

HIGHLIGHTS

As of 14 April, **414 people benefited from Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme** in 2022.

IOM Belarus established a **project site in Gomel**, to respond to the needs of refugees from Ukraine.

The IOM-supported hotline on safe migration and combatting human trafficking received **145 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.



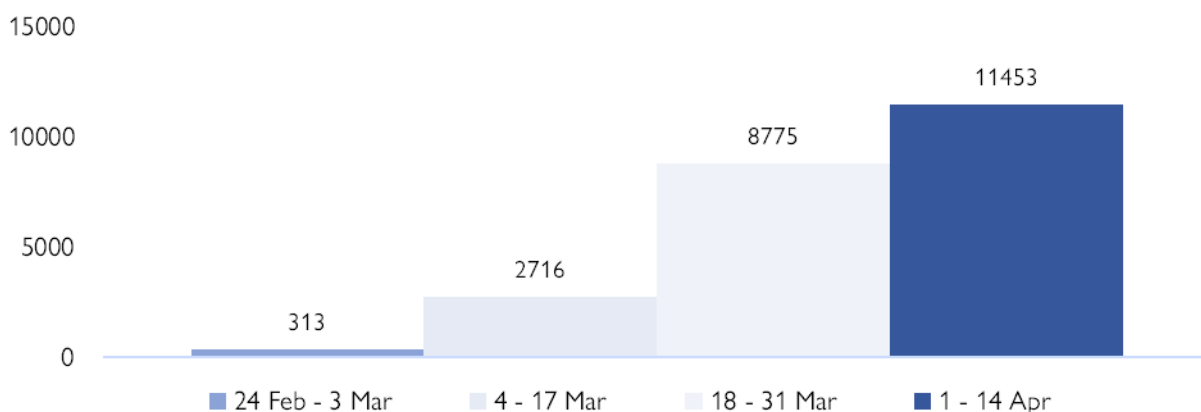
IOM representative together with people departing to Erbil through AVRR © IOM 2022

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) and medical assistance, from migrants stranded at Belarus’s border with Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland and from others located throughout the country.

People fleeing the war in Ukraine continue to enter Belarus from the Ukraine-Belarus border, as well as through transit from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

According to the State Border Committee of Belarus, from 1-14 April, 11,453 people entered Belarus from Ukraine. Since 24 February, approximately 23,257 people have entered the country (902 Belarusians, 22,111 Ukrainians and 244 third-country nationals).



Number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine and crossing the border with Belarus since 24 February

CONTACTS

On 3 April, temporary restrictions on entry to, transit through and exit from Belarus have been lifted. For citizens of Belarus, entry and exit are no longer restricted. Neither a negative PCR test nor a vaccination certificate is required. For foreign nationals and stateless persons, entry to and exit from Belarus are also not restricted, however, these persons are required to provide a negative PCR test or a certificate of vaccination to enter the country. The PCR test/vaccination certificate requirement does not apply to people fleeing the war in Ukraine, including those transiting through other countries. Furthermore, third-country nationals traveling from Ukraine to countries of permanent residence are granted visa-free entry to Belarus until 15 April.

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's borders with EU countries and in urban settlements. Food, hygiene items and medical support were provided, as well as voluntary return to the country of origin, if requested. People learn about IOM from friends, relatives, and IOM's online and offline materials such as leaflets and social media publications. They approach the organization in various ways: via email, social media, and phone calls to AVRR consultants and Grodno staff. The vast majority of migrants approach IOM on their own, although sometimes they are referred to IOM by partner NGOs or police.

IOM continues coordination efforts in order to provide timely and relevant assistance to people fleeing Ukraine. IOM's local partner, the Belarusian Red Cross (BRC), continues to operate on the frontline and provide emergency assistance at the Belarus-Ukraine border. People who arrive in Belarus often stay with their relatives and friends or move onward to other countries. Those who do not have shelter are accommodated in four temporary accommodation facilities in Gomel region.



IOM staff checking documents before departure through AVRR
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IOM staff facilitation the transportation of migrant to the hotel in Minsk
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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Since 22 March, when the logistics facility temporarily accommodating stranded migrants was closed, IOM Belarus has received **47 requests from 146 migrants stranded in the border area** of Grodno region. Most of the requests (41) were related to AVRR, while others concerned food, NFIs and medical assistance. IOM also receives **requests from urban migrants**; since 1 April, **23** such requests have been registered. All requesting migrants were connected with AVRR support. Some urban migrants also asked for food (19 requests), NFIs (18 requests), and medical assistance (7 requests).

