

THEY DID NOT LET US SPEAK
THE "TEMPORARY" SUSPENSION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE
POLAND-BELARUS BORDER

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Warsaw, March 2026

In 2025, along the Polish–Belarusian border:

3,164 people requested humanitarian assistance. Support was provided to 819 individuals, including 23 women and 65 children, 56 of whom were unaccompanied.

400 humanitarian interventions were carried out.

We documented 2,077 pushbacks from Poland to Belarus, affecting a total of 868 people. Among them were 56 women and 57 children, 53 of whom were unaccompanied.

277 people reported experiencing more than one pushback.

271 people required medical care during or immediately before a pushback, 29 of whom had previously been hospitalised.

400 people experienced violence perpetrated by the Polish authorities.

487 people experienced violence perpetrated by the Belarusian authorities.

200 people experienced violence on both sides of the border.

According to data released by the Polish Border Guard under the Public Information Access procedure, officers carried out 14,754 pushbacks.

Hospitals in the Podlaskie region admitted at least 118 patients who required hospitalisation after crossing the border.

From August 2021 to March 2025, at least 103 people died in the Polish–Belarusian border area.

Have you ever heard of Belarus? Madam, I assure you, it's pure torture here! A year of torment.

I was beaten by Belarusians who tortured me because I couldn't pay for a room. They made me sleep on public benches. I spent two weeks sleeping on public benches. I lost my phone. A friend helped me get a new SIM card [...]. While wandering the streets of Minsk, I became everyone's target. People stared at me like I was crazy until, on 20 November 2025, a man passed by and saw me. He assaulted me. That day, I screamed at the top of my lungs, but there was no one to help me. My visa has expired, and I currently don't have the money to renew it because it requires a lot of money. I'm so traumatized that I'm afraid to sleep.

Zouba from Cameroon

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Introduction

*I only know that there was a violation of the law there. These are human rights...
Human rights were not respected on the Polish side by the Border Guard.*

Amadou from Guinea

A year has passed since the right to apply for international protection at the Polish–Belarusian border was suspended. This suspension, which is in contradiction with both international agreements and domestic legislation, was intended to be temporary and limited to a specific area. In practice, however, it has remained in force continuously for a full year and now applies de facto across the entire country. How has this legal change affected the situation at the border?

As noted by Marcin Sośniak of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights: *it not only fails to resolve the crisis or mitigate its effects, but in fact deepens it, both in humanitarian terms and through the undermining of the law and systemic violations of the rule of law*

There has been, and continues to be, an unexpectedly low level of public objection to this regulation. Each subsequent extension of the suspension is passed through parliamentary votes almost automatically. Beyond the attention of human rights organisations and institutions such as the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, there is a striking absence of protest or even basic questions about the grounds for the continued use of such far-reaching measures.

Since 2021, violence against people with migration experience has been escalated and normalised, with new legal frameworks created for its legitimisation. The “border problem” has been stripped of its human dimension; those crossing are reduced to numbers to be lowered, deprived of their self-agency and of their voice. Dehumanisation, infused with racialised and Islamophobic undertones, is widespread, and the public sphere is dominated by language that further entrenches this reality. At the border, it is not “people” who die, but “illegal migrants”. Since January this year, “foreigners” or “migrants” over the age of 15 may be placed in closed facilities operating under prison-like conditions. Would the public response look different if the discourse referred to them simply as “children”?

We will never know the course of most of the 14,754 pushbacks that, according to Border Guard data, were carried out in 2025. The accounts of the 17 people that have crossed the border included in this report, are their own individual, lived experience records of the reality of the borderlands. They represent a voice which should be an integral part of public debate and policy analysis. Yet this voice is currently almost entirely absent from the public sphere and from the rooms where laws concerning their lives are made.

The testimonies describe events that took place both before and after the suspension was introduced. They are arranged chronologically, yet when reading them it is difficult to conclude that the state's treatment of people at the border has changed in any meaningful way following the suspension of the right to apply for international protection.

Bakari crossed into Poland on New Year's Day by swimming across one of the border rivers. Border guards pushed him back to Belarus exactly as he was, in completely soaked clothes. Yahya and Amadou requested protection in February at the Terespol border crossing, without success. Eighteen-year-old Haval experienced eight pushbacks; his requests for asylum were dismissed with derision. Selam was pushed back at midnight, while heavy snow fell. Earlier, officers had lied to her, telling her she would be allowed to stay in Poland.

Aman from Eritrea had first fled to Sudan. Only when war broke out there did he decide to travel to Europe. He witnessed the drowning of two people forced by Belarusian officers to swim across the Bug River. Khalid was pushed back across the river on the very day the right to seek international protection was suspended. During the crossing, he helped a friend who could not swim. Nureddin's main memory of interacting with Polish guards is the word "kurwa". He too was initially told he would be allowed to remain in Poland.

Amna had her period while she was stranded in the border area. When she asked for a sanitary pad at a Border Guard facility, an officer began shouting at her. Hassan still feels like crying when he recalls the violence he experienced in Poland. Desta was pushed back twice. The second time, when she realised she would not be allowed to remain in Poland, she fainted. After falling from the wall, Kebede was unable to walk:

This is where I really saw hell on earth. And because I was sick, I was, you know, my ankles were broken, my hips were broken and I needed help. And not even a first aid kit. How come they don't even provide a first aid kit? [...] And in order to take me from one place to another, they would just drag me.

Before pushing him back, Polish officers took the chocolate he had with him and handed it out to others in front of him. Tafari was also injured. He begged for medical assistance, his whole body shaking. In response, he was mocked. He wondered how such treatment was possible in a time when even animals are guaranteed rights. Barkhad was told that if he answered all the questions in detail, he would be allowed to stay in Poland. This did not happen. When he asked for water just before the pushback, he was sprayed with pepper spray. Amir had tried to start a new life in Belarus, but his employer cheated him and withheld his wages. In Poland, rubber bullets were fired at him. Farsan witnessed sexual violence inflicted on his friend in Belarus. Abeba did not speak to the guards; she was too afraid to say anything. Omar, like many others, was not permitted to speak at all.

This study also includes a numerical summary, produced with the cooperation of organisations and collectives engaged in solidarity work along the border region. In addition, a legal analysis of the suspension of the right to protection, authored by Marcin Sośniak, together with a timeline of events situating developments within a broader context, serves as a complement to the voices from the border.

We publish this report on the anniversary of the introduction of the suspension of the right to apply for international protection, as a symbolic act of resistance against the repressive, racist reality of Europe's borders and in solidarity with its victims.



Timeline of events in 2025

JANUARY

1.01 2.01

28.01

ON 1 JANUARY, a soldier participating in the “Safe Podlasie” operation stopped a civilian vehicle in Mielnik by firing a warning shot into the air.¹ He then discharged several dozen rounds from his rifle in the direction of the car, perforating, among other things, the passenger seat. A 13-year-old passenger jumped out of the vehicle. In October, the District Prosecutor’s Office in Olsztyn announced that it had submitted a motion to the Warsaw Military District Court to discontinue the proceedings and to impose a preventive measure in the form of the soldier’s placement in a secure psychiatric facility.

ON 2 JANUARY, a man from Senegal died in the strip of land between the Polish and Belarusian border fortifications.² The most probable cause of death was hypothermia and exhaustion. According to the account of his companion, the group crossed the Belarus–Poland border after more than four hours of walking, during which they had to wade through a river. On the Polish side, approximately 15–20 minutes after crossing, they were apprehended by Border Guard officers and, still wet, pushed

back to Belarus. The Senegalese man was not wearing shoes and his feet were swollen. During the subsequent march, already on the Belarusian side, he collapsed and began to bleed from the nose. Soon afterwards, due to extreme exhaustion, he was no longer able to continue. His companions stayed with him, attempting to keep him warm, but were unable to help. He died shortly thereafter. He was approximately 24 years old.

ON 28 JANUARY, the trial of the “Hajnówka Five” began. The defendants faced up to five years’ imprisonment for providing humanitarian assistance at the Polish–Belarusian border.³ The case concerned support offered to an Iraqi family with seven children and to an Egyptian national, who, fearing violence and pushback to Belarus, had taken shelter in a Polish forest. The prosecution alleged that the defendants acted “for the personal benefit” of the foreigners by supplying them with food and clothing and by transporting them “further into the country” in reality, only a few kilometres to the nearest locality.

FEBRUARY

MARCH

5.02

12.02

3.03

10.03

18.03

ON 5 FEBRUARY, the Border Guard announced the completion of the installation of the so-called “electronic barrier” (perimeter system) along the water sections of the border in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.⁴ The system covers approximately 47 kilometres of the border along the Świsłocz and Istocznanka rivers.

ON 12 FEBRUARY, a hearing was held before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case brought by 32 Afghan nationals who, in 2021 in Usnarz Górny, were subjected to a pushback despite having expressed their intention to apply for international protection. A judgment has not yet been issued.⁵

IN MARCH, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration announced and began implementing the modernisation of the perimeter system along a 206-kilometre section of the border.⁶ The works included, among other elements, the installation of an additional line of cameras, the deployment of LED lighting and new observation points, and the use of artificial intelligence to analyse signals generated by the

system. Although the investment itself had commenced earlier, 2025 marked the year of its substantive implementation and the formal launch of the project’s subsequent stages.

ON 3 MARCH, the Prosecutor’s Office filed an indictment⁷ against Border Guard officer Adrian J., who in June 2024 brutally assaulted two Ethiopian nationals.⁸

ON 10 MARCH, the exclusion zone along the Polish–Belarusian border was extended and expanded.⁹ The ban now covered a 78.29-kilometre section of the border. Since its introduction in June 2024, the zone has been repeatedly extended. It is currently set to remain in force until June 2026. This results in the continued restriction of access to the border area for outsiders, including the media and civil society organisations.

ON 18 MARCH, the Belarusian authorities published a recording showing the body of a man dressed in light spring clothing, lying in a field. They reported that the body had been found in the Kamyanyets

APRIL

27.03

district and claimed that the man had been pushed back from Poland.¹⁰ No further information has been made available.

ON 27 MARCH, based on the Act of 21 February 2025 amending the *Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland*, signed the previous day by President Andrzej Duda, the Council of Ministers adopted a regulation introducing a temporary territorial suspension of the right to apply for international protection.¹¹ Initially, the regulation was to apply for 60 days along the “state border with the Republic of Belarus”.

IN APRIL, Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced the launch of an “information” campaign targeting the societies of countries of origin of people reaching the European Union via the Belarusian route.¹² The first video was published on the YouTube channel of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister on 30 May 2025.¹³ The dynamic footage includes, among other scenes, images of the border wall, an aggressive barking dog, armed soldiers, as well as deportations and people being handcuffed.

3.04

ON 3 APRIL, following a disinformation campaign conducted by right-wing media outlets and social-media accounts, an attack was carried out against five residents of the foreigner reception centre in Czerwony Bór.¹⁴ Before the incident, images of several residents had been circulated in the media space. Anti-immigrant sentiment intensified, and on 6 April a xenophobic demonstration took place outside the centre.

ON 5 APRIL, Border Guard officers discovered the body of a young man in the Bug River near the village of Woroblin (Janów Podlaski municipality).¹⁵ He was most likely one of the two people whose disappearance during a river crossing had been reported two weeks earlier by men who managed to reach the Polish bank of the river. In June, the District Prosecutor in Biała Podlaska announced that the deceased’s identity had been established. He was 26 years old and came from Eritrea. He was buried on 30 July 2025 in Janów Podlaski. His companions, who had witnessed the drowning, were pushed back to Belarus after giving their account to the

5.04

MAY

15.04

19.04

20.04

28.04

19.05

22.05

Polish authorities, despite attempting to lodge applications for international protection.

ON 15 APRIL, the bodies of two men from Ethiopia were found in the Bug River near the village of Stary Bubel (Janów Podlaski municipality).¹⁶ One of the deceased may be the man whose disappearance during a river crossing had been reported by his travelling companions at the beginning of April. Both were buried on 12 June 2025 in Janów Podlaski. Their headstones list their names as “probable”.

ON 19 APRIL, the public learned of three new victims.¹⁷ Two bodies were recovered near Janów Podlaski. One of the deceased was buried on 15 May at the Muslim cemetery in Bohoniki, and the other on 30 July in Janów Podlaski. That same day, journalist Piotr Czaban¹⁸ and the portal *Wirtualny Brześć* reported that the Belarusian authorities had retrieved the body of another man from the river. The identity of this person remains unknown.

ON 20 APRIL, the installation of new observation towers, each approximately 70 metres high, began along the border in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.¹⁹ They form part of the ongoing expansion of the electronic barrier (perimeter system).

ON 28 APRIL, a forester discovered human remains in a forest complex near the village of Straszewo (Gródek municipality). They belonged to a 29-year-old man from Afghanistan who had gone missing several weeks earlier. The circumstances of his death are being investigated by the prosecutor’s office. He was buried in Afghanistan.²⁰

ON 19 MAY, the body of a man was recovered from the Bug River near the village of Neple in the Terespol municipality. Information about the incident appeared in the media only several weeks later. The identity of the deceased could not be established. He was buried on 8 July in Koroszczyń.²¹

ON 22 MAY, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration announced the construction of an electronic barrier on the Bug

JUNE

26.05

River in the Lublin Voivodeship. The works continued until 20 July 2025.²²

ON 26 MAY, the first extension of the suspension of the right to asylum, the Sejm, at the request of the government, approved the prolongation of the temporary suspension of the right to apply for international protection for a further 60 days.²³

IN JUNE, groups of right-wing militias appeared along the Polish–German border.²⁴ Their declared aim was to counter the alleged “dumping” of migrants from Germany into Poland. These self-appointed patrols stopped vehicles, checked people’s identity documents, and carried out searches.

IN JUNE, the District Prosecutor’s Office in Siedlce announced that charges had been brought against five Border Guard officers in two separate cases.²⁵ The charges stemmed from a year-long investigation conducted by a special team established to examine incidents along the Polish–Belarusian border. At the same time, numerous other cases involving officers were

6.06

7.06

13.06

being discontinued. By the end of August, citing a “lack of elements indicating the commission of a crime”, the prosecutor’s office had discontinued 18 out of the 24 previously initiated threads.²⁶

ON 6 JUNE, the Warsaw Regional Court awarded compensation for the unlawful detention of activists and journalists associated with the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia.²⁷ In December 2021, several dozen armed officers entered the Intervention Point operating in Podlasie, conducting a search of the building and interrogating those detained for several hours.

ON 7 JUNE, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration announced a further extension of the buffer zone in place along the Polish–Belarusian border.²⁸

ON 13 JUNE, the Border Guard updated its list of countries to which deportations should not be carried out.²⁹ Only Ukraine remained on the list, while Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen, among others, were removed.

JULY

27.06

1.07

7.07

9.07

10.07

ON 27 JUNE, an agreement was signed setting out the conditions for establishing the Frontex European Border and Coast Guard Academy Training Centre in Warsaw.³⁰

CIRCA 1 JULY, a man aged approximately 30–40 drowned in the Bug River. He had been attempting to cross the river as part of a group of four people. He was unable to get out of the water. His body was noticed some time later by a Territorial Defence Forces soldier.³¹ It was only on 4 July, when the current carried the body to the Polish side, that the authorities undertook actions to retrieve it.

ON 7 JULY, temporary controls were reinstated on Poland's borders with Lithuania and Germany.³² Initially introduced for only 30 days, the controls have remained in force continuously since then. Under the most recent extension, they are set to remain in place until 4 April 2026.

ON 9 JULY, the Border Guard signed a contract with the company UNIBEP for the construction, modernisation and reinforcement of approximately 180–186 km of the

technical road running along the border wall in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.³³ The value of the investment amounts to 290–292 million PLN. The works began in October and were completed in January 2026.

ON 10 JULY, a violent incident occurred on the Polish–Belarusian border, in which a soldier assaulted a young Afghan man. The victim sustained serious facial injuries, was hospitalised, then transferred to a detention centre for foreigners and ultimately deported. The situation was recorded on video, although the footage was not released at the time. Most media outlets and political figures initially portrayed the incident as an attack on the soldier. It was only on 21 December 2025 that journalist and activist Piotr Czaban obtained and published the recording, which clearly shows the Afghan man being subjected to unprovoked force.³⁴ The soldier fired rubber bullets at him and, after the man fell to the ground, struck him several times with his weapon.

IN THE SECOND HALF OF JULY, large scale anti-migration protests took place across Poland, organised mainly by

17.07

20.07

24.07

right-wing and far-right groups, including parties and organisations with openly xenophobic and racist profiles.³⁵ Demonstrators, present in cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań and Białystok, demanded “tougher border protection”, mass deportations, and repressive measures against migrants, frequently using dehumanising and openly hostile language towards people on the move. In many locations, confrontations occurred between these groups and anti-racist counter-demonstrators.

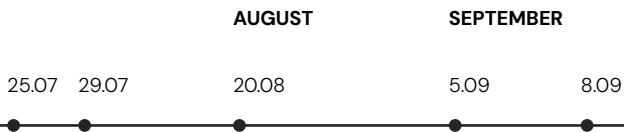
ON 17 JULY, the Białystok Regional Court awarded 5,000 PLN in compensation to two Afghan nationals for their unlawful removal by the Border Guard from Poland to Belarus.³⁶ This was the first judgment of its kind in Poland. The men had crossed the border in August 2021 and expressed their intention to apply for international protection, which was ignored. They were held for several hours at a Border Guard facility without access to legal assistance or an interpreter, and without being informed of the reasons for their detention. They were then taken at night to the strictly

protected area of the Białowieża Forest reserve and forced to cross the state border. Earlier, the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski had ruled that their detention was illegal, unfounded and procedurally improper.

ON 20 JULY, a perimeter barrier was activated on the Bug River.³⁷ The electronic monitoring system includes day-and-night cameras, thermal imaging devices and sensors installed along approximately 172 km of the Polish-Belarusian border.

ON 24 JULY, President Andrzej Duda signed the act withdrawing Poland from the so-called Ottawa Convention³⁸, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

ON 24 JULY, a Territorial Defence Forces patrol near the village of Kuzawka discovered a body in the Bug River.³⁹ The fire service recovered the remains from the water. The deceased was an Afghan man born in Pakistan. The circumstances of his death are being investigated by the District Prosecutor’s Office in Parczew.



ON 25 JULY, the second extension of the suspension of the right to asylum, the Sejm, at the request of the government, approved a further 60-day extension of the temporary suspension of the right to apply for international protection.⁴⁰

ON 29 JULY, near the village of Kuzawki, a Border Guard and Territorial Defence Forces patrol spotted a body floating in the Bug River. During the attempt to retrieve it, the officers came across the remains of a second person.⁴¹ The circumstances of both deaths are being investigated by the District Prosecutor’s Office in Parczew.

