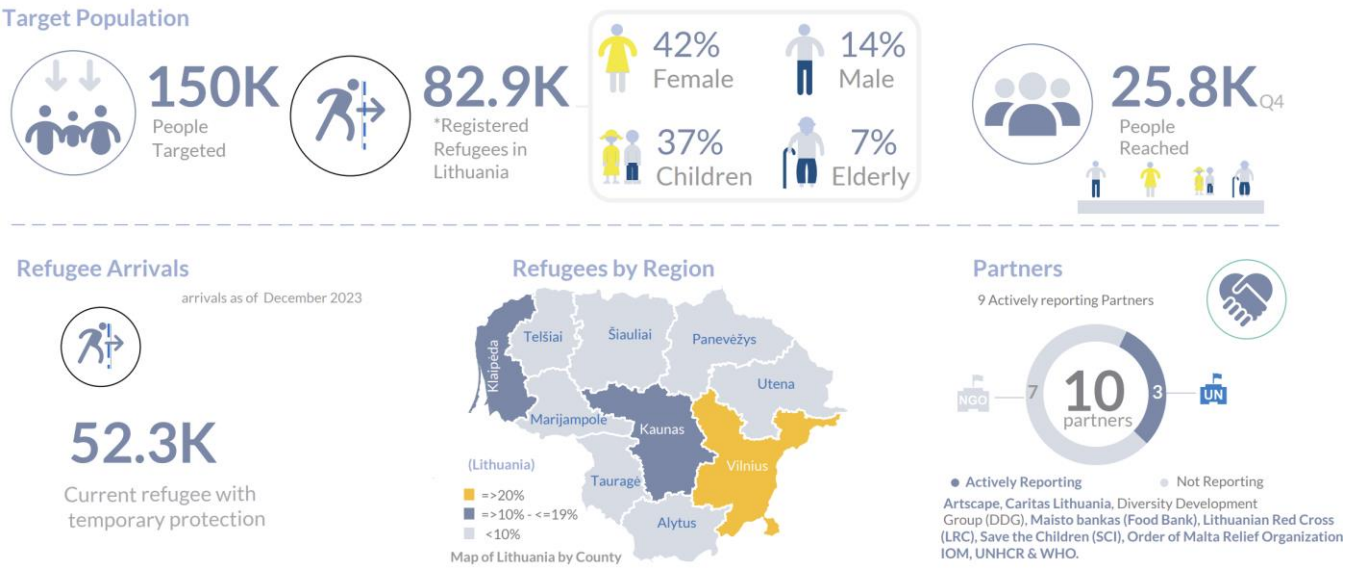
Lithuania

Report of activities and achievements in 2023

By December 2023, 82,900 refugees from Ukraine had been cumulatively registered for temporary protection (TP) in Lithuania, constituting some 2.5 per cent of the host country population, with 42 per cent being female. As of December 2023, 52,300 remained actively registered with TP status. The Government, civil society and host community united to work towards a whole-of-society approach to ensuring reception and protection conditions for refugees arriving from Ukraine.

The refugee response is coordinated overall by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, with municipalities and civil society as key actors supplementing central government programming. The system is based on inclusion in mainstream Lithuanian education, the social services and support system, as well as on open access to the job market. As of 2023, Lithuania is included in the Ukraine RRP, complementing the government-led response.

This year-end report provides an overview of RRP partner activities throughout 2023. The RRP, which provides all actors with a common plan and financial appeal for each organization, targets the needs of Ukrainians in Lithuania who have applied for temporary and international protection in Lithuania. At year's end, some 25,800 individuals had received humanitarian assistance.



For further information, 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 Lithuania

Since 24 February 2022, more than 5.9 million people from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe. At year's end 2023, Lithuania had received 82,900 applications for temporary protection by Ukrainian citizens.

Today, organizations in Lithuania helping refugees from Ukraine are part of the **Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** for Ukraine. The RRP outlines the multi-partner and multi-sector response strategy and financial requirements of UNHCR and other partners responding to the needs of refugees from Ukraine, complementing the government-led response. It provides all actors with a common plan and budget in support of government-led coordination. Meetings between the RRP partners are held provisionally on a monthly basis and/or as needed.

Through the inter-agency coordination platform, led by **UNHCR**, three UN agencies, one international NGO, and six NGOs engaged on their funding situation and its impact on programming. The 2023 RRP required US$17.8 million for activities in Lithuania, of which 46 per cent were funded as of the year's end. Consequently, more than half of the appealing partners needed to adjust or abandon 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.

