

HIGHLIGHTS

As of 26 May, **508 people benefited from Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme** in 2022. IOM Belarus started to provide **direct assistance** to Ukrainian refugees due to the closure of state temporary accommodation facilities.

The IOM-supported hotline on safe migration and combatting human trafficking received **311 requests (25 per cent of the total number of queries) 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. **Three third-country nationals** (two Tajik and one Russian citizens) who fled Ukraine to Belarus were supported by IOM to return to their countries of origin.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

IOM Belarus is **scaling up its response targeted at people fleeing the war in Ukraine**. Currently, the majority of persons arrive in Belarus through Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, while the number of people entering Belarus directly through the Ukraine-Belarus border is low, as those Ukrainian border check points are not currently functional.



IOM staff accompanying migrants returning within AVRR programme at the airport
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According to the State Border Committee of Belarus, from 13-26 May, 2,205 people entered Belarus from Ukraine. Since 24 February, **30,011 people have entered the country** (902 Belarusians, 28,865 Ukrainians, and 244 third country nationals).

IOM Belarus took part in the meeting of the UN Refugee Operational Working Group held on 17 May. While the group is chaired by UNHCR, other UN agencies, the Belarusian Red Cross (BRC) and representatives of the Ministry of Interior participated as members. The participants exchanged information and discussed mechanisms and pathways for the referral of Ukrainian refugees and migrants.

CONTACTS

CURRENT RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

IOM Belarus is providing direct assistance to people located throughout the country. To inform populations of available assistance, IOM disseminates brochures and notifies relevant partners about assistance – Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Protection, local labour and migration departments, as well as public associations.

Referral mechanisms have been set up in Gomel and partially Brest region for potential beneficiaries to learn about available IOM assistance and have access to it. IOM plans to establish similar referral mechanisms throughout the country.

IOM Belarus has a permanent office in Minsk, with additional project sites in Grodno and Gomel.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

IOM staff working at the Gomel project site – a response coordinator and a social worker – are involved in rapid vulnerability screening, identification of protection cases and their respective referrals to support services. They assess needs of people fleeing Ukraine and offer targeted assistance, including food, non-food items, clothing, medications, and employment support. In this reporting period, IOM screened 94 beneficiaries and identified their needs. Based on the assessments, the key needs of Ukrainian nationals who fled the war are clothing and medication.

From 13-26 May, 41 people who fled the war in Ukraine and were sheltering in Gomel region and in Minsk were provided with food, hygiene items, clothing and shoes. The mission initiated the purchase of clothes and shoes for another 12 people as well.

Vouchers for medications were provided to seven Ukrainian refugees and migrants. In addition, all the beneficiaries approaching IOM are consulted on the best solutions for them and referred to other institutions if needed.

IOM published and disseminated 6,000 information leaflets on IOM support and services to people fleeing Ukraine.



IOM staff working at the Gomel project site handing over an assistance package to the woman who fled the war in Ukraine © IOM 2022

There are still stranded migrants in Belarus who approach IOM for assistance, including support for voluntary return. People who have registered for AVRR and are awaiting departure are accommodated either in a hotel or hostel in Minsk and are provided with three meals a day. In addition, food and non-food items are regularly procured and delivered to people awaiting their departure.

Eight hygiene kits were provided to vulnerable migrants in Grodno region.

Stock of food and hygiene items was created in a Minsk hotel, including 600 kg of crispbread, cookies, pasta, baby food and 500 kg of toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, shower gel, liquid soaps, and towels.

HEALTH ASSISTANCE

IOM continues to offer psychosocial and psychological support to displaced persons from Ukraine located in Gomel. Consultations are provided by a social worker/psychologist hired at the IOM project site in Gomel. From 13-26 May, 11 Ukrainian nationals were provided with psychosocial and psychological support.

In addition, psychosocial counselling and support is provided to AVRR beneficiaries prior to their departures. From 13-26 May, psychosocial support was provided to four people at the hotel in Minsk where migrants are accommodated and to seven people who approached IOM staff in Grodno.

