

SEPTEMBER 2025

Report from the Poland-Belarus border



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.

For additional questions please contact: dane@wearemonitoring.org.pl

Definitions

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

SUPPORT US!



You can support our activities by making a donation:

We Are Monitoring Association

51 1090 1056 0000 0001 5481 1903

Twarda 18, 00-105, Warszawa

Transfer title: **"Donation for statutory purposes"**

or by using the payment gateway on our website:

<https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/en/donate/>

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.

If we were to adopt an interpretation, that a person could be punished under Article 264a of the Penal Code every time a person in need receives a personal benefit, then every person providing assistance would be at risk of punishment.

Judge Adam Rodakowski during verbal justification of the 'Five' trial 8.09.2025 r.

In September, two high-profile trials of activists providing aid on the Polish-Belarusian border came to an end. All defendants were acquitted. In both cases, the parties filed motions for written justification, and representatives of the prosecution did not rule out an appeal.

The trial of the Five

The first of the trials concerned five people accused of acts under Article 264a § 1 of the Penal Code¹. According to the prosecution's findings, they were alleged to have facilitated the continued stay in the country of foreigners who had previously crossed the green border from Belarus into Poland. This assistance allegedly consisted, among other things, of providing food, drinks, sleeping bags, shelter, and transportation. The requirement under the provision – obtaining a material or personal benefit – was not attributed to the accused but to the migrants who received the support; the fact that they gained a 'benefit' as a result of the helpers' actions was supposed to be sufficient to fulfill the condition.

The events that led to the charges took place in March 2022 and concerned a nine-member family from Iraqi Kurdistan: two adults and seven children aged 2 to 16, and a citizen of Egypt. The group crossed the border and for some time wandered on the Polish side, trying to contact a person who was supposed to transport them further west into Europe. According to their account, the smuggler refused to come near the border and instructed them to walk deeper into the country to a meeting point about 20 km away. Due to the low temperature and difficult weather conditions, their physical condition gradually deteriorated. In this situation, the activists visited them twice – the first time providing only food and dry clothing, and the second time deciding to evacuate them from the forest to a place where they could warm up and recover. During this operation, one of the vehicles carrying some of the exhausted people was stopped by the authorities.

After nearly two years of proceedings conducted by the District Prosecutor's Office in Hajnówka, an indictment was prepared. The trial before the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski (Criminal Division in Hajnówka) began at the beginning of 2025. The defendants were supported by the Szpila Collective. Several organizations joined the court

¹ Article 264a of the Penal Code – Enabling Illegal Stay on the Territory of the Republic of Poland § 1. Whoever, for the purpose of obtaining a material or personal benefit, enables or facilitates another person's stay on the territory of the Republic of Poland in violation of the law, is subject to imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years.

proceedings including the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the Polish Bar Council, the Free Courts Foundation, the Association for Legal Intervention, the Election Observation Mission, as well as the right-wing Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture and the "Independence March" Association.

Among witnesses testifying in court were Border Guard officers, the aforementioned family from Iraq, and a local resident from Podlasie, who is involved in providing humanitarian aid. Prosecutor Magdalena Rutyna, toward the end of the trial, suggested changing the legal qualification and description of the act to organizing illegal border crossings. In her closing statement, she demanded a sentence of 1 year and 4 months of imprisonment for each of the accused, arguing:

The evidence collected in the case confirms the defendants' involvement in organizing illegal crossings of the border from the Republic of Belarus into the Republic of Poland, as well as organizing illegal crossings of the internal borders of the European Union.

The prosecutor also accused the defendants of conducting their activities in a conspiratorial manner, using coded language, operating within an organized structure with a defined division of roles, and acting out of a desire to oppose the existing migration policy. Their actions had an anti-state and anti-system character, she emphasized. All organizations (except Ordo Iuris and the "Independence March" Association) demanded acquittal. Michał Cykała from the Polish Bar Council said:

In my opinion, this case is not about whether to let migrants into Poland, nor about border protection, nor about migration policy. It is about what a citizen can do when the state and its institutions fail. Whether a citizen has the right to provide help and whether the state, in general, can punish an attempt to help. [...] The history of Poland is a history of resistance against authority when the law did not treat citizens as equals. From an early age, we are taught patriotic and religious values. It is hard today to accuse the defendants of acting in accordance with those principles they deeply believe in.

