

FREE LEGAL OFFICE FOR THE RIGHTS OF FOREIGN CITIZENS AND STATELESS PERSONS

**Annual Report
for 2024**

Human Constanta is a Belarusian human rights organization.

We work with human rights in three main areas:

- protection of the rights of foreign citizens and stateless persons
- promoting anti-discrimination and non-formal human rights education
- digital freedoms and rights

Our mission

Promoting public interests and joint actions in response to modern challenges in the field of human rights in Belarus

What are we doing?

- We help others protect their rights;
- We compare Belarusian laws and practices with the best foreign examples and human rights standards;
- We pass on this knowledge through educational events

We believe in human rights and love what we do!

Support our work!

Your donation will help us continue this work and support those who need it

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In 2017, Human Constanta launched a free legal office to support and defend the rights of foreign nationals and stateless persons in Belarus. In 2021, like many other civil society organizations in Belarus, Human Constanta was subjected to unjust persecution and forced liquidation, which significantly hampered its human rights and humanitarian efforts inside the country. The physical offices in Minsk and Brest were closed, and in-person consultations were suspended. The team had to develop new approaches and tools to continue advising foreigners and stateless individuals on rights protection in Belarus, and to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the border between Belarus and the European Union (EU), which began in the summer of 2021 and remains unresolved as of the time of this report.

This report provides an overview of the office’s activities, outlines the nature of the inquiries received, and describes the legislative and enforcement-related challenges encountered in Belarus throughout 2024.

Key Findings

In 2024, the Human Constanta free legal office provided legal assistance to 254 individuals from 45 countries. The highest number of inquiries came from citizens of Russia and Ukraine.

The reasons for seeking assistance varied depending on the country of origin. Inquiries from Ukrainian nationals were mainly driven by the ongoing armed conflict, which continues to force people to flee their country. At the same time, inquiries from Russian nationals were largely influenced by the lack of border controls along the land border with Belarus and the simplified conditions for their stay.

The issues raised covered a wide range of topics — from the consequences of the war in Ukraine to the effects of the humanitarian crisis in Belarus and at its border with the EU, which began in 2021. These developments continue to have a significant impact on migration dynamics in the region. Compared to 2023, there was an increase in inquiries related to international protection procedures in both Poland and Belarus. The need for legal assistance in obtaining exit visas also grew.

Ukrainian nationals continued to face entry refusals into Belarus without any explanation. Despite the adoption of specialized legal provisions aimed at simplifying the legalization and employment procedures for Ukrainians, serious obstacles and systemic issues remain in practice. These are largely the result of legal uncertainty and the broad discretion granted to law enforcement and migration authorities at different stages of Ukrainians' residence in Belarus.

At the same time, enforcement practices demonstrate a readiness on the part of Belarusian authorities to ease formal requirements for foreigners seeking legal employment, especially in professions most in demand for the state.

Belarusian authorities have various mechanisms for identifying deceased foreign nationals and informing their families via interagency and international channels, including consular communication. However, the lack of publicly available information about the deceased and the high number of unresolved missing foreigners cases cast serious doubt on the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

Despite the existence of formal procedures, the actual response to reports of missing migrants remains inconsistent and heavily dependent on the specific agency or region involved.

Problems related to documentation and legal protection of children of migrant women who lack legal residence status in Belarus and/or identity documents remain pressing. These issues stem from insufficient cooperation between state bodies and diplomatic missions, as well as the predominance of punitive approaches over child rights protection.

Fear of detention effectively makes emergency medical care inaccessible for many irregular migrants.

The situation of certain nationals from African countries, who used student visas as a form of forced migration, requires special attention. In the absence of social support and with limited access to employment in Belarus, they often found themselves marginalized and, in many cases, were compelled to seek international protection outside Belarus.

In 2024, Belarus significantly simplified the employment procedure for foreign nationals and stateless persons. In particular, the list of professions exempt from work permit requirements was expanded, and all types of employment contracts with such professionals were allowed. These changes aimed to enhance flexibility and efficiency in recruiting foreign labor and to streamline the process for obtaining temporary residence. At the same time, employers were obliged to promptly notify migration authorities about hiring foreign nationals, thereby increasing control over migration flows.

General Information

In 2024, the Human Constanta free legal office received inquiries from 254 individuals from 45 countries. Some of the applicants (23 individuals) did not specify their nationality, so the actual geographic scope of the inquiries may be broader. Consultations were provided via phone, email, and the Legal Hub service.

