

HUMANITARIAN OBSERVATORY FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

No 2/2025

FROM THE EDITORS

About the Newsletter

We are pleased to present the second issue of the **Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe Newsletter**. This quarterly publication is part of a broader network coordinated by the Hague Humanitarian Studies Centre at Erasmus University Rotterdam, bringing together academic institutions, humanitarian actors, and civil society from across the region. The Observatory serves as a collaborative space to critically engage with humanitarian governance, refugee response, and crisis management in Central and Eastern Europe.

What's inside this issue?

This second issue (2/2025) focuses on the shifting humanitarian landscape in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine amid funding pressures, securitisation trends, and continued displacement.

- **Poland:** The summer months of 2025 saw intensifying anti-migrant sentiment and further operational decline of humanitarian and social sectors. New restrictive policies at the Polish–Belarusian border have coincided with increasing criminalisation of humanitarian

aid. A new report by the Helsinki Foundation of Human Rights in Poland sheds light on emblematic cases, including recent trials of human rights activists. At the same time, Ukrainian refugees remain exceptionally economically active, contributing to an estimated 2.7% of Poland's GDP in 2024, though uncertainties around welfare entitlements signal potential shifts in support.

- **Belarus:** Tens of thousands of displaced people from Ukraine remain in Belarus, with limited access to protection. New case studies by Human Constanta expose systemic violations — including family separation, deportations without due process, and the broader erosion of migrant rights. The report highlights how migration control is increasingly used as a tool of political and social pressure.
- **Ukraine:** As Russian military attacks intensify, humanitarian needs have deepened sharply. Access to front-line communities remains severely constrained, while local organisations — despite limited direct funding — play a critical role in maintaining humanitarian

coverage. Findings from a recent study by Open Space Works Ukraine and Ground Truth Solutions underline the importance of localisation of cash assistance, demonstrating how partnerships with local actors improve programme reach, integration with national social protection, and communication with affected populations.

Community and collaboration

On September 9–10th, 2025, we held an in-person meeting in Warsaw of the Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe. All partners were represented: International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Migration Consortium, Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw, as well as the Ukrainian House Foundation, Human Constanta, and Open Space Works Ukraine.

Over two days, we:

- held an internal coordination meeting at the Ukrainian House Warsaw,



Photo: Meeting of the Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe (HOCEE).

- joined the public debate “[Future of Humanitarian Justice in Central and Eastern Europe](#)” at the Warsaw Multicultural Centre ([recording available here](#)),
- and visited the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw, to discuss ongoing research collaborations.

The meeting reaffirmed our shared commitment to advancing joint research, strengthening humanitarian ethics, and promoting inclusive and effective responses to crises in the region.

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS

POLAND

Sarian Jarosz, Benjamin Cope

The summer months of 2025 were accompanied by intensifying anti-migrant sentiment and the operational decline of the humanitarian and social sector in Poland as a result of recent aid cuts, as [described in the previous newsletter](#). The direction in which

Poland's migration and humanitarian policy is heading strongly indicates that the trend towards securitisation will continue, with a very limited transfer of responsibility from exiting INGOs to the public administration. The [reconstruction of the Polish government](#) resulted in the abolition of the Ministry of

Civil Society and [the announced departure of the Undersecretary for Migration](#).

Criminalisation of solidarity at the Belarusian border

The criminalisation of humanitarian aid, [citizen patrols by “border defenders”](#), [anti-migrant far-right demonstrations](#) and [ongoing pushbacks](#) define the shrinking space for humanitarian assistance and pro-migration bottom-up humanitarianism in Poland.

Over the last months, Poland [has passed laws](#) that suspend or limit the right to request international protection, while reinstating the temporary border checks with Germany and Lithuania in July 2025. We recommend [a new report by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights](#), which analyses cases of criminalisation of solidarity and humanitarian assistance in recent years. Such cases