ON 20 AUGUST, a Latvian first-instance court delivered a conviction in the case of Ieva Raubiško.⁴² The case concerns events from 2023, when Raubiško provided assistance to a group of Syrian nationals in the area along the Latvian–Belarusian border. She called an ambulance and the border authorities, and, acting as the Syrians’ representative, applied to the European Court of Human Rights for an interim measure to prevent their return to Belarus. The ECtHR’s decision temporarily secured

their stay within EU territory. Wanting to ensure they would not be subjected to another pushback, Ieva entered Latvia’s state-of-emergency zone (similar to the one in force in Poland in 2021–2022). The trial began in February 2024 and lasted for more than a year and a half. Numerous human rights organisations, both Latvian and international, condemned the judgment as an example of the criminalisation of humanitarian and solidarity-based assistance to people on the move at the EU’s borders.

ON 5 SEPTEMBER, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration announced a further extension of the buffer zone in place along the Polish–Belarusian border.⁴³

ON 8 SEPTEMBER, the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski, Hajnówka Criminal Division, acquitted all defendants in the case known as the “Hajnówka Five”, concerning the provision of humanitarian assistance to people on the move near the Polish–Belarusian border.⁴⁴ The court found that the prosecution had failed to demonstrate that the accused had acted with the intention of obtaining personal gain, which is a necessary element

OCTOBER

23.09

26.09

2.10

7.10

of liability under Article 264a § 1 of the Criminal Code. In the oral justification, the judge stated: “[...] If we accept that Article 264a can be applied whenever a person in need receives a personal benefit, then anyone providing assistance would be at risk of punishment.” The judgment was welcomed by human rights organisations as an important signal of resistance to the criminalisation of solidarity-based actions at the border. Another notable passage from the justification read: “If we prevent a foreign national from physically submitting an application for international protection, then it must be questioned whether a person who has not submitted such an application is in fact staying here unlawfully.” In January 2026, the prosecution filed an appeal.

ON 23 SEPTEMBER, the third extension of the suspension of the right to asylum, the Sejm, at the request of the government, approved a further 60-day extension of the temporary suspension of the right to apply for international protection.⁴⁵

ON 26 SEPTEMBER, the District Court in Białystok acquitted Bartek, who had been

charged with attempting to influence the actions of Border Guard officers by using criminal threats.⁴⁶ The court found that his actions fell within the scope of the authority granted to him by the foreign nationals he represented and did not constitute a criminal offence. The judgment became final in January 2026.

ON 2 OCTOBER, the Belarusian Border Guard in Brest reported the discovery of the body of a young woman.⁴⁷ According to the statement, the remains were found near the Polish border barrier.

ON 7 OCTOBER, following the conclusion of the public consultation process, a key provision was removed from the draft act amending, among other laws, *the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland*⁴⁸. The deleted provision would have prohibited placing unaccompanied children over the age of 15 in detention centres. This significant change was not subject to public debate and was presented merely as an informational adjustment.

NOVEMBER

13.11

17.11

22.11

DECEMBER

4.12

13.12

ON 13 NOVEMBER, construction began along the Belarusian border on a second line of physical barriers, intended to serve as an additional obstacle alongside the existing metal structure built in 2022.⁴⁹ The new barrier is planned to reach approximately four metres in height and to be equipped with mesh reinforced with additional coils of barbed wire.

ON 17 NOVEMBER, road traffic resumed at the Kuźnica Białostocka–Bruzgi and Bobrowniki–Bierestovitsa border crossings, which had been closed since March 2022.⁵⁰ The authorities justified the decision by citing the need to “tighten border security” while simultaneously responding to the needs of local communities and businesses. Kuźnica is open to passenger traffic, excluding buses, while Bobrowniki handles both passenger and freight traffic for vehicles from the EU, the EEA and Switzerland.

ON 22 NOVEMBER, the fourth extension of the suspension of the right to asylum, the Sejm, at the request of the government, approved a further 60-day extension of the temporary suspension of the right to

apply for international protection.⁵¹ Two days later, in response to an inquiry from the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration confirmed that the Border Guard was refusing to accept asylum applications from people arriving in Poland from Belarus not only “at the border”, as stipulated in the act, but throughout the entire territory of the country.⁵²

ON 4 DECEMBER, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration announced a further extension of the buffer zone in place along the Polish–Belarusian border.⁵³

ON 11 DECEMBER, the Border Guard reported the discovery of a tunnel beneath the barrier on the Polish–Belarusian border. The passage was approximately 1.5 metres high. Its exit on the Polish side is located around 10 metres from the barrier, beyond the service road, while the entrance was concealed in the forest on the Belarusian side, roughly 50 metres from the borderline. According to available information, it was the largest of four tunnels uncovered during the autumn–winter period.⁵⁴



Suspension of the right to seek international protection— law vs. reality

Marcin Sośniak, Coordinator of Migration Department
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

The suspension of the right to apply for international protection marks yet another chapter in the crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border. Contrary to what the initiators of the suspension claim, it not only fails to resolve the crisis or mitigate its effects, but in fact deepens it, both in humanitarian terms and through the undermining of the law and systemic violations of the rule of law.

A mechanism allowing the Council of Ministers to temporarily and regionally suspend the right to apply for international protection was introduced into the Act on granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the Republic of Poland (further: Protection Act) in March 2025. Pursuant to Article 33a, added to the Act, the Council of Ministers, having established the occurrence of instrumentalisation of migration, gained the power to temporarily suspend, by way of a regulation, the right to apply for international protection at a specified section of the State border. During the period and in the area where the suspension is in force, the Border Guard does not accept applications for international protection unless the foreign citizen making the application falls into one of the categories of persons with special needs listed exhaustively in Article 33b(2) of the Protection Act. The list contained in this provision is, however, quite limited—the Act identifies the following as persons with special needs: unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, persons requiring special treatment, e.g. due to their age or state of health, persons in respect of whom there are circumstances clearly indicating that they face a real risk of suffering serious harm in the country from which they arrived directly in Polish territory, and nationals of a country involved in the instrumentalisation of migration. None of these categories has anything to do with the actual reason for seeking international protection.

Immediately after the entry into force of the provisions establishing the mechanism for suspending the right to apply for international protection, the Council of Ministers exercised

the powers conferred upon it and suspended that right, initially for 60 days. Since then, however, the suspension period has been extended repeatedly and, as a result, has remained in force continuously since March 2025. Thus, the temporary nature of the suspension envisaged by the legislator has proved to be illusory. Its territorial scope is also only apparent. The Border Guard authorities, citing the current suspension, are refusing to accept applications for international protection even from people located far from the Polish-Belarusian border, for example in a hospital in Białystok or at Border Guard posts in Warsaw or Szczecin. This is the case despite the fact that the Council of Ministers has clearly specified the territorial scope of the suspension in its successive regulations: namely, that it is to apply exclusively to the section of the border between Poland and Belarus. The government appears to be overlooking this obvious contradiction between the Border Guard's practices and the content of the Council of Ministers' regulations. Government and Border Guard representatives consider it self-evident that the current suspension applies to all persons who have crossed the aforementioned border, regardless of where they subsequently attempt to apply for protection. However, this clearly runs counter to the intention of the legislature and the provisions of the Protection Act. According to the Act, the suspension of the right to apply for international protection is to be territorial (i.e. it is to apply within a specific area and concern persons currently present there), rather than personal (i.e. it cannot apply to all persons sharing a specific common characteristic, such as having crossed the Polish-Belarusian border under conditions of migration exploitation).

The mere rejection of an application for international protection constitutes what is known as an 'administrative act', i.e. an authoritative act by the State (or, more precisely, its representatives—the Border Guard authorities) which is not preceded by any formal proceedings and does not require a written form, i.e. the issuing of a decision or ruling. The Border Guard authorities are not subject to any of the obligations typical of standard administrative proceedings. Nor does the principle of objective truth apply, which would oblige the authorities to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the facts of the case, and there is no obligation to give the party the opportunity to comment on their legal or factual situation. The rejection of an application for protection, as an administrative act, falls within the jurisdiction of the administrative courts, i.e. it may be challenged before such a court; however, the lodging of a complaint does not suspend the execution of that act. This is because the rejection of the application has immediate effect. In this sense, a complaint to the court is therefore not an effective means of appeal.

WHAT DOES THE POLISH CONSTITUTION SAY ABOUT THIS?

A foreign citizen seeking protection from persecution in the Republic of Poland may be granted refugee status in accordance with international treaties binding on the Republic of Poland. This is provided for in Article 56(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. This provision concludes the catalogue of personal freedoms and rights set out in Chapter II of the Constitution, entitled *Freedoms, Human and Civic Rights and Obligations*. The placement of the provision, like everything else in the Constitution, is significant. In this way, the drafters of the Constitution determined that the right to seek international protection (to seek it, but not necessarily to receive it) is a constitutional personal right of every foreign citizen.

Personal rights and freedoms may be restricted, but only if the conditions set out in Article 31(3) of the Constitution are met. Under this provision, restrictions on the exercise of constitutional freedoms and rights may be imposed only by a statutory act and only where they are necessary in a democratic state to ensure its security or to protect public order, the environment, public health or morals, or the freedoms and rights of others. Most importantly, such restrictions must never infringe upon the essence of the freedom or right in question. In other words, in order to assess the admissibility of a restriction on a constitutional right, one must examine its legality (whether it was established by a legal act of the appropriate rank), proportionality (which occurs when the disadvantages caused by the restriction of a given right are justified by the objectives to be achieved by that restriction) and necessity (where the restriction on the exercise of a specific right is the sole and least burdensome means by which the intended objective can be achieved). It must also be determined whether the restriction on the right infringes upon its very essence. Naturally, all these conditions must be met cumulatively.

This report provides arguments supporting the view that the suspension of the right to apply for international protection—as a response by the Polish authorities to the phenomenon of the instrumentalisation of migration—is neither proportionate nor necessary. The report contains clear evidence of how severely the deprivation of migrants' right to seek protection in Poland affects them, how deeply it infringes upon the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, and how greatly it exposes potential refugees to the risk of persecution, torture, violence or other forms of inhuman treatment. At the same time, such severe measures serve no legitimate purpose—they have no discernible impact on the scale of Belarus's exploitation of the situation. This is evident from the data published by the Podlaski Border Guard Unit. The data show that the number of

recorded attempts to cross the border irregularlyⁱ in 2025 (approx. 28,000)⁵⁵ does not differ significantly from the figure recorded in 2024 (29,600)⁵⁶.

The author of this chapter is equally certain that restricting the right to seek international protection, as guaranteed by Article 56(2) of the Constitution, infringes upon the essence of that right. What is the essence of a right? According to the Constitutional Tribunal, it is the fundamental core without which the right cannot exist. Violating this core amounts to either its complete abolition or a restriction that renders its exercise practically impossible. Therefore, what is the core, the fundamental element of the right guaranteed by Article 56(2) of the Constitution? It seems obvious: since this provision guarantees the right to seek international protection in Poland on the terms set out in international law, the core of this right is the actual possibility of presenting each individual case—that is, the grounds for seeking international protection—for an objective assessment by the competent authorities in an appropriate procedure, in accordance with the standards of international law. Furthermore, these standards require—and this too must be recognised as forming part of the essence of the right guaranteed by Article 56(2) of the Constitution—that the right to seek international protection be exercised in safe conditions, that is, without the risk that, before the case is examined, the person seeking protection will be returned or expelled to a country where their fundamental rights or freedoms would be at risk.

Is it therefore possible, in practice, to implement a suspension of the right to apply for international protection in a way that does not undermine the very essence of that right? It would appear so. Indeed, one can envisage various forms of restriction on that right which would not entail depriving anyone of the opportunity to submit an application for protection and to have their case examined by the competent authorities. The acceptance of applications may be temporarily suspended, provided that those wishing to submit an application during that period are able to wait safely, under the protection of the host state, until their application is accepted. It is also possible to refrain from accepting applications in a specific area, provided that those who wish to apply for international protection there are able to reach safely (i.e. legally) the place where their application can be accepted. The proponents of the suspension of the right to apply for international protection did not take such solutions into account.

i The aggregate category of “attempted border crossings,” as used by the Border Guard, represents the sum of all incidents recorded at the border related to irregularized migration. It includes other categories (as used by the Border Guard) such as: pushbacks, detention, returns, and crossings registered by surveillance cameras but not resulting in apprehension or pushback. When using this aggregate category to monitor trends at the border, it is important to recognize that even if the total number of incidents in individual years is similar, they may consist of entirely different proportions of specific types of events, and that the category refers to cases rather than to individual persons.

AND WHAT ABOUT EU LAW?

The equivalent of Article 56(2) of the Polish Constitution in European Union law is Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This provision guarantees (to every foreign citizen) the right to asylum, in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. At present, the right covered by this provision is exercised in accordance with the rules set out in Directive 2013/32 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection. One need only look at Article 6(2) of that Directive and recital 27 of its preamble to see that the suspension of the right to apply for international protection is in flagrant breach of EU law. Not only do the provisions of the Directive fail to provide for the possibility of suspending the right to apply for international protection, but they actually oblige EU Member States to ensure that any person who indicates an intention to seek international protection is given the opportunity to lodge a formal application as soon as possible (Article 6(2)). From the moment such a person indicates their intention to submit an application, they must be treated as an applicant in the pending procedure, which means, above all, that they must be afforded guarantees of safe stay in the host country (recital 27 of the preamble).

These rules will continue to apply following the anticipated implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. One of the regulations⁵⁷ forming part of the Pact refers explicitly to the phenomenon of the instrumentalisation of migration (defining it in a similar way to the Polish legislation), but among the measures that Member States will be able to implement to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon there is no solution as radical as a suspension of the right to apply for international protection. Moreover, the provisions of the Regulation require that, in situations of instrumentalisation, third-country nationals or stateless persons must still be able to apply for international protection at the external border or in transit zones, even if they are detained in connection with an unauthorised border crossing.

DOES THE GENEVA CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES PROVIDE FOR THE SUSPENSION OF THE RIGHT TO APPLY FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION?

The Geneva Convention does not provide for the possibility of a general or abstract suspension of the right to apply for refugee status. Article 9 of the Convention certainly does not constitute a basis for such a suspension, although the government cited this provision in public debate as the basis under the Convention for such action.

To unequivocally rule out Article 9 as a basis for the abstract suspension of the right to international protection, it suffices to read this provision carefully:

Nothing in this Convention shall deprive a Contracting State, in time of war or in the event of other grave and exceptional circumstances, of the right to take, temporarily, in respect of a specific person, such measures as it deems necessary for national security, until such time as that Contracting State determines that the person is indeed a refugee and that the continued application of such measures to that person is necessary for reasons of national security.

This provision therefore refers to the possibility of the State applying unspecified ‘measures necessary for national security’, but only in relation to a ‘specific person’ and before the State determines that ‘that person is indeed a refugee’. The wording used in the provision indicates that a provisional measure, whatever it may be, may be applied only to a specific person, and thus only within the framework of an individualised procedure, and that person must under no circumstances be deprived of the opportunity to apply for refugee status, as this is the only way the State can determine whether they are indeed a refugee. Seeking in Article 9 of the Convention authorisation for a general suspension of the right to protection is therefore a clear over-interpretation of that provision.

A similar interpretation of Article 9 of the Geneva Convention is proposed in the document entitled “Legal considerations on asylum and non-refoulement in the context of instrumentalisation”, published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁵⁸. In accordance with the UNHCR guidelines, any interim measures taken under Article 9 of the Convention must be necessary and may remain in place for as long as is required to determine whether the person in question is in fact a refugee. The measures may also be maintained after refugee status has been granted, but only where this is necessary ‘in the interests of national security’ and proportionate to the degree of threat to that security, in the light of the specific individual circumstances of the refugee.

AND YET THE VOIVODESHIP ADMINISTRATIVE COURT IN BIAŁYSTOK HAS A DIFFERENT OPINION...

In 2025, the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Białystok dismissed three appeals lodged by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) against decisions rejecting applications for international protection from citizens of Sudan, Afghanistan, and Eritrea. The complaints were based on allegations that the contested decisions were inconsistent with

the Constitution, EU law and the Geneva Convention. The judgments handed down by the Court are certainly worth reading, although from the perspective of the author of this chapter, it is difficult to agree with them. This is because they relate not so much to the compliance (or rather non-compliance) of the acts refusing protection with the provisions of the aforementioned legal instruments, but to the necessity, suggested by the Court (and previously by the government), to reinterpret constitutional standards or norms of international law regarding respect for human rights in the broadest sense. In these matters, the Court took the view that the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border justifies a 'dynamic' interpretation of the law. It was precisely this interpretation that led the Court to conclude that the suspension of the right to international protection did not violate either the Polish Constitution or the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The Foundation naturally disagreed with the Court's position, and, consequently, all three judgments were appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court. Interestingly, in its appeals, the Foundation alleged, among other things, that the Court of first instance had violated Article 10 of the Polish Constitution, namely the principle of the separation of powers. By applying a purported dynamic interpretation of legal provisions, the Court gave these provisions a new meaning, going far beyond what actually follows from their literal wording. In the Foundation's view, the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Białystok may thus have exceeded the powers of a judicial authority and unlawfully assumed a law-making role (the Court derived a non-existent legal norm from an existing provision). Such an overreach of powers, in the Foundation's view, may include the Court's assertion that there are exceptions to the absolute applicability of the provisions of the Geneva Convention, even though the Convention itself does not establish such exceptions.

Ultimately, the case will be decided by the Supreme Administrative Court.