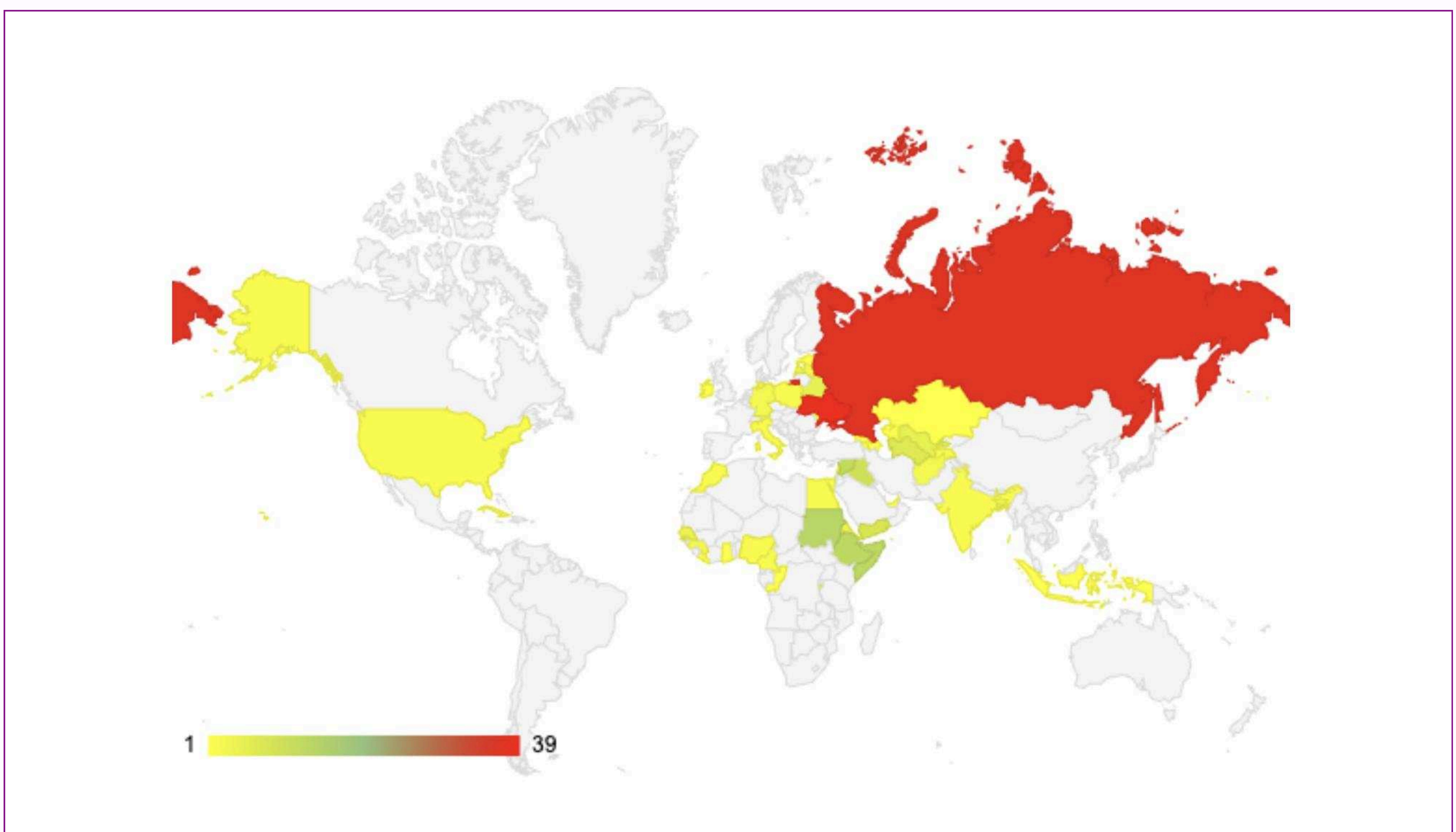
A significant number of inquiries in 2024 were related to procedures for obtaining protection in Belarus and Poland. We also continued to provide consultations on general issues concerning arrival and residence/stay in Belarus, as well as on topics related to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Belarus and at its borders with EU countries. These included assistance with locating deceased, missing, or detained foreign nationals, and issues concerning access to humanitarian and medical aid.

Countries of Origin of Applicants to the Fee Legal Office

In 2024, the largest number of inquiries came from nationals of Ukraine (39), the Russian Federation (37), Sudan (14), Ethiopia (13), and Somalia (13).

There were also frequent inquiries from citizens of Syria (12), Iraq (10), Yemen (8), Turkmenistan (7), Burundi (6), Belarus (5), and Uzbekistan (5).

Additional inquiries were received from nationals of the following countries and territories: Eritrea (4), Senegal (4), Latvia (3), Afghanistan (3), Germany (3), Azerbaijan (3), Guinea (3), Bangladesh (3), Cameroon (2), Italy (2), India (2), Morocco (2), Nigeria (2), Poland (2), Cuba (2), Egypt (2), Moldova (2), USA (2), Tajikistan (2), Kazakhstan (1), Lebanon (1), Liberia (1), Ghana (1), Congo (1), Georgia (1), Comoros (1), Ireland (1), UAE (1), Nagorno-Karabakh (1), Armenia (1), Indonesia (1), Estonia (1), Israel (1).



