Different approaches to audience segmentation can be observed. Some outlets focus on socio-demographic characteristics, others on information channels, values, or emotional states. Most combine these approaches, resulting in varying levels of detail in defining their target groups. *This diversity is natural and should not be subject to standardization or strict regulation.*

Audiences of different media outlets often overlap, creating a healthy level of competition. At the same time, this overlap benefits the audience, which receives news from several independent sources differing in focus, tone, and format – ultimately strengthening trust in information. In contrast, a strictly “niche” model (one outlet for one audience) would lead to social fragmentation and reinforce informational bubbles.

At the same time, there are significant differences between target audiences. Media outlets making targeted efforts to reach groups that were previously underrepresented or outside their traditional reach. Most have moved beyond broad categories such as “pro-democratic Belarusians” or “neutral audiences” and now think carefully about whom they serve and what they can offer. These groups include, for example, *proactive young men and women proud of their cities, IT specialists, young families, creative industry workers, factory-level micro-influencers, retirees with modest incomes, people tired of negativity but still hoping for change.*

HOW INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE & EXPANDING THEIR REACH

Independent Belarusian media target diverse audience groups



Crucially, media outlets prioritize the needs of their audiences and view content through the lens of a unique value proposition (UVP) for readers and viewers. This approach is not formal but deeply human-centered, placing the audience at the core of editorial work – fully aligned with leading international journalism practices.

According to a newsroom survey, common UVP goals include, among others: *helping audiences regain a sense of control over their lives; reducing fear and anxiety; guiding them through the information flow; teaching them to make informed, balanced decisions; reinforcing the sense that they are not alone; showing that their voices matter as much as those of experts.*

A shared guiding principle across the ecosystem is the promotion of democratic values, civic engagement, and open public dialogue. This remains a long-term priority even when some outlets temporarily shift toward lighter or non-political content to retain audiences fatigued by repression and negativity.

Taken together, these perspectives on audience engagement and the development of clear, audience-centered value propositions form the foundation of the ecosystem approach to Belarusian independent media in exile.

The key target groups and their corresponding unique value propositions are presented in the Annex 3.

1.3. Evolving ecosystem

Next level of self-organisation

The Belarusian Exiled Independent Media Outlets ecosystem (BEIME) is a unique example of media self-organisation among the exiled media communities. It is not a loose collection of exiled outlets but an organically interconnected structure characterised by both cooperation and competition – a phenomenon known as cooptation⁷.

BEIME emerged organically, developing through horizontal collaboration among media outlets and supporting organisations. While each newsroom retains full editorial and strategic independence, they share resources, exchange expertise, and coordinate efforts to strengthen their collective reach and impact.

At the same time, much like in any market environment, newsrooms must compete for audiences whose access to independent information is restricted, as well as for the limited financial resources available. To stay relevant, visible, and effective it is no longer enough to simply deliver accurate and timely reporting on domestic events. Every day, independent newsrooms navigate a highly competitive environment, contending not only with state-controlled outlets but also with each other in the struggle to reach and retain audiences. This pressure pushes them toward increasingly adaptive and technology-driven strategies for creating and distributing content⁸.

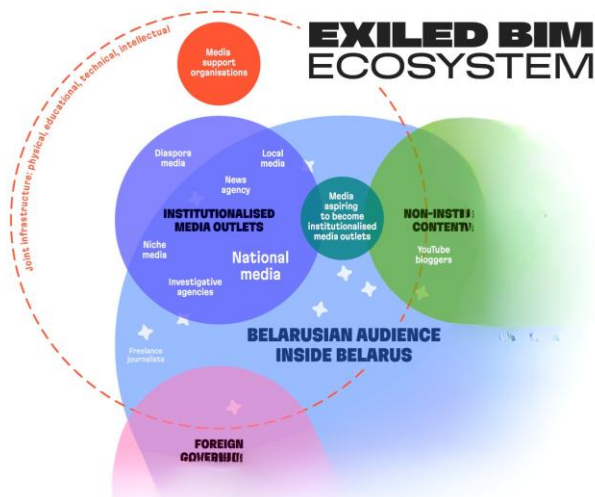
Supporting organisations fulfil the role of keystone institutions by linking otherwise dispersed actors and maintaining the infrastructure necessary for overall coherence. This decentralised model fosters constant exchange, innovation, and adaptability – the qualities that allow BEIME to remain functional and resilient despite repression and exile.

Key actors within BEIME

The BEIME brings together a diverse range of actors, each performing a distinct yet interdependent role. The largest group of actors are institutionalised Belarusian independent media outlets in exile. They could be further grouped in the following way.

⁷ Studies of Management & Organization 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 11–31, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247886826_Cooptation_An_Introduction_to_the_Subject_and_an_Agenda_for_Research

⁸ Daria Hryshchuk and Alena Shkurova, How do media reach blocked audiences? A Study of Media Practices in Post-Soviet Countries (SALT, 2025)



National media. National outlets set the agenda and provide comprehensive coverage across politics, society, culture, and the economy. They act both as producers and distributors, amplifying the work of smaller partners within BEIME. By maintaining professional standards and a national perspective, they define the information environment for domestic and international audiences alike.

National media include Zerkalo (zerkalo.io), Nasha Niva (nashaniva.com), Euroradio (euroradio.fm), SaBlidarnasts (gazetaby.com), and Reformation (reform.news).

News agency. Operating under the highest standards of news journalism, the agency primarily produces a "raw material" of Belarus-related news for some other media within the ecosystem, which then develop it into their own stories. At the same time, it delivers news and analytical content directly to end audiences in Belarus and to those abroad with an interest in Belarusian affairs.

The news agency is represented by the Pozirk (pozirk.online).

Local media. Regional outlets concentrate on specific areas of Belarus, often operating through networks of remote correspondents and freelancers. Relying on open-source intelligence (OSINT) and user-generated content (UGC), they preserve local visibility and feed grassroots perspectives into the national narrative. Acting as connectors between centre and periphery, they ensure that regional realities remain part of the broader public discourse.

Local media include BGMedia, (bgmedia.site), Hrodna.Life, Flagshtok (flagshtok.info), etc.

Niche media. Specialised outlets serve targeted segments – professional, generational, or thematic. They provide depth and expertise in areas such as the economy, human rights, culture, and youth issues. Beyond their specific focus, they enrich the ecosystem by offering analysis and context to larger outlets, reinforcing its diversity, credibility, and analytical depth.

Niche media include [Devby](https://devby.io) (devby.io), *Belorusy i Rynok* (belmarket.by), *Tribuna* (by.tribuna.com), *CityDog* (citydog.io), etc.

Investigative agencies. These agencies uncover information of public significance that is often concealed or distorted by state-controlled sources. They lead in fact-checking, data verification, and analytical reporting, producing evidence-based investigations that enhance BEIME's overall credibility and strengthen its accountability function within the Belarusian information space.

Investigative agencies include Belarusian Investigative Centre (investigatebel.org), *Bureau Media* (bureaumedio.io), etc.

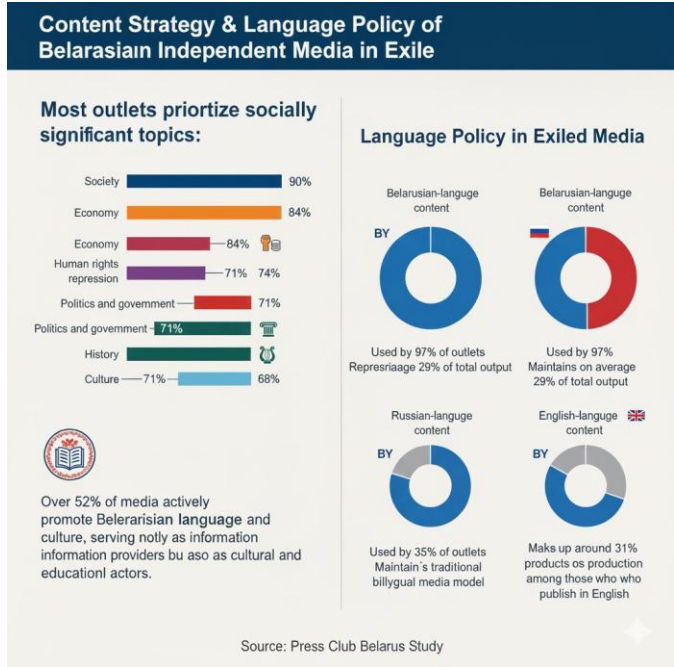
Another large group that is part of the ecosystem are **freelance journalists**. Freelancers form the connective tissue of the ecosystem. Many contribute regularly to several outlets without formal employment, reflecting the project-based nature of donor funding. Importantly, some continue to work from within Belarus, gathering first-hand information under conditions of risk. Their reporting maintains BEIME's vital link to developments inside the country and ensures that exile does not become detachment.