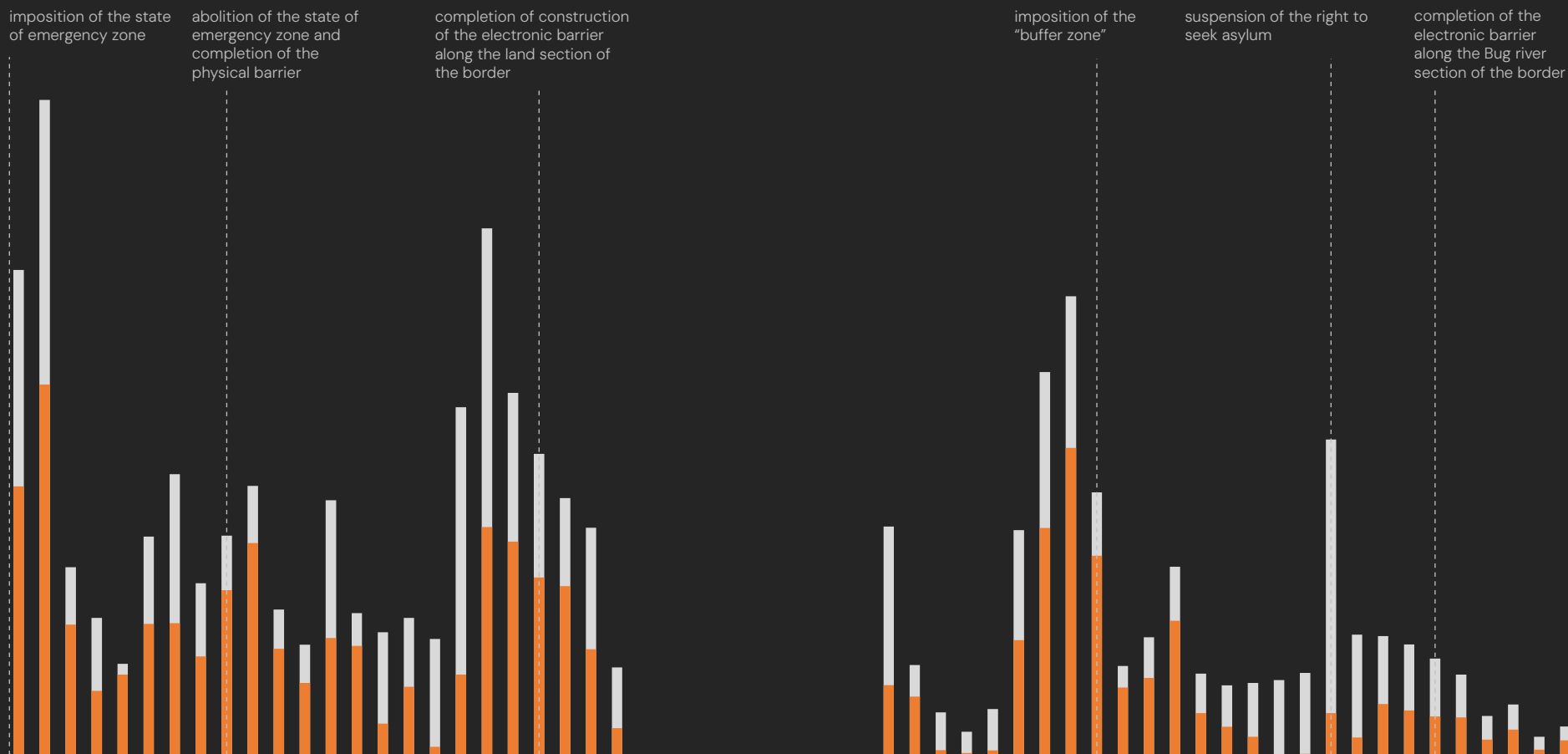
The border by the numbers

based on We Are Monitoring data

October 2021 – December 2025

26 080 number of people who expressed need for support

13 412 number of people who received humanitarian support



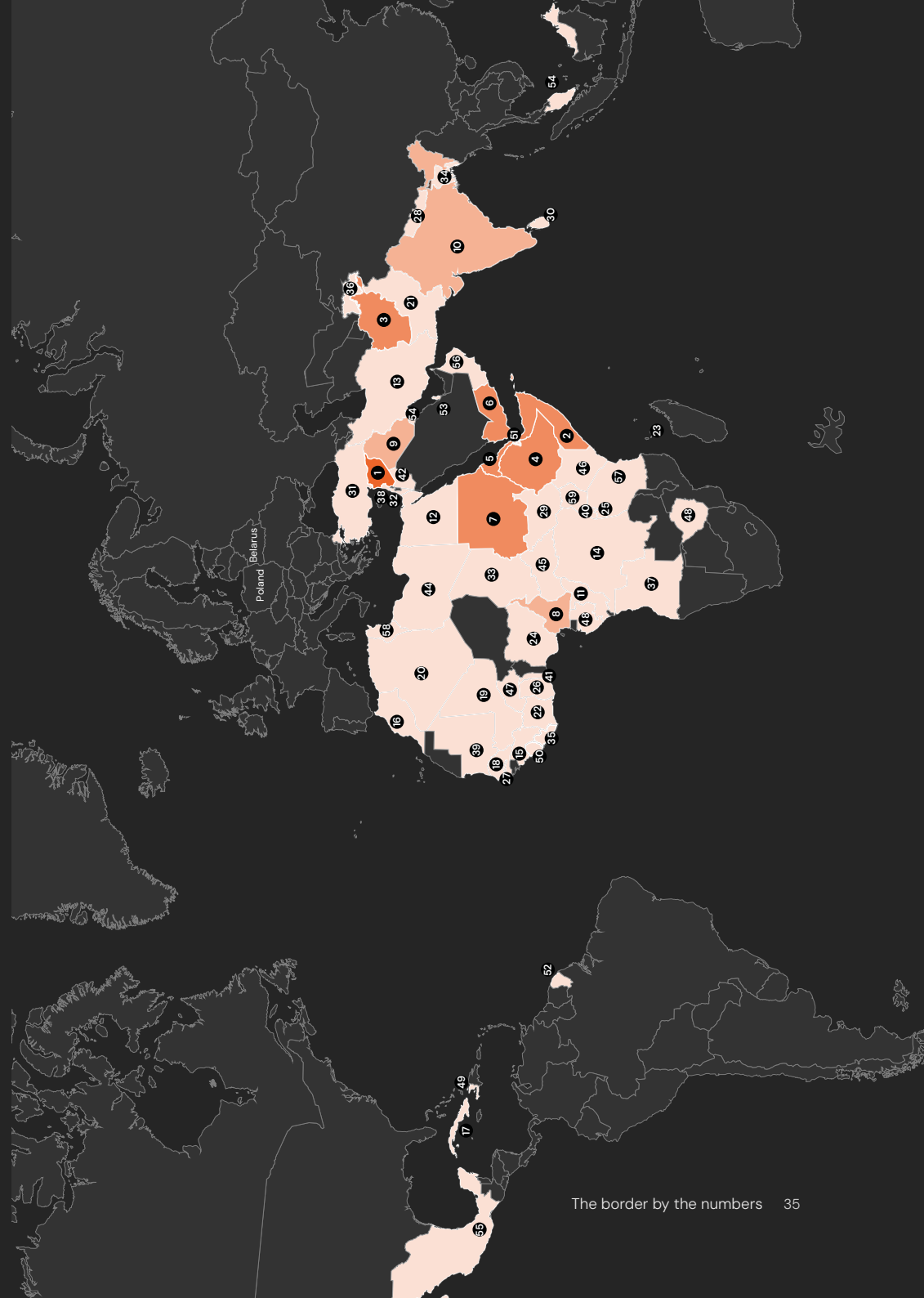
Countries of origin of people at the Poland–Belarus border

June 2022–December 2025

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Syria – 4611 | 21 Pakistan – 99 | 41 Togo – 4 |
| 2 Somalia – 2259 | 22 Ivory Coast – 83 | 42 Jordan – 3 |
| 3 Afghanistan – 1398 | 23 Comoros – 67 | 43 Kenya – 3 |
| 4 Ethiopia – 1367 | 24 Nigeria – 55 | 44 Libya – 3 |
| 5 Eritrea – 1291 | 25 Burundi – 52 | 45 Central African Republic – 3 |
| 6 Yemen – 1234 | 26 Ghana – 48 | 46 Zimbabwe – 3 |
| 7 Sudan* – 919 | 27 Gambia – 34 | 47 Burkina Faso – 2 |
| 8 Cameroon – 410 | 28 Nepal – 26 | 48 Gabon – 2 |
| 9 Iraq – 380 | 29 South Sudan – 23 | 49 Haiti – 2 |
| 10 India – 326 | 30 Sri Lanka – 21 | 50 Sierra Leone – 2 |
| 11 Congo** – 293 | 31 Turkey – 20 | 51 Djibouti – 1 |
| 12 Egypt – 287 | 32 Palestine – 19 | 52 French Guiana – 1 |
| 13 Iran – 280 | 33 Chad – 17 | 53 Qatar – 1 |
| 14 DR Congo – 269 | 34 Bangladesh – 8 | 54 Malaysia – 1 |
| 15 Guinea – 180 | 35 Lebanon – 8 | 55 Mexico – 1 |
| 16 Morocco – 136 | 36 Tajikistan – 6 | 56 Oman – 1 |
| 17 Cuba – 125 | 37 Angola – 4 | 57 Tanzania – 1 |
| 18 Senegal – 112 | 38 Liban – 4 | 58 Tunisia – 1 |
| 19 Mali – 101 | 39 Mauritania – 4 | 59 Uganda – 1 |
| 20 Algeria – 100 | 40 Rwanda – 4 | ● Unknown – 2869 |

* includes people from South Sudan who indicated Sudan as country of origin

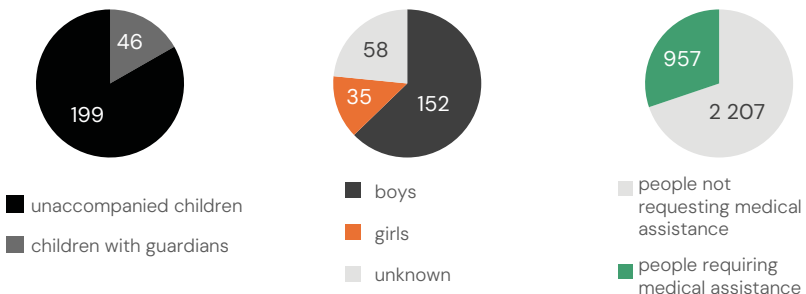
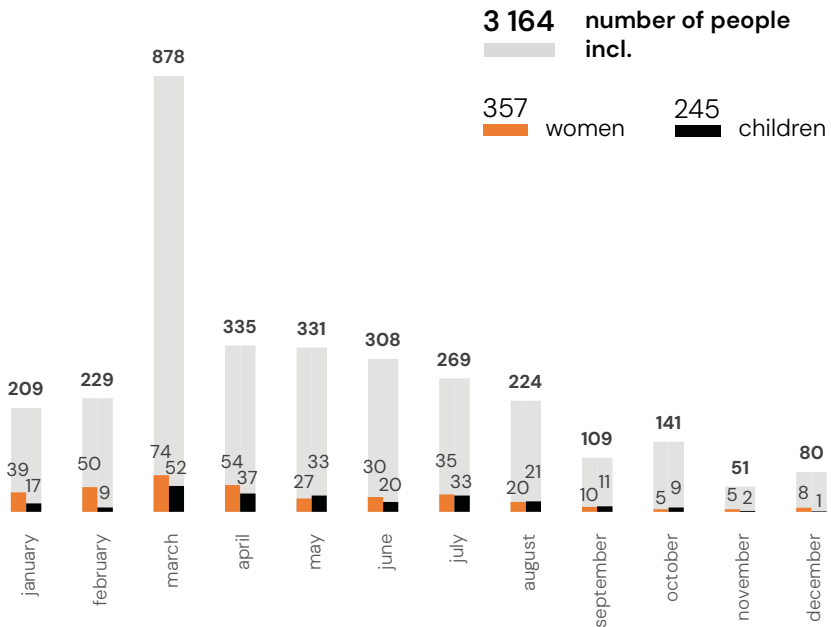
**includes people from Democratic Republic of Congo who indicated Congo as country of origin



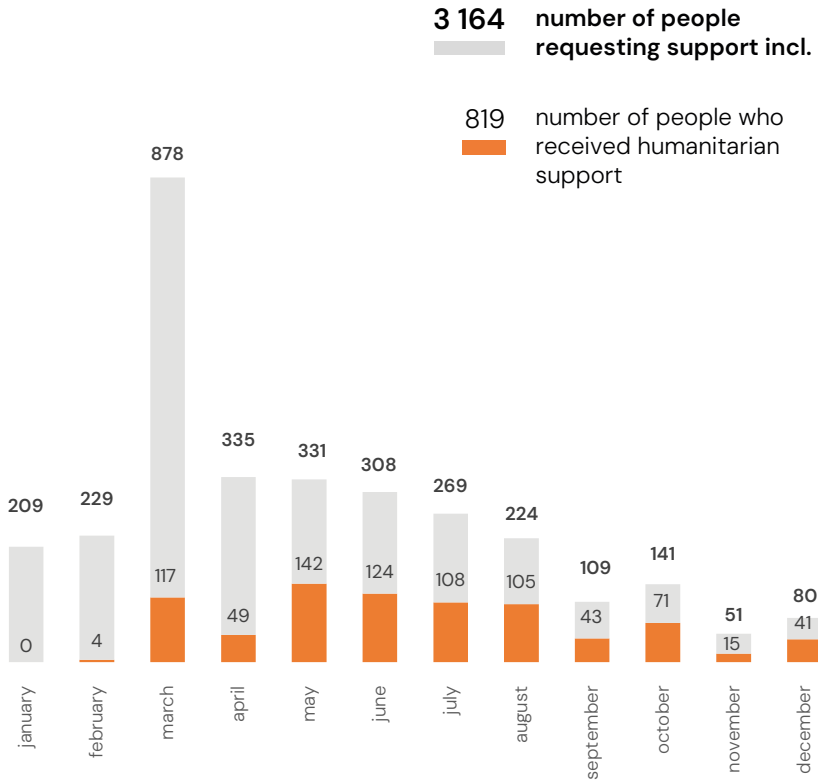
The border by the numbers

based on We Are Monitoring data in 2025

Characteristics of people who requested support

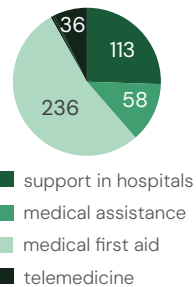
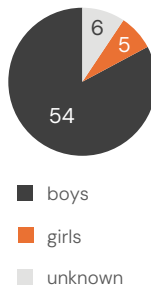
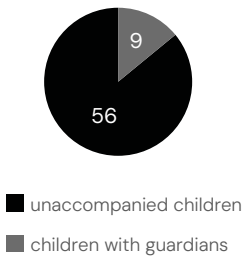
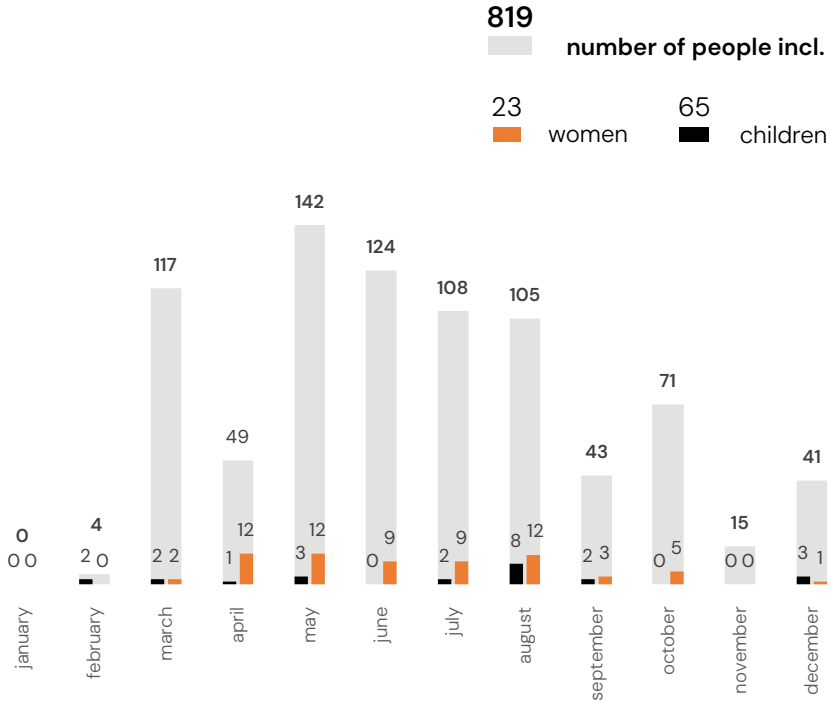


Support provided

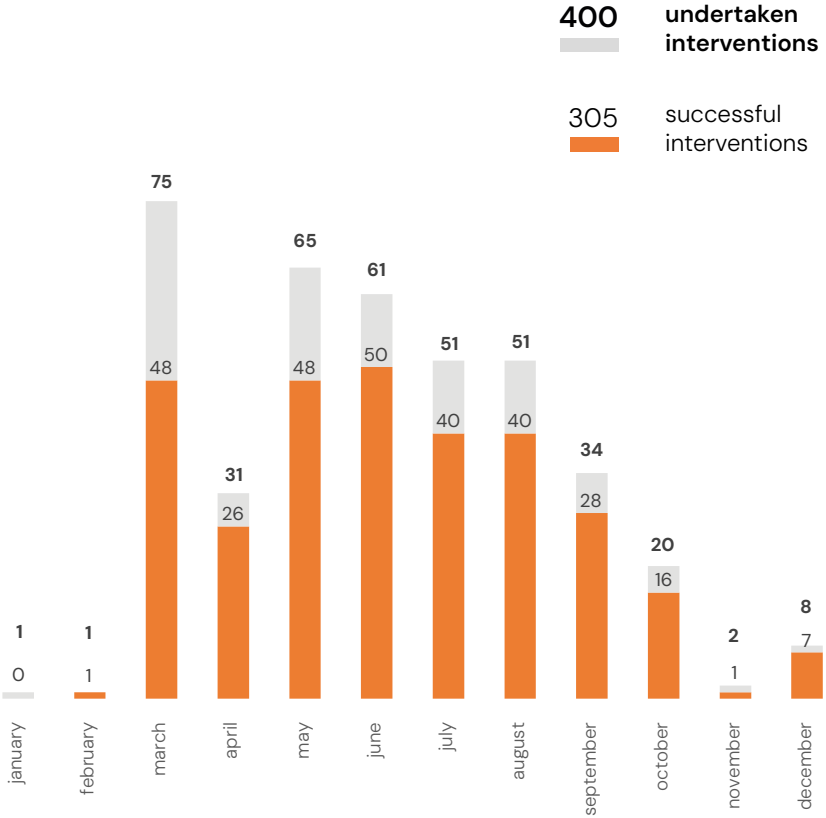


The number of people who ultimately receive support has consistently been lower than the number of reported cases, due to factors such as: reports originating from *muharrama* and from Belarus, where the provision of assistance is not feasible; difficult terrain conditions that at times prevent locating people on the move; and pushbacks in cases where people are found and apprehended by border patrols prior to meeting with humanitarian teams.

Characteristics of people who received support

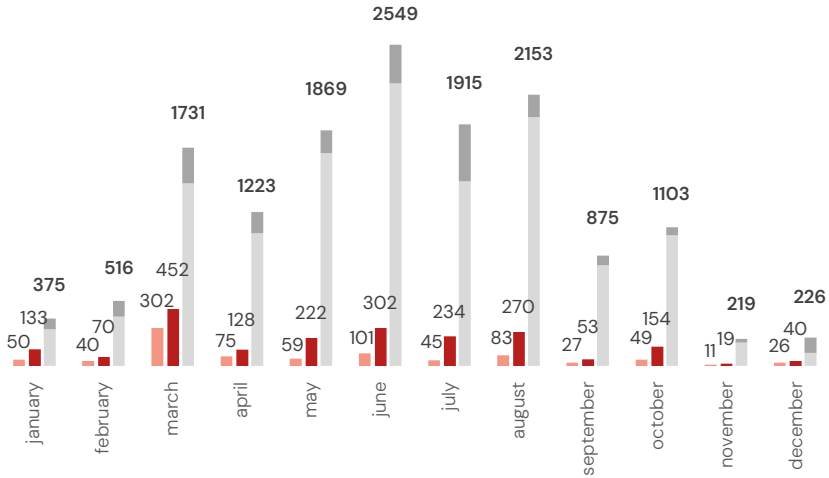


Field interventions

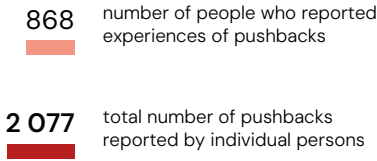


Successful field interventions are defined as those that result in locating and assisting people in need of support. Unsuccessful interventions most often indicate a failure to reach the location specified by people on the move. Such situations typically arise from difficulties in determining the group's precise location or from a loss of contact, which may result from a depleted phone battery or the group's apprehension by border patrols prior to the arrival of humanitarian teams. In some cases, it is possible to confirm that individuals have been subjected to pushbacks. After a period of time, they may re-establish contact from the eastern side of the border barrier, again requesting support.

