



Estonia

Report of activities and achievements in 2023

Since 24 February 2022, Estonia has received a high number of refugees from Ukraine, amounting to more than 3 per cent of Estonia's population. From the outset of the war in Ukraine, the Estonian Government and civil society have responded with steadfast solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine including by providing access to employment and public services. Challenges facing refugees from Ukraine include access to suitable

accommodation, access to decent work, as well as access to medical support and language training. Fourteen partners implement the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) to provide protection and support to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in Estonia and advocate for their inclusion. In 2023, Estonia was included in the Ukraine RRP, complementing the government-led response, and outlining the multi-partner and multi-sector response strategy.

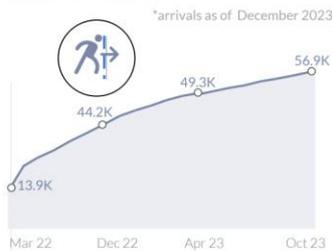
This year-end report provides an overview of RRP partner activities in 2023. The RRP, which provides all actors with a common plan and appeal aims to address the needs of over 57,000 Ukrainians in Estonia who applied for protection there. While funding constraints did not allow all partners to fully implement their plans, at year's end, some 17,600 individuals had received humanitarian assistance through UNHCR and its partners.

Key Figures

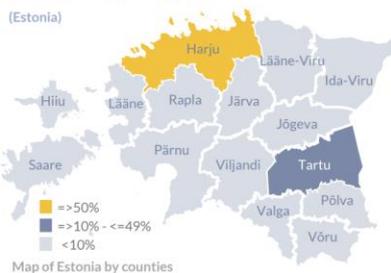
Target Population



Refugee Arrivals



Refugees by Region (Estonia)

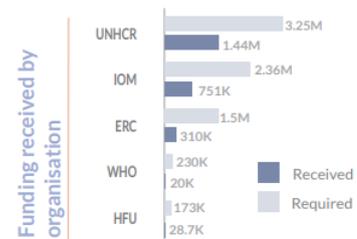
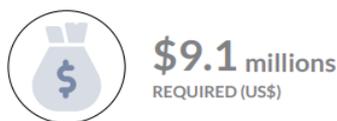


Partners



FUNDING : REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN 2023

Jan - Dec 2023 (Financial Tracking)



Sectors (millions US\$)

Donor contribution (millions US\$)

For further information please see the [Operational Data Portal for the Ukraine Refugee Situation](#) for more details on refugee population figures and information resources. | See also the [Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan](#) for a breakdown of sectoral response priorities and requirements and the [Refugee Funding Tracker](#) for RRP funding information.

Refugee Response Plan in Estonia

Since 24 February 2022, more than 5.9 million people from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe. By the end of 2023, Estonia had received just under 57,000 applications for temporary protection by Ukrainian citizens. Temporary protection enables refugees to access healthcare, education, and the labour market. Estonia also received 6,379 asylum applications for international protection by Ukrainians, which were being processed.

In Estonia, inter-agency coordination was led by the Government of Estonia. To complement this government-led response, the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners convened a forum to coordinate and advance RRP objectives. Co-chaired by UNHCR and NGO partner Estonian Refugee Council, the coordination body included representatives of relevant state authorities such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Social Insurance Board. Through the inter-agency coordination platform, three UN agencies and eleven NGOs engaged on their funding situation and its impact on programming. The 2023 RRP required US\$9.135 million for activities in Estonia, of which 29 per cent were funded at the year's end. Consequently, more than half of the appealing partners needed to adjust their programming due to funding gaps, with local NGOs in particular being severely affected. The sectors most affected were basic needs, protection and livelihood and economic inclusion.

