

OCTOBER 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.

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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.

Demographics, trends and requests

In October 2025, we recorded requests from 141 people travelling in 64 groups, including five women and nine children (four of whom were travelling unaccompanied). Nearly 30% of all those requesting support reported health problems.¹

REQUESTS OCTOBER 2025				
	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls (incl. pregnant)
Total	64	141	9 (5)	5 (0)
incl. in Poland	26	92	6 (2)	3 (0)
incl. in hospitals	N/A	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
incl. in Belarus	36	47	3 (3)	2 (0)
incl. in muharrama	4	11	0 (0)	1 (0)
Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

In October, we recorded requests from 47 people contacting us from Belarusian territory and from the border strip on the eastern side of the barrier (*muharrama*).² At the time of requesting support, 11 of them were located in the *muharrama*, travelling in four groups. At least one woman was among them. 36 people contacted us from within Belarus, mainly from larger Belarusian cities. Unfortunately, even these locations do not provide

¹ 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.

² 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.

safety for people on the move. Migrants contacting humanitarian organisations report a lack of access to asylum procedures and basic medical care. Many describe health problems resulting from severe beatings by both Belarusian and Polish border guards.

One such person was an unaccompanied teenager from Eritrea, who had been in the Polish–Belarusian border area for at least two months. In one of the messages he sent to a humanitarian organisation, he wrote:

My back is broken and I can't go anywhere. The Belarusian hit me in my lower back. I am in a position where I can't even sleep because of the pain.

A man from Eritrea writing from Minsk — who had been pushed back from Poland the previous day — was in a similar situation:

I am currently in Belarus. Yesterday I crossed the Polish border, but I was caught and beaten. I was beaten by Belarus and Polish police. I can't move now. I have a spinal cord injury. I'm being moved by humans. My back pain is getting worse and I don't know what to do. couldn't get treatment.

Health problems resulting from severe beatings by both Belarusian and Polish officers, as well as the lack of access to any medical assistance, were also described by a man from Sudan who contacted us in the second half of the month:

I was stuck in the Belarusian–Polish forests for several days without food or drink. I was beaten by both sides, the Polish border guards and the Belarusian border guards. I have been suffering from this ringing for two weeks. I feel it in both ears, but in one more than the other. The bullet didn't hit me anywhere, but the aim was close to my head. I can hear with both ears, but one is weaker than the other, and I only suffer from this ringing at night when I try to sleep. I feel dizzy when I sit down and want to stand up. I feel dizzy for 14 seconds or less. I couldn't go to any hospital at all.

43 of the 141 requests came from people from Afghanistan and Sudan. During this period, 12 people from Ethiopia, six from Pakistan and Somalia, four from Mali, and three each from Eritrea and Cameroon also requested support. We also recorded one request each from individuals from Egypt, Guinea, Yemen, and Morocco. The country of origin of 17 people could not be determined.³

³ 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..

