

CHILDREN AT THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

JANUARY – SEPTEMBER 2025

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Introduction

The following report is based on operational data and intervention notes. We would like to thank all humanitarian organisations and individuals working along the Polish–Belarusian border for sharing with us the reports from their interventions. Our sources include organisations, informal initiatives, and private individuals. Special thanks are due to all people on the move who decided to share their experiences with us.

The interventions described here, as well as the support provided to people on the move, take place in the Podlaskie and Lublin voivodeships. People staying in Belarus receive information about the legal situation and about access to international protection procedures in Poland and in Belarus. All names used in this report have been changed. The report was prepared as part of a project carried out in cooperation with Save the Children Poland.

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

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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.

Children on the Polish–Belarusian border from the beginning of the crisis until September 2025

In August 2021, due to geopolitical factors, the importance of the eastern migration route across the Polish–Belarusian border increased significantly. The Lukashenko regime in Belarus used this route for its own political purposes. From the outset, the Polish authorities responded by constructing successive physical and legal barriers targeting people seeking protection, as well as by criminalising both migration itself and acts of solidarity with migrating persons.

The physical form of the deterrence system at the border — a 5.5-metre-high wall and the use of razor wire (concertina) both at the top and at the base of the primary border fence — appears to be designed to deliberately injure and slow down people attempting to cross the barriers. The systematic denial of access to Polish territory through strengthened border fortifications and the closure of crossing points, as well as the gradual — and, since March 2025,¹ almost complete — restriction of access to international protection, have created a situation in which men, women, and children are trapped in dense, primeval forests, exposed to violence from both Polish and Belarusian services and subjected to repeated pushbacks.

Thus, the Polish–Belarusian border quickly became a particularly dangerous trap for those most at risk. Since early September 2021, non-governmental organisations, collectives, and activists have been gathering information on children and adolescents travelling across the Polish–Belarusian border. Initially, the primary purpose of collecting these data was to assess the psychophysical condition and the most urgent needs of the individuals concerned, in order to plan operational activities, which also required basic information about demographics and vulnerable groups. Over time, the scope of collected data was expanded to more precisely monitor, document, and disseminate information about the situation of children — including unaccompanied children — on the border. The data presented here therefore do not correspond to the statistics published by the Polish authorities or the Border Guard, as they come exclusively from people who requested humanitarian assistance.

From autumn 2021 to the end of September 2025, we recorded 1,782 requests for support from minors. In 2021 and 2022, children accounted for almost 7% of all requests. During this period, we did not yet collect information on whether they were travelling alone or with caregivers. In 2023, the share of children in the total number of requests was the lowest — only about 3.5% of all support requests came from individuals under the age of 18.² In total, we documented the presence of 414 children at the border.

¹ At the time this publication went to print, the territorial suspension of the right to protection at the Polish–Belarusian border remained in force.

² We Are Monitoring, Pepper spray in a bottle of water, p. 22–23, August 2024, <https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Pepper-spray-in-a-bottle-of-water-2023.pdf>

Among them were at least 139 who were travelling unaccompanied.³ In 2024, requests from children – similar to 2021 and 2022 – accounted for more than 8% of all registered cases. At least 331 out of 469 children (70.5%) were travelling without a caregiver.⁴ From January to September 2025, we recorded requests from 227 minors, of whom 191 (84%) were travelling unaccompanied.

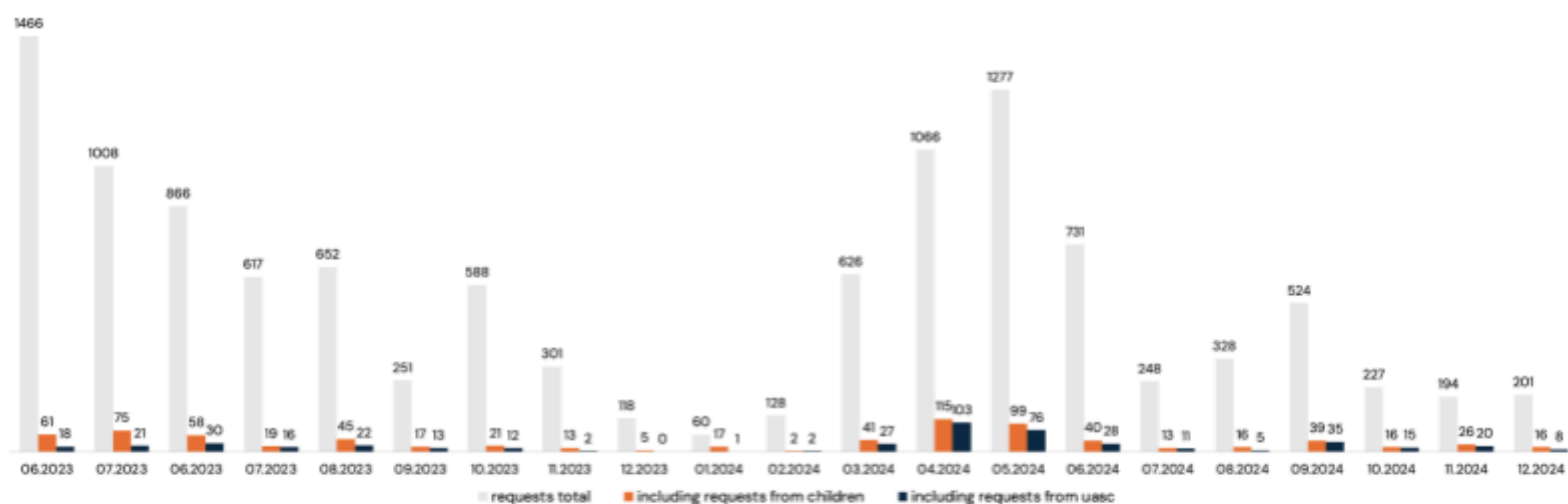


Fig. 1. Total number of people, including children and unaccompanied children, from April 2023 to December 2024.

