

Refugee crisis on Belarus-Poland Border - International Relations This Week

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the Refugee crisis on the Belarus-Poland Border and related developments.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/K-v1P2y8hAs>

Belarus-Poland Border Explained

What is the Crisis at the Belarus-Poland Border?

- The number of migrants illegally entering Poland from Belarus is increasing, resulting in increased tensions at the Belarus-Poland border.
- The migrants, who are largely from West Asia, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, have attempted multiple times to enter Poland.
- Authorities in Belarus are accused of worsening the problem by diverting thousands of migrants to the country's Polish border.
- Migrants crossing the border are not allowed to enter Belarus or Poland.
- Since then, the situation on the border has been tight and, in terms of humanitarian aid, has become progressively grim.

Belarus-Poland Border Map



The Economist

Source: The Economist

How has the crisis escalated?

- Desperate migrants, mostly from the Middle East and Asia, have battled the final obstacle to reach their end goal - the EU – the issue has worsened.
- Migrants are being sent to the Polish border, where they have attempted to pass through, due to Belarusian officials preventing the flow of migrants back into the nation.
- Poland has refused to allow them to enter the country and has declared a state of emergency around its border.
- Because the external border of the [European Union \(EU\)](#) is the sole line of defense against unwelcome migrants, Poland utilized water cannons and tear gas to fend off the asylum seekers.

- Poland bolstered the border guards with riot police and other personnel.
- This issue, as well as the escalation of rhetoric between the EU, Poland, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, serves portions of all of these entities' international and domestic objectives.

What is the background to the crisis?

- Following the 2020 election, which delivered autocratic President Alexander Lukashenko a sixth term in office, Belarus was shaken by months of intense demonstrations.
- The Belarusian government's actions appear to be revenge for international economic sanctions enacted in reaction to Lukashenko's increasingly dictatorial reign.
- The United States and the European Union refused to recognise Lukashenko's presidential legitimacy and implemented a series of measures, including asset freezes and travel bans, on Belarusian leaders.
- Belarus' actions were dubbed "air piracy" by the EU, which prevented Belarusian airlines from flying over its territory and curtailed imports of the country's major commodities, such as petroleum products and potash.
- In return for the sanctions, the EU accused Lukashenko of exploiting migrants as pawns in a "hybrid campaign" against the EU.
- Lukashenko, enraged, retaliated by stating that he would no longer comply with an agreement to stop illegal migration, claiming that EU sanctions had deprived his administration of funding required to control migrant flows.

Migrant:

"Migrant" refers to the overall temporary population at the border, regardless of how it is divided into refugees, economic migrants, and others.



Refugees:

Refugees are defined as those who have a reasonable fear of violence or persecution and are entitled to asylum under international agreements.

What are the different aspects responsible for escalating the crisis?

- **Role of European Union (EU)**
 - The migrant crisis that has erupted at the EU-Belarus border has left hundreds of people trapped in the cold and unable to enter the EU.

- The EU has expressed its strong support for Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Officials from the EU are scheduled to discuss more penalties on Belarus, as well as the idea of supporting "physical infrastructure" such as border walls or fences.
 - Belarus has been accused by the EU of "weaponizing" migrants by enticing them from the Middle East and dumping them at EU frontiers in retaliation for targeted EU sanctions.
- **Role of Russia**
 - Belarus has received substantial backing from its biggest ally, Russia, which has provided funds and political assistance to the government.
 - Russia has challenged the EU to provide Belarus with financial support to deal with the inflow.
 - At the same time, Russia dismissed Poland's assertion that Russia is to blame for the conflict.
 - In the hopes of repairing relations with Germany and other EU countries, Russia may act as a mediator.
- **Role of the US:**
 - The US refused to acknowledge Lukashenko's presidential legitimacy. Asset freezes and travel restrictions were enforced by the United States on Belarusian authorities.
 - The US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Western-backed Arab Spring protests in the Middle East and North Africa, have resulted in migrant flows.
- **Response of Ukraine:**
 - Tensions in Ukraine have also been rising. The Ukrainian army has been accused of utilizing Turkish-made drones against Russian-backed rebels in Donbas.
 - In addition, Viktor Medvedchuk, Putin's man in Ukraine, is facing legal action, as is his media empire, which has been accused of pushing Russian propaganda.
- **Other Countries' Responses:**
 - Citizens of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have been barred from flying to Belarus by Turkish officials.
 - Flights to the nation have also been halted by Iraqi airlines and Syria's Cham Wings Airlines. Flights to Belarus have also been halted in the United Arab Emirates.
 - Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, the three EU nations bordering Belarus, have beefed up their border patrols and announced plans to construct a wall.
- **NATO-Belarus-Russia**
 - Belarus is Russia's closest ally, and it is formally a member of the Union of Russia and Belarus.
 - The boundary between Belarus and Poland, as well as the two Baltic nations, is basically Russia's external border, isolating its security zone from NATO's.
 - As a result, any confrontation along this border becomes a conflict between Russia and [NATO](https://byjus.com).
- **Geopolitical Aspect of the Crisis:**

- Geopolitics has long provided a cover for Poland and other Eastern European governments to get away with violating democratic procedures and human rights.
- Russia's dictatorship is a hideous illustration of the far-right authoritarian movement that is consuming the whole East European area, free of the rule of law restraints that come with EU membership.

Concerns associated with Belarus-Poland Border Crisis:

1. **Manufactured Emergency between Belarus and EU:** The crisis appears to have been staged by Belarus' dictatorial leadership in order to wreak havoc on the European Union. The European Union retaliated by imposing penalties on Belarus, which is not a member of the bloc.
2. **Playing into European politics:** In Europe, migrant politics is so unpredictable that even a small group may spark conflict. Non-European immigration has long been viewed as a danger to the culture and sovereignty of several EU countries. It has sent tens of thousands of troops to keep refugees out, describing the situation as an invasion by Belarus.
3. **Migrants, but not necessarily refugees:** Many of the Middle Easterners in Belarus appear to be economic migrants rather than refugees. Migrants have reportedly been abused by Polish and Lithuanian police, who have forced them back into Belarus. The migrants are now caught in the middle of a possibly deadly international conflict.

Implications of Belarus-Poland Border Crisis on India:

- With a long history of movement to, from, and within its boundaries, India stands at the crossroads of South Asia.
- During the 20th century, the country saw large-scale forced migration as people fled conflict prior to, during, and after partition with its South Asian neighbours.
- India, on the other hand, does not have domestic asylum legislation and is not a party to the [1951 Refugee Convention](#).
- Due to a lack of access to many government-issued documents, humanitarian migrants are frequently excluded from formal socioeconomic inclusion mechanisms.
- The government manages asylum applicants from neighbouring nations, mostly Tibetans and Sri Lankans.
- Those arriving from all non-neighbouring countries, as well as Myanmar, which shares an eastern border with India, must report to [UNHCR](#) for refugee status assessment and accompanying paperwork.
- A major incident like the Belarus-Poland Border crisis might teach policymakers in India valuable lessons.
- A clear government strategy from the start would have been beneficial. Internal migrant workers and asylum seekers were particularly hard hit by the economic downturn, as they are frequently paid on a daily or weekly basis and may switch jobs frequently.

Way Forward

The EU should stop its blind declarations of solidarity with Poland and put pressure on the government to work immediately on a humane solution for the people on the border. With the help of international organizations, there should be efforts to de-escalate the situation at the border. The rest is a matter of negotiation with the refugees' countries of origin and transit countries as well as Russia and Belarus.

