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# The service of police officers and soldiers at the Polish-Belarusian border during the 2021–2022 crisis

## Introduction

The events that occurred at the Polish-Belarusian border at the turn of 2021 and 2022 are unprecedented in the history of border security in the Third Republic of Poland. It is worth reminding that after 1989 the phenomenon of immigration has become the reality of our part of Europe as well. It was a consequence of the so-called Second Chechen War, when in the years 2000–2002 the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borders were crossed by over 120 thousands of Chechen refugees.<sup>1</sup> Later on, after Poland's accession to the European Union, due to our geographical location we became a rather convenient transit country to Europe for many people. Consequently, the phenomenon of foreigners from neighbouring countries choosing to settle in Poland has developed. Among basic reasons for this trend we can name a relatively highly attractive standard of living, cultural proximity, but

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of Chechen refugees is more widely approached in K. Pietrasik, *Uchodźcy czeczeńscy w Polsce w latach 1994–2000*, Difin, Warszawa 2020.

also a lack of hope for the development of migrants' home countries.<sup>2</sup> These are possible reasons why the problem of immigrants was non-existent in the public debate and in the general perception of reality.

This state of affairs continued for quite a long time. A large breakthrough came only in 2015. The phenomenon of the so-called migration crisis of 2014–2015, when millions of migrants arrived at Europe's borders as a result of armed conflicts in the Middle East and Libya, was not insignificant.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the common belief and the narrative presented by the government, Poland was also, indirectly, affected. This is visible in numbers: in 2010 there were 54,310 foreigners legally residing in Poland; in 2015 – 99,124, and in 2020 it was already 524,903 people.<sup>4</sup> Quite importantly, these groups eventually started to include representatives of other cultures and other – non-Christian – religions. The indicated growth is also reflected in the number of issued work permits and their statistics are even more detailed. Thus, the following numbers of work permits were issued: in 2015 – approx. 66 thousand, in 2016 – over 127 thousand, in 2017 – almost 236 thousand, in 2018 – already 329 thousand, in 2019 – 445 thousand, and in 2020 – 406,5 thousand, which was most probably affected by the pandemic. Last year, already over 580 thousand of work permits were issued to citizens of 129 countries and to 11 stateless persons.<sup>5</sup> The trend is stable, as in May 2022, 797 thousand of foreigners were legally working in Poland.<sup>6</sup> Let us add that work permits were most commonly given to Ukrainian citizens. Almost 73% of foreigners granted with a work permit in Poland had a passport of this country. A notable percentage of permits was also granted to the citizens of Georgia and India (both at 2.0% of all granted permits), as well as Moldova (1.9%).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See E. Grzelak-Kostulska, M. Hołowiecki, D. Szymańska, *Migracje stałe do Polski w okresie transformacji ustrojowej*, [in:] *Ruchliwość przestrzenna ludności w okresie przemian ustrojowych*, ed. D. Szymańska, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu, Toruń 1998, pp. 181–189.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting analysis of this crisis was provided by M. Dahl, *Europejski kryzys migracyjny z 2015 roku i jego wpływ na prowadzoną przez Polskę w latach 2015–2018 politykę zagraniczną*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2019, no. 2(65), pp. 202–219, [https://mysl.lazarski.pl/fileadmin/user\\_upload/oficyna/Mysl\\_Ekonomiczna\\_i\\_Polityczna/meip-64/MEiP\\_2-19\\_12Dahl.pdf](https://mysl.lazarski.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/oficyna/Mysl_Ekonomiczna_i_Polityczna/meip-64/MEiP_2-19_12Dahl.pdf) [accessed: 24.11.2021].

<sup>4</sup> See *Statystyki – Polska – Aktualne dokumenty – Mapa – Porównanie lat 2021/2010*, <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/typ/dokumenty/widok/mapa/rok/2021/rok2/2010/?x=0.6896&y=1.5023&level=1> [accessed: 24.11.2021].

<sup>5</sup> *Statystyki – Polska – Aktualne dokumenty – Mapa – Rok: 2022*, <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/> [accessed: 12.06.2022].

<sup>6</sup> *Coraz więcej cudzoziemców pracuje w Polsce*, Money.pl, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/coraz-wiecej-cudzoziemcow-pracuje-w-polsce-6649123652348800a.html> [accessed: 12.06.2022].