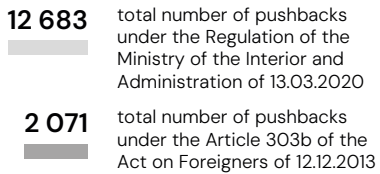
Pushbacks and violence



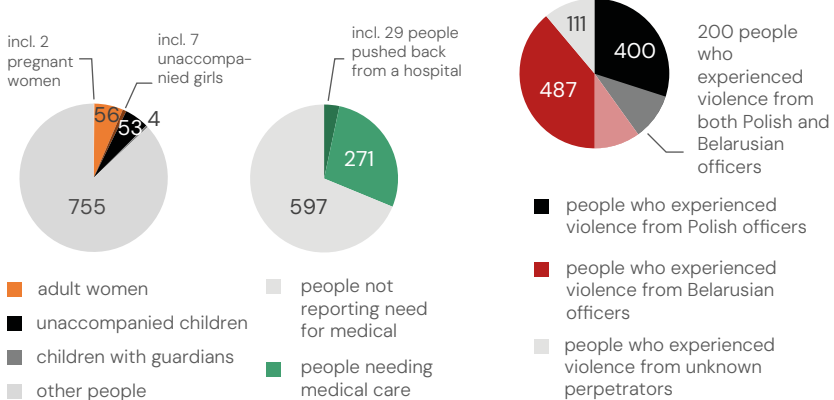
According to WAM data



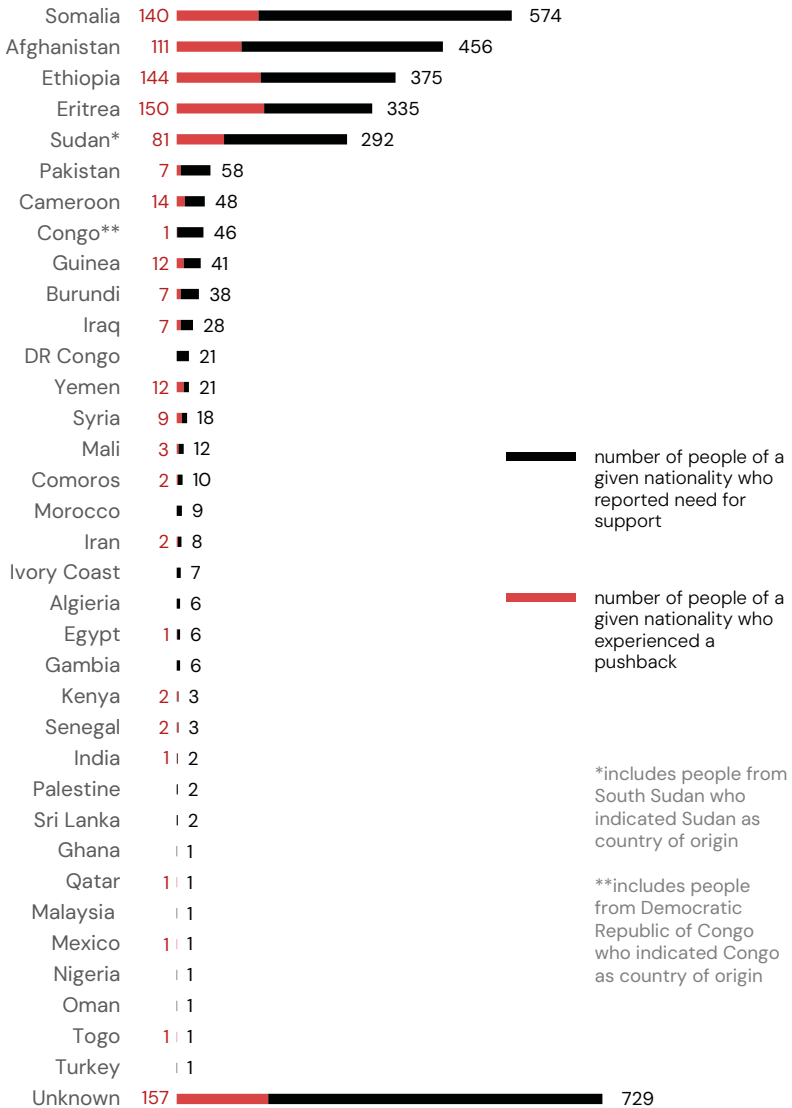
According to Border Guard data (Podlaski and Nadbużański BG units)



Characteristics of people who experienced pushbacks



Countries of origin





Testimonies of People on the Move

The narrative testimonies were developed on the basis of interviews conducted with people who had experienced pushbacks from Poland to Belarus or other forms of violence perpetrated by Polish and/or Belarusian authorities.

A core element of the structural violence faced by people with migration experience is the denial of their voice and self-agency. The collected testimonies constitute a form of self-documentation by those who have lived through these events. Our role is limited to creating conditions in which such individuals can share their accounts safely and anonymously.

The methodology for conducting and processing the interviews was developed with the support of the Border Violence Monitoring Network. Thanks to cooperation with interpreters from the MOVA Association, interviews are carried out in the languages chosen by the interviewees. They take place only after full information has been provided regarding the purpose of collecting the testimonies, the methods of data storage, and the options available to interviewees to decide which data should be anonymised and to what extent their account may be used. Interviewees also retain the possibility to withdraw their consent for its use.

The questionnaire is designed to allow interviewees to decide for themselves which elements of their story they wish to share. As a result, the testimonies vary in their structure and level of detail. Because most interviewees are no longer in Poland, the interviews have been conducted online.

The preparation of narrative testimonies aims to present the interviewees' experiences, often recounted in a non-chronological way, in the clearest and most accessible form possible. All names have been changed, and any details that could lead to the identification of interviewees have been removed.

We were so weak that we couldn't help him— Bakari's Pushback

We tried six times in total, and managed to cross four times. I will tell you about the time when I lost my companion because it still haunts me, along with the mistreatment I experienced here, in Belarus.

It was the night of 1 January 2025. Five of us left the city of Grodno in Belarus to make our way to Poland. It took us around 20 hours, I think. We got to the forest, we walked for almost five hours, without light. We used touch and our phones to navigate in the dark, everything was fine. So we got close to the Belarusian border, climbed the fence and moved on. 15–20 minutes after crossing the fence, we saw a watercourse. On the other side of it there was a barbed wire, which signaled the beginning of the Polish border. In order to get to the other side, we had to get into the water. The five of us got into the water, the water was up to my shoulders. We all crossed the water, and after the water the barbed wire. We tried to sneak through it. We all managed to get through, and immediately we heard the sound of the alarm. The guards arrived immediately and we ran away into the forest (on the Polish side). They spent a lot of time searching for us, but they couldn't find us until other guards, with dogs, came. After over an hour, the dogs tracked us. We were all soaked, with our wet clothes on. When we got detained, guards asked us in English—"Where are you from?". Each of us told them where we were from and what nationality we were. After a few minutes they started beating and kicking us, then, after destroying our phones, they opened the gate and pushed us out, to the Belarusian side. We had to go back to Grodno. It started to snow and my companion walked without shoes, which he lost when we were crossing the watercourse. We walked for about two hours, back to Grodno. He had no shoes on and at one point his foot started to swell. He fell down and his nose started bleeding. We were so weak that we couldn't help him. So we stayed by him for 15 minutes, and that's how he died. We were exhausted, so we kept going. Far ahead we saw a truck coming towards us. The driver spotted us and, because we were exhausted, he put us in the back of his truck, and we told him everything that had happened.

We don't want to return to Yemen. We want asylum and protection in Poland—Yahya's pushback

Twenty-one-year-old Yahya from Yemen expressed his intention to apply for asylum in Poland at the Terespol border crossing in February 2025. The border guards denied his request and told him to return to Belarus.

I was there with three other people. They were between 22 and 24 years old and they were from Yemen.

After passing through the Belarusian passport control at 8 a.m. they continued driving through the border bridge that leads to the Polish control point.

I hadn't received any documents. They only stamped my passports as I was leaving, because I had a Belarusian exit visa.

We got out of the carⁱ on the bridge and we went up to a soldier. We informed her that we want asylum and protection in Poland and she told us that it was forbidden to walk on the bridge and it was only allowed to move by car. Then, we went back to the car and we moved on.

Just after the bridge there is a small room, at the beginning of the border crossing, I will show it to you in the picture. [...] There was a tall and good-looking soldier, he took our passports and told us to wait. We waited for about 20 minutes and then the good-looking soldier came with two other people. Then, they were calling us one by one, and it took about 40 minutes. [...] They asked us only three questions [...]:

ⁱ The Terespol–Brest border crossing is closed to pedestrian traffic. People wishing to apply for protection at the crossing are forced to find, often paid, transport—most often a so-called “taxi”, a private car on the Belarusian side—in order to cross the border bridge. Since 2015, the Polish Border Guard has systemically ignored declarations of intent to apply for protection in Poland made at the Terespol crossing. This is also confirmed by rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, in which the Court states that Poland has pursued a broader policy of refusing entry to foreigners arriving from Belarus. An example is the case of Chechen families who, between 2015 and 2017, spent months waiting at the railway station in Brest. Additionally, on the Belarusian side, the border area is controlled by Belarusian services. Before a person reaches the Polish crossing, they must obtain an exit visa, be allowed by the Belarusian border guard to approach the crossing itself, and then be permitted to exit Belarus.

"Where are you from?"—I told them that I'm from Yemen.

"Why did you come to Poland?"—I informed them that I wanted asylum and protection in Poland and that I couldn't return to my country because of the war. I also said that we were forced out from Belarus.

"How many times have you tried to enter Poland?"

I told them that I hadn't tried before and they said: "Go back to the car". [...] I wanted to tell them, to explain my situation, but they refused, they didn't want me to say anything more. [...] They didn't inform us about the reason for the refusal. They returned the four of us to the taxi and they ordered the driver: "Go back, take them straight to Belarus". So, we turned back. They are inhumane. We told them: "We don't want to return to Yemen, there is a war, there are no possibilities and we lost our money. We want asylum and protection in Poland". When we returned to the taxi, they told the driver: "Take them back" and that's it.

Prior to events described Yahya had already experienced two pushbacks from Poland to Belarus.

The only thing we need is safety— Amadou’s pushbacks

Twenty-one-year-old Amadou from Guinea had been in Belarus for nine months at the time of the interview. Following the 2021 coup, he discontinued his studies and left his home country out of fear for his life.

You know, there was a coup in Guinea in 2021, on 5 September. My father did not agree with the current president, so my family became a target. My father and my brother were simply killed in a car, and no investigation was ever conducted. I was a student. I was studying at university. But I left everything behind, because it is impossible to study when you are in danger. So I left it all in order to get out of there.

He arrived in Belarus together with his older sister. They began their studies on the basis of a six-month visa and lived in a student dormitory. In December 2024, their visas expired. They did not have enough money to pay for rent and tuition, and were forced to leave their accommodation. Shortly afterwards, Belarusian officers detained them, took their fingerprints, and ordered them to purchase tickets to leave the country. As they could not afford to do so, they were taken to a forest and ordered to leave Belarus.

When the time came to pay the rent, I was unable to do it. I also had no support to help me cover the rent. Earlier, I had already been expelled from the hostel, from the dormitory. The university removed me from the student register. I was reported to the immigration authorities. They took our fingerprints. They forced us to leave their country, to return to our own. I was with my sister. They told us to leave their country. But we could not return to Guinea because our lives were in danger there. That is why we had come to Belarus.

Amadou and his sister crossed the Polish–Belarusian border multiple times. Pushed back and forth by Polish and Belarusian officers between the two sides of the border barrier, they spent a total of ten days in the forest.

[The officers] on both sides kept sending us back with the intention that we leave their countries, while we were trying to reach Poland. The Polish officers tortured us, beat us, destroyed our belongings—our phones, everything—and sent us back again. When they pushed us back, Belarus also refused to let us enter the country.

We were trapped: the Polish side would not allow us in, and the Belarusian side would not allow us to return. We suffered so much, tortured there almost to death.

At least once, they were caught by armed Polish officers and transported to another location near the border—Amadou only recalls that it was not a building—and surrounded by vehicles.

Amadou, along with the others traveling with him, were also brutally beaten on the Polish territory. Officers struck the men with the butts of their rifles, hitting one in the eye and knocking out another man's teeth. As a result of the beating, Amadou's sister sustained injuries to her feet and had difficulty walking. At the time the interview was conducted, she had still not fully recovered.

On the Polish side, people were beaten. There was even [a man]... they broke his front teeth, just like that. My sister was injured, and our belongings were destroyed, damaged. They didn't take our things, they destroyed them: phones, everything, power banks, everything was destroyed. And they kept beating us.

I was also beaten, I was exhausted. Women, everyone, everyone. My sister suffered injuries to her feet. [...] She couldn't walk, so we had to carry her.

Amadou and his sister asked for international protection, but Polish officers ignored their requests.

I did not understand what they were saying, but we asked for international protection in Poland anyway. They completely rejected us and forced us to return to Belarus.

Amadou and his companions eventually managed to avoid Belarusian officers and get out of the forest. They reached Grodno and then went to Minsk, where they stayed in their friend's apartment.

After everything that had happened in the forest, we managed to escape from the Belarusian police officers. If we had not managed to do that, they would not have allowed us to enter their country again, because we had already been deported. But we managed to escape, because it is a large forest. We had maps on our phones, so we were able to find our way out.

No, the violence was worse on the Polish side than on the Belarusian side. Because the Belarusians did not beat women, they did not torture women, they only beat the men. But on the Polish side, they beat everyone.

What I could add is the violence against women on the Polish side. It affected me deeply; it affected all of us. The women who were crying in the forest—it was terrifying. They were treated as if they were animals. We did not deserve that from them. It was a country of law. We did not think they could do this to us.

The siblings spent the next three months in Belarus again, until they were eventually stopped by Belarusian officers in Minsk.

They put us in a police car. We even have a photo of that car here. They sent us to the migration authorities, to a facility. Then they forced us again to obtain an exit visa so that we could leave their country. When we received this exit visa, we had hope, because we thought that we might still be accepted in Terespol. With that hope, we went directly to Terespol to ask for international protection.

On 11 March, Amadou and his sister received exit visas. At night, on the same day, they went to the border crossing in Terespol. In Brest, two additional people joined them—a pregnant woman and her husband. Before crossing the border, Amadou contacted a non-governmental organisation, which provided him with information about the process of applying for international protection.

Amadou and his sister crossed the bridge by car with a driver. At the Belarusian border crossing, their passports were checked and stamped. They then encountered a Polish officer and expressed their intention to apply for international protection. After checking their passports, the officer allowed them to proceed. Amadou and his sister then went to a bigger border control station, where they again requested international protection. The officers took their passports and kept them for an extended period of time. They were then told to turn back without being given any explanation, while the Border Guards avoided further conversation. Amadou and his sister did not receive any additional documents from them.

When they asked us what we wanted, we simply said that we wanted to apply for international protection. They took our passports, went away, we did not know where they had taken them. When they came back, they told us to turn around. They left immediately, so there was no conversation. They did not allow us to speak; they did not allow us to explain anything. They just sent us back like that, without any reason.

They returned to the Belarusian side, where officers again checked their passports and stamped them. They then travelled back to Minsk.

What I can add is... It's a tragedy, what happened on the side of Terespol. I only know that there was a violation of the law there. These are human rights... Human rights were not respected on the Polish side by the Border Guard. To this day, my sister is not even able to calm down; she still seems shaken, and that worries me. Especially because she is a woman. I am a man, but she is a woman. If a woman is a victim of violence, everyone knows what state she can be in afterwards. Moreover, we have already been expelled from the country we are currently in. We do not know what to do next. The only thing we need is safety, but that is impossible.



We asked for help, for international protection [...] but they just laughed and made jokes— Haval's pushback

Eighteen-year-old Haval from Kurdistan flew to Georgia in October 2024 after receiving a visa, and then traveled by bus to Moscow. From there, he went to Belarus, where he spent just over twenty days before crossing the Poland–Belarus border for the first time.

In April 2025, Haval told us that he had tried to cross the border nine times, eight of which were successful. On one failed occasion, he couldn't get through the barrier; the other eight times he was caught by the Polish Border Guard and pushed back to Belarus. During our conversation he provided a detailed account of the second-to-last pushback from Poland to Belarus:

Of course, they pushed us back by force, knocking us over, even though every time they caught us, we asked for help, for international protection [...] but they just laughed and made jokes.

At the time Haval crossed the border river Bug. He left the area of Brest with seven other Iraqi Kurds all between 18 and 21 years old, and a guide from Pakistan. One of the men suffered from a health condition related to an old car accident. They crossed the river using an inflatable boat at around 10 p.m. At the same time, another six people from Afghanistan, accompanied by a different guide, were also crossing the river. On the other side, the groups separated. After approximately half an hour Haval heard that the group of Afghans had been caught. After about two hours, one of the men twisted his ankle and was unable to continue walking. Two of his friends stayed with him. They were afraid of turning on their phones, so they did not ask for help.

He was completely unable [to walk on his own], even though we wanted to support him, carry him. Despite that, he was screaming that his foot and legs were in severe pain.

The remaining five continued walking until 3 p.m. the following day, taking only short breaks. They then reached a pickup point where a car was waiting for them. After approximately one kilometer they were stopped by two officers in a civilian vehicle and clothes, who pulled them out of the car and then beat and kicked them for about half an hour.

- They pulled you out of the car and told you to lie on the ground?
- Yes, yes. Even if you refused, they would force you and beat you anyway.
- Can you describe how they beat you? Did they use any tools or objects?
- They didn't have any weapons; I don't know if [inaudible] or something else. But when they beat us, they used their hands, their legs, and so on.

There was also one young guy with us. I don't know, he didn't understand, or something, he just kept [...] They stopped him [inaudible] and threw him to the ground. They stood on his back there. He already had injured elbows, his arm, and so on. After this beating, he went back [to Iraq], because he was very afraid by then; he was terrified.

They beat him [the driver] terribly. Very severely. So badly that he no longer had the strength to walk. [...] And then the military vehicles arrived, and that's when they beat him terribly.

Two other vehicles arrived at the scene. One was a Border Guard car with three uniformed officers in it. All except the driver were taken to a Border Guard facility. The drive took about 15–20 minutes. Before entering the building, they were searched.

