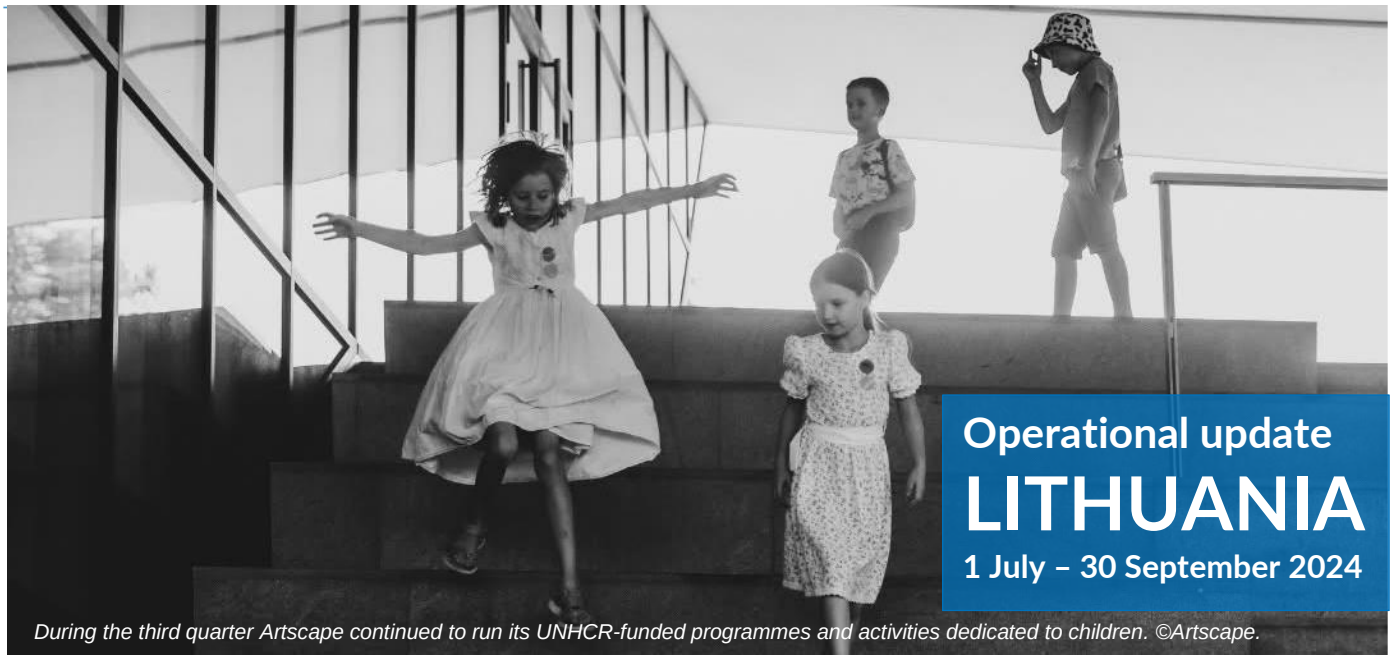
UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

LITHUANIA



Operational update
LITHUANIA
1 July – 30 September 2024

During the third quarter Artscape continued to run its UNHCR-funded programmes and activities dedicated to children. ©Artscape.

Operational context

Since the outset of the war in Ukraine in early 2022, the Lithuanian Government and civil society have responded with steadfast solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine, including by providing access to employment and all public services. While immediate access to employment, education, and availability of mainstream social benefits and services have created favourable conditions for integration of refugees from Ukraine, factors such as lack of local language skills, de-skilling in workplaces, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, may hinder integration into local society. Since 2023, Lithuania has been included in the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), complementing the government-led response. In 2024, a new plan has been launched, coordinated by UNHCR and developed by 18 humanitarian organizations in Lithuania.

Following the increase in refugee and migrant arrivals via Belarus to Lithuania in 2021, Lithuania introduced temporary measures limiting access to asylum. In April 2023, the adopted amendments to the State Border Law further reinforced the restrictions at the border. UNHCR is concerned that the law authorizes pushbacks and may lead to individuals not being granted effective access to territory and the right to seek asylum.

Working with partners

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

KEY FIGURES

- Around **90,000** applications for temporary protection by refugees from Ukraine since February 2022.
- Current estimated presence: **45,000** individuals.*
- **117** individuals granted refugee status in 2024.
- **297** asylum applications lodged by end of Q2 2024.
- **2,283** stateless persons in Lithuania as of 1 January 2024.

** Renewal of permits is ongoing and may result in changes in figures.*

LIETUVOS RAUDONASIS KRYŽIUS — Lithuanian Red Cross

ARTSCAPE — Artscape

Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities

COUNSELLING SERVICES

- In the first nine months of 2024, UNHCR and partner the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) have provided legal consultations to a total 627 refugees, asylum-seekers, and those newly arrived in country in that time; this includes 167 in the third quarter alone. Consultations are carried out both at reception and detention centres and outside centres, and in 2024 have included 152 Ukrainians (with 62 in the third quarter) so far. Legal consultations are also given via email and/or face-to-face at LRC's Vilnius office.
- LRC's office in Alytus also supports UNHCR project activities. During the first six months of 2024, 64 individual cases were handled, and 346 people received social counselling on various issues (employment, benefits, disability pensions, residence permits, etc.), with applicants coming from Alytus, as well as from other regional cities. Since the beginning of the year, the need for humanitarian aid has increased as the procedure for housing compensation has changed, which has reduced people's income.

PROTECTION MONITORING

- In 2024, to date, LRC has conducted a total of 42 protection monitoring visits, including 13 in the third quarter, often to multiple locations and targeting such facilities, amongst others, as refugee reception and foreigners' registration centres.
- In August, UNHCR conducted a monitoring visit to the child welfare centre at Pastogė, one of the institutional care facilities housing unaccompanied children from Ukraine. Ten Ukrainian children remain under care, with four set to attend universities and the others continuing in schools, most of whom are 16 years or older.

INTEGRATION AND OUTREACH

- LRC supports the integration and inclusion of refugees, inter alia through counselling, guidance, referrals and information provision. In the third quarter of 2024, 554 individuals, including 365 Ukrainians, were assisted through these integration and inclusion activities. So far in 2024, outreach activities organized by UNHCR's partners, LRC and Artscape, have drawn 4,381 participants, including 3,594 refugees from Ukraine; in the third quarter alone, 577 Ukrainians (and 37 others) participated in such activities.

EVENTS

- In July, UNHCR participated in the XXIIIrd Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) meeting and conference on refugee and migrant integration. UNHCR participated in a panel discussion on *Integrating Migrants and Refugees at the Local Level: Unlocking the Opportunities*, together with a number of prominent experts and officials.
- In August, the UNHCR Regional Security Coordinator provided security training to staff members at Rukla and Naujininkai reception centres and personnel of Lithuanian Red Cross and Artscape. In total there were 42 participants and issues addressed included confronting violence, conducting safe interviews, handling personal threats, and giving trauma related first aid.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- Consultations with partners on the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) took place in Vilnius from 6-10 September. High-level meetings were held with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the Ministry of Interior. To assist in the planning for the 2025 RRP, two focus group discussions with refugees and asylum-seekers as well as NGO partners were organized. The diplomatic community in Lithuania was also briefed on the progress with the current RRP as well as the plans for the 2025 RRP.