

# EGALA



## **Egala Association** **Situation Report 2025:**

Humanitarian Assistance  
at the Polish-Belarusian Border,  
Casework and Integration Support

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### 1. Introduction

Egala Association has been operating since **10 December 2021** in Białystok, in response to the humanitarian crisis at the Polish–Belarusian border. Since then, we have remained continuously present wherever people experience violence, exhaustion, and extreme uncertainty. We believe that every person deserves assistance, support, and respect, regardless of the reasons for migration. We **do not accept** violence, discrimination, or marginalization. We strive to create a safe space based on respect, accompanying people on the move, responding to their needs, and organizing the necessary support.

The year **2025** marked the **fourth year of active operations of the Egala Association** in the context of the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the Polish–Belarusian border. We provided **humanitarian assistance and medical first aid** in the field, supported people on the move in their contacts with services and institutions, and organized legal, psychological, and material assistance. We continued our **casework and integration activities**, supporting individuals residing in the open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok and offering Polish language learning opportunities to those wishing to settle in Poland.

We were also present in the hospital in Hajnówka, supporting patients arriving from the border area. We continued the housing programme (**the training apartment operating in Białystok since autumn 2024**), which enabled men leaving reception centres to adapt to a new environment and transition more safely into the first stage of independent life in Poland. Our activities also included advocacy efforts aimed at promoting respect for the rights of people with **migration experience**. In 2025, we also conducted **psychosocial workshops for Polish children and children with refugee experience in foster care** in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

This report summarizes our work over the past year. It presents data and experiences that illustrate the scale of needs and our continued commitment to protecting human rights and respecting the dignity of every person we encounter.

## 2. Situation at the Border



In 2025, the situation of people crossing the border deteriorated. The authorities consistently hindered the provision of humanitarian assistance. Political decisions taken in 2025 raised serious concerns among human rights organizations operating in the border region. Numerous protests, conferences, and initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the situation and encouraging the government to change its position did not bring results – the authorities remained unresponsive to recommendations and grassroots appeals.

Below we present the most significant events of 2025 that negatively affected the situation of refugees and the activities of the humanitarian sector.

### Temporary territorial suspension of the right to apply for international protection

#### **26.03.2025 – President signs amendment to the law**

President Andrzej Duda signed the Act of 21 February 2025 amending the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland. The amendment introduced the possibility of temporarily and territorially suspending the right to submit applications for international protection.

#### **27.03.2025 – first regulation of the Council of Ministers**

The Council of Ministers adopted a regulation introducing a temporary territorial suspension of the right to apply for international protection for a period of 60 days. This was the first executive act making use of the new statutory authorization. The regulation covered a designated border area. Since then, the regulation has been extended every 60 days. As a result, a measure introduced as extraordinary and short-term has in practice functioned continuously.

### Court proceedings and the criminalization of humanitarian assistance

#### 08.09.2025 – acquittal of all members of the “Hajnówka Five”

The District Court in Bielsk Podlaski (criminal division sitting in Hajnówka) found all defendants in the case of the so-called “Hajnówka Five” not guilty. They had been accused of providing humanitarian assistance. The verdict strengthened the argument that providing aid to people in a humanitarian crisis cannot be treated as a criminal offence. At the beginning of 2026, the prosecutor’s office filed an appeal.



#### 26.09.2025 – acquittal of Bartek by the District Court in Białystok

The District Court in Białystok issued an acquittal in the case of Bartek, a volunteer. He had been charged with committing an offence under Article 224 § 2 of the Polish Criminal Code. The prosecutor’s office claimed that Bartek attempted to influence the actions of Border Guard officers when, acting as a legal representative, he tried to obtain information about a Somali national who had been taken to Belarus. The verdict became final in January 2026.

### Changes regarding the placement of unaccompanied minors in guarded centres

In autumn 2025, an amendment to Article 88a of the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland was adopted, allowing for the placement of an unaccompanied minor who has applied for international protection in Poland in a guarded centre for foreigners. This represents a departure from previous regulations, which categorically excluded such a possibility (the provisions entered into force on 1 January 2026).

The procedure for introducing this amendment also raised controversy. The change was not included in the government draft submitted to the Polish Parliament on 6 August 2025. It was proposed only in the form of amendments after the first reading in the parliamentary committee on 7 October 2025, and therefore was not subject to public consultations or the formal opinion-gathering process.

## 2.1 Timeline of the Humanitarian Crisis

**26.09.2025** – acquittal of volunteer Bartek (the verdict has already become final)  
**08.09.2025** – acquittal of the “Hajnowka Five” (an appeal was later filed)  
**03–04.2025** – bodies of people who had drowned in the Bug River were discovered  
**27.03.2025** – suspension of the right to submit applications for international protection at the Belarusian border (in force continuously to this day)

2025

2024

**14.08.2024** – law exempting uniformed officers from criminal liability in cases of exceeding their powers regarding the use of direct coercive measures or firearms  
**13.06.2024** – introduction of a new buffer zone at the border (still in force)  
**06.06.2024** – death of a soldier who had been stabbed at the border  
**05.2024** – indictment filed against five individuals providing humanitarian assistance at the border

**13.12.2023** – swearing-in of the government of Donald Tusk  
**03.11.2023** – a man from Syria shot in the back by a soldier  
**07.2023** – deployment of a new layer of concertina wire on the ground along the border barrier  
**15.06.2023** – activation of the electronic barrier along part of the border

2023

2022

**01.07.2022** – introduction of a ban on staying within 200 metres of the state border line  
**06.2022** – completion of the construction of the border wall along a 186 km section  
**02–03.2022** – Belarusian services transported a large group of people to the border (including many Kurdish families) who had spent the winter in a warehouse near the village of Bruzgi

**12.2021** – deployment of concertina wire coils along the Bug River  
**01.12.2021** – introduction of a temporary ban on staying in the border zone (covering 183 localities in the Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships), later extended until 30 June 2022  
**08.11.2021** – events in Kuźnica: Belarusian services gathered around 3,000 people near the border and forced them to attempt to cross it  
**26.10.2021** – entry into force of the so-called “pushback law”  
**02.09.2021** – introduction of a state of emergency in 115 localities in the Podlaskie Voivodeship and 68 in the Lubelskie Voivodeship  
**20.08.2021** – entry into force of the regulation providing a formal basis for pushbacks (the so-called “Wąsik regulation”)  
**25.08.2021** – beginning of the construction of a 2.5-metre border fence, supplemented on the eastern side with concertina wire coils  
**08.2021** – a group of migrants trapped at the border line near the village of Usnarz Górny  
**spring/summer 2021** – increase in the number of people crossing the so-called “green border” between Belarus and Poland

2021

## 3. Programmatic Activities



### 3.1 Humanitarian Assistance

In 2025, migrants and refugees continued attempting to cross the Polish-Belarusian border despite the expanded border infrastructure, increased patrol presence, and the continued policy of pushbacks. Violence on both sides of the border was a commonly reported experience among the people we encountered. They described beatings, the use of tear gas, dog attacks, and the destruction of personal belongings, including phones. In some cases, **individuals required urgent medical intervention**; however, calling an ambulance involved the risk of further consequences, including the possibility of a pushback. For this reason, decisions to call emergency medical services were made only in situations where there was a direct threat to health or life.

## Situation Report 2025

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In response to the situation at the border with Belarus, the Polish authorities introduced legislation in March 2025 suspending the possibility of submitting applications for international protection (the so-called **suspension of the right to asylum**), which meant a temporary restriction of access to asylum procedures directly at the border. This decision further increased **the risk of pushbacks** and limited the possibility for individuals genuinely in need of protection to apply for it in Poland. The suspension was extended several times during the year and remained in force until the end of 2025.

