



On World Refugee Day, UNHCR and partners organized an event in Riga with refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Nigeria, Kuwait, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, together with Latvian locals. © UNHCR/Shelter Safe House

## Operational context

Since 24 February 2022, Latvia has received a high number of refugees from Ukraine, amounting to approximately 2% 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 organisations in Latvia.

Following the increase in refugee and migrant arrivals via Belarus to 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.

## 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.

### KEY FIGURES

- 49,467 applications for temporary protection lodged by refugees from Ukraine since February 2022. \* Officially estimated presence: 32,313
- 564 asylum applications lodged in first half of 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 with Article 1.2(ii).



**I Want to Help  
Refugees**

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RIGHTS



**Latvian  
Centre for  
Human  
Rights**



**Shelter Safe  
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## Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities



### COUNSELLING SERVICES

- UNHCR and partners provide support, information and legal counselling to new arrivals and refugees about asylum procedures, access to temporary protection and access to rights and services, among other issues. In the second quarter, 111 asylum-seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection received individual legal counselling and support through UNHCR and partners.



### MONITORING VISITS

- UNHCR and partners conducted a monitoring visit to Grebneva border crossing point and three monitoring visits to detention centres (Daugavpils and Mucenieki). Due to long waiting times at the Latvian-Russian border area in Grebneva, the demand for water and food increased, and has been addressed by NGOs and authorities. NGO "Your Friends" set up a humanitarian assistance and information point at the border crossing point in Vientuli. At Daugavpils detention centre, UNHCR and partners observed limited access for asylum-seekers to the children's room and outdoor areas. UNHCR's position is that children should not be detained, and UNHCR promotes a broader use of alternatives to detention.



### DIALOGUE WITH AUTHORITIES

- On 20 June, [UNHCR shared its observations](#) regarding amendments to the State Border Law and State Border Guard Law with the Parliament and relevant Government institutions. On 27 June, [UNHCR published a statement](#) expressing concern that the adopted changes to the laws will effectively authorize pushbacks. The law amendments authorize Latvian border guards to prevent entry to the country in case an asylum-seeker has entered the territory in an irregular manner and without an objective reason for not crossing at an official border crossing point.



### INTEGRATION AND OUTREACH

- At the LAMPA Opinion Festival on 9-10 June, UNHCR organized two events, provided visitors with the chance to watch a film from Za'atari refugee camp through Virtual Reality, and supported NGO "Your Friends" with a large tent to host a wide range of activities related to the topic of forced displacement. UNHCR hosted a presentation about the global refugee situation as well as [a conversation between two refugees in Latvia](#), from Ukraine and Türkiye respectively, who shared their experiences of arriving and rebuilding their lives in Latvia.
- In June, UNHCR and partners organized two events to mark World Refugee Day. [In Liepaja](#), UNHCR and partners hosted the discussion "Being a refugee in Liepaja – what does it mean?" and provided an overview of the global refugee situation. Refugees and locals at the event celebrated midsummer and participated in singing Latvian and Ukrainian songs, finishing the day by enjoying a meal together.
- UNHCR and partners visited eight municipalities to strengthen working relations with local authorities and service providers and to meet with refugees from Ukraine living in these municipalities. The main concerns identified are the need for inclusion of older people who require additional support and the need for increased attention to children who receive insufficient support in the national education system. Additionally, children who study remotely risk being isolated from local children.
- During a visit to municipalities in April, UNHCR co-organized and co-led a project seminar to discuss training methodology regarding the involvement of immigrants and refugees in policy planning, co-design and implementation. This seminar was part of the FOR-IN integration project, coordinated by the Nordic Council of Ministers and UNHCR.

- From April through June, UNHCR and partners managing the Information Centre in Riga responded to at least 299 inquiries received from refugees from Ukraine. The inquiries primarily relate to basic necessities as well as extracurricular activities for children, prolongation of visas and residence permits.



## **COORDINATION**

- UNHCR organized monthly inter-agency coordination meetings in Latvia with participation of representatives from NGOs, UN agencies and the relevant line ministries. The participants shared information on their activities and discussed existing challenges and needs of refugees from Ukraine. At the latest meeting, the participants also discussed current trends related to formal and non-formal education for refugees from Ukraine.
- In April, UNHCR met with RRP partners to establish a PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) taskforce network in order to strengthen prevention work as well as formal and informal inter-agency referral systems. During the RRP coordination meeting in May, UNHCR and partners presented a draft action plan which includes mapping of service providers, identifying gaps and planning PSEA training.