

GRUPAGRANICA

November 2023

Report from the

Polish–Belarusian border

نحن قد هربنا من الحرب لسنا مجرمين حتى نُعامل بهذه الطريقة انا متعجب كيف يتمكن هؤلاء الأشخاص من ضربنا وتركنا بلا طعام وماء حتى نموت ثم يعودون إلى منازلهم وعائلاتهم ويقومون بممارسة حياتهم بشكلٍ طبيعي

We have escaped from war, we are not criminals to be treated this way. I am amazed at how these people can beat us and leave us without food and water until we die. And then they return to their homes and families and go about their lives normally.

A message sent by a group from Syria that got stuck in a lane between Polish and Belarusian border security, then ended up in prison in Russia.

We Are Monitoring

Photo from the Egala Foundation archive.

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Situation at the border	4
Growing crisis in Finland.....	6
Quantitative summary November 2023.....	6
Demographics and trends	7
Humanitarian, medical and legal interventions	9
Pushbacks and violence by services	10
Hospitals.....	12
Guarded detention centres for foreigners	13
Applying for protection in Poland	14
Definitions	16

Introduction

The following study contains first-hand data from people participating in the events described. We would like to thank all humanitarian organisations operating in the Polish-Belarusian border area and individuals working with them for providing us with reports of their interventions. Our sources include organisations, informal initiatives as well as individuals, often wishing to remain anonymous, so we do not mention them by name unless they have given us permission to do so. Special thanks are due to all those on the move who have chosen to share their own experiences with us.

Humanitarian workers and those working with them emphasise that the difficult context and ethics of their work often prevent them from obtaining more detailed information about the stories and situations of people on the move. During interventions, many are in such a poor psycho-physiological state that it is not possible to obtain more data without putting them at risk of retraumatization or making them feel that they owe humanitarian organisations any

answers to their questions by virtue of receiving material or legal support from them.

The described interventions and support provided to persons on the move took place on the territory of the Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships. For persons in Belarus, information is provided on the legal situation and access to procedures for applying for international protection in Poland and Belarus.

We hope that this brief outline of the context will help you to better understand the current dynamics of events in the border region with Belarus. For additional questions and recommendations from individuals or organisations who might also be interested in receiving the reports, please contact wearemonitoring@gmail.com.

Definitions

At the end of the report you will find a list of terms and definitions we have adopted.



current number of deaths

53



Photo from the Egala Foundation archive.

Situation at the border

In November, the pushbacks are still being carried by the border services putting in danger the health and life of the people on the move. Among other things, we were able to record the testimony of a man pushedback in a group with a woman and two minors aged 13 and 3. According to his testimony, the members of the group were bitten by the dogs of the local police on the Belarusian side, and sprayed with tear gas on the Polish side after being caught but before the pushback.

On 4 November, a Syrian citizen was shot in the back at the border. Fortunately, the bullet missed the spine and the vital organs. According to his account, he crossed the border with his group through a hole in the fence. They walked a few kilometres into Polish territory where they heard the Polish services. They broke off to flee, the man was shot in the back.

He does not know what happened to his companions, he reports that he heard at least 3 shots, although, he claims, there may have been more. The first bullet hit him in the back, then he heard more. He reports that he lost consciousness after about five minutes. The man underwent more than six hours of surgery at the University Clinical Hospital in Białystok. In a statement to „Gazeta Wyborcza”, a spokeswoman for the aforementioned hospital said that the patient was very lucky: *Had the bullet passed a centimetre higher, he would have had his legs paralysed and, among other things, would not have been able to hold his urine.* Gazeta Wyborcza’s journalists put a question about the incident to the press services of the Military Police Branch in Lublin (locally and factually competent – the shot was fired by a soldier of the Polish Army) and the Armed Forces Command. The answers that were given contradict each other – it was

stated that the shot was fired accidentally (as a result of a stumble — *the weapon was unlocked as the military man was ready to fire an alarm shot into the air*), but also that it was a ricochet of an alarm shot (the injured person was injured as a result of a ricochet of the bullet after the soldier fired a warning shot).¹ At this point, a pre-trial investigation is underway at the Białystok district prosecutor's office. For the time being, the incident has been provisionally classified as careless handling of a weapon and causing injury to another person unintentionally. The man also managed to apply for international protection.

On 9 November, the deportation of an Egyptian national was also successfully halted. The man is temporarily protected from deportation by an interim measure received from the European Court of Human Rights.