Supporting organisations. Supporting organisations serve as enablers of collaboration and continuity. They connect dispersed editorial teams, facilitate joint projects, and provide legal, professional, and psychological support. By sustaining infrastructure and coordination mechanisms, they transform a scattered set of media initiatives into a functioning and adaptive ecosystem.

Supporting organisations include Press Club Belarus (press-club.pro), *Belarusian Association of Journalists* (baj.media), etc.

Content and language policy

Sample infographics:



According to a study conducted by Press Club Club⁹ the content strategy of Belarusian independent media in exile demonstrates a clear focus on public-interest journalism. The majority of outlets prioritise socially relevant topics, including society (90%), the economy (84%), human rights and repression (74%), politics and government (71%), history (71%), and culture (68%). Notably, over half of all media projects (around 52%) actively promote the Belarusian language and culture, fulfilling not only an informational but also a cultural and educational function.

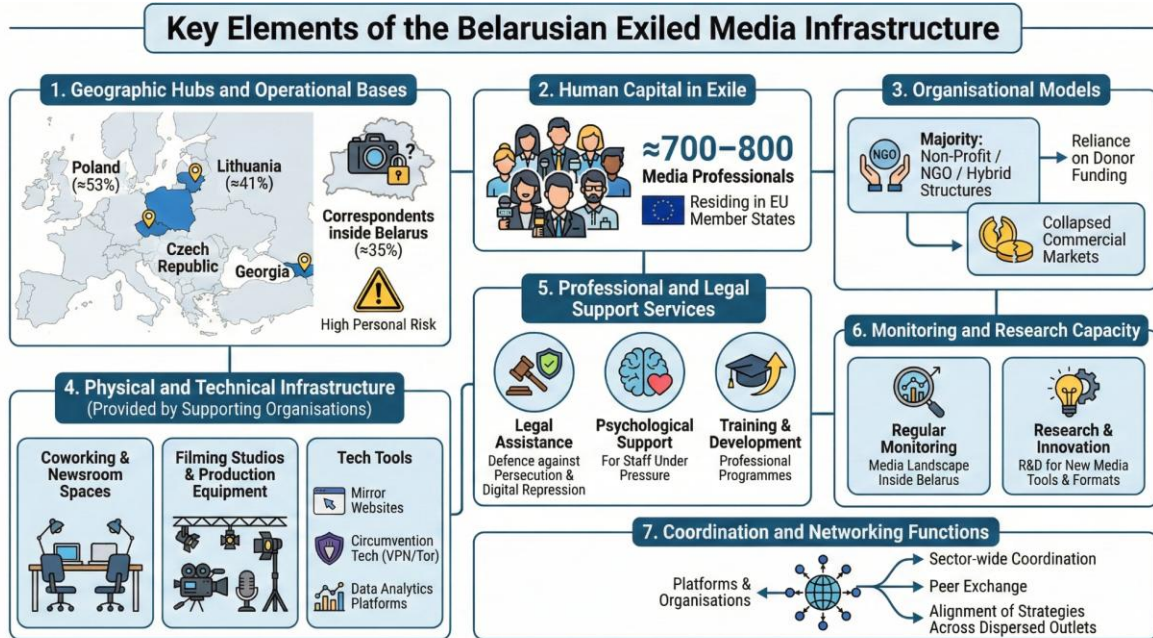
The linguistic policy of exiled media reflects the dual nature of the Belarusian information space. Nearly all outlets (97%) produce content in Belarusian, though its average share accounts for about 29% of total output. Russian remains equally widespread (also 97%), maintaining the country’s bilingual media model. Around one-third (35%) of outlets also publish in English, though this content usually represents a smaller portion of production – roughly 31% among those that use it.

Infrastructure of the ecosystem

BEIME’s infrastructure reflects the geography and institutional conditions of Belarusian exile. Most independent media operate from neighbouring countries – primarily Poland (around 53%) and Lithuania (41%), with smaller concentrations in Georgia and the Czech Republic.

Notably, around 35% outlets continue to have correspondents or staff in the country despite significant risks of persecution. Overall, an estimated 700 to 800 Belarusian media professionals and staff connected to the surveyed outlets are now based in European Union member states.

⁹ Media Analytical Lab, Survey of 34 Media Organisations (Press Club Belarus, February 2025)



Most entities function as non-profit organisations, either as NGOs or hybrid structures combining non-profit status with limited commercial activity. This mirrors the dominance of donor funding and the collapse of market-based revenue models.

In this environment, supporting organisations help independent media remain resilient by sustaining the broader institutional infrastructure. They provide co-working and filming spaces, audio and visual production equipment, [legal assistance, and monitoring of the media state inside the country](#). Their work extends to legal aid, psychological support, training, and professional development, as well as [research and development initiatives for media](#). They also create technological tools, including mirror sites and advanced data analytics solutions, enabling exiled newsrooms to operate and innovate despite restrictions.

Thus, the ecosystem's infrastructure helps offset the absence of a domestic media market and provides a stabilising framework that allows dispersed actors to operate as a coherent system.

Interconnections and functional dynamics

What distinguishes BEIME from a simple network or alliance is its intricate system of interconnections. Each actor fulfils a distinct role but remains embedded in continuous exchange of content, expertise, and human resources.

A vivid example is the distribution of investigative materials through national media: when an [original](#), rigorously researched report appears as a large and complex document, other outlets break its insights into "informational atoms", turning them into shorter, more accessible [news stories](#).

РАСЛЕДАВАННІ

14 ЛІСТАПАДА 2023

Грошы любяць цішыню. Як «нафтавы гаманец» Лукашэнкі Анатоць Тарнаўскі знік з дакументаў сваіх кампаній і пазбег санкцый

Раследаванне пра самага буйнога «нафтавага гаманца» Лукашэнкі і адначасова аднаго з самых непублічных.

Аўтары: *Лілія Янчук*
Рэдактары: *Станіслаў Іванкевіч, Лалі Бурыева*

Анатоль Тарнаўскі – беларускі бізнесовец украінскага паходжання з расейскім пашпарта, уласнік некалькіх найбуйнейшых кампаній Беларусі, удадальнік ордэна Рускай праваслаўнай царквы. Ён, верагодна, самы буйны



Another illustration is the ecosystem-wide digital streaming platform [Belarus Tomorrow](#), which established a shared satellite broadcasting platform enabling exiled video producers to reach audiences in and beyond Belarus while preserving full editorial independence.

Functional production chains unite all levels of the ecosystem: national outlets amplify regional stories; investigative agencies supply analytical depth; niche projects add thematic expertise; freelancers move flexibly between them; and supporting organisations ensure coordination and resource flow.

A defining strength of the ecosystem is its adaptability: the absence of rigid hierarchies allows resources and attention to be redistributed according to emerging needs and challenges. At the same time, the system is marked by deep interdependence – the loss of

any single element weakens its overall performance, while the success of one actor reinforces the resilience and effectiveness of the whole.

This coopetition model encourages innovation, diversification of formats, and experimentation with audience engagement. Internal competition drives quality, while cooperation ensures sustainability. When one approach proves ineffective, others fill the gap – a dynamic that makes BEIME collectively resilient.

At its foundation lies an ethical core built on journalistic integrity, professional standards, freedom of expression and Belarusian agency. These shared values bind the ecosystem together and distinguish it from all other media configurations within Belarus's information environment.

