

APRIL 2026

Report from the Poland–Belarus border

I am currently in Belarus. I am completely destitute; my health is failing, and I have absolutely no means to provide for food or drink. I sleep outdoors beneath residential buildings, but with the biting cold, I attempted to find work. Instead, I was thrown into prison, beaten, and tortured simply because I do not possess a visa. I cannot return to my home country, as the situation there is a living hell—rife with killing, looting, displacement, and homelessness.

Excerpt from a conversation with a man from Sudan currently staying in Belarus

In April we registered reports from 26 people, 10 of whom were located in Poland. A group of people from Sudan, Yemen, and Ethiopia, including two women, requested assistance in the area where the borders of Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania meet. Some people from the group, due to having experienced violence at the hands of Lithuanian border officers, required medical support. Unfortunately, it was not possible to help them. Before the necessary assistance could reach the group, contact was lost. From information provided by another humanitarian organization, we know that the entire group was pushed back to Belarus.

Since the beginning of the year, the vast majority of all registered cases have come from people stranded in Belarus or Russia. Another such case is that of an unaccompanied 16-year-old boy from Sudan, who in April attempted to cross from Belarus into Poland. In addition to lacking access to asylum procedures, legal aid, or medical assistance, he also experienced theft and physical violence:

I was beaten at the Belarusian border. There were people who took my food and everything I owned.

Excerpt from a conversation with a teenager from Sudan

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

The trauma from having the realisation that our hopes and dreams were now gone was worse than the beating – Ismail's pushbacks

Originally I'm from Somalia. I grew up in a refugee camp in Kenya. Later I travelled from Kenya to Belarus on October 8th, 2024, so that's where I began my travel – from Nairobi to Minsk, Belarus. [...] I was in Belarus from October 2024 to November 19th, 2025. [...] I tried [to cross the border] over 15 times – 10 times on the Belarus–Poland border and 5 times on the Belarus–Latvia border.

I lost some of my friends there – some died and some were beaten. [...] They [the officers] broke my hand – that was [on] the Polish side. They beat me, also my leg, they broke [it] – that was the Latvian side. And also the Latvians kicked me in my head [...]. Also [on] the Polish side, they shot me with this bullet, plastic bullet, they shot me with plastic bullet. It didn't hurt me, but they shot me through my hips. [...] But I can say mostly the pain was on the Polish side, Belarus–Poland border.

In the interview conducted in March 2026 Ismail describes the first and the last of the experienced pushbacks.

First pushback

Ismail crossed the Polish–Belarusian border for the first time on 12 November 2024 together in a group of 13 people from Somalia.

There were 12 people with me, as well as a lady who was approximately 7 to 8 months pregnant. When we got to the Belarusian border, the Belarusian officers told people to go and continue with their journey. There is a point or a crossing area close to a river where people can enter from. When we got to that point, we were told to stay. [...] The lady fell ill suddenly and there were no officers or anybody near us, it was just about five of us and the lady. At this place, there was no huge surveillance and we were able to enter through this point. However, we did not feel it right to leave the lady alone. So, the lady started vomiting [...].

We were closer to the Polish side of the border compared to the Belarusian side, so we opted to scream for the Polish officers. [...] Only one of us crossed through the barrier just to call the officers and the rest of us had stayed with the lady. [...] Soon after, they [the Polish officers] were able to hear us and they came to us. They started [threatening] us with sticks and we started explaining to them that the lady needed urgent help [...] and she collapsed and lost consciousness. They were laughing and were saying that they will not offer assistance.

He [the person who crossed] was hit really hard and [they were] kicking him. A second officer stopped the first officer and they sprayed him with the pepper spray and put him into the back of the car. When the boy was put away, two of the officers pulled out a camera – [...] an item that the officers were using to zoom in – just to investigate what was happening with the girl. One of the officers screamed asking us: "Is she dead?!". I had the phone numbers to one of the foundations and this was during the time that the

foundations were able to [help with] asylum. The foundation told us that they could not offer us help while we had not yet crossed the border and asked us if there is any other form of help they can offer us.

[...] a vehicle carrying Belarusian officers came from the Belarusian side to us and took the lady away from us. They took the lady to a hospital in the capital city and they refused to let us get on board this vehicle and go with them. Since the lady had gone, we started hiding once more and tried to continue making a different attempt at crossing the border.

