

## **WE ARE MONITORING**

**Update PL-BY**

**24.08-06.09.2023**

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 24.08–30.08.2023

	groups	individuals	children (UASC <sup>1</sup> )	women (inc. pregnant)
Total Requests	32	100	11 (6)	7 (0)
Requests BY / inc. Sistiema <sup>2</sup>	9/6	42/38	4/4	3/2
Support Provided	17	48	6 (6)	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in-kind support / inc. in hospitals</li> </ul>	17/0	48/0	6 (6)	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>legal aid / inc. in hospitals</li> </ul>	-	-	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>medical support PL / BY<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	2/0	6/0	-	-
Reported Pushbacks	13	48	5 (1)	3
Reported Missing Persons <sup>4</sup>	3	3	0	0
Reported Violence PL / BY	5/4	17/16	1(1)/1(1)	-
Wall Induced Injuries	1	1	0	0
Field Interventions			19	

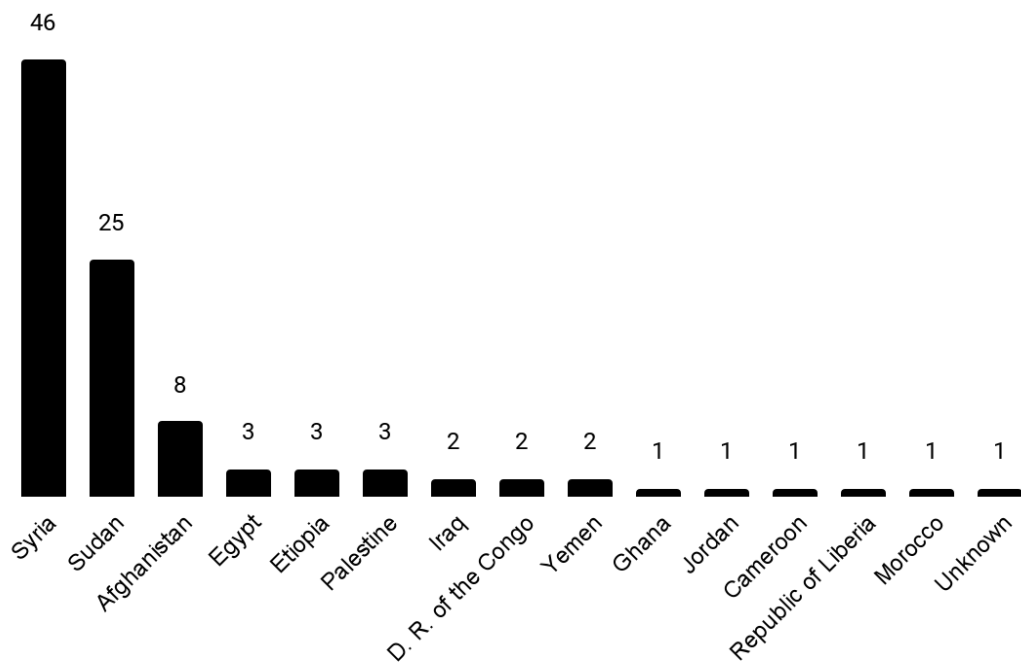
<sup>1</sup> Unaccompanied and Separated Children in this report refers to children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law, is responsible for doing so.

<sup>2</sup> Sistiema is a widely-used term currently referring to the strip of land between the wall recently erected on the Polish territory adjacent to the Belarussian border and old Belarussian border fortifications known under the same name.

<sup>3</sup> BY is used in cases where migrants were referred to MSF Belarus.

<sup>4</sup> Missing Person is defined as a person reported missing by close relatives, who did not have contact with them for at least three days.

## Countries of Origin 24.08–30.08.2023<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> The acronym CI stands for Ivory Coast.