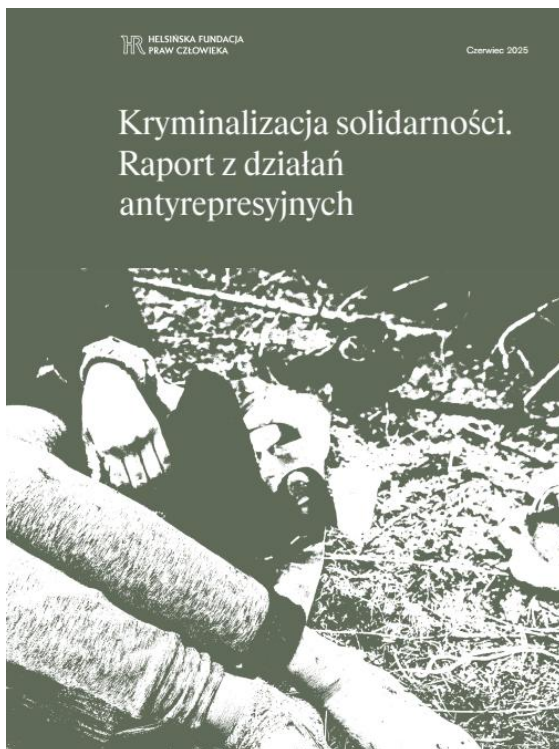


Photo: Cover of the latest report on the criminalisation of humanitarian aid, published by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Kolektyw Szpila in June 2025.

include the trial of the “[five activists from Hajnówka](#)”, who were found not guilty in September 2025, but also the case of Ieva Raubisko, [found guilty in August 2025](#) by the Latvian Latgale District Court of “abetting intentional illegal crossing of the state border for a group of people” for providing humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. At the same time, the reports by Save the Children & We Are Monitoring, and Plan International & Migration Consortium indicate that people from particularly vulnerable groups, [\(unaccompanied\) minors](#) and [LGBTQI+ persons](#) are seeking protection at the Polish-Belarusian border, usually with no response from the Border Guards.

The impact of the Ukrainian response

A joint [UNHCR and Deloitte study](#) published in June 2025 estimated that refugees from Ukraine generated 2.7% of Poland’s GDP in 2024, with about 69% of working-age Ukrainian refugees employed. This suggests that many are contributing strongly to the economy, and that integration efforts (such as employment access) are bearing fruit. From the UNHCR’s [Poland Chapter of the Regional Refugee Response Plan](#) (2025-2026), in the early part of the year, over 140,000 Ukrainian forced migrants had received “essential assistance” (cash, housing support, food or core relief), and more than 70,000 had participated in economic inclusion initiatives (jobs, language, skill certification) by early 2025. In August 2025, [Fitch Ratings](#) noted that most Ukrainian refugees are likely to remain in Poland even if a ceasefire is reached, because of the strong integration into the labour market and contribution to economic growth. From the perspective of HDP nexus, in Poland ongoing humanitarian assistance is, combined with social and legal inclusion.

However, there was a notable political development in August: [Poland's President initially vetoed a bill](#) that would have extended welfare benefits for Ukrainian refugees beyond September 2025, particularly affecting child benefits, which introduces uncertainty for continuing support. A compromise version was signed into law in late September 2025, [which extends aid for Ukrainian refugees but includes many of the President's proposed restrictions](#). For example, the right to the child benefit for the period beginning June 1st,

UKRAINE

Maryana Zaviyska

Humanitarian situation update: access and adaptation

By mid-2025, humanitarian needs in Ukraine deepened sharply. Intensified attacks on populated areas have driven [civilian casualties](#) up by nearly 50% compared to early 2024. [Displacement surged](#), particularly from Sumska, Donetsk, Kharkivska, and Dnipropetrovska oblasts, while access to health care, education, and food in front-line and border areas has deteriorated further.

The re-prioritised 2025 [Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#) now focuses on reaching the most vulnerable people near the frontline, supporting evacuations, responding rapidly to attacks, and aiding at-risk IDPs. Yet, [humanitarian access](#) is increasingly constrained. Front-line shifts in Donetsk oblast have cut off an estimated 10,000 people from aid, and the conscription of staff is eroding operational capacity.

While many international agencies have reduced their presence in high-risk areas, local civil society organisations often retain

2026, will be limited to foreigners professionally active in Poland.

Additional materials:

We highly recommend Witold Klaus' [analysis of the future of migration policy](#) in Poland (in Polish only) and the academic article of Jaroszewicz, M., Jakniūnaitė, D., & Adey, P. [Seeing like a train: the viapolitics of emergency mobilities during Russia's war against Ukraine](#) (2025).

access thanks to deep roots, established trust, and adaptive networks. However, with less than 10% of humanitarian funding channelled directly to such organisations, their ability to scale and sustain this access advantage is constrained. Prioritising direct, multi-year funding for local actors, embedding them in coordination and planning structures, and investing in their