Both trials are examples of the repression experienced by those providing humanitarian aid. Attempts to criminalize solidarity aim to discourage people from standing up for human rights. From the beginning of the humanitarian crisis at the border, we have maintained that helping is legal, emphasized lawyer Jarosław Jagura, representing the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.

On September 8, a verdict was handed down acquitting the five activists. Judge Adam Rodakowski, presenting the oral justification, referred to both ethical and strictly legal

issues. Referring to Article 264a § 1 of the Penal Code, he pointed out that the function of this article is based on the assumption that those who commit the offense do so for the purpose of obtaining a personal benefit. Therefore, one cannot be punished for the fact that the personal benefit was obtained by the people who received assistance. Every foreigner who reaches Poland may need help.

If we were to adopt the interpretation that a person could be punished under Article 264a of the Penal Code every time a person in need of help receives a personal benefit, then every person providing assistance would be at risk of punishment—he explained.

Additionally, the judge raised the issue of the right to protection and the situation of people on the move in the context of the practical impossibility of applying for international protection in Poland.

If we make it impossible to submit an application for international protection, we cannot be surprised that these people try to reach Germany. [...] If we have a situation where we physically prevent the submission of an application for international protection, then it is necessary to question whether a foreigner who has not submitted such an application is in fact staying here in violation of the law.

Bartosz's trial:

In September, proceedings were also held before the District Court in Białystok against Bartosz, who volunteered at the border [surname withheld at his request]. The prosecution accused him of “exerting influence on the official actions of Border Guard officers,” which was alleged to have occurred when – acting as the legal representative of a citizen of Somalia – he demanded the right to contact his client, who had been detained by the Border Guard. The officers denied him this right, and the decision to expel the foreigner from Poland was made without his knowledge or participation.

The incident took place in October 2024, during a field intervention in the woods, when three people—two from Ethiopia and one from Somalia – declared their intention to apply for international protection in Poland. These individuals signed the appropriate powers of attorney authorizing representation in administrative proceedings and requested

contact with Border Guard officers.²

A Border Guard patrol arrived at the scene and said that all three asylum seekers would be transported to the facility in Michałowo. Upon arrival at the facility, Bartosz attempted to determine the date when proceedings involving his clients would begin, but he received only assurances that he would be notified. On his way back to base, he received a phone call asking whether in the dirty clothes exchanged for new ones during intervention – there might be identity documents belonging to one of the men. After confirming that the documents were indeed there, it was agreed that Bartosz would deliver them the following day. During the conversation, a Border Guard officer informed him that the proceedings involving the foreigners were to begin at that time.

Upon arriving at the facility at the agreed time, Bartosz was informed that the two Ethiopian citizens had already been transported to the center in Połowce, where administrative procedures had been initiated against them. Regarding the Somali citizen, a Border Guard officer stated that “that case no longer exists,” as the man had allegedly withdrawn his application for international protection and revoked the power of attorney. When Bartosz demanded contact with the Somali man or access to documents confirming this information, he was forcibly removed from the facility. In a moment of emotion, he shouted at the officers: *You’re breaking the law. You’re screwed; consequences will follow*, and he also announced that the matter would be reported to the Ombudsman and the media. These words became the basis for charges of attempting to exert influence on the actions of Border Guard officers through unlawful threats—under Article 224 of the Penal Code.

In her closing argument, Prosecutor Agnieszka Łupińska stated that in the event the court found no violation of the above provision, she requested that the defendant be found guilty of violating Article 65a of the Code of Petty Offenses³ and sentenced to a fine of 250 daily rates of 30 PLN each. As in the case of the trial of the five activists from

² This action is standard for an operational protocol called ‘Assisted Asylum Request’, adopted by the solidarity network of organisations and activists operating at the Polish–Belarusian border before the suspension of the right to seek asylum in the region. Its aim was to reduce the risk of pushback for applicants for international protection. The process was based on an assumption known as ‘protection through presence’, according to which the presence of humanitarian organisations/activists has the ability to deter potential risk of abuse and, in this particular context, denial of access to asylum procedures. People on the move expressing their intention to seek protection to activists are offered to be accompanied by them during the process. Field workers and volunteers support asylum seekers during the process by providing information on the legal consequences of applying for refugee status in Poland, informing the Border Guard of their intention to apply for international protection, waiting with them for the Border Guard to arrive, documenting their willingness to submit an application and then accompanying them to the Border Guard station and at subsequent stages up to the point when the application is successfully submitted. Each person seeking to apply for international protection also has the option of choosing a proxy to support them during the administrative procedure until the risk of pushback has been resolved. This is done by granting a power of attorney to a designated person.

