

NOVEMBER 2024

Report from the Poland–Belarus border



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Since 2021, we have been collecting reliable information regarding the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. Your support will allow us to continue this work.

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

Definitions

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

We are supported by:



Demographics, trends and requests

In November, 194 requests for assistance were recorded from both sides of the barrier on the Polish–Belarusian border; these individuals traveled in 79 groups.

REQUESTS NOVEMBER 2024				
	groups	individuals	minors (incl. UASC)	women (incl. pregnant)
Total	79	194	26 (19)	24 (0)
incl. in Poland	57	140	16(16)	8 (–)
incl. from Muharrama	9	21	7 (3)	6 (0)



Photo from the archives of the Egala Association

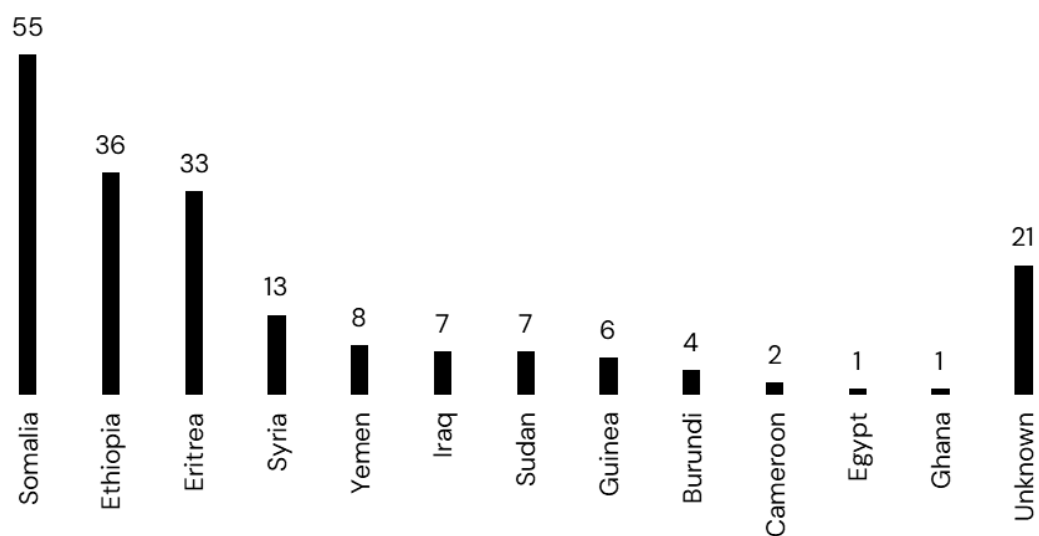


Fig. 1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in November 2024

Delivered assistance

In November, 37 field interventions were successfully conducted, providing material support to 79 individuals traveling in 36 groups. Among them were six women and eleven minors. Similar to previous months, individuals contacting from Polish territory most frequently requested support in the form of food, water, clothing, and shoes. There were also occasional requests for functioning mobile phones.

DELIVERED ASSISTANCE NOVEMBER 2024

	groups	individuals	minors	women
Total	36	79	11	6
Material aid	36	79	6	6
Legal aid	28	66	6	6
Medical aid	3	3	1	0
First aid	8	8	0	0
Hospital assistance	5	5	0	3
Number of successful interventions		37		



Hospital

In November 2024, the staff of the Egala Association recorded the admission of 5 patients who arrived to hospitals after irregularly crossing the Polish–Belarusian border, including 3 women. As in previous months, the most common reasons for hospitalization of individuals on the move were severe exhaustion, dehydration, and hypothermia.



Pushbacks and Violence

From 1 to 30 November, humanitarian organisations received reports of pushbacks involving 56 persons. This data was obtained during encounters in the forest, in interviews and through online communicators. Among these persons were seven children and ten women.

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE NOVEMBER 2024				
	groups	individuals	minors (incl. UASC)	women (incl. pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	24	56	7 (0)	10 (0)
Reported violence PL	7	11	1(1)	2 (0)
Reported violence BY	5	9	0(0)	1 (0)



Photo from the archives of the Egala Association

Eight individuals were pushed back despite expressing their intention to apply for international protection to border guard officers in the presence of witnesses and legal representatives¹, during the so-called request for international protection with assistance².

In November 2024, nine persons, including one woman, reported experiencing violence perpetrated by Belarusian services. Migrants reported beatings, destruction of property, restriction or forced movement.

Violence perpetrated by Polish services was reported by eleven persons, including one child (unaccompanied minor) and two women. As migrants are usually not able to recognise the formations operating in the Polish-Belarusian border area, the perpetrators could have been officers of the Border Guard, the Polish Army or the Territorial Defence Forces.

¹ Legal representatives do not need to have a legal education. In the context of humanitarian interventions, powers of attorney are most often granted to humanitarian organization workers. This enables them to represent and support the grantors during administrative procedures conducted by the Border Guard.

² The Assisted Asylum Request is an operational procedure adopted by non-governmental organizations operating along the Polish-Belarusian border. Its purpose is to reduce the risk of pushback for individuals seeking international protection. This process is based on the principle known as "protection through presence," according to which the presence of humanitarian organizations can mitigate the potential risk of abuses, specifically the denial of access to asylum procedures in this context. Migrants expressing their intention to apply for protection to humanitarian workers can choose to be accompanied during their meeting with border guard officers. Aid organization staff support individuals seeking refugee status throughout this process by providing information on the legal consequences of applying for refugee status in Poland, informing the Border Guard of their intention to seek international protection, waiting with migrants for the arrival of officers, documenting their expressed intention to submit an application, and accompanying them in subsequent stages of the procedure. Every individual wishing to apply for international protection also has the option to select a legal representative who will support them throughout the administrative procedure until the risk of pushback is eliminated. This is achieved by granting power of attorney to the designated individual.

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">- minors- unaccompanied minors- persons over 45 years of age- senior citizens aged 60 and over
Medical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- pregnancy- chronic illness- disability
Protection Needs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- victims of sexual violence- victims or persons subjected to gender-based violence- victims of torture- victims of human trafficking

* virtually impossible to identify at this stage