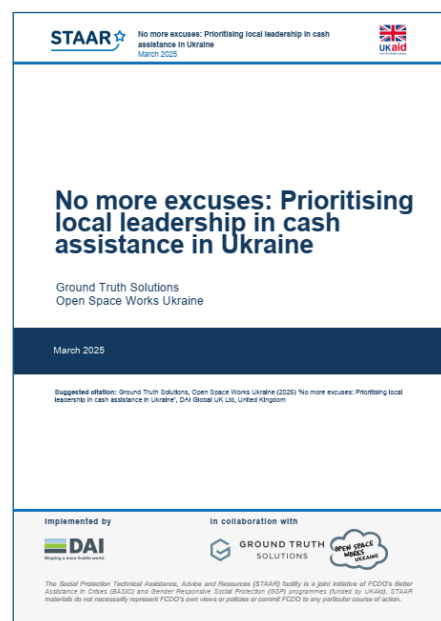


Photo: Front page of the report by Open Space Works Ukraine and Ground Truth Solutions (Austria), published in March 2025.

organisational resilience are measures essential to safeguarding humanitarian coverage while building a foundation for recovery.

Findings from [No More Excuses: Prioritising Local Leadership in Cash Assistance in Ukraine](#), a study by Open Space Works Ukraine and Ground Truth Solutions (Austria) conducted between October 2024 and March 2025, show that while Ukrainian civil society is highly active in the humanitarian response, local organisations directly manage only 3.4% of cash assistance. This imbalance limits the ability of trusted community actors to shape targeting, communication, and

delivery. The study documents cases where involving local authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs) in programme design and implementation led to cash assistance being better integrated with the national social protection system – closing coverage gaps, avoiding duplication, and ensuring smoother referral pathways. In these communities, people also reported a clearer understanding of available support and easier access to reliable information, addressing a persistent challenge in Ukraine where overlapping humanitarian and state schemes often create confusion for those most in need.

BELARUS

Kyrill Kofanov

As of mid-2025, tens of thousands of people displaced by the war in Ukraine remain in Belarus. [According to ACAPS](#), by the end of June, there were over **42,000 displaced persons** from Ukraine in Belarus. [UNHCR reports](#) similarly that at the end of 2024, there were around 50,000 displaced or stateless persons/returnees in the country, and approximately 43,000 refugees or asylum-seekers in need of protection. [The latest analysis](#) by Human Constanta and Legal Hub documents a trend whereby children of Belarusian nationality are placed by the authorities in socially dangerous situations (SDS) to pressure dissidents and their families.

Additionally, [the new Human Constanta report](#) analyses the recent developments in the human rights situation of migrant workers in Belarus, mainly coming from India and Pakistan.

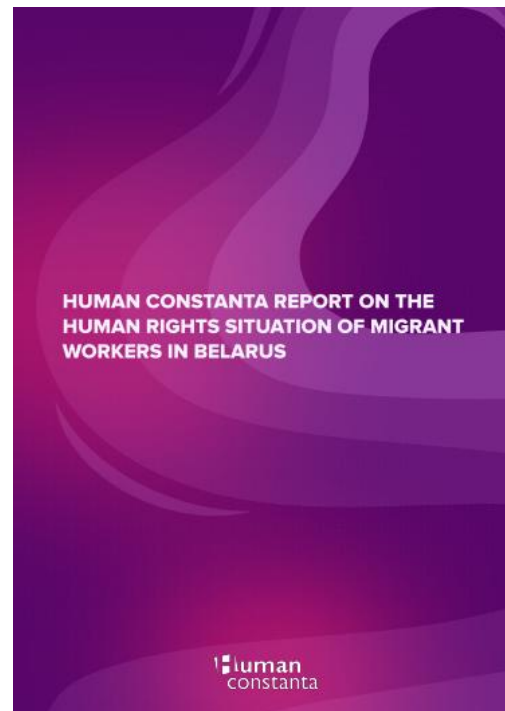


Photo: Human Constanta report on the human rights situation of migrant workers in Belarus, published in September 2025.

There are three new case studies of Human Constanta describing the challenges faced by migrants in Belarus:

Imminent Expulsion and Family Separation: The Case of Mariam Soumah (Guinea)

In a deeply concerning case from Minsk, Mariam Soumah – a Guinean citizen and mother of a [premature newborn](#) – faces imminent deportation while forcibly separated from her child. After birth in late 2024, Mariam's daughter was left in the hospital, and Mariam's right to visit her was restricted from the very beginning. After two months of the child's stay in the hospital, Mariam was completely denied access – allegedly due to an unpaid medical bill for the child's treatment. Despite attempts to assume full parental responsibility, she was barred from hospital visits and later detained. The child was transferred to an orphanage, potentially triggering the termination of Mariam's parental rights. Authorities continue to pursue her expulsion, ignoring her legal and humanitarian claims. Human Constanta has submitted an urgent appeal to UN Special Rapporteurs regarding violations of due process, child rights, and family unity.