³ Failure to comply with orders issued by a Police or Border Guard officer.

Hajnówka, organizations—including HFHR, the Polish Bar Council, and SIP—joined Bartosz’s case.

This case is also one of the manifestations of how humanitarian aid is being criminalized. Its goal is to create a chilling effect, emphasized attorney Karolina Gierdal from the Szpila Collective, representing the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in the trial. In outlining the situation of those seeking protection at the border, she cited reports by Médecins Sans Frontières and We Are Monitoring. She focused on the procedures at facilities in 2024m— the period during which the events described in the indictment occurred. Earlier, in the spring of 2024, the practice had become widespread of presenting foreigners transported to facilities with statements declaring that they did not wish to apply for protection in Poland and indicating which country they intended to go to.

Your Honor, in 2024 the organization [WAM] documented 3,183 cases of pushbacks from Poland to Belarus, involving 1,555 people. At the same time, 1,622 individuals formally expressed their intention to seek protection before the Border Guard in the presence of representatives of NGOs – who were even present at the facilities – yet as many as 165 of them were nevertheless pushed back to Belarus. [...] The report contains over a dozen testimonies, including a few describing situations identical to the one in this trial: foreign nationals were willingly reported to Border Guard, had previously granted powers of attorney, and then, when they found themselves at the Border Guard facility, despite having every reason to expect that the proceedings would take place in the presence of their representatives, nothing of the sort happened. They were subjected to pressure, forced to sign documents whose meaning they did not understand, and then pushed back. This is one of many recurring forms of coercion: blackmail, threats of violence, psychological pressure. The accused, as someone providing humanitarian assistance, was certainly aware of these practices. He knew perfectly well what was happening at the facilities and that such statements were being obtained in a way designed to force signatures. It is truly difficult to blame him, and I believe his actions were taken in the interest of his client – exactly the kind of action one should expect from a legal representative. He demanded a personal meeting with his client to confirm whether the client truly understood what had happened, what he had signed, and what the consequences were.

Representative of the Polish Bar Council, Artur Kula, emphasized the systemic context of Bartosz’s prosecution in his statement:

The first articles of the Law on the Bar indicate that the role of the Bar is also to cooperate in the protection of citizens’ rights and freedoms, to shape the application of law, to represent the Bar, and to defend its rights. Therefore, for

the Bar, the issue of representation guarantees is crucial – not only for advocates but also for legal advisers and other representatives operating in the administrative system, because –colloquially speaking we are all in the same boat. In the opinion of the Bar Council, the repressions faced by the accused could just as easily have been directed against an advocate, a legal adviser, or a professional representative. Thus, we are dealing with a very serious, systemic problem in this case.

On September 26, a verdict of acquittal was issued. In his verbal justification, Judge Tomasz Pannert addressed, one by one, the elements of the incident that formed the basis of the indictment. It was undisputed, in the judge's view, that all three men had crossed the border against the provisions of the law and that, once in Poland, they had granted powers of attorney to Bartosz. The second matter, also beyond doubt in the judge's opinion, was that the powers of attorney had not been revoked, which meant that Bartosz was indeed their representative. Thirdly, the accused did not participate in any proceedings, and there was no evidence that he had been notified of them.

We thus have a defendant who believes himself to be – and is recognized by the officers as – the legal representative. This person is allowed onto the premises of the Border Guard facility, he did not force his way in. He asks about his clients, and is informed about events that have already taken place. Events in which he should have participated but was not informed of. The accused is not the kind of hooligan who storms into a facility. In the court's view, he is a person of above-average sensitivity, characterized by respect for the principles of law. And this person hits a wall. A hooligan might have resorted to violence. And what does the accused say? 'You're breaking the law, there will be consequences.' What else was he supposed to say? Leave and thank them?—argued the judge.