The guy that went inside [to call the Polish officers], they beat him up and they took him to the Brest side of the crossing. Normally, when they catch someone, they don't let him go through the same place, they take him to a different place. Since he had actually crossed, they took him to Brest.

We waited for the evening or night to go and cross the border. However, they [the officers] were aware that we were around and at night they were operating a drone. The place was well lit and the four of us tried to cross through the same point. We were also not aware that if you try to cut through the metal, there is a sensor which will alert them. However, we came and found out about this later. When we were crossing, it was just the four of us as the lady had gone and I was the last one amongst the four to cross.

As soon as we crossed, they [Polish officers] came from all four sides [...]. We started running, and when we started running they shot at us with rubber bullets. As I was the last one, one of the bullets hit me, and as soon as it hit me I wasn't able to run far away, so I stopped. As soon as I stopped, the three [were] ahead and all four of us were caught.

[...] this is when they actually beat us up and I wouldn't describe it as severe compared to the one in Latvia – I would describe it as less of a beating compared to Latvia, but what was damaging was the pepper spray they used. [...] They took us to a camp¹ after, and this is where we slept the night [...]. [In the camp] we asked them for food, but they gave us water. And they told us that this water is for the dog. But we were really thirsty, so we drank it.

[The next morning] they were taking us to the Brest side. We explained to them that since they were planning to throw us out either way, if they take us to the Brest side, we will be beaten up by the Belarusian officers on that side. So we opted for them to take us to the Grodno side. They refused our plea and they took us to the Brest side, and this area is heavily monitored by the Belarusian officers.

As soon as they took us out [pushed us back], we were beaten up by the Belarusian officers. During this beating was when one of the boys died. [...] Belarusian officers beat

¹ Ismail explains that it was not a building: "And the place that they took us [to] I would describe as somewhere that the officers just come to stay for a short time. So not exactly a camp. [...] I think it was an old police construction".

us up, and they do this thing whereby they throw you back to the Polish side and the Polish officers beat you up, and then you come back to the Belarusian side and they beat you up again. [...] The boy was really ill and one of the officers suggested that the boy [could] receive treatment and be sent to Warsaw. The second officer refused, and after the second officer refused, this is when we were pushed back to Brest.

The Brest officers had seen us, and a few guys who I would describe as Pakistani – but I'm not sure if they were from Pakistan or Afghanistan – quickly came towards us. They're the ones who took \$500 from each of us, and they quickly crossed us over to the Grodno side. The officers from the Brest side did not pursue us when we crossed over. [...] We walked for what I would estimate to be between 5 and 10 kilometres. [...] And at this point, one of the Pakistani guys was carrying the ill boy, as he was having difficulty at this point, and they took us to a car. When we got to the car, we thought that the ill boy was sleeping, but we didn't realize that he was dead. When we realized that the boy was dead, the driver said that he would drop us somewhere close to the capital city – he opposed driving us in, he was afraid that he might encounter some sort of issues with carrying someone who was dead in the car.

As far as I can gather, his illness, or his death, was eventually as a result of the multiple beatings, as well as hunger. We did not have any food for a long time. And I communicated with his family after and asked him if he had any prior history of illnesses. And they said that he did not. So I would summarize that the reason being that a major one being the beatings as we had been to the Brest side two times and both times we have been beaten severely. [...] I believe that if the second officer did not refuse that the boy be offered assistance, he would still be alive.

We got out of the car and were standing on the road. While we were standing, a police vehicle came. A military vehicle came past us, they saw a dead boy and they stopped. They took us to the hospital, all of us, as well as the dead boy. When they noticed that we did not have severe injuries, they said that we just needed heat, somewhere hot to stay.

So they took us to a [place] which was heated. They asked us to fill out some documents, asked where we are from, what kind of identification we have. And they let us go. The news broadcasted information about the boy and they were able to contact the family of the boy and make arrangements whether his body would be taken home or if he'd be buried in Belarus.

As far as I can gather, his illness, or his death, was eventually a result of the multiple beatings, as well as hunger. We did not have any food for a long time. I communicated with his family after and asked them if he had any prior history of illnesses. And they said that he did not. So I would summarize that the reason was the beatings as we had been to the Brest side two times and both times we had been beaten severely.