## Quantitative Summary 31.08–06.09.2023

	groups	individuals	children (UASC <sup>6</sup> )	women (inc. pregnant)
Total Requests	15	37	2 (2)	4 (0)
Requests BY / inc. Sistiema <sup>7</sup>	5/4	20/19	-	3/3
Support Provided	9	16	2 (2)	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>material support / inc. in hospitals</li> </ul>	9/0	16/0	2 (2)/0	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>legal support / inc. in hospitals</li> </ul>	2/0	4/0	1 (1)/0	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>medical support PL / BY<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>	1/0	2/0	-	-
Reported Pushbacks	6	10	1 (1)	-
Reported Missing Persons <sup>9</sup>	-	-	-	-
Reported Violence PL / BY	2/4	4/7	1 (1)/1 (1)	-
Wall Induced Injuries	-	-	-	-
Field Interventions			10	

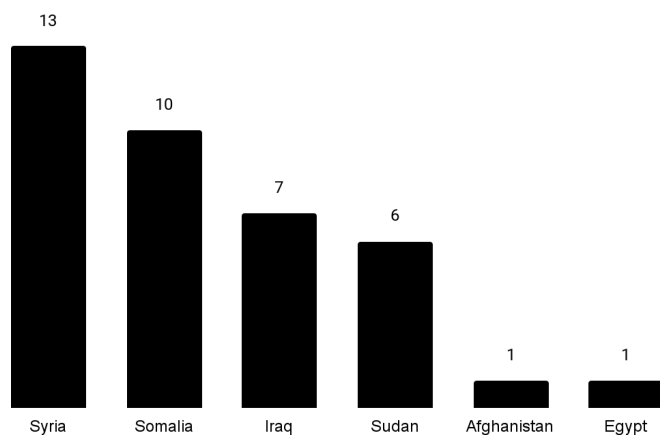
<sup>6</sup> Unaccompanied and Separated Children in this report refers to children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law, is responsible for doing so.

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<sup>9</sup> Missing Person is defined as a person reported missing by close relatives, who did not have contact with them for at least three days.

## Countries of Origin 31.08–06.09.2023



### Situation on the border

In the reported period from 24 August to 6 September, we noted a significant decrease in the number of reports from persons irregularly crossing the Polish-Belarusian border. Similar trends are shown by the Border Guard statistics published during this period. For example, on 1–5 September, official communiqués mentioned only 70<sup>10</sup> attempts to cross the border or foreigners disclosed<sup>11</sup>. These were respectively:

- 55 persons or attempts on 1 September
- 6 persons or attempts 2 September
- 9 persons or attempts 3 September

At the same time, both sparse Polish sources and Latvian government statistics show an increase in the number of irregular crossings on Latvian and Lithuanian territory. Since 20 August 2023, the Latvian State Border Guard Service has reported as many as 170 people attempting to cross the border per day, compared to statistics previously mentioning 30–50 people daily. Between 8 and 10 September, Latvian services stopped 472 individual attempts to cross the Latvian-Belarusian border. The increase in crossings is also reflected in the announcements of the Polish Border Guard. Until August of this year, information about apprehended couriers

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<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/12255.Weekend-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej.html>  
<https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/12263.Na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej.html>

<sup>11</sup>Due to the imprecise and interchangeable terminology used, we are not in a position to determine whether the Border Guard services are writing about specific persons disclosed or about attempts to cross that may have been made by the same persons over several days. The use of the term 'attempted border crossing' suggests that these persons never entered the territory of Poland. On the other hand, when stating the nationality of the persons stopped, the phrase 'disclosure' is used

driving migrants after crossing the Lithuanian border was sporadic, while in the reported period announcements about persons apprehended on this route appeared practically every day<sup>12</sup>.

The aforementioned increase in the statistics of the Latvian State Border Guard Service corresponds in time with a decrease in the number of people reached by persons and organisations providing humanitarian assistance at the Polish–Belarusian border. At this stage, however, it is difficult to forecast whether this situation will continue or whether it is just a short-term trend.

## **Demographics and trends**

In the reported period covering the time between 24.08 and 6.09.2023, we recorded requests of assistance from 137 people travelling in 47 groups. Requests came from 100 people in the week 24–30.08 and 37 people in the week 31.08–06.09.2023. In comparison, in the previous reporting period (10–23.08.223) we recorded requests from 333 people, which is more than a double the amount.

## **Belarus and the border area**

Between 30 August and 6 September, 57 people in 10 groups informed us that they were stuck in the strip between the barrier on Polish territory and the fortifications on the Belarusian side, called the Sistema. The largest of the groups we received information about had 14 and 15 people, the others had between 1 and 9 people.

## **Humanitarian, medical and legal interventions**

The humanitarian organisations and people working with them, who provide us with data, managed to deliver in-kind support to 64 persons travelling in 26 groups. In addition, 8 travellers in 3 groups received specialised medical assistance thanks to the involvement of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) medics and volunteer medics in Podlasie. Organisations and individuals providing in-kind and medical support to people on the move in the border areas took part in a total of 29 successful interventions. Due to the cold weather, the first symptoms of hypothermia in a long time were observed with two people.