The people we reached with assistance often remained in the border zone (the “sistema”) for extended periods — frequently for more than 48 hours — without access to food, water, or safe shelter. Prolonged stays in the forest under such conditions can lead, and often did lead, to **severe physical and psychological exhaustion**, dehydration, deterioration of health, and an increased risk of serious complications. The continuing harsh conditions at the border also posed a **direct threat to life**. In 2025, we received testimonies from individuals forced to cross the Bug River, as well as reports of drownings. This demonstrates that people on the move face not only violence and exhaustion, but also life-threatening risks resulting from terrain conditions and the lack of safe migration routes.

Our team reached people staying in the forest in a state of severe physical and psychological exhaustion. We provided **humanitarian assistance, including basic medical first aid and psychosocial support, as well as the distribution of food, water, and clothing**. Psychosocial support included, in particular, emotional support, conversation, and assistance in reducing stress levels. We also provided **information about the legal situation** in Poland and the available options for further assistance. In many cases, interventions took place in difficult terrain and in situations of increased presence of law enforcement, manhunts, and the use of drones and service dogs. There were also situations in which individuals were separated in the forest and left without phones, which made it more difficult to reach all members of a group and increased the risk that those in need of assistance would remain without support.

Despite these exceptionally difficult circumstances, throughout the entire year we continued to provide humanitarian assistance to people staying in the forest whose health or lives were at risk.



### Scale of Humanitarian Assistance in 2025 – Data

In 2025, our field team carried out a total of **214 humanitarian interventions**, during which we provided support to **366 people** (5 women and 361 men).

The assistance provided included:

- ▶ psychosocial first aid for **337 people** (5 women and 332 men),
- ▶ medical first aid for **217 people** (4 women and 213 men),
- ▶ distribution of essential non-food items to **327 people** (5 women and 322 men),
- ▶ provision of food and water to **359 people** (5 women and 354 men),
- ▶ provision of information on the legal situation in Poland to **221 people** (4 women and 217 men).

Most of the individuals who received assistance belonged to the 18–45 age group (339 people). A significantly smaller proportion were aged 15–17 (22 people) and over 60 years old (1 person). In 4 cases, the age of the individuals could not be determined.

### Health Conditions and Vulnerable Groups



The people we reached with assistance were often in a state of extreme physical exhaustion and dehydration, resulting from prolonged stays in the forest. In many cases we observed severe weakness, difficulties in movement, and a deterioration of their overall health condition. Particularly difficult situations affected individuals who had spent many days, and sometimes weeks, in the “sistema” — the border fortification zone on the Belarusian side, where they were unable to leave the area or access assistance.

## Situation Report 2025

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A frequent cause of injuries were **accidents related to crossing the border wall**, including falls from height and wounds caused by razor wire. We documented fractures, sprains, deep cuts, and other injuries requiring medical attention. These injuries were often accompanied by severe exhaustion, which further increased the risk of complications.

Accounts from individuals also repeatedly included reports of **violence experienced during attempts to cross the border** or after being detained by authorities. People reported beatings, the use of gas, dog attacks, and the destruction of phones and personal belongings. In some cases, visible signs of violence were present, including extensive bruising, deep cuts, and other physical injuries.

Among those we assisted were also individuals belonging to **particularly vulnerable groups**. These included people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes or asthma, whose health conditions deteriorated while spending extended periods in the forest without access to treatment. In cases requiring urgent intervention, we provided basic first aid, monitored individuals' health conditions, and when necessary, organized further medical assistance in cooperation with Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

An important group also included **unaccompanied minors**, who crossed the border alone or were separated from their relatives. They were in an especially difficult situation due to the absence of adult support and uncertainty regarding their legal and procedural status.

The scale of exhaustion, injuries, and the presence of individuals belonging to vulnerable groups confirmed that people crossing the border required immediate humanitarian assistance and special protection, particularly in light of their health condition, age, and gender.

### Countries of Origin

In 2025, the individuals supported by our team came primarily from **Afghanistan** and countries in **East Africa**, particularly from the Horn of Africa. The largest groups consisted of people from **Eritrea**, **Ethiopia**, and **Sudan**. We also recorded the presence of individuals from **Somalia** and **Pakistan**, as well as single individuals from other countries in Africa and Asia. The overall structure of countries of origin remained similar to that observed in previous years.

### Border Warehouse

In 2025, we began operating a logistical warehouse that served as a shared support facility for our activities as well as for other groups providing humanitarian assistance at the border. We took over the management of the warehouse from Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH), which supported our logistical activities and enabled the continued operation of the facility. The warehouse remained continuously accessible to field teams from different organizations, allowing for rapid responses to ongoing intervention needs.

We supplied field teams with essential **non-food items**, including sleeping bags, power banks, clothing, and backpacks, as well as **food and water**. We regularly distributed material assistance used during field interventions and for individuals transferred from the border to the hospital in Hajnówka. These items were essential for survival in harsh conditions and for restoring a basic sense of safety.

Operating the warehouse allowed us to improve coordination of humanitarian activities and ensure that field teams had continuous access to essential equipment, thereby strengthening the continuity and effectiveness of the assistance provided.

### Testimonies from Humanitarian Interventions

The following testimonies come directly from our humanitarian interventions conducted in 2025. They document the experiences of the individuals we supported and the conditions in which our teams carried out emergency assistance.

”

16 February

*A request for support came in. When we arrived at the location, we saw a young Somali man. He was terrified. He was lying in the bushes. He immediately began assuring us that he wanted to apply for international protection in Poland. We explained how the procedure works and what his rights are. The man signed the necessary documents.*

*Suddenly we heard shouting coming from the distance: ‘Stop, you b\*tch!’ It turned out that we had found ourselves in the middle of a manhunt. We could hear someone running away – probably a refugee – and soldiers chasing him.*

*One of the soldiers stopped right next to us. We informed him that there was a man with us who wanted to apply for international protection in Poland. The officers took him to a Border Guard facility.*

*Fortunately, the Somali man is now safe. However, we do not know what happened to the person the soldiers were chasing.*





## 10 September

*When we met them, they were completely soaked. They had spent 14 days in the forest. During that time, they crossed the border three times and were pushed back each time by Polish authorities to Belarus. They no longer had the strength to keep trying – after everything they had experienced and witnessed at the border.*

*They wanted to leave the area, but Belarusian soldiers then showed them a pit containing five bodies, telling them that this would be their fate if they also tried to return to Minsk.*

*They told us that during attempts to push people across the border, officers often take their shoes and destroy their phones and, if they have them, their documents as well. When we poured them hot soup, they asked us why they were being treated this way. They had fled a nightmare in Sudan only to find themselves in another one here, at the border of the European Union. ‘The world falls everywhere,’ the older of the two told us.*

*Both men were from Sudan – a country where war over resources such as gold, natural gas, and rare earth metals has led to mass hunger. It is estimated that half of Sudan’s population – more than 24 million adults and children – suffer from hunger, alongside large-scale forced displacement.*





15 October 2025

*He was completely soaked and freezing. He drank a cup of hot tea. Before serving him soup, we suggested that he change into the dry clothes we had brought. He took off his jacket and from his pocket pulled out a carefully wrapped bundle of sorrel leaves, which he had been eating over the past few days to suppress his hunger.*

*He had spent more than 30 days in the forest. During that time, he had managed to cross into Poland several times, but Polish authorities pushed him back to Belarus each time. He drank water from swamps and had nothing left with him.*

*His face and back were covered in bruises, and he had several larger wounds that were already filled with forest debris. All we could do was clean and dress them. He told us about the severe violence he had experienced at the hands of Belarusian authorities.*

*He comes from Afghanistan – a country where Polish troops were stationed for nearly 20 years. The last soldiers returned in June 2021. At the same time, after the Taliban took power, many Afghans began fleeing the country. In addition to widespread violations of basic human rights, the country is facing severe drought and food shortages.*

## 3.2 Casework and Integration Support



We understand casework as individualized support provided to migrants and refugees receiving our assistance. It involves assessing their situation and needs in order to provide comprehensive support. These activities include accompanying individuals in their contacts with institutions and organizations, organizing medical, legal, and psychosocial assistance, and taking steps to improve their safety and access to the rights and support mechanisms available to them.

