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Poland Says 230 Migrants Crossed Belarus Border by Force

By AFP

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Some 230 migrants forced their way through the border from Belarus with the help of Belarusian border guards but were immediately sent back across, Poland said on Thursday.

"They destroyed the fence and a group of 232 people made their way several meters into Polish territory," border guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska told Polish news agency PAP.

"The officers instructed them to leave Polish territory and escorted them to the border demarcation," she said, adding the incident happened late Wednesday.

The EU and US accuse Belarus of manufacturing the crisis by bringing in migrants from the Middle East and then taking them to the border — an accusation that Belarus denies.

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In a statement, Polish border guards said the migrants "threw rocks and sticks at Polish forces" as Belarusian forces used lasers and strobe lighting to try and blind Polish officers.

The border guard spokeswoman said five migrants were taken to hospital suffering from "exhaustion."

The border guards said there were a total of 375 attempted crossings from Belarus on Wednesday.

Aid groups say at least 11 migrants have died on both sides of the border since the crisis began in the summer and have criticized the Polish government over its policy of pushing migrants back.

So far this year Poland has clocked more than 35,000 attempted illegal crossings from Belarus.

They include 6,000 in November, nearly 17,300 in October, some 7,700 in September, and over 3,500 in August, according to border guard data.

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