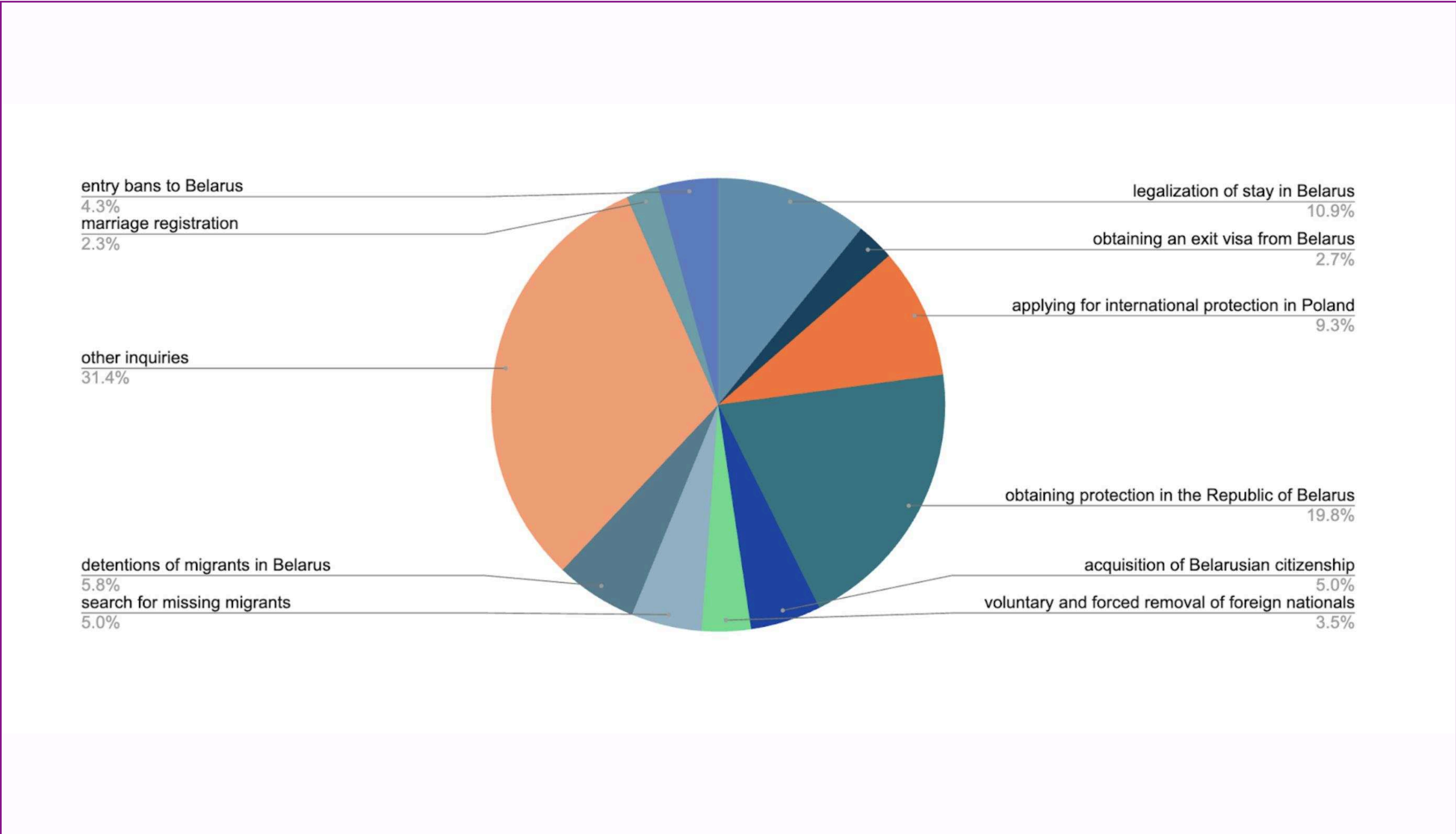
Topics of Inquiries

In 2024, the majority of inquiries received by the Human Constanta free legal office concerned the issues of obtaining protection in the Republic of Belarus (51 inquiries), as well as the process for applying for international protection in Poland (24 inquiries). Specifically, applicants sought information on how to submit asylum applications at the border and what steps to take if they crossed the border in violation of established procedures.