As part of our casework activities in 2025, we supported individuals arriving from the Polish-Belarusian border to **the hospital in Hajnówka**, as well as those staying in the **open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok**. Throughout the year, we also continued the **housing project in Białystok**, launched in autumn 2024, through which young men leaving the open reception centre received support in the process of integration and achieving independence during the first months of their stay in Poland outside the reception centre system.

In 2025, we also supported children and young people — both Polish and those with refugee experience — living in **foster care facilities** in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. We organized psychosocial workshops to support their well-being and develop their social competencies.

An important component of our casework activities was also the provision of **Polish language classes**, which supported people with migration experience in their everyday functioning, particularly in accessing the labour market, building independence, and participating in social life.

At the beginning of 2025, we continued activities carried out in previous years, providing support to men with migration experience placed in the Detention Centre for Foreigners (SOC) in Białystok. Until the end of April 2025, our work focused primarily on ensuring that people detained in the SOC had access to appropriate legal assistance and material support. We remained in email contact, answering questions related to procedures, explaining their legal situation, and clarifying their rights and obligations in Poland. Whenever possible, we also responded to telephone requests from Border Guard officers or from themselves. We provided support in situations where individuals leaving the centre did not have a mobile phone or the financial means to purchase a ticket, which made it difficult for them to reach a reception centre. In such cases, we assisted, among other things, by purchasing tickets and, when necessary, accompanying individuals to the railway or bus station. We also provided basic material assistance, such as food or clothing.

From May 2025, due to limited funding, we were no longer able to continue these activities in the SOC on such a broad scale. Our support for people detained in the centre was therefore significantly reduced. Nevertheless, whenever possible, we continued to respond in exceptional situations, when requested either by the Border Guard or themselves, providing assistance in individual cases.

In 2025, we provided support to:

- ▶ 107 people in the hospital in Hajnówka,
- ▶ approx. 60 people in the open reception centre in Białystok,
- ▶ 82 unaccompanied minors in foster care facilities, 80 Polish children and 2 children with refugee experience,
- ▶ 16 men in the training apartment in Białystok,
- ▶ 45 people participating in Polish language classes,
- ▶ approx. 100 people supported after leaving the hospital, open reception centres, guarded centres for foreigners, or the training apartment.

We provided casework support to individuals who, after leaving reception centres for foreigners or moving out of the training apartment, had begun the process of becoming independent but still required **assistance in their daily functioning**. We supported them in their contacts with public institutions, including offices such as the Municipal Family Assistance Centre (MOPR), for example in connection with applying for the Individual Integration Programme (IPI). We also assisted them in organizing access to healthcare, continuing their Polish language learning, and searching for employment and establishing contacts with employers. In addition, we provided **psychological first aid and psychosocial support**, which was particularly important in the context of loneliness and the challenges associated with starting an independent life in a new country. In many cases, we remained one of the first and most important points of contact for these individuals, as well as a stable source of support throughout their integration and transition to independent living.

### 3.2.1 Hospital



In 2025, individuals found in the forest by the Border Guard were brought to the hospital in Hajnówka when their health condition prevented them from moving independently. Most often these were **people with serious injuries** sustained while crossing the border wall, as well as individuals suffering from extreme exhaustion, dehydration, or requiring urgent medical assistance. In situations of direct threat to health or life, ambulances were also called by our staff and volunteers.

Our activities in the hospital were continuous and comprehensive. They included both **direct support for hospitalized individuals and organizational, legal, and logistical** efforts aimed at ensuring continuity of care during hospitalization and after discharge.

In 2025, we provided support to a total of **107 people** hospitalized in the hospital in Hajnówka, including 99 men, 7 women, and 1 non-binary person.

In January and February 2025, no patients from the Polish-Belarusian border were recorded in the hospital. During this period, the activities of our team focused on supporting individuals outside the hospital who had decided to remain in Poland, particularly by ensuring access to medical, psychological, and material assistance. These activities included organizing donations, such as milk for mothers with children. From March 2025, activities in the hospital became regular and included the constant presence of caseworkers on hospital wards until October. In November and December, no individuals from the border were admitted to the hospital.

Caseworkers documented cases of individuals staying in the hospital and maintained records of the actions taken. At the same time, they coordinated cooperation with partner organizations, lawyers, interpreters, and public institutions to ensure patients continuity of medical, legal, and social support.

### Support provided to hospitalized individuals included in particular:

- ▶ accompanying patients during hospitalization and maintaining regular presence on hospital wards,
- ▶ monitoring the health and procedural situation,
- ▶ supporting communication with medical staff, including explaining procedures and conveying information,
- ▶ providing oral and written interpretation of conversations as well as medical and administrative documentation,
- ▶ supporting contacts with lawyers, the Border Guard, and other institutions,
- ▶ assisting in preparing, completing, and submitting medical and procedural documentation,
- ▶ supporting communication with patients' families, including providing information about their health condition,
- ▶ organizing transport to a reception centre after the end of hospitalization,
- ▶ coordinating further stay in Poland after discharge, including contact with reception centres and organizations supporting migrants and refugees,
- ▶ providing basic material assistance, including clothing, shoes, orthopedic equipment, hygiene items, and food,
- ▶ supporting the purchase of prescription medicines, obtaining medical certificates, and facilitating access to further treatment,
- ▶ interventions in urgent situations requiring immediate psychological or legal support.

### Patients' Health Conditions

Individuals admitted to the hospital in Hajnówka required urgent or specialized medical care. We documented various types of injuries, medical complications, and conditions related to severe physical exhaustion. The most frequently observed group of injuries consisted of **orthopedic injuries**, particularly fractures of the upper and lower limbs. We regularly encountered highly complex fractures of the heel bones, lower legs, ankles, arms, and legs, as well as more severe injuries such as pelvic fractures, spinal fractures, and open fractures requiring surgical intervention. Some individuals were admitted to the hospital following **falls from height**, including jumps from the border wall, which often resulted in extensive multi-organ injuries.

Another significant category consisted of **lacerations and soft tissue injuries**, including deep wounds to the hands, legs, and thighs, severed muscles and tendons, as well as infected wounds, sometimes posing a risk of serious complications. These injuries were often related to contact with razor wire. In some cases, the wounds had remained untreated for extended periods, leading to infections and a deterioration of health.

We also repeatedly documented **injuries resulting from physical violence**, including beatings that led to fractures, bruising, head injuries, orbital injuries, and the presence of blood in the urine (hematuria). In isolated cases, we also recorded gunshot wounds, including injuries caused by shotguns or other types of ammunition, as well as dog bites.

A significant group also consisted of individuals showing **symptoms of severe physical exhaustion**. Among the most frequently recorded health problems were dehydration, malnutrition, loss of consciousness, general weakness, hypothermia, abnormalities in laboratory test results, and infections of the skin and respiratory tract. Some individuals arrived at the hospital in a condition requiring immediate stabilization of vital functions and prolonged hospitalization.

We also observed cases involving pre-existing medical conditions and additional health complications, including hepatitis B, bacterial infections, post-traumatic complications, and symptoms of severe psychological stress, such as panic attacks or disorientation.

The nature of the injuries and medical conditions indicates that individuals admitted to the hospital often required comprehensive medical care, including surgical, orthopedic, and internal medicine treatment, as well as support during the subsequent recovery process. In many cases, hospitalization represented the first moment of access to professional medical care after experiences related to crossing the border and remaining in harsh environmental conditions.

### Hospital Testimonies

We regularly reported on our activities in the hospital through social media, highlighting the challenges faced by refugees after being brought to the facility from the border. Below we present selected testimonies illustrating the nature of the support provided and the situation of patients.