<sup>7</sup> *Zezwolenia na pracę cudzoziemców w 2020 roku*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/opracowania/zezwozenia-na-prace-cudzoziemcow-w-2020-roku,18,4.html> [accessed: 24.11.2021].

However, it must be noted that the overall number of foreigners residing in the Republic of Poland is much higher. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Central Statistical Office (Pol. Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS) estimated it to exceed 2.1 million. 2020 brought a slight decrease in the number of foreign citizens, but the stabilisation of the post-pandemic situation restored previous figures.<sup>8</sup> The quoted number includes employees, students and all other persons residing within our borders while illegally prolonging their resident visa, but also those who crossed the Polish border declaring the intention of proceeding to other EU countries and never fulfilled it. The unofficial estimates of the Polish Border Guard prior to the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict indicated a number of approx. 2.5 million foreigners.

Two things should be mentioned here. Firstly, the aforementioned dominance of immigrants from our cultural circle. Poland is chosen as the country of final destination mostly by Ukrainians, but also, even though much less commonly, by Belarusians and Russians. It seems we can also carefully assume that apart from the closeness of the language, the Christian religious and ethnic identity (Pan-Slavism is still a present ethno-ideological movement to the east of the Polish borders), the historical political experience was also a decisive aspect. All post-communist countries were expected to have similar institutions and procedures, meaning that the adaptation to the new conditions in Poland should be easier.

The second observation is of different nature. Emigration from a native country is usually an individual, independent and independently carried out decision, with a possible psychological and logistic assistance from relatives, frequently family or neighbours, who had previously experienced it themselves. Considering the perspective of a home country, it may have a positive aspect of easing the tensions on the local labour market, bringing foreign exchange funds to the local economy and increasing the standard of living of its citizens. On the other hand, in the long term it may also have negative outputs. It drains the economy of the native country out of qualified workers, consequently lowering its human and social potential. Nevertheless, in most countries, governments try to avoid any administrative or forceful interference in these processes, recognising the citizens' rights to undertake individual decisions on the matter.

The events of autumn of 2021 at the Polish-Belarusian border contradicted this practice. Regardless of the intentions of Belarusian authorities, it is without doubt that the state machine of the country was responsible for these incidents and their goal was to destabilise the border protection system, if not the entire defence system of our country. The material collected on this matter lets us suggest that both the campaign promoting the entry to the EU through Poland, the migrants'

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<sup>8</sup> *Imigracja do Polski: wymiar sektorowy i regionalny*, <https://9lib.org/article/imigracja-dopolski-wymiar-sektorowy-i-regionalny.yj7r8k8m> [accessed: 12.06.2022].

stay in Belarus, and the attempts to cross the border were all motivated by Belarusian police forces.<sup>9</sup> Here is where there occurs a certain novelty when it comes to population migrations in modern times. Arguably, we can mention the case of the Mexican-USA border, but, even though the authorities of the former supported the emigration of foreigners to the United States, they never organised their arrival in Mexico and did not actively encourage them in attempting to cross the border.

It is, nonetheless, not our goal to analyse this issue. Nor do we intend to analyse the reaction of Polish authorities to these events. Certainly, time will come to do that and profound studies will answer the questions of if the reaction was adequate to the level of emergency and if our state followed the applicable international conventions on the treatment of refugees and foreigners seeking international protection. If the forces and measures, not only police, but also military, were used in accordance with the existing procedures and duly equipped with legal instruments and technical and material resources to ensure an effective goal execution. A thing that certainly does not help in answering these questions is the news blackout established since the beginning of this crisis. Whatever we know about these events is more a result of speculations of journalists and stories of volunteers that served in the areas of Podlasie and Lublin Province, as they usually do in such crises.

The origins of these events are most certainly to be found around the political crisis that occurred in Belarus after the 2020 presidential elections, which, according to many political environments, were neither free nor fair. Such an opinion was shared by the authorities of many European countries, including the government of the Republic of Poland. Criticism of Belarusian leaders increased after their violent suppression of public protests in Minsk and following the active support of the local opposition by EU countries and the threat of sanctions to be issued against the regime. The threat escalated after a Ryanair flight was forced to land in Minsk on 23 May 2021 and one of the leaders of the opposition was arrested as a passenger of the flight. In response to the sanction threat, on 26 May 2021, Alexander Lukashenko stated that his country will no longer stop the immigrants from crossing the EU border. In view of this situation, relevant EU administration announced the list of economic sanctions against Belarus and its authorities. In the beginning of July 2021, first organised groups of immigrants appear at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, and a few days later at the Latvian-Belarusian border. Lithuania reacts to these events with the development of a fence on its border with Belarus, whereas Latvia introduces a state of emergency along its frontier. FRONTEX formations arrive in both countries, equipped with helicopters, means of communication and video surveillance.

