


# JUNE 2024

Report from the Poland–Belarus border



**OBSZAR OBJĘTY  
ZAKAZEM PRZEBYWANIA  
- WEJŚCIE ZABRONIONE**

*Kurwy! Come on! We are waiting for  
you! Baaaaa! Baaaaaa!*

Screams heard by three women from Eritrea as they were on the  
eastern side of the wall at the Polish border.

The quote on the previous page of this report may be shocking. However, after discussion within our editorial team, we decided not to replace the swearing with asterisks. Instead, we think it should be shocking that such words were directed at three women travelling by themselves. We don't know who shouted. What we do know is that the shouts originated from inside the Buffer Zone, to which access is restricted. We also know that people on the move have reported during interviews that representatives of the uniformed services, in addition to physical violence, often direct insults and demeaning comments—most of them racist or sexual in nature—toward them. The quote we have chosen is not arbitrary. This report is largely about violence, obstruction of access to international protection procedures, and the increasing dehumanisation of those forced to migrate across the Polish green border.

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Timeline, May–June 2024</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Demographics and Trends</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Muharrama</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Interventions</b>	<b>17</b>
Medical interventions	21
Hospitals	25
<b>Pushbacks and Violence</b>	<b>26</b>
Pushbacks of migrants who expressed intention to seek asylum in the presence of witnesses (Assisted Asylum Request).	26
Violence and humiliation during pushbacks	30
Pushback Testimonies	33
<i>When I refused to sign they beat us with batons. Metal batons.</i> Adam’s Pushback. June 2024.	33
“Get into the water!”. Amadi’s pushback. June 2024	34
<i>Because they mask their face, all their faces was covered.</i> <i>I cannot see their faces.</i> Andre’s Pushback. June 2024.	37
<b>Definitions</b>	<b>41</b>

## Introduction

The following study is based on first-hand data obtained from persons involved in the described events. Our sources comprise organisations, informal initiatives, as well as individuals—the latter of whom often wish to remain anonymous, hence we do not mention them by name unless they have given us permission to do so. We owe special thanks to all those in transit who chose to share their own experiences with us.

Humanitarian workers and those who collaborate with them emphasise that the challenging context and ethics of their work often prevents them from obtaining more detailed information about the stories and circumstances of people on the move. During interventions, many such people are in such a severe psychophysical condition that it is not possible to obtain detailed information without risking retraumatisation or making them feel obligated to provide answers to humanitarian organisations simply because they have received support.

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.

For additional questions and suggestions from individuals or organisations who might be interested in receiving reports, please contact:

[dane@wearemonitoring.org.pl](mailto:dane@wearemonitoring.org.pl)

## Definitions

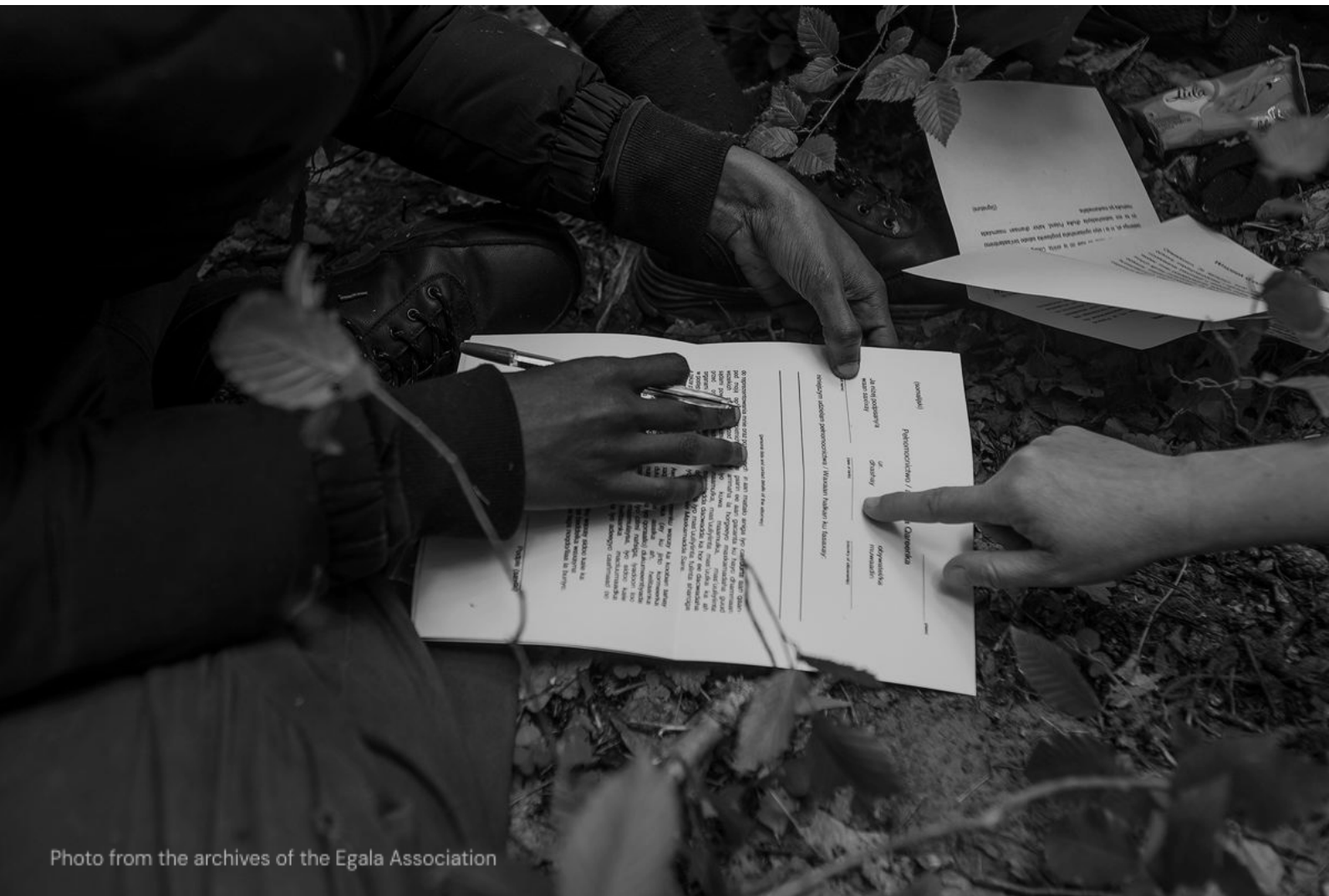
A glossary of terms and the definitions we have adopted can be found at the end of the report.

We are supported by:



*'You have every right, indeed a duty, to employ all available methods, and it is our responsibility to ensure your legal protection. We will not hesitate to support you in every way, including for those who decide to take the toughest actions. You are heroes, we stand with you.'*

Prime Minister Donald Tusk to Border Guard officers during his visit to Podlasie, 29.05.2024



## Timeline, May–June 2024

- May 28: there is an attempt to cross the border by a group of several dozen foreigners. During the incident, one of the Polish Army soldiers on duty is seriously injured. The Border Guard Headquarters issues a statement<sup>1</sup>.
- May 29: Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Minister of the Interior and Administration Tomasz Siemoniak, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz visit Dubicze Cerkiewne, where they meet with the command of the uniformed services<sup>2</sup>. They announce the reestablishment of the 'Buffer Zone'<sup>3</sup>. The draft regulation appears on the Government Legislation Centre's website that evening, along with a list of municipalities (27 towns) where entry would be prohibited<sup>4</sup>.
- June 5: the Onet portal reveals that a few weeks earlier, three soldiers were detained for using firearms at the Polish–Belarusian border<sup>5</sup>. Two of them were charged with exceeding the bounds of their authority. In response, Prime Minister Donald Tusk instructs Minister of National Defence Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz to prepare legal amendments: *The aim is for the law to unequivocally support the Polish soldier in using firearms for 'self-defense' or to protect Polish territory at the border. They must have a sense of legal security*<sup>6</sup>.
- June 6: the General Command of the Armed Forces announces that despite the immediate first aid provided and the subsequent efforts of doctors in the days following the incident, the soldier's life could not be saved<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> K. Grzech, Attack by foreigners on Polish–Belarusian border, 2024, <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/13355,Atak-cudzoziemcow-na-polsko-bialoruskiej-granicy.html> [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

<sup>2</sup> Portal TVN24, There will be a buffer zone, "the most experienced commandos" on site. Prime Minister and ministers on the border, 2024, <https://tvn24.pl/polska/donald-tusk-przywrocimy-strefe-buforowaw-pasie-200-metrow-st7938854> [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

<sup>3</sup> M. Chrzczonowicz, Tusk wants to return to the 'Buffer Zone' on the Polish–Belarusian border. What is it that we won't see?, 2024, <https://oko.press/tusk-przywracamy-strefe-buforowa-na-granic>, [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

<sup>4</sup> M. Chrzczonowicz, It won't be 200 meters. There is a draft regulation on a "buffer zone" at the border, 2024, <https://oko.press/to-nie-200-metrow-strefa-buforowa-przy-granicy>, [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

<sup>5</sup> Portal Onet, M. Wyrwał, E. Żemła, Polish soldiers handcuffed on the border with Belarus. The military is boiling over [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

<sup>6</sup> KPRM, Soldiers and officers must feel the support of the state, [www.gov.pl/web/premier/zolnierze-i-funkcjonariusze-musza-czuc-wsparcie-panstwa](http://www.gov.pl/web/premier/zolnierze-i-funkcjonariusze-musza-czuc-wsparcie-panstwa) [dostęp 20.08.2024]

<sup>7</sup> Dowództwo Generalne [@DGeneralneRSZ], (2024, 6 czerwca), '... own blood or life not to spare' We regret to inform you that on June 6 in the afternoon at the Military Medical Institute in Warsaw, surrounded by the support of family and soldiers, died stabbed soldier of the 1st Armored Brigade, [X], <https://x.com/DGeneralneRSZ/status/1798707799079215137> [Accessed on: 05.08.2024]