The saddest part of this story is that there were two instances when the officers were able to rescue someone's life. They refused to offer assistance to a lady at one point, the second time one of the officers refused the suggestion of his fellow to offer medical

care to the boy. If he had accepted this suggestion from his partner maybe this boy would have been alive and would continue living now.

The interviewee also recounts the later story of the pregnant woman:

She is currently in Germany and she was assisted by one of the human rights foundations in Poland. We shared images, pictures relating to what we'd recorded about her situation and through this, a lady from the humanitarian agency was able to assist her.

Last pushback

The interviewee crossed the Polish–Belarusian border barrier for the last time in a group of seven people – two Sudanese and five Somali.

The story that I'm telling about the last Polish crossing was somewhere between the border of Belarus, Lithuania and Poland. [...] There was an Ethiopian group ahead of us and they were able to enter without much difficulty. I would describe this border [as] two barriers: one that you would jump over and the second one that is closer to the road where the officers would be, and the forest, the Polish forest. So this group had arrived ahead of us to the crossing point. And they said that they would cross over fast. There were five of them and this is how they crossed the border.

I would estimate that the officers, sometimes they would be exhausted or sometimes they wouldn't necessarily pursue some of the people. When they had crossed, since we had phones, we were able to time four minutes after them and then attempt the crossing. So we crossed both barriers [...]. We used a ladder. As soon as we came over the second barrier, immediately I believe that they [the officers] communicated to each other and a few vehicles came to surround us.

When they had arrived at the scene, they came behind us, so they didn't block us completely and we had already run into the forest. As I understand, as soon as you run into the forest, they do not come after you. So while we were in the forest, we waited a bit and as the evening was coming in, we slowly started to move. We had been walking through the forest for four days trying to reach a point where we could take a vehicle.

This time we were able to travel for four days because we were prepared, we had some food. But it just happened that after four days again one of us got ill. We contacted the foundation [...]. They said that they would come and offer us medical assistance. They also promised that they would kind of keep our secret, they wouldn't give away our location. But this time we decided to split up. We left the boy in his position and we went somewhere a bit further where we were able to see him and we asked him not to – in case the officers came – tell them that we were around.

After approximately one hour, an individual from the foundation came and they brought clothes, food and as well as a power bank with them. We still did not come out – we were just observing the interaction, checking if any officers would come to the place.

We stayed for another hour just observing. After we saw that no officers were coming, we came closer to also receive assistance in terms of getting the power bank as well as sharing some of the food.

We continued our journey and we got to the point where we could take a taxi vehicle. So while the taxi was what I would estimate to be 30 minutes away from our location, a car came past us. It was nighttime and I would estimate that [...] the individual from this car had seen us and contacted the officers. So while the taxi was coming towards us, this is when the officers came. We were somewhere in a village.

Ismail describes that the officers arrived in two blue-and-white vehicles. They were dressed in dark clothes and were armed.

As soon as the officers came, they just beat us up on the spot immediately. And during this beating, one of us lost a [tooth] – it happened right there and then. We had the description of the car that was supposed to pick us up, the plate number, as well as the appearance of the car. They [the officers] took this information down and I believe the number of the driver of the car as well. So, before they arrived, we were really happy. We believed that we finally made it and we were just thinking of all the reasons [of why] we left, all the reasons that led us to leave our country. We were thinking both about the difficulties that led us to leaving our past as well as of how bright our future was.

And as soon as they [the officers] came, this was kind of a high point for us, as well as a trauma. I would describe that even though they beat us, the trauma from having the realization that our hopes and dreams were now gone was worse than the beating that they delivered on us. So, this is the time that I gave up, or I kind of left the idea of going back to Poland. The other times were maybe just us getting close to the border and going back.

At the time that the officers had caught us, I would estimate it to be around 3 am in the morning. The time between them catching us up until throwing us out of the border – so beating us up, taking information about who we were and just general checking documents, taking information – was around [4 hours]. So, all this happened between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. They threw us out from the Grodno side. I would say that these officers were better than the previous ones because after they beat us and took us to the border, they apologized and told us that they do not have the power to allow us to cross into the country. [...] The reason why officers were kind of apologetic was they also seemed to notice that we were kind of hopeless at that point, we lost our hope.