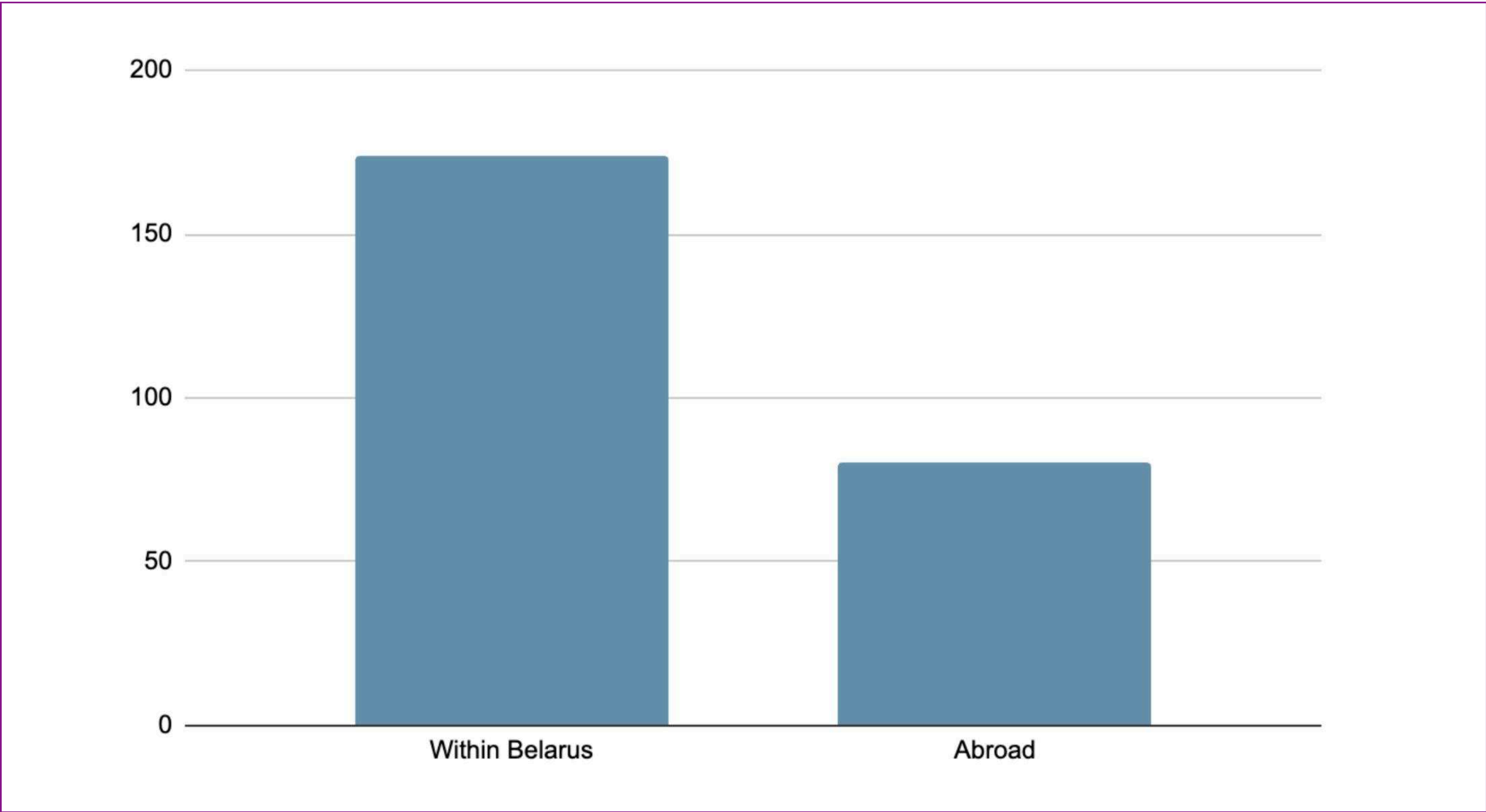
In addition, 7 inquiries related to the procedure for obtaining an exit visa from Belarus, which many migrants consider a safer mechanism to access official border crossing points between Belarus and EU countries in order to file asylum applications there.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis continued to generate requests related to the search for missing migrants at the Belarusian border (13 inquiries) and detentions of migrants in Belarus (15 inquiries). Seven individuals reached out seeking humanitarian aid.

In 2024, we also continued working on our "traditional" areas of focus, including: legalization of stay in Belarus (28 inquiries), acquisition of Belarusian citizenship (13 inquiries), appeals against entry bans to Belarus (11 inquiries), voluntary and forced removal of foreign nationals from Belarus (9 inquiries).



Applicants to the Free Legal Office: From Within Belarus and from Abroad



Communication Channels with the Free Legal Office

Since 2021, the free legal office has suspended in-person appointments for foreign nationals in its offices in Belarus. In 2024, the majority of people contacted us through various messaging apps, which allow for full consultations and secure document exchange.

- **Messaging apps: 143 inquiries**
- **Online platform LegalHub: 98 inquiries**
- **Email: 13 inquiries**



Legislative Changes in Belarus in 2024 in the Field of the Foreign Nationals' Rights

Migration Policy Concept for 2024–2028

In January 2024, Belarus approved the Migration Policy Concept for 2024–2028, which defines the strategic directions for work with foreign citizens. The document is a framework, setting out general goals and priorities in the regulation of migration into and from Belarus.