2. Evaluating Belarusian independent media in exile as providers of quality journalism (EMFA and CoE standards)

2.1 Belarusian exiled media as actors within the EMFA context

To apply European Media Freedom Act's provisions to Belarusian exiled independent media outlets, one needs to establish their compatibility with the definitions and/or functions in the Act. European Media Freedom Act defines "**media service**" as a "service whose principal purpose is to provide programs or press publications to the public, under the editorial responsibility of a media service provider, in order to inform, entertain, or educate". A "**media service provider**" is a natural or legal person whose professional activity is to provide a media service and who has editorial responsibility for the choice of the content of the media service and determines the manner in which it is organised.

Exiled Belarusian media conform to these definitions **despite the destruction of their traditional business models**. BEIMOs provide programs and publications to a broad audience, producing high-impact journalism that shapes public opinion, informs and educates. They operate with editorial independence, adhering to ethical and journalistic standards. According to earlier studies commissioned by Press Club Belarus, they represent a "professional and sustainable ecosystem." Although their commercial models (subscriptions, advertising) have been destroyed, the media continue to function within the framework of economic activity. They have budgets, operating expenses, and are supported by donor funding, with a rising share of donations from individuals or membership. Most organisations are registered as non-profit, but some have the right to conduct commercial activities.

On top of that, they produce quality journalism, which in turn opens up additional opportunities for them within EMFA. EMFA does not provide a single, standalone definition of quality media. Nonetheless, the recitals consistently connect quality journalism with democratic resilience, for example, by acknowledging that quality empowers citizens to make informed choices; that recipients should be able to access trustworthy media produced independently and in line with ethical standards; that obstacles to journalists' economic activity undermine access to quality media; and that strong, inclusive self-regulation effectively guarantees quality and professionalism and safeguards editorial integrity. These ideas are reflected in the provisions relevant to protection and duties (Annex 4).

Belarusian media are characterised by **independence and reliability**; they serve as "public watchdogs," providing reliable information, especially in conditions where Belarusian state actors spread disinformation and hate speech, and fail to perform the function of controlling the government's actions. Their work meets high ethical and journalistic standards, includes

self-regulation and impartiality. More than 20 publications have signed a charter of ethics and created a Media Ethics Council. They play a crucial role in countering propaganda and disinformation from both the Minsk regime and Moscow. Their existence ensures **media pluralism** for Belarusians who would otherwise receive information only from state sources. Their investigations have far-reaching effects, **holding authorities accountable** for their actions and attracting international attention.

While Article 5 is designed to support **public service media providers**, which are usually public media in the EU member states, it is also possible to extend to them the concept of public **interest** providers to the Belarusian exiled independent media outlets: editorially independent providers that produce trustworthy information as a public good and meet EU- level expectations on transparency and ethics. One could argue the case of expanding the public service media providers' definition to include such public interest media, in which case BEIMO could get an opportunity to **apply for funding necessary to keep their editorial independence and continue the realisation of their public mission.**

2.2 Belarusian exiled media in the lens of the Council of Europe

While the EMFA offers a new legal shield, the Council of Europe's (CoE) Recommendations **CM/Rec(2022)4** and **CM/Rec(2016)4** on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism and on safety of journalists provide the essential **normative framework** that validates the mission and existential needs of Belarusian exiled independent media outlets (BEIMO) and their workers.

The CoE frames quality journalism as a public good, characterised by independence, accuracy, fairness, transparency, humanity, and a strong **public- interest mission**. Its guidelines urge **targeted, viewpoint-neutral support to sustain pluralism, including for cross-border and investigative journalism; they also encourage the development of legally robust frameworks vis-à-vis** platform intermediaries to ensure fair treatment and revenue sharing. These points align tightly with BEIMO's reality in exile. As most BEIMO operate within CoE member states, they are functionally subject to these standards and recommendations.

CM/Rec(2022)4 promotes a favourable environment for quality journalism, describing it as an unwavering commitment to truth, fairness, and accuracy; to independence, transparency, and humanity; and to the public interest in promoting accountability. Operating under extreme pressure, BEIMO exemplify this ethos: they act as public watchdogs, counter disinformation, and maintain ethical self-regulation (including joint charters and a Media Ethics Council).

This alignment implies concrete host-state responsibilities. **Guideline 1.1.3 (Targeted support)** urges states to recognise the distinct roles of different media actors and provide differentiated, safeguarded support, including multi-annual core funding where commercial models are structurally impaired by repression.

The Recommendation's core definition of **quality journalism**, described as having an "**unwavering commitment to the pursuit of truth, fairness and accuracy, to independence, transparency and humanity**" and a "**strong sense of public interest in promoting accountability**", is one that the exiled media outlets fully embody.

Operating as vital **public interest media** under conditions of extreme duress, the BEIMO serve as essential **public watchdogs** and are explicitly recognised by the Council of Europe itself for providing "**significant input into countering disinformation and propaganda of the Łukašenka regime**"¹⁰.

¹⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/belarus-journalists-in-exile-meet-in-strasbourg#:~:>

3. Recommendations

For European institutions

Recognising Belarusian exiled media as legitimate media service providers under the EMFA, granting them EU-level legal protection from surveillance, external interference, and political pressure.

Recognising Belarusian independent media as high-quality media service providers under Recital 47 of the EMFA, acknowledging their contribution to combating disinformation, safeguarding democratic values, and ensuring pluralistic access to verified information for citizens deprived of it inside Belarus.

Creating legal and security mechanisms against transnational repression, including cybersecurity measures, legal aid, and protection from digital and judicial harassment targeting journalists and editorial teams abroad.

Applying a functional approach to recognition, assessing media by their actual public-interest role and adherence to quality journalism standards rather than formal registration or commercial viability. Repressive conditions and disrupted business models should not exclude them from Europe's legal and policy frameworks.

Establishing a dedicated EU programme for media in exile from repressive regimes, focused on long-term operational sustainability rather than short-term project grants. Prioritising institutional (core) funding to ensure predictability, continuity, and staff retention.

For host-country governments

Simplifying registration and access to national media support schemes, ensuring that Belarusian independent outlets based in Poland, Lithuania, and other host countries have equal access to media funding, accreditation, and operational registration without bureaucratic barriers.

Recognising Belarusian journalists' diplomas and professional qualifications, allowing them to work legally as accredited media professionals and benefit from national labour protections and social guarantees. Many currently operate as freelancers due to regulatory constraints, resulting in insecurity and exclusion from formal employment systems.

Integrating Belarusian exiled media into national self-regulation and ethics systems, enabling participation in press councils and media ethics bodies, and granting formal recognition of compliance with professional standards – strengthening both their legitimacy and public trust.

Ensuring physical and legal protection from transnational repression, including safeguarding journalists from abduction attempts, cyberattacks, and politically motivated extradition requests initiated by the Belarusian regime.

For donor organisations

Prioritising institutional (core) support over short-term project funding, ensuring predictable, multi-year financing that covers essential operational costs. Sustainable support enables media to plan strategically, invest in staff development, and maintain editorial independence.

Supporting the development of hybrid business models, adapted to the realities of exile. This includes subscription models for diaspora audiences, consulting and training services, educational projects, and partnerships with host-country outlets – building long-term financial resilience.

Investing in supporting organisations as institutional hubs, which sustain the ecosystem through co-working spaces, shared technical infrastructure, legal assistance, and capacity-building programmes.

Funding research and data-driven analysis of the Belarusian information space, including monitoring of propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and audience trends.
Enhancing donor coordination and complementarity, to avoid duplication and close critical funding gaps.

For media organisations

Strengthening transparency of ownership and funding, in line with the Council of Europe's Recommendation. Public disclosure of ownership structures, funding sources, and potential conflicts of interest is essential for building audience trust and institutional legitimacy.

Developing robust self-regulation mechanisms, through ethical charters, ombudspersons, and independent media councils. These tools enhance accountability and demonstrate compliance with European standards – a key factor for recognition as high-quality media under EMFA.

Engaging in systematic and in-depth audience research, with continuous adjustment of content strategies and tone of voice to reflect audiences' needs, lived experiences, and emotional states.