Other interventions by medics concerned cases of dressing deep cuts from razor wire, providing analgesics to a person suffering from rib pain as a result of being beaten by Polish or Belarusian<sup>13</sup> officers. Another person suffered injuries requiring medical intervention as a result of being hit with a baton by an officer on the Polish side of the border.

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<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/12256.Wbrew-przepisom-przez-polsko-litewska-granice.html>

<sup>13</sup>person suffered violence on both sides of the border. According to reports, she and her group were subjected to deportation 4 or 5 times. Polish services used gas against her and her companions and destroyed 6 telephones. The Belarusians threatened them with dogs.

## Pushbacks and violence perpetrated by the authorities

Between 24 and 30 August, 48 people forming 13 groups that were reached with humanitarian assistance reported experiencing an illegal deportation, while during the week of 31 August to 6 September, it was reported by 10 people from 6 groups.

Some individuals, including a Syrian family travelling with four children aged 5, 7, 10 and 16, reported experiencing a pushback more than once. The family in question was in Belarusian Sistema at the time of sending the report. Shortly afterwards, due to the lack of a legal and safe way to get to Poland, the individuals decided to return to Syria. This is how they describe their experience of trying to cross the Polish–Belarusian border:

*"Please i want to talk to the human side in you... we are a family of 4 children and father and mother on the border of Poland.. I know you can't help anyone out of Poland but please consider helping us in any way.. our children are drinking from swamp water and are terrified from each and every sound.. we are in a death or life condition we went twice to Poland and the police kicked us back.. we tried to go back [to Minsk] and the Belarusians tortured us and threw us away 9 kms of our camp.. yesterday we walked from the sunrise till the sunset with the children crying "please stop we're tired" and once we reached there we slept the most horrible sleep only to be awakened by Belarus soldiers to terrify us again and take all what's left of our food and mentality.. simply, we are stuck here.. we are humans like you.. we breathe like you, eat and drink like you, we like to sleep on our beds like you.. the story is much longer than this, but i will wait for your reply dying to see a message from you.. i'm not alone.. my kids are dying in front of me.. and all im asking for is a life with dignity.. which is impossible as i'm seeing, so if my only way is going back Syria.. then i hope you help me out.. Please reply."*

A total of 22 persons reported experiencing violence from the Belarusian and Polish services. All of them, with the exception of one man who declared that he had only experienced it on the Belarusian side, reported that they had encountered physical and verbal violence by uniformed services on both sides of the border. Often these were experiences accompanying a pushback, during which people were first sprayed with gas or beaten on the Polish side before being pushed out, and then beaten and chased with dogs on the Belarusian side. According to the persons' declarations, theft and destruction of property (documents, telephones) are frequent on both sides of the border. One person additionally declared that they were hit in the head with a stun gun. There was also a case of dogs being used by Polish border guards, but there were no bites.

One man, who in mid–August made several unsuccessful attempts to cross the Polish–Belarusian border describes his experience in retrospect as follows:

*16 days left at the border*

*I did not see any human rights in this Polish*

*They beat and torture*

*And they steal phones and money*

The poor condition of the groups is confirmed by employees of organisations working on the Polish–Belarusian border. They often see traces of violence during their encounters with groups.