In November the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski (Criminal Subdivision in Siemiatycze) also passed a **verdict² acquitting four activists** who in March this year gave food and water to people on the other side of a fence set up along the border. The court ruled that the Governor's regulations (in this case, the regulation concerning the prohibition of staying near the fence) could not constitute grounds for liability under the offence referred to in Article 54 of the Code of Offences. At the same time, the court found that the perpetrators did not break the prohibition on passing items across the border line with Belarus, due to the fact that the wall does not stand exactly in the line

of the border, but was built on the Polish side, about 1–2 metres from the border, so placing aid packages on the ground just behind the fence is not passing items across the state border. As the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights writes on its website: *The court's findings in this regard are also important for the assessment of the situation of people who are right next to the border wall and apply for international protection.*³ So far, the Polish state has refused to accept applications for protection from people standing just behind the fence, claiming that they are on the Belarusian side.

In November 2023, we have received information about a further 2 deaths at the border. These are the 52nd and 53rd deaths of which we are aware.

On 4th November, the corpse of a Syrian man was found in the strict reserve of the Białowieża National Park. The case is being investigated by the Hajnówka District Prosecutor's Office.

On 28 November, Belarusian media reported the death of a man under the border fence on its eastern side. Witnesses to the death were said to be coincidental men from Afghanistan who came upon the dying man. According to their statements, quoted in the material, the man was extremely exhausted⁴. Due to the subordination of the Belarusian media to the authoritarian regime, we have no way of verifying this information.

¹<https://bialystok.wyborcza.pl/bialystok/7,35241,30379408,kryzys-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej-postrzelony-przez-zolnierza.html> [accessed on 6.12.2023].

² <https://www.rp.pl/prawo-kanne/art39376391-sad-niesienie-pomocy-przez-mur-na-granicy-z-bialorusia-jest-legalne> [accessed on 13.12.2023].

³ <https://hfhr.pl/aktualnosci/za-murem-na-granicy-jest-pas-polskiego-terytorium> [accessed on 8.12.2023].

⁴ <https://gpk.gov.by/news/gpk/154514/> [accessed on 8.12.2023].

Growing crisis in Finland

At the beginning of November, the crisis at the border between Russia and Finland began – primarily at the crossings on the southern section of the two countries' common border. By the middle of the month, the number of applicants for international protection was increasing rapidly. Some of these were people on bicycles – due to the nature of the crossings (road, not pedestrian). As a consequence of the increased pressure on the crossings (inspired and organised by Russia), the Finnish government decided to close the crossings in southern Finland – in Vaalimaa, Nuijamaa, Imatra and Niirala. a few days later, excerpts from the Chancellor of Justice's report appeared in the Finnish media: *The government's proposal does not sufficiently safeguard the rights to international protection contained in constitutional norms, EU law, the European Convention on Human Rights and other documents.*⁵ Despite this, on 30th November the border was closed completely for the personal border traffic (for a fortnight).

On the night of 17–18th November (i.e. after several crossings had already been closed, but before the border was completely blocked), we received requests for help from groups near the closed crossing. One of the groups contacted was about 20 people, they were at a clearly closed crossing (concrete barriers, concertina, standing officers with guns). In the following days, other groups were heard from. The videos we got show the bicycles that people used to reach the border with Finland. The ones who wrote us informed that the Russians had allowed them to approach the official border crossing at Nuijamaan, but, as it turned out, the Finnish side had installed concertina razor wire entanglements. They were told that applications for protection could be made at the Salla and Vartius crossings. The migrants also wrote to us that the Russians, despite very cold temperatures, do not allow them to turn back from this border crossing, so they are stuck.

Quantitative summary November 2023

	groups	number of individuals	children (unaccompanied minors)	women (pregnant)
Total requests	72	301	13 (2)	19 (2)
Requests from Sistiema	12	103	10 (0)	11 (0)
Aid provided	37	86	1 (1)	3 (1)
Reported Pushbacks	18	86	3 (-)	1 (0)
Number of interventions			47	

⁵ After: <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/swiat/artykuly/9356897,finlandia-nie-zamknie-calej-granicy-z-rosja-przed-azylantami-przygot.html> [accessed on 7.12.2023].

