On 31 December 2023, Patvērums Drošā māja / Shelter Safe House organized end of year celebrations in Riga. © Shelter Safe House

Operational context

Since 24 February 2022, Latvia has received a high number of refugees from Ukraine, amounting to approximately 2 per cent of Latvia's population. From the outset of the war in Ukraine, the Latvian Government and civil society have responded with steadfast solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine, including by facilitating access to rights and services on equal footing with Latvian citizens. Challenges facing refugees from Ukraine include access to long-term accommodation, psychosocial assistance and Latvian language courses.

As of 2023, Latvia is included in the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), complementing the government-led response. The plan is coordinated by UNHCR and has been developed by 14 humanitarian organizations in Latvia.

Following the increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving via Belarus in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland in 2021, Latvia introduced a state of emergency, limiting access to asylum for those trying to reach Latvia irregularly through Belarus. In June 2023, Latvia adopted new legislation, formalizing this approach which UNHCR is concerned will effectively authorize pushbacks.

KEY FIGURES

- **49,467** applications for temporary protection lodged by refugees from Ukraine since February 2022.* Officially estimated presence: 32,313
- **1,624** asylum applications lodged as of December 2023
- **187,564** stateless persons and "non-citizens" in Latvia as of January 2023.**

**Renewal of permits is ongoing and may result in changes of figures.*
*** With respect to persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate, this figure includes persons of concern covered by two separate Latvian laws. 160 persons fall under the Republic of Latvia's Law on Stateless Persons on 17 February 2004. 187,404 of the persons fall under Latvia's 25 April 1995 Law on the Status of those Former USSR Citizens who are not Citizens of Latvia or Any Other State ("Non-citizens"). In the specific context of Latvia, the "Non-citizens" enjoy the right to reside in Latvia ex lege and a set of rights and obligations generally beyond the rights prescribed by the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, including protection from removal, and as such the "Non-citizens" may currently be considered persons to whom the Convention does not apply in accordance*

Working with partners

UNHCR works closely with partners to provide protection and support to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in Latvia and to advocate for their inclusion.

***Gribu Palīdzēt Bēgļiem* / I Want to Help Refugees**

LATVIJAS CILVĒKTIESĪBU CENTRS
LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Latvian Centre for Human Rights

***Drošā Māja* / Shelter Safe House**

Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities

COUNSELLING SERVICES

- UNHCR and partners provide support, information, and legal counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees throughout Latvia. In the course of 2023, beneficiaries received assistance regarding asylum procedures, access to temporary protection, and access to rights and services. During 2023, UNHCR's partner 'I Want to Help Refugees' (GPB) assisted 5,541 refugees and asylum-seekers at its Information Centre in Riga, as well as through other outreach activities in border areas and municipalities. The main queries related to Latvian language courses, the completion of documentation, social support, transportation services, and medical assistance.
- Throughout 2023, UNHCR's partner Shelter Safe House provided 528 asylum-seekers and refugees with legal assistance, as well as offering psycho-social support to a total of 167 individuals.

MONITORING VISITS

- During 2023, GPB conducted 39 protection monitoring visits, often to multiple locations. The monitoring visits highlighted concerns and needs of refugees and their vulnerabilities; for example, the specific needs of elderly refugees and ensuring that information about support is available.
- In mid-October, data collection for the multi-sector needs assessment ended, through the assistance of GPB and the Lithuanian Red Cross, who jointly completed 383 interviews with refugees from Ukraine. UNHCR organized a validation of the preliminary results of the 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment for the RRP partners in Latvia in the middle of December. UNHCR presented the collected data on demographics, protection, including status, social tensions, child protection, accountability to affected populations (AAP), education, social economic inclusion and livelihood, health, accommodation. Partners actively participated in discussions of the results for the final report.
- In October and November, UNHCR visited the detention centres in Mucenieki and Daugavpils respectively and spoke with asylum-seekers regarding their situation and experience.

TRAININGS & CONFERENCE

- In mid-December, UNHCR's partner the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) organized a seminar on the topics of family reunification and access to territory, in order to strengthen the involvement of lawyers in asylum-seekers' cases and to support a network of lawyers. Some 25 persons, for the most part lawyers, participated in the seminar.

COORDINATION

- A total of 16 partners in the Refugee Response Plan submitted their project and budgets for activities to support refugees in 2024. The total appeal for Baltic countries in 2024 will amount to $33,743,678, including $9,252,633 for Latvia.
- At the end of November, the UNHCR Inter-Agency team held two virtual training sessions on resource mobilization. Some 39 individuals joined in these sessions to learn more about the fundraising cycle and donor management.