

HIGHLIGHTS

Around 400 people
remain at the logistics facility.

242 people
benefited from Assisted
Voluntary Return and
Reintegration (AVRR) in 2022 as
of 18 March.

**1,300kg of food and 86kg of
hygiene items**
were distributed among
migrants at the logistics facility in
the reporting period.



IOM Belarus staff entering the Bruzgi logistics facility where over 400 migrants are accommodated © IOM 2022

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The number of migrants at the Bruzgi logistics centre **has decreased**: some people applied for AVRR and were transported from Bruzgi to Minsk to await their departure while others reportedly left to attempt to cross into the European Union. It is estimated that currently there are around 400 people at the logistics facility.

As security in the region deteriorates and grows increasingly unpredictable, more people accommodated at the logistics facility are expressing their willingness to return to their countries of origin.



IOM representatives visiting the tents installed by the BRC to provide assistance to refugees and migrants from Ukraine © IOM 2022

As a country neighboring Ukraine, Belarus has registered an increase in Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals fleeing war. According to the State Border Committee of Belarus, since 24 February, **3,029 people entered Belarus from Ukraine** (902 Belarusians, 1,884 Ukrainians and 243 third-country nationals). Since 10 March, the Belarusian Red Cross (BRC) has been working at the Belarus-Ukraine border to provide support to people arriving from Ukraine. The BRC recently installed two heated tents near the border for first aid support.

CONTACTS

NEEDS OVERVIEW

Key needs of migrants accommodated at the logistics facility remain unchanged: **non-food items (NFIs), food items, health needs and winterization needs.**

On 16 March, IOM visited Gomel and Gden village, Bragin district, in the vicinity of the Belarus-Ukraine border where the BRC team is working. IOM conducted a needs assessment to inform potential response activities at the border. Ukrainian refugees and displaced third country nationals cross the border by foot, by cars, and by bicycle. Some have only one bag or backpack with them and require urgent support and assistance, including psychological support.

CURRENT RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

The UN Refugee and Migrant Task Force continued its operations during the reporting period. The last meeting took place on 15 March 2022 and was chaired by UNHCR. The main issues discussed include: increased attempts by migrants to cross into the EU, which has left many of them stranded in forests; poor sanitary conditions in the logistics facility; lice treatment; shortage of medicines despite the improvement of primary healthcare through WHO recruitment of a general physician and a nurse for daily support at the center. The decision was taken to conduct UN Taks Force meetings on a biweekly basis.

IOM continues to carry out a humanitarian response based on the migrants' needs assessment. In response to their changing needs, **IOM's current response activities include medical support, food items, NFIs, and AVRR.**



Migrants accommodated in the logistics centre © IOM 2022



Children playing in the logistics centre © IOM 2022

HEALTH ASSISTANCE

At the logistics facility in Bruzgi, IOM provides **medical referrals**. From 4 to 18 March, five people were referred to healthcare organizations with diagnoses ranging from acute pulpitis and severe dental pain to inflammation of eyes leading to impaired vision. One baby was referred to a hospital to get treatment for a serious allergy and skin lesions. Twenty people have received medications bought by IOM in accordance with prescriptions made by a general practitioner. For people with lice contamination, treatment is provided by a general practitioner, with lice treatment procured by IOM.

In the reporting period, IOM-trained staff provided psychological first aid to 34 migrants. The main concerns expressed were anxiety and stress caused by uncertainty and living conditions. Fifteen applicants were tested through IOM's adapted Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). The results of repeated surveying after consultations show that migrant's overall level of anxiety and stress decreased while their social networking engagement and communication improved.

IOM continues providing **health support to AVRR beneficiaries housed at the hotel in Minsk**. A charter flight for AVRR beneficiaries to Iraq was initially planned for 14 March and while the flight has since been rescheduled for 21 March IOM conducted **pre-embarkation checks (PEC)** for 124 applicants. All of them were found fit to travel, although some have significant medical conditions: two women are pregnant and one teenager is dealing with complications after a car crash and consulted with a neurologist. One of the migrants was referred for dental treatment at a local clinic. There are also regular requests from the applicants in the hotel regarding different minor ailments such as aches, diarrhea, and sore throat.

HUMANITARIAN AID

IOM continues to ensure that the essential needs of stranded migrants are met. During its needs assessment conducted in January and updated on 1 March, IOM not only identifies the categories of needs (food, NFIs, clothing) but also the specific products requested by migrants to make evidence-based procurement decisions. For example, the most requested food items are bread, chicken, meat, fresh vegetables, rice and pasta while requested NFIs include batteries, clothing, shoes, and bedding items.