Demographics and trends

During the reported period (01-30.11.2023) we recorded applications from 301 people travelling in 72 groups. This is a decrease of 49% from the 588 requests from people in 140 groups recorded in the previous month (01-31.10.2023). Very similar is the comparison of the same data in 2022, with the number of submissions falling by 44%, from 709 in October to 395 in November 2022.

The reduction in the number of applications is characteristic of the autumn and winter period. One reason for this may be the severe deterioration in weather conditions – lowering temperatures and snowfall effectively make it more difficult to move around and stay in the woods for long periods of time. In November there were 13 days where temperature dropped below zero, and 15 days with rain or snow.

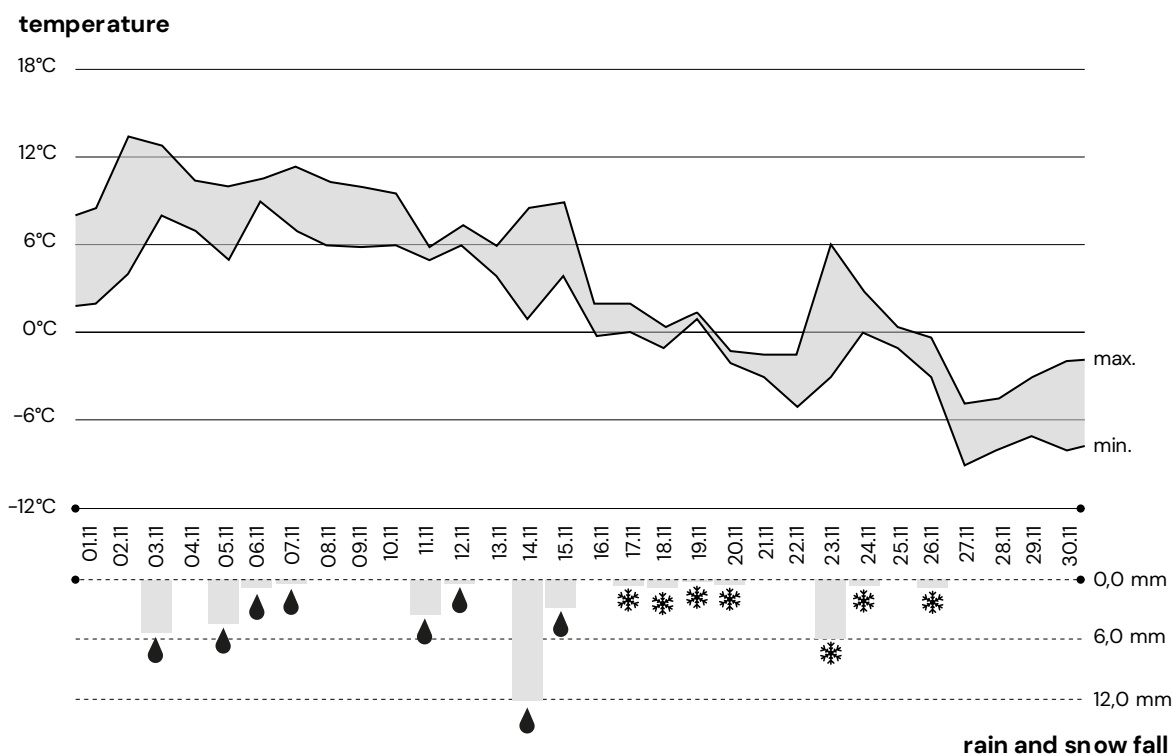


Figure 1. Weather conditions in November 2023 according to the Bialystok weather station.

A decrease in traffic on the border is also visible in the Border Guard statistics on the number of "disclosures of foreigners who attempted to illegally cross the Polish-Belarusian border". A comparison of the numbers from October and November 2023 shows a similar decrease (47%) – according to subsequent announcements published on the website of the Border Guard Headquarters, 2040 persons were disclosed between 1-30 October and 1385 between 1-31 November.

According to information provided to us by humanitarian organisations and persons cooperating with them, in November a total of 47 field interventions were undertaken, and support was provided to 86 persons travelling in 37 groups. The effectiveness of our assistance has remained at a similar level over the past months – in September we managed to reach slightly less than 83% of people asking for support on the territory of Poland, in October over 78%, while in November 2023 it was almost 84% – we received requests for help from 97 people who were on the territory of Poland at

the time of contact, 86 of whom we managed to reach with assistance.