- June 7: the Border Guard officially admits for the first time in a press release that smoothbore firearms were used on June 5–6, 2024<sup>8</sup>.
- June 9: the European Parliament elections are held. The campaign leading up to the vote saw major party politicians increasingly adopting racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Migration across the Polish–Belarusian border emerges as one of the main topics.
- June 12: the Minister of the Interior and Administration signs a regulation establishing a restricted zone along the Polish–Belarusian border. This so-called ‘Buffer Zone’ comes into effect the following day.
- June 19: the Parliament adopts a project for a law allowing the Armed Forces to participate in a military operation conducted in peacetime, as well as exempting uniformed service representatives from criminal liability if they exceed their powers regarding the use of direct coercive measures or firearms if ‘circumstances require immediate action’<sup>9</sup>.
- June 19: a woman with an eye injury is admitted to a hospital in Hajnówka. The incident is reported by the Egala Association<sup>10</sup>:

*The 35-year-old was very hungry, having not eaten for several days. She was walking along the fence in search of someone who would share food with her. At that moment, suddenly and without any warning, a shot was fired. According to the woman, the shot came from one of the two uniformed individuals on the Polish side of the fence<sup>11</sup>. The Iranian woman began to loudly scream in pain. The officers approached her, having previously covered their faces with balaclavas. Afterwards, they called for an ambulance that transported the woman to a Polish hospital.*

- June 19–21: a meeting occurs between the heads of Border Guard services from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> K. Zdanowicz, End of the week at the Polish–Belarusian border [podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/60811.Koniec-tygodnia-na-polsko-bialoruskiej-granicy.html](https://podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/60811.Koniec-tygodnia-na-polsko-bialoruskiej-granicy.html) [Accessed on: 20.08.2024]

<sup>9</sup> Draft Act amending certain acts in order to improve the activities of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, the Police and the Border Guard in the event of a threat to state security, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/projekt-ustawy-o-zmianie-niektorych-ustaw-w-celu-usp-rawnienia-dzialan-sil-zbrojnych-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej-policji-oraz-strazy-granicznej-na-wypadek-zagrozenia-bezpieczenstwa-panstwa>, [Accessed: 05.08.2024]

<sup>10</sup> K. Rochowicz, 35-latka z urazem oka na granicy polsko-białoruskiej. "Widziała osoby w mundurach". Mamy komentarz, 2024, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,31073904,35-latka-z-urazem-oka-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej-widziala.html> [Accessed on: 01.09.2024]

<sup>11</sup> We publish the quote in its original version. However, we would like to point out that the wall does not run exactly along the border line, so the strip of land on its eastern side is also Polish territory.

<sup>12</sup> Border Guard Headquarters, 5-party meeting of the Heads of Border Services, 2024, <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/13445,5-stronne-spotkanie-Szefow-Sluzb-Granicznych.html> [Accessed on: 01.09.2024]



- June 29: humanitarian workers encountered an armed civilian during a night intervention in the forest. There are more and more reports on social media about informal groups of masked individuals whose aim is to stop people on the move in the border forest and, at best, inform the border guards of their presence in the forest. There are invitations to join such groups on various portals.

*We were returning from the forest with a man from [...]. We were heading to a location where the Border Guard was supposed to pick him up. Suddenly, a man dressed in camouflage emerged, carrying a pistol. Shining a light in our eyes and with his hand on his holster, he asked: 'Friends or strangers?'*

*There were many of us activists, mostly white people, and the man from [...] was not visible, which is why we were able to proceed without escalation. One of our colleagues went back to talk with him and learned that he was concerned about his family's safety and saw his mission as 'fishing out sand niggers'. He mentioned that when he encounters larger groups, he calls the border guard, but for smaller groups, he handles them himself.*

Excerpt from Humanitarian Intervention Report. End of June 2024

- June 29: one of the organisations working at the border receives a message from a man who was beaten by an unknown perpetrator while on his way to an asylum centre. The physical attack was accompanied by racist insults:

*On Thursday evening, I was coming from fingerprint processing centre in Poland to a Camp where I was designated to stay. I was given a train to the Camp and when I was trying to take the train to the Camp I was attacked by a white man saying "blacks, blacks, refugee" in English with loud voice. He punched my right eye and I fall on the ground. The train security guards immediately call the ambulance and I was admitted to the hospital upon arrival at hospital I was Xrayed. I was told by doctors that my right finger is broken and doctors also confirmed that my eye needs a surgery. After this I feel scary and unsafe to come out from the Camp.*

Message excerpt from a man who was beaten on his way to the centre after submitting an application for international protection, June 2024.

## Demographics and Trends

REQUESTS				
	groups	individuals	minors (incl. UASC)	women (incl. pregnant)
<b>Total</b>	248	730	35 (23)	103 (3)
<b>incl. in Poland</b>	223	693	27 (21)	96 (3)
<b>incl. from muharrama</b>	30	60	7 (-)	12 (1)

June saw the first recorded decrease in the number of reports from both sides of the Polish–Belarusian border since the start of the year<sup>13</sup> Following a period of heightened activity in the spring, the beginning of summer brought 730 requests for help from individuals travelling in 245 groups. In comparison, there were 1,269 requests in May and 1,066 in April.

The scale of incoming requests can be compared with June 2023, when 838 people in 222 groups were registered, and the same period of 2022<sup>14</sup>, which saw 611 individual requests for assistance.

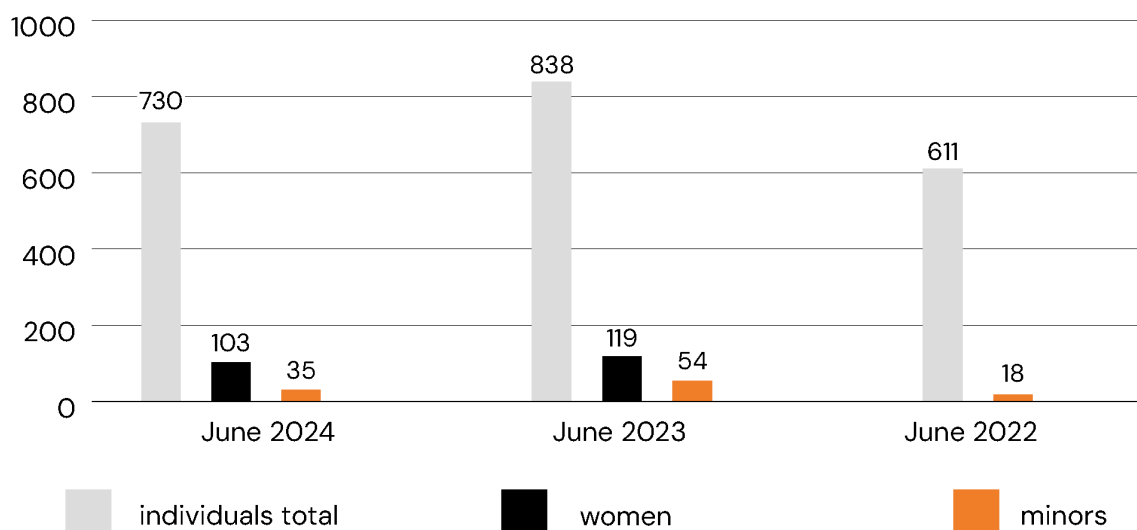


Fig. 1 Number of people who requested support in June 2024, 2023 and 2022 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> The number of people who receive support is always significantly lower than the number of requests, due to factors such as: reports from *muharrama* and from Belarus, where providing support is not possible; difficult field conditions that sometimes make it impossible to locate individuals in transit; and deportations, when individuals are captured before meeting with humanitarian workers.

<sup>14</sup> No data is available on the number of women among those crossing the Belarus–Poland border in 2022.

In June, women accounted for 14% of all requests (103 out of 730 total individuals), with 3 of them being pregnant. According to the collected data, there were 178 women in May. In the same months of 2023, 119 and 117 women were registered, respectively (14.2% and 11.6% of all requests). The proportion of minors among the June reports was slightly above 3.5%. A significant majority, 23 out of 25 registered minors, were traveling without a legal guardian or caregiver.

The size of the registered groups ranged from single individuals, who often became separated from their travel companions due to pushbacks, fleeing from authorities, or difficulties in overcoming barriers, to a group of over 20 people who sought assistance in the Białowieża Forest in early June.

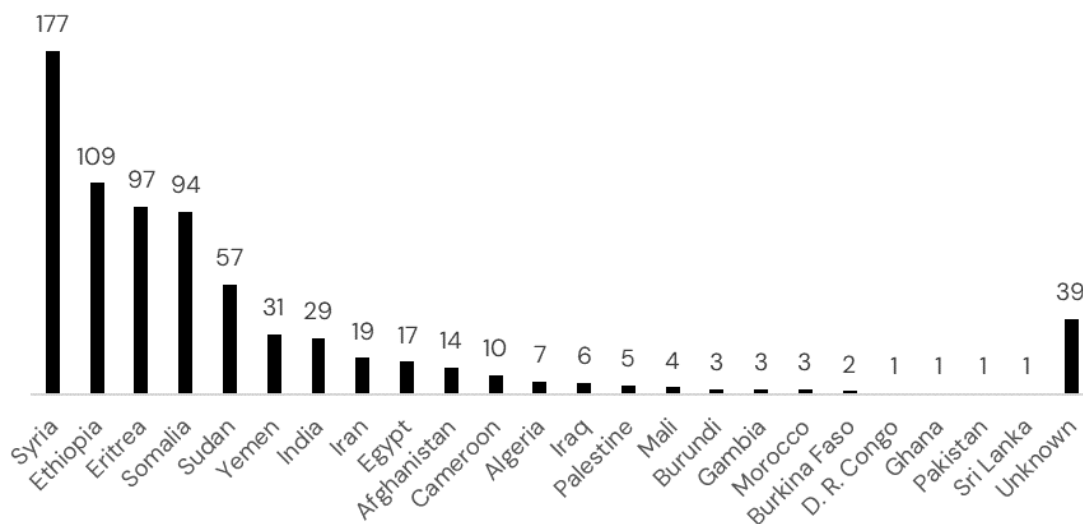


Fig. 2 Countries of origin of individuals who requested support in June 2024.

