

WE ARE MONITORING

Statistics

15.06–28.06.2023

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.

Demography

In the second half of June, we received information about 94 groups consisting of a total 384 people on the move. This is a decrease from the first half of the month. Of those, there were 23 minors, including six aged 8 to 13 and sixteen aged 15 to 17. The ages of three of the minors could not be determined. The groups also included at least 65 women and a person with cancer who was in Sistiema at the time of receiving the information. Most were from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Yemen. The nationalities of 44 people could not be determined.

Belarus and the border area

There was an increase in entries from the so-called Sistiema area compared to the previous month. As many as fourteen groups, consisting of 132 individuals, were staying there. By comparison, in the first two weeks of June, we received information about only 37 individuals in the border zone.

As many as six of the fourteen groups, including a lone man from Yemen and eight women from Somalia, reported that they were in Sistiema as a result of the pushback they had experienced from individuals they identified as Polish Border Guard officers. Other groups, including 25 Eritrean nationals (presumably) and 10 Syrian nationals and a Syrian citizen were only just intending to cross into Poland, both groups accounts featured Belarusian uniformed services.

We are 10 people stuck at the Polish border Without water, without food, and there is not enough charger for my device. We can't go back The Belarusian army is not letting us go back

In the accounts of those staying near the Polish border, there was repeated information about the involvement of Belarusian uniformed services, which blocked their return to Minsk and did not allow them to get out of the belt. This was directly indicated by four groups and an additional two suggested indirectly the involvement of Belarusian uniformed services. A lone man describes his experience as follows:

I am currently stuck between the border of Poland and Belarus, no side is giving me permission, it has been 10 days, I have no new facilities and I am alone. I haven't eaten anything for 10 days. I lost all my friends. It [Belarus Army]doesn't allow me anywhere, I'm stuck, I can't find a solution The police of Poland and Belarus have beaten me a lot, they are very cruel

People on the road, including those encountered on the Polish side, reported that there were more people between the borders. The increased mobilisation of Polish uniformed services and pushbacks combined with the activity of Belarusian uniformed services blocking returns to Minsk may be relevant here, but we are not able to say for sure.

A group of nine people from Syria, including one woman and one 16-year-old, reported that after the pushback experienced by five of them, they found themselves in Sistiema without food and water. Polish authorities supposedly took it from them during the pushback. Four of these people, including a 16-year-old, were also alleged to have experienced physical violence from service officers of both countries. According to their accounts, the Polish uniformed services beat four of the five people, sparing only the woman, and destroyed their telephones.

they [polish uniformed services] beat us and took our phones, except this girl was hidden by the girl. They took our bags and everything and brought us back at night to the Bella Rossi lands again. We got very tired and died during these days and in the end they brought us back. We are now trapped between Belarus and Poland. The Belarusian army refuses our return No food, no drink, no shoes, no clothes. We suffer a lot We were killed by cold and rain and we have been in the forest for a month and two days

Individuals then, by their own account, experienced violence on the Belarusian side. One man who attempted to get out of the strip between the borders was allegedly beaten with a rifle butt and bludgeoned with dogs in retaliation. He then managed to get out of Sistiema and urgently sought medical help.

the dog bit me in the head and face and the [Belarussian] soldiers broke my ribs with the back of the gun. I am now facing death. Do you know an organisation that helps me here, because I don't have the right to medicine, and the hospital here reports it to the police.

Individuals, as in previous months, often spoke of crossing the border in large groups of several dozen people. One person encountered in Poland declared that they crossed the Polish border in a group of 120 people. Persons who provided information on how the border was crossed most often mentioned ladders put against the fence and in two cases undermining.



