



End the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border

The current situation at the EU's Eastern border with Belarus can only be described as a severe humanitarian crisis. For several months now, the Belarusian regime has been sending men, women and children, who want to flee their homes, to its border region with the EU, predominantly Poland. People fly to Belarus in order to find safety in Europe, but instead they end up stuck in a border zone where they encounter closed borders and experience cold, hunger due to blocked humanitarian assistance as well as serious abuses and illegal pushbacks from both sides. Many people spend weeks in the forest, sleeping rough on bare ground with no access to food, clean water or medical assistance. The public has no access to accurate information since the state of emergency introduced by Poland due to the situation at its border zone and the subsequent legislation has prevented journalists, medical workers, NGOs or volunteers from accessing the area.

As European Greens we strongly protest against the Belarusian regime instrumentalizing human beings for political reasons. We also strongly condemn the failure of the EU member states to act in accordance with EU law by denying people access to asylum, which allows the situation to continue at its border, leading to suffering deaths of asylum seekers and migrants. We are deeply concerned by the proposals put forward on 1 December 2021 by the EC to allow Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to decrease protections for asylum seekers for a period of 6 months. These proposals mean that all asylum seekers arriving via Belarus will be subject to a sub-standard asylum procedure in detention, without any of the usual exemptions for vulnerable groups, including children. Return procedures will be simplified and sped-up, meaning that asylum seekers will likely have insufficient ability to challenge in court the finding that their return is not a violation of, the non-refoulement principle. The extension of the registration period for asylum applications to 4 weeks, instead of the current 3 to 10 days, creates a longer period when people are not protected and likely to be subject to violations including expulsions, pushbacks and summary removals. The European Commission has not explained why it is necessary to set a dangerous standard in allowing member states to derogate. The current humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border requires full respect of EU asylum protection standards and human rights, not the suspension thereof.

We demand urgent actions to address the humanitarian crisis at the Eastern EU border:

- The authorities of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia must without delay ensure adequate humanitarian assistance for the people stranded at the border, especially those in vulnerable situations;
- In line with the fundamental right to seek asylum, EU member states must grant effective access to fair asylum procedures to the people stranded in the border region and offer relocation;



- The EC should take measures against member states violating fundamental EU laws, such as the non-refoulement principle, rather than looking the other way or suggesting normalisation of such illegal practices by allowing for a temporary derogation of asylum standards;
- Returns from the border must be implemented in full respect of human rights, in particular the non-refoulement principle;
- We demand that the Polish authorities ensure access to the border zone for journalists, medical workers, NGOs and volunteers;
- The EU should reaffirm the centrality of human rights in its external relations by prioritising solidarity among member states, rather than avoiding migrant arrivals at all costs.
- The EU needs to live up to its commitment to making the best interests and rights of asylum-seeking children a primary consideration
- The EU must show a strong, unequivocal and united reaction towards Belarus. We will not let Lukashenka instrumentalise human beings for political purposes. It is therefore right that the EU further tightens its targeted sanctions against those responsible for the suppression of the democratic movement within Belarus as well as the humanitarian crisis at the border, above all the illegitimate Belarusian regime and relevant economic sectors;
- In addition to legal pathways for asylum and migration to the EU, the EU is encouraged to develop a human rights sensitive information campaign directed at refugees to inform them of their rights and to oppose fake news;
- We call upon the EU and its member states to uphold the rule of law, including effective access to fair asylum procedures, the full respect of human rights and the principle of non-refoulement;
- The EU must stand together and find ways to develop a common approach to migration in solidarity, in respect of human rights, leaving member states with the option to have a more ambitious approach and based on the principles of the rule of law;
- We call on the OSCE to send observers at the border which would serve as an independent and objective source of information;
- We demand that asylum and migration centres under supervision of UNHCR provide adequate humanitarian conditions for people located there; and that those conditions can be independently accessed, monitored and assessed by experts, politicians, the media, and NGOs;
- We recognise and support the NGOs which aim to provide necessary help for the refugees at the EU border.