In June, the majority of individuals requesting support continued to come from Syria, which was identified as a country of origin by as many as 177 people, accounting for just over 24% of all those asking for support. The second most common region of origin for people on the move was the countries of the Horn of Africa. A total of 300 individuals reported Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somalia as their country of origin – 109, 97 and 94 people respectively. There were also 57 demands from people from Sudan. Due to unfavourable interview conditions, the country of origin of 39 individuals could not be determined.

## **Muharrama**<sup>15</sup>

In June 2024, humanitarian organisations operating in the border region recorded requests from 59 individuals contacting from *muharrama*. During conversations, some of them indicated that they were in the *muharrama* before making their first attempt to cross the border barrier, while others ended up there after being forcibly expelled by Polish border guards.

Accounts gathered from recent reports indicate that the situation of individuals residing in the *muharramas* has deteriorated compared to previous months. Migrants encountered during humanitarian interventions in the Podlasie region described an escalation in violence by Belarusian authorities. The reports included mentions of brutal beatings, including with rifle butts, shootings, attacks by dogs, extortion of money and food, as well as destruction of phones, and burning of clothing, sleeping bags, and tents.

*[...] In the muharrama for 15–30 days. They said it's a nightmare there, and since the Polish soldier was stabbed, it's become unliveable. The Belarusians are even more brutal than before, forcing large groups of people to cross the border, and the Polish forces are spraying tear gas heavily. [...] One of their friends had his arm broken by the Belarusians when he mentioned wanting to return to Minsk. They spoke of brutal beatings, shootings, and having dogs set on them. They say being pushed back to Belarus is a certain death, and they are terribly afraid of it. They all started the conversation by saying that they want to apply for international protection in Poland.*

Excerpt from Humanitarian Intervention Report. Quoted from an interview with men from Syria and Yemen, June 2024.

*[...] He spoke extensively about the violence on the Belarusian side, describing the brutality with which Belarusians push large groups of people against the fence, the beatings, the confiscation of food, water, and money, and the threatening with dogs. He said that once they captured them and rubbed some kind of filth into their hair—it wasn't very clear what it was, he used the word 'jam' – in any case, it was clear that it was about violence and humiliation.*

---

<sup>15</sup>A shortened form of the expression *muntaha muharrama*, in Arabic meaning 'no man's land'. A term used by Arabic speakers for the militarized strip of land extending between the Polish barrier and the Belarusian barrier (the so-called *sistiema*) from a few dozen meters to as much as 2 kilometers into Belarusian territory. From the east, only Belarusian services, mainly border guards, officially have access to this space. Most of this zone belongs to Belarus, but a strip up to a few meters wide behind the Polish barrier is still the territory of the Republic of Poland.

Excerpt from the Humanitarian Intervention Report. Quoted from an interview with men from Eritrea, June 2024.

*[...] He spoke of the relentless, terrifying violence in Belarus—of being beaten with a rifle butt, with the brutality increasing each time someone is turned back from Poland, of food being confiscated and thrown away, of the increasingly violent coercion to push larger groups against the border, and of being forced through beatings to throw stones at the fence.*

Excerpt from Humanitarian Intervention Report. Quoted from an interview with a woman and a man from Somalia, June 2024.

*He told us that he decided to flee Somalia after learning that a terrorist group operating in his town was planning to forcibly recruit him, as they have done with many boys his age in Somalia. They had already made an attempt, but, somehow, he managed to escape. Knowing they would return, he decided to leave, not even knowing exactly where or with whom he was going. He ended up in the Belarusian forest. He spoke of extreme violence, beatings with shovels, and being forced to lie in a row while soldiers walked over them. If anyone tries to get up in that situation, they take him away and ‘use as a punching bag’.*

Excerpt from Humanitarian Intervention Report. Quoted from an interview with a minor from Somalia, June 2024.

Accounts consistently reference the coercion of people on the move into attempting to cross the barrier in large groups. There are also mentions of being encouraged to use aggression and violence against Polish authorities. A man from Syria, seeking medical help for his visually impaired companion with whom he had been staying in a camp within the *muharrama*, wrote:

*A police officer gave me a knife and said: ‘Hit a Polish officer’. I told him I couldn’t do it. The police beat me and said I had to. It was the Belarusian police. They told me to go to Poland, and if the Polish police caught me, I should stab an officer.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Syria, June 2024.

For the first time in accounts from individuals in transit, there have been descriptions of Belarusian authorities detaining people in enclosed vehicles and letting snakes inside, most likely vipers. Descriptions of snake bites have been reported by at least a few of those encountered during the June interventions.

*They complained extensively about the Belarusian officers—describing them as brutal and punishing people for letting themselves be pushed*

*back. They are also racist, they do not like Black people. They beat boys severely with wooden sticks. Both boys and girls are being locked in cars to which snakes are let in.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with three women from Eritrea, June 2024.

*The women reported being locked in the back of a car with several others, where soldiers subsequently placed a snake, and as everyone screamed and cried, the soldiers mocked them. On another occasion, the soldiers said that they would have them for themselves and took the women into a car. After the women cried and begged, they were released without harm.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with two women from Ethiopia, June 2024.

Staying in the *muharrama*, particularly for extended periods, entails lack of access to food and drinking water, which can lead to general weakness of the body and gastrointestinal problems. Migrants met during field interventions repeatedly mentioned, among other things, incidents of food theft by Belarusian border guards and prolonged periods without access to food, lasting several to over a dozen days.

*They spent around a month in the muharrama and have been in Poland for three days. Only the man from [...] spoke English. He is [...]. He fled from war; half of his family was killed. Five years ago, he underwent surgery on his abdomen after being struck by a drone. Now that area still hurts him. During his time in the muharrama, he drank his own urine because they had neither water nor food. He described the violence of Belarusian border guards: beatings, destruction of phones, being attacked with dogs and snakes. [...] In sistemi, there are many people, including children, pregnant women, and individuals in very poor health, with broken legs or severely poisoned by dirty water.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted account from a conversation with individuals from Ethiopia and Eritrea, June 2024.

*One man had spent 8–9 months in the forest, and this was his first successful attempt to cross. They [the five men] spoke about beatings by Belarusian authorities, about being attacked by dogs (two of them showed bite wounds), about the confiscation and destruction of phones, and about how the Belarusians burn people's belongings, take their food, and give it to their dogs.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with five men from Ethiopia, June 2024.

*Several months at the border, second day in Poland. Previously, he travelled with his sister, but she was caught by the military and pushed back. He described severe violence on the Belarusian side and a lack of food. He showed us a small bottle containing water mixed with spices and pepper. For the past month, his main food has been grass soaked in this water. In Eritrea, he worked in design or construction, but due to mandatory military service, he was unable to pursue his profession. He was very reluctant to fight, he criticised the military and their exploitation of ordinary people. He showed us his phone, which had been destroyed by the Polish authorities. From the beginning, he affirmed that he wanted to stay in Poland.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man from Eritrea travelling on his own, June 2024.

In June, women accounted for over 20% of the total number of individuals contacting us from the muharrama area, 12 altogether. One of the women declared being pregnant at the time of contact. The reports also documented the presence of at least 7 minors on the eastern side of the barrier.

Among them were three teenage siblings from Syria, travelling with their parents. The father, who reached out for help, described the medical condition of the youngest child, a 12-year-old boy suffering from severe gastrointestinal issues. His condition deteriorated daily, with a rising fever, blood in his urine, and episodes of losing consciousness.

A major issue for individuals trapped in the strip between the Polish and Belarusian border fortifications is the lack of access to medical care. In June, half of the registered cases—30 out of 59—were from people reporting health problems. Among the most frequently described ailments were: fractures and injuries resulting, according to the accounts, from beatings by officers from both the Belarusian and Polish forces, general weakness of the body and gastrointestinal problems (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting) caused by prolonged stay in the forest (often more than 30 days), lack of access to food and drinking contaminated water, dog-bite injuries, lacerations from razor wire, and irritation caused by contact with irritants such as pepper spray.

In early June, a man reached out for support from the eastern side of the barrier, requesting medical assistance due to a broken arm from a beating. He reported that, due to his medical training, he had been trying to help others in the muharrama, particularly women and children in more vulnerable situations, but had to stop due to his injury.

*A man from [...] described symptoms resembling an epileptic seizure, and his messages indicated that he was also suffering from partial*

*paralysis on the right side of his body. Several years ago, he underwent major head surgery, and now, in the muharrama, after being beaten by Belarusian officials, his condition has significantly worsened.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man. June 2024.

Part of the problem with the lack of access to medical assistance is also the unavailability of medicines taken on a regular basis, which have either been stolen or destroyed by the authorities or have run out due to the unexpectedly prolonged journey. In mid-June, underage siblings from Burundi—a 15-year-old boy and his 16-year-old sister, who suffers from epilepsy—reached out from muharrama, seeking assistance. Their family had been persecuted in their home country. The girl had been unable to take her regular medication for a long time, and her health was deteriorating day by day.

None of the individuals mentioned above were able to receive any support, including basic medical assistance. Despite attempts to intervene and inform the Polish Border Guard units about the presence of sick individuals on the eastern side of the barrier, often within Polish territory, requiring urgent medical intervention, the authorities did not provide assistance. According to our knowledge, these individuals were left in the area between the border fortifications, without any support from the Polish services, and their health condition were not consulted with a doctor.