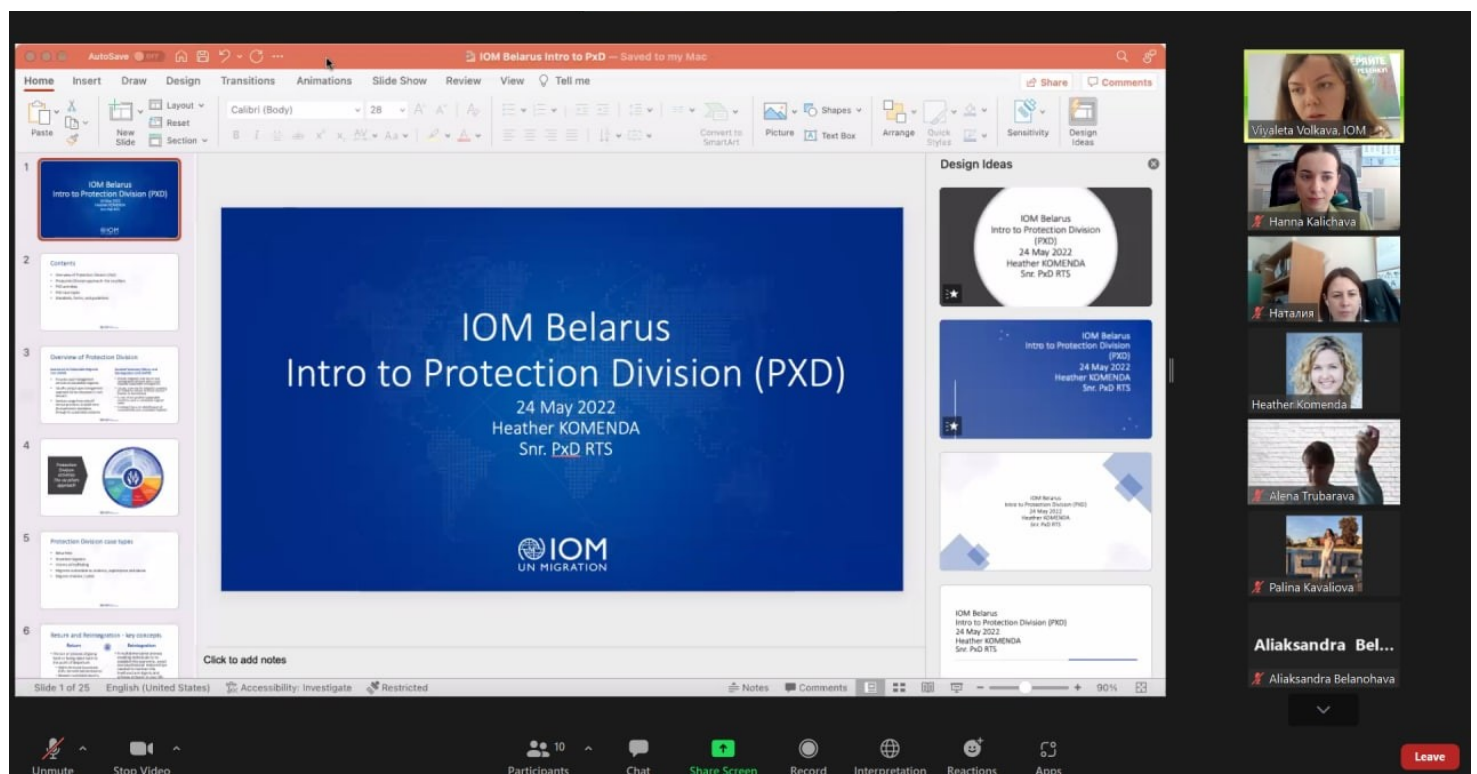
PROTECTION

Through the previously established protection referral pathways, IOM Belarus has supported 18 Ukrainians in securing employment, mostly in the field of agriculture, through payment for special employment permits.

One beneficiary has been provided with assistance in the confirmation of her education degree through payment of relevant state fees and assistance in transportation within Belarus for this purpose.

IOM Belarus has concluded a contract for rendering legal services (employment-related) and one person is expected to receive relevant legal counselling. An agreement for translation services was concluded and one beneficiary benefitted from support with the translation of employment-related documents.