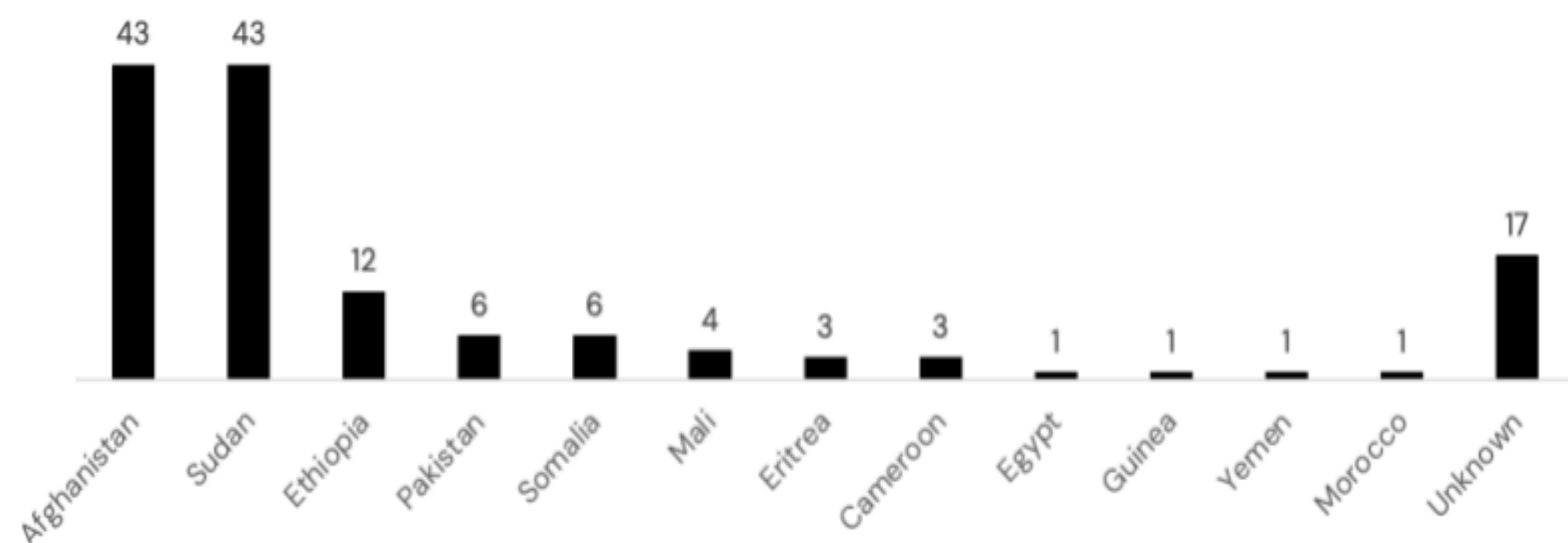


Fig. 1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in September 2025

Support provided

In October, support was provided to 71 people travelling in 16 groups, including five children (two of whom were travelling unaccompanied). Four of the 20 field interventions carried out ended unsuccessfully.⁴

During the reporting period, temperatures in Białowieża dropped below 0°C on six days, and on 11 days the highest temperature did not exceed 10°C. It rained in the Białowieża Forest on 22 out of 31 days in October.⁵ From the very beginning of the month, humanitarian teams increasingly encountered people who were severely cold and chilled. This was the case with three men from Sudan who received support in the first week of October.

Three men, between 22 and 26 years old. They had spent three weeks in the forest. Since their last pushback, they had been in Poland for two days. Each of them had experienced around 15 pushbacks. All had suffered physical violence from both Belarusian and Polish forces. They had been sprayed with pepper

⁴ 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.

⁵ Data from the Hydrology System database of IMGW-PIB, <https://rafalraczynski.com.pl/imgw-archiwum/> [accessed: 16 October 2025].

spray many times. The Polish Border Guard destroyed their phones. One of the men had been severely beaten by Polish officers, resulting in a bloody and bruised left eye. He said that the Belarusian border guards had pulled his tongue out; he pointed to the wounds on his tongue and said it hurt. All three were in moderate condition — exhausted, hungry, and freezing. They had not eaten for seven days.

They described an escalation of physical violence by Belarusian guards and at least one death. A boy in poor health had decided to ask Polish officers for medical help. The officers reportedly promised to take him to a hospital, but he was pushed back to Belarus. The men found his body about three metres from the border fence on the Belarusian side.

One of them described an empty, cold room in Brest, where 20 people were being held and then transported to the border in smaller groups. From their account, it appeared they had been taken to this place several times.

Excerpts from a humanitarian intervention

As many as 19 of all the people encountered during humanitarian interventions reported health problems. They received pre-medical first aid from humanitarian workers or activists.

Five people from Sudan. They said it was their first time in Poland. They had not eaten for five days. One had a swollen right arm after being shot with a rubber bullet. [...] He had also been hit in the jaw. Another reported pain in his lower ribs, also after being struck by a rubber bullet.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention

In October, the medical team of the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) carried out one teleconsultation supporting a person staying in Belarus.

SUPPORT PROVIDED OCTOBER 2025

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total⁶	16	71	5 (2)	0 (0)
Material aid	15	70	5 (2)	0 (0)
Legal aid	1	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
Medical aid	1	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
First aid	7	19	1 (0)	0 (0)
Hospital assistance	N/A	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
# of undertaken interventions			20	
# of successful interventions			16	
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

Humanitarian field interventions — often combined with accompanying medical interventions — together with legal interventions constitute the total support provided to people on the move. In October, legal assistance was provided to only one person. A patient in the hospital in Hajnówka received support in applying for an interim measure from the European Court of Human Rights.

Hospital

In October 2025, we received information about one person who was hospitalised in the hospital in Hajnówka after crossing the green border. The European Court of Human

⁶ Explanations of the individual categories can be found in the glossary at the end of the report.