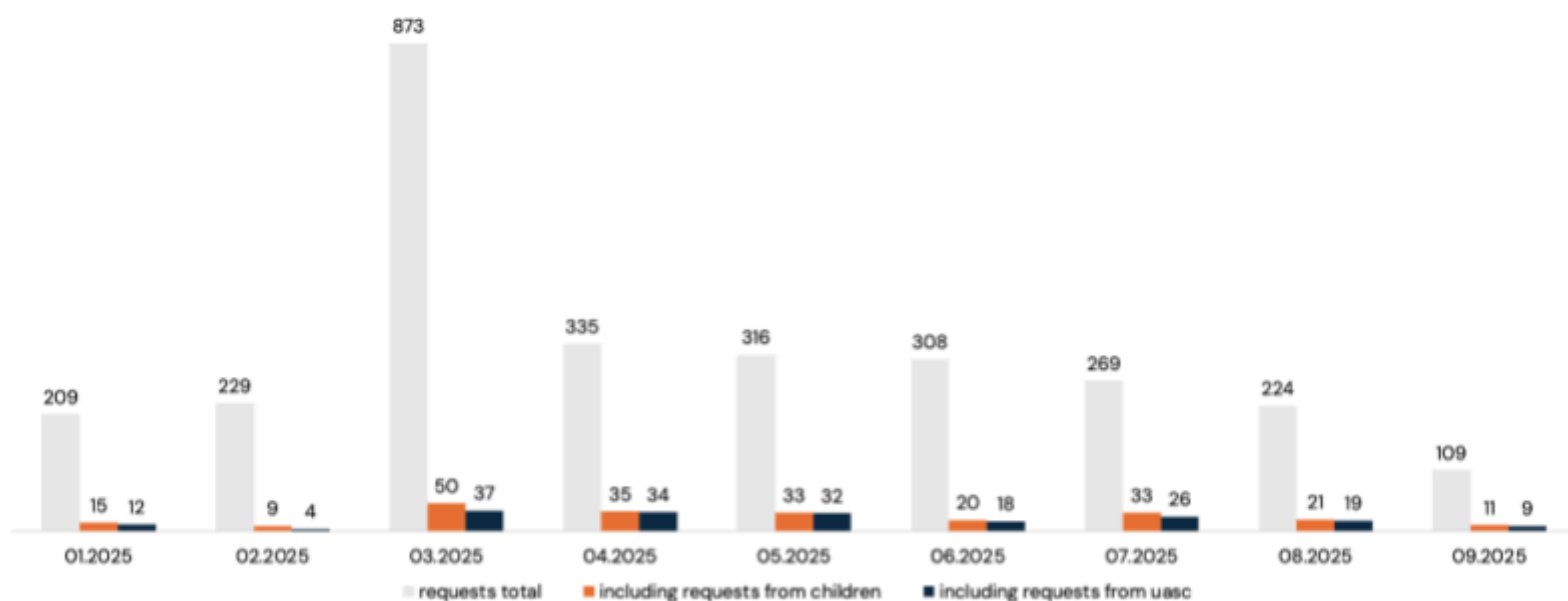


Fig. 2. Total number of people, including children and unaccompanied children, from January to September 2025.

³ Data on the presence of caregivers have been analysed only since 20 April 2023, which means we cannot estimate what percentage of all children travelled without a caregiver. If we consider only the period from 20 April 2023 to 31 December 2023, the figure is almost 43%: 314 children, including 134 travelling without a caregiver.

⁴ We Are Monitoring, A summary of the year 2024 at the Polish–Belarusian border, March 2025, <https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WAM-summary-2024.pdf>

Year 2025 – Demographics of children and adolescents at the border

In the period from January to the end of September 2025, we recorded a total of 2,872 requests for support. Of these, 227 (almost 8%) came from minors, and as many as 191 of them (over 84%) were travelling without a legal guardian. Girls accounted for almost 14% of all minors – there were 31 of them, 22 of whom were travelling unaccompanied.



Fig. 3. Demographics of persons requesting support from January to September 2025.

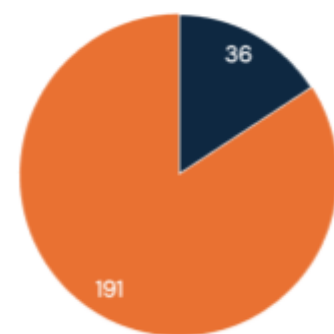


Fig. 4. Children and unaccompanied children on the Polish-Belarusian border from January to September 2025.

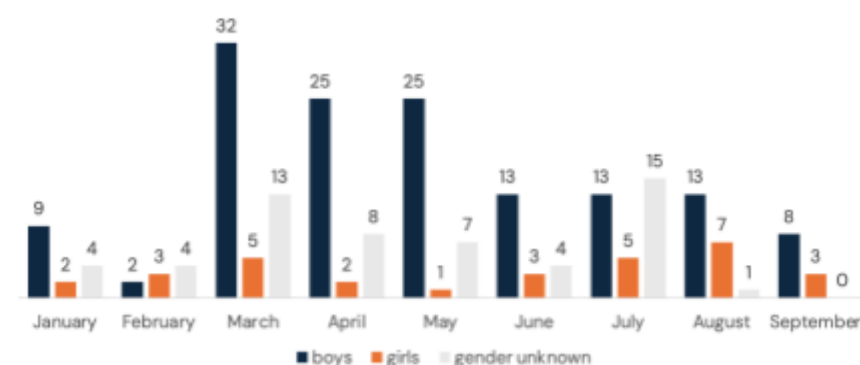


Fig. 5. Demographics of children requesting support from January to September 2025.

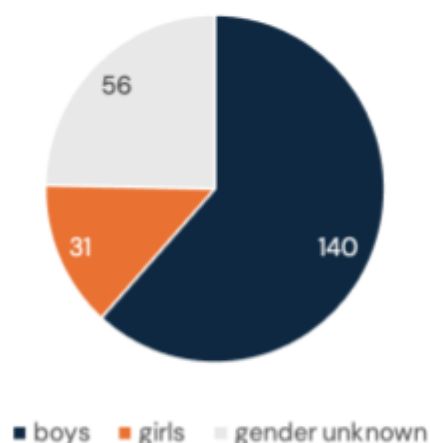


Fig. 6. Demographics of children requesting support from January to September 2025.

The largest group — 70 minors — came from Somalia. During this period, 33 children from Afghanistan, 26 from Eritrea, 16 from Ethiopia, and eight from Iraq also sought support. These figures largely correspond to the countries of origin of the adults requesting assistance. The country of origin of 41 minors is unknown. This mainly concerns individuals contacting us from within Belarus. Because organisations and collectives operating in Poland are unable to provide them with any form of support at this stage, demographic data about these individuals are not actively collected, and information about the country of origin appears only when the person on the move voluntarily includes it in their request. Other cases in which the country of origin is unknown typically involve individuals whom teams were unable to reach during field interventions.