Person being carried on stretcher by firefighters. Photo: Ewa Bartkowiak

Humanitarian, medical and legal interventions

The humanitarian organisations and cooperating individuals who provided us with information managed to provide in-kind support to 252 travellers in 57 groups. 11 people in 9 groups were additionally provided with specialised medical assistance through the involvement of Medics Without Borders. Organisations and individuals providing humanitarian and medical support to people on the move in the border areas took part in a total of 78 successful interventions. According to humanitarian workers and people working in the Podlasie region, people on the move most often asked for water, clothing and mosquito repellent.



Man during humanitarian intervention. Photo: Małgorzata Klemens

Among the persons on the road to whom in-kind assistance was provided were at least eleven unaccompanied minors aged 15-17. One of the minors, expressed fear of being in Poland due to the brutality of the Polish uniformed services, we do not know if his fears were based on his own experiences or those heard from others on the road:

I want to apply for asylum outside Poland because the military is inside Poland. If I get caught, I will be severely beaten and my phone will be broken. (...) I am a minor in the jungle on my own, and my family is now dying in Sudan. The army will come and take me and beat me and throw me in the forbidden border area again where I will die

Those who reported medical problems complained of trench feet, wounds and cuts from barbed wire, pain in limbs, particularly knees and ankles often caused by crossing the 5.5-metre high fence at the border, and stomach problems from drinking contaminated water.

One woman who had fallen off the wall and was unable to move on her own was helped by a group of men from the same country she had met by chance. The men found her unconscious and, as there was no signal in the area, put her on a makeshift stretcher made of branches, tightly woven string and a tarpaulin. The woman awoke when she had walked about 1.5 kilometres and was unable to withstand the pain caused by the shocks of the transport. Seeing that she was in a life and health emergency, they tried to draw attention to themselves by lighting a bonfire, risking discovery by the uniformed services and pushback. They saw a helicopter above them, but no one appeared. They decided to go away to look for a range and eventually managed to alert humanitarian organisations of the situation. They returned to the place where the wounded woman was staying to await the arrival of a medic together with her. In the meantime, they kept the woman warm and tried to make her as comfortable as possible.

Thanks to their intervention, the woman was transported to one of the hospitals in Podlasie, where she received medical and legal care.



Trench feet. Photo: Małgorzata Klemens

A total of nine people were admitted to Podlasie hospitals, most of them in orthopaedics as a result of fractures and injuries. Individuals received support and legal information thanks to case-workers from the Egala Association and lawyers from Eliil. They were given power of attorney and support in applying for international protection.

Pushbacks and violence by uniformed services

A total of 19 groups, consisting of a total 61 people, reported experiencing pushbacks, at least 12 of whom had experienced it more than once. Among those pushed back to Belarus were at least 10 women and 7 children, including 4 unaccompanied by the adults responsible for them.

According to the accounts of those on their way, pushbacks to Belarus are often accompanied by physical and verbal violence.

One person described that he himself reported to the service officers because of pain and wounds on his feet that prevented him from walking. He asked for medical assistance.

When I crossed the Polish border, I got into a swamp and my shoes were torn. I had no option, but walking bare in that swamp in the forest. I called the Polish border security. They didn't even bother to assist me by taking a look at my situation. They told me to sit in the car and threw [me] off the border.

Another man who had already experienced pushbacks twice in four days did not experience physical violence, but his request for international protection was ignored and he was forced to sign documents in an unspecified manner.