The judge also noted that in the testimonies of the witnesses – the Border Guard officers – one detail stood out: they emphasized the fact that the Somali citizen did not file an application for protection. According to the judge, the excessive emphasis on a particular piece of information can cast doubt on the sincerity of the testimony. He then moved on to more general remarks:

All proceedings involving citizens must be conducted in a manner that inspires trust. Such conduct toward state authorities is what citizens expect. Trust in institutions does not stem merely from wearing a robe or a uniform. It comes from the testimony given by those who wear them. [...] Regardless of whether the refugee wanted to remain in Poland or not, we can ask ourselves– what went wrong in this case? What was missing was human sensitivity, transparency, and professional conduct. Had the accused been notified of the date of the proceedings, this trial probably would never have happened.

Demographics, trends and requests

In September 2025, we recorded reports from 111 people traveling in 66 groups. One in ten women was pregnant. Seven out of nine children were traveling without guardians. More than 32% of all those requesting support reported health problems.⁴

REQUESTS SEPTEMBER 2025				
	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls (incl. pregnant)
Total	66	111	9 (7)	10 (1)
incl. in Poland	32	64	4 (4)	1 (0)
incl. in hospitals	N/A	4	1 (1)	0 (0)
incl. in Belarus	32	46	7 (4)	9 (1)
incl. in muharrama	5	10	4 (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 September, we recorded reports from 46 people contacting us from within Belarus and from the border strip on the eastern side of the border wall (muharrama).⁵ In the muharrama, there were 10 people traveling in 5 groups. Among them were 3 women and 4 children, including 3 traveling with their families. During the crossing of the wall, one

⁴ Among the reported health problems, the most common were: general physical weakness caused by prolonged stays in the forest; gastrointestinal issues related, among other things, to the consumption of contaminated water; irritation caused by contact with irritating substances such as pepper spray; and injuries resulting from dog bites as well as from violence inflicted by officers of both the Belarusian and Polish services. Frequently observed injuries also included numerous and extensive lacerations caused by razor wire, as well as orthopedic injuries resulting from falls or jumps from the border barrier. [Trapped Between Borders](#) from January 2025.

⁵ 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.

family was separated. A 17-year-old boy from Afghanistan managed to cross the barrier, while his mother did not. Due to her health condition and physical exhaustion, she was unable to climb the border wall and was forced to remain in the muharrama zone. The boy continued his journey alone.

36 people made contact from within Belarus, mostly from larger Belarusian cities. Unfortunately, even these cities do not provide safety for people on the move. Migrants who contacted humanitarian workers reported a lack of access to asylum procedures and basic healthcare. Particularly severe was the lack of access to regularly taken medication, which had either been stolen or destroyed by the authorities, or had run out due to the unexpectedly prolonged journey.

I have severe liver disease. I cannot even sit. I cannot work. I am in serious trouble because I have nothing to buy food and medicines and I am afraid.

Excerpt from a conversation with a person staying in Belarus.

Of all 111 reports, 24 came from people from Afghanistan. During this period, 19 people from Sudan, 17 from Somalia, 15 from Eritrea, and 5 from Iraq also reported. The country of origin of 22 people could not be determined.⁶

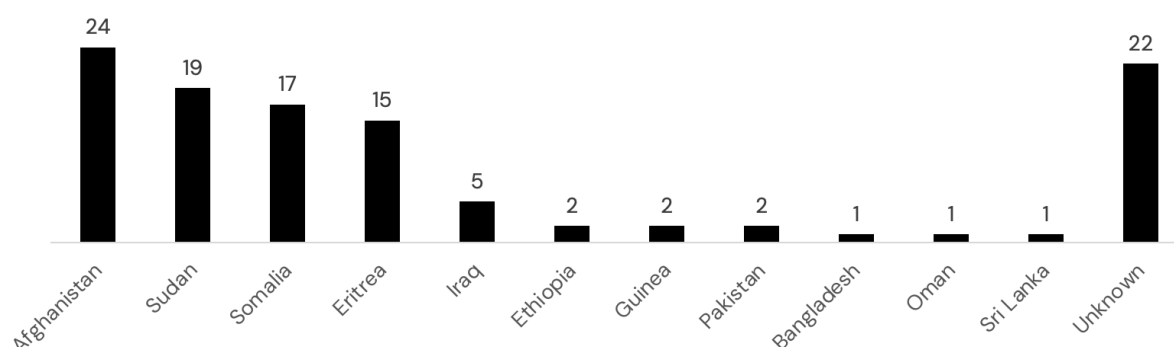


Fig. 1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in September 2025

⁶ 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 September, support was provided to 43 people traveling in 26 groups. Among them were three unaccompanied boys and two women, one of whom was pregnant. A total of 34 field interventions were carried out, during which 38 people were assisted, including three unaccompanied minors and one woman. Six of the field interventions were unsuccessful.⁷