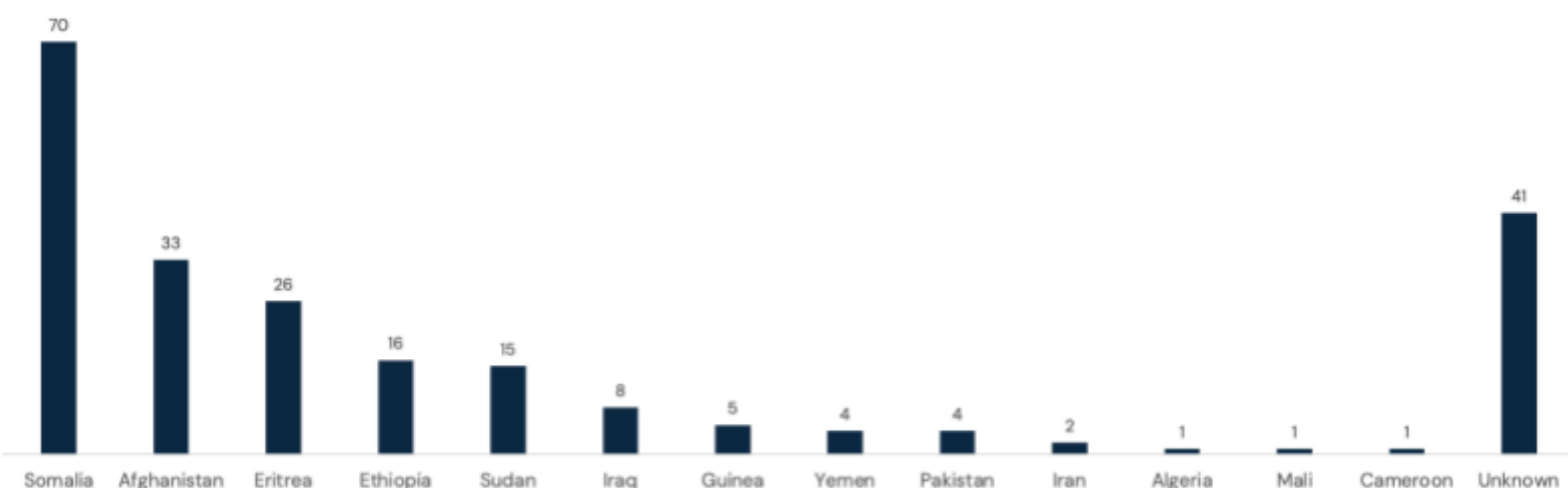


Fig. 7. Countries of origin of children who requested support from January to September 2025.



Fig. 8. Countries of origin of children who requested support from January to September 2025, disaggregated by gender.

By the end of September 2025, we had recorded requests from 168 children staying in Belarus or in the strip of land between the barrier located on Polish territory and the fortifications on the Belarusian side. Thus, individuals under the age of 18 accounted for more than 9% of all those contacting us from the eastern side of the fence.⁵ Of these, 135 were travelling without a caregiver. Humanitarian organisations registered requests from 66 minors located deeper inside Poland, on the western side of the border fortifications — this represents slightly more than 6% of all requests originating from within Poland. Only six of them were travelling with caregivers.

Threats to children in Belarus and in the *muharrama*

Interviews conducted with both adults and minors on the move, as well as reports from individuals and organisations working in the borderland, show that the continuously expanded border barrier and the presence of security forces significantly delay and hinder crossing attempts.⁶ In addition, the barrier functions as an instrument of violence, deliberately exposing people to serious injuries such as razor-wire cuts, fractures, and contusions. During pushbacks, people — regardless of age or gender — are forcibly returned to the Belarusian side, into the *muharrama*, where they often spend several to even dozens of days, frequently unable to move freely back to the Belarusian towns from which they set out. According to consistent accounts, Belarusian security services control the border zone, often preventing people on the move from withdrawing and forcing them to make repeated attempts to cross the Polish barrier, regardless of their age or physical condition. In the *muharrama* zone, people on the move do not have free access to drinking water — according to their accounts, once their own supplies run out, they rely on water from rivers, lakes, or puddles, or on water provided or sold at inflated prices by Belarusian or Polish forces. The situation is similar with regard to food, shelter, and medical care. Attempts to leave the area often result in experiencing violence from Belarusian officers or in having to pay for permission to return to a town — most commonly Minsk.

⁵ We emphasise that the figures we present do not allow us to estimate, even approximately, the actual number of people staying in the zone between the barriers during a given period. We publish them because they make it possible to identify upward and downward trends and to record moments of increased migratory activity along the Polish–Belarusian border.

⁶ In addition to the 5.5-metre-high Polish barrier, there are also Belarusian fortifications on the Belarusian side. The Polish wall is not built directly on the borderline. A strip of land approximately 1–1.5 metres wide on its eastern side is still Polish territory. The zone between the Polish and Belarusian barriers is controlled by Belarusian forces. People on the move are often trapped there — unable to cross into Poland, pushed back repeatedly, and at the same time needing permission from Belarusian forces to withdraw to Minsk or other Belarusian cities. This zone is often referred to by Arabic-speaking people on the move as *muharrama* — a no man's land.



Fig. 9. Children requesting support from within Poland and children requesting support from Belarus and the muharrama from January to September 2025.

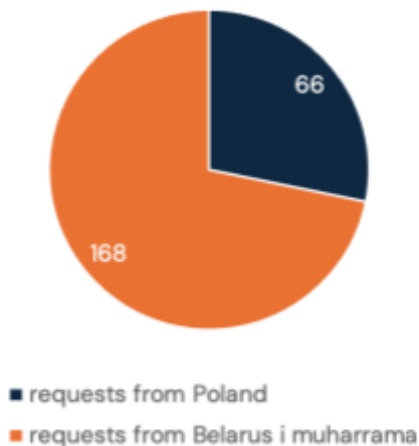


Fig. 10. Children requesting support from within Poland and children requesting support from Belarus and the muharrama from January to September 2025.

By the end of September 2025, we had received information about 40 minors who experienced violence at the hands of Belarusian security forces, representing more than 17% of all individuals under the age of 18 registered during this period. Of these, 31 (over 77%) were travelling without a caregiver.

Belarusians are beating us and we are receiving violence from them. We want to enter Poland. All my teeth are broken and my nose. And my friend can't walk.