Rights issued an interim measure in the patient's case, allowing him to avoid a pushback.⁷

Pushbacks and Violence⁸

In October, humanitarian organisations operating in the border region recorded information about the pushbacks of 49 people, including at least two children. Fourteen of these individuals experienced more than one pushback. In total, 154 expulsions to Belarus were recorded.

In the same month, activists accidentally came across a group of people on the move who had been detained by officers. These individuals spoke about previous pushbacks and violence and reported health problems:

We encountered four men from Sudan who had been detained by Border Guard officers. They said that in recent weeks they had been pushed back multiple times. One of them had a shallow gunshot wound on his leg. Another had numerous deep bite wounds on his shoulder and leg from a dog. A third had a sprained ankle. They said they had been beaten by Belarusian guards.

After some time, more officers arrived with two other men, also in their twenties. One was from Sudan, the other from Ethiopia. They too had been pushed back multiple times. They said they had not eaten for seven days.

Excerpts from field intervention reports

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE OCTOBER 2025

	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women* (incl. pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	17	49	2 (0)	0 (0)
Incl. from a hospital	N/A	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence PL	8	26	2 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence BY	8	23	4 (3)	0 (0)
Reported violence N.N.	2	3	0 (0)	0 (0)
* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).				

26 people, including four children (three of whom were travelling unaccompanied), reported experiencing violence at the hands of Belarusian officers. Violence by Polish officers was recorded in the reports of 26 people.

Four young men, aged between 17 and 21. They had spent between a week and 10 days in the forest. Two of them had been pushed back seven times. They experienced physical violence from both Belarusian and Polish forces. They emphasised that Belarusian officers used greater violence. They spoke about being forced to work cutting down trees. They described violence by Polish officers, including being hit with sticks, kicked, and punched. One of them had been injured by rubber bullet shots.

Excerpt from a humanitarian intervention

According to the official response from the Border Guard to an inquiry submitted by Grupa Granica, Polish border guards carried out 954 pushbacks in October. A decision ordering departure from Polish territory was issued to 26 individuals⁹, while 928 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 Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Afghanistan.

⁹ Article 303b of the Act on Foreigners of 12 December 2013.

A man from Sudan, who was among those pushed back in October, contacted a humanitarian organisation while he was still being detained. According to his account, he was shot by Border Guard officers.

I'm afraid the border guards will kill me because they shot me. I was injured in the war in Sudan, and because the border guards shot me again, my eyes became blind.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Sudan

They told us to cross or they will kill us – Hassan's multiple pushbacks

The interviewee is Hassan from Somalia, who left the country due to the war in his region. He arrived in Belarus four months before the interview was conducted. During that time, he experienced five pushbacks.

Hassan crossed the Polish–Belarusian border barrier on the evening of 16 May 2025 together with seven other Somalis aged 16 to 22, including two women and three minors. Two people in the group had asthma.

Hassan and his companions reached the border barrier by car. They spent five days and six nights in the forest on the Belarusian side. The group crossed the wall using a ladder. Hassan is unable to specify the exact location, as one person was responsible for navigation and guiding the rest of the group. While crossing the border barrier, one of the men suffered a leg injury and cut his arm on the wire.

[...] there was one friend of mine who got an injury on his arm and leg. So his leg was kind of broken and his arm got a huge cut on the metal on the border. [...] when he was crossing the top part of the border, the chain or the metal, the barbed wire kind of cut his arm and so he fell on the ground. And when he fell on the ground, his lower leg, so the ankle and below, kind of got injured in the impact.

All people from the group managed to cross to the Polish side of the border barrier. Shortly after, eight to ten officers in camo uniforms arrived at the scene and apprehended Hassan and his companions. They arrived in four vehicles and had a dog with them. Hassan notes that the officers ordered them to look away and gave the impression that they did not want to be observed. They ordered Hassan and his companions to lie on the ground and sprayed them with pepper spray. Hassan reports that they also restrained people in the group with plastic zip-ties and then beat them with batons while they were sitting – including the man with the broken leg, who had informed the officers of his condition and was vomiting. The incident lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

As soon as we fell on the Polish side, immediately the border guard was on us and they instructed us to lie on the ground. And immediately they started pepper spraying us and as soon as they pepper sprayed us, they started kicking us on the ground, including the guy who was injured. He was complaining and trying to explain that he was injured and he was also vomiting, but they started hitting everybody immediately.