When you reach the facility there are cameras everywhere, from the main gate, along the way to the doors, and inside as well. And that's why they don't beat you there, but they swear, shout, and so on. But before we reached the facility, they searched us.

They were locked in the room along with the other three Kurds who had been caught earlier after they separated. During their detention at the facility, the Border Guards gave a small bottle of water and a biscuit to each of them. Later they asked for more and received one more bottle per person. Two people were asking for medical help, but were ignored by the officers.

Haval felt intimidated and was forced to sign documents written in Kurdish. The officers instructed him on how to fill out the forms. One required answers to be marked as "yes" or "no". The Border Guards told Haval to check "yes" in all fields.

There were "yes" and "no" options written there, and they always told me to mark "yes" everywhere, and then sign at the bottom.

The officers threatened him with deportation to Iraq or a pushback to Belarus if he refused to sign the documents:

They scare us, saying that in that case we will keep you here longer, or we will deport you directly to Iraq, or you will be sent back to Belarus immediately, like that.

Among other things, he was questioned about the destination country. This time, he said that he wants to reach the United Kingdom. During earlier pushbacks, he told the guards that he would like to stay in Poland. At that time, the officers promised to help him if he indicated another country, e.g., Germany or the United Kingdom.

Ultimately, according to Haval, it does not matter what one indicates as the destination, how the documents are completed, or whether they are signed or not. The outcome is always the same—a pushback to Belarus.

We had to sign what was written in Kurdish. [They were] saying that they would help us, but that we had to write that we wanted to go to Germany, to the United Kingdom—that they would help with that, but in reality, it wasn't like that. [...] It doesn't matter if they ask you where you want to go, or how you answer, because it no longer matters. And the declaration they give you is different each time—sometimes in Kurdish, sometimes in Arabic, sometimes in Polish—and you sign it anyway and it's the same. They push you back regardless.

The following evening, the men were taken to the border in two vans—there were four people in one and five in the other, including Haval and a guide. The pushback took place at border point 25ⁱ:

On the other side of the barrier, they were detained by Belarusian services and forced to cross back to Poland. Haval was immediately caught by Polish border patrol and pushed back into Belarus.

They pushed us back to the other side, and there was also the Belarusian Border Guard. They saw that the Polish Border Guard was pushing us back. After a while, they treated us the same as always, but then the Belarusian Border Guard threw us back across the border like a ball, meaning to the Polish side, but soldiers were already waiting there on the other side. They took us again and detained us. [This time] there were more than six of us—we were several dozen people. There were people of different nationalities, Afghans and so on. And this time they put 19 people into a small minivan to push us back again.

ⁱ Near the village of Tokary.



I said: “Yes, I want to stay in Poland” — Selam’s pushback

Selam, a twenty-four-year-old woman from Eritrea described a pushback she experienced on 16 March 2025.

At around 11:30 a.m., she crossed the border in a group of seven men and three women from Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eight of them were stopped by the Polish Border Guard immediately after crossing. Selam moved slowly due to a leg injury she had suffered in the past, but she still managed to get away from the barrier and contact one of the NGOs. Before help reached her, she was captured by a man in camouflage pants, who photographed her and took her to a place where there were more officers.

All of them wear, you know, ranger clothes, soldiers’ clothes. But the one that caught me from the top was wearing civilian clothes and [...] his trousers, his pants were 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 were. [...] At first, I thought he was like a humanitarian [worker] because he was not clothed, but he was armed. He had everything to tell you that he’s not, you know, “a civilian-civilian”. He had a gun, pepper spray and everything. [...] I thought he was [a] humanitarian [worker], but when he took me to the other place, and then I said: it’s the police.

[...] 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 Selam was transported to a facility in a car. She was alone and was not handcuffed.

At the police station I met a girl and two guys that were with us [before]. There were two other people from another group that joined us when we were about to be pushed back late at night. [...] So I met three people from my group: one girl and two guys.

At the facility, Selam was searched by a female officer. She was not interrogated and did

not sign any documents. Two other officers took photos of her again. Her fingerprints were not taken.

At first, we were together and then they separated [us into] rooms for male and female. [...] We were allowed to go to the toilet, but they would rush you and tell you to go quickly, rushing you here and there.

She spent about six hours at the facility. Then she was transported with the others to the border line and forced to cross to the Belarusian side near border point 292ⁱ.

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

[...] they put the plastic handcuffs on us, and they took us to the border and we asked them to cut it. They cut them on the one side and they pushed us back.

After the pushback, the group she was traveling with was apprehended by Belarusian services.

They took us by car and because we were in a very bad condition they drove us to the taxi point from where you can go to the cities in Belarus.

Friends whom Selam met again on the Belarusian side told her about the violence they experienced during the pushback.

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

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 together, we used to live together, and he was someone that I knew, yes.

i In the forest between the villages of Wólka Terechowska and Opaka Duża.

They couldn't go back [and water] took two of them. One person saved his life— Aman's pushback

I come from Eritrea. From Eritrea we fled with my family to Sudan, but when the war started in Sudan, we were forced to flee again [...]. From Sudan I went to Ethiopia. I was in a refugee centre there for almost a year and then I managed to get a visa to Belarus.

Aman arrived in Belarus in October 2024. During the interview, he describes the pushback from Poland that he experienced on 19 March, 2025.

I've tried about seven times, but I didn't manage. I also have a problem with my health, I have epilepsy. Sometimes, because of my health, I cannot walk.

Here I am afraid. I am alone, locked in a flat, because I am an "illegal". I am afraid to go out, so I am worried about myself. And I also don't have any messages from my family. So, I don't know what has happened with them, where they are. I don't know. I worry about them, but I am also in a difficult situation, I don't know what to do.

On the night of 19 March, Belarusian services gathered Aman and more than twenty other men on the banks of the Bug River. Aman does not know which countries the others came from, nor how old they were. He estimates that some of them may have been underage. At 3 a.m., Belarusian officers ordered them to get into an inflatable raft that could hold four people at a time. When the raft reached the middle of the river, the officers pulled it back to the Belarusian side using a rope or wire.

This inflated [boat] was tied with some wire. [...] We swim a little, a little—then we could not go any further, because they took it back [...]. It [the boat] is tied and they pull it back. Then, we jumped into the water and we're left without anything. [Those] who swim, try to swim further.

Aman crossed the river in the second group of four, together with two men from Eritrea and one from Ethiopia. All of them were adults. After reaching the Polish bank of the river, they split up:

There was one Ethiopian with us, and he was waiting for his group who was behind us. He was waiting for them after he crossed, but three of us ran as soon as we crossed. But he waited for his friends. [...] So after we crossed the border to Poland, we walked for around an hour and a half, something like that. [...] [We called the humanitarian organization] because we swam into the river, we were shivering and it was cold. [...] And also to help us with the legality in Poland, to help us establish a legal ground as well.

The humanitarian group arrived around 9 a.m. At the request of Aman and his companions, they called the Border Guard because the men wanted to apply for international protection in Poland in their presence. After about an hour, five or six officers arrived at the scene.

They were dressed in normal clothes; it was not like police or anything. It looked like civilian clothes. [...] [They came in] a normal car, not a police or soldier's car. [...] It was like a van, not too big, not too small. Something like a van, it could hold up to six people [...]. They didn't handcuff us, they just put us in the car, and they took us to the police station. [...] They didn't search us but they asked us to give [them] our phones.

The drive took approximately 20 minutes.

When we arrived at the police station they searched us properly. [...] They just searched us and the phones [...] they just took [them]. [...] It was in a city, and it was like a big police station.

In the corridor, Aman saw more people who had crossed the river the previous night in an inflatable boat. Including him, a total of 12 men were being detained. All of them were from Ethiopia or Eritrea.

Twelve people, including me. [...] All of us were in one place. [...] It was not even a room; it was just in a hall. They gave us mattresses that we just slept there. [...] They gave us water and food there.

The men were taken one by one to separate rooms. Aman recalls that he told the officer who was escorting him up the stairs that he wanted to stay in Poland and apply for international protection there.

I asked him: "I want to apply for asylum in Poland, I want to stay", but he was saying: "You want to go to Germany, you don't want to stay here".

They asked for the passcode of my phone, and they got into my phone. There was my passport and everything. [...] They just searched me and everything and that's it. [...] They took [my] fingerprints and they took pictures of me.

All the people Aman was with at the facility were given documents to sign in a language they did not understand. No one agreed to sign them without the presence of an interpreter.

They brought us some papers, but we said before we understand it, we cannot sign. And because we refused to sign without understanding what's in the document, they pushed us back. [...] I was upstairs. The people who were downstairs, I was watching this one female police officer, she was forcing them to sign. She was yelling at them to sign. [...] But they said they hadn't signed.

From the police station, they took us separately. It was like four people, four people at one place, four people at another point. If I'm not mistaken I was pushed back around border post 303 or 297,ⁱ one of those two. [...] The people who were with me, all of them were Eritreans.

There were around three [officers]. [...] I was in a really difficult situation at the time. There was all this hunger and all of these problems, so I cannot remember for sure [what their uniforms looked like], but they were like soldiers. You could tell they were soldiers. [...] [They took us in] a car for four people, a small police car, and there was kind of a fence in the car that separates the driver from the passengers.

Upon arrival, the officers opened a gate in the border barrier and ordered the men to cross to the other side.

Once they pushed us back and once we were in Belarus they threw the phones and gave it to us. There was no charge [...]. We stayed in the forest for two weeks and there was no charge, but the phones were not broken.

ⁱ A forest area near the village of Biala Straż.

Aman and his companions headed north along the border barrier. They wanted to avoid being pushed back into Poland again, and they had heard that Belarusian services on the northern section of the border more often allow people to return from the border zone to Minsk.

After we walked for two days to go back to Minsk, they caught us at the border post around 380.ⁱⁱ Then they took us back to Brest, [...] to make us return to Poland.

This time, Belarusian services gathered around 40 people on the banks of the Bug River. There was no raft, and the river had to be crossed by swimming. The Belarusians assured those who were to enter the river first that the crossing was safe.

And they told them that the river, the water is up to their neck. There's no way to drown them.

Two people from Cameroon entered the river first, followed by three Eritreans.

The situation was, Cameroonian was like... The minute that he got into the water it took him. His friend and the other Cameroonian, he tried to save him, and they both went together and they both drowned together. And their friends [Eritreans], three of them. They swam first and then they saw it [was too] far. And then they said, "let's come back, let's come back". And they [tried to] come back and while they were getting back they couldn't go back to the finish line and it took two of them. One person saved his life and one person managed to get back from the water, get out of the water. He was able to do that but two people, [...], but the two guys there, they couldn't finish and it took them, they drowned.

Aman knew both Eritreans who drowned. One of them had been with him at the station after being detained by the Polish Border Guard on 19 March.

Mebrahtu was with me then. [...] They [the Polish officers] said: "the translator won't come and you have to sign it" [...]. We were afraid to sign it, because we've heard that if you signed it, they would push you back. So, we wanted a translator. And we thought that the translator would come. We didn't know that they would push us back. They pushed us back to the other side, to Belarus. Mebrahtu was with me then. Now Mebrahtu is dead.

ii A forest area north of the Białowieża town.

After four people drowned, the Belarusians did not force anyone else to enter the water. Aman, due to his poor health, was allowed to return to Minsk. Others remained in the border zone.

According to this and other testimonies, in March 2025, at least seven people drowned while attempting to cross the Bug River from Belarus to Poland. Between April and July, a total of 11 bodies were found in the river and along its banks⁵⁹.



“Welcome back, brother” — Khalid’s repeated pushbacks

Twenty-three-year-old Khalid left Iraqi Kurdistan due to fears of a mafia group linked to the police. He was threatened and blackmailed by them. He spent two months in prison. Fearing for his life he decided to emigrate to Europe.

He began his journey to Poland on 24 September 2024. During five months of trying to cross the Polish–Belarusian border, he experienced around 20 pushbacks. In the conversation Khalid describes his attempts to cross the border barrier at several locations, focusing mainly on the most recent one.

We were struggling to cross the Polish border because of the fence. It was hard to climb and most of the time the two of us were climbing and the police was on our heads and they were catching us. And sometimes all of us were able to climb and try to cross it and they were catching us again. [...] We were crossing [the border] not only from one location: we were starting from Minsk, we were starting from a house near the border, we were starting from Brest.

Khalid was travelling in a group of around 20 people: eight from Afghanistan, eight from Iran and four from Iraq. Among them was a Kurdish couple with a three-year-old boy, as well as a teenage boy from Iran who was travelling unaccompanied. There were three women in the group. Additionally, one of the men from Afghanistan was described by Khalid as a person with a disability. Due to a previous operation, he had a metal implant in his leg, which affected his mobility.

The last fence that we are crossing, we call it a “hard wall”. And it takes us two to three hours to cross it, to cut the fence or break the wall. And when we are crossing, it takes a maximum of three minutes for police to come to the place or to catch us. Maximum three minutes. So otherwise, you are not able to cross.

Sometimes they [Polish border guards] know that you are crossing, but they are letting you come, they are making you tired. They are letting you enter the territory of Poland just to use pepper spray against us. And to take our phones, to break our phones, to take our clothes, to take our wallets, to take our stuff, shoes and jackets. Later on, they send us back to the Belarusian area. And it’s just about luck sometimes.

The last time Khalid crossed the border was on 27 March 2025, around 9–10 p.m. His group split into two smaller ones, with 10 people in each. They planned to cross the barrier in two locations about 500 meters apart and then meet again on the Polish side. Khalid and his companions were the first to cross the border. The remaining 10 people—including a Kurdish family with a three-year-old child and the guide—waited at a distance.

Shortly after crossing the barrier, all of them were detained by officers. Khalid recalls that it was just before dawn.

The second group [...] The smuggler was with the second group, and he was staring, he was looking at us when we got caught. We were far from each other, 500 meters. And when we got caught, he thought about it, like: "they are busy with them, like we had a chance to cross, so let's cross it". They crossed it, but they also got caught. When they gathered us together, they asked if we knew each other, and we said: "Yes, we know each other, and we are a group".

According to Khalid's account, two vehicles arrived at the scene, each carrying five or six officers in light brown or light green uniforms. After some time, they called officers dressed in black,ⁱ who arrived in a black vehicle.

The officers and the Polish border guards were good if you compare them to the commandos or the forces that were wearing black outfits and uniforms. [...] The only thing that the Polish border guards [did when] they were stopping us [...] It was so cold when they were telling us: "Lay down on the ground and put your hand on your head or on the sky". And it was cold for us, and we weren't used to this coldness and this weather. And when the second forces, army came to us they were violent and whoever they wanted to beat, they were beating them. [...] Only the families, [...] they were not beating them. We were like a towel for their hands. [...] They were beating us as they want[ed]. We weren't able to defend ourselves at all.

[...] they [officers in the black uniforms] are huge. They are different if you compare them to the officers. And they come with a black car, and they are not in our height, physically they are bigger than us, and when they are telling them, [something] like: "maybe this guy is a smuggler, or that one is a smuggler", so he will just hang you

ⁱ Khalid refers to them using the word "commando".

as like a towel, like you are not able to do anything, and he will beat you, he will do a lot of things to you physically, like beating you so much.

For sure, we asked them [for asylum] a couple times—not a couple times, more than a couple times. But they were making fun of us. [...] Because me and my friend, we were able to speak English [...] That’s why they were thinking that we are the smuggler. And that’s why they were using their violence against us more than the people that were with us.

The officers referred to by Khalid as “commandos” used batons to beat people. Khalid reports that the beatings were carried out in a way intended to avoid causing fractures, targeting parts of the body less prone to bone injury. They also did not beat families.ⁱⁱ The officers left the group with only one phone. They also took the money they found: €100 from Khalid and €500 from the Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians.

They would just leave one phone to contact our smuggler and to find a way to go back. And they were stealing our money also. They were taking our money, especially euros. The only currency they would leave was rubles, Belarusian rubles. Otherwise, they were taking euros.

Despite that Khalid and his companions crossed the border on its northern part, near Grodno, after being apprehended they were transported and pushed back near Brest.

There were four cars that took us to Brest and when we got down from the cars, there was a boat and we needed to cross the lakeⁱⁱⁱ by boat. We don’t know if the boat was provided by Polish border guards or if the boat was already there. So we don’t know how, but we were crossing the lakes by boat.

[...] they were using something to pull [the boat]—when we were crossing, they were bringing back the boat by pulling it. [...] And they were telling us that we needed to push ourselves to cross the lake and we will pull it back again to send five [people] more, four more. So, we were sent back group by group because the boat was small.

ii In his account, Khalid mentions a total of three families: three married couples, including one with a three-year-old child.

iii This may be a translation error; there are no lakes along the Polish–Belarusian border near Brest. The interviewee was likely referring to the Bug River.

There was not enough space [on the boat] for us, for me and my friend. And we decided to swim. My friend wasn't able to swim very well, but I was helping him. If I hadn't been beside him, he would have drowned already. And I was able to save him. Our lives were at risk. But after all, we managed to cross.

They were not that polite to send us back by boat. They were not behaving that well. Because we had a kid, we had a child with us and we had a family. That's why they decided to send us back by boat. Otherwise, they were just pushing us to the water.

On their way back to Brest, they reached the border fence, where they were noticed by Belarusian officers.

When they [Belarusian officers] said "welcome back, brother", they started beating us and the worst things started from there. If you compare it to Polish [services], it was [...] There was a huge difference, it was worse. And they were using all means of violence against us. And they were releasing their dogs. And they were calling other forces to come [...]. And most of us passed out when they were beating us, they were knocking [us] out, like there was no chance to stand. And they were throwing us back to the water. [...] And we know that they killed people during this pushback. Before us and during this time, they're still killing people. Not from my group. But from my group we were knocked out, we were passing out [...]. They were pushing us back to the water. So [...] they were releasing their dogs on us, and it was a tragic story and I cannot [...] You cannot even imagine it.

They were using the huge sticks, like [what is used] in the construction to build the buildings, they [...] It was a disaster. They were hitting us on the head, like they were using it to hit us on our head.

Khalid learnt that the Afghans who had separated from the group earlier—hoping that at least some of them would manage to leave the Belarusian border zone—were also caught and beaten by officers using an object, likely a shovel.

According to Khalid, the families travelling with the group were separated, but remained within a short distance of one another. The officers did not beat the couple with a child. Two women traveling only with their husbands experienced physical and sexual violence.

One family had a child. [...] They went back to Minsk without beating. But there were two other families. They didn't have a child, so they [Belarusian officers] didn't believe that they were a husband and wife. [...] They were taking the women to another place near to us and they were asking them to have sex with them. And when they were accepting it, they were calling them: "You are a whore. You are not saying the truth. You are not the wife of this guy, and you are a whore". Especially in this slang way. And they were pulling them by their hair to the floor.

The violence against the women took place near the camp. Khalid states that the women were filmed before the beating and assault occurred. He refers to the group of perpetrators as members of the Wagner Group. According to his account, they were responsible for the most brutal acts of violence.

And if you compare Wagners to Belarusian or Polish border guards... [...] Polish and Belarusian border guards [...] were angels if you compare it to Wagner's army. They were like hell, like devils against us.

