

# AUGUST 2025

## Report from the Poland-Belarus border

The photo on the cover was taken on 2 August by an employee of the Egala Association. It shows a camp abandoned by the Polish army in the south-western part of the Białowieża Forest. What remains are makeshift log structures, tarpaulins, abandoned planks, catering waste, a beer can and a wood-burning stove in one of the shelters—unsecured, with a chimney pipe leaning against a wooden stump—posing a fire hazard. It was only after photos were published on social media that the military cleaned up the rubbish they had left behind<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=780539031294298&set=a.275676085113931>  
[Accessed: 22.09.2025]

## Introduction

This study is based on the data obtained from individuals involved in the events described. Our sources include organisations, informal initiatives, and individuals—many of whom prefer to remain anonymous. We only name organisations or individual activists when explicit permission has been granted.

Most of all, we extend our sincere thanks to all people who crossed or tried to cross the Poland-Belarus border, and chose to share their experiences. It is thanks to them that we know the full extent of violence, mistreatment and abuse perpetrated by the Polish and Belarusian authorities. All of their names in this report have been changed.

NGOs, activists and others involved in the response stress that the challenging context and ethical considerations of their work often make it difficult to obtain detailed information about the stories and circumstances of people on the move. Many individuals are in such severe psychophysical condition during interventions that requesting information risks retraumatisation or may lead them to feel obligated to respond merely because they have received support.

The interventions and assistance described in this report took place in the Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships. For individuals in Belarus, only information on the legal situation and procedures for applying for international protection in both Poland and Belarus can be provided. No direct support is possible for NGOs and activists operating in Poland.

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## 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.

## Bill of indictment against a Border Guard officer

In August, Piotr Czaban, a journalist covering the border crisis, made public the fact that in March 2025 an indictment had been submitted to the court against a Border Guard officer who had allegedly brutally beaten two Ethiopians almost a year earlier. The case will be heard by the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski (criminal division in Hajnówka). According to Czaban's account, the events took place in June 2024. In the forest near Białowieża, tourists noticed two young men, around twenty years old. They informed soldiers they encountered a moment later on the trail. The soldiers detained the migrants in question and, in accordance with procedures, notified the Border Guard. According to the testimonies collected during the investigation, the Ethiopians were calm at that time and complied with the orders. Piotr Czaban writes:

*From the Białowieża outpost, a patrol car set out, commanded by a young officer in his twenties, Adrian J. (who had been in the Border Guard for five months). He was accompanied by a more experienced and older officer, deployed to Białowieża from another region of Poland together with his service dog. In this formation, several dozen minutes after receiving the report, the guards arrived on site with the dog. Before leaving the car, they covered their faces with so-called balaclava-scarves, so that even the soldiers guarding the Ethiopians could not recognize them. In fact, the soldiers themselves had ensured their anonymity in a similar way. The guards ordered the refugees to stand up and strip down to their underwear. They obediently followed the orders. Once again, they did not resist during further searches. The guards found nothing alarming. At one point, without any warning, Adrian J. began kicking the Ethiopians—one in the thighs, the other in the face. He kicked with the tip of his boot, several times. He did not stop there. He pulled out a telescopic baton, which he carried with him, and began striking one of the Ethiopians mercilessly. He delivered several blows to the man's arm, directly on bare skin. According to the victim's testimony, the guard beat him so hard that he broke the baton, and blood spurted from the wound caused by the strikes. Both beaten Ethiopians were bleeding and screaming in pain and fear. Only then did Adrian J. take out a first-aid kit, roughly dressed the wounds, and allowed his victims to put their clothes back on. [...]*

The two Ethiopians were then taken to a service gate and pushbacked. During the intervention, the migrants' phones and power banks were destroyed. The case came to

light thanks to the soldiers who, as witnesses of the incident, reported it to their superiors. The court has not yet set a date for the first hearing.<sup>2</sup>

The story described fits entirely into the practices of the Border Guard and the Polish Army, repeatedly reported by migrants to those providing humanitarian assistance. In 2024, the WAM team, drawing on interviews recorded since 2022, created a typology of abuses occurring on the Polish side of the border that accompany pushbacks.<sup>3</sup> The typology was as follows: intimidation and threats (including intimidation and threats involving firearms), confiscation and destruction of property, humiliation and exposure to suffering (including humiliation, denial of access to water and food, denial of access to medicines and medical assistance, the use of natural conditions as a tool of inflicting suffering, and exposure to disappearance), mistreatment (including beatings of people requiring medical assistance, infliction of injuries through the use of coercive measures, and sexual violence). In addition, the lack of access to the asylum procedure was identified, including refusal to accept an application for international protection, forcing migrants to sign documents, as well as misleading them and exerting pressure on apprehended migrants.