Both 20 years old, they met in Belarus. The woman had been in Belarus for 10 days; the man had been pushed back once. They crossed the border the previous day. The man had old wounds from concertina wire. The woman reported being beaten and subjected to a violent search but did not report other acts of violence. They met at the Polish–Belarusian border and are not related. Communication was somewhat difficult, as only the woman spoke English, and only at a basic level. We provided them with water, soup, clothes, shoes, backpacks with dry food, and a power bank. After receiving assistance, they immediately got up and continued their journey.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention report concerning two people from Eritrea

SUPPORT PROVIDED SEPTEMBER 2025

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total⁸	26	43	3 (3)	2 (1)
Material aid	25	42	3 (3)	1 (0)
Legal aid	4	4	1 (1)	0 (0)
Medical aid	9	10	0 (0)	1 (1)
First aid	13	15	1 (1)	1 (0)

⁷ 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.

⁸ Explanations of the individual categories can be found in the glossary at the end of the report.

SUPPORT PROVIDED SEPTEMBER 2025

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Hospital assistance	N/A	4	1 (1)	0 (0)
# of undertaken interventions			34	
# of successful interventions			28	
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

The total support provided to people on the move includes humanitarian field interventions, often accompanied by medical interventions, as well as legal interventions, which in September primarily concerned assisting people on the move who were staying in hospitals in their efforts to obtain an interim measure from the European Court of Human Rights.

Although September is still a relatively warm month, during the reporting period there were nights in Białowieża when the temperature dropped below 0°C. It rained in the Białowieża Forest on 14 out of 30 September days.⁹ During interventions, humanitarian teams increasingly encountered people who were severely cold and hypothermic, and the prolonged stay of people in the forest more and more often resulted in a significant deterioration of their health. One such case was a 19-year-old man from Sudan, traveling alone, whom the field team supported on four separate occasions.

We met him. [...] He had crossed the border three days earlier. They had been in a group of ten people. Most of the others were caught and pushed back. The rest, as far as we understood, had separated. He had spent the last two nights in the forest. He said he had been in Belarus for seven days and had been severely beaten by Belarusian forces. He was in good condition but cold and soaked from staying in the forest. He showed early signs of trench foot. We gave him food, water, clothes, shoes, and power banks. He preferred to change later.

Excerpt from a field intervention report.

The following day, the man asked for support again.

⁹ Data from the Hydrology System Database of the Institute of Meteorology and Water Management – National Research Institute (IMGW-PIB), <https://rafalraczynski.com.pl/imgw-archiwum/> [accessed: 16.10.2025].

We met him again today. This time, compared to the previous day, he was in very poor physical and mental condition. When we arrived, he was lying on the ground, trembling slightly from pain and barely moving. He was unable to sit up and remained lying down for a long time. He was extremely exhausted, and his arm, hip, and knee were very sore. He said he had been beaten by Belarusian forces with a wooden stick. He did not want to eat or drink water. [...] Emotionally, he was struggling. He seemed to have been wandering around, a bit lost, and unsure whether he could manage. He was afraid he might die in the forest or be caught and killed in Belarus. He said that his friend had been shot in the leg by Polish forces and taken to a closed detention center. He himself just wanted to be taken to such a center. We talked to him for a long time. Eventually, he felt a bit more encouraged and determined. He sat up and began to eat on his own.

We returned to him late in the evening. After a short walk, he seemed weaker again. He vomited the water he had drunk earlier. He said he had been drinking swamp water for two days before we met him for the first time. [...] When his condition improved and stabilized somewhat, we parted ways.

Excerpts from a field intervention report.

The fourth meeting took place the following day.

We met the same person again. He had not moved since the last encounter. The man reported having a fever. [...] His emotional state was average, not as bad as the previous day. [...] We didn't stay long. We gave him a power bank, water, and soup, and then we parted ways.

Excerpts from a field intervention report.

In September, half of all people encountered during humanitarian interventions reported health problems (19 out of 38 individuals). First aid was provided to 15 people by humanitarian workers or activists. Four individuals were patients of the medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières – MSF). MSF medics also conducted six teleconsultations for people located in Poland and Belarus, including one pregnant woman.