Excerpt from the account of two teenagers from Algeria, February 2025

Brother, approximately we are here for 10 days. We didn't eat anything. When we came to Poland soldiers [pushed us back] to Belarus. Belarusian soldiers hit us, beat us very badly and they will transfer back to Poland. Poland transfer back to Belarus, we are very [unintelligible], we are thirsty, hungry and we can't move because Belarus also called us. Please help us brother [...] Sir, four times Belarusian soldiers transferred us to the Polish side. Polish soldiers transfer us to the Belarusian side. Before five hours the Polish soldier transferred [us] back to the Belarusian side [...] our [unintelligible] is not good, our hands is not good sir, please help us please [...] we are not in a good situation sir.⁷

Excerpt from a conversation with a group consisting of three men and a 14-year-old boy from Afghanistan, March 2025

⁷ Transcribed from a voice message.

I tried many times but the Belarusian army beat me so hard, four times. Last time one of our friends died from a beating and a dog bite.

Excerpt from a conversation with a teenage boy from Somalia, March 2025

The Balusian [Belarusian] army is killing me [...].⁸ I was staying in the forest between Poland and Belarus for eight days without food and water then Belarusian soldiers very killing me [...]. There is electricity that is used [by] Belarusian soldiers on my back has injured.

I am in Belarus. I suffered a lot between Belarus and Poland. I spent seven days without water and food. Belarusian soldiers killed me indiscriminately. They killed my friend. I am so tired that I have to go back. Please help me. I am not here. I can't eat or drink. I can't stand [on my feet].

Excerpts from two messages sent by a sixteen-year-old boy from Somalia — the first from late March, the second from the final days of April 2025.

I am a Sudanese refugee in Belarus. I am 16 years old. I previously tried to reach Poland through the forest, but I failed. All my documents were burned by the Belarusian border guards, including my phone, bag, and my ID.

Excerpt from a conversation with a 16-year-old boy from Sudan, March 2025

I asked many people for help but no one helped me. I came to the Polish border. They send me back. Now I'm in stage I don't have anything. [...] So even if we come to Poland side you can't help and Belarusian police beat people when they try to go. Many people died here between Belarus to Poland road. I came here even [though] I can't walk. My body is hurting. I have been in the jungle for 18 days.

Excerpt from a conversation with a 15-year-old girl from Somalia, March 2025

I'm tired of the Belarusian guard thrown from the wall and I don't feel good and I think that my fingers are broken, as far as I stand and walk on my feet, I want help my body is all hurting me.

Excerpt from a conversation with a teenage boy from Sudan, June 2025

Unfortunately, even returning to larger cities in Belarus, such as Minsk, Grodno, or Soligorsk, does not provide safety for people on the move — neither adults nor children. Migrants report a lack of access to asylum procedures and to healthcare.⁹

⁸ People on the move commonly use online translation tools. Due to the inaccuracy of free tools, translations of some words or sentences may not fully reflect the original statement.

⁹ Medical facilities in Belarus cooperate with the security services. People on the move often express a well-founded fear of using them due to the risk of arrest or detention. Another barrier to accessing healthcare is the lack of financial resources to cover treatment costs.

I am in difficulty, I have tried several times to pass the Polish barriers but I am mistreated by the Polish police and beaten by the Belarusians, I have nowhere to go or where to sleep, the snow will kill me if you do not help me, I will die of hunger, please help me, a 15 year old orphan, Someone brought me back to Minsk to get treatment but the hospital didn't accept because I have no money, I'm going to die.

Excerpt from a conversation with a 15-year-old boy from Guinea, January 2025

My name is [...]. I am 14 years old, I am here Belurus. I left my parents in Somalia. Please help me. I don't have good health, good food and a good life. I left my country because some people wanted to kill me. My mother helped me to send here to save myself. I don't have money to pay in this university. I wanna support and help in human organization group or Poland government please. I wanna save myself. I can't go back to my country and here I don't have anything to pay for food and health. I came here to save myself , today I didn't eat even one biscuit.

Excerpt from a conversation with a 14-year-old boy from Somalia, January 2025

Humanitarian, medical, and legal interventions

From January to September 2025, non-governmental organisations and individuals cooperating with them, who provided information on their intervention activities, managed to support 676 people. This number includes humanitarian interventions carried out in the field — most often in the Podlasie forest — frequently combined with accompanying medical interventions; legal interventions, which, since the suspension of the right to apply for international protection in Poland, take place primarily in hospitals in the Podlasie region; as well as medical teleconsultations.

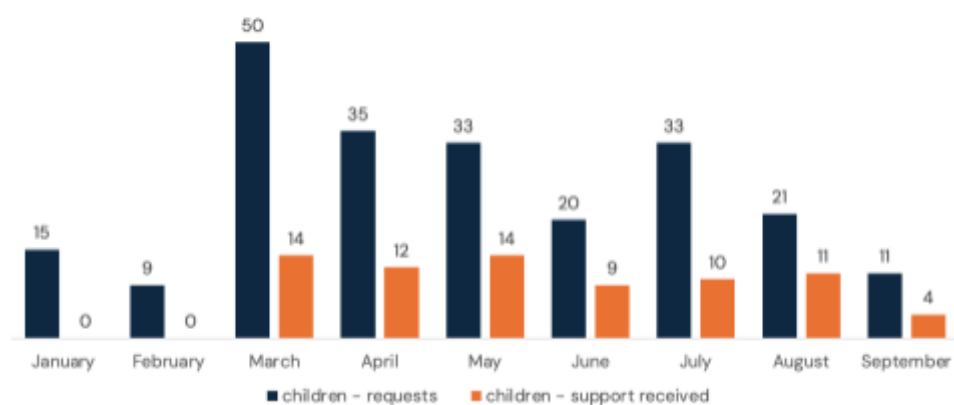


Fig. 11. Support provided to children from January to September 2025.

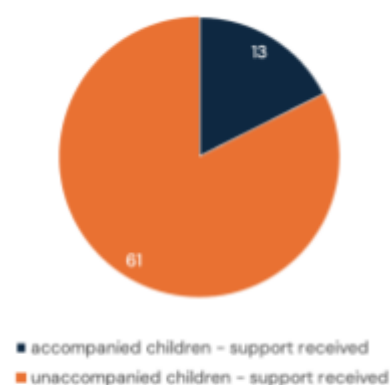


Fig. 12. Support provided to children from January to September 2025.