The Concept is focused on two main aspects: attracting foreign workers and reducing the emigration rate of Belarusian citizens. It emphasizes that migration processes are becoming a key factor in demographic and economic development, especially against the backdrop of natural population decline.

One of the main objectives of the Concept is to encourage the voluntary resettlement to Belarus of foreigners who share “close spiritual values,” possess high professional potential, and are willing to integrate into Belarusian society. To attract such migrants, the document provides for information campaigns, the creation of social infrastructure, and simplified procedures for obtaining residence and work permits.

Belarus also declares its intention to strengthen measures for the adaptation and integration of migrants: to develop temporary accommodation centers, expand access to education, employment, and social assistance, improve legal and informational support, and promote the values of Belarusian society among incoming foreigners.

Educational migration occupies an important place in the Concept. The authorities plan to increase the number of foreign students in Belarusian universities and vocational institutions. At the same time, employment conditions will be simplified for those who have received education in Belarus, with the aim of their further integration into the national labor market.

The Concept also addresses the situation of forced migrants — foreigners who apply for refugee status, subsidiary protection, or asylum in Belarus. The Republic of Belarus plans to improve the infrastructure for receiving such individuals and to ensure the realization of their rights in the areas of education, employment, and social protection. Measures are also planned to support the voluntary return of migrants to their countries of citizenship.

A more liberal employment regime will apply to foreign workers: the list of professions for which foreigners can be hired without special permits has been expanded, administrative procedures for obtaining temporary and permanent residence permits have been simplified, and migration electronic systems are being modernized.

Special attention is given to combating illegal migration. It is planned to strengthen migration control, including through the modernization of information systems for tracking foreigners and the mandatory fingerprint registration of certain categories of migrants. Belarus intends to cooperate with foreign states in developing joint programs to counter illegal migration and to conclude readmission agreements.

Thus, Belarus's migration policy for 2024–2028 is aimed at increasing the country's attractiveness for migrants and supporting their integration, while at the same time strengthening control over migration flows. These measures are intended to contribute to demographic growth and maintain socio-economic stability in the country. At the same time, the document acknowledges the issue of the outflow of Belarusian professionals abroad but lacks a full analysis of the causes of this phenomenon. It notes that “migration attitudes are largely related to the socio-economic situation in the Republic of Belarus and in neighboring and more distant countries.” However, it makes no mention of the steadily worsening political situation since 2020 and the growing repression against various professional groups.

Concrete implementation steps for the Concept were defined in a separate Program, approved by Resolution No. 115 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus dated April 22, 2024. The Program is a comprehensive action plan aimed at regulating migration processes, taking into account economic, social, and demographic factors. However, the emphasis is placed mainly on security and oversight, while issues of humanitarian support and integration remain secondary. The measures are presented formally, with vague language and no clear effectiveness indicators. International cooperation and work with the diaspora are mentioned in the document but are poorly elaborated.

Resolution of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus dated 19.12.2023 No. 52

As of August 1, 2024, significant changes came into force regarding the employment procedure for foreign nationals in Belarus:

- The list of professions and positions for which foreigners and stateless persons can be employed under a simplified procedure — without the need for a permit to hire foreign labor — has been expanded.
- All types of labor contracts can be concluded with such foreigners: open-ended, fixed-term, and contract-based.
- Based on the concluded employment contract, a foreigner has the right to apply for a temporary residence permit in Belarus.
- The employer is obligated to notify the citizenship and migration authorities in writing within 3 working days about the conclusion or termination of the employment contract with the foreigner; failure to comply entails administrative liability.

The simplified procedure applies to both manual labor occupations (drivers, concrete workers, cooks, bricklayers, seamstresses, electricians, etc.) and to white-collar positions (doctors of all specialties, engineers, nurses, agronomists, veterinarians, etc.).

Analysis of Inquiries

The analysis of inquiries received by the free legal office helps to identify systemic issues faced by foreign nationals and stateless persons in Belarus in 2024, as well as to trace trends shaped by the political situation in the country and the region — such as the ongoing humanitarian crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the persecution and repression of civil society actors in Belarus.

Humanitarian Crisis

The analysis of inquiries received by the Human Constanta free legal office in 2024 indicates the continued vulnerability of migrants who have found themselves in Belarus and at the border with the European Union in the context of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. These individuals still face limited access to basic rights and guarantees.

The most systemic problems identified through monitoring include: difficulties with official employment, limited or unsafe access to medical care, barriers to submitting applications for international protection, arbitrary deportation practices, and lack of reliable mechanisms for documenting children born to migrants. All these factors contribute to a high level of social, legal, and economic vulnerability for migrants and are further exacerbated by the absence of effective mechanisms for institutional support.

Particularly alarming is the increase in reports of deaths and disappearances of migrants in border areas, as well as the limited access to information and legal protection for those affected. In addition, the low level of trust in official channels for legal assistance increases the risks of exploitation and secondary victimization of migrants.