IOM delivered **30 emergency hygiene kits** and **30 food kits** to its Grodno project site to support vulnerable stranded migrants.

People who have registered for AVRR and are awaiting departure are accommodated either in a hotel or in a hostel in Minsk and provided with **three meals a day**. In addition, IOM distributes other necessary assistance. In the reporting period, IOM delivered **503kg of food** and **40kg of NFIs**, including hygiene items, to migrants registered for AVRR.

While responding to the situation of stranded migrants at the Belarus-Poland border, a significant amount of humanitarian aid was procured but not used by the Belarusian Red Cross under its agreement with IOM. The agreement was amended to **redirect the items to the Ukraine response**: 4,060 children food kits, 8,340 adult kits and 7,800 hygiene kits (**totaling USD 67,000**). This assistance will be provided not only in Gomel region, but across the country to Ukrainian refugees, third-country nationals fleeing the war, as well as to other stranded migrants.

On 1 April, IOM established a **project site in Gomel**, the main city of Gomel region neighbouring Ukraine, to ensure a prompt and targeted response to assist people fleeing Ukraine and to efficiently coordinate response activities with local partners. With this aim, on 8 April, the IOM Belarus Chief of Mission met with local authorities of Gomel region, including the Governor and the BRC. During this meeting, the partners exchanged information on the most vital needs of people fleeing the war, discussed the direction of cooperation and future provision of assistance by IOM.

While primary emergency needs are being met, **there remains a vital need for NFIs, cash and voucher support, medical support, mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS), employment opportunities and addressing the protection needs, which requires additional funding.**



Meeting between IOM Belarus and local authorities of Gomel region
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IOM has completed preparatory work for the recruitment of **four professional psychologists**, who will provide psychosocial first aid (PFA) and psychological counselling to Ukrainian refugees in all four temporary accommodation facilities.

The mission carried out the necessary preparations to launch the **referral system for people with serious medical conditions.**

Discussions continue with partners on **data collection activities to monitor displacement and onward intentions of Ukrainian arrivals throughout Belarus.**

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVRR)

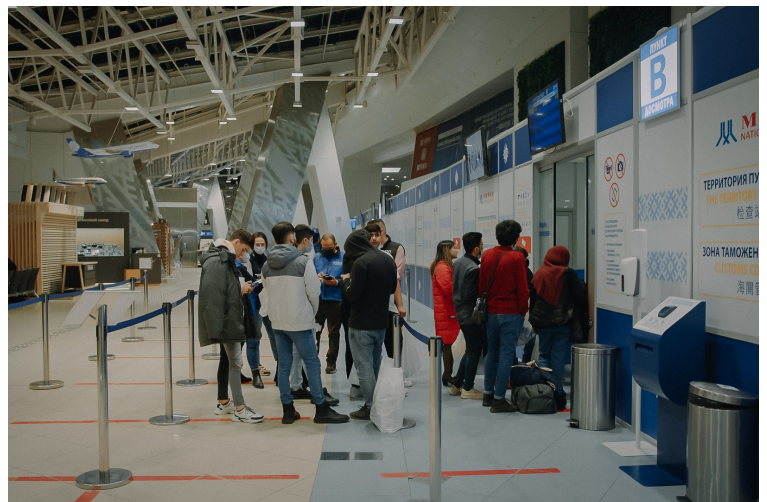
From 1-14 April, IOM provided **AVRR support to 64 migrants**, totaling 414 returnees since the beginning of 2022.

Currently, while awaiting departure through AVRR, **27 people remain at the hostel and urban accommodation** while **45 migrants are accommodated in a hotel near Minsk Airport.**

As of 14 April, **IOM Belarus has provided AVRR support to 414 migrants** (289 males and 125 females), including 107 children, in 2022. Most of the returnees were Iraqi nationals (85.3 per cent). Other AVRR beneficiaries have returned to Sri Lanka, Turkey, India, Cameroon, Nigeria, Moldova, Iran, Egypt, Somalia, Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Russia, Algeria, Guinea, Burkina-Faso, and Ghana. Within the reporting period, IOM Belarus also provided AVRR services to an applicant from Turkmenistan and her child, both of whom had been stranded in Belarus due to the travel restrictions since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. IOM also assisted two students from Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had applied for voluntary return due to financial constraints and inability to continue their studies in Belarus. Three nationals of Guinea were assisted with the re-issuance of travel documents by the Embassy of Guinea.