They started kicking us on the head, the chest and started hitting us with batons that they have as well. [...] When I remember the injuries or the pain that they gave us on that day, I still feel like crying again.

Hassan states that he and his companions expressed their intention to apply for international protection, but their requests were ignored by the authorities. The officers searched people on the move and took their food, power banks, and phones, which they then destroyed. The man with injuries did not receive any medical assistance.

The officers forced people on the move into two black vehicles. They were then transported to another location along the border. The drive lasted approximately forty minutes. The officers separated Hassan and his companions into two smaller groups: one of five people and one of three. After sunset, the five-person group, which included Hassan, was pushed back across the border near border post no. 348, close to Brest. Before the pushback, the officers cut the zip-ties and returned the power banks and the destroyed, unusable phones. During the incident, the officers kicked Hassan and his companions.

They would open the door, take us out one by one, open also the crossing on the border and they'll just kick you and tell you to go away and they will open the handcuffs too at that time and they would do it one by one. [...] they were using the swear word "kurwa" and also told us "you're Africans, go back to where you came from".

After 24 hours, Hassan and his companions managed to find the remaining three people from the second group, who had been pushed back at a different location. They were later apprehended by the Belarusian authorities. Hassan reports that the officers took them to a facility, where they were beaten, including with the use of stun guns. During the day they were ordered to collect firewood, and at night they were pushed back again to the Polish side of the border barrier.

They took us back to some form of barracks, military barracks, and they would just beat us, and they also made us work during the day, so they made us collect firewood for fires for them. And then after, in the night, this is when they threw us back to the Polish side.

They caught us, they detained us there. They took us to the station or to the barracks and lined us up and started asking us questions where we were from

and why we came to Belarus. We were explaining that we were from Somalia and about the situation in the country and the difficulties that we were encountering. And they started beating us and kicking us as well. And they say that in the evening they would return us back to Poland and told us never to come back.

Belarusian officers placed a ladder against the wall and cut the barbed wire at the top. They then ordered Hassan and his companions to cross, threatening them and hitting them with the wire cutters. On the other side, Polish officers were already present, telling the Belarusian officers to stop pushing the group through.

So they took us to the border and they brought the stairs with them as well. And they put the stairs along the border, they also had wire cutters. They climbed the border crossing and on the top there is this kind of barbed wire. And they cut the wire and started hitting us with the wire cutters they used to cut the wire. And they were doing this while Polish guards on the other side were telling them to stop and then immediately they told us to cross or they will kill us.

On the Polish side of the border barrier, Polish officers pepper-sprayed the group, ordered them to lie on the ground, and then kicked them. Afterwards, they placed Hassan and his companions in a van and transported them to another location along the border, approximately 30 minutes away.

As soon as we crossed the border on the Polish side, immediately they were on us, they asked us, they were shouting at us to lay down. And they pepper sprayed us, started kicking us and loaded us into a vehicle. They were asking us: "why did you come back?". [...] And immediately we started explaining that the Belarusian officers had returned us and they were seeing the Belarusian officers on the other side. So we explained that it was the Belarusian officers that had returned us and we actually didn't want to come. And they answered these questions, asked us to lie down, paper sprayed us, kicked us a bit and then put us in the car and took us to another crossing. And this lasted like 30 minutes.

The officers then pushed Hassan and his companions back through the border barrier once again. Hassan reports that after the second pushback to the Belarusian side, two members of the group died and their bodies were left in the forest. He stated that he did not feel able to answer questions regarding the deaths of his companions.

I did not recognize the next place that they threw us out from. As we had already sustained injuries, we were tired, we've been through this ordeal for a long time now, and when we were crossing back on the Belarusian side, we met a group of people from Ethiopia and went back with them. But during this whole ordeal, the second time that we were pushed back on the Belarusian side, two of our group died and we had left them there.

I would not like you to ask any further questions around the death. As it will take me back to memory [...]. Also, the Belarusian officers later found them and had taken pictures of the bodies and the parents had requested that the bodies be returned to them in Somalia, but they refused. And they were put in morgues and after they were buried somewhere here in Belarus [...]

On the Belarusian side, Hassan and his companions encountered several Ethiopian men who shared food with them, provided first aid to the injured man, and gave them a phone so they could return to the city.

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