12 of the 72 groups that were reported in November were, at the time of contact, in the strip between the barrier located on Polish territory and the fortifications on the Belarusian side (the so-called Sistiema), by people on the move called *muharrama*⁶. These groups consisted of a total of 103 people, including 10 children and 11 women. We emphasise that these numbers are not complete and do not allow us to estimate, even roughly, the actual number of people trapped in the belt between the barriers at any given time. We present them because they allow us to identify downward and upward trends and to note moments of increased migration activity along the Polish-Belarusian border.

During the reporting period, the majority of people reporting a need for humanitarian assistance were invariably from countries in the Middle East, in particular Syria, which was indicated as a country of origin by almost half of all those asking for support, with a total of 138 persons (46%). However, the trend of a decrease in the number of requests from people from the so-called Horn of Africa countries, visible since the turn of July and August, has reversed. While in the second half of July, 46% of all submissions were from the Horn of Africa, in the following months this ratio decreased to just over 4.6% in October. In November, however, a significant increase is visible, with 74 out of a total of 301 people requesting support (25%), indicated Eritrea, Ethiopia or Somalia as their country of origin.

In November 2023, women accounted for 6.3% of the total number of reports – there were 19 out of 301 people reporting the need for support at the Polish-Belarusian border. These figures are similar to those collected in October (6.12%) and September 2023, when women accounted for just under 8% of all reports. The recorded decrease (by comparison, in the period between 5 May and 5 July, women accounted for 13% of all those reporting and 15% of all those reached by humanitarian organisations with material, legal and medical assistance) is characteristic of the autumn-winter period characterised by worse weather and thus much more difficult travel conditions. The proportion of minors in the reported period remains similar to the last periods we reported and stands at 4.3% of all those reporting a need for support. 2 of the 13 minors we were in contact with in November 2023, were travelling without a legal guardian or carer.

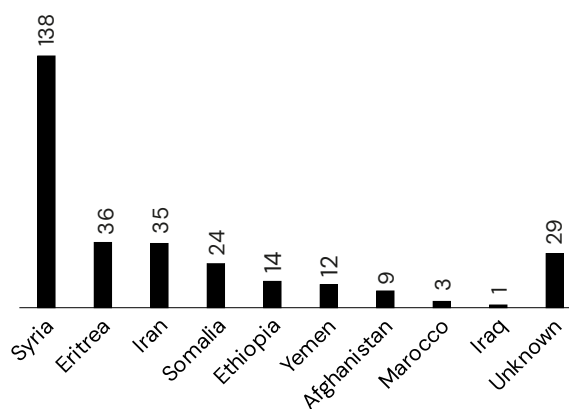


Figure 2. Countries of origin of people who reported need for support in November 2023

⁶ Muharrama in Arabic means "forbidden." People on the move also use the longer term المنطقة المحرمة "forbidden zone."

Humanitarian, medical and legal interventions

The humanitarian organisations and their partners who shared information with us managed to provide in-kind support to 37 groups with a total of 86 persons, including four women (two of whom declared being pregnant) and one minor travelling unaccompanied by a legal guardian or carer.

16 persons, 15 men and one woman, travelling in 7 independent groups, were additionally provided with specialist medical assistance thanks to the involvement of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) medics and medics staying in Podlasie privately as volunteers.

Organisations providing people on the move with in-kind and medical support in the border areas took part in a total of 38 successful interventions..

According to those involved, people in the forest most often ask for food, water, dry warm clothes and powerbanks. There are also requests for mobile phones. Overwhelmingly, the accounts of people contacting us for support show that their mobile phones are destroyed during pushbacks. The scale of reported abuse by persons described by the victims as officers of the Polish uniformed services is not diminishing. These abuses include the above-mentioned destruction of mobile phones and beatings.

In the reporting period, the groups which we managed to reach with in-kind, medical or legal assistance numbered 2 persons on average. The largest group we were able to reach was 7, and as many as 15 successful interventions targeted people who were alone.






Figure 2. Number of groups and individuals given a form of support in the reporting period

Pushbacks and violence by services

	groups	number of individuals	children (unaccompanied minors)	women (pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	18	86	3 (-)	1 (-)
Reported violence Poland	6	40	2 (-)	-
Reported violence Belarus	4	21	-	-

In November, 86 individual people reported a pushback experience. Of these, 12 reported to us that they had been deported more than once. We note that not all of these multiple pushbacks occurred in November. In-depth interviews were conducted with three of those who declared the experience of being deported, during which respondents indicated the total number of pushbacks they had been subjected to – not just in a given month.