## Demographics, trends and requests

In August 2025, we documented 228 requests for support from people traveling in 116 groups. Requests concerning minors and women each accounted for just under 10% of the total. Among the 23 children registered, 21 were traveling without a legal guardian. Two of the 21 women requesting support were pregnant. Limited access to medical care remains a persistent and serious problem for all people crossing the Polish–Belarusian border. In August, more than 35% of those requesting support reported health problems during conversations or meetings with humanitarian workers and activists.<sup>4</sup> A particularly severe issue is the lack of access to essential long-term medication, either

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<sup>2</sup> The full account and quotation are taken from Piotr Czaban's report: P. Czaban, Ciężki dzień strażnika. Kopał i bił teleskopową pałką. Akt oskarżenia przeciwko strażnikowi, Patronite, 6 August 2025, available at: <https://patronite.pl/post/85411/ciezki-dzien-straznika-kopal-i-bil-teleskopowa-palka-akt-oskarzenia-przeciwko-straznikowi> [accessed 10 September 2025]

<sup>3</sup> We Are Monitoring Association, *We Have Only One War, Which is Immigration, Which Is You. The Policy of Pushbacks and Border Forces Violence on the Polish–Belarusian Border*, 2024, [https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/RaportGranica\\_srodek\\_ENG\\_online.pdf](https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/RaportGranica_srodek_ENG_online.pdf) [accessed 10 September 2025].

<sup>4</sup> The most frequently reported health problems included: general exhaustion caused by prolonged stays in the forest; gastrointestinal issues linked to, among other factors, the consumption of contaminated water; skin irritation resulting from exposure to chemical agents such as pepper spray; and injuries caused by dog bites as well as by violence from both Belarusian and Polish officers. Commonly reported injuries also included numerous and extensive lacerations from razor wire, along with orthopedic injuries sustained during falls or jumps from the border barrier. More information on medical issues can be found in the MSF report [Uwięzieni pomiędzy granicami. Zagrożające życiu konsekwencje zwiększonej militarystyki i przemocy na granicy polsko-białoruskiej](#) (January 2025).

stolen or destroyed by state services, or unavailable due to the unplanned prolongation of the journey.

REQUESTS AUGUST 2025				
	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
<b>Total</b>	116	228	23 (21)	21 (2)
<b>incl. in Poland</b>	60	143	10 (10)	6 (0)
<b>Incl. in hospital</b>	N/A	12	2 (2)	2 (0)
<b>incl. from Belarus</b>	46	85	11 (9)	15 (2)
<b>incl. from Muharrama</b>	12	31	6 (4)	5 (1)
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

In August, we registered requests from 85 people contacting us from Belarusian territory, including from the border strip on the eastern side of the barrier (*muharrama*).<sup>5</sup> A total of 31 people were located in the *muharrama*, traveling in 12 groups. Among them were at least five women (including one pregnant) and six children, four of whom were traveling without a legal guardian. Another 54 people made contact from other locations within Belarus. Unfortunately, even larger Belarusian cities such as Minsk, Grodno, or Soligorsk do not provide safety for people on the move. Migrants contacting humanitarian workers reported a lack of access to asylum procedures and basic medical care.

*I have epilepsy. I get seizures almost every day. Sometimes two, three, or even more. I fall. I shake. I lose my mind. I forget where I am. Sometimes I wake up on the ground and I'm bleeding, and I don't even know what happened. I'm*

<sup>5</sup> The figures we present do not allow for an approximate estimation of the actual number of people present in the zone between the barriers at any given time. We publish them because they enable the identification of upward and downward trends, as well as the recording of periods of increased migratory activity along the Polish–Belarusian border. Individuals are present in the “*muharrama*” zone either prior to attempting to cross the barrier or immediately following a pushback. This area takes the form of a strip ranging in width from a few meters to several kilometers, with an approximately 1.5-meter-wide strip adjacent to the barrier lying on Polish territory. The entirety of the zone remains under strict control by Belarusian authorities, who, according to reports from migrants, often detain individuals in specific locations, preventing their return deeper into Belarus and/or occasionally ordering them to re-enter Poland or move to another location. The frequency and nature of these interventions are variable.

*supposed to take medicine every day. But here in Belarus, there is no medicine for me. I mean it — nothing. I search everywhere. I go to pharmacies, I ask people. Sometimes I walk for hours. But I go home empty. No medicine. No help. And every time I don't take the medicine, I get worse. My seizures get stronger. I fall harder. I hurt myself more. But it didn't stop there. I tried to leave. I tried three times to cross the border — not to run from life, but to find a place where I could stay alive. But each time, the soldiers of Belarus caught me. And they didn't just stop me — they beat me like I wasn't a person. They hit my head, they beat my back, they kicked me while I was on the ground. I was crying. I was bleeding. And no one came. Since then, something changed inside me. Now I feel like fracture in my left side skull get bigger. Because the hit me at that spot many times and the pain in my head never leaves. My right hand goes numb, most of the time I can't feel my fingers. I can't take out anything from my pocket with my right hand I always use my left hand. My jaw and tongue also go numb. I try to speak but my voice is slow and broken. I speak like someone who is not whole anymore.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Ethiopia in Belarus