Children accounted for 8% of all 588¹⁰ people encountered during field interventions. From January to September 2025, there were 47 children in total, including at least nine girls. In addition, field notes did not include information on the gender of six minors who received support. Forty-three of the children encountered (91%) were travelling without a legal guardian.

Three young men from Eritrea, one is 16 years old. They are friends. They spent four months in Belarus. This is their second time in Poland. Belarusian guards took their passports. They reported violence on the Belarusian side. They came to Poland two days ago.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report, May 2025

The boy confirmed that he was 16 years old. At first, he was very scared, he did not want to be left alone. He asked about the international protection procedure, but he did not make up his mind. His psychophysical condition improved after he ate and warmed up. He had no medical problems. He said that his brother was killed in Sudan and he has a video of it. He said that he was pushbacked the day before. One of two phones he got was damaged – cracked screen, broken charging port.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report concerning
a sixteen-year-old boy from Sudan, May 2025.

Three days earlier, the boy had requested support from the eastern side of the fence.

At that time, he was part of an eight-person group,
but following a pushback the group was separated, and the boy was left alone.

Two Afghans. They had been in Poland for three days, and in the forest for a total of eight. It was their first time in Poland. One of them was a minor, 17 years old. He was in rather poor psychological condition and suffered from back pain after falling from the wall. The older one had a shoulder injury – it hurt and was slightly swollen. They had run out of water and were drinking only dirty water. He also had a razor-wire scratch on his leg. We stabilised the shoulder and disinfected the scratch. Both received pain medication.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report, June 2025

Two very young girls from Eritrea, weakened, dehydrated, and terrified. Unfortunately, it was impossible to ask whether this was their first time in Poland, because they spoke in whispers, constantly listening for every snapping branch or the sound of a car in the distance. A quick change into dry clothes and shoes, handing over food and a power bank, checking whether the cables worked, and giving them a hug.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report, August 2025

¹⁰ This number refers only to field interventions. It does not include support provided in hospitals or medical teleconsultations.

People crossing the Polish–Belarusian border often suffer from razor-wire injuries, orthopaedic trauma resulting from falling or jumping from the fence, gastrointestinal problems caused by contaminated water or food, injuries sustained while moving through the forest, or extreme physical and psychological exhaustion. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), present in the border region for more than two years, report that between 2022 and 2024 as many as one third of their patients suffered injuries related to crossing the barrier, including fractures and deep wounds.¹¹ It is not uncommon for both children and adults to require hospitalisation after crossing the border. Unfortunately, medical facilities do not provide protection from pushbacks, which — according to humanitarian workers — often leads people on the move to avoid hospital stays out of fear of being pushed back.

We visited three boys from Somalia — aged 15, 15, and 16. They received clothing kits, shoes, two power banks, and food. They had spent 9 days in the forest. They had been pushed back three times. They had now been in Poland for two days. They had been beaten on the Belarusian side. One of them had a broken arm as a result of violence by Belarusian officers. He had spent one day in a Polish hospital, where his arm was put in a cast, and then he was pushed back. They had not eaten or drunk anything for a long time.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report, May 2025

Nearly 35% (79) of the children requesting support between January and September 2025 reported health problems during conversations with humanitarian workers or activists.

I was in the forest for three weeks, I was very hurt. One eye was severely damaged. My arm is broken and my leg is injured. When I was in the woods, I was eating one snickers in two days, I was very hungry. I was drinking dirty water, I have a stomach ache.

Excerpt from a conversation with a teenage boy from Ethiopia, April 2025

During humanitarian interventions, medics and activists — trained in first aid (KPP) — often provide emergency pre-medical assistance to people on the move. Among those who received such pre-medical first aid between January and the end of May 2025 were four minors. Since the beginning of its presence in the border region in November 2022, MSF has registered 59 minor patients who received medical assistance. Between January and the end of September 2025, MSF provided medical care to seven minors — two adolescent girls from Ethiopia and Eritrea, two infants from Somalia, and three boys from Guinea, Somalia, and Afghanistan. According to information from field notes, the

¹¹<https://www.msf.org/trapped-between-borders-life-threatening-consequences-increased-militarisation-poland-belarus>

patients had injuries typical of deliberate physical violence as well as lacerations caused by razor wire. In addition, one patient was suspected of having a metatarsal fracture, and two others were diagnosed with dehydration.

Legal interventions carried out over the past four years most often took place when people on the move decided to request assistance in expressing their intention to apply for international protection in Poland. Between January and 27 March 2025, two legal interventions were undertaken on behalf of minors. Staff members of organisations and activists assisted two children in expressing their intention to apply for international protection in Poland. Both boys were travelling without a legal guardian.

After the introduction of the temporary suspension of the right to apply for international protection at the Polish–Belarusian border, the ECtHR granted an interim measure to at least seven unaccompanied minors. In the case of one of these minors, the Court’s positive decision came too late — he had been pushed back to Belarus two hours earlier.

An interim measure generally protects individuals from expulsion to Belarus, but it does not, in itself, allow them to submit an application for international protection. Such support takes place both in the field and in hospitals in the Podlasie region, where people requiring hospitalisation — and who have crossed the Polish–Belarusian border — are admitted.

The situation of children at the border after 27 March 2025¹²

On 27 March 2025, a temporary territorial suspension of the right to international protection in Poland came into force, and it has since been extended twice. The adopted law constitutes a gross violation of the right to protection and closes one of the few available pathways to safety for people migrating along this route. In theory, however, the suspension does not apply to the following categories of persons:¹³

- unaccompanied minors;
- pregnant women; persons who may require special treatment, in particular due to age or health condition;
- persons for whom the Border Guard determines that they face a risk of serious harm in the state from which they arrived directly on the territory of the Republic of Poland (this state is not clearly specified, but it most likely refers only to Belarus, without acknowledging the close cooperation between Belarus and Russia);

¹² Fragments of this text appeared in *We Are Monitoring, March 2025 – Report from the Polish–Belarusian Border*, pp. 4–6,

<https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WAM-Report-March-2025.pdf>, and *We Are Monitoring, April 2025 – Report from the Polish–Belarusian Border*, pp. 4–8,

<https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/WAM-Statistics-April-2025-1.pdf>.

¹³ Provided that no direct coercive measures or weapons were used against them

- citizens of a state conducting activities amounting to the instrumentalisation of migration, from whose territory foreigners arrive in Poland — in the current context, this refers to Belarusian citizens.