The increasingly difficult weather conditions did not result in the suspension of the practice of pushback. Among those who experienced it this month were two children aged 5 and 3.

	86	number of pushbacks carried out to individual persons in groups
	12	number of persons who reported to have been subjected to more than one pushback
	4	number of persons from vulnerable groups pushed back

At the end of November, when temperatures reached below zero, female and male Border Guard officers pushed, among others, another man and his companions. The man stressed that the female guards with whom he had contact were extremely racist: [...] *especially women in the Polish army are very racist*. The deportation was to be of an exceptionally brutal nature. Subjects were to experience all kinds of violence:

I received all kinds of violence from the Polish army, which does not know humanity.

Their phones were also destroyed. Pepper gas, bang grenades and rubber bullets were used against them. Depriving people on the move of access to mobile phone apps used to navigate in the forest brings even more danger during snowfall and sub-zero temperatures. Last month, training was held for officers on duty in the Podlasie region on how to recognise and assist people in hypothermia.⁷

⁷<https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/12701.Szkolenia-z-zakresu-udzielania-pierwszej-pomocy-osobom-w-hipotermii.html> [accessed on 10.12.2023].

Another practice, which in autumn and winter, can have much more serious consequences, is the pushback of people in areas remote from where their detention took place. Another Syrian crossed the border in a group of twelve. He and his companions were stopped and pushedback at a place almost 6 km from the point of entry into Poland (such a precise calculation is possible thanks to the man's precise indication of the number of the post at which he and his group crossed the Polish border and at which the pushback took place). Earlier, everyone had their phones destroyed, were beaten and pepper-sprayed:

I remember him well, he broke our phones, beat us, and sprayed us with pepper [spray - WAM] without mercy.

We have not been able to establish under what circumstances the man ended up in Russia. He also previously reported that he had attempted to cross the Latvian-Belarusian border. In Latvia, he was allegedly beaten and pushedback by officers there. According to his account, after being deported from Latvia, he ended up in the Federation, where he was arrested and placed in what he described as a prison. There, he was forced to sign a document in which Syria was recognised as a safe country, so that the Syrian could be deported to his country of origin. During his detention, he was also given the opportunity to join the Russian army, which he refused. This is not the first case reported to us of a person who, after experiencing pushback, reported receiving an offer to join the Russian army from the services there as an alternative to deportation:

We have been in prison for 11 days and they asked us to volunteer for the Russian army, but we refused. [...]

We signed the forced deportation decision and were forced to sign papers guaranteeing that our country is safe.

All of the individuals in the group, including the man whose account we are presenting, expressed a desire to seek asylum while detained in Poland, mentioning the ongoing war in Syria. They also reported the need to transport one of the men to hospital due to his foot injury – according to their diagnosis it was a fracture. Based on the victim's own account, he was beaten until he changed his mind and said he no longer wanted to go to hospital. The officers also allegedly made fun of and joked about the detained men:

They were making fun of us and beating us, and when my friend asked to go to the hospital, they started beating him until he told them that he didn't want to.

From the point of deportation, from the post number 751, the group travelled a distance of approximately 6.5 km to the next post number 761, heading towards post number 784, where their food and drink were left. They were all detained before reaching their destination and were taken by Belarusian officers in the opposite direction, to the post number 736. For several days they had nothing to drink or eat, and drank water from the swamp. According to the account of one of the men, the Belarusian officers forced him and others to work at transporting wood:

When we were arrested we were forced to work like slaves transporting firewood. And they told us if we don't do it they will beat us.

Hospitals

In November, 13 people were admitted to hospitals. Five men from Afghanistan, two each from Iran and Yemen, one Sudanese and one Syrian. Three of them were diagnosed with hypothermia. Among the injuries caused by falling off a wall or moving through difficult forest terrain were fractured fibula and tibia, knee ligament damage and head and neck injuries. Exhaustion, frostbite and fever affected all those hospitalised. The collected testimonies also show that in November the patients showed more symptoms of stress and tearfulness, their mental condition in general could be considered bad. They all reported that they had experienced several deportations each.

These deportations, due to the lack of information on specific numbers, are not included in the statistics presented above.

One of the patients does not remember, probably due to his serious condition at the time, how he got to the hospital. He only has a vague recollection of being reached by humanitarian workers. What he does remember is one of the pushbacks, during which he and his group were pepper-sprayed by the guards. The guards also allegedly used bang grenades in their presence..



