

## WE ARE MONITORING

**Weekly Update PL-BY**

**01.06–07.06.2023**

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](mailto:wearemonitoring@gmail.com).

## Quantitative Summary

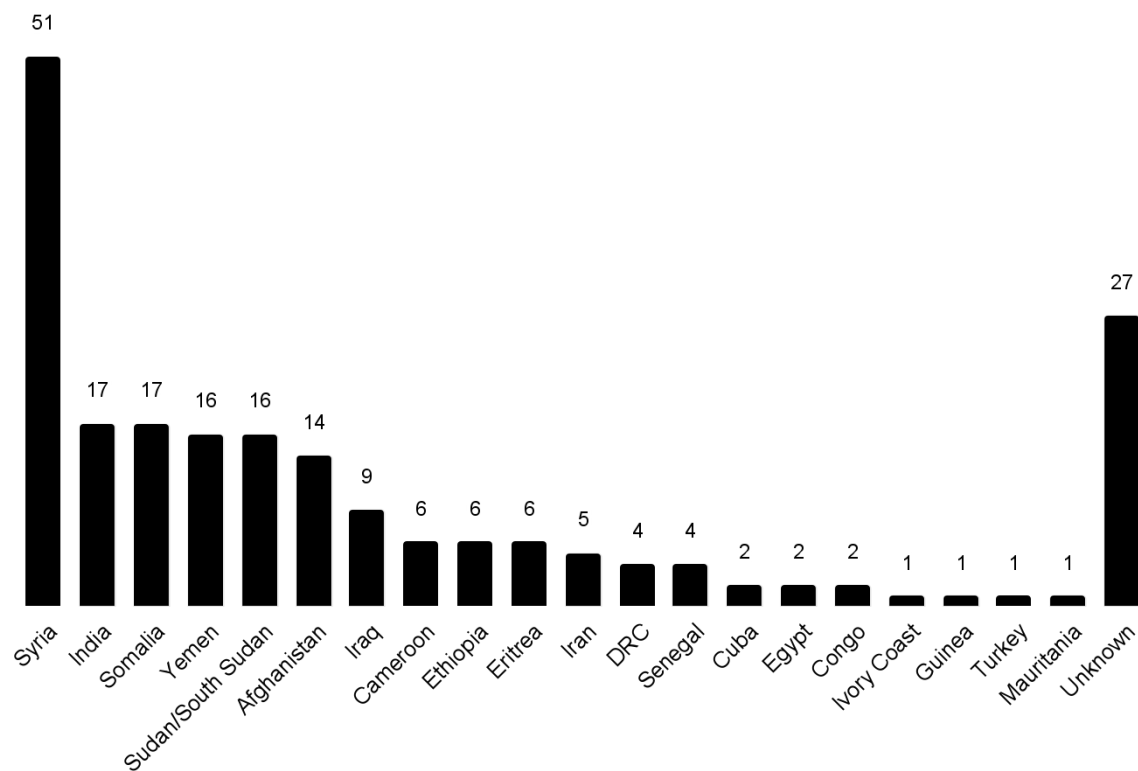
	groups	individuals	children (inc. UASC <sup>1</sup> )	women (inc. pregnant)
<b>Requests - total</b>	65	208	20 (6)	20 (2)
<b>Requests from BY/including Sistiema</b>	4/3	31/27	7/7 (1)	3/3
<b>Support provided</b>	49	149	9(5)	14 (2)
• <b>In-kind support / including in hospitals</b>	48	148	9/(1)	14(2)/2
• <b>legal aid / including in hospitals</b>	8/6	18/6	4/(1)	7/2
• <b>medical assistance PL/BY<sup>2</sup></b>	8/1	8/1	1/0	2/0
<b>Pushbacks Reported</b>	12	43	6	3
<b>Reported missing persons<sup>3</sup></b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Reported violence by PL / BY</b>	3 / 5	6 / 12	0/2	0/0
<b>Border Induced Injuries</b>	5	5	2(1)	1
<b>Total number of Interventions</b>			78	

<sup>1</sup> Unaccompanied minors.

<sup>2</sup>The migrants were redirected to the organization Medics Without Borders, which operates in Belarus.

<sup>3</sup>We consider missing persons whose disappearance has been reported by their relatives.

## Countries of origin



## Demographics

This week we received information about 65 groups representing a total of 208 people on the move who were currently in Poland or Belarus. Among them, 20 were minors.