In November, the Inter-Agency team held two virtual training sessions on resource mobilization. Close to 40 individuals joined these sessions to learn more about the fundraising cycle and donor management.

Spotlight

In January 2023, the **Diversity Development Group (DDG)** published its study *Municipalities' Response to the Reception of Refugees from Ukraine: Experiences, Challenges and Good Practices* (*Savivaldybių atsakas į pabėgėlių iš Ukrainos priėmimą: patirtys, iššūkiai ir gerosios praktikos*). The aim of the study was to analyse the response of selected municipalities to the reception of refugees from Ukraine and to identify challenges and good practices that could be applied to migrant integration policy in Lithuania. Participants included those from six municipalities, viz. Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai, Akmene district, and Jonava district. Recommendations included: information packages (both electronic and printed) about various services and their availability for foreigners newly arriving to live in the municipality, as well as more information in English (and other languages); simplification of temporary residence process; strengthening Lithuanian language instruction; more flexibility when employing non-EU nationals; promote overall inclusion of non-EU nationals into society.

Further, DDG aimed to strengthen the capacity of municipal authorities and other local actors in involving immigrants and refugees in policy planning, co-design and implementation through a project called Fostering refugee and immigrant integration at the local level (For-In). The project was launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers offices in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and UNHCR representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries. [*Photo credit*: ©DDG]

Partners' response to the Ukraine refugee situation

RRP partners were at the forefront of the response to the Ukraine refugee situation and assisting refugees in accessing services.

Addressing immediate needs upon arrival

In 2023, the majority of refugees arriving in Lithuania either made their way from Poland or through Latvia, and went directly to larger cities, such as Vilnius and Kaunas. As such, the first line of response was in the cities and not at the border crossing points and focussed on providing access to all services. The principal cities offered a one-stop shop solution where refugees could receive support, including assignment to hosts and initial accommodation, each location being autonomously and municipally organized, rather than by centralized government coordination.

Caritas Lithuania, through a number of Humanitarian Aid Centres, provided assistance, including information, humanitarian aid, clothing, footwear, housing materials and emotional support. The Humanitarian Aid Centres functioned as catch-all information centres for social support, job finding, and different consultations. In 2023, more than 20,000 Ukrainians received help from Caritas, including 13,152 individuals who received humanitarian aid (hygiene products, food products, other aid products); 2,218 vouchers were given for purchasing hygiene items; 54 vouchers given for families; and 386 telephone SIM cards were handed out. In the course of 2023, the need for support through Humanitarian Aid Centres had lessened and the hubs were all closed by May, as those newly arrived often proceeded through existing connections within Lithuania, such as relatives and friends, often with sufficient funds to immediately access private rental accommodation.

Another organization providing assistance upon arrival and meeting refugees' basic needs is **Save the Children**. In 2023, Save the Children managed to meet the basic needs of 4,897 individuals, which included the distribution of non-food items (school-kits, hygiene-kits) to 2,876 individuals.

Food security is another valuable source of support, especially for the most vulnerable and for those arriving with very little. In 2023, **Food Bank (*Maisto bankas*)** provided a total of 2,435 refugees from Ukraine with food support.

With the shifting trend in 2023 of refugees frequently arriving with established links in Lithuania and moving immediately to rental accommodation, **IOM** undertook two surveys of Lithuanian homeowners and Ukrainians respectively, on the accommodation situation of Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania. Key findings revealed that 30 per cent of refugees from Ukraine stated that they had initially (and often in 2022) found housing in the private market, 27 per cent were staying in accommodation provided by private hosts, 17 per cent were staying in housing provided by friends or family members, and 18 per cent were living in housing provided by municipalities or at a Refugee Reception Centre. The survey of hosts who had provided accommodation to refugees from Ukraine (1,200) showed that 40 per cent of respondents provided housing for a period of two to six months, 35 per cent indicating that they were still hosting refugees. IOM noted that refugees from Ukraine in Lithuania were becoming more and more independent – after finding work and securing a stable income, many had been able to secure their own accommodation.

Under the project title, *Continuing the Dialogue with Refugee Communities in Lithuania*, refugee-led organization, **Pabėgėlių Taryba (Refugee Council)** held a number of meetings which enabled refugees to gain information about and hear the experience of other refugees who had been in country longer. Refugees had the opportunity to hear speakers talk about starting up a business, online tools for business realization, career development, and the introduction of a Job Centre.