Adapting content strategies to evolving media consumption habits, by investing in short-form video, podcasts, and messenger-based distribution to reach younger and domestic audiences more effectively.

Deepening cooperation within the ecosystem, through content-sharing, joint investigations, and resource pooling.

4. Annexes

Annex 1. Glossary¹¹

Belarusian information environment – the media landscape of Belarus, divided after 2020 into two parts. The state-controlled media space inside the country includes state outlets serving propaganda, Russian media content, and private outlets practicing self-censorship under threat of repression. The Belarusian Independent Media Sector (BIMS), forced into exile and operating mainly from Council of Europe and EU countries, forms an exiled media ecosystem (BEIME) of independent outlets (BEIMO) committed to editorial independence and quality journalism, serving audiences in Belarus and abroad.

Belarusian Independent Media Sector (BIMS) – the community of media outlets, editorial offices, content creators and supporting organisations that focus on Belarus and its audiences. BIMS is characterised by the absence of government affiliation in ownership or funding, independent editorial policies, and freedom from political control. Its members share democratic values, adhere to professional standards and journalistic ethics, and maintain the ability to reach audiences inside Belarus. The sector operates on the principles of freedom and independence, embodies media pluralism, and is primarily based in EU and Council of Europe countries.

Belarusian Exiled Independent Media Ecosystem (BEIME) – a dynamically evolving part of the Belarusian Independent Media Sector (BIMS), comprised of exiled independent outlets and supporting organisations. It brings together national, local and niche media, news agencies, investigative centres, and resource organisations, which complement one another's outputs. The ecosystem is characterised by editorial cooperation, shared infrastructure, knowledge exchange, innovation, and mutual support, while maintaining healthy competition. Its outlets offer unique value propositions tailored to different audience segments.

Belarusian Exile Independent Media Outlets (BEIMO) - institutionalised independent media outlets that relocate outside their home country due to threats, repression, conflict, or the impossibility of operating safely at home because of administrative harassment, imprisonment or violence, while continuing to serve their original audiences from abroad.

Unique Value Proposition (UVP) - the reason why audiences should choose one journalism product or service over another, the benefits it provides and what makes it distinctive. It includes the quality of journalism, how stories are produced and designed, how accessible and usable they are, and the overall experience for the audience.

¹¹ The glossary provides abbreviations and acronyms used in this guide. Several definitions are drawn from authoritative sources, including the Council of Europe's Recommendation on Quality Journalism in the Digital Age (2022); the European Media Freedom Act (2024); the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a common framework for media services (2024); the UNESCO-endorsed Windhoek Declaration (1991); and the OECD's Development Co-operation Principles for Media Support.

Foreign government-backed media outlets – media funded and managed by foreign states/public institutions, primarily from Western democracies such as EU member states and the United States. They include international broadcasters and regional services targeting Belarus. These outlets operate with strong institutional capacity, professional management, and transparent funding. While their editorial stance may reflect foreign policy priorities, they uphold editorial independence and promote democratic values and open dialogue.

Hybrid Belarusian-Russian TV channels - Hybrid Belarusian-Russian TV channels – joint or coordinated state media projects integrating Belarusian and Russian influence. Built on Belarusian state infrastructure and reliant on Russian content and resources, they lack editorial independence and follow both Minsk and Moscow’s political agendas. Distributed mainly via terrestrial, satellite, and online platforms, they reproduce Russian state narratives promoting traditionalism, patriotism, and anti-Western sentiment. Funded through opaque state and quasi-state sources.

Independent media¹² – media outlets that create original content in the public interest, uphold democratic values, and adhere to high ethical and professional standards. They are typically not affiliated with state actors, politically exposed persons, or political parties; are not founded or operated by political or non-media entities; and are not implicated in spreading propaganda. Independent media generally maintain financial autonomy from political parties, politically exposed persons, and state funds over time.

Media pluralism¹³ – the diversity of media types, ownership, and content available to the public, ensured by a supportive legislative and regulatory framework. It encompasses structural diversity (public, local, minority, community media), editorial independence and operational autonomy, transparency of media ownership, and equitable access to diverse viewpoints through media literacy and visibility across platforms.

Media service¹⁴ – any service whose main purpose, or a separable part of it, is to provide programmes or press publications to the general public, under the editorial responsibility of a media service provider, for the purpose of informing, entertaining or educating, by any means, in the context of an economic activity.

Media service provider¹⁵ – a natural or legal person whose professional activity is the provision of a media service, who holds editorial responsibility for the selection of the service’s content, and determines the manner in which it is organised.

Non-state media outlets in Belarus – privately owned or semi-independent media operating under continuous state censorship, economic pressure, and restrictive legislation. To avoid persecution, many practice self-censorship, face limited access to official

¹² JX Fund, Journalism in Exile: A Complex Phenomenon, Country Profiles overview, JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile, 2025

¹³ Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Media Pluralism and Transparency of Media Ownership (adopted March 7, 2018),

¹⁴ European Union, European Media Freedom Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of 11 April 2024, Article 2(1),

¹⁵ European Union, European Media Freedom Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of 11 April 2024, Article 2(2)

information, and encounter legal barriers to reporting. Funding comes mainly from advertising and small private donations, while the domestic advertising market remains largely monopolised by the state.

Pro-government bloggers – informal online actors who support the Belarusian authorities and reproduce official narratives. Active mainly on Telegram, VKontakte, and YouTube, they may receive covert state support. Lacking journalistic standards and transparency, they spread propaganda and disinformation, promoting traditional and loyalty-oriented values while rejecting democratic ideas.

Public interest media¹⁶ – media that exist to inform the public on issues of concern, provide fact-based and trustworthy information, pursue truth through transparent sourcing and representation, operate with editorial independence, and maintain transparency in processes, finances and policies.

Quality journalism¹⁷ – journalism that upholds truth, fairness and accuracy, operates with independence, transparency and humanity, and serves the public interest by promoting accountability across society. It also relies on sustainable and independent editorial structures, adherence to ethical and professional standards, and the capacity to adapt through continuous learning and innovation.

Russian state-controlled media – state-financed outlets operating as instruments of Kremlin propaganda, including major television networks and online platforms. They possess vast institutional and distribution capacity, reaching Belarus through retransmission and digital channels. Their content promotes pro-Russian nationalism, conservative values, and anti-Western narratives, lacking transparency and journalistic ethics. These outlets shape public perceptions in Belarus and pose a significant challenge to national and regional information sovereignty.

State-controlled media space – the part of the Belarusian information environment located inside the country and dominated by media outlets under direct or indirect state control. It includes state-owned broadcasters, news agencies and hybrid Belarusian–Russian TV channels that retransmit Russian content. The sector is characterised by propaganda, political censorship, self-censorship in private outlets, and repressive control mechanisms.

State media outlets – state-owned or state-managed media organisations that operate under the supervision of government authorities. Their leadership is appointed by presidential decree or by executive officials subordinate to the president. These outlets serve the communication and propaganda needs of the state, prioritising official narratives and often integrating Russian content into their programming.

¹⁶ OECD, Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024),

¹⁷ Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Promoting a Favourable Environment for Quality Journalism in the Digital Age (adopted March 17, 2022),

Annex 2. Methodology

Key questions and scope

This guide seeks to address several key questions:

1. How is the Belarusian independent media structured?
2. What information environment does it operate in, and who are its main competitors?
3. What unique value propositions does it offer to its audiences?
4. Can the media outlets within this ecosystem be regarded as high-quality media service providers under the European Media Freedom Act?

The core problem this paper addresses is the limited visibility of Belarusian independent media in exile among European partners, despite their strong adherence to quality journalism standards, their distinctive value for Belarusian audiences, and their strategic relevance for European democracy.

The guide provides a detailed description of the Belarusian independent media ecosystem in exile, comprising more than 40 media outlets operating primarily from Poland and Lithuania. It also offers essential contextual information on other key actors present in the Belarusian information space – including state and Russian media, independent bloggers operating freely within the country, and non-state media outlets.

The terminology used in this guide is drawn from authoritative international sources, including the Council of Europe’s Recommendation on Quality Journalism in the Digital Age (2022), the European Media Freedom Act (2024) and others. A full list of reference documents is provided in Annex 7.