21 March

*Three people from Somalia and one from Eritrea urgently needed support. When we arrived, it turned out that the Eritrean man had severely injured hands and legs. He had cut himself on razor wire.*

*The entire group wanted to apply for international protection in Poland, so we called the authorities. The Eritrean man's bleeding wounds were deep enough that we also called an ambulance. After examining his condition, the medical team decided to transport him to the hospital.*

*The group told us that they had already experienced several pushbacks. They also spoke about the brutality of Belarusian services.*

*Fortunately, they are now safe.*





27 March

*A young man from Somalia was transported by ambulance to the hospital in Hajnówka after falling from the border wall. When he was lying on the ground, unable to move, Polish services sprayed him with tear gas. He was in pain and severely undernourished.*

*He submitted a declaration of his intention to apply for international protection in Poland, but the document was not accepted. This most likely means that he will be taken back to the forest. We delivered warm winter boots and a jacket to the hospital in case he was pushed back.*

*Yesterday we learned that the President had signed the law suspending the right to asylum. Pushbacks from the hospital had already occurred before, but we fear that they may now become a regular practice. This law poses a threat to the health and lives of people at the border!*



30 September

*(...) We have just learned that the Border Guard took a 22-year-old man from Sudan from the emergency department and transported him to the forest on the Belarusian side. He had been admitted to the hospital due to severe exhaustion, hunger, and extreme weight loss.*

*The last time our staff member, a volunteer in the hospital, saw him was at 12:40 p.m. He was trembling and crying a lot. He said that he could not return to Belarus or to Sudan, where war is ongoing. He had spent 40 days in the forest. He had been beaten. He told us that he had eaten only once every four days – very small portions.*

*We provided him with dry and clean clothes (his were completely unusable) and essential items – but we did not know that he would be taken back to the forest.*

*With the assistance of a lawyer from the Nomada Association, the Sudanese man submitted a request for an interim measure to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). A positive decision from the Court means a prohibition on returning the foreign national to Belarus. The Border Guard knew that the Court was examining his case, yet still decided to carry out the removal. The Court's decision granting the interim measure reached us later that afternoon...*



The following story has not previously been published on our social media. It is a direct testimony of a man from Ethiopia who was admitted to the hospital in Hajnówka in July 2025 and later shared his experience with us.

*I lived in Ethiopia, in the eastern part of the Tigray region, in the city of Zalambessa. In 2020, the war against the people of Tigray began. The city of Zalambessa, where I lived, was bombarded with heavy weapons, and Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers killed many innocent people. I was forced to flee and moved to the city of Mekelle. Life in Mekelle was very difficult. Later I went to stay with my uncle in Addis Ababa.*

*After two months in Addis Ababa, I was arrested by the police because of my origin from Tigray. I was placed in the Awash detention camp, where I was detained and tortured for four months. After four months I was released. It was a very difficult time for me. I returned to Addis Ababa and tried to continue my life, but my situation remained extremely difficult. I became ill and was admitted to the hospital — it was a very complicated period. After recovering, I started working.*

*The police in Addis Ababa arrested me again because of my origin from Tigray. This time I was detained for five months. I was released on bail and then travelled to Belarus. I cannot return to Ethiopia. I need protection in Poland.*

### 3.2.2 Training Apartment

The training apartment in Białystok responded to the real challenges faced by migrants and refugees. It is a **form of transitional support aimed at men with migration experience** who had already left reception centres for foreigners but did not yet have stable housing or sufficient resources to function independently in Poland. At the same time, these were individuals who had permission to work and were ready to enter the workforce.

We primarily supported people from groups that faced particular difficulties in the adaptation process and were therefore more vulnerable to homelessness. These were mainly individuals from African countries and the Middle East, who often experienced discrimination in the labour and housing markets and lacked extensive support networks or diasporas in Poland.

The programme, which we launched in autumn 2024, was based on a holistic approach. We provided a **safe and welcoming space** where residents could focus on integration and on taking their first steps toward independence in a new living environment. Each participant in the programme received a **free place in a shared apartment** with other refugees for a period of **2–3 months**. During this time, they could focus on finding employment, securing stable income, and adapting to their new reality without having to worry about meeting their basic needs.



Throughout the programme, participants received continuous support from our casework team. We assisted them in searching for job opportunities, preparing CVs, navigating the Polish social and legal systems, and familiarizing themselves with the city and public transport. We also accompanied them to administrative procedures and medical appointments. Our work was based on an **individual independence plan**, taking into account each person's resources, needs, and challenges.

The apartment was not only a roof over their head but also a **space for building relationships** and a new sense of community. We believe that everyday experiences, mutual support, and simply spending time together can genuinely help people adapt to a new environment. For this reason, we organized regular meetings; the programme coordinator spoke with residents every week about their successes, plans, difficulties, and everyday matters. We also organized shared activities, including trips to the ice rink, concerts, and football matches, as well as events in the apartment such as baking holiday gingerbread together.

## Situation Report 2025

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Building independence gradually restored a sense of security and personal agency that difficult migration experiences and trauma had often seriously affected. Participants in the program could also benefit from professional psychological and legal assistance. Many of them took part in the Polish language courses organized by our association, which were also attended by residents of the open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok, further strengthening the integration process.

**We know how important the continuity of support is, which is why we supported residents in their transition to full independence. We helped them find their next home and remained in contact after they completed the program. The results of this work are tangible: program participants have found employment, are renting apartments, are learning Polish, and continue to rely on our support to varying degrees. Most of them have decided to build their future in Białystok.**

In 2025, a total of 16 men from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria participated in the program.

**Excerpt from an interview with Ilyas, a former resident of the training apartment, conducted on 26 February 2026 in Białystok:**



**Question:** How long did your journey from Somalia to Poland take?

**Ilyas:** I left in 2023 and arrived in Poland at the end of 2024. The entire journey lasted one year and seven months.

**Question:** Is Białystok the first city you have lived in since arriving in Poland?

**Ilyas:** No. First, I was placed in a reception centre in Biała Podlaska, where I stayed for about one month. Then I was transferred to a centre in Linin, where I lived for around seven months. Later I moved to Białystok and have been living here for about six months now.

**Question:** Do you like Białystok?

**Ilyas:** Yes, very much. It is a big city, and things are going well here. I have met many people who have helped and supported me. That is why I like this place.

**Question:** Are you currently working?

**Ilyas:** Not at the moment. At first, I worked in construction for two months, but it was very difficult for me. I am a journalist by profession, and that is the work I truly value. Physical labor requires experience and conditioning, which I did not have. I became ill and had to quit. Later, I worked for a furniture company on a two-month contract, but when the orders ended, the company let me go. Now I am seeking employment again.

**Question:** Are you still waiting for a decision on your case?

**Ilyas:** Yes, I am still waiting. It is stressful. I am a father. My children live in Kenya: five of them are staying with my cousin. My former wife lives in Germany with our son. I would like to receive a decision as soon as possible and gain some stability.

**Question:** How are you finding Poland? Is integration difficult?

**Ilyas:** I heard from other foreigners that life in Poland can be difficult and that people do not like foreigners. But my experience has been different. Since I arrived, no one has said anything negative to me. In the centre in Linin, one of the staff members once told me: "If you want to connect with people, smile." I kept that in mind. I always smile and say "good morning." People respond positively.

**Question:** What does safety mean to you?

**Ilyas:** Safety means peace. Somalia is a country at war. I have also lived in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, and South Africa. These countries have governments and constitutions, but there is often no real sense of safety. In Somalia, I lived in constant fear for my life. When I arrived in Poland, I felt calm for the first time. I still sometimes have nightmares and memories from my country, but here I feel safe. I also spoke with a doctor who helped me deal with difficult experiences. For me, safety means being able to live without fear.

**Question:** How do you look back on your time in the training apartment?

**Ilyas:** It was very important for me. Life in the reception centre was restrictive: we had to report when we left and when we returned. In the training apartment, I felt freedom. I could manage my own time, do my own shopping, and organize my daily life independently. It was the first moment when I truly felt independent.

