

## BELARUS - POLAND BORDER

People on the move fleeing conflicts in the Middle East continue to be trapped in a forested border region between Belarus and Poland and are in need of humanitarian and medical assistance. In 2021, thousands of people tried to enter European Union through Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland from neighbouring Belarus. The situation at the borders became critical during the winter months, with hundreds of people stranded for weeks in freezing conditions.

At least 24 people lost their lives in attempts to cross the border from Belarus to the EU in 2021 and early 2022. The people crossing that border in need of protection arrive after a long and difficult journey from countries where conflict is ongoing, such as Yemen, Syria, or the Iraqi Kurdistan. Most of the asylum seekers have been repeatedly caught, and illegally and violently pushed back. Policies and restricted access for aid organisations could result in yet more migrants and refugees risking their lives.

In January 2022, the construction of a new 353 million euro wall started along the Belarus border aimed at deterring refugee crossings. The 5.5-metre-high wall will run along 186km of the border – almost half the total length – and is to be completed in June 2022.

In March 2022, there were reports about the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border having worsened as all the migrants in a camp in Bruzgi, Belarus were forced out. The most vulnerable among them, including families with children and those who are ill or disabled, are trying to survive in the surrounding forest.

Some Catholic organisations have witnessed the conditions of people who have been forcibly sent back to their countries of origin, such as people from the persecuted Yazidi minority, who tried to seek safety in Europe and were sent back to Northern Iraq, facing danger and a protracted situation with no prospects of a long-term solution.

**For further information:**

*Institutional Websites*

UNHCR - UNHCR and IOM Call for immediate de-escalation at the Belarus-Poland border, November 2021

<https://www.unhcr.org/neu/70501-unhcr-and-iom-call-for-immediate-de-escalation-at-the-belarus-poland-border.html>

Vatican News - Migrants face uncertainty at Belarus-Polish border

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2021-11/migrants-uncertainty-belarus-poland-border.html>

*Online Newspapers and Periodicals:*

UN News - Human rights defenders threatened at Poland-Belarus border, UN News, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112032>