It is important to note that those staying on the eastern side of the border barrier experience violence not only from Belarusian officials. Accounts from people on the move include numerous descriptions of violence inflicted by Polish border guards and soldiers through the barrier at the border. Three men from Somalia, during an intervention in early June, recounted what they had experienced during their journey so far:

*They spoke about the violence on the Belarusian side. Dogs were set on them—they showed scars, bite marks, and holes in their clothing where they had been bitten. They were beaten, with some injuries already healed. [...] a wound from a razor wire. They recounted that there are many women and small children—aged 2 to 3 years old—on the Belarusian side. The women are exhausted and faint, in some cases losing their eyesight due to extreme fatigue. Another form of violence used by Belarusian authorities involves transporting people 40–80 kilometres from the border as punishment and forcing them to walk back under threat of death, without food or water. At the fence, people were sprayed with gas in their mouths, noses, and ears. They said that for \$20, you could buy 2–3 slices of bread from Polish guards across*



*the fence. Phones are destroyed, and they are handcuffed and beaten with sticks.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with three Somali men, June 2024.

A few days later, another group encountered in the forest—a Somali couple and a man from Syria—reported similar practices by Polish authorities.

*They told us that they could buy a piece of bread from Polish soldiers for \$20. On one occasion, a Somali man gave them \$100 to receive 5 pieces, but they gave him nothing in return and chased him away. When he was dying of hunger and wanted to return to Minsk, the Belarusians took him deep into the forest, 40 kilometres away, and told him to return to the border, threatening him with death. They took his backpack, phone, and documents.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with three people from Somalia and Syria June 2024.

During a field intervention, three Eritrean women cited shouts in their direction from on-duty Polish officers on the western side of the barrier.

*They also described that at night, near the border, soldiers repeatedly shouting towards the fence: 'Kurwy! Come on! We are waiting for you! Baaaaa! Baaaaa!' [imitating the bleating of sheep] and: 'We love Poland! We hate you!'*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with three women from Eritrea, June 2024.

In the accounts from people on the move encountered in the Polish forest and from reports by NGO workers and activists, there are mentions of gunfire and audible shooting sounds in the forest, even outside the restricted zone. We know from people passing through the muharrama that Belarusian authorities sometimes use firearms against people on the move. The use of firearms by Polish soldiers was confirmed by Defense Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, who stated at a press conference on June 6 that Polish soldiers had used firearms approximately 700 times for warning purposes in May alone. The following day, during a briefing at the Prime Minister's Office, Prime Minister Donald Tusk confirmed this information, additionally mentioning the use of firearms by border guards during the previous night (June 6–7, 2024)<sup>16</sup>. Information obtained by the newspaper Rzeczpospolita from the Ministry of National Defense press office indicates that:

---

<sup>16</sup> M. Kazubal, Shots fired on the border with Belarus. We know how many times the military used weapons, 2024, <https://www.rp.pl/wojsko/art40581321-strzaly-na-granicy-z-bialorusia-wiemy-ile-razy-wojsko-uzylo-broni> [Accessed on: 22.08.2024]

*from January 1, 2024 to June 6, 2024 along the Polish–Belarusian border, soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland fired 1,190 warning shots, using 1,190 pieces of ammunition<sup>17</sup>.*

In light of the above, the sounds of gunfire heard in the border area should no longer be surprising. However, it is important to note that, as described in a conversation conducted during one of the June interventions with three men from Syria, sounds resembling explosions are not always indicative of gunfire.

*During the intervention, every now and then we heard strange sounds, gunshots. The men said that when people try to cross the fence, the Polish services throw something on the other side of the barrier that explodes after a while, like fireworks or firecrackers.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Quoted from an interview with men from Syria, June 2024.

It is crucial to emphasise that all individuals who have experienced violence at the hands of Polish authorities and who require medical assistance due to this in response to violence, but those who remain on the eastern side of the barrier also lack access to it. Those who have been exposed to irritants have no means to wash these substances off their bodies and clothes due to the lack of access to clean water and their inability to change clothing. The lack of access to medical assistance also affects individuals suffering from fractures and injuries resulting from falls from heights while attempting to cross the barrier or from lacerations caused by razor wire. Reports indicate that these individuals are frequently denied any form of support, and after being forcibly pushed back to the eastern side of the barrier, their chances of receiving any medical assistance only diminish further. One such individual was a woman from Ethiopia who sought assistance in the first half of June, having been subjected to multiple pushbacks while travelling on her own. After falling from the wall during her last attempt to cross the barrier, she suffered from increasing pain in her spine and chest. She was unable to obtain any assistance from either Belarusian or Polish authorities.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Interventions

Non-governmental organisations and those working with them managed to provide assistance to 535 individuals travelling in 178 groups. The total support provided to these individuals includes humanitarian interventions in the field, most often in the Podlasie forest, frequently combined with accompanying medical interventions, as well as legal interventions which typically occur when supporting persons in transit in applying for international protection, detaining persons by the services, and in hospitals. Over 15% of all individuals assisted in June were women (84). There were significantly fewer minors – 23 in total – comprising 4% of those supported during their journey (of these, at least 18 were travelling without the care of a legal guardian).

<b>SUPPORT PROVIDED</b>				
	<b>groups</b>	<b>individuals</b>	<b>minors</b>	<b>women</b>
<b>Total</b>	181	555	23	84
<b>Material aid</b>	176	546	16	79
<b>Legal aid</b>	141	392	16	73
<b>Medical aid</b>	22	40	7	11
<b>First aid</b>	48	88	3	16
<b>Hospital assistance</b>	36	36	8	20
<b>Number of interventions</b>		<b>196</b>		

In June, 192 successful field interventions were carried out, providing material support to 526 individuals travelling in 173 groups. Among them were 78 women and 14 minors. People reaching out from within Polish territory most often requested support in the form of food, water, clothing, or shoes. There were also occasional requests for functional mobile phones. According to accounts from persons in transit encountered during the interventions, their phones are often destroyed by both the Belarusian and Polish authorities. This destruction occurs

not only during pushbacks but also at border guard stations, after submitting applications for international protection, when individuals are sent by officials to accommodation centres. One such story was told at the meeting by people from Somalia, including one pregnant woman.

*They got papers from the border guards to go to a centre in [...], they were taken to the train station. Today no trains are running anymore. They have no tickets, nothing. [...] One of the boys, as they were taken to the station, was beaten and his phone was destroyed. The guards who escorted them were very hostile. They drove them up the road to the station, got out, hit the boy several times on the thigh with a baton, smashed his phone charging input (the only one they had), and sprayed the whole phone with gas. They said 'Go, kurwa!'.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with people from [...], June 2024.

According to accounts from those providing support during humanitarian interventions, an increasing number of individuals encountered in the forest express profound fear of contact with Polish authorities. Their stories include descriptions of physical and verbal abuse. People on the move experience beatings, humiliation, extortion, intimidation, having dogs set on them, and having their documents destroyed.

Encounters between individuals in transit and the Polish authorities often result in their being pushed back to the eastern side of the border barrier, though this is not always the case. During one of the June interventions, a group delivering material aid to those in need of support met two men on their way, one from India and the other from Pakistan. Both were in Poland for the first time, having previously spent approximately six weeks in Belarus. They said that in the forest, after they had already passed the wall, they met Polish soldiers who took their money and allowed them to proceed.

Due to the fear of encountering violence, often not for the first time, some individuals in transit are reluctant to seek assistance from humanitarian organisations. Those who do reach out are frequently found by NGO workers or activists in a severely distressed psychological state—trembling, terrified, and often in tears.

*A minor from Somalia, found in a small forest near the main road [...] terribly frightened, afraid even of us. He told us to stop and shone a white light at us, fearing we might be military personnel. He was very thirsty and hungry, visibly shaken. He drank and ate quickly. It was very difficult to calm him down. From the start, he expressed a desire to stay in Poland. It was only when he focused on reading information about the*

*application for international protection that he settled down a bit. [...] At the border for about a month, certainly at least one pushback. He has experienced significant violence in Belarus. Polish soldiers also beat him. He said that his passport was destroyed by the Belarusians, but he asked his mother for a photo, which he unfortunately did not receive during our meeting. We called the border guard, the officers accepted power of attorney.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a Somali man travelling alone, June 2024.

There are individuals who, even when in poor health, refrain from seeking assistance. These individuals, even if they have not personally experienced violence at the hands of Polish officials yet, are often aware of the scale of abuse by Polish authorities through their interactions with fellow people on the move across the Polish–Belarusian border. Just as they fear beatings in the Polish forests, they also dread returning to Belarus, where further failed attempts of crossing may result in physical ‘punishment’. People on the move are aware of cases where individuals in need of medical care have been subjected to pushbacks, even those who, following intervention by NGO workers or Doctors Without Borders, were taken to hospitals and subsequently pushed back to the eastern side of the barrier. For this reason, two women from Ethiopia, met by chance by the field group, decided not to ask for support despite significant health problems:

*One woman was lying on the road, crying, while the other reported that the crying woman was pregnant and experiencing pain. One team member went to get help, while another completed the paperwork and called an ambulance. The woman, who was in her second trimester of pregnancy, complained of severe pain. The other woman reported pain in her left kidney and mentioned having been ill for some time. Both were taken to the hospital. [...] Fortunately, both eventually ended up in an open centre.*

Fragment raportu z interwencji humanitarnej. Przytoczona relacja z rozmowy z dwoma kobietami z Etiopii, czerwiec 2024.

Encountering border guard officials is immensely frightening for individuals in transit, even when their goal is to apply for international protection in Poland, which naturally involves interacting with the authorities. Declaring the intention to seek protection during a humanitarian intervention, in the presence of NGO workers or activists, aims to enhance safety and increase the chances of having the application accepted, rather than facing another pushback to Belarus. While waiting for the border guard officials during such encounters, people on the move often

recount the experiences of their acquaintances and express fear that they too will be treated in the same manner.

*The individuals wanted to apply for international protection but were very afraid of being subjected to a pushback to Belarus. They spoke of violence on both sides of the barrier, of their friends being beaten and coerced at a border guard facility into signing papers stating he did not wish to stay in Poland. They feared that the same would happen to them. They received detailed information about the procedure, and we then called border guards.*

Extract from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with men from Syria and Yemen, June 2024.

