

Oleshky Evacuees Arrive in Belarus Before Heading to Ukraine

By [Reuters](#)

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ROMAN PILIPEY / AFP

Four planes carrying residents evacuated from the Russian-controlled Ukrainian town of Oleshky landed in Belarus on Saturday, the Belarusian state news agency Belta and a senior Ukrainian official said.

Hundreds of starving and exhausted residents left the town of Oleshky on Friday during a U.S.-backed local ceasefire, the first of its kind and the longest humanitarian pause in the war, which is nearing its fifth year.

"The last, fourth plane landed in Gomel," said David Arakhamia, a top Ukrainian peace negotiator and close ally of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"In a few hours, all Ukrainian citizens evacuated from Oleshky together with a Ukrainian delegation will be on Ukrainian territory."

Belta later reported that a convoy of buses carrying the residents had departed from the airport in Gomel, in southeastern Belarus near the border with Ukraine.

The evacuees heading for Ukraine had to take a complicated route to leave Oleshky as the frontline runs just a few kilometres away.

They traveled first by bus via Crimea to the Russian town of Anapa, before flying to Belarus, from where they will continue to Ukraine via a border crossing, Belta said.

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The ceasefire was reached thanks to mediation efforts by U.S. First Lady Melania Trump and with the involvement of the Pope. The ceasefire has been holding since Tuesday without violations, according to both Ukrainian and Russian officials. It has allowed them to de-mine the roads and bring food, medicines and other supplies into the town.

Supply routes to Oleshky were disrupted by fighting and drones. According to some residents, food deliveries were stopped in May, pushing hundreds of people into starvation.

It was not immediately clear how many people decided to leave Oleshky and how many opted to stay in the town. Oleshky residents had the option to travel to Russia or to return to Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials have said around 1,700 people remained in Oleshky from a pre-war population of about 24,000. According to several residents interviewed by Reuters, many of those were elderly or ill.

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