

JANUARY 2026

Report from the Poland–Belarus border

I applied for asylum in Belarus through the UNHCR. The first time, at the immigration office, they practically threw my passport in my face. The second time, a woman helped me write a letter and told me I would receive a response within two weeks, but two weeks have passed, I haven't received any response, and my passport is being held by immigration because my visa has expired.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Burundi

January 2026 brought requests from 36 people. At the time of contact 31 of them were in Belarus – mostly Minsk. Eight women and three children, including one unaccompanied, were amongst them. Accounts gathered here come mostly from people who were forced to survive this cold winter in Belarus cities. These reports consistently indicate a lack of access to asylum procedures, legal assistance, and safe shelter, as well as the imposition of coercive fees for administrative services such as the issuance of a birth certificate. While violence and abuse affect everyone, they disproportionately impact women and unaccompanied children.

I am Guinean. I have an 8-year-old child. We have been in Belarus for a year and a month. [...] My child has a disability on the right side of his ear and is very sickly; he has sinusitis. I also have a vision problem because my ex-husband beat me so badly that he left a defect in my eye and my head. [...] I cannot go home because his father will take him from me.

Excerpt from a conversation with a woman from Guine

I have a child, a two-month-old daughter. I am in Belarus. At the hospital, they refused to give me the birth certificate. I still [can't] get my daughter vaccinated. I wanted you to help me leave because I'm afraid my daughter will get sick, and I don't see how I can get her medical care. [...] I don't know anyone there. Even in Poland, we tried to find help, but we didn't find any. We've been trying since August, and we still haven't found any help. [...] We are suffering a lot here in Belarus. Since I was pregnant, I started looking for asylum [...] As you know, here in Belarus, there might be nothing. [...] I'm Burundian, and so is my husband. We're together at the hospital. He asked for money for treatment so they would give it to us. The birth certificate cost \$2400, and I tried speaking with the UNHCR, and they also told me that he's not working now.

Excerpt from a conversation with a woman from Burundi, who was at the time in one of the Belarusian hospitals together with her husband and baby

Most people report being unable to afford the often inflated costs of accommodation, food, and medical care. They also frequently express fear regarding organized detentions conducted by the authorities and the forced transfers to the Russian border.

If the neighbors report us, the security forces will come and arrest us and then deport us to the Russian border.

Excerpt from a conversation
with a man from Chad

I have been caught by the police, spent three days in jail and been dumped at the Russian border. That's why I was lost.

Excerpt from a conversation
with a man of unknown nationality

Four individuals reported experiencing pushbacks from Poland to Belarus. Some of them identified severe beatings by Polish authorities as the direct cause of their subsequent health problems.

I went into the forests and entered Poland, where I was severely beaten on the head by border guards. Since then, I've had constant headaches, dizziness, and impaired vision. [...] I was inside Polish territory and was thrown out after being severely beaten by the Polish authorities. [...] We suffered a lot at the border. I received two strong blows to the head, one from the front as shown in the picture, and another from the back which was very strong and is what is causing my headache. I didn't lose consciousness, but after the second blow to my head, I couldn't see for a few seconds. I had been wearing glasses for several years, but after being hit on the head, I couldn't see well while wearing them. I was vomiting in the first few days and now I feel nauseous at times. I was also subjected to electric shocks from border elements on various parts of my body.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Chad

According to data provided by the Polish Border Guard under public access to information regulation, Border Guard officers carried out three pushbacks in January.

I couldn't express myself. They tortured and beat me on my last attempt. [...] We were tortured. All our money was taken. Our phones were taken. There's no way we can survive. It's over. I hope this is over and that you found us. I hope my brother and I don't die on the way because we've been beaten, robbed, and worked, but we haven't received any money and we can't get out of here. It's over. We'll die trying.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Sudan

Eight individuals, including one unaccompanied child and two women, reported experiencing violence perpetrated by Belarusian authorities. At least two of these individuals were subjected to sexual violence during their journey.

I was sexually assaulted by masked Belarusians and I need a doctor now. [...] I am now with a group of Afghans and Sudanese... I also heard a girl's voice in a small cave in the forbidden Belarusian forests; she was also being raped.

Excerpt from a conversation with an Iraqi man residing in Lithuania.
We decided not to publish the graphic description of the consequences of sexual violence

Key Figures

REQUESTS JANUARY 2026				
	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total	28	36	3 (1)	9 (0)
incl. in Poland	1	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
incl. in hospitals	N/A	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
incl. in Belarus	26	33	3 (1)	8 (0)
incl. in muharrama	1	2	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).

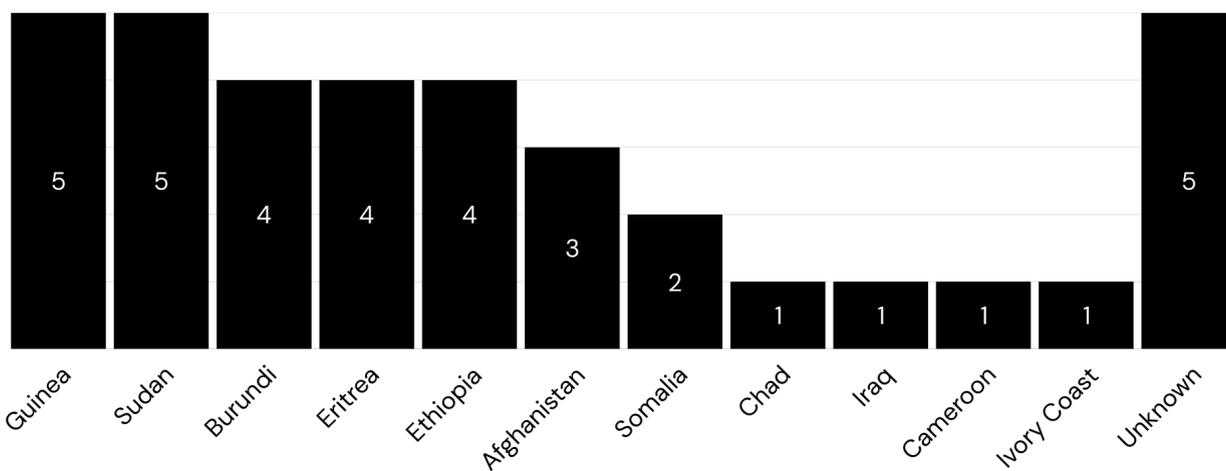


Fig. 1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in January 2026.

