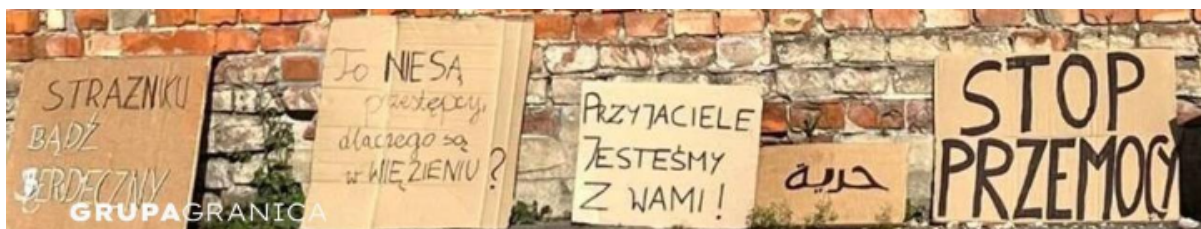


WE ARE MONITORING

Statistics

07.09–20.09.2023



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.

Quantitative Summary 07.09–13.09.2023

	groups	individuals	children (inc. UASC ¹)	women (inc. pregnant)
Requests total	18	72	8 (8)	10
Requests from BY / inc. sistemiema²	5/4	44/38	6 (6)/2(2)	7/5
Support provided	8	15	2 (2)	2
• in-kind support / inc. in hospitals	8/1	15/1	2 (2)/0	2/1
• legal aid / inc. in hospitals	1/1	1/1	0/0	1/1
• medical PL / BY³	-	-	-	-
Reported pushbacks	5	19	7 (7)	3
Reported missing persons⁴	2	2	-	1
Reported violence PL / BY	2/2	4/2	4(4)/1(1)	2/0
Border induced injuries	-	-	-	-
Field interventions			7	

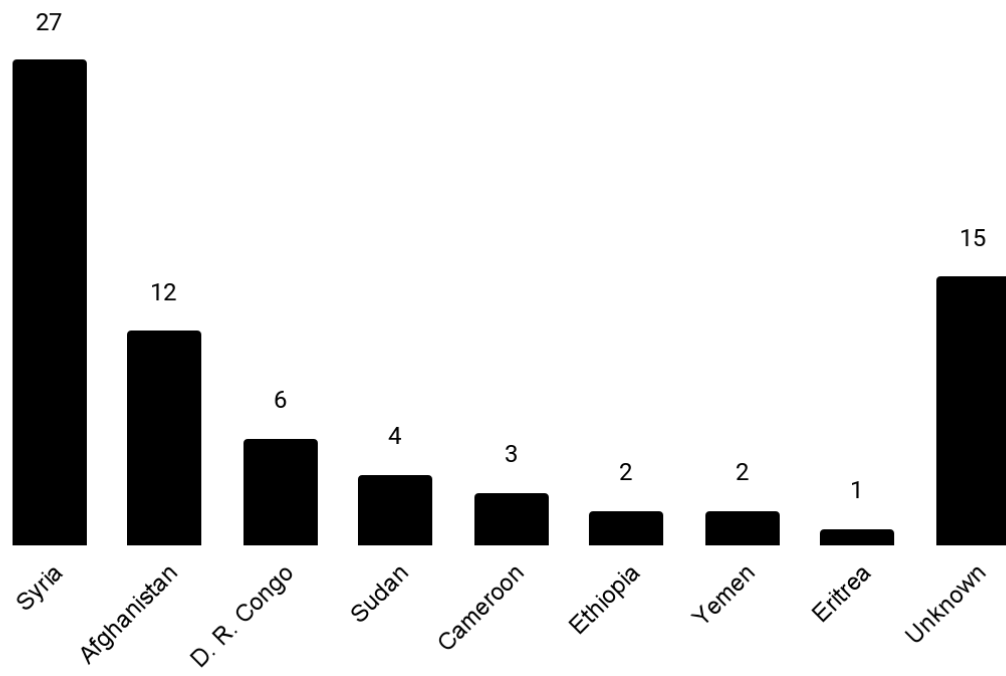
¹ Unaccompanied minors. Persons under the age of 18 traveling unaccompanied by legal guardians.