Nine of them previously belonged to a group from Syrian Aleppo, which in the previous reporting period (i.e. a week earlier), in the presence of representatives of the ombuds office and humanitarian organizations, expressed their willingness to apply for international protection in Poland - this event was widely covered by the media due to location of migrants (they were behind the fence, but already on Polish territory). The youngest was two years old, two were four, and the others were six, eight, ten, eleven, and fourteen, respectively.

The other minors were aged 16 and 17, at least six of them, including two 17-year-old Somali girls, were traveling unaccompanied. The groups also included at least 20 women and a young man with cerebral palsy who was traveling under the care of his father.



Photo by Agata Kubis

The largest number of people came from Syria (51), Somalia (17), India (17), Yemen (16), Sudan/South Sudan<sup>4</sup> (16) and Afghanistan (14). The others came from Iraq, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iran, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Cuba, Egypt, Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Turkey and Mauritania.

## **Belarus and the border zone**

Compared to previous reporting periods, in the first week of June the number of requests for help sent from the territory of Belarus and the border zone (between the Polish and Belarusian barrier) clearly decreased. Most of the people in this area are actually one large group, mentioned in previous sections of the report.

27 people (in total in three groups, including the one mentioned above) were staying in the border zone (Sistiema) between the Polish barrier and Belarusian fortifications at the time of contact. These were people who either had not yet made an irregular border crossing attempt or were there as a result of a pushback.

When it comes to the strict territory of Belarus (not the Sistiema belt between the fortifications), two groups contacted us. The first of them, three persons, was pushed back from the territory of Poland. As they report, the Polish Border Police beat them and destroyed their phones (according

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of these two countries, there is often a doubt whether a person is from Sudan or from South Sudan. Due to the language barrier and the relatively short time since the division of countries, many people are unable to answer this question for us.



to one of them: *They beat me and broke my phone.*). Members of the group were in a very bad mental condition and desperate. At the time of contacting us, they declared their willingness to return to their country of origin (i.e. Yemen and Egypt). The second demand from Belarus came from a lonely Syrian who reported injuries resulting from a fall from a wall on the Polish–Belarusian border.

## Humanitarian, medical, and legal interventions

The humanitarian organizations and collaborators who provided us with information were able to provide in-kind support to 149 people traveling in 49 groups. 8 people from 8 groups were additionally provided with specialist medical assistance and one person, who needed medical assistance in the territory of Belarus, was directed to the local mission of the MSF organization .



*Photos from Grupa Granica archives*

One of the requests came from a single, 26-year-old citizen of S<sup>5</sup>, who originally spoke to us from behind a fence that forms the Polish barrier. After receiving information that we were unable to help her, she contacted us again after crossing the wall. Before humanitarian workers and medics reached her, spontaneously and, as they concluded from abandoned or lost items, in panic, she moved further into Polish territory. After a long search, she was found in the forest in a very bad condition – without verbal and logical contact, with a very painful leg injury and a wounded hand. The medic examined her for joint and bone injuries, but the result was inconclusive. The pain did not stop despite intravenous medication, so the decision was made to call an ambulance. At the same time, the patient vomited very strongly (as she told us earlier when sending a request for help – she drank water from the swamp for some time) and despite the administration of medication – the problem with the gag reflex did not stop. At the same time, after a slight improvement as a result of painkillers, the woman expressed her willingness to apply for international protection. After reporting the need for the arrival of the Medical Rescue Team,

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<sup>5</sup> Country of origin anonymized due to the rather detailed description of the intervention and the risk of identifying the woman.

instead of medical assistance, two officers of the Border Guard appeared in the forest. One of them said he was a lifeguard, gave the woman a cursory examination and found that she was fine. A doctor from our intervention team, referring to his qualifications and experience, repeated his indication to call an ambulance again and transport the woman to the hospital, suggesting that a femur fracture might have occurred. Eventually, he called an ambulance himself. After some time, a team of firefighters from the state fire department in Hajnówka arrived at the site and, with the help of Border Guard officers, carried out the patient on a stretcher. After being taken out of the thicket, she was placed in the Border Guards car. The ambulance was waiting on the main road. During the intervention, after the decision to call an ambulance, the Ombuds Office was notified about the case. Finally, the woman was able to successfully apply for protection, but the Border Guard applied for her detention and the court granted it.

Legal aid was provided to 18 persons, 6 of them were in the hospital.

## **Pushbacks and violence by the authorities**

A total of 12 groups representing 43 people reported being pushed back. 6 of these people additionally reported experiencing physical violence from people they identified as officers of the Polish uniformed services. As for the forms of claimed violence, in the reported period it was destroying phones (breaking the display, destroying the charging sockets), beating and (in one case) tearing the passport.