Before any contact they would always start with the pepper spray—Nuruddin’s pushback

At the time of the interview, Nuruddin from Somalia had already been in Belarus for more than ten months. During the conversation, he describes the last time he crossed the Polish border, around two weeks earlier, in mid-April. He was travelling in a group of ten or eleven adult Somali men. They used transport in Belarus to get closer to the Polish border and were taken to a point approximately 10–15 kilometres away. From there they continued on foot. In the forest, they encountered Belarusian officers, who placed them in a military camp for two days before allowing them to continue their journey.

When they caught us, they initially questioned us, so they would ask us where we’re coming from, where we’re headed, and they would also beat us, but nothing that would cause substantial damage. It was normally a few punches and kicks [...] And afterwards they would detain us. We would let them know that we’re headed for Poland, they would let us go. Regarding the conditions of the place, it’s like an army barracks or a small camp for the officers. At night we would have a toilet to keep warm and we would eat our own food, as no food was provided.

Nuruddin reports that the entire group he was travelling with managed to get to the other side of the border barrier near border post number 514 or 515.ⁱ This happened at night, although he does not remember the exact time.

When we started the trip to cross the border the last time, we were all fine. But due to the journey and due to the attempt at crossing the border—this would be the encounter with the guards as well as like the metal [...] injuries from the wires—most of us were injured after the attempt. [...] So when the officers would come, you would be shocked and while trying to run or trying to rush, we fell over this wall and most of us sustained injuries.

Immediately after crossing the border, all the men were apprehended by the Polish services. The officers arrived in four or five vehicles. Nuruddin says that the first to appear at the scene were dressed in black uniforms bearing an inscription he remembered as “Polska Straż”. Later, officers arrived whose clothing he described as “military”.

ⁱ An area at the edge of fields and forests near the town of Krynki.

Immediately we fell and we were injured, some of us screamed and this is when the officers were already near us and immediately, they started spraying the ones that were screaming in pain. They started spraying us with pepper spray and some [of us] attempted to run but they let the dogs on them and they started beating us. I showed them my injured arm and was trying to ask for help and while showing them the arm, they immediately put the bracelets on it and they put me in the, they put us in a tiny vehicle and they led us to a station or a holding area whereby they had us for three nights and this is where they would also beat us multiple times and whenever we would attempt to ask for help they would pepper spray us.

About 20 minutes passed between the moment of apprehension and the time when Nuruddin and his companions were taken to the facility. During that time, the officers beat them, searched them, and destroyed their phones.

They searched us immediately, and they also asked us if we were carrying anything like knives or weapons. And once you said [that] no, you were not, they would take your phones and they would break them. This would happen on the spot. [...] Whenever we would attempt to ask for help, they would say: "We are Polish Guards and we cannot offer assistance".

The detainees were transported to the facility in groups of four or five per vehicle. The drive took about half an hour.

When we got to the station, they handed us to another group [of officers], who were wearing a similar uniform, but they weren't as equipped as the group that caught us at the [barrier] bottom. And this group initially started asking us questions, but then after a bit they started hitting us, and they beat us for a while. Then [they] took us to a room. I would not say it was big or small; I would describe it as mid-sized. And this is where we were held without any food for the next slightly more than 24 hours.

During that time, each of them received one litre of water. Nuruddin recalls that upon arrival at the facility, the officers who were there sprayed them with pepper spray and beat and kicked them for about 15 minutes.

This was when the previous officers handed you over to these new officers and they took you to the room first, so when you all together were taken to this room—this [is] when the beating took place. [...] I would like to mention that before anything

or before any contact they would always start with the pepper spray. This is the first item that they would use and then immediately they followed it up with punches and kicks and afterwards they started hitting us with this [inaudible], the black [inaudible] that they carry.

Initially, after their arrival, all of them were held in one room. They were then taken out one by one for questioning in a separate room. During the interviews, which lasted about 5–10 minutes, no Somali interpreter was present; they were questioned in broken English and with the use of Google Translate.

The questions that they would ask you, I would generally describe them as: "Where are you coming from?", "How did you get here?", "Who brought you?", "How much money did you pay?" Those were the kind of questions that they would ask you in the separate room. [...] Initially, they would start off with talking to you calmly, and this is when they would be telling you that they would be granting you amnesty [asylum]. But then towards the end, this is when they would talk to you a bit rougher, and they would give you a bit of an insult. [...] I do not remember the exact words, but I remember something to the tune of "kurwa". [...] Initially they would give you some hope, they would tell you, "You will never go back to Belarus", "it's a terrible country", "we will give you asylum", but then thereafter they would throw you back. [...] Yes, multiple times, me and the group I was with would tell them multiple times that we were trying to seek asylum in Poland, but in the end, it appears that nobody listened.

On the second night of their stay at the facility, the men were separated and taken to the Belarusian border in two smaller groups. The drive took about two and a half hours. They were separated, and each group was forced to cross the border at a different location. Nuruddin, together with three of his companions, was pushed back near border post no. 275.

They did not give us any explanation. They just picked us up, took us there and then took us out. [...] When they take you from the station, you still have the plastic handcuffs and when they take you to the border, they cut the handcuffs and while cutting the handcuffs, they also punch and kick you.

Nuruddin did not get his shoes back, nor did he recover his phone, which had been destroyed. After he and his companions found themselves back in Belarus, they encountered Belarusian officers.

When we crossed the Belarusian border, we were caught by the Belarusian guards, and we told them what happened to us. Because they would ask us where we are going and what happened. We told them that we were crossing from Poland and we had been beaten by the Polish guards. Here they would provide us with food, some assistance and after a while, after questioning us, they would let us go.

Despite his right arm being broken, Nuruddin has been unable to obtain the medical care he needs in Belarus.

If I would go and ask for medical assistance, they would ask for documentation. And once they [did] and I [didn't] have any legal documentation, they would call the officials and I would get deported.



It felt like I was in hell, while the soldiers stood casually chatting as if nothing was happening— Amna’s pushback

I am from Sudan. I left because of war—real violence, instability, fear, and threats, including threats of sexual assault. I had no safety and no future. I eventually got a student visa to Russia, hoping I could study and start a new life. But things didn’t go as planned. I ended up in Belarus, staying in Minsk with my older sister. Life was stuck. I had no education, no stability, and no idea if I’d ever see my family again. On 5 May, I made the decision to try crossing the Belarus–Poland border. I was terrified, but I felt I had no choice.

ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE BARRIER

I contacted a smuggler who arranged everything—he picked the crossing point and worked with taxi drivers. I left Minsk with three Sudanese men I didn’t know. The driver dropped us off at a point the smuggler chose. Then one of the men guided us further into the forest.

I was carrying a heavy bag filled with supplies meant to help me survive for a week. It was my first time doing such a walk. After about one kilometer, I collapsed. I couldn’t continue. Luckily, the men helped carry my bag, and we reached a place near the Belarusian border fence in time. We rested there. Then we were told: “Cross now”.

We walked about 15 kilometers and were only 15 minutes in when Belarusian guards caught us. They shouted, set a dog on us—it tore my bag apart, ruined my food and water. They questioned us: “How many are you? Did anyone escape?”. Then: “What’s your nationality?”. Then they made us walk back to their camp.

They did shout at us, scream, swear. I don’t understand any Russian, but they weren’t nice at all. They didn’t hit the guys, as I expected, but they were aggressive. So, the moment they caught us, I was very scared. [...] They took us to that point, and they searched us, and they took our phones, and then they told us to wait at

the same point.

By that time, my legs were giving up. I was beyond exhausted. I was scared, sick to my stomach. When I told them I was too tired to walk, they yelled at me, with the dog still behind me.

At the camp, one guard who spoke some English asked questions—how we got there, who gave us the point, who the taxi driver was. Then he separated me from the group.

At first, he tried to comfort me—I was crying. He said things like: “Why are you crying? You want to go to Poland, right? I’ll take you. This is our friendship with Poland—we help you cross.”

But he kept switching between kind and cruel. One moment he was acting like a friend. The next, he was calling us “problems”, “objects” who make his duty harder. I couldn’t tell what was real.

He told us to wait, that other soldiers would come to take us to the Polish fence. He said we might need to climb a tall fence, so we should build a stair from wood. But the other soldiers didn’t come that day. We waited three days in the forest.

We had a plastic sheet and sleeping bags. We were trying to survive. I was on my period. I had sanitary pads with me at that point. But as the days passed, we ran out of food and water.

At one point, we stood at the Belarusian camp’s gate holding a water bottle. One car passed and ignored us. Another [was] full of soldiers [who] gave us disgusting looks. One soldier spat toward us. Then a third car came and took our bottle—only to return it later, thrown at us, full of yellow water.

I was so angry I refused to walk back with the men. I waited, hoping to ask for my phone, which had been taken on the first day. I just wanted to tell my mom I was alive. I waited alone for an hour. Four soldiers came, laughed at me, mocked me in Russian, then left. I returned to the group.

When the soldiers finally came to take us, they didn’t ask if I was willing or able.

They just said things like: "Can you do it in [one] minute?"

I didn't want to show fear. Even though my legs were sore, I nodded. I knew if I hesitated, they might punish the whole group, or send us back to Minsk.

And it wasn't for me, it was for the others. It would be bad for them to come all that way and not try. So, we told them that I will manage to climb and jump to the other side. And they took us. It was very bad. The fence was very tall, like five meters or six meters, I don't know exactly.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

They drove us to the fence. We hid behind trees. The soldiers had their own metal stairs. They kept trying to put it up, but every minute or so, a Polish border patrol car would pass, and we had to hide again. In the chaos, one soldier hit my leg with the stairs by accident. Still, I didn't say anything.

Before crossing, they forced us to leave everything behind—our bags, clothes, food, even my pads. Even though I was still on my period, I had to leave without anything.

Suddenly, they told us: "Now. Go". They cut the top of the razor-wire fence and started yelling. It all happened so fast—maybe [within] 1 minute. I don't remember how we all made it up, but they pushed us. I went first.

And the thing is that they made me climb it first, even though when they explained the thing before, I told them that one of the guys was supposed to help me on the other side. And we agreed on that.

It happened too fast. I don't even remember how I did it or how I managed to climb it. All I remember is that the moment I was aware of myself, I found myself caught on the other side, holding the fence with my hand.

My jacket got caught on the fence. I was hanging, holding onto the razor wire with bare hands, but I didn't even feel the pain. I just knew I had to climb.

When I got to the top, I saw Polish guards on the other side, pointing guns and screaming.

They sprayed the men with pepper spray, causing them to fall off the fence. They didn't spray me, but I was frozen, terrified. I begged them to help me down. At first, they refused, but then they helped—without force.

On the ground, they tied our hands behind our backs. My hands were bleeding, but they still used tight plastic restraints. I told them, "It's too tight, it's painful." One said: "Who told you to cross illegally? You could have done it the legal way". Eventually, they replaced the restraints and sprayed something to clean my wounds.

My body wouldn't stop shaking uncontrollably. I had never experienced that before. It felt like I was in hell, while the soldiers stood casually chatting [like] nothing was happening. They drove us to a building. When I got out of the car, I realized my foot was injured—I couldn't walk. But I still had to step down and go inside. I was still shaking.

Inside, they searched us again, asked our ages (not our names), offered food (I refused), and then separated me from the men. One officer was kind, treated my wounds and tried to calm me down.

Then another came and told me to unlock my phone. I cried and finally did. Later, I knocked and asked to use the toilet and for a pad. That officer yelled at me in Polish for a full minute. At first, I thought he didn't understand, but then he gave me one pad. He just wanted to yell.

Later, I realized my foot wasn't just sore—it was seriously injured. I told the same officer, and he said: "A doctor will come tomorrow". I believed him. I thought: maybe they'll let me stay.

But a few hours later, other officers came—colder, more aggressive. They didn't listen when I said my foot hurt. They yelled when I asked to use the toilet. They put us back in a car and drove us straight to the fence. They opened a gate and pushed us back to Belarus.

They gave me only my phone back—but it had no charge. I didn't get my money, jacket, or glasses. I was in the forest again, freezing, in pain, with nothing.

We knew we had to turn ourselves in again to the Belarusian officers. I couldn't walk. The men carried me for two kilometers until we found guards. This time, we were detained.

They put me in a cell with fourteen men for two days. I had no sanitary pads. I was bleeding through my clothes, humiliated, in pain, and terrified—not knowing if they'd send us back to Minsk or make us cross again.

BACK ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE BORDER

On 30 May, I attempted to cross the border again, this time with my sister and four other people I hadn't met before, making a group of six. Unlike the first time, when we took a route from Grodno, we chose a different path on the Brest side.

Unfortunately, we didn't make it further than the Belarusian fence. The Belarusian border guards on the western side were much more violent than the guards we had encountered the first time. As soon as we were caught, the guards started hitting the men very hard—the men were screaming and shouting, begging for the beatings to stop. When the men continued to cry out, one of the guards threatened them with a shovel to force silence. They also threatened us, the women, to stop crying or else we would be hit just like the men.

Before even taking us to the camp, the guards played cruel games with dogs, releasing them towards us to scare us while they laughed. At the camp, they made us sit exposed to the sun in a hole dug into the ground for two to three hours. Then, they took us outside the camp, where a masked man was waiting for us—a man I recognized as one of the previous guards, now disguised.

They searched us again, and the search was deeply invasive and humiliating, especially for the women. It didn't feel like a normal search; it felt like sexual assault under the guise of inspection.

The guards made the men cut trees and collect wood while continuously beating them. They also forced us to clean the fireplace area. Throughout this, they swore at us constantly, called us degrading names, and made inappropriate sexual comments about our bodies. Even though we didn't speak Russian, it was painfully clear from their tone and words that their language was extremely dirty and disrespectful.

They took all our belongings—bags, food, water, power banks, everything. They kept whatever they wanted and threw the rest into the fire, leaving us with nothing.

Later, a soldier asked my sister questions about the smuggler who arranged the crossing, the taxi drivers, and how we got to that point. After gathering this information, the guards sent us all back to Minsk without any chance to try crossing again.

The above account is based on a written testimony by Amna, a twenty-two-year-old from Sudan, complemented by excerpts from a follow-up conversation with her. Amna left her country with her sister—first travelling to Russia on a student visa, and later to Belarus in March 2025.

They told us to cross or they will kill us— Hassan’s multiple pushbacks

Hassan left Somalia because of the war in the region. Between April and August 2025, he experienced five pushbacks. One of them took place after he crossed the Polish border barrier on the evening of 16 May, 2025. The group he was travelling with, made up entirely of Somalis, included three teenage boys and two women. Two people had asthma. They all crossed the barrier using a ladder.

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 barbed wire kind of cut his arm and he fell on the ground. And when he fell on the ground, his lower leg—the ankle and below, got injured in the impact.

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.

They were instructing us to look away. And the impression I got [was] that they didn’t want us to notice them. But what I noticed was that there were about eight to ten and they had Polish flags on their uniforms and they were wearing camo outfits.

The officers restrained Hassan and his companions with cable ties and then beat them with batons while they were seated. The whole incident lasted about an hour and a half.

We told them multiple times that we were looking for assistance, we asked them to help us, but this was all through them beating us and stuff like that. But they were not interested, they were just laughing and also saying things that we did not understand, but I remember them saying “kurwa” multiple times.

During the search, the officers took their food, power banks, and phones, which they then destroyed. They did not provide medical assistance to the most seriously injured man.

They then forced everyone into two black vehicles and drove them for about forty minutes to another location on the border. They split Hassan and his companions into two groups, one of five and one of three. After sunset, Hassan and four of his companions were pushed back through the barrier near border post no. 348ⁱ. Before the pushback, the officers cut off their handcuffs and returned their power banks and destroyed phones, which were no longer usable.

They would open the door, take us out one by one, open 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 will 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 who had been pushed back at a different location. They were then all apprehended by Belarusian officers.

They [the Belarusian services] 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.

So, they took us to the border and they brought the stairs [ladder] 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 would kill us.

As soon as we crossed the border on the Polish side, immediately they were on

ⁱ In the southern part of the Białowieża Forest.

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?". [...] So we explained that it was the Belarusian officers that had returned us and we actually didn't want to come. [...] [They] 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.

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 the 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 met a group of Ethiopians who shared food with them, gave first aid to the injured man, and gave them a phone so that they could return to the city.

They said they were going to send us back there. [...] And I fainted when they said that, because I failed to believe that we're going to continue again—Desta's pushback

Desta comes from northern Ethiopia, where she fled the civil war. She arrived in Belarus in April 2025. At the turn of June and July, she crossed the border twice and experienced two pushbacks.

The second pushback took place after Desta crossed the Polish–Belarusian border in a group of seven people. All of them were from Ethiopia and were around 20 years old: among them were a woman whom Desta had known before and five men. Before crossing, they had spent five days in the forest between the Polish and Belarusian border barriers.

The first time that we entered was in an area called Brest from the Belarus side, [...] the second time when we entered I don't remember the border [post] number, but there was this small [...] river-like water body that we crossed through. [...] the river was so deep. You could go in deep and you could never get out. For us, because of our height, we couldn't manage to stand in the river. [...] the river is not like, you know, running water. It's calm and it stays in one place. And you can go into the middle of the river and then jump from one side to the other. And that's how we cross.

When we were crossing the river, the men in our group helped us because we needed their support. They helped us cross safely, and all seven of us made it.

PUSHBACK FROM POLAND TO BELARUS

I don't remember exactly how many kilometres we ran from the border but we definitely did run. We ran a lot and later we heard the sound of a drone and then we hid again. [...] I don't know how we were caught but I think maybe it's because we were too scared or maybe it's because of the drone that saw us. But it could be the reason.

Soon after the drone appeared, they were apprehended by four officers.

We were pulled to put our heads down, and they put these kind of plastic handcuffs on us. But the men [...] they beat them, they used force and beat them. And we were told not to look, but we saw that they were beaten. [...] Once we were caught, they really beat them up very badly and they used every force necessary. They were stamping over their stomachs, and they were walking all over their bodies and beating them really badly, and they really mistreated them.

We didn't even have a chance to speak. We couldn't even say a word. The only words that I understood from what they said was "go, go". And when they put our heads down, I understood it. Other than that, I didn't understand anything.

The officers then transported them by van to the Polish–Belarusian border.

They drove the car for around one hour and thirty minutes before they dropped us off. [...] all of us were sitting in [...] a car seat, but two people were sitting under our legs, on the ground. [...] there was a place to sit, but the soldiers ordered for those two guys to sit on that floor, not on the car seat.

Desta recalls that the officers hurried them along by kicking them. The pushback took place at dawn, at a different location from the one where the group had crossed the border.

So, once we were at the border between Poland and Belarus, they opened the gate and they were just trying to rush us and kick us with their legs and said: "Hurry up, go, go, go".

Shortly afterwards, on the Belarusian side, they were apprehended again.

The Belarusian border guards, they have dogs. And one of the dogs has beaten one of our friends. And once the dog bit him, they put us into their cars. They took our phones and they broke our phones. And then they drove us to another location and said: "From now on, this is Europe. You can get into Europe. And from here you can go to Europe". And from that place, they sent us to another place.