Of the 228 requests registered in August, 47 came from people from Afghanistan. During the same period, 42 people from Eritrea, 41 from Somalia, 36 from Ethiopia, 27 from Sudan, seven from Pakistan, two from Yemen, and one from Cameroon also requested support. The country of origin of 25 people could not be established.<sup>6</sup>

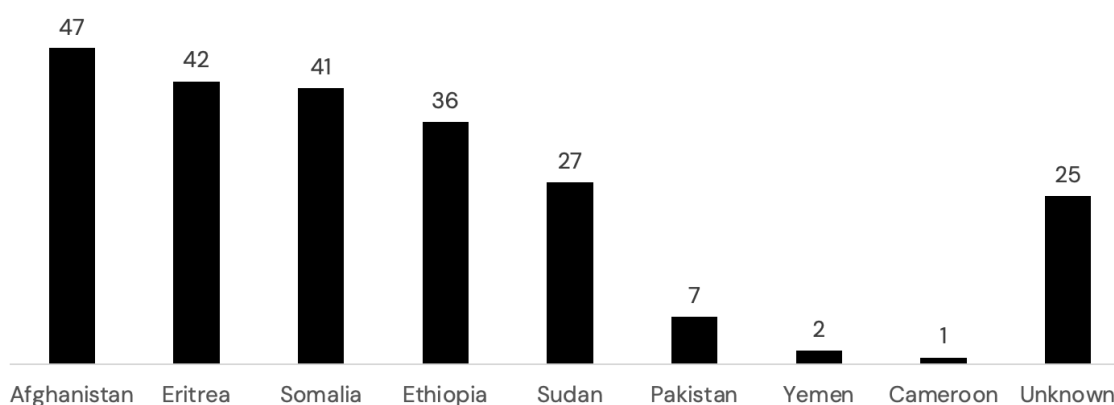


Fig. 1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in August 2025.

<sup>6</sup> The largest group of individuals whose country of origin could not be determined consists of those contacting NGOs from the territory of Belarus, primarily from inland areas. Due to the inability of organisations and collectives operating in Poland to provide any form of support to them, demographic data on these individuals is not actively collected, and information about country of origin is recorded only if the person includes it in their request. Other cases in which the country of origin is unknown usually involve individuals who could not be reached during field interventions..

## Support provided

In August, support was provided to 105 people traveling in 52 groups. Among them were 11 unaccompanied children and nine women. A total of 51 field interventions were carried out, during which 88 people were assisted, including eight unaccompanied minors and four women. Eleven of the field interventions were unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup>

### SUPPORT PROVIDED AUGUST 2025

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
<b>Total<sup>8</sup></b>	52	105	11 (11)	9 (0)
<b>Material aid</b>	46	99	10 (10)	6 (0)
<b>Legal aid</b>	11	11	2 (2)	3 (0)
<b>Medical aid<sup>9</sup></b>	12	12	3 (3)	4 (0)
<b>First aid</b>	21	35	2 (2)	0 (0)
<b>Hospital assistance</b>	N/A	11	2 (2)	2 (0)
<b># of undertaken interventions</b>			<b>51</b>	
<b># of successful interventions</b>			<b>40</b>	
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

Group sizes varied, ranging from single individuals to an eight-person group encountered in mid-August near Masiewo.

<sup>7</sup> The failure of a field intervention most often indicates that it was not possible to reach the location indicated by the individuals in time. Such situations typically result from difficulties in determining the exact location of the group or from loss of contact, which may be caused by a drained phone battery or the detention of the group by authorities before support could arrive. In the case of some groups, it is possible to confirm that individuals were pushbacked. After a certain period, they re-establish contact to request assistance from the eastern side of the border barrier.

<sup>8</sup> Explanations of the individual categories can be found in the glossary at the end of the report.

<sup>9</sup> As part of medical assistance, 6 teleconsultations were conducted, covering 6 individuals, including 3 women and 1 unaccompanied minor.

*We met a man from Afghanistan who was alone. His friends had been caught. He fled the country because the Taliban want to kill him. He had been in Poland for three days—during that time he had neither eaten nor drunk anything. He was frightened and exhausted. His right knee had undergone some kind of surgery—in the jump from the fence that leg had swollen a bit. He also had a swollen and very painful left foot.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

In some cases, group size changed between consecutive interventions. In all such instances, people encountered in the forest reported to activists and humanitarian workers that other members of their group had been pushbacked. In the first week of August alone, this situation was recorded at least twice. The first case concerned a call regarding three people from Somalia.