The bus bringing AVRR beneficiaries arriving at the airport © IOM 2022



Migrants waiting for customs control before the departure © IOM 2022

COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

IOM's partner NGO, the Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers (BMMW), continued to provide **counseling services** for AVRR applicants stranded in Grodno region, with a total number of 30 consultations provided. BMMW assisted IOM staff in the **delivery of 20 hygiene and 19 food kits** to the most vulnerable migrants in Grodno region.

Two **trainings** were organized in Grodno for the staff and volunteers of the Belarusian Red Cross. The first training, attended by 16 people, was devoted to community outreach, including cultural and religious studies. The second one covered the Safer Access Framework (SAF), which ensures acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need, for 15 participants.

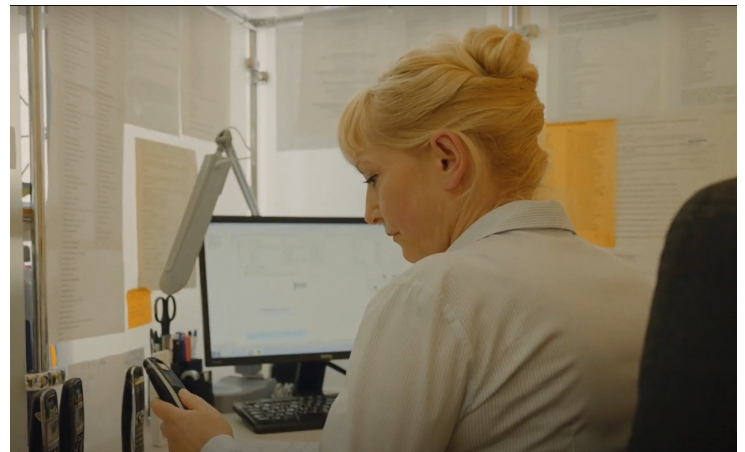
On 4 April, a **roundtable on assistance to migrant minors** was organized by UNICEF. Among migrants stranded at the Belarus-Poland border, cases of unaccompanied minors have been registered. Currently, unaccompanied minors fleeing Ukraine have also been identified at the Belarus-Ukraine border. Under international law, they require additional protection, such as legal assistance, guardianship, referral for other assistance (e.g., psychological, medical, social), provision of shelter and family reunification or relocation. However, Belarusian legislation does not permit the use of all protection mechanisms in these circumstances. The roundtable was organized to coordinate possible solutions for migrant minors among the relevant stakeholders, which included the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, General Prosecutor's Office, Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities, local authorities of Grodno, Gomel and Brest regions, BRC, UNICEF, IOM, and UNHCR. During the event, attendees discussed and developed **mechanisms to identify and refer unaccompanied migrant children stranded in Belarus** who do not wish to apply for asylum.

IOM Belarus continued its participation in the **Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF)** established at the Heads of Agencies level. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Belarusian Red Cross are also attendees of the RCF meetings. The aim of the Forum is **to ensure a common and effective approach to Belarus's Ukraine response**. The meetings are held on a biweekly basis. On 5 April, the first meeting of the RCF's operational working group occurred, during which stakeholders discussed agency responses to the cross-border displacement of Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals. The working group was established to ensure working level cooperation and will be convened every two weeks.

The 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 11 April, the hotline received **145 such requests**, approximately 18.4 per cent of all consultations provided during this period. The number of Ukraine-related requests continues to increase every week. **From 5-11 April, 29.8 per cent of requests were related to entry to, transit through, and exit from Belarus with regards to the war**, in comparison to 22 per cent of requests received two weeks ago and 15 per cent of requests received three weeks prior.

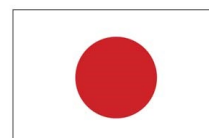


Staff of the hotline on safe migration providing phone consultations © IOM 2021



Staff of the hotline on safe migration providing phone consultations © IOM 2021

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