## **Border induced injuries**

We have information about at least 5 people who suffered limb injuries as a result of going over the fence in the first week of June.

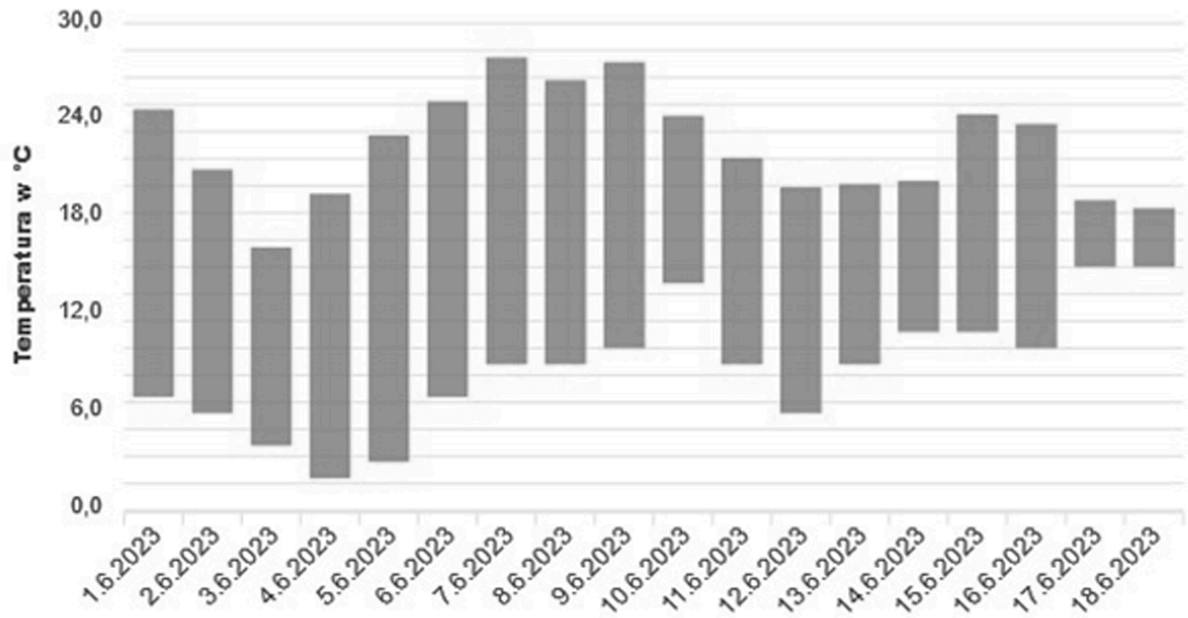
During this reporting period, we received, among others, a request for help from a young Somali woman who was lying about 600 m from the fence. She had fallen from the structure earlier, and when she asked for help, she reported very strong pain in her left arm, back and left thigh. According to the report of the humanitarian workers and the medic who helped her, the hand had a changed outline, there was swelling, bruising, and bruises. There were large bruises on the left thigh, without a changed outline. She received intramuscular analgesics, which did not improve the situation. As she expressed her wish to apply for international protection, the Ombuds Office was notified of her situation. An ambulance, fire brigade and border guards were called. Cooperation with the services went smoothly, the officers appeared on the spot quite quickly. Firefighters evacuated the victim, an ambulance was waiting at the border crossing, border guards without objection accepted the information that the woman was asking for international protection in Poland.

## **Relevant events**

In early June, Lithuania announced the temporary reintroduction of border controls with Poland and Latvia related to the NATO summit to be held in Vilnius on July 11-13. Lithuanians are also concerned that Alyaksandr Lukashenka will use the irregular migration to disrupt the order during the event. As reported by [baltictimes.com](http://baltictimes.com): *The measure will apply at the border crossings of*

Lithuania with Latvia and Poland and at its airports and seaports, as well as at border crossings when traveling through airports and seaports on internal Schengen routes.<sup>6</sup>

## Temperatures<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup>[https://www.baltictimes.com/lithuania\\_to\\_reinstate\\_checks\\_on\\_borders\\_with\\_latvia\\_and\\_poland\\_for\\_na\\_to\\_summit/](https://www.baltictimes.com/lithuania_to_reinstate_checks_on_borders_with_latvia_and_poland_for_na_to_summit/) [accessed on June 20, 2023].

<sup>7</sup><https://www.pogodowecentrum.pl/archiwum-pogody/szczegoly-miasta/122950-99999/bialystok> [accessed on June 20, 2023].