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<sup>9</sup> The issue has been broadly covered in publications. See e.g. K. Bachman, *Kto zadzwoni do Łukaszenki*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 13.11.2021; W. Sokala, *Niepokój ze Wschodu*, "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna", 10–14.11.2021; W. Łobodziński, *Piekło uchodźców trwa* [interview with Rut Kurkiewicz], "Dziennik Trybuna" 4–5.05.2022.

As a consequence, groups of immigrants move to the Polish-Belarusian border. The reaction of Polish authorities consists in a decision to build a fence along the Polish-Belarusian border and to introduce, as of 2 September 2021, a state of emergency in 183 municipalities bordering with Belarus. This is the beginning of a crisis that will last until the spring of 2022 and involve events raising dramatic emotions within the Polish society and political life. For our further considerations, it is important to note that from 10 August 2021, the actions of the Polish Border Guard were supported by the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces and, subsequently, police officers.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, we were unable to find data that would allow to establish the size of this support among the publicly available sources, whether it would refer to the number of soldiers and officers, or their equipment.

## Research methodology

Among the soldiers and officers mobilised to serve on the border, there were several male and female students of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University. It was not kept secret, as service on the border was indicated as a reason of absence in classes, and the topic of observations and feelings related to this episode in their careers would also come up in informal conversations. This was the primary inspiration for the authors of this article to undertake research on the recruitment methods, preparations and conditions of service in the border area. Concurrently, we were aware of the methodological deficiency of the study. It was not possible to ensure representativeness of the research, mostly due to the aforementioned problems with establishing a reference group that would allow to confirm the level of representativeness.

Furthermore, it was not possible to ask all the questions necessary to explain the arising research problems. It was clear to us that some of the crucial issues are covered by the confidentiality of service and, obviously, it was not our goal to breach it. Hence, the designed questionnaire may be deemed non-exhaustive when it comes to substantial complexity and methodological correctness, but its final shape seemed optimal to us, especially with regard to the sincerity of replies and the comfort of the respondents. Received answers, opinions and the presented feelings of the participants allow to solve research problems and verify the hypotheses we constructed at the beginning of the study.

Our main research problem was formulated as a question: what were the circumstances of deployment and service in Podlasie and Lublin Province and their

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<sup>10</sup> *Kryzys migracyjny na granicy Polska-Białoruś*, XXI wiek Wiki, [https://xxiwiek.fandom.com/pl/wiki/Kryzys\\_migracyjny\\_na\\_granicy\\_Polska\\_-\\_Bia%C5%82oru%C5%9B](https://xxiwiek.fandom.com/pl/wiki/Kryzys_migracyjny_na_granicy_Polska_-_Bia%C5%82oru%C5%9B) [accessed: 16.06.2022]; *Granica polsko-białoruska – o co chodzi w konfliktach (Kalendarium wydarzeń)*, TVN24, <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/granica-polsko-bialoruska-o-co-chodzi-w-konfliktach-kalendarium-wydarzen-5484213> [accessed: 16.06.2022].

consequences for the participants? By dividing it into more specific problems, we intended to find an answer to the following questions:

1. What did the recruitment process look like?
2. Did the participants have trouble adapting to the situation at the border and what were the common issues?
3. What were the social and living conditions of soldiers and officers serving on the Polish-Belarusian border?
4. What kind of feelings and impressions did the participants experience during service?

Main hypothesis:

It is assumed that the stay at the border would have no significant impact on the service nor any consequences for the condition of officers and soldiers.

Specific hypotheses:

1. It is supposed that the officers and soldiers were assigned to this duty by order.
2. It is suspected that the participants had no problem with adaptation and the most affecting factor was separation from family.
3. It is assumed that social and living conditions deviate from the official message.
4. It is believed that the majority of feelings and impressions regarding the service on the border are positive.