Together with a medic, we reached a group of three men from Sudan, aged 17, 24, and 27. They had spent three days in the forest on the Polish side and two weeks on the Belarusian side. The 17- and 24-year-olds had been pushed back twice, and the 27-year-old three times. They reported being beaten by Belarusian authorities, sprayed with gas, and attacked by dogs. According to their account, it was the Belarusian forces who cut the border fence. The 27-year-old had visible bite wounds, cuts from concertina wire, and had been shot with a rubber bullet by Polish forces while crossing the border. Despite their injuries, they

appeared to be in relatively good condition. All serious wounds were treated by the medic. They had not eaten or drunk anything for three days. Earlier, they had been part of a group of five people who tried to cross into Poland together, but at some point, they ran in different directions.

We met three men who said that a fourth person was supposed to join them. From the conversation, we learned that they were from Afghanistan. The oldest of them was 30 years old, while the other two were around 25. The intervention was carried out with the participation of a medic due to reported vomiting. The group said that the vomiting was caused by drinking water from the forest. One of the men was very difficult to communicate with. The one who vomited after drinking tea and soup with medication was weak and disoriented; he needed help changing his clothes. [...], after which he fell asleep very quickly. He was wrapped in a Blizzard blanket and slept until the end of the intervention.

Excerpts from a field intervention report involving a medic

Hospital

In September 2025, we received information about four patients who, after crossing the green border, were admitted to the hospital in Hajnówka. Among them was an unaccompanied teenage boy. Due to the ongoing risk of pushback, despite their poor health condition, the patients received not only material assistance but also legal support in submitting requests for interim measures to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In all cases, the ECHR granted the requests. However, in one case the decision arrived too late. On 30 September, a 22-year-old man from Sudan, hospitalized due to severe starvation and hypothermia, was pushed back to Belarus by the Border Guard just a few hours before his positively reviewed application was delivered.¹⁰

Since March 27, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has issued at least 55 interim measures prohibiting expulsion from Poland, at the request of individuals who had irregularly crossed the Polish-Belarusian border. In at least 2 cases, the Court's decision reached the applicants too late — only after they had already been subjected to pushbacks. 49 people who requested interim measures were staying in hospitals while awaiting the decision.¹¹ Among them were 8 children and 3 women.

¹⁰ Egala Association, [@stowarzyszenie_egala]. (2025, September 30). *Jeszcze dziś był w szpitalu. Straż Graniczna wywiozła właśnie do Białorusi wygłodzonego 22-latkę z Sudanu*. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/stowarzyszenie_egala/p/DPPP_EXjM4g/ [accessed: 16.10.2025].

¹¹ 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.

Pushbacks and Violence¹²

In September, humanitarian organizations operating along the border recorded information about the pushbacks of 27 people. Among them were three unaccompanied minors and three women.

If we are sent back to Belarus, we risk torture and abuse by the police. If we attempt to enter Poland, we fear being pushed back to Belarus again. In both cases, we face the real danger of torture and even death.

Excerpt from a conversation with a woman from Afghanistan staying in Belarus

Ten people experienced more than one pushback. In total, we recorded 53 pushbacks to Belarus in September.

Me seven times pushed back to belarus my friend 5 times pushed back to belarus

Excerpt from a conversation with men from Eritrea traveling together

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE SEPTEMBER 2025

	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women* (incl. pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	14	27	3 (3)	3 (0)
Incl. from a hospital	N/A	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence PL	2	5	1 (1)	0 (0)
Reported violence BY	10	16	1 (1)	1 (0)
Reported violence N.N.	2	2	2 (2)	1 (0)
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

¹² 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.

16 people, including one unaccompanied minor and one woman, reported experiencing violence from Belarusian authorities. Violence by Polish officials was recorded in reports from 5 people, including one unaccompanied child.

They hit me in the heart and broke my hands and legs. I can no longer walk. Even breathing has become difficult for me.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Sudan

According to the official response from the Border Guard to an inquiry submitted by Grupa Granica, Polish border guards carried out 818 pushbacks in September. A decision ordering departure from Polish territory was issued to 43 individuals¹³, while 775 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 and Sudan.

I come one time in Poland so they kick me out.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Somalia

I said: "Yes, I want to stay in Poland" – Selam's¹⁴ pushback

The interview was conducted in May 2025 with Selam, a 24-year-old woman from Eritrea. She described a pushback she experienced on 16 March 2025.