Protection Services

An important step for refugees to establish themselves is by applying for Temporary Protection and obtaining relevant documentation which allows them to access many of the services that are also available to citizens of Lithuania. **Lithuanian Red Cross**' lawyers were tasked with making regular visits to accommodation facilities in order to provide legal counselling. In 2023, LRC provided 96 individuals with legal assistance, and conducted outreach activities with 13,971 individuals. Community coordinators facilitated communication with refugees, provided support to social counsellors and, together with volunteers organized group information sessions on specific issues (e.g., healthcare, social benefits, labour rights, trafficking and other forms of GBV, non-discrimination, protection of children's rights). They also organized other community engagement activities, such as community meetings, self-help groups, language clubs, and meetings with public authorities, local organizations and other stakeholders. These activities helped strengthen community-based protection mechanisms and facilitate access to rights in host municipalities.

Artscape conducted 'creative missions' for 400 refugee and asylum-seeker children, youth in detention, and institutions. These 'creative missions' entailed non-formal, creative workshops for children, unaccompanied minors, and youth. The core of the project is focused around dealing with challenging situations, transitioning in new environments, and developing 'escape' through art and creativity, so space for emotional wellbeing can be

created. For further capacity building of staff, facilitators and volunteers, sessions on refugee child protection and care training and development on work with young children with special needs were organized for staff and volunteers. The programme was designed with a high level of engagement and a range of non-formal activities were included, reached through the exchange of community-based values, reflection and reconceptualizing connections between multicultural lives and identities.

IOM provided 260 individuals with direct case management support, legal and translation services, and individual psychological consultations. In addition, IOM trained 83 psychiatrists and psychologists from Ukraine. The trainings covered the specific aspects of working in a war context: new skills and approaches to assist people coping with grief, support for traumatic loss and bereavement, and suitable methods and techniques for working with war veterans, as well as self-care and resilience strategies in a war situation. The trained professionals came from various regions of Ukraine, and most of them worked in health facilities that served vulnerable community members.

The protection risks to a population in transit are significant and under an **IOM** project aimed at the prevention of Trafficking in Persons and Other Protection Risks of Vulnerable Conflict-Affected People of All Genders and Ages in Ukraine and Neighbouring Countries, 100 people received training, vocational education (VET), and language support. Further, under a project supporting access to protection services, 501 individuals accessed helplines from which they gained support. A total of 81 people were referred for specialized services.

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 2023, **Save the Children Lithuania's** implemented different activities, with special focus on children's mental health and psychosocial support and positive parenting. Ukrainian children were made welcomed at the Save the Children centres and provided with equal services as the children of host community. In addition, groups of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine relocated to national institutions were continuously supported with needed items and psychosocial support activities; 355 individuals participated in community-based psychosocial support activities. **Artscape** also provided some 400 children with similar services in the last quarter of 2023. Save the Children distributed mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) home-kits to 1,960 refugee children.

A child-friendly space operated by **Save the Children** at the Alytus Registration Centre, about 100 km west from Vilnius, was run until May 2023. Activities included delivering social services and providing MHPSS individually and for groups of children as well as Children Day Centre services. Save the children also provided multipurpose cash assistance with a strong emphasis on identification of households with child protection risks. In 2023, 144 children received support at the safe spaces and 322 children participated in recreational activities in the form of summer camps organized locally by Save the Children.

Cross-Cutting Activities

A cross-cutting activity that is of great importance is ***Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).*** UNHCR advocated for improvement of referral pathways for MHPSS for refugees from Ukraine and for developing guidelines for frontline workers (i.e., social workers, employment consultants, NGO staff and volunteers, and others) on how to talk with refugees about MHPSS. The initiative was welcomed both by the ministries and NGOs, and the Ministry for Social Security and Labour led the follow-up. In July, IOM organized a training session for 50 Ukrainian psychologists and psychiatrists, dedicated to grief and mourning.

In March, **UNHCR** conducted a monitoring visit to the Service for Work Capacity and Disability Determination (SWCDD). At that time, 857 beneficiaries of temporary protection had had their disability recognized or determined in Lithuania – approximately 2 per cent of the refugees from Ukraine. Throughout the year, the number of new enquiries decreased. SWCDD noted that foreign citizens do not have access to determination of intellectual/psychosocial disability due to unavailability of required tests in different languages. Furthermore,

it was noted that citizens of Ukraine can access disability determination or recognition procedures only if they are beneficiaries of temporary protection, but not if they have temporary resident status on other grounds (i.e., work, study, family reunification, etc.). In 2023, **Maltos Ordino Pagalbos Tarnyba** (the Order of Malta) provided assistance for older people, children from socially vulnerable families, disabled, refugees, and others in need.

