

## HIGHLIGHTS

As of 28 April, **467 people benefited from Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme** in 2022.

**Three migrant referral pathways for protection services** have been set up by IOM.

The IOM-supported hotline on safe migration and combatting human trafficking received **198 requests for information on entry to, transit through, exit from Belarus** from Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals fleeing the war in Ukraine since 24 February.



IOM staff checking PCR tests of the AVRR programme beneficiaries © IOM 2022

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

IOM Belarus continues to receive requests for assistance, including for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR), provision of food and non-food items (NFI) from migrants stranded at Belarus' border with Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland and from others located throughout the country.

People fleeing the war in Ukraine continue to enter Belarus mainly through Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, while the crossing points at the Belarus-Ukraine border in Gomel region, where the largest influx of Ukrainians' arrivals was observed previously, are closed given that humanitarian corridors are currently not functioning.

According to the State Border Committee of Belarus, from 15-28 April, 2,227 people entered Belarus from Ukraine. Since 24 February, 25,484 people have entered the country (902 Belarusians, 24,338 Ukrainians and 244 third-country nationals). IOM has received an increasing number of requests to provide protection related services from national stakeholders and migrants fleeing the war in Ukraine. This includes emergency health care, transportation, humanitarian return, employment pathways support, and legal aid, among other areas.

## CURRENT RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

In Belarus, IOM has a permanent office in **Minsk**, with additional project sites in **Grodno** and **Gomel**. IOM continued to provide support to migrants stranded in the forest areas near Belarus' borders with EU countries and in urban settlements. IOM primarily provides emergency food and hygiene items, as well as voluntary return to the country of origin. The number of requests for AVRR services, however, have recently dropped.

## CONTACTS

IOM continues to coordinate with local and national stakeholders to provide **timely and relevant assistance to people fleeing Ukraine**. IOM's local partner, the Belarusian Red Cross (BRC), continues to operate as the frontline responder across Belarus through the provision of assistance to Ukrainian refugees. Ukrainian nationals are accommodated in temporary accommodation facilities allocated for this purpose by the regional authorities. The largest number of refugees are accommodated in four facilities in Gomel region. According to the information received from the national authorities, as of 26 April, approximately 200 Ukrainians are accommodated at the temporary accommodation facilities. Other Ukrainians who decide to stay in Belarus mainly stay with their relatives and friends or are provided with accommodation by their employer once they start to work.

One of the vital needs of Ukrainian refugees is employment. People accommodated at temporary accommodation facilities are being matched with job opportunities in Belarus and moved to the accommodation provided by the employer. Employment support is in high demand, specifically payments for employment permit fees, document authentication, and employment-related legal counselling. The fleeing Ukrainian Roma people as well as young people aged 18-19 years old sometimes require vocational education support.

While primary emergency needs are being met, there remains a vital need for **NFIs**, including clothing, **cash and voucher support**, **medical support**, **mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS)**, **labour pathway assistance**, and **protection services**, including services and support for potential victims of human trafficking.

### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

People who have registered for AVRR and are awaiting departure are accommodated either in a hotel or in a hostel in Minsk and are provided with **three meals a day**. On average, 25 migrants receive accommodation per week. During the reporting period, IOM distributed **417kg of food**, including fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals, and canned meat, and **20kg of hygiene items**, including shampoos, soaps, and washing powder, to the migrants registered for AVRR.



AVRR beneficiaries accommodated at the hotel prior to their departure home © IOM 2022

IOM's project site in Grodno continued to respond to requests from stranded migrants residing in border areas and urban settlements and Ukrainian refugees arriving to the Grodno region. Since 15 April, IOM provided **17 emergency food kits** and **16 hygiene kits** to migrants in the area, alongside regular provision of AVRR counselling.

Local IOM staff continue to monitor the arrivals of Ukrainian refugees to Grodno. Meetings with the Grodno branch of the BRC were held to ensure preparedness planning and coordination to provide assistance to people fleeing the war.

IOM's project site in Gomel continues functioning to ensure a prompt and targeted response to assist people fleeing Ukraine and to efficiently coordinate response activities with local partners. On 28 April, a **kitchen set**, consisting of a microwave, kettle and other small household items, was procured and handed over to a Ukrainian family.



IOM representatives handing over a kitchen set to a Ukrainian family in Gomel © IOM 2022

From 25-26 April, IOM staff specializing in protection issues visited Gomel region with the intention to set up an IOM protection support system. IOM Belarus staff met with local authorities (Department of Citizenship and Migration and Committee of Labour and Employment under Gomel Executive Committee) and NGO partners (Gomel branch of the Belarusian Red Cross). As a result, three migrant referral pathways for protection services have been set up.

People fleeing the war in Ukraine also arrive in other regions of the country, including Brest region, which borders Ukraine and Poland. Given that an increasing number of Ukrainian nationals are coming to Belarus through Poland, IOM is considering scaling its presence to be able to conduct activities in these areas.

From 25-26 April, IOM staff visited Brest region to assess the number of migrants and refugees arriving from Ukraine and identify their needs. IOM representatives met with local NGO partners, including the Brest branch of the Belarusian Red Cross, the Brest branch of the Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers (BMMW), and the Business Women Club. Thirty-two Ukrainian refugees, including nine children, are currently accommodated in a dormitory in Brest. According to the Brest branch of the BRC, 300 people fleeing the war in Ukraine requested assistance from the BRC and were provided with hygiene kits and food items. The BRC also covers temporary accommodation fees in the dormitory for people in need of shelter.