The research was conducted in April 2022 among the students of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University who served on the Polish-Belarusian border during the ongoing crisis. It used a diagnostic survey as the method, a questionnaire as the technique, and a survey questionnaire as the research tool. The survey questionnaire comprised of 19 questions regarding social and living conditions, preparations for service, and 21 questions designed to reflect the impressions, feelings and problems related to the, nonetheless, new and particular manners of conducting service in very specific conditions.

## Profile of the research group

The research involved 50 representatives of uniformed services, police officers and soldiers only. The survey questionnaire was provided to 56 persons confirmed, directly or by a university group representative, to have served on the border. The questionnaire was sent via e-mail. Every fifth person from the list received the survey questionnaire directly from us, the others received it through their university group representatives or through another respondent who voluntarily provided the questionnaire to them. In order to ensure anonymity, we asked the respondents to send back their replies via e-mail through other persons they trusted or through student group representatives. 50 respondents participated. We do not know the reasons behind the other 6 persons not sending the surveys back, nor do we know

who they were. All this being said, we are fully aware of the risk of such a sample selection being unreliable, especially in view of the research representativeness, but other methods were out of question.

The research group was mainly comprised of men, with women representing 8% of all respondents, meaning a much lower proportion than in the main formation; moreover, all female participants were police officers. The latter constituted a vast majority of all respondents, i.e. 86%, whereas soldiers comprised 14%. A different, more balanced set of proportions refers to the age of the respondents. People under 25 years old constituted 30% of all participants; over a half of the respondents, 56%, was between 26–35 years old, whereas the group with a more significant life experience, over 36 years old, constituted just 7 persons.

Among the soldiers, the most numerous group had experienced between 3 to 6 years of service, whereas among the police officers, the groups were proportionally similar: for the experience of up to 3 years – 15 officers, for service of 3 to 6 years – 14 officers, for service of over 6 years – 14 officers (Table 1). It is worth reminding that all respondents were students of National Security or Internal Security at Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University, meaning that they were in the process of receiving higher education, including a few participants at Master's level. This variable has been omitted in order to ensure full anonymity.

Table 1. Gender, experience in service and formation of respondents

Formation	Female	Male	Total	Experience of up to 3 years	Experience of 3–6 years	Experience of over 7 years
Armed Forces	0	7	7	1	5	1
Police	4	39	43	15	14	14
Total	4	46	50	16	19	15

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Therefore, we can establish that the age and the experience in service correspond with the generational structure of main formations, especially the part that constitutes their executive section. This is confirmed by the place within the structure of these formations occupied by our respondents, which can be determined by their corps and rank. Consequently, there were no commissioned officers among the respondents and the most numerous group comprised privates and non-commissioned officers, 24 and 21 persons, respectively. The corps of warrant officers and inspectors was represented by 4 policemen and 1 soldier. If we compare this category with the experience in service and the structure of the Armed Forces and the Police, it seems that this data is characteristic for the main formations and their paths of promotions. In line with this, we can assume with high probability that the research group, even though sparse and somewhat randomly selected, can indeed, to some extent, be

considered representative of the totality of soldiers and police officers. Nevertheless, it does not entitle us to draw any far-fetched general conclusions.

## Deployment and service on the border

The answers of the respondents revealed that only 20% of them volunteered for service on the border, whereas the remaining 80%, i.e. 40 persons, including 4 women, were assigned to service by order. The specific distribution of this data is displayed in Table 2, and its content does not allow for any definite conclusions, apart from the one that no woman has volunteered for this duty and the proportion of soldiers to police officers among volunteers was higher.

Table 2. Formation, corps, form of deployment regarding gender of respondents

Formation, corps		Gender, form of deployment		Voluntary application		By order	
		F	M	F	M		
Armed Forces	privates	0	2	0	4		
	non-commissioned officers	0	0	0	0		
	warrant officers/inspectors	0	1	0	0		
Police	constables	0	2	2	14		
	non-commissioned officers	0	2	2	17		
	warrant officers/inspectors	0	3	0	1		
Total		0	10	4	36		