Means and sources

The analysis of independent media in exile uses two complementary lenses: viewing them as a cohesive ecosystem and assessing them as high-quality media service providers in line with the standards of the European Media Freedom Act.

The methodological foundation of this study is a functional approach that evaluates media not by formal indicators – such as audience size, budget, or legal status –but by the roles and functions they perform within the information ecosystem.

The study applies a matrix of quality journalism criteria grounded in leading international standards and policy frameworks. It draws on the European Media Freedom Act, key Council of Europe recommendations on quality journalism and media pluralism, the OECD’s principles for supporting public interest media, and the UNESCO-endorsed Windhoek Declaration. The approach is further informed by JX Fund’s 2024 report "Defining Media in

Exile" and by criteria for the Belarusian independent media sector developed collaboratively by the sector itself under the facilitation of Press Club Belarus.

The study relies on a comprehensive combination of data sources and methods. Primarily, it draws on reports and analytical materials documenting the state of the Belarusian media sector – including the Strategic vision paper¹⁸ by Press Club Belarus, the Analysis of the Belarusian Media Sector in 2023¹⁹, the Review of the Belarusian Information Space in 2024²⁰, the Study on the transformation of the Belarusian information field²¹, and the reports on the system of state propaganda²² and the Synchronisation of Belarusian and Russian Narratives²³.

Additionally, between March and September 2025, two complementary research initiatives were carried out. The first study included ten in-depth interviews with media editors, journalists, researchers, and implementers, exploring newsroom management in exile, ecosystem cooperation, and adaptation challenges. The second study by Press Club Belarus surveyed fifteen independent media outlets, outlining their target audiences – including socio-demographic profiles, interests, and values – and identifying the unique value propositions each newsroom offers.

Also, the study draws on previous work by one of its authors, Pavel Bykouski, within the Media IQ project (2020-2024). In that role, he developed monitoring methodologies, conducted content analyses, and authored analytical materials and recommendations. The Media IQ research tracked how Belarusian newsrooms adhered to journalistic standards, assessed pro-Kremlin narratives and propaganda in national media, and examined the value map of Belarusian outlets along with the presence and citation frequency of various actors.

Use of AI

The study prioritized expert-led analysis, complemented by the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in a strictly supportive capacity. AI was employed for data structuring during desk research, handling large volumes of open-source data, and assisting with text refinement and translation between Belarusian, Russian, and English. Some analytical components

¹⁸ Gorchinskaya, K., Bykoŭski, P., & Belikava, N. (2025). Exiled. Effective. Essential: Supporting the Belarusian Independent Media Ecosystem. Press Club Belarus. https://press-club.pro/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025_Press-Club_EXILED_EFFECTIVE_ESSENTIAL.pdf

¹⁹ Bykouski, P., & Belikova, N. (2024). Belarusian Independent Media Sector in 2023. Press Club Belarus. <https://press-club.pro/dosved/the-belarusian-independent-media-sector-in-2023>

²⁰ Parfionienka, P., & Bykoŭski, P. (2025). A Divided Reality: Analysis of the Belarusian Media in 2024. Media IQ. <https://mediaiq.info/a-divided-reality-analysis-of-the-belarusian-media-in-2024>

²¹ Igor Buzovsky, Alexander Karliukevich, Alexander Postalovsky, and Dmitry Rotman, Specifics of the Transformation of the Information Field of the Republic of Belarus in Modern Conditions: A Sociological Analysis (Minsk: Higher School Publishing House, 2020).

²² Pavel Bykouski, Iryna Sidorskaya, and Maryna Mazurkevich, State Propaganda: How to Avoid It in the New Belarus (Belarusian Association of Journalists, 2024), https://baj.media/sites/default/files/analytics/files/2024/government_propaganda.pdf

²³ Pavel Bykouski, "A Loss of Media Sovereignty: Synchronization of Belarusian and Russian Propaganda after 2020," in Russian Policy towards Belarus after 2020: At a Turning Point?, ed. Arkady Moshes and Ryhor Nizhnikau (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781666925982>

include AI-generated synthetic data; however, all final judgments and interpretations were made by human experts.

Limitations

The analysis centers on institutionalized media organizations, recognizing that the boundaries of the ecosystem remain fluid. While the current configuration of BEIMO largely overlaps with BIMS, audience and donor perceptions often extend to independent bloggers and freelance content producers without formal editorial structures. These actors were noted but not systematically included due to limited empirical data.

The survey sample covered fifteen newsrooms representing key national, regional, and niche outlets. Although not statistically representative, the results – combined with qualitative insights – provide a coherent analytical overview. Data verification was constrained by the repressive environment in Belarus, limiting the ability to confirm certain operational details without compromising safety.

Fieldwork took place between March and October 2025. Given the rapidly changing context – marked by ongoing repression and shifting donor priorities – the findings reflect the state of the ecosystem at that moment while acknowledging its dynamic and evolving nature.

Annex 3. Comparative matrix assessing various media types by quality journalism criteria

This set of criteria was developed by the authors following an analysis of multiple sources that define or reference the principles of quality journalism, including the Council of Europe’s *Recommendation on Quality Journalism in the Digital Age (2022)*; the *European Media Freedom Act (2024)*; the *Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Common Framework for Media Services (2024)*; the UNESCO-endorsed *Windhoek Declaration (1991)*; and the OECD’s *Development Co-operation Principles for Media Support*.

Criteria	State media outlets	Non-state media outlets in Belarus	Independent media outlets in exile (BEIMO)	Foreign government backed media outlets	Hybrid Belarusian - Russian TV channels	Russian state-controlled media	Pro-governmental bloggers	Disengaged bloggers	Independent/opposition bloggers
Institutional capacity (staffing, infrastructure, management)	✓✓	✓	✓?	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adherence to journalistic standards	XX	✓	✓✓	✓✓	XX	XX	XX	~?	✓?
Track record of disseminating propaganda	✓✓	~?	XX	XX	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	~?	XX
Editorial independence (from government, business, or political interests)	XX	✓?	✓✓	✓	~?	XX	~?	✓?	✓
Funded by	✓✓ (budget)	~ (mixed/limited)	✓ (grants)	✓✓ (budget)	✓✓ (budget)	✓✓ (budget)	~?	N/A	~
Size of audience by type/platform	≥3 mln (✓✓)	~1 млн	≥1 mln (✓✓)	≥500 тыс.	≥3 mln (✓✓)	≥2 mln (✓✓)	~1 mln (~)	≤500k (~)	≥1 mln (✓)
Distribution channels	✓✓	~	✓✓	~✓	✓✓	✓✓	~	~	✓
Trust rating	XX	✓?	✓✓	✓	~?	X	~?	~	✓

Influence on public discourse	✓✓	✓	✓✓	~✓	~?	~?	~	~	✓
Disclosure of ownership and affiliations	✓	✓✓	~?	✓✓	X	X	X	N/A	~
Transparency of funding sources	X	~?	~?	✓✓	X	X	X	~	~?
Declared or observable political bias	✓✓	~?	X?	X	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	~	X
Support for civic dialogue and social cohesion	XX	✓	✓✓	✓	XX	XX	XX	~	✓
Promotion of traditional values	✓✓	~?	~	~	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	~	~
Promotion of secular-rational values	XX	~?	✓	✓	XX	XX	~?	N/A	N/A
Promotion of survival values	✓✓	~	X	X	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	~	X
Promotion of self-expression values	XX	✓	✓✓	✓	X	XX	XX	~	✓✓
Support for democratic values	XX	✓	✓✓	✓✓	XX	XX	XX	~	✓
Promote national identity/culture	~	✓	✓✓	✓	~?	XX	X	~	✓
Journalism investigations	XX	N/a	✓✓	✓?	XX	XX	X	N/A	✓
Perform Watchdog Function	XX	✓?	✓✓	✓	XX	XX	X	N/A	N/A
The state legally restricts access to this information	XX	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓✓
Access to information from State bodies	✓✓	✓?	XX	X?	N/A	✓✓	✓	X	XX
Access to ad market inside the country	✓✓	~	XX	XX	✓	X	~?	~	XX
Practice of compliance with ethical standards	XX	✓	✓✓	✓✓	~?	XX	X	~	✓
Mechanisms for audience feedback	X	✓	✓✓	✓✓	X	X	~	✓	✓✓
Transparency of algorithms and moderation	XX	✓?	✓✓	✓✓	X	XX	X	~	✓
Influence on public discourse	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	~	✓✓
Disclosure of ownership and affiliations	✓	✓	~?	✓✓	X	X	X	✓?	✓
Transparency of funding sources	X	~?	~?	✓✓	X	X	X	~	✓
Declared or observable political bias	✓✓	~?	X?	X	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	X	X?
Support for civic dialogue and social cohesion	XX	✓	✓✓	✓	~?	XX	X	~	✓
Promote national identity/culture	~	✓	✓✓	✓	~?	X	~?	~	✓