*Very emaciated, in poor mental condition, tearful, and collapsing. He spoke of many of his relatives being killed. He comes from the area of [...]. First time in Poland. He has a passport. He does not have a phone as it had been taken by Belarusian authorities. He was very apprehensive about asking for international protection because his friend had been pushed back from a facility despite expressing a desire to stay in Poland.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man from Sudan travelling with two people from Yemen, June 2024.

In June, during 161 out of 196 humanitarian interventions, staff from humanitarian organisations and activists accompanied a total of **392** individuals in expressing their intent to apply for international protection before border guard officials. According to the information gathered, despite being initially taken to the B-G facility, at least **59** of these people later experienced pushback<sup>18</sup>. Given the documented scale of pushbacks following assisted requests for asylum and the fact that those who have experienced them share their stories with others in transit, the described fear and anxiety should come as no surprise.

In addition, NGO workers themselves frequently report encountering individuals in the forest who, just a day or a few days earlier, had declared their intention to apply for international protection to border guard officials in their presence. These individuals, having been pushed back from the facility area, are often in a much worse condition than they were during the previous encounter. After experiencing beatings, theft, being sprayed with gas without the ability to wash off the irritant, and spending successive days without access to food and drinking water, they still maintain a desire to remain in Poland and seek protection.

*Upon arrival, it turned out that one of the men was a Syrian whom we had met two days earlier near [...]. At that time, he wanted to apply for*

---

<sup>18</sup> We write more about this in the *Pushbacks and Violence* section.

*protection, so we called the border guards, they arrived, took him to a facility, and, as it turned out, later pushed him back. Both individuals reported stomach pain after drinking water from a swamp, they had a bottle of such water with them. Additionally, their feet were treated. Both expressed a desire to seek protection, but the Syrian man feared another pushback. To protect him, we requested the Ombudsman to intervene, which was successful.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with men from Somalia and Syria, June 2024.

## **Medical interventions**

In June, a total of 123 out of the 526 individuals supported by humanitarian interventions reported health issues, including 27 women and 9 minors. Of all those supported on their journey, 46 were patients of the medical team from the humanitarian organisation Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières—MSF).

Information from submitted requests for assistance and reports from field interventions indicates that the most common health issues faced by those at the border include general weakness and hypothermia due to prolonged stays in the forest, lack of sleep, extended periods of being soaked through, and, despite the seemingly typical summer weather in June, sharp drops in night-time temperatures. During one intervention, a man from Ethiopia, travelling with two companions, was found to be in the early stages of hypothermia, in addition to suffering from severe kidney pain and reporting dark urine. He had not drunk any water for six days. Another individual, a lone boy from Cameroon, according to people who met him in the forest ‘was very cold and shivering badly’. Similarly, six men from India were found to be severely hypothermic after spending time in the forest, completely soaked from crossing one of the rivers in the Podlasie region. There were also individuals showing symptoms of a cold.

*They had been in the forest for a total of 13 days. One man showed signs of a cold—he was chilled, slightly elevated temperature of 37.5 degrees. He also had a cough and reported a sore throat.*

Report from a humanitarian intervention. Quoted from a conversation with men from Yemen and Syria, June 2024.

Another group requiring medical assistance consisted of individuals suffering from gastrointestinal issues (stomach pains, diarrhea, vomiting), often caused by a lack of access to clean drinking water and food, as well as the consumption of water from swamps, rivers, and puddles. A group of three men from Eritrea, requesting support, reported that one of them was vomiting and had diarrhea after drinking

dirty water. A minor boy travelling alone, also from Eritrea, reported gastrointestinal problems as well—he drank dirty water and, in addition, had not eaten anything for several days. Another man, this time part of a larger group from Syria and Somalia:

*[...] after four pushbacks, the last time he was in a facility, and they pushed him back from there. He was severely beaten, with both arms bruised. Lower abdominal pain after drinking swamp water, along with a high fever, confusion, and a panic attack.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a group of people from Syria and Somalia, June 2024.

Among people on the move supported during humanitarian interventions, many had spinal injuries and injuries to their limbs acquired while attempting to cross the barrier, as well as lacerations from razor wire. A man from Sudan, encountered in the forest in the first half of June, complained of pain in his ribs after falling from the barrier, and had difficulty breathing. Another man, part of a six-person group from India, had issues with his left knee and pelvic area. He signalled severe pain, and was initially unable to stand. Two women travelling together from Somalia and Ethiopia struggled to walk after crossing the wall. One had a deep cut on her knee from razor wire, and the other likely had a sprained ankle. Two other Somali women, travelling together:

*[...] are after two pushbacks. One spent two weeks in muharrama, the other 34 days. They jumped over the fence last night. One of them hit her chest area when she fell—experiencing significant pain around the sternum and collarbones. General health parameters are normal, she is breathing normally. Both talk about the violence of the Polish authorities—destruction of phones, pepper spray.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with Somali women, June 2024.

*A couple from Sudan. The boy—very large and deep wound from concertina wire on the sole of his right foot, a wound from about a month ago with necrotic tissue along the edges. Also a deep wound from a wire on the left foot—dead tissue, pus. I cleaned the wounds, applied bandages. The right foot a little swollen, the boy was not able to wear a shoe, he had to walk in just a sock.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a Sudanese couple, June 2024.

Injuries and bruises resulting from beatings by both Belarusian and Polish authorities were also frequently observed, alongside irritations caused by exposure to irritants such as pepper spray. One man, part of a group of six Algerians, had a head wound after being hit by a Belarusian border guard with a stick. While the



wound was relatively shallow, those providing assistance reported that it was challenging to dress the wound due to the hair. During one intervention at the end of June:

*A man from Sudan reported severe pain in the rib area on the left side of his chest, both in the front and back. He also reported shortness of breath. He was beaten by Belarusian authorities approximately two weeks ago. Since then, he has been vomiting.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man in Sudan, June 2024.

Another man, part of a four-person group from Somalia, reported being beaten by Polish officers. He complained of pain in his side, particularly in his ribs and shoulders. He had visible bruises there. His companion recounted that during their most recent pushback, the man attempted to escape, but when the soldiers caught him, they beat him severely. Similar experiences were also mentioned by a young man from Afghanistan:

*A 20-year-old Afghan boy found by chance by a local resident. The boy was sleeping wrapped in NRC foil. He complained of pain in his thigh from being struck by Polish authorities with a truncheon and showed marks from the blows on his back. He had no phone [...]. In the forest for 14 days. He had a passport. He wanted to apply for international protection in Poland, he was provided with all the necessary information. Together we called the Border Guard.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man from Afghanistan, June 2024.

Among those requiring medical support are individuals with wounds and injuries from being bitten by dogs. According to collected reports, setting dogs on people on the move occurs on both sides of the border barrier.

*[...] repeatedly pushed back and beaten by Polish services. Painful bite on left calf. Trench foot was only superficially treated as he did not report any issues. His condition began to deteriorate—cold, vomiting, delirium, and very shallow, rapid breathing, eventually leading to respiratory arrest. Chest compressions were initiated, and an ambulance was called, which arrived after 40 minutes. His breathing returned before the ambulance arrived. The paramedic declared he was fine and did not take him to the hospital. Everyone was given soup, tea and some basic clothes, a power bank. They all expressed the desire to seek international protection in Poland. All were pushed back from the border guard station the next day.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man from Syria, June 2024.

*[...] from [...], for several weeks in 'muharrama', after two pushbacks, beaten on both sides of the border. Belarusians did not allow him to retreat to Minsk. Two days ago, he successfully crossed into Poland. While sleeping on the Polish side, soldiers set a dog on him. He had festering wounds on his right forearm from these dog bites. A medic treated the wounds but stated that rabies vaccinations would be necessary. We argued that it was pointless to burden the healthcare system and call an ambulance when there was no imminent threat to life or likely need for hospitalisation. We suggested that we could take the man ourselves for the injections. One of the officers protested, claiming we were not allowed to transport "illegal migrants", but he was unable to provide a legal basis for this. I explained that I had previously transported individuals expressing a desire to seek international protection to Border Guard facilities or—if necessary—to a hospital, and I didn't understand why this would be against the law. In the end, the officers said they would take him to the Border Guard facility first and then call an ambulance from there. The medic stated that she would call the ambulance herself right away, as she wanted to be sure that the man would see a doctor. The third emergency dispatcher we spoke to categorically refused to send an ambulance, explaining that 'after recent events', it was too dangerous, and the ambulance would only respond to a Border Guard request. One of the officers, speaking on speakerphone, confirmed that they were on site. This ended any further conversation with the emergency services, who agreed that they could come, but only to the Border Guard facility. We both got frustrated and said that we would seriously put the man in the car and take him to the hospital ourselves because we really didn't see any valid reason not to. At that point, the officers contacted their headquarters again and said that they would immediately take him to the ER themselves. We followed them. They brought the man to the ER, but exactly 8 minutes later, they brought him back out, put him in the car, and drove off to Białowieża. It was impossible for the doctor to have even seen the patient in such a short time.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report. Quoted from an interview with a man, June 2024.

## Hospitals

Due to its location, the hospital in Hajnówka is the most frequented medical facility in the Podlaskie Voivodeship by people on the move. In June 2024, staff members from the Egala Association recorded the admission of 36 patients who arrived at the hospital after unregulated crossing of the Polish–Belarusian border. Among them were 20 women and 8 minors.

The most common reason for hospitalisation of people on the move was severe exhaustion, dehydration, and hypothermia. In June, as many as 15 individuals were hospitalised for these reasons, often accompanied by gastrointestinal problems caused by limited access to clean water and food. 11 patients were admitted to the hospital due to orthopedic injuries, including fractures (some open), bruises, sprains, and severe limb swelling. Some of these injuries were the result of falls from the border barrier. In some cases, not only the bones but also the surrounding soft tissues were damaged. These types of injuries are characterised by a longer healing process, swelling, and prolonged severe pain. Additionally, in June, three cases of pregnant women being admitted to the hospital were recorded.

