



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONFERENCE DES OING DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Migration committee

Migration and tension on the Polish-Belarusian border

The President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and the Migration Committee "Rights of Migrants" of this Conference urge the bodies of the Council of Europe to strengthen their involvement in the growing tensions at the Polish-Belarusian border, in order to stop the violations of asylum rights in the humanitarian crisis since August 2021.

Hundreds of migrants from the Middle East, including young children, attempt to cross the EU's eastern border every day. They find themselves in conditions of extreme deprivation which have already caused several deaths. Most of them have been turned back several times at the Polish-Belarusian border and are escorted to the border line and left to die in the middle of the forest without food or first aid materials.

According to the information received from NGOs and inhabitants of the border territory, there are serious violations of the rights of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement, according to which no one should be sent back to a territory where he or she is exposed to danger.

We recall the following: regardless of the circumstances and without the derogation granted by the European Court of Human Rights, Member States are obliged to respect all articles of the European Convention on Human Rights and relevant international treaties.

We ask the competent bodies of the Council of Europe to send a delegation to the Polish-Belarusian border and to examine the recent legislative changes in the field of migration as to their incompatibility with European law.

We condemn the policy of the Belarusian regime to use migrants, who are in a very vulnerable position, as a means of political pressure in the face of justified criticism of their lack of respect for the rights of the Belarusian people. Even in such a situation, Council of Europe member States must respect their humanitarian obligations, as defined in the European Convention on Human Rights and many other Council of Europe instruments and conventions.

We express our solidarity with the civil society which acts as it can to provide help and assistance in the context prevented by the government and parliamentary majority of the Republic of Poland.

Poland will not solve the violence on the border by increasing the military presence. In order to support the increased solidarity of the Polish populationⁱ, a permanent solution that respects people's rights must be found. To this end, NGOs, doctors and journalists must have access to the area where the state of emergency has been declared by the President of the Republic.

ⁱ Actions of NGOs and local population in response to the humanitarian crisis:

- Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis at the border, many representatives of NGOs have gone to the border to provide first aid to migrants. They were forced to leave the border territory as soon as the state of emergency was declared by the President of the Republic
- Amnesty International Poland conducted the investigation with digital evidence of refugee rights violations by Poland in Ustrz Górný. The published report includes the analysis of satellite images, media images and digital reconstructions of what happened to 32 people from Afghanistan in respect of whom the ECHR decided on immediate measures.
- Many NGOs have joined forces, creating a "Border Group" to provide humanitarian aid and mobilise public opinion around the crisis, countering the anti-migrant narrative and actions disseminated by governments and associated media.
- The number of citizen initiatives is increasing day by day in the hostile context, where humanitarian aid in the border area is prevented by the public authorities due to the state of emergency.
- A demonstration in solidarity with refugees under the slogan "Stop torture at the border", organised by more than 30 feminist groups, took place on 17 October in Warsaw.
- A Polish lawyer has launched a plan to provide support to migrants who enter the country illegally via Belarus. He called on people living near the border to light a green light in their windows or doors to signal that they can provide food and shelter to migrants or simply offer to charge their mobile phones. Some local authorities have echoed this call by asking residents to light a green light.