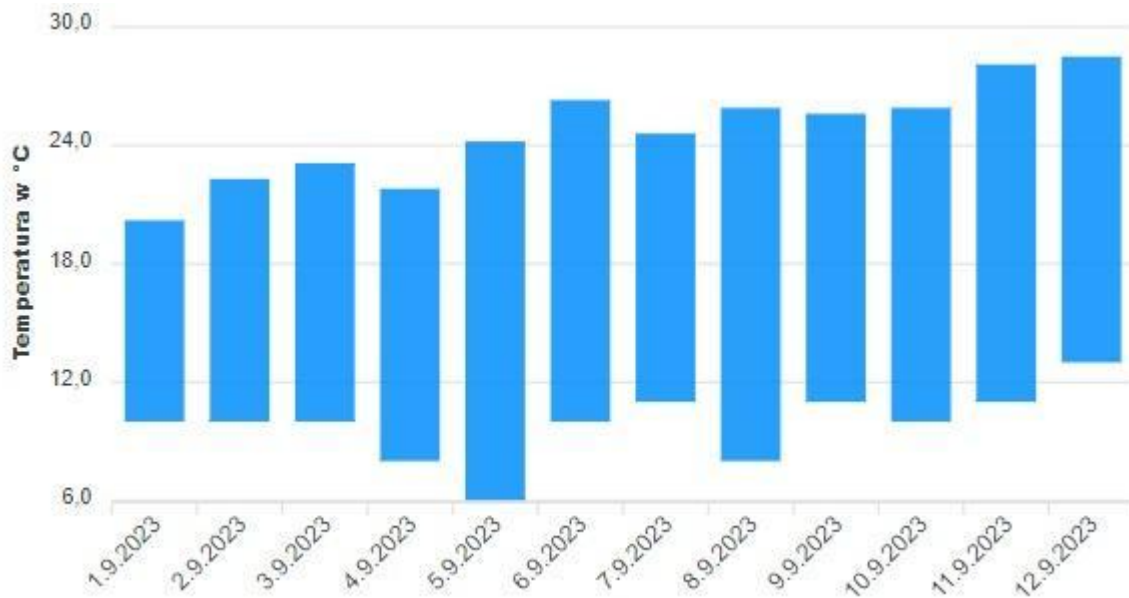
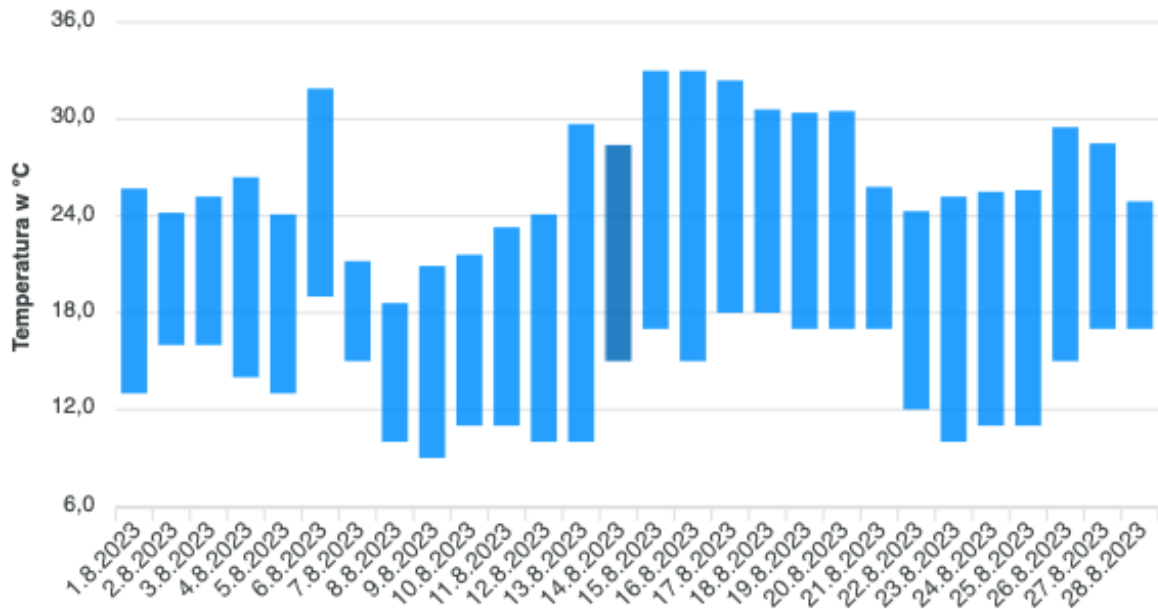
The following excerpt from a description of injuries comes from one of the reports of a humanitarian intervention with a group whose members declared having experienced violence on both the Polish and Belarusian sides:

*[...] kidney pain, neck pain from being hit, dog bite wounds on legs and back. They mention 4 pushbacks, very scared. Physical condition poor – kidney problems (pains), dog bites, beatings in Belarus, neck sore; pain when urinating. Younger boy all sore – I examined abdomen, everything hurts him. In pain for four days because [he was] kicked in the kidneys. Visible scars from being bitten by dogs. For two months in the woods, pushedback three times. [...]*



## Temperatures by weather station Białystok<sup>14</sup>

The graph shows the daily maximum/minimum temperature on a given day in °C in August and September this year.



<sup>14</sup> <https://www.pogodowecentrum.pl/archiwum-pogody/szczegoly-miasta/122950-99999/bialystok> [accessed 31.08.2023].