Partners' response to the Ukraine refugee situation

When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, the Government of Estonia led the refugee response. The Social Insurance Fund and local NGOs were present to welcome newly arrived refugees, the majority of whom came up through Latvia. Refugees were able to receive both core-relief items as well as food, often from private donors. Reception centres were set up in which arriving refugees could be referred for services. In general, and in terms of trends of movement, those that came through the Russian Federation entered Estonia at Narva in the north of the country, gravitating toward the capital city of Tallinn with the intention of staying longer in Estonia; others elected to continue southward to Latvia and onwards to other countries of the European Union. Those that chose to stay in Estonia could apply for Temporary Protection to regularize their stay in the country. After registration of their residency in a local municipality, refugees could access social services and benefits, and enrol their children in local schools.

Addressing Immediate Needs Upon Arrival

Where needed, partners delivered targeted basic needs assistance to refugees from Ukraine either travelling to onward destinations or planning to remain in Estonia. While the number of people transiting Estonia decreased over the course of the year, support needs persisted for those remaining in Estonia. In general, the basic needs sector remained underfunded despite the growing needs related to rising prices and housing shortages.

The primary focus was on the most vulnerable refugees to help them meet their basic needs in the event of a gap between their arrival in Estonia and enrolment in its mainstream social protection system. The **Estonia Food Bank** through its 16 food banks provided food packages to some 10,000 individuals. Approximately three quarters of the food was donated by producers, supermarkets, and private people and one quarter of the food was purchased.

Temporary accommodation for those fleeing the war was a valuable form of support in the immediacy of their initial movement. The **Estonian Refugee Council** (ERC) was able to accommodate 1,000 individuals. **'Hands for Ukraine'** provided accommodation for 150 people, and IOM was able to place 366 individuals into private accommodation. At the Pärnu Reception Centre those arriving could be assigned to temporary accommodation. With regard to accommodation, 'Hands for Ukraine' completed renovation works on three of seven apartments provided by the Tallinn City Government to accommodate refugees from Ukraine. In 2023, the needs for temporary accommodation referrals lessened and the last centre closed in the Autumn. Hygiene

kits and winter clothing was distributed to 5,000 people through 'Hands for Ukraine', with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** contributing a further 315 items.

In 2023, **IOM** provided transit support to 535 vulnerable refugees from Ukraine, including 260 male and 270 female, as well as five whose gender was not specified, travelling through Estonia to other European countries. Further, pre-travel screening was provided for 390 people and movement support to 357 individuals, as well as food for 169 individuals including 22 in transit. Cash assistance was given to 242 people.

Protection Services

In 2023, partners reached a total of 6,065 individuals with protection assistance. RRP partners provided legal counselling and assistance to refugees from Ukraine, supporting legal practitioners who help them. In addition to counselling and legal assistance, guidance on procedures and practices in Estonia and emotional support services were provided to Ukrainian and other refugees seeking assistance and information. A strong focus on the provision of information, child protection issues, and support services for victims of gender-based violence remains key.

Protection monitoring activities continued throughout 2023, aiming to expand knowledge and available information concerning the situation of refugees from Ukraine in Estonia, including protection of refugee children. Partners conducted regular visits to border crossing points, as well as to registration, reception and accommodation sites, and met with refugees from Ukraine to understand their situation, protection needs, problems and intentions. This allows ensuring their access to rights and services in Estonia and their effective inclusion and integration in its society. For example, the **Estonian Refugee Council (ERC)** carried out 315 monitoring visits, often to multiple locations, throughout 2023, and **EHRC** made 16 such visits to border crossing points, accommodation sites, and detention facilities.

To strengthen two-way communication with refugees from Ukraine, **UNHCR** developed a **HELP Page** for Estonia to facilitate access to information and raise awareness about assistance and services available in the country. The page also allowed collecting feedback on experiences of refugees from Ukraine in Estonia. **MTU Eluliin** opened a phone line to provide emotional support to Ukrainian refugees which was staffed by 40 Ukrainian-speaking volunteers. The **Estonian Refugee Council** provided individual and group counselling to refugees in Estonia and individual counselling was provided daily in Tallinn and through phone, Viber, Telegram, e-mail, and other digital channels. Group counselling sessions were provided on topics of particular interest, such as Estonian digital services, housing, legal issues, and employment. The **Estonian Human Rights Centre (EHRC)** offered legal assistance to refugees, as well as advocacy and court interventions as needed. In the course of 2023, **EHRC** was on hand to provide 510 individuals with legal assistance. **EHRC** further created short explanatory videos providing guidance on what steps an individual needs to take when applying for asylum in Estonia and how the **EHRC** can assist them throughout the process. The videos are available in English with subtitles in English, Russian, Ukrainian, and Estonian.