SUPPORT PROVIDED JANUARY 2026

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total¹	6	6	0 (0)	2 (0)
Material aid	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Legal aid	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Medical aid²	3	3	0 (0)	1 (0)
First aid	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hospital assistance	N/A	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Psychological support	3	3	0 (0)	0 (0)
# of undertaken interventions			0	
# of successful interventions			0	

* Girls are included both in the category of children (based on age) and in the category of women (based on gender).

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE JANUARY 2026

	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women* (incl. pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	3	4	0 (0)	0 (0)
Incl. from a hospital	N/A	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence PL	3	4	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence BY	5	8	1 (0)	2 (0)
Reported violence N.N	0	11	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).

¹ Explanations of the individual categories can be found in the glossary at the end of the report.

² As part of medical assistance, 10 teleconsultations were conducted, concerning 10 individuals.

Definitions

Total requests – the total number of reported groups/people on the move, located in Poland, Belarus, Lithuania or Latvia. It does not consider individuals 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 – individuals travelling or residing together at the time of reported event such as pushback, humanitarian/legal/medical intervention. These individuals may or may not be related by family or social ties.

Individuals – number of individual persons.

Children/minors – all individuals under 18 years old.

Unaccompanied Children/Minors – individuals under 18 years of age travelling without a legal guardian. This category also includes minors travelling with older siblings or other relatives who are not their legal guardians under Polish law.

Border barrier (also: wall, barrier, fence) – a fortification located on Polish territory several to several-teen metres from the border with Belarus, in the form of a steel fence topped with coils of razor wire, with additional entanglements of concertina razor wire positioned alongside it.

Concertina – razor wire formed into large coils, constituting an additional element of border infrastructure.

Muharrama – a term used by Arabic-speaking people on the move to describe the strip of land located between the Polish border barrier and the fortifications on the Belarusian side (referred to as the sistema). In Arabic, muharrama means “forbidden”. People on the move also use the longer term المنطقة المحرمة (“forbidden zone”). Individuals stay there either before attempting to cross the barrier or immediately after being subjected to a pushback. The zone takes the form of a strip ranging from several metres to several kilometres in width, with an approximately 1.5-metre section directly adjacent to the barrier located on Polish territory. The entire area remains under the strict control of Belarusian services which, according to peoples’ accounts, often hold individuals in specific locations, preventing them from returning further into Belarus and at times forcing them to attempt another crossing into Poland or forcibly moving to another location. The frequency and character of these interventions vary.

Sistema – the fencing and electronic security system separating the militarised Belarusian border zone (muharrama) from the rest of Belarusian territory.

Support total – total number of people or groups 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), provided during field interventions or in hospitals.

Legal aid – support in procedures aimed at preventing pushbacks and enabling the submission of an application for international protection, provided during field interventions or in hospitals.

Medical aid – professional support provided by individuals with formal medical education during field interventions or remotely.

Medical first aid – assistance provided by individuals without formal medical education or after basic first-aid / rescue training (e.g. wound cleaning or treatment of trench foot).

Aid in hospital – material and/or legal aid provided to individuals hospitalised as a result of crossing the Polish–Belarusian border.

Pushback – the forced return of migrants to the border line or compelling them to leave Polish territory without proper examination of their individual circumstances; regardless of whether they received return decisions, and even if they explicitly expressed their intention to apply for international protection in Poland. Experts monitoring human rights violations at the EU’s external borders note that pushbacks constitute a form of violence per se and are commonly accompanied by additional physical or verbal violence.

Reported pushback events – pushbacks reported to us during the given reporting period by individuals who experienced them directly or witnessed them firsthand. The number of pushback events may be higher than the number of individuals.

Reported violence – reported cases of violence experienced by people on the move that do not constitute the act of pushback itself. Subdivided into categories depending on the perpetrators: Polish services, Belarusian services, or unidentified (Polish or Belarusian). One person may experience violence from multiple perpetrators; the categories must not be summed to determine the number of individuals.

Reported violence PL – reported cases of violence experienced directly by people on the move, 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 – reported cases of violence experienced directly by people on the move, the perpetrators of which, according to the victims’ accounts, were people belonging to the Belarusian uniformed services.

Reported violence N.N. – reported cases of violence in which, based on the wording of the account and the location provided, it is not possible to determine whether the perpetrators were Polish or Belarusian 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 people on the move 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 sustained while crossing border fortifications at the Polish–Belarusian border, such as orthopaedic injuries, fractures, sprains, or wounds caused by razor wire.

Individuals from vulnerabilised groups – individuals who are facing specific risks in the context of Poland–Belarus border regime based on following grounds:

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

* virtually impossible to identify at this stage

The study is based on data obtained from individuals who witnessed or participated in the events described. We would like to thank all non-governmental organisations, collectives, activists operating at the Polish-Belarusian border for sharing their reports and notes from the interventions carried out. Special thanks are due to all people on the move who decided to share their own experiences.

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