To ensure that IOM frontline staff are aware of the specific needs and vulnerabilities of migrants, and to facilitate protection mainstreaming into the humanitarian response, on 24 May, IOM organized an online protection training for two new Gomel-based staff, IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance team, and IOM's Emergency team. The training was led by the Protection Division of IOM Regional Office in Vienna.



Online protection training for new Gomel-based staff, IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance team, and IOM's Emergency team

Within the reporting period, multidisciplinary group (MDG) meetings were held in Gomel and Vitebsk regions. These meetings serve as an integral part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for the protection of vulnerable migrants. IOM Belarus used this platform to sensitize key 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's legislation. UNICEF and UNHCR joined the MDG meeting in Minsk. Information on IOM Belarus' assistance to people fleeing Ukraine was widely disseminated to ensure referrals.

As of now, no victims of human trafficking were identified from the people who fled Ukraine to Belarus, however, IOM is screening the migrants on indicators of trafficking through phone screenings and the hotline.

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVRR)

From 13-26 May, IOM provided AVRR support to 20 migrants, totaling **508 returnees since the beginning of 2022**.

Currently, while awaiting departure through AVRR, **21 people remain in the urban hostel while 21 migrants are accommodated in a hotel near Minsk Airport**.

As of 26 May, IOM Belarus has provided AVRR support to 508 migrants (362 males and 146 females), including 125 children, in 2022. Most of the returnees were Iraqi nationals (77.4 per cent), while other AVRR beneficiaries have returned to Cuba (6.9 per cent), Sri Lanka (2.4 per cent), Guinea (2.2 per cent), Nigeria, Turkey, Ghana, Egypt, India, Russia, Cameroon, Somalia, Republic of Congo, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina-Faso, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Iran, Kenya, Algeria, Georgia, and Norway.

Two nationals of Tajikistan fled Ukraine to Belarus and were supported by IOM to return to their country of origin. Within the reporting period, two nationals of Cuba were assisted with the receipt of travel documents through their embassy.

In the reporting period, one Georgian national was referred to IOM Belarus by the Embassy of Georgia. IOM staff conducted vulnerability screenings and identified that the migrant was a potential victim of trafficking. The beneficiary took advantage of the protection services within the counter-trafficking project run by IOM Belarus, including rehabilitation in IOM's Rehabilitation centre. Afterward, the migrant was assisted with return to his country.

An **information campaign** is being carried out on IOM Belarus social media to raise awareness about the AVRR programme. On 26 May, a [video](#) on IOM's assistance at Bruzgi logistics facility was published.

COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

The main challenge in terms of response to the humanitarian situation caused by the war in Ukraine and irregular migration is the **lack of data**. The **Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)** is an effective tool to monitor displacement flows. In cooperation with the BRC, the staff in the field in the regions will conduct survey for the estimation of flows. Relevant IOM and BRC staff will be trained. IOM is also a member of the UN working group on data that looks at identifying protection needs of refugees.

IOM, in coordination with the Business Women Club located in Brest city, continues to provide information to requesting migrants and refugees on counter-trafficking and safe migration through its hotline. From 24 February to 23 May, the hotline received 311 **requests for information on entry to, transit through, and exit from Belarus in connection with the war in Ukraine**, which amounts to approximately **25 per cent** of all consultations provided during this period.

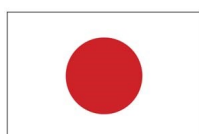
IOM partner, the Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers (BMMW), continued supporting migrants in Grodno region. Approximately 69 consultations on AVRR solutions were provided to migrants in collaboration with IOM Grodno local staff and eight hygiene kits were given to migrants. In Gomel, an NGO partner provided consultations on AVRR to eight Ukrainian refugees, and nine beneficiaries were referred by the NGO to IOM field staff in Gomel for further assistance.

On 23 May, IOM took part in the round table on lessons learned during the response to stranded migrants in Grodno region that was organized by the BRC. Other UN agencies as well as BRC and Grodno region authorities discussed main takeaways and improvements needed to ensure a joint effective and prompt response in case of a migration crisis.

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