

EU-Belarus border: wake-up call for EU humane asylum policy

EPSU Executive Committee Emergency Statement, 24-25 November 2021

The EPSU Executive Committee is deeply concerned by the violence occurring on the EU Poland-Belarus border. Thousands of people fleeing war and violence are stranded in the icy cold. At least 12 people are reported to have died, including a one-year-old child.

We reiterate our condemnation of Belarussian regime¹ and remain united in solidarity with independent trade unions and human rights organisations in Belarus.

The despicable use of displaced people as pawns to serve geopolitical agendas risks becoming a pattern, as recently seen on the Greek-Turkish and Moroccan-Spanish borders.

These situations are only possible because the EU is ready to pay any price to keep asylum-seekers away from its territory, including outsourcing its border security to repressive regimes such as Turkey or Libya.

The lack of an EU human rights and solidarity-based asylum policy coupled with state-sponsored brutality against asylum-seekers has become the EU's weakest point – a flaw which authoritarian regimes can exploit.

Irrespective of the specific geopolitics of Belarus and its allies, the immediate response must be humanitarian to end human suffering and violations of human rights, including the right to seek asylum.

We call upon the Polish government to stop the escalation of violence against people trying to reach the EU, to allow human rights groups and journalists to access the border region as called for by Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and to not resort to violence against refugees, which is also putting at risk the safety of border guards.

We urge the Polish government to provide newcomers with international protection, while an EU safe humanitarian corridor should be put in place as a matter of urgency.

We pay tribute to citizens who provide shelter and food to asylum-seekers.

We remind our members involved in security forces that, by EU law, they can withdraw labour in case of an imminent and grave danger for their life. These forces must stand firm against violence against people who only seek a better life.

The policy of containment, illegal pushbacks and dehumanisation of refugees creates xenophobia, racism and a false sense of urgency and danger.

We urge the Commission, in its response scheduled for 24 November, to consider the EU-Belarus border as a wake-up call for EU solidarity based on common decent reception conditions and fair repartition of asylum-seekers across EU member states.

This is the only way to provide stability and predictability and to allow for more investment in rescue, reception and asylum public services, areas where our members have long reported difficult working conditions.

The situation in Poland shows that asylum cannot be left to individual Member States bordering third countries. This is a European matter which requires European solutions made in close cooperation with local authorities, citizens, migrant support groups and trade unions.

We call upon our affiliates across the European continent, in the framework of the EPSU EUcare network, to step up their efforts and campaign for a humane, solidarity-based migration and asylum.

More information on EPSU demands for a humane asylum policy see [here](#)

ETUC statement on Belarus-EU border, adopted by the Steering Committee, 23/11/21, available [here](#).

Speech by Council of Europe Commissioner for human rights, Dunja Mijatović, 19/11/21, following a 4-day mission in Poland, see [here](#)

ⁱ <https://www.epsu.org/article/belarus-rigged-elections-police-violence-and-thousands-detained>