With regard to community outreach, **ERC** were able to reach 4,911 individuals while **Mondo**, an Estonian organization that focuses on education and health in Estonia, saw a further 355 people. In addition, **Mondo** also reached out to host communities, which is a crucial factor in enhancing togetherness amongst both refugees and the people hosting them, and to that end, 1,765 individuals were reached. **Mondo** also made 69 communication interventions in the course of the year mostly through social media, as well as enabling refugees to produce their own content.

The RRP partners strengthened coordination among civil society organizations and facilitated mapping of available services across the country, while simultaneously establishing an effective referral system, with **ERC** making 102 referrals to a variety of service providers, mostly for mental health, as well as child protection, other health-related, and civil services.

Capacity development activities enhanced the knowledge of RRP partners on accountability to affected people, gender-based violence, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and other relevant refugee protection issues, and to that end in 2023 **ERC** and **IOM** provided training to their staff on PSEA.

Child Protection

Children are among the most vulnerable groups in a crisis and particular care is paid in attending to this group's needs. In the course of 2023, partners expanded intercultural and extracurricular activities for children and their families, enabling them to find their way into new social networks and thus contributing to children's positive development in a new environment. The **Estonian Union of Child Welfare** (EUCW) delivered training for child protection officers and held seminars and other awareness raising activities. **IOM** provided cultural adaptation sessions for youth and has been training child protection officers of municipalities together with **Tallinn University** and **Mondo**, reaching 300-400 children approximately. **EUCW** identifies a need for more guidance and support for refugee parents from Ukraine regarding a variety of issues, including how the child protection system works, questions about guardianship and custody, and awareness-raising about the rules of child-rearing in Estonia, such as positive parenting. For children, materials about losing parents may also be needed.

Cross-Cutting Priorities

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

In the area of MHPSS, the **Estonian Refugee Council** ran its MindSpring programme, helping refugees to cope with trauma and adaptation challenges. ERC reached 163 people with peer-driven and group-based mental health support in 2023. **IOM** delivered seven psychosocial support sessions for 241 child protection specialists, social workers, and teachers working with Ukrainian refugees across Estonia. These were held in close collaboration with researchers and scholars from the Tallinn University.

IOM will continue to deliver specific psychosocial support sessions for frontline staff across Estonia, including border guards from the Police and Border Guard Board.

An MHPSS crisis coordination group was established by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, Department of Mental Health. Members include representatives of governmental institutions Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education, Social Insurance Board, Health Board, Rescue Board, international organizations IOM, WHO, UNHCR and civil society organizations, including Estonian Red Cross, Estonian Refugee Council, and Ukrainian War Refugees Psychosocial Crisis Assistance Fund (USF).

On 1 June, the first ever national MHPSS conference under the patronage of the First Lady of Estonia took place in Tallinn followed by multiple workshops on 2 June. It was organized in collaboration with Ministry of Social Affairs, WHO country office in Estonia, WHO regional office for Europe, WHO headquarters, IOM and UNHCR. Over the two days, more than a total of 200 people participated in person in the conference.

WHO organized a seminar in February in Tallinn about the MHPSS component in responding to crises and contingency planning. The seminar was attended by 30 staff and experts who play a role in the organization and delivery of MHPSS services in different types of crises and emergencies, including the Ukraine refugee response. Further, WHO and the mental health department of the Ministry of Social Affairs set up an MHPSS national coordination group. The first meeting of the MHPSS coordination group was held on 15 June. In 2023, WHO provided assistance to 150 particularly vulnerable beneficiaries to improve their state of health and accessibility of medical services and medicines (dental care, purchase of medicines, rehabilitation).