*Earlier there were three of them, but one was caught by the services. We gave them a full set of clothes [...] Over soup and tea we talked for a few minutes—they have been in the forest for 25 days, during which they were repeatedly pushed from Belarus to Poland and from Poland back to Belarus, back and forth, without pause. Sometimes they returned to Brest to recharge their phone. Now they have been in the forest for three days straight.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

The following day, the group requested support again. By the time of the intervention, however, only one of the Somali men remained.

*An eighteen-year-old from Somalia. The previous day we had visited him and his friend, but in the meantime his friend had been caught. He also spoke about the pushback of eight people from their group. He reported violence on both the Polish and Belarusian sides—beatings and the use of gas. He had been pushbacked several times.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

The following day, a group of four men requested support:

*On site we met three men—one from Eritrea and two from Afghanistan. The fourth person was deeper in the forest searching for water. The group had met in Brest. The man from Eritrea said he had been on the move for a month and in Poland for four days. He said he wanted to return to Brest, but the Belarusian services did not allow him. He could not get out of the sistiema; on the Belarusian side there were always orders of “go Poland” and gunshots. He described himself as being like a ball—“like football.” The Afghan men said they had been in the forest for eight days. They declared that they had been*

*pushbacked many times and subjected to violence, including tear gas. Their only phone had its charging port destroyed by the services.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

The following day, when the group requested support again, only two of the four men remained on site.

*On site were the two Afghans we had met yesterday. Wet and chilled. During the night, while fleeing from the services, they became separated from the other two men. They said they saw that the others had been caught.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

In August, nearly half (46%) of all people encountered during humanitarian interventions reported health problems (41 out of 88 individuals). Six of them were patients of the medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The remaining 35 people received basic first aid.

*Three men from Somalia. One had problems with his ankle—it was stabilized, ointment was applied, and he received painkillers for immediate and later use. The second man had a cut on his foot—the wound was cleaned and dressed, and medication was provided. The third had a cut eyebrow—this wound was also cleaned, and he too received painkillers.*

Excerpt from an MSF medical intervention report

*Three people reported medical needs—stomach pain (reflux), a cut wound on the hand from concertina wire, and a leg injury caused by a fall. Fortunately, the young man with the leg injury was still able to walk. [...] They had been in the forest for several days. They had not eaten or drunk anything for a very long time. All of them had previously been pushbacked more than once. They spoke about violence on both sides of the barrier.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

*When we arrived, the Afghan man was lying on the ground. He was very emaciated and at first said nothing. After drinking water and tea and eating soup, he regained some strength and became more communicative. He complained of pain—mainly in his back, groin, and legs. He said he suffers from asthma. He had many wounds, but already in the form of scabs. He said these were from bites by guard dogs—he did not specify whose—and from concertina wire. He also said he had been kicked in the face by officers and sprayed with gas. We treated his trench foot.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

Particularly concerning are cases of injuries caused by shots from smoothbore weapons, which are increasingly being reported in field intervention reports:

*A man had been in the Polish forest for five days. He seemed unaware of the realities of the border area. He asked whether he would be sent back if found. [...] He reported stomach pain. He had a visible hematoma and bruises from an injury and a shot (by Polish officers) from a smoothbore weapon to the right side of his abdomen. He was given medication and electrolytes.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

*[...] They had several small cuts (one more serious and open), were hungry and dehydrated. All of them had experienced severe violence from both sides. The Polish Border Guard beat them, used pepper spray, smashed their phones, and slashed their clothes. They also used firearms and shot at them with rubber bullets. They showed us bruises and scars. They had only one phone.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

Although August is still a summer month, humanitarian interventions increasingly involved people who were severely cold and chilled. During the reporting period, there were nights in Białowieża when temperatures dropped below 6°C. Rainfall was recorded in the Białowieża Forest on 14 out of 31 days in August.<sup>10</sup>

*On site were three young men from Somalia, aged 18, 19, and 20. They had been in the forest on the Polish side for three days, and eight days on the eastern side. They were very cold. Their clothes were soaked. Hungry. The 20-year-old had a twisted ankle from jumping off the fence; he was given painkillers and a brace. [...] The 18- and 19-year-olds, while fleeing from the border strip, each lost one shoe. For three days they had been moving through the forest, each wearing only one shoe.*

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

## Hospital

In August, we received information about 12 people who were hospitalized after crossing the green border (all of them in the hospital in Hajnówka). Among them were at least two unaccompanied teenagers and two women. According to collected information, during the reporting period Polish Border Guard officers carried out at least one pushback directly from the hospital. It occurred so soon after the patient's admission that

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<sup>10</sup> Data from the Hydrology System Database of IMGW-PIB, <https://rafalraczynski.com.pl/imgw-archiwum/> [accessed: 15.09.2025]

caseworkers working in the hospital were unable to reach the person before the pushback took place.