And we decided to go back, but we were hungry. We were hungry and we were in a very bad condition. Some of us were sick. Some of us were beaten. "So let's

look at the trail of the cars". And we decided to go back. [...] The Somalis that we met at that place told us that it was the Lithuanian–Belarusian border, not the Polish border. So if they caught us, they would shoot us. It's very dangerous. And [we said:] "Let's get out of this place".

On the way back, they were stopped once again by the Belarusian services.

PUSHBACK FROM LATVIA TO BELARUS

The Belarusians took Desta and her companions to the location where the borders of Belarus, Lithuania, and Latvia meet. There were also six Somalis with them.

We were hungry. We had nothing. And then, we didn't want this. We didn't want to try, at least for today, because we were so hungry and we had nothing. And we were so out of energy. And they took us to the Latvian and Lithuanian borders. They took us to Latvia. They drove for more than four hours to take us there. And then they cut the fences of the Latvian border and said: "Go in". And they forced us to go into the Latvian border. And they locked the door. They locked the fences.

On the other side, they were apprehended by the Latvian officers.

They asked us who cut the fence. We said, "It wasn't us. They cut the fence. Belarusian soldiers cut the fence and let us in." [...] So they put us [...] into the car and they [said:] "Do not watch". And they put our heads down for me and my friend, for the two women. And for the men, [...] they treated them as if they were bulls. And they kicked them so much and so hard that you would be shocked. [...] they gave sticks to [them] and they told them to beat each other up, between the men there [...] and they told them to never come back to Europe. [...] And: "If you're going to die, you're going to die there and not in our continent, not in Europe". And they put us back; they were beating us [...]. There was blood in the car, and they told us to clean the blood, to clean the sweat, whatever there is. And we were forced to clean it. And then we cleaned the car and then, they sent us back to Belarus.

Once they were back on the Belarusian side, the Belarusian officers ordered them to return across the Latvian border. By that stage, the physical and mental condition of the entire

group was very poor. None of them had eaten for several days, and the men had serious injuries.

They said they were going to send us back there. [...] And I fainted when they said that, because I failed to believe [that] we're going to continue again. [...] And then they were about to send us [back] and they saw Latvian soldiers [...] lining up, they put us into some kind of room. Then we asked them for some food and water because we were so down. And they said: "Ask your brothers to feed you". That's what they said. [...] And the Latvian border is the worst border ever. The people [...] The dead bodies that exist there [...] It's a pile of dead bodies there. Because people are dying there of hunger, it's very troubling to see something like that. [...] [It] is very horrific on the Latvian border.



I really saw hell on earth—Kebede’s pushback

Kebede comes from Ethiopia. He left the country because he feared persecution.

A lot of my family members were murdered because they said they were supporting a rebel group that’s fighting the government, called Fano. So I was accused of aiding and assisting Fano, and a lot of my family members were killed. That’s why I escaped and I came through Belarus to come here.

Kebede crossed the Polish–Belarusian border barrier on 3 June 2025 at around midnight, together with eight other men, including four Ethiopians. The crossing most likely took place near Grodno. He sustained injuries to his legs and hips as a result of jumping off the border wall. One of his friends suffered similarly severe injuries, while several others were also wounded.

There were a lot of people who also wanted to jump. There were these cable barbed wires that I didn’t want to touch and someone pushed me—not on purpose, but because they were also trying to cross. And when they pushed me, my legs, my ankles got broken, and my hips also were injured. I was on the ground and I was in severe pain.

The Polish officers promptly arrived at the scene. They put Kebede in handcuffs and sprayed him with pepper gas. During the body search, they took away his phone, power bank, documents, and shoes. He kept asking for a medic, but they ignored him.

My ankles were broken and my hips were broken and I was laying on the ground. I was in severe pain and the border guards, the Polish border guards, came and pepper sprayed my eyes and put me in handcuffs. I couldn’t walk, but I was being dragged all the way to the car [...].

Kebede was taken to the Border Guard station together with five other men, including the other injured Ethiopian.

At the facility, he did not receive food or any medical attention. The officers confiscated the bar of chocolate he had on him and handed it out to the others. He slept on the ground in the same room as the rest of the detainees.

I have experienced a lot of injustices in this place. This is where I really saw hell on earth. And because I was sick, I was, you know, my ankles were broken, my hips were broken and I needed help. And not even a first aid kit. How come they don't even provide a first aid kit? [...] And in order to take me from one place to another, they would just drag me. They would just drag me. And that was not fair. And, you know, I was under the impression that they would do the right thing, but eventually they didn't.

At the time they didn't do any kind of interrogation or talking with me. They were just taunting me. They would look at my broken ankles and my broken hip and they would laugh. They would say: "I'm a doctor, I will help you". They said: "You don't need a doctor, I can help you recover". They were just making fun of my moaning and groaning because of the pain. They were making fun of it. There was no standard talk to ask me what my problem was or what I was looking for.

When asked whether he requested international protection from the officers, he replied:

There was no question. How could I even ask them when they were making fun [of me]? They didn't even consider me a human being. I could not even reach the level to ask them a question because they were just taunting me.

After approximately a day and a half the officers took all of the detainees to the border. Kebede was in a car with the wounded Ethiopian. Being carried to the vehicle was painful and—as he was not able to sit—he had to lay on the floor throughout the drive. The men were pushed out through a gate in the wall around 5 p.m. Their personal belongings, which had been taken from them earlier, were not returned. Kebede was unable to walk; on the orders of the Border Guards, he and his injured companion were carried across the border by other men from the group. The guards saw that the injured men were laid on the ground and left to fend for themselves, yet they still chose to close the gate behind them.

They opened the gate and I said to them—I was lying on the floor—"Kill me, kill me, because I have no hope of living and instead of dying a painful death just kill me". And they said "no" and they ordered the four people to carry me and go to the border of Belarus. [...] And it's just me and him and both of us were injured and we couldn't move, we couldn't do anything. So we slept there, we slept on the ground.

Once we rested a little bit, I said: "let's try something before our life passes". He went looking for a stick and I tore my clothes and tried to tie my broken hip. I was walking on my knees and on my hands, like an animal. I was crawling back to the Belarusian side.

It took them two days to reach the place where they saw Belarusian border patrol. The Belarusians transported them to a "camp" in the forest, where they met another Ethiopian with whom they had previously crossed the Polish border. While in the "camp", the men still did not receive any medical assistance – only water. After two days, they were taken to a taxi pick-up point, from where they traveled to a forest near Minsk. The three of them spent another two days there. They managed to gather some money and get help finding an apartment.

Kebede ended up in a hospital in Belarus, where doctors only told him that his legs were in grave condition. He could not afford to buy the necessary medication. At the end of the interview, he added:

According to international law, a migrant—in any way or form—when injured, should get medical treatment and not be treated how we were treated. And any human in any place asking for asylum, [...] any human in general should be able to get medical treatment, especially when their life is in danger. We're in very grave danger. I don't know what the future holds for me, but I am someone who's really been abused and pushed back. I didn't even get medical care. Even if we got medical care and pushed back, that would be fair, but that's not what happened. And I want to emphasize that.

Kill us, let us die with dignity [of] a human being— Tafari's two pushbacks

Tafari comes from the Amhara region of Ethiopia. At the time of the interview, in July 2025, he had been in Belarus for three months.

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

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

FIRST PUSHBACK

On June 3, 2025, Tafari travelled from Grodno to the Belarusian border barrier in a group of 13 people from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Among them were three teenagers, who could be around 17-18 years old.ⁱ

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

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

Around midnight, the officers dropped them off at the Polish border barrier, having taken

ⁱ Tafari was not certain of their age: "One of them said he was 17, another said he was 18. The third said he was around the same age. So I guess he was about 17 or younger, because he looked very young."

their phones beforehand. At the site, they were split into two groups, one of five and one of eight. Tafari was with the larger one.

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

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

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

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

After falling from the wall, Tafari was in shock. Despite his injured leg, he ran as far as a couple of kilometres into the forest, until he collapsed from exhaustion and fell asleep. That was where four or five Polish officers found him. They put cable ties on him and pepper sprayed his eyes. Tafari remembers that they were wearing light green uniforms. He also noticed a large graphite-coloured van with an open back, in which they had arrived. He stresses that at the moment of his apprehension, he was not fully conscious. He was unable to make out details after being pepper sprayed in the eyes and intense pain after the fall.

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

The officers put Tafari into a vehicle and took him to a hospital, where his wounds were treated. At that point, Tafari asked for international protection.

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

He was then taken to a facility, where he was given a form to fill in in a language he did not understand. Despite the presence of an interpreter, Tafari did not fully understand the contents of the document he was signing. The officers told him that he would be allowed to stay in Poland.

All I remember was [that] she [the interpreter] was asking me where I was from, and then she was just wishing me good luck. I wasn't feeling good, I wasn't myself, I was vomiting at the time. You know, I was in a very bad condition. [...] Not only my leg, but also my stomach was hurting, my breathing was off. It was not the way that I used to breathe in a normal way [...] My entire body was shaking and I was begging them not to send me back. I was actually on my knees asking them to take me to the hospital and they were mocking me and [...] they snatched me out of the institution to take me and put me in the car and then they pushed me back.

Tafari remained at the facility for about six or seven hours. During that time, he was given half a litre of water. He was not offered access to a toilet. He was unable to move on his own. During the body search, one of the officers cut the clothes off his body, while three others stood nearby and watched.

[...] they cut my entire clothes without my boxers, without my underwear, without my underpants, they cut off everything. They cut it with scissors [...] and I was sent back in boxers. [...] They didn't respect privacy, no privacy rights, no nothing. Even at this time, when animals are even respected, and when there are laws for animals, they don't respect any laws.

The pushback took place at around 1 p.m. Tafari does not remember the exact location, only that it was near a border post numbered somewhere between 400 and 500.ⁱⁱ

They came while I was sleeping and they told me that I was going to go to the hospital. And later I was pushed back on the van. I had that torn ACLⁱⁱⁱ and I was in very terrible condition. I was there on my knees and they were telling me to get

ii The border stretches between Ozierany Male and Stare Masiewo.

iii Anterior cruciate ligament.

up to the car [...] they were telling me to go up and put me through the fence and pushed me and then that was all. [...] three people who are injured severely, without getting any medical attention, have been pushed back and returned. But the other guys went, I think they crossed, and some of them have been [pushed] back [...] But some of them have managed to cross.

He spent around two days in the forest on the Belarusian side of the border. He was unable to move on his own and recalls having to lean against trees. There, he met other people with whom he had crossed the border. After two days, Belarusian officers apprehended them and took them to a taxi pick-up point.

After we reached Belarus they didn't do anything for us. We slept there for two days and they didn't give us any food or water. A tuna can we found... water that was probably left three or four months ago and we had to warm that and drink that [...] They didn't even beat my friends, because we were severely injured and we had to eat leaves and we had to survive [on] what we found on the ground [...] And what we have found over there... like I said, warm tuna, water with leaves, and later we got sick because we ate like cows [...].

SECOND PUSHBACK

Tafari crossed the border for the second time a month later, on 4 July 2025, in a group of four people from Ethiopia. Before that, they had spent two days in the forest between the Polish and Belarusian border barriers. They crossed a river and made it to the Polish side through a gap in the fence.

[They] found me in Poland. There was a river, like a lake, that we crossed, and then we crossed the lake, and then we found a cut fence, so we sneaked in, we didn't climb, but we sneaked into the border. They [Polish officers] were using pretty much their hands and their feet. I don't know if they were using weapons, because for 15 minutes I lost consciousness, and they [...] don't say: "This is a sensitive spot, this is a private part where you're not supposed to hit". They just throw punches and [...] hit you wherever they want to. After we were on the ground, he [Polish officer] stomped on my head, like I mentioned earlier, I lost my consciousness. So [our hands] were tied [behind our backs]. I was on the floor [...] my face was entirely

covered with blood. And he was stomping [...] they were taking pictures of me, mocking me [...] I was on the ground there, begging for my life.

Tafari and his companions were taken to a facility, where they were held for three or four hours. During that time, they were given neither water nor food.

So we went there and they were searching us. They told us to take off our clothes. They searched us, they took pictures of us, and they put us naked, and then they pushed us back. [...] I was honestly saying: "Kill us, let us die with dignity of a human being"... To be cruel this bad to another human being... as if we were criminals [...] Whereas people that come out of a different world, to be treated that way was horrific and [to have] someone stomping on your head. He literally stomped on... He stood on my head while I was on the ground. And to see that was horrible.

Tafari also says that there was no opportunity to speak with the officers or ask for asylum. All four people were taken to the border and pushed back. Tafari does not know the location of the pushback; as he emphasizes, he was only half-conscious at the time because of his head injuries.

In Poland they pushed us back, they opened the fence. They opened it and they told us to move in, to get into the border [with] Belarus. And once we arrived there, in Belarus, they [Belarusian border patrol] mixed us with the girls. And once they mixed us with the girls, they put us into this camp. From that camp, they took us out and they took us to the forest. And [...]they took our shoes, so we were barefoot. [...] They told us to be naked, to kiss a woman and to rape a woman and when we refused to do that, we said we would never do such a thing, we were the ones who are getting beaten. We were in [such] a severe condition that you wouldn't even wish for your enemies [...] Once we arrived there at the taxi [point], the taxi driver helped us get there, because when [...] he saw my legs, he felt bad for me. He took me to the hospital. And they [at the hospital] made some adjustments to my leg. But my hips still don't work. I cannot move my hips. My hips are damaged.

At the time of the interview, Tafari was still in Belarus and remained in grave condition. He had no access to food or medical care.

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



Honestly, they treated us like animals— Barkhad’s pushbacks

Barkhad, from Somalia, left for Belarus at the end of 2024, shortly after completing his studies. He remained there until 4 September 2025, and during that time experienced six pushbacks from Poland to Belarus. In the interview, he speaks about the most recent one.

At the beginning of August 2025, he headed towards the Polish–Belarusian border in a group of eight Somali men. After crossing the first Belarusian border fence, they were apprehended by Belarusian border patrol, who ordered them to lie on the ground and then kicked them, beat them with their fists, and shouted threats at them.

They took our phones, asked us questions and put us at their post for the night. The next day they gave us back our phones, asked us some questions and after they found out that we were trying to cross to Poland, they let us go, they told us to cross.

Barkhad and the others then spent a total of seven days in the forest between the border fences of Poland and Belarus. During that time, they ran out of food.

On August 12, at around 5 a.m., they crossed the Polish border barrier in the area between border posts no. 390 and 400.ⁱ Only three people from the group—Barkhad and two men aged 22 and 23—managed to get through the barrier before the Polish border patrol appeared. The rest did not make it across. Later, Barkhad learned that they had been shot with rubber bullets.

As a result of falling from the border wall, one of the men suffered back injuries. Immediately after crossing the barrier, Barkhad noticed two officers getting out of a dark green vehicle and running towards them. The officers started firing rubber bullets at them as they ran and one hit Barkhad in the back. A short while later, the guards stopped chasing them. Barkhad and his companions had stayed hidden for a few hours before they moved on, heading towards a prearranged pickup point.

i Probably south of the village of Masiewo

This is when I tried to stand up. This is when I realized that my leg was severely injured and that I couldn't put any weight on it. So, my two colleagues decided that they would help me and we were walking very, very slowly because of my injury. We could have covered this distance faster, but since we were walking through the woods, avoiding the bigger roads, it took us four days to actually make this 20-kilometer journey. We did not have food, we did not have any water—the only water that we had was one that we found in a river while walking.

At some point, they were no longer able to continue walking. They contacted a humanitarian organisation to ask for help because of hunger and injuries. They received water and food, as well as first aid and after a while continued on their way.

The car that picked them up was stopped after about 10–15 minutes of driving. Officers in civilian clothes, travelling in two vehicles, switched on their sirens, got out, and then pulled everyone out of the stopped car.

They were just threatening us. They had their pistols [out]. They were like: "If you try to run, we'll shoot you". But we were not making any trouble, we were just sitting, so they did not hit us or physically assault us.

The officers questioned all of them. Four border guards then arrived at the scene. Barkhad noticed "Straż Graniczna" stickers on their vehicle.

The driver was [with] someone I would describe as his female partner. They were handcuffed by the officers using the metal handcuffs, we were using plastic ones. And they were questioned, and we were questioned as well [...]. The border guards came and we were transferred to the border guards. They took us to a bigger complex with larger buildings and also many cars [...]. And also when we were coming out they thought that I was pretending with my foot so they pushed me out of the car.

I would say there was no privacy, they searched us all together, and this is when they asked us to remove our clothes. But it wasn't them asking us to do it, and us consenting, it was more rather than threatening and pushing and shouting for you to remove the clothes.

They spent the night at the facility and were then questioned again by two officers—a woman and a man. During the lengthy interview, Barkhad was told that he would be granted asylum as long as he answered the questions asked.

They were asking us very complete questions and it was covering everything. It was from where we came from [to] how we got into the country, what were our intentions, who we were, what were our mothers' names—everything. The lady would ask us questions. I asked them specifically [something] like: "Will you grant me asylum?" And they were like: "As long as you give us the answers we are looking for and if you just give us conclusive answers—yes, we will give you assistance, we'll give you asylum". Basically they were saying: "We'll give you whatever you want".

Barkhad was given an interview protocol which, hurried by the officer, he could not read carefully. He felt compelled to sign it.

From what I read in the document it was the conversation that we just had, but I can't say that I read the whole document because they were rushing us and he was asking if I would sign it or not. I felt pressured and I just thought that my only option was to sign it. But then again I cannot tell you conclusively that yes, I read the whole document and I know everything that was written on there.

In another room, he was presented with another document to sign.

One of the officers had a separate document, he also asked us to sign this document, but he was covering this paper with another paper in his hand. He was just pointing towards the signature place asking us to sign. I asked this officer to remove his hand and show me the document. Initially he refused, but I said that I will not sign unless I read the document, and after arguing for a bit, he let me read it. And this document was very shocking because [...] what it read was totally different to what we just finished in the other interview. What was really shocking was also that this document was not only written in Polish and English, it was also written in Somali, a language that I could actually completely understand. And what it said was shocking for me because it said that I'm not seeking any asylum at all, and I'm okay with being taken to... and then this place was [left] blank. Then this document said that I agreed to be taken to a "blank space" so they could fill this later where they would take me. He kept on pushing me to sign this document. Initially I disagreed, I said: "I won't sign", and ultimately I did not sign, and they did not force me to actually sign it, they were just pushing, and I just refused.

Afterwards he asked me to put my fingerprints somewhere else and I also refused this initially because I thought it would be connected to this document. Then after a while he forced me and they did take the fingerprint. Only two of us were taken to sign this document, the third guy was not. Later on when we were talking to the second guy, he [said that he] also initially refused to sign the document, but they told him: "Okay, if you don't want to sign the document, then just write your three names, that is also fine". At the time, he didn't realise that this was similar to a signature, so he just wrote his three names in the signature space. Afterwards they also took his fingerprint, and they also took photos of us, like two pictures.