Protection Monitoring

UNHCR carried out a protection profiling and monitoring exercise, commenced in October 2022. By the end of December 2023, some 621 refugees from Ukraine (representing 1,756 householder members), were interviewed. Key findings include the fact that 98 per cent of respondents had applied for temporary protection, with 98 per cent having received a positive decision. Further, 43 per cent were employed in Estonia, 27 per cent were unemployed, and some 10 per cent retired. Some 85 per cent cited having at least one urgent need. Employment was one of the main concerns, with 65 per cent of the 27 per cent unemployed citing language as the greatest barrier, and 36 per cent citing lack of opportunity. After employment, the greatest need was for

education (37 per cent). The need for material assistance was recorded at 32 per cent, food at 18 per cent, and healthcare at 28 per cent.

Livelihoods and Socio-Economic Inclusion

In 2023, Estonia had one of the highest employment rates of refugees from Ukraine, thanks in part to fewer language barriers than in other countries, and it was noted in the aforementioned protection profiling exercise that 47 per cent of refugees are presently employed, including remote workers (3 per cent) and self-employed (1 per cent) in addition to the 43 per cent employed in Estonia. RRP partners capitalized on this through entrepreneurial programmes, cultural adaptation, and on-the-job language training. The **Estonian Refugee Council**, for example, commenced a new cycle of its entrepreneurship programme targeting refugees in Estonia in autumn 2023. The programme assisted refugees with creating refugee-led micro-businesses and featured a new component which supported refugees looking to enter the labour market. Further attention to this area, including language training, is nevertheless needed to assist refugees to fully integrate.

In order to facilitate the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine into Estonian society, RRP partners implemented communication activities and produced content pieces to promote a positive narrative on refugees and their active role in society as well as to support advocacy in the area of refugee protection and integration. Briefings for journalists and media students were organized in order to increase interest in refugee topics. Regular community events targeting various refugee groups, strengthened programmes that empower the refugee community. Partners organized events that help bring together refugees and the host community. Approximately 2,400 adults with subsidiary protection received cultural adaptation courses delivered by **IOM** trainers under an AMIF-funded project. Through IOM, a total of 126 vulnerable Ukrainian refugees (single mothers, pensioners, and others) participated in focused adaptation courses on specific topics such as digital social services, e-identity, and its affiliations (mobile-ID, smart-ID), and working in Estonia: rights and obligations of both employees and employers.

In 2023, partner **Köömen** conducted a training programme for a group of refugees from Ukraine through which they completed six months' work experience, on the job Estonian language study and job culture adaptation counselling. Many of the participants went on to find employment in Estonia.

The **ERC** ran a women's entrepreneurship programme targeting 92 Ukrainian refugee women in Estonia. Furthermore, between September and December 2023, ERC utilized evidence-based advocacy and facilitated integration through community-based protection activities in Estonia reaching 34 individuals.

To further foster socio-economic inclusion in Estonian society, The **Institute for Baltic Studies** commenced a mentoring project for migrant and refugee women in February 2023, reaching 100 women.

Language learning opportunities both for adults and children remained as a residual need, with the number of available language courses not corresponding to the language learning demand. Language learning opportunities are especially limited outside of larger Estonian cities and on the islands.

IOM continued delivering a variety of activities in Estonia that support livelihoods, social cohesion and inclusion and access to services for Ukrainian refugee children and adults into society. Between July and December 2023, IOM reached 159 individuals with activities geared to supporting their social inclusion in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services as well as development programmes. IOM identified a growing need to deliver focused adaptation courses regionally in Estonia with specific requests from local cities and municipalities hosting Ukrainian refugees on various topics including employment regulations, summer jobs for children and digital social services. IOM ran specific summer camps enhancing opportunities for Ukrainian children to meet with their Estonian peers.