Journalism investigations	XX	N/A	✓	✓?	X	XX	X	N/A	✓
Perform Watchdog Function	XX	✓?	✓✓	✓	~?	XX	X	~?	✓
Legend: Symbol Meanings									
Symbol	Meaning								
✓	Yes / Present / Meets the criterion								
✓✓	Strongly present / Fully meets the criterion								
~	Partially meets the criterion / Limited or inconsistent								
X	No / Not present / Does not meet the criterion								
XX	Clearly absent / Strongly								

	violates the criterion								
N/A	Not applicable / Irrelevant for this category								
?	Insufficient data / Cannot be reliably assessed								
√? / ~?	Approximate or uncertain assessment								
≤	Less than or equal to (used for numerical values, e.g. audience size)								
≥	Greater than or equal to (used for								

	numerical values, e.g. audience size)								
--	---------------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Annex 4. Key target audiences and unique value propositions of BEIMO

The information in this section is based on a survey of 15 editorial teams, conducted using a methodology based on International Media Support's practical guide *Values, Value and Impact: "Good Journalism, Better Societies"*²⁴. The sample includes different types of actors, ensuring a representative picture.

Media	Main target audiences	Unique value proposition
Nasha Niva	Educated urban Belarusians (35-64) with families in major cities; medium to high incomes; politically engaged, valuing democracy and national identity.	Opportunity to make better life decisions through reliable information; sense of belonging to a like-minded community; ability to express opinions in comments despite censorship.
	Belarusians 45+, mostly retirees with modest incomes; read news in Belarusian, distrust state institutions, focus on domestic politics, economy, and social issues.	Feeling engaged in life after retirement; understanding daily events without lengthy news searches; explanations of complex issues that enhance confidence; connection to a community.
	Belarusians (18-45), politically neutral, prefer short content; follow breaking news, local stories, social issues, and entertainment, mostly in Russian.	Effortless awareness through fast-food-style news; engaging format with clear highlights; communication through comments; sense of relevance and belonging.
Zerkalo	Politically fatigued yet quietly hopeful audience; engaged through light, neutral content that gradually reintroduces balanced political and social coverage.	Ability to stay informed without pressure or anxiety through light, neutral content that reintroduces news consumption safely; gradual engagement provides balanced information, fostering connection to change and understanding of one's role in it.
	Cautious audience avoiding clear positions, viewing the situation as complex; receptive to subtle fact-based counter-propaganda and likely to share insights within their circles.	Access to propaganda-free news and longreads revealing real causes and responsibility behind the idea that "things are not so clear". Simple, convincing explanations to share within one's circle, fostering critical thinking.
	Pro-democratic audience seeking an accurate understanding of reality; drawn to credible information and thoughtful analysis combining emotional support with intellectual clarity.	A sense of community and confidence that her desire for democratic change is shared by millions. Honest, balanced reporting – neither embellished nor alarmist – provides clarity and reassurance, helping sustain faith in the future.
	Belarusians who were forced to leave the country and are now building new lives abroad while continuing to follow events in their homeland.	Opportunity to stay connected to the homeland while understanding the processes shaping life in a new country – preserving identity and providing resilience for adaptation in a new environment

²⁴ International Media Support, *Values, Value and Impact: "Good Journalism, Better Societies" in Practice* (Copenhagen: International Media Support, June 2025), <https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/values-value-and-impact-good-journalism-better-societies-in-practice/>

		without a sense of rupture.
Euroradio	Belarusians 40+ from medium and large cities; regular radio, podcast, and live stream audiences; remember Belarus before Lukashenka and hope for its renewal. Gender split: 55% men, 45% women.	Access to objective information, [civic] education, and understanding of the political and economic context.
	Mostly women from major cities, prefer short news videos; unintentional consumers, economically discontent, without a clear political stance but aware of the need for change.	Alternative perspectives on Belarus and neighbouring countries, comparison of living standards, explanation of change pathways, and ways for citizens to influence local issues.
	Belarusians (25-40) living mostly in Poland; emigrated for political and economic reasons, interested in Belarus's development and European-style institutions.	Staying informed about events in Belarus, receiving practical advice on legalisation and everyday issues, and learning ways to support other Belarusians.
Salidarnasts	Micro-influencers (35-54) connected to independent trade unions and labour collectives – workers, managers, and small-business owners, shaping opinions in their communities.	A sense that their voices matter alongside well-known experts through participation in media as anonymous sources; enabling grassroots information exchange, connecting fragmented groups.
	Belarusians (25-44) from major cities, working in IT, creative industries, and business; politically aware from 2020; engaged on platforms; interested in both Belarusian and Western culture.	Safe access to political information without risk or overload; understanding of key issues through engaging formats; connection to public discourse and interest in Belarus's future.
	Highly educated professionals (45-64) from Minsk and major cities, including doctors, teachers, and engineers; with grown children, pro-democratic since the 1990s, viewing Belarus as part of Europe.	Ability to see events in long-term context, interpret them through personal and historical experience, and feel part of a like-minded community amid efforts by the authorities to divide society.
Pozirk	Belarusian audience inside the country; men and women (25-65+) who stay engaged with news and politics, support national independence, and uphold democratic values	For all target groups: ability to stay oriented in the information flow through quality journalism that prioritises verification, balance, and depth over speed and sensationalism.
	Belarusian diaspora maintaining interest in national news and developments.	
	Politicians, diplomats, and media professionals subscribed to the outlet's updates.	
Hrodna.life	Family women (35-45) from Hrodna; educated, earning up to \$800, working in the private sector or self-employed, active on digital platforms; once frequent EU travellers, now based in Belarus; proud of Hrodno.	For all target groups: sense of being right in an unjust environment; pride in Hrodna and unity with fellow citizens; restored feeling of agency over city life; informed awareness enabling balanced decisions and improving quality of life.

	Educated family men (45-60) from Hrodna, working at major enterprises and earning up to \$700. Interested in city development and local history, supporting adult children, using Instagram passively for news and educational content.	
	Men and women of various ages who left Hrodna for Minsk or abroad, visit occasionally, and stay interested in their hometown.	
BGmedia	Men (30-55) from Belarus, including Brest; economically active, often married with children, working in logistics, IT, construction, trade, or small business. Interested in politics, economy, prefer verified content.	For all target groups: access to independent information under censorship and pressure; development of critical thinking and media literacy; strengthening of civic responsibility.
	Women (35-55) from Belarus, including Brest; educated, employed in education, healthcare, or social services. Raising children, interested in social issues; value accuracy, calm tone, and practical content.	
	Belarusian diaspora (24-45) in Europe and the US and wider Russian-speaking audience, prefer concise analysis, and short, dynamic formats via social media.	
Piershy Region	Belarusians (30-65) from regional towns, with medium income, employed in services, trade, or manufacturing. Interested in local news, healthcare, and prices; value simple, practical content on TikTok and Instagram.	Sense of control over their lives through access to verified information and understanding of laws and economic processes; strengthened dignity, awareness that they are not alone in their beliefs.
	Men (25-55) from border regions; truckers or regular cross-border drivers with high income. Interested in logistics, border news, visas, and road updates; prefer short, practical content on the website, Telegram, and TikTok.	Support in navigating change, making informed decisions, feeling protected and understood, through fast, reliable information about work and income – borders, visas, laws, road conditions.
	Mostly retired, some in the public sector or jobless. Interested in benefits, healthcare, prices, and utilities. Prefer clear, respectful, practical videos and stories on the website, TikTok, Odnoklassniki.	Opportunity to handle everyday challenges – securing benefits, protecting rights, resolving legal or household issues – through access to clear, reliable information.
Bureau Media	Belarusians aged 18-65 inside the country, largely deprived of reliable, independent information.	Opportunity to think critically and be informed in legal and media matters through clear, accessible explanations, enabling a stronger sense of justice, transparency, and personal responsibility.
	International regulators who can use the newsroom's investigations as verified evidence and background material in their work.	Access to verified data, facts, and evidence that can inform policy decisions, support international advocacy, and strengthen pressure on the authorities.