Just to describe the contrast: the first guy who was asking us the questions and taking the interview was rather calm, and this part of the situation was calm. But the second part where they were trying to force me to sign, as well as taking the fingerprints and the pictures—the officers here were a bit more crude. They were getting very close to you, shouting, screaming and they would also make movements pretending that they would hit you just to scare you.

He repeatedly asked the officers for medical assistance, but his requests were ignored. Despite asking many times, they were only allowed to use the toilet once during the entire period of their detention at the facility.

I told officers at all levels—the ones that caught us, [...] the border guard that took us to the facility as well as the ones that were interviewing us later, but most of the time they would just jump to their questions or just pretend they did not hear or understand. So they would just ignore that you explained that you have an injury.

When we explained to them that we were in the forest for a very long time, we hadn't eaten in a very long while, we asked them for water, but they didn't give us anything during this time we were there during the night and the day [...] So during this whole period they gave us nothing, but they gave us biscuits and water the next day, when they would return us [...] Approximately, I would say 24 hours [later].

We asked for asylum, specifically when we were doing the interview at this facility the next day [...] During the conversation we explained multiple times that we were seeking asylum, and she was also giving the impression that they were there to assist us. She was asking us to answer clearly, give as much information as we can, with the impression that they were willing to help us and offer us asylum after.

So yes, we did ask them multiple times, they understood, and they also gave the impression that they were planning to help.

Two officers—a woman and a man—handcuffed them again. Then, shouting threats at them, they forced them into a vehicle and drove them to the border barrier near border post no. 300.ⁱⁱ The journey took about two hours. The officers returned their phones and pushed them back across the border between 7 and 8 p.m.

After they took my fingerprints and the pictures, they led us back to where we were being held and later on they came back and at one point they just asked us to put our clothes on very quickly. This is when I tried to explain that I was injured, [ask] if they can offer assistance, but they said that there's no such thing [...] We were handcuffed as well, so when we were getting out of the vehicle, again it was just the same procedure: just screaming and asking us to go. And when they were cutting the handcuffs, they were using the cutters and [...] they also cut my arm. They asked us to go, they opened the gate, and we crossed the border. When we were crossing the border, this is when I tried to ask them for water, because I was the one who was speaking English. But they said they won't give us water and they pepper sprayed me as well.

After the pushback, Barkhad and his companions found themselves near Brest. They walked north along the border, towards the Grodno region, where, according to Barkhad, it is easier to leave the border area and Belarusian officers use less violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Because I was walking really slowly due to my injuries, the other two guys just moved ahead. I was walking alone, and in these parts, there's this marshy area with mud. And multiple times I was almost getting stuck in the mud because of my injuries. But I just moved on and luckily enough, I did not exactly get stuck. As I was going slowly, once I got to between border point 389 and 390, this is when a dog, a car and officers arrived. And this is when I was apprehended. And this is when I started experiencing everything I was [trying to] avoid in Brest [...] Honestly, they would treat you like animals. They would beat you, scream at you and just hold you in one area.

ii North-East of the Opaka Duża village.

iii Reports of brutality of Belarusian services in the Brest area appeared regularly in testimonies from 2025.

Belarusian officers took Barkhad to a place where other people were also being held. There, he met the companions from whom he had earlier separated while walking along the border.

They beat us, they threatened us. And later on, they just locked us in somewhere. Afterwards, they came screaming in the middle of the night, these officers without uniforms. And they told us: "You're going to go to Poland and you're not going to come back". So, they took us to the border.

They had this electric cutter and they started cutting the fence. And they told us: "If you do not cross or if you come back, we will cut you, like we cut the fence right now". And they told us to go into Poland [...] We were tired, we hadn't eaten in a very long time. And some of us were injured. And this was a big group. It wasn't just the two of us—it was just a bunch of us that they collected from the station. And this is when we just stopped immediately and waited for the Polish officers to come to us. Some Ethiopian guys actually did try to continue their crossing, but they were caught immediately and they were beaten even worse. We were not beaten because we just surrendered as soon as we were on the Polish side. When the officers came, they just pepper sprayed us and it was a bit too much. We were experiencing a lot of pain.

I tried talking to the officers since I spoke English [...] immediately I tried talking to them. This is when they pepper sprayed me more. And while I was on the ground, one of them kicked me in the head.

Barkhad was pushed back through the border barrier once again.

This would be the second one. The experience was similar. Immediately, they [Belarusians] would push us to Poland. The [Polish] officers would come, and they would ask us "do you like this game?" And we would try to explain to them: "Don't push us back to Brest again. This time, take us to Grodno", but they would still push us to the Brest side. This happened the second time, and the third time again, and the experiences were so similar: just getting caught, pushed back, being beaten, taken to the station, being beaten, pushed back again. And this happened, apart from the one we just described, two [...] more [times].

They know that if they push you back to the Brest side, that you'll be beaten, and they still do it regardless, because this is their plan [...] just to make you struggle more while being aware that you're already struggling. I would like to say that this is just a part that I would like to stress: that they do things knowingly. Like, most of the actions that they take are not necessarily accidental or more of a coincidence, it's more like every step is calculated. They know what you will experience based on the actions they take.

In the end, Barkhad managed to leave the border area by paying 900 dollars to an Afghan man who was working with the Belarusian services. He spent a total of 22 days at the Polish–Belarusian border and, for around two weeks of that time, experienced continuous pushbacks. He stresses that, apart from the food he received from a humanitarian organisation, he did not have a single proper meal during that period.

On 4 September 2025, after a short period of medical treatment in Belarus, Barkhad returned to Somalia.



They just say: “You have to go back”— Abeba’s pushback

Abeba comes from the Amhara region of Ethiopia. She left the country because of the war, during which she lost close family members. She has been in Belarus for five months and has experienced five pushbacks during this time.

The last one took place after she crossed the border near Grodno in a group of six people—four women and two men—in the evening, around August 6. Two of the women had various health issues: first one had kidney problems, while the other had a gynecological condition and back problems. Two Belarusian officers put a ladder against the barrier. They had a dog with them. They ordered Abeba and her companions to cross, hurrying them up and beating them at the same time. They also took their food.

We’re afraid, we don’t look at their clothes, it’s fear, but I know [that] they wear different clothes. Sometimes the same, sometimes different. Their faces are covered, we can’t see their faces..

Abeba injured her back on barbed wire while crossing the border barrier and fell from a height. At the time of the interview, she was still experiencing severe pain.

I still have wounds [...] That last time, I managed to cross the [razor] wire, [which] is very high. Something [snagged] me and then I fell. I’ve had back pain since then, I can’t sit. Five minutes—I can’t sit longer than that without feeling pain. I can’t go to a doctor.

Around 10 minutes after crossing the barrier, a dog ran up and attacked one of the men, biting his leg. Shortly afterwards, three uniformed officers arrived at the scene. They pepper sprayed Abeba and her companions and told them to go back to Belarus. They tied everyone’s hands with cable ties, and beat the men with batons, knocking them to the ground and kicking them. They also destroyed one person’s phone.

They don’t ask anything, they don’t ask, they just say: “You have to go back”. [...] They don’t let us look, they use [pepper spray] straight away and we can’t see them, what they look like, what they’re wearing. At first, we are terrified, we can’t see them. Then they [spray] us straight away in the face, in the eyes, and we can’t see anything.

Despite injuries, Abeba, and others who had been hurt during crossing, did not receive medical assistance. After a while, more officers arrived at the scene, this time in a dark, most likely navy blue car. In the evening, the guards pushed everyone into the car and drove them to the border barrier. The drive took about 20–30 minutes. When they got out, other people were already at the scene who had also been apprehended.

They push us into the car. One by one, one by one. [...] They beat us, they shout [...] but we don't understand, it's their language.

Abeba reports that the men were beaten continuously until the moment they were pushed through the barrier. Only some of the people had the cable ties on their hands cut.

On the Belarusian side, they were all apprehended by Belarusian officers. In addition to beating them, the officers also threatened them with sexual violence..

They met us there. And the men told us that they were being ordered to rape us [...]. They were also beating the men.

They spent six days in the forest on the Belarusian side. During that time, they were not given any food.

We asked them: “Where are you guys taking us?” They said: “We will take you to Germany”— Omar’s pushback

Omar left Sudan because of the war. At first, he tried to find a safe place in another part of the country, but when that proved impossible, he left for Belarus. He arrived there on July 25, 2025. He experienced three pushbacks.

He was travelling with four other men and two boys aged 16 and 17. They crossed the border from Belarus into Poland at around 3 p.m. Shortly afterwards, they were spotted by Polish border patrol, who began firing rubber bullets at them. The group split up while fleeing. Omar and his companions hid about a kilometre away from the scene. He was wounded and in severe pain after snagging his arm on the fence.

After about an hour and a half, they were apprehended by five Polish officers — Omar believes they were the same ones who had earlier fired at them near the barrier. They had a dog with them. The officers ordered them to lie face down on the ground, pepper sprayed them, and brutally beat them on the back, shoulders, and legs for about half an hour. They then handcuffed them, swearing at them in Polish and Arabic. After about an hour, they also found the remaining people with whom they had crossed the border.

Honestly, it was horrible. I never had this kind of situation. They made me lay down on the ground and there was a female soldier. She was beating me so hard and I couldn't do anything. They also used pepper spray during that time.

The officers forced the men into two vehicles, rushing them with kicks, and then took them to a border facility. The journey lasted about 40 minutes. They were all brought into one room. The guards ordered them to strip down to their underwear, searched them, photographed them, and then—threatening to beat them—took their fingerprints.

They didn't explain anything. They just said: “If you don't do the fingerprint, we will beat you”.

During their time at the facility, those apprehended were given one one-litre bottle of water to share among seven people. They did not receive any food.

They didn't ask us any questions, "how old are you?" or something like that. We didn't fill any form, and they didn't let us say anything [...]. Among us, only one person could speak English, and they didn't allow him to speak unless they asked him something.

At around 8 p.m., the officers placed them in two vehicles and drove them to the border barrier, having first restrained their hands with cable ties. The journey took about 50 minutes.

Well, they didn't use violence, but I was trying to sleep during the time that they were taking us inside the car. All of us were tired, and we were trying at least to take a nap before arriving at the border. But they were shaking the car—right and left, right and left—most of the time, to make us awake.

It's just when they were taking us back to the forbidden area, we asked them: "Where are you guys taking us?" They said: "We will take you to Germany". They were making fun of us. And they took us to the border and they released us to go back to the forbidden area, to muharrama.

At the barrier, another group of officers returned their jackets, emptied of the food that they had in their pockets, cut the cable ties with a knife, and pushed them back through a gate in the barrier near border post no. 605.ⁱ

On their way back into Belarusian territory, Omar and his companions passed through marshy ground and crossed a stream over a fallen log.

[...] When they went back to the Belarusian border, they got caught by the Belarusian soldiers, border guards, and they got arrested in their base for two days, until they collected some other people. There were 15 [people], and later on they brought a bigger van, they put all of them inside the van, and they brought them to the Lithuanian border.

A van took them to the border river, which the officers, using threats, ordered them to swim across.

ⁱ An area at the edge of fields and forest near the village of Lipszczany.

After that they told us to not come back: "If you come back, we will break your phones, and we will beat you, and we will put you in jail" [...]. After the soldiers went [away], we stayed around the river. We were waiting for three hours, and it was raining, and it was cold. It was at 5 p.m. and it was 10 degrees. The weather was so cold. And later on the Lithuanian border guards found us, but they didn't catch us. They asked us: "How did you come here?". We told them Belarusian border guards brought us here, and they said "Go back from the same point that you came from", and we went back.

All seven of them returned to Minsk by taxi.

Soon after returning to Minsk, one of the men who had been travelling with Omar that time, decided to set out once again towards the Polish border. Omar heard that he was brutally beaten while still on the Belarusian side. He had no access to water or food.

They were there almost for 10 days and they didn't have any choice. They were trying to cross [the] Polish border, they were sent back to the forbidden area. They were trying to cross the Belarusian border. Wagner soldiers were catching them and they were sending them back to the forbidden area. So they were stuck for 10 days.

The man died near border post no. 292ⁱⁱ at the beginning of October.

ii A forested area near the village of Wólka Terechowska.

We felt as if we were not human—Amir’s pushback

Hello, I’m from Sudan.

At first, I came to Russia to study and I had no intention of immigrating to Europe. I started my studies at the university, and everything was going well. However, when the war in Sudan started, everything changed. My brother could not send me money. I tried to balance work and study so that I could pay my university fees and cover my personal expenses. I began working two days a week in construction and going to university.

But the problem I faced was not just the challenges at work, such as the racism I experienced due to my skin color and the offensive language. The real issue was that they did not pay me. Every day, they would tell me they would pay me the next day. I would go to another place and encounter the same treatment. I couldn’t report them to the police because I was not allowed to work legally.

When the time came to pay the university fees, I could not afford it and was expelled from the university. I could not return to my country because of the war and I didn’t even have enough money for a flight ticket. I was literally homeless.

I tried to find a safe place where I could feel free and secure. I didn’t search for anything else, so I went to Belarus and met some Sudanese people, each with their own story. We went to the forest—five of us—and met another five Sudanese people there. We were all Sudanese. We were arrested by Belarusian border guards.

In fact, the treatment by the military at the border points wasn’t as bad as in Brest; they were somewhat less harsh. We entered the border searching for a better life in Poland, but the Polish border guards dealt with us using rubber bullets and pepper spray. My friend was shot in the face with a rubber bullet, another one was shot in the foot, and I was bitten by a dog in my leg.

We were ten people, and the Polish border guards arrested all of us at border point 453ⁱ around 8 p.m. They were wearing green uniforms, and there were about 25 of them, including women. They handcuffed us, took our phones, and returned them to us without SIM cards.

Seven of us, including myself, were sent directly to Brest, while the other three were taken to the camp. They were interrogated and then sent to Brest. They usually return us to the points 296, 272, 284, 269, and 303 because they know what happens there.

After that, we were arrested by Belarusian border guards, and they beat us with everything they had for half an hour in front of them, telling us that we would be sent to Poland. We were then put into a small car, packed like luggage, unable to breathe. They handed us over to forces wearing masks, who also tortured us.

The Polish guards treat you brutally if they find you in the forest. There are no cameras, so they beat you, smash your phone, and spray pepper spray into your eyes. We asked them for help—food and water—and to return us to the points we were at, but no one listened. They sent us back to the same Brest points.

We were many in Brest, with Afghans and people from other nationalities, including Eritreans and Somalis. There were about 40 of us, and we were sent back twice a day, in the morning and evening. After about two or three hours, we were lying on the ground, then sent back to Belarus. We requested international protection, but no one responded to us. We asked for food, but no one helped. This was the situation in the forest, a place devoid of humanity, where we were treated like animals, not humans. Even when we needed a doctor, they wouldn't send us. One of my friends, named Mustafa, would tell them he was sick and asked to see a doctor, but they didn't send him.

This continued for 21 days. Every morning and evening, they would send us to the same points, and then bring us back. Sometimes they would beat us, asking why we returned. We drank from stagnant water, and if someone new arrived with food, they would give it to us. Every two days, we might receive

ⁱ Area at the bank of Świsłocz river near Dublany village.

three dates. Mustafa couldn't bear it and died at [border post] 284ⁱⁱ at the end of September 2025.

We felt like we were not humans but animals, treated this way. It is truly heartbreaking to see this from these so-called developed countries, which claim to value freedom, democracy, and humanity.

ii Area at the border near Stawiszcze village.



If you don't work, they kill and they beat you— Farsan's testimony

Farsan comes from the Oromia region of Ethiopia, which he left because of the ongoing armed conflict. He crossed the Polish-Belarusian border three months before the interview, in October 2025, after spending seven days in a forest near Grodno. He was travelling in a group of nine people who had known each other from their studies in the same city in their country of origin. Among them were one or two minors.ⁱ

We are from one environment. We are nine people, one environment, because of the same problems, you know—the government, and the other, the opposite government [...] We are all students.

Shortly after crossing the border, one man from the group was attacked by a dog. The others then fled into the forest, where they remained for around four hours. Farsan and his companions were then apprehended by three Polish officers, who destroyed their phones. Other members of the group were also bitten by a service dog.

Polish officers pushed Farsan and his companions back across the border near Brest. There, they were apprehended by Belarusian officers and held in a camp. Farsan reports that he was beaten and forced to perform physical labour.

When the police come and deport you to Brest, they give you some work [...]. Many people don't have energy, you know, they have no food. They're tired. If you don't hold this work, if you don't work, they kill and they beat you.

For example, just some lady with me, she came from Ethiopia. And they just do whatever they need [to] that lady, you know. But she's my friend. Just she came from Ethiopia with me, you know. Then after I stayed in Brest, she came to me. After she stayed in the forest, just, you know, they do whatever they need, you know, on that lady, you know [...] They don't respect her.

After their stay in the camp, Farsan and his companions spent about a month in a forest in that area, trying to cross the border. During that time, they had no access to water or food,

ⁱ Farsan speaks of two teenage boys, describing them as being 17–18 years old.

except for some chocolate given to them by newly arrived refugees and water provided by Polish officers. According to his account, Belarusian officers repeatedly forced Farsan across the border from Belarus into Poland.

[...] We stayed in the forest [for] one month. One month in the forest in Brest without any food and water. Sometimes you get water from the Polish police [...] But no food. That's why many people are tired and many people die..

During their time near Brest, one man from Farsan's group died of exhaustion.

Not only him. Me and other friends we [also] got gastric problems. Because [it was] not only me, [it was] many people. But he was more tired, more than us [...] And that's why he died.

After a month, Farsan and his companions crossed the border barrier, having been forced by Belarusian officers. Farsan reports that many people in the group broke their arms or legs at that time. After around twenty minutes, the group encountered Polish officers, who pushed them back through the border barrier near Grodno.

Farsan and his companions were then apprehended by Belarusian officers and taken to the Belarusian–Lithuanian border, where they were forced to cross the border river three times. At that time, Farsan witnessed the death of an Afghan man, who, according to the account, drowned.

After three days, Farsan and the others met a group from Sudan and returned with them by taxi to Mogilev. One of the men travelling with Farsan died in Mogilev.

Farsan reports that he was repeatedly hospitalized because of injuries he sustained as a result of beatings by Belarusian officers. At the time of the interview, he was still suffering from severe pain on the left side of his body. He had no money for treatment. The only help he receives comes from other people on the move.



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THEY DID NOT LET US SPEAK

THE “TEMPORARY” SUSPENSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE POLAND–BELARUS BORDER

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The We Are Monitoring Association is part of the Grupa Granica coalition and the Border Violence Monitoring Network. Together with other organizations, informal initiatives, and local residents, we co-create a network of solidarity at the Poland–Belarus border. Since 2021, we have been working to uphold human rights by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data on the major trends, abuses of power, and various forms of violence—including institutional violence—used against people on the move.

Our work also aims to complement public discourse on migration by creating space for the voices of those who have been deprived of the right to freedom of movement and to seek safety.

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