² Sistemiema is the generally accepted term for the border fortifications on the Belarusian side. Here: it also refers to the area between Poland and Belarus in the strip between the border fortifications of both countries.

³ The migrants were redirected to a branch of 'Doctors Without Borders', an organisation operating in Belarus.

⁴ We consider people to be missing when they have been reported missing by their next of kin in circumstances where they have had no contact with the reported person for at least three days.

Countries of Origin 07.09–13.09.2023



Quantitative Summary 14.09–20.09.2023

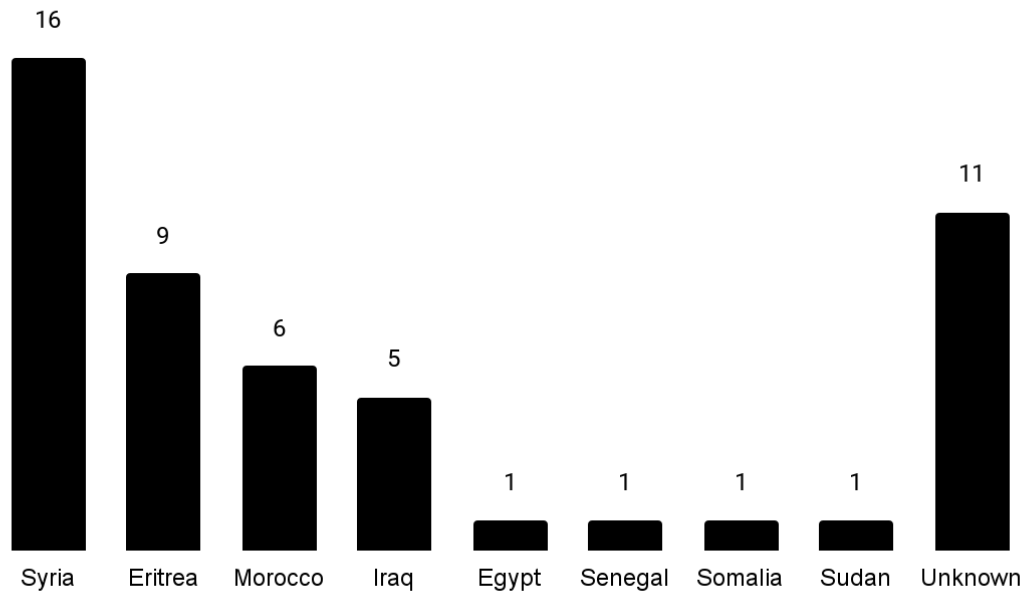
	groups	individuals	children (inc. UASC)	women (inc. pregnant)
Requests total	13	51	4	7
Requests from BY / inc. sistemiema⁵	4/3	28/23	4/2	7/5
Support provided	6	13	-	-
• in-kind / inc. in hospitals	6/0	13/0	-	-
• legal / inc. in hospitals	-	-	-	-
• medical PL / BY ⁶	1	1	-	-
Reported pushbacks	5	22	0	3
Reported missing persons⁷	-	-	-	-
Reported violence PL / BY	1/4	6/17	-	2/1
Border induced injuries	1	1	-	-
Field interventions			8	

⁵ Sistiema is the generally accepted term for the border fortifications on the Belarusian side. Here: it also refers to the area between Poland and Belarus in the strip between the border fortifications of both countries.

⁶The migrants were redirected to a branch of 'Doctors Without Borders', an organization operating in Belarus.

⁷ We consider people to be missing when they have been reported missing by their next of kin in circumstances where they have had no contact with the reported person for at least three days.