Legal interventions in August took place exclusively in hospitals. Eleven patients, in addition to receiving basic material assistance, were supported by humanitarian workers in their applications for interim measures of the European Court of Human Rights, which in the context of the Polish–Belarusian border provide individuals with temporary protection from pushback.<sup>11</sup>

## Pushbacks and Violence<sup>12</sup>

According to the official response from the Border Guard to an inquiry submitted by Grupa Granica, Polish border guards carried out 1985 pushbacks in August. A decision ordering departure from Polish territory was issued to 77 individuals<sup>13</sup>, while 1908 people were expelled under the Regulation of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration of 13 March 2020. The largest groups affected were nationals of Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

*I try to go Poland, but the border men beat me by stick without mercy and let the dog bite me. I tell the border men I am sick. I have absent mind and anger obsession. I also have sick in my bone and problem in my immunity. I have papers from doctor prove all my sickness, but the border men beat me without mercy. I will send you all pictures. The border men break bone in my chest cage. I feel pain in every place in my body. This is not humanitarian behaviour. The human shouldn't treat like this. I am from Sudan. We have war in my country. My country not safe. My family die in war. I am the only survivor. I don't have anyone to send me money. After border men beat me, my sickness increase. My bone shake. My absent mind and anger obsession increase. People from Sudan find me in forest. They carry me and take me to Minsk because my state very bad. I sleep*

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<sup>11</sup> The interim measure issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) generally provides protection, for the period indicated by the Court, against expulsion to Belarus and thereby, in practice, may enable individuals to initiate administrative procedures leading to the regularization of their stay. The average waiting time for a Court decision whether to grant the requested measure ranges from several hours to as much as 1–2 working days. In the meantime, as practice in recent years has shown, applicants for interim measures remain at risk of pushback, even when hospitalized.

<sup>12</sup> The quotes used in this chapter come from interviews conducted with people on the move, reports from non-governmental organizations working on the Polish–Belarusian border, and excerpts from messages sent by individuals on the move to NGOs and advocates. Quotes from text messages and reports that are not direct testimonies are appropriately described. Translations of quotes from in-depth interviews are based on consecutive translations and, as such, inherently include a degree of interpreter interpretation. Translations of messages and reports were carried out to preserve the original tone of the statements. Dates, locations, and details that could identify individuals have been removed from this work to ensure the anonymity of our interlocutors. All names have been changed.

<sup>13</sup> Article 303b of the Act on Foreigners of 12 December 2013.

*in park because I don't have money. I begging people in street to give me money. I begging you to help me. I deserve asylum in Poland.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Sudan who had been pushbacked

In the same period, humanitarian organizations operating at the border registered information on 83 people who had been pushbacked. Among them were nine unaccompanied children (seven boys and two girls). Thirty-three of these individuals experienced more than one pushback. In total, 270 pushbacks to Belarus were recorded in August.

*I have been in Poland more than six times.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man who had been pushbacked multiple times

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE AUGUST 2025				
	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women* (incl. pregnant)
<b>Reported pushbacks</b>	33	83	9 (9)	2 (0)
<b>Incl. from a hospital</b>	N/A	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
<b>Reported violence PL</b>	16	38	7 (7)	1 (0)
<b>Reported violence BY</b>	14	36	5 (5)	5 (0)
<b>Reported violence N.N.</b>	12	16	1 (1)	3 (0)
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

In August, 36 people, including five unaccompanied children (three boys and two girls), reported experiencing violence from Belarusian services. According to their accounts, on the eastern side of the fence violence affects both those who remain there before making their first attempt to cross the barrier and those who end up there as a result of being pushbacked by Polish Border Guard officers.

Two young men from Sudan, aged 23 and 21. They had been on the Polish side for two days, and in total 14 days in the forest. They crossed in a group of ten people, the rest were caught. This was their third time in Poland. The first time, they were taken to a facility where they were issued documents with a ban on entry to

Europe and then pushbacked across the border. On the Belarusian side, they wanted to return to Sudan, from which they had fled a brutal war. Belarusian soldiers then showed them a pit with five or six bodies and told them that this is how those end up who want to return to Minsk—making sure they still wanted to go back. The young men said that during pushbacks their shoes were taken and their phones or at least the charging ports destroyed. Those who had documents had them confiscated and destroyed. The older of the two could not understand why. He also could not understand being used so instrumentally by both sides and thrown back and forth across the border. He said they had fled a nightmare in Sudan only to find another nightmare in the forest. “The world falls everywhere,” he concluded.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report

In conversations with women reporting violence, accounts of sexual violence also emerged.