How I arrived at the decision of not attempting the crossing to Poland again was that I realised or I came to the conclusion that I could not get farther than to the vehicle, the taxi point. So this is why I decided not to attempt the crossing to Poland once more.

I have made an attempt after, but this was to cross towards Latvia. After enduring this last attempt of crossing to Latvia, this was one where I had more horrific experiences whereby two individuals from our group had died. One from Eritrea and a girl from Somalia. The girl actually died on my lap and this is when I had the shock. So after this I

decided not to even attempt any more crossings at all. I decided to come back home. I was severely sick [...].

I've had the most horrific experience whereby many people, many Arab people, many people from Eritrea, many people from Somalia, many people from Sudan have died. Which was also the trip whereby most people just made the decision of not attempting to cross again. This was the trip where I had experienced the biggest beating. This was the experience, the trip whereby we were being electrocuted. I've attempted to make this crossing five times, and each trip was worse than the one before it. The crossings in Latvia are not even comparable to the ones in Poland in terms of the physical abuse that you experience.

[...] When we made the [last crossing amongst these five], the officers caught us, put us inside a van. They would come inside the van, beat us up, go outside, and come back again. At one point they would even put their dogs in the van, close us with the dogs. They would wait outside and the dogs would start biting us. This is the one that I'd describe to be the last trip. They told us that they were tired of beating us up, so the dogs started to bite us. It was during this trip that they electrocuted us together with a girl. Later on, when they let us go, the girl just suddenly had palpitations, and she died, I believe, from the electrocution. This is when I had a really big shock. The beating, as bad as it was, I would say that it's something that is just on the outside, or something that is not so damaging. But the worst of it all was the severe electrocution that they would do on us multiple times.

And also there was the Eritrean boy who died. What happened was they put him on the floor and they put tyres on his body and they started stepping on him as well as beating him up while jumping on him with the tyres on his body. The boy died while he was still in their custody. He died in the vehicle, in their car, while they were taking us back to the crossing. They told us to carry the body across the border with us.

It was during this trip that one of my hands was broken. When we were back, one of the Belarusian officers offered first aid and they bandaged my arm. The arm hasn't fully healed yet [...]. It was the same trip that I injured my head. This injury, the doctors here [in Kenya] have told me that I need to come back every month for the next 6 months for continuous monitoring just so they can make sure that everything will be fine. I still feel the impact from the electrocution. Once in a while I would just be seated and all of a sudden my body would shake or it would make some weird jacking movement as if I was still being electrocuted. So I feel like the impact of the electrocution is the worst and it's the one that impacts me the most.

I would just like to emphasise that there were many who have died and their family is not aware that they died in the forest. I would like to mention that at that point that I was crossing the forest, I would just come across dead bodies. [...] These are the people I was with in the same group, the total number will be three: one on the side of the crossing with Poland, and two of them on the side of the crossing on Latvia. However the ones that I've seen while making crossings, just walking by, I've seen more than ten.

I would say the worst I can describe is the ones that have died and their families are not aware of their deaths and their bodies are just lying in the forest. [...] On this side of Belarus and Poland I think the highest number of such deaths were around February 2025. But most of it or most of these deaths are between Belarus and Latvia

After thirteen months since arriving in Belarus, Ismail returned to Kenya.

Key Figures

REQUESTS APRIL 2026				
	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total	13	26	3 (3)	3 (0)
incl. in Poland	2	11	0 (0)	3 (0)
incl. in hospitals	nd	1	0 (0)	1 (0)
incl. in Belarus	10	10	3 (3)	1 (0)
incl. in muharrama	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)