The violations of migrants' rights that we recorded are a direct consequence of the protracted humanitarian crisis within the country and at the EU border — a crisis marked by legal uncertainty, arbitrary actions by authorities, and the lack of stable mechanisms for protecting the rights of migrants.

University Students in Belarus

Since November 2024, the Human Constanta free legal office has been receiving inquiries from citizens of African countries — primarily Burundi, Cameroon, and Guinea — who arrived in Belarus on student visas. According to their statements, the purpose of entry was to pursue higher education. However, due to limited opportunities for official employment, they found themselves in economically and socially vulnerable situations, unable to pay for housing and tuition, and consequently fearing forced deportation from Belarus to their countries of origin.

In an effort to ensure their basic safety and means of subsistence, some of these students attempted to cross the EU border to apply for international protection. A similar approach is used by foreign students who had previously studied in the Russian Federation and are transiting through Belarus on their way to the EU. Some of the applicants emphasized that obtaining a student visa to Belarus was the only safe and accessible way for them to leave their country of origin.

Thus, for some citizens of African states, the student visa functioned not so much as a means of accessing education but rather as a form of forced migration. In the absence of social support and legal employment rights, this led to marginalization and a subsequent search for international protection outside Belarus.

These inquiries also highlight another issue — the involvement of private intermediaries in the process of recruiting foreign students to Belarus. Among those who contacted us were foreign nationals interested in arranging invitations to Belarus for international students. For example, a citizen of Yemen, enrolled in a regional university in Belarus, requested assistance in opening an office for a company that arranges such invitations. In another case, a woman contacted us on behalf of her husband, a citizen of Egypt, who helped recruit students abroad to sign contracts with Belarusian universities. One such student arrived in the country with the initial intention of crossing into the EU and did not pay tuition fees. Subsequently, representatives of the university and the company employing the intermediary demanded money from the student, threatening him with deportation and accusing him of theft.

Such practices create risks of exploitation, involvement in shadow schemes, and potential human trafficking — both for the students themselves and for the intermediaries.

• **Employment in Belarus**

A citizen of Yemen contacted the free legal office while residing in Belarus without legal grounds. He independently approached the migration authorities, requesting permission to stay in Belarus and declaring his intention to obtain official employment and integrate into Belarusian society. In response, he was issued a temporary residence permit, with the condition that he would secure employment within a specified period. Additionally, the Belarus Social Protection Fund provided him with a list of employers willing to hire foreign nationals and stateless persons without regard to restrictions aimed at protecting the domestic labor market — provided the employment was in specific high-demand professions.

Although the Yemeni citizen was ultimately unable to find a job, this case illustrates that Belarusian authorities, under certain circumstances, are prepared to ease requirements for foreign nationals who seek to legalize their stay through employment. This is particularly relevant for sectors experiencing labor shortages.

At the same time, no further similar inquiries were received by the free legal office, making it impossible to assess whether this practice is systemic or remains an exception.

• **Medical Assistance**

Emergency medical care in Belarus remains formally and in practice accessible to migrants who are in the country without legal grounds. However, in reality, the fear of being detained in medical facilities due to the presence of law enforcement officers discourages many from seeking help — even in situations that pose a threat to life and health.

In October 2024, a group of migrants from Sudan contacted us after being injured while attempting to cross the border with Poland. As a result of violent pushbacks by Polish border guards, they were forced to return to Minsk in extremely severe condition — with torn wounds from dog bites, fractures, frostbite, and fever after prolonged exposure to cold in the border area. Despite the urgent need for medical attention, they did not go to a hospital due to fear of possible detention, which further worsened their health and put their lives at risk.

Another case involved a foreign student from one of Belarus's higher education institutions. She sustained an injury while attempting to cross the EU border but was afraid to disclose the actual circumstances of her injury to the medical staff. The fear of possible consequences — expulsion from the university and, as a result, the loss of legal grounds to stay in Belarus — became a deterrent for her in seeking necessary help.

In practice, Human Constanta has not recorded cases of migrants being detained directly in medical facilities. Although police officers are indeed present in hospitals, their functions are generally not related to checking the migration status of patients. Nevertheless, the widespread fear among migrants of interacting with law enforcement has a chilling effect, even in critical situations.

It is important to note that receiving emergency medical care in Belarus also includes the issuance of prescriptions for necessary medications. Without a prescription, access to certain drugs is impossible, which makes seeking medical help in some cases the only way to preserve health and life.

• Exit Visas

In 2024, the practice of issuing exit visas for foreign nationals wishing to voluntarily leave the territory of Belarus became increasingly relevant. Generally, even in cases of violations of residence rules or irregular status, such visas are issued without major difficulties, provided that the state fee and fine are paid. In some cases, exit visas were issued repeatedly, including to those who had previously been detained.

Obtaining an exit visa allows transit refugees to apply for international protection directly at official border checkpoints, making this route a safer alternative to irregular border crossings, such as through forest areas or rivers.