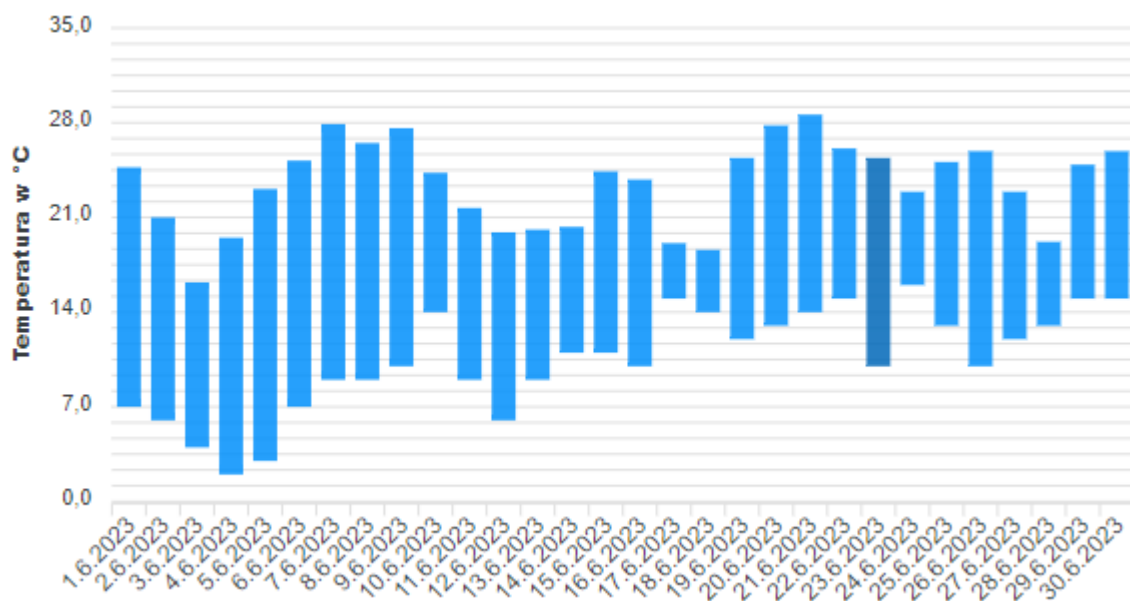
I asked them [Polish Border Police] for asylum on the site but they denied me. [...] The guard just smashes the phone and removes the SIM card and forces you to sign the paper

As many as six groups reported that they had experienced pushbacks multiple times, between two and four times.

Injuries sustained as a result of crossing the barrier

Four people reported injuries resulting from falling off the wall, these were all women. The injuries were mainly to the lower limbs and included lacerations, swellings and fractures. One person, due to the severity of her injuries, was taken to hospital.

Temperatures recorded by weather station Bialystok¹



¹ <https://www.pogodowecentrum.pl/archiwum-pogody/szczegoly-miasta/122950-99999/bialystok> [accessed on. 29.06.2023 r.].

Quantitative summary 15.06–21.06

	groups	Individuals	children (inc. UASC ²)	women (inc. pregnant)
Requests – Total	54	224	18 (8)	44 (0)
Requests from BY/including Sistiema³	11/9	194/93	11 (1)/ 10 (1)	27/22
Support provided	33	106	7 (7)	24 (0)
• In-kind support / including in hospitals	31/7	96/7	6 (6)/0	15 (0)/3
• legal aid / including in hospitals	8/7	17/7	1 (1)/0	12 (0)/4
• medical assistance PL/BY⁴	6/0	7/0	1 (1)/0	3 (0)/0
Pushbacks Reported	8	30	5 (2)	7
Reported missing persons⁵	2	2	0	1
Reported violence by PL / BY	4 / 4	21 / 10	4 (1) / 1 (1)	13 (0) / 0
Border Induced Injuries	3	3	0 (0)	3
Total number of Interventions			42	