Guarded detention centres for foreigners

In November, 37 persons detained in open or guarded detention centres for foreigners reported the need for support.⁸ 11 of them were detained in the centre in Biała Podlaska, 10 in Kętrzyn, 8 in Przemyśl, 4 in Białystok, 3 in Dębak and 1 in Grupa near Grudziądz.

23 of these people made contact for the first time, these were: 3 people from Zimbabwe, 2 each from Syria, Cameroon, Pakistan, Iraq and Bangladesh and 1 each from India, Algeria, Iran, Somalia and Ethiopia.

Current observations show that foreigners spend an average of 3.5 months in detention (minimum 1 and maximum 10 months).

Persons detained in the centres report both the need for in-kind support (24 persons in November) and psychological⁹ (2) or medical support (1). Legal assistance is also particularly important in the context of closed centres¹⁰, as foreigners are often placed in detention despite the lack of grounds for such a decision. Thanks to legal interventions, some of these people manage to be released. In November, 10 people benefited from legal assistance, including 7 for the first time.

Parcels with a basic clothing and hygiene kit are sent to people in the centres by Polish Humanitarian Action. However, mobile phones are a particularly frequently reported need (15 requests in November). Unlike in open centres, where residents can use smartphones, only phones without a camera and the possibility to connect to the Internet are allowed in the guarded ones. Access to computers is only provided there for a few hours during the day, which reduces the chances of contacting support organisations for all those who need it. In addition, ongoing case-working activities are carried out to holistically support people on the move.

In November, in addition to the 9 people already supervised by caseworkers, 13 people in the centres and 80 people who had already left the centres requested our support. 21 of them asked for assistance related to legal procedures, including

- 2 – assistance in the preparation of documentation for Dublin procedures;
- 54 – assistance with the application for financial assistance from UNHCR;
- 3 – assistance in relation to deportations;
- 8 – assistance in finding work;
- 5 – assistance with health matters.

⁸ Applications to the "Pomoc SOC" team operating under the „PodróżnychUgościć Foundation”, formerly SIP.

⁹ Professional psychological support provided by therapists.

¹⁰ Professional psychological support provided by therapists.

Applying for protection in Poland

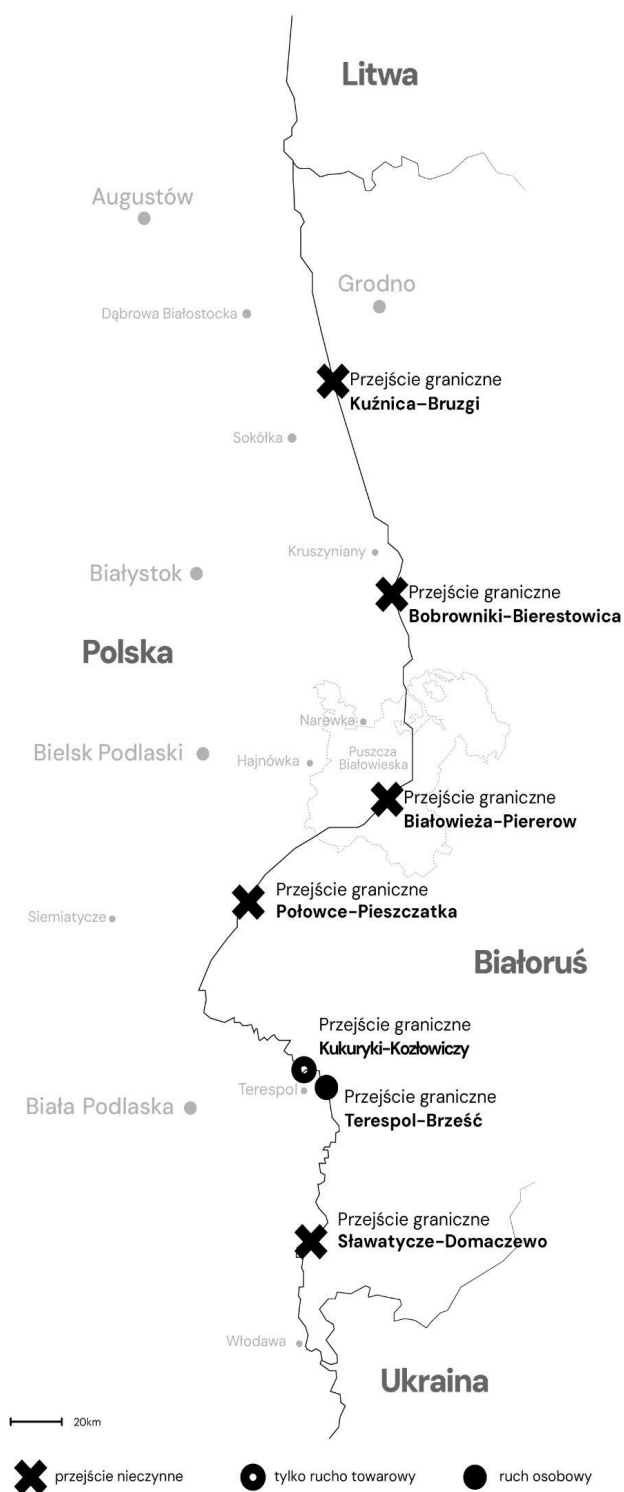
Applying for international protection at a border crossing point? PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