*They are telling me 'We will beat you' and not only that. I went to the forest four times. I was raped three times and I am very bad, desperate.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a woman. Country of origin unknown

*I came back from the forest a few days ago and I'm still exhausted from the forest. The day after, after the raid on my residence, we were taken to the cartridge department and then to the Russian border. For 4 days without food or drink, with the help of a strong person, I returned to Minsk. I am now without a family and without shelter. A girl who was raped twice. I lost my virginity. Death is kinder than this harsh life. Homeless, lost, and sick. My life in my country is more dangerous. I cannot go back to my country forever. I was deported three times to the Russian border. The Belarusian army has no mercy. I suffer from a psychological condition due to rape. I am an unmarried girl who was raped. This has put me in an extremely difficult psychological state now. I have a blood pressure problem. I suffer greatly from the lack of medical care. There is no treatment. My head has been on the verge of exploding for weeks.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a woman from Sudan

Thirty-eight people, including seven unaccompanied children (one of them a girl), reported violence from Polish officers.

*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 a conversation with a pushbacked man from Somalia

Some people emphasized the particularly humiliating and degrading nature of the violence they experienced. In some accounts, the reported practices were explicitly described as racist.

*They insulted me with beatings and violence, and they put hot pepper in our eyes, then they sent us back. They are very violent and they are racist in all its forms.*

Excerpt from a conversation with two men from Somalia

*It is racist and it is being killed.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Somalia

*Why does the army beat and torture us? They say to me: "You are not human you are a monkey". The dog is more honorable than you". I am a black African, they don't see me as a human being.*

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Somalia traveling with a pregnant woman

## **I was honestly saying: "Kill us, let us die with dignity [of] a human being" – Tafari's two pushbacks**

Tafari comes from Ethiopia, from the town of Lalibela in the Amhara region. Because of the civil war, he left the country in fear for his life after two of his brothers were killed. At the time of the interview in July 2025, he had been in Belarus for three months. During this period, he experienced two pushbacks.

*I came because of the war, the civil war that's going on in my country [...], two of my brothers are dead, many of my friends are dead. And the reason why I'm here is because I fear for my life and women get raped and a lot of horrible stuff [is] happening. And that's why I came here, that's why I'm trying to come to Poland.*

*I was pushed back two times, but the first time I was really severely injured. I even begged them to kill me because of the pain that I felt.*

### **First pushback**

On June 3, 2025, Tafari went from Grodno to the Belarusian border barrier, where he was detained and beaten by four Belarusian officers. At that time, he was traveling in a group

of 13 people from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Among them were three teenagers, including two minors about 17 years old<sup>14</sup>.

*At first we went to the border of Belarus and when we went to the border, the soldiers who found us at that place beat us up, they were very violent with us and they beat us, they beat us so badly. [...] They were four people and I think they were also drunk at the time. And even if we were enemies, even if you're like an enemy, you wouldn't beat someone up like that. And it was very disgusting to watch and to experience that.*

Belarusian officers pushed Tafari and his companions – thirteen people in total – into a small vehicle to transport them to a station. During the ride in the overcrowded car, Tafari lost consciousness due to lack of air.

*[...] They cramped us into like 13 people in one car, in a very small car. It was so congested and it was so busy in that car I fainted because there was little air at that time.*

Between 11:00 p.m. and midnight, the officers dropped the people off on the road near the Polish border barrier. Tafari is unable to specify the exact time this happened, as their phones had been taken away earlier. On site, they were divided into two groups: one of five people and another of eight. Tafari was placed in the second group. The Belarusian officers set up a ladder against the wall, cut through the razor wire, and forced Tafari and his companions to jump to the other side, brutally beating, pushing, and setting dogs on them in the process.

*The soldiers themselves, they bring a ladder. They bring a ladder and they put the ladder on the fence. And the soldiers themselves stood up on the ladder and cut the barbed wires. And after they cut those barbed wires, they will tell you to jump. [...] And if you're not quick, then they will beat you at that point. They're telling you to climb quickly. And if you don't climb how they want, as fast as you can, they will push you themselves.*

*At first they beat us until we lost ourselves and until we fainted. We were severely beaten, you know, we've been punched. We've been attacked, we've been put to a corner and they even brought dogs to bite some of us. [...]*

*Then after we climbed on the fence, we jumped and I was at that time... My leg was broken, I also run just a little bit, but at the time I didn't feel it, because I run, I was trying to get away.*

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<sup>14</sup> Tafari was not certain about the ages of the people in the group. He estimated as follows: "One of them said he was 17, another said he was 18. The third said he was about the same age. So I guess he was around 17 or younger, because he looked very young."

Tafari and his companions sustained serious injuries. They did not receive any medical assistance.

*[There were] way worse accidents than mine. And they were people who needed medication or medical attention, [...] one person, he broke his two legs and his two hips. And one person broke his right leg and it's like completely broken, broken. It was so ugly to see and I have a video [...].*

Tafari reports that after falling from the wall, he was in shock and ran several kilometres into the forest with a broken leg, until he collapsed from exhaustion and fell asleep. He was later found by four or five Polish officers, who placed plastic handcuffs on him and sprayed pepper spray into his eyes. Tafari recalls that they were dressed in light green uniforms and spoke Polish to one another. He also observed a large graphite-coloured van, open at the back, which belonged to the officers. Tafari states that at the time of his detention he was not fully conscious. He was unable to identify any distinguishing features due to the spray in his eyes and the severe pain caused by the fall.