Countries of Origin 14.09–20.09.2023



Context Update

Since mid-August 2023, the number of people on the move attempting to cross the Polish-Belarusian border remains low. People staying in Belarus, according to official Latvian data, are much more likely to reach Poland via Belarus-Latvia border and then Lithuania. The Polish Border Guard are probably aware of this fact, although in their reports they refrain from providing this information, focusing instead on isolated reports of arrests of couriers transporting people on their way across the Polish-Lithuanian border as well as the low number of crossings through the Belarus border.

The Latvian Border Guard reports that the situation is the most tense since 2021. On September 19, one of the two border crossings with Belarus was closed, after Latvian border guards thwarted a very high number of 894 crossing attempts over the course of just six days.

Germany is also recording a higher number of irregular crossings. The Center for Eastern Studies reports that according to Bundespolizei statistics, from the beginning of 2023 until the end of August, the largest number of people came to Germany through Poland – 18,269.⁸ of which as many as 3964 people entered the country in August. This figure includes both those who irregularly crossed the Polish border to the east, via Belarus or Lithuania, and those who came via the Balkan route. The change in direction of the Balkan route is also reflected in Slovak statistics⁹

⁸<https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2023-09-25/niemcy-msw-rozwaza-stacjonarne-wyrywkowe-kontrolne-na-granicy-z-polska?fbclid=IwARIGbn1BLwNEVqnH53VKOqGpcJwdDe7juiAdSnqFrLPblzFKImfrw-XXeas>

⁹ <https://mykysuce.sme.sk/c/23213290/migrantov-zadrzanych-v-polsku-vracaju-na-kysuce-maju-slovenske-doklady.html>



Latvian Border Guard patrolling the BY border area in August. Phot. Kalnis/Reuters

The upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland, scheduled for October 15, 2023, are contributing to the intensification of the government's anti-immigration campaign, recently picked up by the opposition as well. Politicians affiliated with the government party have become particularly involved in the campaign against Agnieszka Holland's film *Green Border*. There has also been repression against an independent activist involved in helping people on the move. She was arrested on September 8, and the news hit the media a week later. Despite the early stage of the proceeding and therefore lack of a court judgment, the woman is being called a smuggler in the pro-government media, including by government politicians such as Deputy Minister Wąsik¹⁰

The case was addressed by the Szpila collective, which provides legal assistance to the person. In an informative post, Szpila stressed that creating big fake cases is one of the repressive strategies and that 'charges do not create reality'.

On September 9, Grupa Granica received news of the suspension of the largest hunger strike to date at the Przemyśl detention center. According to the coalition, one of the reasons for the strike, which involved about 100 people, was a suicide attempt by one of the inmates. The protesters were forced by violence and intimidation to suspend their protest. They demanded that their rights be respected, that they have access to medical and psychological assistance, and that they be allowed to contact their relatives¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://katowice.tvp.pl/72749009/przerzut-migrantow-przez-granice-poslowie-ko-poreczyli-za-kobiete-podejrzana-o-kierowanie-gangiem>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=294890729839356&set=a.156833196978444>

Demography and trends

The small number of people currently crossing the Polish–Belarusian border means that we are unable to talk about significant changes in demographics, as we do not have enough information about people migrating from Belarus via Lithuania and Latvia. Latvian data speaks of the predominance of nationalities such as Syria and Afghanistan. Reports recently provided to us by humanitarian organizations operating on the Polish–Belarusian border also show that the biggest number of people come from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

14% of all reports came from women (17 women out of 123) and 10% from minors – 12 out of 123. Most, as many as 8 minors, were traveling unaccompanied.

We are 9 people. Various nationalities. We have children, women. We are at the Polish fence. There is no food, water or clothes. [...] There is an injury to the man, a broken foot and the girl is sick.

Nearly half of the reports came from Sistema, the strip between the border security of Poland and Belarus. People in Sistiema complained of lack of water and food, poor health, and experienced violence – at least four groups of up to 13 people were in the border strip as a result of deportations.