**Question:** Is there anything you would like to add?

**Ilyas:** During my journey through Kenya, Ethiopia, Russia, and Belarus, I met many people in very difficult situations. I saw how much help they needed. I tried to support them whenever I could. After I arrived in Poland, many journalists contacted me to tell my story. I would like to use my experience and knowledge to speak about the reality of migrants' lives. I share my story on social media, organize meetings, and record videos. I want to raise awareness and show the truth about migration.

### 3.2.3 Open Reception Centre



Since the second half of 2024, we have been supporting people with refugee backgrounds staying in the open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok. It is one of the facilities run by the Office for Foreigners, where people reside while applying for international protection or holding certificates confirming their temporary protection status in Poland. The open nature of the centre means that residents are allowed to leave the facility, for example, to attend administrative appointments or educational activities, as long as they return according to the center's regulations.

At the center, we provided regular individual support, responding to the specific needs of each person. Many of these needs involved administrative matters. We assisted residents in submitting applications to the County Family Assistance centre (PCPR) for the Individual Integration Program (IPI), which enables access to financial support and health insurance, which are both crucial at the beginning of independent life in Poland. We supported residents in completing and translating documents, helped them reach the appropriate institutions (also outside Białystok, for example in Warsaw), and when necessary accompanied them during visits to public offices. We were also present during contacts with institutions such as the Office for Foreigners, labor offices, and public health departments, addressing day-to-day situations and helping ensure that administrative deadlines were met.

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Our support also covered a wide range of **health-related needs**. We helped residents navigate the public healthcare system, book doctor's appointments, and identify appropriate specialists. In some cases we accompanied them to consultations due to language barriers, stress, or the complexity of the situation. We also assisted with filling prescriptions. Starting in November, we began arranging access to dental care. In practice, this meant supporting individuals in obtaining treatment that is not covered either by Petra Medica (responsible for providing healthcare to people going through the international protection process) or by the National Health Fund (NFZ) in the case for individuals who have already received a positive protection decision. This particularly involved costly procedures such as root canals treatment, which many migrants cannot afford on their own.

Regarding employment support, we assisted residents in preparing CVs, reviewing job listings together, and contacting potential employers. In some cases, we also continued providing support after individuals had started working, helping them clarify administrative matters or address emerging difficulties. We supported families in enrolling their children in schools and kindergartens by helping them choose an appropriate school, facilitating communication with staff, and explaining how the Polish education system functions.

We also assisted with **everyday tasks**, such as opening bank accounts, getting public transport cards, registering SIM cards, or sending postal parcels. In urgent situations we intervened directly, supporting residents in submitting documents under tight deadlines, arranging immediate medical appointments, or helping resolve conflicts and tensions. The scope of our work was broad and always tailored to each individual's situation.

We also facilitated access to **legal assistance**, connecting residents with lawyers and organizations that specialize in refugee support. When necessary, we arranged **interpretation services** to overcome language barriers. We also provided **material support**, including clothing, children's items, and hygiene products, responding to specific needs reported by residents.



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We paid particular attention to integration and relationship-building. We organized shared activities, including trips to the ice rink, and during the Ethno Festival Czeremcha, we supported culinary workshops led by three women from Somalia who had previously lived in the center. Every Thursday we held regular office hours at the center, speaking with residents about their challenges, plans, and successes while working together to find solutions.

We also offer **Polish language courses**, including a group created specifically for mothers with young children. Classes took place at the center, and volunteers provided childcare during the lessons. In this way, we sought to reduce the inequalities affecting women, who often face limited access to education and the labor market due to family responsibilities.

Our support did not end when residents left the centre, whenever possible, we remained in contact and guided them on their continued path toward **full independence**.

In 2025, we supported **approximately 60 people**, including 17 children, from countries such as Iran, Cameroon, Guinea, Cuba, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Iraq. This number reflects the high turnover of residents in the center. During the year, some individuals left, while others arrived. We accompanied people with refugee experience at different stages of life, including the youngest, from their first days after birth, supporting mothers who arrived at the centre during advanced stages of pregnancy.

### Excerpt from an interview with Esta, a resident of the open reception centre in Białystok, conducted on 26 February 2026:

**Question:** Is Białystok the first city in Poland where you have lived?

**Esta:** At the beginning it was Biała Podlaska. I spent my initial month there, but it primarily consisted of life within the centre rather than in the city itself. Seated there with some apprehension, I endeavored to ascertain my precise location throughout that initial month. I knew that I was in Poland and that I was safe, but I still had this fear inside me. Previously, I had spent one year in Russia and six months in Belarus, so I still found it difficult to fully believe it. Each day, I experienced a sense of being merely seated there, with no awareness of my surroundings.

But when I came to Białystok and started to meet people, I saw that they were very kind. Even in the street, on the bus, or in shops: everywhere. They see that you are not from here, but they still smile. They really help. I am happy to be here.

**Question:** What are your dreams and plans in Poland, since you are also a painter.

**Esta:** Yes, I paint and I also do photography, although I am not a professional. I really love painting. I had my first exhibition here in Białystok, and Caritas helped me a lot with that. The manager, Ola, was very kind and helped me organize everything. People liked the paintings and said many positive things. They also visited my Instagram and Facebook and wrote that they were happy that I was here with them. Some of them even asked if they could buy my paintings. I was very happy, because suddenly I felt seen. I am here; I have my place, my space, and my life. All of this is new to me, but it brings me a lot of joy. I would like to continue painting. I would also like to create projects close to women and children. I enjoy creating handmade items by hand. I used to do this before: I collected different materials and created things from them. I like being in contact with people and with society. I want to help women like me. There are many women – not only from Arab countries but also from Africa – who have similar stories.

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I also really like mixing cultures. In many societies, people are taught that their religion and culture are the best and that others do not matter. Sometimes you are even not allowed to read about other religions, because people are afraid that you might change your mind. But I am here, and I see that there are many religions and also people without religion, and still everyone is human. It is their choice and something between them and God. I simply treat them as human beings. I am curious about other religions, other cultures, and other societies. I really like discovering new things. In my paintings I also try to show that a human being is a human being is everywhere, even if they have a different religion, different opinions, or different ideas.

In the Quran, there is even a verse that says that God created different communities so that they could get to know each other. This is part of our religion. That is why I do not understand why sometimes people turn life into something like a prison, where you are not allowed to learn about others. If you truly love your religion and understand it, you do not need to be afraid of other people.



**Question:** You also created a painting connected with Białystok. Can you tell us about it?

**Esta:** This is one of my favorite paintings. It is about women, especially women in societies where they do not have rights. In the painting, there is a woman who has traveled very far. She carries a lamp that lights her path. But the lamp does not only light the road; it has been with her all her life because her life was like darkness. In the painting, you see a dark sky. It symbolizes that she lived in a world without light and without freedom. It is like someone locked you in a dark room and did not allow you to find the light. Because if you find the light, you can open the window and escape. But when the woman arrives in Białystok, which in the painting is shown as a gate to Poland, she leaves the lamp behind her. She does not need it anymore. The sky above Białystok is bright; there is green, and there is a lot of light. This means that the woman is finally safe. She has a voice. She has freedom. She has rights. Even if she does not know yet what will happen in the future, she knows that this society will not hurt a woman. That is the story of this painting.

**Question:** What does the process of creating your paintings look like?

**Esta:** I like telling stories through painting. It is not like I see something beautiful in nature and simply paint it. Of course I love nature, but in my paintings the most important things are my thoughts and my ideas.

**Question:** You said you have had a good experiences with people in Poland. Was there something that surprised you in a positive or negative way?

**Esta:** There are many beautiful things. One of them is the law and the way people treat each other. I often take the bus, and I see how people treat older people: how they give them their seats and show respect. In shops, on the street, and in the kindergarten when I pick up my daughter, everywhere I see respect. Even if you speak English, people try to help. They do not just say, "I don't speak English." Even if they do not know the language well, they try to explain something; they use gestures; they try to help. No one runs away from you or is afraid. People are very kind.