IOM together with **UNHCR** and Interpol have created a ***Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (PSEA)*** training package 'Partnership for Protection' and delivered it to 90 police officers and border guards in Lithuania in November 2023. This training package aimed to equip law enforcement personnel with the essential skills and knowledge to effectively prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse. The key objectives included a comprehensive module to teach participants how to identify different types of sexual violence and the procedures for responding quickly and sensitively, as well as an analytical discussion on power dynamics, fostering an understanding of the critical role of ethical conduct in preventing SEA.

With regard to ***Accountability to Affected Populations***, beneficiaries were able to have access to a number of mechanisms including helplines. Under **IOM**'s supervision, in 2023 helplines offered support to some 501 individuals. Overall, within the framework of the monitoring activities, the views of beneficiaries are a key source of information for assessing the situation and undertaking follow-up interventions and advocacy. Their views are reflected in the visit reports, which in turn, inform advocacy documents and the annual monitoring report. During anonymous interviews and confidential focus group sessions, beneficiaries are able to express their opinion on access to rights and the availability of services, including services delivered under the present project (i.e., legal assistance, individual counselling, and support). Complaints by beneficiaries are referred to the internal complaint mechanism and a reasoned response given.

Protection Monitoring

During **UNHCR**'s ongoing protection profiling and monitoring exercise from October 2022 to 31 December 2023 651 respondent households representing 1,588 household members, being refugees from Ukraine, were interviewed. Key findings included that 97 per cent of respondents had applied for temporary protection (76 per cent of whom had had a favourable response), 29 per cent were employed (including 26 per cent within Lithuania), 33 per cent were unemployed, and 19 per cent retired. Some 77 per cent cited at least having one urgent need. The main needs included material assistance (50 per cent), food (42 per cent), employment (41 per cent), and healthcare (31 per cent). With regard to unemployment, 19 per cent cited language as the greatest barrier.

In 2023, **IOM** also contributed to data collection on mobility tracking, trends, immediate needs of Ukrainians refugees. In June, IOM published results of its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) survey, which shows that 62 per cent of Ukrainians rent housing via the private market (an increase of 11 per cent when compared to 2022). Some 12 per cent were hosted in Lithuanian families, and 10 per cent were hosted by friends or relatives. A total of 95 per cent stated that they had received humanitarian or other support with only 5 per cent indicating that they had not received any assistance. When asked about current challenges, 24 per cent respondents indicated that their main challenge was financial stability, 20 per cent said finding a long-term, well-paid job, 18 per cent said to find long-term housing, and 18 per cent said to overcome the language barrier. Although some employment indicators have increased when compared to 2022, the survey shows that refugees from Ukraine often take up jobs that do not correspond with their qualifications and many work as unskilled workers (27 per cent).

Cash assistance

The provision of cash support is a valuable tool in the response to refugee crises as it allows individuals the dignity of providing for their own wants. Cash assistance can take the form of payment cards or vouchers. **Save the Children** opted to give support with multipurpose cash assistance which is a flexible option that allows the beneficiary the discretion of tending to his or her own needs. Save the Children's cash programme for refugee families was further developed, complementing the ongoing family support programme (i.e., nationwide network

of family support coordinators, who are delivering social and referral services and providing targeted non-food items distribution for refugee families with children and pregnant women). To that end, Save the Children provided 2,021 individuals with such support. **Caritas** used the same form of assistance, reaching 2,380 individuals. Through **IOM**, some 1,900 individuals received multi-purpose cash assistance in 2023. In addition, IOM organized the delivery of pharmacy gift vouchers to over 1,875 beneficiaries in 2023, which the recipients were able to use to purchase basic medicines. IOM also supported 627 beneficiaries with rental assistance and provided 495 beneficiaries with vouchers for non-food items.

Livelihoods

Employment can always be a challenge for refugee communities, especially when in a country where language can be a barrier, which was reflected by some 33 per cent of refugees as noted in the protection profiling and monitoring exercise. **IOM** in collaboration with a Vilnius-based employment agency (SOPA) used a digital approach to provide online support to help facilitate Ukrainians' entry into local society and explore employment opportunities for refugees from Ukraine. A pamphlet advising Ukrainians on how to seek employment in Lithuania was produced and distributed, consolidated by a webinar on the topic.

From January 2023, **Maltos Ordino Pagalbos Tarnyba** (the Order of Malta) had two of their consultation/integration centres tasked with everyday activities, such as giving out humanitarian aid, consulting families and individuals on various integrational questions such as school, renting apartment, getting a job, and getting registered to a local hospital. In some cities, such as Viekšniai, at the child day centres, Ukrainian children were involved in everyday activities, and their parents were volunteering. Some of these children have already acquired a good level of spoken Lithuanian, because local social workers as well as volunteers are talking and teaching Lithuanian to them. Also at the Vilnius branch, the Order of Malta held art therapy sessions for research purposes with a small group of Ukrainian women and utilized its 'buddy' programme, aimed at pairing up Lithuanian volunteers with Ukrainians, which also supports Ukrainians in Lithuanian language learning.