Currently on the Polish–Belarusian border there is ONE border crossing open for personal border traffic: Brest – Terespol. All other border crossings remain closed until further notice.

Persons who currently cross the border in an irregular manner often **have no practical possibility to submit an application for international protection** at an operating crossing point. According to numerous reports from international organisations, RPOs and NGOs, the Polish Border Guard has been ignoring declarations to apply for protection in Poland made by foreigners at the Terespol border crossing since 2015. This is also confirmed by judgments of the ECHR, in which the court says that *Poland has a broader policy of refusing entry to foreigners arriving in Poland from Belarus*¹¹.

The Polish Border Guard has been ignoring such attempts for years, as exemplified by the stories of Chechen families who camped at Brest railway station for months in 2015–17. Additionally, on the Belarusian side, the border area is controlled by Belarusian services. Before a person enters a Polish crossing point, he or she must be admitted by the Belarusian border guards to the crossing point itself and then released from Belarus.

As a consequence of the above practices, irregular border crossings become the only way for most people to enter the territory of Poland and apply for refugee status. UNHCR stresses that the right to seek and enjoy international protection does not depend on the lawfulness of the asylum-seeker's arrival in the country, as these persons are often forced to enter the territory or enter it without prior authorisation.



¹¹ M.K and others v. Poland HUDOC – European Court of Human Rights (coe.int).

Data made available by the Polish Border Guard shows that in the period January–September 2023, applications from 616 persons

were accepted at the Border Guard Post in Te-respol: 572 citizens of Russia (mainly of Chechen nationality), 35 of Tajikistan, 6 of Belarus, 2 of Kyrgyzstan and 1 of Armenia.

Submission of applications for international protection at Polish embassies?

NOT POSSIBLE

In Poland, refugee status or subsidiary protection may be granted upon submission of an application for international protection. Such an application should be submitted to the Head of the Office for Foreigners through the commanding officer of the Border Guard division or the commanding officer of the Border Guard post. This is possible **ONLY** if the person is staying on the territory of Poland. The Act on granting protection on the territory of the Republic of Poland does not impose an obligation to submit an application at a border crossing

point. The will to apply for international protection may be expressed before a Border Guard officer in any place on the territory of Poland.

Embassies do not offer the possibility to submit an application for international protection¹². Procedures structured in this way **in practice make it impossible for persons seeking refuge to safely access the territory and have effective refugee procedures**. Closed border crossings, the practice of not accepting applications by the Border Guard, and the lack of systemic solutions are among the factors that increase irregular migration.

Submission of asylum applications at Polish embassies?

ONLY IN EXCEPTIONAL CASES

International protection is often mistakenly referred to as asylum. This may be due to a linguistic calibration; in English, 'asylum' means precisely protection in the sense of the Geneva Convention, or even refugee status. This mistake is often reproduced, also in the media and in specialist articles, and leads to the misleading impression that 'asylum' understood as refugee status can be applied for at an embassy. However, **in Poland, 'asylum' is a separate, national category of protection**, which can be applied for at an embassy, but in order to obtain it, one needs to meet very specific requirements set out in Article 90 of the

Act on granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the Republic of Poland:

'A foreigner may, at his/her request, be granted asylum in the Republic of Poland when it is necessary to provide him/her with protection and when an important interest of the Republic of Poland so warrants.