Sometimes I read on social media that Polish people are racist. I think this is not true. I think that sometimes people may be afraid that many people will come and something will change in their country, and they have the right to have such concerns. But that does not mean they are racist. I have not seen that. I have been in Białystok and in Warsaw, and everywhere people were kind: drivers, shop assistants, women, and men in shops. No one said anything bad to me. That is why I think many of these things exist only on social media.

**Question:** You are also learning Polish. What is your favorite word? And which one was the most difficult?

**Esta:** Polish is very difficult for me, but I really like learning languages. Our teacher is very nice, and she doesn't speak English, which is actually very good. She explains with gestures and facial expressions and speaks slowly. Because of that, I can understand her; maybe not everything, but even when I do not understand something, she repeats it in other words, and then I understand.

On the street it is harder because people speak "szybko, szybko" (fast, fast). But I try my best! My favorite word is "ładne" (beautiful).

**Question:** And the most difficult one?

**Esta:** At the beginning the most difficult word was "przepraszam" (I'm sorry). It was very difficult.

### 3.2.4 Polish Language Classes



Lack of language proficiency is **one of the most significant barriers to independence** for people with refugee backgrounds. Without the ability to communicate effectively, it is difficult to find employment or pursue education, as well as to fully access healthcare services and support from public institutions. For non-Slavic language speakers, often with limited formal education, learning Polish can be particularly challenging. At the same time, the language courses offered within the formal system still largely cater to the needs of people from Slavic-speaking countries, such as Ukraine or Belarus. An additional difficulty is the lack of widely available, free, and long-term language courses tailored to non-Slavic speakers, which means that the responsibility for filling this gap often falls on civil society organizations.

Since December 2024, we have been organizing Polish language classes for individuals who crossed the Polish-Belarusian border. The classes are held twice a week and last one and a half hours each. In 2025, a total of **45 people** participated in our Polish language courses, originating from countries such as Syria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Iran, Cuba, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, Mali, Guinea, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We created **three groups**, including one dedicated to mothers with young children staying in the open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok. In response to their needs, we conducted the course directly at the centre, and volunteers provided childcare during the classes. We recognize that for parents, **learning the language is not only an investment in their own future but also**, and often most importantly, **in the future of their children**. The ability to speak Polish is not only about finding better employment or making Polish-speaking friends. It also enables parents to help their children with homework, check school notebooks, and understand school documents.

Classes were conducted in small groups, with the level and pace adapted to the participants' language skills and life situations. We focused on the **practical use of the language when interacting** with public offices, at work, during medical visits, and in everyday social interactions.

We observed clear progress among participants. With each passing week, they expanded their vocabulary, gained greater confidence in communication, and became more self-assured. The classes were not only a space for learning but also an **opportunity to build relationships and foster mutual support**. It is also worth noting that for many participants, the course was particularly important for formal reasons: individuals enrolled in the Individual Integration Programme (IPI) are required to attend a Polish language course as one of the programme's conditions. The Municipal Family Assistance Centre (MOPR) repeatedly approached us with requests to create such a programme, as there were very few accessible courses for this group in Białystok. Most available options consisted of individual lessons, which were often very expensive.

### 3.2.5 Foster Care

One of the additional integration support activities our organization undertook in 2025 was organizing psychosocial support workshops for children living in six foster care facilities in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The project ran from early April to mid-November with the support of Save the Children Poland. Our activities were initially intended primarily for children with refugee backgrounds living in these facilities. However, due to their small number, during the course of the project the support was provided mainly to Polish children living in foster care.

The project addressed the lack of structured psychosocial support in foster care facilities, where staff often face heavy workloads, limited resources, and frequent staff turnover. Many children enter these institutions with past trauma. In conversations with caregivers, we repeatedly heard about challenges such as low self-esteem, difficulties in emotional regulation, conflicts among peers, a lack of constructive ways of spending free time, and limited access to supportive and child-friendly spaces. Our activities were designed to create a safe, participatory, and empowering environment where children could develop emotional awareness, communication skills, self-confidence, and psychological resilience. During the implementation of the project, only one facility hosted children with refugee experience: two boys from **Mali and Sudan**.





### Children with Refugee Backgrounds

Two children with refugee backgrounds participated in the workshops, both staying in a facility in Białystok. Their needs particularly included:

- ▶ stable and trust-based relationships with adults,
- ▶ inclusive activities strengthening their sense of belonging and security,
- ▶ support in coping with uncertainty regarding their legal status,
- ▶ language support, including interpretation from French and Arabic.

The boys were fully included in all workshop activities, and the sessions were adapted to ensure they understood the content and felt emotionally comfortable. One of the boys, from Sudan, later left the facility and departed from Poland. After some time he contacted us and sent a message reflecting on his participation in the workshops and the support he received.



*Dear Egala Team,*

*I hope you are all doing well.*

*I wanted to write to let you know that I am now safe and in a calmer place. After some time I left Poland because I often felt like a stranger there, and the looks I received from people in the street caused me pain. I am a very sensitive person, and it affects me deeply, especially when I encounter lack of acceptance or prejudice.*

*During that difficult period, you were a light of hope for me. You always treated me with respect and kindness, helping me without hesitation — and I will never forget that.*

*You are truly wonderful people, with big hearts, doing beautiful humanitarian work that makes the lives of many people better. Now I am in a safer place and feel more at peace, but I will always remember you with gratitude.*

*You are like angels — full of kindness and empathy. I wish you to continue your beautiful mission with the same love and dedication. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

*I will never forget you.  
With respect and gratitude,  
A.*

### 3.3 Advocacy and Communication

We actively participated in advocacy, consultation, and communication activities at both national and international levels.

In March 2025, as part of consultations on the draft regulation by the Minister of the Interior and Administration, we submitted a position paper, like many other organizations, **regarding the extension of the restricted access zone at the Polish-Belarusian border**. However, these efforts did not bring results, and the zone has been extended several times since then.

During the same period, we actively engaged in the **legislative process concerning the bill on suspending the right to apply for international protection**. We spoke during meetings of parliamentary and Senate committees, prepared materials for senators supporting the initiative, and provided commentary in the media. The legislative process concluded on 26 March 2025, when the law was signed by the President of the Republic of Poland.

Together with Oxfam, we published a report on the situation at the border entitled *Brutal Barriers: Pushbacks, Violence and the Violation of Human Rights on the Poland-Belarus Border*. The report was presented during an event at the European Parliament, organized by Members of the European Parliament Cecilia Strada and Tineke Strik, as well as during meetings with representatives of the European External Action Service, DG HOME, and DG JUST. In the following months, together with Oxfam representatives, we participated in further meetings with the media and European institutions.

We also **took part in numerous events and meetings** where we presented the current situation at the Polish-Belarusian border, including during the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference (OSCE), at the Embassy of Switzerland, at the More in Common think tank, at the Stefan Batory Foundation, and during a meeting with the Director for Emergency Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We also presented our organization's work at an international meeting of the Paradigm network of charitable organizations. Additionally, we organized a two-day visit to the Podlasie region for representatives of the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation. We maintain regular contact with partners across Europe, including the Netherlands Refugee Foundation and the Leave No One Behind initiative, as well as with journalists, providing them with up-to-date information from the border.

We are active members of the **Migration NGO Network (Sieć NGO Migracje)**, whose aim is to coordinate advocacy activities in the field of migration. As part of this cooperation, we participated in expert meetings and, together with other organizations, prepared and disseminated joint letters and appeals, including those addressing growing xenophobia in Poland.