One person, a 35-year-old woman from Iran, required hospitalisation after being shot with a pellet gun while on the eastern side of the barrier. According to her account, the shots were fired from the Polish side of the wall. The woman was transported to the hospital in Hajnówka by Polish Border Guard officers. The incident is currently under investigation<sup>19</sup>.

At least three people were admitted to hospitals with injuries which, according to their accounts, were the result of violence they experienced from Polish and Belarusian security forces. These injuries included chest trauma, broken limbs, internal injuries, and dog bite wounds. One particular case stands out: a man who, according to his account, experienced a deterioration in his health due to a beating by Polish security forces on the western side of the border barrier. After a brief hospitalisation, the man was pushed back to the eastern side of the wall. The case is under investigation by the prosecutor's office.

The man described above was not the only person who experienced a pushback from the hospital grounds in June. Humanitarian organisations operating at the border reported at least five such cases.

---

<sup>19</sup> R. Kim, More shootings on the border. 35-year-old Iranian woman shot in the eye, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/znow-strzaly-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej-35-letnia-iranka-postrzelona-w-oko/7nqcnqc> [Accessed on: 01.09.2024]

## Pushbacks and Violence<sup>20</sup>

### Pushbacks of migrants who expressed intention to seek asylum in the presence of witnesses (Assisted Asylum Request).

*The return of foreigners to the border line is undertaken by the Border Guard as a last resort and results from the requirements of protecting the security of the country and the Schengen member states. It is carried out only against those who have crossed the border in violation of the law, are in good health and do not express an intention to apply for international protection in Poland.*

Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Response to the Questions of Gazeta Prawna 25.06.24<sup>21</sup>

Between June 4th and July 4th this year Border Guards perpetrated 1689 instances of pushbacks from Poland to Belarus according to their official response to Grupa Granica inquiry.

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE				
	groups	individuals	minors (incl. UASC)	women (incl. pregnant)
<b>Reported pushbacks</b>	73	178	10 (2)	31 (-)
<b>Reported violence PL</b>	41	81	4 (1)	11 (-)
<b>Reported violence BY</b>	40	89	5 (3)	7 (-)

In the similar period between June 1st and June 30th 2024, 178 cases of individuals being pushed back were recorded by humanitarian organisations. This number includes 10 minors and 31 women. 66 of those were people who were pushed back

<sup>20</sup> The quotes used in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted with the people on the move, reports from NGOs working in the Polish-Belarusian border region, and excerpts from messages sent by people on the move to NGOs and their representatives. Quotes from text messages and reports that are not direct testimonies are described accordingly. Translations of quotes from in-depth interviews are from consecutive translations and, as such, are translators' interpretations. Translations of messages and reports were made to preserve the original tone. Dates, locations and details that could identify individuals have been removed from this paper to preserve the anonymity of our interviewees. All names have been changed.

<sup>21</sup> W. Szkwarek, Pushbacks in Polish. These are the plans of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 2024, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/9537986.pushbacki-po-polsku-takie-plany-ma-mswia.html> [Accessed on: 25.08.2024]

despite expressing the intention to seek asylum in the presence of their representatives<sup>22</sup> and witnesses through so-called Assisted Asylum Request<sup>23</sup>. Additional 5 were pushed back from hospitals – all of them have also expressed the intention to seek asylum. Thus, almost 40% of those pushed back in June who have reported pushbacks to humanitarian organisations, were asylum seekers who have expressed the intention to seek asylum in the presence of witnesses and were returned to Belarus regardless. We do not know how many of the remaining 107 individuals who reported pushbacks in June expressed the intention to seek asylum upon encountering the Border Guard, some of them, like quoted below Netsanet reported, that they were pushed back despite declaring the will to request asylum.

On every pushback, on every of the 6 pushbacks, I asked them to apply for international protection, and they say: “you want to go to Germany” and I say: “no, I want to stay in Poland, but they pushed me back.”<sup>24</sup>

*I told them in English, and I even tried to tell them in Russian because there was one person who speaks Russian and I also speak Russian, so I asked them to apply for asylum.*

*[...]*

*Yeah, the pregnant woman was pushed back like 8 times, and then she was showing her baby [stomach] and showing that she is pregnant and she begged them too much to be accepted for international protection [...]. But they refused and they pushed us back at the point [...] they push both of us back.*

Netsanet. Ethiopian woman who has experienced multiple pushbacks despite declaring the will to apply for asylum. Her last known pushback was in May 2024. Another woman from her group was taken to the hospital. Netsanet and her pregnant companion were pushed back.

---

<sup>22</sup> Representatives do not need to have a legal background. In these cases Power of Attorney was given to humanitarian workers in order for them to be able to represent and support foreigners during the administrative proceedings performed by the Border Guard.

<sup>23</sup> Assisted Asylum Request is a procedure adopted by organisations working in the area of the Poland-Belarus border. The objective is to reduce the risk of pushback of an asylum seeker and the process is based on the premise known as ‘protection through presence’, notion that humanitarian presence might deter the potential risk of abuse and, in this specific context, denial of access to asylum procedures. Migrants expressing the intention to seek asylum to humanitarian workers may choose to be accompanied by aid workers during their encounter with the Border Guard. Aid workers support the asylum seeker during the process by providing information about legal consequences of applying for asylum in Poland, informing Border Guard about a person's location and intention to request asylum, waiting with them for the arrival of the officers and accompanying them during the next stages. Every asylum seeker is also able to choose a representative to support them during the administrative procedures until the risk of pushback is averted. This is done by granting the power of attorney to a designated person.

<sup>24</sup> Transcription was unified. In the original transcription the interpreter interchangeably quotes Netsanet in first and third person.

Of the 71 migrants pushed back despite declaring the will to apply for asylum, several related that after submitting themselves to the Border Guard they were taken to the station where they were reportedly forced or manipulated into signing documents stating that they do not wish to seek asylum in Poland. Some of them reported that they were explicitly told by the Border Guards that their application is being processed and they will be taken to a “camp”. Others reported force and threats being used in order to make them sign the documents, with one person describing his fingers being broken as a result. More than 5 persons reported that before pushback they were held in detention for 2–5 days without any explanation provided.

*[...] we signed some papers with the border guards, they translated for us, and we signed a paper. And we were expecting to go to the camp and they even told us that. We were going to the camps, and then later they drive to the border and they say [something] like: “Go back to Belarus, you are pushed back.” That was it. That’s how it was the last time.*

Amadi. Pushed back in the beginning of June 2024. During the pushback he was reportedly forced to cross a waist-deep river and his documents and phone were thrown into the water. Full account of Amadi’s pushback can be found at the end of this chapter.

Along with the closure of border crossings accessible to pedestrians this reported practice indicates further obstruction of access to asylum procedures. Even though pushbacks have never stopped since their apparent legalisation in the Fall of 2021, in the last 1,5 years they were rarely perpetrated against people who had assistance during expressing their intention to seek asylum. The first instances of these incidents since the early stages of this crisis<sup>25</sup> were documented at the end of May 2024. The situation escalated quickly with over 66 cases reported in June and additional 6 cases of pushbacks reported from hospitals.

*On the document it read, that I had been offered to apply for international protection in Poland to the Border Guard, and that I refused international protection in Poland. They forced us to sign this document. When I refused to sign they beat us with batons. Metal batons.*

Adam, pushed back in mid-June. After the beating he was reportedly put in a car where he was made to sit in the back with others “cramped like animals”. He describes the place of

---

<sup>25</sup> Similar instances of reported pushbacks of persons who expressed intention to seek asylum in the presence of witnesses or/and from hospitals were occurring quite frequently according to reports from the period of August 2021–April/May 2022.

pushback as swamps. Full account of Adam's pushback can be found at the end of this chapter.

The interviewees also reported:

- not being able to contact their chosen representatives or legal organisations;
- destruction of property during the pushback;
- additional violence e.g. beatings suffered during the pushback;
- being forced to sign the documents they did not understand or did not have a chance to read;
- being forced to sign documents they understood but did not want to sign;
- being pushed back in unsafe areas e.g. swamps, rivers.

*Hello, I was saying that I am the gentleman you brought to the border police on Thursday morning. They sent me back to the Belarusian forest today, saying that I do not have access to apply for protection in Poland. That the passport in the photo is invalid, I even asked to contact you and call a lawyer, they did not allow me access to the phone. So I don't know if I happen to leave again, what could I do? If you know what I can do, so that I can have international protection in Poland, tell me. I spent a day in their office from Wednesday to Thursday before taking me back to the forest. They hit us and destroy the phones.*

A message to a humanitarian organisation. Jean, pushed back in the beginning of June after requesting asylum in the presence of witnesses.

*I submitted<sup>26</sup> an asylum application with three of my friends. The border guards terrorised and intimidated us and forced us to sign papers without reading them. Then they returned us to the forest and threw our phones, money, and all our travel papers into the water.*

*I don't know where they are now. They beat us and I am now sick from the beatings.*

*They practised severe violence on us. And they threw us into the swamps. One person couldn't walk. I don't know what happened to him. He didn't have a phone or anything, and he was also sick because of the beating.*

---

<sup>26</sup> Kamal was probably referring to an attempt to apply for international protection.

Messages from Kamal, pushed back in June after requesting asylum in the presence of witnesses.

*The organisation take my father yesterday and recorded video of him when he was saying, "I want asylum in Poland" and also he make signature. But then the border guard take him to police<sup>27</sup>. They made him sign against his will on paper. They sent him back to the Belarusian forest.*

A message from Fatima, who wanted to report her over 60-years old father missing. He was pushed back at the beginning of June after assisted asylum request. From his representatives we learnt that the man reportedly suffered from severe medical condition.