IOM staff during the visit to Brest region on 25-26 April © IOM 2022

## HEALTH ASSISTANCE

A team consisting of **four psychologists**, which will provide MHPSS support in the temporary accommodation facilities in Gomel region, is currently being recruited. After receiving trainings, they will provide psychosocial first aid and psychological counselling to Ukrainian refugees.

IOM is working to develop a **referral system for people with serious medical conditions**. An agreement with Gomel regional medical institution is under negotiation and will ensure that refugees with serious medical conditions are referred to specialized institutions and experts, when necessary. In addition, an agreement with a big pharmacy chain to procure vouchers to cover urgent needs for prescription medications that cannot be provided by medical teams in sanatoriums is under negotiation.

## PROTECTION

Following the IOM field visit to Gomel from 25-26 April, **three migrant referral pathways for protection services have been set up:**

- 1. On a community level**, IOM field staff in Gomel inform migrants and communities about IOM support options, including MHPSS, emergency healthcare, voluntary humanitarian return for third country nationals, transportation support, reintegration assistance for victims of human trafficking, and employment pathways support. The migrants with protection needs then contact IOM field staff for referrals to specialized assistance from IOM.
- 2. On a government level**, migrants with protection needs, mainly those seeking employment, contact regional level Departments of Citizenship and Migration and Committees of Labour and Employment or Territorial Centres for Support Services, which then refer the individuals to IOM.
- 3. Through the IOM-supported hotline** administered by the NGO partner, Business Women Club, callers receive briefings on available IOM assistance by the hotline staff.

The available **IOM protection assistance includes MHPSS, referrals to health establishments, voluntary humanitarian return for third country nationals, transportation support, reintegration assistance for victims of human trafficking, and – importantly – employment generation and integration support.**

As of 28 April, IOM has received and is processing **five requests from Ukrainian refugees to cover the costs for employment permit fees to facilitate their employment in Belarus**, and **one request to provide legal aid and document authentication** related to employment.

## ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVRR)

From 15-28 April, IOM provided AVRR support to 53 migrants, totaling 467 returnees since the beginning of 2022.

Currently, while awaiting departure through AVRR, **20 people remain at the hostel and urban accommodation while 23 migrants are accommodated in a hotel** near Minsk Airport.

As of 28 April, IOM Belarus has provided AVRR support to **467 migrants** (326 males and 141 females), including 122 children, in 2022. Most of the returnees were Iraqi nationals (82 per cent), while other AVRR beneficiaries have returned to Cuba (4.5 per cent), Sri-Lanka (2.5 per cent), Turkey, Guinea, Nigeria, India, Russia, Cameroon, Egypt, Somalia, Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Turkmenistan, Burkina-Faso, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Iran, and Algeria. Within the reporting period, one national of Pakistan had a significant medical condition and was provided with a medical escort.



AVRR beneficiary checking in for the flight © IOM 2022



AVRR beneficiaries lining up for the check-in prior to the flight © IOM 2022

## COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

The Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers, IOM's partner NGO in the Grodno and Gomel regions, provided 136 consultations on AVRR options, mainly in Grodno region. BMWV assisted IOM staff in the delivery of 16 hygiene and 17 food kits to the most vulnerable migrants in Grodno region.

Four trainings were held by Grodno BRC in the reporting period: (i) one training on Safer Access Framework (SAF), which ensures acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need; (ii) two trainings on psycho-emotional burnout; and (iii) one training on camp management. In total, IOM trained 64 BRC staff and volunteers.

On 26 April, IOM participated in the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), established at the Heads of Agencies level and led by UN-HCR. The RCF continues its functioning and ensures exchange of information between stakeholders, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Belarusian Red Cross.

In addition, on 19 April, IOM took part in the meeting of the operational working group of the RCF, two meetings of the data sub-group and the first meeting of the cash-based interventions sub-group. The main aim of the data sub-group is to help the BRC ensure a more effective registration procedure for people approaching the BRC for assistance.

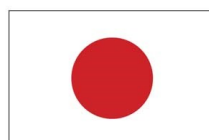
On 19 April, within the framework of the **multidisciplinary group (MDG) meeting** for the Minsk region – an integral part of the national referral mechanism for victims of human trafficking – IOM **Belarus sensitized key country counter-trafficking stakeholders on the issue of unaccompanied migrant children**, including those fleeing Ukraine who do not wish to claim refugee status and are not covered by Belarus' legislation. This is a step towards building momentum for strengthening the national migrant protection and anti-trafficking framework following the Best Interests of the Child approach. IOM will continue to discuss this issue further during upcoming MDG meetings across all regions of Belarus from April-June.



Multidisciplinary group meeting held in Minsk on 19 April © IOM 2022

IOM-supported **hotline on safe migration**, managed by the NGO Business Women Club, located in Brest city, is receiving an increased number of requests connected to the war in Ukraine. From 24 February to 25 April, the hotline **received 198 requests for information on entry to, transit through, and exit from Belarus in connection with the war in Ukraine, approximately 19.4 per cent of all consultations provided during this period.** The share of Ukraine-related requests has increased during the week. From 18-25 April, such requests amounted to 26.6 per cent of all consultations provided, while a week before they totaled 19.3 per cent.

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