In the reporting period, IOM delivered and distributed 795kg of pitta bread, 235kg of bananas, 179kg of apples, 91kg of oranges, and 86kg of soap. In addition, 200 lice treatment sprays were delivered and distributed among the migrants.



IOM delivering pitta bread to the logistics facility © IOM 2022

IOM provides meals three times a day to an average of 124 AVRR beneficiaries staying at the hotel in Minsk and awaiting departure to countries of origins. The migrants were also provided with hygiene items and clothing (jackets, sweaters, shoes).



A family admitted to the AVRR program staying at the hotel in Minsk before their departure to the country of origin © IOM 2022

A Frequently Asked Questions form was translated into Arabic and Kurdish, published and distributed among migrants in the logistics center and local partners providing assistance and support to the migrants.

A stock of kits containing food and hygiene items was established in Grodno for distribution among the vulnerable urban migrants, as more and more migrants leave the logistics centre and try to cross the EU border. After failing to cross the border, migrants are often stranded in the cities.

During the **visit to Gomel** on 16 March, IOM met with the local department of BRC to conduct a needs assessment of Ukrainian refugees and displaced third country nationals coming from Ukraine. The assessment identified the following needs and vulnerabilities:

- Many people coming from Ukraine have only one bag or backpack with them. They need clothes, shoes, hygiene items, baby food, diapers, and other NFIs.
- Some people travel onwards to stay with their relatives or to leave Belarus and do not need any further assistance.
- Some people need shelter. For this purpose, 21 facilities (sanatoriums, camps, dormitories) were pre-reserved by the regional Gomel authorities. The facilities have good sanitary conditions and meals are provided three times per day, however, funding these shelters is unsustainable as BRC pays for the accommodation and meals of each person. At the time of the visit, around 300 migrants from Ukraine were accommodated in the facilities in Gomel region.
- All the medical treatment for Ukrainian refugees is provided free of charge as per the decision of the Ministry of Health, however, there is a strong demand for psychological support, especially for children.



IOM representatives meeting with Gomel branch of BRC © IOM 2022

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVRR)

AVRR remains a safe option for vulnerable migrants to return to their countries of origin. The program continues to function and accepts new applicants.

At the same time, IOM has encountered some operational challenges given that part of the Belarusian airspace is closed and many flights were cancelled. In recent months, IOM Belarus used mostly commercial airlines such as FlyDubai and Turkish Airlines to Dubai and Istanbul for its return operations. As these flights were suspended, there were no returns carried out during the reporting period.

The demand for AVRR is still high among both migrants accommodated at the logistics facility and urban migrants. **Thirty-five AVRR beneficiaries were transported from Bruzgi to Minsk**, where they are awaiting their departure. In total, 128 migrants are currently staying at the hotel in Minsk.



People getting on the bus taking them from Bruzgi logistics centre to the hotel in Minsk © IOM 2022

In this regard, IOM Belarus is organizing its first charter flight for Iraqi nationals flying from Minsk directly to Erbil on 21 March.

Twenty-three migrants (mostly from African countries, Sri-Lanka, and India) **are accommodated in the urban hostel** and are also awaiting AVRR services. IOM Belarus provides them with food and hygiene items.

As of 18 March, IOM Belarus has provided AVRR for 242 migrants (175 males, 67 females), including 57 children, in 2022. Most of the returnees were Iraqi nationals (87.6%). Other AVRR beneficiaries returned to Sri Lanka, Turkey, India, Cameroon, Nigeria, Moldova, Iran, Egypt, Somalia, Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Russia and Algeria.

COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

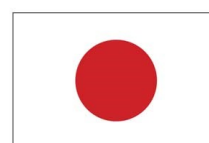
During the reporting period, the Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers (BMMW) provided 78 consultations on AVRR to urban migrants in Grodno and further technical support to the IOM Grodno project site. BMMW provided eight kits containing food and hygiene items to vulnerable urban migrants in Grodno in coordination with IOM staff in Grodno.

Hygiene kits (toilet paper, shampoo, wet wipes, and toothpaste) and food items (pasta, bottled water, biscuits, nuts, fruit puree, and milk for children) for migrants at the logistics centre were procured and distributed by the BRC. A training session on psychosocial support was held by BRC for fifteen staff members and volunteers working in the logistics centre. An additional training on the same topic is planned for the next reporting period.



Belarusian Red Cross delivering humanitarian aid to migrants in Bruzgi logistics centre © IOM 2022

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