



Operational update
LITHUANIA
1 January – 31 March 2024

On 1 February, the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) was launched in Vilnius. The event concluded with the performance of Ukrainian singer Maryna Pylypenko, herself a refugee currently residing in Lithuania under temporary protection. ©UNHCR.

Operational context

Since the outset of the war in Ukraine in early 2022, 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. While immediate access to employment, education, and availability of mainstream social benefits and services have created favourable conditions for integration of refugees from Ukraine, factors such as lack of local language skills, de-skilling in workplaces, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, may hinder integration into local society.

Since 2023, Lithuania has been included in the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), complementing the government-led response. In 2024, a new plan has been launched, coordinated by UNHCR and developed by 18 humanitarian organizations in Lithuania. Following the increase in refugee and migrant arrivals via Belarus to Lithuania in 2021, 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 **85,000** applications for temporary protection by refugees from Ukraine since Feb 2022.
- Current estimated presence: **40,500** individuals.*
- **31** individuals granted refugee status in 2024
- **134** asylum applications lodged by end of Q1 2024
- **2,283** stateless persons in Lithuania as of 1 January 2024

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

Highlights of UNHCR's and partners' activities



COUNSELLING SERVICES

- In the first quarter of 2024, legal consultations were provided by UNHCR and partner the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) to 288 refugees, asylum-seekers, and those newly arrived in country. Consultations were carried out both at reception and detention centres and outside centres, and included 49 Ukrainians. Legal consultations were also provided via email and/or face-to-face at the LRC's Vilnius office. Refugees continued to participate in outreach activities organized by UNHCR's partners, predominantly by the LRC who reached 614 individuals, including 577 refugees from Ukraine.



PROTECTION MONITORING

- In the course of the first quarter, UNHCR and partners carried out protection monitoring activities at key locations in Lithuania. LRC conducted 14 monitoring visits and followed up with observations on reception conditions and conduct of initial asylum interviews. The LRC provides annual training for the border guard officers who carry out the initial interviews, which includes correct procedures and good practices. UNHCR conducted nine visits, including to two newly built multifunctional accommodation units in the Pabradė foreigners' registration centre. These two units were ready for use by April and with a total capacity of 364 persons.
- In March, UNHCR conducted a monitoring mission in Anykščiai District municipality, meeting with representatives from the municipality and NGOs, where reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine were discussed. UNHCR visited a collective accommodation site where 111 refugees from Ukraine are accommodated, and talked with a group of 17 women, as well as conducted individual interviews. In general, reception conditions are fair, with refugees sharing that they were normally able to meet basic needs of their families, and were cognizant of their rights and the available services.
- In February, a new round of the protection monitoring and profiling survey was launched together with the partner Lithuanian Red Cross. New enumerators have been enrolled and trained. As of the end of March, 260 interviews with refugees from Ukraine had been conducted.



TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES

- Also in March, UNHCR provided refugee law training for Lithuanian judiciary, focusing on inclusion clauses. Altogether 45 judges and assistant judges of the Regional Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court attended the event. The training was organized in cooperation with the National Courts Administration at the Ministry of Justice with a view to strengthening the capacity of the newly established Regional Administrative Court in handling asylum cases.
- In January, UNHCR attended a roundtable on the findings of LRC's monitoring activities in 2023. The roundtable was attended by ministerial and governmental representatives. UNHCR *inter alia* focused on the need for best interests procedures, notably in the context of readmission arrangements with Latvia, and the need to ensure adequate reception conditions for asylum-seekers staying outside reception centres.



INTEGRATION AND OUTREACH

- In February, partner Artscape provided 33 children with psychosocial support in the form of 'creative missions' taking place both in detention and migrant centres. In March, Artscape started creative missions at five locations: Refugee Reception Centres (Rukla and Naujininkai), MICentre of IOM (Vilnius), Pastogė (Kaunas) and Foreigners' Registration Centre (Pabradė). Artscape offers psychosocial support through art-based activities – creative missions – for refugees from Ukraine, the majority of whom are children and youth; they participate in regular activities for up to three months.

- An open call for Artscape’s ‘Young Refugee Talents’ programme was launched in the first quarter, and the selection process of the mentees started, with a high number of motivated and diverse applicants having submitted their applications. In [March](#), the programme leaders conducted initial interviews, selected the mentees, and networked with potential mentors in preparation for the official launch of the mentorship programme.



COORDINATION

- On 1 February, the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) was launched in Vilnius. UNHCR’s Representative and Deputy Representative together with the Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour addressed a gathering of some 75 participants, including diplomats, business representatives, partners and media. In addition, UNHCR presented the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA). Lastly, a refugee guest speaker from refugee-led organization House of Nations also gave a speech on the human-centred approach in integration and resilient communities building and informed guests about their current activities in Lithuania.
- In March, UNHCR participated in an inter-agency meeting on the Ukraine situation led by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL). Challenges relating to education, documentation, health, and housing were discussed.
- Also in March, the Lithuanian RRP/Inter-agency meeting was held. The main topic of discussion was access to health care, led by a presentation from WHO on a current project to conduct a health system assessment. Presentations were also provided by the Stockholm School of Economics and new RRP partner, Malva.
- Together with the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Vilnius, MSSL, and Diversity Development Group, UNHCR co-organized a Pan-Baltic knowledge exchange seminar and Baltic-Nordic FOR-IN conference in Vilnius, on 19-21 February. The seminar was dedicated to sharing best practices among Baltic integration practitioners (national and local authorities, non-governmental and refugee-led organizations) about sustainable reception and integration services for refugees. The conference focused on local-level integration, evidence-based policymaking, and mental health, and was attended by around 150 in-person participants, while 1,000 people watched the event through a live broadcast.