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Only the second question allows for some conclusions of qualitative nature. The respondents were asked for their motivation behind joining the service on the border. One participant (volunteer) refrained from responding, while the choice of others is quite surprising. Six respondents (i.e. slightly over 12%) indicated a motivation we would define as patriotic: 'I was happy to go, the border needs to be defended'. Twelve other participants indicated a pragmatic reason ('I was happy to go, it's always a new experience'). These two answers were chosen, unsurprisingly, by all respondents that went to the border voluntarily. Meanwhile, the others divided into two halves. Sixteen participants chose the easiest explanation ('an order is an order'), whereas the other sixteen indicated: 'it ruined my plans, the service was a burden'. In our opinion, this means that during the recruitment of soldiers and police officers for this duty, the task of building motivation for service was completely neglected and the process of recruitment itself did not create a desirable, positive motivation. This is confirmed by the answers to another question, where 68% of respondents declare unwillingness towards repeating the service on the border and further 16% have no opinion on the matter.

The aforementioned critical remark is additionally confirmed by the answers to the question about the preparation for service. For a substantial majority of those assigned to serve on the border, i.e. over 70%, no training was organised with regard to the risks they could expect to face, not to mention the lack of trainings on the operation tactics and conflict resolution. Only 16% of officers and soldiers participated in the trainings for the service on the border. Every tenth respondent participated in the training and evaluated it as superficial. If we were to refer to the press coverage from their service on the border, one can carefully assess that the soldiers and officers were not prepared for the duty, and the training deficiencies and the lack of knowledge of the procedures resulted in many misunderstandings and conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

A certain chaos in the preparation of deployment of soldiers and officers to the border is additionally reflected in the fact that the service had various time frames. Most commonly, officers and soldiers were deployed on two-week duties, under the assumption this is the most optimal and effective time frame. Almost a half of respondents performed a two-week duty. Among the others, 14 persons served on the border for 1 month and the rest went there several times for a couple of days, which may suggest that their duties were of a more interventionist, interim character rather than planned.

Concurrently, it seems that the level of satisfaction from service was related to the social and living conditions provided for the soldiers and officers on the border. The accounts of respondents suggest that the soldiers and officers had an unlimited access to hot water. This results predominantly from the fact that 80% of them were accommodated in hotels or dormitories. When it comes to washing and drying clothes, it was ensured for only slightly over a half of them. All respondents, regardless of the place of accommodation, had access to a sufficient number of toilets. Depending on the place of accommodation, meals for the soldiers and the officers were either prepared on-site, or catering was provided. According to 60% of respondents, access to a heated canteen was available between specific hours, which was probably due to a very large group of forces on the border. However, only a few officers and soldiers (nearly 30%) had access to hot drinks on duty.

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<sup>11</sup> See e.g. B. Dżon-Ozimek, *Polska źle zarządza migracją* [interview with Michał Wanke, sociologist, University of Opole], "Przegląd", 7–13.03.2022; A. Jucewicz, *Chcę wrócić na granicę* [interview with Weronika Kalemba], "Gazeta Wyborcza", 16.04.2022; eadem, *Nie hejtuj pogranicznika* [interview with Sylwia Urbańska and Przemysław Sadura], "Gazeta Wyborcza", 13.11.2021. It is hereby worth mentioning that in December 2021, representatives of the Ombudsman's office controlled the conditions of soldiers serving on the border. The conclusions from this inspection were delivered to the Minister of National Defence and the bulk of them found confirmation in our research. See *Problemy służby żołnierzy na granicy. Marcin Wiącek sygnalizuje je MON po wizytacji Biura RPO. Resort odpowiada*, <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-mon-zolnierze-granica-problemy> [accessed: 15.06.2022].

When it comes to the question of free time for the officers and soldiers on the border, the situation looked very unfavourable. A vast majority (66%) was not provided with any organised leisure activities. For the rest, their main free time activities were watching TV and playing table tennis. This was indicated by 16% of respondents, whereas the others mentioned social games or other, individually organised leisure activities. Such an organisational shortcoming undoubtedly affected the level of satisfaction from the task. In hindsight, we can conclude that neglecting this issue and the lack of its closer analysis was our mistake in the process of developing the research.

The question that sums up this section of our study concerned the problems with adaptation during service on the border. It is worth noting that all volunteers for service had no problems with adaptation, whereas among the others, 25 respondents gave a similar answer. Among all participants, only 7 respondents admitted to any difficulties in the matter. In absolute numbers, this is illustrated in Table 3. In this case, we applied a five-point Likert scale with a final score of 1.26 point, and even with the deduction of the volunteer group, the score was still well above 1 point (1.06). Hereby, it needs to be added that other variables (gender, age, experience and corps) do not differentiate the participants.