The second premise is the key one, which means that granting asylum is, in a sense, a political decision – it is to serve the interest of the state and the decision to grant or deprive of asylum requires the consent of the minister responsible for foreign affairs. Persons fulfilling the prerequisites for being granted refugee

¹² The Polish Embassy in Minsk, in a telephone conversation on 20/11/2023, also confirmed that there is no such possibility.

status or subsidiary protection (i.e. English asylum) are often not eligible to receive 'asylum' in the Polish meaning of this word.

asylum				international protection				
2020	31 persons applying			2 803 persons applying				
	4	11	13	161	2 048	222	16	1 044
2021	27 persons applying			7 699 persons applying				
	3	11	1	1 019	1 457	1 135	0	1 078
2022	50 persons applying			9 933 persons applying				
	8	26	2	372	1 603	4 590	0	4 093
	positive decision	negative decision	cancelled	refugee status	negative decision	complementary protection	tolerated residence	cancelled

The number of people who applied for asylum or protection in Poland in 2020–2022 and the number of people who were granted a decision in the same periods. Compiled on the basis of statistics from the Office for Foreigners in Poland.

Definitions

Total requests — Total number of reported groups/persons on the move, located in Poland, Belarus, Lithuania or Latvia. It does not take into account persons staying in other European countries during the reporting period, as the report aims to illustrate the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border and the related migration route.

- **Groups** — individuals travelling together at the time of reporting and/or humanitarian/legal/medical intervention. These persons may or may not be related by family or social ties
- **Number of individuals** — individual members of groups

Children — all persons whose confirmed or declared age is 0–18 years

Unaccompanied minors — Persons under the age of 18 travelling without an adult legal guardian, and therefore also minors travelling with older siblings or other relatives who are not their guardians under the law of Poland.

Requests from Sistiema — reports of groups/persons staying in the strip of land between the border fortifications of Poland and Belarus, commonly referred to as the *sistiema*.

Muharrama — a term used by Arabic-speaking people on the move for the strip of land located between the Polish border barrier and the fortifications on the Belarusian side. *Muharrama* in Arabic means 'forbidden'. People on the move also use the longer term المنطقة المحرمة "forbidden zone". In Polish, this area is commonly referred to as *Sistiema*.

Aid provided — total number of people reached by organisations and entities operating in Podlasie who agreed to share information with us (GG + Ocalenie, unaffiliated residents and inhabitants of Podlasie, collectives, individuals, POPH)

- **Material aid** — support in the form of basic humanitarian aid packages – food, clothing, water, information
- **Legal aid** — support in procedures relating to the prevention of pushbacks and deportation

and enabling the submission of an application for international protection.

- **Medical aid** – professional support provided by medically qualified persons.
- **Medical first aid** – support provided by people with basic rescue training, such as washing wounds or dressing trench foot.

Reported pushbacks – pushbacks reported to us during the reporting period by persons who experienced them directly or witnessed them directly.

Reported violence Poland – reported cases of violence experienced directly by persons on the road, the perpetrators of which, according to the victims' accounts, were members of the Polish uniformed services: Border Guard, Police, Polish Army, Territorial Defence Forces.

Reported violence Belarus – forms of violence directly experienced by persons on the road, the perpetrators of which, according to the victims' accounts, were people belonging to the Belarusian uniformed services.

Number of interventions – number of humanitarian interventions undertaken by field teams in response to a report of a need for assistance or a chance encounter of persons on the road in a border area.

Number of dead – number of persons on the road who died between August 2021 and November 2023 on the Polish side of the Polish-Belarusian border and those cases from the Belarusian side of which we are aware. It does not include all deaths in hospitals or car accidents, linked to the migration route. The data will be verified and supplemented. We expect that there may be data on more deaths from the period considered here as well.

Number of missing – persons whose disappearance has been reported by next of kin or companions on the road, with a declared lack of contact of at least two days.

Injuries from the wall – injuries which, according to the declaration of persons on the road, occurred while crossing the security at the Polish-Belarusian border.

Persons from vulnerable groups – vulnerable persons on the following grounds:

Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minors - unaccompanied minors - persons over 45 years of age - senior citizens aged 60 and over
Medical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pregnancy - chronic illness - disability
Situational considerations Protection Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - victims of sexual violence or subjected to - victims of gender-based violence - victims of torture - victims of human trafficking

* virtually impossible to identify at this stage