Despite the exemptions included in the legislation, as reported by the Granica Group, on the very first day the law came into force, a 17-year-old Somali citizen travelling without a guardian was pushed back from the hospital in Hajnówka, located 18 kilometres from the border:

The boy said he was 17 years old. [...] His family belongs to a persecuted minority in Somalia. In Belarus, he experienced horrific violence. He fell from the border wall. Before the ambulance took him, Polish officers sprayed him with pepper spray. In the hospital he could not stand, nor was he able to eat or drink after starving for many days in the forest. He declared his intention to apply for international protection in Poland. He spent a few hours in the emergency room, was taken away by the Border Guard, and we later learned that he had been pushed back.

Child-rights specialists—including the Ombudsman for Children and non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children — have pointed out that among the groups listed in the law as “vulnerable,” only unaccompanied minors are included, while not all minors. In theory, the law allows for a joint application submitted by a family, but only if the primary applicant is an adult belonging to a vulnerable group. For unaccompanied minors, another major issue is the very need for them to be recognised as under 18. First, this must be noticed and acknowledged by the officers carrying out the apprehension. This decision is entirely in their hands and is not subject to independent monitoring. This is particularly concerning given that most apprehensions take place in the forest, without witnesses, under conditions of language barriers, limited visibility, and the absence of effective protection procedures. Even when a minor is not immediately pushed back and is allowed to proceed further on the basis of visual assessment or documents (or photographs of documents), in cases of continued doubt the most commonly used method is an X-ray examination of bones. This method raises serious ethical concerns, is not compliant with European standards for age assessment, and carries a high risk of mistakenly identifying a minor as an adult due to a margin of error of up to five years.¹⁴

It is worth noting that applications for an interim measure most often concern people who, while waiting for the Court’s decision, are staying in hospitals in Hajnówka or Białystok. This was the case for both minors who received support in applying for an

¹⁴Sauer, P., Nicholson, A. and Neubauer, D., ‘Age Determination in Asylum Seekers: Physicians Should Not Be Implicated’, *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 175 (2016), 299.

interim measure from the European Court of Human Rights. One of them was a seventeen-year-old girl from Guinea, who arrived at the medical facility without a phone, passport, or any other documents. She had spent 10 days in the forest. She told those supporting her in the hospital about the violence she had experienced at the hands of Belarusian security forces. She had crossed the barrier multiple times, each time followed by a pushback. She had been sprayed with pepper spray.

The average waiting time for a Court decision ranges from several hours to even 1–2 working days. In the meantime, as practice in recent years shows, the person applying for such protection remains at risk of being pushed back — even if they are in a medical facility due to health problems. For example, on 11 April the Granica Group reported that in the first half of April a young man from Mali, who had previously been hospitalised, was pushed back. The boy had been brought by ambulance to the hospital in Hajnówka. He showed signs of disorientation — repeatedly asking which country he was in and where exactly he was. He stated that he was 17 years old and wished to apply for protection. He signed a power of attorney for a legal counsel from European Lawyers in Lesvos as well as a declaration of intent to apply for international protection. Because he had no documents and stated that he was a minor, he was scheduled to be taken for an age-assessment examination (X-ray of the wrist bones) the next day.

The following day, at around 11:00, he was discharged from the hospital by officers. The legal representative sent the full set of documents to the Commander of the Border Guard Post in Białowieża and requested information on the boy's whereabouts. Fearing a pushback, an application for an interim measure was sent the same day to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Due to the lack of any information from the Border Guard, at about 15:00 that same day the legal representative called the station and was informed that the boy was already on his way back from Białystok. According to her account, the officer speaking to her used a reassuring tone and assured her that she would be kept informed about all actions taken with regard to her client. However, no one contacted her in the following hours. She was not informed about the result of the age-assessment examination nor about any subsequent steps being taken. At around 18:30, a positive decision from the Court in Strasbourg arrived — prohibiting Poland from returning the young man from Mali to Belarus. At around 19:00, the legal representative forwarded the decision by email to the Border Guard post and then called. The duty officer refused to provide her with any information and only told her to call back later. She contacted the post again the next morning. She was told that the message with the Court's decision had arrived 20 minutes too late, because the boy had already been taken to the Belarusian border. The officer expressed how sorry he was, but, as he put it, "unfortunately, time cannot be turned back." In the meantime, the boy contacted the Granica Group's emergency number from Belarus. He wrote that before he was thrown

onto the border barrier, the officers had managed to beat him: *Polish police officers beat me and broke my foot and finger.*¹⁵

From January to the end of September, we recorded information on 11 minor patients in Podlasie hospitals who had previously crossed the border from Belarus irregularly. All of them were travelling without a legal guardian; among them were nine boys and two girls. The suspension of the right to international protection also applied to the only functioning road crossing between Poland and Belarus — Brest–Terespol, which since the 1990s has been the main escape route for citizens of former Soviet states experiencing persecution. According to lawyers supporting people arriving in Brest, Belarus, on the very first day the new regulations came into force, individuals declaring political repression (including torture) were turned back from the crossing despite having informed Polish officers that they feared persecution if returned to their home countries. In the following days, lawyers also documented the refusal to accept an application from a citizen of one of the Central Asian states, who had been living in the Russian Federation in recent years. He carried documentation confirming the violence he had suffered at the hands of the Russian authorities and additionally reported receiving threats of forced conscription into the Russian army and deployment to the frontline in eastern Ukraine. In the case of two women travelling together, an application was accepted only from the one who was pregnant, while the other — travelling with a small child — was ordered to leave the vehicle and return.¹⁶

Reports of pushbacks at the Terespol border crossing and of officers refusing to accept applications for international protection had already appeared in the accounts of people on the move even before the official suspension of the right to apply for protection.

I'm in trouble, I've tried several times to get through the Polish barriers but I've been ill-treated by the Polish police and beaten up by the Belarusians. [...] We came to Terespol and [they] are turning [us] back for no reason.

Excerpt from the account of a fifteen-year-old boy from Guinea, January 2025

Pushbacks and violence

Based solely on return decisions issued on the territory of Poland, the Border Guard pushed back 172, 5, and 69 children in 2022, 2023, and 2024 respectively. All of them were recorded as travelling with caregivers. There is no available data on the number of

¹⁵ Grupa Granica, post dated 11 April 2025, Facebook,, <https://www.facebook.com/grupagranica/posts/pfbid02sQ26C7WuELePEY8nBUb3MyUK2dcZbtCZMxpUNkF2uw9GmLgc2E2NDmT1jZ5qmN7gl?rdid=UQcgzbf3XkvskCB#> [accessed: 19.05.2025 r.].