Education

Educational activities can either focus directly on children or can have a train-the-trainer approach. In 2023, **IOM** facilitated educational activities aimed at teacher development in multicultural environments, including a survey on methodologies and experiences, discussion with key partners, and the development of a qualification programme.

In 2023, some 80 per cent of school-aged Ukrainian refugee children were enrolled in education. At the end of March, **IOM** organized a workshop to discuss integration challenges concerning refugees from Ukraine in the national education system. The main aim was to discuss the current situation and to encourage providers of non-formal education to be more active in integration.

Inclusion and Social Cohesion

Starting life in a new home country is not only financially, but also emotionally challenging. It is often difficult to navigate and understand how to find a place to live or where to seek help in a crisis situation. Integration courses can help refugees in familiarizing themselves with the law and duties in the country of Lithuania and help in the acquisition of knowledge about topics that might be relevant for refugees, such as education, employment, health and other topics. In the course of 2023, 7,028 individuals received support in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes from NGOs including the **Maltos Ordino Pagalbos Tarnyba** (Order of Malta) and **LRC**. Language courses for adults were particularly sought after. While some 40 per cent of Ukrainian refugees accessed the labour market, due to language challenges or lack of certain qualifications required in the local labour market, de-skilling remained a challenge. In July, measures were undertaken to address this, with the aim, for example, to allow medical practitioners to access local employment opportunities.

In August, **IOM** carried out a perception survey with the aim of understanding the attitudes of Lithuanians towards refugees from Ukraine as well as their opinion regarding integration measures and state support for refugees from Ukraine. The survey garnered the opinion of 1,015 respondents across Lithuania. Main findings included that the absolute majority of the country's residents believe that Ukrainian war refugees should be ensured equal rights with Lithuanian citizens to access healthcare, social protection, and other services; however, it came with the caveat that this should apply only to those who have a job or have established a business and pay taxes in Lithuania. Lithuanian language courses and helping with documentation were deemed the best measures for the integration of Ukrainians. Over 50 per cent support the financial and social assistance provided by the state for refugees. Half the respondents thought those refugees who had learned the language and found jobs could remain in Lithuania, with only one in ten suggesting that Ukrainians should leave Lithuania after the war.

In October, **IOM** opened the Migration Information Centre 'MICenter' in Vilnius, which provides comprehensive information and counselling for migrants on their rights and obligations in Lithuania, as well as opportunities for integration, education, employment, health care, and social assistance. The centre also organizes various cultural and social events to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between migrants and the host society.

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LINKS

Regional data portal – Ukraine Situation RRP – Refugee Funding Tracker

RRP Partners in Lithuania

Caritas Lithuania *Caritas is a worldwide Catholic organization that provides a wide range of humanitarian aid to people in need, regardless of age, nationality, faith, gender or other differences. Caritas Lithuania has developed a network of children's day care centres and family support services, responding to the needs of the sick, the lonely and the elderly. Provision of food, clothing and other items to people with needs, helping those who are experiencing homelessness, violence and addiction.*

Diversity Development Group (DDG) *is a non-profit organization with an objective to carry out social (scientific, applied, and infrastructural) projects and research in the field of human trafficking, human rights, education, equal opportunities, diversity, migration and integration.*

Maltos Ordino Pagalbos Tarnyba (MOPT) *provides assistance for the lonely, elderly, children from socially vulnerable families, the disabled, refugees, and for everyone who is in need.*

Save the Children – Lithuania *was founded in 1991, and implements projects in the fields of child rights, positive parenting, poverty reduction, education and reduction of domestic violence.*

ARTSCAPE*'s focus is on the power of art through artistic projects that bring social change and togetherness in vulnerable communities through participatory arts and advocacy.*

Food Bank (*Maisto bankas*)*'s mission is to fight food waste and feed people in need.*

Lithuanian Red Cross *provides assistance and relief to people affected by the crisis, as well as to other vulnerable society groups, including asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless people, and other migrants irrespective of their legal status.*

International Organization of Migration *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.*

World Health Organization *Country Office, Lithuania (WHO CO LTU) promotes health, keeps the world safe and serves the vulnerable – so everyone, everywhere can attain the highest level of health and well-being.*