Reports of Border Guard allegedly manipulating people on the move or forcing them into signing papers stating that they do not wish to apply for asylum are also coming from different humanitarian organisations present in the field. In some cases Border Guard informed the humanitarian workers, who had been granted the power of attorney by migrants, that the people they represented gave up their right to apply for asylum in Poland upon receiving the information that this would mean that they would have to remain in Poland. Aid workers stress that all people they represent are informed about the consequences and practical aspects of applying for asylum in Poland before they are handed over to the Border Guard. The information is provided in a native language or another language that is understood by the person. The whole process is based on the informed decision of the person on the move. Of 71 people assisted in submitting their asylum request, 12 individuals were assisted twice over the course of June. This means that they had expressed the intention to seek asylum, then were pushed back to Belarus by the Polish Border Guard and later came back and requested assistance in submitting an asylum request once again.

Aside from these inconsistencies, aid workers have also reported cases of interpreters working for Border Guard reportedly misleading people into signing documents through providing incorrect translation of the documents.

### **Violence and humiliation during pushbacks**

People on the move who reported violence suffered during pushbacks on the Poland-Belarus border often mentioned instances of pepper spray use and beatings. In June alone 81 people related experiences of violence perpetrated by Polish uniformed services while 89 people talked about violence by the Belarussian forces.

---

<sup>27</sup> Most probably Fatima is referring to the Border Guard station.



*I tried more than five times. Every time they arrested me, they pepper-sprayed me in my eyes, and the last two times before crossing into Poland, they beat me violently and let the dog get close to my face.*

A message from Yassir, who reports suffering multiple pushbacks

Organisations present in the field also report accounts of violence related to them by people on the move during humanitarian interventions:

*[He spent] six months in Belarus and then in Moscow. According to his words he was beaten by the Polish Border Guard and pushed into a swamp. [...] Four pushbacks, he was at the [Border Guard] station and they pushed him back from there: severely beaten, both arms bruised, pain in his lower abdomen after drinking swamp water [...] high fever, confusion, panic attack.*

Excerpt from a field intervention report. Recalled conversation with a man met in June 2024.

Some reports related accounts of particularly degrading and humiliating behaviour towards migrants by the uniformed services on Polish territory. Those include mocking, degrading speech, and elaborated humiliation such as:

- painting on people's faces;
- ordering migrants to express gratitude for received beatings;
- ordering migrants to shout 'white power';
- beating migrants with stinging nettle bundles after stripping them naked.

*They talked about beatings by Belarusian services, about dog attacks (two showed bite wounds), about taking and/or destroying phones by Polish services. They recalled how Belarusians burn people's things and take the food and give it to their dogs. One of them said that Polish services caught a group [of migrants] on the Polish side, were taking smiling selfies and videos with their phones and ordered them to shout 'white power'.*

Excerpt from a field intervention. Recalled conversation with a group of men from Ethiopia and Eritrea met in June 2024.

*We met four people in the forest. Three men from Yemen and one from Syria. Second day in Poland. All experienced pushbacks, three or four each, [They said that] during pushbacks they experienced violence from Polish uniformed services. They said that the army didn't treat them like humans. That they were painting cat or dog whiskers on their faces and pressed their faces to the ground. They also reported that during the beatings Polish services ordered them to thank them. They*

*[reportedly] broke their phones, stripped to the underwear and beat them with nettle bundles.*

Excerpt from the field report. Recalled conversation with a group of men from Yemen and Syria met in June 2024.

They ran to us, as soon as they arrived. We were lying on the ground, facing the ground. They ran towards you straight away as soon as they saw us. The first thing was, they spray pepper on your face so you can't see anything, right!

*And they start hitting. They hit you on the ribs, on your stomach, like a strong beating, not that. Of course with insults, like he says for example "Suka", or he tells you, "Kurwa", you know! And they start hitting you.. They beat you, they hit, hit, hit, hit, they beat you until you scream louder like you know, until they see you seriously in pain, they leave you.. and when he first arrived, I was telling him, I told him, I told him, "please I am from Syria and I have international protection". He gave me a look and told me, like point out to me that I don't understand you. I tell him, "You speak English", he says, "no no no". Like, they apparently only know the word sit down.*

*The Yemeni was with me and he couldn't walk. we were carrying him. They started trampling on his leg, you know. The leg that is hurting him, they start trampling on it.*

Saleh, a Syrian man pushed back at the end of May 2024 after expressing his intention to seek asylum in Poland.

## Pushback Testimonies

***When I refused to sign they beat us with batons. Metal<sup>28</sup> batons.***

***Adam's Pushback. June 2024.***

Adam, Syrian, crossed the border with two other men from [...] and a woman from [...].

*Our condition was very bad. I had a broken<sup>29</sup> leg and my friend's heart stopped. They called an ambulance for him.*

One of Adam's companions contacted a humanitarian organisation that sent a humanitarian field team. Adam and his friend received first aid and after that called the emergency line for the ambulance. The group wanted to apply for asylum in Poland.

*When [people from] the organisation came my friend was in a very bad state. He was in a bad state because of drinking contaminated water from the swamps. His heart stopped several times. The lady from the organisation [...] called an ambulance and gave him [unclear] medical. Then the border guards arrived.*

At the Border Guard station where the group was taken the officers have reportedly coerced Adam and his companions to force documents stating that they do not wish to apply for international protection in Poland. Towards at least two of them – Adam and the person requiring medical assistance, the officers have reportedly used physical violence.

*On the document it read, that I had been offered to apply for international protection in Poland to the Border Guard, and that I refused international protection in Poland. They forced us to sign this document. When I refused to sign they beat us with batons. Metal batons.*

As he further relates the same thing happened to the man suffering from some health issues:

*Same thing. When he refused they beat him and took to the forest.*

After they signed the document the men were taken back to the border line in a vehicle.

---

<sup>28</sup> Adam might be referring to an expandable baton which is part of Border Guard standard equipment. E. Świtłała, Tactics and techniques of using a telescopic service baton, 2024, <https://wssg.strazgraniczna.pl/wss/aktualnosci/57001.Taktyka-i-techniki-poslugiwania-sie-palka-sluzkowa-teleskopowa.html> [Accessed on: 25.08.2024]

<sup>29</sup> The word broken is often used to describe any painful injury. Adam did not receive medical attention; we do not know the exact nature of his injury.

*They put us behind the seats, cramped like animals. They left us at the point far from where we crossed [the border]. We found ourselves in swamps [unclear]. Our condition was very bad.*

Adam does not know what happened to the woman who travelled with them initially, because after the events at the border post she was put in another vehicle.

### **"Get into the water!". Amadi's pushback. June 2024<sup>30</sup>**

Amadi crossed the Belarus–Poland border in a group of three men, all from Ethiopia at border post [...]. After crossing, they moved about five to six kilometers from the border line to a place where they found telephone coverage and were able to call one of the organizations providing legal and humanitarian assistance in the area with the intention of applying for international protection in Poland.

Upon arrival, the aid workers notified the Border Guard of the men's whereabouts. Amadi, along with the others, was then to be transported to a Border Guard outpost, located, in his estimation, four or five kilometers from Hajnówka. Amadi remembers the inscriptions on the guards' uniforms.

*I'm sure it was border guards because there is, it's written on their shirt. On their clothes. One in their language and one in English.*

Amadi reports that he and his companions were told by guards that they would be transported to the 'camp'<sup>31</sup> after signing documents at the facility. The documents were translated into many languages and Amadi says that he understood their content.

*[...] we signed some papers with the border guards, they translated for us, and we signed a paper. And we were expecting to go to the camp and they even told us that. We were going to the camps, and then later they drive to the border and they say [something] like: "Go back to Belarus, you are pushed back." That was it. That's how it was the last time.*

*[...]*

*I don't remember it like word by word of everything that's written there, but the content of it is like "I am seeking asylum, I want to live under Poland's government and I want to apply for asylum in Poland, but I didn't come here to the country legally and nobody's forcing me to provide, legal identification or anything." That's the content of what's written, but I don't remember every word that was written there.*

---

<sup>30</sup> All quotations are from the consecutive translation.

<sup>31</sup> Commonly used to describe to various types of facilities for asylum applicants and refugees.

Amadi reportedly spent four nights at the facility. He describes the place where he was held as an underground cell-like room where many other people<sup>32</sup> were already detained. He remembered the place as being devoid of mattresses and beds, there were only cardboard boxes and plastic. The room had no direct access to a toilet. Amadi recalls that he and the others – he doesn't specify whether this refers to the group he crossed the border with or everyone – were responsible for keeping the room clean.

*[..] it [the room] is similar to a prison, because it was in the underground. And even to go to the toilet you have to ask their [border guards] permission and there are [?] restrictions and limits, and there are a lot of also refugees. So, a lot of people in there. It's like a prison. [...] And there is no bed or a mattress to sleep in. Like you're [inaudible] to sleep in plastic and some cartons to sleep on. And it's not a comfortable place and there were a lot of people cramped up in a room, in one room, and there's not a lot of sunlight because it's underground, and even to go to the toilet, the toilet is near their office. So it was not a good place or a comfortable place to be in.*

Amadi describes that the facility had three rooms where migrants were held, two designated for men and one for women. According to the interviewee, there may have been as many as 120 people on the move at the facility, but he stresses that he is guessing, as he only stayed in one of the rooms. He points out that he does not know why he spent so much time there, as he did not get any information regarding his situation from the officers.

*They [border guards] don't have any conversations with them. They don't talk to them or anything.*

The interpreter's statement during the interview, addresses the interviewer directly.

*Where they are, they tag a number on our hand and then they call us based on that number to take us to a different place, we don't know, they're not talking to us. Based on that number they say [something] like this person now stand up and you should leave, and sometimes they'll call you and they just say sit there and wait here. So they don't know why, they don't tell them why they're there or why they're being kept there.*

On the fifth day of his stay at the post [...] <sup>33</sup>, Amadi and nine others were transported to the border barrier by the Border Guard. According to him, a journey to the border line took about fifteen minutes. As he describes, him, and others

---

<sup>32</sup> Amadi speaks of 40–50 people, he does not specify whether they were there at one time or whether they changed over the four nights he spent there.

<sup>33</sup> Date removed from the report for anonymisation.

thought until the last moment that they had applied for international protection and that they were being taken to the 'camps'.