Table 3. Problems with adaptation and form of recruitment

Likert scale	Problems with adaptation	Volunteers	By order
-2	Yes, I did experience	0	3
-1	I may have experienced some	0	4
0	It is difficult to say	0	3
+1	I almost did not experience any	0	7
+2	No, I did not experience	10	23

Source: authors' own elaboration.

In this case, we asked a control question about if the respondents noticed their colleagues from service mentioning any problems related to their stay on the border. The question was answered positively by 17 respondents (34%), who were also allowed to indicate more than one reason for these problems. We present the outline of these answers in Table 4.

The issue most commonly reported by the officers and soldiers was separation from family. Over 30% of respondents indicate coming across such opinions. Only 10% of respondents observed an opinion mentioning an emotional reaction to the difficult situation of immigrants, including especially the images of migrant children. What draws attention here, is the low level of discomfort regarding the situation of immigrants. We may argue that the studied group of soldiers and officers had a limited direct contact with refugees during their service on the border, and

the information on their location was provided either through media coverage or unofficially. Perhaps what we encounter here as well is a certain state of denial of this issue. The conflict between the sense of duty and the human compassion was resolved in favour of the former.

Table 4. Problems most commonly reported by soldiers and officers, as specified by respondents (more than one answer was possible)

	Problems reported	No problems reported
	17	33
Type of problem		
Separation from family	16	
Difficult situation of immigrants	1	
Images of migrant children	4	
Other, unspecified	2	
Other (stress)	1	

Source: authors' own elaboration.

## Impressions and feelings of participants

Finally, the last part of the survey questionnaire was dedicated to the issue of impressions and feelings, which we decided to capture under statements that the respondents needed to address. We simplified the task asking the participants to determine their opinion on a particular issue using digits that correspond to the following scale:

- 0 – never,
- 1 – rarely,
- 2 – sometimes,
- 3 – quite often,
- 4 – very often.

The questionnaire included 21 statements of various character, aimed at verifying the previous views and opinions and provide a basis to answer the question to what extent we can actually observe satisfaction from this duty and which parameters can define the level and quality of this satisfaction. We applied a solution that seems obvious, even though it may raise doubts in certain questions. We divided these factors into two groups: one being positive elements, meaning those that affected the sense of satisfaction positively. The second group includes negative feelings and impressions that may suggest that the satisfaction from duty is debatable. Three parameters are not suitable for this division, which is why they were set aside and described separately.

We classified all the above in terms of the level of impact of a particular factor on the feelings of the respondents. Additionally, we distinguished two groups of participants: police officers and respondents with short experience in service (both soldiers and police officers). These two variables stand out among the others when it comes to the feelings of the respondents, which is why they deserve attention. Feelings classified as positive are hereby presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Positive feelings and impressions of respondents according to the impact of a particular parameter

Ranking	Feeling/impression	Average result	Police officers	Respondents with experience of up to 3 years
1	A willingness to cooperate prevailed in my team	3.06	2.93	3.06
2	During service I was positively evaluated by superiors	2.46	2.30	2.31
3	I found satisfaction in the service	1.74	1.63	1.69
4	I felt the sense of purpose of this job	1.22	1.05	1.13
5	I see it as a good experience on my professional path	1.19	0.98	0.88
6	I learnt new skills	1.10	1.00	1.63
7	I thought I was finally doing something I like	0.72	0.53	0.63

Source: authors' own elaboration.

In order to provide a comprehensive view, it is worth adding that among the above impressions, the answer '4' was most commonly assigned to entry 1 (22 participants), entry 2 (10 participants) and entry 3 (6 participants). Other impressions received only one answer represented by '4' each, with no such answer to entry 7. Contrarily, the feelings that never accompanied the participants were entry 7 (26 respondents), entry 6 (20 respondents), entry 5 (19 respondents), entry 4 (18 respondents) and entry 3 (8 respondents). Three respondents questioned entry 1, and two others entry 2. Generally speaking, the average result for these impressions was 1.64, meaning that they were closest to the 'sometimes' category.

What draws attention here is a relatively high evaluation of the atmosphere in the teams of the respondents and their relations with direct superiors during service. Considering the service integration processes, these results cannot be overlooked, as they have an impact on the identification with the uniform, determining to high extent the level of professional satisfaction. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the negative factors, low level of contentment with the types of tasks assigned to our participants, a certain disappointment with the experience.