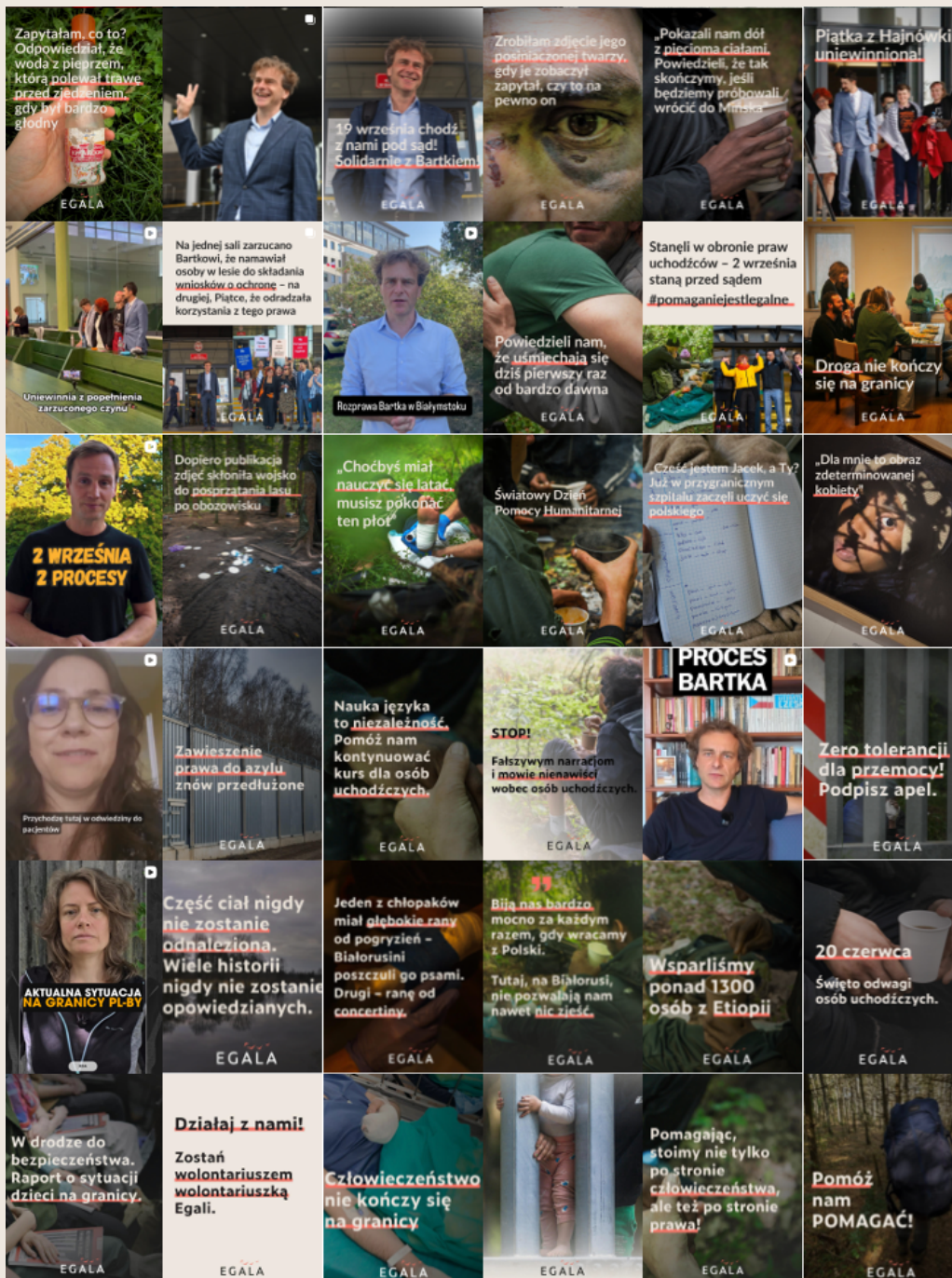
We also joined the **long-term advocacy training programme "Pogotowie Rzecznicze"**, organized by the Shipyard Foundation (Fundacja Stocznia). The course will continue until mid-2026 and aims to strengthen our competencies in influencing public policies. Egala is participating in the programme with a three-person team.

We are also involved in the **communications activities of the Grupa Granica coalition**, co-managing, among other things, its social media channels.

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At the same time, we manage communications for the Egala Association, preparing content for social media, maintaining relationships with national and international journalists, and facilitating contacts between the media and individuals engaged in humanitarian work in the field. In 2025, coverage of our work was published in outlets such as *The New Yorker*, *Le Figaro*, *The Guardian*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Al Jazeera*, *Euronews*, *Die Zeit*, *Le Monde*, *CNN London*, *Publico*, *Tagebuch* and *Forced Migration Review*.

We conduct our communications primarily through social media and through a newsletter. Our regular posts reach more than 5,000 followers on Facebook and 2,500 on Instagram. We focus on providing reliable, fact-based information about migrants and refugees, their countries of origin, the reasons for migration, and the realities of life in Poland. This is particularly important in the current context of growing disinformation and increasingly negative narratives about refugees.



# 4. Strategic and Operational Partnerships

In 2025, as in previous years, we cooperated with numerous partners, which can be divided into six categories.

## 1. Organizations involved in providing humanitarian assistance

- ▶ **Grupa Granica (GG)** – an informal coalition of non-governmental organizations and civic initiatives established in August 2021 to coordinate humanitarian assistance for people affected by the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. Within GG, we maintain close cooperation with many of its member organizations while also being an active part of the coalition. Our main partners within the group are the We Are Monitoring Association (WAM) and the Catholic Intelligentsia Club (KIK).
- ▶ **Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)** – since the beginning of 2025, thanks to PAH's support, we have been able to maintain the main border warehouse, ensuring access to essential supplies used during field interventions for all organizations and individuals working at the border.

## 2. Institutions with which we cooperate in our casework

- ▶ **Hospital in Hajnówka** – as part of our long-standing cooperation with the hospital, our caseworkers operate there as volunteers, supporting patients arriving from the border area. We work closely with the medical staff, respecting the facility's rules, adhering to ethical standards, and ensuring equal rights for all patients. Our caseworkers have signed **volunteer agreements**, which allow them to provide support to hospitalized individuals, including assistance with communication and organizing further support after discharge.
- ▶ **Open reception centre for foreigners in Białystok (Zajazd "Budowlani")** – we maintain regular cooperation with the centre and stay in contact with its residents, organizing weekly office hours and providing various forms of support.
- ▶ **Open reception centres for foreigners in Dębak, Biała Podlaska, and Linin** – additional centres with which we maintain regular contact with the administration.

## 3. Public institutions

- ▶ **Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman)** – we work with the Ombudsman's Office in individual cases concerning people with migration and refugee backgrounds. The Office has the authority to inspect places where foreigners may be held and to intervene in cases of violations of the rights of people on the move, including pushbacks.

## 4. Organizations we refer individuals to for specialized support

- ▶ **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** – in 2025, as in previous years, MSF ensured the presence of medical personnel during field interventions, enabling the provision of immediate medical assistance to individuals requiring urgent care.
- ▶ **Association for Legal Intervention (SIP)** – the association's lawyers were available for ongoing cases, providing training for our team and organizing regular meetings where we could discuss complex cases and consult on issues related to new regulations and legal practice.
- ▶ **Mova Association** – we cooperated in providing language support for migrants and refugees through the organization of interpreting services.

- ▶ **Dialog Foundation** – provided temporary shelter for migrants and refugees in particularly difficult situations who required urgent access to safe accommodation.
- ▶ **European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL)** – lawyers from this organization provided legal assistance to patients hospitalized in Hajnówka Hospital, representing the majority of patients requiring legal support.
- ▶ **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights** – provided legal assistance to patients in Hajnówka hospital.
- ▶ **Polish Medical Mission (PMM)** – through our cooperation with PMM, we were able to finance the purchase of prescription medications, equip field bases with medicines and medical supplies, cover the costs of dental treatment, and support individuals staying in reception centres by purchasing essential medical and hygiene products, including supplements for pregnant women and products supporting the treatment of infections and skin conditions.
- ▶ **Polish Red Cross – Podlaskie Branch (PCK)** – supported us with regular deliveries of mineral water distributed to migrants and refugees receiving our assistance.
- ▶ **Caritas of the Archdiocese of Białystok** – we referred migrants and refugees to this organization for material assistance.