However, the practice of allowing migrants to pass through the border varies depending on the checkpoint: for example, at the Brest crossing, migrants generally cross the border without obstacles, while at Kamenny Log, cases of detention have been recorded. If Lithuania, Latvia, or Poland refuse entry or deny the asylum request, the exit visa is annulled upon the migrant's return to Belarus.

Thus, the practice of issuing exit visas in 2024 demonstrates a relative flexibility of the Belarusian authorities toward migrants willing to leave the country, providing a safer pathway for seeking protection in the EU. However, inconsistencies in the application of this procedure across different border crossings remain a source of uncertainty and risk for migrants.

• **Missing and Deceased Migrants**

According to the State Border Committee of Belarus (GPK), in 2024, at least 16 migrants died near the Belarusian border with EU countries.

Belarusian authorities possess the necessary mechanisms for identifying deceased foreign nationals and informing their relatives through interagency and international channels, including consular communication. However, it is unknown whether these procedures are actually implemented in practice.

We also continue to receive requests regarding missing migrants, which we forward to the competent authorities of Belarus. For example, in an attempt to determine the possible whereabouts of a Syrian woman, we sent inquiries to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), GPK, and medical institutions in border regions. The responses stated that there was no information confirming her presence in those areas. Later, an officer from the Investigative Committee (IC) informed us that, based on the information available to him, the woman had died and was buried in Belarus, but he was unable to provide specific details about the time and place of burial.

In another case, we also contacted the Investigative Committee, the Department of Citizenship and Migration, and one of the regional police departments (UVD) requesting information on the whereabouts of a missing citizen of Afghanistan. The responses from the IC and the department were formal and did not address the substance of our inquiry. However, the regional UVD contacted us and requested additional information that might assist the search: with whom the person attempted to cross the border, where and with whom he had lived in Belarus, his Belarusian phone number, photo, and biometric data.

These cases demonstrate that, despite the existence of formal procedures, the actual response to reports of missing migrants remains inconsistent and often depends on the specific agency and region involved. In some instances, cooperation is possible and is accompanied by initiative from individual staff members. However, the lack of transparency creates additional barriers to establishing the fate of missing migrants and informing their families.

• **Applying for International Protection in Belarus**

In 2024, the Human Constanta team recorded a significant increase in the number of inquiries related to the procedure for applying for international protection. Of the total 254 inquiries received in 2024, 50 (19.7%) concerned international protection issues — a notable rise compared to 2023, when 28 out of 219 inquiries (12.8%) were related to this topic. In absolute terms, this represents a 78.6% increase.

A similar trend is reflected in the official data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus: the number of foreign nationals applying for refugee status, subsidiary protection, or asylum rose from 1,236 in 2023 to 2,239 in 2024, which corresponds to an 81% increase.

Nevertheless, an analysis of practice shows that Belarusian authorities continue to avoid fulfilling their obligations in the field of asylum and create additional barriers to submitting applications.

A key obstacle remains the unjustified refusal by the Citizenship and Migration offices (OGiM) to accept applications for international protection. In response, the Human Constanta team assisted migrants in pre-filling the forms and sending them to OGiMs by mail, as well as initiating complaints against government agencies to higher authorities. However, these measures did not lead to systemic changes: the waiting time for the initial reception of applicants remained unreasonably long — often lasting several months. During this time, many migrants were left in legal limbo, effectively staying in the country without legal grounds, which exposed them to the risk of detention and deportation.

• **Deportation of Foreign Nationals from Belarus**

In addition to formal deportation procedures, the practices of Belarusian authorities in 2024 included cases where detained foreign nationals were taken to Russian territory without any official documentation, allegedly for readmission, and left in forest areas. This practice is particularly common with foreigners lacking identity documents or with expired Russian visas.

Instead of initiating identity verification procedures through diplomatic channels — even if lengthy and resource-intensive — Belarusian authorities often resort to unofficial and effectively illegal deportation. Migrants are not given any documents confirming the fact of deportation, placing them in a legal limbo at the Belarus–Russia border. As a result, many return to Belarus, where they are detained again and illegally transported back to the border.

Special attention should be paid to contradictory decisions by Belarusian migration authorities, which demonstrate arbitrariness in the assessment of evidence and disregard for authoritative international sources. For instance, a Syrian national who applied for refugee status in Belarus was denied on the grounds that “the information provided by the applicant indicates that he does not belong to any of the listed categories of persons who may face persecution in Syria.” However, in the text of the rejection, the migration authorities refer to a country overview by the European Union Agency for Asylum, which explicitly states that the professional community to which the applicant belonged is among the vulnerable groups in Syria. This interpretation of facts suggests either negligence by the migration authorities or a deliberate disregard for the key circumstances of the case.