	Belarusian officials and public servants. The newsroom contacts them monthly, sending corruption evidence and requests formal explanations.	Ability to understand and evaluate governance standards through feedback on systemic weaknesses, fostering accountability.
Belarusian Investigative Center	Men (35-45) with higher education, working in the private sector or running their own businesses with stable income. Rely on YouTube, Telegram, and news websites as primary sources of information.	Ability to navigate an evolving news landscape with confidence through the development of analytical skills
	Women (35-45) with higher education and stable income. Rely primarily on video platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram for information.	Ability to think critically and resist disinformation through improved media literacy.
CityDog	Proactive Belarusian women (18-35) in Belarus and abroad; tired of negativity, seeking trustworthy content on relationships, growth, and mental health, valuing engaging storytelling on Instagram and TikTok.	Support in overcoming fear and news fatigue through quality content that fosters personal growth, mental well-being, urban Belarusian identity, and community belonging in a safe, value-driven space.
	Proactive Belarusian men (18-35); tired of negativity, seeking trustworthy, original content on personal growth, politics, and relationships, valuing insightful news and edutainment across YouTube, TikTok, and X.	Opportunity to stay informed and inspired through content that broadens perspective, strengthens critical thinking, fosters national and urban identity while encouraging an active civic and social stance.
Dev.by	Tech and business professionals (18-59) from Belarus and Central and Eastern Europe; educated, well-off, mobile, focused on growth and networking, using a website, LinkedIn, Telegram, and newsletters.	Connection to the Belarusian and global IT community through access to objective information, opportunities for networking, and support in achieving professional and personal goals.
	People (18-30) – students, aspiring IT workers, and young professionals seeking educational opportunities and insights into how technology shapes their lives. Active on Instagram and TikTok.	Access to guidance and support in choosing education and career paths, opportunities to learn from experienced professionals, exchange experiences with peers, and find motivation for personal and professional growth.
	Neutral audience (18-59) interested in technology and innovation, seeking to enhance professional status through digital skills or explore new business opportunities. Engage via website and social media.	Insight into emerging tech trends and guidance for thriving in the digital world; connection to a community of professionals sharing knowledge, collaborating, and driving positive change.
MOST media	Belarusians (20-45) living in Poland; employed in IT, business, or services. Active and curious, seeking community, stability, and connection to Belarusian identity. Prefer short, practical content on adaptation and work.	Sense of belonging and support for Belarusians adapting to life in Poland while preserving identity; guidance for integration and building understanding between Belarusians and Poles.
	Belarusians (25-50) from border cities; employed in services, education, or healthcare, earning \$500-700. Follow life abroad, as many	Honest insight into the lives of Belarusians abroad, offering residents of border regions real stories about migration; fostering broader perspectives and

	relatives and friends have emigrated, and seek practical guidance.	stronger ties with loved ones overseas.
Malanka Media	Men (50-60) from Belarusian cities with average income; interested in analytical news on politics, healthcare, and the economy with context and expert insight. Mostly prefer YouTube.	Understanding causes and connections between events through access to expert news and analysis, enabling informed decisions and conscious participation in social and professional life.
	Men and women (18-40) in Belarus with middle income; students, IT specialists, teachers, and entrepreneurs interested in success stories, self-development, and inspiring non-political content on platforms.	Ability to overcome challenges and achieve goals through inspiring real-life stories, gaining practical insights for self-development, and fostering creativity, motivation, and a positive outlook.
Belarus Tomorrow	A combined audience of active Belarusians seeking truthful information and perspectives beyond official narratives, with strong interest in Belarusian culture and history.	Access to diverse viewpoints and opinions, fostering dialogue among supporters of democratic change, and laying the groundwork for future pluralistic public broadcasting in Belarus.

Annex 5. The EMFA Framework

EMFA does not provide a single, standalone definition of quality media. Nonetheless, the recitals consistently connect quality journalism with democratic resilience, for example, by acknowledging that quality empowers citizens to make informed choices; that recipients should be able to access trustworthy media produced independently and in line with ethical standards; that obstacles to journalists' economic activity undermine access to quality media; and that robust, inclusive self-regulation effectively guarantees quality and professionalism and safeguards editorial integrity. These ideas are reflected in the provisions relevant to protection and duties:

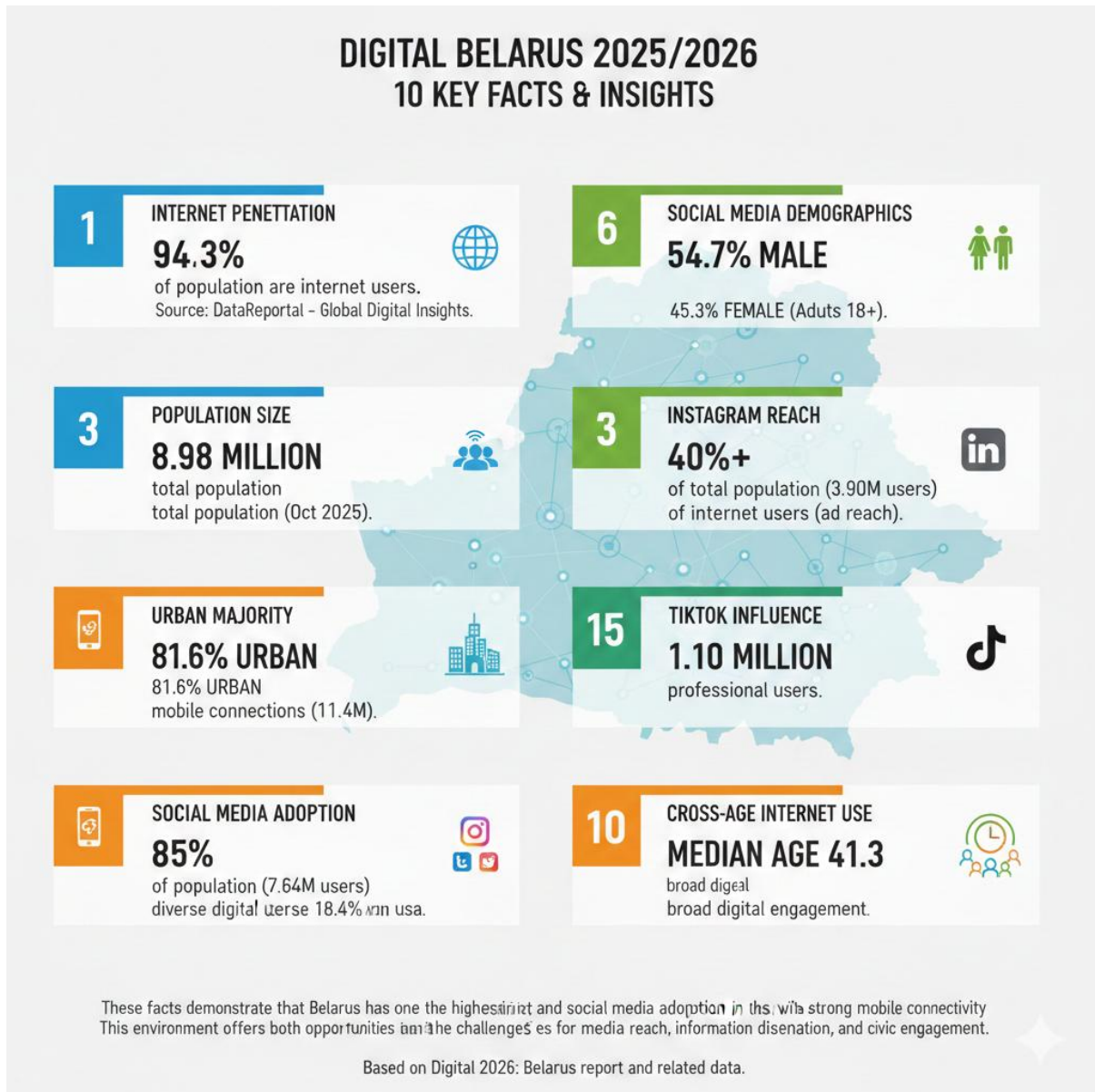
- Preamble 8: “**quality journalism** empowers citizens to make informed choices, including about the state of their democracies”
- Preamble 14: “recipients of media services should be able to access **quality media services** which have been produced by journalists in an independent manner and in line with ethical and journalistic standards and which, therefore, provide trustworthy information. (...) **Quality media services** are also an antidote against disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference”.
- Preamble 19: “journalists' freedom to exercise their economic activity and fulfil their vital 'public watchdog' role could be jeopardised by such obstacles, thus affecting access to **quality media services** negatively”.
- Preamble 27: “Public service media providers play a particular role in the internal market for media services by ensuring that citizens and businesses have access to a diverse content offering, including **quality information** and impartial and balanced media coverage, as part of their remit as defined at the national level in line with Protocol No 29 on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States, annexed to the TEU and the TFEU. (...) The independence of public service media providers is key during electoral periods to ensure that citizens have access to impartial, **quality information**.”