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

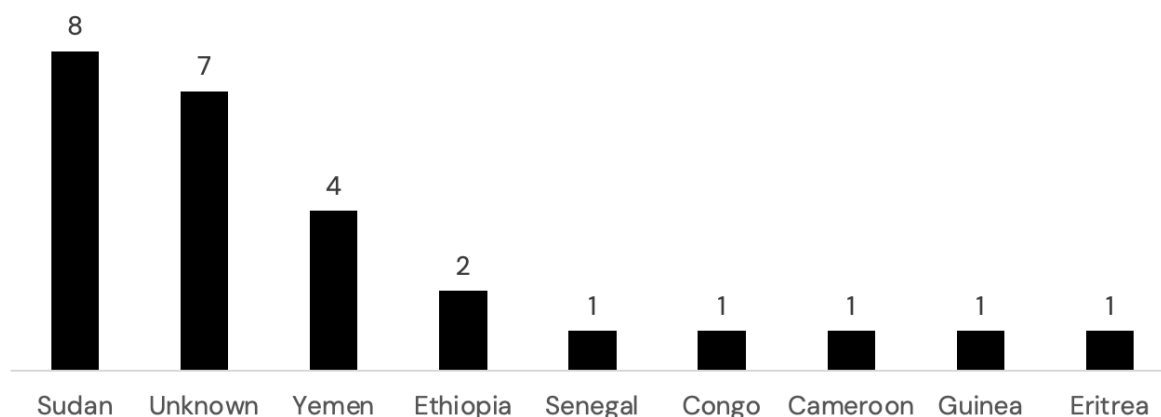


Fig.1 Countries of origin of those reporting a need for support in April 2026.

SUPPORT PROVIDED APRIL 2026

	groups	individuals	children* (incl. UASC)	women and girls* (incl. pregnant)
Total²	4	4	0 (0)	1 (0)
Material aid	1	1	0 (0)	1 (0)
Legal aid	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Medical aid³	3	3	0 (0)	1 (0)
First aid	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hospital assistance	nd	1	0 (0)	1 (0)
Psychological support	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
# of undertaken interventions			1	
# of successful interventions			0	

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

PUSHBACKS AND VIOLENCE APRIL 2026

	groups	individuals	minors* (incl. UASC)	women* (incl. pregnant)
Reported pushbacks	1	10	0 (0)	2 (0)
Incl. from a hospital	nd	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence PL	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence BY	1	1	0 (0)	0 (0)
Reported violence N.N	1	1	1 (1)	0 (0)

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

² Explanations of the individual categories can be found in the glossary at the end of the report.

³ As part of medical assistance, 1 teleconsultation was conducted.

Definitions

Total requests – the total number of reported groups/people on the move, located in Poland, Belarus, Lithuania or Latvia. It does not consider individuals staying in other European countries during the reporting period, as the report aims to illustrate the situation on the Polish–Belarusian border and the related migration route.

Groups – individuals travelling or residing together at the time of reported event such as pushback, humanitarian/legal/medical intervention. These individuals may or may not be related by family or social ties.

Individuals – number of individual persons.

Children/minors – all individuals under 18 years old.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Material aid – support in the form of basic humanitarian aid packages (food, clothing, water, information), provided during field interventions or in hospitals.

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

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

Medical first aid – assistance provided by individuals without formal medical education or

after basic first-aid / rescue training (e.g. wound cleaning or treatment of trench foot).

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

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

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

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

Reported violence PL – reported cases of violence experienced directly by people on the move, the perpetrators of which, according to the victims' accounts, were members of the Polish uniformed services: Border Guard, Police, Polish Army, Territorial Defence Forces.

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

Reported violence N.N. – reported cases of violence in which, based on the wording of the account and the location provided, it is not possible to determine whether the perpetrators were Polish or Belarusian services.

Number of field interventions – number of interventions undertaken by field teams in response to a report of a need for assistance or a chance encounter of people on the move in a border area.

Number of deceased – all known victims of the border regimes of Poland (also acting as a member state of the European Union) and Belarus are individuals who died along the Eastern European migration route, on the Polish-Belarusian border, and on its both sides. Cases of people who died outside of these areas but whose deaths are connected to the attempt to cross this particular border are considered individually by the Border Death Monitoring Group (BDMG), in order to avoid the arbitrary inclusion or exclusion of specific individuals. The data continues to be verified and updated. It is expected that, over time, additional information may surface regarding further deaths, including from the period covered here.

Injuries from the wall – injuries sustained while crossing border fortifications at the Polish-Belarusian border, such as orthopaedic injuries, fractures, sprains, or wounds caused by razor wire.

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

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

* often difficult to identify at the intervention stage unless disclosed by an individual

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

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