• **Undocumented Children of Migrant Women**

Cases continue to emerge in Belarus illustrating the vulnerability of migrant women and their children, especially in situations where they lack legal status in the country. A telling example is the case of a Liberian citizen who, for over two years, was unable to obtain documents for her two children born in Belarus. Throughout this period, she was under deportation proceedings and faced threats from Belarusian authorities regarding the potential removal of her children.

In 2024, these threats were carried out: the children were forcibly taken by state authorities and returned to their mother only after she managed to provide passports and airline tickets to Liberia.

The de facto linking of family reunification to the presentation of exit documents can be viewed as a form of pressure aimed at accelerating deportation. At the same time, it remains unclear on what grounds and under what legal procedure the children were taken away, which points to a lack of proper legal process and judicial oversight. This practice constitutes a serious violation of children's rights and highlights the inadequate protection of vulnerable migrant women in Belarus.

This case also illustrates a broader issue: the lack of a sustainable mechanism for documenting and legally protecting children born to undocumented migrant women. The absence of effective interagency and international cooperation, the lack of clear procedures, and a punitive rather than rights-based approach demonstrate systemic flaws in Belarus's migration and social policies toward this group.

Inquiries Not Related to the Humanitarian Crisis at the Border

• Ukrainian Citizens

In 2024, the highest number of inquiries received by the Human Constanta free legal office came from Ukrainian nationals. This is due to the ongoing armed conflict and people's efforts to find ways to legalize their stay and protect their rights in Belarus.

One of the most notable trends was a sharp increase in inquiries related to acquiring Belarusian citizenship: while in 2023 there were only 3 such inquiries, in 2024 that number rose to 16. This trend may be explained by the continuing war in Ukraine and the perception of Belarusian citizenship as a means to obtain a stable legal status. The increased interest in citizenship is also linked to the possibility of applying for naturalization from abroad — this procedure is available through Belarusian diplomatic and consular missions.

At the same time, Ukrainian citizens in Belarus face numerous problems. For instance, in 2024, a Ukrainian woman who had been legally residing in Belarus for four years was denied subsidiary protection. According to her, during a visit to a district police department, she was verbally informed that her presence in the country allegedly posed a threat to national security. Her national passport was confiscated and replaced with a copy along with an order to leave the country within ten days. Additionally, she was banned from entering Belarus for a period of ten years. Meanwhile, her permanent place of residence in Ukraine is currently under the effective control of the Russian Federation, making her return unsafe and violating the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in both international law and Belarusian legislation.

The practice of denying entry to Ukrainian citizens without written explanation also remains a concern. For example, in late March 2024, a Ukrainian citizen was refused entry without any stated reason. The lack of formal notification prevents appeal and limits access to effective legal remedies.

In the media space of several EU member states, calls for the repatriation of Ukrainian men for military service have become more frequent. In this context, Human Constanta received inquiries from Ukrainian citizens — including those fleeing mobilization — regarding the possibility of applying for international protection in Belarus. Questions were also raised about the legal consequences of irregular border crossings and how such actions might affect the consideration of protection claims in Belarus.

The growing number of inquiries from Ukrainian nationals regarding citizenship, entry, non-refoulement guarantees, and international protection reflects their vulnerability and legal uncertainty amid the ongoing war. The broad discretionary powers of Belarusian authorities, arbitrary refusals of entry or revocation of residence permits, and the lack of transparent procedures create significant risks of human rights violations and undermine the guarantees provided under international law.

• **The Problem of Trust in State Authorities and Low Legal Awareness**

One of the cases documented by the free legal office in 2024 illustrates the intersection of two critically important issues — a lack of legal awareness and a lack of trust in official channels of support among vulnerable migrants.

A citizen of Afghanistan, who had fled the country due to threats from the Taliban, arrived in Belarus in search of safety. However, shortly after his arrival, he was detained by police in Minsk along with several of his roommates. Seeking help, his friends turned to a person who introduced himself as a lawyer. The key factor in choosing him was not verified professional qualifications but the ability to communicate in a shared language.

This person, who did not have official lawyer status, initially demanded 200 USD from each individual for assistance in securing the detainee's release. After the money was handed over, the terms changed: he then demanded 5,000 USD, without offering any guarantee of results. As a consequence of the imposter's actions, the migrants lost not only financial resources, but also valuable time that could have been used to contact qualified lawyers or human rights organizations. This case illustrates the risks migrants face in a context of limited legal knowledge, language and cultural barriers, and a lack of trust in state institutions.

Such incidents point to the urgent need for systemic efforts to improve legal literacy among migrants, expand access to reliable information about legal aid, and strengthen the presence of professional mediators and interpreters within support mechanisms for vulnerable groups.

How to contact us?

If your rights have been violated in Belarus, you can contact our public reception office for free legal consultation:

☎ via phone: +4915774002500 (Telegram, WhatsApp, Signal)

✉ e-mail: legal@humanconstanta.org

🌐 through the platform: <https://www.legalhub.help/>

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