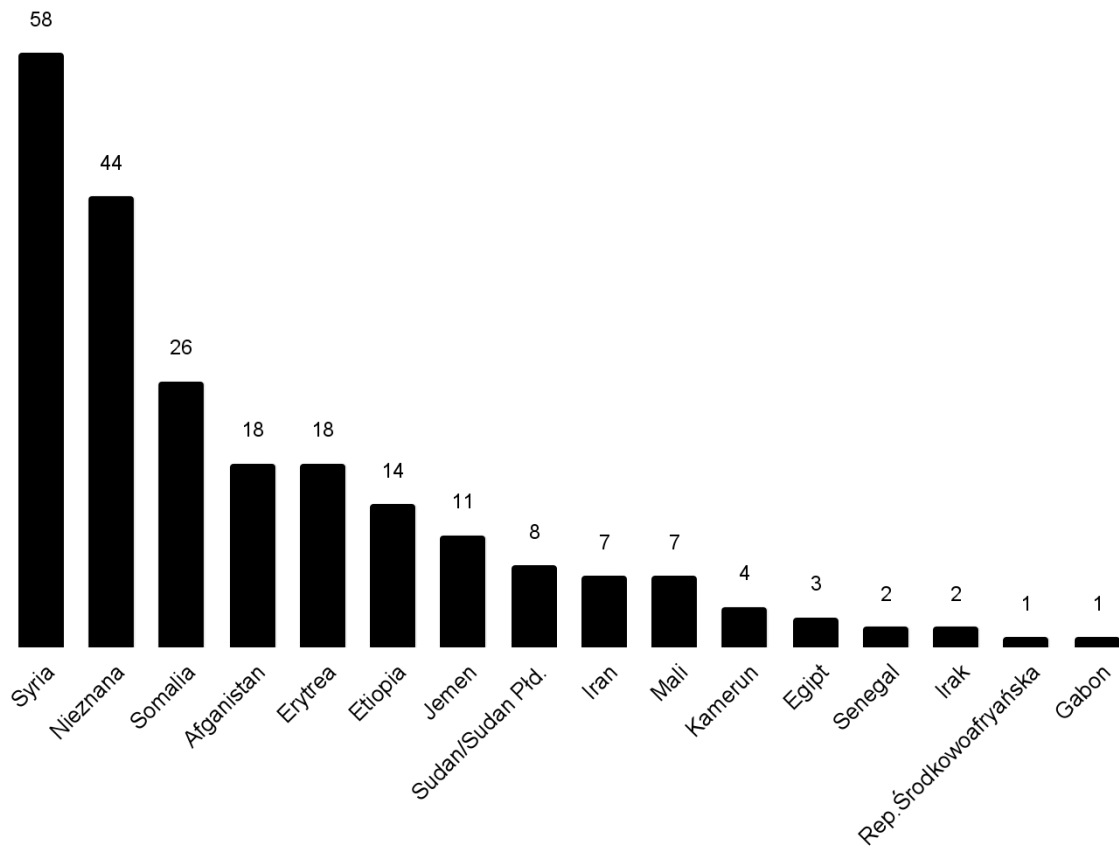
² Unaccompanied minors.

³ Sistiema is a colloquial term for the area between Poland and Belarus in the strip between the two countries' border fortifications.

⁴The migrants were redirected to the organisation Medics Without Borders, which operates in Belarus.

⁵We consider missing persons whose disappearance has been reported by their relatives.

Countries of origin 15.06-21.06



Quantitative summary 22.06–28.06

	groups	individuals	children (inc. UASC ⁶)	women (inc. pregnant)
Requests – total	40	160	5 (5)	21 (0)
Requests from BY/including Sistiema⁷	7/5	41/39	0/0	3/2
Support provided	26	82	4 (4)	14
• In-kind support / including in hospitals	24/2	74/2	4 (4)/0	14/1
• legal aid / including in hospitals	4/2	10/2	0/0	1/1
• medical assistance PL/BY⁸	4/1	5/1	0/0	0/0
Pushbacks Reported	11	31	2 (2)	3
Reported missing persons⁹	2	2	0	1
Reported violence by PL / BY	6 / 12	12 / 32	2 (2) / 2 (2)	2 / 6
Border Induced Injuries	2	2	0 (0)	2
Total number of Interventions			36	

⁶ Unaccompanied minors.

⁷ Sistiema is a colloquial term for the area between Poland and Belarus in the strip between the two countries' border fortifications.

⁸The migrants were redirected to the organisation Medics Without Borders, which operates in Belarus.

⁹We consider missing persons whose disappearance has been reported by their relatives.

Countries of origin 22.06-28.06