Deportation Without Due Process: Moroccan Students Expelled After Gomel Incident

On April 22nd, 2025, a video circulated showing a fight between foreign students in Gomel. By May 19th, Belarusian authorities

confirmed the [expulsion](#) of three Moroccan nationals. These expulsions occurred without proper legal proceedings, violating the students' right to a fair hearing, legal defence, and individual case assessment – principles protected by Belarusian and international law. The Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasised the “public” nature of the deportation by making official statements to the media and showing footage of the detained individuals on national television. This case reflects a broader pattern of marginalisation, where migration enforcement is used as a tool of control rather than justice.

Respecting Human Dignity After Death: Support for the Family of a Deceased Somali National

In early 2025, Human Constanta intervened in the case of a deceased Somali citizen. Following engagement with Belarusian authorities, communication was established with the family abroad, and a culturally appropriate burial was arranged. The family was able to witness the funeral remotely, ensuring respect for religious rites. This case underscores that the right to dignity transcends life itself. Recognition of identity, belief, and belonging must extend even beyond death – a reminder that human rights do not end when life does.

INSIGHTS & REPORTS

STAY INFORMED!

- Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka (2025), [*Kryminalizacja solidarności. Raport z działań antyrepresyjnych.*](#)
- Human Constanta (2025), [*Human rights situation of migrant workers in Belarus.*](#)
- Human Constanta (2025), [*Recognition of children as being in a socially dangerous situation in Belarus.*](#)
- Jaroszewicz, M., Jakniūnaitė, D., & Adey, P. (2025), [*Seeing like a train: the viapolitics of emergency mobilities during Russia's war against Ukraine,*](#) Mobilities, 1–18.
- Klaus, W. (2025), [*Polityka migracyjna w Polsce - gdzie jesteśmy i dokąd zmierzamy?*](#)
- Krępa, M., Pachocka, M., Trylińska A., Sieniow, T., Jaroszewicz, M. (2025), [*GAPs Policy Brief: The Policies of Return Migration in Poland: A Need for a More Systematic Approach,*](#) CMR Spotlight 10 (76).
- Plan International, Migration Consortium (2025), [*Crossing Double Borders. LGBTQI+ displacement to Poland.*](#)
- Save the Children, WAM (2025), [*Children and unaccompanied minors at the Polish-Belarusian border.*](#)
- UNHCR/Deloitte (2025), [*Analysis of the impact of refugees from Ukraine on the economy of Poland.*](#)

Recording of the Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe, held in September 2025 in Warsaw: [here](#) or [here](#)

PROJECT

The [Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe](#) was established in 2024, as a new member of the international network of [Observatories](#). It is an organised space and network that undertakes activities dedicated to understanding local, regional or national humanitarian governance. It is self-governing, and consists of a Host Organisation, and multiple participating individuals and/or organisations from sectors including, but not limited to, academia, humanitarian action, research, government, and civil society organisations. The network coordinator for the Observatories is [The Hague Humanitarian Studies Centre](#), based at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The aim of the cooperation is to develop joint research activities, identify key thematic areas for exchange and collaboration in humanitarian ethics, reassess humanitarian studies and promote inclusion and effectiveness in humanitarian action, with a regional focus on Central and Eastern Europe, and refugee response.

PARTNERS



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MIGRATION
RESEARCH**

AUTHORS

Kyryll Kofanov (Human Constanta), Benjamin Cope (Ukrainian House), Sarian Jarosz (Migration Consortium), Maryana Zaviyska (Open Space Works Ukraine), Michał Nowosielski (Centre of Migration Research UW)

EDITORS

Michał Nowosielski, Sarian Jarosz, Marta Pachocka, Marta Jaroszewicz, Dominika Pszczółkowska

SUGGESTED CITIATION

Humanitarian Observatory for Central and Eastern Europe. (2025). *Humanitarian Observatory Newsletter*, 2(2025).

CONTACT

Centre of Migration Research

Pasteura street 7
02-093 Warsaw
e-mail: migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl

Migration Consortium

Szpitalna Street 5/14
00-031 Warsaw
e-mail: konsorcjum@konsorcjum.org.pl

