



**Operational update**  
**ESTONIA**  
1 January – 31 March 2024

UNHCR supports local partner Estonian Refugee Council in an initiative known as the Adaptation Club, which offers support to elderly refugees. © Estonian Refugee Council/Sofja Popova

**Operational context**

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 Government of Estonia 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 employment commensurate with their level of education, lack of education opportunities beyond ninth grade, access to medical support including for mental health, and a shortage of language courses.

Since 2023, Estonia has been included in the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), complementing the government-led response. In 2024, a [new plan was launched](#), coordinated by UNHCR and developed by 14 humanitarian organizations.

Following the increase in refugee and migrant arrivals via Belarus to Lithuania, Latvia and Poland in 2021, Estonia has adopted amendments to the State Border Act which allow for denial of access to the asylum procedure in situations of mass influx.

**KEY FIGURES**

- **51,947** applications for temporary protection lodged by refugees from Ukraine since February 2022\*
- **500** individuals granted asylum or subsidiary protection in Q1
- **426** asylum applications lodged in Q1
- **64,297** stateless persons

*\*Renewal of permits is ongoing and may result in changes of figures. The current figure has been determined as 32,867 but is subject to constant fluctuations.*

**Working with partners**

UNHCR [works closely with partners](#) to provide protection and support to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in Estonia and advocate for their inclusion.



## Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities



### COUNSELLING SERVICES

- In the first quarter of 2024, UNHCR's partner, the Estonian Human Rights Centre (EHRC), had assisted 89 individuals with legal counselling, including 48 people from Ukraine. Additionally, 102 persons were counselled by phone or email. UNHCR and partners regularly provide information and legal counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees regarding asylum procedures, access to temporary protection and access to rights and services to aid their inclusion and integration.



### PROTECTION MONITORING AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- In February, UNHCR met with a group of elderly refugees from Ukraine living in Tallinn, and in March with refugees from Ukraine living in collective housing in Põlvamaa. Language learning was one of the important topics brought out in both meetings. In Tallinn refugee women expressed difficulty in finding advanced language courses and opportunities for language practice, while refugees in Põlvamaa are content with the support they receive but face language barriers in securing suitable employment.
- In the second week of March, UNHCR established relations with nine municipalities: Jõelähtme, Lügánuse, Viru-Nigula, Võru linn, Põlva, Viljandi, Põltsamaa, Paide, and Kose. The situation in all municipalities is rather good, and municipalities do not report having outstanding concerns. UNHCR has noted the low utilization of language learning courses, which affects employment opportunities and integration in long term. Additionally, despite the availability of mental health services, refugees rarely use these opportunities.
- By the end of March, UNHCR partner Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) had reached a total of 428 individuals through outreach activities. In the last three months, ERC identified and referred for services 18 persons with specific needs, including 14 from Ukraine.
- In the first quarter of 2024, UNHCR and partners conducted two protection monitoring visits to a detention centre in the village of Soodevahe, where both migrants and asylum-seekers are detained. UNHCR monitors the overall conditions in this centre and based on its findings, makes recommendations to the centre's management.
- UNHCR partner Mondo has organized workshops led by refugees in schools to introduce refugee matters to the students and integration events to bring together refugees and local people. So far, eight refugees have carried out these events, offering in total 168 host community members the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the lives of refugees in Estonia.



### TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES

- In January, UNHCR participated in the second Tallinn Integration Meeting, the goal of this reoccurring event is to exchange information between state institutions, local government institutions, NGOs, and UN agencies and address challenges in the field of integration, not only regarding refugees, but local minorities and all other foreigners residing in Estonia. The new Head of ERC's Estonian office presented local and international activities. Participants queried about older refugees' loneliness, absence of a mandatory state Welcoming Programme for refugees, and improving communication with refugee communities.
- Local integration actors from Estonia were included in the Pan-Baltic knowledge exchange seminar and FOR-IN conference held in Vilnius over 19-21 February. The seminar was dedicated to sharing best practices in sustainable reception and integration services for refugees, especially relevant due to the significant number of refugees from Ukraine in the Baltic states. Meanwhile, the conference focused on local-level integration, evidence-based policymaking, and mental health, offering valuable insights from all Nordic and Baltic countries. The event provided an excellent platform for engagement with key stakeholders from NGOs, state institutions, local municipalities and UN agencies across the Baltics.

- In February, UNHCR and its partners Mondo, the Estonian Human Rights Centre, and the Estonian Refugee Council worked on the development of plans regarding Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



#### **COORDINATION**

- On 31 January, UNHCR launched the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) in Estonia, being the first country in the region to do so. There were 55 participants from embassies, state institutions, local municipalities, NGOs and UN agencies in Estonia. The speakers included the Head of Estonian Office of ERC, the Undersecretary for Population and Civil Society of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the UNHCR Representative, members of the Inter-Agency Unit, and the members of the board of a Refugee-Led Organization in Pärnu.
- In March, the UNHCR Inter-Agency Unit and ERC jointly convened the first inter-agency meeting of the year. UNHCR gave an overview of RRP reporting products, and the plans for the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment this year. Additionally, IOM Estonia presented their DTM results, and the IOM strategic response plan. The RRP meeting also covered protection issues such as access to health system, WHO's health system assessment project, and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).