Humanitarian, medical and legal interventions

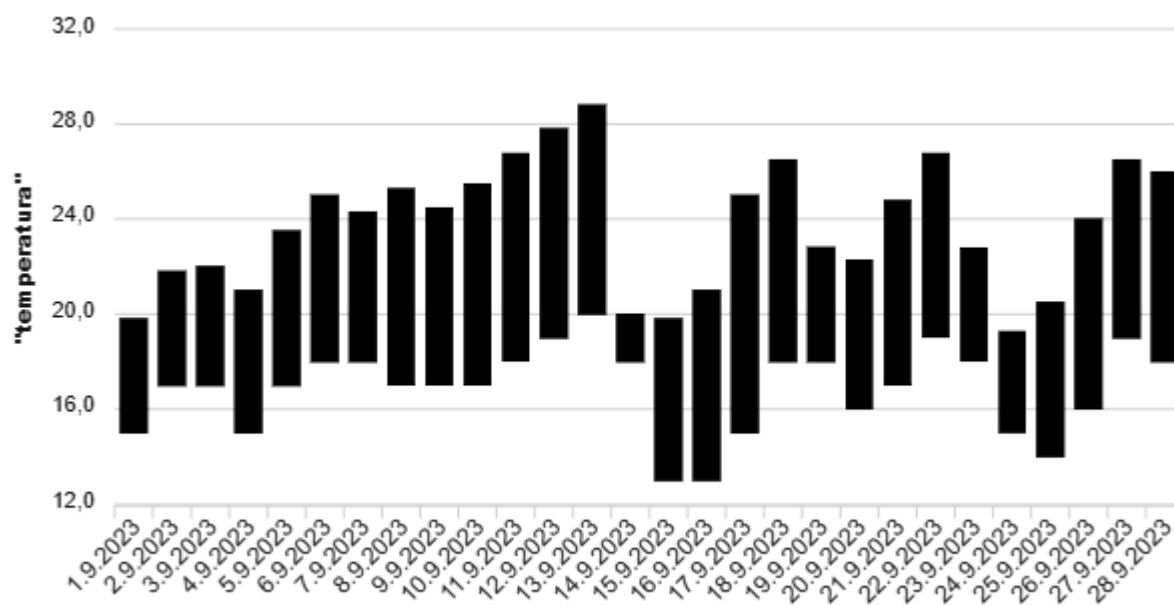
Humanitarian organizations and the people working with them who provided us with information managed to provide in-kind support to 123 people traveling in 14 groups. 1 person was additionally provided with specialized medical assistance thanks to the involvement of Doctors Without Borders. Organizations and individuals providing in-kind and medical support to people on the road in border areas took part in a total of 15 successful interventions. According to humanitarian workers and people working in Podlasie, people on the move most often asked for food and water and dry clothes. There are also requests to hand over cell phones enabling people to contact their loved ones and to ask for support from humanitarian organizations. Very often, from the accounts of people coming to us for help, it appears that their cell phones are destroyed by people identified as uniformed service officers when they are deported behind the barrier.

Pushbacks and violence perpetrated by the authorities

41 people reported that they experienced deportation to Belarus during this period. In doing so, at least 10 people experienced violence from people they identified as representatives of the Polish uniformed services. Some of those reporting the experience of deportation stayed in Sistema. One of them describes her experience this way:

I am now in Belarus. I have been here for 10 days. Without eating. Only drink water here that is not potable. But the Belarusian military does not like that when we return to Belarus, they attack us. Me and my friends, we are 6 people. We have two girls and four guys. My friends and I were in Poland before and they caught us and broke all our phones and took our food.

Temperatures by weather station Bialystok¹²



¹² <https://www.pogodowecentrum.pl/archiwum-pogody/szczegoly-miasta/122950-99999/bialystok> [accessed 31.08.2023.].