At around 11:30 a.m., she crossed the border in a group of ten people: seven from Eritrea and three from Ethiopia, including seven men and three women. According to her account, eight people were apprehended by the Border Guard immediately after crossing. Selam managed to move away from the border barrier. However, she was moving slowly due to a leg injury she had sustained in the past. Once she managed to get deeper into the forest, she contacted a humanitarian aid worker. She was found by an officer around 6:00 p.m., before assistance could arrive.

The officer who stopped Selam was alone. According to her account, he was wearing military trousers and a civilian top¹⁵. He was armed and carried pepper spray. He was on foot, and his vehicle was parked at a distance from where Selam was found. Selam states that the officer did not use violence against her. He took a photo of her and also confiscated her phone after switching it to airplane mode.

All of them wear, like you know, ranger clothes, soldiers clothes. But the one that caught me from the top he wears civilian clothes and [...] his trousers, his pants are like soldiers pants. He came on foot and the car [...] was very far from where I was. [...] So I just showed him my leg that I had a problem [with] and he just took my phone and put it on airplane mode and he took me where the other people

¹³ Article 303b of the Act on Foreigners of 12 December 2013.

¹⁴ The interviewee's name has been changed.

¹⁵ He was likely a Border Guard officer. Border Guard officers often wear black T-shirts or fleeces and khaki-colored trousers."

were. [...] At first I thought he was like a humanitarian [worker] because he was not like, well enclosed, but like he had like... he was armed. He had like, you know, he has everything to tell you that he's not like, you know, "a civilian-civilian". So he had a gun, [...] pepper spray and everything. [...] I thought he was [a] humanitarian [worker], but when he took me to the other places and then I said: it's the police.

Selam states that she was asked by an officer if she intended to stay in Poland, which she affirmed at the time.

[...] he asked me if I want to stay in Poland. I said: "Yes. I want to stay in Poland". I said "yes". And then they said: "OK, you're in Poland. You're going to stay here".

After that she was transported to a facility in a car.

The police station was in the city. It was not like something in the forest. They took us to the city and it looked like a city. There were houses and people and everything.

According to Selam's account, she was alone in the vehicle — she was placed in the back seat and was not handcuffed. Selam does not recall how many officers were in the car. At the station, she encountered two men and one woman, who, according to her testimony, were part of the group of ten with whom she had crossed the border.

At the police station I met the girl and two guys. Two guys that were with us. And then there were other two people from another group that joined us when we were about to be pushed back late at night. So there were six people who were there. The six people were pushed back early during that time when they were caught. So I met three people from my group: one girl and two guys, two boys.

At the station, Selam was searched by a female officer. She states that she was not interrogated and did not sign any documents. Two other individuals at the station took photographs of her again. Her fingerprints were not taken. Initially, men and women were held in the same room, but they were later separated and placed in different rooms.

At first we were together and then they separated rooms for male and female.

The detained individuals were not offered any food or water. They were allowed to use the toilet, but only under pressure from the officers.

We were allowed to go to the toilet but they would rush you and tell you [...] to go [...] quickly and you know, rushing you here and there.

Around midnight on 17 March 2025, Selam and the other individuals were transported to border post 292. It was snowing.

It was like midnight [...] and it was snowing at the time. That's where they pushed us back.

You know, for us it was not that complicated because they put the plastic handcuffs on us and they took us to the border and we asked them to cut it [...]. They cut [...] only the one side and they pushed us back.

Selam and other individuals who were transported in the same vehicle were dropped off at a location where taxis to Minsk were departing.

Later, she learned from acquaintances she encountered again in Belarus about the violence they had experienced during the pushback. They had been beaten, pepper sprayed, and their phones had been damaged.

[...] our friends, they beat them, they beat them on their stomach [...], they pepper sprayed them and then pushed them back. [...] They broke their phone. Even the girl that was with me, they broke her phone as well.

Selam mentioned in an interview that she had heard about the drowning of one of the Ethiopians from the group with whom she was crossing the Polish–Belarusian border. According to her account, two weeks had passed since she heard about it.

One person who was in our group has died. And according to what we heard, he [...] drowned in the lake and then he died. It's been two weeks since I've heard that. [...] We lost him at the time but he was found later, [...] [after] two weeks. [...] He was our friend. We used to eat and like we used to eat together we used to live together and he was someone that I know, yes.

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::

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