*They [Polish officers] came, they handcuffed me and they put that pepper spray on. Then there was nothing. And after that they pepper sprayed me and they asked me how many people were in the group. I told them how many people were in the group and that's all.*

The officers put Tafari into the vehicle and transported him to a hospital, where his wounds were treated. At that time, Tafari requested international protection.

*When I was filling out the form at the hospital, I was asking them if I could apply for asylum.*

He was then taken to a facility<sup>15</sup>, where two new officers in civilian clothing gave him a form to fill out in a language he did not understand. Tafari reports that, despite the presence of an interpreter, he did not fully comprehend the content of the document he was signing due to extreme exhaustion. During the interview he was vomiting continuously. While at the facility, he also experienced breathing difficulties, convulsions, and pain in his stomach and leg. The officers informed him that he would be allowed to remain in Poland.

*All I remember was [that] she [translator] was asking me where I was from, and then she was just, like, wishing me good luck. I wasn't feeling good, I wasn't myself, I was vomiting at the time. You know, I was in a very bad condition.*

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<sup>15</sup> Tafari described the facility as a concrete building: "some kind of cement looking kind of house."

*So, not only my leg, but also all over my stomach was hurting, my breathing was off. It was not the way that I used to breathe in a normal way and everything about my entire body was like shaking and I was begging them not to send me back and I was actually on my knees asking them to take me to the hospital and they were mocking me and [...] they snatched me out of the institution to take me and put me in the car and then they pushed me back.*

Tafari remained in the facility for around six to seven hours. During that time, he was given half a litre of water. He was not offered the use of a toilet. He was unable to move on his own. While searching him, one of the officers cut his clothes off, while three others stood by and watched.

*[...] they cut my entire clothes without my boxer, without my underwear, without my underpants, they cut off everything. They cut it with scissors [...] and I was sent back with boxers.*

*They didn't respect no privacy, no privacy rights, no nothing. Even at this time, when animals are even respected, and when there are laws for animals, they didn't respect any laws. They just do everything right there and then, and there was no right or nothing they protected for me.*

They then ordered him to get up from his knees and get into the car. Tafari notes that this was difficult for him because of injuries to his knees and thighs. The guards told him they would take him to the hospital, but instead they drove him to the forest in the same graphite-colored vehicle they had arrived in. The pushback took place around 1:00 p.m. Tafari does not remember the exact location, only the pole number between 400 and 500<sup>16</sup>.

*They came while I was sleeping and they told me that I was going to go to the hospital. And later I was pushed back on the van. I had that torn ACL and I was in a very terrible condition. I was there on my knees and they were telling me to get up to the car. [...] they were telling me to go up and put me through the fence and pushed me and then that was all.*

Tafari also recounts the situation of the other people from the group with whom he crossed the border.

*[...] three people who are injured severely without getting any medical attention have been pushed back and returned. But the other guys went, I think they crossed and some of them have been back in maybe in a different order, I don't know. But some of them have managed to cross.*

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<sup>16</sup> The border stretches between Ozierany Małe and Stare Masiewo.

Tafari spent about two days in the forest on the Belarusian side of the border. He was unable to move on his own — he recalls having to lean against trees for support. There he met other people from his group. Tafari and his companions survived by eating leaves and drinking water from cans they found on the ground. After two days, they were detained by Belarusian officers and taken to a taxi point.

*After we reached Belarus they didn't do nothing for us. We slept there for two days and they didn't give us no food, no water. You know a tuna can we found, a water that was like probably left three or four months ago and we had to like warm that and drink that [...]. They didn't even beat my friends, because we were severely injured and we had to eat leaves and we had to survive out of what we found on the ground [...]. And what we have found over there we have to, like I said, warm tuna water too and eat it with leaves and later we also got sick because we ate like cows [...].*

## **Second pushback**

Tafari crossed the border for the second time a month later, on July 4, 2025, in a group of four people from Ethiopia. Before that, they had spent two days in the forest between the Polish and Belarusian border barriers. Tafari and his companions crossed a body of water and entered the Polish side through a hole in the border fence. They were then detained by Polish officers.

Between his detention and pushback, Tafari experienced a severe beating, but he was unable to specify the exact place and moment when it occurred. The officers tied Tafari's hands and those of his companions, sprayed pepper spray into their eyes three times, and beat them brutally. Tafari recounts that the officers were dressed "like soldiers": they wore light green uniforms and masks covering their faces.