We verified this thesis confronting the feelings and impressions of respondents which we qualified as negative (Table 6).

Table 6. Negative feelings and impressions of respondents according to the impact of a particular parameter

Ranking	Feeling/impression	Average result	Police officers	Respondents with experience of up to 3 years
1	I counted down the days until the duty was over	2.92	3.07	3.06
2	I had a feeling not a lot depended on me	2.60	2.81	2.31
3	I thought the service should be organised differently	2.38	2.49	2.25
4	I felt like I was wasting my time	2.33	2.30	2.00
5	I felt discouraged	2.10	2.23	1.94
6	I was struggling to relax	1.80	1.93	1.81
7	During service on the border, I felt nervous	1.74	1.81	1.94
8	I was feeling irritated	1.64	1.84	1.56
9	During this service I felt lonely	1.35	1.37	1.44
10	I don't think I'll ever experience anything worse	1.29	1.33	1.44
11	I was given tasks beyond my capabilities	0.58	0.58	0.69

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Just as with the Table 5, we were interested to see what was the distribution of answers presented in absolute numbers, and once again we used the answer '4' here, meaning the case where particular feelings were mentioned very often. The highest number, over a half of the respondents, admitted they often counted down the days until the duty was over. Much less persons, 14 respondents, indicated entry 2 as common, while 11 respondents commonly identified with the feelings mentioned in entries 3 and 4. The remaining answers were evaluated with digits 1 to 3, meaning it did not have a great impact on the Table 6. Let us note that the average result for these feelings was 1.88.

We suppose that this is related to a lack of respectful approach towards the officers and soldiers during their service or, perhaps even more importantly, poor preparation for the job, which we already described earlier. The respondents indirectly admit that they had not been informed about the character of service, the nature of tasks, the essence and meaning of their duty. If this interpretation is true, it is a straight path towards the development and increase of stress and burnout. The analysis of these issues would require a more elaborate and extensive research, both when it refers to the research group and the substantial scope.

Ultimately, it is worth noticing the feelings we qualified as neutral, not being able to clearly assign them to one of the aforementioned groups. Their parameters are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. Neutral feelings and impressions of respondents

Feeling/impression	Average	Police officers	Respondents with experience of up to 3 years
After returning from service, I felt completely exhausted	2.21	2.30	1.94
I still have memories of service	1.90	1.97	2.13
I feel that this episode has not affected me in any way	1.85	1.88	2.13

Source: authors' own elaboration.

The results displayed in Table 7 are not easily interpreted, as they may appear as both negative and positive. It is worth emphasising that around 20% of respondents chose the answer '1', meaning never. The other answers were indicated rather equally often, meaning that this incidental deployment was an episode worth remembering in the lives of these young people, and as such, it is worth the attention of researchers and professional superiors.

What is worth noticing here is the two subgroups we distinguished in the Tables: police officers and a group at the beginning of their professional career. We already mentioned that the average result of positive feelings in the entire research group was 1.64. Police officers proved to be less satisfied, with an average of 1.49. Similarly, the average of the feelings we classified as negative for all participants was 1.88, while the average for police officers was 0.1 point higher. This may either mean that police officers are more critical of this service or the preparation for deployment and the leadership was worse.

Similarly, the group of less experienced soldiers and police officers displayed a lower level of satisfaction than the entire research group (average 1.62), but also lower dissatisfaction (average 1.85). The less experienced, as the specified results of Table 6 may be interpreted, had lower expectations towards service, but also much more commonly they mentioned feeling nervous, lonely, and thinking nothing worse could ever happen to them. They appreciated (Table 5) gaining new skills, but in general they did not think it was a good experience on their professional path.