¹⁶ Z. Kaciupska, T. Sieniow, Zawieszenie prawa do azylu – realia prawne i konsekwencje dla rozwoju sytuacji na granicy polsko-białoruskiej, paper presented at the 25th seminar of the Researchers at the Border group, 12–13 April 2025

children who were pushed back under the Regulation of the Minister of Interior and Administration of 13 March 2020, on the basis of which — according to Border Guard statistics — such actions are carried out more frequently. Between August 2021 and December 2024, 70,020 pushbacks were conducted under this regulation, compared with only 8,009 based on return decisions.¹⁷

There is also no data on the number of pushbacks involving unaccompanied minors who, as noted above, have constituted the majority of the children we recorded over the past two years. Border Guard data show that between 1 January and 30 September 2025, the Border Guard carried out 13,206 expulsions from Poland to Belarus.¹⁸ In the same period, humanitarian organisations received reports of pushbacks from 777 people who experienced a total of 1,859 expulsions. Among all individuals reporting a pushback to Belarus during this period were 54 persons under the age of 18, including 7 girls. The gender of 8 minors is unknown. Of all the children pushed back, 52 were travelling

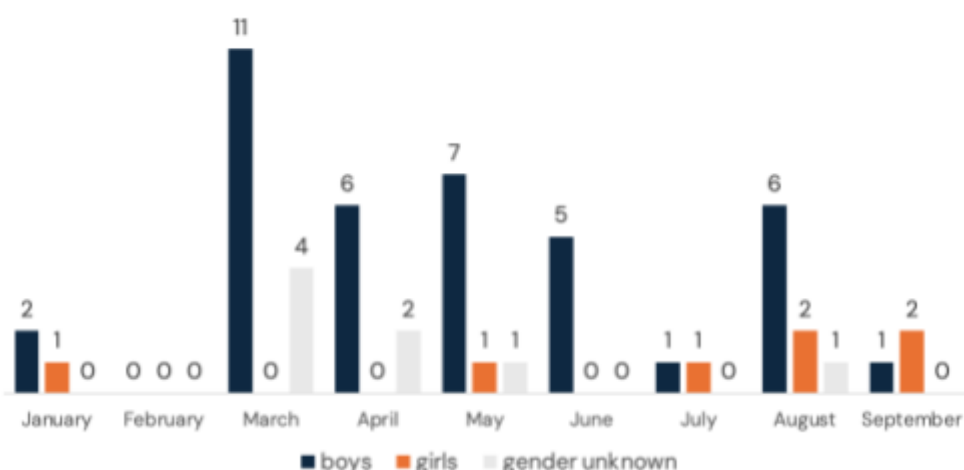


Fig. 13. Number of pushedback children and unaccompanied children recorded by We Are Monitoring from January to September 2025.

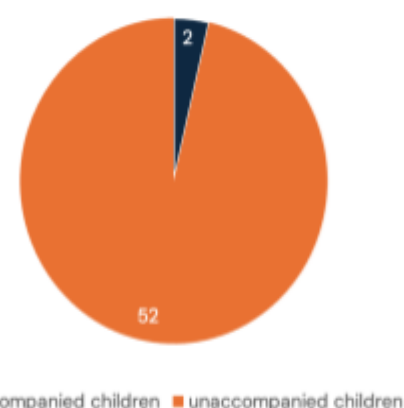


Fig. 14. Number of pushedback children and unaccompanied children recorded by We Are Monitoring from January to September 2025.

without a guardian. People on the move reporting pushbacks additionally describe accompanying violence, including beatings, the use of irritant sprays, stun guns, and dogs set on them by officers. Widespread reports also concern theft and the destruction of property, including documents. Accounts of violence accompanying pushbacks have appeared since the beginning of the crisis. Although some practices of state services described by people on the move have changed over time, the intensity and forms of violence have not shifted significantly. The most common forms of violence described above already appear in accounts from 2021 and are, in the overall context of the experience, consistent with reports from 2025.

¹⁷ According to an analysis of Border Guard data conducted by Natalia Ciastoń, Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw

¹⁸ Responses from the Podlasie Division of the Border Guard to public information requests.

According to the accounts of pushed-back children, between January and the end of September the circumstances of their apprehensions and expulsions did not differ from those reported by pushed-back adults. During this period, humanitarian organisations received information about 24 minors who experienced violence at the hands of Polish uniformed services; 22 of them were travelling without a guardian.

I am a refugee who needs asylum in Poland because my parents died and I have no care. I am 15 and I need life in Poland but when I ask Polish army for asylum, they kill me and send me back.

Excerpt from the account of a fifteen-year-old boy from Somalia, February 2025

We are two people under the age of 18. We have been stuck in Belarus for a year now. We want to come to Europe to continue our studies. We have been to Poland several times. The police don't know where we are going and are harassing us. [...] When we enter Polish territory, they don't treat us like human beings at all, and when they send us to Brest, they harass us a lot there. Once, when I was wounded on the sole of my foot and was bleeding, they didn't take me to the hospital in Poland and deported me to Belarus. I wandered around with my injured foot for a week. Considering that I'm sixteen years old, I've been stuck in Belarus for eight months.

Excerpt from the account of two teenagers travelling together, March 2025

I was 14 in Poland with out any food and cold clothes. And Polish army were killing me They sent me back to Belarus. I lost a lot of blood, these are some of the injuries inflicted on me by the Polish army. I also have allergies and they used poison and I have asthma. My age is 17 so also They brought me back to the Belarusian border.

Excerpt from the account of a seventeen-year-old travelling alone from Somalia, April 2025

[...] Poland and Belarus killed both of them. Poland dog bit me and they took a simcard, they broke mobile. Me and my friends.

Excerpt from the account of a man travelling in a three-person group, in which at least one person was under the age of 18, March 2025

The border guard in Poland also makes things very difficult. A Polish soldier beat me very badly. One eye — now I cannot see. [...] I will turn 18 in two months.