- Preamble 54: “Robust, inclusive and widely accepted media self-regulation represents an effective guarantee of the **quality** and professionalism of media services and is key to safeguarding editorial integrity.”

Subsequent articles are deepening conditions for these media’s protection and/or obligations:

	Definition/description
Article 4	"Member States shall ensure that journalistic sources and confidential communications are effectively protected. Member States shall not take any of the following measures: (a) oblige media service providers or their editorial staff to disclose information related to or capable of identifying journalistic sources or confidential communications or oblige any persons who, because of their regular or professional relationship with a media service provider or its editorial staff, might have such information to disclose it; (b) detain, sanction, intercept or inspect media service providers or their editorial staff or subject them or their corporate or private premises to surveillance or search and seizure for the purpose of obtaining information related to or capable of identifying journalistic sources or confidential communications or detain, sanction, intercept or inspect any persons who, because of their regular or professional relationship with a media service provider or its editorial staff, might have such information or subject them or their corporate or private premises to surveillance or search and seizure for the purpose of obtaining such information; (c) deploy intrusive surveillance software on any material, digital device, machine or tool used by media service providers, their editorial staff or any persons who, because of their regular or professional relationship with a media service provider or its editorial staff, might have information related to or capable of identifying journalistic sources or confidential communications."
Article 5	Article 5(1): " Member States shall ensure that public service media providers are editorially and functionally independent and provide in an impartial manner a plurality of information and opinions to their audiences, in accordance with their public service remit as defined at the national level in line with Protocol No 29.." Article 5(3): "Member States shall ensure that funding procedures for public service media providers are based on transparent and objective criteria laid down in advance. Those funding procedures shall guarantee that public service media providers have adequate, sustainable and predictable financial resources corresponding to the fulfilment of and the capacity to develop within their public service remit. Those financial resources shall be such that the editorial independence of public service media providers is safeguarded. "
Article 6	Article 6(3): "media service providers providing news and current affairs content shall take measures that they deem appropriate with a view to guaranteeing the independence of editorial decisions. "
Article 22	Article 22(1): "Member States shall lay down, in national law, substantive and procedural rules which allow for an assessment of media market concentrations that could have a significant impact on media pluralism and editorial independence ".

Annex 6. Digital Belarus 2025



Annex 7. Bibliography

Books, Reports, Studies

- Belarusian Association of Journalists. *State Policies in the Field of Media Regulation in the New Belarus*. BAJ.Media, February 12, 2024. <https://baj.media/be/mediyaprava/gosudarstvennye-politiki-v-oblasti-regulirovaniya-media-v-novoy-belarusi/>.
- Buzovsky, Igor, Alexander Karliukevich, Alexander Postalovsky, and Dmitry Rotman. *Specifics of the Transformation of the Information Field of the Republic of Belarus in Modern Conditions: A Sociological Analysis*. Minsk: Higher School Publishing House, 2020.
- Bykouski, Pavel, and Natalia Belikova. *Belarusian Independent Media Sector in 2023*. Press Club Belarus, 2024. <https://press-club.pro/dosved/the-belarusian-independent-media-sector-in-2023>.
- Bykouski, Pavel, Iryna Sidorskaya, and Maryna Mazurkevich. *State Propaganda: How to Avoid It in the New Belarus*. Belarusian Association of Journalists, 2024. https://baj.media/sites/default/files/analytics/files/2024/government_propaganda.pdf.
- Bykoŭski, Pavel, and Alena Parfionienka. *A Divided Reality: Analysis of the Belarusian Media in 2024*. Media IQ, 2025. <https://mediaiq.info/a-divided-reality-analysis-of-the-belarusian-media-in-2024>.
- Daria Hryshchuk and Alena Shkurova. *How Do Media Reach Blocked Audiences? A Study of Media Practices in Post-Soviet Countries*. SALT, 2025.
- Gorchinskaya, Kateryna, Paviel Bykoŭski, and Natalia Belikava. *Exiled. Effective. Essential: Supporting the Belarusian Independent Media Ecosystem*. Press Club Belarus, 2025. https://press-club.pro/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025_Press-Club_EXILED_EFFECTIVE_ESSENTIAL.pdf.
- International Media Support. *Values, Value and Impact: “Good Journalism, Better Societies” in Practice*. Copenhagen: International Media Support, 2025. <https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/values-value-and-impact-good-journalism-better-societies-in-practice/>.
- JX Fund. *Journalism in Exile: A Complex Phenomenon. Country Profiles Overview*. JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile, 2025.
- Media Analytical Lab. *Survey of 34 Media Organisations*. Press Club Belarus, February 2025.
- Parfionienka, P., and Pavel Bykoŭski. “A Divided Reality: Analysis of the Belarusian Media in 2024.” Media IQ, May 6, 2025. <https://mediaiq.info/razdelennaya-realnost-analiz-belarusskih-smi-v-2024-godu>.
- Studies of Management & Organization 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 11–31. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247886826_Coopetition_An_Introduction_to_the_Subject_and_an_Agenda_for_Research.

Chapters

Bykouski, Pavel. "A Loss of Media Sovereignty: Synchronization of Belarusian and Russian Propaganda after 2020." In *Russian Policy towards Belarus after 2020: At a Turning Point?*, edited by Arkady Moshes and Ryhor Nizhnikau. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781666925982>.

Articles & Online Publications

Media IQ. "The West's Main Goal Is to Worsen the Lives of Millions of People'. 'It's Bad Where There Is No 'Russian World', According to Kremlin Propaganda.'" March 31, 2023. <https://mediaiq.info/osnovnaya-cel-zapada-uhudshit-zhizn-millionov-ljudej-ploho-tam-gde-net-russkogo-mira-po-versii-kremljovskoj-propagandy>.

Council of Europe. "Belarus: Journalists in Exile Meet in Strasbourg." Accessed n.d. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/belarus-journalists-in-exile-meet-in-strasbourg>.

President of the Republic of Belarus. "Personnel Decisions Regarding the Leadership of Several National Media Outlets." Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/prinjatje-kadrovyx-reshenij-v-otnoshenii-rukovodstva-rjadas-republikanskix-smi-18055>.

Legal and Policy Documents

Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers. *Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 on Media Pluralism and Transparency of Media Ownership*. Adopted March 7, 2018.

Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers. *Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 on Promoting a Favourable Environment for Quality Journalism in the Digital Age*. Adopted March 17, 2022.

European Union. *Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a Common Framework for Media Services in the Internal Market (European Media Freedom Act)*. Official Journal of the EU, July 10, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj/eng>.

OECD. *Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024.