### 5. Cooperation within the non-governmental sector

- ▶ **Fundacja Stocznia** – we are participating in the long-term mentoring and training programme on advocacy and public policy entitled “Advocacy Emergency Support (Pogotowie Rzecznicze)”.
- ▶ **NGO Migracje** – we are involved in this coalition, which focuses on joint advocacy activities in the field of migration; the network’s secretariat is run by the Catholic Intelligentsia Club in Warsaw.
- ▶ **Amnesty International** – together with other organizations, we cooperate on a public awareness campaign related to migration.

### 6. Organizational and institutional support

- ▶ **Support Centre for Non-Governmental Organizations (OWOP)** – provided us with advisory and administrative support, assisting our organization in areas related to organizational development and operational stability.

Our activities were also made possible thanks to the dedication of a large **group of volunteers**, who supported the functioning of the field base and traveled from different parts of Poland and from abroad to participate in field operations. Without their support, we would not have been able to provide assistance on such a scale to people stranded in the forest.

Equally important to our work was the support of individual volunteers, who assisted with our casework, particularly by providing interpretation and facilitating communication between migrants and refugees and public institutions or support organizations. In certain cases, volunteers also provided logistical support, including assistance with transportation from detention facilities to reception centres. The involvement of volunteers who provided childcare during Polish language classes for mothers was also invaluable. The commitment of all volunteers supporting our activities in various areas was essential and enabled us to ensure continuous assistance for the people we serve.

# 5. Organisational Development

## Changes in the Board

The year 2025 brought significant changes to the composition of our Association's management board. At the beginning of the year, a new member joined the board, replacing two members who had resigned from their positions. In April, the board expanded to include two additional members, significantly strengthening our team at the strategic level.

In November, the Association saw a leadership transition as the term of our first president and co-founder came to an end. Although these board transitions throughout 2025 were organizationally and emotionally demanding, they concluded successfully and ultimately strengthened the organization.

Currently, our board consists of a cohesive and committed team, combining the experience of individuals who previously worked within Egala in various areas (casework, field operations, administration) with new energy and readiness to further develop the organization so that we can continue responding to the needs of the people we support.

## Fundraising and Financial Situation

In 2025, we experienced several changes in the position of fundraising coordinator. After a period of staff turnover, a new fundraiser took over the role in October, bringing stability to this area. Her work focuses on securing funding from public institutions, maintaining relationships with existing international donors, and developing new funding sources, including cooperation with corporate foundations and strengthening individual donor support.

With the support of one of our donors, we also began the process of developing a **fundraising strategy**, which will allow us to structure our fundraising activities and define financial goals for the next 2 to 3 years.

By the end of 2025, **the team carrying out the Association's activities consisted of 21 paid team members**, although some individuals performed more than one role. Maintaining a team of this size was a significant achievement in the context of financial uncertainty and the withdrawal of some international donors from funding activities in Poland.

## Support for the Team

Due to the high emotional burden associated with humanitarian and casework activities, we continued to provide **psychological support for our staff and volunteers**. Until the end of June 2025, this was possible thanks to the support of the Stefan Batory Foundation. Starting in July, due to limited funding, we were forced to reduce this support to crisis intervention, provided in cases of acute need. We also organized team supervision sessions several times during the year.

## Changes to the Location of the Field Base

An important operational challenge in 2025 involved relocating our field base. By the end of January, we had to leave our previous location due to high maintenance costs. After several months of operating in a new place, we had to relocate again in April, which created a significant logistical and organizational burden.

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Since June, we have been operating from a new location generously provided by the Catholic Intelligentsia Club (KIK). This solution significantly stabilized our infrastructure situation and enabled us to operate the base in a more secure and predictable manner. Sharing the space also allows us to reduce operational costs and improves day-to-day operational cooperation. The new base facilitates faster deployment for field operations, is well connected, and has lower maintenance costs, strengthening the stability of our activities in the longer term.

### Capacity Strengthening

In 2025, important institutional support came from our partnership with Save the Children Poland, which, despite ending its operations in Poland at the end of the year, significantly contributed to strengthening our structures and capabilities.

Through this partnership, we developed our work in the areas of safeguarding, MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning), risk management, theory of change, fundraising, and communications. We also received support in developing our fundraising strategy and participated in a series of training sessions and webinars that contributed to the further professionalization and stabilization of our organization.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Catholic Intelligentsia Club and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), we organized training sessions for volunteers and field staff. These sessions enabled participants to acquire or refresh the knowledge and skills necessary to provide safe and effective humanitarian assistance.

### Priorities for 2026

In 2026 and the following years, we aim to maintain the broadest possible scope of activities while adapting to limited funding. At the same time, whenever possible, we plan to further develop our casework activities, responding to the growing needs in this area and building on the experience gained in 2025.

An important element in strengthening our team's stability will also be maintaining regular psychological support and supervision for staff and volunteers, which are essential for work involving high levels of stress and responsibility.

We will continue striving to maintain high ethical and humanitarian standards and to strengthen our organization so that we can effectively respond to the needs of people with migration and refugee backgrounds while providing stable working conditions for those delivering humanitarian assistance.

## 6. Donors and Financial Support

Our activities would not be possible without the support of our **trusted donors**. Their financial contributions, operational cooperation, and expertise strengthened our capacity to provide humanitarian assistance, casework support, and advocacy for migrants and refugees.

In 2025, we received support from: Stefan Batory Foundation, Choose Love, Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR), Humanity Now, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Oxfam, Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH), the Totalizator Sportowy Foundation, Polish Medical Mission (PMM), the Presbyterian Church, Store Without Borders, Stichting Vluchteling, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes (TDH), United4Rescue (U4R), and Leave No One Behind.

Additionally, we received **support from individual donors**, which remains invaluable to our work. Individual contributions reflected the solidarity of many people who believed in our mission and strengthened our capacity to continue our humanitarian work.

Individual support was raised through two main channels: **crowdfunding** (two campaigns on the zrzutka.pl platform, one dedicated to financing Polish language classes and another supporting the organization's statutory activities) and **direct donations** made through our website. This allowed us to respond flexibly to emerging needs and ensure the continuity of key activities, including educational and emergency interventions.

A particularly important contribution to the fundraising campaign for Polish language classes came from an initiative by influencer Zwierz Popkulturalny (Kasia Czajka-Kominiarczuk), who donated all proceeds from the sale of her e-book *Racice Namiętności (Hooves of Passion)* to support our language classes and the activities of Grupa Granica. This initiative significantly contributed to raising funds that allowed us to continue **offering language classes for the following months**.

In parallel, we organized a **fundraising campaign** connected to our general donation drive based on **artistic workshops**. Together with people with refugee backgrounds, including participants from Iraq, Iran, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan, and with the involvement of our caseworker and Polish artist Bobuk, we created **seven artworks**, inspired by symbols important in the traditions and personal stories of the participants. Four original pieces and their printed copies were offered to donors in exchange for a specified donation amount to the campaign. This initiative was made possible thanks to the support of the Dutch Council for Refugees, and the funds raised will strengthen our statutory activities in 2026.



Another important form of support was **material assistance**. We received donations from individual supporters, including bicycles, orthopedic equipment, and hygiene products. In each case, we ensured that the donated items were distributed to the people who needed them most, based on an ongoing assessment of the situation and individual needs.





## Let's stay in touch!

Egala Team

 [kontakt@egala.org.pl](mailto:kontakt@egala.org.pl)

 [www.egala.org.pl](http://www.egala.org.pl)

 [stowarzyszenieegala](https://www.facebook.com/stowarzyszenieegala)

 [stowarzyszenie\\_egala](https://www.instagram.com/stowarzyszenie_egala)