Education

In 2023, 9,130 Ukrainian citizens were registered in the state education system including primary, secondary and vocation, education, and training (VET). Additionally, Estonian language courses at A1 level were provided to more than 10,000 beneficiaries of TP.

Throughout 2023, RRP partners supported schools, students, and teachers to better understand the needs of the refugees and the education system in Estonia. As a result, the collaboration between refugees and their hosts increased. The **Estonian Refugee Council** developed and piloted an updated methodology for supporting schools which had taken in a large number of children with refugee or migrant background in autumn. ERC continued its work targeting kindergartens with already-developed approaches.

Mondo organized workshops and meetings between students and refugees in Estonian schools to support the awareness of Estonian youth on forced migration. Refugee students from Ukraine were able to participate in interactive methods such as virtual reality workshops. They also participated in joint activities with Estonians, which was particularly beneficial for Ukrainian youth who otherwise have limited contact with Estonian youth. Throughout 2023, Estonian educational workers improved their understanding of refugee matters because of the trainings and seminars. Ukrainian refugee teachers in Estonia participated in the Mondo Ukraine Academy training programme to gain a deeper understanding of the Estonian education system. As a result, Ukrainian refugee teachers have become more active in organizing events at their schools such as global education days. In September, Mondo provided 20 laptops for use by said teachers. Mondo established cooperation with the programme of art therapy at Tallinn University for the provision of art therapy for refugees. Art therapy has the potential to improve the psychosocial well-being of refugees and can help refugees process their trauma and express their emotions in a safe and supportive environment. Mondo has identified that refugee youth as well as educational workers, who could apply the technique with their students, would benefit from learning art therapy methods.

IOM in collaboration with the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian government agency responsible for implementing social security delivered adaptation courses in schools with high numbers of refugee children. The courses were attended by 240 Ukrainian children from three schools in Tallinn and were designed to enhance the settling in experience for children.

CONTACTS

Gregory Cameron, Inter-Agency Coordinator, Estonia

cameron@unhcr.org, Tel: +371 2 6299 045

LINKS

[Regional data portal – Ukraine Situation RRP – Refugee Funding Tracker](#)

RRP and extended partnerships in Estonia



Estonian Human Rights Centre (EHRC) is an independent non-governmental human rights advocacy organization.



Estonian Food Bank runs sixteen food banks all over Estonia that provide weekly free food support to people who need it, among them Ukrainian refugees.



Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) provides humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected people around the world and various needs-based support services to refugees in Estonia.



Friends of Mariupol is a charity volunteer organization, helping Ukrainian war refugees who came to Estonia, through counselling.



Hands for Ukraine organizes accommodation for Ukrainian war refugees.



Institute of Baltic Studies uses applied research, policy analysis and practical activities in the areas of migration and integration.



International House Tartu's main focus is community building between people of migration background and local people.



Johannes Mihkelson Centre is a social work and training centre that supports people in job-seeking, career choice, livelihoods improvement, rehabilitation, and integration process.



Mittetulundusühing Eluliin offers professional emotional and psychological support to vulnerable target groups from Ukraine, including counselling for victims of gender-based violence.



Mondo is an Estonian organization focuses on education/health, subsistence, environmental and digital competencies programmes and global education in Estonia.



NGO Ukrainian Cultural Centre aims to preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage, crafts and traditions as well as the cultural identity of Ukrainians who reside permanently in Estonia.



International Organization for Migration (IOM) is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.



European Region

WHO's mission is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.



Köömen is a social enterprise that provides both work & extensive on-the-job language & culture training for refugees in order to help them access the labour market.



EESTI PUUETEGA INIMESTE KODA
ESTONIAN CHAMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities (ECPD) is an umbrella organization for people with disabilities in Estonia, covering all disabilities and a wide range of chronic diseases, advocating for the rights and quality of life of people with disabilities



Lastekaitse Liit
Estonian Union for Child Welfare

Estonian Union for Child Welfare (EUCW) is a non-profit umbrella organization that contributes to ensuring children's rights and shaping a child-friendly society.