



In March, UNHCR travelled to and met with officials of South Kurzeme municipality, who accompanied a visit to refugees from Ukraine. ©South Kurzeme Municipality.

Operational context

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

Since 2023, Latvia is included in the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), complementing the government-led response. In 2024 a new RRP is being coordinated by UNHCR, developed by 17 humanitarian organizations in Latvia.

Following the increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving via Belarus in 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

- **54,247** applications for temporary protection lodged by refugees from Ukraine since February 2022.* Officially estimated presence: 47,960.
- **96** asylum applications lodged as of end of March 2024
- **180,614** stateless persons and “non-citizens” in Latvia as of January 2024.**

*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(iii).



**Gribu Palīdzēt
Bēgļiem / I Want to
Help Refugees**



LATVIJAS
CILVĒKTIESĪBU
CENTRS
LATVIAN
CENTRE FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS

**Latvian
Centre for
Human Rights**



**Drošā Māja /
Shelter Safe House**

Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities



COUNSELLING SERVICES

- In the first quarter of 2024, UNHCR's partners Shelter Safe House (SSH) and Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) provided counselling to 163 individuals, including 57 refugees from Ukraine as well as with refugees from other countries of origin including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, DR Congo, and Mali. The main topics for counselling were the refugee status determination process and decisions, employment issues, family reunification, and registration of a newborn child.
- In February, SSH visited the accommodation centre for asylum-seekers at Liepna, during which nine asylum-seekers received counselling. The questions from these asylum-seekers mainly covered the asylum procedure.



MONITORING VISITS

- In the first three months of 2024, partner 'I want To Help Refugees' (GPB) conducted twelve monitoring visits. In March, GPB visited Valka municipality in the northeast of the country, on the Estonian border, where 56 refugees from Ukraine are residing, including children and elderly. The main challenge in Valka is the lack of employment opportunities. GPB further conducted visits to detention centres at Mucenieki and Daugavpils. UNHCR also conducts monitoring visits to these centres.
- In March, GPB interviewed refugees for the purpose of a regional protection profiling and monitoring exercise. In total, 302 refugees from Ukraine were interviewed (representing 704 household members). Two thirds of those so far interviewed had arrived in Latvia more than a year ago while less than one sixth had arrived less than three months ago. Some 40 per cent of refugees had resided in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkivsk oblasts before fleeing Ukraine. About one third of the interviews indicated that they or someone in their household has a serious medical condition that has required medical treatment for three months or more. While 25 per cent indicated that they have no urgent needs, at least 18 per cent indicated employment, and at least 10 per cent each identified accommodation and medical treatment as urgent needs.
- In March, UNHCR conducted a mission to seven municipalities in Latvia – Riga, Dienvidkurzemes novads, Ķekava, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Cēsis and Ropaži and met with refugees. The main focus of the visits was discussing education for refugee children and plans to engage children studying remotely, as well as employment. Following these meetings, Ķekava municipality will share their approach to supporting refugees with finding employment through job fairs during an online event on labour market inclusion of refugees from Ukraine. This event takes place in the framework of the Regional Inclusion working group led by UNHCR and UNDP.
- In March, SSH held an activity for asylum-seeking mothers at the Accommodation Centre for Asylum-Seekers in Mucenieki. In total 12 women participated. The topic was about female's intimate health and contraception, which had been suggested by participants themselves. The activity was led by a midwife who had previous experience in working with asylum-seekers through SSH's psychosocial support programme.



INTEGRATION & OUTREACH

- In January and February, GPB in cooperation with the Riga Active Seniors Alliance (RASA) organized two table game sessions for a total of 27 elderly from Ukraine. This group of elderly also listened to a lecture on the history of Latvia and received legal counselling. RASA runs Latvian language courses through the government's own programme and caters mainly for adults including those from Ukraine.
- In February, SSH held an event for asylum-seeking women from French-speaking African countries. An expert was invited to facilitate the event which focused on personal relationships.

- In early March, UNHCR met with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Science to discuss recent developments in integration as well as education for refugee children from Ukraine. Currently, more than half of all registered children from Ukraine in Latvia are not enrolled in local schools. The meeting with Ministry of Education focused on the inclusion of refugee children from Ukraine in Latvian schools. UNHCR has offered to provide technical support with the Ministry of Education's endeavours to work towards enrolment in Latvian schools of all refugee children from Ukraine.



COORDINATION

- On 5 February, the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for Ukraine was launched in Riga, led by UNHCR's Representative and Deputy Representative, together with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior who addressed a gathering of 63 participants, covering both the 2023 response, as well as looking towards 2024. In addition, the Inter-Agency team gave a presentation on the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA).
- On 13 March, the inter-agency team held an RRP coordination meeting at RRP partner NGO Common Ground premises in the centre of Riga. RRP partners shared updates, e.g., on upcoming calls for proposal on language and cultural orientation courses. During the coordination meeting, a guest speaker from the Stockholm School of Economics presented their project on a pan-Baltic coordination forum between stakeholders including businesses, refugees, and NGOs.
- In late February, UNHCR chaired the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) network coordination meeting. The network agreed on providing capacity-building sessions for partners in the Refugee Response Plan, finalization of communication materials with messages on PSEA, as well as coordination with the Society Integration Fund on possible strengthening of a referral mechanism.