Excerpt from a conversation with a seventeen-year-old from an East African country, April 2025

A boy from Afghanistan, 17 years old. He has been in Poland for 12 days, for the second time; he was pushbacked. He was completely soaked, he had a black eye caused by the Polish services, he had been beaten with a wooden stick on his body, mainly on his back, and he had wounds on his arms. He was surprised that he had been beaten by the Polish services, because from other people in the

system he had heard that it is mainly the Belarusians who beat. He was very hungry; since being in the forest, he had not eaten anything.

Excerpt from the account of a seventeen-year-old travelling alone from Afghanistan, June 2025

Mr. Amir, 17 years old, from Afghanistan, speaks very little English; his native language is Pashto. He had been pushbacked, we do not know how many times. He reported violence from the Polish services. He was hit in the face, arm, and side. He showed bruises — he had them on his face, along the whole side/jaw, a black eye, and wounds on his arms. He also reported that his phone and SIM card were destroyed. He was taken about 20 km from the place where he had been detained and was pushed back into the forest on the Belarusian side, without a working phone. We helped him wash his feet, hands, and face. He reported pain in the back of his head.

Excerpt from the account of a seventeen-year-old travelling alone from Afghanistan, June 2025

I have faced all kinds of problems in Poland and I don't have a good life. They poured tear gas on me and kicked me in the ribs. [...] I am very worried about continuing to live without food, water, and unimaginable torture.

Excerpt from the account of a teenager from Somalia, July 2025

That day, 12 of us went to the taxi, then 6 people went to German in a taxi. then, while the taxi was coming for the remaining 6 of us, When we were about to get into a taxi, the police came and we ran into the forest. My leg was injured, so I couldn't run. I was caught. The 5 of them escaped. they called another taxi and went to German. Then they took me to the police station, saying I was underage, and I told them what happened to me in Ethiopia. They took me to a testing center and examined me. Then they brought me 3 or 4 papers written in Polish Even though I asked for a translation, they just said sign and made me sign and took my fingerprints I stayed for 2 days and on the 3rd day, they put me to brest at night Then the Belarusian soldiers took me, noticing that my leg was injured, and took me to a taxi. On the 3rd night, they threw me into Belarus.

Excerpt from the account of a man travelling in a 12-person group, in which at least three people were under the age of 18, July 2025

Accounts repeatedly mention frequent aggression by the Belarusian border guards towards people who return to the eastern side of the border barrier after an unsuccessful attempt and after experiencing a pushback by Polish officers.

We tried the forest to be able to get out but we did not manage to cross the military arrested us and beat us and threw us into Lithuania they separated from our African brothers.

Excerpt from the account of a couple from Cameroon travelling with a three-month-old child, January 2025

I was beaten by belarusian army crossing to poland in order to get protection from human right in poland please as a humanitarian what can you hel me. I'm injured badly. I'm 17 years old. they tied me and made me be bitten by a wild dog.

Excerpt from the account of a seventeen-year-old travelling alone from Eritrea, July 2025

Definitions

Total requests — the total number of reported groups/people on the move located in Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, or Latvia. It does not include people staying in other European countries during the reporting period, as the report aims to reflect the situation on the Polish–Belarusian border and the related migration route.

Groups — people traveling together at the time of the report and/or during a humanitarian/legal/medical intervention. These individuals may or may not be related by family or social ties.

Individuals — specific people who may be part of groups

Children — all individuals whose confirmed or declared age is 0–18 years.

Unaccompanied children/minors — Persons under 18 years of age traveling without a legal adult guardian, including minors traveling with older siblings or other relatives who are not their legal guardians under Polish law.

[Border] barrier, also: wall, fence — a fortification located on Polish territory a few to several meters from the border with Belarus, in the form of a steel fence topped with a coil of razor wire and flanked by entanglements of coiled razor wire.

Concertina — razor wire, formed into large coils, constituting an additional part of the border infrastructure.

Muharrama (Arabic: forbidden) — a term used by Arabic-speaking people on the move to describe a strip of land on Polish and Belarusian territory located between the Polish border barrier and the fortifications on the Belarusian side (sistema). *Muharrama* in Arabic means “forbidden.” People on the move also use the longer expression المنطقة المحرمة, meaning “forbidden zone.”

Sistema — the fence and electronic system on the eastern side of the militarized border strip located in Poland and Belarus (muharrama), separating it from the rest of Belarus.

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 assistance — support in the form of basic humanitarian aid packages: food, clothing, water, information.

Legal assistance — support in procedures aimed at preventing pushbacks and enabling the submission of applications for international protection or other means of regulating stay.

Medical assistance — professional support provided by individuals with medical qualifications.

Basic first aid — support provided by individuals with basic rescue training, such as cleaning wounds or dressing trench foot.

Assistance in hospitals – material and/or legal assistance

Pushback — the forced return of people on the move to the border line or forcing them to leave the territory of Poland without properly examining individual circumstances; regardless of whether they have received return decisions and regardless of the fact that they have explicitly expressed the intention to apply for international protection in Poland. As noted by experts monitoring human rights violations on the southern borders of the European Union, pushbacks constitute a form of violence *per se*, and are commonly accompanied by other forms of physical and verbal violence.

Reported pushbacks — pushbacks reported to us during the given reporting period by people who experienced them directly or were eyewitnesses.

Reported violence — Poland — reported cases of violence directly experienced by people on the move, whose perpetrators, according to the victims' accounts, were members of Polish uniformed services: Border Guard, Police, Polish Army, Territorial Defence Forces.

Reported violence — Belarus — forms of violence reported to us and directly experienced by people on the move, whose perpetrators, according to the victims' accounts, were members of Belarusian uniformed services.

Number of interventions — the number of humanitarian interventions carried out by field teams in response to a request for support or the accidental encounter of people on the move in the border area.

Number of deceased — the number of people on the move who have died since August 2021 on the Polish side of the Polish–Belarusian border, as well as cases on the

Belarusian side that we are aware of. This does not include all deaths in hospitals or car accidents related to the migration route. Data are verified and supplemented by the Border Death Monitoring Group and published [here](#) along with detailed methodology. We expect that over time, data on more deaths may emerge, including from the period under consideration.

Number of missing persons — individuals whose disappearance has been reported by close relatives or travel companions, and for whom no contact has been made for at least two days.

Injuries caused by the barrier — injuries that occurred due to crossing the border barrier on the Polish–Belarusian border.

Age	- minors - unaccompanied minors - persons over 45 years of age - senior citizens aged 60 and over
Medical reasons	- pregnancy - chronic illness - disability
Protection Needs*	- 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