*[...], the fifth night, at the fifth day that they [border guards] sent them to Belarus,. They even say: "Say bye to the people who help you." they say "You'll go to camp." and "You're accepted". And they tell them all these things and then they drive to some place and it was a forest, and they reach a fence. When they turn around and ask them "What's wrong?" "Why are we near the fence?" and they thought it was a different road or something. And they [border guards] said like "This is Belarus, you have to go back" and they pushed them back and they throw [explained later] them in a river. River reaches around their stomach, and then they pushed them there with all their stuff and belongings. And they closed the door, they closed the fence and they just left them there.*

*[...]*

*they point their guns towards them and say:, "Get into the water", because, they don't want to be beaten, they jump and get into the water and he [border guard] throw their stuff and their belongings and their phones into the water.*

Amadi believes that the Border Guards deliberately chose the location where they carried out the deportation, exposing people on the way to getting wet and cold, with the aim of discouraging further attempts to cross the border.

*[...] they [border guards] were purposefully pushing to the water, they enjoy their suffering and for you to quit and stuff, so they do that on purpose. And we don't go to the Belarusian side because the Belarusians, if they caught you they beat you up and you know, abuse you and stuff. So we just follow the path on the water like to go to a safe destination. But yeah, they do that on purpose, to push people on the water. They could have not pushed people to the water but they choose to push them.*

After the pushback, Amadi was beaten by Belarusian officers. He stresses that people on the move experience cruel violence – regardless of their gender, age and health condition – when staying in the border zone on Belarusian territory.

*I was beaten a lot by the Belarusian soldiers. And there was no one not beaten by them.[...]*

*Yeah, he said that everybody's beaten by the Belarusians, everyone who stayed, who tried to cross the border he's beaten by the Belarusian soldiers. And, you know, even some people are bitten by a dog in a very*

*vulnerable place, in your private parts or in your [unclear]. And he said he even has a photo of himself, like he was really beaten and everybody is abused by the Belarusians. He said the Belarusians are the worst.*

During the interview, Amadi also mentions previous pushbacks from Poland to Belarus and the violence he experienced during them. At a Border Guard post during one of his previous times in Poland [location and date unknown], he was reportedly forced to sign documents he did not understand and give his fingerprints. As a result of the violence used to force these actions he suffered a broken hand. As he relates, the health consequences accompany him to this day.

*[...] they [border guards] told him "come here to sign the paper", it was at the border guard station, "come inside to this paper" and he said "No". And they say [something] like "Give your fingerprints" and they say "no", and he said "no". And then after a lot of altercation, he said there were a lot of police, I mean border guard officers there. And they beat him up and they break his hand and they make him give fingerprints by force.*

*[...] they say "you are illegal, now sign here and there". "Unless it's translated, and something that I understand, I cannot sign any paper". And then they're all laughing and said "Oh, you're not going to sign? Okay." And then they used force and then they were ten people and more than ten people. And then they, one hold him on his neck, one holds his legs, and the other one breaks his fingers and get the fingerprints and make him sign.<sup>34</sup>*

***Because they mask their face, all their faces was covered.  
I cannot see their faces. Andre's Pushback. June 2024.***

Andre at the time of the interview had experienced one pushback. He does not remember the exact date but it was the beginning of June. He crossed the border in company of 12 men of undefined nationality.

*There we cross and we go inside Poland. So in Poland, the soldiers, they catch me and others. I don't know how many people they catch, because they return me. I didn't see everybody, but me and my friends, and almost 6 people was arrested.*

Andre was stopped by a uniformed person, described by him as a "soldier," about one kilometer from the border line. The uniformed man that stopped him was said

---

<sup>34</sup> Transcripts of all quotations as translated by the interpreter.

to have called three more masked officers by telephone. Together with Andre, a total of six people were caught.

- *Do you know who caught you [...]?*
- *No, I don't know them. Because they mask their face, all their faces was covered. I cannot see their faces.*
- *Do you know what they were wearing? If it's a military costume, or like.*
- *Yes, yes it was military. [...] The military costume they was wearing. Those military who stand on the borders, those people do that.*

The officers reportedly first took Andre's phone from him, and then began beating him. According to the account, the moment of apprehension, as well as the entire intervention of the uniformed men, was accompanied by brutal violence, including beating, kicking, insulting and destroying property.

*They beat me seriously, they take my phone from me, they spoil it in front of me. They was kicking me, and insulting me. I explain to them: "I'm not a criminal, I'm an immigrant. I'm from country because of war is there, I cannot stay there. I want to go to Poland, and seek for asylum. You don't need to treat me like I'm a criminal. I'm not a criminal. I'm trying to save my life, that's why I take this risk. To risk my life, just to come here. You need to have thinking on me." But they was not understanding me, [...] they was kicking me, they was beating me anyhow.*

Andre reports that officers used their hands, heavy military footwear, as well as gun butts to beat him and others.

- *They was using their legs and their hands, everything. My friend, one of soldier, take his gun and beat my friend with this [...]. He beat my friend with that one. I was very scared that they are coming to kill us. It was so brutal to us. It was so brutal, more of four of them was. I was laying down, he was kicking me, all of them, with their security shoes. [...]*
- *Four of them were kicking you?*
- *Yes. Four of them do that together. All of them was kicking me. This one is kicking here, another is kicking there, another one is slapping my face.*

In addition to the phone, Andre also lost his watch, which, as he related to the interviewer, was taken and destroyed by soldiers.



*They take my phone, they spoil it. After they give it to me, they spoil my screen, everything. They give it back to me. My watch, I was having good watch on my hand, they spoiled that one.*

At the time of crossing the border, Andre was already injured [three photos of the injury were attached to the interview, with a congested, blackened wound visible on the sole and big toe of his left foot], which significantly impeded his movements. As he reports, he had to drag his left leg and was unable to lean on it. A friend crossing the border with him was also injured – suffering from a dog bite. According to Andre’s account, the officers carrying out the arrest and pushback have consistently ignored information about his poor health condition and need for medical attention.

*Beat me seriously, and my friend also, they beat my friend. [...] And I was wounded, I was having very serious wound on my feet. I show them that, but they don't care. One man, my friend was sitting down, he was suffering after man push the dog to my friend, and bite my friends leg. So then they bring all to the, how to call it. They bring back to the border again, and they threw us out.*

Andre points out that he has asked officers to call for medical assistance several times, including when he was pushed back to Belarus. At the time of the interview, he is still suffering from untreated injuries to his foot.

*I can't go to the hospital in Belarus, and till now I have that injury here, because I can't have good treatment till now. And then they threw me out. I talked to one soldier, I told him that: "Please, try to call Red Cross for me. I'm so [inaudible], my friend here is dog bitten, and me also. My leg, I have serious wound here. Call Red Cross so they can give us treatment". He didn't do it, he don't care. It was just like that, and [I] was in bush there for two weeks. No food, no nothing. [...]*

*So I was waiting, we waiting there, after I call him back, I said "Man, please help me. Try to call red cross". He said: "No, he already called." He had authorization to call for Red Cross only one time. Not second time, not two times.*

According to the account, the whole intervention took about 30 minutes. Neither Andre nor his traveling companions were taken to the border guard facility and they were not presented with any documents to sign. After the four officers led him and the others on their way to the border line, they met two more soldiers, who also beat the apprehended.

Andre and the others were pushed back to Belarus at the border post [...] Once in Belarus, he and his friend waited for about two or three hours, and then went in search of Belarusian soldiers, as they were losing their strength and felt very weak.

The Belarusian officer that they encountered reportedly pointed a gun at the two men who had just experienced pushback. He then called for backup. Soon after that, the respondent cites, more Belarusian officers, also described as "soldiers" arrived, and they transported him and his friend to the camp, which held many people on the move. Andre was then questioned.

*We explained to them, what happened to us. They give us a lot of food and water. We eat food and drink water there. After, they, belarusian soldiers, ask me: "What do you want? Do you want to continue, or you want... What do you want?" and then I explained to them. I said: "No I cannot. I have serious wound in my leg. My friend also, dog bitted him. Right now, we cannot go. We want to go to Mińsk. We need your help. If you can help us go to Mińsk, so that we can go to hospital".*

Andre describes that he was then taken to an even larger camp and interrogated again. Because his phone was destroyed he was given permission by Belarusian officials to return to Minsk. Him and his friend were transported to a town where they managed to order a taxi to Minsk.

He stresses that when he encountered Polish forces, he unequivocally declared his will to apply for international protection in Poland, speaking in English. His declarations and requests were ignored.

*[...] is a war country. I've tried so hard to run from there, my younger brother has been killed there, by the war. My mom is killed by war. I'm living alone, I have nobody.*

*[...]*

*I explained to them: "Me, I'm from war country, I cannot go there. I'm saving my life. I want to ask asylum here in Poland. Please, help us. There was any place we can seek asylum". But they don't listen to us.*

## Definitions

**Total requests** – The total number of reported groups/persons on the move, located in Poland, Belarus, Lithuania or Latvia. It does not consider 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** – number of groups that consist of 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.

**Individuals** – number of 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 *sistema*.

**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. Including support at the hospital.

**Legal aid** – support in procedures relating to the prevention of pushbacks and deportation and enabling the submission of an application for international protection. Including support at the hospital.

**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.

**Aid in hospital** – material and/ or legal aid

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

**Reported violence PL** – 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 BY** – 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 deceased** – number of persons on the move who died from August 2021 on the Polish side of the Polish–Belarusian border and those cases from the Belarusian side of which we are aware. 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"><li>- minors</li><li>- unaccompanied minors</li><li>- persons over 45 years of age</li><li>- senior citizens aged 60 and over</li></ul>
Medical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- pregnancy</li><li>- chronic illness</li><li>- disability</li></ul>
Protection Needs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- victims of sexual violence</li><li>- victims or persons subjected to gender-based violence</li><li>- victims of torture</li><li>- victims of human trafficking</li></ul>

\* virtually impossible to identify at this stage