*He found me in Poland. So there was a river, like a lake, that we crossed, and then we crossed the lake, and then we found a cut fence, so we sneaked in, we didn't climb, but we sneaked into the border. They were using pretty much their hands and their feet, so I don't know if they were using weapons, because for 15 minutes I lost consciousness, and they [...] don't say: "This is a sensitive spot, this is, you know, private part where you're not supposed to hit". They just throw punches and, you know, hit you wherever they find you. So they will hit you wherever they feel like it. So they will hit you wherever they want to. After we were on the ground, when he [Polish officer] stomped on my head, like I mentioned earlier, I lost my consciousness. So we were tied on the back of my hands. I was on the floor and he... my face was like entire blood, entire blood was covered on my face. And he was stomping, [...], they were taking pictures of me, mocking me. [...] And I was like on the ground there, begging for my life.*

Tafari and his companions were taken to a facility, where they were held for 3–4 hours. During that time, they were not given any food or water. At the facility, the officers strip-searched the members of the group and took photos of them.

*So we went there and they were searching us. So, they told us to take off our clothes. They searched us, they took pictures of us, and they put us naked, and then they pushed us back.*

Tafari sums up these events with a reflection on the particular cruelty of the officers:

*I was honestly saying: "Kill us, let us die with dignity [of] a human being"... To be cruel this bad to another human being, as if we are criminals [...]. Whereas people that come out of like a different world, to be treated that way was horrific and like someone stomping on your head. He literally stomped on his like... He stood on my head or like I wanted like you know, while I'm on the ground... And to see that was horrible.*

Tafari says that in this situation there was no possibility to talk to the officers or to ask for international protection.

The four of them were then driven by car to the border and pushed back. Tafari does not know the location of the pushback and emphasizes that he was semi-conscious at the time due to head injuries. In Belarus, officers caught them and took them to a facility. Afterwards, they led them into the forest, where they forced them to commit sexual violence against women and beat them when they refused. As a result, they sustained serious injuries.

*In Poland they pushed us back, they opened the fence. They opened it and they told us to move in, to get into the border [with] Belarus. And once we arrived there, in Belarus, they mixed us with the girls. And once they mixed us with the girls, they put us into this camp. And from that camp, they took us out and they took us to the forest. And we were, like, they took our shoes, so we were barefoot. [...] They [Belarusian officers] told us to be naked and to rape a woman so they said like kiss her, grope her, rape her and then while we said no, we were the ones who were getting beaten. So they told us to be naked, to kiss a woman and to rape a woman and when we refused to do that, we said we'd never do such a thing, we are the ones who are getting beaten. We were in a very severe condition that you wouldn't even wish for your enemies. [...] Once we arrived there at the taxi, the taxi driver helped us get there, because when he was... He saw his legs, he felt bad for him. He took him to the hospital. And they kind of, like, made some adjustment to his leg. And... But his hips still don't work. He cannot move his hips. His hips are, like, damaged.*

At the time of the conversation, Tafari is still in Belarus and in serious condition. He has no access to food or medical assistance.

*At this moment, the sad reality is that we were eating food out of a trash can because we couldn't do anything. We have no money. We have nothing. And that's the reality that we are currently facing. I want everything to be published. I want nothing to be left out from the publication, because I want the world to know the suffering. To know that there is a war in our country. We're here not because we chose to be here, but because we're forced [...]. We can't go back. That's why we're here [...].*

## 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 individuals.

**Children/minors** — all persons under 18 years old.

**Unaccompanied Children/Minors** — Children travelling without a legal guardian.

**Requests from Muharrama** — reports of groups/persons requesting assistance from muharrama

**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*.

**Sistiema** – ogrodzenie i system elektroniczny odgradzające zmilitaryzowany pas pogranicza białoruskiego od głębi terytorium Białorusi.

**Support total**— total number of people reached by organisations and entities operating in Podlasie who agreed to share information with us (Grupa Granica, Ocalenie, unaffiliated residents and inhabitants of Podlasie, collectives, individuals, Podlaskie Ochotnicze Pogotowie Ratunkowe)

**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 regularization of stay such as 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 provided to migrants hospitalised as a result of border crossing.

**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 field interventions** — number of 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** — all known victims of the border regimes of Poland (also acting as a member state of the European Union) and Belarus are individuals who died along the Eastern European migration route, on the Polish-Belarusian border, and on its both sides. Cases of people who died outside of these areas but whose deaths are connected to the attempt to cross this particular

border are considered individually by the Border Death Monitoring Group (BDMG), in order to avoid the arbitrary inclusion or exclusion of specific individuals. The data continues to be verified and updated. It is expected that, over time, additional information may surface regarding further deaths, including from the period covered here.

**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** — persons considered vulnerable in the context of Poland–Belarus border based on following grounds::

<b>Age</b>	<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>
<b>Medical reasons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pregnancy</li> <li>- chronic illness</li> <li>- disability</li> </ul>
<b>Protection Needs*</b>	<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