



Operational update
LITHUANIA
1 July - 30 September 2023

On 12 September, UNHCR's partner Artscape opened a safe space at the Foreigners' Registration Centre in Pabrade. © Artscape/Leonard Lipsky

Operational context

Since 24 February 2022, Lithuania has received a high number of refugees from Ukraine, amounting to more than 2.5 per cent of Lithuania's population. From the outset of the war in Ukraine, 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. Challenges facing refugees from Ukraine include access to long-term accommodation.

As of 2023, Lithuania 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 10 humanitarian organizations in Lithuania.

Following the increase in refugee and migrant arrivals via Belarus to Lithuania in 2021 – during which approximately 4,500 individuals arrived of whom many applied for asylum – 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.



Lithuanian Red Cross



Artscape

KEY FIGURES

- Around **81,000** applications for temporary protection by refugees from Ukraine since Feb 2022*
- Current estimated presence: **49,905** individuals.
- **432** individuals granted refugee status in 2023
- **435** asylum applications lodged by end of Q3 2023
- **2,427** stateless persons in Lithuania as of 1 January 2023

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

Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities



COUNSELLING SERVICES

- By the end of the third quarter of 2023, UNHCR and partners had provided legal consultations to 405 refugees, asylum-seekers and new arrivals both at reception and detention centres, as well as outside centres. In addition, in the third quarter, some 69 Ukrainians were consulted via e-mail and/or face-to-face at the office of UNHCR's partner, the Lithuanian Red Cross, in Vilnius.
- Since the beginning of 2023, 11,163 refugees from Ukraine have participated in outreach activities organised by UNHCR's partners.



PROTECTION MONITORING

- As per the end of September, UNHCR and partners have so far this year conducted 40 monitoring visits to SBGS (State Border Guard Service) facilities as well as to other government-run facilities, including Pabradė Foreigners' Registration Centre, Mickunai (Vilnius Frontier District), Kybartai railroad Border Crossing Point (BCP), Švenčionys Frontier Station (FS), A. Barauskas FS, Tribonys FS, Medininkai BCP, and Rukla Refugee Reception centre (RRC).
- The Multi-Sector Needs Assessment-Light (MSNA) exercise began in Lithuania in early September. By the end of September, 324 interviews had been conducted by IOM and the Lithuanian Red Cross. The survey is due to be finished by 15 October.
- UNHCR's protection profiling and monitoring exercise continued, with 651 respondents (representing 1,588 household members), all refugees from Ukraine, interviewed. Key findings included that 97 per cent of respondents have applied for temporary protection. Some three quarters of respondents cited having at least one urgent need, such as material assistance, food, employment, and healthcare. With regard to unemployment, language was cited as the greatest barrier.



TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES

- On 25 July, a roundtable on family reunification was organized by the Lithuanian Red Cross in cooperation with UNHCR. The event was attended by various Ministries, the Migration Department, and Caritas. UNHCR underlined the need to ensure flexible and efficient family reunification procedures for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. UNHCR offered support in arranging remote interviews with family members and collecting biometrics. Representatives of MOI preliminary agreed to consider amendments to legislation and procedures with a view to facilitating family reunification of refugee families.



INTEGRATION AND OUTREACH

- A delegation from the Akmene District municipality participated in a study visit to Dalarna County in Sweden. The study visit was supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers' office in Lithuania and facilitated by UNHCR. Four municipalities were visited, including municipal integration services, education institutions, private sector, NGOs, and others. The aim was not just to exchange knowledge and experiences to further improve integration systems, but also to establish long-term cooperation between Swedish and Lithuanian municipalities to work on integration projects and initiatives.
- UNHCR facilitated and participated in a one-week study visit for Naujoji Akmene Municipality in Jakobstad region in Finland. The delegation of local integration actors met with municipal representatives, refugees, NGOs and civil society organisations to learn how Jakobstad region is welcoming and integrating refugees and how the integration strategy at the local level has been developed.

- In August, UNHCR participated in the BUTENT festival at Birštonas. Discussions took place between the Lithuanian Red Cross, UNHCR, and Ukrainian as well as Belarusian refugees. The topic of discussion was 'What Have We Learnt from Welcoming and Integrating Ukrainian Refugees?' The discussion shed some light on the number of integration challenges Ukrainian and Belarusian refugee communities are facing in Lithuania, and possible actions to address these challenges in the future were suggested. The discussion gave a chance for the audience to hear the reflections from people who are directly affected by integration policies in Lithuania.
- In September, UNHCR participated in the Artscape 'safe space' opening at the Foreigners' Registration Centre in Pabrade. The safe space or 'house of creative missions' as it is also referred to, gives an opportunity for residents of the centre to enjoy some privacy and quiet time, away from the centre. To arrange the space, Artscape painted a refugee housing unit (RHU), which forms the actual safe space, and decorated the inside together with the residents of the centre. Please see the picture on the first page of this update.
- UNHCR's partner, Artscape, won a gold medal at the Baltic states advertising competition *BalticBest 2023* in the 'Best Print/Outdoor Communication Campaign' category. The prize was awarded for the social campaign *Pažinti ar susipažinti* ('To Know or Get to Know') created with the Marios Agency and designed to foster celebration of diversity, acceptance and cultural understanding, especially among refugee children and youth. The campaign has resonated deeply with many, including the international jury, who applauded the innovative artistic approach and social message.



COORDINATION

- Throughout the third quarter, UNHCR organized inter-agency coordination meetings in Lithuania. Further, UNHCR initiated discussions with the partners as well as government actors about the projects to be included in the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for Ukraine. In September, workshops were held with the RRP partners, to prepare and lay the groundwork for the next phase, which is the submission of projects and budgets for inclusion in the 2024 RRP.