The question intended to verify the results presented in the Tables was the following: Given the opportunity, would you join similar service again? We correlated the answers to this question with several variables and two of them proved to be of high level. The first one: the form of recruitment for this service is illustrated in Table 8. It clearly displays that 60% of volunteers and only 5% of the participants deployed to the border by order are willing to perform such service again. This result leads us to interpret the data included in Tables 5, 6, 7 extremely carefully and resolve any doubts in favour of the thesis suggesting poor experiences from this service. This data is displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Form of recruitment and the willingness to serve on the border again

Willingness to perform such service again	Form of recruitment	Voluntary application	By order	Total
Yes		6	2	8
No		3	31	34
I don't know		1	7	8

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Another variable we decided to indicate in this analysis is the formation the respondents served. As a result, it appeared that a vast majority of police officers, 34, including 19 non-commissioned officers and 15 constables do not wish to serve on the border again. This confirms our previously expressed opinion that the goal and conditions of service on the border are more critically evaluated by police officers than by soldiers. Even the fact that 3 inspectors and 1 non-commissioned police officer, as well as 3 privates and 1 warrant officer of the Polish Armed Forces would gladly serve again, does not affect the result of the entire research.

Overall, the duty on the border is not highly appreciated neither by soldiers nor by police officers.

## Conclusions

The Polish-Belarusian border crisis requires the government to foresee, plan and take specific preventive actions including as well, or perhaps first and foremost, mental preparation of uniformed services to serve in various conditions. Such preparations should focus on providing positive motivation and a clear understanding of the significance of given tasks. Our research indicates a lack of specific procedures and recruitment regulations for service on the border. Just as we assumed, a vast majority of officers and soldiers were deployed to the border by order, which significantly affected the general evaluation of the duty. If service preparations were well implemented, with the use of motivational tools, both tangible and intangible, more people would volunteer for service.

It is obvious that to outsiders the representatives of uniformed services adapt to various conditions and situations very quickly and such a view results from the character of service. In our research we intended to receive a first-hand answer to the question if the character and challenges of this clearly unusual service have an impact on the adaptation process and related difficulties. As it appears, only a small number of participants had problems with adaptation, the others handled the conditions well. Separation from family turned out to be the biggest issue. The adopted hypothesis was confirmed by the study.

What seems crucial for job satisfaction, especially during deployment, are the social and living conditions. We had mistakenly assumed that the conditions on the border were not great and that the government did not ensure appropriate conditions of stay for the soldiers and police officers. Even though at the beginning of the crisis there were many critical remarks regarding accommodation and food, the situation kept improving from one week to the next. The respondents state that the social and living conditions were good, with critical remarks only towards the question of organised leisure. Nevertheless, the mandatory rest and service hours were guaranteed.

With regard to the fourth hypothesis, the research does not clearly determine if service on the border created positive feelings and impressions. On the one hand, the respondents indicated a good atmosphere among their colleagues and good relations with their superiors, on the other hand, though, they did not demonstrate particular contentment with the service. This reflects in the statement that they would not willingly perform such service again. Some of them felt nervous and lonely, while most believed this experience would have no impact on their future service and professional career.

What seems to be necessary is the following:

1. Recruitment and emergency training strategies for various future events should be established.
2. Various motivational tools, including tangible and intangible incentives, should be developed in cooperation with psychologists.
3. The Agency for Strategic Reserves should be in possession of resources for various emergencies in order not to take reactive measures.
4. A 'modus operandi' for the occurrence of the most adverse events and phenomena should be prepared, so that a quick and decisive reaction to a particular situation is possible.

In order to present a full picture of the situation on the border and related dilemmas, a more extensive qualitative research would be necessary, thus enabling to offer recommendations and tools for an effective implementation of knowledge, experience and engagement of police officers and soldiers in the performance of similar tasks.

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## *The service of police officers and soldiers at the Polish-Belarusian border during the 2021–2022 crisis*

### **Abstract**

In recent years, the question of population migration has become more present in the Polish social and political life. One of the examples of this phenomenon was the set of events at the turn of 2021 and 2022, when thousands of people tried to illegally cross the Polish-Belarusian border and enter the Republic of Poland. The state reacted by reinforcing border services, deploying soldiers and police officers to serve on the border. The circumstances of the deployment, conditions of service and related impressions of participants became the subject of research, the results of which are presented in this article. Most of our respondents were deployed to the border by order and were scarcely

or completely unprepared to the service. The social and living conditions during service are evaluated as rather good, although leisure activities were poorly organised. Among the feelings and impressions from service, the most highly appreciated were the team atmosphere and cooperation and the attitude of superiors. Nevertheless, what prevails is a moderate dissatisfaction with the job, with a vast majority of participants unwilling to repeat such service.

Key words: immigration, border, border service, Polish-Belarusian border, border crisis

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